

From Awareness to Action – Building a Collective Future

By Mardoche Sidor, MD; Adaiah Lassalle, LCSW; Karen Dubin, PhD, LCSW; and The SWEET Institute

Oppression is not dismantled by awareness alone. Awareness is necessary, it shines a light on the shadows where internalized oppression hides. But awareness without action risks leaving us standing still, watching the chains without moving to break them.

True liberation requires translating inner recognition into outward transformation. This is the movement from awareness to action.

Awareness: The Spark of Transformation

Awareness is the first step in disrupting the cycle of internalized oppression. When individuals begin to notice how racism, sexism, classism, ableism, or other systems of domination have shaped their own thinking, they reclaim the power to choose differently. Paulo Freire called this conscientização, or critical consciousness, the awakening to the structures that confine us (Freire, 1970).

Without this recognition, oppression operates silently, unchallenged, through self-doubt, resignation, and division. Awareness interrupts this silence.

Action: The Path to Change

Yet awareness alone can lead to despair. Seeing the depth of oppression without pathways to respond can feel overwhelming. Action transforms awareness into possibility.

Action happens at multiple levels:

- **Personal Action:** Challenging internal narratives of inadequacy, practicing self-affirmation, and choosing dignity in daily life.
- **Relational Action:** Speaking up when oppressive dynamics appear in relationships, validating others' experiences, and co-creating spaces of belonging.
- **Systemic Action:** Advocating for policy change, engaging in collective organizing, and building institutions rooted in equity and justice.

Each action, however small, signals refusal. Refusal to accept oppression as inevitable. Refusal to remain complicit in silence.

The Collective Future

Internalized oppression thrives on isolation, convincing us that we are alone, powerless, and unworthy. But when awareness becomes collective and action becomes organized, liberation becomes inevitable.

Building a collective future means:

- Healing together in circles of trust.
- Redistributing power in workplaces, schools, and communities.

- Designing systems of care, governance, and knowledge rooted not in domination but in shared humanity.

The arc from awareness to action is not linear but cyclical. Each act of resistance deepens awareness, which then fuels new forms of action.

A Call to Move Together

The journey from awareness to action is not easy, but it is essential. Liberation is not just an individual victory, it is a collective inheritance we build for generations to come.

The question we now ask is: What action will you take today?

References

- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Continuum.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. Routledge.
- Fanon, F. (1963). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press.
- Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Crossing Press.
- Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). "Decolonization is not a metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1), 1–40.