Exploring the Phenomenon of Open Awareness and Its Effects on Stress and Burnout

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This article introduces research in *open awareness* (OA). The qualitative research method of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was utilised to investigate the characteristic phenomena that are associated with the state and perspective of OA, including its effects in terms of stress resilience, burnout prevention and psychological well-being. The research project involved exploring the experiences of people with high stress and burnout levels who practiced the OA technique for 24 days. The overall outcome of this research suggests that the OA technique may promote resilience to stress, while helping to improve well-being and performance, which in turn may support the prevention and treatment of burnout. This conclusion is supported by current literature, covering how distress and the onset of burnout may be associated with chronic tunnel awareness, which the OA technique was found to counteract. Two distinct areas of future research are proposed involving OA with implications for social renewal.

Keywords: awareness, consciousness, mindfulness, stress, burnout, resilience, performance, coaching, change, social renewal, phenomenology

The author became interested in studying the effects of applied *open awareness* (OA) as a result of this being an implicit aspect of the Judo martial art, which he has been practicing for over forty years. This interest was intensified when the author discovered similar techniques for coaching and therapy in 2003, during his training in neuro-linguistic programming (NLP). He has since experienced in himself, and witnessed in

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many others, various healing, transformative and generative effects of applying the OA technique in different contexts. This motivated him to explore the phenomenology of OA in his MSc research project during 2014/15.

The OA technique explored in this work involves a deceptively simple set of skills to broaden one's perspective in the present moment. The technique is based on becoming perceptive of the space in which one experiences themselves, others, and the environment. Through applying the OA technique in coaching, therapy, and training contexts, the author has found that OA may sharpen one's sensory acuity, enhance creativity, cultivate a sense of interconnectedness, and promote a state of well-being (Dängeli, 2018). As a result of these experiences, the author has identified that the introduction of OA into teams, organisations and communities, may help to generate widely beneficial and constructive new ways to address relationship problems and social issues in various contexts, as well as in society.

The development and cultivation of OA is fundamental in soft martial arts, such as Judo, Aikido, Kung fu, and Tai chi, although this is not commonly explicit, especially not among the martial arts that have become competitive sports in the current era. It is for this reason that the author has been developing the *Jumi* - Judo Mind (Jumi, n.d.) practice over the past twenty years. Jumi is based on the original teachings of Judo's founder (Kano, 2005) in conjunction with Qigong and yoga-based practices, synthesised into sequences of movements that engage the body and the breath for the purpose of establishing and anchoring the state of OA.

Other tracings of OA-related skills appear to stem from Buddhist origins (Gunaratana, 1996), and were possibly first introduced in the West through the teachings of George Ivanovich Gurdjieff in the early 1900s (Ouspensky, 1971). The growing popularity of mindfulness in the West, including mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), developed by Kabat-Zinn (2003) as well as other forms of mindfulness meditation, often involve the practice of *open monitoring* (OM), described in Lutz et al. (2008). Whilst OM and OA may overlap in terms of their effect on an individual's consciousness and with regards to emotion regulation, it should be noted that OM is considered to be a mindfulness meditation practice, while the state of OA can be brought about through various means, including Jumi and similar skills involving both movement and static exercises (Dängeli, 2019).

In both the *Open Awareness Handbook* (Dängeli, 2019) and the *Transpersonal Coaching Handbook* (Dängeli, 2018), this author and others have written extensively on the value of applied OA for the purpose of holding an empathic space. Components of this quality of held space include rapport and mutual resonance (Bandler & Grinder, 1976; Siegel, 2013), a participatory perspective (Ferrer & Sherman, 2008), mindfulness (Siegel, 2010) and intentional attitudes, such as unconditional acceptance and beneficence (Watson, 2004). Another dimension of applied OA is that it has been

found to be useful in coaching and therapy contexts to help move both individuals and groups away from a fixated tunnel awareness, commonly associated with the *fight-or-flight* response that prevails in all forms of distress (Siegel, 2018), to a state of openness, receptivity and equanimity (Dängeli & Geldenhuys, 2018), shown in Figure 1 below. These qualities may help to cultivate the soil for positive change – individually and socially.

Figure 1

States associated with tunnel awareness and open awareness

Describing the psychological characteristics that are associated with the scope (aperture) of one's awareness, Finlay (2014) cites Ratcliffe (2008) and Schmitz et al. (2011), suggesting that when we feel threatened, our world narrows and constricts, and it feels unsafe. Similarly, when we are happy, our world broadens, expands and becomes light. Here, one's psychological state appears to determine how narrow or broad one's aperture of awareness is. This implies that if one can adjust the aperture of one's awareness, one will be able to shift one's psychological state, which in turn presupposes that a means to open the aperture of one's awareness may be a useful technique to enhance one's psychological state.

The process of establishing OA reframes one's current experience of self, placing phenomena within one's field of awareness, as opposed to these being experienced outside or separate from oneself. The practise of OA involves the intentional observation of one's thoughts, feelings and sensory perceptions in the present through *opening the aperture* of one's awareness. This type of opening is facilitated by means of expanding one's mode of perception to include the aspects of each unfolding experience that usually occurs in or beyond the outskirts of conscious awareness and which is therefore usually unconscious or disregarded. In addition to identifying the subtleties of one's internal experience, OA includes becoming receptive to the energetic and relational links between oneself and others, and the environment. Depending on the individual and their reason for practicing OA, the experience of self fluctuates, and is therefore not an ultimate state, but rather one in which the individual experiences a felt sense of expansiveness and interconnection resulting from dis-identification from their limited self-concept.

In an attempt to deal with the new or intensified types of challenges that today's technologically driven and fast-paced lifestyles demand, we are, to a certain degree, being forced to operate in tunnel awareness in order to fulfil many of our functions in the workforce. Society has never before had the technical means to capture and narrow our attention, as it does today. With our online digital devices readily on hand, the media and the medium have merged, and the result is, to some extent, that we have become the victims of *attention slavery*. With our attention locked in by the gadgets (smart phones, for example) that we have become accustomed to use in order to operate in this world, we may find ourselves unable or less able to release our attention when appropriate in order to relate to each other and our environment in ethical ways. The result may be a rise in inter-personal problems, emotional disconnection, and elevated stress levels, which if unresolved can lead to burnout (Cartwright & Cooper, 1996).

The tunnel awareness phenomenon may further compel one to retreat into a virtual world and to favour interacting with virtual friends for the sake of convenience, quick fixes and immediate gratification. This hypothesis suggests that as an increasing amount of the world's human population becomes more tuned into a virtual reality, our ability to tune back out into the rest of reality may become jeopardised. Other issues related to the narrow focus of attention demanded by contemporary media devices include inhibited cognitive functioning and emotion regulation, as cited in the work of Langford et al (2018). In such a mode of tunnel awareness, one may be less able to think creatively and deal with life's stressors mindfully (Farb et al., 2007; Finlay, 2014; Hanson & Mendius, 2009; Ouspensky, 1971; J. Overdurf, personal communication, June 20, 2013; Rossi, 1993). On the other hand, if one is able to counteract tunnel awareness, through applying a means to reopen one's mode of perception, by using the OA technique, for example, then one may be better equipped to navigate the multi-dimensional challenges of life beyond the flat screens of our electronic devices. This analogy is depicted in Figure 1.

The research question that set the direction of this study is: *How does open awareness affect an individual's experience, particularly in stressful situations and in relation to burnout?*

Method

Research participant selection

Research participants were found via the Facebook social media platform, where this project was announced. The main criteria for eligibility were that participants were experiencing burnout and aged between 16 and 60.

In order to measure burnout levels, the participants were asked to complete a Burnout Self Diagnostic Tool, which is a survey consisting of 70 questions, developed by Stephen Wright (2005). Applications to participate in this research were closed after

the surveys had been assessed for the first 11 people, which included seven women and four men of varying ages, from six countries, each with high levels of burnout. In Smith and Osborn (2008), 11 participants are considered more than enough for a phenomenological study such as this. Formal consent to participate in the research was obtained from all participants.

Research intervention

After completing the Burnout Self Diagnostic Tool, the participants' next step involved being taught the technique of OA. An initial training session was facilitated by the author via Skype. Following that, each participant received a copy of the "Mindful Power audio-programme" which teaches a basic OA technique. They were asked to listen to one part of the programme per day for 24 consecutive days. There are six parts in the Mindful Power audio-programme (Dängeli, n.d.), varying in length between about 30 to 40 minutes each, with each part applying the OA technique in a different context. All 11 research participants reported that they did listen for 24 days, meaning that each part of the programme was heard four times, totalling about 14 hours of OA training and practice. This amount of listening to the programme was suggested in order for the participants to have a thorough yet focussed learning period that could be integrated into their schedules without requiring long term commitment. Additionally, the participants were also encouraged to practice the basic OA technique regularly and to apply it as much as possible in challenging and stressful situations. The participants were asked to log their experiences with OA up until the date of their interview, which was scheduled for a month after their initial training session.

Data collection and interpretation

All 11 interviews were recorded, however, five of the recordings were of very poor audio quality, due to issues with the participants' internet, computer, or microphone. This made it difficult to hear what these participants said on the Skype call, or it caused many interruptions in the Skype connection. Furthermore, there was a problem of English not being the first language of four participants - with heavy accents making it difficult to understand them. The six recordings that were of good enough audio quality were transcribed. These participants included two females and four males, between the ages of 41 and 50, from four continents.

In order to explore a phenomenon, research methods should capture something of its *is-ness* (Giorgi, 2009). Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is an example of such a research method. Smith and Osborn (2008) suggest that "IPA is a suitable approach when one is trying to find out how individuals are perceiving the particular situations they are facing, how they are making sense of their personal and social world" (p. 56). For this reason, IPA was positioned as an appropriate research methodology for the purpose of this study. Smith and Osborn (2008, pp. 55/67) emphasise, as is generally the case with qualitative research methods, that there is no single, definitive way to do IPA. They point out that as one proceeds, one may find oneself adapting the method to one's own personal

way of working and the particular topic one is investigating. In order to both capture and respond to the authentic expressions that the research participants used, he found that it was useful to not follow a tightly predetermined protocol, but rather keep a flexible and open perception during the interviews. The way in which the author/researcher facilitated this, was to use a semi-structured interview protocol as a starting and reference point, while following the participant's lead in order to explore the phenomenology of their experiences in a free-flowing manner. When the participants accessed their own deeper attributes and meanings that were directly associated with their experience of OA, then the interview questions took the form of spontaneous and reflexive prompts to elicit more of the inner experience that the participants were trying to put into words.

The key interview questions are listed below:

1. Can you relate your experience of open awareness (OA) to experiences that you have had before?
2. Has there been any change in your general state since learning and using OA?
3. Has there been any change in how you deal with stress since learning and using OA?
4. Have you noticed a difference in how you relate to people and/or the environment when in OA?
5. Have you noticed a difference in how you relate to yourself when in OA?
6. What is your general experience of having learned and applied OA?
7. Has there been any change in how you deal with challenging situations since learning OA?
8. Has any part of the OA technique been ineffective or irrelevant to you?
9. Do you foresee any practical use of the OA technique in your life?
10. What kind of a world would we see if more people were in OA?

The six transcribed interview recordings were analysed using the IPA method. This involved paying attention to how each participant expressed their experience of OA, which phenomena were given most emphasis, as well as noting the subtleties of each participant's unique way in which they tried to give words to their experiences. While

analysing the transcripts, in an attempt to accurately elicit the authentic meanings of each participant's experience, the researcher aimed to see the world through their eyes and get in touch with their feelings. Through being in OA himself, he was able to calibrate to the participants' subtle physiological responses as they described their experience of OA. As described earlier, OA has been found to enhance sensory acuity and equanimity, thus it can be a valuable tool in qualitative research. The intention here was to identify the amount of congruence, or lack thereof, between the unconscious mind's physical response and the participants' consciously chosen words during the interviews. In this case, congruence was identified when there was alignment between the words expressed, the manner and tone used to express them, as well as the participant's physical posture, or matching gestures in each expression. In this way, the author paid attention to and noted the congruent responses as accurate descriptors of the participant's genuine experiences of OA. These were highlighted and categorised into groups that became the various themes. Focusing on these congruency markers enabled him to bracket his presuppositions, prejudice and previous knowledge about OA, in order to gather as much pure data as possible.

Concerning potential demand characteristics, the participants in this research were all in burnout to begin with, and as such they were looking for a solution. While this might be considered to be a motivation for them to adhere to the intervention and to put extra effort in, on the contrary, typical of burnout is a lack of motivation and energy to exert oneself (Wright, 2010). Arguably, some participants may have wanted to please the researcher by achieving positive outcomes, however, he was careful to discern between their congruent and incongruent responses, while not seeking out their positive responses. During the interviews and transcript analyses, all responses were treated with equanimity.

Results

During the first phase of analysis of the transcribed interviews - *seeing afresh* (Finlay, 2014), the main phenomena that each participant described in their own words were highlighted and nineteen initial themes emerged. Following that, the nineteen themes were ranked according to the amount of emphasis given to each. The themes are listed below, from most emphasised to least emphasised. In a few instances, the phrase "readily implied" is used instead of the actual amount of times that the particular word was stated. The reason for this is because these implied themes were embedded in long descriptions where some participants struggled to find the optimal words to describe their experience.

1. Awareness (expressed 31 times by all six participants)

In this context the participants were referring mainly to having more (sometimes referred to as "greater") sensory awareness of the environment in which they were, as well as an astute awareness of their thoughts and feelings. Additionally, there was

an enhanced awareness of the interrelatedness between the participant's external circumstances and their internal state.

2. Objective (expressed 31 times)

The participants referred frequently to seeing the “bigger picture” and identifying more interrelatedness, which in turn gave them a sense of being more objective, especially in confrontational and other stressful situations.

3. Easy to learn and apply (expressed 30 times)

OA was relatively easy to learn for all the participants and became quite automatic to apply in general contexts after a few practice sessions. Applying OA in stressful situations became more achievable toward the end of the 24-day practice period.

4. Connection (expressed 27 times)

A majority of participants described more of a felt (or deeper) connection with others and the environment, leading to:

5. Compassion (readily implied in association with “connection”)

Tenderness, sensitivity and care toward others and themselves. Being receptive to people's needs was also mentioned.

6. Well-being (expressed 19 times)

Described on various levels, including physical, emotional and spiritual well-being.

7. Resourceful responses in challenging situations (readily implied)

All participants expressed that OA enabled them to deal with stress more effectively. In other words, while in OA, they were less reactive and more resourceful in situations compared to how they had been in such situations previously.

8. Dis-identification (expressed 18 times)

In general, there was less identification with thoughts and a limited self-concept while in OA. This was sometimes expressed as being aware of the activity of the mind, without being controlled by it.

9. Relaxation (expressed 16 times)

For some participants, physical relaxation was the most prominent phenomenon resulting from being in OA when practicing the technique in uninterrupted contexts.

10. Non-reactive (expressed 15 times)

Most participants described a sense of freedom from negative emotions and “knee-jerk” reactions. “Non-reactive” and “dis-identified” were generally mutually inclusive.

11. Being present (expressed 14 times)

The experience of being in a heightened state of awareness, without worrisome thoughts was common. This was sometimes described as a feeling of “aliveness”. While “being present” may be a descriptor for other themes in this list, it was quite frequently mentioned as distinct phenomenon.

12. Mindfulness (expressed 10 times)

In this first level of analysis, mindfulness was mostly described as a state and generally associated with simply being present. Additionally, several participants mentioned that OA led to a more mindful approach to both regular tasks and in challenging situations.

13. Calmness and stillness (expressed nine times)

Little or no distracting self-talk was a common phenomenon. While not all participants used the word “calmness” or “stillness” to describe their experience of peripheral awareness, it was largely presupposed in the language used by all participants.

14. Clarity (expressed eight times)

This phenomenon was often associated with having a more objective perspective, or seeing the “bigger picture”, while sometimes it was referred to more as a level of knowing or certainty that helped the participants have a clearer sense of direction in uncertain circumstances.

15. Performance and flow (expressed eight times)

While some participants described being able to perform better, as in being creative and productive when in the state of OA, others emphasised that it helped them to be in the “flow”.

16. Communication (expressed eight times)

Relating to people optimally was relatively common amongst the participants, while in OA, as was presenting a topic with greater ease in front of others and expressing themselves more openly in social contexts.

17. Resilience (expressed six times)

OA, whether stated directly or implied, played an integral role in helping the participants bounce back or recompose themselves in stressful situations. Mostly, it was the participant’s more mindful orientation that served in this regard. A greater level of resilience was also frequently presupposed in the descriptions of the other phenomena (listed above).

18. Inner peace (expressed six times)

Some participants used the term “inner peace” interchangeably with “calmness” and “stillness”.

19. Intuition and receptivity (readily implied)

Being more in tune with their *gut feel* was not frequently stated explicitly, however it was extensively implicit in the participants' descriptions of OA.

These initial themes are the words that the research participants used to describe their experience of OA based on their own *map of reality* and vocabulary. Further analysis included looking for patterns across cases in order to build a thematic structure as suggested by Smith et al. (2009). Multiple themes were abstracted and one superordinate theme with sub themes was identified. In this case the superordinate theme represents the experience of OA that some of the participants were not able to articulate consciously, but which can be abstracted from their descriptions as central to their experience of OA. Mindfulness was not the most used word amongst the participants, but it showed up unanimously as a superordinate theme. Of the many definitions of mindfulness, a fitting one in relation to how these research participants expressed their overarching experience of OA, is Gunaratana's (1996) description of mindfulness as a *non-conceptual, non-egoic, non-judgmental, non-attached awareness that involves a goal-less, participatory and wakeful observation in the present*. Some of the research participant's own words to describe OA in relation to mindfulness are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1
Mindfulness related responses

Research participant	Mindfulness related responses to questions about the experience of OA
Carol	"I'm a lot more mindful before I speak...I'm more aware of what's around me."
Frank	"[F]eeling really present in the moment...noticing everything that is happening around me and being able to make assessments from almost a non-judgmental state."
Nigel	"[M]ore thoughtful and in relation to the other person...more objective...more open."
Nic	"Much more openness to observe, to receive whatever there is in front of me...an expanded awareness state."
Prim	"I feel more relaxed and open...I'm much more present...my aliveness and my awareness feels full contact so that it's connected to myself, to others and to the broader environment and that feels like um there is another level of restedness and being in that."
Sue	"[E]nabled me to see my tension...acknowledging, seeing it... I could think more clearly, I could respond more clearly...I could be more present with what I was busy with."

Although this study involved predominantly a qualitative methodology, a quantitative aspect was included by means of measuring the participants' burnout levels both before and after the twenty-four-day OA intervention. For this purpose, all 11 participants

were asked to complete the Burnout Self Diagnostic Tool (Wright, 2005) both before and after the intervention. As can be seen in Table 2, below, the 11 participants experienced on average a 58.74% reduction in their burnout levels after 24 days of practicing OA. This can be considered a significant improvement in their baseline level of well-being or in their ability to respond to stress more resourcefully. A paired T-test indicated that these data suggest a significant difference: $t(10) = 4.8705$, $p = 0.0007$.

Table 2

Burnout levels before and after the intervention

Name	Burnout score before intervention (out of 70)	Burnout score after intervention (out of 70)	Reduction in level of burnout	Percentage of burnout reduction
Sandy	54	11	43	79.62%
Frank	32	10	22	68.75%
Carol	20	11	9	45.00%
Kate	17	5	12	70.58%
Sue	22	16	6	27.27%
Nigel	57	44	13	22.80%
Nancy	9	4	5	55.55%
Trish	45	20	25	55.55%
Nic	39	12	27	69.23%
Jo	14	6	8	57.14%
Prim	40	5	35	87.50%
Average	31.73	13.09	18.64	58.74%

Discussion

Both the qualitative study and the quantitative data, indicating the 58.74% reduction in burnout levels, suggest that OA has the potential to provide participants with a significant ability to enhance their psychological state. The major limiting factor in the quantitative element of the research is that the small sample size precludes any definitive conclusions, nonetheless, this additional quantitative aspect does support the outcomes of this qualitative study.

From the participant feedback in Table 1, it can be identified how their experience of OA is closely related to the five empirically validated facets of mindfulness that are described in the Five Facet Mindfulness Scale (Baer et al., 2006), namely:

1. *Observing* (sensory awareness and how we use it).
2. *Describing* (the way we label our experiences and express them in words)
3. *Acting with awareness* (attending to what is present with self-awareness and responding consciously).
4. *Nonreactivity* (detachment from negative thoughts and emotions).
5. *Non-judgment* (self-acceptance and unconditional empathy toward oneself and others).

From the initial themes that emerged, to the superordinate theme of mindfulness, these phenomena associated with OA were clearly positive, meaningful and constructive for the research participants. No adverse effects were expressed. The simplicity of learning and applying the OA technique in different contexts is also worthy of noting, as this is important when considering approaches toward treating and preventing both stress and burnout.

Burnout has been referred to as a “soul sickness” (Wright, 2010, p. 8), where one reaches a point of *being sick and tired of being sick and tired*, but oblivious of any solution. A pervasive cause of burnout is believed to be unwavering and persistent stress (Cartwright & Cooper, 1996) that results in dysfunctional attitudes and behaviours that are disengaged from the present moment (Dierendonck et al., 2005). Therefore, since mindfulness (including the OA technique) involves the cultivation of present moment awareness that can in turn help to reduce one’s stress levels (Malinowski, 2008), it is most likely helpful to alleviate burnout too and might even serve as a preventative measure. McKnight and Kashdan (2009) suggest that people with access to a large set of self-regulatory tools with an ability to flexibly apply them, are in an optimal position to navigate the challenges of life and sustain high levels of healthy functioning. The simplicity of OA makes it a practical self-regulatory skill. Inherent in mindfulness is self-knowledge, realizing larger patterns of meaning, and taking a wider view (Niemiec et al., 2012). This research has identified that similar qualities are also associated with OA.

Mindfulness offers a metacognitive perspective which makes it possible to see the aspects of any experience as temporary phenomena rather than creating an identity from them (Teasdale, 1999). This phenomenon, as well as an improved ability to cope with stress, has also been attributed to meditation (Katz et al., 2005). Additionally, Niemiec et al. (2012) point out that the integration of mindfulness through meditation

may well be a formula to cultivate productive engagement at work, an expanded sense of meaning and purpose, enhanced physical and psychological well-being, and improved relationships. The development of mindfulness may counteract the effect of stressors that can lead to burnout, thus mindfulness practices like OA may contribute to the alleviation of burnout symptoms and possibly even play a significant role in burnout prevention. Studies have shown that this is of particular value among healthcare providers (e.g., Goodman & Schorling, 2012; Gracia-Gracia & Oliván-Blázquez, 2017).

From this research and more recent work (e.g., Dängeli, 2018, 2019), including studies in neuroscience (Sänger et al., 2014), it can be substantiated that tunnel awareness might be a mode of perception that identifies separateness between self and others, as well as between subject and object. In contrast, OA is a mode of perception in which we sense the deeper connection between oneself and others, as well as the interrelatedness between subject and object. This point raises the issue that a sense of separateness between self and others is typically involved when one experiences distress. Indeed, in *fight-or-flight* mode one has to confront or escape the ‘other’ (Siegel, 2018). As this research has shown, the sense of being deeply connected with others may promote feelings of calm and well-being, while cultivating the virtues of non-judgment, empathy and compassion. It is not being suggested that tunnel awareness is inherently problematic or the cause of distress, but rather that a narrowly focussed perception is often one’s operational mode in stressful situations. As such, the ability to consciously shift into OA in such situations may be paramount.

Conclusion

A month after the research intervention had been completed, the author sent an email to all eleven research participants, asking about their current states and general responses to stressful situations. All replies indicated that the participants were less triggered by what used to cause them stress and negative emotional reactions, and they were experiencing more well-being and resourcefulness in their life. Almost all of them also reported that they were finding it relatively easy to access OA whenever they wanted to, including in challenging situations. This was summed up concisely by one participant who stated: “I can now drop into the state of OA very quickly, like I decide to go into it and there it is”.

The overall result of this research indicates that OA shares similar characteristics with mindfulness, and its simplicity serves in various contexts in terms of performance enhancement and stress resilience, which in turn may help to prevent and treat burnout.

Future research and applications

Firstly, the increasing use of mobile electronic devices (including smart phones) might, through classic conditioning, contribute to the onset of an enduring state of tunnel awareness, that may in turn be one of the reasons behind why many individuals do not cope well with stress and behave in destructive ways. Research is recommended

to explore the validity of this hypothesis and the potential role of applied OA in this context.

Secondly, in the author's current role as a transpersonal coach and trainer, working with individuals and groups, OA is being recognised as a fundamental aspect of *participatory processes* that typically generate fulfilling outcomes for clients and students, as well as the facilitators who engage with them in OA based participatory processes. Collectively, we have identified that pairs and groups can use the OA technique to co-create a participatory space that is open, multisensory, multidimensional, inclusive, creative, and process oriented. This has generated a shared idea and enthusiasm about an 'OA For Change Project' with a vision to collaboratively explore and address current social issues. This project was launched online in February 2020 (Authentic Self Empowerment, 2020). Research is suggested to investigate the value of OA centred participatory groups and their effectiveness at generating beneficial outcomes to influence broader circles, as well as their impact in society.

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