

# Open Awareness Inquiry

**Introducing applied *open awareness* as an inquiry method for researchers to engage the transformative dimensions of consciousness**

**Written for the Integral Transpersonal Journal - Research Report Section**

**By Jevon Dangeli, MSc.  
jevondangeli.com**

## **Abstract**

This article introduces *Open Awareness Inquiry* – a participatory process that may aid qualitative researchers in the context of exploring the transpersonal and transformative dimensions of consciousness. Researchers will gain insight into the theory and application of Open Awareness (OA) Inquiry as a potential resource in qualitative research.

Characteristics of OA include rapport and mutual resonance (Bandler & Grinder, 1976; Siegel, 2013), a participatory perspective (Ferrer & Sherman, 2011), mindfulness (Siegel 2010), empathy (Watson, 2004), and a state of conscious awareness that moves individuals and groups away from a fixated tunnel awareness, to a state of openness, receptivity and equanimity (Dangeli & Geldenhuys, 2018).

These characteristics indicate that OA may be beneficial in all three stages of research, as described by Anderson and Braud (2011). The authors encourage optimising a “context of discovery” in these stages of the research (2011, p. 189). By virtue of its inherent characteristics, OA promotes such a context of discovery.

## **Introduction**

At the Transpersonal Research Colloquium (TRC) in Prague in 2017, and the TRC in Paris in 2019, I presented *open awareness* (OA) as a constructive tool in qualitative research. At both colloquiums I lead experiential exercises for researchers to sample how OA may enhance receptivity in the researcher and a heightened awareness of the relational space between co-researchers. In the lively discussions that followed these experiential sessions, there was a general agreement that OA could be of value in terms of research ethics and in terms of being mindful of inter-subjective dynamics in the conduct of research.

In this article I will introduce *Open Awareness Inquiry* – a participatory process that may aid qualitative researchers in the context of exploring the transpersonal and transformative dimensions of consciousness. OA Inquiry has been distilled from the *Open Awareness Integral Process*, which came into existence through investigating and modelling the essential components that make the group sharing circles at the author’s transpersonal coaching courses and retreats impactful, meaningful, and sometimes transformative for the whole group. Until now, the inquiry process described in this article has only been applied in such sharing circles, which include groups engaging in it for the purpose of collaborative coaching,

problem solving, change management, as well as for exploring and integrating transpersonal experiences. OA Inquiry is still to be tested in a formal research setting; however, this article will provide researchers with insight into the theory and application of OA Inquiry as a potential resource in qualitative research.

### **Describing Open Awareness**

The state and perspective of OA reframes one's current experience of self, placing phenomena within one's field of awareness, as opposed to these being experienced as separate from oneself. 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 (Dangeli & Geldenhuys, 2018). In OA the person experiences a felt sense of expansiveness and interconnection as a result of dis-identification from their individual self-concept (Dangeli, 2019).

Put simply, the experience of OA is one where the person becomes aware of their body as a whole, including their emotions and their mind's activity, yet not identified with any of that content; while at the same time becoming aware of their deep connection to everyone, nature, and everything else in existence. This might be comparable with what Stanislav Grov refers to as a *holotropic* state of consciousness (2000). These days, with knowledge of both traditional and contemporary spiritual practices from various walks of life readily available, the cultivation of OA is widely accessible.

The author's own experience of OA is predominantly through the practice of *Jumi* – an acronym for *judo mind*. Jumi can be understood as a transformative movement-based practice. The author began developing Jumi in the late nineties by combining the principles of judo with qigong, yoga and conscious breathing skills. The Jumi practice (n.d.) has evolved over the years, but its primary purpose has remained intact, this being to enable children and adults at any level of fitness and at any stage of psycho-spiritual development to establish and embody OA.

### **The potential value of Open Awareness Inquiry in qualitative research**

OA Inquiry is a means for individuals, groups and researchers to explore subtle phenomena that may ordinarily not occur in conscious awareness. This method involves skills to open the *aperture* of an individual's or group's awareness, enabling them to 'see' deeper and wider into the individual psyche as well as that of the intersubjective or relational space between individuals and among groups.

Characteristics of OA in the context of relationships, as well as the researcher and participant relationship, include rapport and mutual resonance (Bandler & Grinder, 1976; Siegel, 2013), a participatory perspective (Ferrer & Sherman, 2011), mindfulness (Siegel 2010), empathy (Watson, 2004), and a state of conscious awareness that moves individuals and groups away from a fixated tunnel awareness, to a state of openness, receptivity and equanimity (Dangeli & Geldenhuys, 2018). These qualities may help researchers to identify their biases and to keep them as much as possible out of the research process, while being more aware of the extent to which they might influence the research, so that researchers can bracket their influences. These characteristics of OA indicate that its application may be beneficial in all three stages of the research that have been described by Anderson and Braud (2011). These stages are: (1) the *preparatory and data collection* stage, (2) the *data treatment and interpreting* stage, (3) the *reporting/communicating* stage. Anderson and Braud encourage

optimising a “context of discovery” in these stages of the research (2011, p. 189). By virtue of its inherent characteristics, OA promotes such a context of discovery.

Open Awareness Inquiry generally follows the principles of Co-operative Inquiry, of which the key concept is establishing an *extended epistemology* (Heron, 1996; Reason & Heron, 1995). OA is proposed as another means to support the establishment of a broadly inclusive epistemology. Both OA Inquiry and Co-operative Inquiry are participatory approaches in which groups gather to explore a subject of interest. OA Inquiry shares the major idea of Co-operative Inquiry, which is to engage in research ‘with’ rather than ‘on’ people. Reason & Heron (1995) recommend that the optimal group size for a Co-operative Inquiry is a minimum of four *co-researchers* (their term for research participants) and a maximum of twelve co-researchers. The same would apply in OA Inquiry.

A full OA Inquiry involves six cycles of separate inquiry sessions, each consisting of five steps, namely: (1) intention, (2) open awareness, (3) expression, (4) synthesis, (5) integration (See Figure 1). These five steps represent the sequence of the OA Inquiry session from beginning to end in one cycle. In formal research, the complete sequence would be applied in the first stage of the research, specifically in regard to the data collection. For informal or small research projects, one OA Inquiry cycle in a single session might suffice. In a full OA Inquiry, the first five cycles explore the subject of the research predominantly in one of five domains, namely: (1) physical, (2) mental, (3) emotional, (4) interpersonal, (5) transpersonal. The sixth cycle is for consolidating the data that emerged from the preceding cycles, and to generate a unified representation of the core themes that arose through the inquiry process. For smaller OA inquiries, where anything less than six cycles will be used, all five domains should be covered in each cycle.

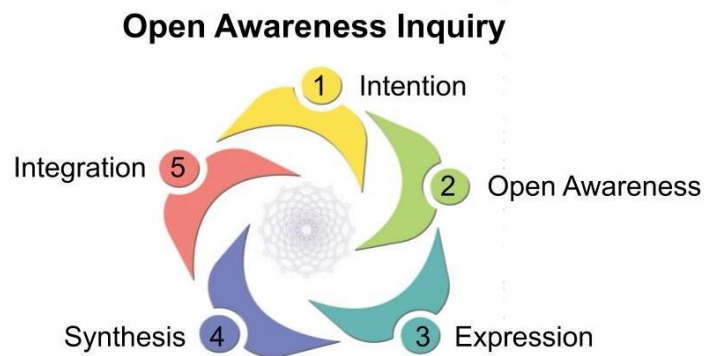


Figure 1

### Preparation and data collection

While in the full OA Inquiry, each cycle begins with a focus in one particular domain, it can be expected that the co-researchers will experience the subject in other domains simultaneously, and as such, each cycle may end up exploring the subject in more than one domain. The reason for beginning each cycle with a focus in one domain is to ensure that all five domains are covered in the full OA Inquiry, thereby making this an integral approach. The timeframe between each cycle should be determined by the co-researchers depending on the subject being explored and the period in which the data collection should be completed. If the timeframe is unclear, then one-week intervals between cycles is recommended in order to

keep momentum while allowing for periods of reflection and the logging of experiences between cycles.

I will now outline an example of what each step in the OA Inquiry generally involves.

### **Step 1: Intention**

The intention is a clearly stated and written agreement made by the group of co-researchers that describes the subject or focus of the research, including the group's combined commitment to explore it for at least a designated minimum amount of cycles of the inquiry. By agreeing upfront on a minimum amount of cycles, the sessions can be scheduled, while allowing for the possibility that more cycles may be of value and implemented at a later stage, depending on how the process unfolds and what emerges.

Groups should agree on their intention in an introductory meeting prior to gathering for the first OA Inquiry session. On the day of each session/cycle, the intention of the research and the predominant domain, if any, in which the inquiry will focus on that day should be articulated and all co-researchers in the group should be in agreement about this before commencing with the following step of that session's inquiry.

### **Step 2: Open Awareness**

The group should nominate one of its members to facilitate OA for the group in this step. There are various ways in which the group can access a collective state of Open Awareness, and the facilitator can use any means that they are familiar with, suitable for the group.

Below is an example of how the facilitator can guide the group into OA. The prompts in the following example are suitable for in-person gatherings in a private setting, and can be adapted for online gatherings:

The facilitator should arrange that everyone sits in a circle without any objects between the individuals. Once the group has settled, the facilitator can provide the following prompts with about a 30 second pause between each prompt:

Prompt 1: *We can start by all inhaling through the nose, pulling a full breath deep into the belly, then releasing the breath slowly out from the mouth.*

*We'll continue breathing in this way until we all establish a collective breathing rhythm, where our own inhalations and exhalations become synchronised with those of everyone else in the group.*

Prompt 2: *Now, breathing naturally again, we can all gaze gently toward the floor in the centre of the circle.*

Prompt 3: *Let's each begin to sense the entire volume of space between us and surrounding us. We can become aware of how we are all connected through our combined breath and the space that we collectively occupy.*

Prompt 4: *Now, we can allow awareness of our unifying space to extend beyond this area and throughout the atmosphere of the earth, including all beings around the world and our precious planet as a whole.*

Prompt 5: *Let's raise our eyes` gaze from the centre of the circle and briefly make gentle eye contact with each other, purposefully connecting with each other and our collective consciousness, and in this way co-creating our participatory space, so that we can be open and receptive to the ideas that it may give rise to.*

### **Step 3: Expression**

The first thing in this step is that the members of the group should feel welcome to share what is present for them. Everyone in the group should hold an empathic space while those who wish to express what their experience of Open Awareness is like, take turns to do so.

Next, the group can begin to focus on their intention for engaging in the inquiry. Here research groups can address the subject or topic of the research in their co-created participatory space, and explore any particular experiences, impressions or ideas that arise. The co-researchers can express their experiences in any way; for example, verbal, somatic (movements or gestures), representational (drawing, art, or any means of creative expression), including any other forms of expression.

All co-researchers should have an opportunity to freely express their experiences, impressions, or ideas in relation to the subject or topic being explored. Points that peak the most interest and gain traction can be explored further by discussing or enacting the key features. Any expressions or arising ideas can be questioned by other co-researchers in the group in order to elicit the meanings of the expressions, as well as to investigate their authenticity and implications. Creativity and spontaneity should be allowed to flow through the group's participatory space and all co-researchers should note the main expressions, including ideas and themes that arise.

### **Step 4: Synthesis**

In this step the inquiry group brings all their main ideas and themes together, while allowing this synthesis to possibly spark other ideas that had not yet arisen. Similar ideas can be clustered, noting potential superordinate themes and exploring their validity. This can be a lively part of the investigation among the co-researchers and all perspectives should be welcomed. The synthesis of all pertinent ideas and themes should be agreed on by all co-researchers in order to form a consolidated representation of the group's collective experience and perspective before the integration phase in the final step.

### **Step 5: Integration**

Since OA Inquiry would typically be used to explore an experience through an open *aperture* of awareness, and calibrate the experience in the five domains; in this final step of the inquiry cycle the co-researchers aim to integrate their consolidated representation with the inquiry intention that was elicited in Step 1. The means of integration will be determined by the nature of the inquiry intention and how the consolidated representation can be optimally integrated with this, depending on the context. This is to be explored, discussed and agreed upon among the co-researchers.

In a full OA Inquiry using six cycles, integration in the sixth cycle would involve integrating the consolidated representations of all six cycles. Here the aim is to generate a unified representation of the complete inquiry process. Ultimately, the unified representation is the outcome of the inquiry, which can be applied to the primary intention for the inquiry, if relevant, and as appropriate.

The last aspect of the inquiry process involves recording the outcome of the inquiry and initiating a means to transfer the outcome in a way that it can potentially have a constructive impact beyond the group. Key points and any particular action steps are discussed, agreed upon by all, and logged for record prior to closing the inquiry session – as appropriate for the group.

## **Data treatment and interpreting**

All co-researchers, including the primary researcher, if there is one, should keep a journal and log their significant experiences after each inquiry cycle. Following the sixth cycle, the co-researchers should each write a reflective account, drawing from their journal entries in order to document their key experiences throughout the period of the OA Inquiry process.

In the case of OA Inquiry being used in a formal research project, in which there will quite likely be a primary researcher, the primary researcher's next task is to analyse the reports from all co-researchers, including their own, with the aim to identify both the unique/individual and the shared/group experiences. The themes and outcomes should be appropriately documented in a project report. Another means of capturing data would be to video record the live sessions in which the cycles took place in order to analyse both the verbal and non-verbal expressions of the co-researchers. If further data is required, then the co-researchers can be interviewed within a few days following the completed inquiry.

Either all the co-researchers or only the primary researcher, depending on the nature of the project, would analyse the reflective reports and other recorded data, if any. All collected data should be treated and interpreted according to qualitative research protocols (Anderson and Braud, 2011). Once all the treated and interpreted data has been analysed, categorised, critiqued and synthesised, the researchers would document their experience of the research project in a main report.

## **Reporting and communicating**

In order to provide a rich account of the OA Inquiry and the subject that was studied, the researchers can synthesise their findings and insights in a reflective account, using, for example, *Embodied Writing* (Anderson and Braud, 2011, pp. 267-280) as a means to express the fullness of their first-person accounts and their perception of the shared group process.

Finally, the researchers should evaluate all aspects of the research in relation to its strengths and weaknesses, as well as the potential transferability of the OA Inquiry method to other contexts, situations, and populations.

## **References**

Anderson, R. & Braud. W. (2011). *Transforming Self and Others Through Research*, New York: SUNY Press.

Bandler, R., & Grinder, J. (1976). *The Structure of Magic* (Vol. 1). Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behaviour Books.

Dangeli, J. (2019). *Open Awareness Handbook*. Retrieved from [https://jevondangeli.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Open\\_Awareness\\_Handbook\\_Jevon\\_Dangeli.pdf](https://jevondangeli.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Open_Awareness_Handbook_Jevon_Dangeli.pdf)

Dangeli, J. and Geldenhuys, H. (2018). Open Awareness: Holding the Liminal Space in Transpersonal Coaching and Therapy, *Integral Transpersonal Journal*. Vol. 10, pp 105-107.

Dangeli, J. (2018). *The Transpersonal Coaching Handbook*. Retrieved from [https://jevondangeli.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Transpersonal\\_Coaching\\_Handbook\\_2018.pdf](https://jevondangeli.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Transpersonal_Coaching_Handbook_2018.pdf)

Dangeli, J. (2015). *Exploring the phenomenon of peripheral awareness and its effects on stress and burnout*. MSc Research Dissertation. Retrieved from [http://authentic-self-empowerment.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Open\\_Awareness-Dissertation\\_Jevon\\_Dangeli.pdf](http://authentic-self-empowerment.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Open_Awareness-Dissertation_Jevon_Dangeli.pdf)

Ferrer, J. (2008). *The Participatory Turn, Spirituality, Mysticism, Religious Studies*. Sate University of New York Press.

Ferrer, J. N., & Sherman, J. (2011). *The Participatory Turn: Spirituality, Mysticism, Religious Studies*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Grof, S. (2000). *Psychology of the future*, New York: State University of New York Press.

Heron, J. (1996). *Co-operative Inquiry: research into the human condition*. Sage Publications.

Jumi (n.d.) Retrieved from [www.jumi.live](http://www.jumi.live)

Reason, P. & Heron, J. Co-operative Inquiry. In R. Harre, J. Smith, & L. Van Langenhove (Eds.), *Rethinking Methods in Psychology* (pp. 122-142). London: Sage 1995.

Siegel, D. (2018). *Aware: The Science and Practice of Presence. A Complete Guide to the Groundbreaking Wheel of Awareness Meditation Practice*. Tarcher Perigee.

Siegel, D. (2010). *The mindful therapist: a clinician's guide to mindsight and neural integration*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton.

Watson, J (2004). Caritas and communitas: a caring science ethical view of self and community. *Journal of Japan Academic Nursing*, 24 (1), 66-71.

---