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The Just One Look Method

*The Act of Inward Looking and the Self-Directed
Attention Exercise*





Many thanks to the participants who made this study possible

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine personal experiences of an alternative method for improving mental health and well-being called The Just One Look Method (JOLM).

Data were collected and analyzed by qualitative content analysis of eight semi-structured interviews of JOLM users resulting in three main themes: The Act of Inward Looking (AIL), The Self-Directed Attention Exercise (SDA) and Consequences of JOLM. The main results were that AIL may offer an additional aspect and definition of the concept of self, a kind of subjective *sense* of self with possible implications for the field of consciousness science. And that *looking at* that sense of self may influence attention with possible positive consequences for mental health and well-being. JOLM was contrasted theoretically with traditional attention-based methods for achieving better mental health with a particular emphasis on Buddhist meditation. Further research was suggested to investigate more causal relationships between AIL and SDA and between JOLM and mental health.

Keywords

The Just One Look Method. The Act of Inward Looking. Self-Directed Attention Exercise. Mindfulness Meditation. Attention. Mental Health. Qualitative content analysis.

Attention is the process of concentration where some features of the environment is attended to while others are ignored. The ability to focus and respond to specific stimuli is described as focused attention. The ability to maintain focus in the face of distractions is called selective attention. Attentional skills can be enhanced due to repetition and reach automaticity, which is a process where an often-performed task requires less conscious attention and becomes automatic (Groome et al, 2012; Holt et al, 2015). The Just One Look Method (JOLM) is an alternative approach to consciously work with attention with the aim of improving mental health and well-being. JOLM consists in two parts 1: The Act of Inward Looking (AIL) where the focus of attention is directed at a person's sense of self and 2: The Self-Directed Attention Exercise (SDA) where selective attention is strengthened by sitting down for ten minutes once or twice a day and maintain focused attention on the sensation of breathing (Sherman & Sherman, 2019).

The role of attention for mental health and well-being has been studied widely in research and can be seen in the scientific interest in mindfulness meditation and mindfulness-based interventions (Fjorback et al, 2011; Parsons et al, 2017; Creswell, 2017; Dunning et al, 2018). Mindfulness meditation and mindfulness-based interventions can be described as a set of techniques where attention is trained in order to enhance the skill of attending to present moment experience. And that the strengthening of the focus of attention is believed to help the practitioner be more open towards present moment experience and to ignore the mind's tendency to judge and wander towards past and future events (Black, 2011). Being more mindful towards present moment experience has been shown to be able to lower stress levels by lowering arousal and thereby increase mental health and well-being (Rapgay et al, 2009; James et al, 2016). To illustrate the role and use of attention for mental health and well-being research has often used experienced meditators as study objects. Key research has shown that meditation can improve regulatory functions on attentional and emotional processes with potential long-term impact on brain and behavior (Lutz et al, 2009).

Lutz et al, (2009) studied two forms of meditation techniques that are well established within the Buddhist community. The first is called Focused Attention (FA). FA is practiced by sustaining selective attention on a chosen object from moment to moment. The aim of FA is to strengthen attention by developing three skills related to attention which is vigilance, disengagement, and redirection in relation to distractions.

When this practice has reached advanced levels, it is said to lead to an ability to sustain an effortless focus of attention that in turn have shown to correlate with a significant decrease in emotional reactivity. The second meditation practice studied by Lutz et al, (2019) were Open Monitoring (OM). When the skills of FA are developed the practitioner is said to be able to use those skills to cultivate a state where usually implicit features of one's mental life becomes more available. The increased awareness of such features is said to lead to an ability to transform cognitive and emotional habits and at the same time be less reactive against them to create less mental distress.

The outline of this thesis is as follows. First, I describe traditional attention-based methods for achieving better mental health and one of its origins, such as meditation with a particular emphasis on Buddhism. Second, I describe the Just One Look Method as an alternative to more traditional methods. Third, I describe differences between these methods and finally I present qualitative data regarding how The Just One Look Method works.

Buddhist Detachment and the Idea of No-Self

The psychological approach of a kind of nonreactive meta-cognitive monitoring can also be called nonattachment or detachment. Nonattachment is a core feature in Buddhist meditation and understanding and has a direct link to the Buddhist doctrines and teachings. One example of that is the first noble truth that declares that life is suffering. To end suffering, it is crucial to have a correct understanding of the nature of the human mind and to develop a correct mental attitude towards mind and life. The mind, in a Buddhist context, is conditioned to experience and create new suffering until the cycle of misconception and attachment towards life is ended. To end suffering, it is believed, a crucial step is to discover that there is no separate sense of self. The idea of a separate identity or a sense of self is regarded as an illusion and until the illusion of self is discovered the mind experience an illusory sense of separation and existential limit. Another crucial step to end suffering, from a Buddhist perspective, is to train the mind to not engage in a too attached way in relation to life events. Greed, desire, and aggression are believed to create an unhealthy attachment towards life and the only way to handle those tendencies of the mind is to detach from them. Meditation then, can be seen as a mental tool that is said to reveal the nature and functioning of the human mind (Budiarto, 2019).

Problems with Self, Approach, Effort, and Detachment

The psychological meaning and relevance or even existence of a person's subjective sense of self seems absent in both the teachings of Buddhism and in modern Western psychology. In Buddhism the subjective sense of self, the ego, refers to an illusion (Budiarto, 2019). In the field of scientific psychology, the sense of self is referred to as self as in the personality responding to life situations (Holt et al, 2015). But it seems undeniable that for every subject there is a subjective *sense* of self that does not change over the life span. The subjective feeling of being *here* as *me* seems to be universally available to every person without changing over time. One central question of this study was to investigate what the sense of self is and how it can be described and what possible psychological effect it could have if it were brought into a more conscious awareness within the subject by looking at it with the beam of attention.

Various meditation techniques and mindfulness approaches implemented in other practices with the aim of alleviating mental health problems stems from Buddhist theory and practice. A central aspect of meditation lies in the use of attention. An increased awareness of the role of attention as well as stronger attention seems to stand in close relationship with experienced mental health. But even though meditation can seem safe in itself and that various meditation-based techniques have shown promising results in relation to mental health problems, it is unclear if the understandings and approach towards mind and life that meditation is built upon, is unproblematic for working with attention in a secular mental health context. Is meditation the only way of using attention for achieving better mental health and well-being?

Furthermore, if a meditative approach towards mind and life is viewed in relation with ordinary mental health, there seems also to be a problem with effort. Research link effortless authority over attention with an expert level of meditation practice (Lutz et al, 2009). When Buddhist monks were studied, who could be said to have reached an advanced level of attention regulation, the average practice among them was in total 44,000 hours. That means practicing meditation for about 6 hours a day for 20 years. Then having control over attention seems more like a special and effortful skill to achieve, rather than a natural functioning of the human mind.

Lastly, the Buddhist view of the nature of human mind does, however, stand in stark contrast to western ideas of, for example, identity, personality, and

attachment. The development and stages in the emergence of identity and self in the early years of development and its psychological meaning over the life span is well established in research (Groome et al, 2012; Holt et al, 2015). Likewise, is a secure attachment created by warm and loving caregivers at the very core of the understanding of a healthy psychological development within western developmental psychology (Bowlby, 1997; Groome et al, 2012). Research have made attempts to bridge the gap between Buddhist detachment and western attachment, arguing that the view of Buddhist attachment as anti-attachment is a misunderstanding, or at least an oversimplification. Buddhist detachment, it is argued, must be seen in a more complex way. For example, attachment is fostered when it comes to compassion and love and detachment can be used to disengage from more negative emotional states (Lynken, 2007; Sahdra, Shaver & Brown, 2010; Sahdra & Shaver, 2013). In this view detachment and attachment can be seen as the Buddhist way of transforming the mind through meditation to be more open and compassionate and less closed and clinging. Nevertheless, Buddhistic beliefs are arguably at odds with secular Western society. Thus, alternative mental health frameworks can play a role in modern society. One such example is the Just One Look Method (JOLM).

The Just One Look Method

The Just One Look Method (JOLM) is an alternative approach for working with attention with the aim of improving mental health and well-being. JOLM consists in two parts 1: The Act of Inward Looking (AIL) and 2: The Self-Directed Attention Exercise (SDA). AIL is performed by bringing the sense of self, the *me*, into conscious awareness by looking directly at it. Doing this can also be called to look at yourself. To look, then, means to focus attention. And yourself refers to *you* or what you would call *me*. According to JOLM, a person only needs to look at him or herself once to establish a sustainable connection with the sense of self within the mind (Sherman & Sherman, 2019).

Concepts from consciousness research can help clarify how The Act of Inward Looking is performed. Attention can be said to exist in the environment of the phenomenal consciousness, the most fundamental kind of consciousness. A creature equipped with phenomenal consciousness do feel or sense its own existence and the subjective experience of information in some way. When experienced subjective

activities in phenomenal consciousness are brought into a more reflective consciousness it is performed by the ability to move and focus attention. When a person focuses attention on some activity in phenomenal consciousness, like on a fly on the wall, the person *looks* at it with the spotlight of attention. The spotlight of attention then defines what becomes the center of consciousness and what is subjected for more detailed processing (Revonsuo, 2018). The same applies when a person *looks* at him or herself. The spotlight of attention is directed to the subjective *sense* of self, the *me* within the person. If attention is seen as the light beam of the spotlight, the light beam is reversed and directed backwards to the source of the light, the light bulb. The subjective sense of self then, the sensation that subjectively confirms that a person exists, is what is brought into the center of consciousness with the use of attention (Sherman & Sherman, 2019).

The benefit of consciously looking at the sense of self is said to be that it has an effect on the general perception towards life. The first look it is said, replaces over time, a sense of *wrongness* with a lasting sense of *rightness*. The existential fear-based sense that something is inherently wrong and needs to be fixed in order to enjoy life as it is, is said to be removed by bringing the *me* into conscious awareness by looking directly at it. The idea is that, until the first look, much of the psychological reactions towards day-to-day experiences of life are fear based. There is a vigilant and protective attitude that seems to want to protect the person from life itself, making sure it is safe, although there is often nothing to fear. The fear addressed in a JOLM context is purely psychological and has nothing to do with natural biological fear (Sherman & Sherman, 2017).

AIL is not viewed as a practice or coping strategy. To perform the act itself demands extraordinarily little effort although the willingness to actually do it is necessary. After AIL is performed the effects of it is said to develop naturally and without effort. The effects of AIL are described as a process of psychological fear leaving the mind with the result of a decrease in fear-based reactions towards life. And although AIL is simple to perform, the method highlights that the process of psychological fear leaving the mind can be a process accompanied by psychological distress. And that the lessening of fear often is identified in retrospect (Sherman & Sherman, 2019).

The Self-Directed Attention Exercise (SDA) were developed to educate the person of the role of attention after AIL is performed. SDA is performed by sitting

down in a relaxed way and focus the beam of attention on the sensation of breath created by the air passing through the nose. Every exhale is counted starting with one. When there is a distraction and attention wanders it is noticed and attention is brought back to the counting starting over from one. The goal is to strengthen attention and enhance the ability to learn what is and what is not worthy of attention. To be effective with SDA it is recommended that each session does not last more than 10 minutes and that no more than 2 sessions per day are performed (Sherman & Sherman, 2019).

The difference between Meditation and The Just One Look Method

There are some central differences between meditation and The Just One Look Method (JOLM). Firstly, JOLM is initiated by the first inward look (AIL), which is not the case in meditation. Secondly, The Self-Directed Attention Exercise (SDA) is not used with the intention to develop a meditative and non-judgmental approach towards mind and life. To the contrary, the goal of SDA is to discriminate among useful and useless mental content. And SDA, as a formal practice, is not thought of as a lifelong practice. Instead, SDA is seen as a time bound tool for reducing fear-based thoughts, after the first inward look has been performed. The idea is that the less attention that is given to the old fear-based thoughts, the weaker they get and the sooner they disappear. When SDA has strengthened attention enough the use of attention moves naturally over to daily life by giving less attention to psychological fear and the formal practice of SDA is stopped (Sherman & Sherman, 2017; 2019).

Thirdly, JOLM has a different approach and view of the mind compared to the approach of meditation. The only dysfunctional part of the mind from a JOLM perspective, is psychological fear. As fear decreases, psychological functions such as being mindful towards present moment experience, comes naturally and without effort. Effortless control over attention is seen as a natural human state free from fear rather than a special or higher state of consciousness achieved by practice (Sherman & Sherman, 2019).

Aim and limits of the study

The aim of this study was to investigate and describe personal experiences of an alternative approach for working with attention with the aim of improving mental health and wellbeing called The Just One Look Method (JOLM). The method was contrasted

theoretically through the lens of Buddhist mindfulness meditation and empirically studied through semi-structured interviews of Just One Look Method users. An additional aim of this study was to present JOLM in a scientific context. The lack of scientific research on JOLM is then considered a limit for this study.

Method

Participants

This study included eight participants, six men and two women, ranging from 32 to 65 years of age. The participants came from five different parts of the world: Sweden, Germany, Spain, Ukraine, United Kingdom and United States. The participants were included by a convenient selection and with the common feature that they all have had contact with the website (justonelook.org) that offers The Just One Look Method (JOLM). The participants were contacted by email with the acceptance and assistance of the nonprofit organization (The Just One Look Foundation) that supports the work of JOLM. All who were asked to participate agreed to take part in the study. The time difference for starting with JOLM among participants varied from three months to 18 years. Three of the participants had started with JOLM within the last 12 months. The other five participants made their first contact with JOLM between 8 and 18 years ago.

Materials

The interview data consists in recordings of semi-structured interviews. The interviews were given a structure by an interview guide. The interview guide was designed in accordance with the aim of the study; to get users to describe how JOLM is performed and what possible consequences JOLM might have. Each participant's interview were carefully transcribed. Data analysis was performed using Burnard's method of analyzing interview transcripts in qualitative research. Burnard's method is a systematic stage-by-stage process with the aim of categorize the data into themes, categories, and subcategories (Burnard, 1991).

Interview Procedure

The interviews took place using Skype online video call that were recorded. In two of the interview's participants asked of the possibility to only use the Skype voice function. This was accepted. The interviews tended to be more structured in the

beginning. As the interviews proceeded the topic areas were covered more freely and with less involvement from the interviewer. The aim was to cover all the questions in the interview guide for every interview. In accordance with the literature, interviews begun with questions of more general nature and questions of more sensitive nature were presented in the middle of the interview (Langemar, 2008; Svartdal, 2001). This was done to create as little discomfort as possible for the participant in the interview situation. The interviews varied in length from 30 to 80 minutes.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations in this study were based on four main research ethical principles. The participants were properly *informed* about the aim of the current study and of the role participants would play in the study. Furthermore, they were informed that participation is voluntary and that they can abort participation at any time without explanation. As active participants of this study participants were asked to give their *consent*. This was made in the early stages when collecting participants and always before the actual interview. Because the interviews were recorded, participants were ensured that their personal information collected on them was treated with *confidentiality*. Recorded interviews, interview transcripts, email addresses, and names were always kept protected, anonymous and confidential. And that collected data on participants would be *used* for the purpose of this study only and that the collected data would be deleted when the study was finished (Vetenskapsrådet, 2020).

Results

Data Analysis

The overall aim of this study was to investigate and describe personal experiences of an alternative approach for working with attention called The Just One Look Method. By a careful transcription of the informant's interviews using Burnards (1991) stage-by-stage method of analyzing interview transcripts it was possible to identify three themes. The themes followed naturally from the emergence of subcategories and categories in the interview transcripts. Together these themes represent the informant's experiences with The Just One Look Method. The themes are: 1) *The Act of Inward Looking* 2) *Self-Directed Attention* and 3) *Consequences of The Just One Look Method*. Themes, Categories and Subcategories are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Themes, categories and subcategories that describe and explain personal experiences among users of The Just One Look Method

Theme	Category	Subcategory
The Act of Inward Looking	Sensation	Source of attention
		Personal pronoun
		Sense of <i>me</i>
		Sense of <i>here</i>
		Not abstract
		Not a practice
Self-Directed Attention	Mental Act	Movement of attention
		Focus attention
		Looking at...
	Formal Practice	Strengthening of attention
		Focus on breath sensation
		Counting breaths
	In Daily Life	Sitting down
		Attention regulation
		Becomes automatic
		Self-help
Consequences of JOLM	Mental Health & Well-Being	Judging and non-acceptance
		Catching oneself
		Psychoeducation
		Role of attention
		Stronger attention
		Self-reliance
		Takes thoughts less seriously
		More relaxed & calm
		Feeling safe & light
		Less anxious & depressed
		Less stress and better at coping with stress
		Less worry
		Less worry of feeling states
		Feel and function better
		No feeling of separation
		Life Satisfaction
		Natural state
		Life flow
		A new mental foundation
		Alcohol and drug reduction
	Other	Relief
		Less fearful
		Less self-conscious
	Other	Lost interest in spiritual pursuits
		Lost interest in other methods
		End of searching

The Act of Inward Looking (AIL)

The theme “The Act of Inward Looking” constitute the interview data describing informants experiences with AIL. All informants reported that they had performed AIL at least once. All informants also reported that it was hard to describe how AIL was performed and that it was hardest to describe for informants who had recently tried AIL. Among informants who did try to describe AIL it was possible to distinguish two main categories related to AIL, namely sensation and mental act. The mental act was a movement and direction of attention. The movement of attention was directed towards something subjective among informants. The subjective sensation that was “looked at” by informants was described with names such as *me*, *myself*, *here* and *source of attention*. One example to illustrate this was given by the following informant: “*One directs attention, tries to direct attention back to its source, to myself really*”.

Even though this subjective sensation was experienced as fleeting and hard to describe, informants did not describe the sensation being looked at as abstract. At the same time, informants did not, when for example the sensation was named *me*, seem to refer to the autobiographical self. An informant illustrated this by saying that: “*One directs attention to how it really feels like to be me and I don’t mean that what one first thinks of when one says me, with me as my and, who I am and such, who I have relationships with and such, but I mean this feeling that is, this feeling that is as physical as the ground under my feet’s for example, it is obvious*”. Another informant said this about the mental act of inward looking: “*The very first time there was a shift in attention, so instead of looking for something abstract, it just happened that I looked at myself*”. So, when informants referred to themselves in the context of this mental act of inward looking, they did not refer to a concept related to the story or perception of the person. Rather they seemed to refer to a concrete sensation felt as a “personal pronoun” that they named myself or me.

A characteristic among informants when describing AIL was that it was not used as a practice. Some did though report that they had used AIL more frequently for some time after the first inward look but that the interest in doing that eventually stopped by itself, as described by an informant: “*It can be that way that I have been using mostly The Act of Inward Looking and then also as a way of becoming more aware of the possibility of direct attention...I turn my attention at myself instead from time to time and then, it is hard to say, it was enough for me for a long time, but the*

more aware of the role of attention a became the more interested I became in doing more. After having started with this Self-Directed Attention I have started to see some more results”

Self-Directed Attention (SDA)

The theme “Self-Directed Attention” constitutes the interview data describing informants’ experiences with SDA. Of all the data describing SDA among informants it was possible to distinguish two main categories related to SDA, namely SDA as a more formal practice and SDA as something that is used spontaneously in day to day life. SDA as a formal practice is described by Sherman & Sherman (2019) as an attention exercise that educates the user of the role of attention after AIL is performed. The use of SDA as a formal practice was more common among informants who were new to the Just One Look Method (JOLM). Newcomers seemed to view formal SDA as a more central aspect of JOLM compared to other informants. Newcomers reported that they first tried to look at themselves (AIL) until they sensed that they had done it, and that they then focused primarily on formal SDA. Informants who were newcomers also tended to explain JOLM in more practical terms where ordinary mental health benefits were of main interest. This will be further illustrated under consequences of JOLM.

Informants who were not newcomers reported that AIL, instead of formal SDA, had been the most central aspect of JOLM for their part, at least for some time. But when “older” informants started to see the value of using attention more outwardly then inwardly they reported a shift of interest. This is illustrated by the following statement: *“Yes, I realize that the looking at myself has outlived its purpose in a way, and that I now can focus on Self-Directed Attention, counting breaths to continue to strengthen my ability to direct my attention”*. And also, by another statement from an informant saying that: *“It has become more like exercising the body. It is nothing that I desperately needs to do, but I do it to be stronger with my attention.”*

SDA in daily life is referred to as an informal use of directing attention in daily life. After the first look (AIL) and after some formal attention practice (SDA) the use of attention moves over to day to day life with the aim of discriminating among useful and useless thoughts and feeling states (Sherman & Sherman, 2019). If there was a difference in the use of formal SDA among informants that was not the case when it came to a more informal use of SDA in day to day life. All informants reported that

they had been using attention more explicitly as a consequence of JOLM. One statement from an informant that captured what many informants reported was that:” *It is almost as I have started to see how little control over attention I really have and that there is some kind of, as I have been discovering, that there is a possibility of having control*”

The reports regarding informal SDA seemed all come down to a kind of increased awareness of how attention can be used in day to day life. Awareness and control over attention could be used as a tool to navigate among mental activity and life situations. A characteristic among informants regarding informal SDA was that it became natural and automatic and was not used as a strategy or practice. Informants could notice in the moment an unwanted mental activity and then judge it as useless and then choose not to give it attention.

Consequences of The Just One Look Method (JOLM)

The theme “Consequences of The Just One Look Method” constitutes the interview data describing informants’ own reports of results of having worked with JOLM. Of all the data regarding consequences of JOLM two main categories emerged, namely consequences for mental health and well-being and other consequences. Related to the mental health and well-being category it was also possible to distinguish some difference in reported consequences between AIL and SDA. The consequences of having performed AIL were reported in more general and existential terms. This could be expressed in sayings like “*there is no longer a feeling of separation*” and “*It’s like a new mental foundation*” or “*a natural state*” or a “*feeling of being safe*”. And other statements related to AIL was also described in a more general way. This could be described as being “*less worried of feeling states*” and reports of “*taking thoughts less seriously*” or just being “*less fearful*” or to have stronger feeling of “*life satisfaction*”.

One informant that had tried to seek help before among both traditional and alternative methods described the effect of AIL like: “*The change was actually that the sense of, I need to change something, wasn’t there as much*”. When the same informant reflected on the long term effects of the method as a whole it tended to be more specific. The informant illustrates this by saying that: “*This is something that really strikes me as how much the physical implications have lessened, the physical impact of the depression, I still talk about depression, I still have depressive ideas but not so much felt sense you know*”. The informant continues with an example from daily

life: *“If I feel lonely, I just sit down and wait for a while and then I feel lighter, so that’s how it’s happens today, I don’t even get enough gumption to use Self Directed Attention because once, the moment I think well I could use it, I already feel lighter”*. It is important to notice though that this informant first found JOLM for over nine years ago and had not been using formal SDA regularly from start.

Informants who had found JOLM most recently tended to relate more to the importance of SDA when reporting consequences of JOLM. For them, it seemed like SDA was the actual method. They all reported that they had done the first inward look (AIL) but they tended not to seek further understanding of its relevance and meaning. These informants also talked more explicitly about JOLM in terms of a method to alleviate ordinary mental health problems, compared to other informants. One informant that had found JOLM within the last year reported the self-help value of JOLM: *“That’s right and I never knew how, I never knew how to before and that’s why I kept seeing hypnotherapists and the doctors and tablets that’s why I did all those things because I experienced the symptoms and I didn’t know how to, not experience them or how to, just feel better, so now there’s a method where you can work, with yourself by yourself and it’s 10 minutes twice a day it’s very doable”* (10 minutes twice a day refers to the formal SDA exercise).

The informant who reported most consequences in relation to mental health and well-being was also the one who had found JOLM in most recent times, for about three months ago. This was also the informant that reported the most structured way of implementing JOLM. The person had performed AIL and reported that the only experience that confirmed that AIL was performed was *“that I must have done it, without realizing it because I felt different, it’s just a strange sort of feeling I can’t really explain the feeling, but I just felt different afterwards”*. After that the informant started a daily practice of SDA for ten minutes twice a day. The motivation to try JOLM was reported as a way to handle anxiety and excessive worry. When asked how the anxiety and worry manifested itself the informant told that: *“Well, lots of different ways it manifested itself, I mean I had, difficulty sleeping, I could not go to sleep, and I would always wake up the early hours in the morning. I worried about everything all day everyday just little things that never used to bother me before, so just very anxious, found it difficult to focus on things”*.

When talking about the results of having used SDA for some time the informant pointed out that it had an educating effect in relation to thought processes: *“I mean, sometimes you don’t realize how many thoughts you have during the day that are useless, but I think that I’m just having, it’s just a bit strange because I’m having less unhelpful thoughts if that makes sense”* and that it had an effect on being too fearful and self-conscious: *“Now I can do this and I can do that and not being so afraid of things because it’s, just so, afraid of things and not feeling, so self-conscious all the time and that was making, that was restricting me a lot feeling so self-conscious and not doing things”* and also on general well-being: *“I just feel I’m just more positive in so many different ways and more motivated and therefore I’m just not, I do still get, I still call it negative thoughts, but I do still get them but nowhere near as many as I was getting so, I think, I think for me personally I’m, it’s just making a difference throughout the day of how I feel and how motivated I feel and how positive I feel... I don’t know whether this has happened really quickly compared to other people but I just, I didn’t expect it to, I did expect it to work but I didn’t expect it to work as quick maybe because I’ve tried other things and nothing else has worked this quickly or this much ever, so I suppose I’ve been searching for years and years and years and it’s just like, It’s almost like surreal really.”*

Although informants who were new to the work tended to be more specific in their reports of consequences, there were exceptions. One informant that first found JOLM around 2012 reported consequences for general mental health and well-being, although his focus had been mostly on using AIL, rather than SDA. This informant reported that things as *“stress, worry and social anxiety”* had been improved. He also reported of a problem with addiction that had improved significantly saying that: *“I was doing drugs before and alcohol, cigarettes, and that has declined, disappeared almost. I can take a glass of wine or two but not more”*. When the informant reflected on what might have helped make these changes possible, he concluded that: *“To have looked at myself have given me a stronger attention, you don’t have to be carried away by all the emotions and thoughts, you get a bigger, you kind of setting your attention free.”*

Other consequences of JOLM were reports of decrease in a kind of searching energy that had been directed towards different spiritual pursuits and other methods for healing and self-knowledge. All informants reported that they had have a

pretty high level of searching energy that declined after they had started to use JOLM. The same informant as above noted that:” *Almost instantly after I had looked at myself the searching for a lot of things started to decline*”. And another informant said that: “*That’s one of the things I would say very clearly. I lost all interest in spiritual stuff. Yes, and I think it is very practical, and that’s what struck me and got me involved in this, because unlike the spiritual stuff, this was very practical, and it was having a result*”.

How the searching energy had expressed itself earlier differed somewhat among informants. Informants who were not new to JOLM often told of a long history of spiritual pursuits where bigger questions such as identity and meaning of life were in the search light. Informants who were new to JOLM more often told of the search for tools and methods for improving ordinary mental health and well-being. But in general, they all connected JOLM with a kind of end of searching.

Discussion

This study suggests that there could be more to the concept of self than provided by the scientific field of psychology and by the field of Buddhist philosophy of mind. From a psychological perspective the self is typically described and referred to as the part of the person that undergoes development and change, the personality (Groome et al, 2012; Holt et al, 2015). From a Buddhist perspective the idea of a separate self, often referred to as ego, is nonexistent (Budiarto, 2019). Neither scientific psychology nor Buddhism then, offers a satisfying explanation of the subjective part of self that this study’s participants refer to when they tell of their experience with The Act of Inward Looking.

The main result of this study is that it offers a small but significant contribution to the understanding and definition of self. Apart from self as a concept or an abstraction there is a *sense* of self. This sense of self cannot, however, be understood or conceptualized. It can only be subjectively experienced. The sense of self does not refer to some aspect of personality or personal identity. Rather, it is a fixed and basic referent to the subject, the *me* or *you*. To bring the sense of self into a conscious experience, the subject uses the ability to move attention. The spotlight of attention is

directed backwards to the source of attention, which is the same as the subject's sense of him or herself.

The knowledge of the sense aspect of self might, due to its subjective nature, bring implications to the field of consciousness science. In consciousness science subjective experiences are a legitimate study object (Revonsuo, 2018). At the same time, the study object is more aimed at investigating experiences from a subjective perspective. To investigate the sense of self, however, is the investigation of the one who has the experiences, the subject itself. If it is true that the subjective experience of the sense of self has the same quality as the experience of the source of attention, then there might be some new knowledge to attain about the nature of attention and consciousness. Attention might be more than a mental tool for information processing. And the subjective experience of the source of attention might have something more to say about consciousness.

It seems reasonable to argue, on the background of this study's findings, that a sense of self exists and can even be looked at. But it can, of course, be discussed what possible psychological effects it might have to *look* at it with the use of attention. Why would such a simple inward look have any meaning and effect at all? This study makes no attempts to explain why an inward look would have psychological consequences. This study does, however, present reports from people who have performed The act of Inward Looking (AIL). Informants who had performed AIL did make reports of "*feeling different*", "*safe*" or even "*less worried*" after AIL were performed. But it is not possible to say something about any possible long term psychological consequences of performing AIL or JOLM as whole. Five of the eight informants did find JOLM between 10 and 18 years ago. Even though all five of these informants refers to JOLM, and particular to AIL, as an important event in their healing process, it is hard to rule out other causes. For the other three informants the problem is the opposite. They all report positive psychological consequences of using JOLM, and especially SDA. But they all found JOLM within the last 12 months and in what degree their experienced consequences will last is impossible to say.

An interesting result that can, however, be documented as consistent over time in this study is the fact that all informants reported that JOLM had "*ended their search*". This was true for informants that had first found JOLM for almost two decades

ago, as well for informants who were just a few months into the work. This end of searching took the form of an experience of not feeling the need to search for other solutions or methods. This might indicate that there are some positive psychological consequences to gain from JOLM and that these consequences might best be understood in a context of ordinary mental health. It is important to note though that not all informants viewed JOLM as a method to improve mental health and well-being. Especially informants with a long history with JOLM seemed to have a more *existential* approach to JOLM, at least for some time. One explanation of this can be that people who found JOLM for 10 to 20 years ago more often had a background with spiritual pursuits and more esoteric methods, which might have affected their expectations with JOLM. But when interviewing them and hearing of their results with JOLM the impression is that the consequences they report belong to the ordinary field of mental health and well-being. People who find JOLM today seems more often to talk about JOLM as practical method to improve their mental health.

Overall, this development of the view of JOLM seen among informant, fits well with the development of JOLM itself over time. Historically, the sense of self has been studied in various spiritual and religious settings which has mystified it by giving it names such as True Self, Awareness or Enlightenment. Although such concepts may be meaningless and unwanted in a scientific psychological context, the referent, the sense of self is still there. The Just One Look work offers a demystification of the sense of self and opens a new possibility to studying it afresh in a modern secular context and with a proper language (Sherman & Sherman, 2017; 2019).

This study suggests on the background of its results, that JOLM has a place for further study in a general scientific context and particularly in the context of mental health and well-being. Having said that, it is also important to note that this study has its limits and methodological problems. The research of JOLM is still in its infancy and the lack of more structured and controlled studies thereby limits this study's findings. When talking of consequences and effects there is also some clear methodical limits with this study. This study cannot, for example, conclude any causal relationship between JOLM and any effect or consequence. Another methodological drawback is that the author of this study is well informed and involved with JOLM, creating an undeniable set of biases. The familiarity with JOLM has its advantages. To conduct a study of a method like JOLM at this early stage, it is a clear advantage to be well

informed to the understandings and use of the main concepts and its history. A methodological strength of the study is that there is a diversity among the informants when it comes to, for example, time passed since first contact with JOLM. Informants were spread over six different countries and their age spanned from 32 to 65 years of age. Their first encounter with JOLM varied from 3 months to 18 years.

Before suggesting new aims and research questions for JOLM it is important to be clear on the results in relation to both AIL and SDA. JOLM is a method, a procedure, first you look at yourself (AIL) and then you do the attention practice for some time (SDA). From a JOLM perspective, AIL is primary and SDA is secondary, as the results of this study also indicated. If there were a consequence from SDA, it was only because that AIL already had been performed. Practicing SDA without first doing the first inward look (AIL), would reduce SDA to a meditation like exercise. SDA and mindfulness meditation could technically be said to be similar, although with different aims. SDA aims to discriminate among useless and useful mental content, while mindfulness meditation aims at accepting and be less judgmental towards mental content in general. The biggest difference then, between JOLM and mindfulness meditation is if AIL is performed or not. To only practice mindfulness meditation then, is a way to cope with what is and accept that psychological suffering is a natural part of the human mind, echoing the Buddhist perception of mind and suffering (Budiarto, 2019).

The meaning and consequence of doing the first inward look before any attention practice is central in JOLM. The Act of Inward Looking (AIL) is said to be the necessary starting point for effectively be able to work with attention (Sherman & Sherman, 2019). The idea that AIL, looking at the subjective sense of self, could have an effect on a person's chance of working effectively with attention is supported by this study's informants. Several informants reported that they had tried attention-based techniques as meditation before and failed due to the effort it demanded. Informants also found that working with attention for attaining mental health benefits were done with less effort after AIL was performed. Some even named the results of having performed AIL as having "*freed attention*". Is it possible that, the *felt* sense of self is the same *felt* sense as the "*source of attention*" and that it is beneficial for a person's actual use of attention if that sense is looked at consciously with the spotlight of attention?

This study suggests that further research should be aimed at investigating JOLM in a more structured and controlled way and with a main emphasis on the primary part of JOLM; The Act of Inward Looking. The research on JOLM could possibly be seen as a complement and a healthy contrast to the heavily researched field of mindfulness meditation. One way of doing such research could be to try to isolate AIL by randomly assign it to half the participants of a group that were set to practice SDA. Then AIL would constitute the independent variable. Would it be possible to measure any significant difference between, for example, trait and state anxiety among people doing only SDA with people doing The Act of Inward Looking and The Self-Directed Attention Exercise, that is to say The Just One Look Method? Further research could also be aimed at investigating how and why JOLM might work. One important question to answer would be to uncover how and why a brief inward look at *me*, the subjective sense of self, could be said to target and lower fearfulness and anxiety.

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Appendix

Interview Guide

Background information:

- a) Age
- b) Country
- c) How, when, and where did you come in contact with the JOL Method?

Open-Ended Questions and Themes

Can you describe with your own words how to perform the JOL Method?

- a) The Act of Inward Looking
- b) Self-Directed Attention

What, if anything, would you say that you have achieved from the JOL Method?

How much time and effort would you say that you have spent on the JOL Method?

- a) The Act of Inward Looking
- b) Self-Directed Attention