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Title Page

A Critical Realist Study of Epiphanic Experiences

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of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

234 The purpose of this enquiry was to contribute to the much under-developed field of
235 psychology that pertains to change that is sudden, positive, and profound. In particular, this
236 research sought to conceptualise and operationalise epiphanic experience, which has
237 previously been referred to as epiphany, quantum change, and sudden personal
238 transformation. It was considered important to understand epiphanic experiences as although
239 positive transformation has been under-researched, it deserves attention in all its forms, as
240 these experiences ultimately improve quality of life. Further, ‘extreme’ cases of positive
241 transformation can provide valuable understandings of the mechanisms underpinning ‘less
242 extreme’ cases (Danermark et al., 2019), meaning that insights into epiphanic experience can
243 enrich conceptions of positive change, and how to attain it. The research was underpinned
244 philosophically by Critical Realism, and this meta-philosophical series of positions was key
245 to both the scope and process of the research. The aims of this enquiry were as follows: (1) to
246 determine whether epiphanic experience is distinct from other sudden, positive, and profound
247 experiences, (2) to determine the distinct experiential features of epiphanic experience, and
248 (3) to apply Critical Realist analytical procedures in order to understand the generative
249 mechanisms that permit the emergence of an epiphanic experience.

250 In order to address these aims three studies were conducted: (1) a scoping review, (2)
251 a thematic synthesis, and (3) a Critical Realist analysis using a participant sample of
252 practitioner psychologists, whose profession was thought to lend them insight into the
253 process of change and transformation. Findings suggest that whilst epiphanic experiences can
254 be construed as a distinct category of sudden, positive, and profound change, they are
255 intrinsically related to both mystical experiences and the insight experience. Moreover,
256 epiphanic experiences were found to possess the following key markers: (1) brevity, (2)

257 noetic aspects, (3) somatic aspects, (4) vivid memorability, (5) enduringness, (6)
258 benevolence, and (7) profound, holistic change to the individual. Experientially, epiphanic
259 experiences tended to be preceded by uncertainty, negative life experience, and degrees of
260 disorganisation. Using the Critical Realist ontology of personhood (Bhaskar, 2008, 2020), it
261 is suggested that epiphanic experience constitutes the elimination or diminishment of the ego,
262 such that the embodied personality is able to align with the transcendently real self, thereby
263 unifying intentionality. An interdisciplinary account of the generative mechanisms proposed
264 to underpin epiphanic experience is provided. Further, the strengths, limitations, and
265 implications of the research are discussed with a particular focus on the impact of this
266 research on applied practice. In particular, practitioners are encouraged to consider how the
267 ontology of epiphanic experience suggested by this research might shape how they choose to
268 implement their therapeutic interventions.

269

270 **Key words:** Epiphanic experience, Critical Realism, interdisciplinary research.

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To Luna, the best partner in crime I could ask for.

296

Introduction

297 The non-academic literature is replete with tales of people who have undergone
298 transformative change that is dramatically sudden, incredibly profound, and undeniably
299 benevolent. These epiphanic experiences are as vividly described in James Joyce's (1914)
300 Dubliners and the tale of Ebenezer Scrooge (Dickens, 1995) as they are in the personal
301 accounts of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's (1986) experiences in a Siberian Labour camp, or Victor
302 Frankl's (1946) imprisonment in Auschwitz concentration camp. As Frankl (1946), a
303 Holocaust survivor, neurologist, psychiatrist, and creator of logotherapy described:

304

305 We were at work in a trench. The dawn was grey around us; grey was the sky above;
306 grey the snow in the pale light of dawn; grey the rags in which my fellow prisoners
307 were clad, and grey their faces. I was again conversing silently with my wife, or
308 perhaps I was struggling to find the reason for my sufferings, my slow dying. In a last
309 violent protest against the hopelessness of imminent death, I sensed my spirit piercing
310 through the enveloping gloom. I felt it transcend that hopeless, meaningless world,
311 and from somewhere I heard a victorious 'Yes' in answer to my question of the
312 existence of an ultimate purpose. At that moment a light was lit in a distant
313 farmhouse, which stood on the horizon as if painted there, in the midst of the
314 miserable grey of a dawning morning in Bavaria. 'Et lux in tenebris lucent' — and the
315 light shineth in the darkness. (p.51).

316

317 Dostoyevsky's (1986) intense account of his experiences in a Siberian labour camp
318 detail an event that shares similarities to Frankl in terms of the suddenness, profundity,

319 benevolence, and the enduring impact generated by a discrete moment in time (Bidney,
320 2004):

321

322 It came to my mind at the needed time: that tender, motherly smile of a poor peasant
323 serf... And when I climbed down off the boards and gazed around, I suddenly felt... a
324 wholly different outlook, and, suddenly, by some miracle, all the hatred and anger
325 completely vanished from my heart (Dostoyevsky, 1986, p.209–210).

326

327 Perhaps one of the most deeply rooted examples of sudden, positive, and profound
328 change that exists in our Western, Judeo-Christian culture comes from Christian doctrine.
329 The tale of Saul on the road to Damascus tells the story of being “born again” (Lofland &
330 Skonovd, 1981). The story, detailed in the New Testament, revolves around Saul, born of
331 Jewish parents, who was travelling to Damascus on the orders of the Kohen Gadol with
332 instructions to arrest anyone who followed Christ. Whilst on the road, Saul and his party were
333 struck by a bright light, and it is written that Saul experienced Christ telling him to become
334 his emissary to the Gentiles. From that moment on, Saul became Paul and a follower of a
335 path that he had once vehemently opposed. In that instant, Saul experienced something that
336 had profound and enduring personal and behavioural consequences.

337 Indeed, narratives on this revelatory or transformative process can be traced further
338 back still, and seen throughout mythologies the world over (Campbell, 2004). Examples are
339 as evident in ancient Greek tales of deities revealing themselves to unsuspecting humans
340 (Herodotus, 1996), as they are in Buddhist references to concepts of sudden, positive, and
341 profound change that occur as a part of dedicated meditative practice, and which are

342 exemplified by the enlightenment of the Buddha (Chodron, 2005). It is perhaps unsurprising
343 then, that it is not uncommon for experiences of sudden, positive, and profound change to be
344 considered religious in nature, or even the sole purview of religion, when so many of our
345 cultural exemplars are rooted in it (Harris, 2014; Ilivitsky, 2011).

346 This research focuses on the phenomenon described above, that of epiphanic
347 experience. Whilst there exists some research into epiphanic experiences, this literature is
348 hindered by ambiguity surrounding terminologies, conceptual overlap with similar
349 experiences (e.g., peak experiences), lack of philosophical rigour and rationale, and instances
350 of insufficient methodological clarity and reflexivity. It was considered important to
351 understand epiphanic experiences for two main reasons. First, it was acknowledged that
352 positive change and transformation has long been neglected by modern psychology
353 (Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2000; Fosha, 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014) and
354 deserves attention in all its forms as a mechanism through which quality of life is improved.
355 Second, it was understood that ‘extreme’ cases of positive transformation could provide
356 valuable information pertaining to less extreme cases (Danermark, Ekström, Jakobsen &
357 Karlsson, 2019), thereby permitting this research to inform therapeutic work that seeks to
358 facilitate positive transformation.

359 A foundational aspect of this research was its philosophical grounding in Critical
360 Realism (discussed at length in Chapter 1). Psychologists tend to subscribe, be it implicitly or
361 explicitly, to two dominant philosophical paradigms: positivism and postmodernism (Pilgrim,
362 2019). Critical Realism is a third path, offering the researcher access to the advantages of
363 positivism and postmodernism, but without their philosophical limitations. The development
364 of Critical Realism has been greatly influenced by the discipline of sociology (Gorski, 2013),
365 reflected in the emphasis it places on the interactions that occur between structures and

366 agents. As such, this research lies at the interface between psychology and sociology, as well
367 as at the interface between psychology and neuroscience. This aligns with the emphasis
368 placed by Critical Realism on interdisciplinarity as a facilitator of deep, ontologically
369 differentiated understandings of phenomena (Pilgrim, 2019). Because this research focuses
370 on an inherently internal and private experience, it was thought to be a good testing ground
371 for the utility of the Critical Realist concepts of the four planar social being and ontology of
372 personhood (Bhaskar, 2020; discussed in Chapter 1, section 2.6) which have very limited, if
373 any, usage in psychological research.

374 Using a Critical Realism informed research paradigm, this research sought to answer
375 the following questions:

- 376 1. What makes epiphanic experience distinct from other sudden, positive, and
377 profound experiences?
- 378 2. What are the distinct experiential features of epiphanic experience?
- 379 3. What generative mechanisms permit the emergence of an epiphanic experience?

380 In order to answer the first research question, Chapter 3 details a scoping review
381 undertaken using Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework. It was important to answer this
382 question as there exists a large volume of terminologies to describe sudden, positive, and
383 profound change experiences, often with conceptual overlap. Therefore, it was considered
384 premature to conceptually distinguish epiphanic experience from other, similar experiences
385 based on a set of experiential markers derived from disparate, and often methodologically
386 opaque, research. This piece of research was therefore an act of under-labouring (Bhaskar,
387 2017), that permitted for the clarification of epiphanic experience as a distinct phenomenon,
388 as well as the reconfiguration of the key experiential markers of epiphanic experience (noted

389 in the abstract and again in Chapter 3), in a transparent and methodologically rigorous
390 manner. Using core Critical Realist concepts, in particular the ontology of personhood,
391 permitted a new understanding of epiphanic experience to emerge that fully integrates the
392 embodied nature of epiphanic experience into conceptualisations of this phenomenon.
393 Because the conceptual distinctiveness of epiphanic experience has, until now, been largely
394 assumed rather than systematically tested, this study demonstrated an investment in the
395 principle of Hermeticism and served to prevent the perpetuation of untested assumptions.

396 In order to answer the second research question, Chapter 4 details a thematic synthesis
397 undertaken using Thomas and Harden's (2008) framework and supplemented by the Critical
398 Realist theories of the four planar social being and the ontology of personhood (Bhaskar,
399 2020), which were found to be very valuable in facilitating a thorough exploration of this
400 question. Analysis revealed that the time preceding an epiphanic experience tends to be
401 characterised by disintegration and disorganisation throughout the four planes of social being
402 (Bhaskar, 2020), in particular through the universal presence of negative life experience and
403 uncertainty. The moment of epiphanic experience tended to involve the advent of new
404 conscious content that represented the emergence of a change in the overall functioning of the
405 embodied personality and a more adaptive way of being. It was important to answer this
406 question because Critical Realism advocates for investigating the intrinsic nature of a
407 phenomenon through the lens of observable experience prior to engaging in processes that
408 permit the underlying generative mechanisms from which the observed reality might have
409 emerged to be identified (Bhaskar, 2009). In this way, this piece of research was not only
410 valuable in terms of answering the second research question, but it also provided part of the
411 foundation for answering research question three.

412 In order to answer the third research question, Chapter 5 details a Critical Realist
413 exploration of epiphanic experiences undertaken primarily using Danermark et al.'s (2019)
414 framework. This study collected primary data from practitioner psychologists who had
415 experienced an epiphanic experience. This sample was selected as practitioner psychologists
416 were considered experts with insight into epiphanic experience due to the core of their work
417 focusing on the creation of change in others. It was important to answer this question as
418 understanding the generative mechanisms that underpin epiphanic experience would allow
419 therapeutic practitioners to utilise this knowledge of transformative change to enhance their
420 practice.

421 In Chapter 5, a rich, ontology of epiphanic experience is developed, underpinned by
422 Critical Realism. This ontology integrates epiphanic experiences into a broader understanding
423 of the material world. It does this by drawing upon Critical Realism-congruent nonlinear
424 dynamical systems theories, including Chaos/Complexity Theory (e.g., Guastello, Koopmans
425 & Pincus, 2008; Robertson & Combs, 2014), the Free Energy Principle (e.g., Friston, 2009,
426 2010, 2012), the Entropic Brain Hypothesis (e.g., Carhart-Harris et al., 2014; Carhart-Harris,
427 2018), and the broader literature on altered states of consciousness. In so doing, the work
428 contained within Chapter 5 challenges dominant ontological paradigms that are often implicit
429 in psychological theorising (discussed in Chapter 2, section 2). The proposed ontology of
430 epiphanic experience also acknowledges that social structures can influence this phenomenon
431 and provide the context for its' emergence. Particular consideration is given to the tensions
432 that arise between the social structures of religion and psychology/science when considering
433 epiphanic experience – both in Chapter 5 and throughout the thesis. This ontology also
434 considers the influence of the realm of social interactions between people, exploring how the
435 actions of others can shape epiphanic experiences, both in the moment of transformation, and
436 through their participation in negative life experiences. Finally, underpinned by the Critical

437 Realist ontology of personhood, this ontology of epiphanic experience considers how the
438 organisation of the self provides the grounds for epiphanic experiences, and how this
439 structure is shaped by this phenomenon. Although there are different ways of framing
440 psychological experience (Fleuridas & Krafcik, 2019), psychodynamic explanations (in
441 conjunction with Critical Realist theory) provided the greatest depth of understanding.

442 It is recommended that therapeutic practitioners consider the implications that the
443 Critical Realist ontology of personhood and the proposed ontology of epiphanic experience
444 has on their practice. Some suggestions are made by the researcher, including the therapeutic
445 value of meditative activities, the importance of an embodied approach to practice, and the
446 notion of uncertainty and ambiguity as fertile grounds for change. However, it is equally
447 understood that each practitioner will make sense of, and extract value from, the work
448 contained herein differently. It is further recommended that psychologists consider the merits
449 of the Critical Realist embrace as a powerful paradigm from which to conduct research.

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458 Chapter 1: Philosophical Positioning: An Exploration of Critical Realism and Research

459 1) Introduction

460 The contribution made by this thesis is not only psychological, but also philosophical.
461 Therefore, before all else, it is important to clarify the philosophical positioning of the work
462 that follows, as philosophy has been taken seriously throughout the research process.
463 Although the academic discipline of psychology has origins that reach back to antiquity, at
464 the turn of the 20th century, Psychology (with a capital ‘P’) legitimised itself as a science by
465 severing these roots, in particular its connection to philosophy¹, and in large part by
466 grounding itself in positivism and empiricism (Jones & Elcock, 2001; Pilgrim, 2019; Pickren
467 & Rutherford, 2010; Richards, 2010; Smith, 1997; Thomson, 2007; Ward & Rivers, 1904).
468 However, this left psychologists in a precarious position, anxious about their scientific
469 legitimacy, making a self-conscious case for empiricism, but without the understanding of the
470 strengths and weaknesses of this position *as a form of philosophy* (Pilgrim, 2019). This
471 resulted in “psychologists asserting a reliance on empirical neatness, transparency and
472 integrity (methodological rigour). What was not left was a philosophical rationale. The
473 rhetoric of ‘methodologism’ began to substitute for full metaphysical insight and reflection”
474 (Pilgrim, 2019, p.16).

475 In short, the understanding that psychology has paid a price for losing contact with its
476 philosophical roots is deeply embedded within this thesis². As such, the PhD process as a
477 whole was conceived of as an apprenticeship to philosophically informed critical thinking,

¹ In England, the term "mental philosophy" was used until the mid-1800s. Psychology only became a self-conscious field of experimental study in 1879, when German scientist Wilhelm Wundt founded the first laboratory dedicated exclusively to psychological research (Pickren & Rutherford, 2010).

² This statement is made with the understanding that the way in which this has manifested is also linked to geographical locale, as the interplay between psychological and philosophical stance has evolved differently between America, Europe, and the UK (Ben-David & Collins, 1966; Murphy, 2013). As this research was undertaken by a British researcher, it is in reference to the evolution of British psychology to which this statement is made (Pilgrim, 2019).

478 rather than as the production of a narrowly focused set of specialist knowledge (Bosch,
479 2018). This understanding manifested as a commitment to developing confidence and
480 competence in reflecting on the premises of enquiry, and the process of research, through a
481 philosophical, as well as psychological, lens. As such, the information that follows in this
482 chapter is critical to understanding the foundation on which this thesis was built. To that end,
483 this chapter will: (1) introduce the philosophical positioning of this research, (2) explore the
484 process of knowledge generation, and (3) present an account of reflexivity, inclusive of a
485 reflexive account of the researchers' journey to the adoption of the philosophy of Critical
486 Realism.

487

488 **2) Understanding Critical Realism**

489 The philosophical lens through which this research was viewed is that of Critical
490 Realism (CR; Bhaskar, 1975, 1978). Although there exist multiple forms of CR this research
491 utilises Bhaskarian CR, which is accredited to Roy Bhaskar in collaboration with several
492 British social theorists including Margaret Archer, Mervyn Hartwig, Tony Lawson, Alan
493 Norrie, and Andrew Sayer (Gorski, 2013). CR is a post-positivist series of meta-theoretical
494 philosophical positions, rather than a dogma, specific methodology, prescriptive framework,
495 or theory (Bhaskar, 1975; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). CR is influential in a range of academic
496 disciplines including sociology (Archer, 1995; Layder, 1994; Sayer, 1997), economics
497 (Fleetwood, 1999; Lawson, 1997), geography (Pratt, 1995; Yeung, 1997), information
498 systems (Mingers, 2004, 2006; Mingers, Mutch & Willcocks, 2013), and international
499 relations (Kurki, 2007; Wright, 1999). Though CR has been applied in the field of
500 psychology, its use is still very limited (Pilgrim, 2019; Riley, Sims-Schouten & Willig, 2007;
501 Sims-Schouten, Riley & Willig, 2007). As such, the contribution made by this research i.e.,

502 operationalising and applying CRist research processes in psychological research, must be
503 emphasised.

504 CR arose as a reaction to both positivism and postmodernism. People who ascribe to
505 CR, termed as Critical Realists (CRists) in this thesis, recognise that maintaining a realist
506 position against the criticisms directed at both positivism/empiricism and
507 interpretivism/postmodernism is challenging, and consider neither position to be satisfactory
508 alone (Bhaskar, 1975, 1979, 1993, 1996; Keat & Urry, 1981). Positivism/empiricism is
509 viewed as problematic by CR due to its pursuit of reducing the world to universal covering
510 laws (CR does not subscribe to this notion, but rather, seeks tendencies and probabilities; see
511 section 2.4 below) based only on that which can be empirically observed, and for its naïve
512 assumption that knowledge is merely the process whereby facts are acquired about the world
513 in a strictly empirical fashion (Bhaskar, 1979, 1993; Mingers, Mutch & Wilcocks, 2013).
514 This narrow focus on only what is present to the senses creates a misconception that only that
515 which is positively present is real and leads to a kind of reductionist ontological monovalence
516 (Pilgrim, 2019). Furthermore, falsification – the gold standard for good science in the
517 positivist tradition (Popper, 1959) – is rejected by CR as an imperfect guide to science.
518 Indeed, many theories generally accepted as ‘true’ (e.g., gravity, evolution) are unfalsifiable
519 (Pilgrim, 2019).

520 Postmodernist and interpretivist standpoints are also found lacking because of their
521 tendency to reduce ontology to epistemology, urging against discourse about the world and
522 focusing instead on discourse about discourse about the world (Bhaskar, 1975, 2008;
523 Mingers, Mutch & Wilcocks, 2013). This is a core issue from a CRist standpoint as this
524 interpretivist view rejects the idea of an objective reality (a notion supported by CR).
525 Moreover, this is particularly problematic when applied to academic psychology, as

526 postmodernism presumes that all psychological topics are ubiquitously socially constructed,
527 thereby leading to the dissolution of the self by reducing our unique personhood to merely a
528 set of discourses (Archer, 2000; Pilgrim, 2019). This positioning fundamentally overlooks the
529 inherently embodied nature of human existence (Pilgrim, 2019). Indeed, Smith (2011)
530 concluded that “Postmodernism in the end is the abandonment of social science, actually, in
531 favour of antirealist storytelling and identity posturing. That is a dead end.” (p.489). Because
532 postmodernism does not take the totality of reality seriously by way of linguistic
533 reductionism, Sayer (2000) concludes that postmodernists commit ‘ontological vandalism’.

534 In order to further explain and position CR, the discussion will now turn to the
535 dominant concepts in CR that determine how it is applied to scientific research. As such, the
536 following notions will be explored: (1) the six features of CR, (2) the transitive versus the
537 intransitive, (3) the ‘holy trinity’ of CR, (4) open versus closed systems, (5) a stratified
538 reality, and (6) structure, agency, and the ontology of persons. These CRist fundamental
539 premises of enquiry provide an understanding of the foundation on which this thesis is built.

540

541 **2.1) The Six Features of Critical Realism**

542 CR can be introduced by means of the six features of CR (Bhaskar, 2013, 2017): (1)
543 philosophical under-labouring, (2) seriousness, (3) immanent critique, (4) philosophy as a
544 pre-supposition, (5) enhanced reflexivity/transformational practice, and (6) the principle of
545 Hermeticism.

546

547 **2.1.1) *Philosophical Under-labouring***

548 The concept of philosophical under-labouring can perhaps be best summarised by
549 Locke (1854), whose work formed the foundation for some of Bhaskar’s own thinking, and
550 who can broadly be considered CRist himself (Magill, 1994; Naidu, 1935):

551

552 The commonwealth of learning is not at this time without master-builders, whose
553 mighty designs, in advancing the sciences, will leave lasting monuments to the
554 admiration of posterity; But everyone must not hope to be a Boyle, or a Sydenham;
555 and in an age that produces such Masters, as the great Huygenius, and the
556 incomparable Mr. Newton, with some other of that strain; 'tis ambition enough to be
557 employed as an under-labourer in clearing ground a little, and removing some of the
558 rubbish, that lies in the way to knowledge (p.121).

559

560 Here, we can understand under-labouring to be the act of clearing the ground of, and
561 removing, thoughts and beliefs that stand in the way of our knowledge of the world.

562 Therefore, a core aim of CR is to facilitate, or accomplish, the removal of obstacles (e.g.,
563 systems of thought) to knowledge. In this way, the removal of an obstacle to knowledge can
564 be thought of as a contribution to knowledge.

565

566 **2.1.2) Seriousness**

567 Seriousness is a principle of CR based on what Bhaskar considered to be the
568 unserious nature of man’s philosophies. To illustrate this point, Bhaskar references Hume’s
569 claim that “there’s no better reason to leave the building by the ground floor than by the

570 second floor” (Hume cited in Bhaskar, 2017, p.8). Because Hume was unwilling to
571 incorporate gravity into his philosophical position (as it is not something that can be observed
572 and provides a point of contention to his views on causality) he instead produced what
573 Bhaskar (2013, 2017) believed to be a ludicrous epistemological proposition. It is this
574 unseriousness of philosophy, that toys with unresolvable problems, rather than genuinely
575 considering “real, multiple and possibly contradictory geo-historical grounds and conditions”
576 (Bhaskar, 2008, p.315) that infuriated Bhaskar. CR is therefore a series of philosophical
577 positions that aim to be lived by, and acted by, in the world by taking the world into account
578 (how exactly it does so will become evident below as the discussion continues).

579

580 ***2.1.3 Immanent Critique***

581 Immanent critique is part of the CRist approach to philosophy that states that
582 criticisms of a system of thought should happen from inside that system of thought, rather
583 than being based on personal objections (Appleton & King, 2002; Bhaskar, 2013). In order to
584 do this the CRist should take the claim seriously and examine the system of thought for an
585 element of itself that it cannot sustain (Pilgrim, 2019). Bhaskar (2017) believed that this kind
586 of critique engenders transformation of beliefs as, rather than holding up external and
587 opposing beliefs, the system of beliefs is shown to be incompatible with itself. In this way,
588 reflexivity (discussed in section 4 below) is closely intertwined with the act of engaging with
589 CR, whereby the researcher is almost forced to adopt an attitude of openness, honesty, and a
590 willingness to critique oneself.

591 Whilst this is perhaps the most dominant form of critique utilised within CR, it is not
592 the only form of critique routinely engaged with by CRists. Explanatory critique is a
593 technique whereby how a claim came into being and has been sustained is explored; even if

594 the claim, and the process by which it came into being, is flawed. For example, although
595 creationist theory is flawed and fundamentally logically indefensible, exploration of its
596 origins and the interests it serves in the world today can be an important source of criticism
597 (Pilgrim, 2019). Another form of critique is omissive critique, which is the exploration of
598 absences or silences in a body of knowledge (Pilgrim, 2019). Therefore, in this instance, the
599 CRist should sensitise themselves not just to what the research is saying (that which is
600 positively present), but also to what is not being said.

601

602 ***2.1.4) Philosophy as a Pre-supposition***

603 The fourth feature of CR, philosophy as a pre-supposition, refers to the act of bringing
604 to conscious awareness presuppositions that we hold about the world and substantive
605 practices. This tenet of CR can be employed in tandem with the tenet of immanent critique,
606 whereby the CRist researcher is encouraged to bring to light the presuppositions they hold
607 about that which they are studying. This process appears similar to the phenomenological
608 ‘bracketing’ process (e.g., Dörfler & Stierand, 2020). However, whilst many CRists were
609 influenced by phenomenological philosophy (e.g., Margaret Archer was heavily influenced
610 by Merleau-Ponty’s arguments in her account of subjectivity), the two philosophies differ
611 considerably in their overall understanding of the world. CR criticises phenomenology for
612 “its proneness to collapse subject and object, epistemology and ontology, language and the
613 world, i.e., for its lack of robust concepts of intransitivity, structure, difference” (Hartwig,
614 2007, p.347).

615

616 ***2.1.5) Enhanced Reflexivity/Transformative Practice***

617 Enhanced reflexivity/transformational practice is a critical feature of CR that
618 emphasises the importance of reflective practice and its potential to transform praxis. Indeed,
619 the importance of reflexivity to CR is demonstrated by the fact that it has also been
620 implicated in the two preceding points (2.1.3 and 2.1.4). CR positions reflexivity to be the
621 most important condition of philosophy and considers it to be the absence of theory-practice
622 inconsistency (Hartwig, 2007; reflexivity will be discussed further in this chapter, section 4).

623

624 ***2.1.6) The Principle of Hermeticism***

625 The final feature of CR is the principle of Hermeticism, which can be summarised as:
626 “do not accept anything that I say just because I say it” (Bhaskar, 2017; p.12). Therefore,
627 according to CR, if someone asserts something as true, one must be capable of establishing
628 this truth for themselves as well. Further, the principles and theories associated with CR
629 should be applicable to everyday life, and therefore testable both in everyday life as well as
630 research contexts (Bhaskar, 2013). In this way, CR advocates for scepticism and a refusal to
631 accept anything on authority, through the consistent application of criticality and critique
632 (Pilgrim, 2019).

633

634 **2.2) The Transitive versus the Intransitive**

635 In his philosophy of science Bhaskar (1975) argued for two delineated concepts: (1)
636 the epistemological transitive domain (i.e., the manner in which we construe the world) and
637 (2) the ontological intransitive domain (i.e., aspects of the world we cannot change). This
638 distinction, according to Bhaskar, is necessary to maintain the perspicuity of scientific
639 investigation and understanding. The transitive domain refers to inherently fallible,

640 theoretical interpretations of reality (Cruickshank, 2004), which are “antecedently established
641 facts and theories, paradigms and models, methods and techniques of inquiry available to a
642 particular scientific school or worker” (Bhaskar, 2008, p.21). Therefore, the transitive
643 dimension represents the changing knowledge of things.

644 Concurrently, the intransitive domain refers to things in the world about which people
645 strive to know that are relatively unchanging. Objects in the intransitive domain are
646 considered “the real things and structures, mechanisms and processes, events and possibilities
647 of the world” (Bhaskar, 2008, p.22) and exist as independent entities that can be recognised
648 by their causal effects. Therefore, the intransitive dimension acts and exists independently to
649 human knowledge of it. Given that this research focuses on a psychological phenomenon, it is
650 worth here considering how psychological phenomena manifest in terms of this dichotomy.
651 Pilgrim (2019), in his cornerstone work on CR and psychology, provides the example of a
652 dream (i.e., a real inner event). A dream exists in both the intransitive and transitive domains;
653 intransitive because the dream happened at a particular point in time and possessed specific
654 content; transitive because it is possible to re-visit, and re-construe, the dream, and its
655 perceived meaning. Thus, the distinction between the relative transitive and intransitive
656 character of a phenomenon is important to consider in order to determine the best method of
657 analysis.

658

659 **2.3) The ‘Holy Trinity’ of Critical Realism**

660 The distinction between the transitive and intransitive domains serves to highlight the
661 ‘holy trinity’ of CR, which refers to the compatibility of three elements: (1) ontological
662 realism, (2) epistemological relativity, and (3) judgemental rationality (Bhaskar, 2008, 2017;

663 Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2010; Hartwig 2007). CR's foundation in ontological realism means that
664 it supports the existence of an independent and causally active reality that gives rise to events
665 and non-events autonomously of our awareness and comprehension of it. Epistemological
666 relativity proposes that our knowledge of reality is mediated linguistically, culturally,
667 historically, socially, and can be transformed through human activity. Our beliefs are
668 produced within a social context and are fallible, so our knowledge of the world is relative.
669 However, it should be noted that these two presuppositions do not equate to judgemental
670 relativity. CRists do not support the view that all arguments have equal validity. The principle
671 of judgemental rationality asserts that, although our knowledge of the world is relative, we
672 are able to produce arguments that allow us to favour one set of beliefs over another³. Efforts
673 should be made to eliminate less valid arguments, and CR favours retrodution (discussed in
674 section 3 below) in this endeavour (Bhaskar, 2008).

675 Therefore, ontological realism represents a commitment to the existence of an
676 objective reality, but epistemological relativism acknowledges that this truth cannot be
677 accessed outside of contextual reality and time. There exists an independent reality, but it is
678 not accessible immediately, nor is it accessible entirely objectively. As such, all our
679 interactions with reality occur in an active-constructive manner. By formulating such a
680 philosophy, Bhaskar (1975) established that it is possible to talk about the world, and that the
681 act of talking about the world is important. As noted above, interpretivist paradigms suppose
682 that we can talk about our talk about the world, but not the world itself. CRists argue that this
683 reduces ontology to epistemology, and that when people make sense judgements and

³ This philosophical outcome can be considered in relation to postmodernism as “Whilst both postmodernists and CRists refuse to separate facts from values (contra positivism), this prompts judgmental relativism in the former and judgmental rationality in the latter” (Pilgrim, 2019, p.47).

684 interpretations there must be a referent to which they respond (Bhaskar, 2017). Therefore, CR
685 brings ‘being’ back into philosophy and re-vindicates ontology.

686 This re-vindication of ontology directly addresses the epistemic fallacy (the logical
687 position that statements about being cannot be reduced to statements about knowing) that
688 Bhaskar (2008a) believed inherent to most modern philosophies. A simple way of
689 conceptualising the epistemic fallacy is to consider the metaphor of confusing the map
690 (epistemology) with the territory (ontology). This CRist perspective has been criticised by
691 interpretivists for generating a sense of detachment between the observer and the observed
692 (Appleton & King, 2002; Doyle, Brady & Byrne, 2009). However, the CRist paradigm,
693 whilst defending this detachment, does so with the understanding that researcher
694 interpretation is fallible, and the research process itself can only be viewed in context
695 (Bhaskar, 1979; Morgan, 2007; Redman-MacLaren & Mills, 2015). This is termed ‘epistemic
696 humility’, the notion that our knowledge is fallible, and we do not understand much of reality
697 (Pilgrim, 2019).

698 Another related fallacy is the ontic fallacy, which constitutes using an observation of
699 the world as evidence of knowledge about the world (e.g., assuming that a patient diagnosed
700 with schizophrenia is proof of schizophrenia; Bentall, Jackson & Pilgrim, 1988; Pilgrim,
701 2007). Given the interplay between these two fallacies CRists often term them the ‘epistemic-
702 ontic fallacy’. These common fallacies are important to note in order to develop logically
703 sound theory and praxis.

704

705 **2.4) Open versus Closed Systems**

706 Bhaskar (1975) asserted that this alternative understanding of the world was necessary
707 because the existing philosophies and epistemologies did not talk about the world. These old
708 philosophies only talked about the world in terms of Humean causality, wherein constant
709 conjunctions of events underpin the dominant hypothetico-deductive model, and also imply
710 that “the world is fixed, repetitive, unstructured and undifferentiated” (Bhaskar, 2017, p.18).
711 This kind of ontology depicts a world that is insensitive to complexity, as well as temporal,
712 cultural and historical change, and differences. Therefore, a critical distinction that needs to
713 be made in order to appreciate Bhaskar’s argument for a new ontology is between open and
714 closed systems. Fleetwood (2017) defines open and closed systems as:

715

716 Parts of the social world characterised by (stochastic and/or probabilistically
717 specified) regularities between events or states of affairs of the form ‘whenever event
718 or state of affairs x then event or state of affairs y’, are closed systems, and parts of
719 this world not characterised by such regularities are open systems (p.41)

720

721 Bhaskar stated that positions such as empiricism pre-suppose that the world is a
722 closed system, and so can reasonably then support the idea of constant conjunctions of events
723 (Bhaskar, 2008, 2017). However, Bhaskar argues against this edict, and rejects Humean
724 causality, by arguing that the world, and particularly the social world, is an open system in
725 which there are no constant conjunctions of events (Bhaskar, 2008, 2013). This approach is
726 due to CR being embedded in the Heraclitan tradition which views reality as being in
727 constant flux rather than being fixed (Pilgrim, 2019).

728 Given that all biological systems are open systems, this position, or pre-supposition, is
729 critical for psychologists to consider as it has practical implications (Pilgrim, 2019; Von
730 Bertalanffy, 1950). For example, the notion of prediction using universal covering laws
731 becomes inappropriate, and instead, focus turns to the discussion of trends and probabilities.
732 This is because in open systems, prediction is frequently practically impossible (Pilgrim,
733 2019). Another implication is that laboratory-based, controlled, and experimental studies of
734 events that happen in the real world become unsuitable representations of reality. This is
735 because the world is an open system, and a laboratory setting is a misleading, closed, and out
736 of context representation of the world – thereby making the data produced in this context
737 relatively meaningless to a CRist.

738

739 **2.5) A Stratified Reality**

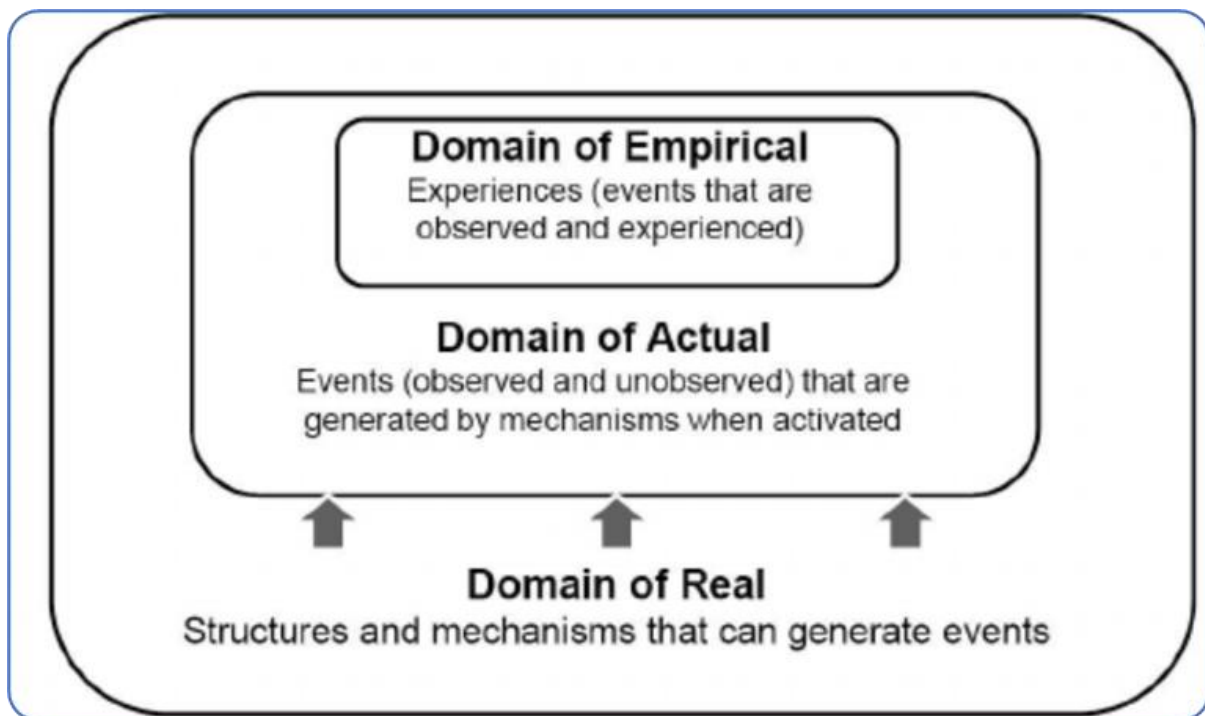
740 Another distinction that Bhaskar makes is between events, generative mechanisms,
741 and structures – or as Bhaskar termed them: (1) the Empirical, (2) the Actual, and (3) the
742 Real, respectively (see Figure 1.1). The Real relates to the underlying intransitive causal
743 mechanisms and structures at work in the world that are inherently responsible for all
744 observable realities. The Actual refers to the events caused by the Real (Alvesson &
745 Sköldbberg, 2009; Bhaskar, 2008). The domain of the Actual is not necessarily accessible as it
746 is filtered through perceptual processes. Moreover, this domain also encapsulates the plethora
747 of non-events that may be generated by the domain of the Real. Therefore, the events in the
748 domain of the Actual are necessarily distinguished from their generative mechanisms. The
749 domain of the Empirical refers to observable experience and represents the position of the
750 observer in relation to the Actual and the Real. In this way, Bhaskar presents the case for a

751 differentiated and stratified world; in essence, a new ontology, or paradigm shift, typified by
752 structure, difference and change (Bhaskar, 2020).

753

754 **Figure 1.1**

755 *Depiction of Bhaskar's (1978) concept of stratified reality (Radulescu & Vessey, 2009, p.2).*



756

757 An example of these distinctions can be drawn from Pilgrim (2019) who explains that
758 when we hear a bird singing, we are experiencing something in the Empirical domain. If this
759 bird were to then fly away, and land on a branch in a deserted forest to continue singing, this
760 would constitute an Actual event. The bird's specific physiology and evolutionary history
761 that permit it to sing form part of the Real. This view of reality advocates for ontological
762 differentiation (as opposed to the ontological monovalence generated by a strict empiricist
763 position), by arguing against reducing the mechanisms present in the domains of the Actual
764 or Real to merely events in the domain of the Empirical (see Table 1.1). In essence, this
765 model of the world emphasises that reality and causality do not always align with our

766 experience of them. As such, CRist research urges the researcher to consider what may be
 767 happening in reality and not just interpretations thereof (Collier, 1994; Easton, 2019). As a
 768 result of this positioning the investigation of causation, or generative mechanisms, forms a
 769 core part of CRist research. A great deal of emphasis is placed on generative mechanisms
 770 within CRist thought because CR accepts that they are present, regardless of whether the
 771 emergent events are actualised or detected by human senses (Pilgrim, 2019).

772

773 **Table 1.1**

774 *Stratified reality and its contents*

	Domain of the Real	Domain of the Actual	Domain of the Empirical
Mechanisms	X		
Events	X	X	
Experiences	X	X	X

775

776 As such, a core construct of CR is the notion that reality is striated or laminated.
 777 Stratification is sometimes also referred to as emergence whereby “some substance, entity,
 778 property or system... is dependent for its existence upon some other substance, entity,
 779 property or system” (Hartwig 2007, p.166). The idea of emergence is intrinsic to a stratified
 780 view of the world, and Bhaskar (2009, 2020) identifies three criteria for emergence: (1)
 781 unilateral dependence (the notion that higher emergent levels are unilaterally dependant on
 782 lower-order levels), (2) taxonomic irreducibility (the notion that higher emergent levels
 783 cannot be taxonomically reduced to lower-order levels), and (3) causal irreducibility (the
 784 notion that higher emergent levels cannot be reduced to causal explanations of lower-order
 785 levels). Bhaskar (2009) further identifies a consequence of emergence: implicit potentiality

786 (the notion that the higher order level is implicit - sometimes termed ‘enfolded’ - in the lower
787 order level, and as such, new capacities will emerge from higher levels of systemic
788 organisation).

789 Moreover, according to CR, the laminated nature of reality indicates that researchers
790 are only able to access the relative entirety of our reality through methodological pluralism.
791 This focus on methodological pluralism aims to provide multiple sources of information from
792 the domain of the Empirical, which in turn allows for more informed views of the Actual and
793 Real. Methodological pluralism does not propose the use of any method in any situation, but
794 rather that different methods are appropriate depending on the nature of the phenomenon
795 under investigation⁴ (Sayer, 2002). In this way, interdisciplinary research is strongly
796 advocated for by the CRist position (Danermark et al., 2019; Pilgrim, 2019).

797

798 **2.6) The Ontology of Persons**

799 Because this research pertains to the discipline of psychology it is crucial to explore
800 how CR conceives of the self and notions of personhood. Much of Bhaskar’s thinking on
801 personhood, and the self, emerged from the third ‘wave’ of his philosophy: the philosophy of
802 metaReality (PMR). This was the most controversial era of Bhaskar’s philosophy largely
803 because it took a decidedly spiritual turn and invested heavily in the Eastern philosophical
804 notion that the fundamental nature of reality was interconnectedness and non-dualism
805 (Gorski, 2013; Price, 2016; Valente, 2021). However, one of the aims of this research was to
806 take seriously Bhaskar’s later ideas, and in later chapters the argument is made for the utility

⁴ This is a significant contrast to the methodological rigidity of positivism and postmodernism, whereby the former is bound to experimentalism and the empirical method, and the latter to the deconstruction of texts (Pilgrim, 2019).

807 of Bhaskar’s ideas and their ability to enrich understandings of the nature of personhood and
808 epiphanic experience. In order to explicate the CRist ontology of persons, the following
809 subjects will be discussed: (1) the context for persons, and (2) a CRist model of the self.

810

811 ***2.6.1) The Context for Persons***

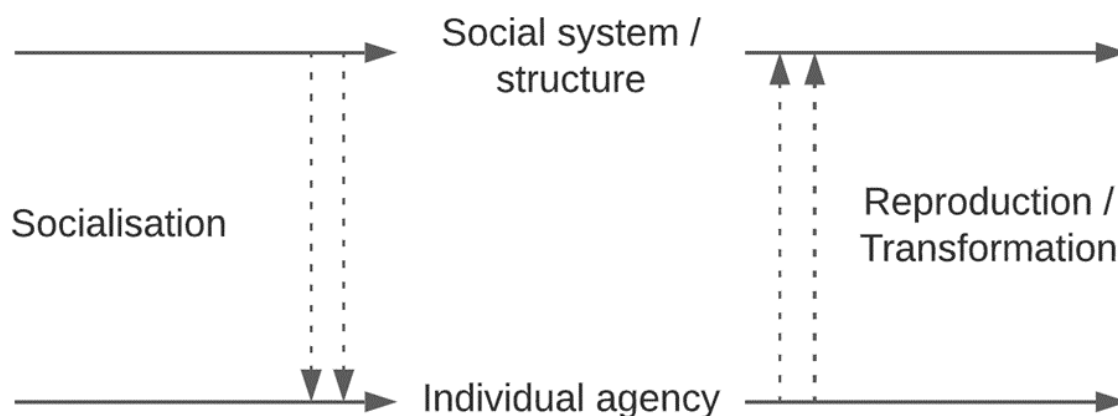
812 When considering the ontology of persons Bhaskar (2002, 2010, 2020) notes that it is
813 important to first be sensitised to the idea of open-systemic phenomena as laminated and
814 emergent. Further, a key feature of Bhaskar’s approach to the social sciences, and to the
815 notion of personhood, is the acknowledgment of certain dualisms. Examples of dualisms can
816 be found at the macro-level (e.g., structure and agency) as well as the micro-level (e.g., mind
817 and body), and CR is conceived of as able to rationally resolve these dualisms (Bhaskar,
818 2020). A particularly critical dualism to CR is that between structure and agency – which are
819 considered ontologically distinct (Carter & New, 2004). The term ‘structure’ refers to
820 “relatively enduring (but not permanent) features of the world that often precede and succeed
821 our individual lives, but which human agency can reproduce or transform over time”
822 (Fletcher, 2017; p.186; Archer, 2010; Bhaskar, 1979). Therefore, whilst “structure precedes
823 everything” (Hartwig, 2007, p.232), agency that is not predetermined by structures is able to
824 shape structures (Bhaskar, 1979; Elder-Vass, 2011). Agency is made up, not only of
825 individual action, but also of values, ideas, beliefs, theories, and meanings. The dichotomy
826 between structure and agency is operationalised by the Transformational Model of Social
827 Activity (TMSA; Bhaskar, 2008; Collier, 1994; see Figure 1.2), which depicts how social
828 structures affect intentional agency and how agency may in turn impact social structures.

829 From this perspective, humans can be seen to exist as both determined, and determining,
830 beings⁵ (Pilgrim, 2019).

831

832 **Figure 1.2**

833 *Depiction of Bhaskar's (2008) Transformational Model of Social Activity.*



834

835 Understandings of personhood gleaned from the TMSA can be deepened through the
836 use of Bhaskar's notion of the four planar social being which addresses the ontology of
837 persons via the notion of four interacting planes. This conceptualisation has been noted as
838 particularly useful with regards to psychological research and serves to represent the
839 complexity of our lives (Pilgrim, 2019). The model of the four planar social being conceives
840 that all social (including psychological) phenomena occur in each of the following four
841 dimensions: (1) the plane of material transactions with nature (the physical reality of the
842 natural world and biological bodies), (2) the plane of social interactions between people
843 (relationships between people and groups), (3) the plane of social structure sui generis (social

⁵ This stance puts CR at odds with, for example, humanistic-existentialist approaches to personhood which are entrenched in voluntarism (Pilgrim, 2019).

844 structures in a broad sense), and (4) the plane of the stratification of the embodied personality
845 (personal subjective agency) (Bhaskar, 2020).

846

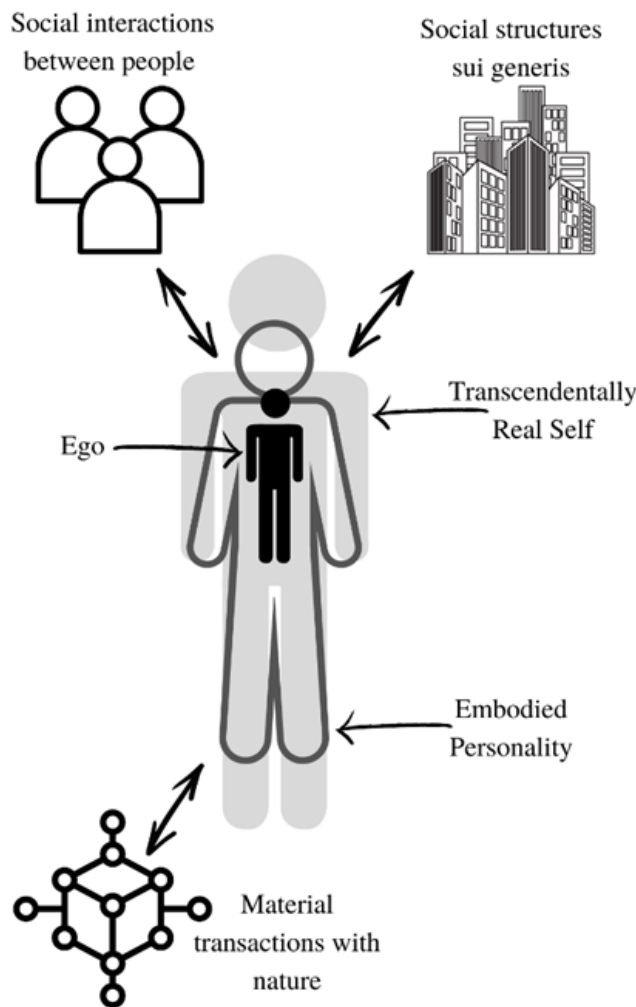
847 **2.6.2) A Critical Realist Theory of the Self**

848 The above has served to provide the context for persons, and attention now turns
849 toward how CR conceptualises the self. Hartwig (2007b) suggested that humans are
850 “changing embodied persons who are also transcendently real selves, profoundly
851 interconnected with each other and the rest of the cosmos.” (p.155). From this it is possible to
852 extract the first two components of a CRist theory of the self: (1) the embodied personality,
853 which constitutes the mind, emotional makeup, and physical embodiment of a person
854 (Bhaskar, 2016), and (2) the transcendently real self, which is a person’s ‘ground state’, or
855 ‘higher self’ (Bhaskar, 2020). Hartwig (2007b) and Bhaskar (2016) make a third ontological
856 distinction in their model of personhood: (3) the ego, which they saw as the illusory sense
857 that people possess of themselves as separate from everything else (see Figure 1.4)⁶. The
858 CRist four planar social being has been suggested as a useful construct for facilitating
859 interdisciplinary, psychological research (Pilgrim, 2019), though instances of its utilisation
860 are limited (Price & Martin, 2018). The CRist ontology of personhood has yet to be applied
861 to psychological research. As such, this work contributes to the development of Bhaskar’s
862 (2020) thinking by applying these theories to a psychological phenomenon.

863

864 **Figure 1.4**

⁶ The reader is directed towards Appendix I for a reflexive account of how the researcher has made sense of this CRist ontology of personhood within the context of therapeutic practice.



866

867 The above describes the complex and non-reductionist CRist account of the ontology
868 of persons. Furthermore, it is important to address three further notions raised by the theory
869 above: (1) emergence, (2) free will, and (3) neuro-reductionism (the idea that neurochemical
870 theories are able to explain all mental processes and behaviour). In terms of emergence,
871 CRists do not view a person as the sum of the causal capacities discussed above, but rather
872 that these causal capacities provide the conditions from which personhood can emerge.
873 Because humans exist in an open system, and indeed are open systems themselves, reality is
874 in constant flux meaning that it is important to exercise epistemic humility when exploring
875 the range of capacities that provide the grounds for the emergence of personhood.

876 In terms of free will CR asserts that no person ever truly becomes an independent
877 decision maker, simply because lives are embedded in the material world and social
878 relationships (Pilgrim, 2019). Moreover, people exist alongside pre-existing social structures
879 that we are not always wholly aware of. In this way, CR rejects the voluntarism that
880 underpins many humanistic-existentialist views of the world (Pilgrim, 2019). Finally, it is
881 important to position CR in terms of its views on the role of the brain. CRists assert that the
882 brain does not cause, but rather, affords thoughts, feelings, and behaviours in conditional
883 contexts (Pilgrim, 2019, 2020). In this way, CR ‘walks the path’ between subjectivist and
884 neuro-reductionist accounts of the human experience (Pilgrim, 2020). Subjectivist accounts
885 of experience privilege lived experience as authentic representations of what it is to be
886 human. In contrast, neuro-reductionists view lived experience as an epiphenomenon of
887 neurochemical activity which can be presented theoretically as covering laws that do not take
888 context into account. Both these positions are cautioned against by CRists as they are not
889 considered complete psychological accounts.

890 In addition, the CRist ontology of personhood bears some congruence to Frankl’s
891 (1946, 1966, 1970) tripartite model of personhood and Freud’s (1915, 1923, 1940, 1947)
892 metapsychological model⁷. Frankl (1946) proposed that personhood was formed by three
893 dimensions, the mental psyche (i.e., the ego), the physical soma (i.e., the embodied
894 personality), and the spiritual (in a non-religious sense) noös (i.e., transcendently real self)

⁷ When considering which psychological theories of the self might align with Bhaskar’s (2020) ontology of personhood the researcher considered each of the four forces of psychology, i.e., 1) psychodynamic, 2) behavioural/cognitive-behavioural, 3) humanistic-existential, and 4) contextual/systemic (Fleuridas & Krafcik, 2019). Contextual/systemic theories were incompatible as they tend to be deeply entrenched in post-structuralist and postmodernist philosophies (e.g., Dickerson, 2014; Besley, 2002). Behavioural/cognitive-behavioural theories tend to be ontologically monovalent and therefore incompatible (Pilgrim, 2019). Humanistic-existential theories tend to be incompatible due to their commitment to voluntarism and tendency to not take structures or the material, embodied aspect of human consciousness seriously (Pilgrim, 2019). Whilst the researcher acknowledges that other models from the first force in psychology might enrich interpretations of epiphanic experience (in particular, Jungian and Franklian ideas), this thesis will focus on Freudian ideas as these were found to be most relevant to the research question posed in Chapter 5.

895 (see Figure 1.5). The similarity between the Bhaskarian (2020) concept of the
896 transcendently real self, and the Franklian noös is acknowledged by Fabry (1991), who
897 noted that “You have a body and a psyche, but you are your noös” (p.127). Frankl observed
898 that each layer of personhood corresponds with a different science, the psychic with
899 psychology, the somatic with biology, and the noetic with philosophy (Hallowell, 2009). This
900 positioning is congruent with the CRist stance that interdisciplinarity facilitates deep, non-
901 reductionist, and ontologically differentiated understandings of phenomena (Pilgrim, 2019).
902

903 **Figure 1.5**
904 *Frankl’s Dimensional Ontology*



905
906 Metapsychology was conceived of by Freud for the purposes of communicating his
907 proposition that psychical processes possess three aspects, or coordinates: (1) dynamic, (2)
908 topographical, and (3) economic (Freud, 1915). Cumulatively, he proposed that each of these
909 three coordinates could be used to guide explanations of psychical phenomena and processes
910 (Fulgencio, 2005). Although there remains no complete clarity with regards to what precisely
911 defines each of these coordinates, they can be conceptualised as follows. The dynamic
912 perspective relates to the interactive forces present within the psychical system. This

913 perspective implicates the existence of basic drives or instincts⁸ (Fulgencio, 2005). The
914 topographical perspective presents the argument that the mind is composed of different
915 regions, or territories, which are governed by different processes. Freud’s topographical
916 model of the mind includes the following mental systems: the unconscious, the preconscious,
917 and the conscious. Freud later revised this model, becoming known as the structural model, to
918 include the id, ego⁹, and superego (Boag, 2017; see Figure 1.6). The economic perspective
919 concerns itself with the intensity of psychical events, and the amount of psychical energy
920 invested into objects of desire (Fulgencio, 2005).

921 Freud’s metapsychological model (Freud & Strachey, 1984) of the self, is considered
922 by many theorists and psychoanalysts (Freud included) to be an essentially speculative
923 superstructure intended to be used as a heuristic, its contents considered fallible and
924 ultimately replaceable (Fulgencio, 2005), which is congruent with a CRist approach
925 (Fletcher, 2017). Metapsychological concepts are not referents to psychic phenomena that are
926 empirically observable, but rather to the phenomena that underpin the empirical level of
927 reality (Eriksson, 2012; Pilgrim, 2019). This positioning aligns with a CRist perspective,
928 given Freud’s implicitly striated view of the human psyche (Hartwig, 2007). Freud also
929 acknowledged that the psychological was emergent from the physiological, but not causally
930 reducible to it (Freud, 1891), which reflects the CRist, non-reductionist positioning on the
931 relationship between the psychological and the physiological (Bhaskar, 2020). The above

⁸ Freud defined two basic instincts: Eros (more commonly known as Libido) and Thanatos, the destructive instinct (or death instinct); “the aim of the first of these basic instincts is to establish ever greater unities and to preserve them thus – in short, to bind together; the aim of the second is, on the contrary, to undo connections and so destroy things” (Freud, 1940, p.18). The energy generated by the Libido is used by the three components of personality: the id, the ego, and the superego.

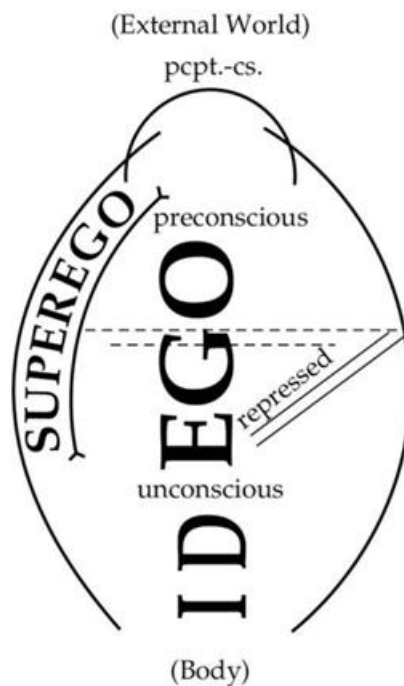
⁹ The Bhaskarian ego and the Freudian ego (defined as: “In each individual there is a coherent organisation of mental processes; and this we call his ego. It is to this ego that consciousness is attached”; Freud, 1923, p.17) both refer to the conscious sense of self, though due to the psychological nature of Freud’s (1923, 1947) work, his metapsychological structural model of the self contains greater depth as to how this aspect of personhood functions. In particular, Freudian theory implicates the notions of the ego as a force for self-cohesion and somatic-cohesion, as a reservoir of libido, and as the primary agent of repression (Boag, 2017; Freud, 1923, 1947).

932 serves to demonstrate that Freudian metapsychological ideas are congruent with CR (Pilgrim,
933 2019). However, an important caveat to reassert is that these metapsychological ideas are
934 congruent with CR only if they are not treated as covering laws, but rather as tendencies
935 (Pilgrim, 2019). Freudian metapsychological ideas were found to be useful in better
936 understanding the generative mechanisms of epiphanic experience discussed at greater length
937 in Chapter 5.

938

939 **Figure 1.6**

940 *Freud's model of the psyche (drawn from Fancher, 1966)*



941

942 A thorough account of the CRist perspective of reality has been provided in this
943 section detailing the premises of enquiry that were established as the foundation from which
944 the research that comprises this thesis was conducted. However, in order to furnish the reader
945 with the fullest possible understanding of CR, and its implications on the research process, it

946 is necessary to discuss two further topics: (1) the process of knowledge generation, and (2)
947 reflexivity.

948

949 **3) The Critical Realist Process of Knowledge Generation**

950 The above details some of the philosophical positions adopted by CR to help
951 understand the world. Attention now turns to how this is applied to the world in order to
952 generate knowledge about it. The role of the CRist researcher is to investigate the nature, and
953 intrinsic qualities, of something, in order to move towards identification of the underlying
954 causal mechanisms that might generate or explain observed reality (Bhaskar, 2017). This
955 involves gathering information from the domain of the Empirical and using it to try and
956 understand the domains of the Actual and Real. The CRist researcher should approach
957 science sceptically, which can be contrasted with both the empirical and postmodernist
958 method, whereby the former fetishises the empirical method, and the latter questions modern
959 scientific approaches on a fundamental level (Pilgrim, 2019). The following topics will be
960 discussed in order to introduce the reader to the CRist process of knowledge generation: (1)
961 DREIC and RRREIC, (2) CR and qualitative research, and (3) CRist methodology.

962

963 **3.1) DREIC and RRREIC**

964 When considering the application of CR Bhaskar (1994) proposed an optimal
965 sequence for scientific discovery, summarised by two mnemonics: DREIC and RRREIC. The
966 mnemonic DREIC represents the typical process of knowledge generation in experimental
967 settings most commonly attributed to the natural sciences. This process is as follows: (1)

968 **D**escription of the phenomenon; (2) **R**etroduction (the cornerstone of CR research, whereby
969 the researcher must ask what the world would need to be like in order for the phenomenon in
970 question to emerge); (3) **E**limination of less valid explanations; (4) **I**dentification of the most
971 valid explanation, and (5) **C**orrection of past findings in light of new findings.

972 However, the mnemonic that is of greater relevance to this research is RRREIC,
973 which typifies the process of knowledge generation in open systems most commonly
974 attributed to the social sciences. This process is as follows: (1) **R**esolution of the phenomenon
975 into its constituent parts; (2) **R**edescription of the phenomenon in accordance with relevant or
976 significant theory; (3) **R**etroduction (defined above) and Retrodiction (“inference from effects
977 to causes or from later to earlier states of systems via retroduced explanatory structures”;
978 Psillos, 2007, p.257); (4) **E**limination of other explanations; (5) **I**dentification of the best, or
979 most correct, possible explanation, and (6) **C**orrection of past findings in light of new
980 findings.

981 These mnemonics not only represent the CRist version of the optimal sequence for
982 scientific discovery, but also elucidate the forms of inference most essential to this
983 philosophical approach (retroduction and retrodiction). Whilst there is a tendency within
984 psychology to idealise deduction (application of a general rule to a particular case) and
985 induction (formation of a general rule from the particular) (Stephens, Dunn & Hayes, 2018),
986 these approaches are considered fallible by CR (Pilgrim, 2019). The deductive assumption of
987 the validity of a general rule may prove incorrect in light of the emergence of a new event.
988 Likewise, the inductive assumption that the details of a particular case, or cases, can be
989 generalised may not hold true in different contexts. Retroduction and retrodiction are
990 therefore considered superior, but not fool-proof, forms of inference by CR because they are
991 contextualised forms of inference (Pilgrim, 2019).

992

993 **3.2) Critical Realism and Qualitative Research**

994 CRists frequently advocate the use of qualitative research methods for knowledge
995 generation as they enable collection of data that provides descriptive information pertaining
996 to individuals' experiences and perspectives (Creswell, 2009; Willig, 2013). Further, from a
997 CRist perspective, qualitative methods can be considered to be more attuned to the open
998 system of social life and human experience (Alvesson, 2002). Indeed, CRists note the dangers
999 of representing an open system with a closed, quantitative, model of a system (Sayer, 2002).
1000 Therefore, qualitative research is inherently congruent with this philosophical approach
1001 (Bhaskar, 2017).

1002 Although CR does not reject quantitative or empiricist methods, when investigating
1003 social phenomena, it favours qualitative methods for examining deeper causal processes
1004 (Bhaskar, 2009). Through the use of intensive 'epistemologically valid' qualitative methods
1005 the CRist researcher is better able to abstract the underlying generative mechanisms, and to
1006 construct a potential model of it (Bhaskar, 2009; Roberts, 2014; Zachariadis, Scott & Barrett,
1007 2013). Upon construction of a theory that accounts for the underlying causal mechanism,
1008 empirical testing of that model can then be undertaken (Morais, 2011). The identified causal
1009 mechanisms can then be used to describe what a particular phenomenon is, why it occurs, and
1010 under which conditions it occurs (Hedström & Swedberg 1998; Roberts, 2014). In this way
1011 CR rejects not the use of quantitative methods but the reification of quantitative methods that
1012 is often present in the discipline of psychology due to its positivist entrenchment (Breen &
1013 Darlaston-Jones, 2010).

1014

1015 3.3) Critical Realist Methodology

1016 Although CR has garnered increased attention, and utilisation, in the past decade
1017 published guidance on applied CR is still limited (Bhaskar, 2014; McAvoy & Butler, 2018).
1018 This is not aided by the fact that CRist literature is often either high-level philosophical
1019 theory, thick with opaque language, or the authors utilising this approach do not explicitly
1020 state how their philosophical positioning impacted their data collection or analysis (Fletcher,
1021 2017). Furthermore, although there is a growing body of literature in fields such as
1022 Information Systems research (e.g., Bygstad, Munkvold & Volkoff, 2016; Mingers, 2004,
1023 2006; Wynn & Williams, 2012) psychology-specific deployment of CR has not yet seen the
1024 same growth (Pilgrim, 2019; Riley, Sims-Schouten & Willig, 2007; Sims-Schouten, Riley &
1025 Willig, 2007). Therefore, the following topics will be discussed in order to provide the reader
1026 with an understanding of how CR influences methodological considerations: (1) Danermark,
1027 Ekström, and Karlsson's (2019) Model of Explanatory Social Science, and (2) determining
1028 quality of inferences.

1029

1030 3.3.1) *Danermark, Ekström, and Karlsson's (2019) Model of Explanatory Social Science*

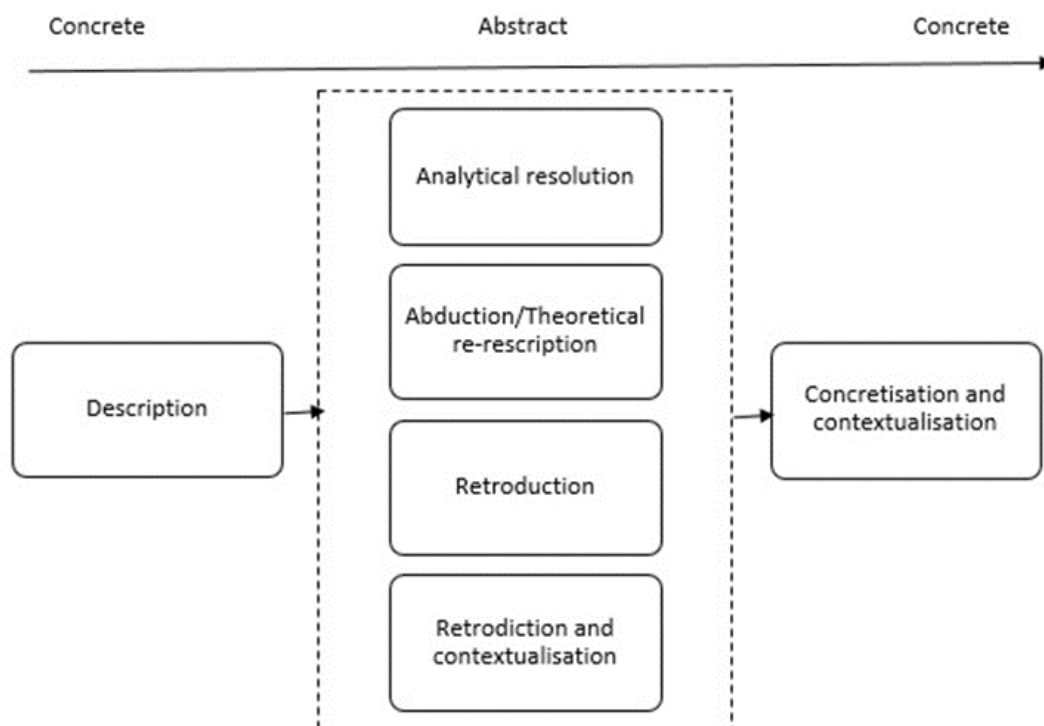
1031 Danermark, Ekström, Jakobsen and Karlsson's (2019) Model of Explanatory Social
1032 Science is perhaps the most dominant CRist methodological framework, and is based on
1033 Bhaskar's (1978, 1989) explanatory models of CR in science (DREIC and RRREIC). The
1034 purpose of this framework is to explain events that occur in the social world, and it is
1035 grounded in the notion that explanatory social science can be described as a movement from
1036 concrete acquisition of empirical knowledge to abstract reasoning, that occurs as a product of
1037 the abduction and retroduction that are core to the CRist research process. Research using this
1038 framework progresses through six stages (Danermark et al., 2019; Raduescu & Vessey,

1039 2014): (1) description, (2) analytical resolution, (3) abduction, (4) retrodiction, (5)
1040 retrodiction and contextualisation, and (6) concretisation and conceptualisation. These six
1041 stages serve to illustrate the idea of research progressing from ‘concrete’ (stage 1), to
1042 ‘abstract’ (stages 2-5), and back to ‘concrete’ (stage 6) (see Figure 1.5).

1043

1044 **Figure 1.5**

1045 *Model of Explanatory Social Science (Danermark, Ekström, & Karlsson, 2019)*



1046

1047 **3.3.1.1) Description.**

1048 The description is the culmination of the data coding process and is intended to
1049 present the phenomenon under investigation in all its complexity. Therefore, at this stage, the
1050 participants' interpretation of the phenomenon is particularly relevant. Description is reliant

1051 on data coding processes that allow for the identification of tendencies within the data
1052 (termed ‘demi-regularities’ and detailed in more depth in section 3.3.1.2 below). Fletcher
1053 (2017) states that demi-regularities can be identified using “qualitative data coding” (p.185).
1054 However, the term ‘qualitative data coding’ is vague. In the literature on the application of
1055 CR to data analysis, ambiguous language such as the following has been used to describe the
1056 process: “intensive grounding process in which concepts emerged” (Yeung, 1997, p.69). This
1057 language from Yeung (1997) highlights that it is common for Grounded Theory to be paired
1058 with CR (Oliver, 2012; Redman-MacLaren & Mills, 2015). Although arguments have been
1059 made for this approach the congruence of this method with CRist philosophy is tenuous. The
1060 purpose of Grounded Theory is to discover theory that is implicit in the data (Glaser &
1061 Strauss, 1967). Although there are many forms of Grounded Theory, the clear emphasis
1062 placed by CR on starting coding from a flexible deductive standpoint (Fletcher, 2017),
1063 appears incongruent with even Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) realist version of Grounded
1064 Theory (Dey, 1999).

1065 However, Fletcher (2017) described a particular process of data coding that is more
1066 congruent with CRist philosophy. This approach to CRist methodology, though not directly
1067 aligned with Danermark et al.’s (2019) model, is one of the few accessible accounts of
1068 applied CR in qualitative research. Fletcher describes the application of a CR-congruent
1069 process that involves a researcher-driven deductive, yet flexible, coding process. The
1070 literature, theoretical frameworks, and CRist concepts serve to aid in generating a list of
1071 deductive codes that are applied to the data. These codes should be considered as provisional,
1072 and subject to change, additions, substitutions, or eliminations (Fletcher, 2017; Gilgun, 2011;
1073 Saldaña, 2013). CR views the world as theory-laden, rather than theory-determined, and so
1074 all possible explanations for a phenomenon are fundamentally considered fallible during
1075 coding and analysis (Bhaskar, 1979). The views of the researcher and the participant are

1076 equally subject to judgemental rationality. Therefore, whilst the CRist qualitative researcher
1077 will act as interpreter to the data, and possible causal mechanisms, the researchers' own
1078 explanation is treated as potentially fallible and able to be challenged by participant
1079 experience (Redman-MacLaren & Mills, 2015).

1080

1081 **3.3.1.2) Analytical resolution.**

1082 After generating the initial codes, and presenting the description, the most dominant
1083 codes act as starting points to the identification of demi-regularities (Fletcher, 2017). The
1084 concept of demi-regularities emerges from the CRist standpoint that social constructs (such as
1085 ideas or decisions) are causally impactful, but do not follow laws of Humean causality.
1086 Because the social world is inherently an open system, Hume's deterministic perspective on
1087 constant conjunctions of events is not applicable because in an open system multiple
1088 occurrences can interact and intersect (Danermark et al., 2019; Fletcher, 2017). As such,
1089 demi-regularities refer to tendencies for certain patterns in empirical data, rather than laws
1090 (Danermark et al., 2019). Therefore, analytical resolution is the process whereby demi-
1091 regularities are identified.

1092

1093 **3.3.1.3) Abduction.**

1094 Whilst abduction is emerging as a new 'trend' in psychological research (e.g., Halpin
1095 & Richard, 2021) it should be noted that the manner in which abduction is being advocated
1096 speaks to the tendency for methodologism in psychology (Pilgrim, 2019). Abduction is a
1097 long-standing core inferential tool in CRist research which permits the researcher to move
1098 beyond the knowledge generated through the primarily deductive, and sometimes inductive

1099 (when new codes emerge), analysis that typifies the description phase (Danermark et al.,
1100 2019; Kapitan, 1992; Meyer & Lunnay, 2013). In this way, abduction has been
1101 conceptualised as being part of the very basis of scientific enquiry alongside deduction and
1102 induction (Kapitan, 1992).

1103 Abduction, as a method of inference, is the process by which data that falls outside
1104 the purview of the initial theoretical frameworks used to explain a phenomenon is analysed
1105 (Meyer & Lunnay, 2013). It is this approach that makes abduction so distinct from deduction,
1106 as with deduction if findings do not align with a theoretical frame, that theory is ‘disproved’.
1107 Conversely, when employing abduction, the data that exists beyond the theoretical frame is
1108 given consideration, permitting the researcher to make new associations and ideas beyond the
1109 initial theoretical premise (Danermark et al., 2019). Therefore, the purpose of abduction is
1110 not merely theory testing, but rather to generate a more comprehensive view of the theory
1111 that may account for the phenomenon in question.

1112

1113 **3.3.1.4) Retroduction.**

1114 Retroduction constitutes the stage within the research process wherein the researcher
1115 must consider what causal mechanisms would need to exist in order for the previously
1116 identified causally relevant structures to arise. The researcher must therefore pose themselves
1117 questions such as: what does the existence of this phenomenon presuppose? What must exist
1118 in order for this phenomenon to exist? Thus, the causal links between underlying structures
1119 and the phenomenon in question are examined. Therefore, retroduction is a method of
1120 analysis that requires the researcher to consider the circumstances without which something
1121 cannot exist (Danermark et al., 2019; Meyer & Lunnay, 2012; Sayer, 2002). Retroductive
1122 inference is built upon the notion that knowledge of reality is only attainable if the researcher

1123 moves beyond the empirically observable and asks questions akin to those mentioned above,
1124 therefore developing a deeper conceptual knowledge of the phenomenon in question
1125 (Danermark et al., 2019; Meyer & Lunnay, 2012).

1126 Retroduction is a cornerstone of CRist knowledge production although not often used
1127 by those employing CR in their research (Strong & Volkoff, 2010; Zachariadis, Scott &
1128 Barrett, 2013). As such, the commitment to retroductive inference demonstrated in this thesis
1129 constitutes part of its contribution to the literature. Moreover, it can be argued that
1130 retroduction is central to social science research in general, as: “Social research, in simplest
1131 terms, involves a dialogue between ideas and evidence” (Ragin, 1994, p.55). In this way, the
1132 CRist researcher moves between knowledge and observable events, with the understanding
1133 that knowledge cannot be reduced to observable events (Meyer & Lunnay, 2012). By
1134 employing abduction and retroduction in tandem new conceptual frameworks and theories
1135 are able to emerge (Danermark et al., 2019). There are several strategies that can be utilised
1136 to facilitate retroductive inference (Danermark et al., 2019; Meyer & Lunnay, 2012):

1137 1. *Counterfactual thinking*. This strategy involves using stored knowledge and
1138 experience of social reality to ask such questions as, ‘can you imagine X without Y?’
1139 which requires the researcher to examine a concept in relation to its opposite (Danermark
1140 et al., 2019; Meyer & Lunnay, 2012). This tool is considered to be particularly valuable in
1141 instances where controlled experiments are not possible (Meyer & Lunnay, 2012; Tetlock
1142 & Belkin, 1996). In much the same way as when individuals reflect on how a particular
1143 outcome may have been different had they made a different decision, researchers consider
1144 how their research may have been different had the conditions of the investigation been
1145 different (Coricelli & Rustichini, 2010; Meyer & Lunnay, 2012). It is therefore critical
1146 not only for the researcher to be able to identify the constitutive factors that account for

1147 the existence of a particular phenomenon, and in particular to be able to differentiate
1148 between constitutive factors and accidental circumstances, but also to have the reflexive
1149 capacity to engage with this process (Meyer & Lunnay, 2012).

1150 2. *Social experiments and thought experiments*. This strategy requires the researcher to
1151 imagine and systematically work through the implications generated by the hypothetical
1152 world that is being proposed (Meyer & Lunnay, 2012; Tetlock & Belkin, 1996).

1153 3. *Studies of pathological and extreme cases*. This strategy is particularly helpful to
1154 researchers wanting to identify the conditions under which the phenomenon in question is
1155 possible. To implement this strategy the researcher studies extreme, or pathological, cases
1156 where the mechanisms in question are ‘purer’ in form than usual (Danermark et al.,
1157 2019).

1158 4. *Comparative case studies*. This strategy involves comparing cases and exploring their
1159 differences and commonalities. By comparing cases the researcher is able to better
1160 determine the nature of the phenomenon in question alongside which mechanisms
1161 facilitate its emergence (Meyer & Lunnay, 2012).

1162

1163 **3.3.1.5) Retrodiction and Contextualisation.**

1164 This stage requires that the explanatory powers of the structures and mechanisms
1165 identified through abduction and retrodiction are assessed. Danermark et al. (2019) note that
1166 at this stage it is important to contextualise the phenomenon under investigation in its
1167 temporary circumstances (e.g., cultural, social, etc.) as well as its structural conditions (e.g.,
1168 organisational structures).

1169

1170 **3.3.1.6) Concretisation and conceptualisation.**

1171 In this stage, the theoretical understanding made manifest by the previous stages is
1172 directly re-applied back onto the data. The purpose of this stage is to enable the interpretation
1173 of the meanings assigned to the phenomenon within a specific context, as well as providing
1174 an explanation for the event itself.

1175

1176 **3.3.2) *Quality of Inferences***

1177 Zachariadis, Scott, and Barrett (2013) examined how the concept of validity in CRist
1178 research compares to that which is described in mixed-methods literature. When discussing
1179 validity, these authors adhere to Venkatesh et al.'s (2013) classification within which three
1180 categories are proposed: design validity, measurement validity, and inferential validity. In
1181 qualitative research these categories become: internal and external validity, reliability, and
1182 construct validity. Although there is disagreement in the qualitative literature, about the need
1183 for the concept of validity (Guba & Lincoln, 2005), there remains an acknowledgment that
1184 validation is critical to the potential of science to create a common body of knowledge
1185 (Morse et al., 2002; Venkatesh et al., 2013). Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett's (2013) CRist
1186 conceptualisation of validity in qualitative research is presented in Table 1.2 below; they cite
1187 Venkatesh et al. (2013) and Johnston and Smith (2010) as critical sources for this endeavour.
1188 As the table below makes evident the focus in Critical Realist research is shifted from
1189 empirical events, the conventional focus of attention, to the underlying causal mechanisms.

1190

1191 **Table 1.2.**

1192 *Validity in Critical Realist qualitative research (drawn from Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett,*
 1193 *2013)*

Validity Type	Conventional Description	Critical Realism
Design Validity	<i>Descriptive validity:</i> Accuracy of events, objects, behaviours, and settings reported.	Explanations of mechanisms in action and the conditions with which they are interacting;
	<i>Credibility:</i> Results are believable from the participants of the research.	Appreciation of the field by identifying, prioritising, and scoping boundaries of the study.
	<i>Transferability:</i> Results can be generalised and transferred to other settings.	The idea that similar or related events that occur (or might occur) in other settings are caused by the generative mechanism that caused the actual events in the field.
Analytical Validity	<i>Theoretical validity:</i> Theoretical explanation developed fits the data.	Theory is used to help hypothesise about the mechanisms and provide explanations for the events that have occurred.
	<i>Dependability:</i> Researchers describe the changes in the research setting and its effects on the research approach of the study.	This is an essential part of the retroductive process and identification of contingent factors.
	<i>Consistency:</i> Verifying the steps of qualitative research process.	Challenge and inform the terms of (quasi-)closure and process of ongoing inquiry in retroductive analysis.
	<i>Plausibility:</i> Findings of the study fit the data from which they are derived.	Whether data that is empirically available gives valid knowledge about the actual manifestation of the alleged generative mechanism in the field.
Inferential Validity	<i>Interpretive validity:</i> Interpretation of participants' views are accurate.	Findings from qualitative research can provide information about the mechanisms that cause the events at the empirical level.
	<i>Confirmability:</i> The results are confirmed by others.	

1194

1217 Reflexivity is a highly integral part of CRist research (Bhaskar, 1993, 2017), and is
1218 defined by Archer (2010) as “the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal
1219 people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa” (p.5).
1220 Archer acknowledges that the form of these inner conversations will vary according to the
1221 individual, with each individual representing a concrete singularity (a unique expression of a
1222 concrete universal phenomenon). As Archer (2000) states, “the ‘inner conversation’ is how
1223 our personal emergent powers are exercised on and in the world – natural, practical and social
1224 – which is our triune environment” (p.318). As such, reflexivity can be seen as a mental
1225 capacity which varies in efficiency and complexity (Pilgrim, 2019).

1226 Archer’s (2003) theory is grounded in CRist distinctions between the dualism of
1227 structure and agency (see section 2.6). Archer suggests that this dualism functions in a two-
1228 fold manner: (1) structural and cultural powers bear upon agents, and (2) how these structural
1229 and cultural powers impact reflexive agents is determined by what reflexive agents use their
1230 agency to do (Archer, 2003; Elster, 2017). Therefore, Archer emphasises the ontological
1231 primacy of structure over agency, whereby structures pre-exist agency and act as a
1232 framework for it, whilst maintaining the independent nature of their relationship. Archer
1233 asserts that when structure and agency are conflated, the operationalisation of reflexivity is
1234 compromised as without this distinction any interplay between the two cannot be brought into
1235 awareness. Therefore, within the scope of this theory, reflexivity is defined as an emergent
1236 personal property and:

1237

1238 An internal dialogue, a condition of existence in society, which activates the causal
1239 powers of structures and allows individuals to project their actions based on the
1240 articulation between personal concerns and the conditions that make it possible to

1241 accomplish them. Internal conversations basically consist of the dialogues that people
1242 engage in inwardly and through which they define and clarify their beliefs, attitudes
1243 and goals, evaluate social circumstances and define projects based on their main
1244 concerns (Caetano, 2016, p.3).

1245

1246 Therefore, reflexivity acts as the intermediary between structure and agency,
1247 mediating the influence of structures on agents, and simultaneously the responses of agents to
1248 structures. Structures will impact the situations in which agents find themselves, as well as
1249 shaping how agents subjectively interpret issues of concern that are created through structural
1250 enablement and constraint.

1251 Although Archer (2003) asserts that reflexivity is a universal emergent property she
1252 equally acknowledges that reflexivity will be exercised differently by different agents.
1253 Reflexive practice, according to Archer, is not a process of homogenous internal deliberation,
1254 but is instead a diverse range of internal conversations within individual social contexts. This
1255 view is based on, and supported by, her qualitative research conducted to discover how
1256 individuals exercise reflexivity differently. From this research emerged a typology of four
1257 modes of reflexivity: (1) communicative, (2) autonomous, (3) meta, and (4) fractured.

1258 Communicative reflexivity describes internal conversations that need to be discussed
1259 and confirmed by others in order to then engage with a course of action; for the current
1260 researcher/author this took place in the form of supervisory meetings held continuously
1261 throughout the research process. Autonomous reflexivity refers to self-contained inner
1262 dialogues that initiate a course of action, absent of external validation; this took the form of a
1263 reflexive diary, drawings, mind-mapping, and private reflections, which were also engaged in
1264 throughout the entirety of the research process. Meta-reflexivity describes how individuals

1265 engage in reflexive critique of their self-contained inner dialogues in a manner that
1266 exacerbates stress responses and social disorientation; due to the stressors inherent to the PhD
1267 journey, this was often engaged in as the researcher navigated through this process. Fractured
1268 reflexivity refers to a practice performed by individuals with a self-contained inner dialogue
1269 that disallows for dealing with social situations in an optimal manner; any instances of
1270 fractured reflexivity were reflected on in the aforementioned fashions (i.e., conversations
1271 with supervisors, personal reflexive practice).

1272 Despite its utility, Archer’s conceptualisation of reflexivity has been criticised for not
1273 including a temporal dimension which disallows for temporal embeddedness (Elster, 2017).
1274 By including the temporal dimension to reflexive practice, the researcher is able to
1275 investigate how different points in time have impacted their experiences, actions, and
1276 reflexive orientations, and how these have evolved through time (see Figure 1.6). Reflexivity,
1277 Elster (2017) argues, does not occur in a vacuum; each time it is engaged with, the individual
1278 draws on a host of lived experience from other points in time which have bearing on current
1279 reflexivity:

1280

1281 In a nutshell, the historical slate is not wiped clean each time reflexivity is in
1282 operation. Nor is reflexivity merely a present-oriented activity or something that, once
1283 in a blue moon, crops up only as a result of structural disruption. It is a process
1284 embroiled in the past, present and future; it is historically constituted and often
1285 projected towards the time ahead. In other words, there is a temporal dimension to
1286 reflexivity (p.29).

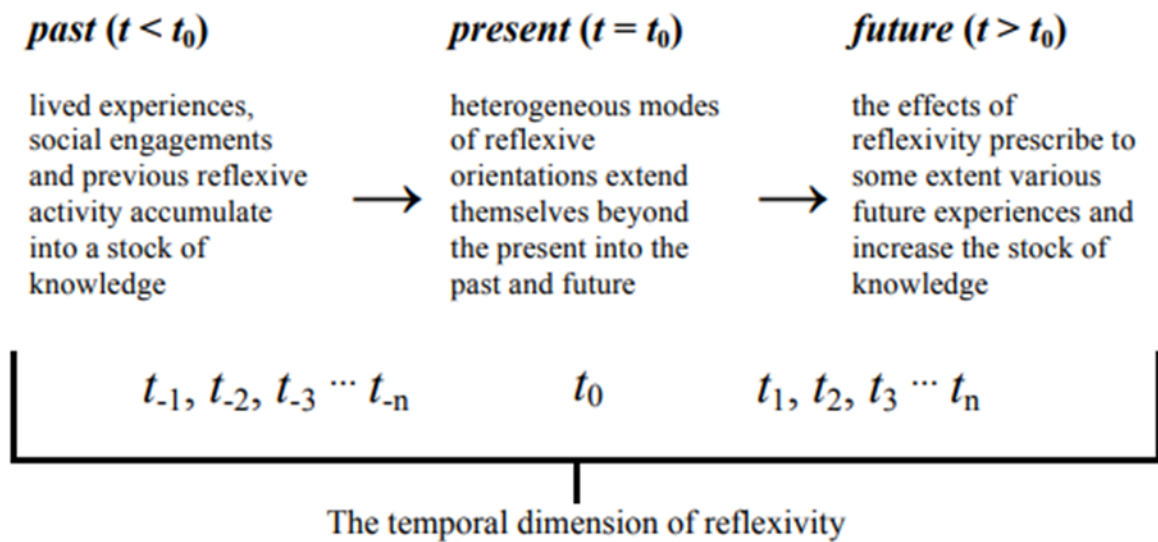
1287

1288 Therefore, as a result of these criticisms, it was deemed necessary to incorporate this
 1289 additional element into Archer's CRist understanding of reflexivity.

1290

1291 **Figure 1.6**

1292 *Elster's (2017) schematisation of the temporal process and 'time points' pertaining to*
 1293 *reflexive orientations (drawn from Elster, 2017).*



1294

1295 Whilst enhanced reflexivity is a key feature of Critical Realism (Bhaskar, 2017) this
 1296 philosophical approach does not stipulate, or limit, the form in which this should take. In
 1297 order to demonstrate some of my reflexive process I will now present some reflexions on CR.
 1298 This evidences my engagement with reflexivity and also serves to contextualise the journey I
 1299 undertook to 'find' CR, as well as reinforcing the underlying tenets of this philosophy for the
 1300 reader.

1301

1302 **4.1) Reflexions on Critical Realism**

1303 Whilst I was exploring different philosophical perspectives, I found that I was
1304 struggling to find one that ‘fit’. By ‘fit’, I guess what I mean in ‘academic language’ is ‘was
1305 congruent’; but what I really mean is that it felt right. There was a felt resonance with some
1306 of the ideas I encountered that was almost magnetic, and that resonated with my ‘gut’. Whilst
1307 this position runs contrary to how we are generally taught to think, academically, some
1308 researchers support the notion of non-cognitive modes of engagement as being facilitative to
1309 learning (Barnacle, 2009; Sodhi & Cohen, 2012).

1310 I was finding that neither positivist nor interpretivist approaches were able to
1311 encapsulate how I viewed the world. They were both uncomfortable and incongruent - like
1312 wearing a hair suit. I found that, ontologically, I sat with perspectives from the realist side of
1313 the spectrum. I believe that there is a world out there that exists objectively and
1314 independently to my perception of it. Solipsistic notions of the world seemed to me to be
1315 ‘unserious’ (Bhaskar, 2017). My forays into these anti-realist ontologies led to an instant
1316 rejection, their ideas and concepts producing an almost visceral refutation. Like placing the
1317 like poles of two magnets close to each other.

1318 However, epistemologically, I found myself somewhat on the interpretivist side of the
1319 spectrum. Though, I have to admit that the extreme side of this side of the spectrum,
1320 particularly positions such as social constructivism, made me more uncomfortable than the
1321 more naïve forms of positivism did. They never seemed to talk about anything ‘real’ – it was
1322 talk about talk about real things, but I found myself wondering, if the real things existed then
1323 surely, they should be a core part of that conversation. I could see a tendency in the literature
1324 I was reading to routinely mention ontology as part of the core philosophical assumptions
1325 made by the researcher, and then discard that facet of philosophy, because the focus in
1326 basically all sources appeared to be almost exclusively on epistemology. Because no one was

1327 talking about ontology and epistemology in the same breath, I questioned how my own
1328 nascent philosophical perspectives (ontological realism coupled with epistemological
1329 relativism) could co-exist within the philosophical frameworks that I had read about. I am,
1330 unsurprisingly, not the first doctoral student to have to navigate this terrain (e.g., Batchelor &
1331 Napoli, 2006; DeForge & Shaw, 2011; Mays & Smith, 2009; Pansiri, 2009).

1332 It is at this point that I feel I should draw attention to the fact that, because I am a
1333 psychologist, I carry with me a certain inheritance. My education up until the point of
1334 commencing my doctoral journey taught me to assume that universal covering laws were out
1335 there to be discovered, and that empirical methods allowed me a wholly unfettered path to
1336 this knowledge. Psychology's entrenchment in empiricism and methodological behaviourism
1337 has been noted by Pilgrim (2010). This particular message, whilst implicit throughout my
1338 undergraduate studies, became even more greatly advocated for when I entered sport
1339 psychology – which has its roots in sport science (an unquestionably positivist-behaviourist-
1340 dominated field) rather than mainstream psychology (Goldman & Gervis, 2021). At the time
1341 of my master's degree, I was uncomfortable with this deeply-entrenched positivist lens but
1342 was utterly incapable of articulating why this was the case – it just sat on the fringes of my
1343 consciousness as a vague sense of discomfort and discord.

1344 I realise now that one of the main reasons why I was unable to move past this
1345 viewpoint at that time and find a philosophical position more congruent with my own views,
1346 was that I had not yet learnt the language that would allow me to construct oppositional ideas.
1347 Moreover, I didn't even know that there were entirely different paradigms to the positivist,
1348 empiricist, hypothetico-deductive model that I could explore, because philosophy of science

1349 had never once been mentioned throughout the totality of my education¹⁰. When I began my
1350 doctoral journey, my primary supervisor recommended that I explore my own philosophy,
1351 before beginning my research. This provided me with the opportunity to finally make
1352 congruent that which had been so incongruent for so long. It forced me to really think about
1353 reality, ontology, epistemology, psychology, the mind – which reawakened an intense
1354 personal interest in philosophy (that had laid dormant since my A Level Philosophy and
1355 Ethics studies with Mr. Moriarty) and provided me with the language I needed to explain why
1356 some ideas resonated with me and others didn't, as well as facilitating my ability to make
1357 meaningful interpretations of the world around me.

1358 I was also going through the British Psychological Society's Stage 2 training to
1359 become a Chartered Psychologist (sport and exercise), between 2015-2018, which required
1360 me to explore my philosophy from an applied perspective. This two-pronged reflexive
1361 process was very useful as it forced me to think very carefully so that there was philosophical
1362 congruence across my praxis. So, whilst the lengthy, and often opaque process of wading into
1363 philosophical literature was exhausting, and sometimes confusing, ultimately, it's what I
1364 consider to be the most important development (personally and academically) of this entire
1365 journey.

1366 It was by what felt like a complete, synchronicitous chance that I 'discovered' CR. In
1367 a short, almost throwaway sentence in Willig's (2013) book on qualitative methods, she
1368 mentions CR: "Less naïve forms of realism (e.g., critical realism) have much in common with
1369 constructionist approaches because they recognize the subjective element in knowledge
1370 production" (p.172). This statement rang all kinds of bells for me, and my gut told me to go

¹⁰ I'm aware that my commitment in this thesis to CR positions me in the area where psychology and sociology meet, and that this way of thinking might be more familiar to people with a sociology background because, whilst philosophy is formally taught in sociology programmes, this is rarely the case in psychology.

1371 in this direction, so I trusted it and looked CR up, and never really looked back (Bhaskar's
1372 comments on the re-vindication of ontology were particularly useful in answering my earlier
1373 questions about the reduction of ontology to epistemology). This was a philosophy that
1374 intuitively 'fit', and indeed still fits.

1375 However, I did extensively consider other philosophical approaches to research. I did
1376 this by developing my understanding of opposing paradigms to CR (e.g., positivism,
1377 interpretivism), as well as by exploring other philosophical perspectives on CRist concepts.
1378 For example, the structure/agency dichotomy is a key concept in CR that addresses social
1379 ontology (which perhaps makes it more relevant to sociological research, but as demonstrated
1380 in section 2.6 above, provides critical understanding of the context of persons for
1381 psychologists). I looked at other approaches to this dichotomy, some which gave primacy to
1382 structure (e.g., structuralism, Marxism), and others which gave primacy to agency (e.g.,
1383 individualism, interactionism) – but the CRist stance spoke to me, providing what I felt was a
1384 more balanced view.

1385 A particular challenge for me emerged when it came to translating CR into a living
1386 methodological practice. At the start of my doctoral journey (circa 2017) I struggled to find
1387 papers specifically in the field of psychology that dealt with operationalising CR as an
1388 approach to analysing qualitative data (I'm aware that this is a big statement, but I stand by it,
1389 given that Sims-Schouten, Riley & Willig's (2007) paper deals with Critical Realist
1390 Discourse Analysis, and Pilgrim's (2019) book had not yet been published). So, to get
1391 'answers' I had to go further afield. I found that CR had received a large amount of traction
1392 in the field of Information Systems research, and I found Fletcher's (2017) paper which
1393 became a key text for me. So, this became my starting point for developing a way to apply
1394 CR to my research.

1395 Critics have stated that: CR is too abstract and vague (Roberts, 2014). However, the
1396 amount of reading and research I have undertaken in order to be able to discuss this
1397 philosophy with any kind of understanding (and dare I tentatively say, authority) suggests the
1398 contrary. Basic CR, which encompasses its ontological, epistemological, and judgemental
1399 stance, is superficially relatively straightforward but contains a huge amount of nuance.
1400 Moreover, I can see how taking CR at this face value could lead some to believe that it is just
1401 an ‘anything goes’ philosophy as it enables researchers to engage with a range of methods,
1402 because it is not prescriptive with regards to which methods are used to explore which
1403 problems (Vincent & O’Mahoney, 2018). However, I believe this criticism to be rooted in
1404 methodologism, and enjoy the fact that this philosophy permits the researcher to explore a
1405 range of ways of doing research. Further, looking deeper into Bhaskar’s arguments (across all
1406 three ‘waves’ of his philosophy), it seems obvious to me that CR provides a very specific
1407 view of the world that is anything but abstract, vague, and wantonly methodologically
1408 permissive.

1409 Immersing myself in CRist thought, and my overall ‘philosophical re-education’, has
1410 been eye-opening, providing me with an entirely new way of thinking critically (in particular,
1411 the notions of methodologism, the four planar social being, and the ontology of personhood,
1412 have been the objects of considerable reflection). It has left me with an appreciation for the
1413 importance and utility of philosophically informed research, as well as the pitfalls of
1414 ‘philosophical ignorance’. Moreover, Bhaskar’s arguments provide the framework for a
1415 worldview that is congruent with my own at this stage of my life.

1416

1417

5) Conclusion

1418 This chapter has provided an account of the CRist approach to reality, science, and
1419 research. CR is at the heart of this thesis and provides the foundation from which all
1420 methodological decisions were made, as well as the reference point when considering the
1421 premises of enquiry, and when considering the theories relevant to this subject. This is
1422 congruent with a CRist approach to science as Bhaskar (1979) considered empirical social
1423 science and philosophy to be fundamentally interwoven. In this way, philosophy forms a core
1424 part of the contribution made by this research, thereby countering the often-de-philosophised
1425 nature of the discipline of psychology (Pérez-Álvarez, 2018; Pilgrim, 2019; Richards, 2010;
1426 Wiggins & Christopherson, 2019).

1427 Now that the premises of CRist enquiry have been expounded the narrative will turn
1428 to the phenomenon of interest central to this research – that of epiphanic experience.
1429 Although there exists a small pool of literature on this kind of change, much of this literature
1430 is disparate. Further, attempts to synthesise this pool of literature have tended to lack
1431 methodological clarity as well as an explicit awareness of the philosophical pre-suppositions
1432 underpinning the researchers thinking. It is with this in mind that an account of epiphanic
1433 experience will now be presented that is reinforced by the CRist worldview as well as CRist
1434 principles of critique and criticism.

1435

1436

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Chapter 2: A Literature Review of Epiphanic Experience

1441

1) Introduction

1442

The purpose of this chapter is to represent the current state of literature on the

1443

phenomenon under investigation, that of sudden, positive, and profound change – termed

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‘epiphanic experience’ (see Appendix A). In order to do this the discussion will proceed as

1445

follows. First, the nature of change will be explored; context will also be provided to further

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explore how and why the discipline of psychology possesses certain views about change.

1447

Second, the specifically psychological theoretical conceptualisations of epiphanic experience

1448

from the extant literature will be presented and critically evaluated; because Critical Realism

1449

(CR) places emphasis on the exploration of generative mechanisms, particular attention will

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be given to the proposed causes of these experiences. Finally, the chapter will end with a

1451

presentation of the research questions this thesis sought to answer.

1452

1453

2) The Nature of Change

1454

The cases of epiphanic experience noted in the introduction preceding Chapter 1

1455

constitute only a few examples of this phenomenon from popular culture. They serve to

1456

exemplify that references to this kind of change permeate Western culture, and cultures

1457

across the globe. Indeed, these experiences are irrefutably, in greater and lesser forms, a

1458

fundamental part of human experience (James, 1902). However, it soon becomes evident that

1459

within the discipline of modern psychology the unexpected changes noted above are given

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little consideration (Fosha, 2006). Change, and in particular change that is considered to be

1461

positive and enduring, is generally conceptualised within psychology as a process that occurs

1462

gradually, intentionally, in a linear fashion (whereby the change or outcome is proportional to

1463 the stimulus or input), and over a length of time (Baban & Cracium, 2007; Bien, 2004;
1464 Forcehimes, 2004; Fosha, 2006; Hayes, Laurenceau, Feldman, Strauss, & Cardaciotto, 2007;
1465 Higginson & Mansell, 2008; Ilivitsky, 2011; McDonald, 2005; Miller, 2004; Prochaska,
1466 Norcross, & DiClemente, 1994). However, this is a reductionist view of change which
1467 ultimately compromises the ability to understand the broader picture of human change in all
1468 its complexity.

1469 This kind of linear progressive change has been termed Type 1 change (Miller & C'de
1470 Baca, 2001) and has been examined within two primary areas: (1) change that occurs across
1471 the lifespan, e.g., stage-based models such as the Trans-Theoretical model (Baban &
1472 Cracium, 2007; Prochaska and DiClemente, 1998), and (2) change that is the result of
1473 therapeutic processes (Carey et al., 2007). This conceptualisation of change is fundamentally
1474 incongruent with the nonlinear, discontinuous, accounts of change discussed throughout this
1475 thesis, meaning that it possesses limited explanatory value if a causal understanding of these
1476 experiences is sought. Moreover, a strict linear conceptualisation of personal change is
1477 incongruent with the Critical Realist (CRist) worldview as these models do not account for
1478 the open, context-sensitive nature of biological systems. Fortuitously, psychology as a field
1479 does possess some language that allows for nonlinear change (the change or outcome not
1480 being proportional to the stimulus or input) to be discussed. Change that is congruent with the
1481 research and accounts detailed above is termed nonlinear, or discontinuous, change and has
1482 been referred to as Type 2 change in the literature (Jarvis, 1997; Miller & C'de Baca, 2001).

1483 Despite the relatively widespread acknowledgement of the reality, and of the
1484 importance, of this kind of change the discipline of psychology has almost entirely excluded
1485 sudden positive change from its attention (Fosha, 2006). Further, despite research emerging
1486 from various other fields, in recent years only a very small number of psychological studies

1487 have explicitly explored epiphanic experiences. Meanwhile, sudden negative change has been
1488 extensively documented and is accepted by psychology as a legitimate phenomenon (Fosha,
1489 2006; Ilivitsky, 2011; Siegelman & Conway, 1978; Skalski & Hardy, 2013). For example,
1490 post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which can follow either a delayed or, more relevant to
1491 this argument, immediate onset (Gray, Bolton & Litz, 2004). Sudden positive change,
1492 however, is treated with scepticism with psychology “cautiously maintaining that enduring
1493 change need be slow and gradual” (Fosha, 2006, p.590; Naor & Mayselless, 2017). This
1494 scepticism could be attributed to the tendency within psychology to pathologise experience
1495 (Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2000; Rosenhan, 1973; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).
1496 It could also be attributed to the paradigm endemic to modern science and psychology: the
1497 Newtonian paradigm (Guastello, 2009; Jarvis, 1997). A critical part of CRist research is
1498 understanding context, therefore, it is important to explore the impact of this paradigm as an
1499 act of explanatory critique (Bhaskar, 1979).

1500 The disregard psychology has shown to nonlinear, discontinuous change can be
1501 explained as the result of the general bias in science, predicated on a Newtonian worldview,
1502 towards searching for continuity within phenomena (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009; Jarvis,
1503 1997). Western scientific thought has long favoured the seeking of, and attending to,
1504 phenomena and experiences that are continuous rather than discontinuous (Guastello &
1505 Liebovitch, 2009; Jarvis, 1997). In large part, this is due to the dominance of the Newtonian
1506 paradigm, which places significant emphasis on prediction using linear systems (whereby a
1507 linear system is conceptualised as one where the whole is exactly equal to the sum of its
1508 components) to generate universal covering laws, and which has shaped scientific thought for
1509 over two hundred years (Oestreicher, 2007). In essence, the Newtonian paradigm can be
1510 surmised as: to describe the world according to the simplest possible universal laws (Doll,
1511 1986). This is predicated on the following axioms: (1) every complex thing is a collection of

1512 simpler components, (2) all complex things can be reduced to their simpler components, and
1513 (3) all processes are time-reversible (Jarvis, 1997). Suffice it to say that this runs counter to a
1514 CRist worldview (Bhaskar, 2017; Pilgrim, 2019; see Chapter 1).

1515 The Newtonian paradigm produces a highly mechanistic view of the world where
1516 cause and effect are simple, independent, and predictable (Goerner, 1995). In this way,
1517 Newton favours causal determinism, and the assumption that if one knows all of the causes
1518 then the outcome can also be wholly known. Causal determinism is well explicated by Pierre-
1519 Simon Laplace's hypothetical intelligence that possesses complete knowledge; referred to as
1520 Laplace's 'demon':

1521

1522 We may regard the present state of the universe as the effect of its past and the cause
1523 of its future. An intellect which at a certain moment would know all forces that set
1524 nature in motion, and all positions of all items of which nature is composed, if this
1525 intellect were also vast enough to submit these data to analysis, it would embrace in a
1526 single formula the movements of the greatest bodies of the universe and those of the
1527 tiniest atom; for such an intellect nothing would be uncertain and the future just like
1528 the past would be present before its eyes (Laplace, 1951, p.4).

1529

1530 In its time, and arguably still today, the Newtonian worldview has been accepted and
1531 advocated widely within science, explicitly and implicitly, and particularly by those in
1532 alignment with positivism/empiricism (Jarvis, 1997). Researchers have suggested that the
1533 readiness with which this perspective was adopted was due to its assumption of a strict
1534 universal order, and its simplification of the world to a linear and predictable system. Despite

1535 the misleading reductionism of this paradigm, it is a comfortable worldview to humans,
1536 particularly in Western cultures, due to their tendency to view events in a linear fashion, their
1537 desire to seek understandable attributions of linearity, causality, and predictability, and their
1538 developmental tendency to suppress uncertainty (Carhart-Harris et al., 2014; Doll, 1986;
1539 Goerner, 1995; Prigogine & Stengers, 1984; Resnicow & Vaughan, 2006). Epiphanic
1540 experiences are decidedly nonlinear (Jarvis, 1997), therefore making them potentially more
1541 uncomfortable for many of us, as modern human animals, to process. However, the
1542 overapplication of the Newtonian paradigm to systems that are not linear (such as the human
1543 mind and human behaviour; Shapiro, 2015) can manifest as a reluctance in the scientific
1544 community to investigate the complexities in systems that cannot be explained in a linear
1545 fashion (Boker & Graham, 1998; Cavanaugh & McGuire, 1994; Goerner, 1995; Jarvis,
1546 1997).

1547 This reluctance is made particularly clear by the literature noted above on sudden
1548 change, wherein sudden negative change is overwhelmingly accepted in psychology, as it can
1549 be more easily understood in a linear fashion, whilst sudden positive change is treated with
1550 scepticism (Fosha, 2006; Siegelman & Conway, 1978). Therefore, the Newtonian worldview,
1551 which asserts that change need be linear and gradual, has:

1552

1553 Exerted an effect on our ways of thinking about change in a way that is difficult to
1554 estimate. Its implicit assumptions have been subtly and at times almost inextricably
1555 woven into our epistemologies about the physical world, the biological world, and all
1556 manner of social processes as well, including our collective conceptualizations in
1557 psychology regarding the nature of psychological change. (Jarvis, 1997, p.261)

1558

1559 A particular facet of the Newtonian paradigm that has had a strong influence on the
1560 formation of psychological views on mental health and psychological change is that of
1561 equilibrium (Jarvis, 1997). Because the Newtonian paradigm is only applicable at conditions
1562 of equilibrium, or near-equilibrium, this state of being has become the almost exclusive focus
1563 of attention in psychological research. Though it is not inherently problematic to understand
1564 the behaviour of a system at equilibrium, it is problematic when equilibrium becomes a
1565 marker for optimal conditions within a system (Prigogine, 1989).

1566 As a result of the assumption that equilibrium equates to health, chaotic, complex, or
1567 random systems are considered undesirable or unhealthy, even though they form a core part
1568 of everyday human experience (Guastello, Koopmans & Pincus, 2008; Jarvis, 1997). Even
1569 systems considered to be entirely linear and predictable have been shown to act chaotically
1570 (Gleick, 1987; Guastello, Koopmans & Pincus, 2008). For example, although a healthy heart
1571 beats within a range of sixty to eighty beats per minute, electrocardiograms demonstrate
1572 considerable minute-to-minute irregularities, therefore illustrating that disorder is part of a
1573 healthy system (Krippner, 1994; Oestreicher, 2007). Further, electroencephalograms show
1574 that there is extreme regularity in the brains of epileptics immediately preceding a petit mal
1575 seizure, therefore illustrating that equilibrium can be the precursor to undesirable
1576 consequences (Krippner, 1994; Oestreicher, 2007).

1577 Chaos and nonlinearity are normal and necessary in a healthy, open, biological system
1578 as it allows that system to be able to adapt flexibly when it encounters change (Francis,
1579 1995). Moreover, if equilibrium were the only direction in which a system moved, the system
1580 would merely return to its previous state when perturbed. Instead, research shows that
1581 nonlinear or chaotic systems, such as the human brain, engage in a search for an optimal
1582 direction therefore enabling the system to adapt and improve in relation to its changing

1583 conditions (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009). When applied directly to epiphanic experiences it
1584 is evident that the Newtonian paradigm has functioned to directly limit the capacity for
1585 scientific exploration as:

1586

1587 This self-transcending quality of human existence is ignored and neglected by those
1588 motivational theories which are based on the homeostasis principle. According to
1589 these theories man is basically concerned with maintaining, or restoring, an inner
1590 equilibrium and to this end with reducing tensions (Frankl, 1966, p.97).

1591

1592 However, nonlinear dynamical theories of physical systems, evolutionary, genetic,
1593 ecologic, psychological, sociological, and biochemical processes, and of time itself, have
1594 begun to be established in the literature, themselves supplanting previous assumptions of
1595 linearity (Bak et al., 1987; Faure & Korn, 2001; Guastello, Koopmans & Pincus, 2008;
1596 Jensen, 1998; Robertson & Combs, 2014; Rovelli, 2017; Tognoli & Kelso, 2014). Using
1597 cognition as an example, a nonlinear approach has been supported by the extant literature
1598 which states that:

1599

1600 Overall, both theoretical and experimental works in the field seem to demonstrate that
1601 the advanced tools of nonlinear analysis can much more accurately describe and
1602 represent the complexity of brain dynamics than traditional mathematical and
1603 computational methods based on linear and deterministic analysis (Mattei, 2014, p.1).

1604

1605 Linearity as a concept is now ingrained into the way in which people understand, and
1606 interpret, their world and has even permeated attempts to understand nonlinear change. For
1607 example, certain theories of epiphanic experience present linear models of what is
1608 fundamentally a nonlinear phenomenon (McDonald, 2005; see section 3.3 below). Therefore,
1609 if this kind of change is to be truly understood, then the Newtonian worldview must be
1610 divested of its power in the search for answers. This assertion is made for two primary
1611 reasons. First, from a pragmatic perspective, it is understood that this paradigm shift – no
1612 matter the researcher’s underpinning philosophical stance – is necessary for a more accurate
1613 and necessarily complex understanding of human psychology as it exists, as and in, an open
1614 system(s) (Guastello, Koopmans & Pincus, 2008). Second, the premises of the Newtonian
1615 paradigm are incongruent with a CRist philosophy, as the Newtonian paradigm engenders a
1616 view of the world that is fixated on the application of closed system logic to open systems
1617 (Hartwig, 2007). By this logic, it is even possible to question the conceptualisation of Type 1
1618 change as merely representing an illusion of linearity, as CR fundamentally views social
1619 reality as an open system in which linear predictability is nigh on impossible (Pilgrim, 2019).

1620 With one notable exception (i.e., Jarvis, 1997), the literature on epiphanic experience
1621 appears to have either tacitly accepted, or not questioned, the ontological norms within
1622 modern psychology. As detailed in Chapter 1, questions of ontology are not considered trivial
1623 to the CRist approach. As such, the act of making explicit the accepted ontology within
1624 modern psychology, and questioning it, becomes a critical part of generating a more complete
1625 understanding of epiphanic experience.

1626

1627 **3) Epiphanic Experience: An Example of Nonlinear, Discontinuous Change**

1628 Although a small body of literature details the extant psychological research on
1629 epiphanic experience (discussed below) it should be noted that other disciplines have
1630 published on this subject. Theologians (Loder, 1981), religious scholars (Chodron, 2005;
1631 Lofland & Skonovd, 1981), historians, sociologists, scholars of orientation and identity
1632 (Barlow, Abel, & Blanchard, 1979; Barlow, Reynolds, & Agras, 1973; Jensen, 1998), and
1633 scholars of literature (Beja, 1993; Bidney 1997, 2004; Denzin, 1989; Hayman, 1998; Schultz,
1634 2001) have contributed to current understandings.

1635 William James (1902), a committed empiricist (Pilgrim, 2019), and arguably a
1636 founder of modern psychology (Sommer, 2013), wrote the text ‘The Varieties of Religious
1637 Experience’, which stands as the first modern academic exploration of sudden, positive, and
1638 profound change. Though there is relative consensus that mystical experience is dissimilar
1639 enough from epiphanic experience to constitute a separate category of experience, given the
1640 importance of this kind of experience in the history of research on epiphanic experience it is
1641 worth exploring in order to provide context (Amos, 2016a; Ilivitsky, 2011; McDonald, 2005;
1642 Miller & C’de Baca, 2001; Pilgrim, 2019).

1643 Mystical experiences are described by James (1902) as dramatic and profound, and as
1644 leading to inner transformations that are conceptually distinct from gradual change. In
1645 particular, James (1902) referred to ‘mystical states of consciousness’, which he described as
1646 having four defining characteristics: (1) ineffability (difficult to put into words), (2) noetic
1647 quality (generates knowledge or possesses a sense of deep significance), (3) transiency
1648 (unable to be sustained for longer than between half an hour to two hours), and (4) passivity
1649 (sustains itself seemingly independently to the will of the experiencer). This
1650 conceptualisation of mystical experience bears similarities to more modern notions of

1651 epiphanic experience that cite ineffability (e.g., Amos, 2016a), insight (e.g., Miller & C’de
1652 Baca, 2001), and brevity (e.g., Ilivitsky, 2011) as notable features.

1653 Until recently psychological efforts to study epiphanic experience have been hindered
1654 by the lack of a unifying framework from which a suitable research sample can be identified,
1655 disparate methodologies, and the usage of definitions and terms that exist in relative isolation
1656 (Ilivitsky, 2011). The three most commonly used terms to describe epiphanic experience are:
1657 (1) epiphany (e.g., e.g., Jarvis, 1997; Liang, 2006; McDonald, 2005), (2) quantum change
1658 (e.g., Miller & C’de Baca, 1994, 2001), and (3) sudden personal transformation (SPT; e.g.,
1659 Amos, 2016a, 2016b, 2018; Ilivitsky, 2011). Each of these concepts will be discussed in
1660 relation to: (1) how epiphanic experience has been conceptualised, (2) their methodology and
1661 philosophy, and (3) their proposed generative mechanisms.

1662

1663 **3.1) Conceptualising Epiphanic Experience**

1664 Although different definitions of epiphanic experience have been proposed, they all
1665 possess conceptual similarities. Ilivitsky (2011) defined sudden personal transformation
1666 (SPT) as “a positive, profound, and lasting personal change that follows a relatively brief and
1667 memorable inner experience” (p.23). The main features of SPT indicated by the above
1668 definition are: (1) positiveness, (2) profundity, (3) permanence, (4) brevity, (5)
1669 memorability¹¹, and (6) internality. Moreover, it makes a clear distinction between the
1670 transformative experience and the ensuing personal transformation.

¹¹ Inclusion of memorability (the ability to subsequently recall the SPT vividly) in the definition suggests that epiphanic experiences are subjectively distinct from normal waking consciousness. Yet, although the ability to provide a detailed account of the event has been deemed necessary for the identification of epiphanic experiences, this has not been explored in relation to memory storage and the process of remembering, thereby leaving a significant gap in attaining a fuller understanding of this phenomenon.

1671 This distinction is less evident in Miller and C’de Baca’s (2001) definition of
1672 quantum change as a “vivid, surprising, benevolent, and enduring personal transformation”
1673 (p.4). The four main features of quantum change, as indicated by the definition above, are:
1674 (1) vividness, (2) surprise, (3) benevolence, and (4) permanence (Miller & C’de Baca, 2001).
1675 Furthermore, Miller and C’de Baca state that quantum change must be sudden, positive, and
1676 profound and differ subjectively from linear change. Further, Miller and C’de Baca explain
1677 that they chose to use the term ‘quantum change’ due to the lack of a distinct term for the
1678 phenomenon within modern psychology. The term ‘quantum change’ was created based on
1679 the concepts of a quantum leap and quantum mechanics (surmising the sudden and brief
1680 nature of the change).

1681 To date there have been three key studies, and by extension three definitions, relating
1682 to epiphany¹² (Jarvis, 1997; Liang, 2006; McDonald, 2005). Jarvis (1997) defined epiphany
1683 as a “sudden, discontinuous change, leading to profound, positive, and enduring
1684 transformation” (p.v). McDonald (2005) defined epiphany as “a sudden, abrupt, and positive
1685 transformation that [is] profound and enduring” (p.90); further, Liang (2006) considered
1686 epiphany to be “a critical incident characterised by sudden, profound transformation of one’s
1687 life” (p.113). Whilst only Jarvis’s (1997) definition distinguishes between the
1688 transformational experience and the ensuing personal transformation, all definitions of

¹² Whilst empirical accounts of epiphany are dominant in the literature there have been non-empirical accounts of epiphany (Beja, 1993; Goud, 1995; Johnson, 1992). The typology of epiphany proposed by Denzin (1989, 1990) is particularly influential as it has been used to inform associated empirical research (e.g., Griffiths, Barton-Weston & Walsh, 2016). Denzin’s (1989, 1990) typology distinguishes four categories of epiphany, defined as a turning point after which a person permanently changes: (1) the major (a single event that instantaneously affects all areas of the person’s life), (2) the cumulative (akin to a moment in which the ‘straw breaks the camel’s back’), (3) the illuminative (or minor; an event that creates a change in perspective about previous events that consequently also changes all future events), and (4) the relived (an event that is deemed important at the time, but only later accrues greater meaning through being relived). Denzin’s vision of epiphany is a far broader, and less prescriptive, conceptualisation of epiphany than detailed by McDonald (2005). However, the openness of such a definition also hinders the demarcation of epiphany from other events that are turning points for permanent change (e.g., marriage, parenthood).

1689 epiphany (including Ilivitsky's (2011) definition of SPT) assert that the transformational
1690 experience is: (1) sudden, (2) positive, and (3) profound.

1691 In order to fully conceptualise epiphanic experience, the discussion that follows will
1692 address the three phases of epiphanic experience that have been delineated in the literature:
1693 (1) the antecedent phase, (2) the transformative experience, and (3) the personal
1694 transformation.

1695

1696 *3.1.1) The Antecedent Phase*

1697 A number of antecedent facilitators to epiphanic experience have been identified. For
1698 example, openness to experience, or being of a Jungian Intuitive-Feeling type, has been
1699 identified as a personal factor that influences the likelihood of experiencing a quantum
1700 change (C'de Baca & Wilbourne, 2004; Miller & C'de Baca, 1994, 2001). McDonald (2005)
1701 also suggested that certain personality factors are crucial to epiphanic experience. The first
1702 being: courage and perseverance, the second: insight and self-analysis. Through engaging
1703 with these two sets of characteristics McDonald (2005) states that individuals are able to
1704 question and re-appraise the assumptions they hold about their beliefs and values. McDonald
1705 (2005) also stipulated that those who have experienced epiphany: show willingness to engage
1706 in personal growth, have developed deep insights of themselves, have created purpose and
1707 meaning for themselves, and are more resilient.

1708 Factors such as experiences of negative life events, inner turmoil, emotional distress,
1709 loneliness, anxiety, despair, anger, depression, suicidal ideation, and alienation, immediately
1710 or recently prior, have previously been identified as being antecedents to epiphanic
1711 experiences (Jarvis, 1997; McDonald, 2005, 2008; Miller & C'de Baca, 1994, 2001; Murray,
1712 2006). In essence, the individual about to experience an epiphanic experience will generally

1713 be consciously unhappy and feel a sense of desperation, stagnation, and have experienced
1714 internal conflict, isolation, or traumatic discontent (Miller, 2004; Miller & C’de Baca, 1994,
1715 2001). Further, participants from Ilivitsky’s (2011) study identified 13 factors that they
1716 believed to be facilitative to their SPT: (1) going through a life transition; (2) hearing
1717 unsettling information; (3) feeling put down; (4) feeling miserable; (5) a sense of not caring;
1718 (6) feeling exhausted; (7) feeling like they could not resolve their problems; (8) reaching a
1719 breaking point; (9) letting go or relinquishing control; (10) a sense of there being “something
1720 more” to life or to themselves; (11) an early belief in a higher power; (12) receiving support
1721 from others; and (13) hearing others describe a related experience. Therefore, epiphanic
1722 experience appears to largely emerge from turmoil, and negative life experience, and may
1723 well be inexorably linked to it.

1724

1725 ***3.1.2) The Transformative Experience***

1726 In direct contrast to notions of gradual change, the onset of the transformative
1727 experience is not experienced as intentional or volitional (Ilivitsky, 2011; Miller & C’de
1728 Baca, 1994, 2001; Murray, 2006). Further, epiphanic experiences are generally categorised in
1729 two ways (see Figure 2.1 below). The first is as moments of mental clarity, awareness, and
1730 insight when an individual reaches a new realisation or way of thinking (commonly referred
1731 to as the ‘insightful type’). These insights appear in a person’s consciousness with a
1732 considerable sense of clarity, and power, and leave the person with an innate sense of
1733 confidence about the ‘truth’ they have uncovered. Insightful quantum changes were found to
1734 have a sense of continuity rather than feeling intrusive (Miller & C’de Baca, 2001). Further,
1735 insightful quantum changes are experienced as distinctly different to the outcomes of
1736 ordinary processes of reasoning, as they appear without volition, but are not entirely beyond

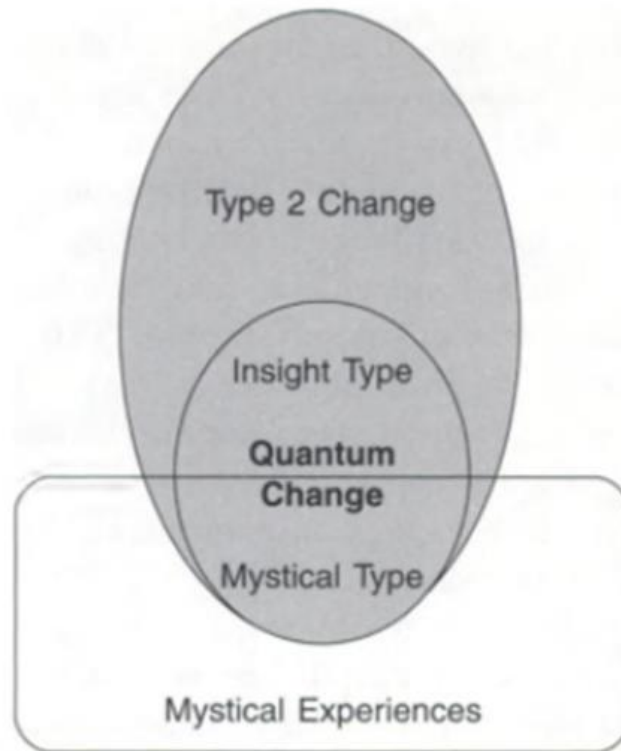
1737 the scope of normal conscious experience. Whilst there is no sense of being acted upon by
1738 something beyond themselves these kinds of insight are considered to be sudden, dramatic,
1739 and deeply transformative.

1740 The second category of epiphanic experience is often referred to as the ‘mystical
1741 type’, denoting experiences in which the individual feels connected to a higher power –
1742 whether that be explicitly religious or otherwise (Ilivitsky, 2011; McDonald, 2005, 2008;
1743 Miller & C’de Baca, 2001; Murray, 2006). These kinds of epiphanic experiences are
1744 experienced as out of the ordinary and bear a “noetic sense of being acted upon by something
1745 outside of and greater than oneself” (Miller & C’de Baca, 2001, p.21). Further, ‘mystical’
1746 epiphanic experiences possess clear similarities to mystical experience; however, Miller and
1747 C’de Baca (2001) stress that because not all mystical experiences lead to quantum changes
1748 the two concepts can be considered distinct. Despite the differences between
1749 conceptualisations of epiphanic experience, previous researchers emphasise that these two
1750 categories should not be viewed as strictly distinct as they can overlap. This is because they
1751 are thought to possess core commonalities, with all participants reporting having experienced
1752 an altered perception of the world (which can overlap with psychotic symptomatology, e.g.,
1753 apophenia; Brugger, 2001; Conrad, 1958), a new sense of meaning, and a strong clear sense
1754 of self (C’de Baca & Wilbourne, 2004; Ilivitsky, 2011; Jarvis, 1997; McDonald, 2005; Miller
1755 & C’de Baca, 1994; Murray, 2006). As such, these two types of epiphanic experience are not
1756 considered separate or distinct. Instead, insightful, and mystical epiphanic experiences are
1757 conceptualised as existing on a continuum, where, although most cases are more strongly
1758 associated with one end of the continuum or the other, some fall between the two.

1759

1760 **Figure 2.1**

1761 *Miller and C'de Baca's (2001, p.35) model of Quantum Change*



1762

1763 The characteristics of epiphanic experiences have been conceptualised by McDonald
1764 (2005), through a content analysis of the existing literature, both empirical and non-empirical,
1765 on epiphany (see Table 2.1). Although McDonald's framework possesses good descriptive
1766 validity when comparing it to the literature referenced, it is important to stress that there was
1767 no transparency with regards to the methodological process in attaining this information as,
1768 for example, no rationale was provided regarding the selection of the literature used in
1769 analysis. McDonald (2005; see Table 2.1) proposes six core characteristics of epiphany: (1)
1770 suddenness, (2) personal transformation, (3) illumination/insight, (4) meaning making, and
1771 (5) enduring nature. This conceptualisation aligns with the literature discussed above as, for
1772 example, it also recognises the centrality of negative life experience prior to epiphanic
1773 experience. McDonald's work also serves to highlight the largest difference between
1774 epiphany, quantum change, and SPT: that the concept of epiphany places significantly less

1775 emphasis on the mystical component of epiphanic experience that is often referred to in other
 1776 conceptualisations.

1777

1778 **Table 2.1**

1779 *McDonald's (2005, p.45) six core epiphanic characteristics*

Concept	Description of concept
1. Antecedent State	Epiphanies are preceded by periods of depression, anxiety and inner turmoil (Denzin, 1989, 1990; Jarvis, 1997; Jensen, 1998, 1999; Loyttyniemi, 2001; Miller & C'de Baca, 1993, 2001).
2. Suddenness	Epiphanies are sudden and abrupt (Beja, 1993; Goud, 1995; Jarvis, 1997; Jensen, 1998, 1999; Miller & C'de Baca, 1993, 2001; Schultz, 2001).
3. Personal Transformation	Epiphanies are an experience of profound change and transformation in self-identity (Denzin, 1989, 1990; Goud, 1995; Jarvis, 1997; Jensen, 1998, 1999; Miller & C'de Baca, 1993, 2001).
4. Illumination/ Insight	Epiphanies are an acute awareness of something new, something which the individual had previously been blind to (Denzin, 1989, 1990; Goud, 1995; Jarvis, 1997; Jensen, 1998, 1999; Miller & C'de Baca, 1993, 2001; Paris, 1997; Schultz, 2001).
5. Meaning making	Epiphanies are profound insights that are deemed significant to the individual's life (Denzin, 1989, 1990; Frick, 2001; Miller & C'de Baca, 1993, 2001).
6. Enduring	While the actual epiphany is a momentary experience, the personal transformation that results is permanent and lasting (Denzin, 1989, 1990; Goud, 1995; Jarvis, 1997; Jensen, 1998, 1999; Miller & C'de Baca, 1993, 2001).

1780

1781 **3.1.3) The Personal Transformation**

1782 The consequences of epiphanic experience have been described as benevolent, joyful,
 1783 and liberating, leading to emotional changes such as feelings of calm, emotional release, and
 1784 relief (Amos, 2016a; Jarvis, 1997; Miller, 2004; Miller & C'de Baca, 1994, 2001; Murray,
 1785 2006). Participants from Miller and C'de Baca's (2001) study referred to: (1) releasing
 1786 chronic negative affect, (2) finding a pervasive sense of peacefulness, and (3) undergoing a
 1787 shift in values and priorities that changed their sense of meaningfulness in life (Miller, 2004;

1788 Miller & C'de Baca, 2001). This shift in core values was particularly significant for men,
1789 whilst the female participants experienced a less pronounced change in values (Miller & C'de
1790 Baca, 2001). The men in this study ranked their top five values prior to quantum change in
1791 order of importance: (1) wealth, (2) adventure, (3) achievement, (4) pleasure and (5) being
1792 respected. When considering these values following a quantum change the men ranked these
1793 values 50th, 29th, 26th, 25th and 33rd respectively. The top five values were replaced by: (1)
1794 spirituality, (2) personal peace, (3) family, (4) God's will, and (5) honesty, perhaps indicating
1795 a greater shift towards health and wellbeing. Further, the gendered differences found may be
1796 due to the gender-role attitudes common in Western society. Within Western society women
1797 are expected to be nurturing and family-orientated, and men are expected to be leaders and
1798 financial providers (Blackstone, 2003; Fortin, 2005). Therefore, the values that society
1799 expects women to have are already closer to the values that men who had experienced
1800 quantum change reported.

1801 The literature also indicates that epiphanic experiences are challenging to make sense
1802 of and difficult to express in words (i.e., ineffable; Amos, 2016a, 2016b; James, 1902; Miller
1803 & C'de Baca, 1994). Amos' (2016a) results strongly suggest that the participants viewed
1804 their experience as one that defied causal explanation, but that left them irrevocably changed
1805 with a greater sense of purpose and meaning. In order to make sense and meaning from their
1806 experiences the participants separated their lives temporally into before and after their SPT,
1807 and often told their stories by positioning themselves between these two times. This strategy
1808 places the individual out of time, therefore suggesting that SPTs possess a liminal, temporal
1809 quality (Kent & Wittmann, 2021; Wagoner & Zittoun, 2021), though this temporality has,
1810 until now, not been explicitly noted in the literature on epiphanic experience.

1811

1812 **3.2) Methodology and Philosophy**

1813 To provide a thorough account of the methodological and philosophical constraints of
1814 the literature on epiphanic experience, each conceptualisation of this phenomenon will be
1815 addressed in turn.

1816

1817 **3.2.1) Sudden Personal Transformation**

1818 To formulate her conceptualisation of epiphanic experience Ilivitsky (2011) drew
1819 from three major conceptualisations, each derived from a series of independent studies which
1820 previously contained many overlapping concepts, and methodological limitations. These
1821 conceptualisations were: (1) the unencumbered moment (Murray, 2006), (2) epiphany (e.g.,
1822 McDonald, 2005; Jarvis, 1997), and (3) quantum change (e.g., Miller & C’de Baca, 1994).
1823 Whilst epiphany and quantum change have accrued support in the literature the
1824 unencumbered moment remains a term used in isolation. Moreover, Murray’s (2006) study
1825 contains several significant philosophical and methodological limitations, such as: circular
1826 reasoning, insufficient methodological detail, and a lack of philosophical positioning
1827 (Ilivitsky, 2011). Therefore, whilst this research informed Ilivitsky’s work, the unencumbered
1828 moment simply has not accumulated sufficient weight in the literature to be addressed as a
1829 fully comprehensive conceptualisation of epiphanic experience. Moreover, Ilivitsky was not
1830 transparent with regard to the methodological process undertaken to differentiate these
1831 concepts, nor the process used to select which concepts would enrich her conceptualisation of
1832 SPT – which makes replication challenging.

1833 Another important methodological issue to raise when considering SPT is the nature
1834 of the participant sample. Ilivitsky screened participants for unipolar and bipolar depression,

1835 post-traumatic stress, and psychosis, and excluded them from the study on that basis. This
1836 decision is counter to those made by scholars on quantum change and epiphany (e.g., Jarvis,
1837 1997; Miller & C’de Baca, 1994, 2001) and appears to have been made without justification.
1838 This is problematic as an exploration of the research reveals that epiphanic experiences are
1839 aetiologically diverse, and therefore it is reasonable to assume that there should be a strong
1840 rationale for the exclusion of a particular aetiology. Indeed, even Ilivitsky’s (2011) own
1841 definition of SPT distinguishes between the biopsychological event and its subsequent
1842 interpretation; raising further questions about the decision to exclude experiences of this
1843 aetiology. Epiphanic experiences often appear to contain elements that overlap with psychotic
1844 symptomatology (Brugger, 2001; Conrad, 1958; discussed further in section 3.1.2 below)
1845 further suggesting that it was premature to exclude this aspect of investigation.

1846 Amos (2016b) and McGovern (2021) built upon Ilivitsky’s conceptualisation of SPT
1847 to explore the features of SPT from an embodied perspective and from the psychotherapist’s
1848 perspective¹³, respectively. Ilivitsky’s (2011) study included three participants, whilst Amos
1849 (2016) included six participants, and McGovern (2021) included eight. The modest sample
1850 sizes were largely due to the use of a phenomenological approach to methodology; Ilivitsky
1851 and Amos used Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), whilst McGovern used
1852 hermeneutic phenomenology. Although phenomenological approaches have been criticised,
1853 those who use this method recognise the value of small sample sizes (Wagstaff et al., 2014;
1854 Vasileiou, Narnett, Thorpe & Young, 2018), and this number of participants can be

¹³ It is important to draw attention to McGovern’s (2021) study as it is the only study of epiphanic experience thus far that has utilised therapeutic practitioners as the participant sample, therefore aligning with the purpose of this thesis. McGovern’s study serves to highlight differences between the psychotherapeutic community and the psychological community. As discussed above, whilst modern psychology is sceptical of the concept of epiphanic experience, acknowledgment of this phenomenon has emerged from the psychodynamic context. For example, Freud noted that “sweeping insights could bring about important changes in personality” (in Baumeister, 1994, p.295), and Jung observed an “intuitive way of knowing...where the process is more like making leaps than proceeding step by step” (in Miller, 2004, p.185). As such, it is likely that there is greater acceptance of this phenomenon in the psychotherapeutic community than in the psychological community.

1855 considered sufficient within an IPA framework given its idiographic epistemological
1856 commitment that diverges from the nomothetic approach adopted by mainstream psychology
1857 (Alase, 2017; Smith, Flowers & Osborn, 2013; Smith et al., 2009). From a CRist perspective,
1858 a fixation on sample size in qualitative research could be seen as an inheritance from the
1859 methodologism that permeates psychology (Pilgrim, 2019). What is perhaps more important,
1860 is that none of these studies explicitly philosophically positioned themselves beyond their
1861 chosen methodology so there is room to challenge their premises of enquiry.

1862

1863 **3.2.2) *Quantum Change***

1864 Miller and C’de Baca’s (1994, 2001) concept of quantum change is founded on the
1865 largest study to date on sudden, positive, and profound change, with their participants
1866 recruited through an article posted in a major American newspaper (Miller & C’de Baca,
1867 1994, 2001; $n = 55$). However, although quantum change is the most rigorously examined,
1868 robust, and methodologically sound conceptualisation of epiphanic experience, there remain
1869 challenges to its operationalisation.

1870 Ilivitsky (2011) argued that the link between the assertions (based upon the raw data)
1871 made by the researchers was tenuous with the interpretive categories stipulated by the
1872 researchers sometimes having little correspondence with the interview data. Moreover, the
1873 term quantum change is itself considered to be problematic as it can be confused with other
1874 concepts whose relatedness has not been explicitly explored - such as theories from quantum
1875 physics, or ideas from New Age psychology (Wordsworth, 2007). Further, Miller and C’de
1876 Baca’s (2001) study does not specify the qualitative methods that were employed, noting only
1877 that they used “qualitative analysis” and presenting their results in a thematic format.
1878 Therefore, whilst the notion of quantum change is the most theoretically robust

1879 conceptualisation of epiphanic experience there remain issues that could be rectified by a
1880 more transparent approach to data analysis, and a commitment to philosophical clarity, with
1881 regards to the premises of enquiry.

1882

1883 **3.2.3) Epiphany**

1884 The concept of epiphany was formulated using participants from a pool of American
1885 college students (Liang, 2006) and through the researchers' personal connections (Jarvis,
1886 1997; McDonald, 2005). The methods through which each study examined experiences of
1887 epiphanies were disparate; phenomenological analysis (Jarvis, 1997; Liang, 2006), and self-
1888 identity existential analysis (McDonald, 2005, 2008) were both used to explore the
1889 phenomenon. Whilst McDonald evidenced the application of an Existentialist philosophy
1890 throughout the totality of his work, the phenomenological analysis applied by Jarvis and
1891 Liang appears to be an example of methodologism in the absence of a broader conversation
1892 about philosophy (Pilgrim, 2019). However, both McDonald (2005) and Jarvis (1997)
1893 presented their findings as support for "hypotheses" - language reflective of the
1894 positivist/empiricist approach and therefore incongruent with their respective existential and
1895 (supposedly) phenomenological positions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997; Pilgrim, 2019). Liang
1896 (2006) also uses terminology that is incompatible with qualitative research in the form of
1897 causal language such as: "results from" or "common triggers" (p.160). However, as Liang did
1898 not provide any information on their guiding philosophy it cannot be determined whether this
1899 language is congruent.

1900 Further, each of these studies has methodological limitations. Despite suggesting that
1901 epiphany is not experienced by everyone, Liang (2006) recruited 217 self-selected university
1902 students seemingly without formal inclusion criteria, which demonstrates a fundamental

1903 contradiction in their argument. McDonald (2005, 2008) used circular reasoning whereby a
1904 priori predictions about the nature of epiphany gathered from the literature were used to
1905 select the sample. The results were then used to support the predictions. For example, it was
1906 predicted that inner turmoil, depression, and anxiety would be antecedents to epiphany. These
1907 criteria were used to recruit the sample, and then the results stated that the participants had
1908 experienced inner turmoil, depression, and anxiety prior to their epiphanic experience.
1909 Moreover, there is not always congruence between the interpretive categories asserted by
1910 researchers, and the interview data provided (Jarvis, 1997; McDonald, 2005, 2008; Ilivitsky,
1911 2011). For example, McDonald (2005, 2008) found that epiphanies were the result of
1912 “profound change and transformation in self-identity” (2008, p.99). However, the quotations
1913 provided to support that theme did not seem to directly address the construct of self-identity.

1914

1915 **3.3) Proposed Generative Mechanisms**

1916 A range of generative mechanisms have been proposed by researchers of epiphanic
1917 experience. This section will explore and evaluate these suggested causal mechanisms in
1918 order to generate an understanding of how previous researchers have conceived of the
1919 domain of the Real. It is important, from a CRist perspective, to explore these generative
1920 mechanisms as CR advocates the notion of an ontologically differentiated reality, rather than
1921 an ontologically monovalent one (Pilgrim, 2019).

1922

1923 **3.3.1) *Non-conscious Thought***

1924 Ilivitsky (2011) proposed that formalised activity (e.g., meditation, prayer) can act in
1925 a causal capacity through the mechanism described by non-conscious thought theory (Zhong,

1926 Dijksterhuis & Galinsky, 2008). Non-conscious thought is considered to increase when
1927 problems are challenging or complex, or if the individual has weak or abstract prior
1928 associations about the problem. Formalised, ritual, activity, it is suggested, distracts
1929 individuals from conscious problem solving, and allows for more creative and divergent
1930 thinking. This corresponds with other ideas about convergent and divergent thinking (Runco,
1931 2014). The former (convergent) is prevalent when problems are defined in a closed-ended
1932 manner - which may occur when large amounts of conscious effort are involved. The latter
1933 (divergent) is prevalent when problems are defined in an open-ended manner - which may be
1934 inherent to cognitive activity during periods of non-conscious thought.

1935 Although this causal explanation has an advantage of presenting a theory that can be
1936 tested (McPhetres et al., 2020) there is a logical inconsistency within Ilivitsky's argument. An
1937 assumption was made that formalised activity is a conduit for epiphanic experience through
1938 the mechanism described by non-conscious thought theory (Zhong, Dijksterhuis & Galinsky,
1939 2008). This is problematic as other explanations for how formalised activity engenders
1940 epiphanous change can be retroduced. A prime example of such an alternative is experiential
1941 absorption which has been defined as "total attention involving a full commitment of
1942 available perceptual, motoric, imaginative and ideational resources to a unified representation
1943 of the attentional object" (Tellegen & Atkinson, 1974, p.274). Experiential absorption has
1944 been found to engender states that result in a restructuring of the self (Jamieson, 2005;
1945 Tellegen, 1981). Thus, whilst formalised activity has been found to be a facilitator of
1946 epiphanic experience (Amos, 2016a; Ilivitsky, 2011) the precise mechanism through which

1947 this occurs remains unclear¹⁴, thereby making the application of CRist philosophy, with its
1948 focus on generative mechanisms, of particular utility to the field of epiphanic experience.

1949

1950 **3.3.2) *Breaking Point***

1951 Proposed by Miller and C'de Baca (2001), Breaking Point represents the individual
1952 reaching a turning-point, or 'kairos', at which they cannot continue on the same path, either
1953 because they are unwilling or unable, and a major change must occur. The result of this
1954 Breaking Point is a dramatically reorganised identity, conceptualised by Miller and C'de
1955 Baca (2001) in accordance with Rokeach's (1973) model of personality (see Figure 2.2
1956 below; note: the authors do not explain why this particular model of personality was
1957 selected). The authors contrast this process to the development of dissociative identity
1958 disorder (DID). Whilst with DID identity is fragmented, in the case of epiphany the effect is
1959 opposite; disparate aspects of identity are reordered and reconstituted into a new, and stable,
1960 configuration of the self. Miller and C'de Baca (2001) postulated that in order for this to
1961 occur the new configuration of the self must be built from resources that are already
1962 available.

1963 Adult trauma was identified as a potentially potent catalyst for such change. However,
1964 the authors provide no explanation for the causal mechanism/s through which adult trauma
1965 results in a Breaking Point and subsequent integrative phase. Those around the individual at
1966 the time of their Breaking Point are also thought to be influential in determining the structure
1967 of the new identity, by acting to provide guidance for what a possible self might look like.

¹⁴ It should be noted that the studies referenced within this section did not utilise research philosophies, such as CR, that would permit them to explore and identify generative mechanisms, thereby limiting their ability to theorise on this topic.

1968 However, whilst this accounts for the plane of social interactions between people (see
1969 Chapter 1, section 2.6) this remains an incomplete account through the lens of the four planar
1970 social being (Bhaskar, 2020).

1971

1972 **3.3.3) Deep Discrepancy**

1973 Proposed by Miller and C’de Baca’s (2001), Deep Discrepancy described a deep, non-
1974 conscious, conflict created by dissonant values erupting into consciousness. This mechanism
1975 is purported to be more relevant to quantum changes that occur without obvious trauma, or
1976 personal pain, present. The non-conscious conflict of Deep Discrepancy may only emerge
1977 after a period of incubation during which the dissonance is not consciously recognised, but
1978 which may later erupt into consciousness. Miller and C’de Baca (2001) refer to Roger’s
1979 (1959) writings on discrepancies, and non-conscious conflicts, that can occur within the self
1980 when the actual self and the ideal self are incongruent. Further, Miller and C’de Baca (2001)
1981 postulated that Deep Discrepancy becomes apparent through what Baumeister (1994) called
1982 the process of ‘crystallisation of discontent’. Within this process, individuals form associative
1983 links between the negative features of their life. Prior to the moment of crystallisation each of
1984 these negative features is separate, but at the moment of crystallisation these disparate
1985 features are brought together into one coherent entity. Baumeister (1994) argues that this
1986 large body of negative features may be sufficient to undermine an individual’s commitment
1987 to their current situation and result in radical changes to behaviour and perception at the
1988 ‘deepest’ levels of the self.

1989 Reorganisation of the self is a feature of Deep Discrepancy, and also of Breaking
1990 Point, that occurs due to the resolution of inner conflict. Miller and C’de Baca (2001) cite
1991 Rokeach’s model (see Figure 2.2) as being useful in understanding sudden reconfiguration of

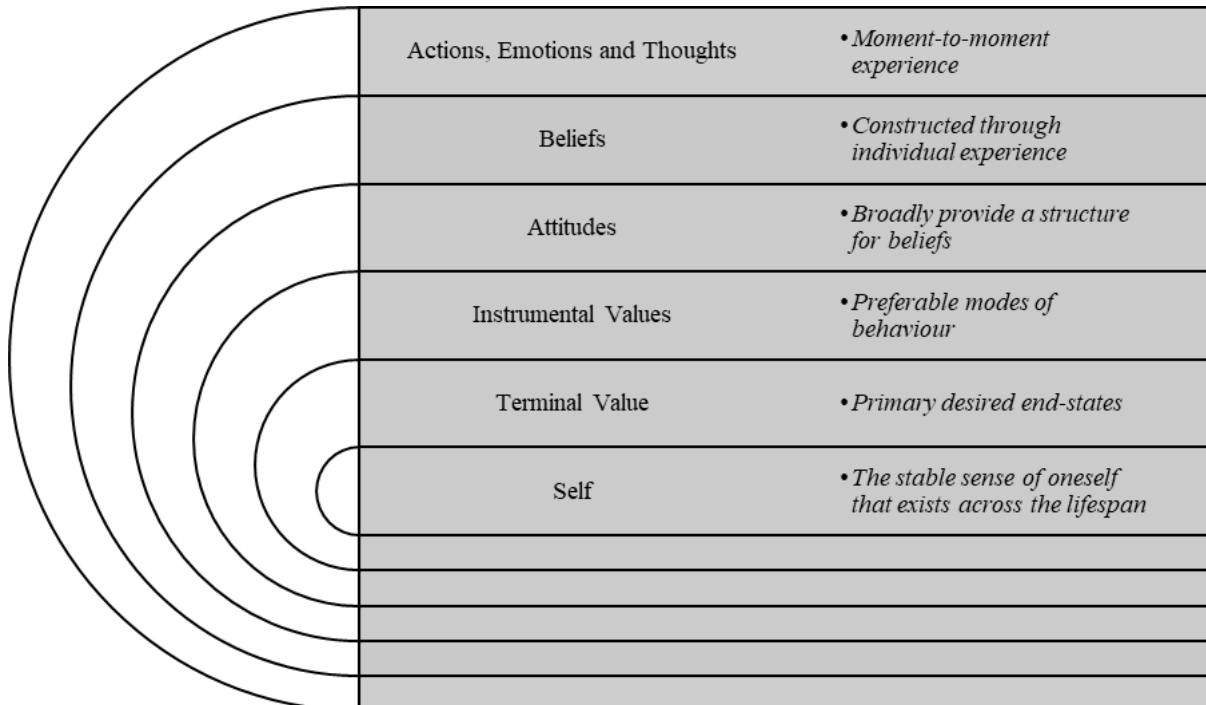
1992 the self as the model allows for the understanding that the level at which the event occurs will
 1993 impact the effects of the change. For example, changing a belief will impact actions,
 1994 emotions, and thoughts, but changing a terminal value will set in motion a change throughout
 1995 the entire structure of the personality. Whilst Rokeach conceptualises personality as a being
 1996 organised in a laminated system, which appears promising given the philosophical
 1997 positioning of this research (see Chapter 1, section 2.5), in actuality it does not align with the
 1998 CRist view of the self largely due to its lack of recognition of the embodied personality
 1999 (Bhaskar, 2020; see Chapter 1, section 2.6).

2000

2001 **Figure 2.2**

2002 *Depiction of Rokeach's (1973) Model of Personality*

2003



2004

2005 **3.3.4) Personal Maturation**

2006 Miller and C'de Baca (2001) explained that considering quantum change merely as
2007 the solution to a deeply held internal conflict ignores the significance of the change as a
2008 milestone in life. Indeed, many of their participants were at a stage wherein they were
2009 actively seeking change and deeper meaning in their lives. As such, they considered these
2010 experiences through a developmental perspective and likened epiphany to developmental
2011 models such as Piaget's (1936) theory of cognitive development, Fowler's (1981) theory of
2012 the development of faith, and Kohlberg's (1976) theory of moral development (despite it
2013 being a prime example of androcentric beta bias; Gilligan, 1982). Therefore, they
2014 conceptualised quantum change as a jump in development, or a level of maturation, only
2015 reached by a few people.

2016 Miller and C'de Baca also likened these experiences to self-actualisation, or the
2017 realisation of one's full potential (Maslow, 1954, 1968). Maslow (1968) investigated peak
2018 experiences (defined as "rare, exciting, oceanic, deeply moving, exhilarating, elevating
2019 experiences that generate an advanced form of perceiving reality and are even mystic and
2020 magical in their effect upon the experimenter"; p.96) and initially concluded that those
2021 individuals who had a peak experience were most often self-actualised. Later, however,
2022 Maslow stated that self-actualisation was not "a king or all-or-none pantheon into which
2023 some rare people enter at the age of 60" (Maslow, 1968, p.79), but was instead often a surge
2024 in development that could occur at any point in someone's life. The two previously discussed
2025 mechanisms, Breaking Point and Deep Discrepancy, are also resonant of Maslow's
2026 arguments and Rogers' ideas. Rogers (1974) stipulated that in order to achieve self-
2027 actualisation, an individual must first achieve a state of congruence. Therefore, by
2028 experiencing a Breaking Point or Deep Discrepancy, inward facing orientation is disrupted,

2029 thereby allowing movement towards a sense of wholeness. By resolving the conflict and
2030 dichotomy between a challenging situation and individual core values self-actualisation
2031 becomes possible (Maslow, 1965).

2032 However, Maslow’s later ideas on self-transcendence could be considered more
2033 relevant to quantum change than self-actualisation (Maslow, 1969, 1996; Koltko-Rivera,
2034 2006). Maslow (1971) defined transcendence as “the very highest and most inclusive or
2035 holistic levels of human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than means, to
2036 oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature, and to
2037 the cosmos” (p.269). Therefore, by specifically denoting that quantum change may be related
2038 to self-actualisation Miller and C’de Baca failed to address a related concept which appears
2039 pertinent. However, models of self-transcendence (e.g., Reed, 2003) are limited to explication
2040 of the domain of the Empirical. This thesis sought to account for epiphanic experience in the
2041 domain of the Actual and Real meaning that descriptive theories, such as those presented
2042 above, are insufficient.

2043 Although Miller and C’de Baca (2001) posit that quantum change is the result of
2044 natural developmental processes, and in so doing link this to Maslow’s work, they provide
2045 insufficient rationale for this. Moreover, they fail to address the premises of enquiry
2046 stipulated by a humanistic approach, such as voluntarism (the notion in psychology that
2047 human agents are fundamentally free and responsible, and which is rejected by CR; Pilgrim,
2048 2019), as well as the longstanding absence of third force psychology¹⁵ from the
2049 developmental psychology literature (DeRobertis, 2012). Furthermore, although they
2050 acknowledge that self-actualisation can occur at any time, this appears to lessen the

¹⁵ Fleuridas and Krafick (2019) delineate four major forces, or paradigms, in the development of psychotherapy: 1) the psychodynamic, 2) the behavioural and cognitive-behavioural, 3) the humanistic-existential, and 4) the contextual/systemic.

2051 credibility of their argument as the developmental models after which they fashioned this
2052 explanation present structured and linear developmental changes, with no recognition of the
2053 nonlinear nature of these changes (van Geert, 2009).

2054

2055 **3.3.5) Particular Person**

2056 Particular Person represents Miller and C’de Baca’s (2001) Jungian typology-based
2057 speculation that people who have epiphanic experiences are intuitive types who, during the
2058 transformative experience, are undergoing an enhanced version of their usual style of
2059 perception (although crucially they note that not all those who experienced quantum change
2060 were intuitive types). Their postulation is highly reflective of James’ (1902) assertion that
2061 those who had mystical experiences had an active subliminal self, alongside: emotional
2062 sensitivity, suggestibility, and a tendency to automatisms (i.e., non-purposeful and often
2063 repetitive behaviours).

2064 Miller and C’de Baca’s argument is based on Jungian (1959) personality theory
2065 wherein knowing, via the unconscious, is considered a normal method of perception. The
2066 authors included the Jungian-based Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI; Myers &
2067 McCaulley, 1985) in their research. Focusing on the sensing-intuitive dimension it was found
2068 that intuitive (N) and feeling (F) types were overrepresented in their sample, whereby they
2069 accounted for 79% of those who had insightful quantum changes, and 60% of those who had
2070 a mystical quantum change. Therefore, N and F types were present at twice the rate of the
2071 general population suggestive of a relationship between being of an N and F type and having
2072 an epiphanic experience (Myers & McCaulley, 1985). As an additional note, because Jungian
2073 personality theory has not been integrated into social and personality psychology (Stein &
2074 Swan, 2019) it is useful to understand that N and F MBTI types correlate with the Big Five

2075 personality traits of Openness and Agreeableness – although MBTI types are considered
2076 more dynamic constructs than the Big Five (Furnham, 1996; McCrae & Costa, 1992, 1997).
2077 Therefore, although the CRist approach considers trait approaches to personality (i.e., the Big
2078 Five) as reductive (Pilgrim, 2019) combining these two frameworks might provide a more
2079 nuanced lens through which to view the transitive domain.

2080 Miller and C’de Baca (2001) further indicated that ‘special realities’ (e.g., mental
2081 illness) may also help to explain quantum change. The authors stress that, although mental
2082 illness (including unipolar and bipolar depression, post-traumatic stress, and psychosis) was
2083 present in their sample, epiphanic experience and mental illness should not be conflated.
2084 However, they conceded that mental disorders may facilitate quantum changes. Furthermore,
2085 they suggest that profound loss or prolonged distress might open a ‘channel of sensitivity’
2086 that makes epiphanic experience more accessible to certain individuals. However, when
2087 considering Miller and C’de Baca’s observation that mental illness was present in their
2088 sample, it becomes evident that they fail to address the fact that mental illness may have been
2089 present in their sample due to, for example, psychosis, or psychotic bipolar disorder,
2090 appearing similar in form to epiphanic experiences in terms of their rich and unpredictable
2091 experiential content. Miller and C’de Baca’s assertion, that epiphanic experience and mental
2092 illness should not be conflated, is reflected in the literature whereby epiphanic experiences
2093 are considered to be non-pathological despite little evidence to support this claim (Lebedev et
2094 al., 2016; Parnas & Henriksen, 2016). Instead, this assertion appears to be based on existing
2095 tensions between religion and science, and a desire to ‘protect’ these kinds of experience
2096 from science, thereby leaving a metaphorical door open for these experiences to be explained
2097 as an act of a God (Dawkins, 2006; Harris, 2011).

2098 The Particular Person explanation appears to provide some insight into some of the
2099 causal mechanisms that may facilitate epiphanic experiences. In particular, Miller and C’de
2100 Baca assert that people who have epiphanic experiences are intuitive types according to the
2101 MBTI (Myers & McCaulley, 1985) – which, as noted above, corresponds with the Big Five
2102 trait of Openness (Furnham, 1996; McCrae & Costa, 1992, 1997). This argument is also
2103 made by researchers on epiphany who implicate related characteristics such as courage and
2104 perseverance, insight and self-analysis, and a willingness to engage in personal growth
2105 (McDonald, 2005). However, the fact that all measures and discussions of personality from
2106 the extant literature took place post-epiphanic experience limits the strength of the argument.
2107 As such, whilst personality may play a role in the susceptibility of a person to epiphanic
2108 experience, the constraints of the phenomenon (i.e., the impossibility of pre- and post-
2109 measures) mean that it would be unwise to build a theory on these ideas alone.

2110

2111 ***3.3.6) Sacred Encounter***

2112 Miller and C’de Baca’s (2001) suggested causal mechanism ‘Sacred Encounter’,
2113 entails sudden change being understood as an experience of transcendence and contact with
2114 the divine. The sacred encounter mechanism appears functionally equivalent to Ilivitsky’s
2115 (2011) proposed mechanism ‘Transformed by a Process Outside of My Conscious Control
2116 (Higher Power or a Wisdom Deep Inside)’ as both refer to a passive transformation that is
2117 perceived to occur as a result of connection with a higher power. Although it is now
2118 understood that epiphanic experience need not be ‘mystical’ or religious in nature, when
2119 addressing causal mechanisms many researchers have left space open such that religious
2120 Sacred Encounters, or transformation through a higher power, may be considered a legitimate

2121 account for the emergence of these experiences¹⁶ (Amos, 2016a; Ilivitsky, 2011; Miller &
2122 C’de Baca, 1994, 2001). Indeed, much of the literature on epiphanic experience describes
2123 overtly religious mystical-type experiences which are almost exclusively Christian in nature
2124 (Amos, 2016a; Ilivitsky, 2011; Miller & C’de Baca, 1994, 2001).

2125 Given that judgmental rationality is part of the ‘holy trinity’ of CR, it appears
2126 important and relevant to cross the invisible, and often feared, line between science and
2127 religion and discuss religious experience (Dawkins, 2006). CR is open to discussions about
2128 the existence or non-existence of a God or gods, but there is no formalised position on this
2129 issue – different CRists have come to different conclusions and conceptualisations¹⁷ (Archer,
2130 Collier & Porpora, 2004). The inclusion of Sacred Encounter as a legitimate potential
2131 generative mechanism is perhaps a matter of unclear philosophy, whereby distinctions have
2132 not been made between the domain of the Real and Actual (the actual event and its causal
2133 mechanisms) and the domain of the Empirical (interpretations of the event based on
2134 experience) (Bhaskar, 1975).

2135 Therefore, it is important to clarify that Sacred Encounter will not be given
2136 consideration in this thesis as a legitimate causal mechanism for epiphanic experience.
2137 Perhaps the greatest reason for this exclusion of genuine religious experience as a potential
2138 causal mechanism is philosophical: it is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide evidence

¹⁶ Dawkins (1986) somewhat-jokingly refers to this as ‘God smuggling’. For example, given the religious slant to some of Miller’s work (e.g., Tonigan, Miller & Schermer, 2002), the researcher considered this as a representation of his personal interest in legitimising, or leaving a metaphorical door open for his religious convictions – a reflexive discussion that is missing from his work. Additionally, it is perhaps worth considering that ‘sacred encounter’ has been legitimised as a potential generative mechanism as, so far, literature on epiphanic experience has not utilised a research philosophy with judgmental rationality at its core (see Chapter 1, section 2.3).

¹⁷ *Reflexive note:* It appears important at this point to exercise reflexivity and briefly position myself with regards to the topic of religion and a higher power, as this has undoubtedly influenced my approach to this proposed generative mechanism (Archer, 2000). I am an atheist, which means that I am unconvinced by any arguments for the existence of a God or gods.

2139 extraordinary enough to support the extraordinary claim of a God or gods of any kind¹⁸
2140 (Dawkins, 2006; Deming, 2016; Geertz, 2009; Sagan, 1979). If no evidence can be presented
2141 that a God exists, then logically, it cannot be used as a valid causal explanation. Because the
2142 existence of a God has never been proven, nor given scientifically acceptable evidence, this
2143 research focuses on natural explanations, rather than supernatural ones. As such, arguments
2144 for epiphanic experience that rest on a foundation of religious or spiritual belief (in the
2145 Mediaeval sense described by Harris (2014), at least) will be considered a meaningful
2146 reflection of interpretation, rather than as a direct correlate of ‘reality’. In essence: one cannot
2147 use a God as an explanatory device, without first providing robust evidence of the existence
2148 of a God.

2149

2150 **3.3.7) *Existential Theory***

2151 McDonald (2005) developed an existential perspective on epiphany based upon the
2152 philosophical bodies of work of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre in order to
2153 explore the domains of the Actual and Real. McDonald suggested that epiphanies are the
2154 consequence of an honest encounter with the conditions of existence that is triggered by
2155 profound awareness of authentic and inauthentic modes of self-identity. Self-identity can be
2156 considered an “individuals’ experience and internal representation of themselves and their
2157 world” (McDonald, 2005, p.53). McDonald identified eleven interconnected existentials, or
2158 modes of authenticity, that facilitate the move towards a more authentic self-identity:

¹⁸ Indeed, another weakness of the ‘Sacred Encounter’ argument is that authors appear to have assumed that there exists a shared or universal definition of God, i.e., preference has been given to the Judaeo-Christian God. Therefore, due to the Western, Christian culture within which epiphanic experiences have been studied, the idea of an Abrahamic God has been considered a ‘valid’ belief, whereas Odin, Shiva, Bastet, or Herne the Hunter are not considered credible explanatory devices. Why this God and not others?

2159 1. *Freedom*; whereby epiphanies are viewed as moments wherein individuals assume
2160 their own existential freedom and consequently utilise their newfound openness to
2161 reassess the goals and directions they pursue (Heidegger, 1987). In this way they
2162 experience self-identity as ‘Being-for-itself’ (transcendence), rather than ‘Being-in-itself’
2163 (immanence) (Sartre, 1943). McDonald noted that participants had often eschewed their
2164 existential freedom earlier in their lives.

2165 2. *Responsibility*; whereby it is understood that freedom necessitates responsibility of
2166 action, choice, and the creation of self-identity. Some might avoid responsibility and
2167 therefore be in denial of their own existential reality through, for example, obscuring an
2168 inner sense of purpose, or using defence mechanisms to avoid encountering the
2169 conditions of existence (Sartre, 1943). Therefore, epiphanies constitute the point at which
2170 individuals resolve to take responsibility for their freedom after an existential crisis.

2171 3. *Choice*; whereby choice constitutes the manner in which one defines self-identity, is
2172 the by-product of responsibility, which is in turn the consequence of freedom. Choice
2173 facilitates individuation, which allows for positive action towards one’s possibilities and
2174 the overcoming of alienation (Heidegger, 1927; Sartre, 1939). Therefore, epiphanies are
2175 conceptualised as being grounded in a significant choice that permitted greater
2176 authenticity.

2177 4. *Alienation*; whereby people are understood to be alienated when they avoid the
2178 conditions of existence, including “its origins (thrown), its conditions (freedom,
2179 responsibility, choice), and its ultimate destination (death)” (McDonald, 2005, p.224).
2180 Epiphanies are viewed as the overcoming of alienation through negative life experience
2181 (existential crisis, wherein an individual’s basic assumptions about the world are
2182 examined) and insight about self-identity and the conditions of existence.

- 2183 5. *Temporality*; whereby self-identity is viewed by existentialist thought as a temporal
2184 entity, a synthesis of past, present, and future (Heidegger, 1927). In this way, time is
2185 conceptualised as a simultaneous trinity that is incongruent with the concept of linear
2186 time which views time as a series of consecutive ‘now’s’.
- 2187 6. *Being-towards-death*; which is understood as the stimulation of an individual’s
2188 priorities that provides an awareness of the impermanence of status, wealth, success, and
2189 indeed, life (Heidegger, 1927; Kierkegaard, 1845). Therefore, the inevitability of death
2190 becomes a force for living a life of one’s own choosing.
- 2191 7. *Depression and anxiety*; understood in existentialist terms as “an overriding sense of
2192 meaninglessness concerning one’s past, or one’s future, leading to a closing down of
2193 one’s possibilities” (McDonald, 2005, p.238). They arise when there is an unwillingness
2194 to adjust to the conditions of existence. Kierkegaard (1849) believed these states mark the
2195 beginning of self-hood as they catalyse profound personal questioning about the nature of
2196 existence.
- 2197 8. *The inter-personal world*; understood as the relationships between the self and itself,
2198 important others, other social relationships. Self-identity is thought of as always in
2199 context with others (Heidegger, 1987; Sartre, 1948). Existence is therefore conceptualised
2200 as relational, meaning that others play a significant role in epiphanic experience, and that
2201 these experiences are able to increase a person’s capacity for relatedness.
- 2202 9. *Dogma and the socio-cultural world*; whereby existentialist thought recognises that
2203 social, political, and religious ideologies act as preventatives to individuation by
2204 dogmatically eschewing the conditions of existence and placing limitations on freedom
2205 (Nietzsche, 1895).

2206 10. *Meaning and purpose*; in existentialist thought, are concepts to which there is no
2207 ultimate answer – one must instead construct their own sense of meaning and purpose.
2208 Heidegger (1927) claimed that a meaningful life “begins with a commitment to openness,
2209 illumination, insight and a commitment to one’s possibilities – as opposed to being closed
2210 off, concealed and alienated” (Guignon, 2004a, p.128, quoted from McDonald, 2005,
2211 p.258).

2212 11. *Narrative*; whereby self-identity is viewed as a narrative construction, made from
2213 interpretations and understandings accrued from being in the world (Heidegger, 1927).
2214 McDonald posited that in their depressive, pre-epiphanic state participants deconstructed
2215 their life stories and self-identities, allowing them to illuminate their self-limiting
2216 narratives (the transformative experience).

2217 Although McDonald (2005) used this framework to describe the experiences of the
2218 participants in his study, and those from other studies (i.e., Jarvis, 1997; Miller & C’de Baca,
2219 2001), there are problems with doing so. Firstly, Existentialism makes assumptions about the
2220 nature of existence that must be accepted for this perspective to perform an explanatory
2221 function. For example, the Existentialist assumption of the existence of free will (Sartre,
2222 1948) is problematic because the literature suggests that free will, in the existentialist sense of
2223 being absolutely free (Sartre, 1943), is illusory (Libet et al., 1983; Haynes, 2011), and
2224 because CR does not subscribe to the fetishisation of voluntarism evident in existentialist
2225 accounts but rather to a kind of determinism (discussed Chapter 1, section 2.6). Furthermore,
2226 whilst the existentialist perspective provides a philosophical conceptualisation of epiphany, it
2227 provides an incomplete account of the underlying causal mechanisms in the domain of the
2228 Real through which this kind of change is possible. In essence, it adds a layer of complexity,
2229 or interpretation, rather than removing it.

2230

2231 **3.3.8) *Chaos/Complexity Theory***

2232 Greater attention will be paid to Chaos/Complexity Theory due to its later relevance
2233 in the thesis. Jarvis (1997) considered Chaos/Complexity Theory (simply referred to as Chaos
2234 Theory from this point onwards) to be well placed to explain, and understand, epiphanic
2235 experience. By advocating for Chaos Theory, Jarvis was proposing a complete paradigm
2236 shift. Chaos Theory is a nonlinear dynamical systems (NDS) theory (Guastello & Liebovitch,
2237 2009; nonlinear dynamical systems have already been touched upon, above, in section 2).
2238 Pincus and Kiefer (2017) suggest that a straightforward way of making sense of NDS is to
2239 consider each term separately:

2240

2241 Nonlinear refers to disproportional cause and effect... Dynamical refers to processes
2242 in which time and timing are essential for understanding cause and effect - non-
2243 Newtonian, circular causality, precisely speaking...Systems, within this context, refer
2244 to a complex interaction of multiple factors, rather than simple linear cause and effect
2245 that are easily identifiable through controlled experimental methods. Complex
2246 systems contain multiple highly interactive elements. Combining all three terms, NDS
2247 theory is concerned with the non-reductionistic modelling and measurement of
2248 disproportional processes of cause and effect over time among multiple interacting
2249 elements. (p.4)

2250

2251 NDS theories allow for the understanding that sometimes large inputs can produce
2252 small outcomes, and that small inputs at the right time can produce disproportionately

2253 dramatic outcomes (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009), which is reflected in the phenomenology
2254 of epiphanic experience. Therefore, NDS theory can be understood as a holistic, rather than
2255 reductionist, scientific approach that does not sacrifice rigour (Pincus & Kiefer, 2017), and as
2256 a useful way to conceptualise the CRist notion of open systems (Bhaskar, 1975). This makes
2257 NDS theories not only relevant to the study of epiphany, as these experiences are inherently
2258 nonlinear dynamical psychological phenomena (Jarvis, 1997; Koopmans, 2009), but to the
2259 overall study of all biological systems. NDS theories contradict the overriding, yet implicit,
2260 assumption in psychology that there is only one kind of change (linear change) whereby
2261 outcomes are proportional to inputs (Guastello, Koopmans & Pincus, 2008). In this way,
2262 Jarvis's (1997) causal explanation for epiphany possesses a strength that the aforementioned
2263 explanations do not, as it stands alone in not using a linear theoretical framework to
2264 understand a nonlinear phenomenon, therefore making it an ontologically appropriate
2265 suggestion.

2266 Chaos Theory is an interdisciplinary mathematical theory, defined by Krippner (1994)
2267 as "the branch of mathematics for the study of processes that seem so complex that at first
2268 they do not appear to be governed by any known laws or principles, but which actually have
2269 an underlying order" (p.49). Researchers applying Chaos Theory have been successful in
2270 providing a bridge between higher-order psychological phenomena (e.g., traits, schemata, and
2271 norms) and lower-level phenomena (e.g., thoughts, feelings, and movements), as well as
2272 explaining previously problematic fields of study in such areas as physics, ecology, and
2273 astronomy, and has been suggested by many as providing the capacity to connect the natural
2274 and social sciences (Ayers, 1997; Gleick, 1987; Koopmans, 2009; Robertson & Combs,
2275 2014).

2276 As such, Chaos Theory, and NDS theories in general, represent a paradigm shift in the
2277 scientific landscape, preceded by such other paradigm shifts as the Copernican revolution,
2278 Newtonian causal determinism, and the Einsteinian revolutions; each in search of a universal
2279 model that might unify physics (Gleick, 1987; Krippner, 1994; Kuhn, 2012). The universe
2280 that Chaos Theory describes is immensely different from the universe the Newtonian
2281 paradigm allows for (discussed above in section 2). Chaos Theory demonstrates that the
2282 outcomes of dynamical, self-organised systems (see section 3.3.3.2.3) are unable to be
2283 predicted at a local level. Instead, Chaos Theory allows for models of real-world phenomena
2284 that better correspond with their actual complexity than the causally deterministic and linear
2285 Newtonian paradigm.

2286 Chaos Theory (and NDS theories in general) has met with resistance from scientific
2287 communities which are reluctant to embrace this paradigm shift (Gleick, 1987; Renisow
2288 & Vaughan, 2006). However, Chaos Theory has gained traction, and formally entered the
2289 consciousness of the entire field of psychology with the establishment of the Society for
2290 Chaos Theory in Psychology and Life Sciences (SCTPLS) and the Chaos Network in 1991
2291 (Guastello, 2009). Psychology-specific applications of Chaos Theory include psychotherapy,
2292 human development, sleep neurophysiology, psychophysics, mind and consciousness,
2293 collective intelligence, neurodynamics and electrocortical activity, and psychopathology,
2294 amongst myriad others (Gleick, 1987; Gregson, 2009; Krippner, 1994; Lunkenheimer &
2295 Dishion, 2009; Minelli, 2009; Sulis, 2009; Tschacher & Junghan, 2009). Unsurprisingly,
2296 Chaos Theory first gained attention in disciplines that were already open to interdisciplinary
2297 thinking, such as neuroscience, social systems analysis, and organisational behaviour
2298 (Guastello, 2009).

2299 Chaos Theory focuses on, and allows for a way of understanding, phenomena,
2300 processes, and behaviours that appear locally chaotic and unpredictable, but at a global level
2301 are stable and ordered (Gleick, 1987; Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009; Jarvis, 1997; Krippner,
2302 1994; Prigogine, 1991). In this way, Chaos Theory emphasises that order is an emergent
2303 property of disorder. This marks a distinct contrast to the Newtonian worldview, shifting
2304 from linear to nonlinear, predictable, and controllable, to infinite potentials (Bütz, 1992;
2305 Jarvis, 1997). The discussion will now turn to the central premises of Chaos Theory in order
2306 to demonstrate the applicability of Chaos Theory to epiphanic experience: (1) the nonlinear
2307 system, (2) interdependence, (2) self-organisation, (4) phase space and attractors, and (5)
2308 sensitive dependence on initial conditions.

2309

2310 **3.3.3.2.1) *The Nonlinear System.***

2311 The primary objects of study in Chaos Theory are nonlinear systems whereby a
2312 nonlinear system is conceptualised as “one in which input to the system is not proportional to
2313 output from the system” (Jarvis, 1997, p.252). A chaotic system must demonstrate
2314 nonlinearity, but a nonlinear system is not necessarily chaotic (Bradley, 1995). This is
2315 relevant to the study of epiphany as these experiences involve the locally unpredictable
2316 emergence of a new system order that is disproportionate to the input into the system, and
2317 therefore can only be the product of the dynamics of a nonlinear system (Goerner, 1995). In
2318 this way, Chaos Theory possesses an explanatory power suited to epiphanic experience and is
2319 a significant contrast to linear Newtonian models.

2320

2321 **3.3.3.2.2) *Interdependence.***

2322 Despite the notion of interdependence often being confounded with nonlinearity,
2323 these two terms are conceptually independent. Nonlinearity is conceptually related to
2324 proportionality; whilst interdependence relates to the interactions between entities (Jarvis,
2325 1997). Therefore, interdependence addresses whether two entities affect each other, and
2326 nonlinearity addresses how they affect each other. The term used to describe a system that is
2327 nonlinear and interdependent is a ‘dynamical system’. The human mind is a dynamical
2328 system and is therefore impervious to prediction, thus reflecting the unpredictable nature of
2329 epiphanies (Jarvis, 1997).

2330

2331 **3.3.3.2.3) Self-organisation.**

2332 Dynamical systems, as already noted, may appear locally chaotic, but form patterns at
2333 a global level. In this way, dynamical systems are self-organising. Self-organisation occurs
2334 when a system is in a state of high entropy (i.e., disorder), and occurs in order to allow the
2335 system to operate more efficiently within its set of conditions (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009;
2336 Prigogine & Stengers, 1984). A particular theoretical and analytical challenge is that living
2337 systems do not remain in a chaotic state for long periods of time, instead these systems self-
2338 organise, so that chaos is often a transient state (Guastello, 2009).

2339 It is now accepted that the brain functions in a nonlinear manner (Bob, 2008;
2340 Freeman, 1991), and there is strong evidence of chaotic dynamics in the brain, in particular,
2341 the electroencephalographic (EEG) activity of the brain has been demonstrated to be a
2342 chaotic process (Guastello, 2009; Minelli, 2009; Pijn, Van Neerven, Noest & da Silva, 1991;
2343 Pritchard & Duke, 1995; Rapp, 1995; Stam, 2003). The brain is a self-organised system,
2344 meaning that it is a complex system, comprised of multiple units, that displays emergent
2345 properties as a whole that are beyond those that its individual units are capable of, and that

2346 moves towards higher levels of complexity when perturbed (Carhart-Harris et al., 2014;
2347 Chialvo, Balenzuela & Fraiman, 2008; Hollis, Kloos & Van Orden, 2009; Jarvis, 1997;
2348 Tognoli & Kelso, 2014). The brain interacts with its environment continually in order to
2349 minimise internal chaos, even if that requires it to adopt new patterns of self-organisation as a
2350 result of additional chaos in the internal or external environment (Friston, 2010; Gabora,
2351 2017). As such, self-organised systems can be said to possess three main features (Skar,
2352 2004):

2353

2354 1. They are open and intimately connected with their environment. Because they exist in
2355 far-from-equilibrium conditions, they are able to develop and maintain their structure and
2356 organization; the Second Law of Thermodynamics does not inexorably drive them
2357 towards increasing disorder as it does closed systems.

2358 2. They can create novel new structures and new modes of behaviour. Therefore, we can
2359 say that they are ‘creative’.

2360 3. Their parts are so numerous (in all but the simplest of examples) that there is no way
2361 in which a causal relationship between them can be established. Their components are
2362 interconnected by a network of feedback loops (p.249).

2363

2364 This flexibility, being able to function well over a range of conditions, is critical to
2365 biological systems, so a biological system becoming functionally ‘stuck’ in one mode can be
2366 harmful as it prevents it from adapting to changing conditions (Gleick, 1987; Huberman,
2367 1986). This is reflected in literature on epiphanic experience whereby participants were

2368 documented as often being trapped in modes of being that were unsuited to their
2369 environments (Ilivitsky, 2011; Miller & C'de Baca, 2001).

2370 Chemist Ilya Prigogine (1984) proposed the notion of dissipative structures (a
2371 structure wherein time evolution is irreversible, e.g., epiphany) as a way of understanding the
2372 self-organising properties inherent to chaotic systems (in the discussions that follow, the term
2373 'system' is used synonymously with the term 'brain' or 'mind' when considering Chaos
2374 Theory in a psychological context). Jarvis (1997) defined dissipative structures as: "those that
2375 evolve in far-from-equilibrium conditions where the internal or external conditions of a
2376 system are turbulent enough to push a structure out of the limited parameters which had
2377 described its previous equilibrium" (p.259). Therefore, the notion of dissipative structures
2378 allows for the understanding that a chaotic system may further dissipate into disorder, or a
2379 new and more complex order may emerge that is better suited to the system's conditions.
2380 This is reflective of the personal transformation that occurs as part of epiphanic experience.

2381 Self-organisation therefore becomes conceptualised as a process of transformation, as
2382 a dissipative structure "must be open to change, must be able to break down old system
2383 functions and generate new ones" (Prigogine, 1984, as quoted in Jarvis, 1997, p.260).
2384 Further, this transformative process is capable of generating a range of unpredictable new
2385 forms and occurs as a phenomenal 'quantum leap' (Jarvis, 1997). Chaotic systems are
2386 therefore understood as being able to create both disorder and order; despite locally chaotic
2387 behaviour, the system as a whole can be described as ordered and patterned. In dynamical,
2388 chaotic systems instances of change are experienced as qualitatively punctuated, chaotic, and
2389 sudden (akin to epiphanous change), rather than progressive or gradual (Bütz, 1995; Goerner,
2390 1995).

2391

2392 **3.3.3.2.4) Phase Space and Attractors.**

2393 The term ‘phase space’ refers to a theoretical space in which all the possible states
2394 that a system could occupy are represented, and within which each possible state corresponds
2395 to a distinctive point in phase space. When a system becomes perturbed, it may seek any
2396 number of potential regions, termed ‘attractors’, located in phase space that exert an influence
2397 on it (Francis, 1995; Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009). Attractors are essentially boxes of space
2398 within phase space in which movement could, or could not, occur (Guastello & Liebovitch,
2399 2009).

2400 When an object enters the space around an attractor it will not leave unless a
2401 sufficiently strong force is able to pull it out (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009). Metaphorically,
2402 an attractor can be seen as a magnet, and the range in which it has the power to attract objects
2403 is known as a basin. There is variance in the strength of attractors, and stronger attractors will
2404 have wider basins. Attractors are essentially stable structures (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009),
2405 of which there are four types, each embodying a different kind of movement: (1) the fixed
2406 point, (2) the limit cycle, (3) toroidal attractors, and (4) chaotic attractors (also known as
2407 strange attractors) (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009; Jarvis, 1997; Oestreicher, 2007). Of
2408 particular relevance to epiphany are strange attractors, which characterise the behaviour of
2409 chaotic systems in phase space (Jarvis, 1997; Ruelle & Takens, 1971). Each type of attractor
2410 will now be detailed.

2411 1. *Fixed Point Attractors.* A fixed-point attractor has only one state and represents a
2412 steady state for the system (Goertzel, 1995b). When a system is near a fixed-point
2413 attractor it enters that state and does not leave (Goertzel, 1995b). Points that are pulled
2414 into the basin of a fixed-point attractor gravitate towards a fixed point, such as the final
2415 states of a pendulum that has been dampened (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009; Oestreicher,

2416 2007). If two fixed point attractors are present, then the movement of the object may
2417 appear convoluted depending on the strengths and locations of each attractor relative to
2418 the other (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009).

2419 2. *Limit Cycle Attractors and Toroidal Attractors.* Oscillatory behaviour is associated
2420 with limit cycle attractors, whereby the system will begin in one state, move through a
2421 series of other states, eventually return to its initial state, and repeat this process
2422 (Goertzel, 1995b). Points in the basin of a limit cycle attractor exhibit cyclic behaviour in
2423 a fashion similar to the way that the moon orbits the earth, or the heartbeat at rest
2424 (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009; Oestreicher, 2007). Points that are pulled into the basin of
2425 a limit cycle attractor do not move to the epicentre of the attractor, but rather oscillate
2426 around it (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009). Toroidal attractors are the result of a limit cycle
2427 attractor that cycles on two axes, rather than one axis (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009;
2428 Oestreicher, 2007). The motion of a point within a toroidal attractor basin is
2429 unpredictable, but not as complex as a chaotic attractor (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009).

2430 3. *Chaotic Attractors.* Chaotic attractors create the conditions for the system to behave
2431 in ways that are continually fluctuating and turbulent (Goertzel, 1995b). Chaotic
2432 attractors affect points so that they are pulled into and stay within a certain space, even
2433 though they can move within it (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009). Jarvis (1997) explained
2434 that a chaotic attractor causes systems to behave unpredictably and creates the potential
2435 for the behaviour of the system to bifurcate (i.e., sudden transformation). Bifurcation
2436 represents a gateway to the emergence of a new way of being (Francis, 1995).

2437 The internal motion within the basin of a strange attractor is chaotic, characterised by
2438 three primary features: (1) unpredictability, (2) boundedness, and (3) sensitivity to initial
2439 conditions (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009; Kaplan & Glass, 1995). Unpredictability refers

2440 to the fact that the series of numbers that a chaotic function generates does not repeat
2441 itself. Boundedness refers to the unpredictability of motion within the boundaries of the
2442 attractor. Sensitivity to initial conditions refers to the fact that two points that begin in
2443 arbitrary close proximity will increasingly move away from each other over time. If a
2444 point within a chaotic attractor basin moves too close to the edge of the basin, motion
2445 contracts and the point is pulled inside. If the point moves too close to the centre of the
2446 attractor, motion expands, and the point moves outwards. This kind of motion has been
2447 described as being similar to a school of fish (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009; Semovski,
2448 2001).

2449 Self-organised systems such as the brain are argued to be unpredictable on a small scale,
2450 but roughly predictable in the level of structure (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009). Complex
2451 self-organised systems fluctuate within a chaotic attractor that has “many wings,
2452 subwings, sub-subwings, and so on, each one corresponding to the presence of a certain
2453 pattern or collection of patterns within the system” (Goertzel, 1995b, p.140). So, whilst
2454 the behaviour of a complex self-organising system within a strange attractor is chaotic
2455 and pseudorandom, the structure of the attractor allows for the imposition of a rough
2456 global predictability. Therefore, although brain dynamics are suggested to be governed by
2457 a strange attractor, this attractor is complex enough to contain information on the
2458 transitions between states that is inherent to the brain (Goertzel, 1995b).

2459

2460 ***3.3.3.2.5) Sensitive Dependence on Initial Conditions.***

2461 Sensitive dependence on initial conditions, sometimes referred to by its colloquial
2462 nomenclature ‘The Butterfly Effect’ (Gleick, 1987), refers to the fact that a system that
2463 appears structurally stable may be highly reactive to even small perturbations that lead to

2464 significant and unpredictable structural changes (Poincaré, 1992). For example, historically
2465 the weather was assumed to be structurally stable, when in reality it is a dynamical system
2466 which is more accurately described in accordance with structural instability. This was first
2467 noted by mathematician and meteorologist Edward Lorenz (Gleick, 1987; Lorenz, 1963,
2468 1972) who demonstrated that the equations used to model the weather were not sufficiently
2469 precise, so as to be able predict the weather beyond two or three days, due to the inherent
2470 structural instability of the weather pattern system.

2471 Reniscow and Vaughan (2006) provide an illustrative example of how this
2472 mathematical concept can be applied to human behavioural change:

2473

2474 The weather (behaviour change) is an example of a chaotic system. In order to make
2475 long-term weather forecasts (predictions of behavior change) it would be necessary to
2476 take an infinite number of measurements, which would be impossible to do. Also,
2477 because the atmosphere (human behavior) is chaotic, tiny uncertainties would
2478 eventually overwhelm any calculations and defeat the accuracy of the forecast. Even
2479 if it were possible to fill the entire atmosphere of the earth with an enormous array of
2480 measuring instruments, e.g., thermometers, wind gauges, and barometers
2481 (psychosocial, biologic, and environmental measures) uncertainty in the initial
2482 conditions would arise from the minute variations in measured values between each
2483 set of instruments in the array. Because the atmosphere (human behavior) is chaotic,
2484 these uncertainties, no matter how small, would eventually overwhelm any
2485 calculations and defeat the accuracy of the forecast (prediction). (p.3)

2486

2487 Complex, adaptive systems, such as living organisms, are therefore understood to
2488 display extreme sensitivity to context and initial conditions that prevents the prediction of the
2489 future trajectory of the system (Mitchell, 2009). Indeed, perhaps the most critical point to
2490 return to, before discussing the limitations of Chaos Theory, is that living systems are unable
2491 to exist either as separate components or as separate to their environment. This is because no
2492 living system can be considered closed, linear, and at environmental equilibrium, because this
2493 is the thermodynamic definition of death (Shapiro, 2015). As such, the notion that Type 1
2494 change exists (see section 2 above), can be considered fallacious in light of CRist and NDS
2495 theory premises of enquiry.

2496

2497 **3.3.3.2.6) *Evaluating Chaos Theory.***

2498 The application of Chaos Theory to psychology presents significant challenges as
2499 psychology is an expansive and often interdisciplinary field (Guastello, 2001). Yet, the
2500 science of chaos, and its relation to psychological experience, has continued to develop since
2501 the completion of Jarvis' (1997) work. These developments have added support to Jarvis'
2502 arguments and, critically, were found to provide the start of a comprehensive, retroductively
2503 constructed, framework for understanding the data from this research and the causal
2504 mechanisms that underpin epiphanic experiences (discussed at length in Chapter 5).
2505 Moreover, it is worth noting that CR and Chaos Theory are considered to align, due to
2506 overlapping agendas and worldviews (e.g., both are positioned to consider open systems
2507 existing in a state of flux, emergence within these systems, and the importance of context;
2508 Hartwig, 2007; Pilgrim, 2019), thereby highlighting the congruence of this paradigm within
2509 the context of CRist research.

2534 tested quite empirically, although not necessarily quantitatively” (p.62). Therefore, existing
2535 theory acts as the starting point for any subsequent research. However, as of yet, there exists
2536 no comprehensive underlying theory of epiphanic experience that can be tested. Movement
2537 towards theoretical consensus can be considered critical to the progression of science, and yet
2538 there is a paucity of cumulative theory in the discipline of psychology, both with relevance to
2539 this subject area, and in general (McPhetres et al., 2020). As such, the overarching aim of this
2540 research is to be able to provide a theory of epiphanic experience that is underpinned by
2541 Critical Realism. In order to facilitate this aim, the following research questions were posed:

- 2542 1. What makes epiphanic experience distinct from other sudden, positive, and
2543 profound experiences?
- 2544 2. What are the distinct experiential features of epiphanic experience?
- 2545 3. What generative mechanisms permit the emergence of an epiphanic experience?

2546 Each of the following three chapters will be guided by each of the respective
2547 questions above. Chapter 3 will present the results of a scoping review of the literature on
2548 sudden, positive, and profound change experiences in order to transparently demarcate
2549 epiphanic experience from similar experiences. Using the results of the scoping review
2550 Chapter 4 will report the findings of a thematic synthesis of the extant literature on epiphanic
2551 experience, that focuses on the experiential features of epiphanic experience in the domain of
2552 the Empirical using a CRist framework. Finally, Chapter 5 will present the results of a CRist
2553 analysis of primary data used as the foundation for an ontologically differentiated discussion
2554 of the generative mechanisms proposed to underpin epiphanic experience.

2555

5) Conclusion

2556

2557 The purpose of this chapter was to provide the reader with a thorough, and focused,
2558 understanding of epiphanic experience as it is represented in current literature. To summarise,
2559 although several concepts exist that describe epiphanic experience, current thinking in the
2560 literature suggests that it can be distinguished according to a continuum that spans from: (1)
2561 moments of *insight*, mental clarity, and awareness, to (2) *mystical* experiences in which the
2562 individual often feels connected to a higher power (Ilivitsky, 2011; McDonald, 2005, 2008;
2563 Miller & C’de Baca, 2001). Further, epiphanic experiences appear to possess a set of
2564 common markers i.e., brief, sudden/surprising, inner (insightful or mystical),
2565 memorable/vivid, lasting/enduring, positive/benevolent, and profound. However, the current
2566 body of literature on epiphanic experience is hindered by a lack of philosophical rigour, and
2567 rationale, with many of the studies lacking clarity regarding philosophy as a pre-supposition
2568 (excluding McDonald, 2005; see Chapter 1, section 2.1), not explicitly accounting for the
2569 nature of open systems (excluding Jarvis, 1997), and in some instances, providing insufficient
2570 methodological clarity and reflexivity.

2571 Both content (McDonald, 2005) and concept (Chilton, 2015) analyses on epiphanies
2572 have been conducted. However, both of these analyses are undermined by the fact that they
2573 provide little methodological detail such that it is not evident how the researchers applied the
2574 different frameworks for content analysis they chose, which studies were selected for
2575 inclusion, and on what basis. Despite this, these content analyses, as well as individual
2576 authors’ interpretations of the literature, have been used to support arguments that assert the
2577 distinctiveness of epiphanic experience as a phenomenon. For example, it has been asserted
2578 that Maslow’s (1971) concept of ‘peak experiences’, or the ‘spiritual emergencies’ defined by
2579 Grof and Grof (1986), may be sudden but do not necessarily engender positive, profound, and

2580 lasting change. Mystical experiences can be positive but need not be profound (Ilivitsky,
2581 2011). Similarly, some examples of profound change, such as ‘religious conversion’, do not
2582 follow a brief inner experience but are gradual (Ilivitsky, 2011; Paloutzian, 2005; Zinnbauer
2583 & Pargament, 1998). However, without the ability to understand the analytical processes
2584 undertaken by the researchers to reach these conclusions, the delineation of epiphanic
2585 experience from several other similar experiences appears to have been influenced by a lack
2586 of investment in the principle of Hermeticism (Bhaskar, 2017).

2587 Given the volume of terminologies that exist within the literature to describe sudden,
2588 positive, and profound change experiences, and the amount of conceptual overlap they
2589 possess, it seems premature to make an assertion of the distinctiveness of epiphanic
2590 experience based on a set of characteristics derived from disparate, and sometimes
2591 methodologically opaque, research without testing this transparently, methodologically
2592 rigorously, and with the principle of Hermeticism firmly in mind. As such, attention will now
2593 turn to the subsequent chapter, a scoping review with the purpose of exploring if, and on what
2594 grounds, epiphanic experience can be considered a conceptually and operationally distinct
2595 category of nonlinear lived experience. This is a necessary act of under-labouring (Bhaskar,
2596 2017; see Chapter 1, section 2.1.1) to establish a solid foundation for the research that
2597 follows.

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2603 **Chapter 3: A Scoping Review of Sudden, Positive, and Profound Nonlinear Change**

2604 **1) Introduction**

2605 The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, it aims to provide the reader with a
2606 broader view of the field of literature pertaining to sudden, positive, and profound nonlinear
2607 change experiences, such that epiphanic experience can be more broadly contextualised
2608 within the field. Second, it aims to engage with methodological procedures designed to
2609 facilitate the exploration of the distinctiveness of epiphanic experience against the range of
2610 sudden, positive, and profound changes described in literature. Each of the conceptualisations
2611 of epiphanic experience (i.e., epiphany, quantum change, SPT) discussed in Chapter 2 have
2612 considerable overlap in terms of common features (McDonald, 2005). Moreover, epiphanic
2613 experiences share features with similar experiences such as ‘peak experience’ (Liang, 2006).
2614 As such, it is critical that the process described in this chapter was undertaken as the range of
2615 terminologies and conceptualisations used in the literature to address sudden, positive, and
2616 profound change experiences can make this field of research appear very convoluted. Thus,
2617 the study that follows represents a necessary act in accordance with the CRist tenet of under-
2618 labouring (Bhaskar, 2017).

2619 Further, and in line with the second aim stated above, this chapter will provide a
2620 methodologically transparent, systematic assessment of the literature that addresses sudden,
2621 positive, and profound change, in order to consider the grounds upon which epiphanic
2622 experience can be demarcated from similar experiences. This is important and necessary as,
2623 to date, it appears as though the distinctiveness of epiphanic experience has been tacitly
2624 assumed rather than hermetically postulated (see Chapter 1, section 2.1.6). Researchers have
2625 also made claims about the functional equivalence of, for example, quantum change and
2626 epiphany (McDonald, 2005), without providing transparent systematic detail of how these

2627 conclusions were reached. If this research is to meaningfully discuss epiphanic experience
2628 then it is critical to understand the landscape of terms used to describe epiphanic experience,
2629 as well as evidence the delineation of epiphanic experience from other similar experiences.
2630 To this end, a scoping review of extant literature on sudden, positive, and profound
2631 transformative experiences was undertaken. By engaging with this process, robust evidence
2632 can be provided that epiphanic experience warrants demarcation from other sudden, positive,
2633 and profound transformative experiences.

2634

2635

2) Method

2636 The purposes of a scoping review are to: (1) provide a rigorous and transparent
2637 assessment of a body of research, (2) to map the available evidence, and (3) to identify any
2638 gaps therein in order to enhance future research on the phenomenon under investigation
2639 (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Ludlow & Rogers, 2017; Tricco et al., 2016). Scoping reviews
2640 are also of particular utility when used to investigate topics that are heterogenous, complex,
2641 and as of yet under-reviewed (Mays et al., 2001; Pham et al., 2014). As such, a scoping
2642 review was considered an appropriate method for identifying the range of concepts that
2643 address sudden, positive, and profound transformative experiences in the literature, and the
2644 kinds of evidence that have been produced in this field of research (Arksey & O'Malley,
2645 2005; Levac, Colquhoun & O'Brien, 2010; Munn et al., 2018). Moreover, the role of a
2646 scoping review is not, unlike a systematic review methodology, to synthesise evidence.
2647 Instead, the task is to collate, summarise, and report an overview of all the material that has
2648 been reviewed in a narrative fashion (Arskey & O'Malley, 2005).

2649 The researcher’s primary supervisor acted as a critical friend throughout the research
2650 process (Deuchar, 2008; Smith & McGannon, 2018; Smith, Sparkes & Caddick, 2014) and
2651 the scoping review was underpinned by Arksey and O’Malley’s (2005) framework. This
2652 framework was the first methodological framework proposed as a guideline for scoping
2653 reviews, and only a few researchers have suggested augmentations to the framework (Pham
2654 et al., 2014). Mindful of these suggested augmentations, this study was further supported by
2655 the recommendations from Brien et al. (2010), Levac et al. (2010), and Daudt et al. (2013)
2656 based on their own experiences using the framework. This facilitated the optimisation of
2657 rigour of the scoping review findings (Levac et al., 2010). According to this framework, a
2658 scoping review should progress through the following five phases: (1) identifying the
2659 research question, (2) identifying relevant studies, (3) study selection, (4) charting the data,
2660 and (5) collating, summarising, and reporting the results. For clarity, the structure of this
2661 chapter will mirror these recommendations.

2662

2663 **2.1) Identifying the Research Question**

2664 The purpose of this scoping review was to better understand the topography of the
2665 broad and diverse field of sudden, positive, and profound transformative experiences, such
2666 that it would be possible to map out how each of these conceptualisations overlap and differ,
2667 and so determine whether, and on what grounds, epiphanic experience can be considered a
2668 distinct concept. Therefore, the research question that guided the scoping review was: what
2669 makes epiphanic experience distinct from other sudden, positive, and profound experiences?

2670

2671 **2.2) Identifying Relevant Studies**

2672 To identify relevant studies the following databases were searched: (1) APA
2673 PsychNET, (2) Scopus, and (3) CINAHL Plus. These databases were selected to generate a
2674 comprehensive search of the psychological literature and represent the most relevant
2675 databases to the research area that were available through the University of Hertfordshire.
2676 Grey literature (i.e., research that is produced outside traditional academic channels of
2677 publication and distribution) that was not already identified by the databases was accessed
2678 using Open Grey (www.opengrey.eu). Additional handsearching was conducted using
2679 Google Scholar. A search of titles, abstracts, key words, and texts was run on 11/01/2021,
2680 and additional ‘checks’ of the literature were run every two months after this date until
2681 11/01/2022 in order to ensure the literature included was up to date.

2682 The search terms used were structured using appropriate BOOLEAN operators.
2683 Further, relevant search techniques (e.g., proximity searching, truncations, and wildcard
2684 symbols) were used flexibly in accordance with the specific requirements of each database
2685 used. Key search terms focused on the phenomenon of interest; an example search for Scopus
2686 was:

2687

2688 epiphan* OR “quantum chang*” OR “mystical experience*” OR personal W/3
2689 transform* OR “sudden personal transformation*” OR sudden W/3 change* OR
2690 unexpect* W/3 change* OR last* W/3 change* OR spontaneous W/3 change* OR
2691 discont* W/3 change* OR ineffab* W/3 change* OR mystical W/3 change* OR
2692 unusual W/3 change* OR abrupt W/3 change* OR rapid* W/3 change* OR acute W/3
2693 change* OR transform* W/3 change* OR nonlinear W/3 change* OR non-linear W/3
2694 change* OR brief W/3 change* OR positive W/3 change* OR profound W/3 change*

2695

2696 There were no limitations placed on the date of publication, but the search was
2697 restricted to literature written in English.

2698

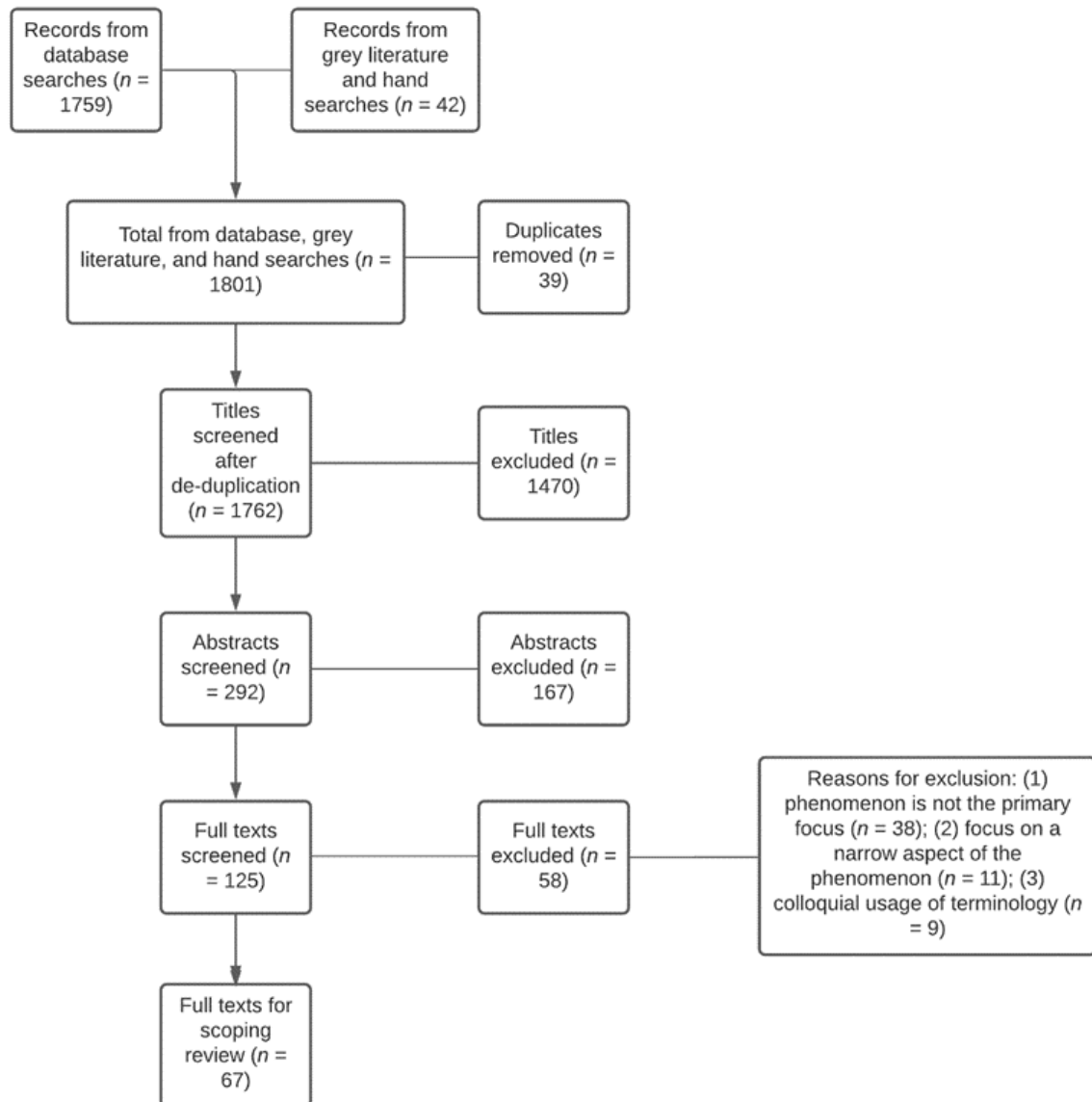
2699 **2.3) Study Selection**

2700 The 1801 citations gathered from searching the aforementioned databases, and hand
2701 searching, were imported to Mendeley (Version 1.19.4) and duplicates were removed. The
2702 reviewer first screened titles for eligibility. What was immediately evident was that the search
2703 strategy employed had identified a large number of irrelevant studies. This was likely due to
2704 search terms being created to identify a great breadth of studies, rather than depth, and that
2705 many of the terms required to do this are not unique to this field. Subsequently, abstracts
2706 were reviewed for eligibility, and literature that did not have transformative change as a core
2707 focus was removed. Finally, 125 full texts were screened, and articles were removed if: (1)
2708 they did not place their primary focus on the phenomenon in question, (2) they focused on a
2709 narrow aspect of the phenomenon, therefore not providing a holistic view, or (3) they used
2710 terminology colloquially or without an empirical foundation (this was most commonly found
2711 in conjunction with the term ‘epiphany’). This selection process followed the guidance by
2712 Arksey and O’Malley (2005). A total of 67 texts were selected for inclusion in the scoping
2713 review (see Appendix B for a list of the literature reviewed). Figure 3.1 provides a visual
2714 schematic of this process.

2715

2716 **Figure 3.1**

2717 *Schematic of study selection process*



2718

2719 2.4) Charting the Data

2720 'Charting' refers to a technique whereby qualitative data is synthesised and
 2721 interpreted by charting and sorting the material into key themes or issues (Arksey &
 2722 O'Malley, 2005; Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). As recommended by Arksey and O'Malley
 2723 (2005), a data charting form was constructed using Microsoft Excel (2012) and included the
 2724 following information: (1) author(s) and year of publication, (2) study population, (3) aims of
 2725 the study, (4) methodology, (5) terminology used to describe sudden, positive, and profound

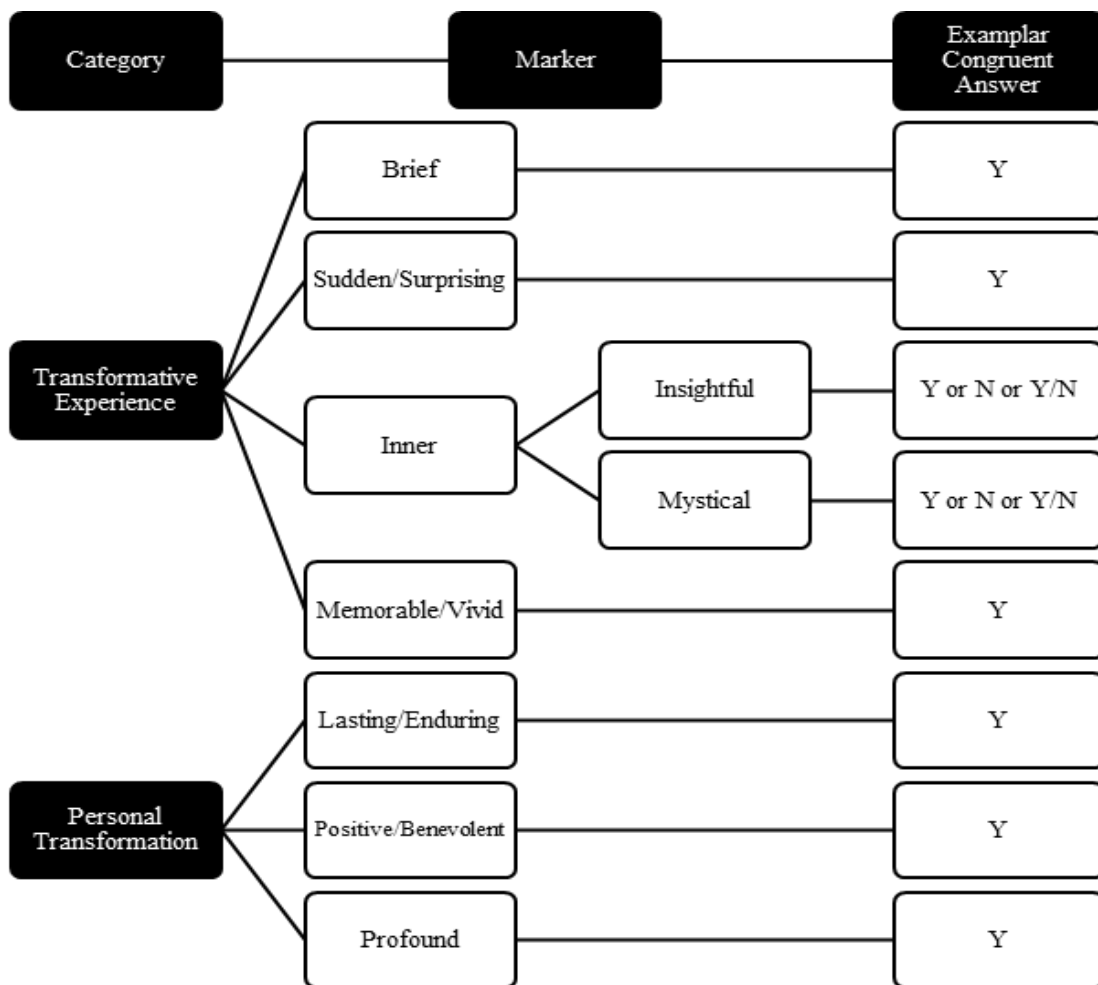
2726 change, (6) congruence with the markers of epiphanic experience identified in the literature
2727 (i.e., brief, sudden/surprising, inner (insightful or mystical), memorable/vivid,
2728 lasting/enduring, positive/benevolent, and profound). It should be noted that not all the
2729 information was readily available to be charted, as in some instances the authors did not
2730 include material that allowed for the points above to be answered.

2731 To establish congruence with the markers of epiphanic experience, a provisional
2732 deductive charting system was developed whereby the selected literature was placed into a
2733 descriptive category according to the phenomenon described (in total 11 categories were
2734 found; discussed in section 3.3 below). Each article from each category was searched in order
2735 to determine whether or not the concept it described possessed the markers of epiphanic
2736 experience noted above (see Figure 3.2; please note, a flexible deductive approach is
2737 congruent with a CRist approach, see Chapter 1, section 3.3). It was noted whether: (1) the
2738 article confirmed the presence of a specified feature (indicated with a ‘Y’), (2) negated the
2739 presence of this feature (indicated with an ‘N’), (3) both did and did not display that feature
2740 (indicated with a ‘Y/N’), or (4) did not provide enough evidence to allow for a clear
2741 judgement to be made (indicated with a ‘?’). This shorthand has been used throughout the
2742 reporting of the findings below.

2743

2744 **Figure 3.2**

2745 *Initial deductive charting system with exemplar congruent answers*



2746

2747 * 'Y' = Yes, 'N' = No, 'Y/N' = both Y and N, '?' = unclear

2748 ** response for all features of both the transformative experience and the personal
 2749 transformation should be 'Y', except the feature 'inner', which can have any combination of
 2750 responses but cannot contain 'N' in both.

2751

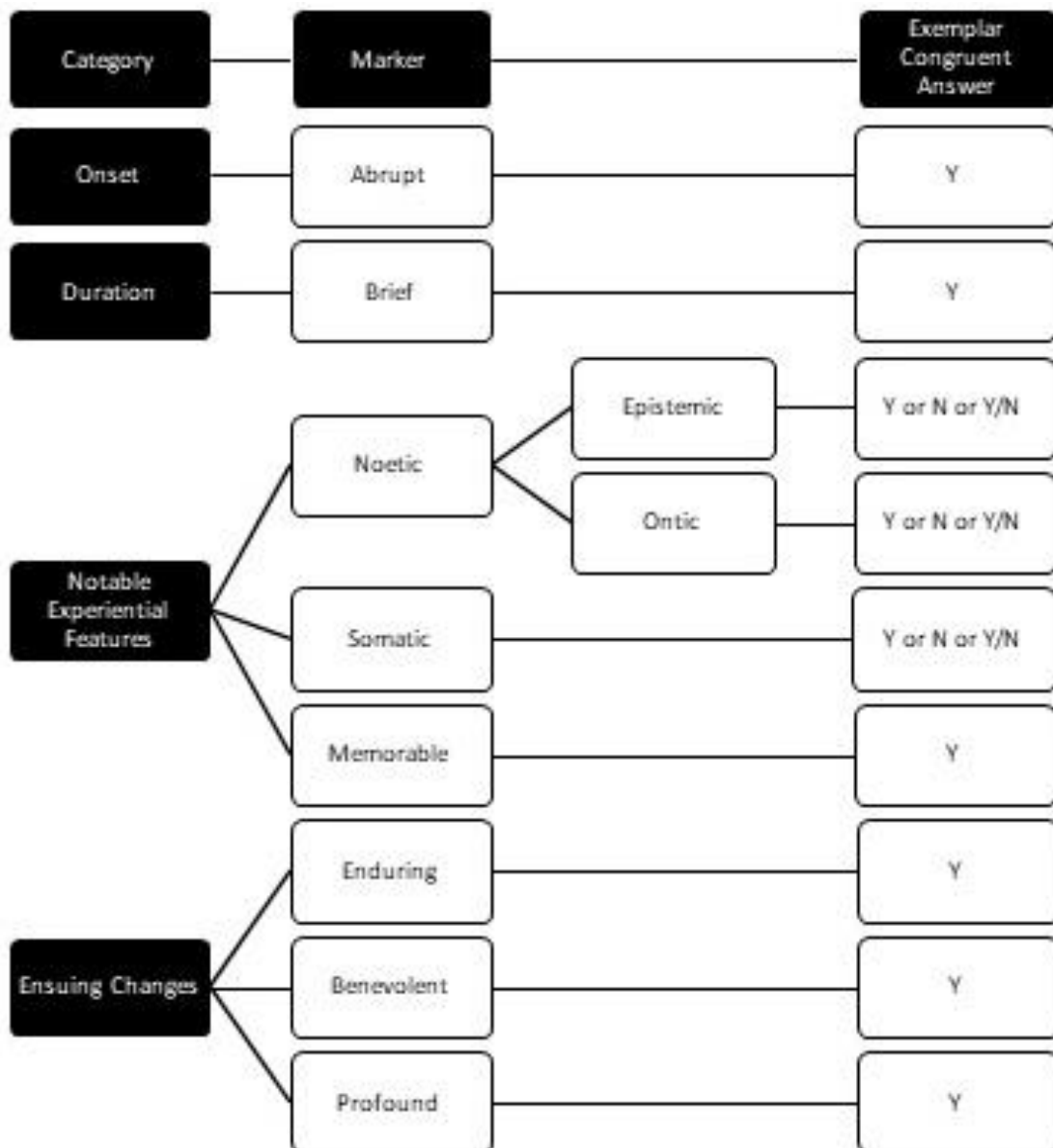
2752 However, it is important to note that the charting system presented in Figure 3.2 was
 2753 provisional and so changed as part of the analytical process. This is because the CRist
 2754 approach favours flexible deductive analytical processes (see Chapter 1, section 3.3), such
 2755 that whilst codes are set before analysis, they may always be subject to change (Fletcher,
 2756 2017; Saldaña, 2013). Therefore, through the process of engaging with the data, the markers
 2757 of epiphanic experience in Figure 3.2 were refined and augmented. The outcome of this

2758 process can be seen in Figure 3.3 will be further discussed below in section 3.3 alongside the
 2759 rationale for the changes made.

2760

2761 **Figure 3.3**

2762 *Markers of epiphanic experience after charting with exemplar congruent answers*



2763

2764 * 'Y' = Yes, 'N' = No, 'Y/N' = both Y and N, '?' = unclear

2765 *** response for all features should be ‘Y’, except ‘noetic’ and ‘somatic’, which can have any*
2766 *combination of responses but cannot contain ‘N’ in both.*

2767

2768 After charting the data, it was reconfigured in order to address the research question.

2769 The following process represents a degree of synthesis not traditionally associated with
2770 scoping reviews (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005), but which was considered appropriate for
2771 doctoral research, and facilitative of the aims of the review. First, each of the 11 categories
2772 was assigned an ‘absolute value’ (‘Y’, ‘N’, ‘Y/N’, or ‘?’) for each of the markers (see Figure
2773 3.3) in order to better visualise the broad trends within the data. Whilst the term ‘absolute
2774 value’ is essentially arbitrary in nature it was constructed by the researcher in order to
2775 facilitate the search for demi-regularities (tendencies for certain patterns in empirical data –
2776 see Chapter 1, section 3.3). This decision was taken in the relative absence of formal or
2777 informal guidance on the practical application of CR to psychological data and review-
2778 focused approaches to research. The ‘absolute value’ assigned to each marker merely denotes
2779 that at least 60% of the data is in accordance with that value. In instances where no one value
2780 attained 60% prevalence, a ‘?’ was assigned, and if there was a 50/50 split between any
2781 combination of ‘Y’, ‘N’, and ‘Y/N’, then the value ‘Y/N’ was assigned. By doing this, the
2782 natural variation within the data set was eradicated, which may appear at cross-purposes with
2783 the philosophical approach adopted by this research (see Chapter 1, section 2.4). However,
2784 whilst the data has been simplified, it should not be considered as simple. These ‘absolute
2785 values’ are merely representations of tendencies (i.e., demi-regularities) within the data.

2786

2787

3) Discussion of Results

2788 This scoping review examined a total of 67 articles published between 1902 and 2021
2789 ($M = 2011$; $Mdn = 2013$; $Mode = 2017$). The mean, median, and mode demonstrate the
2790 increasing amounts of attention being directed towards this subject. The aims of the selected
2791 studies were almost exclusively to explore, examine, or further investigate the phenomenon
2792 under investigation (N.B. the term assigned to the phenomenon differed according to the
2793 study). The overarching descriptive features of the included articles will first be presented
2794 and discussed before considering the research question addressed by this study (see section
2795 2.1).

2796

2797 **3.1) Study Population**

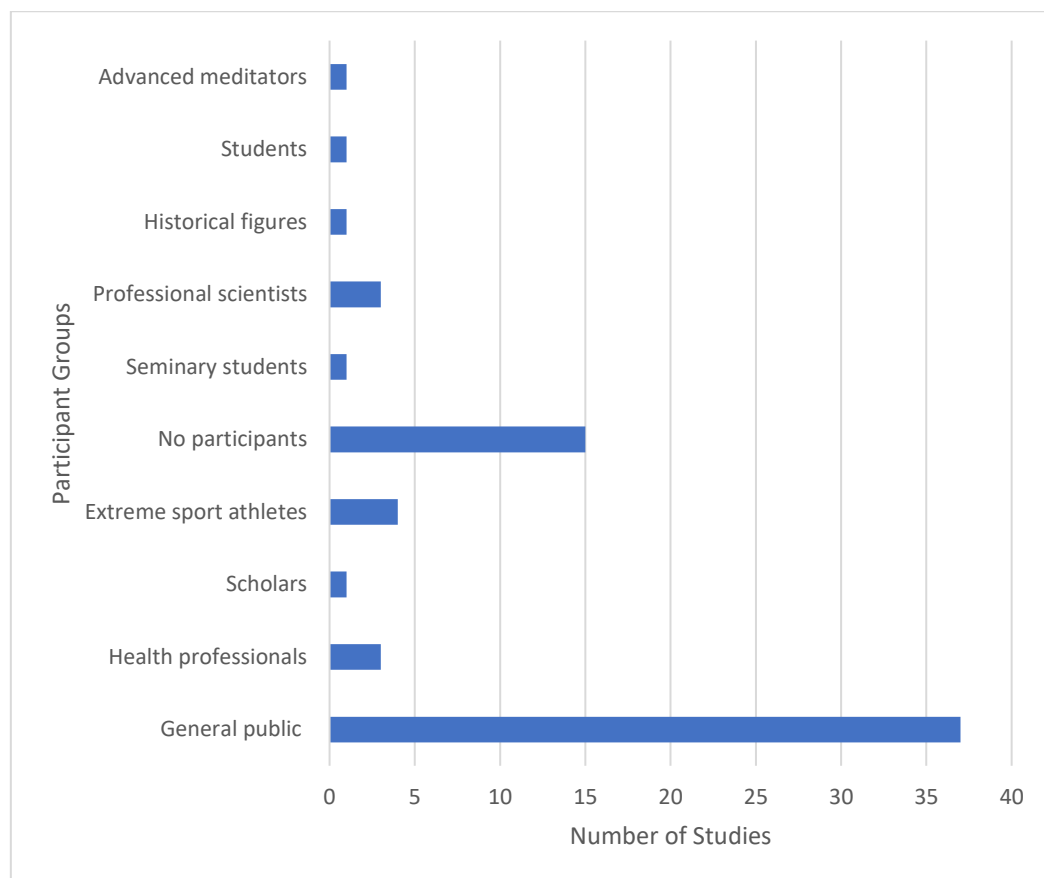
2798 The vast majority of participants in these studies were members of the general public
2799 who had experienced the phenomenon in question or possessed the desired characteristics for
2800 inclusion in the participant sample (see Figure 3.4). In terms of gender, initial calculations
2801 reported a total of 3522 males, 2233 females, and one intergender participant. However, this
2802 skew to the data was found to be the result of one specific article from Griffiths, Hurwitz,
2803 Davis, Johnson and Jesse (2019). The aim of this study was to compare naturally occurring
2804 ‘God encounter experiences’ with those occasioned by classic psychedelic drugs. In the
2805 psychedelic group the number of male participants far outweighed female participants (2746
2806 to 730, respectively). This discrepancy is likely to be linked to the research suggesting that
2807 males are more likely to use drugs than females, and that females are more likely than males
2808 to perceive drug use as being risky (Eaton et al., 2005; Powis, Griffiths, Gossop & Strang,
2809 1996; Spigner, Hawkins & Loren, 1993). Therefore, this data may be more indicative of
2810 which gender engages in psychedelic drug use, rather than which gender is more likely to
2811 experience the phenomenon under investigation. When the drug group (both males and

2812 females) from this study was removed the gender split changed considerably: 800 males,
2813 1535 females, and one intergender participant, therefore demonstrating a prevalence rate for
2814 females having epiphanic experiences at almost twice the frequency of men.

2815

2816 **Figure 3.4**

2817 *Participant groups from the included 67 studies*



2818

2819

2820 **3.2) Methodology and Philosophy**

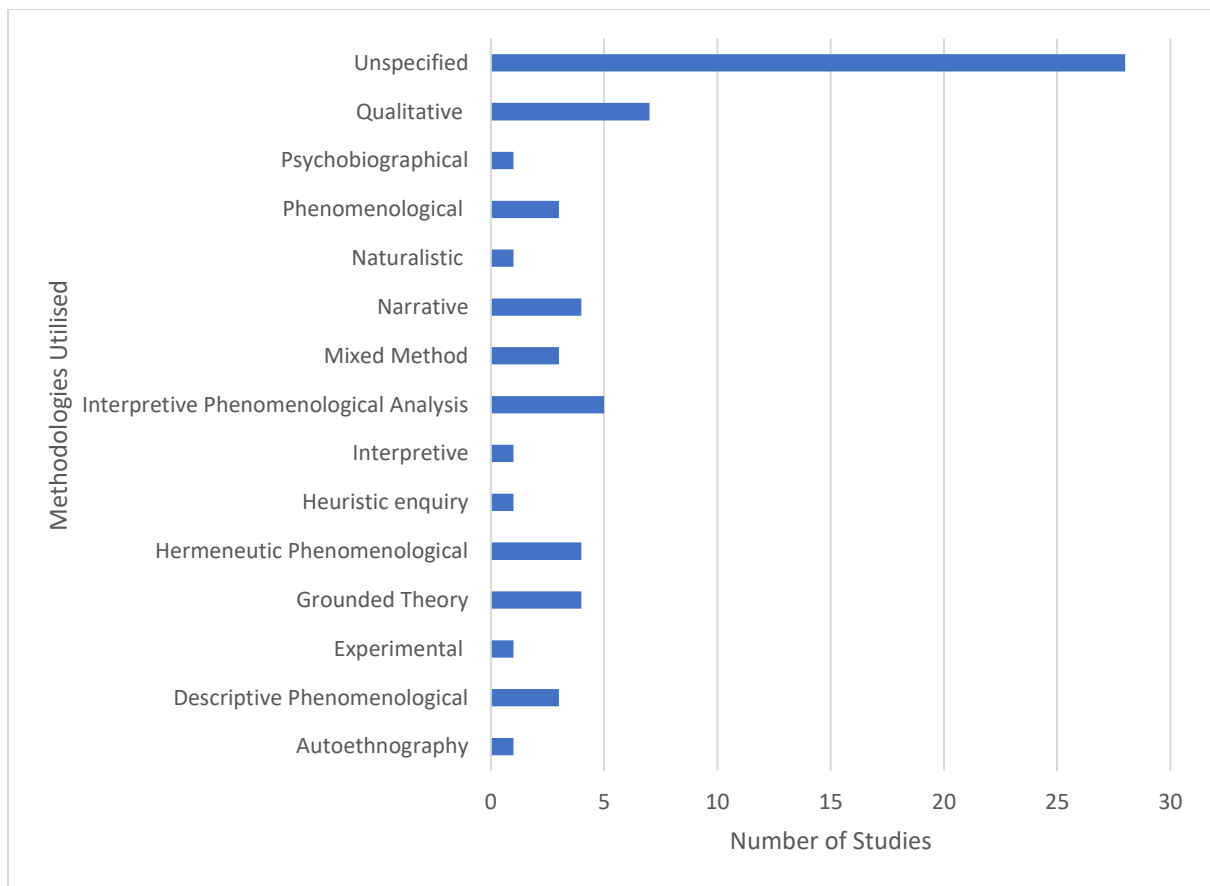
2821 It was rare for the studies reviewed to expressly position themselves philosophically
2822 ($n = 54$ did not address philosophy; $n = 12$ Phenomenological; $n = 1$ Existential). Moreover,
2823 of those few that stated a philosophical position, even fewer explored the premises of enquiry

2824 associated with this positioning, and others appeared to fall into the trap of methodologism
2825 described by Pilgrim (2019; see Chapter 1, section 1). Whilst often used absent of a broader
2826 philosophical rationale, a range of methodologies and methods were utilised by the
2827 researchers whose work was surveyed. Methodologically, phenomenological approaches
2828 were the most favoured ($n = 15$). However, the majority of studies did not specify their
2829 methodological positioning ($n = 28$), or simply referred to their research as being ‘qualitative’
2830 ($n = 7$; see Figure 3.5). A large number of studies, particularly – though not exclusively –
2831 those that presented a conceptual reading of transformative experiences and did not utilise
2832 participants to generate data, did not specify their method. However, the dominant method
2833 used by researchers was interviewing of various kinds ($n = 37$; see Figure 3.6).

2834

2835 **Figure 3.5**

2836 *Study methodologies from the included 67 studies*

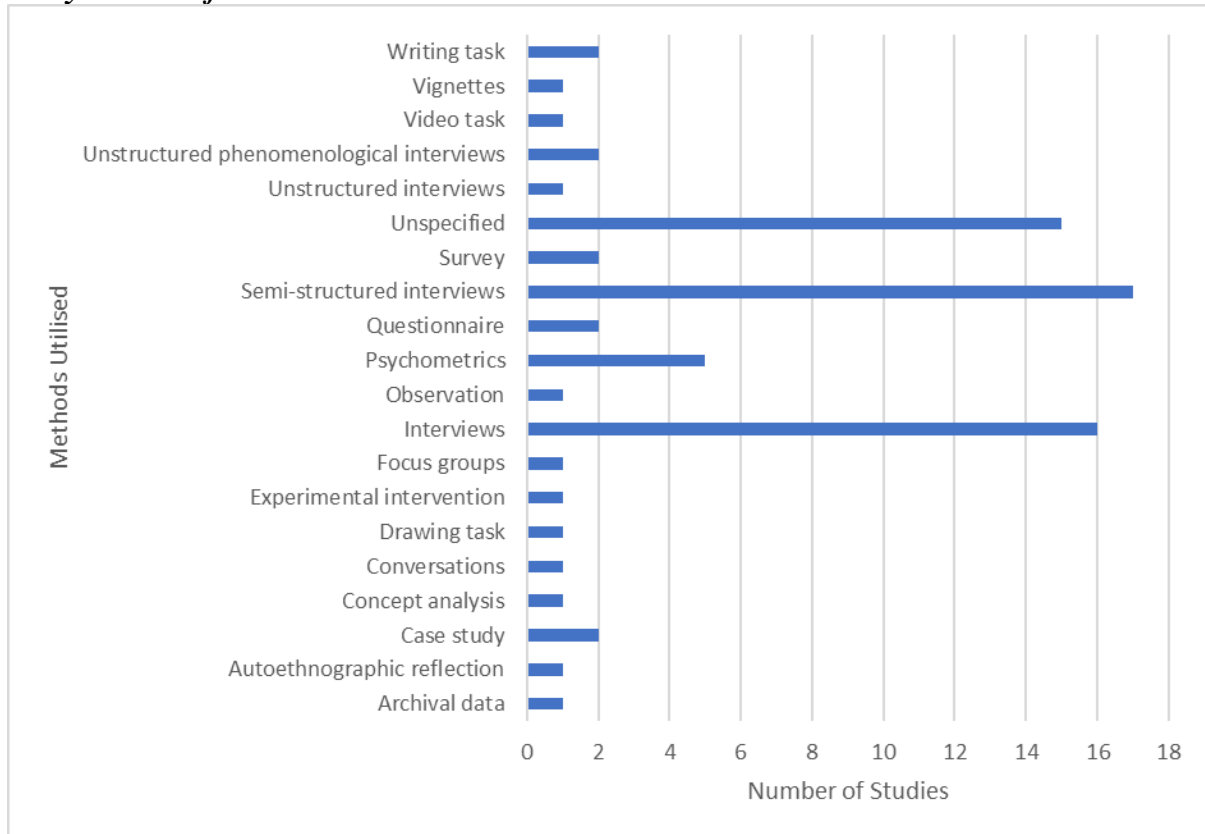


2837

2838

2839 **Figure 3.6**

2840 **Study methods from the included 67 studies**



2841
2842

2843

2844 The discussion will now turn to the research question posed at the start of this scoping
2845 review: what makes epiphanic experience distinct from other sudden, positive, and profound
2846 experiences?

2847

2848 **3.3) Delineating Epiphanic Experience**

2849 Collation of the 67 articles yielded many conceptualisations of sudden, positive, and
2850 profound change which were grouped into 11 categories: (1) anomalous experience, (2)
2851 awakening, (3) awe, (4) epiphany, (5) insight, (6) mystical experience, (7) peak experience,
2852 (8) quantum change, (9) sudden personal transformation, (10) transformative experiences,
2853 and (11) other unique terminologies. Figure 3.7 below provides a representation of the

2854 weighting of each conceptualisation within the articles reviewed. Whilst these categories may
2855 appear independent, 28% of the articles used more than one term within the same paper to
2856 describe the same phenomenon. This is interesting in light of the ineffability first attributed to
2857 these kinds of experiences by James (1902; Amos, 2016a). However, almost all of the terms
2858 used were, to some extent, synonyms of each other. As such, the data from this study
2859 demonstrates that, whilst there is scepticism towards these phenomena from within the
2860 discipline (Fosha, 2006), many concepts exist within psychology to address change that is
2861 sudden, positive, and profound. However, each of the 11 categories listed above
2862 demonstrated varying degrees of congruence with the markers of epiphanic experience (see
2863 Figure 3.3).

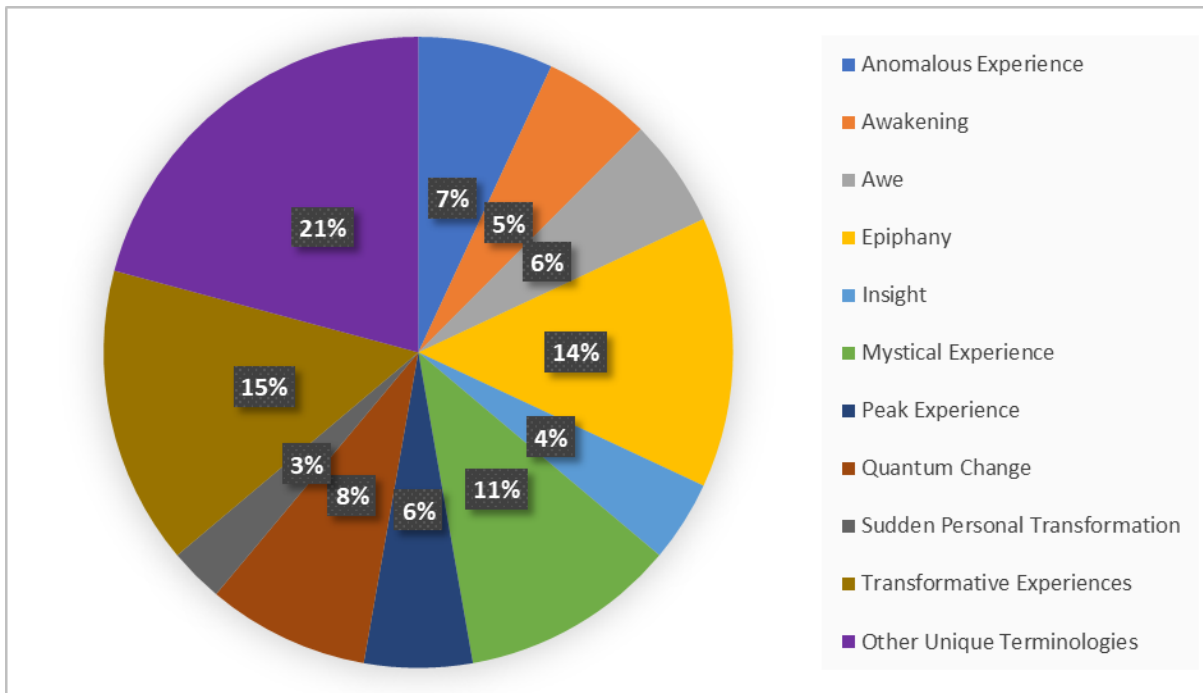
2864 In order to answer the research question ‘what makes epiphanic experience distinct
2865 from other sudden, positive, and profound experiences?’, the following will be discussed.
2866 First, the markers of epiphanic experience will be operationalised in order to orient the reader
2867 to the language being used. Second, the distinctiveness of epiphanic experience will be
2868 explored by examining the results of the scoping review more closely.

2869

2870 **Figure 3.7**

2871 *Terminologies used to describe sudden, positive, and profound change*

2872



2873

2874 3.3.1) *The Markers of Epiphanic Experience*

2875 Given that the markers of epiphanic experience changed by virtue of the CRist-
2876 informed charting process, before addressing the research question each will be briefly
2877 operationalised. ‘Brief’ still refers to the notion that epiphanic experiences cannot be
2878 sustained for long periods of time, usually less than 24 hours. ‘Abrupt’ is an amalgamation of
2879 the terms previously used in the literature ‘sudden’ and ‘surprising’ and is intended to evoke
2880 these synonymous concepts. ‘Memorable’ denotes that epiphanic experiences are
2881 remembered long after their occurrence. ‘Enduring’ refers to the notion that the changes
2882 engendered by an epiphanic experience tend to be permanent. ‘Benevolent’ describes the
2883 tendency for epiphanic experiences to, ultimately, be a positive and beneficial force for
2884 change. Finally, ‘profound’ represents a ‘deep’, holistic, and often transcendent change in the
2885 individual’s internal landscape.

2886 It is worth elaborating on the markers ‘noetic’ and ‘somatic’ given the novelty of this
2887 conceptualisation within the literature on epiphanic experience. ‘Noetic’ is a term used to
2888 denote activity relating to the mind (or intellect) and is representative of the tendency for
2889 epiphanic experiences to involve the emergence of some kind of new object of knowledge or
2890 way of knowing. ‘Somatic’ refers to activity pertaining to the body and denotes the tendency
2891 for epiphanic experiences to involve changes to physical sensation and perception. The
2892 innately embodied aspect of epiphanic experience has previously been noted by Amos
2893 (2016), which lends support to establishing this as a core marker of epiphanic experience.
2894 ‘Epistemic’ noesis aligns with what the literature has dubbed insightful type epiphanic
2895 experience; this kind of noesis is generally experienced as a moment of particularly powerful
2896 insight or awareness – it denotes the emergence of a new kind of knowledge or way of
2897 knowing, specifically relevant to the life of the individual. ‘Ontic’ noesis aligns with what the
2898 literature terms mystical type epiphanic experience; this kind of noesis is often numinous in
2899 nature and frequently precedes a change in the individuals’ conceptualisation of the nature of
2900 reality. Both these markers (noetic and somatic) reflect the inner nature of epiphanic
2901 experiences and together represent a new way of conceptualising the differences in epiphanic
2902 experiences previously characterised by the insightful-mystical continuum (see Chapter 2,
2903 section 3).

2904 The reason ‘noetic’ and ‘somatic’ were established as separate markers was that the
2905 reviewer noticed that epiphanic experience is an embodied, or somatic, experience. Sensitised
2906 by Amos’ (2016) work, and Bhaskar’s ontology of personhood which recognises the
2907 embodied nature of the self (see Chapter 1, section 2.6), it became evident that, because it had
2908 not been recognised in its own right, the pronounced somatic element of epiphanic experience
2909 had been tacitly subsumed under the label ‘mystical’. This was considered problematic given
2910 that, although somatic changes were more likely to occur in conjunction with ontic noesis

2911 (previously termed: mystical), this was just a tendency, and not an entirely consistent one at
2912 that. Epistemically noetic experiences sometimes included changes to physical sensation and
2913 perception, although in a perhaps less rich and pronounced manner than numinous
2914 experiences. Because the insightful-mystical continuum does not distinguish between what is
2915 noetic and what is somatic, it can lead to the assumption that only experiences on the
2916 mystical end of the continuum involve somatic features. Therefore, this new configuration
2917 was thought to be able to better accommodate for nuance and represents a novel contribution
2918 to the literature.

2919 Therefore, whilst ‘noesis’ represents a new way of conceiving of the
2920 insightful/mystical dichotomy proposed in the literature, ‘somatic’ introduces an entirely new
2921 marker in order to explicitly address the recurring tendency in the data for epiphanic
2922 experiences as well as other sudden, positive, and profound changes to often involve changes
2923 to physical sensation and perception. Now that terms have been defined and explored,
2924 attention turns to determining the distinctiveness of epiphanic experience as a phenomenon
2925 amidst this ‘landscape’ of terminology.

2926

2927 ***3.3.2) Delineating Epiphanic Experience***

2928 The data strongly suggests that epiphanic experience can be conceptually and
2929 operationally distinguished from other kinds of sudden, positive, and profound change (see
2930 Table 3.1 below). Moreover, the categories of epiphany, quantum change, and SPT can all be
2931 considered functionally equivalent conceptualisations of epiphanic experience as they each
2932 tended to be highly congruent with the markers that were charted in support of extant
2933 literature (e.g., Ilivitsky, 2011; McDonald, 2005). However, it is worth noting that the term
2934 ‘epiphany’, as an individual term, was more likely to be attributed to experiences without a

2935 numinous component. Further, whilst epiphany, quantum change, and SPT can be considered
2936 essentially equivalent categories two unique terms were also used to describe functionally
2937 identical experiences: (1) God encounter experience (Griffiths, Hurwitz, Davis, Johnson &
2938 Jesse, 2019), and (2) Transformative Positive Experience (Naor & Mayseless, 2020). This
2939 suggests that the labelling of these experiences may be less important than the experience
2940 itself.

2941 Whilst only the categories of epiphany, quantum change, and SPT consistently
2942 demonstrated almost complete congruence with the key markers associated with epiphanic
2943 experience, each of the eight other categories displayed certain similarities:

2944 1. **Anomalous experience:** Charting of the data on anomalous experience found it to
2945 be abrupt, profound, memorable, somatic, and noetic in an ontic sense, but not
2946 necessarily in an epistemic sense. There were mixed responses with regard to the
2947 benevolence of anomalous experiences, as some of the participants recounted
2948 overtly negative paranormal-type experiences. The articles reviewed tended not to
2949 address the brevity and enduringness of anomalous experiences, therefore
2950 impeding clarity on these factors, but more pertinently, suggesting that these are
2951 not core features of this kind of experience.

2952 2. **Awakening:** Although each paper reviewed used a different term to denote an
2953 awakening experience, most were found to be profound, benevolent, memorable,
2954 and enduring – but largely without a pronounced somatic component. It was not
2955 possible to gain clarity with regards to the brevity, abruptness, or noetic
2956 components of awakening experiences as these were not noted by the authors in
2957 the studies reviewed. This does not automatically indicate that these are not

2958 features of awakening experiences, but perhaps instead that they are not necessary
2959 or consistent components of an awakening experience.

2960 3. **Awe:** Awe, as a concept, was found to be a largely profound, benevolent,
2961 memorable, and noetic (ontic) experience. However, whilst awe is considered an
2962 epistemic *emotion* (thereby further differentiating it from the other terms in this
2963 review), this feature was only clearly referred to in half of the included studies
2964 (Cuzzolino, 2019; Schindler et al., 2017). Moreover, there was a considerable lack
2965 of clarity regarding the other markers used in the charting system (i.e., brief,
2966 abrupt, noetic (epistemic), somatic, and enduring). This suggests that whilst these
2967 features may manifest during experiences of awe, they have not been considered
2968 core markers of awe by researchers.

2969 4. **Insight:** The process of charting revealed that insight experiences were, in the
2970 majority of cases, epistemically noetic, abrupt, and benevolent – there were no
2971 instances of ontic noesis, nor any somatic changes. The relevance of the remaining
2972 markers in the charting framework to insight were in large part, unclear. It is
2973 possible that this is due to these features not being part of the core characteristics
2974 of insight, but instead features that can sometimes be present, dependant of
2975 individual differences and context.

2976 5. **Mystical experience:** The process of charting illustrated that mystical experiences
2977 tend to be brief, ontically noetic, memorable, enduring, benevolent, and profound.
2978 This explicitly contradicts the pervading assumption in the literature on epiphanic
2979 experience that mystical experiences can be positive, but need not be profound
2980 (Ilivitsky, 2011). There was less clarity within the articles as to whether mystical
2981 experiences are abrupt and epistemically noetic, though some papers did convey
2982 these characteristics (i.e., Galadari, 2019; James, 1902).

2983 6. **Peak experience:** Overall, peak experiences were found to be brief, epistemically
2984 noetic, memorable, and benevolent. However, whilst some experiences were
2985 profound and ontically noetic, abruptness and enduringness were found to be less
2986 critical as features of peak experience.

2987 7. **Transformative experiences¹⁹:** There was general consensus that the changes
2988 ensuing this category of experience are profound, benevolent, and enduring, and
2989 that the experience itself is memorable. However, there was little consensus
2990 regarding the other aspects of the transformative experience. Two papers
2991 demonstrated congruence with the stipulated markers, one regarding spiritual
2992 transformation (Forcehimes, 2004), and another regarding personal transformation
2993 that occurred as a result of peak experience (Naor & Maysseless, 2020). However,
2994 despite this congruence, other papers that were reviewed on spiritual and personal
2995 transformations did not share these characteristics. This may suggest that these
2996 labels refer to much broader concepts within which there can occur more
2997 variation, or that there is conceptual ambiguity with reference to these terms. In
2998 any case, the brevity, abruptness, noetic, and somatic components of epiphanic
2999 experience appear less critical to these conceptualisations of transformative
3000 experiences.

3001 8. **Other unique terminologies²⁰:** These conceptualisations are unique
3002 representations within the literature, therefore making further analysis difficult.
3003 However, the majority of these experiences were memorable, benevolent,

¹⁹ The category of Transformative Experiences contained the following terminologies: (1) narrative transformation, (2) post-traumatic transformation, (3) personal transformation, (4) consciousness transformation, (5) transformative experience, (6) spiritual transformation, (7) existential transformation, (8) transformative life experience, (9) transformative tourism experience, and (10) transformative positive experience (n = 11 studies).

²⁰ The category of Other Unique Terminologies contained the following terms: (1) corrective experience, (2) emptiness, (3) extraordinary experience, (4) God encounter experience, (5) healing moments, (6) naturally occurring change, (7) personal spiritual experience, (8) profound emotional experience, (9) sacred moments, (10) self-transcendent experience, (11) spiritually transcendent experience, (12) spontaneous recovery, (13) positive self-transition, (14) the unencumbered moment, and (15) pivotal mental states (n = 15 studies).

3004 profound, and many were enduring, abrupt, and noetic. Of the terms used in this
3005 category, only two were congruent with the stipulated markers of epiphanic
3006 experience: God encounter experience (Griffiths, Hurwitz, Davis, Johnson &
3007 Jesse, 2019) and sacred moments (Lomax, Kripal & Pargament, 2011).
3008 Interestingly, analysis of Murray's (2005) unencumbered moment revealed that
3009 neither brevity nor abruptness were consistent features of this experience. This is
3010 important to note as it was used by Ilivitsky (2011) in her conceptualisation of
3011 sudden personal transformation.

3012 The commonalities that run through and between each of the 11 categories of sudden,
3013 positive, and profound change found in this study, indicate that these are generally, and to
3014 varying degrees, intimately entwined experiences. It also suggests that, whilst they have been
3015 presented as such for clarity, these categories are not wholly distinct. This means that we
3016 must hold these categories lightly, with the understanding that this is a spectrum of
3017 experiences, and as such there will be overlap and concrete singularities that may be more
3018 challenging to define.

3019 The areas of conceptual overlap between epiphanic experience and other categories
3020 can also provide further context for the phenomenon of epiphanic experience. In particular,
3021 the overlap between epiphanic experience and mystical experience, suggested in the literature
3022 (e.g., Ilivitsky, 2011; James, 1902), is supported by this data. Mystical experiences can be
3023 seen to have the tendency to manifest in a very similar manner to epiphanic experiences, but
3024 critically, tend to manifest without a pronounced epistemic component. This may suggest a
3025 continuum of experience on which epiphanic experience and mystical experience coexist.
3026 Further, the fact that epiphanic experiences routinely tend to have an epistemic noetic
3027 component may indicate that the category 'insight' also exists on this continuum of

3028 experience. Perhaps then, epiphanic experience can be conceived of as an interface between
3029 these two phenomena, embodying varying degrees of both.

3030

3031

Table 3.1

3032

Table charting the markers of epiphanic experience against different categories of sudden, positive, and profound change

Type of Sudden, Positive, and Profound Change	Marker of Epiphanic Experience								
	Brief	Abrupt	Noetic		Somatic	Memorable	Enduring	Benevolent	Profound
			Epistemic	Ontic					
Anomalous Experience	?	Y	?	Y	Y	Y	?	?*	Y
Awakening	?*	?*	?	?*	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Awe	?	?*	?*	Y	?*	Y	?*	Y	Y
Epiphany	Y	Y	Y	N	Y/N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Insight	?	Y	Y	N	N	?	?	Y	?
Mystical Experience	Y	?	?*	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Peak Experience	Y	?	Y	?*	?	Y	?	Y	?*
Quantum Change	Y	Y	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Sudden Personal Transformation	Y	Y	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Transformative Experiences	?*	?*	?*	?*	?*	Y	Y	Y	Y
Other Unique Terminologies	?*	?*	?*	?*	?*	Y	Y	Y	Y

3033

* 'Y' = 'yes'; 'N' = 'no'; 'Y/N' = 'both yes and no'; '?' = 'unclear'; '*?' = no one value attained 60% prevalence. In this table, these response

3034

items represent 'absolute values' (see section 2.4 above)

4) Conclusion

3035

3036 This chapter has provided a philosophically and methodologically rigorous
3037 justification for the treatment of epiphanic experience as a distinct type of nonlinear,
3038 discontinuous change that is interconnected and intertwined with many of the other
3039 experiences detailed above. Further, it has explored, and more tightly conceptualised the
3040 nature of epiphanic experience. Epiphanic experience can be considered a brief experience
3041 with an abrupt onset, wherein it is common to experience a pronounced sense of noesis,
3042 typified by the presence of personal (epistemic) and/or numinous (ontic) mental phenomena,
3043 as well as changes to physical sensation and perception (i.e., somatic changes). An epiphanic
3044 experience tends to catalyse ‘deep’, holistic personal changes that the individual ultimately
3045 views as beneficial, and which persist over time. Epiphanic experience is noticeably different
3046 from normal waking consciousness and as such is vividly remembered for long after. The
3047 presence of these markers, to greater or lesser extents, is what distinguishes epiphanic
3048 experience, in the domain of the Empirical, from any of the other categories discussed in this
3049 chapter. This represents a refined and novel conceptualisation of epiphanic experience that
3050 can inform future study on the subject.

3051 Further, the work contained within this chapter has functioned as an act of under-
3052 labouring (Bhaskar, 2017) towards an understanding of the nature of epiphanic experience.
3053 This aligns with common conceptualisations of the role of the CRist researcher, which
3054 advocate for investigating the intrinsic nature of a phenomenon, before moving towards
3055 identification of the underlying generative mechanisms from which the observed reality
3056 might have emerged (Bhaskar, 2009; see Chapter 1, section 3). Therefore, it is at this stage
3057 that attention turns to the second research question: what are the distinct experiential features
3058 of epiphanic experience? Exploration of this question will enable the provision of a more

3059 intensive account and understanding of the nature of epiphanic experience, which, in turn,
3060 will facilitate subsequent explorations into the generative mechanisms underpinning
3061 epiphanic experience.

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Chapter 4: A Thematic Synthesis of Epiphanic Experience

3078

1) Introduction

3079

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an answer to the second research question:

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what are the distinct experiential features of epiphanic experience? Although there exist

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content (McDonald, 2005) and concept (Chilton, 2015) analyses of epiphanic experience

3082

these are methodologically opaque and outdated given that several studies have been

3083

conducted since 2015. Therefore, the contents of this chapter are important, not just as a

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continued act of under-labouring, but also in explicitly developing as rich an understanding as

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possible of the domain of the Empirical (see Chapter 1, section 2.5). This intensive account of

3086

the nature of epiphanic experience is considered facilitative of any subsequent aims to

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explore the generative mechanisms underpinning epiphanic experience – which this research

3088

seeks to do (Bhaskar, 2009). Therefore, it was deemed important to conduct a synthesis of

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epiphanic experiences that: (1) included the full scope of the current literature, (2) was

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presented in a manner that allowed the end-user to clearly see how the researcher arrived at

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their conclusions, and (3) facilitated the exploration of generative mechanisms that will be

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detailed in Chapter 5.

3093

Approaches to syntheses of qualitative research are varied and include, for example,

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critical interpretive synthesis, grounded theory synthesis, meta-study, meta-ethnography, and

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thematic synthesis (Tong, Flemming, McInnes, Oliver & Craig, 2012). The approach that was

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adopted for this study was thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008). The rationale for

3097

this decision was based on the philosophical positioning of thematic synthesis, which is

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congruent with CR as it acknowledges that knowledge of reality is mediated by one's

3099

personal perspectives, as well as their socio-political, historical, cultural, and linguistic

3100

context (Tong, et al., 2012). Further, thematic synthesis can be considered an appropriate

3101 method from a CRist perspective as it favours intensive qualitative methods for investigating
3102 social phenomena (Bhaskar, 2009). The practicalities of thematic synthesis will be explored
3103 in the Method section below.

3104

3105

2) Method

3106 The peer reviewed protocol ‘Enhancing Transparency in Reporting the Synthesis of
3107 Qualitative Research’ (ENTREQ; Tong, et al., 2012; see Appendix C) was used as a
3108 guideline for reporting the findings of this study. The ENTREQ is a framework for the
3109 reporting and synthesis of primary sources of qualitative research and was developed to
3110 establish a standard for reporting qualitative syntheses that enables the end-user to better
3111 understand the processes employed (Tong, et al., 2012). The ENTREQ consists of 21 items
3112 grouped into five domains: (1) introduction, (2) methods and methodology, (3) literature
3113 search and selection, (4) appraisal of included studies, and (5) synthesis of the findings
3114 (Franco et al., 2015; Tong et al., 2012). This process was further supported by reference to
3115 the ‘Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses’ (PRISMA)
3116 statement (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Altman, 2009) and PRISMA elaboration and
3117 explanation document (Liberati et al., 2009). The purpose of these texts is to provide authors
3118 conducting systematic reviews with guidelines that will improve their reporting (Moher,
3119 Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Altman, 2009). Reference to the PRISMA guidelines is recommended
3120 by Tong et al. (2012) for reporting the different phases of searching, screening, and
3121 identifying relevant studies. For clarity, the structure of this chapter will mirror these
3122 recommendations.

3123

3124 **2.1) Search Strategy and Inclusion Criteria**

3125 Methodologically, this study was a continuation of the scoping review presented in
3126 Chapter 3. Therefore, elements of the procedure, most specifically pertaining to the
3127 identification and extraction of relevant studies, will initially appear familiar to the reader. In
3128 order to conduct a comprehensive search of the psychological literature on epiphanic
3129 experience the following databases were searched: (1) APA PsychNET, (2) Scopus, and (3)
3130 CINAHL Plus. These databases were selected as they were available through the University
3131 of Hertfordshire LRC and are relevant to the research area due to their focus on psychological
3132 phenomena. Grey literature (i.e., research that is produced outside traditional academic
3133 channels of publication and distribution) that was not detected by these databases was
3134 searched for using Open Grey (www.opengrey.eu). Google Scholar was also used for
3135 additional handsearching. A search of titles, abstracts, key words, and texts was run on
3136 11/01/2021, although the researcher checked every two months until 11/01/2022 for any
3137 newly published literature that should be included.

3138 Search terms used were structured using BOOLEAN operators considered
3139 appropriate. Techniques such as proximity searching, truncations, and wildcard symbols were
3140 also used in keeping with the different requirements of each database. An example search for
3141 APA PsychNET was:

3142

3143 epiphan* OR "quantum chang*" OR "mystical experience*" OR personal ADJ3
3144 transform* OR "sudden personal transformation*" OR sudden ADJ3 change* OR
3145 unexpect* ADJ3 change* OR last* ADJ3 change* or spontaneous ADJ3 change* OR
3146 discont* ADJ3 change* OR ineffab* ADJ3 change* OR mystical ADJ3 change* OR
3147 unusual ADJ3 change* OR abrupt ADJ3 change* OR rapid* ADJ3 change* OR acute
3148 ADJ3 change* OR transform* ADJ3 change* OR nonlinear ADJ3 change* OR non-
3149 linear ADJ3 change* OR brief ADJ3 change* OR positive ADJ3 change* OR
3150 profound ADJ3 change *

3151

3152 Additionally, search items were restricted to those written in the English language,
3153 and no limitations were placed on the year of publication.

3154 The results gathered from searching the aforementioned databases were imported into
3155 Mendeley (Version 1.19.4), duplicates were removed, and titles and abstracts were screened
3156 for eligibility. The criteria used to determine eligibility for inclusion were reflective of the
3157 SPIDER framework (i.e., Sample, Phenomenon of Interest, Design, Evaluation, Research
3158 type; Cooke, Smith & Booth, 2012). ‘Sample’ refers to the participant group characteristics;
3159 ‘Phenomenon of Interest’ refers to what is under investigation; ‘Design’ refers to the
3160 theoretical framework implemented; ‘Evaluation’ refers to the outcome measures of the study
3161 (e.g., attitudes or views); and ‘Research Type’ refers to the type of research (i.e., qualitative,
3162 quantitative, mixed methods).

3163 Given the relatively small pool of data from which to draw on the subject of epiphanic
3164 experience no inclusion criteria were set with regards to the sample or evaluation. However,
3165 it was stipulated that the study needed to have a sample population (i.e., possess primary
3166 data) to be included. Studies were included if they referred to the phenomenon of interest
3167 (epiphanic experience), as defined by the markers identified within the scoping review (i.e.,
3168 brief, abrupt, noetic, somatic, memorable, enduring, benevolent, and profound). With regards
3169 to design, and research type, studies were excluded if they were exclusively quantitative in
3170 nature. Finally, whilst it is common practice for thematic syntheses to use a second reviewer,
3171 this was not considered appropriate given that this study is part of a doctoral thesis and as
3172 such must be independent in nature. However, the researcher’s primary supervisor acted as a
3173 critical friend throughout the research process (Deuchar, 2008; Smith & McGannon, 2018;
3174 Smith, Sparkes & Caddick, 2014).

3175

3176 **2.2) Comprehensiveness of Reporting**

3177 Assessing the quality of qualitative research is a contentious issue as there is no set or
3178 standardised criteria to undertake this process (Barbour, 2001; Mays & Pope, 2000; Spencer,
3179 Ritchie, Lewis, & Dillon, 2003; Tong et al., 2012; the reader is referred to the CR ideas
3180 around quality of inferences that have already been discussed in Chapter 1, section 3.3.2).
3181 Moreover, there is scant evidence that the quality of the reporting bears any effect on how
3182 trustworthy, transferable, or robust the findings of a particular study are (Dixon-Woods,
3183 Booth & Sutton, 2007; Tong et al., 2012). Despite this, it has become standard practice to
3184 include a quality appraisal when conducting a synthesis of qualitative research.

3185 In order to appraise the quality of the included studies the ‘Qualitative Assessment
3186 and Review Instrument’ (QARI; Joanna Briggs Institute, 2003) was used. The QARI asks
3187 questions which require the reviewer to judge the congruency of various aspects of the
3188 research (McInnes & Wimpenny, 2008), and has been found to be a coherent tool, sensitive
3189 to aspects of validity (Hannes, Lockwood & Pearson, 2010). The 10-item QARI checklist
3190 was selected, rather than other existing tools such as CASP or COREQ (Mays and Pope,
3191 2000), because it emphasises the overarching role of philosophy, and the importance of
3192 congruency at each level of the research process (McInnes & Wimpenny, 2008; Spencer,
3193 Ritchie, Lewis, & Dillon, 2003). Therefore, using a measure of quality that placed emphasis
3194 on philosophy as its primary focus was considered the most CR-congruent act as CRist
3195 thought considers empirical social science and philosophy to be fundamentally intertwined
3196 constructs (Bhaskar, 1979).

3197 Table 4.1 below presents the QARI items. Each item on the instrument requires rating
3198 as either ‘yes’, ‘no’, or ‘unclear’. All included texts were evaluated according to this
3199 framework, and the decision was made to exclude any study that did not align with the ten
3200 QARI items, with the exclusion of items 6 and 7. These two items were considered ‘non-
3201 essential’ as their inclusion was considered to be reflective of the researcher’s personal
3202 philosophical positioning. Comprehensiveness of reporting was relatively consistent across
3203 studies with between eight and ten of the criteria being reported for each of the included
3204 studies.

3205

3206 **Table 4.1**

3207 *Qualitative Assessment and Review Instrument (QARI; Joanna Briggs Institute, 2003)*
3208 *Items*

QARI Statement

1. There is congruity between the stated philosophical perspective and the research methodology.
2. There is congruity between the research methodology and the research question or objectives.
3. There is congruity between the research methodology and the methods used to collect data.
4. There is congruity between the research methodology and the representation and analysis of data.
5. There is congruity between the research methodology and the interpretation of results.
6. There is a statement locating the researcher culturally or theoretically.
7. The influence of the researcher on the research and vice versa is addressed.
8. Participants, and their voices, are adequately represented.
9. The research is ethical according to current criteria or, for recent studies, there is evidence of ethical approval by an appropriate body.

10. Conclusions drawn in the research report do appear to flow from the analysis or interpretation of the data.

3209

3210 **2.3) Data Extraction**

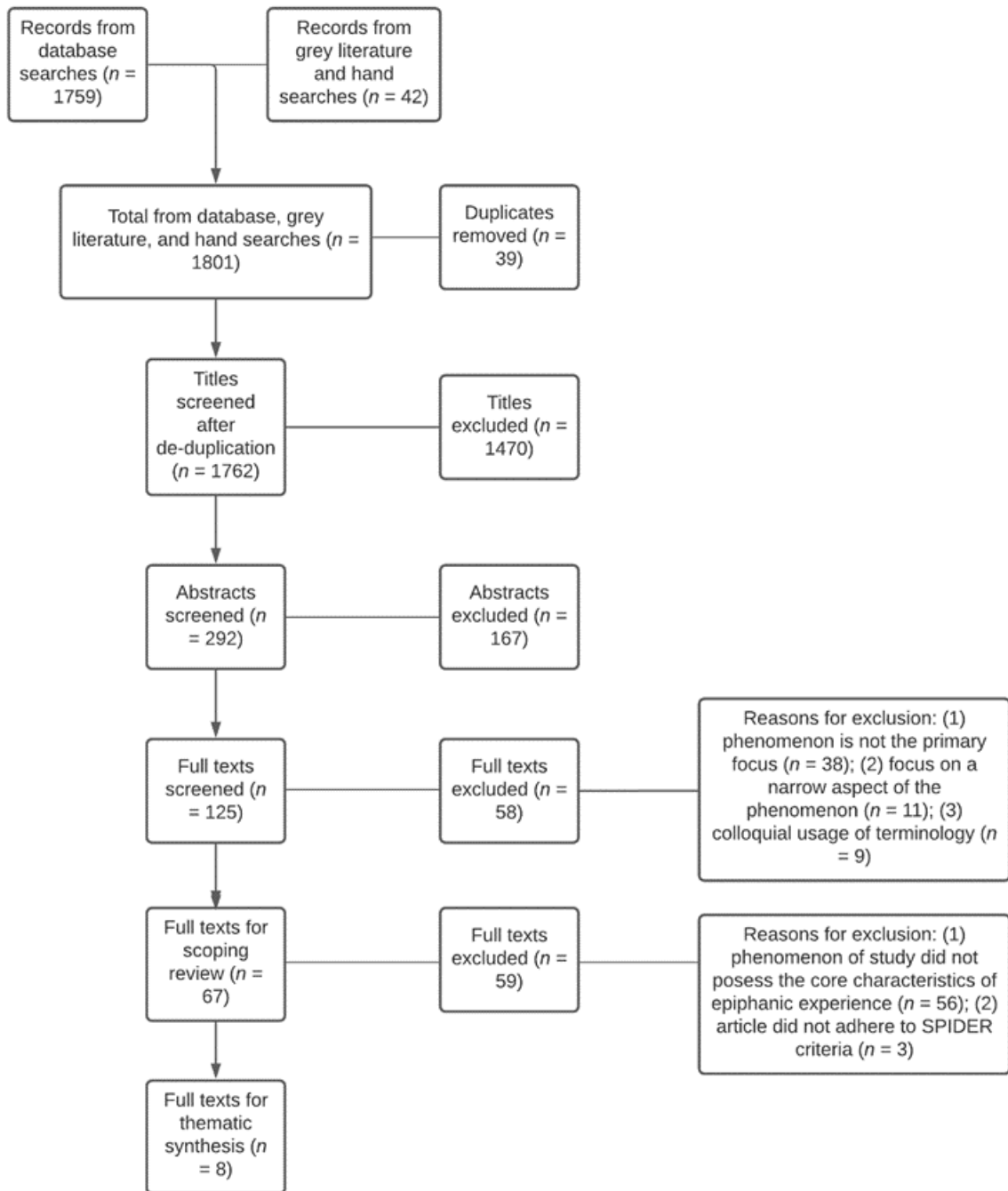
3211 A total of eight studies (participant $n = 111$) were included in the thematic synthesis.

3212 Figure 4.1 below demonstrates how many studies were screened and indicates the reasons for
3213 inclusion/exclusion from the synthesis, whilst Table 4.2 reports the characteristics of the
3214 studies included.

3215

3216 **Figure 4.1**

3217 ***Search Process and Results***



3218

3219 **Table 4.2**

3220 *Characteristics of included studies*

Author(s)	Date	Country	Population	Number of Participants	Data Collection	Data Analysis	Research Question/Aim
Amos	2016	UK	People who had experienced a self-identified Sudden Personal Transformation	6 (4 male, 2 female)	Unstructured interviews	IPA	<i>“Research Question One: How do individuals make sense of their SPT experiences? Research Question Two: How does a SPT impact the lives of those who have experienced them? Research Question Three: How can qualitative research facilitate the expression of lived experience which is considered as ‘more than words can say’?”</i> (p. 20)
Ilivitsky	2011	Canada	People who had experienced a self-identified Sudden Personal Transformation	3 (1 male, 2 female)	Semi-structured interviews	Thematic Analysis	<i>“What are the self-reported facilitative factors and causal mechanisms for individuals who have experienced a Sudden Personal Transformation?”</i> (p. 55)
Jarvis	1997	USA	People who had experienced a self-identified epiphany	5 (all male)	Semi-structured interviews	Un-formalised coding method	<i>“To explore the nature of the epiphanic experience”</i> (p. v)
McDonald	2005	Australia	People who had experienced a self-identified epiphany	5 (1 male, 4 female)	In-depth life-story interviews	Narrative analysis	<i>“To understand experience termed epiphanies from an existential philosophical and</i>

							psychological standpoint” (p. 15)
McGovern	2021	Ireland	Psychotherapists who had experienced an epiphany	8 (2 male, 6 female)	Autoethnography, interviews, and written accounts	Hermeneutic phenomenological	“To explore experienced psychotherapists lived experience of an epiphanic experience that presents as a sudden moment of self-awareness” (p. 46)
Miller and C’de Baca	2001	USA	People who had experienced a self-identified Quantum Change	55 (24 male, 31 female)	Interviews	Unclear	An open exploration into the phenomenon of quantum change (assumed as not stated by authors)
Naor and Mayseless	2020	Israel	People who identified as having had quick positive transformation, taking place in nature	15 (5 male, 10 female)	Interviews	Phenomenological analysis	“ <i>Research Question 1</i> : How has peak experience in nature led to rapid personal transformation from the perspective of those undergoing that experience? <i>Research Question 2</i> : How was nature implicated in this process?” (p. 871)
Skalski and Hardy	2013	USA	People who identified as having had a sudden, transformative experience	14 (7 male, 7 female)	Interviews	A modified grounded theory method that incorporated team consensus	“To capture idiographic, intra-individual, and discontinuous transformation and new consciousness using qualitative research methods.” (p. 165)

3222

3223 QSR International’s NVivo 12 software was used to code, store, and search the data.
3224 However, whilst the issue of what ‘counts’ as data is simple to answer when synthesising
3225 quantitative data, it is considerably less simple when qualitative data is the focus of attention
3226 as participant data and researcher interpretation often becomes intertwined (Campbell et al.,
3227 2003; Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002; Sandelowski, 2004; Thomas & Harden, 2008). The
3228 current study followed the example set by the originators of thematic synthesis and included
3229 any data subsumed under the labels of ‘results’ or ‘findings’ (Thomas & Harden, 2008).
3230 However, given that some of the research reviewed was in the form of (unpublished) doctoral
3231 theses, what constituted as ‘results’ or ‘findings’ differed on a case-by-case basis. Table 4.3
3232 details the chapters/sections that were analysed from each piece of research. It should be
3233 noted that whilst Amos (2016a) and McDonald’s (2005) doctoral theses were analysed, both
3234 published elements of their theses. However, these individual studies were not included as
3235 they contained heavily abridged versions of their doctoral work and as such, their theses were
3236 viewed as more complete sources of data.

3237

3238 **Table 4.3**

3239 *Chapters/sections analysed from each included study*

Author(s)	Chapters/sections Analysed
Amos (2016a)	Chapter 3 (only section: ‘Introducing the participants’) and Chapter 4
Ilivitsky (2011)	Chapter 4
Jarvis (1997)	Chapter 4 and Chapter 5
McDonald (2005)	Chapter 5 and Chapter 6
McGovern (2021)	Findings
Miller and C’de Baca (2001)	Chapters 2 to 17
Naor and Mayseless (2020)	Results
Skalski and Hardy (2013)	Results

3240

3241 **2.4) Data Synthesis and Analysis**

3242 Thomas and Harden's (2008) three-step process was used to guide synthesis of the
3243 data. However, whilst thematic synthesis is purported to be innately congruent with a CRist
3244 stance (Tong et al., 2012), greater emphasis was placed on CRist concepts throughout this
3245 process than this method traditionally includes, in order to undertake a truly CRist thematic
3246 synthesis. The instances in which CR was more explicitly integrated are indicated below as
3247 the process of thematic synthesis is detailed:

3248 1. Stage one of thematic synthesis involves free line-by-line coding of the findings of the
3249 selected studies. Line-by-line coding is purported to enable the translation of concepts
3250 from one study to another (Fisher, Qureshi, Hardyman & Homewood, 2006), and is
3251 beneficial when investigating a phenomenon that has been operationalised in multiple
3252 ways. In this study, each sentence was coded at least once. Moreover, all text associated
3253 with a given code was examined to check for consistency.

3254 However, due to the CRist preference for theory-led, flexible deductive coding
3255 (Danermark et al., 2019; Fletcher, 2017), the coding system used was not entirely 'free'.
3256 Bhaskar's theories of the four planar social being, and of the ontology of personhood
3257 (Bhaskar, 2020; see Chapter 1, section 2.6), were used as a provisional deductive
3258 framework for coding, acting as topic-based 'bins' into which the data was coded and
3259 sorted (Fletcher, 2017; Maxwell, 2012). This framework was considered truly
3260 provisional, such that it always had the potential to be subject to change (Fletcher, 2017;
3261 Saldaña, 2013).

3262 2. Stage two involved organisation of the codes into descriptive themes. During this
3263 stage, similarities and differences between codes were searched for to group them into

3264 meaningful hierarchies. These groups were assigned new descriptive codes that captured
3265 the meaning of the codes within the group.

3266 3. Stage three involved the development of analytical themes and – as echoed by the
3267 originators of thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008) – was considered to be the
3268 most challenging to complete. Using the descriptive themes generated in stage two, the
3269 reviewer exercised their own judgement and insight to infer more abstract and analytical
3270 themes that accounted for the emergent descriptive themes. Therefore, the analytical
3271 themes, that put forward a novel interpretation of the subject that goes beyond the
3272 primary studies, become the synthesis output.

3273 The subjective nature of this stage of analysis has sometimes raised controversies
3274 (Thomas & Harden, 2008). However, there are perhaps two responses to this
3275 methodological concern. First, the CRist presuppositions about the world advocate for
3276 epistemological relativism and the open nature of social systems (see Chapter 1, section
3277 2.3 and 2.4, respectively), which means that the notion of attaining objectivity appears
3278 specious²¹. Second, the inherent subjectivity of research in the social sciences was
3279 managed, and supplemented, by continuous reflexivity, particularly through engagement
3280 with communicative reflexivity (largely in the form of critical discussions with the
3281 primary supervisor of this thesis; Smith & McGannon, 2018) and autonomous reflexivity
3282 (Archer, 2003).

²¹ Critical Realism rejects both the positivistic assumption that researchers can be entirely objective and value-neutral, and the social constructionist assumption that because researchers cannot be entirely objective and value-neutral, they should capitulate any attempts to attain objectivity. Instead, CR defines objectivity as being true to the object of enquiry (Pilgrim, 2019; Patel & Pilgrim, 2018). In order to be objective, from a CRist standpoint, one should begin with the ontological focus (which for psychologists, broadly speaking, is human behaviour and interiority) and then find ways to take seriously the complex range of foci (e.g., as exemplified by the four planar social being) that might interact with the phenomenon under investigation.

3306 The word ‘integration’ comes from the Latin word ‘integrat-’, meaning ‘made whole’,
3307 which is itself derived from the word ‘integer’, meaning ‘whole’. Therefore, disintegration
3308 becomes indicative of a movement away from wholeness. This higher order theme was
3309 labelled as such because participants from the studies reviewed were living lives, on the
3310 whole, where things (e.g., relationships, careers, identities) were breaking down, not fitting,
3311 out of order, and chaotic. Each lower order theme will be discussed in turn and the reader is
3312 directed to Table 4.4 for an overview of the lower order themes and sub-themes subsumed
3313 under the higher order theme of Disintegration.

3314

3315 **Table 4.4**

3316 *Overview of lower order themes and sub-themes subsumed under the higher order theme of Disintegration*

Higher Order Theme	Lower Order Theme	Sub-theme	Amos (2016)	Ilivitsky (2011)	Jarvis (1997)	McDonald (2005)	McGovern (2021)	Miller and C'de Baca (2001)	Naor and Mayseless (2020)	Skalski and Hardy (2013)
Disintegration	Material Transactions with Nature	Connection with the Natural World	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
		Formalised Activity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
		Synchronicity	✓			✓		✓		
	Social Interactions Between People	Disintegrative and Disconnected Relationships	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
		Fulfilling and Connected Relationships	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
	Social Structures Sui Generis	Cultural Taboos as Harmful				✓			✓	
		Religious Structures		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
		Leaving Structures Behind	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
	The Embodied Personality	The Ego and its Defence Mechanisms	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
		The Embodied Personality in Turmoil	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Disconnected from The Transcendentally Real Self					✓	✓		✓	✓	✓

Negative Life Experience	Abandonment				✓			✓	
	Abuse				✓			✓	
	Death		✓	✓	✓			✓	
	Illness	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
	Personal Challenges	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Uncertainty	Existential Seeking		✓	✓	✓			✓	
	Feeling Uncertain	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
	Turmoil		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
	Wandering	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	

3317

3318 ***3.1.1) Material Transactions with Nature***

3319 It was relatively common for participants to have epiphanic experiences when
3320 immersed in the natural world. It is suggested that this environment affords epiphanic
3321 experiences as it provides an unpredictable external reality that is capable of reflecting an
3322 individual's internal reality, such as in the case of Lital (Naor & Mayseless, 2020):

3323

3324 While on a boat in the Arctic, Lital was confronted with a specific and concrete
3325 situation that revealed her lifelong fear and anxiety, especially as related to
3326 helplessness and fear of death... "and then I'm on this boat in the Arctic and all of a
3327 sudden temperatures dropped to -10, it's a cold you cannot imagine...I'm freezing,
3328 literally it's the utmost feeling of helplessness...a real fear of death" (p.875).

3329

3330 In this way, by engaging with the natural world, Lital's internal fears were made
3331 manifest in her external world, preventing any avoidance of such fears. Therefore, the
3332 external world might be conceived of as a window to internal worlds (Naor & Mayseless,
3333 2020), providing the individual with unpredictable opportunities to confront themselves.

3334 Further, in the time directly preceding their epiphanic experience, participants often
3335 engaged in some kind of formalised activity. Meditative activity, in particular, was found to
3336 be commonly engaged with by participants prior to epiphanic experience. One of Miller and
3337 C'de Baca's (2001) participants provides a particularly clear example of this kind of
3338 meditative formalised activity:

3339

3340 There was a meal before noon, which was the only main food we had each day. After
3341 the meal there was a rest period, and then more teachings and questions and answers
3342 in the afternoon, then tea and usually two to three more hours of meditation in the
3343 evening. All this was done in silence for thirty days (p.66).

3344

3345 Other participants also engaged in meditative practices immediately prior to their
3346 epiphanic experiences, though usually in contexts that were far less structured than the
3347 aforementioned participant. This facet of formalised activity makes the link between
3348 epiphanic experience and mystical experience (noted in Chapter 3, section 3.3) more
3349 concrete, as meditation has been shown to precipitate mystical experience (de Castro, 2017;
3350 Kundi, 2013; Russ & Elliott, 2017). Moreover, this lends credence to Ilivitsky's (2011)
3351 assertion that formalised activity may be causally relevant to epiphanic experience (see
3352 Chapter 2, section 3.1.3).

3353

3354 ***3.1.2) Social Interactions Between People***

3355 Many participants were connected to, and had fulfilling relationships with, others.
3356 Most commonly, these significant interpersonal connections were found between the
3357 participant and people they were not related to, as many had destructive and dysfunctional
3358 relationships with their parents and families. For Jason (Ilivitsky, 2011), having support from
3359 his friends was critical as:

3360

3361 Without having that kind of support, without at least just knowing that it was there, I
3362 may have, you know, verged over into some real despair... I think, you know, it could
3363 have been I may not have – yeah, without having that love in my life I don't know if I
3364 would have been able to approach it in the way that I did (p.67).

3365

3366 Therefore, the other people present in the lives of the participants can be viewed as
3367 shaping, and in some cases facilitating, their epiphanic experiences – therefore supporting
3368 Ilivitsky (2011) and Miller and C'de Baca's (2001) conclusions. Despite this, participants
3369 generally told stories that emphasised the disconnected and disintegrative nature of their
3370 relationships. Tensions within the family unit were common: "My daughter was breaking up
3371 her marriage. I thought my son was going crazy, and my husband was drinking. My whole
3372 world was falling apart, and I felt that I had nothing to hold on to", recounted a participant of
3373 Miller and C'de Baca (2001, p.25). Further, some participants also spoke of their social
3374 isolation and disconnection from others, such as Cathy (McDonald, 2005), who experienced
3375 postnatal depression, and reflected that "You don't know you've got it because who's going
3376 to tell you? You're at home, isolated from the outside world and you've got no support
3377 networks to rely on" (p.163). Therefore, whilst relationships with others were found to shape
3378 epiphanic experiences, a lack of relationships, or difficult relationships, contributing to an
3379 overall sense of disconnection, can be viewed as facilitative of destabilisation and therefore
3380 contributing to the disintegration of the individual.

3381

3382 ***3.1.3) Social Structures Sui Generis***

3383 Perhaps the most influential structure implicated by the data is that of Religion.
3384 Several participants reported a pre-existing connection to religion and religious beliefs, such
3385 as Laura (Ilivitsky, 2011): “There was always like um... a fear of God though. Like, my mom
3386 always instilled in us that there’s a God and stuff like that” (p.67). However, many
3387 participants were non-believers, and some were openly disdainful of religion, such as
3388 Anderson (who later became a believer; Jarvis, 1997): “I didn't need leaps of faith into an
3389 antiquated religion or to sell out to the mushy thinking Jesus People or Young Life escapist
3390 just to get a little extra love in my life” (p.130). The structure of religion is perhaps so
3391 important to an understanding of epiphanic experience because these experiences frequently
3392 caused participants to re-evaluate their relationship with this structure (which will be
3393 discussed below in section 3.3).

3394

3395 ***3.1.4) The Stratification of the Embodied Personality***

3396 All three aspects of Bhaskar’s (2020) model of the self were implicated in this lower
3397 order theme: (1) the ego (i.e., the illusory sense that people possess of themselves as separate
3398 from everything else), (2) the embodied personality (i.e., the mind, emotional makeup, and
3399 physical embodiment of a person), and (3) the transcendently real self (i.e., a person’s
3400 ‘ground state’, or ‘higher self’).

3401

3402 **3.1.4.1) The Ego and its Defence Mechanisms.**

3403 The data revealed that participants' sense of self was generally steeped in negative
3404 associations. Participants described lacking confidence and engaging with self-criticism, self-
3405 doubt, and self-blame, as well as generally disliking themselves. “I had a lack of confidence,

3406 a really poor self-image” reported one of Miller and C’de Baca’s (2001, p.57) participants.
3407 Despite this, many participants described a sense of growing awareness, such as Cathy
3408 (McDonald, 2005) who was “road-testing lots of new things in my life during this period and
3409 I was becoming aware of the fear thing in my body, becoming aware of messages of fear”
3410 (p.176). Skalski and Hardy (2013) describe this growing awareness as participants having
3411 “some understanding [of a tacit, unexpressed consciousness] prior to their experience; it was
3412 as if someone whispered to them about a world beyond the trees” (p.171). This is redolent of
3413 Baumeister’s (1994) crystallisation of discontent, a theory proposed by Miller and C’de Baca
3414 (2001) as having causal explanatory power, whereby the individual begins making
3415 connections between the negative aspects of their lives. However, whilst there appears to be
3416 evidence for participants forming associative connections between negative features in their
3417 lives, there is insufficient evidence to firmly support crystallisation as the cause of the
3418 transformative experience itself.

3419

3420 **3.1.4.2) The Embodied Personality in Turmoil.**

3421 Participants frequently spoke of feeling physically depleted, and sometimes spoke of
3422 feeling tense. Many were exhausted; Jason (Ilivitsky, 2011) explained that “I just felt
3423 extremely tired, you know” (p.63), whilst Laura (Ilivitsky, 2011) recalled that “I was just
3424 tired of everything. I was tired of feeling like this... I was tired of this living, yeah. The life
3425 that I was living I was tired of it” (p.63). Tension was also referred to; Arthur (Jarvis, 1997)
3426 explained that “there was a gradual build-up before the bubble burst in a certain way... There
3427 was a deep tension that had existed for months, years really” (p.160-161).

3428 The sense of depletion conveyed by participants may also be reflected in their
3429 affective states, which were largely characterised by high arousal (Liu et al., 2018; Russell,

3430 1980), negative valence (in particular, sadness and anger), and disconnection. The elevated
3431 arousal levels associated with the emotions experienced by participants may provide context
3432 for the sense of depletion they felt, as higher levels of arousal would consume more energy
3433 (Campbell et al., 2021). Alongside sadness and anger, emotions related to disgust were also
3434 referred to by participants who reported feelings of shame, remorse, and feelings of
3435 wrongness, such as Michelle (McDonald, 2005), who “believed that she was too awful a
3436 person to reveal to the outside world” (p.191). Affective disconnection was evident in
3437 participant descriptions of alienation, isolation, and loneliness, as noted by Peter (McDonald,
3438 2005): “a deep sleep, an emotional hibernation. In a sense I had become alienated from
3439 myself, everyone, and everything around me” (p.129). Concurrently, participants described
3440 feelings of ‘not caring’ that ranged from probable anhedonia to general reduced interest in
3441 things, that are encapsulated most simply and clearly by Robert (Skalski & Hardy, 2013): “I
3442 didn’t really care” (p.173). In this way, disintegration characteristic of the participants' lives
3443 can be seen to have manifested itself throughout the embodied personality.

3444

3445 **3.1.4.3) Disconnected from The Transcendentally Real Self.**

3446 Several participants described being disconnected from a deeper (or higher) sense of
3447 self. Lichtenstein (Jarvis, 1997) explained that “inside I was very disconnected from what I
3448 was feeling and who I was...It is hard to describe exactly because on the outside everything
3449 looked so, so perfect. But I was so disconnected with what was inside” (p.117 & 164). For
3450 some participants, this was attributed to their sense of self being obscured by a particular
3451 burden, or activity from the ego, such as Lital (Naor & Mayseless, 2020): “My whole life I
3452 carry the burden of being a second-generation Holocaust survivor, the whole identity is so
3453 heavy that I don’t really know who I am”. For other participants this was attributed to their

3454 running “away from ‘me’ but ‘me’ was with me all the time... I didn’t have to look at myself,
3455 just a journey ahead and another adventure to be had, new people, better maybe?” (Janet;
3456 McDonald, 2005; p.192).

3457 Using CRist theory as a guiding framework (i.e., Bhaskar, 2020), the above illustrates
3458 that in the time preceding their epiphanic experience participants tended to describe their
3459 embodied personality as being in a state of turmoil, and their transcendently real self as
3460 something from which they had become disconnected. In this way it is implied that the
3461 participants’ overall stratified embodied personality was inconsistent (or ‘out of sync’), again
3462 alluding to the disintegrative nature of the time preceding an epiphanic experience.

3463

3464 *3.1.5 Negative Life Experience*

3465 Almost all participants discussed negative life experiences of some kind, be that:
3466 abandonment, abuse, death, illness (physical or mental), or significant personal challenges.
3467 However, participants most commonly referred to the impact of illness and personal
3468 challenges. Physical illness was noted by some participants. However, instances of mental
3469 illness were more commonly referred to, such as depression. This is clearly represented by a
3470 participant of Miller and C’de Baca (2001): “I just felt like there was no reason to live”
3471 (p.103). Personal challenges were also prevalent and varied in nature. Participants had to
3472 navigate issues pertaining to their families, finances, occupation, and education. Others had
3473 problems with the law that ended in arrest or incarceration. Participants frequently explicitly
3474 or indirectly alluded to their lives being a struggle, such as Bill (Amos, 2016):

3475

3476 I like imagery, and the image that is in my mind is of this deep-sea diver trudging
3477 through the weeds, and the murk at the bottom of the ocean, in the darkness. That's
3478 what life's like: it's just a struggle, it's such an effort to place one foot in front of the
3479 other, nothing seems to work, everything is going against me... (p.114).

3480

3481 These universally experienced, negative life experiences are conceptualised as acting
3482 as catalysts for the sense of disintegration that permeated the lives of the participants prior to
3483 the emergence of their epiphanic experiences. Moreover, this higher order theme is conceived
3484 of as encompassing each of the four dimensions of the four planar social being (Bhaskar
3485 2020; see Chapter 1, section 2.6). Therefore, the importance of negative life experience as a
3486 demi-regularity of epiphanic experience must be emphasised.

3487

3488 ***3.1.6 Uncertainty***

3489 Another defining feature of participants' lives before their epiphanic experience was
3490 uncertainty. Whilst 'uncertainty' as a distinct term was rarely explicitly referred to by
3491 participants (or researchers) it permeated their accounts. For example, uncertainty was
3492 evident in participants' language whereby they demonstrated hesitancy and frequent checking
3493 for understanding and acceptability when discussing their experience (Tree & Schrock,
3494 2002). They also openly made statements such as "I don't know" or "Who knows?". Jason
3495 (Ilivitsky, 2011) epitomised the state of uncertainty that was identifiable in almost all
3496 participant accounts: "there was a large part of what I was doing, which was just like, 'I just
3497 don't – I don't know,' you know? It was like, 'I just really, really don't have the...tools. Like,
3498 I just really am at a loss" (p.64).

3499 Whilst uncertainty was implicitly present throughout the data set, turmoil,
3500 characterised here as “a state of extreme confusion, uncertainty or lack of order” (Cambridge
3501 University Press, n.d.), was explicitly referred to. Turmoil is a facet of epiphanic experience
3502 that has been established in the literature and was again found to be of importance in this
3503 study. However, critically, in this study turmoil is recognised as a corollary of uncertainty.
3504 Anderson (Jarvis, 1997) “recalled the time of his life prior to the experience as one of great
3505 personal turmoil” (p.127). Indeed, turmoil was evident right up until the point of epiphany for
3506 some participants, such as Hadar (Naor & Mayseless, 2020): “I felt so tired and the rocks
3507 looked so big and I had this inner conflict because I really didn’t want to climb, but I told
3508 everybody I would” (p.876).

3509 The fact that uncertainty was rife amongst participants aligns with the presence of
3510 fear-related emotions, as fear-related emotions are intimately connected with the experience
3511 of uncertainty (Carleton et al., 2012; Hirsh, Mar & Peterson, 2012). Cathy (McDonald, 2005)
3512 explained that “I was always alert and fearful” (p.188). However, some participants had
3513 grown accustomed to their fear on some level, for example Arthur (Jarvis, 1997) who was:
3514 “Not totally fearful because I could still function and I was still able to study ... But I had a
3515 lot of fear, huge amounts of fear” (p.160). Anxiety was also frequently referred to, such as in
3516 the case of Lital (Naor & Mayseless, 2020) “who described her life prior to the experience as
3517 living in constant fear and anxiety” (p.875).

3518 Furthermore, uncertainty can be seen to impact, and be impacted by, other lower order
3519 themes. Negative life experience can generate uncertainty, as trauma acts as an aversive event
3520 that undermines assumptions the individual has made about the world around them (Janoff-
3521 Bulman, 1992), therefore boosting uncertainty. By extension, the participants' challenging
3522 experiences detailed in the lower order themes above may have further undermined their

3523 world and self-related assumptions therefore exacerbating uncertainty. This represents a
3524 novel finding, as existing literature has not explicitly identified uncertainty as a significant
3525 experiential feature of epiphanic experience.

3526

3527 **3.2) New Consciousness**

3528 'New Consciousness' was chosen to label this higher order theme in accordance with
3529 the finding that participants experienced something new; a new way of seeing things (large or
3530 small scale), a new understanding, a new view of reality, a new sense of self – in essence: a
3531 new consciousness. What follows is a focused exploration and analysis of the moment of
3532 epiphanic experience. It is important to note that the ineffability that is inherent to mystical
3533 experience (James, 1902), and that has also been associated with mystical epiphanic
3534 experience (Miller & C'de Baca, 2001), permeated most of the accounts of the moment of
3535 epiphanic experience in these studies. As such, there was less information pertaining to this
3536 moment of new consciousness than there was to Disintegration (section 3.1) or Integration
3537 (section 3.3).

3538 Two aspects of Bhaskar's (2020) model of the self were strongly implicated in this
3539 lower order theme: (1) the embodied personality (i.e., the mind, emotional makeup, and
3540 physical embodiment of a person), and (2) the transcendently real self (i.e., a person's
3541 'ground state', or 'higher self'). Each lower order theme will be discussed in turn and the
3542 reader is directed to Table 4.5 for an overview of the lower order themes and sub-themes
3543 subsumed under the higher order theme of New Consciousness.

3544

3545 **Table 4.5**

3546 *Overview of lower order themes and sub-themes subsumed under the higher order theme of New Consciousness*

Higher Order Theme	Lower Order Theme	Sub-theme	Amos (2016)	Ilivitsky (2011)	Jarvis (1997)	McDonald (2005)	McGovern (2021)	Miller and C'de Baca (2001)	Naor and Maysseless (2020)	Skalski and Hardy (2013)
New Consciousness	The Ego	Altered Sense of Identity				✓	✓	✓	✓	
	The Embodied Personality	An Ineffable Sense	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
		Altered Cognitive State	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
		Altered Affective State	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
		Sensorial Changes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	The Transcendentally Real Self	Noesis	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

3547

3548

3549 **3.2.1) *The Embodied Personality***

3550 An altered cognitive state (conceptualised as a noticeable change to the individuals'
3551 usual experience of their cognitive processes) during the moment of epiphany was ubiquitous
3552 across each of the included studies. For example, Lichtenstein (Jarvis, 1997) stated that "I
3553 recall the experience at the level of atoms. Like into the space in between the atoms is where
3554 the space of my spirit was able to travel ... that's the space that I climbed into" (p.119).
3555 Indeed, there was a wide variety of altered states²² described by participants, such as:
3556 absorption, non-duality (defined as "those states of being and consciousness in which the
3557 sense of separate individuality and autonomy has been metabolized or dissolved into the flow
3558 of experience"; Davis, 1998, p.9), and some participants' epiphanic experiences were the
3559 result of a meaningful dream. Another cognitive feature of epiphanic experience was
3560 described by participants as a sense of letting go and relinquishing control of various
3561 structures. Kevin (Skalski & Hardy, 2013) explained that: "I was almost just compelled to let
3562 go [of his understanding of self and world], to let it go... Because if I didn't, if I held on to
3563 that, it's just going to destroy me" (p.168).

3564 Participants also commonly noted altered affective states prior to their epiphanic
3565 experience. Whilst emotions of a negative valence were common prior to epiphanic
3566 experience participants rarely referred to emotions with a negative valence during epiphanic
3567 experience. High arousal manifestations of positive emotion sometimes took the form of awe,
3568 such as Firelight (Amos, 2016) who "was simply rendered in awe" (p.89). Other participants

²² Consciousness is defined by Garcia-Romeu and Tart (2013) as "the subjective awareness and experience of internal and external phenomena" (p.123), whilst references to states of consciousness signify "the spectrum of ways in which experience may be organised" (p.123). Altered states of consciousness are therefore deviations from a "baseline state of consciousness" (Tart, 1975, p.5), where the baseline refers to the discrete state of normal waking consciousness.

3569 experienced forms of high arousal happiness, such as ecstasy. One of Miller and C’de Baca’s
3570 (2001) participants described that:

3571

3572 I knelt down in the earth and picked up some sand and rocks, and I experienced God
3573 in the earth. I don’t know whether I was holding it or it was holding me. It was an
3574 experience of ecstasy, which literally means “being out of your skin” (p.101).

3575

3576 However, the most commonly referred to emotive state was calm, a low arousal
3577 positive emotion, as epitomised by Thomas (Skalski & Hardy, 2013): “and all of the sudden,
3578 I had this overwhelming calm come over me” (p.169). This sense of calm was felt as
3579 reassurance, relief, and as a soothing emotional state, such as in the case of Arthur (Jarvis,
3580 1997), who described experiencing “this enormous flood of relief” (p.85). Therefore, the
3581 participants' new consciousness marked a significant shift away from negative emotion, and
3582 perhaps also a shift into a lower state of psychophysiological arousal (Porges, 2018; Van der
3583 Kolk, 2014).

3584 Altered sensorial states were referred to in all of the included studies, and constituted
3585 the strongest sub-theme subsumed under ‘the embodied personality’. Some participants
3586 experienced altered visual experiences, such as Arthur (Jarvis, 1997) who “had a vision of
3587 Christ on the cross” (p.85), or one of Miller and C’de Baca’s participants who recounted that
3588 “It was as if there were light in the room...It was like the light was coming out from me”
3589 (p.90). Auditory experiences were very common; some attributed the voice to their higher
3590 power and others did not make attributions. One of Miller and C’de Baca’s (2001)
3591 participants described that: “A voice came into my mind and said, “Everything will be all

3592 right; I am here to protect you, and I will be with you always”” (p.78). Although hearing
3593 voices is a common symptom of psychosis (i.e., auditory hallucinations; Johns et al., 2014;
3594 Ohayon, 2000), it must be stressed that none of the participants pathologised their auditory
3595 experiences.

3596 Though participants often described altered visual, and auditory, experiences
3597 descriptions of altered somatosensory states were most commonly referred to. For some,
3598 changes in temperature were experienced such as a “warm feeling” (Stephanie; McDonald,
3599 2005, p.145), or chills, where “the hair stands up on the back of your neck” (Langton; Jarvis,
3600 1997, p.149). Other sensations were more challenging to describe, and so participants
3601 frequently used metaphorical²³ language to describe their perceptions of their somatosensory
3602 states, such as Stephanie (McDonald, 2005) who described a sense of opening as “a flower or
3603 a rose bud opening” (p.145). The most common perceptual change was described as a sense
3604 of connection or unity. Langton (Jarvis, 1997) described this sense as an “incredible feeling
3605 of connectivity... everything was obvious and one and not little bits and pieces, it was just this
3606 single light that shone on everything you know and illuminated all the right things at once”
3607 (p.156).

3608 Somatic changes were found to be a key feature of the moment of epiphanic
3609 experience as these experiences were consistently described in terms of felt senses, and
3610 emotions, and were sometimes explicitly described as non-cognitive events. This is perhaps
3611 best articulated by participants such as Joe (McGovern, 2021) who described “an inner
3612 knowingness that was non-verbal” (p.53), and Langton (Jarvis, 1997), who stated that “It
3613 wasn't a thought. I wasn't consciously thinking” (p.96). This suggests that epiphanic
3614 experience constitutes a sensuous way of knowing, a notion which aligns with Amos’ (2016a)

²³ Metaphor is recognised as an important linguistic tool that allows people to "consolidate and extend ideas about themselves, their relationships, and their knowledge of the world" (Smith & Sparkes, 2004, p.613).

3615 embodied perspective wherein she conceptualised the lived body as an essential source of
3616 understanding in the context of epiphanic experience. This is a notion that in many ways
3617 contradicts the dominant discourses in psychology that focus on the mind as the source of self
3618 and knowledge (Caldwell, 2018).

3619

3620 **3.2.2) *The Transcendentally Real Self***

3621 There was a noetic quality, an experience of revelatory knowledge, to almost all
3622 participant accounts of epiphanic experience. As a caveat, the reason for which noesis has
3623 been subsumed under this lower order theme is because participants regularly alluded to their
3624 experience of this noesis coming from either a higher power or a deep inner wisdom. In either
3625 case, the noesis was not experienced as emanating from what CR terms the ego.

3626 The structure for noesis established in Chapter 3 (section 2.4) held firm, as data from
3627 this study revealed that this noetic quality manifested on a continuum from epistemic noesis
3628 about a particular issue, to a numinous sense of ontic noesis. Epistemic noesis was more
3629 common within the data set and can be represented by examples such as Elisabeth’s (Amos,
3630 2016a) realisation “that one of the major reasons for staying in her marriage was the fear that
3631 if she left, she might never have a baby” (p.65), or Janet’s (McDonald, 2005) “profound
3632 realisation – it was herself that she had been trying to escape from all this time” (p.154).
3633 Ontic noesis was less specific and carried with it more existential implications which could
3634 be operationalised religiously or non-religiously. Examples of a religious sense of numinosity
3635 is evident in the following quotations: “I became so aware again that God is all around
3636 us...God is *us* – God is outside of us and inside of us and through us” (Miller & C’de Baca,
3637 p.95), and “I just found myself speaking with God” (Patrick, Amos, 2016b, p.114). Examples
3638 of non-religious numinosity include Lichtenstein (Jarvis, 1997), who realised that “I am here

3639 to be of service to something greater than myself” (p.125), and Fuller (Jarvis, 1997) that
3640 “You do not belong to you, you belong to the universe” (p.111). Therefore, it becomes
3641 evident that, at least in the domain of the Empirical, a significant experiential feature of
3642 epiphanic experience is the emergence of noesis from an aspect of the self that possesses a
3643 sense of authority and distance from the participants' sense of self (i.e., ego).

3644

3645 **3.3) Integration**

3646 As previously noted, based on its Latin etymology, ‘integration’ represents a
3647 movement towards wholeness. During this phase, which participants often considered to be
3648 ongoing, the epiphanic experience was integrated allowing the participants to reorganise and
3649 reconstitute themselves in their new form. Each lower order theme will be discussed in turn
3650 and the reader is directed to Table 4.6 for an overview of the lower order themes and sub-
3651 themes subsumed under the higher order theme of Integration.

3652

3653 **Table 4.6**

3654 *Overview of lower order themes and sub-themes subsumed under the higher order theme of Integration*

Higher Order Theme	Lower Order Theme	Sub-theme	Amos (2016)	Ilivitsky (2011)	Jarvis (1997)	McDonald (2005)	McGovern (2021)	Miller and C'de Baca (2001)	Naor and Mayseless (2020)	Skalski and Hardy (2013)	
Integration	Social Interactions Between People	Fulfilling and Connected Relationships	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
		Changed Relationship with Religion	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	The Embodied Personality	The Ego as Changed	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
		Release and The New Embodied Personality	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
		The Transcendentally Real Self as Restored	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Disintegrative Responses	Disconnection	✓		✓				✓		✓
		Uncertainty	✓		✓	✓			✓		
	Sensemaking	A Higher Power at Work	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		
		A Conscious Process			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

An Unconscious Process	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Necessary Suffering	✓		✓	✓			
Synchronicity	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Sensemaking as a Process	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

3655

3656

3657 **3.3.1) Social Interactions Between People**

3658 A new sense of connection emerged for participants with regards to interpersonal
3659 relationships. Skalski and Hardy (2013) found that “Overall, participants were more
3660 connected with their spouses, family, and friends after their experience” (p.173), and this was
3661 indeed reflected in the current synthesis. Participants described forging new connections with
3662 family, friends, and romantic partners, and in other instances described cutting these ties. In
3663 many cases, this connectedness to others manifested as a desire to serve others, such as
3664 Patrick (Amos, 2016), who found that “every single day, I felt compelled to help others”
3665 (p.109). Likewise, “Fuller launched what he called his fifty-six-year experiment of "guinea-
3666 pig B," the "B" for Bucky [his name], in which "an average healthy human being" resolved to
3667 become a problem solver "on behalf of all humanity"" (Jarvis, 1997, p.111). Indeed,
3668 participants became fundamentally more altruistic, and compelled to connect with those
3669 around them. This is clearly demonstrated by Michelle (McDonald, 2005) who stated that:
3670 “It’s...about connecting with people. That’s what really sustains me. The money wasn’t
3671 sustaining me [in her previous jobs]. Money wasn’t giving me that sense of connecting with
3672 people” (p.183). It is therefore evident that epiphanic experiences profoundly impact how
3673 people engage with the dimension of social interactions between people (Bhaskar, 2020),
3674 whereby participants consciously shaped this dimension for themselves to reflect their new
3675 state of being.

3676

3677 **3.3.2) Social Structures Sui Generis**

3678 Participants commonly described a new sense of religiosity or spirituality emerging
3679 after their epiphanic experience (please note that ‘religion’ is used in reference to formalised
3680 religious groups (e.g., Christianity, Judaism, Sikhism), whereas ‘spirituality’ is used in
3681 reference to individualised spiritual practices that are unconstrained by religious dogma). For
3682 some, this represented a new view on an existing sense of spirituality or religiosity, such as
3683 Lichtenstein (Jarvis, 1997) who felt his experience “was clearly a shift in my understanding
3684 of my relation with God” (p.120). With this new sense of religiosity or spirituality came
3685 active engagement with religiospiritual structures, such as in the case of Robert (Skalski &
3686 Hardy, 2013), “I’ve been pursuing Christianity” (p.174).

3687 Therefore, epiphanic experience appears to trigger a movement towards greater
3688 religiosity or spirituality. Whilst some participants engaged in formalised religion, others
3689 developed a highly individualised sense of spirituality such as Cathy (McDonald, 2005)
3690 whose view of spirituality became based on “the idea of universal energy, which is most
3691 readily identifiable in nature - in forests, oceans and wild animals” (p.167). Moreover, even
3692 some of those who became part of organised religions, such as Anderson (Jarvis, 1997),
3693 explained that their beliefs had “less to do with having a particular set of beliefs about Jesus,
3694 and more to do with teaching kids that living is not a spectator sport” (p.135). Perhaps
3695 experiencing something ineffable led participants to areas of thought that embraced the kind
3696 of experiences that they had, a place where science regularly fails to tread, namely, religion
3697 and spirituality (Dawkins, 2006; Jung, 1938).

3698

3699 ***3.3.3) The Stratification of the Embodied Personality***

3700 All three aspects of Bhaskar’s (2020) model of the self were implicated in this lower
3701 order theme: (1) the ego (i.e., the illusory sense that people possess of themselves as separate

3702 from everything else), (2) the embodied personality (i.e., the mind, emotional makeup, and
3703 physical embodiment of a person), and (3) the transcendently real self (i.e., a person's
3704 'ground state', or 'higher self').

3705

3706 **3.3.3.1) The Ego as Changed.**

3707 Participants often described the emergence of a new sense of identity, such as Lital
3708 (Naor & Mayselless, 2020) who experienced “a profound change in her perception of self”
3709 (p.878), which aligns with findings from extant literature (McDonald, 2005; Miller & C'de
3710 Baca, 2001). Lichtenstein (Jarvis, 1997) explained that he was “replaced back in the world,
3711 fundamentally changed, but replaced back in my place in society... my context was the same
3712 as before the experience, but I wasn't” (p.123). Similarly, Patrick (Amos, 2016) describes
3713 waking up “a different guy” (p.93). Analysis of the language participants used to describe
3714 themselves after their epiphanic experience suggests that participants underwent a change in
3715 their fundamental characteristics. The most striking of these changes was the increase in
3716 Openness²⁴ that was evident across all studies besides Skalski and Hardy (2013). For
3717 example, Bill (Amos, 2016), “developed what he referred to as a why not? attitude, finding
3718 himself saying the word ‘yes’ rather more than the word ‘no’” (p.96), and Lital (Naor &
3719 Mayselless, 2020), found that “the unknown became okay” (p.878).

²⁴ Please note that CR strongly criticises the Big Five model of personality for its reductionistic approach to personhood, as well as its history being mired in the political ideology of eugenics (Pilgrim, 2019). Therefore, it is important to carefully operationalise the conditions under which this model is used in this chapter: as the dominant model of personality in modern psychology, the language of the Big Five model of personality is used as an accessible way of describing tendencies in the transitive aspect of reality. Under no circumstances does use of this language allude to the notion that these terms describe anything from the intransitive aspect of reality (see Chapter 1, section 2.2). Further, as will be discussed below, Openness can be thought of as associated – but not necessarily synonymous – with the Jungian-based Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI; Myers & McCaulley, 1985) Intuitive and Feeling types.

3720 What is important to note is that there was no observable trend in the data that
3721 suggested Openness was common amongst participants prior to their epiphanic experience.
3722 This challenges some of the arguments made by Miller and C’de Baca (2001) on the subject
3723 of personality and epiphanic experience. Miller and C’de Baca (2001) postulated that people
3724 who have epiphanic experiences are people with characteristics that align with the Jungian-
3725 based Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI; Myers & McCaulley, 1985) sensing-intuitive
3726 dimension, as their study found that intuitive (N) and feeling (F) types were overrepresented
3727 in their sample. It is worth noting that N and F MBTI-types correlate with the Big Five
3728 personality traits of Openness and Agreeableness (Furnham, 1996; McCrae & Costa, 1992,
3729 1997). However, whilst the current study found agreeableness to be a common trait amongst
3730 participants, only one reference was found to language that clearly implicated the presence of
3731 Openness prior to epiphanic experience. Perhaps this is due to Miller and C’de Baca (2001)
3732 administering personality tests to their participants after their experiences, therefore making it
3733 difficult, if not impossible, to accurately measure personality preceding the experience.
3734 Further, given that the research demonstrates that mystical experiences, which can be similar
3735 to epiphanic experiences (see Chapter 3), can produce lasting changes in Openness
3736 (MacLean, Johnson & Griffiths, 2011), this strongly suggests that Miller and C’de Baca
3737 (2001) were not necessarily measuring what they thought they were measuring.

3738

3739 **3.3.3.2) Release and The New Embodied Personality.**

3740 All participants described the emergence of a new awareness that appears to be an
3741 extension of the noesis that occurred during the experience itself. In particular, participants
3742 described a transformation of their view of themselves, others, and the world. For example, a
3743 participant of Miller and C’de Baca (2001) stated that “I experienced just a complete

3744 transformation of my understanding... my view of the world, my whole outlook on life”
3745 (p.52). Similarly, Kevin (Skalski & Hardy, 2013) reflected that:

3746

3747 I know I’m not saying anything new here, you know? I know these truths have been
3748 around forever. But for me they’re new. For me I – I experienced these things for the
3749 first time. I mean, I know, I know, everyone knows that family’s important and blah-
3750 blah-blah, but until you really put those things first... (p.172).

3751

3752 Therefore, the epiphanic experience heralded the arrival of a new awareness of reality,
3753 which Arthur (Jarvis, 1997) understood as follows: “the new version of reality means
3754 bringing new structures into your life, the thinking of completely new ideas, the
3755 reorganization of your life... it stood everything on its head” (p.143). Therefore, the lens
3756 through which the participants experienced their reality following an epiphanic experience
3757 was profoundly altered, and this alteration caused them to reorganise their pre-existing
3758 assumptions and structures to align with this new awareness.

3759 Participants also described a sensorial sense of release that stands as a direct contrast
3760 to the depletion (and sometimes tension) that typified sensorial states prior to epiphanic
3761 experience. This sense of release was experienced by participants as a sense of freedom,
3762 liberation, lightness. Patrick described feeling “so much lighter” (p.114), whilst Hadar (Naor
3763 & Mayseless, 2002) explained: “That moment was one of the most liberating moments in my
3764 life, I could choose to let go of all my stories, I could be naked, no family, no degree”
3765 (p.878). Similarly, Arthur (Jarvis, 1997) described this sense as: “there's some inner part of
3766 your being that needs to sing and can now sing and can now be free. Can now dance. Can

3767 now express itself” (p.154). Therefore, the participants can be viewed as describing a sense of
3768 release from a previous state of being, and whatever burden they had been carrying they felt
3769 physically relieved of following their experience. This lends further weight to the notion that
3770 epiphanic experiences can be highly embodied, somatic events.

3771 Emotionally, overall, the data shows a pronounced shift from the negative emotions
3772 that dominated the disintegrative phase to positive emotion in the integrative phase. Many
3773 participants described high arousal positive emotion (Liu et al., 2018; Russell, 1980)
3774 associated with happiness. A particularly common emotional experience was joy, which
3775 appears to have been most present in the time immediately following the epiphanic
3776 experience. After this, participants recounted the presence of more low arousal positive
3777 emotions, particularly related to happiness and connection. This manifested in different ways,
3778 sometimes as hopefulness, as in the case of Fuller (Jarvis, 1997): “He believed anything was
3779 possible because he'd seen anything become possible... an enormous sense of possibility”
3780 (p.114). This marks a pronounced change in affect for the participants from affective states
3781 characterised by negative valence, and frequently by high arousal, to affective states
3782 characterised by positive valence, and low arousal.

3783

3784 **3.3.3.3) The Transcendentally Real Self as Restored.**

3785 Whilst disconnection (to meaning and purpose, as well as a higher sense of self) was a
3786 common theme prior to epiphanic experience this was not the case subsequent to the
3787 experience. Instead, many participants found that, as a consequence of their epiphanic
3788 experience, a sense of purpose became illuminated as part of a new sense of connection to a
3789 higher sense of self. For example, Michelle (Skalski & Hardy, 2013) explained: “It was just

3790 kind of like a light bulb, that's what I'm supposed to do" (p.172). For Lital (Naor &
3791 Mayseless, 2020), this connection to meaning and purpose displayed itself when:

3792

3793 I asked myself what do you want, without feeling guilty or ashamed or scared to be in
3794 touch with my needs and desires. I want to be a writer, to create, not to feel scared and
3795 guilty... I left my job in the factory, lost 20 pounds and am now working on a play
3796 (p.878).

3797

3798 This illumination of meaning and purpose was critical for participants such as Peter
3799 (McDonald, 2005) who stated that: "My epiphany gave me something to live for, to move
3800 toward, instead of being dead... In my own way I started to find hope and some meaning
3801 about why I was here" (p.194). In this way, epiphanic experience can facilitate a sense of
3802 connection to the self, not simply through noesis and the revelation of something that was
3803 previously unknown, but in many instances also through a sense of meaningful purpose.

3804

3805 **3.3.4) Disintegrative Responses**

3806 It is important to note that not everyone who had an epiphanic experience was able to
3807 accommodate and integrate it. For a small number of participants ($n = 4$) the experience was
3808 not viewed as positive for some time after the event, although it was eventually integrated in
3809 a helpful way. The two sub-themes of 'uncertainty' and 'disconnection' are perhaps best seen
3810 in the case of Lichtenstein (Jarvis, 1997) who felt that his experience had led him to being
3811 "free. Too free it turned out" (p.120):

3812

3813 I was very high then very low. For about six weeks afterward I was in a tizzy... The
3814 after-effects looked like a psychotic break, but it's, call it what you will. I mean to me,
3815 today looking back, psychic spiral-out, spiritual emergency is definitely what I'd call
3816 it. They didn't have the term then. So suddenly I was free-falling in psychological
3817 space without any sense of who I was (p.169).

3818

3819 Therefore, Lichtenstein's quote demonstrates a sense of disconnection from the self,
3820 and a great deal of uncertainty and disequilibrium. Further, Jarvis (1997) writes that:

3821

3822 What followed the experience itself was a period of five years in which Lichtenstein
3823 tried to integrate his experience. "In the course of a few hours something had
3824 happened that changed my life. But I didn't know what it was and I needed to figure it
3825 out" (p.122).

3826

3827 This highlights the criticality of the integrative phase following the transformative
3828 experience and illustrates that integration may be a difficult and lengthy process which may
3829 not ultimately be successful. Moreover, whilst the descriptions of the transformative
3830 experience from these participants provide assurance that this is indeed the same
3831 phenomenon, it may indicate that individual differences play a role in how able that person is
3832 to integrate their experience.

3833

3834 **3.3.5) Sensemaking**

3835 Amos (2016a), who paid particular attention to sensemaking, noted that participants
3836 found it challenging to make sense of their epiphanic experience, and therefore tended to
3837 eschew the need to assign causality and instead simply “take pleasure in the significance of
3838 it” (p.90). However, the results of this current synthesis are contradictory to Amos’ assertions
3839 as the reviewed literature is replete with participant attempts to make sense of what they
3840 experienced. Some believed their epiphanic experience to be the direct result of divine
3841 intervention: “It was all by the power of God. The Holy Ghost is what transformed me... I
3842 give the credit to God, solely and fully” (Laura; Ilivitsky, 2011; p.71). Others attributed it to
3843 the suffering they had experienced, such as Langton who thought that people who had an
3844 “intermediate amount of trauma...didn't get dragged down enough to have to recalibrate.
3845 They didn't crack...and become plastic and recalibrate” (Langton; Jarvis, 1997, p.102).

3846 However, the most commonly held notion held by participants was that epiphanic
3847 experience was driven by an unconscious process. This is clearly articulated by Rachel
3848 (Ilivitsky, 2011):

3849

3850 This was an unconscious change. Like, I didn't have a choice... It just happened... I
3851 just felt that way. The words came, the feeling was there, boom!... Like there was no
3852 pre-contemplation, there was no contemplation there was just – there's nothing in
3853 action because I didn't act. I didn't do anything. I walked down the street and it was
3854 like, ‘ah, I'm free. I'm free’ (p.71).

3855

3856 Participants also made various postulations regarding the cause of this unconscious
3857 process. For example, Langton (Jarvis, 1997) believed that it may have been due to “a
3858 different brain state maybe?” (p.96) in which his “brain became malleable and I found I could
3859 reconfigure my assumptions” (p.101). Rachel (Ilivitsky, 2011) believed her epiphanic
3860 experience to have emanated from a deep, inner, wisdom: “It came from inside of me, but
3861 there’s lots of parts of me... from deep inside that really got it. Like part of me that just –
3862 balls to bones is how I think of it. Like a really ‘hard wisdom’ is a phrase I would use” (p.71).
3863 Arthur (Jarvis, 1997) thought that epiphanic experiences were experienced by particular
3864 people: “people who can look at some form of reality and find that the template they're using
3865 to structure that reality doesn't work for them” (p.178). A participant of Miller and C’de Baca
3866 (2001) asserted that: “What really happened is that the lowered tension level allowed my
3867 conscious and unconscious to become totally integrated” (p.111). Therefore, whilst epiphanic
3868 experiences were generally conceived of as manifesting due to unconscious processes, there
3869 was huge variability with regards to the precise mechanism through which this was thought to
3870 have occurred. Consequently, this research makes an original contribution by synthesising the
3871 range of ways individuals attempted to make sense of their epiphanic experiences.

3872 Another theme to emerge from the data was ‘sensemaking as a process’. The time
3873 after their epiphanic experience was frequently conceived of by participants as “the
3874 integrating period” (Lichtenstein; Jarvis, 1997, p.124). The amount of time this process of
3875 integration took varied greatly from participant to participant. For example, Fuller (Jarvis,
3876 1997) “went into hibernation for two whole years. Hardly spoke a word, only as necessary to
3877 Anne [his wife], because what had happened to him was so monumental and he needed quiet
3878 time to think and gather himself” (p.144). In fact, some participants described “still trying to
3879 make sense of it” (James; Amos, 2016a, p.88).

3880 The process of sensemaking invariably involved the need to find language that
3881 allowed for communication of the experience. However, Amos (2016a) noted that “Part of
3882 the process of sense-making appeared to be an acceptance of this impossibility to completely
3883 and precisely capture the nature of an SPT in all its complexity and wonder” (p.111).
3884 Therefore, the ineffability that permeated the experience itself is again visible. Some
3885 participants engaged with this issue by declaring, as noted by Jarvis on the subject of Fuller:
3886 “a moratorium on words. He would not speak to anyone nor allow anyone to speak to him
3887 until he was sure what words he wanted to use” (p.167). Others used metaphorical or
3888 religious language to convey the nature of their experiences, such as one of Miller and C’de
3889 Baca’s (2001) participants who noted that: “I guess I’ve just had the kind of experience that
3890 Saul must have had on the road to Damascus. That’s the closest experience that I can relate
3891 this to” (p.94). This tendency to use religious language has been noted in the literature
3892 (Amos, 2016; Ilivitsky, 2011; Jarvis, 1997; McDonald, 2005; Miller & C’de Baca, 2001).
3893 Therefore, it becomes evident that the interpretations the participants assigned to their
3894 experiences were often internal and symbolic.

3895

3896

4) Conclusion

3897 The aim of this study was to synthesise the literature on epiphanic experience in order
3898 to answer the second research question: what are the distinct experiential features of
3899 epiphanic experience? The CRist theories of the four planar social being, as well as the
3900 ontology of personhood (Bhaskar, 2020) were found to be very useful in facilitating a
3901 thorough exploration of this question. Whilst many themes emerged from this synthesis,
3902 through the implementation of CR-informed processes, certain tendencies, that manifested
3903 within the domain of the Empirical were able to emerge. The time before an epiphanic

3904 experience was found to be characterised by an overall sense of disintegration which
3905 permeated each of the four planes of social being (Bhaskar, 2020). The embodied personality,
3906 in particular, was found to be ‘out of sync’ with the transcendently real self (Bhaskar, 2020)
3907 whereby participants regularly used language to describe their embodied personality as being
3908 in a state of turmoil, and their transcendently real self as something from which they had
3909 become disconnected. This is problematic as it results in disintegration of the individual's
3910 mental state (Bhaskar, 2020). Moreover, the presence of both negative life experience and
3911 uncertainty prior to epiphanic experience was universal and impacted each of the four planes
3912 of social being.

3913 The new consciousness phase, as described by participants, appears to demonstrate a
3914 change in the functioning of the overall embodied personality. During this phase, the plane of
3915 the stratified embodied personality was described as absorbed by new, rich, phenomenal
3916 content, such that its hold on various structures and/or assumptions loosened. Participant
3917 descriptions, combined with researcher interpretation, further suggested that the sense of
3918 noesis that characterises epiphanic experience can be linked to the transcendently real self.
3919 This in turn suggests that the new consciousness phase involves the re-emergence, or the re-
3920 connection, of the transcendently real self within the overall structure of the self.

3921 Participants who experienced numinous, ontic noesis were more likely to experience dramatic
3922 sensory and perceptual changes through the embodied personality. Moreover, the regularity
3923 with which participants noted sensorial changes further supports the notion that epiphanic
3924 experiences constitute an embodied, somatic way of knowing (Amos, 2016a).

3925 After breaking down (the disintegrative phase), and experiencing a new
3926 consciousness, the task then turns to integration. Integration is critical, as examples from the
3927 theme ‘disintegrative responses’ demonstrates (whilst only four studies supported this demi-

3928 regularity, analysis of atypical cases can be equally illuminating when seeking a
3929 comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon; Tuckett, 2005). The experience of new
3930 consciousness was found to reveal to the individual a different way of being that, ultimately,
3931 helped them to better navigate their personal circumstances and contexts. This tended to lead
3932 to a greater sense of connection to the self and things found by the individual to be
3933 meaningful.

3934 The thematic synthesis presented in this chapter, combined with the scoping review
3935 presented in Chapter 3, allows for the conceptual unification of experiences related to the
3936 range of concepts subsumed under the term ‘epiphanic experience’ (e.g., quantum change,
3937 epiphany, sudden personal transformation, personal transformation). Moreover, a rich and
3938 intensive account of the nature of epiphanic experience in the domain of the Empirical has
3939 now been presented which is based on rigorous philosophical and methodological rationale.
3940 This undertaking has been important, not only as a self-contained act in service of answering
3941 a research question, or as part of under-labouring (Bhaskar, 2017), but also as part of a
3942 broader process. CR advocates for the use of intensive qualitative research in order to better
3943 abstract potential underlying generative mechanisms (Bhaskar, 2009; Roberts, 2014;
3944 Zachariadis, Scott & Barrett, 2013). Additionally, CR supports the use of flexible deductive
3945 coding (Fletcher, 2017). Therefore, the results from this study were carried into the next
3946 study and used as the framework of deductive codes for engagement with the CRist analysis
3947 undertaken in the subsequent chapter (Bhaskar, 1975, 1989; Danermark, Ekström, &
3948 Karlsson, 2019). In this way, the process of synthesising the extant literature on epiphanic
3949 experience was a critical step towards better understanding the nature of epiphanic
3950 experience, as well as a key link to being able to answer deeper questions of causality as part
3951 of the CRist research process.

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Chapter 5: A Critical Realist Exploration of Epiphanic Experience

1) Introduction

The previous two chapters contain the groundwork, or under-labouring, conducted using secondary data, to establish the key markers (Chapter 3) and experiential features (Chapter 4) of epiphanic experience in the domain of the Empirical (see Chapter 1, section 2.5). However, CR seeks to go beyond the domain of the Empirical and places great emphasis on the asking of ontological questions (Vincent & O’Mahoney, 2018). As such, the purpose of this chapter is to use the understanding of the nature of epiphanic experience generated in the preceding two chapters to address the third research question: what generative mechanisms permit the emergence of an epiphanic experience? This is an important task as the exploration of generative mechanisms active in the domains of the Actual and Real is central to the work of a CRist researcher (Easton, 2019; Pilgrim, 2019). The generative mechanisms proposed by previous researchers on epiphanic experience have been detailed in Chapter 2 (section 3). However, none of these explanations are able to wholly account for epiphanic experience, nor do they present a causal explanation that considers all four planes of Bhaskar’s (2008, 2020) theory of four planar social being.

This chapter presents a study that used primary data to explore the generative mechanisms underpinning epiphanic experience. It was considered beneficial to collect primary data because the use of secondary data carries with it implications for reflexivity (Moore, 2007; Smith & Elger, 2014). Qualitative data is reflexively produced as a fluid, interactive, co-construction between researcher and participant (Mauthner et al., 1998). Therefore, given the emphasis placed on philosophy in this research, it was considered important to approach data collection and analysis from a CRist standpoint, in order to have

3996 experience research (e.g., Amos, 2016a; Ilivitsky, 2011; Miller & C’de Baca), though
3997 McGovern (2021) also explored this topic using a sample of psychotherapists²⁵.

3998 Participants were purposively sampled on the basis of several selection criteria, in part
3999 determined by previous studies of epiphanic experience (Amos, 2016; Ilivitsky, 2011), as
4000 well as the unique factors relevant to this study:

- 4001 1. Using the guidance of existing literature (e.g., Amos, 2016a; Ilivitsky, 2011),
4002 participants were required to: believe that their experience deeply changed them and
4003 describe the effect it had on them as benevolent.
- 4004 2. Further, the experience should have been relatively brief (less than a week), enduring,
4005 memorable, and have occurred more than a year ago. Participants were selected on the
4006 basis that their experience occurred one or more years ago to ensure that the change had
4007 been enduring (Ilivitsky, 2011).
- 4008 3. The experience should have been perceived by friends and family as benevolent, have
4009 not occurred as a direct result of a positive external event, and was not the direct result of
4010 purposeful influence by leader of a group. This final criterion was to ensure that any cult-
4011 like conversions were not included (Amos, 2016; Ilivitsky, 2011). As detailed by
4012 researchers such as Siegelman and Conway (1978), these kinds of experiences, though

²⁵ As discussed in Chapter 2 (section 3.1), psychotherapists and psychologists were considered distinct groups, as although both provide a therapeutic service, each has a distinct history. Psychologists were thought to be fundamentally less open to the notion of epiphanic experience due to the positivist/empiricist inheritance from their discipline (Pilgrim, 2019). This can be contrasted to psychotherapy which remains more open to schools of thought that acknowledge this phenomenon as legitimate (e.g., psychodynamic, and analytical psychology). As such, it is likely that there is greater acceptance of this phenomenon in the psychotherapeutic community than in the psychological community. Indeed, this is perhaps reflected in the number of Counselling Psychologists who participated in the study compared to other types of psychologist (see Table 5.1).

4013 potentially similar in their outcomes, are instigated by a powerful person with the
4014 intention to alter individual awareness. As such, the change is not considered as ‘inner’²⁶.

4015 4. Participants should self-identify as having experienced an epiphanic experience.

4016 5. The final criterion was that the participants were practitioner psychologists registered
4017 with the British Psychological Society (BPS) and the Health Care Professions Council
4018 (HCPC).

4019 It is important to clarify that this study did not exclude people from participating if
4020 they had experienced psychosis related to their epiphanic experience. Although Ilivitsky
4021 (2011) explicitly screened participants for this, both Miller and C’de Baca (2001), and Amos
4022 (2016) did not, though none provided a rationale for this decision. Therefore, this study
4023 allowed for experiences related to psychosis to be included in the sample for two primary
4024 reasons: (1) there is insufficient evidence to determine that psychosis is not related to
4025 epiphanic experience, and so any attempt to exclude these experiences can be seen as
4026 premature, (2) it was thought prudent to incorporate experiences that shared experiential
4027 similarities to epiphanic experiences (see Chapter 2). A total of 900 practitioner psychologists
4028 were invited to participate. 36 positive responses were received, and 16 progressed to
4029 interview ($n = 10$ female; $n = 6$ male; $M_{age} = 51.2$ years, age range 27-75). Table 5.1 details
4030 the participants’ demographic characteristics.

²⁶ It is worth noting that there was some case-by-case flexibility with regards to how this criterion was operationalised, as two of the participants introduced below will demonstrate (Eunice in section 3.5, and Luce in section 3.12). Luce was raised in a cult, but her epiphanic experiences formed part of her emancipation from said cult and were not the result of influence by the leader of a group. Eunice’s experience was catalysed by a talk given by an influential group leader, but, given that the APA defines a cult as “a religious or quasi-religious group characterized by unusual or atypical beliefs, seclusion from the outside world, and an authoritarian structure. Cults tend to be highly cohesive, well organized, secretive, and hostile to non-members” (<https://dictionary.apa.org/cult>), Eunice’s engagement with Sufi mysticism was not considered to be participation in a ‘cult’.

4031

4032 **Table 5.1**

4033 *Participant characteristics (ethnicity, religion, education, psychologist type)*

White British	White European	White Slavic	White Other	
12	1	1	2	
Not Religious	Spiritual	Religious (Christian)	Religious (Buddhist)	Religious (Christian/Sufi)
8	3	3	1	1
Professional Doctorate	Master of Science (including advanced)	Honours Degree	PhD (including post-doctoral study)	BPS Diploma in Clinical Psychology
6	6	1	2	1
Clinical Psychologist	Counselling Psychologist	Occupational Psychologist	Educational Psychologist	Sport Psychologist
3	7	2	2	2

4034

4035 **2.2) Procedure**

4036 Ethical approval was granted by the University of Hertfordshire Health, Science,
4037 Engineering & Technology ECDA (approval number aLMS/PGR/UH/03925; see Appendix
4038 F). The following personal data was gathered: (1) name (2) gender, (3) age, (4) occupation,
4039 (5) contact details and (6) religion. Names and other clearly identifying data (e.g., locations,
4040 other key people in the participants narratives – though each participant was considered
4041 individually to determine what information might compromise their anonymity) were
4042 anonymised at the point of transcription. The data was encrypted and stored on a password
4043 protected computer, accessible only to the researcher for 72 months after which it will be
4044 destroyed under secure conditions. Any identifiable information was stored separately to the
4045 interview transcripts.

4046 The sensitivities inherent to this research process were seriously considered by the
4047 researcher, as it was understood that the interviews might elicit emotional distress for the

4048 participants. Due to all participants being psychologists, it was thought reasonable to assume
4049 that the participants would possess the training and access to resources that would minimise
4050 any potential adverse effects. Despite this, participants were made aware that should they
4051 require any guidance or support as a result of their participation, they should contact the
4052 researcher who would formally debrief them, refer or support them through the process of
4053 getting the help they needed, and remove their data from the study if requested.

4054 Contact with potential participants was initiated through: (1) social media platforms
4055 (e.g., LinkedIn and Facebook), and (2) emailing using the contact details found on the BPS
4056 practitioner directory. Potential participants were given an overview of the study in the initial
4057 email. If a positive response to the email was received the potential participants were then
4058 sent screening questions. If the researcher could determine that an epiphanic experience had
4059 occurred²⁷ (according to the markers of epiphanic experience as discussed in Chapter 3), the
4060 potential participant would be sent a link to an anonymous poll where they could inform the
4061 researcher of their availability for an interview. See Appendix D for a summary of participant
4062 communications.

4063 In case there was confusion with regard to the screening questions the researcher
4064 opened a dialogue with the potential participant using their preferred contact method to
4065 resolve these confusions (this mechanism only needed to be used once). After screening, an
4066 interview time was mutually agreed, and the interview was conducted wherever most

²⁷ This stance towards interviewer expertise superficially aligns with positivist positions, and contradicts interpretivist positions (Smith & Elger, 2014). In CRist terms, the research process is theory-driven, and the researcher is the expert about the phenomenon under investigation, placed at the top of a 'hierarchy of expertise' (Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Smith & Elger, 2014). However, critically, the CRist researcher is also understood as inherently fallible, and so whilst the CRist qualitative researcher acts as expert about the issue, and interpreter to the data, their own explanations are treated as potentially fallible, whereby the interviewee "is there to confirm or falsify and, above all, refine that theory" (Pawson, 1996, p.299; Redman-MacLaren & Mills, 2015). Indeed, the interviewer and interviewee are conceptualised as possessing different kinds of expertise; the interviewer as having expertise on the wider research context and potential outcomes, and the interviewee as having expertise on explanatory mechanisms (Smith & Elger, 2014).

4067 convenient for the participant: (1) at the University of Hertfordshire, (2) another agreed upon
4068 location, or (3) via video conferencing software. Due to the Government induced Covid-19
4069 restrictions from March 2020 onwards, whilst the first six interviews were conducted face-to-
4070 face, the remaining interviews were conducted using video conferencing software. Each
4071 participant chose, or was given, a pseudonym by which they are referred to²⁸. All interviews
4072 were recorded on a digital Dictaphone, or the recording feature on the video conferencing
4073 software, and transcribed verbatim.

4074

4075 **2.3) Data Collection**

4076 In-depth, semi-structured interviews were used as the method of data collection.
4077 Interviews are viewed, by CR, as offering a valuable source of intensive empirical data
4078 (Fletcher, 2017; Parr, 2013). The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for
4079 conversation to flow as organically as possible and meant that the researcher was able to
4080 pursue any novel ideas that emerged from the discussion (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006;
4081 Kvale, 1996). Concurrently, semi-structured interviews ensured that a structure was
4082 maintained, and the research aims were not lost within digressions and tangents (Patton,
4083 2002).

4084 An interview guide was created using the extant literature (e.g., Ilivitsky, 2011; see
4085 Appendix E which also includes an exemplar transcript). Additional probes were included to
4086 prompt the interviewee for more information in order to generate as intensive an account as
4087 possible (Kvale, 1996). From a CRist perspective, it is important that the interchange between
4088 the interviewer and interviewee be informed by a suitable theory-led framework that can

²⁸ Four participants (Anna, Amira, Eunice, and Scarlett; see section 3 below) chose their own pseudonym and the rest were assigned by the researcher.

4089 guide and probe the interviewee in order to facilitate depth and complexity of discussion
4090 (Smith & Elger, 2014). Each interview lasted between 40-100 minutes ($M_{time} = 73.4$ minutes),
4091 totalling 1175 minutes (or 19.6 hours) of data making this study the second largest empirical
4092 study of epiphanic experience to date. Please see Appendix E for an exemplar transcript as a
4093 representation of the richness of the data.

4094

4095 **2.4) Data Analysis**

4096 The reader is referred to Chapter 1 (section 3.3) for an overview of CRist
4097 methodology, and data analysis, as this section will build upon that which has already been
4098 established. Further, due to the relative paucity in the literature with regards to the application
4099 of a CRist approach to data analysis (Raduescu & Vessey, 2014), and more specifically the
4100 application of Danermark et al.'s (2019) framework, additional sources were drawn from.
4101 Wynn and Williams' (2012) framework for CRist data analysis, alongside Bygstad,
4102 Munkvold and Volkoff's (2016; see also Bygstad & Munkvold, 2011) stepwise framework
4103 for CRist Data Analysis were found to be useful for gaining a deeper understanding of CRist
4104 data analysis. Moreover, Wiltshire and Ronkainen's (2021) realist approach to thematic
4105 analysis was also influential in guiding analysis, as consideration was given to whether the
4106 identified codes were experiential (i.e., subjective viewpoints), inferential (i.e., conceptual
4107 redescriptions), or dispositional (i.e., theories about causal powers or ontological properties).
4108 The process undertaken proceeded as follows.

- 4109 1. **Description.** The themes from the thematic synthesis, detailed in Chapter 4, served as
4110 the deductive coding framework for the current study. Therefore, the deductive
4111 coding process began with a framework comprising three higher order themes, 13

4112 lower order themes, and 37 sub-themes (as described in Chapter 4). This framework
4113 was still considered truly provisional such that it always had the potential to be
4114 subject to change (Fletcher, 2017; Saldaña, 2013). Over the course of the coding
4115 process these 53 provisional code groups were supplemented, and altered, by themes
4116 that emerged from the primary data to produce 59 code groups.

4117 The data was coded line-by-line in order to facilitate the translation of concepts from
4118 one participant to another (Fisher, Qureshi, Hardyman & Homewood, 2006), and each
4119 sentence was coded at least once. All text associated with a given code was examined
4120 to check for consistency. Please note that, whilst frequency counts were used, they are
4121 representative of how many participants noted the theme in question, rather than how
4122 many times the theme was mentioned (Malterud, 2012).

4123 2. **Analytical resolution.** The most dominant code groups were used to identify demi-
4124 regularities (Fletcher, 2017). A code group was considered a ‘strong’ demi-regularity if it
4125 was supported by between 9 and 12 participants, and ‘very strong’ if it was supported by
4126 13 or more participants. As noted previously, there is no formalised, or even informal,
4127 guidance in the literature on what should be considered a demi-regularity. Therefore,
4128 these demarcations, although technically arbitrary, were created as a shorthand in order to
4129 establish a rigorous framework to facilitate identification and extrapolation of ‘strong’
4130 demi-regularities within the data set. The results section below will reflect this framework
4131 by only discussing themes from the data that are at least ‘strong’, unless a particular case,
4132 or cases, can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon
4133 (Tuckett, 2005).

4134 3. **Abduction.** The demi-regularities identified in the analytical resolution were re-
4135 described in accordance with the theoretical causal explanations postulated by previous

4136 researchers on epiphanic experience (Amos, 2016a; Ilivitsky, 2011; McDonald, 2005;
4137 Miller & C’de Baca, 2001). This was a critical process whereby data that fell outside the
4138 theoretical frameworks applied to the data was given consideration in order to afford new
4139 understandings of the phenomenon of interest. Further, during abduction, it was important
4140 to explicitly consider lived experience (the domain of the Empirical) and reality (the
4141 domain of the Real) as distinct - a notion supported by CR thought (e.g., Coates, 2007).

4142 **4. Retroduction.** This study employed the retroductive strategies of counterfactual
4143 thinking, social experiments and thought experiments, studies of pathological and
4144 extreme cases, and comparative case studies – all of which can be combined differently
4145 depending on the nature of the research being conducted (Danermark et al., 2019).
4146 Emphasis was placed on the studying of extreme cases, as well as comparisons of
4147 different cases, with regular use of counterfactual thinking and thought experiments to
4148 support this process. More ‘extreme’ accounts of epiphanic experiences were examined
4149 with the acknowledgment that they provide an understanding of the mechanisms at work
4150 in a potentially ‘purer’ form. Whether the mechanisms identified could then be applied to
4151 less ‘extreme’ cases was then explored. As a final point of evaluation in the retroductive
4152 phase, the identified causal mechanisms were evaluated using Runde’s (1998) four causal
4153 test questions as guidance for the empirical corroboration of the proposed generative
4154 mechanisms (Table 5.2 below).

4155 **5. Retrodiction and contextualisation.** The mechanisms identified during abduction,
4156 and retroduction, were assessed with particular reference to the structures that might
4157 trigger their occurrence. Therefore, whilst epiphanic experiences were conceived of as a
4158 manifestation of an underlying material reality, they were also viewed as shaped by social
4159 and structural conditions.

4160 6. **Concretisation and Conceptualisation.** The generative mechanisms identified
 4161 through the analytical process were directly re-applied back onto the data, case-by-case.
 4162 This enabled the researcher to consider the proposed mechanisms within the contexts
 4163 specific to the participants.

4164

4165 **Table 5.2**

4166 *Evaluating Causal Explanations (drawn from Runde, 1998 and Wynn & Williams, 2012)*

Causal Test Question	Implications
Are the causal factors of the phenomenon actually manifest in the context?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm that a cited causal factor was in fact part of the context of the phenomenon. • Confirm that explanatory information from generalisation applies to the specific context. • Ensure causal factors are not idealisations; the causal factor may potentially exist in the realm of the real and not just as an impossible theoretical entity.
If the causal factors were part of the context, were those factors causally effective?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the proposed causal factor to determine if it is a cause of the phenomenon and not an accidental or irrelevant feature of a genuine cause. • Determine if the proposed causal factor was in fact preceded by another causal factor of the event.
Do the causal factors provide a satisfactory explanation to the intended audience?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the causal explanation is not too remote (unspecified links in causal chain or adequate knowledge of links cannot be assumed) • Ensure the causal explanation is not too small such that it is just one of a composite of causes producing the observed event.
Does the proposed mechanism provide causal depth?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the <i>depth of necessity</i> such that the observed event would have occurred in the absence of the proposed causal factor due to the presence of an alternative causal factor. • Assess <i>depth of priority</i> to determine if the proposed causal factor is closely preceded by another causal factor significant in explaining the event.

4167

4168 **3) Introducing the Participants**

4169 Bhaskar (2020) argued that “we must see each person as a concrete
 4170 singular, that is as containing a universal element, but always and only in association with

4171 specific mediations or differentiations, a particular geohistorical trajectory and a unique
4172 irreducible singularity” (p.118). As such, it was considered necessary to provide each
4173 participant’s story individually, before considering the trends and commonalities (i.e., demi-
4174 regularities) that might unite them.

4175

4176 **3.1) Adela**

4177 When Adela was very young, her mother left, and she lived with other family
4178 members, a time which she remembers fondly. Adela went to live with her mother around the
4179 age of six, during which time her mother abused her physically and emotionally. Adela
4180 described struggling with low self-esteem throughout her adult life and living with a sense
4181 that something was missing. She felt very unhappy, trapped, and empty. Furthermore, she felt
4182 lonely and isolated and would often panic when her husband was away at work, something
4183 she understood was related to unresolved feelings of abandonment. This also sometimes
4184 manifested in a struggle connecting with others. Despite this, she had friends, and received
4185 therapy, and felt that in the time before her transformative experience she was seeking, and
4186 ready for, change.

4187 Adela’s experience occurred on a beautiful day in which she described feeling
4188 especially open and present, and without her usual anxiety and preoccupation with others.
4189 She went to meet her friends’ baby, something she described as being particularly powerful.
4190 She described a feeling of sadness at seeing how vulnerable and defenceless the baby was
4191 and felt a greater sense of connection to her bodily experiences from meeting this baby. On
4192 her way home on the train Adela was reading a book on attachment that contained a line (“the
4193 eyes that we see ourselves with are the ones we inherit- that inherit, they're not necessarily
4194 ours”) that she experienced as triggering her epiphanic experience and changing her

4195 understanding of the way that she felt about herself. Reading this line of text led to her
4196 feeling numb and detached, outside her body, time, and herself.

4197 She then went home and lay on her yoga mat, hugging herself and staying with these
4198 feelings, as she had an understanding that this experience was important. Hugging herself led
4199 to a connection with her younger self and to the insight that she didn't need to think badly of
4200 herself, or assume that others did too, because that was a consequence of the way she had
4201 been treated as a child. Since her experience, Adela has improved relationships, good self-
4202 esteem, has let go of the past, and has a sense of coherence in her own mind. Further, she
4203 realised that she could be self-reliant and be on her own. She also cited becoming more open
4204 and accepting of herself. In her practice as a clinical psychologist, Adela has ensured that she
4205 now incorporates aspects of attachment and embodiment.

4206

4207 **3.2) Amira**

4208 Amira was a clinical psychologist working from home which enabled her to home-
4209 educate her children. She and her family enjoyed travelling – she considered herself to be an
4210 adventurous and intrepid person – and her transformative experience occurred on one of these
4211 trips. Amira was due to attend a wedding from her husbands' side in Sri Lanka, a trip to
4212 which they decided to add a stop in the Maldives beforehand. However, Amira found that
4213 although she was happy to go to the Maldives, she was extremely resistant to the prospect of
4214 going to Sri Lanka, even to the extent of putting off booking the flights for six months. She
4215 was aware of the resistance she felt but did not have an answer as to why she felt this way.

4216 Once they were in the Maldives, Amira realised that she still didn't want to go to Sri
4217 Lanka and argued with her husband about delaying the flights. After the argument she left

4218 and, on her walk back to their hotel room, had her epiphanic experience. The sky went very
4219 bright, and a voice spoke to her, saying that she didn't have to go to Sri Lanka, and that she
4220 didn't have to argue about it with her husband either! This reinforced her decision not to go
4221 to Sri Lanka, and she returned to their room. When her husband and children returned, they
4222 continued their discussion and she stated that neither she nor her children would travel on the
4223 originally planned date. When her husband asked when she would be going, she described a
4224 voice channelling through her and saying: any time after the 27th (December). Coincidentally,
4225 it is because of this that Amira and her family avoided being on the beach at the time of the
4226 2004 tsunami in Sri Lanka.

4227 Since this experience Amira, though already spiritual – but not religious, due to an
4228 experience of unwanted touch from a local vicar, and a profound dislike of the Church as an
4229 entire organisation – deepened this sense of spirituality. She gained a sense of there being
4230 ‘something more’ in life, and this sense for her is deeply rooted in the natural world. The
4231 importance of listening to intuition and taking responsibility for oneself also became
4232 extremely important to her. She also described becoming more aware and secure in herself. In
4233 her practice since the experience Amira has focused more on reconnection, helping her
4234 clients to get back in touch with themselves, an approach that is driven by her sense of
4235 spirituality.

4236

4237 **3.3) Anna**

4238 Anna grew up in a family that moved home every few years, with a father who was
4239 violent and physically abusive (later diagnosed as bipolar), and a mother who did not protect
4240 her from this abuse. She described experiencing a near-constant state of dissociation as a
4241 result of the fear this caused. Further, she was forced by her parents to go to church three

4242 times a day, which ensured her strong belief in a higher power. She was angry at this higher
4243 power, but she still believed in it. Anna spent most of her life before her transformative
4244 experience feeling worthless, scared, alone, and with a strong sense of self-hatred. She could
4245 not wait to leave home, met her soon-to-be husband – who her father disapproved of – and
4246 soon became pregnant in order to escape. She had two children and lived as a ‘housewife’.
4247 Later, her brother died in a motorcycle accident at age 19, to which she attributed the start of
4248 panic attacks and a deep depression that lasted six years, at which point, her husband’s father
4249 died which exacerbated her already poor mental health.

4250 Not long after her father-in-law’s death Anna had her epiphanic experience. It was
4251 night, and she was feeling particularly scared, to the extent that she took her first drink of
4252 alcohol in the hopes that it would settle her. In bed, suddenly a presence that she knew
4253 instinctively as God, or more specifically Jesus, appeared to her. In that moment she
4254 described knowing that she would never again be alone, being told by the Holy Spirit that she
4255 didn’t need to be afraid anymore and feeling absolute joy that she was loved and cared for by
4256 somebody.

4257 After her experience Anna developed a personal relationship with her higher power,
4258 citing the visions and dreams her God sent her, as well as the conversations they had together.
4259 She felt that her actions from that point forward were guided and directed by a higher power
4260 (e.g., going to university). A particularly pivotal deity-guided action she started was,
4261 alongside five other women, developing a healing ministry in which she described healing
4262 memories, emotions, and genetic and generational traumas. Anna described becoming a more
4263 non-judgemental, compassionate, and accepting person through Jesus, and chose to practice
4264 using compassion focused therapy and CBT as she thought them to be congruent with her
4265 Christianity. She also found self-love and self-acceptance through her experience. However,

4266 due to her perception that society doesn't allow her to talk about her Christianity openly, she
4267 developed two identities, one non-religious and professional, and the other authentic.

4268

4269 **3.4) Celine**

4270 Celine was three at the time of her epiphanic experience. At the time of the
4271 experience, her parents were separated due to extenuating circumstances. She described
4272 finding it difficult to make friends. Celine suggested that this was perhaps due to being raised
4273 by a single parent which created some anxiety when separated from her mother. Despite
4274 feeling unsettled and anxious about the biggest change in her life at the time (i.e., starting
4275 nursery school) Celine described herself as a being open to experience. Celine believed the
4276 epiphanic experience itself to have happened on her third birthday, though because of the
4277 complexities of childhood memory she admitted that it could also have occurred on another
4278 day, but that she had potentially merged those two memories together.

4279 Celine remembered being in bed on her birthday and having the sudden realisation
4280 that she was able to think, able to form thoughts, sentences, and memories. Essentially, she
4281 remembered the moment in which she developed objective self-awareness. She described this
4282 experience as having a particularly concentrated and clear quality, akin to 'waking up'.
4283 Further, she reflected that, unlike other moments during childhood where life feels like
4284 something that happens to you, in this moment she felt autonomous and in control. This
4285 experience caused her to feel excited and amazed, though with an underlying sense of calm.

4286 Celine stated she made memories much better after her experience. However, because
4287 of Celine's age at the time of her experience, she has found it challenging to tease out what
4288 constituted a personal transformation and what might have occurred anyway as part of her

4289 developmental trajectory. Despite this, Celine discussed that, although she can sometimes be
4290 quite self-critical about certain parts of herself, she had always been very confident in her
4291 cognitive abilities, viewing herself as a cognitive person, and valuing understanding. She also
4292 described always having possessed a strong capacity for self-awareness. This has meant that
4293 she also favoured others, in both her professional and personal life, with self-awareness.
4294 Celine’s epiphanic experience became a narrative throughout her life, and a memory that she
4295 has repeatedly rehearsed.

4296

4297 **3.5) Eunice**

4298 Eunice described his upbringing as “overwhelmingly benign”, though noted some
4299 challenges such as his parents getting divorced when he was five, and his mother being
4300 diagnosed with cancer when he was nine. He had a largely secular and open upbringing,
4301 though his lack of a religious or spiritual framework was something he did not appear to
4302 value. In particular, Eunice referred to finding a conversation he had with his father, at age
4303 four, very challenging to integrate. In this conversation, he asked what happens when you die,
4304 to which his father responded that, that’s it, you’re dead! He contrasted this with the sense of
4305 connection and warmth he felt when he attended church with his grandmother. As an adult,
4306 Eunice described valuing religious tradition and explained that he was both baptised and
4307 confirmed in the Church of England and initiated into the Inyati Sufi order. He therefore
4308 combined traditions from both schools of thought and admitted that at times he could
4309 approach his religious practice in a fervent, unbalanced fashion. Eunice described feelings of
4310 being incomplete and not belonging, and that being in the world in an embodied way could
4311 be a struggle for him at times. He also described a strong sense of seeking something
4312 existential alongside a yearning for community and connection.

4313 Eunice had his epiphanic experience whilst on a spiritual retreat that involved aspects
4314 such as: silence, fasting, and sensory blocking to encourage ‘turning within’. At the time of
4315 his experience, Eunice was listening to the retreat leader speak about how there is hope, and
4316 that in the foreseeable future all the great conflicts will be resolved, there will be peace, and
4317 problems such as starvation will be overcome. During this talk, Eunice was overcome with a
4318 strong emotion that resulted in what he described a shattering of his heart that came with
4319 clarity and ecstasy. In that moment, he felt both the pain of sacrifice and a sense of complete
4320 freedom, even from physical constraints. His sense of self also dissolved, and he felt part of a
4321 greater collective consciousness. In this moment, it was his spiritual mentor who held him
4322 until his breathing returned to normal.

4323 Eunice described his personal transformation as a re-orientation towards something
4324 that he could work towards. He described a deepening of meaningful connections in his life
4325 alongside a different way of seeing people, whereby he described seeing the essential light
4326 and goodness in people. After his experience, Eunice stated that he felt less overwhelmed and
4327 more able to tolerate uncertainty. He also found himself to be more hopeful, courageous,
4328 compassionate, and confident. Furthermore, he described a newfound self-acceptance and
4329 acceptance of the conditions of life. Eunice continued his religiospiritual practices and
4330 adopted therapeutic practices with a spiritual element. He took a spiritually guided approach
4331 to sessions whereby he trusted that there is something beyond his actions in a session that will
4332 unfold.

4333

4334 **3.6) Evelyn**

4335 Evelyn grew up in a household in which philosophy, economics, and politics were
4336 often discussed but spirituality was not. She described her philosophical stance as one of

4337 empirical scepticism and dialectical materialism. She also described herself as an atheist, but
4338 equally as someone with a dissonant identity due to the suppression of her spiritual side –
4339 something she approached with caution and uncertainty as this was something that had not
4340 been discussed by those around her. In her twenties, Evelyn whistle blew on a children’s
4341 home in which child abuse was taking place. When she confronted both the warden of the
4342 home, and her employers she received no support whatsoever. Evelyn attributed this very
4343 stressful and overwhelming event with her development of myalgic encephalomyelitis (also
4344 known as chronic fatigue syndrome). Evelyn described herself as someone who was very
4345 open and perceptive.

4346 Evelyn’s epiphanic experience occurred during a visit to her cousin, a spiritual healer.
4347 At this time, her illness was particularly troublesome for her to the point that she was unable
4348 to even drive herself to this appointment with her cousin. When he put his hands over her, she
4349 felt a sense of warmth, relaxation, and release, and an acceptance of her feelings and parts of
4350 her body that she was unable to before. In that moment she was very sceptical of what was
4351 happening and struggled to attribute her experience to anything or reconcile what was
4352 happening to her body with her philosophical stance.

4353 After her experience, Evelyn undertook a great deal of learning, philosophically,
4354 psychologically, and spiritually – particularly evident in her decision to train as an energy
4355 healer. She forged new relationships that allowed her to explore what happened to her and
4356 integrate it into her other perspectives. Through this experience, she was able to integrate the
4357 two sides of herself. Further, she integrated her experience into her philosophical stance by
4358 attributing her spirituality, and sensitivity to what she refers to as energy, to her being able to
4359 sense Earth’s energy. Evelyn described no longer feeling afraid of the spiritual experiences

4360 that once frightened her, and a sense of self-acceptance. Evelyn also integrated her
4361 experience into the way she practices by becoming an energy healer.

4362

4363 **3.7) Frida**

4364 Frida rejected Judaism at age 17, and later embraced Buddhism as her philosophy for
4365 life. Frida was very involved in the Buddhist community and engaged in Buddhist spiritual
4366 practices. She described her family as very close, but closed, and containing a great deal of
4367 suffering, not least because family members were often ill. She described herself as someone
4368 who was deeply unhappy, pessimistic, in existential pain, and who experienced a lot of
4369 anxiety and uncertainty in herself. Though Frida was very self-critical, she was also
4370 persevering and wanted change to happen, but didn't understand how to go about changing.
4371 At the time of her epiphanic experience, Frida was suffering from very extreme chronic
4372 allergies, involving a chronic rhinitis. This illness meant that her sleep was profoundly
4373 disturbed, and she was exhausted.

4374 Frida's epiphanic experience occurred on such a night of disturbed sleep. She
4375 described getting up to chant, a Buddhist practice she often engaged in, and one that she
4376 explained moved one's consciousness into a different 'place'. She chanted, desperate for her
4377 illness to stop, when suddenly a thought appeared: what if it doesn't? She realised that if it
4378 didn't stop then she needed to be happy now, and further, that happiness is not external. Frida
4379 described her experience as so powerful that she is able to distort time and return to that
4380 experience in her mind. After her experience, Frida described being more empathetic, better
4381 able to cope, and generally happier, as well as now defining herself as an optimistic person.
4382 Her practice as an occupational psychologist was also impacted by her experience, primarily

4383 by the fact that she practices what she preaches by using psychology and Buddhism in
4384 tandem.

4385

4386 **3.8) George**

4387 In the time preceding his transformative experience George was undertaking Stage 2
4388 training to become a chartered psychologist, an endeavour he sometimes found challenging.
4389 Concurrently, one of his largest challenges was his father's mental health, who was
4390 struggling at the time, but who George couldn't help. George described himself as self-
4391 critical, lacking confidence, worried about the opinions of others, anxious, and uncertain. He
4392 considered himself to be a spiritual person and described always having had an interest in
4393 seeking connection to something beyond himself. George was interested in Buddhist
4394 philosophy, and regularly engaged in the Buddhist spiritual practices of meditation and
4395 mindfulness. His epiphanic experience occurred on a nine-day silent meditation retreat, his
4396 first ever silent retreat, which each day involved six hours of sitting meditation and five hours
4397 of slow walking meditation.

4398 Around half-way through the retreat, George's experience of meditation changed. He
4399 experienced non-dual awareness where the distinction between the self and the rest of the
4400 world disappeared. Furthermore, this moment was characterised by the experience of not-self
4401 (or anatta in Buddhist terms), in which George's sense of self, or "I", dissolved. He described
4402 this experience as effortless, tranquil, peaceful, and open. George's experience led to several
4403 changes. He realised that his sense of self was impermanent and not fixed, and that he now
4404 had greater access to non-self-referential thought, where before he described having a more
4405 egocentric view of the world. He became more empathetic and non-judgmental, his
4406 confidence was boosted, and overall, he felt more contentment. George's experience also

4407 reinforced his choice of philosophy of practice, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, as it
4408 is congruent with Buddhist philosophy. In terms of his spirituality, George's experience left
4409 him feeling part of something bigger than himself.

4410

4411 **3.9) Hayley**

4412 Hayley's professional life before her transformative experience was very challenging.
4413 She was working as both an academic and a practitioner, but it was her university life that
4414 was negatively impacting her. She described the environment as being restrictive, insular, and
4415 suppressive of her personal values of creativity and collegiality. Further, Hayley had been
4416 working approximately 70 hours per week, because she had been trying to protect her team
4417 by taking on additional work due to her department telling her that there were no resources to
4418 hire more support. This intense schedule resulted in insomnia, physical effects (such as: heart
4419 palpitations), and not eating due to lack of time. Hayley described her mental health as
4420 "horrific", she felt exhausted, overwhelmed, out of control, stressed, and miserable. However,
4421 she also explained that she was in denial at the time as to how run down she was as she had
4422 an internal narrative around thriving on stress.

4423 In a chance conversation with a faculty manager, she found out that, contrary to what
4424 she had been told, there were resources to get more help. This deception caused her to have
4425 what she described as a breakdown. When she woke up the next day, she found that she had
4426 developed a profound psychogenic stutter which took eight weeks to resolve. Though she
4427 went back to work, she described feeling as though she was going to her own execution every
4428 day. When half term arrived, she went on holiday to the countryside with her husband and
4429 daughter, and whilst there, visited a book festival. As she listened to the authors and looked at
4430 the books, she considered her own expertise and academic career and a thought appeared "I

4431 can't think of any reason why that can't be me". At a time characterised by uncertainty,
4432 Hayley described this moment as being imbued with certainty and clarity.

4433 The consequences of Hayley's experience involved a leap into the unknown. On her
4434 return to work she researched, and then took, an unpaid career break. She was going to write
4435 a book, and although she had no contract, she was certain that she could do it. Certainty was a
4436 key feature of Hayley's personal transformation, alongside which she also now felt in control,
4437 re-energised, self-aware, empowered, and protected. She was able to reconnect with her
4438 values and herself by making space for creativity and setting boundaries on her time.

4439

4440 **3.10) Jeremy**

4441 When Jeremy was seven his parents divorced. In the moment that they told him, he
4442 described starting to feel emotional, but instead of expressing it, he made a vow of emotional
4443 restriction, promising himself that he would never feel upset again. Jeremy believed that as a
4444 result of his vow, he became disconnected from his true self and engaged in extreme pastimes
4445 that allowed him to avoid feeling the pain he had repressed. Jeremy described himself as
4446 spiritual, and with a strong drive to become enlightened so as to be of service to others. In
4447 order to do so, Jeremy engaged in spiritual practices, most notably: tantra and Christian
4448 mysticism. Christian mysticism, specifically the channelled text 'A Course in Miracles', was
4449 the catalyst for Jeremy's epiphanic experience, whereby he participated in the first lesson of
4450 the book for seven consecutive hours, rather than the recommended one minute in the
4451 morning and evening.

4452 During these seven hours Jeremy experienced a great many things. He described his
4453 awareness moving to the atomic level, then the subatomic level, and then quantum level,

4454 distinguishable by their vibration. Concomitantly, his awareness also expanded externally,
4455 past his immediate surroundings, to the world outside, to the vastness of space. He described
4456 feeling himself opening to a place of oneness and stillness, in union with the ‘Infinite
4457 Source’, where there was no self, time, or space. Jeremy reflected that although time has
4458 passed, that moment has never gone, and he is still able to distort time and access it in a way
4459 that is as real now as it was then. When he left his meditative state, he experienced a
4460 profound disconnection with his body and difficulty making sense of time, space, and himself
4461 as a discrete entity. This caused his mother to call an ambulance and he was brought to a
4462 psychiatric hospital and diagnosed as having had an acute psychotic episode. During his
4463 hospitalisation he reconnected with his body, and also noticed that others in the hospital had
4464 had similar spiritual experiences.

4465 Since his experience Jeremy has spent much time integrating his experience into all
4466 aspects of his life. Critically, it has reshaped his perspective, as a counselling psychologist, on
4467 psychosis and he has devoted time to speaking publicly about his experience with mental
4468 health professionals in the hopes of creating a change in the way psychosis is viewed – not
4469 merely as a chemical imbalance but as something more. He is now grateful for everything
4470 that led him to his experience. Jeremy also described himself as having become more
4471 accepting, as now viewing himself as whole, and opening to live his life in union with the
4472 Infinite Source.

4473

4474 **3.11) Liam**

4475 Liam was undertaking his professional doctorate in counselling psychology at the
4476 time of his transformative experience. His decision to go back to university to become a
4477 psychologist was triggered by a prior transformative experience in Sierra Leone, where six

4478 policemen were set on fire and died, and which caused him to question the value of life.
4479 Death was not uncommon in Liam's life as he had seen a lot of it as a child when four family
4480 members (three grandparents and his mother) died within the space of four years. Though
4481 Liam did not have a very good relationship with his father, he did have a father figure in his
4482 life, Andrew, with whom he was very close. Liam took his studies very seriously and was
4483 very inflexible with how he spent his time. He described himself as very cognitively rigid,
4484 and his life was consumed by two main features: studying and swimming – with relationships
4485 often as an after-thought. The only person for whom this rigidity was flexed for was his
4486 sister, which meant that the number of meaningful connections in his life was restricted. Liam
4487 described being in a state of depression, self-doubt, and anxiety at the time.

4488 Andrew called Liam one day to talk, but Liam cut the conversation short as he was
4489 preoccupied with the administrative tasks of registration on his degree. The next day Liam
4490 received a phone call telling him that Andrew had been hit by a bus. He described almost
4491 instantaneously reorganising his values and priorities. Whilst previously he valued studying,
4492 followed by swimming and then relationships, in that moment relationships moved to the top
4493 and the other two were shuffled down. Alongside feelings of guilt, fear, anxiety, and sadness,
4494 he described being in an overriding state of shock, something that he believed allowed him
4495 the emotional space to process what had happened.

4496 As a consequence of this epiphanic experience Liam described having vastly
4497 improved meaningful connections with others. He made time for his friendships, even if he
4498 had plans to swim or study, and later moved to a new city to be closer to his sister and nieces
4499 and be more involved in their lives. The words he used to describe himself also changed, with
4500 'caring' becoming a new, and particularly important, descriptor. Liam also became far more
4501 flexible, which is reflected in his practice, as although he initially thought he would favour

4502 the more rigid approach of CBT, he instead chose to work from a person-centred or
4503 psychodynamic approach which he found more flexible.

4504

4505 **3.12) Luce**

4506 Luce was born into a religious cult. She characterised this group as restrictive,
4507 separatist, positivistic, patriarchal, and repressive of critical thinking. Luce's father decided to
4508 leave the cult when she was a teenager after they brought in some "wacky" rules. Leaving
4509 was catastrophic for Luce, causing her to feel destroyed and dissociated, she had lost her
4510 sense of self. She described herself at the time as compliant, submissive, and non-
4511 questioning. Later, she moved to Switzerland to work as an au pair, something she described
4512 as an attempt to get away. Whilst there, she met someone who was also ex-cult but still very
4513 religious, whom she married and had two children with. Luce described that at the time
4514 Switzerland was also a restrictive, rigid, and patriarchal society. During that time, she felt
4515 trapped and confused, with a sense that something was missing. She still felt disconnected
4516 from herself, but lacked critical thinking skills to resolve this, though she was starting to
4517 develop these. She was isolated and lacked meaningful connections, with no one to talk to
4518 about how she was feeling.

4519 Luce's first epiphanic experience occurred on an ordinary day. She was shopping for
4520 her daughters and saw a double-breasted tweed coat on the rack. When taking the coat to the
4521 counter to pay, she noticed that it was double-breasted and instantly had the thought that she
4522 couldn't buy it because it was double-breasted, and she didn't like double-breasted things. At
4523 the thought of this, Luce then described another, quieter, thought emerging, questioning her
4524 initial reaction. She then realised that it wasn't her that didn't like double-breasted coats, it
4525 was her mother. She recounted this realisation as a physical blow that was followed by a tidal

4526 wave of other questions about how many of her thoughts, feelings, and values were hers? She
4527 felt complete terror and panic and had the urge to go out and do all the things she had learnt
4528 were ‘wrong’, because in that moment her entire sense of morality disappeared as she no
4529 longer knew what came from her, and what came from the cult. She knew that she needed to
4530 find out who she was, what she thought, felt, and valued without the influence of the cult.

4531 Luce started to push to move back to the UK after this as she was driven to
4532 experiment and explore. She and her husband divorced partly as a result of this. She
4533 eventually enrolled on a psychology degree course, and then a master’s degree in counselling
4534 psychology. Whilst on her master’s course Luce had her second epiphanic experience. In the
4535 time between her first and second epiphanic experience Luce described feeling as though
4536 something was wrong with her and shared that she suffered from post-traumatic stress
4537 disorder, and on a few occasions had experienced a nervous breakdown. However, she also
4538 had become a questioning and enquiring person, and had begun to develop critical thinking
4539 skills although she was still relatively inflexible in her thinking. She had become a relatively
4540 more open person. Although Luce’s explorations enabled her to meet people with whom she
4541 could discuss things, they were all her younger sisters age, and she still lacked support from
4542 others.

4543 Luce’s second epiphanic experience occurred whilst reading a text by Carl Rogers,
4544 which she described as a bridge between her positivistic thinking and the freer way of
4545 thinking she enjoys today. Rogers’s ideas allowed her to make sense of herself and her past.
4546 She had not yet considered that the cult were the root of her issues as they had caused her to
4547 repress her own valuing process. She described this moment as a magical moment of release
4548 in which everything fell into place. After this experience she went on to pursue a PhD, in
4549 which she investigated the experiences of others who were raised in, and left, religious cults –

4550 a process she found to be incredibly healing – and eventually started a career as a researcher.
4551 She no longer had any religious belief and particularly valued Openness. Though Luce
4552 described sometimes still feeling a mixture of sadness and anger towards herself, her view of
4553 herself changed to become more accepting, aware, and forgiving. Her relationships as a
4554 practitioner psychologist and in professional contexts improved, though she still struggles to
4555 form friendships.

4556

4557 **3.13) Nina**

4558 Nina was sexually abused in her early teens at a time when abuse was invisible in
4559 society. Despite having had therapy, Nina had an extremely negative self-concept. She lived
4560 for many years with the feeling that there was something wrong with her, not feeling good
4561 enough, feeling shame, self-blame, and lacking self-esteem. She repressed her abusive
4562 experiences to the point that she began to question whether they had happened at all. Despite
4563 this, she continued to work on her mental health, fuelled by her determined nature and a sense
4564 that she should keep trying and seeking change. She described the cost of not finding change
4565 as being too high – without it she could not be the kind of person that she wanted to be. Her
4566 state of mind was a barrier not only to her personal life, resulting in a divorce, but also of her
4567 professional life. Though she trained as a counsellor and psychologist, she did not feel good
4568 enough to work with clients. As part of her journey to create change for herself, she engaged
4569 the help of two coaches, with whom she felt safe in the open and normalising environment
4570 they created. The coaches used an approach that incorporated both mind and body and
4571 encouraged acceptance.

4572 After starting to work with these coaches, Nina had a dream. Amongst imagery that
4573 Nina interpreted as relating to the fact that she was trying to resolve her issues alone, she

4574 dreamt about the house in which she had been abused. This house was significant as she had
4575 had many nightmares about it where the house had taken many forms, sometimes haunted,
4576 sometimes possessed, and always negative. In this dream however, the house had changed,
4577 the doors had glass in them, there was light, the walls were pale, and it was owned by a firm
4578 of solicitors. She had the sense that the house was safe. In the dream, someone said to her, I
4579 thought that house was really scary for you. She replied that, no, not anymore, it's changed.
4580 On waking, Nina felt lighter, and as if she had found the solution that she had been so
4581 diligently looking for.

4582 From the moment Nina woke up from this dream considerable changes happened. She
4583 was able to form new meaningful connections, engage more with the work with her coaches,
4584 and on herself. She was able to reconnect with herself, and who she was before her trauma.
4585 She went on to become a coach herself. She became more confident, and her self-esteem
4586 increased. She no longer had as much fear about practicing, or in general. Nina was able to
4587 drop many of her defences, open up, and move forwards.

4588

4589 **3.14) Scarlett**

4590 Scarlett was on holiday with her family when her husband, who already suffered from
4591 Post-Polio Syndrome, had a heart attack. On a scorching hot day, after having spent a night
4592 sleeping in their car, they arrived at their campsite. As her sons were putting up their tent, she
4593 saw that her husband looked very unwell, and soon started reporting pains in his chest. Not
4594 long after, Scarlett called an ambulance and they took him to a small cottage hospital, leaving
4595 her and her sons at the campsite. She then left her children to follow her husband. When she
4596 arrived, the doctors told her that he needed to be moved to a larger hospital. He recovered,
4597 though the chest pains returned, and Scarlett had to organise returning her children to the UK

4598 without her as her husband needed to stay in Italy to have a heart bypass operation as he was
4599 not stable enough to travel. Scarlett described the night before his surgery, and the eight
4600 hours of waiting for the open-heart surgery to be finished, as surreal, as she had to say
4601 goodbye, and didn't know if she would ever see him again.

4602 On her return to the UK, Scarlett explained that she started to crumble. When she was
4603 at work, she would start to feel very emotional, tearful, and shaky with no apparent reason.
4604 She would ruminate and mentally rehearse what would happen if he fell ill again or died. She
4605 felt that she was disconnected from who she was, becoming a shadow of herself. Convinced
4606 by a friend, Scarlett decided to take some time off work. She eventually went to the doctor,
4607 and explained what had, and was, happening. The doctor listened to everything she said, and
4608 then responded by saying to her, "Scarlett, life is not a rehearsal". In that moment, Scarlett
4609 had a deep sense of clarity, and insight. She realised that she had been mentally rehearsing
4610 her husband's death, and in so doing, missing out on her life. She felt relieved and as though
4611 she had been given permission to live her life.

4612 Scarlett approached death differently after her epiphanic experience. Though she had
4613 always avoided thinking about death, she now understood that talking and thinking about it
4614 was important. She accepted death as part of the natural order of things, meaning that
4615 emphasis was then placed on facing and living life. She described feeling lighter, calmer,
4616 more grateful, more empathetic, and better able to be herself.

4617

4618 **3.15) Will**

4619 Prior to his transformative experience, Will was employed by his local authority. His
4620 professional environment was causing him some adversity as his working relationships were

4621 deteriorating and becoming fractious. Under the pressures of a financial crash, Will spoke to
4622 his managers about his concerns that their service was beginning to become unethical in
4623 terms of the quality of work they provided. His mental health was beginning to deteriorate, as
4624 he was feeling frustrated, defeated, and stuck. Will knew that something needed to change
4625 but was resisting this fact for a variety of reasons. His political beliefs and values aligned
4626 with the idea that his work should be provided as part of the public sector, and logistically he
4627 knew that becoming self-employed was not a good option for him or his family. Moreover,
4628 he explained that in his profession, working privately was seen as quite transgressive. A
4629 pivotal moment in Will's spiral downward was when one of Will's senior managers
4630 reprimanded him for speaking about his concerns, telling him that there was no problem, the
4631 problem was him because he thought that there was a problem.

4632 Will was faced with a conundrum, he could not return to work without feeling like a
4633 fraud, but he could not see any other viable employment options. After his reprimand he
4634 came home and sat in his garden, deliberating, and reflecting on his options, feeling at a loss
4635 as to what he should do. Will described being so absorbed that he lost track of time, alongside
4636 a sense of where he was and what he was doing. In that state of mind, he came to the deep
4637 realisation that his only option was the option that he thought wouldn't work – he resigned
4638 from his job and entered the private sector, which he described as liberating. His perspectives
4639 also changed, most notably on educational psychology as a profession, and on politics. Will's
4640 political values were initially dissonant with his decision to work in the private sector, but
4641 congruent with his personal value of autonomy. He let go of some of his political beliefs, and
4642 integrated others differently so that he was able to achieve a congruent sense of self, both in
4643 terms of his personal disposition, and his environment.

4644

4645 **3.16) Xavier**

4646 Xavier's epiphanic experience occurred halfway through his BPS Stage 2 training
4647 process to become a chartered psychologist. He found the environment of his placement
4648 challenging, he described it as toxic, male dominated, and devaluing of psychology. Xavier
4649 felt uncertain and put down by others in that environment and feared judgement from his
4650 supervisor so didn't often ask them for help or support. He lacked self-confidence, self-
4651 efficacy, often felt miserable, and was very self-critical. Despite this, he had some important
4652 and meaningful interpersonal connections. Most relevant to his epiphanic experience was his
4653 fellow trainee, with whom he shared the experience of traineeship, but who he did not
4654 understand or get on with particularly well.

4655 As part of the supervisory process, Xavier engaged with person-centred counselling,
4656 specifically, Carl Rogers' 19 propositions with his supervisor and the other trainee. During
4657 one of these discussions, he came to a profound realisation. Like him, the other trainee had
4658 experienced the desire to protect her mother from her father. Xavier explained that when his
4659 father became angry and hit him, he would try and run away and avoid the situation.
4660 Conversely, the other trainee would stand up and fight it. Their supervisor pointed out that
4661 they experienced very similar things but had polar opposite reactions to it. Understanding that
4662 they were so alike provided a powerful dose of self-awareness for Xavier, that carried with it
4663 a definite sense of clarity and amazement, and a surge of empathy for his fellow trainee.

4664 Xavier described that after his experience he was more empathetic, non-judgmental,
4665 and accepting of both himself and others. He was aware of, and understood, himself much
4666 better and was able to better process past traumas, including a time in his teens where a very
4667 close friend passed away in horrendous circumstances. Though Xavier described himself as
4668 open and willing to step outside his comfort zone before his experience, this was significantly

4669 heightened in the aftermath. He described forming a deeper connection with his values and
4670 with himself.

4671

4672 **3.17) Summary**

4673 Before progressing to the discussion of results, it is worth highlighting that several of
4674 these participants might be considered ‘wounded healers’. The wounded healer archetype has
4675 existed for over 2500 years (e.g., Groesbeck, 1975) and is a notion “that suggests that healing
4676 power emerges from the healer’s own woundedness” (Zerubavel & O’Dougherty Wright,
4677 2012, p.482). Woundedness exists on a continuum, and woundedness that does not lead to
4678 professional impairment can facilitate therapeutic work (Gelso & Hayes, 2007; Jackson,
4679 2001; Zerubavel & O’Dougherty Wright, 2012). However, whilst all therapists have arguably
4680 encountered adversity and suffering, and many therapists acknowledge the role their
4681 woundedness has played in their choice of profession (Barnett, 2007; Farber, Manevich,
4682 Metzger, & Saypol, 2005; Zerubavel & O’Dougherty Wright, 2012), “Psychologists are often
4683 wary about the recovery status of the wounded healer – at worst, we judge, and at best, we
4684 worry” (Zerubavel & O’Dougherty Wright, 2012, p.483). Perhaps because of this wariness
4685 there lacks a depth of understanding of the wounded healer (Zerubavel & O’Dougherty
4686 Wright, 2012), meaning that this study may contribute to our wider understanding of
4687 wounded healers, and one of the ways (i.e., epiphanic experience) that these healers heal.

4688

4689 **4) Discussion of Results**

4690 The section above has served to provide the reader with an understanding of each
4691 participant’s unique trajectory through their epiphanic experience. Attention now turns to the

4692 demi-regularities that span these narratives, and the causal mechanisms that they implicate.
4693 However, before commencing a discussion pertaining to the third research question: ‘what
4694 generative mechanisms permit the emergence of an epiphanic experience?’, the output of the
4695 data analysis process will first be summarised in order to orient and sensitise the reader to the
4696 changes to the code structure and content that emerged. Three higher order themes emerged
4697 from analysis: (1) disorganisation, (2) revelation, and (3) integration; each aligns with the
4698 higher order themes from Chapter 4 but were adapted to better reflect the evolution of the
4699 researcher’s understanding of epiphanic experience.

4700 Disorganisation can be thought of as the “loss or disruption of orderly or systematic
4701 structure or functioning” (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2022), and refers to the time
4702 before an epiphanic experience. This label was chosen as, although it is conceptually linked
4703 to disintegration (i.e., disorganisation can hinder integration), it was thought to be more
4704 representative of the potentially causally relevant structures positively present in the lives of
4705 the participants prior to epiphanic experience. All participants experienced something
4706 disorganising, whether that experience be acute, or protracted. Moreover, on the whole,
4707 participants lives were characterised by degrees of disorganisation, wherein things (e.g.,
4708 relationships, careers, identities) were tending towards greater degrees of turbulent
4709 complexity and associated difficulty. Analysis supported the continued relevance of the
4710 following themes: (1) material transactions with nature, (2) social interactions between
4711 people, (3) social structures sui generis, (4) the embodied personality, (5) negative life
4712 experience, and (6) uncertainty (see Table 5.3).

4713

4714 **Table 5.3**

4715 *Overview of lower order themes and sub-themes subsumed under the higher order theme of Disorganisation with exemplar raw data and*
 4716 *reference to the number of participants whose data supports each theme (i.e., frequency count)*

Higher Order Theme	Lower Order Theme	Sub-theme	Raw Data	Frequency Count
Disorganisation	Material Transactions with Nature	Connection with the Environment	A place where we'd been before, it's kind of very off grid. So, it's kind of off, you know and there's a couple of yurts here, and there's a little cabin up the trees and we'd go there. (Hayley)	6
		Natural Disaster	They said, ah, there's been an earthquake in, you know, off Aceh, and- and there's been a tsunami. (Amira)	1
Social Interactions Between People		Disorganised and Disconnected Relationships	My life was gradually becoming: "Hey, Liam, do you want to go out?" "Actually, no. I've got to read this". "Hey, Liam, you want to come out?" "Actually, no, I'm swimming". (Liam)	14
		Fulfilling and Connected Relationships	I had good, good relationships. (Frida)	15
Social Structures Sui Generis		Cultural Norms Facilitating Disorganisation	I think I was just still trying to follow the cult mould, which was that women grew up, got married and had kids. We weren't expected to have careers. You know, we weren't expected to study. (Luce)	6
		Religious Structures	I am not Christian and don't subscribe to a lot of the beliefs, and I think that's the, that's probably a lot of the, my problem with religion would be around the fixed belief kind of, rigid framework, kind of. (George)	16
		Formalised Activity	I've been kind of living this [Buddhism] and practicing for a long time since back in the 90s. (Frida)	14
The Embodied Personality		The Ego and its Defence Mechanisms	But the story is that first of all, I kind of like didn't, sort of ignored it, or not ignored it, repressed it should I say. Didn't really think it happened to me. (Nina)	10

	The Embodied Personality in Turmoil	It was the first time I'd kind of started making links between what had happened to me and how I felt about myself. (Adela)	15
	Disconnected from The Transcendentally Real Self	I didn't- wasn't in touch with- with me, I was still this kind of ex-cult sister, who was still a cult sister, who was still kind of following what she'd been taught. (Luce)	12
Negative Life Experience	Abandonment	So, my mum left me when I was really little, so before I was one. (Adela)	1
	Abuse	So, when I was sort of 13, 14, 15 and I don't know the age of it exactly because the memories are quite traumatic. I was abused. (Nina)	6
	Death	But then I lost my brother, my brother. He was 19. And he died on a motorbike accident. I know. It's horrendous. (Anna)	6
	Illness	I started to suffer from very extreme chronic allergies, and- which involved a chronic rhinitis. (Frida)	13
	Personal Challenges	Because I'm chronically ill, I was off sick and under occupational health, and I wasn't happy with the options that I was given at- within my place of work. (Evelyn)	15
Uncertainty	Seeking	I was looking for this key. This- this mystery feeling inside of me to be different, for me to feel different. (Nina)	10
	Feeling Uncertain	It felt like someone had pulled the rug under my feet and there wasn't a floor underneath, there was a gaping hole. (Luce)	13
	Turmoil	Trying to work out what I was doing as a practitioner, who I wanted to be, what my philosophy of practice was going to be, how I was going to have any meaningful impact ... a lot of uncertainty. (Xavier)	16
	Wandering	So, come December, we went to Maldives. (Amira)	8

4718 The term ‘revelation’ was chosen to better represent this phase of epiphanic
4719 experience as it more broadly evokes the key feature of epiphanic experience: something
4720 becoming known that was previously unknown (although the quality of noesis varied on a
4721 spectrum from insightful and epistemic to numinous and ontic). All participants experienced
4722 some kind of revelation, and analysis supported the relevance of the following themes: (1) the
4723 ego, (2) the embodied personality, and (3) the transcendently real self (see Table 5.4).

4724

4725 **Table 5.4**

4726 *Overview of lower order themes and sub-themes subsumed under the higher order theme of Revelation with exemplar raw data and*
 4727 *reference to the number of participants whose data supports each theme (i.e., absolute meaning units)*

Higher Order Theme	Lower Order Theme	Sub-theme	Raw Data	Frequency Count
Revelation	The Ego	Ego Dissolution	It's like a feeling of your sense of self dissolving. (George)	4
	The Embodied Personality	An Embodied Experience	It felt like I had this complete healing warmth, permeating through my body. It wasn't warmth like a radiator. It wasn't warm like the sun. Um. It wasn't warm like from any external source. It was something that radiated in and radiated out from me and just went through my whole- my- my body, my organs. It was just w- the most wonderful feeling. (Evelyn)	16
		Altered Affective State	As he, as he was talking about this, there was a, yeah, just very deep emotion, started building up it, kind of- tears, crying started to build up and become more intense. (Eunice)	13
		Altered Cognitive State	I started looking around. And I looked at the sofa. And I could see it. But then my consciousness went deeper, from the sofa into the atomic level. So, the consciousness goes into the atomic level. Then the consciousness went into the subatomic level. Then it went also into the quantum level. (Jeremy)	12
	The Transcendentally Real Self	Noesis	It was like a knowledge that God, God is alive. He's here with me. And I've got nothing to fear. (Anna)	16
	Support from Others in the Moment		He just reached his hand out, and he I didn't say anything, he just put his hand on my arm as if he understood what I was struggling with. (Luce)	2

4728

4729 As previously noted, the word ‘integration’ comes from the Latin word ‘integrat-’,
4730 meaning ‘made whole’, which is itself derived from the word ‘integer’, meaning ‘whole’.
4731 Therefore, the integration phase of epiphanic experience represents the processes and ways in
4732 which participants integrated and reorganised their internal and external landscapes in
4733 accordance with their experiences in the Revelation phase. Analysis supported the continued
4734 relevance of the following themes: (1) social interactions between people (within which
4735 particular attention was devoted to the ways in which the participants therapeutic practice
4736 changed), (2) social structures sui generis, (3) the embodied personality, (4) disorganised
4737 responses, and (5) sensemaking (see Table 5.5).

4738

4739

4740 **Table 5.5**

4741 *Overview of lower order themes and sub-themes subsumed under the higher order theme of Integration with exemplar raw data and*
 4742 *reference to the number of participants whose data supports each theme (i.e., absolute meaning units)*

Higher Order Theme	Lower Order Theme	Sub-theme	Raw Data	Frequency Count
Integration	Social Interactions Between People	Fulfilling and Connected Relationships	I worry about them a lot less, and I can just- just like be in them. (Adela)	12
		Changed Therapeutic Practice	I very much practice what I preach on my work side of things as well. (Frida)	16
	Social Structures Sui Generis	Changed Religiosity and Spirituality	It's made me feel a sense of something greater than us out there. (Amira)	7
		The Embodied Personality	The Ego as Changed	I think is it's made me see that there is no kind of part of me that is really fixed. (George)
	Release and the Embodied Personality		It's such a relief to have been able to say: it can all go now. I don't need to have that cult mind in my head anymore. So, it was it was a powerful moment. (Luce)	16
	Connected to the Transcendentally Real Self		I kind of feel restored to myself... I really recognize, you know, the kinds of things, the passions and the values that organically emerged when I was a child free of all those constraints. That's what I was able to more fully realise. (Hayley)	16
	Disorganised Responses	Disconnected Relationships	So, you know, I still struggle with that quite a lot. And with close relationships. I mean, since my husband, I haven't really- there hasn't really been anyone else. You know, which is sad. (Luce)	6
		Uncertainty Within the	Obviously, I've been trained that way and it's completely different. I can- I can put my professional face on and leave all that out of it. Yeah. It's like I'm two people, really. Yeah. Because I know in today's world you're not allowed	

	Embodied Personality	to talk about Christianity and that, or your faith and that. So, I- there was a clear line there. (Anna)	
	Friction with Religiospiritual Structures	Yeah, felt like I had very little to offer God or the world or any anyone. (Eunice)	6
Sensemaking	A Higher Power at Work	It was outside of me; it was definitely not me... the voice seemed to be real and outside. (Amira)	5
	A Conscious Process	You know, it's not luck. It was- I- I was looking and she was there to be found. (Nina)	11
	An Unconscious Process	Something inside my head was leading me in that direction. I think a lot of these things are kind of below the level of consciousness. (Luce)	8
	Necessary Suffering	I think the fact that I was feeling really unhappy, a lot of the time, was kind of demonstrating that something needs to change. (Adela)	11
	Particular Person	I don't want to not give myself credit for having been able to be open and receptive to that thought when it came. (Hayley)	11
	Context as Key	I had to be forced into that situation. I would never have volunteered for it, which is an interesting paradox in a way. (Will)	7
	Theoretical Interpretations	The chaos effect. Gleick, sort of chaos theory, Mandelbrots fractals, all that kind of, all that kind of stuff, that there's patterns within chaos. (Scarlett)	15
	Formalised Activity	You know, within the retreats I've done, each time there's been some very profound kind of breakthrough. (Eunice)	9
	Sensemaking as a Process	I think it's just a continuing unfolding... there isn't a kind of an end point to any of this (Eunice)	10

4743

4744 The discussion that follows contains an exploration of the generative mechanisms
4745 underpinning epiphanic experience. The discussion will be structured according to the notion
4746 of the four planar social being (Bhaskar, 2008, 2020) as it allows for a complex, CR-informed
4747 view of humans as biological beings, who are social and sustained by relationships with
4748 others, live alongside pre-existing social structures, and who manifest a unique personhood
4749 (Pilgrim, 2019). Data from this study, the previous two chapters, and the extant and wider
4750 literature are used throughout to support the suggestions made. It should be noted that the
4751 theories and models referenced throughout the discussion below were drawn on as the result
4752 of engagement with Danermark et al.'s (2019) process of CRist analysis, and as such are
4753 presented for the first time in this chapter, rather than the literature review. With necessary
4754 reference to reflexivity (Archer, 2000) this discussion should be considered representative of
4755 generative mechanisms as they are understood and filtered through the concrete singularity of
4756 this particular doctoral researcher.

4757

4758 **4.1) The Plane of Material Transactions with Nature**

4759 When considering the plane of material transactions with nature the CRist researcher
4760 is compelled to consider the physical reality of the world and biological bodies within the
4761 context of the phenomenon under investigation (Bhaskar, 2020). Whilst Chaos Theory (see
4762 Chapter 2, section 3.3.3) was found, through abduction, to provide a satisfying account of
4763 epiphanic experience, greater ontological differentiation can be argued for. As such, this
4764 section will lead the reader through the following core ideas, alongside their implications: (1)
4765 the application of Chaos Theory to the primary data, (2) the free energy principle and how
4766 chaos manifests in biological systems, and (3) chaos, entropy, and the entropic brain

4767 hypothesis. By exploring these theories and ideas, a clearer picture can be conceived of the
4768 generative mechanisms at play in the plane of material transactions with nature.

4769

4770 *4.1.1) Applying Chaos Theory*

4771 Using Jarvis's (1997) work, in addition to more recent literature, epiphanic
4772 experiences can be understood using Chaos Theory as follows. In the disorganisation phase,
4773 participants' phenomenal experiences were overwhelmingly characterised by uncertainty,
4774 negative life experience, and degrees of disorganisation throughout the four planar social
4775 being. Scarlett's description of the time after her husband had been taken to hospital in Italy,
4776 encompasses these aspects:

4777

4778 So, you can imagine, at one point, I got my husband's somewhere, I don't know
4779 where, going towards some hospital in a place that I've never been to in my life. I'm
4780 leaving my two children, and OK they're not babies, but two children, and I can't say
4781 to them, wait there for an hour and I'll be back, because I have no idea, no idea what
4782 was going on...I didn't know whether I'd ever see him again...so I had to spend the
4783 night on my own in this hotel, not knowing whether- whether I'd see him again.

4784

4785 This state of being represents a period of personal chaos (be it acute or protracted).
4786 During this period of personal chaos, the participants' assumptive worlds, which are
4787 themselves dynamical systems, become characterised by turbulent disequilibrium. Further,
4788 because the disequilibrium and its outcomes are unpredictable to the individual, uncertainty is

4789 exacerbated, and anxiety often flourishes (Hirsh, Mar, Peterson, 2012). For example, after her
4790 experiences in Italy, Scarlett described that “I was becoming nervy”, indicating the presence
4791 of uncertainty and anxiety.

4792 Chaos Theory postulates that chaos in human experience can be equated with states of
4793 overwhelming anxiety, but that these states provide fertile ground for growth (Bütz, 1992,
4794 1993; Hirsh, Mar & Peterson, 2012). Indeed, Bütz (1992) goes further to suggest that chaotic
4795 anxiety is necessary for psychological development. Many participants were overtly anxious,
4796 and they all experienced heightened and intense affective states during and before their
4797 transformative experiences. Fear-related emotions such as anxiety emerged as the most
4798 commonly experienced affective states within the data set. For example, Liam described
4799 experiencing anxiety in the time before his epiphanic experience: “Anxious, I would say. I
4800 would say that I probably was [pause] yeah, I would say looking back at it, that time was
4801 definitely marked by an anxiety”. Similarly, Celine explained that “I think there were quite a
4802 lot of separation issues, so I was probably quite anxious”. Anger and sadness, in their high-
4803 arousal forms (Russell, 1980) were also prevalent. For example, Frida described experiencing
4804 a pervasive sadness, misery, upset, and emotional pain: “I kind of - I had a life- you know, it
4805 felt like for the first 30 years of my life I was in, certainly emotional and spiritual pain”.

4806 Furthermore, the participants’ transformative experiences often contained strong
4807 elements of ‘randomness’ or chance that led to unpredictable, extensive, change. For
4808 example, Andrew was randomly hit by a bus, Luce randomly decided to go shopping and by
4809 chance encountered the double-breasted tweed coat, and Scarlett randomly saw a doctor who
4810 used precisely the right words at the right time to reach her. During the aforementioned
4811 period of personal chaos, the self- or world-assumptions held by participants exist in a phase
4812 space of many other self-or-world-assumption-strange-attractors that have the potential to

4813 exert an influence over their existing assumptions. In this way, their initial world-assumptions
4814 may become dissipative structures that, at an unpredictable critical point or bifurcation²⁹ (i.e.,
4815 the transformative experience), can release themselves to the influence of a strange attractor.

4816 Therefore, according to Chaos Theory, the personal transformation that occurs during
4817 the integrative phase is the result of the system moving to a new state of order due to a
4818 perturbation that creates a chaotic transitory period (Bütz, 1993). This move allows for the
4819 possibility of bifurcation of the system's previous behaviour, therefore permitting a new way
4820 of being to emerge (Francis, 1995; Jarvis, 1997). Despite the discomfort of their personal
4821 chaos, but indeed because of the chaos inherent to their mental state, there exist myriad
4822 possibilities for the emergence of a new set of self- or world-assumptions. The form that
4823 these new assumptions may take are unpredictable and unknown to the individual until they
4824 have emerged. This new way of being permits the self-organised system to become better
4825 suited to its conditions (Jarvis, 1997; Prigogine, 1984).

4826 In summary, Chaos Theory provides a CR-congruent conceptualisation of epiphanic
4827 experience whereby the disorganisation phase demi-regularities can be seen as local sources
4828 of disequilibrium, the revelation phase as the manifestation of a chaotic critical point, and the
4829 integrative phase as the emergence of a new dissipative structure. Therefore, Chaos Theory
4830 provides two vital pieces of knowledge that allow for the causal mechanisms of epiphanic
4831 experiences to be understood. Firstly, Chaos Theory represents a CR-congruent, important
4832 advancement in understanding the process of change, and arguably of human behaviour in
4833 general, which rejects Newtonian causal determinism, and its illusion of linearity, and wholly
4834 embraces the knowledge that change must sometimes be chaotic, turbulent, and locally

²⁹ To clarify, bifurcation represents “a pattern of instability in which a system attains greater complexity by accessing new types of dynamical states” (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009, p.14; Nicolis & Prigogine, 1989). A bifurcation structure can manifest as simply as a critical point, though there are multiple kinds of bifurcation structures (Guastello, 2007).

4835 unpredictable (Briggs & Peat, 1989; Bütz, 1995; Gleick, 1987). Secondly, Chaos Theory
4836 provides a comprehensive foundation from which epiphanic experiences can be understood
4837 as examples of discontinuous change (Jarvis, 1997).

4838 Viewing epiphanic experiences through the lens of Chaos Theory in its ‘pure’
4839 mathematical form, and as non-linear, dynamical changes to a system, provides a broad
4840 theoretical perspective through which these experiences can be understood. However, in
4841 order to facilitate ontological differentiation, and to apply Chaos Theory more directly to the
4842 phenomenon under investigation, the following question arises: how is Chaos Theory
4843 applicable within the specific context of biological organisms, given that epiphanic
4844 experiences can be understood as occurring within a biological system? In order to answer
4845 this question, attention now turns to the free energy principle, which addresses how chaos
4846 manifests in biological organisms.

4847

4848 ***4.1.2) Chaos in Biological Systems: The Free Energy Principle***

4849 The free energy principle (FEP) is another NDS theory that has been posited to act as
4850 a unified brain theory (Friston, 2003, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013; Friston & Kiebel, 2009;
4851 Friston, Kilner & Harrison, 2006; Friston & Stephan, 2007; Huang, 2008). The FEP states
4852 that “any self-organizing system that is at equilibrium with its environment must minimize its
4853 free energy” (Friston, 2010, p.127), whereby in its simplest form, free energy refers to the
4854 surprise experienced by an agent as a result of the joint occurrence of a particular sensory
4855 input and its inferred causes, i.e., the amount of prediction error in a system (Friston, 2009;
4856 Friston, Kilner & Harrison, 2006). Derived from mathematical formulations, the FEP
4857 demonstrates that adaptive systems, such as the human brain, are resistant to a natural
4858 tendency to disorder and disorganisation (Colombo & Wright, 2021; Ashby, 1947; Friston,

4859 2009, 2010, 2012; Kauffman, 1993; Nicolis & Prigogine, 1977). Indeed, biological systems
4860 are defined by the fact that they are able to maintain their states and forms, even as their
4861 environments change (Ashby, 1947; Friston, 2009, 2010, 2012; Kauffman, 1993; Nicolis &
4862 Prigogine, 1977). For example, ink dropped into a bowl of water will disperse and dissolve,
4863 but a biological organism will not.

4864 Biological systems exist in an environment that is subject to random and
4865 unpredictable fluctuations, and yet manage to survive by restricting themselves to occupying
4866 a limited number of states (Friston, 2012). Biological systems do this by identifying and
4867 extracting structural regularities from their unpredictable environments, and then embodying
4868 them to “become models of causal structure in their local environment, enabling them to
4869 predict what will happen next and counter surprising violations of those predictions” (Friston,
4870 2012, p.2101). Creating a model of the environment allows biological organisms the
4871 opportunity to self-organise (see Chapter 2, section 3.3.3.2.3), become homeostatic, and limit
4872 the number of states they can occupy, therefore decreasing internal disorder. Therefore, the
4873 minimisation of free energy becomes an account of self-organising behaviour.

4874 That biological systems can maintain order in this way distinguishes them from other
4875 self-organising systems (Friston, 2010). A biological organism can only access a limited
4876 repertoire of sensory and physiological states at any given time. Friston further asserts that
4877 biological agents necessarily act to minimise the amount of sensory disorder they experience,
4878 which violates the second law of thermodynamics (Evans, 2003; Friston, 2010). In this way,
4879 the distal (long-term) imperative of biological systems is to maintain states within
4880 physiological bounds. This means that globally, a biological system is predictable. The distal
4881 imperative translates into a proximal (short-term) imperative to avoid surprise and sources of
4882 uncertainty, as well as movements from one state to another as this can become another

4883 source of uncertainty. However, a system cannot recognise whether the sensations it will
4884 experience are surprising as its local environment is unpredictable, and therefore cannot
4885 deliberately avoid them (Friston, 2009).

4886 Utilisation of the FEP permits epiphanic experiences to be conceived of as perceptual
4887 and interpretive responses to surprising sensory experiences. These unusual and surprising
4888 qualitative experiences can be primarily somatic (e.g., Evelyn), primarily noetic (e.g., Liam),
4889 or a combination of the two. Because biological self-organising systems work to constrain
4890 free energy, this surprise must be resolved, and agents have the ability to suppress free energy
4891 in two main ways: first, by changing their sensory input (through action), and second, by
4892 changing their recognition density through the alteration of their internal states (through
4893 perception and interpretation). Recognition density is a term that denotes an agents'
4894 "probabilistic representation of what caused a particular sensation" (Friston, 2010, p.128).
4895 Indeed, the notion that the brain acts to infer the causes of sensory information is long
4896 standing in psychology and neuroscience (Friston & Kiebel, 2009; Helmholtz, 1962). In this
4897 way, sensemaking and interpretations made by participants can be contextualised as
4898 perceptual inferences³⁰ with the purpose of minimising of free energy (Friston, 2012).

4899 When an agent changes their recognition density, thereby changing their conditional
4900 expectations about their sensory input, free energy is reduced. Alternatively, free energy can
4901 be reduced by changing sensory input so that sensory input conforms to expectations. These
4902 dual processes demonstrate that "free energy rests on a generative model of the world, which
4903 is expressed in terms of the probability of a sensation and its causes occurring together"
4904 (Friston, 2010, p.129). Thus, each agent possesses an implicit generative model of what
4905 causative mechanisms generate sensory data and is able to alter either sensory input, or

³⁰ For reference, CR defines perception as "a dynamic and skilled practical and social activity and accomplishment which may assist in yielding fallible knowledge of the real" (Hartwig, 2007, p.341).

4906 internal states, to minimise free energy. Perceptual processes are thus considered to be an
4907 aspect of emergent behaviour that acts to minimise free energy (Friston, Kilner & Harrison,
4908 2006). In this study, the notion that each agent possesses an implicit generative model of the
4909 causal mechanisms underlying their experience was supported, though some participants
4910 possessed more concrete models than others. For example, Anna, who “knew it was God. I
4911 knew it was God. And nowadays, I knew it was through Jesus”, versus Amira, who was
4912 comfortable with not knowing: “I can't explain who that was, or what it was, or why it was. I
4913 don't know”.

4914 Application of this theory to the data reveals that some participants changed their
4915 recognition density, as some participants utilised religiospiritual interpretations to explain
4916 their sensory experiences and transformed these interpretations to further account for their
4917 sensory experience. For example, Anna had a non-personal relationship with her Christian
4918 God before her epiphanic experience; she reflected that “My eyes, although I couldn't see
4919 anything, but my eyes were open to something so powerful, and he must've put those
4920 thoughts into my head”, indicating not only her causal convictions, but also the newly
4921 personal relationship she experienced with her God. Some participants changed their sensory
4922 input. For example, Evelyn, joined an energy healing group, “finding different groups of
4923 people with whom I could learn and explore... I started to mix with people that allowed that
4924 to come through more and to integrate that with my other perspectives”, that conformed with
4925 her interpretation of her sensory experience as a primary mechanism to reduce free energy.

4926 The FEP provides a view of how the concepts introduced through Chaos Theory are
4927 applicable to biological organisms. Further, the FEP provides a useful perspective on the
4928 integration phase of epiphanic experience as a stage in which the individual engages in
4929 strategies to reduce free energy. However, recent advances in neuroscience provide additional

4930 vital information if more detailed understandings of the perturbative disorganisation phase
4931 and transformational revelation phase of epiphanic experience are sought. As such, attention
4932 now turns to the entropic brain hypothesis.

4933

4934 ***4.1.3) Chaos, Entropy, and The Entropic Brain Hypothesis***

4935 The Entropic Brain Hypothesis (EBH) is a theory that is formally congruent with the
4936 FEP (Carhart-Harris & Friston, 2019), and which effectively demonstrates how brain entropy
4937 can allow for the emergence of an epiphanic experience in the plane of material transactions
4938 with nature. However, before detailing the premises of the EBH, it is important to
4939 operationalise the difference between chaos, which has been discussed above, and entropy, a
4940 term that will be used as this discussion progresses. Entropy is the number of ways that a
4941 system can be organised and still have the same energy (Hirsh, Mar & Peterson, 2012). Chaos
4942 implies sensitivity to initial conditions which further implies a path or evolution of states
4943 (Robertson & Combs, 2014). Therefore, whilst chaos is a measure of how disorderly the
4944 progress of a system is, entropy is a measure of disorder at a given moment.

4945 The term ‘entropy’ originates from the field of thermodynamics and is a measure of
4946 order, first described by Clausius (1867), and defined within psychological literature as “the
4947 amount of energy within a system that cannot be used to perform work (i.e., cannot be used to
4948 transform the system from one state to another)” (Hirsh, Mar & Peterson, 2012, p.305).

4949 Formalised as the first and second laws of thermodynamics Clausius (1867) asserted that: (1)
4950 the energy of the universe is constant, and (2) the entropy of the universe tends to a
4951 maximum. Hence, the net entropy of the universe is always increasing. As such, entropy can
4952 be considered to be the amount of uncertainty, or disorder, accompanying a random variable
4953 (Shannon, 1948; Wiener, 1961). Entropy in the brain can be measured through the analysis of

4954 electroencephalography (EEG) signals and has become a valuable tool in cognitive
4955 neuroscience as it offers researchers the ability to determine the randomness or disorder of a
4956 system (Carhart-Harris et al., 2014). However, it is critical to emphasise that although
4957 entropy is theorised as ever-increasing, it is equally understood that living, self-organised
4958 systems, in accordance with the FEP, enhance their likelihood of survival by constraining or
4959 reducing their internal entropy (Friston, 2009; Guastello, 2009; Schrödinger, 1944).

4960 First proposed by Carhart-Harris et al. (2014), the EBH centres around the notion that
4961 conscious states of any kind are dependent on the entropy of brain activity, i.e., the
4962 randomness and chaos of brain activity (Tagliazucchi, Carhart-Harris, Leech, Nutt &
4963 Chialvo, 2014). Carhart-Harris (2018) defined the theory as follows:

4964

4965 The entropic brain proposes that the ‘qualia’ or subjective quality of any given
4966 conscious state, and specifically the ‘richness’ of its content, can be indexed by a
4967 quantitative measure of the magnitude of entropy (in the information theoretic sense)
4968 in a given parameter of spontaneous brain activity, such as oscillations in electrical
4969 potentials recorded with EEG or MEG. (p.167)

4970

4971 Although the EBH was developed to account for changes in consciousness as a result
4972 of psychedelics, an experimentally controllable method of elevating brain entropy, it intended
4973 to provide a theoretical understanding for the full range of conscious states³¹ (Carhart-Harris,

³¹ It is not within the scope of this thesis to unpack the hard problem of consciousness (which asks questions about the relationship between the material and mental elements of consciousness). However, using Chalmers (2003) taxonomy of metaphysical positions on consciousness, and Bhaskar’s (2020) conception of consciousness as “a synchronic emergent power of matter” (p.116), allows for the CRist stance on consciousness to be viewed in alignment with a nonreductive approach that accounts for both an external perceived reality, as well as the sensory and phenomenal component of experience (Coates, 2007).

4974 2018). Moreover, Carhart-Harris et al. (2014) note that other methods (e.g., meditation) are
4975 able to increase entropy in the system, and therefore shift consciousness towards greater
4976 criticality. Criticality is an important concept when seeking a comprehensive understanding
4977 of the EBH, in particular, the notion of self-organised criticality, which builds on the notion
4978 of self-organisation discussed in relation to both Chaos Theory and the FEP (Beggs & Plenz,
4979 2003; Carhart-Harris et al., 2014; Chialvo, Balenzuela & Fraiman, 2008). This concept
4980 permits for the additional understanding that, when a complex, self-organised system, such as
4981 the human brain, is forced away from equilibrium by regular energy inputs, it displays
4982 unusual properties. These properties emerge as a result of the system reaching a critical point
4983 between order and chaos.

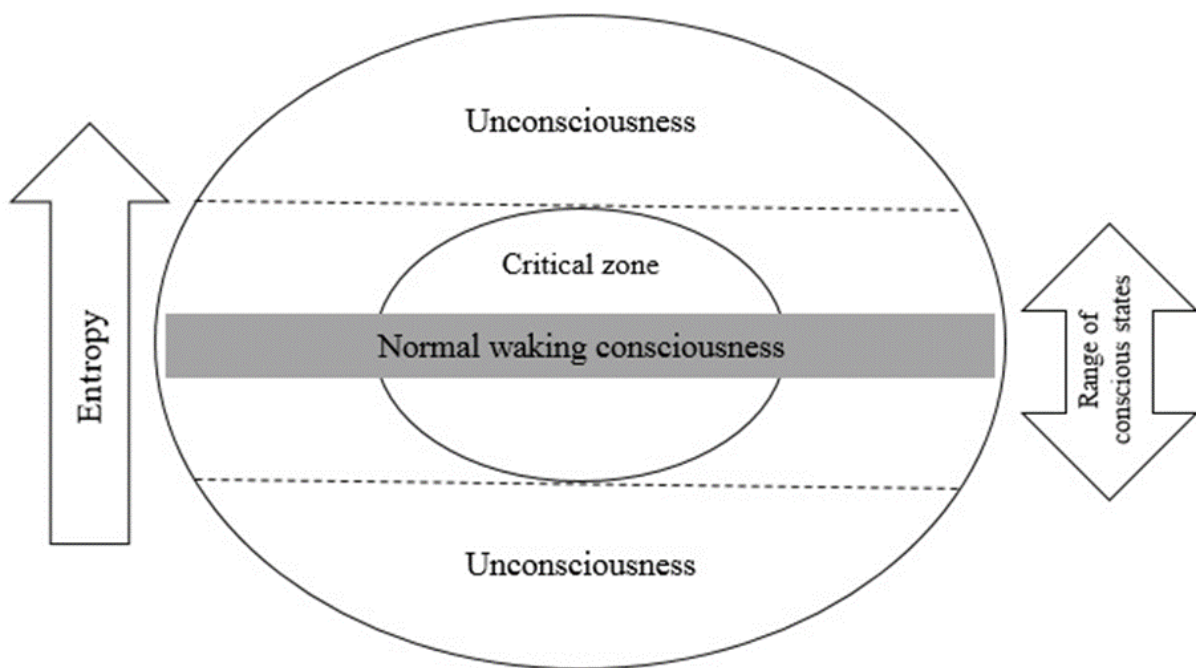
4984 What people experience as normal waking consciousness, according to this
4985 hypothesis, arises within a critical zone in which brain entropy is neither overly disordered
4986 nor ordered. The introduction of, for example, psychedelics would increase brain entropy,
4987 shifting consciousness to a ‘higher’ state within the critical zone. This shift in consciousness
4988 engenders “greater conscious content, flexibility of mind and emotional lability” (Carhart-
4989 Harris, 2018, p.169; see Figure 5.1), which most certainly aligns with the experiences of the
4990 participants in this study during and after their epiphanic experiences as many participant’s
4991 experiences significantly altered conscious content (e.g., Jeremy; see quote in Table 5.4 under
4992 ‘Altered Cognitive State’), psychological flexibility (e.g., Luce: “My mind was opened a bit
4993 more to thinking about things and talking about things”), and intense emotion (in particular,
4994 feelings related to happiness were commonly referred to. Amira explained that she “felt very
4995 happy” after hearing the voice speak to her, and Nina described feeling “euphoric” – both
4996 high arousal positive emotions; Russell, 1980). However, there is an upper limit to brain
4997 entropy and criticality, whereby at a certain point consciousness is lost (Carhart-Harris et al.,
4998 2014). The same is true of low-entropy states of consciousness, as, e.g., sedatives and

4999 anaesthetics decrease entropy, such that system activity enters a sub-critical zone which
5000 negatively impacts the richness of phenomenal experience and will also reach a point at
5001 which unconsciousness is inevitable (Carhart-Harris, 2018; Carhart-Harris et al., 2014).

5002

5003 **Figure 5.1**

5004 *The entropic brain (drawn from Carhart-Harris, 2018).*



5005

5006 The states of consciousness associated with high-entropy include REM sleep (e.g.,
5007 Nina), the onset of psychosis (e.g., Jeremy), temporal lobe epilepsy, and psychedelic-induced
5008 states of consciousness (Carhart-Harris et al., 2014). States associated with high-entropy and
5009 criticality are termed 'primary states of consciousness', a term originally used by Freud
5010 (1900)³², and are understood as regressive and primitive states of consciousness that are
5011 dominant in pre-ego infancy and are argued to be the style of cognition experienced by

³² Freud (1900) explained that "We have found that processes in the unconscious or in the id obey different laws from those in the ego. We name these laws in their totality the primary process, in contrast to the secondary process which governs the course of events in the ego" (p.164). Therefore, Freud postulates the existence of two processes that determine the division of psychical energy.

5012 primordial man. From this evolutionary perspective, primary consciousness can be viewed as
5013 a mode of cognition that was suboptimal for the survival of our evolutionary ancestors, and
5014 which was replaced by a more constrained cognitive style, and a stable sense of self, or ego
5015 (Carhart-Harris et al., 2014).

5016 In contrast, normal waking consciousness – referred to as ‘secondary consciousness’ –
5017 is the result of the brain suppressing entropy in order to shift away from criticality and
5018 therefore maintain stability within our sense of self. By suppressing entropy and being able to
5019 preserve a sub-critical state of consciousness for a prolonged period of time, the brain is able
5020 to organise cognition, exercise executive functioning, experience metacognition (the ability to
5021 think about one’s thoughts and behaviours) and notice and overcome magical thinking
5022 (Carhart-Harris et al., 2014; Fleming et al., 2012). In short, by suppressing entropy, and
5023 therefore narrowing the scope of experienced consciousness, individuals are better able to
5024 negotiate reality (Hirsh, Mar & Peterson, 2012).

5025 Secondary consciousness gathers information mechanistically from reality and adapts
5026 and learns from its experiences, using appropriate constraints (Friston, 2010). Primary
5027 consciousness is more chaotic, but as a consequence is also more flexible, capable of
5028 expansiveness, and making the non-linear jumps demonstrable when considering epiphanic
5029 experiences. Further, the transition from a secondary to primary state involves the brain
5030 undergoing a ‘phase transition’, therefore implying that the relationship between these two
5031 states of consciousness is not continuous and implicating the yielding of a dissipative
5032 structure to a chaotic attractor (Carhart-Harris et al., 2014; Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009;
5033 Zeeman, 1973). This phase transition is perhaps most evident in the quotation from Jeremy in
5034 Table 5.4.

5035 Critically, Carhart-Harris et al. (2014), alongside providing a theory rooted in
5036 cognitive neuroscience (the reader is directed towards Appendix H for an account of the
5037 neural correlates associated with the mechanisms proposed by the EBH), also ensured that the
5038 subjective and qualitative facets of their hypothesis are noted: “The great merit of applying
5039 the measure of entropy in cognitive neuroscience is that it is uniquely adept at bridging the
5040 physical and subjective divide; mere flip sides of the same coin - but different sides
5041 nonetheless” (Carhart-Harris, 2018, p.168). Carhart-Harris et al. (2014) state that increased
5042 entropy in the brain is accompanied by an increase in puzzlement and subjective uncertainty,
5043 therefore stressing that ‘uncertainty’ is a qualitative term that signifies the presence of greater
5044 brain entropy (Hirsh, Mar & Peterson, 2012), and therefore directly aligns the EBH with the
5045 demi-regularity ‘uncertainty’ from this research. For example, when asked which emotions
5046 he associated with the time of his life before his epiphanic experience, George reflected that
5047 “Probably a lot of, kind of, well, some uncertainty”. In order to further explore the relevance
5048 of the EBH (supported by Chaos Theory and the FEP), each of the three phases of epiphanic
5049 experience will be considered in turn.

5050

5051 **4.1.3.1) Disorganisation.**

5052 The EBH was found to offer crucial understandings of the disorganisation phase. In
5053 order to explore this, four main topics will be discussed: (1) negative life experience, (2) high
5054 entropy objects, (3) purposeful experiential absorption, and (4) naturally occurring altered
5055 states.

5056

5057 ***4.1.3.1.1) Negative Life Experience.***

5058 It is proposed that for some individuals, negative life experience generates or
5059 enhances uncertainty (i.e., the subjective aspect of entropy) such that an epiphanic experience
5060 may be afforded. Negative Life Experience was a uniform feature of all participants' lives
5061 preceding their epiphanic experience, echoing the findings from Chapter 4. It should be noted
5062 that, whilst many of the participants experienced trauma, this was not ubiquitous, thereby
5063 making 'negative life experience' a more representative label. Despite this, trauma is of
5064 particular relevance to epiphanic experience across all four planes of social being. Trauma is
5065 an aversive, disorganising event that overwhelms the central nervous system and coping
5066 capacity of the individual and undermines their assumptions about themselves and the
5067 world³³ (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Porges, 2018; Van der Kolk, 2014).

5068 Many participants experienced trauma within particular structures or contexts (the
5069 plane of social structures *sui generis*), and often inflicted by others (the plane of social
5070 interactions). For example, trauma was sometimes the result of dysfunctional dynamics in the
5071 family unit (e.g., Adela: "my mum left me when I was really little, so before I was one, and I
5072 lived with other family members"), the workplace (e.g., Evelyn: "I whistle blew on a
5073 children's home in the seventies... And I was supported by nobody at work"), and/or
5074 religious structures (e.g., Luce: "I was born into the group... which are now considered to be
5075 a cult"). Indeed, the range of participant experiences implicate the presence of a range of
5076 different types of traumas, including (but not limited to) shock trauma (e.g., Liam),
5077 developmental/relational trauma (e.g., neglect: Adela, see above quotation; sexual abuse:

³³ Using the four planar social being (Bhaskar, 2020), the following picture of trauma is permitted to emerge. In the plane of material transactions with nature, trauma can be conceived of as an experience that causes the nervous system to become dysregulated (Porges, 2018; Van der Kolk, 2014). In the plane of social interactions between people, trauma can be recognised as something that can be inflicted or facilitated by others, and that can have long-lasting consequences for the individual in terms of their ability to connect with others (e.g., Dorahy et al., 2009). Trauma happens within a context (i.e., the plane of social structures *sui generis*), which can shape an individual's exposure to traumatic events, as well as their capacity to navigate their lives post-traumatic event (Ungar, 2013). Further, trauma is an event that creates disturbance in the plane of the stratification of the embodied personality (Horowitz, 2015; Janoff-Bulman, 1992).

5078 Nina: “It was sexual. Yeah. Physical. Sexual.”), complex trauma (e.g., Luce: “I still struggle
5079 trying to remember what actually happened around that time because I think I just dissociated
5080 to deal with it all”), and perhaps also intergenerational trauma (e.g., Frida: “coming from a
5081 Jewish family didn't exactly help really, there's a lot of suffering there”³⁴). Moreover, the
5082 participants traumatic experiences occurred over a range of timescales: past (i.e., adverse
5083 childhood experiences, e.g., Adela), recent (i.e., a recent bereavement, e.g., Anna), and
5084 present (i.e., immediate exposure to trauma, e.g., Liam).

5085 Trauma boosts entropy as, from a probabilistic perspective, it presents the brain with
5086 myriad potential outcomes (Hirsh, Mar & Peterson, 2012). The infliction of trauma acts as an
5087 aversive event that undermines assumptions the individual has made about the world around
5088 them (Janoff-Bulman, 1992), therefore boosting chaos, uncertainty, and entropy, serving to
5089 create disorganisation through the human organism (Porges, 2018). Uncertainty, a universal
5090 experience for participants, and a state which is synonymous with the subjective state of
5091 anxiety (Hirsh, Mar & Peterson, 2012), serves to shift brain entropy closer to criticality
5092 (Carhart-Harris et al., 2014). Uncertainty was a pervasive experience for participants, and
5093 anxiety, or related emotions, were explicitly referred to by most participants, such as Liam,
5094 who recalled that the time preceding his epiphanic experience was “definitely marked by an
5095 anxiety”.

5096 However, not all participants were in high-entropy states; for example, Anna
5097 described herself, after a death in her husbands family, as experiencing “a deep, deep
5098 depression...that death triggered off something in me that I completely went down into a
5099 place that I can't describe”. States such as depression and PTSD are considered to be low-

³⁴ This was interpreted as tentatively indicative of intergenerational trauma as it pertains to the Jewish experience (e.g., Dashorst, Mooren, Kleber, de Jong & Huntjens, 2019; Firestone, 2019; Scharf & Mayseless, 2011).

5100 entropy states as they are characterised by inflexible cognitive and behavioural patterns, and
5101 diminished conscious awareness (Hudetz, Liu, Pillay, Boly & Tononi, 2016; Liu et al, 2018;
5102 Schartner et al., 2015). Therefore, participants with psychological inflexibility (e.g., Liam:
5103 “over that two and a half years had been this movement towards an increasing rigidity”),
5104 negative self-concept (e.g., Nina: “I didn't really feel like I could- I was good enough or I
5105 could do- my confidence was very low. My self-esteem was quite low”), sadness (e.g., Adela:
5106 “I was feeling really unhappy, a lot of the time”), depression (e.g., Luce: “I got I got quite
5107 depressed at times, distressed, um, trying to figure things out”), and PTSD (e.g., Anna: “I was
5108 carrying the loss of [brother], not realizing it was PTSD”) would likely have had decreased
5109 brain entropy. In this way, the participants whose conscious states were typified by low
5110 entropy experiences would have been less able to flexibly respond to their changing
5111 circumstances which over time may force the emergence of a critical point (Gleick, 1987).

5112 Many participants had negative life experiences before their epiphanic experience, but
5113 only Liam’s negative life experience appeared sufficient to immediately evoke an epiphanic
5114 experience: “the event was essentially a 24-hour period, from a phone call of which I said,
5115 no, I'm too busy, to a phone call in which it- which said it's quite likely that he's going to
5116 die”. Liam characterised his mental state as rigid and inflexible in the time before his
5117 epiphanic experience, implicating a state of low entropy. However, he was also experiencing
5118 uncertainty, in the form of anxiety, as, for example, he became more disconnected from
5119 people around him:

5120

5121 That rigidity was only flexed for my sister. And then outside of that, it was, you
5122 know, it wasn't really flexed. So, work first, sport second, anything else third. So, I
5123 would say, yes, looking back at it, relationships had become less important.

5124

5125 Andrew being hit by a bus represents perturbation of the system sufficient to trigger
5126 the acute onset of turbulent disequilibrium, i.e., a movement towards criticality, wherein the
5127 set of self- and world-assumptions Liam had been working with became dissipative
5128 structures, as a result of increased entropic activity. Therefore, chronic stress and the long-
5129 term consequences of trauma may act as primers to epiphanic experience. As noted by Adela:

5130

5131 I think the fact that I was feeling really unhappy, a lot of the time, was kind of
5132 demonstrating that something needs to change. So, I think that, you know, that would
5133 have made me more receptive to thinking about things. That's why I was reading
5134 those types of books and doing yoga and things.

5135

5136 Suffering is therefore conceptualised as a driving force for transformative change.
5137 Whilst this acknowledgment by the participants themselves ($n = 10$) could be understood as
5138 participants seeking to attribute meaning to some of their greatest challenges, and not some
5139 deeper causal explanation, it appears likely that suffering is deeply linked to epiphanic
5140 experience. If the disconnection, discontent, and uncertainty generated by the negative life
5141 experiences of the participants is taken to equate with suffering, it becomes clear that this is
5142 an important 'component', or mechanism, if understandings of causality are sought. The
5143 importance of suffering, and its place within narratives of transformation has long been
5144 understood (Campbell, 1949, 2004), and the connection between transformation and suffering
5145 has been noted in the broader literature (e.g., Barrett, 1999; Fosha, 2009; Fosha, Thoma &
5146 Yeung, 2019; Rousseau & Measham, 2007). Although existing literature on epiphanic

5147 experience highlights the presence of suffering prior to transformation (e.g., Ilivitsky, 2011;
5148 Miller & C’de Baca, 2001) the suggestion that suffering is necessary has not yet been
5149 explicitly made.

5150

5151 **4.1.3.1.2) High Entropy Objects.**

5152 Several participants appeared to access the Revelation phase by making meaningful
5153 connections in the presence of ‘high entropy objects’. High entropy objects are here defined
5154 as persons, objects, or ideas that incite uncertainty, shifting brain entropy closer to criticality.
5155 This notion of high entropy objects possesses many similarities to Gabora’s (2017, 2018)
5156 conceptualisation of creativity using psychological entropy, termed Honing Theory³⁵. Honing
5157 Theory postulates that creativity begins when high-psychological-entropy material is
5158 detected. This kind of material incites uncertainty, which typifies high-entropy brain states.
5159 After this material is detected, the process of creativity involves repeatedly considering it
5160 from differing perspectives and contexts (thereby ‘honing it’) until the elevated state of
5161 arousal provoked by the high-entropy material has dissipated. In so doing, the individual can
5162 experience resolution or restructuring.

5163 Therefore, it is suggested that participants tended to undergo a similar process,
5164 whereby the uncertainty produced or enhanced by the high-entropy object generated
5165 sufficient turbulent disequilibrium for them to release and reorganise their self- and/or world-
5166 assumptions. Luce already had several disorganising negative life experiences by the time she
5167 encountered her high entropy object:

³⁵ It should be noted that Gabora’s model carries greater weight now that Shi et al. (2020) have demonstrated the positive relationship between brain entropy and divergent thinking/creativity.

5168

5169 And I saw this lovely little tweed coat. It was cute. It was adorable. And I wish I still
5170 had it because it was so key... as I put it down on the counter, I noticed it was double
5171 breasted. And I thought, oh, I can't have this, it's double breasted. I don't like double
5172 breasted things. And a little voice whispered in my ear, what do you mean you don't
5173 like double breasted things? You like this coat. You've picked it out. You love it
5174 because it's tweed. It's like good old English tweed. Reminds you of home. You want
5175 this coat. Yeah, but I don't like double breasted coats. And then suddenly it hit me. It
5176 wasn't me that didn't like double breasted coats. It was my mother.

5177

5178 On discovery of the tweed coat, Luce was confronted by a potent symbol in her
5179 external reality that reflected an uncertainty in her internal, but largely unconscious, reality.
5180 The tweed coat might therefore be conceptualised as a high-entropy object that ultimately
5181 necessitated that Luce reorganise and restructure her self-and world-assumptions. Other
5182 participants also encountered high entropy objects; Adela had her line of text: "it just said...
5183 something along the lines of "the eyes that we see ourselves with are the ones we inherit- that
5184 inherit, they're not necessarily ours""; Scarlett, her doctors' words: "He just listened to what I
5185 was saying. And then he just looked at me and said, "Scarlett, life is not a rehearsal""; Nina,
5186 her dream.

5187 This notion of high entropy objects is also strongly evocative of Freudian
5188 metapsychological ideas, in particular, the notion of cathexis. Initially used by Freud in a
5189 physiological manner, whereby he referred to neurons or systems imbued with a certain
5190 amount of excitation or energy (Freud, 1894, 1895), cathexis refers to the investment of the
5191 libido in a person, object, or idea. It should be noted that 'object' can refer to literal objects,

5192 but also symbolic or abstract objects. During cathexis, “the main quota of libido is transferred
5193 on to the object and the object to some extent takes the place of the ego” (Freud, 1940, p.21).
5194 This reflects the results from this study, as, for example, Luce’s tweed coat can be viewed as
5195 the object of cathexis, directing libidinal energy away from the ego, diminishing egoic
5196 control, and allowing content from the unconscious to emerge. The high entropy objects
5197 therefore appear to be, for many participants, representations of unconscious or repressed
5198 content, and as such are entangled in their memories as they pertain to the traumas and
5199 neuroses they had experienced. Indeed, Freud (1895) believed that all past experiences (i.e.,
5200 memories) are represented in the present. Memory is also implicated by the involvement of
5201 the medial temporal lobes in the neural causal mechanism proposed by Carhart-Harris et al.
5202 (2014) to be responsible for the experiences typified by elevated brain entropy.

5203

5204 ***4.1.3.1.3) Purposeful Experiential Absorption.***

5205 All but two participant accounts (Anna and Celine) implicated the importance of
5206 formalised activity (which can be conceived of as the behavioural/agentive manifestations of
5207 certain social structures, e.g., mindfulness is a behavioural manifestation of Buddhist
5208 structures). Although meditative activities such as chanting (e.g., Frida), mindfulness (e.g.,
5209 George), and reading (e.g., Adela) were most commonly noted immediately prior to
5210 epiphanic experience, the range of formalised activities described by participants (e.g.,
5211 educational, spiritual, therapeutic) may suggest that the form of the formalised activity
5212 matters less than its function. Perhaps the function of formalised activity is revealed when
5213 considering the commonalities between the formalised activities that participants engaged in
5214 before or during their epiphanic experience, namely: experiential absorption (Jamieson, 2005;
5215 Tellegen, 1981). Many of the formalised activities such as meditation, chanting, silent

5216 retreats, or yoga, appeared to act as conduits for experiential absorption, through which
5217 participants were able to access different states of consciousness (Ott, 2007).

5218 In almost all cases, participants were absorbed, and their attention was not invested in
5219 the conscious deliberation of a problem, therefore allowing them to think more divergently
5220 (Runco, 2014). Absorption is proposed to act as a conduit to the Revelation phase, and in
5221 most instances was accompanied by the presence of negative life experience. Tellegen and
5222 Atkinson (1974) argued that any activity that involves a high degree of absorption also entails
5223 a temporary surrender of selfhood. This is again evocative of the Freudian notion of cathexis
5224 (Freud, 1940), the application of which permits the following picture to emerge. If varying
5225 degrees of libido are transferred to an object, person, or idea, through the vehicle of
5226 formalised activity, the ego is replaced in that moment and unconscious or repressed content
5227 is permitted to move more freely between the unconscious and preconscious. In instances
5228 where the main quota of libido is transferred to the object, person, or idea (e.g., Jeremy),
5229 primary processes³⁶ can be induced. Moreover, and because the unconscious is not
5230 constrained by the rules of logic (Freud, 1940), in instances where smaller portions of
5231 libidinal energy are transferred, individuals tend to be able to think more divergently as a
5232 result of greater unconscious accessibility.

5233 Meditative activities were most commonly referred to, and participants engaged in a
5234 wide variety of meditative activities, including meditation (e.g., George: “my first ever silent
5235 meditation retreat”), chanting (e.g., Frida: “So I'd get up and just chant”), and deep
5236 contemplation (e.g., Will: “I was absorbed, definitely lost track of time, which doesn't

³⁶ The reader is reminded that primary processes are defined as the “archaic and ontogenetically and phylogenetically regressive primary psychical process. The primary psychical process describes the relatively motile, free-flowing activity of the unconscious mind. The primary psychical process becomes observable when the forces of repression are circumvented by the forces of the unconscious. Such episodes are characterised by a fluidity of association – perceptually and cognitively, and a flooding of affect” (Carhart-Harris, Mayberg, Malizia and Nutt, 2008, p.6).

5237 normally happen to me”). Vivot, Pallavicini, Zamberlan, Vigo and Tagliazucchi (2020)
5238 reported that the entropic state the brain experiences during psychedelic experience is similar
5239 to that experienced during meditation for long-term meditators (Atasoy et al., 2017; Carhart-
5240 Harris et al., 2012; Garrison et al., 2013). Therefore, during meditative states entropy
5241 increases. This is relevant to the primary data set as all participants who were meditating
5242 before their epiphanic experience (e.g., Jeremy, George) were experienced meditators.
5243 Chanting, or rhythm-induced trance, has also been reported as being able to evoke altered
5244 states of consciousness (Block, 1979; Thomason, 2010; Winkelman, 2011; Vaitl et al., 2005).
5245 Though there is no literature that directly addresses chanting and its effect on brain entropy,
5246 given that the aforementioned research has noted its capacity to induce altered states, this
5247 suggests that chanting may have altered the entropic activity in Frida’s brain, particularly in
5248 conjunction with her pronounced fatigue (Waters et al., 2014), thereby affording her mind
5249 greater flexibility to arrive at divergent conclusions.

5250

5251 ***4.1.3.1.4) Naturally Occurring Altered States.***

5252 A small number of participants entered organically into an altered state, and in most
5253 instances, this was accompanied by negative life experience. Sleep and dreaming, such as in
5254 the case of Nina, is a classic example of an altered state of consciousness, or more precisely,
5255 a high-entropy primary state (Carhart-Harris et al., 2014; Crick & Mitchison, 1983; Vaitl et
5256 al., 2005). Some participants had experiences which contained pronounced auditory and
5257 visual symptoms generally associated with schizophrenia, a dynamical disease that has been
5258 explained according to NDS theories, and psychosis³⁷ (i.e., both are considered high-entropy

³⁷ It is further acknowledged that whilst psychosis may involve hallucinatory experiences, having hallucinatory experiences does not necessarily indicate the presence of psychosis.

5259 states) (Breakspear, 2006; Chadwick & Birchwood, 1994; Gleick, 1987; Huber et al., 2004;
5260 Sokunbi et al., 2014; Tschacher & Junghan, 2009; Tschacher & Kupper, 2007; Waters et al.,
5261 2018). For example, Amira heard a voice: “a voice spoke to me, then. This disembodied- this
5262 huge voice. It sounded like the whole sky”. However, literature suggests that 38.7% of the
5263 general population has had a hallucinatory experience suggesting that these are common
5264 experiences (Ohayon, 2000). Further, Amira’s experience occurred in nature, a context that
5265 has been repeatedly noted in the literature as affording sudden and profound experiences
5266 (Bethelmy & Corraliza, 2019; DeMares, 2000; Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999; Harrild &
5267 Luke, 2020; Naor & Mayseless, 2020; Storie & Vining, 2018; Williams & Harvey, 2001).

5268

5269 **4.1.3.2) Revelation.**

5270 When considering primary states of consciousness, it becomes clear that certain
5271 participants experienced ‘extreme’ states³⁸, typified by high-entropy, which are characterised
5272 as being content-rich but unpredictable and involving perceptual distortions and a disturbance
5273 to the sense of ‘self’ (Carhart-Harris, 2018; Cavanna, Vilas, Palmucci & Tagliazucchi, 2017;
5274 Tagliazucchi et al., 2014). Jeremy had what was diagnosed as an acute psychotic episode,
5275 making his experience a typical example of a high-entropy state, and the most ‘extreme’ case
5276 in the data set. It should be noted that meditation has been found to induce psychosis which
5277 supports predictions of the EBH’s model (Chan-Ob & Boonyanaruthee, 1999; Dyga &
5278 Stupak, 2015; Kuijpers, Van der Heijden, Tuinier & Verhoeven, 2007). Jeremy experienced
5279 significantly different modes of perception (also evident in Eunice and George’s accounts)
5280 wherein he experienced ego-dissolution and a sense of oneness (Martin et al., 2014):

³⁸ The reader is reminded that the identification of ‘extreme’ cases is a core CRist retroductive method (Danermark et al., 2019).

5281

5282 It [consciousness] went really, really, really, really big. And really, really, really,
5283 really, really small. Until it went to a place where there was this union of everything
5284 and nothing. And in that place, there wasn't self or no self. There wasn't time and
5285 space. There was just- [pause] different philosophies, different psychologies...

5286

5287 The two primary demi-regularities associated with the revelation phase were: (1)
5288 noetic content and (2) somatic content, both of which can be accounted for by the EBH.
5289 High-entropy states have long been found to facilitate insight by revealing parts of the
5290 unconscious mind, and supporting emotional insights, i.e., the acquisition of new self- or
5291 world-assumptions (Carhart-Harris, 2018; Peill et al., 2022). For example, Adela, as a result
5292 of her transformative experience, suddenly understood that:

5293

5294 The way I thought about myself, and the way I assumed other people thought about
5295 me wasn't true. And it wasn't- like I didn't really need to think about that anymore.
5296 Because that was just the way that I'd been treated, when I'd been really, really small.

5297

5298 Similarly, Anna recalled that “it was like a knowledge that God, God is alive. He's
5299 here with me. And I've got nothing to fear”. Further, the experience of insight can be linked
5300 to elevated entropy in the brain through the mechanism of divergent thinking (Shi et al.,
5301 2020; Weiss et al., 2021). Therefore, an understanding of the EBH permits for the

5302 understanding of noesis during the epiphanic experience as a consequence of the
5303 psychological flexibility and divergence engendered by elevated entropy.

5304 Adela provides an example of the distinctly somatic content, or embodied quality, to
5305 epiphanic experience:

5306

5307 I kind of felt a bit out of my body...it was not just outside of myself, almost outside
5308 time...Which is why- which is when the hugging, it didn't feel like I was hugging just
5309 myself. So, it felt like, like maybe a compression of time or something, or, or the
5310 younger me felt present in a way that obviously she's not usually.

5311

5312 This somatic aspect to epiphanic experience was also discernible from the quality of
5313 the noesis. For example, Hayley experienced a felt sense of clarity:

5314

5315 It seemed to break through the, um, that squirrel-like, you know, which way do I go?
5316 ... Like it- it- it just broke through. It was quite clean, and it felt quite linear and quite
5317 straight, and it felt quite definite.

5318

5319 The pronounced somatic component to many participant experiences can also be
5320 accounted for as a facet of elevated brain entropy. In a meta-review of research on sleep
5321 deprivation (a high-entropy state), Waters et al. (2018) found that somatosensory changes
5322 were the second most commonly affected sensory modality. This highlights the relationship

5323 between high-entropy states and somatic and perceptual changes. Further, the somatic content
5324 of epiphanic experiences illustrate that epiphanic experiences are deeper than just an
5325 intellectual shift in understanding, as the term noesis suggests. As noted by Luce: “It's much
5326 deeper than that. It usually involves a sort of a change. You know, they- know the whole- the
5327 way you think about yourself. Just suddenly switches and you've got- it actually can be
5328 actually quite scary”.

5329

5330 **4.1.3.3) Integration.**

5331 Due to the participants' initial self- or world-assumptions becoming dissipative
5332 structures, which are released at an unpredictable critical point, the participants were released
5333 from an old mode of being and were permitted to inhabit a new one. Many participants
5334 reported a sense of release, and frequently referred to letting go of something that they had
5335 previously held close. For some participants, such as Luce, a past sense of self was released:

5336

5337 You've got that introjection in your mind for all those years, you know. It's such a
5338 relief to have been able to say: it can all go now. I don't need to have that cult mind in
5339 my head anymore. So, it was it was a powerful moment.

5340

5341 It was by letting go of harmful parts of herself, that Luce was then able to connect
5342 with a more authentic sense of self. Will also provided a clear example of releasing a set of
5343 beliefs and values:

5344

5345 I suppose at a simplistic level, I've had to let go of something, you know, a belief that
5346 I held dear, which was that the kind of service that I provide, was best provided within
5347 a sort of a public sector, centrally organised, overseen, budgeted organisation. And I
5348 was signed up to that. And I associate that with, you- you- broadly with a leftish
5349 political view, and that was congruent with my leftish political views.

5350

5351 By letting go of this set of political beliefs and values Will was able to connect to a
5352 more authentic sense of his values, and by extension, himself. Most participants let something
5353 go, be that an emotion, a belief, a value, a sense of self, or all of these, aligning with the
5354 theoretical notion that in order for something new to emerge other things must first be
5355 released. The participants also experienced a new and more complex way of being that
5356 emerged from the chaos of the disorganisation and revelation phases (i.e., emergence; see
5357 Chapter 1, section 2.5). This new way of being tended to be better suited to the individual and
5358 their surroundings, considering that all participants felt more connected to a sense of meaning
5359 and purpose following their experience. Hayley reflected that “my sort of response to this
5360 moment was the most important thing I could have done in terms of actively reconnecting
5361 myself with my values”.

5362 The magnitude of the changes experienced by the participants was non-linear. If
5363 linear, Newtonian logic is used, the outcome of perturbation to the system should be a
5364 predictable function of the size of the perturbation. However, the participants showed not
5365 only that the consequences of perturbation (i.e., voices, dreams, etc.) were unpredictable, but
5366 in many cases the extent of the changes experienced as a consequence of the perturbation far
5367 outweighed the magnitude of the perturbation (Oestreicher, 2007). For example, Hayley's
5368 thought at the book festival produced the outcome of her leaving a 'secure' job to write a

5369 book, and Frida's realisation about happiness produced a radical acceptance of her ongoing
5370 health issues. These were life changing events for these participants that may not have
5371 occurred without perturbation.

5372 The EBH is also able to account for the profoundly transformative effects of
5373 epiphanic experiences. Carhart-Harris et al. (2014) suggested that humans tend to be
5374 'happier' when their brains are closer to criticality. Whilst participant affective states prior to
5375 epiphanic experience were characterised by high-arousal emotions with a negative valence,
5376 affective states in the Integrative phase were largely low-arousal emotions with a positive
5377 valence (Russell, 1980). George explained that his experience gave him "the ability to, to just
5378 be kind of, it's not even happy, it's like content and peaceful". Studies investigating the use of
5379 psychedelics (e.g., LSD and psilocybin) found that these compounds produced lasting and
5380 positive effects on subjective well-being in healthy volunteers (Carhart-Harris & Nutt, 2010;
5381 Erritzoe et al., 2018; Griffiths, Richards, Johnson, McCann & Jesse, 2008; Griffiths et al.,
5382 2011; Grob et al., 2011). Therefore, high-entropy states may be considered therapeutic, partly
5383 due to the insights generated by these experiences (Carhart-Harris et al., 2018). For example,
5384 whilst traditional treatments for PTSD (e.g., CBT) have worked to suppress system entropy,
5385 psychedelics have shown great promise in the treatment of this condition (Krediet et al.,
5386 2020). The ability of high-entropy states to produce therapeutic results supports the notion
5387 that epiphanic experiences tend to ultimately be positive for those experiencing them (even
5388 considering instances where the Integrative phase is initially characterised by a disorganised
5389 response).

5390 A particularly significant change that was found was the change in personality or
5391 attitude often noted by participants. Literature highlights the ability of psychedelic drugs to
5392 produce profound and lasting changes to personality and attitude (Bouso, dos Santos,

5393 Alcázar-Córcoles & Hallak, 2018; McGlothlin and Arnold, 1971; Studerus, Kometer, Hasler
5394 & Vollenweider, 2011). Specifically, and despite the truism that personality traits are
5395 relatively stable by adulthood (Costa and McCrae, 1997; McCrae and Costa, 1997), Openness
5396 was shown by MacLean, Johnson and Griffiths (2011) to have increased, and sustained
5397 across 14 months, following an administration of psilocybin. This result has been supported
5398 by other researchers (e.g., Bouso, dos Santos, Alcázar-Córcoles & Hallak, 2018). Moreover,
5399 this increase in Openness is reflective of the results in this research whereby many
5400 participants explicitly described Openness as becoming a new and/or enduring feature of
5401 themselves. Nina, for example, explained that she was:

5402

5403 Able to open up... I started to just be open, come open to the world... I've opened up
5404 and I feel that is that kind of an opening and awakening that I've had has helped, just
5405 kind of like almost like parting of the curtains really.

5406

5407 This demonstrates that epiphanic experience can profoundly alter sense of self, as
5408 well as often resulting in increases in the characteristic of Openness. Therefore, incidents of
5409 elevated entropic activity can be strongly suggested to possess the capacity for re-shaping the
5410 embodied personality.

5411 How participants interpreted their experiences, and the ensuing changes, varied,
5412 though Chaos Theory can provide useful insight into this process. Chaos Theory allows for
5413 the conceptualisation of beliefs as attractors³⁹ (Goertzel, 1995a). Thus, the structures in each

³⁹ Subjectively, attractors are experienced as “patterns of feeling, thinking, and relating that we engage in, either healthy or pathological”, whilst repellers are experienced as “patterns of thinking, feeling, and relating that we are unlikely to follow” (Shapiro, 2015, p.90).

5414 of the participants' lives, alongside their ideas, beliefs, and theories, can be conceived of as a
5415 landscape of attractors and repellers within which the participants moved dynamically with
5416 the landscape constantly changing as their internal and external environments changed.
5417 Attractors, Shapiro (2015) proposed, “gradually transform into a complex network of
5418 interconnected channels where our life flows under normal circumstances, while repellers
5419 grow into mountain ranges, which we are reluctant or unable to climb” (p.91). For example,
5420 Anna’s landscape would be characterised by a deep channel to an attractor basin
5421 representative of her religious beliefs. Each participant’s adaptive, dynamic landscape is
5422 unique, reflecting the process of sensemaking and interpretation itself.

5423 Chaos Theory further allows for the understanding that human conscious experience
5424 of discontinuous change will not necessarily align with the implications made by Chaos
5425 Theory (Bütz, 1995a). This is due to the notion that: “In humans this process of change
5426 inevitably expresses itself in part through internal symbolic representations, in effect
5427 capturing the experience of the passage through chaos” (Bütz, 1995a, p.332). Thus, whilst the
5428 dialectical process of making sense of, and interpreting an experience can be viewed as a
5429 dynamical landscape wherein structures, ideas, beliefs, and theories about the world function
5430 like attractors and repellers, the language used to negotiate this process can be viewed as
5431 symbolic in nature, and unique to the individual.

5432

5433 **4.1.4) Summary**

5434 This section has explored the generative mechanisms identified as influential in the
5435 plane of material transactions with nature. Using an understanding of these mechanisms,
5436 certain factors can be identified as having the potential to make an epiphanic experience more
5437 likely (e.g., negative life experience), but there fundamentally remains no way to predict

5438 these experiences as there is no way (yet) of predicting the myriad factors in an open,
5439 complex, and fluctuating system. However, it appears as though these kinds of experiences
5440 can be evoked in different ways, to different magnitudes, and on purpose, for example
5441 through the use of psychedelics, meditation, or lucid dreaming training (Carhart-Harris et al.,
5442 2014).

5443 The theories contained in this section on the plane of material transactions with nature
5444 further provide the understanding that one's conscious state is afforded in part by a constantly
5445 fluctuating state of entropy. That humans normally occupy a similar set of states (Galatzer-
5446 Levy, 1995), does not equate to the notion that consciousness is categorical whereby there is
5447 either normal waking consciousness or altered consciousness. Instead, consciousness is
5448 conceptualised as a spectrum, the contents of which are individualised based on the
5449 environments encountered throughout the lifespan and the innate tendencies of the biological
5450 system. Therefore, consciousness can be viewed as a spectrum from comatose, to sedated, to
5451 normal, to psychotic, and back to comatose (Carhart-Harris, 2018). Indeed, even within each
5452 'level' of consciousness there are numerous states a system can occupy; for example, in
5453 normal waking consciousness a person can experience multiple states, such as: rumination,
5454 caffeination, and orgasm. Epiphanic experiences are proposed to occur when the
5455 consciousness of an individual moves toward criticality and greater entropic activity.

5456 Freudian ideas⁴⁰ were also found to be congruent with some of the findings from this
5457 study, and in particular, the notion of cathexis via high entropy objects or experiential

⁴⁰ Mainstream psychology and psychoanalysis have somewhat of a torrid history that is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully unpack. CR understands the sources of the distain and marginalisation often shown to psychoanalysis by psychology as emanating from two primary philosophical sources: (1) positivism (e.g., Eysenck & Eysenck, 1985; grounded in the political ideology of eugenics, and with considerable anti-Semitic undertones) and (2) critical rationalism (e.g., Popper, 1962, discussed in Chapter 1, section 2) – neither of which CR aligns with (Pilgrim, 2019). The criticisms of Freudian methods, and its apparently 'self-evident' weaknesses, are therefore seen by CRists as extensions of taken for granted philosophies in psychology (e.g., Freudian case study methods are seen as legitimate and useful sources of information on concrete singularities

5458 absorption. This is perhaps unsurprising given that Freudian metapsychology is especially
5459 congruent with the EBH (Carhart-Harris, 2018; Carhart-Harris et al., 2014; Carhart-Harris,
5460 Mayberg, Malizia & Nutt, 2008). Therefore, whilst the EBH permits the understanding that
5461 epiphanic experiences largely occur due to changes in self-organised criticality as a result of
5462 increased entropic activity in the brain (Carhart-Harris, 2018; Chialvo, Balenzuela &
5463 Fraiman, 2008), the notion of cathexis provides additional nuance. Cathexis may act as a
5464 mechanism to redirect libidinal energy away from the ego, therefore diminishing its control,
5465 shifting towards (or entering into) primary psychical processes, and permitting content from
5466 the unconscious to emerge. The ego must then work to restructure itself (i.e., find a new self-
5467 organised structure) in such a way that it can accommodate and incorporate the information
5468 that has been released from the unconscious into the conscious mind. CR is largely congruent
5469 with psychoanalytical ideas, on the proviso that these ideas are taken as a guiding framework,
5470 and not as a set of covering laws (Pilgrim, 2019).

5471 Existing theories of epiphanic experience can also be subsumed into this perspective.
5472 Breaking Point (Miller & C’de Baca, 2001; Chapter 2 section 3.2.3.1) can be conceived of as
5473 the system entering into criticality. Deep Discrepancy (Miller & C’de Baca, 2001; Chapter 2
5474 section 3.2.3.2) speaks to conflicting sensory experience and recognition density that results
5475 in a non-volitional critical point. Personal Maturation (Miller & C’de Baca, 2001; Chapter 2
5476 section 3.2.3.3) may be conceived of as the system undergoing a non-linear change in order
5477 to become more adaptive to its environment. Particular Person (Miller & C’de Baca, 2001;
5478 Chapter 2 section 3.2.3.4) serves to highlight individual differences in Openness may serve to
5479 increase or decrease the likelihood of experiencing an epiphanic experience. Formalised

by CR). In fact, CRists “have tended to find merit in psychoanalysis as an approach to human life because it takes both causes and meanings seriously. Not only does it endorse the relationship between ontological realism and epistemological relativism, it also emphasises that inner events can have causal efficacy” (Pilgrim, 2019, p.144).

5480 Activity (Ilivitsky, 2011; Chapter 2 section 3.1.3) is one method by which entropy may be
5481 increased in the brain, and cathexis can occur.

5482 This section has provided an ontologically differentiated conceptualisation of the
5483 generative mechanisms at play in the plane of material transactions with nature using theory
5484 that is congruent with CRist philosophy. Together, these theories and ideas constitute a
5485 suggested metaphysical account of what material reality would need to be like in order for
5486 epiphanic experiences to occur. Attention must now turn to the next plane of the four planar
5487 social being, or else risk a neuro-reductionist account of epiphanic experience. As such, the
5488 discussion will now focus on the plane of social interactions between people, exploring the
5489 ways in which other people may act as generative mechanisms to epiphanic experience.

5490

5491 **4.2) The Plane of Social Interactions Between People**

5492 Epiphanic experiences are private, internal events, but despite this, other people
5493 around the participants were influential, thereby implicating the presence of generative
5494 mechanisms in the plane of social interactions between people. For some participants, certain
5495 people appeared directly influential to the emergence of their epiphanic experience (e.g.,
5496 Scarlett, Eunice, Xavier). For other participants, the quality of their social environment (i.e.,
5497 negative life experience), which includes the actions of other agents, contributed to the
5498 emergence of their epiphanic experience (e.g., Hayley, Will, Luce). The majority of
5499 participants noted meaningful connections in their lives, such as George: “Good. Close with
5500 my family. Very close with my friends, particularly the ones I was living with. I’m still living
5501 with a couple of them now. So, yeah, I had a good support network. Good relationships”.
5502 However, most still referred to social connections as being restricted or lacking, such as Luce

5503 who described feeling “pretty isolated, and that relationships were on a superficial level”, and
5504 Adela who explained that “I would find it hard to relate to people”. Critically, those who fell
5505 more into the latter descriptive category tended to suffer greater impediments to their mental
5506 health (Saeri, Cruwys, Barlow, Stronge & Sibley, 2018). In order to explore how the plane of
5507 social interactions between people was causally impactful, the following topics will be
5508 discussed: (1) support, and (2) key relationships.

5509

5510 ***4.2.1) Support***

5511 Both the presence, and lack, of support was found to have causal implications.
5512 Further, many of the participants received support from others in the time before their
5513 epiphanic experience. For example, Nina received support in the form of coaching, which she
5514 perceived as the catalyst for her experience:

5515

5516 I think the coaching was the- the link. Relationships with two people, um, talking
5517 about mind and body rather than just the cognitive, which I stay very much in- in- in
5518 most of the time. That shifted it. Plus, you know, more than one person supporting
5519 me, more and one person saying, you know, this isn't right, this isn't – that, that wasn't
5520 good.

5521

5522 In this way, the support Nina received from coaching allowed her to approach her
5523 trauma (which was itself the product of the actions of other agents) in a new way, cognitively,
5524 as well as in an embodied fashion. Considering the research detailing the use of body-based

5525 treatment for trauma, this new approach to dealing with her issues, introduced by her
5526 coaches' mere weeks before her dream, could have been a powerful facilitator for Nina's
5527 experience (Van der Kolk, 2014; Wilkinson, 2016).

5528 Other participants described a lack of support. For example, Evelyn identified more
5529 than one area in her life in which she did not feel supported. When discussing her illness, she
5530 explained that: "You don't get any support with ME anyway in the medical profession. We
5531 get nothing like you get with MS, we're just diagnosed and basically told to sling your hook".
5532 Evelyn linked her ME to the whistleblowing case she was involved in that led her to become
5533 self-employed, a state of affairs in which she felt "very, very unsupported". Finally, Evelyn
5534 discussed how growing up in a household that had little interest in emotional or spiritual life
5535 meant that: "those sorts of experiences weren't really discussed. So, there wasn't anybody
5536 around that I would have said that I had these experiences". This lack of support generated
5537 uncertainty in Evelyn's life before her epiphanic experience. Further, it also meant that after
5538 her epiphanic experience, Evelyn had to work hard to change her recognition density (see
5539 section 4.1.2 above) as her philosophical perspective (dialectical materialist) disallowed her
5540 experiences. The tension between the disorganised and disconnected, and meaningful and
5541 connected, relationships in the lives of the participants suggests a duality whereby the
5542 individual is disconnected enough for a disorganising, destabilising effect to occur, but
5543 connected enough to prevent this from becoming unmanageable.

5544

5545 ***4.2.2) Key Relationships***

5546 Some participants described their epiphanic experience as being facilitated through a
5547 key relationship. For example, Xavier recalled receiving support from his partner, the other
5548 trainee with whom he was undertaking professional training, and his supervisor. Although

5549 Xavier did not always feel comfortable talking to his supervisor, their support in working
5550 through Rogers' 19 propositions was critical to facilitating his experience:

5551

5552 Kind of facilitated by my – by our supervisor around some of those areas that were
5553 more pertinent and actually probably allowed us to even introspect deeper and deeper,
5554 just to help develop that sense of self even more...I think obviously the people I had
5555 around me made a massive difference. I think, I think my supervisor was great in
5556 terms of how she set it up and the exercise itself and getting us to do that.

5557

5558 Xavier's supervisor therefore played a crucial role in facilitating his epiphanic
5559 experience, pointing out the similarities between him and his fellow trainee, and facilitating
5560 catalysis of his revelation. By setting up these meetings and using person-centred counselling,
5561 Xavier's supervisor also ensured that there would be a structure (discussed in section 4.3
5562 below) through which Xavier could interpret his experience⁴¹. Another example can be drawn
5563 from Eunice. The two facilitators of Eunice's retreat were an important element in his
5564 experience, as they provided both the content that catalysed his experience and much of the
5565 lens through which he integrated it. The course leader, Neil, was an influential figure for
5566 Eunice:

5567

⁴¹ Xavier's experience is also implicative of Mezirow's (1975) theory of transformative learning which proposes that disorientating dilemmas can be used to challenge adult learners' thinking. In so doing, these individuals are then forced to critically assess and reflect on the accuracy of their beliefs (Howie & Bagnall, 2013). Transformative learning can be conceptualised as a non-linear, dynamical process (O'Sullivan, 2003), and has been linked to creativity, as this kind of learning is seen as an "intuitive, creative, emotional process" (Grabove, 1997, p.90).

5568 I can't say how many retreats I've been on with Neil... and he's just a remarkably kind
5569 of magnetic presence and deep pre- very safe presence as well. There's always
5570 something about that combination of, yeah, feeling very safe with him, he's very kind
5571 of – very trustworthy person, but also, somebody who can go to a very deep, you
5572 know, been to very deep places, and that can- yeah that certainly, um, took me there.

5573

5574 In addition, his spiritual mentor, Amal, provided him with support during his
5575 epiphanic experience, as she “just kind of held me like from behind. Like- it was it was kind
5576 of like being held on air, it was very, very gentle. It just felt like my breathing kind of
5577 becoming regulated again”. Thus, for Eunice, others were critical in shaping his epiphanic
5578 experience. This suggests that, under certain conditions, others were able to constellate a
5579 range of unconscious content for the participants. This notion of constellation is Jungian in
5580 origin and denotes the activation of a psychical personal complex (i.e., a group of ideas or
5581 images with an emotional charge; Jung, 1960, 1969). According to psychodynamic and
5582 analytical ideas, if, by whatever method, others are able to constellate complexes for the
5583 individual, then a kind of cathexis occurs whereby energy is drawn away from other
5584 complexes and invested in the constellated complex (Freud, 1940; Jung, 1960; Krieger,
5585 2013). This not only again implicates the relevance of ideas from psychodynamic theory to
5586 the study of epiphanic experience, but also suggests that, in the same way that ideas, beliefs,
5587 and theories can act as attractors (Goertzel, 1995a), other people can also be conceptualised
5588 as acting as attractors within the participants lives. Other people may act as attractors by
5589 facilitating critical points, such as in the case of Eunice, and/or integration, such as in the case
5590 of George: “I probably also was in an environment where teachers were there to talk about it

5591 and understand it ... I think having that support and that framework helped me understand the
5592 experience and it be a positive experience”.

5593

5594 **4.2.3) Summary**

5595 The majority of participants had meaningful connections with others and received
5596 support from others in some form in the time before their epiphanic experience. However,
5597 there are perhaps two things most critical to note when considering the influence of others:
5598 key facilitative relationships, and restricted meaningful connections. Several participants
5599 noted a particular person who they believed to have directly, or indirectly, catalysed, or
5600 shaped their epiphanic experience. This is reflective of existing literature wherein social
5601 support has been implicated as important (Miller & C’de Baca, 1994). Concurrently, many
5602 participants described their relationships with others as being compromised, or restricted, in
5603 some way, which is suggestive of the state of alienation frequently referred to in literature
5604 (Jarvis, 1997; McDonald, 2005, 2008; Miller & C’de Baca, 1994, 2001; Murray, 2006). This
5605 tension between the presence of supportive and key relationships, alongside fractious
5606 relationships, and a more general state of disconnection and disorganisation, may therefore
5607 have causal implications. This duality, whereby the individual is destabilised by their difficult
5608 relationships, but sufficiently stabilised by their supportive relationships, may contribute to
5609 the entropic landscape by shifting the individual towards greater criticality.

5610

5611 **4.3) The Plane of Social Structure Sui Generis**

5612 When considering the structures relevant to the causal mechanisms underpinning
5613 epiphanic experience it is important to refer to the concepts of structure and agency, as they

5614 are operationalised within CR by the Transformational Model of Social Activity (TMSA;
5615 Bhaskar, 2008; Collier, 1994; see Chapter 1, section 2.6), which explores how social
5616 structures effect intentional agency, and how agency may in turn impact social structures.
5617 Four structures in the plane of social structures sui generis appeared to play a particularly
5618 pronounced and causally impactful role in participant epiphanic experiences, namely: (1)
5619 family, (2) ideology, (3) institutions, and (4) psychology⁴². Some participants used their
5620 agency to challenge and transform these structures for themselves, though the structures
5621 themselves placed limitations on the extent to which they could do this.

5622

5623 **4.3.1) Family**

5624 Family can be considered a causally impactful structure as it was entangled in many
5625 of the participant accounts of epiphanic experience. In this way, the participants' family
5626 structures – and the range of phenomena encompassed (e.g., internal working models,
5627 attachment style, etc.; Hooper, 2007) – tended to form part of the foundation for the
5628 experiences to come. This is evident due to a great many participants relating what they had
5629 discovered through their epiphanic experience to their own upbringings. When Adela was
5630 very young, she was abandoned by her mother and left to live with her extended family. On
5631 the day of her epiphanic experience she found herself to be particularly sensitised to the
5632 presence of her friend's baby: “there was also something about seeing, kind of how
5633 defenceless and vulnerable he was, that was quite sad”. Combined with her reading of a
5634 psychotherapy book (the key line within which can be considered a high entropy object; see

⁴² Please see Appendix G for a reflexive passage on another potentially causally impactful structure: time. This reflexive passage has not been included in the main body of the text due to its more abstract nature which might detract from the flow of this train of argumentation. Despite this, the researcher still considered it important to address this structure.

5635 section 4.1.3.1.2), Adela ultimately found the realisation that the negative way she had
5636 thought about herself wasn't 'true', but rather was the consequence of her treatment as an
5637 infant, thereby allowing her to transform the structure of family for herself and overcome her
5638 own latent fears about parenthood: "I don't know if that was stopping me being a parent, but
5639 then I became a parent, sort of like, a year and a bit afterwards. But that made me feel like I
5640 could be like a good enough parent".

5641 Liam's experience also implicated the family structure as being causally impactful.
5642 Liam described being exposed to a lot of death as a child, losing his mother and three
5643 grandparents within the space of four years. He also recounted that "my relationship with my
5644 dad wasn't very good". This meant that Andrew's death was particularly difficult for Liam –
5645 he describes this as "the first significant person who died" – because Andrew had become
5646 "definitely a father figure". Therefore, the trauma inflicted by his death was highly acute, and
5647 seemingly sufficient to provoke an epiphanic experience which transformed and reorganised
5648 his values such that interpersonal connection, in particular with family, became Liam's
5649 priority: "I recently moved out of [city], moved to [different city]. That was again to be- with
5650 the express intention of being closer to my family, which just wouldn't have happened years
5651 ago".

5652 A final example can be drawn from Luce's case, who explicitly details how her
5653 experience with the tweed coat allowed her to understand that her notion of family had
5654 become entangled with the cult:

5655

5656 I was equating my mother with the cult, because she- she [mother] more or less
5657 merged with them, very much merged with them, even after they left, really. So- you
5658 know, it was- you know, the things I liked, the things I disliked, the things I believed

5659 in, the things I didn't believe in, the things I knew were wrong and the things that I
5660 didn't know were wrong.

5661

5662 Indeed, it was Luce's realisation that she did not know herself beyond the structure of
5663 her family (as well as the cult, through entanglement with the family structure) that formed
5664 the basis of her first epiphanic experience, and eventually allowed her to separate, or
5665 individuate, from the family structure and the ideology entwined with it.

5666 The family structure therefore appears influential in terms of the kind of content that
5667 emerged during and after the epiphanic experience. It is well established in the literature that
5668 adverse childhood experiences can impact people profoundly (Boullier & Blair, 2018;
5669 Sheffler et al., 2019). All of the participants in this study had negative life experiences, and
5670 many of them referred to adverse childhood experiences. These adverse experiences disrupt
5671 neurodevelopment, create emotional, cognitive, and social impairments, and can result in the
5672 adoption of high-risk behaviours, disease, disability, and social problems (Felitti et al., 1998;
5673 Hughes & Ostrout, 2020). Childhood development is highly influenced by the family unit
5674 (Anderson et al., 2003). Further, the structure of family is implicated in all participants'
5675 adverse childhood experiences, as family support, and modelling of effective and healthy
5676 coping strategies, facilitates adjustment in children (Hawkis & Manne, 2013; Stevenson et al.,
5677 2020). It is therefore proposed that for many of the participants, early childhood experiences,
5678 in the context of their family structures, created emotional, cognitive, and behavioural
5679 patterns that prevented them from adjusting optimally to their environment in the time before
5680 their epiphanic experiences.

5681

5682 **4.3.2) Ideology**

5683 Participants invested in various ideological structures that can be considered causally
5684 impactful. These ideologies shaped participants' lives and experiences before their epiphanic
5685 experience, as well as informing the integration process. The ideological structures
5686 implicated in the data set were particularly influential in terms of the activities that they led
5687 participants to engage with. For example, Frida was a Buddhist, and she explained that “I've
5688 been kind of living this and practicing for a long time since back in the 90s...my Buddhist
5689 practice is central to my life”. Indeed, the chanting that Frida engaged in directly before her
5690 epiphanic experience was a core part of her Buddhist practice. Similarly, George made sense
5691 of his epiphanic experience in terms of the philosophies (structures) and meditative practices
5692 (behaviour/agency) he was engaging with:

5693

5694 I would say, yeah, the silent retreat had a lot to do with it. I think just the general
5695 mindfulness practice. I'd say probably my interest in, kind of ACT and then a bit more
5696 into kind of, like Buddhist philosophy and getting a bit more interested in those things
5697 I think definitely contributing, I think, with the, with the second experience that would
5698 obviously have been very directly related to the book that I was reading (George).

5699

5700 Here, George implicated various meditative practices in his epiphanic experience,
5701 from the silent retreat he attended, to the literature he was reading at the time. It is suggested
5702 that whilst the form of these behaviours varied across the participants (e.g., meditation,
5703 chanting, reading), what unifies them is their function: the capacity to enhance cathexis or

5704 experiential absorption (Freud, 1894, 1895; Jamieson, 2005; Ott, 2007; Tellegen, 1981),
5705 which has been linked to mystical states (Scheidegger, 2021).

5706 Many participants felt connected to religious structures and ideologies, as many had
5707 experienced a religious upbringing, and some were still actively engaged in this sphere of
5708 life. A clear example of this can be found in Eunice, who felt connected to the Church of
5709 England traditions practiced by his grandmother:

5710

5711 I remember I experienced, one time, being at my grandmother's house, who did go to
5712 church, she's kind of, I guess, old-fashioned Church of England, kind of, almost out
5713 of habit, and just feeling a kind of sense of connection or warmth in relation to that.

5714

5715 This sense of connection to religious ideology is reflected in Eunice's continued
5716 engagement with Christian and Sufi religious structures and ideas. Jeremy's epiphanic
5717 experience was highly influenced by Christian mystical ideologies. He described engagement
5718 with two key texts, 'The Way of Mastery' and 'A Course in Miracles'. It was engaging with
5719 the suggested activities in these mystic texts, particularly 'A Course in Miracles', that
5720 preceded Jeremy's experience. Further, because some participants were already deeply
5721 invested in religious structures before their epiphanic experience, these structures gained a
5722 new sense of importance after their experience. Anna's Christian ideology was central to the
5723 content that emerged during her epiphanic experience, as well as the way in which she made
5724 sense of it:

5725

5726 I suppose because I was affiliated to the church, I just I just automatically went that
5727 way... I had to give my life, I had to give my life to Jesus and, you know, learn about
5728 him... my whole life is working for Jesus.

5729

5730 This aligns with extant literature which asserts that the process of sensemaking is
5731 guided by prior conceptual frameworks (Amos, 2016a; Hirsh, Mar & Peterson, 2012; Miller
5732 & C'de Baca, 2001). However, other participants, such as Amira, eschewed religious dogma
5733 and ideology and described a new sense of spirituality emerging:

5734

5735 I am a spiritual person, and you can be a spiritual person without having formal
5736 religion... It's made me feel a sense of something greater than us out there, and, you
5737 know, each of us is just a small, you know, tiny, tiny little, you know, we're not much
5738 more than a speck of dust, really. But each speck of dust is- has its own place and has
5739 its own importance.

5740

5741 Indeed, the vast majority of participants classified themselves as non-religious, or as
5742 having had a secular upbringing, and few stated this as clearly as Evelyn (who retained these
5743 beliefs post-epiphany but incorporated a spiritual dimension to them): "I was brought up as
5744 an atheist... I'm not into God. I'm not into gods. I'm not into angels". In many ways, the
5745 prevalence of atheism/agnosticism in the data set, is to be expected given that rates of
5746 religiosity are very low, both in the scientific community, and in the United Kingdom
5747 (Ecklund, Johnson, Scheitle, Matthews & Lewis, 2016; Larson & Witham, 1998). Indeed,
5748 religiospiritual structures were only found to have been influential to the progression of an

5749 epiphanic experience if those structures were deeply embedded into the psyche of the
5750 individual (e.g., Anna), and purposefully made relevant by the participant. This is further
5751 evidenced by the fact that several participants had religious convictions (e.g., Adela) but did
5752 not use them to make sense of their experience. Therefore, whilst religio-spiritual structures
5753 were shown to have particular relevance to epiphanic experience (Ilivitsky, 2011; Miller &
5754 C'de Baca, 2001), this study adds another layer of nuance by clarifying that religio-spiritual
5755 structures were relevant - but only in instances in which participants chose to make them
5756 relevant.

5757 Xavier represents another example of the impact of ideological structures, as he and
5758 his supervisory group engaged with Rogerian thought in the form of the 19 propositions of
5759 person-centred counselling (Rogers, 1951). Xavier details how engaging with these ideas was
5760 conducive to “deeper introspection...stuff was very deep, very personal”. It was from the
5761 framework created by this ideology that Xavier’s epiphanic experience emerged. These
5762 ideologies shaped the participants' self- and/or world-assumptions in the time before their
5763 epiphanic experiences, and in many instances, informed the activities they engaged in prior to
5764 transformation. In this way, ideologies can be considered directly causally impactful in terms
5765 of their behavioural corollaries.

5766

5767 **4.3.3) Institutions**

5768 Two types of institution appear to be particularly causally impactful within the
5769 specific context of the participants from this study: (1) the medical system, and (2) the
5770 workplace. An example of the former can be found in Scarlett’s story, which involves
5771 multiple points of contact with the medical system, across two countries (Italy and the UK).
5772 Scarlett’s major instance of negative life experience before her epiphanic experience (i.e., her

5773 husband's heart attack) happened within the context of the Italian medical system. Scarlett's
5774 husband was required to move to different locations to get the treatment he needed, which
5775 was even more challenging to navigate as the medical practitioners, obviously, spoke Italian.
5776 This most likely would have increased subjective uncertainty for Scarlett. Scarlett's
5777 transformative experience also occurred within the context of the medical system, this time in
5778 the UK, which she described as follows:

5779

5780 I thought if I'm off sick I'll go to the doctor. So, I just sort of explained what was
5781 happening. I he- and- and I'm really heartened actually, I was real- I can remember
5782 feeling amaz- how amazing he was, he was one of these doctors- because some of
5783 them can be a bit flippant, some of them can be like, you can tell they're not really
5784 listening, you know, whatever. But he sat there, he didn't interrupt. He just listened to
5785 what I was saying. And then he just looked at me and said, "Scarlett, life is not a
5786 rehearsal".

5787

5788 Perhaps being seen and heard within the same structure and context that had
5789 previously so profoundly destabilised her, was causally impactful for Scarlett. The medical
5790 system also appears causally impactful for Evelyn as she recounted receiving no support for
5791 her ME from the medical profession. In conjunction with her self-professed 'spiritual side'
5792 this rejection by the medical system may have encouraged Evelyn to consider other options
5793 for healthcare.

5794 Occupational structures also appeared causally impactful for some participants. Will's
5795 working situation was becoming untenable in the time before his epiphanic experience. Will

5796 referred not only to the “brutal cuts to local authority budgets” which impeded his ability to
5797 do his job within the organisational structure, but also to the fact that “professional
5798 relationships where I work were getting kind of increasingly kind of fractious”. A significant
5799 part of Will’s epiphanic experience was reorganising his views on educational psychology
5800 provision, which up until his workplace difficulties, had aligned with his organisational
5801 structure. Will explained that “I had to rethink all of that, in terms of what my job was about,
5802 how I wanted to do it”, indicating his understanding that he needed to use his agency to
5803 change his relationship with this structure.

5804 Hayley’s workplace also effectively created the conditions for her epiphanic
5805 experience. She recounted developing a “profound psychogenic stutter”, and other health
5806 issues, before her epiphanic experience: “I sort of had a kind of breakdown because I realised
5807 that not only had I been, you know, overworked when I needn’t have been”. Had Hayley’s
5808 managers not behaved in this way, she may never have been so open to the thought that
5809 emerged at the book festival, and so ready to leave that occupational structure. After her
5810 experience, Hayley moved away from the structure that she felt constrained her, academic
5811 psychology. She exercised her agency by rejecting the structure and pursuing a writing career
5812 on her own terms. In this way, the institutions in participants’ lives can be seen to be causally
5813 impactful, participating in the creation of the conditions from which an epiphanic experience
5814 might emerge.

5815

5816 **4.3.4) Psychology**

5817 Several participants admitted to the researcher after their interviews that they had
5818 never disclosed their experience to others in their profession. Despite this, most used their
5819 psychological background in order to make sense of what they had experienced, such as

5820 Liam⁴³: “there was definitely a willingness in me to try and understand this in psychological
5821 terms and to try and process it in some way”. This tension – trying to create understanding
5822 through the use of psychological structures, but also understanding that this experience is
5823 perhaps not something to be spoken aloud about within psychological structures – may be
5824 due to dominant discourses in psychology which tend to view humans through a lens of
5825 pathology⁴⁴. Seligman and Csikzentmihalyi (2000) reflected that pre-World War II
5826 psychology devoted itself equally to healing mental disorder, helping all people to increase
5827 their productivity and fulfilment, and the development of those with exceptional talents.
5828 However, post-World War II, psychology shifted the vast majority of its focus toward healing
5829 mental disorders. This pathological lens thereby serves to exacerbate stigma around epiphanic
5830 experiences, and mental health more generally, such that perhaps even Psychologists feel as
5831 though this is not a subject they can discuss.

5832 Indeed, both Frida and Will noted the pathological focus inherent to psychology,
5833 which they interpreted as constraining. Frida noted that “when I studied psychology, there
5834 was no positive psychology. You know, it didn't exist. So actually, what you learn was very
5835 negative psychology, the psychology of illness”. She felt constrained by the lack of focus in
5836 psychology on the conditions for happiness, whilst Will discussed that working in the
5837 pathology-focused field of local authority educational psychology meant that he only came
5838 into contact with people with learning difficulties: “you kind of get a feeling that everybody's
5839 ill because your professional life is comprised of one ill person after another”. Frida had
5840 already immersed herself in Buddhism, and this allowed her to negotiate her relationship with
5841 the structure of psychology by finding an alternative structure that placed happiness at its

⁴³ Please note that Liam was not one of the participants who professed to not having spoken to others about his experience.

⁴⁴ This can also be linked to the wariness surrounding the wounded healer archetype (Zerubavel & O'Dougherty Wright, 2012; see section 3.17 above).

5842 core, and after her epiphanic experience, she chose to adopt perspectives within her practice
5843 that did not have a pathological focus, most notably positive psychology, and Buddhism.
5844 Will's decision to resign as a local authority educational psychologist and set up his own
5845 practice meant that he moved away from this manifestation of psychology and created a
5846 space wherein he could navigate educational psychology more freely, and on his own terms.

5847 The consequence of the aforementioned shift in focus in psychology towards
5848 pathology may be the emergence of debate around, and fixation on, what constitutes
5849 normality and abnormality. However, the distinction that psychology seeks to draw between
5850 normal and abnormal, is not as apparent as is often assumed. This argument was most notably
5851 advocated for by Rosenhan (1973), whose landmark study explored the validity of psychiatric
5852 diagnosis, and concluded that there was a strong tendency for psychological professionals
5853 within the psychiatric medical structure to pathologise experience and over-diagnose
5854 disorders. This is a clear indication of a particular tendency within psychology which must be
5855 acknowledged and challenged. Indeed, the very foundation of the system of psychiatric
5856 diagnosis has been seriously questioned by CRists, as despite its descriptive coherence,
5857 psychiatric diagnosis lacks aetiological value (e.g., Bentall, Jackson & Pilgrim, 1988;
5858 Pilgrim, 2007, 2013).

5859 When contextualised with regards to the kind of epiphanic experiences detailed earlier
5860 in the chapter, the tendency to pathologise can pose issues, as these experiences can contain
5861 experiential elements that overlap with psychotic symptomatology, such as altered sensory
5862 perception and apophenic states of mind (Brugger, 2001; Conrad, 1958; Lebedev et al., 2016;
5863 Parnas & Henriksen, 2016). For example, psychosis is considered abnormal within multiple
5864 cultures; however, research shows that 37.8 per cent of people will experience a hallucination
5865 of some kind, and 10 percent of people in the UK will experience specifically auditory

5866 hallucinations at some point in their lives (Johns et al., 2014; Ohayon, 2000). Moreover,
5867 research has shown that many people are not included in these statistics as they simply do not
5868 find their experiences distressing – despite the rhetoric pedalled by the psychiatric diagnostic
5869 system (Cooke, 2017; Garcia-Romeu & Tart, 2013; Van Os, Hansen, Bijl & Ravelli, 2000;
5870 Pilgrim, 2019). Therefore, the psychosis phenotype has been proposed to be part of a
5871 continuum of experiences that may also apply to the general population (Guloksuz & van Os,
5872 2017; van Os, Hansen, Bijl & Ravelli, 2000). This view of psychosis as a spectrum
5873 challenges prevailing views in psychology and raises questions about the labelling of
5874 experience as either normal or abnormal. This perspective also illuminates certain tendencies
5875 within psychology that may impact how the kinds of experiences detailed in this research are
5876 viewed, even by practitioners within the profession (indeed, Chapter 6 (section 2.1) describes
5877 some of the scepticism encountered by the researcher towards this research during participant
5878 recruitment).

5879 The above discussion suggests that modern psychology, as a discipline, tends to
5880 pathologise experience, and has a penchant for attempting to make clear distinctions between
5881 what is normal and abnormal. This tendency is likely a result of psychology’s
5882 positivist/empiricist inheritance (Pilgrim, 2019), and may result in a predisposition to
5883 pathologise epiphanic experiences, reducing them to mere symptoms of mental illness (e.g.,
5884 Parnas & Henriksen, 2016 appear motivated to avoid this fate). However, this attitude would
5885 commit the fallacy of reductionism – reducing a complex phenomenon to simply a brain
5886 disease (Pilgrim, 2007).

5887 Whilst the above serves to demonstrate how the participants negotiated their
5888 relationship with the broader structure of psychology, unsurprisingly, the participants
5889 epiphanic experiences also tended to impact the way in which they conducted their work as

5890 practitioner psychologists. The participants changed their approach to practice in various
5891 ways which were largely dependent on the content of their epiphanic experience as well as
5892 the broader context of their work and lives. Participants described their perspectives and
5893 interests changing, as well as many choosing to disseminate their new ideas, such as Jeremy:
5894 “I’ve been giving lots of talks to, you know, PhD psychology students about my experiences,
5895 giving talks to psychiatrists so that they can see a different perspective on mental health, a
5896 much broader perspective”.

5897 Further, as a result of their experience, many of the participants changed their choice
5898 of therapeutic modality in ways that were consistent with their experience. For example,
5899 Adela, whose long-standing issues were in large part rooted in her abandonment by her
5900 mother, chose to adopt an attachment perspective. She also “tried to like bring in more
5901 embodied aspects into my practice” after her particularly “embodied” epiphanic experience.
5902 Another example can be drawn from Anna: “I use CBT mostly exclusively now because that-
5903 that links to the Christian message of always thinking nice, and thinking lovely things, and
5904 just thinking positively”. Therefore, it becomes clear that the participants chose to adopt
5905 therapeutic modalities that were congruent with their new understanding of themselves and
5906 the world. In this way, their practice became an authentic extension of themselves as people,
5907 and of their newfound philosophies. Moreover, many were aware of the importance of this
5908 congruence referring frequently to the significance of ‘practicing what you preach’ (see
5909 Hayley’s quotation in Table 5.5 above).

5910 The participants’ view of themselves within practice also changed considerably. This
5911 was especially evident with regards to the attributes the participants described seeking to
5912 embody as practitioner psychologists. The most commonly noted characteristics that
5913 participants referred to were Rogerian in nature (Rogers, 1957, 1959), namely: (1) openness,

5914 (2) non-judgmentalism, (3) empathy, and (4) unconditional positive regard. The following
5915 quotation from Xavier is not just evocative of a newfound connection to Rogerian
5916 practitioner values, but also of a personal paradigm shift:

5917

5918 I started to, I tried to understand things from other people's perspectives and the
5919 difficult people that I was working with... let's understand your story. Let's
5920 understand your journey. And let's, let's help improve that journey or let's help make
5921 that journey even stronger, if it's not- you're not coming in with a problem or an issue,
5922 you just want to improve, how can we look to do that? And I can only really do that
5923 through understanding the person, understanding what they want, what their goals for
5924 therapy are, what they want that relationship between us to be like.

5925

5926 Because the participants emerged from their epiphanic experiences profoundly
5927 changed in some way, it is logical that this change would manifest within their practice. The
5928 participants' personal and professional selves became more congruent leading them to
5929 embrace modes of practice that were reflective of their personal philosophies, thereby
5930 allowing them to embody a greater degree of authenticity in their work.

5931

5932 **4.3.5) Summary**

5933 Some of the structures in the participants' lives appear causally impactful. In many
5934 instances, the family and/or the occupational structures active in the participants' lives acted
5935 as a destabilising force. The destabilising effect of these structures could be acute (e.g.,

5936 Hayley), or could represent the long-standing presence of maladaptive ways of being (e.g.,
5937 Adela). The destabilising effect of these structures would serve to increase subjective
5938 uncertainty – the qualitative component of entropic brain activity (Carhart-Harris et al.,
5939 2014). Ideologies could also be causally impactful, particularly when they possessed a
5940 behavioural component (e.g., meditation, chanting). These ideology-congruent formalised
5941 activities engaged in by participants may have acted as focal points from which epiphanic
5942 experiences could emerge (Vivot, Pallavicini, Zamberlan, Vigo & Tagliazucchi, 2020), in
5943 addition to facilitating sensemaking. In this way, social structures sui generis can be seen to
5944 contribute to the conditions and contexts from which epiphanic experiences could emerge.

5945

5946 **4.4) The Plane of the Stratification of the Embodied Personality**

5947 The discipline of psychology contains myriad perspectives on personality and what
5948 constitutes ‘the self’ (Fleuridas & Krafcik, 2019). However, because this research is
5949 grounded in CRist philosophical positioning, the CRist ontological differentiation of the self
5950 into a tripartite laminated system (i.e., the ego, the embodied personality, the transcendently
5951 real self) constituted the premises of enquiry (see Chapter 1, section 2.6). This ontology of
5952 personhood, in conjunction with the arguments presented above (particularly in section 4.1),
5953 is able to provide an understanding of the mechanisms at work in the plane of the uniquely
5954 stratified embodied personality.

5955 In the disorganisation phase preceding epiphanic experience, the embodied
5956 personality tended to be out of sync with the transcendently real self, often due to the
5957 employment of egoic defence mechanisms. This can be seen throughout many participant’s
5958 descriptions of a sense of disconnection from their sense of self. Jeremy described being

5959 disconnected from himself and “living from my head mostly” due to the vow he took at age
5960 seven to “never feel upset ever, ever again” after he received the news of his parents’ plan to
5961 divorce. For Scarlett, this disconnection is evident in her understanding that she was not in
5962 contact with herself: “I was becoming a shadow of my former self...Sometimes, I didn't like
5963 the way I was becoming. I really, I - I was almost getting to the point I don't recognise
5964 myself”. Luce demonstrated a pronounced consequence of this disconnection, manifesting as
5965 a state of dissociation: “I still struggle trying to remember what actually happened around that
5966 time because I think I just dissociated to deal with it all”. This fractured sense of self may
5967 have been influenced by a tendency for the use of egoic defence mechanisms⁴⁵. The plane of
5968 the embodied personality can therefore be conceptualised as disorganised as, overall,
5969 participants described: (1) an ego with a low opinion of itself and a tendency to employ
5970 defence mechanisms, (2) an embodied personality in turmoil and principally characterised by
5971 elevated levels of psychophysiological arousal, and (3) a largely inaccessible transcendentally
5972 real self.

5973 Bhaskar (2020) theorised that when the embodied personality is out of sync with the
5974 transcendentally real self, intentionality⁴⁶ will be split. This notion of split intentionality
5975 aligns with the findings that characterise the participants' inner and outer lives as possessing
5976 degrees of tumult and disorder prior to epiphanic experience. In conjunction with the ideas
5977 discussed in section 4.1, this disorganised quality of the embodied personality can be
5978 conceived of as a source of uncertainty, therefore predisposing a movement towards greater
5979 criticality (Carhart-Harris et al., 2014). Bhaskar (2020) further asserted that unity with the

⁴⁵ Many participants displayed a propensity to employ defence mechanisms (e.g., repression, withdrawal, denial) prior to epiphanic experience. For example, Evelyn explained how her lack of a social network, with whom to discuss her more spiritual side, resulted in her repressing certain experiences: “I realised that I'd had all sorts of experiences that I'd just sort of put a lid on because one does if there isn't anybody to talk about them to”.

⁴⁶ Intentionality can also be thought of as mental representation. In essence, intentionality is a philosophical term used to describe the property of consciousness whereby the mind can be said to be conscious of, and directed towards, something – be that something external (i.e., transcendent) or internal (i.e., immanent).

5980 transcendently real self is attained by elimination of the ego (e.g., the ego dissolution
5981 experienced by George is an ‘extreme case’ of this occurring; discussed in greater depth
5982 below – section 4.4.1.2), such that the embodied personality is able to come into alignment
5983 with the transcendently real self. In this way, incongruence, and disorganisation within the
5984 plane of the stratification of the embodied personality can be viewed as having causal
5985 implications.

5986 Moreover, Bhaskar (2017) offers further insight into the mechanisms within the plane
5987 of the uniquely stratified embodied personality that might generate epiphanic experiences:

5988

5989 I would have liked to have said something about the limitations of the discursive
5990 intellect; the intellect, which is concerned with thinking, because thinking virtually
5991 never takes you to the solution. It is a necessary condition for it, go through all the
5992 possibilities, but what happens when you arrive at the solution of a problem is you
5993 arrive by the action of another part of your mind or consciousness, which is above,
5994 beyond, or beneath thought; sometimes in the West it is called the unconscious.
5995 (p.158).

5996

5997 This quotation not only highlights that Bhaskar's conceptualisation of the ontology of
5998 personhood aligns with Freudian ideas (see Chapter 1, section 2.6.2) through the assertion of
5999 the existence of the unconscious, but it also provides some insight into the 'essence' of
6000 epiphanic experience. In particular, the notion that epiphanic experience is not a purely
6001 cognitive phenomenon. Indeed, the understanding generated by an epiphanic experience was
6002 suggested by some participants to be powerful because it is an understanding that manifests

6003 in “a more embodied and emotional way” (Adela) that “wasn't just the mind. It was the
6004 feeling sense” (Jeremy). For example, Nina reflected that embodied coaching was quite so
6005 powerful for her because:

6006

6007 It was useful to kind of get out of my head and get into the rest of me because I was
6008 not accessing the whole part of me. It was just accessing in my mind, and how I could
6009 think my way through this, and you know, how I could do it. And so actually using
6010 the body was a very powerful tool to kind of wake up the rest- or connect the whole of
6011 me, really, and to get some feelings in, um, you know the whole process.

6012

6013 This quotation serves to demonstrate that whilst epiphanic experiences constitute a
6014 kind of revelatory ‘knowing’, this is not an entirely cognitive way of knowing, but rather one
6015 in which the body (i.e., embodied personality) plays an intrinsic role. Moreover, Nina’s
6016 quotation also aligns with Bhaskar’s (2020) notion that human growth emerges from the
6017 diminishment of the ego (i.e., “it was useful to kind of get out of my head”) and the
6018 unification of the embodied personality and transcendently real self.

6019 Two mechanisms in the plane of the uniquely stratified embodied personality are
6020 suggested to play a causally impactful role in participant epiphanic experiences by facilitating
6021 the elimination of the ego, such that the embodied personality was able to come into
6022 alignment with the transcendently real self. The mechanisms identified were: 1) cathexis,
6023 and 2) Openness. Both mechanisms, alongside the theory they draw from, will be explored in
6024 turn.

6025

6026 **4.4.1) Cathexis**

6027 The notion of cathexis, a suggested property, or tendency, of the psyche emergent
6028 from Freudian psychoanalytic theory (Freud, 1940; see Chapter 1, section 2.6.2), was found
6029 to have the capacity to describe potential generative mechanisms within the participant
6030 sample. Cathexis refers to the investment of the libido in a person, object, or idea (i.e., the
6031 dynamic coordinate). It should be noted that ‘object’ can refer to literal objects, but also
6032 symbolic or abstract objects. Freud (1940) proposed that during cathexis, the majority of
6033 libido (i.e., the economic coordinate) is transferred to the object of cathexis, which then, to
6034 some extent, takes the place of the ego (i.e., topographical coordinate), which allows for the
6035 emergence of repressed⁴⁷ or unconscious content.

6036 Cathexis, and Freudian metapsychological ideas more generally, can not only be
6037 understood in metapsychological terms, but also in terms of modern neuroscientific
6038 understanding⁴⁸, thereby giving them a particular interdisciplinary power (Carhart-Harris &
6039 Friston, 2010; Carhart-Harris, Mayberg, Malizia & Nutt, 2008; Johnson & Flores Mosri,
6040 2016; Stoléru, 2014). Cathexis can therefore be considered a property, or tendency, of the
6041 ego. In order to effectively demonstrate the relevance of this concept to the generative
6042 mechanisms underpinning epiphanic experience, the Disorganisation and Revelation phases
6043 of epiphanic experience will be considered in turn.

⁴⁷ Repression is a critical concept within psychoanalysis (Freud, 1914). Freud (1915) explained that “the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious” (p.147). Repression is conceived of as a defence mechanism that is utilised in the presence of ideas which distress the ego, and which involves anticathexis (whereby the ego withdraws libidinal energy from unconscious ideas in order to strengthen psychical structures that block those unconscious ideas from entering consciousness; Freud, 1895, 1915, 1940).

⁴⁸ Carhart-Harris, Mayberg, Malizia and Nutt (2008) propose that cathexis correlates with activation of the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC). Activation of the DLPFC leads to deactivation of the default mode network (DMN; Raichle et al., 2001). Therefore, cathexis entails the “displacement of libido (energy) from the ego's reservoir (the DMN) and its investment in objects (activation of the DLPFC)” (Carhart-Harris, Mayberg, Malizia & Nutt, 2008, p.4).

6044

6045 **4.4.1.1) Disorganisation.**

6046 Cathexis was found to be particularly causally impactful in contexts that involved
6047 negative life experience, high entropy objects, and purposeful experiential absorption (see
6048 section 4.1.3.1 above). Acute negative life experience describes the generation of significant
6049 uncertainty (Hirsh, Mar & Peterson, 2012), with the trauma itself likely becoming the focus
6050 of cathexis. For example, receiving the news about Andrew could be considered the focus of
6051 cathexis for Liam. The economic intensity of the negative life event would produce a
6052 significant discharge of energy from the unconscious, thereby weakening ego control and
6053 shifting the individual closer to primary state processes. This would then permit the
6054 emergence of a radically new representation of the world for Liam:

6055

6056 None of that stuff was important. Not really. Not in this sort of grand scheme of- of-
6057 of what that relationship was to me. You know, frankly, in comparison to that, all of
6058 that is garbage, garbage. And so, that was the immediate thought process that I went
6059 through.

6060

6061 Indeed, Nersessian (2014) asserted that subjective uncertainty and anxiety can be
6062 attributed to the discharge of psychical energy from the unconscious, and that consistent, and
6063 relatively small, amounts of anxiety are discharged in order to impede a large discharge that
6064 would weaken ego control (Freud, 1936). As a consequence of a large discharge of energy,
6065 the ego tends to be less able to act as guardian to the unconscious, thereby allowing for
6066 unconscious content to move into the preconscious and forcing a reorganisation of the ego.

6067 However, for those participants whose experience was not triggered by acute negative life
6068 experience, but who were instead exposed to protracted negative life experience (e.g., Luce),
6069 consistent discharges of energy from the unconscious would signal the activation of the ego's
6070 defences (Nersessian, 2014). In these instances, not only were egoic defence mechanisms
6071 evident, but other experiences (e.g., formalised activity, high entropy objects, naturally
6072 occurring altered states, or another negative life experience) tended to be necessary for
6073 epiphanic experience to occur. One example of this is Nina, who explained that before her
6074 dream, "I kind of like didn't, sort of ignored it, or not ignored it, repressed it should I say.
6075 Didn't really think it happened to me".

6076 The notion of a high entropy object is also congruent with the notion of cathexis (see
6077 section 4.1.3.1). It is suggested that in the presence of the high entropy object, cathexis, or
6078 hypercathexis (whereby excessive libidinal energy is invested into an object or idea; Freud,
6079 1940), tends to occur. Because the main quota of libidinal energy is transferred to the object,
6080 the object takes the place of the ego to some extent (Freud, 1940). The elimination, or
6081 diminishment, of the ego allows for freer movement between the unconscious and
6082 preconscious. This means that the psyche would behave more in accordance with primary
6083 processes (though the dominance of the primary process over the secondary process is
6084 conceptualised as a function of the economic investment of libido in cathexis), so not only is
6085 repressed or unconscious content more able to emerge, but the individual is also more able to
6086 think freely, divergently, and associatively about that content, and in general. Consequently,
6087 unconscious, or repressed content is permitted to emerge, therefore necessitating ego re-
6088 organisation. For example, the high entropy object of cathexis in Adela's experience was the
6089 sentence she read in her book, which became an external symbol of her internal landscape.
6090 Application of this theoretical perspective allows for the view that this moment temporarily

6091 bound her ego and allowed unconscious content to emerge. This appeared to cause a
6092 reorganisation of the ego with far-reaching effects on how Adela perceived herself.

6093 Purposeful experiential absorption can also be viewed as a vehicle to cathexis or
6094 hypercathexis. In some cases, the object of cathexis was external. Luce's story not only
6095 possesses an external object of cathexis (i.e., the tweed coat), but also represents a case
6096 wherein, in strictly Freudian terms, prior to epiphanic experience the super-ego could be
6097 conceptualised as powerful enough to paralyse the ego into behaving according to its moral
6098 standards. Luce's superego could have been particularly dominant due to her childhood in a
6099 religious cult (Freud, 1940). It can therefore be suggested that Luce's ego repressed any
6100 material that would contradict the strict edicts of her superego. The tweed coat and, later, the
6101 text by Carl Rogers, were her external objects of cathexis. During cathexis it is suggested that
6102 repressed content was able to emerge, thus forcing the ego to reorganise itself and regain
6103 some control over the superego⁴⁹. Bhaskar's (2020) ontology of personhood does not
6104 explicitly account for the superego as a distinct part of the self, but this Freudian notion can
6105 reasonably be considered an aspect of the Bhaskarian ego, given that it is largely conceived
6106 of as being the internalised aspect of parental influence (Freud, 1949), and therefore separate
6107 to the transcendently real self.

6108 In other instances, the object of cathexis appeared internal. In these instances, varying
6109 degrees of libido tended to be transferred to an object, person, or idea, through the vehicle of
6110 formalised activity, such that the ego was replaced in that moment and unconscious or
6111 repressed content was permitted to move more freely between the unconscious and

⁴⁹ The diminishment of the superego is evident from Luce's comments about feeling as though she had no moral compass in the time after the tweed coat: "I suddenly got this urge to go home, or to go out, anywhere, and start doing all the things that I'd learnt were wrong. I even wanted to go and murder somebody just to find out if it was really a sinful thing to do. Because it felt like all my morals, just all of a sudden had vanished because I no longer knew what were mine, and what belonged to the cult."

6112 preconscious. Application of this Freudian theoretical perspective allows for the view that
6113 George's experience appears to be most strongly related to hypercathexis through formalised
6114 activity. It can be suggested that the intensity with which libidinal energy was focused on
6115 meditative activity (through a focus on the breath) bound his ego such that it broke off its
6116 relations with external reality, and he entered a primary state. Therefore, in instances where
6117 the main quota of libido was transferred to the object, person, or idea (i.e., they were highly
6118 absorbed, if Tellegen and Atkinson's (1974) theoretical framework is applied), primary
6119 processes were found to be induced (e.g., Jeremy). Moreover, and because the unconscious is
6120 not constrained by the rules of logic (Freud, 1940), in instances where smaller portions of
6121 libidinal energy are transferred, individuals tended to be able to think more divergently as a
6122 result of greater unconscious accessibility and consequent availability of primary process
6123 thinking.

6124 Despite the apparent relevance of cathexis and the associated emergence of repressed
6125 psychical content, not all participants appeared to deliberately access their epiphanic
6126 experience through this mechanism. For some, there was an apparently organic shift in the
6127 mode of functioning of the psychical apparatus towards the primary processes. In instances
6128 such as these, through the lens of Freudian metapsychology, the ego would withdraw its
6129 anticathexes, such that unconscious material from the unconscious would enter into the ego,
6130 thereby becoming pre-conscious and knowable. Freud (1940) differentiated two ways in
6131 which this could occur: (1) unconscious material gathers sufficient strength to break through
6132 to the ego, or (2) an urge from normal waking consciousness finds reinforcement from the
6133 unconscious. In this way, the cathexis discussed above can be seen as a mechanism to access
6134 primary process states, within which unconscious content can emerge.

6135 Nina’s dream is a classic example of the naturally occurring primary process. Nina
6136 experienced abuse as a child, which she repressed. She experienced a lot of discontent,
6137 disconnection, and uncertainty in the time before her dream. If the mechanisms detailed
6138 above are applied to this case it can be suggested that her unconscious had been discharging
6139 small amounts of energy for a prolonged period of time (Nersessian, 2014). She was also
6140 actively seeking change indicating that her desire to heal was conscious⁵⁰. During her dream,
6141 this was potentially reinforced by an unconscious element and informed her dreaming state.
6142 Freud (1949) believed that during dreaming the ego is focused only on the wish to maintain
6143 sleep (i.e., this is the focus of cathexis). Therefore, when the dream forms, the ego is
6144 predisposed to wanting to remove any impediment to sleep, and so meets the demands of the
6145 dream (thereby removing the disturbance) through wish fulfilment. Nina’s unconscious and
6146 preconscious desire to release her fear may therefore have been met by her sleeping ego.

6147

6148 **4.4.1.2) Revelation.**

6149 Using the notion of cathexis, the revelation phase of epiphanic experience can be
6150 considered the whole, or partial, activation of primary state processes via the diminishment of
6151 the ego. Only a small number of participants wholly entered what might be considered a
6152 primary state (e.g., Nina, Jeremy, George), although some experienced strong elements of
6153 this (e.g., Amira, Anna). The cathexis that characterised almost all participant experiences to
6154 some extent may have diverted the investment of libidinal energy away from the ego, and its

⁵⁰ Many participants described seeking something, whether that be change, understanding, or something more ineffable. Participants knew that there was something they needed to find but were not certain of how to find it. As explained by Nina: “I was looking for this key. This mystery feeling inside of me to be different, for me to feel different”. Participant’s recollections of seeking change suggests that they adopted an epistemic approach, a behavioural strategy whereby the capacity for learning is enhanced by the assumption that there is something to be learnt, therefore making uncertainty unavoidable, and suggesting a move towards greater criticality (Carhart-Harris & Friston, 2019; Friston et al., 2017).

6155 repressive tendencies, to an object, person, or idea – therefore aligning with Tellegen and
6156 Atkinson’s (1974) argument that any activity that involves a high degree of experiential
6157 absorption also entails a temporary surrender of selfhood. In so doing, egoic control is
6158 tempered and activity from the unconscious tends to be freer and more able to move into the
6159 conscious, enhancing the individual’s ability to make cognitive and perceptual associations
6160 often accompanied by strong emotions. The content that emerges from the unconscious is
6161 sometimes unusual, perhaps repressed, and almost universally unknown (it is interesting here
6162 to note that the German for 'unconscious' is 'das unbewusste', which is not typically translated
6163 as ‘unconscious’, but rather as 'not consciously known', which supports this point far better).

6164 The ego (Freud, 1923) is therefore a critical feature of primary states, as within
6165 primary states, the sense of self is dissolved. Three participants experienced ego-dissolution
6166 (e.g., Letheby & Gerrans, 2017) during their epiphanic experience, a phenomenon which is
6167 clearly described by George: “it's like a feeling of your sense of self dissolving”. This was
6168 echoed by Jeremy, who found that during his intense meditation, “in that place, there wasn't
6169 self or no self”, and that after finishing his practice he experienced concerns that his mother
6170 would ask questions he couldn’t answer:

6171

6172 She's gonna ask, how am I? She's going to say hello and how am I going to be able to
6173 say how I am? Because what is that? How am I? What is that? I had no idea what that
6174 meant. How am I?

6175

6176 For Eunice, this sense of ego-dissolution appeared to have been informed by the
6177 Jungian (1960) concept of the collective unconscious:

6178

6179 If we can- are able to kind of let go of our ego, or that sense of our identity, maybe not
6180 permanently, but at certain moments that we can, yeah, we can have a much broader
6181 sense of who we are, in terms of a kind of more collective consciousness... It [the
6182 ‘end’ of his experience] felt then, the kind of bringing back to a sense of being- being
6183 mys- you know, ego, self, Eunice again, rather than this connection was- kind of was
6184 far beyond me.

6185

6186 The objects of cathexis are therefore proposed to be, for many participants,
6187 representations of unconscious or repressed content, and as such are entangled in their
6188 memories as they pertain to the traumas and neuroses they had experienced. Indeed, Freud
6189 (1895) believed that all past experiences (i.e., memories) are represented in the present.
6190 Memory is also implicated by the involvement of the medial temporal lobes in the neural
6191 causal mechanism proposed by Carhart-Harris et al. (2014) to be responsible for the
6192 experiences typified by elevated brain entropy (see Appendix H). This perhaps permits the
6193 suggestion that high entropy objects act as totems to unconscious material. It is this
6194 entanglement with memory, and the high specificity and personal relevance of the focus of
6195 cathexis, that is proposed to engender such specific and personally relevant noetic outcomes.
6196 Repressed or unconscious content and memories are largely accessed through cathexis,
6197 thereby allowing the content against which the ego has built defences to emerge, and after
6198 which reorganisation of the ego is necessary.

6199

6200 **4.4.2) Openness**

6201 One of the most commonly noted outcomes of the connection to the transcendently
6202 real self noted in the integration phase was Openness. This aligns with research which has
6203 illuminated that changes in Openness can occur as a result of elevated entropic activity in the
6204 brain (Bouso, dos Santos, Alcázar-Córcoles & Hallak, 2018; Erritzoe, Smith, Fisher, Carhart-
6205 Harris, Frokjaer & Knudsen, 2019). This also aligns with Tedeschi and Calhoun’s (1996)
6206 findings that openness to experience facilitates post-traumatic growth. However, several
6207 participants noted Openness as a characteristic they possessed before their epiphanic
6208 experience, such as Evelyn: “I was always- I was- I have always been very open”⁵¹. This
6209 aligns with Miller and C’de Baca’s (2001) findings, despite the issues with their
6210 argumentation discussed in Chapter 2 (section 3.2.3.4). In this way, whilst Openness does not
6211 appear to be a prerequisite for epiphanic experience (e.g., Liam professed to not being
6212 particularly open preceding his epiphanic experience), it may tend to act as an individual
6213 difference that lowers the threshold to experiencing this kind of transformative event.
6214 Therefore, the individual difference of Openness may act in a facilitative capacity for some
6215 people preceding epiphanic experience. Hayley explained that: “you have to be able to be
6216 open to it because, I mean, I could’ve dismissed the thought”. This notion of needing to be
6217 open in order to experience an epiphany was also articulated by Luce:

6218

6219 My mind at that point was open to it. Because had I had that same experience a year
6220 earlier, I might have just shoved the coat back on the rail and walked out the shop
6221 without it. So, I suspect that psychologically, what my mind was doing was beginning
6222 to wake up. Someone said to me once actually, that once you open the door, even a

⁵¹ Evelyn’s negotiation with the temporal nature of epiphanic experience is also evident in this quotation, as she searches for the best tense and sentence construction to use. This quote denotes a demarcation point in her sense of self as ‘I was’ becomes ‘I have always been’.

6223 tiny little bit for a- for an enclosed mind, a mind that isn't free to think, you can never
6224 shut it again. You can't close it again because it's been opened, and the person has got
6225 a glimpse of what's out there.

6226

6227 It is suggested that the mechanism by which Openness⁵² (a descriptive term for the
6228 transitive domain) facilitates epiphanic experience can be revealed by exploring the
6229 relationship between Openness, creativity⁵³, and psychoticism – all constructs that have been
6230 associated with elevated entropic activity (e.g., Carhart-Harris et al., 2014; Ramey, Klingler
6231 & Hollibaugh, 2021; Shi et al., 2020). Moreover, Openness to experience has not only been
6232 found to be linked to creativity, but may afford it (Tan, Lau, Kung & Kailsan, 2016;
6233 Käckemester, Bott & Wacker, 2019; Kaufman et al., 2016; King, Walker & Broyles, 1996;
6234 McCrae, 1987). Similarly, positive associations have been found between Openness and
6235 psychoticism, as well as between creativity and psychoticism (e.g., Blain et al., 2020; Fink et
6236 al., 2014). This suggests that these similarities in the domain of the Empirical may share
6237 common generative mechanisms. Indeed, it is not unusual for creative individuals to report
6238 perceptual distortions similar to those described by schizophrenics, such as loose
6239 associations, a sensitivity to pattern detection, magical ideation, and apophenia (Blain, 2019;
6240 Preti & Vallante, 2007; DeYoung, Grazioplene & Peterson, 2012). It is also interesting to
6241 note that some studies have reported increased creativity amongst first-degree relatives of
6242 people with psychosis (Sandsten, Nordgaard & Parnas, 2018). This again suggests that

⁵² Whilst in this study individual differences were framed using the five-factor model of personality (McCrae & Costa, 1992, 1997), Openness can be seen to align with the intuitive and feelings dimensions on the Jungian-based Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI; Myers & McCaulley, 1985) used by Miller and C’de Baca (2001) (Furnham, 1996). Through the amalgamation of these frameworks of individual differences a richer profile of the ‘kind’ of person who might be more susceptible to these experiences may emerge.

⁵³ It is understood that although the definition of creativity is hotly debated, the current body of literature on creativity distinguishes between two perspectives on creativity: the personal view and the social view. Moreover, definitions of creativity usually involve the following features: originality, effectiveness, surprise, authenticity, inconclusiveness, potential, and discovery (Runco & Beghetto, 2019).

6243 psychoticism, Openness, and creativity may be underpinned by similar generative
6244 mechanisms.

6245 It is suggested that the underpinning mechanisms may relate to the Freudian notion of
6246 primary process thinking (which, in turn, can be understood according to the mechanisms
6247 detailed in section 4.1 above), which is evident in all disorders clinically classified as
6248 psychotic, as well as being linked to creativity within non-psychotic populations (Holt, 2012,
6249 2019; Russ, 2001). As detailed in section 4.1, psychosis is an example of a high-entropy brain
6250 state (Carhart-Harris et al., 2014), and creativity has also been attributed to increased entropic
6251 activity (Gabora, 2017, 2018; Shi et al., 2020). The interconnectedness of these constructs
6252 appears to have two main implications. First, it implies a continuum between psychosis and
6253 creativity (Dimkov, 2018) that can be attributed to the elevated entropy of primary states and
6254 primary process thinking. Second, it implies that Openness, as an individual difference,
6255 involves a higher tolerance of entropic activity in the brain, thereby making primary
6256 processes and epiphanic experiences more accessible (McCrae & Costa, 1985; Ramey,
6257 Klingler & Hollibaugh, 2021).

6258

6259 **4.4.3) Summary**

6260 When considered through the lens of Bhaskar's (2020) ontology of personhood, in
6261 conjunction with Freudian metapsychological ideas, the participants' accounts revealed
6262 certain properties or tendencies of the uniquely stratified embodied personality that appeared
6263 to function in a generative capacity. These properties of the self appeared to allow for the
6264 elimination of the ego, which was found to be critical to bringing the embodied personality in
6265 line with the transcendently real self, thereby unifying intentionality (Bhaskar, 2020). The
6266 participants tended to largely attain the whole or partial elimination of their egos through

6267 cathexis. This elimination, or temporary binding, of the ego is suggested to have permitted
6268 the emergence of primary states or primary processes that allowed for participants to think
6269 more freely, divergently, and associatively, and in some cases allowed for repressed or
6270 unconscious content to emerge.

6271 The individual difference of Openness is further proposed to act as a facilitator to
6272 epiphanic experience, as it is suggested that more Open individuals have greater access to
6273 primary process thinking styles. This line of argumentation allows for the integration of
6274 Miller and C’de Baca’s (2001) proposed generative mechanism: Particular Person, as it is
6275 understood that Openness tends to be associated with Intuitive and Feeling types (Furnham,
6276 1996; Furnham, Dissou, Sloan & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2007). The above has provided a
6277 conceptualisation of the generative mechanisms at play in the uniquely stratified embodied
6278 personality using theory that is congruent with CRist philosophy. Together, these theories and
6279 ideas constitute a suggested metaphysical account of what the embodied personality would
6280 need to be like in order for epiphanic experiences to occur.

6281

6282

5) Conclusion

6283 This chapter has served to present a theoretically informed, ontologically
6284 differentiated, and interdisciplinary understanding of the generative mechanisms
6285 underpinning epiphanic experience across all four planes of the CRist social being. Grounded
6286 within a wider landscape of CR-congruent NDS theories, the mechanisms detailed throughout
6287 this chapter allow for a causal understanding of the participant’s experiences to emerge,
6288 thereby providing an answer to the third research question: what generative mechanisms
6289 permit the emergence of an epiphanic experience? The CRist theories of the four planar

6290 social being and the ontology of personhood (Bhaskar, 2020) were invaluable frameworks
6291 throughout the research process, serving to ensure a thorough exploration of the potential
6292 generative mechanisms at work.

6293 Prior to an epiphanic experience, participant's lives were characterised by varying
6294 degrees of disorganisation across the four planes of the four planar social being. This was
6295 routinely associated with the acute or protracted presence of negative life experience and
6296 uncertainty. The epiphanic experience itself can be understood in material terms as a
6297 consequence of elevated entropic activity in the brain, which can occur as a result of trauma,
6298 as well as through formalised activities such as meditation (Carhart-Harris et al., 2014). In
6299 terms of the uniquely stratified embodied personality, epiphanic experiences represent the
6300 whole or partial diminishment of the ego's repressive hold on the unconscious through
6301 transference of libidinal energy away from the ego, primarily via cathexis. Freer movement
6302 between the unconscious and conscious is suggested to allow for greater psychological fluidity
6303 and plasticity, divergence, and transformation. However, whilst the disorganisation phase
6304 demi-regularities identified enhance turbulent disequilibrium (Chaos Theory; e.g., through
6305 traumatic life experience), brain entropy (the EBH; e.g., through meditative formalised
6306 activity), and/or change the focus of libidinal energy or attention (Metapsychology; e.g.,
6307 through cathexis), the moment of transformation itself remains unpredictable at a local level
6308 (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009).

6309 Highly elevated brain entropy is proposed to induce what Freud (1940) termed
6310 primary state processes, whilst brain entropy that shifts closer to criticality/primary processes
6311 is proposed to be capable of greater flexibility and non-linear, discontinuous, insightful
6312 experiences. The enhanced psychological flexibility, and more fluid access to the unconscious,
6313 engendered by increased entropic activity in the brain allows for the emergence and

6314 dissipation of entrenched psychological patterns linked to unconscious or repressed material. This
6315 is proposed to have led to the whole or partial restructuring and resolution of the issues
6316 relevant to the participants, as well as the emergence of a new system order, as by latching
6317 onto a new configuration, or solution, to the increased entropy, a new kind of self-
6318 organisation occurs (Guastello, 2001). Moreover, this process was found to be intimately
6319 shaped by the participant's relationships, and emergent from the social structures sui generis
6320 that the individual is exposed to prior, during, and subsequent to their epiphanic experience.
6321 Attention now turns to the final chapter, in which the limitations and implications of the work
6322 contained within this research will be discussed and evaluated.

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Chapter 6: Conclusions and Reflexions

6335

1) Introduction

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The work contained within this thesis makes sense of a vast landscape of interrelated

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terminologies and presents a philosophically informed, and ontologically differentiated,

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conceptualisation of epiphanic experience. In the domain of the Empirical, epiphanic

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experiences tend to be defined according to the following key markers: (1) the epiphanic

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experience itself is brief, lasting less than a week, with an abrupt onset, (2) the epiphanic

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experience involves the emergence of noetic content (on a continuum spanning from

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epistemic to ontic), (3) the epiphanic experience usually involves noticeable somatic aspects,

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(4) the experience is vividly remembered, (5) the changes are enduring, and continue to

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evolve, (6) the changes are ultimately experienced as benevolent, and (7) the experience

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engenders profound, holistic change within a person.

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In the domain of the Actual, epiphanic experiences tend to be preceded by negative

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life experience, uncertainty, and disorganisation throughout the four planar social being.

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Using Bhaskar's (2008, 2020) ontology of personhood, the data indicates that in the domain

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of the Real, prior to an epiphanic experience, the embodied personality tends to be out of

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sync with the transcendently real self. Moreover, the moment of epiphanic experience itself

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is often facilitated by events or activities that engender object cathexis such that the ego is

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wholly or partially diminished, thereby facilitating the alignment of the embodied personality

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and transcendently real self. Individuals who have an epiphanic experience tend – though

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are not exclusively – to be naturally open, intuitive, and feeling orientated. This means that

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they may have a higher tolerance for uncertainty (McCrae & Costa, 1985; Ramey, Klingler &

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Hollibaugh, 2021), and suggests that the epiphanic experience is an exaggerated version of

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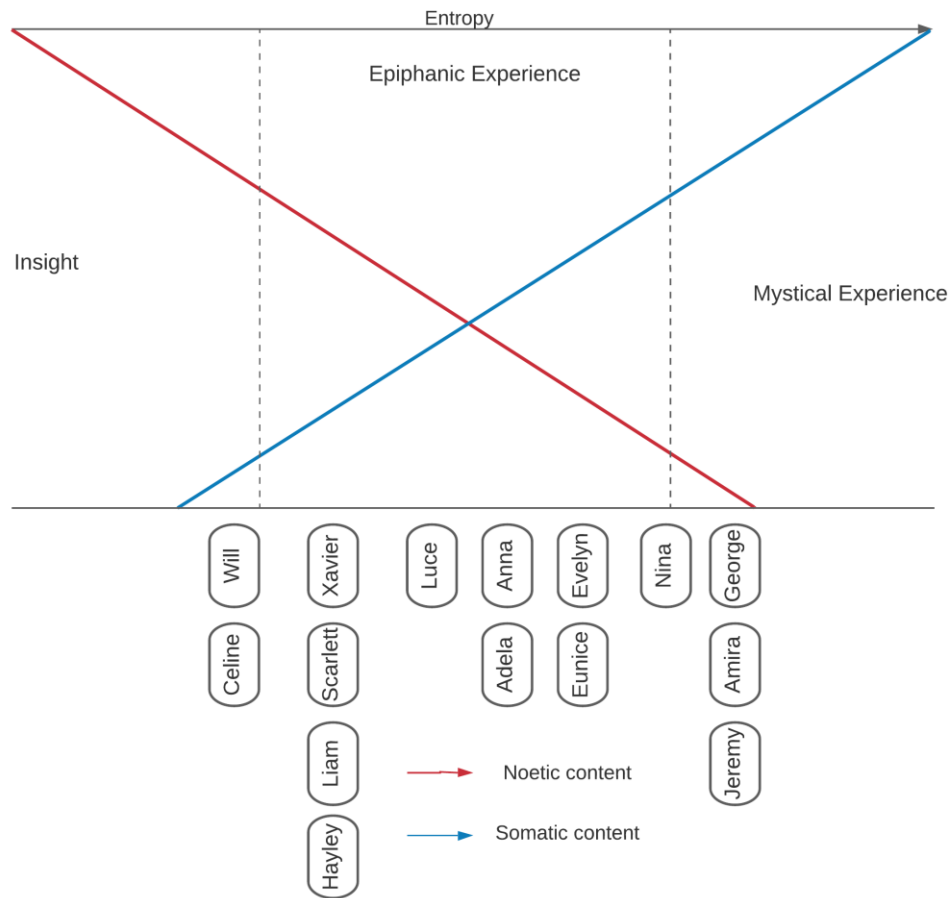
their normal mode of functioning (Miller & C'de Baca, 2001).

6358 Furthermore, epiphanic experiences appear part of a spectrum of conscious
6359 experience ranging from divergent and insightful thinking through to mystical and
6360 transcendent experience (see Figure 6.1 for an abstract visual conceptualisation of these
6361 ideas). Both insight and mystical experience have been linked to entropic activity in the brain
6362 (Johnson, Hendricks, Barrett, & Griffiths, 2019; Peill et al., 2022; Stephen & Dixon, 2009),
6363 thereby supporting the suggestion herein that epiphanic experiences exist at the interface of
6364 these two phenomena, and as such are likely also the consequence of elevated brain entropy
6365 within a particular context and concrete singularity. It is proposed that as a consequence of
6366 elevated brain entropy, the psychical activity of the mind tends to shift closer to primary
6367 processes, thereby engendering greater conscious richness and fluidity, and the emergence of
6368 unconscious content. This emergence necessitates ego reorganisation, which is subjectively
6369 experienced as, for example, a transformation of fundamental axioms with far-reaching
6370 effects. However, in line with the CRist positioning of the work, the mechanisms detailed
6371 throughout this thesis should not be considered as a set of covering laws but rather a set of
6372 tendencies (Pilgrim, 2019).

6373

6374 **Figure 6.1**

6375 *Abstract conceptualisation of epiphanic experience as the interface between insight and*
6376 *mystical experience with participants as exemplars*



6377

6378 This research has provided a rich ontology of epiphanic experience whereby this
 6379 phenomenon can essentially be considered a dynamical psychological process, through which an
 6380 individual experiences a reorganisation of the uniquely stratified embodied personality, that
 6381 better enables them to adapt to their environment. Discussion now turns to the critical
 6382 evaluation of the research contained within this thesis. In order to do this, three subjects will
 6383 be addressed: (1) the limitations of the research and the challenges faced over the course of
 6384 researching and writing, (2) the implications raised, and contributions made by the research,
 6385 and (3) the research from a personal and reflexive perspective. Recommendations are made
 6386 throughout.

6387

6388

2) Limitations and Challenges

6389 Although myriad limitations and challenges were encountered throughout the research
6390 process, two particular challenges stood out: (1) issues pertaining to the nature of epiphanic
6391 experience and the type of data collected, and (2) issues surrounding the chronology of the
6392 research, and (3) the issue of language. Each will be discussed in turn, though it is
6393 emphasised that this is not intended to be an exhaustive list of every challenge encountered,
6394 but rather a broader indication of the limiting tendencies the researcher encountered.

6395

6396 2.1) Qualitative Versus Quantitative Research

6397 Perhaps the most pervasive limitation to impact this research, as well as the existing
6398 research on epiphanic experience, is that it is nigh-on impossible to gather meaningful
6399 quantitative data on epiphanic experiences, or indeed to study them in-situ without the use of
6400 entheogens or similar entropy-enhancing processes. Due to the nature of epiphanic
6401 experiences making them impossible to predict, data (e.g., electroencephalographic data on
6402 entropic activity in the brain) is not realistically accessible for the investigation of naturalistic
6403 epiphanic experiences. It was through the CRist process of retroduction that theorisation of
6404 the role of brain entropy in the causality of epiphanic experience – embedded in a broader
6405 understanding of the ontological implications of NDS theory⁵⁴ –was possible. Whilst brain
6406 entropy can be considered the quantitative component of an epiphanic experience, it should
6407 again be stressed that the qualitative component of increased entropic activity is uncertainty,

⁵⁴ It is recognised that there is acknowledgement in the field of neuroscience that traditional approaches to the study of cognition (i.e., symbolic representation) lack the capacity to adequately explain a range of mental phenomena (including insight and mystical experience). Instead, it is proposed that cognition is better described and explained according to the principles of NDS theory (Stephen & Dixon, 2009). This positions NDS theory, and associated constructs (e.g., entropy) as a more appropriate ontological paradigm for the study of human interiority.

6408 personal chaos, and internal conflict. In essence, uncertainty, personal chaos, and internal
6409 conflict are qualitative terms that are thought to signify the quantitative presence of greater
6410 brain entropy (Carhart-Harris, 2018; Carhart-Harris et al., 2014; Hirsh, Mar & Peterson,
6411 2012). Indeed, the originators of the entropic brain hypothesis state that: “The great merit of
6412 applying the measure of entropy in cognitive neuroscience is that it is uniquely adept at
6413 bridging the physical and subjective divide; mere flip sides of the same coin - but different
6414 sides nonetheless” (Carhart-Harris, 2018, p.168).

6415 Because of the causal focus of CRist research, this physical, chemical, and biological
6416 strand of argumentation was heavily emphasised throughout the thesis as it was thought
6417 important to provide the reader with a strong grounding in the ontological principles –
6418 identified through retroduction – that are interwoven into each layer of argumentation⁵⁵.
6419 These principles demonstrate how the nature of our material world and physical bodies
6420 provide the grounds from which our psychological and sociological realities can emerge (see
6421 Chapter 1, section 2.5 regarding emergence). Although currently impossible to measure, the
6422 argument for the relevance of chaos and entropy to the subject of epiphanic experience may
6423 be supported by new and emerging research on the impact of psychedelics on mental ill
6424 health (e.g., Carhart-Harris & Friston, 2019; Vargas et al., 2021), mystical experience (e.g.,
6425 Barrett & Griffiths, 2018; Luce, 2020), and insight (e.g., Shi et al., 2020; Stephen & Dixon,
6426 2009). Essentially, not only have experiences similar to epiphanic experience been attributed
6427 to elevated entropic activity and subsequent self-organisation into a novel structure, but so
6428 too have the antecedents and outcomes of epiphanic experience. As detailed in Chapter 6,

⁵⁵ Using the CRist four planar social being, the notions of chaos and entropy in the plane of material transactions with nature (Chapter 6, section 4.1) can be seen throughout each ‘layer’ of reality. Tension, conflict, uncertainty, and trauma were found in the plane of social interactions between people. Chaos and uncertainty was present in, and generated through, the plane of social structures sui generis. Disorganisation was evident in the plane of the stratification of the embodied personality. Throughout each plane of reality, the presence and effects of quantitative entropy can be observed, qualitatively.

6429 both uncertainty and negative life experience can be operationalised in terms of chaos and
6430 entropy (e.g., Carhart-Harris, 2018; Carhart-Harris et al., 2014; Hirsh, Mar & Peterson,
6431 2012). Moreover, the changes to personality and sense of self, as well as overall wellbeing,
6432 have also been documented as a consequence of experiencing a high-entropy state (e.g.,
6433 Aixalà et al., 2018; Bouso et al., 2018). Therefore, whilst these assertions are primarily
6434 theoretical, and are based on qualitative research, there is enough early evidence and
6435 recognition of the qualitative aspects of elevated entropy (e.g., Carhart-Harris, 2018) and
6436 associated quantitative evidence to indicate that the theory of epiphanic experience presented
6437 in this thesis may be a promising and worthwhile avenue for future research⁵⁶.

6438 Despite the aforementioned limitations with regard to measurement, more recent
6439 advances in NDS theory are beginning to provide statistical and analytical methods that are
6440 more accessible to social scientists (Guastello, 2009; Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009). In the
6441 social sciences, the use of statistical measures is a dominant paradigm, but one which has
6442 been suggested to prevent the full complexity of data from being evaluated, as what is
6443 labelled as the error rate may instead be indicative of the chaotic component of complex
6444 human behaviour that is visible when applying a linear equation to a non-linear phenomenon
6445 (Hufford et al., 2003; Resnicow & Vaughan, 2006). This is a critical issue as, ultimately, the
6446 measurement of dynamical constructs remains critical to a fuller evaluation of the claims
6447 being made (Guastello, 2009).

6448 Contemporary advances in NDS have provided statistical and analytical methods that
6449 are more accessible to social scientists. This is necessary, as whilst mathematicians,
6450 biologists, and physicists are generally able to generate data to test chaotic processes of their
6451 choice, social scientists must use different methods (Guastello, 2009; Guastello & Liebovitch,

⁵⁶ It should be stressed that the researchers' intention here is not to rule out other theories or explanations, but rather to demonstrate the validity of this line of argumentation within a CRist approach.

6452 2009). The method that appears to be of particular relevance to the kind of data collected in
6453 the field of epiphanic experience is symbolic dynamics, an area of mathematics that discovers
6454 patterns in qualitative data pertaining to the nonlinear dynamics of self-organising
6455 phenomena (Guastello, 2009; Robinson, 1999). However, it was not the purpose of this study
6456 to apply quantitative methods to the data set given that CR advocates for qualitative data in
6457 the first instance as a way of generating intensive, epistemologically valid data (Bhaskar,
6458 1979, 2009; Roberts, 2014; Zachariadis, Scott & Barrett, 2013). Instead, the application of
6459 symbolic dynamics is suggested to be a fruitful avenue for future research that might permit a
6460 fuller evaluation of the claims made, and theory built, within this thesis.

6461

6462 **2.2) Chronology**

6463 Another limitation of the work contained herein is that, fundamentally, there's an
6464 aspect of this research that's back-to-front. This aspect is frustrating to the researcher but is
6465 nonetheless an important part of the overall trajectory of the research. In order to explain this
6466 issue, the chronology of the work needs to be discussed, and this was considered by the
6467 researcher to be best accomplished by utilising a reflexive voice:

6468 I started this PhD, almost entirely philosophically naïve. I had done an A Level in
6469 Philosophy and Ethics that I absolutely adored, and a second-year module in epistemology
6470 during my Psychology BSc that briefly caused me to feel like I was losing my mind. So,
6471 when I was set the task of 'establishing' my philosophy by my primary supervisor, I got to
6472 work looking for 'answers'. At the time, I was not yet aware that this attitude was likely a
6473 product of my implicitly positivistic education.

6474 The understanding of CR that I had amassed before beginning to collect the data
6475 presented in Chapter 5 was, I can now retrospectively see, insufficient for me to
6476 methodologically operationalise this philosophy to the level at which I would now be
6477 comfortable with. I had a basic/good understanding of the ‘holy trinity’ of CR, the transitive
6478 and intransitive, structure and agency, open versus closed systems, and stratified reality, but
6479 the depth of my appreciation of how these ideas translated into the practicalities of research
6480 had still not fully developed. Further, the literature that would introduce me to the four planar
6481 social being (Bhaskar, 2020; Pilgrim, 2019), which has been acknowledged as very useful to
6482 psychological research (Pilgrim, 2019 – and I agree), was not yet accessible to me. Please
6483 note that I started in my PhD in 2017 so Pilgrim's indispensable text had not yet been
6484 published. However, despite this, I do realise that the notion of the four planar social being
6485 was introduced by Bhaskar in 2008 but was an idea that I struggled to extricate from
6486 Bhaskar’s linguistically opaque writing style at the start of my journey. Therefore, at the start
6487 of my journey, I was, in essence, taking a well-informed stab in the dark – but completely
6488 unaware that what I was doing could be considered as a stab in the dark (I am perhaps being
6489 too harsh on myself here, and allowing my frustration to speak for me). This is because I was
6490 *informed* (I could have rattled off a decent explanation of any of the aforementioned concepts
6491 if you had asked me), but I didn’t yet *understand* the full implications of CRist philosophy⁵⁷.

6492 Retrospectively, I can acknowledge that my own thinking was still constrained by my
6493 academic inheritance (discussed in Chapter 1, section 4.1), which seems to have contributed
6494 to my unconscious commitment to the methodologism characteristic of psychological
6495 research (Pilgrim, 2019). So, armed with a basic understanding of CR (hard-won from a
6496 period of deep immersion in the CRist literature) and a bunch of unconscious tendencies

⁵⁷ *Reflexive note:* Again, perhaps I am being too harsh on myself, given that I’m sure in future I will look back at myself now and still critique my level of understanding. To be totally honest, having reached the ‘end’ of this process I feel somewhat stuck in the “I know nothing” phase of the Dunning–Kruger effect!

6497 rooted in methodologism, I began the “doing” of the research⁵⁸. This meant that in the early-
6498 to mid-stages of my work I was not entirely philosophically congruent - which impacted the
6499 methodological decisions I made. For example, the decision to ground the interview guide in
6500 previous guides was made due to my then-understanding that it was important to begin to
6501 generate some methodological continuity within the field of epiphanic experience. This, I
6502 believe, was influenced by the fact that I had not yet understood the CRist position on
6503 methodologism, such that I prioritised method over full metaphysical insight and reflection. I
6504 also used the concept of sudden personal transformation to ground my research in as it was
6505 the most up to date conceptualisation of epiphanic experience – not yet realising that a CRist
6506 approach provided me with a lens through which I would be able to evaluate more critically,
6507 not just the empirical concept of epiphanic experience, but the foundation upon which these
6508 conceptualisations sit. I had not yet done any of the thinking that is detailed in Chapters 3 and
6509 4 because that place in my mind had not yet been opened by my evolving understanding of
6510 CRist philosophy.

6511 However, the most obvious reason for which Chapters 3 and 4 were chronologically
6512 conducted after Chapter 5 was that conducting a scoping review was recommended by one of

⁵⁸ *Reflexive note:* as a further point of chronological clarification, and with reference to the documentation included in Appendix F, it may be useful for the reader to be aware of the pilot study conducted before the primary data study detailed in Chapter 5. The aim of the pilot study was to explore epiphanic experiences within the context of trainee sport and exercise psychologists. This focus was chosen as research on trainee sport and exercise psychologists indicates that neophytes have moments in which their perspective of their profession significantly alters (Holt & Streat, 2001; Owton, Tod & Bond, 2014; Tod, Andersen & Marchant, 2009; Tod & Bond, 2010; Woodcock, Richards & Mugford, 2008). Oftentimes, this is also coupled with a greater understanding of themselves, and how this relates to effective practice (Woodcock, Richards & Mugford, 2008). These features of neophyte experience were at the time considered relatable to the idea of epiphanic experiences. The literature on trainee sport and exercise psychologist experiences also repeatedly points to the emotional difficulties inherent to the training process, whereby neophytes commonly experience anxiety, self-doubt, low self-efficacy, frustration, loneliness, isolation, and disillusionment (Nel & Fouché, 2017; Owton, Bond & Tod, 2014; Tod, Andersen & Marchant, 2009, 2011; Tod & Bond, 2010; Tod, Marchant & Andersen, 2007; Tonn & Harmison, 2004; Woodcock, Richards & Mugford, 2008) – all of which are comparable to the experiences people tend to have before epiphanic experience. This initial thrust to the research was superseded by the current body of research as the results of the pilot indicated that the participants being trainees and/or sport and exercise psychologists had little to do with having an epiphanic experience, and instead appeared more linked to personal factors and personality traits.

6513 my assessors in my doctoral progression viva. Further, my second assessor was an expert in
6514 CR and showed me some of the gaps in my understanding, which was critical given that none
6515 of my supervisors were familiar with this philosophical position. So, after my progression
6516 viva I set to work, going back to the CRist literature and re-immersing myself in texts that
6517 were old and new to me. I see this period of time as the most vital to the research as a whole
6518 as it is when I really got to *understanding* CR. This led me to re-clarifying my research
6519 questions, conducting a scoping review, and then a thematic synthesis.

6520 ‘Starting again’ in this way was challenging but empowering. The latter because I was
6521 becoming aware of how much more I understood philosophy and the implications
6522 philosophical awareness and competency has on the research process. The former because it
6523 was hard work. Engaging with this philosophy on its own terms, rather than a watered-down
6524 version of CR that really only pays lip service to the ‘holy trinity’ in order to justify any
6525 methodology, is something that involved, for me, not only a strong understanding of the
6526 fundamental premises of the philosophy, but a continued dedication to intense reflexivity.
6527 Because I was now aware of how unconscious and implicit my positivistic assumptions were,
6528 I became far more vigilant and questioning of every assumption I made throughout the
6529 research process. ‘Starting again’ also meant that when I arrived back at the point where my
6530 interview data was needed, I was in a rather different position in terms of my (1)
6531 philosophical understanding, (2) understanding of CR-informed methodology, and (3)
6532 understanding of epiphanic experience.

6533 This pronounced shift in the landscape of the research was emotionally charged for
6534 me. I was proud that I had made progress, but anxious about what this meant about the
6535 methodological decisions I had previously made – was my data still useable? In order to deal
6536 with my concerns, I decided to map out the (it turns out, minor) incongruencies between my

6537 Chapter 5 methods, and the ideal methods I would have used had I conducted the study
6538 detailed in Chapter 5 according to my then-current understanding. The main incongruencies I
6539 found were as follows. First, I used the term ‘sudden personal transformation’ in all
6540 participant communication and in the interview itself (see Appendix D and E). However, I
6541 don’t believe this to be innately problematic because the language around this phenomenon
6542 varies so greatly. Further, my experiences recruiting participants for the study taught me that
6543 using language like ‘epiphany’ could cause me to run into a lot of scepticism and perhaps
6544 some resistance to my study (this is discussed at greater length below in section 2.3). Second,
6545 I screened for epiphanic experience during the participant recruitment phase using the
6546 following criteria: personal, positive, lasting, profound, memorable, relatively brief, and inner
6547 (see Appendix D). If I had a time machine, I would screen according to the criteria I
6548 established in Chapter 3. However, it is important to note that the criteria I actually used did
6549 not impede me from identifying people with relevant experiences. Therefore, whilst this
6550 represents a small degree of incongruence, I do not think it has impacted the quality of the
6551 data itself.

6552 Another question that I kept asking myself was whether I could have designed the
6553 interview guide differently had I known then what I know now. In order resolve my anxieties,
6554 I took a copy of my original interview guide, pulled it apart, and reformed it (without
6555 referring to the original guide) according to what I now thought would be most appropriate (I
6556 took a flexible deductive approach, if you will). This was highly effective in resolving my
6557 concerns as I found that the shape and content of the interview guide barely changed. What
6558 little did change was usually related to the integration of CRist notions, such as the four
6559 planar social being, more explicitly into the guide. However, critically, it would be very
6560 unlikely that these changes have been noticeable to participants – it was more about making

6561 the CRist ideas more obvious to me. I think I would have still asked the same kind of
6562 questions, in the same kind of order.

6563 I continued to run into moments when I realised that I didn't understand CR as well as
6564 I thought I did (for example, I briefly fell into the trap of neuro-reductionism; Pilgrim, 2019),
6565 and doubtless will continue to do so. I now know that I have a strong understanding of this
6566 philosophy, and that I am able to apply it to the research process more or less fluently. I also
6567 know that this knowledge will continue to grow through engagement and exposure to these,
6568 often complex, but incredibly satisfying ideas.

6569

6570 **2.3) Language**

6571 Another considerable, and persistent, challenge that emerged related to the issue of
6572 language. Chapters 2 and 3 make evident the wide variety of terminology that exists to
6573 describe epiphanic experiences and related concepts (e.g., peak experience, mystical
6574 experience, etc.) and, indeed, when engaging with this topic it was found to be necessary to
6575 think carefully about how language was used. Language can be noted as a structure that had a
6576 profound impact on the research in terms of: (1) the restrictions imposed by grammar on the
6577 participants ability to communicate these experiences (discussed in Appendix G), (2) the
6578 terminologies used to describe these experiences (discussed in Appendix A, and Chapters 2
6579 and 3), (3) the ways in which others reacted to the language and terminologies surrounding
6580 epiphanic experience, and (4) who was willing to participate in the study on the basis of the
6581 language used. It is these two final points that will be the focus of discussion in this section as
6582 the first two are addressed elsewhere.

6583 The assuagement of scepticism from the scientific community was a primary concern
6584 for the researcher when gathering primary data. The concern was that the use of language like
6585 ‘epiphany’ could result in cynicism, and perhaps some resistance to the study, as it may
6586 trigger associations that lead the individual to viewing the research as ‘unscientific’. This
6587 cautiousness was revealed to be well-founded as even the use of ‘sudden personal
6588 transformation’ managed to evoke scorn from some practitioner psychologists, such as in the
6589 following message that was received in response to the recruitment email: “Nice idea but I
6590 don’t think you will find any Psychologists naïve to interpret any change as you describe!
6591 Certainly not me – try Abraham Maslow.”

6592 Another kind of response that the researcher predicted could be evoked by language
6593 such as ‘epiphany’, and wanted to avoid, was from people with rigid religious beliefs. This
6594 was not from any sort of bias towards religious people, but rather because it was considered
6595 important to be able to have curious, exploratory, and open-minded conversations with the
6596 participants (and this was possible, as evidenced by Anna, who was very religious, but also
6597 open to exploring her experience). This concern too proved valid as the following message
6598 from a potential participant demonstrated:

6599

6600 I had a born again experience which changed my life very radically and as a result of
6601 which I went from being a Management Trainer in US Investment bank and a
6602 consultant with an international City of London based Consultancy, to going back to
6603 University and becoming a Chartered Counselling Psychologist. God has been very
6604 faithful to me right from the start and I had some 23 clients in the first few weeks and
6605 months in my first year of doing my course, whilst all the others were struggling to
6606 find 3 counselling clients required for the course. I went straight into private practice

6607 and somehow BUPA called me and said could I take clients for them and have had a
6608 busy since 1995.

6609

6610 When this participant was sent the screening questions (which were worded neutrally
6611 so as to be applicable to all interpretations of epiphanic experience – not just ones ascribed
6612 numinous properties; see Appendix D), they deselected themselves from the recruitment
6613 process with the explanation that: “From some of your questions I am not sure that my
6614 experience fits - it was an actual epiphany type experience”. Therefore, because the
6615 researcher did not actively concur with them that their experience was the result of divine
6616 intervention, they wanted no part in the study⁵⁹. Therefore, the structure of language was
6617 shown to be a consideration and challenge that was deeply intertwined with the study of
6618 epiphanic experience. Future researchers are recommended to think carefully about the
6619 language they choose to operationalise these experiences. This researcher would recommend
6620 the use of ‘epiphanic experience’ as a term that bridges old and new perspectives on this
6621 phenomenon⁶⁰ (discussed at greater length in Appendix A).

6622

6623 **3) Implications and Contributions**

6624 Although it is conceivable that this research possesses many implications and
6625 contributions, two stand out in particular: (1) the use of CR and the importance of having a

⁵⁹ *Reflexive note:* In instances such as these I did not enter into dialogue with the individual as I did not see it as my role to debate with someone who has already made up their mind!

⁶⁰ *Reflexive note:* I think it’s important to note here that the people who have these experiences tend to not be particularly fussed about what this experience is called – they are generally just happy to have had it (Amos, 2016a also found this) – and so this debate around language is perhaps more relevant to the academic study of epiphanic experiences than anything else.

6626 philosophically grounded approach to research, and (2) the implications of the research on
6627 therapeutic practice. Each will be discussed in turn.

6628

6629 **3.1) Critical Realism and a Philosophically Grounded Approach to Research**

6630 The application of CR permitted the exploration of the research questions in a
6631 philosophically robust, and methodologically rigorous, manner. Further, a large part of the
6632 originality of this research has been a commitment to the re-philosophisation of psychology,
6633 through the establishment of philosophical fundamental premises of enquiry, that explicitly
6634 permeated the entirety of the research process. Indeed, a major contribution made by this
6635 work is the consistent application of CRist philosophy towards the goal of answering a set of
6636 research questions regarding a psychological phenomenon. There remain few examples of
6637 this kind of research within psychology, meaning that this thesis serves as an example of how
6638 CR can enrich research processes within this discipline.

6639 Despite the utility of CR to this research, and although Bhaskar's philosophical
6640 system has been argued to offer conceivably the best starting point for post-positivist social
6641 science research⁶¹ (Fryer, 2020; Pilgrim, 2019), it is important to stress that there will always
6642 be another theory that rivals even the most powerful philosophies (Zhang, 2023). With
6643 reference to the Duhem-Quine holism thesis, Zhang (2023) argues that CR is not the only
6644 post-positivist school of thought to accrue support, and that CRist theory would benefit from
6645 debating schools of thought other than the 'easy targets' of naïve positivism and strong
6646 constructivism/postmodernism. Indeed, some scholars have gone further, and questioned the

⁶¹ CRists argue that this is because the positivist search for universal laws is naïve, and the constructivist denial of reality beyond meaning and discourse prevents deeper exploration of causation (e.g., Fryer, 2020; Pilgrim, 2019).

6647 fundamental CRist notion that social science ought to be performed under the management of
6648 philosophy (Kemp, 2005). Whilst this research benefitted from such guidance, it should be
6649 acknowledged that adherence to strict a priori guidelines may restrict the scope of
6650 investigative and exploratory social science research. However, whilst this argument has
6651 merit, it loses some potency by the presence of the a posteriori argumentation and forms of
6652 inference embedded in CR (i.e., abduction, retroduction, and retrodiction).

6653 Zhang (2023) raises further issue with CRist philosophy by suggesting that CRist
6654 scientific theory may be masquerading as philosophy of science. In practical terms, this raises
6655 several questions about the nature of CRist ontological models; for example, is the four
6656 planar social being philosophy or theory? Has Bhaskar built ontological arguments on
6657 nothing more than beliefs about features of the social world? As such, whilst these theories
6658 have been demonstrated to be useful throughout this research process, future researchers are
6659 encouraged to exercise discernment around where the boundary between philosophy and
6660 theory may lie.

6661 Recent CRist theorising has further critiqued the CRist ontology. In particular,
6662 arguments have been made that there is insufficient reason to distinguish the Empirical from
6663 the Actual (Elder-Vass, 2007, 2022; Fryer & Navarrete, 2022). Elder-Vass (2022) explains
6664 that, not only are these distinctions anthropocentric, but they serve the primary function of
6665 critiquing empiricist philosophy of science. For an empiricist, whatever is currently being
6666 experienced is the event, is the world. Therefore, any distinction between the Empirical and
6667 the Actual serves as an explanatory device to demonstrate the limitations of strict empiricism.
6668 A further distinction is proposed by Elder-Vass (2022), between the Actual, and the ‘real-but-
6669 not-actual’ (for which Elder-Vass proposes a new moniker: the Potential). The Actual
6670 representing the “things that exist and the events that occur to them” (Elder-Vass, 2022, p. 4),

6671 and the Potential representing causal powers and “the unrealised potentials of the world that
6672 only become activated in certain circumstances” (p. 4). These are compelling arguments
6673 which further the CRist enterprise, as well as demonstrating the innate flexibility of this
6674 living philosophy of science.

6675 Another issue that can emerge from engagement with CRist philosophy is the
6676 realisation that some aspects of this philosophy are not sufficiently elaborated in Bhaskar’s
6677 writing⁶², thereby leaving the researcher to independently tackle any ambiguity in the
6678 research process (Gorski, 2013; Pilgrim, 2019). In particular, this research found that,
6679 although psychology-specific engagement with CR is increasing (e.g., Fryer, 2020; Pilgrim,
6680 2019), there remains insufficient investment by CRists in the application of this meta-
6681 philosophy to the psychological sciences. For example, whilst the theory of the four planar
6682 social being has been identified as useful for psychologists (by this research and others, e.g.,
6683 Pilgrim, 2019), there remain few applied examples of its use and integration into
6684 psychological research. Additionally, whilst the sociologically derived CRist theory of the
6685 ontology of personhood was found to be very helpful in this research, it requires far more
6686 critical reflection from researchers whose academic focus centres on the intra-personal, rather
6687 than the inter-personal⁶³. Indeed, there is a recognition within CRist circles that there remains
6688 work to be done (Gorski, 2013), and this researcher would argue that there is considerable
6689 space for exploration at the intersection between CRist philosophy and the discipline of
6690 psychology.

⁶² This has meant that other CRists have served to carry forward the metaphorical baton. For example, Archer (2000, 2003, 2010) developed a much of the CRist theory on reflexivity, structure, and agency. Likewise, Danermark (e.g., Danermark et al., 2019) developed much of the CRist theory on research design, causal inference, and concept building. This is a philosophy that, in many ways, is being built in real-time.

⁶³ *Reflexive note:* The ontology of personhood is one of the very few CRist forays into the intra-personal (CR, after all, did emerge from sociological theory) and if CR is to be functional for psychologists, then greater attention needs to be paid to this element of the philosophy. I have offered some critical reflection on this in Appendix I, but more engagement with this theory from psychologists would be welcome and essential to the continuing growth and development of the philosophy so that it might continue to enrich psychological research.

6691 However, CR poses barriers to psychologists seeking to use, and engage fully with,
6692 this philosophy, as much of the literature surrounding it is accessible only if the reader
6693 possesses a considerable degree of philosophical understanding. Given the de-philosophised
6694 nature of the discipline of psychology (discussed in Chapter 1), this may pose genuine
6695 limitations to psychologists looking to adopt a CRist research paradigm. As such, more work
6696 needs to be invested by CRists into generating CR-congruent approaches and methods to
6697 research that are firmly grounded in CRist philosophy, and do not succumb to the
6698 methodologism that pervades the discipline (Pilgrim, 2019; Reicher, 2000). This thesis
6699 contributes to the circumnavigation of these issues, and makes an original contribution to
6700 literature by: (1) providing an accessible guide to the core tenets of CRist philosophy at this
6701 point in time (see Chapter 1), (2) providing an exemplar of the utilisation of key CRist
6702 theories of particular relevance to psychologists (i.e., the CRist four planar social being, and
6703 the ontology of personhood), and (3) providing a view of the development of CRist
6704 approaches to scoping reviews, thematic syntheses, and qualitative analysis, which have
6705 received little to no attention in psychological research⁶⁴.

6706 Despite the aforementioned weaknesses of a CRist approach, the utility of taking a
6707 philosophically grounded approach to research, and in particular a CR-informed approach,
6708 must be emphasised (Pilgrim, 2019). CR was found by this researcher to be an invaluable set
6709 of meta-philosophical positions that provided clarity and structure with regards to the
6710 premises of enquiry. In particular, the CRist four planar social being, and ontological model
6711 of personhood were found to be invaluable. This thesis serves as one of the few examples of

⁶⁴ It should be noted that it is not only research that might benefit from the development of CR by psychologists – CR may be a mechanism through which approaches to psychotherapy might be enriched. Appendix I provides an example of how CRist metaphysical ideas might be relevant, and applied, to psychotherapeutic work – as does section 3.2 below. A CRist metaphysics of personhood has implications for how a practitioner might practice. The implications of these metaphysical notions in relation to existing therapeutic paradigms and modalities would be a fruitful future path of enquiry.

6712 these theories being applied in psychological research. Humans were seen as part of the
6713 natural world, existing in relation to others, thrown into a world of pre-existing social
6714 structures, and with a uniquely stratified embodied personality. This foundation ensured that
6715 a necessarily complex view of epiphanic experiences could emerge. Moreover, the CRist
6716 ontology of personhood was found to provide a particularly helpful way of making sense of
6717 the changes that occurred as a result of epiphanic experience.

6718 This view of the world also necessitated an interdisciplinary approach to research,
6719 which Pilgrim (2019) argues enriches understanding of the phenomenon under investigation
6720 – a sentiment echoed by the current researcher. By engaging with a philosophy that
6721 emphasises interdisciplinarity, a laminated view of epiphanic experience across physical,
6722 biological, psychological, social, and cultural levels – i.e., a maximally inclusive ontology
6723 (Bhaskar & Danermark, 2006) – was permitted to emerge. It is recommended that future
6724 researchers consider the merits of applying a CRist position to their research⁶⁵, and in so
6725 doing continue to develop interdisciplinary inquiries into epiphanic experience, and more
6726 broadly throughout the field of human science. As such, this researcher echoes the calls of
6727 other CRist researchers (e.g., Fryer, 2020; Pilgrim, 2019) in advocating for a CRist approach
6728 to research in the social sciences.

6729 In more pragmatic terms, the CRist underpinnings of this research facilitated
6730 methodological decision-making. Appleton and King (2002) asked: “Can one make
6731 methodological decisions without considering the ontological and epistemological origins
6732 first?” (p.647), and, based on the process of undertaking this research, the current researcher's

⁶⁵ *Reflexive note:* A large part of the strength of a CRist philosophy lies in the power of the retroductive inferential process (Fryer, 2020). During the CR analytical process, I found a particular love for the process of retroduction. Retroduction as a process, I think, is an act of scientific imagination, and the more options you can generate, the more theories you can explore, the more perspectives you can peer through, the better. You are limited only by your own creativity (I refer to Simonton's (2018) conceptualisation of 'creativity' as a “multiplicative product of originality, utility, and surprise” (p.87) – I know the term can be controversial!).

6733 answer is ‘no’. Without serious consideration of the ontological and epistemological
6734 foundation of the researcher’s worldview, generic methodological research steps seem
6735 unavoidable. This has the potential to be problematic as philosophical assumptions, and
6736 frameworks, are tacit in all psychological theories, whether the researcher is aware of them or
6737 not⁶⁶ (Smith, 2010). Therefore, it is recommended that attempts should always be made to
6738 attain as much philosophical literacy and understanding as possible, particularly with regards
6739 to the premises of inquiry, when undertaking research.

6740 Furthermore, it should be noted that immersion in CRist philosophy enables more
6741 than just the production of methodologically sound research. Bhaskar argued that one of the
6742 unique strengths of CRist philosophy is that it facilitates emancipation from dominant
6743 structures, often through consideration of structure-agency dualisms (Bhaskar, 2017; Gorski,
6744 2017; see Chapter 1, section 2.6). The dominant structure from which CR facilitated
6745 emancipation in the case of this thesis was academic psychology. If philosophy is never
6746 taught or discussed during the education of psychologists, then the structural power of the
6747 academy (which favours positivism/empiricism; Pilgrim, 2019) remains implicit and
6748 unchallenged. Therefore, CR is able to function as a meta-philosophical vehicle through
6749 which psychologists can exercise their agentic powers and challenge these structures⁶⁷ –
6750 thereby emancipating themselves and their research, should they desire. For example, the
6751 emphasis placed by CR on identifying causal powers, encourages researchers to uncover, and
6752 perhaps challenge, the ideologies implicit within psychology that might ‘misrepresent’
6753 reality. Additionally, the notion of the transitive versus the intransitive challenges long-held
6754 positivist assumptions that the natural and social world can be treated equally. In essence, by

⁶⁶ Nietzsche is purported to have once expressed that everyone is the unconscious proponent of some dead philosopher; perhaps then, it is preferable to be philosophically informed rather than philosophically ignorant.

⁶⁷ *Reflexive note:* I have done this at several points throughout the thesis. For example: research philosophy (see Chapter 1), Newtonian versus chaos/complexity paradigms (see Chapter 2, section 2), psychodynamic theory within psychology (see footnote 40).

6755 fully engaging with CRist perspectives – and stepping into the CRist embrace – researchers
6756 are able to transform their relationship to the academy, as well as perhaps the academy itself.

6757

6758 **3.2) Therapeutic Practice**

6759 Perhaps the greatest implication this research has is on therapeutic practice. In order
6760 to explore what the current researcher perceives to be the main therapeutic implications of the
6761 research, the following topics will be discussed: (1) Cartesian dualism and CRist approaches
6762 to therapeutic practice, (2) psychedelics and meditation, and (3) uncertainty.

6763

6764 ***3.2.1) Cartesian Dualism and Critical Realist Approaches to Therapeutic Practice***

6765 As previously noted, subjectively, epiphanic experiences tend to contain both noetic
6766 and somatic content. This is suggested to constitute a holistic, embodied way of knowing
6767 wherein both body and mind are involved. The influence of the body (i.e., embodied
6768 personality; Bhaskar, 2020) has long been overlooked within the discipline of psychology,
6769 most likely as a result of the philosophical inheritance of Cartesian Dualism - but this
6770 position is changing (see e.g., Caldwell, 2018; Clapp, Aurora, Herrera, Bhatia, Wilen &
6771 Wakefield, 2017; Porges, 2018; Van der Kolk, 2002, 2014). Therefore, the noetic and
6772 somatic content discussed clearly reflect the socially imposed, separate interpretive categories
6773 of body and mind, that are, in reality, a unified dynamical system (Shapiro, 2015). With this
6774 in mind, it is suggested that conscious dissolution of Cartesian body/mind dichotomy will
6775 enhance therapeutic practice, particularly for individuals with a history of trauma (Kuhfuß,
6776 Maldei, Hetmanek & Baumann, 2021; Payne, Levine & Crane-Godreau, 2015; Van der Kolk,

6777 2002; Warner et al., 2014). It is recommended that practitioners consider the value of a CRist
6778 ontology of personhood in facilitating the dissolution of this dichotomy.

6779 Specifically, this research has supported Bhaskar’s (2020) suggestion that the task for
6780 human beings is “of eliminating their egos and moving their embodied personalities into
6781 alignment or unity with their ground states” (p.118). Indeed, this research suggests that the
6782 unification of intentionality through this mechanism is a necessary condition for epiphanic
6783 experience, and human growth. Further, the research within this thesis has considered the
6784 dynamical tendencies and behaviours of the uniquely stratified embodied personality, such as
6785 cathexis, which permits the description of one way in which the ego might be diminished or
6786 eliminated. It is recommended that future research further explore and build upon this
6787 ontology of personhood in order to see how else it may enrich understandings of human
6788 nature and experience.

6789 This suggestion is made not only as a result of the research contained within this
6790 thesis, but also due to the understanding that CR has been used to support and enhance
6791 therapeutic practice. CR has been proposed as a suitable metatheory for counselling and
6792 psychotherapy that enables the integration and inclusion of multiple theoretical frameworks
6793 and therapeutic approaches (O’Hara, 2014). Because of the CRist focus on the dissolution of
6794 dualities (see above regarding the mind/body duality, and Chapter 1, section 2.6), O’Hara
6795 (2014) proposes that CR can act as a common meta-framework capable of holding theoretical
6796 differences, thereby enhancing integrative psychotherapeutic practice. Indeed, Pocock (2015)
6797 furthers this argument by suggesting that CR enables systemic psychotherapists to be able to
6798 integrate approaches to practice from realist, pragmatist, and constructivist positions⁶⁸. In this
6799 way, Pocock (2015) proposes that CRist perspectives encourage deeper contemplation of

⁶⁸ However, Pocock (2015) also notes that naïve realist and strong constructivist positions cannot be integrated.

6800 interacting causal tendencies as described by a range of theoretical positions and therapeutic
6801 modalities. In practice, this is proposed to facilitate deeper, and more purposeful, exploration
6802 of, for example: the sociocultural impact of the specific culture the person is embedded in,
6803 how the issue is socially constructed within their social contexts, and the dynamical aspects
6804 of development, attachment, and adaptation.

6805 CR has also been applied to therapeutic practice through analysis of the dominant
6806 model of functional psychiatric diagnosis (Pilgrim & Bentall, 2009). Pilgrim and Bentall
6807 (2009) performed a CRist analysis of the concept of depression, exploring the biological,
6808 sociological, and structural aspects of this diagnosis. They contrast the realist/positivist vision
6809 of depression as a real and intransitive disease entity, with the constructivist notion of
6810 depression as a consequence of the mental health system and mental health professionals.
6811 Through a process of CRist analysis, the authors find both the realist/positivist and the
6812 constructivist positions lacking. Realist ideas do well to study the phenomenon empirically
6813 but fall into the trap of confusing epistemology (context-mediated ideas of depression) with
6814 ontology (the intransitive conceptualisation of depression). In other words, they confuse the
6815 map with the territory. Conversely, constructivist ideas are proposed to do well to emphasise
6816 the sociocultural and historical aspects of depression but make problematic statements
6817 regarding the rejection of all empirical claims on the causality and reality of depression.
6818 Pilgrim and Bentall (2009) instead propose a CRist vision of depression that does not confuse
6819 the map with the territory and takes account of the complex social and historical conditions
6820 from which the depression diagnosis was able to emerge (e.g., melancholia, neurasthenia, and
6821 ‘mopishness’). The authors note the relative absence of the depression diagnosis in many
6822 other cultures (e.g., Marsella, 1981), as well as the ambiguity that exists between depression
6823 and other phenomena (such as dysphoria, anxiety, and madness). Therefore, a CRist approach
6824 to therapeutic practice can be conceived of as attending equally to internal attributed

6825 meanings and external reality – beyond the symptoms of distress defined by contemporary
6826 psychiatry.

6827 Whilst the extant literature on how and why CR might be advantageously applied to
6828 therapeutic practice raises interesting and useful ideas, it is still limited and warrants further
6829 attention. However, as noted in section 3.1 above, the issues around the accessibility of CRist
6830 philosophy may pose challenges in this regard. To that end, interdisciplinarity is advocated
6831 for as a way of facilitating research into the application of CR to psychotherapeutic practice.
6832 The researchers' nascent ideas on how an understanding of the CRist set of ontological
6833 presuppositions about the nature of the self (see Chapter 1, section 2.6) could be applied to
6834 therapeutic practice can be found in Appendix I. It is hoped that the argumentation contained
6835 within this thesis stimulates discussions, further thought, and research into how CR might
6836 facilitate and enhance therapeutic practice.

6837

6838 ***3.2.2) Psychedelics and Meditation***

6839 On the subject of psychedelics, whilst this research suggests that changes in brain
6840 entropy may quite suddenly create profoundly positive and therapeutic psychological change
6841 without the administration of psychoactive substances, early research suggests that perhaps
6842 the most direct way of creating this kind of change (that doesn't require people to master the
6843 art of meditation or suchlike), alongside the reduction of various negative psychological
6844 symptomatology, is through the use of psychedelics or psychedelic-assisted therapy
6845 (Earleywine & De Leo, 2020; Garcia-Romeu & Richards, 2018; Luoma, Chwyl, Bathje,
6846 Davis & Lancelotta, 2020). Moreover, entheogens have a very long history of being used for
6847 healing purposes (Morgan, McAndrew, Stevens, Nutt & Lawn, 2017; Goldsmith, 2010; Rosa,
6848 Hope & Matzo, 2019; Tupper, 2009a, 2009b). As a caveat, it should be clarified that

6849 psychedelics are not being suggested as a panacea for all manner of psychological health
6850 concerns. Indeed, this seems premature given that, for example, psychedelic use can lead to
6851 increases in the personality trait of openness to experience (Bouso, dos Santos, Alcázar-
6852 Córcoles & Hallak, 2018; Erritzoe et al., 2019), which may be problematic for individuals
6853 high in neuroticism. Instead, it is suggested that the ‘new’ science of psychedelics, implicated
6854 by the research herein, may provide a fresh lens through which to view therapy.

6855 Early evidence and understandings of the therapeutic value of psychedelics also
6856 implicate the power of meditative activity and focused attention. Research has demonstrated
6857 that there are phenomenological and neurophysiological overlaps between the psychedelic
6858 state and the meditative state (e.g., Millière et al., 2018; Simonsson & Goldberg, 2023).
6859 Indeed, this research has highlighted the transformative potential of activities that involve
6860 focused attention, contemplation, and movement; the potency of nature, art, music, literature,
6861 dance, chanting, breathwork, meditation, and more. Literature supports that meditative
6862 activity (e.g., meditation, prayer, chanting, reading) has the potential to create the grounds for
6863 powerful positive change (e.g., Malviya et al., 2022; Kwak et al., 2019). Most of the
6864 participants were experientially absorbed at the time of their epiphanic experience, thereby
6865 implicating the efficacy of meditative, or focused, activity in facilitating change. Therefore,
6866 therapeutic modalities that have integrated meditative practices (e.g., Acceptance and
6867 Commitment Therapy; Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson, 2013), are suggested to have greater
6868 potential to facilitate transformative change.

6869

6870 **3.2.3) *Uncertainty***

6871 The research contained within this thesis suggests that ambiguity, destabilisation, and
6872 uncertainty are powerful tools for change that need to be experienced rather than avoided or

6873 controlled (this position is supported in literature, see e.g., Hayes & Strauss, 1998). Given the
6874 findings from this research it is suggested that talking therapies may be most effective, in the
6875 long-term, if they are able to mimic the processes inherent to the states that have the potential
6876 to create the greatest change. This section of text from psychologist and mythologist Sharon
6877 Backie (2021, email communication) articulates this point well:

6878

6879 Sometimes, this inner country can feel like a frightening place. A place of uncertainty,
6880 of ambiguity. Uncertainty might seem to be threatening, but to me, it's an
6881 apprenticeship to mystery. It's an antidote to our desperate need to know, to predict,
6882 and therefore to control. In the old native traditions of these islands where I was born,
6883 uncertainty wasn't a threat, it was a natural condition of existence. The people we
6884 now call the Celts had a particular love of ambiguity, an explicit comfort with not-
6885 knowing. A riddle was a gateway to the Otherworld, piercing the veil between this
6886 reality and the one which envelops it; formulaic koan-like questions jolted the listener
6887 into the heart of ambiguity. First, such questions and riddles produce confusion; then
6888 they engage the suppleness of the imagination. They break down the rational, over-
6889 intellectualised categories that limit our perception to the everyday, and teach us how
6890 to break the spell of ordinary reality. To embrace them, you need to have faith in
6891 enigma, and you must be able to be comfortable in a twilight state where all things are
6892 equally possible, but nothing yet actually is. This ability to be in contact with mystery,
6893 with the dark, fertile realms of infinite possibility, is crucial to the work of inhabiting
6894 a meaningful life. We have to stay rooted in the chaotic unknown, in the shadow-
6895 haunted wild places of the psyche.

6896

6897 It is therefore suggested that, if indeed the aim of therapeutic interaction is to create
6898 transformational change, more thought is channelled into evaluating therapeutic modalities in
6899 accordance with their ability to: (1) work holistically with the mind and body (i.e., ego,
6900 embodied personality, and transcendently real self), (2) hold space for ambiguity and
6901 uncertainty, and (3) account for the brain-mind functioning in a nonlinear and dynamical
6902 fashion. There is existing research that has begun to engage with this idea that addresses, for
6903 example, the application of NDS theories to applied therapeutic practice (e.g., Bussolari &
6904 Goodell, 2009; Hayes & Strauss, 1998; Marks-Tarlow & Shapiro, 2021; Shapiro, 2015; Skar,
6905 2004), though more attention is still needed.

6906 A particularly interesting contribution from the literature is Shapiro's (2015)
6907 psychodynamically informed Dynamical Systems Therapy (DST). As the name suggests,
6908 DST is a nonlinear therapy, which is critical given that biological processes are inherently
6909 nonlinear. Moreover, an understanding of NDS theories naturally leads to the conclusion that
6910 therapies which present linear models of human functioning and therapeutic treatment present
6911 a gross simplification of these processes. This is what makes Shapiro's work so enthralling;
6912 he has not only embedded DST in fundamental NDS principles such as self-organisation,
6913 attractor/repellor configurations, and emergence, but he has also ensured that it is a
6914 biopsychosocial approach, therefore establishing itself as a complex and integrative approach
6915 that accounts for notions raised by the CRist ontology of personhood (Shapiro & Scott,
6916 2018). It is recommended that greater work is needed to evaluate the efficacy of DST (Marks-
6917 Tarlow, 2015). Moreover, if therapists seek to facilitate epiphanic experiences in their clients,
6918 DST appears to provide a suitable framework from which to work.

6919

6920

4) Final Reflexions

6921 Bhaskar argued that the ultimate aim of CRist philosophy and research is to aid in
6922 human flourishing and emancipation (Bhaskar, 2017; Gorski, 2017). I believe that my work
6923 has contributed to this axiological cause, both in terms of understanding a phenomenon that
6924 engenders powerfully positive transcendent change, and in terms of my own ‘flourishing’.
6925 Like many researchers before me, I wanted to study epiphanic experiences because I had
6926 personal experiences of this phenomenon. It is here that I run into a dilemma. I cannot help
6927 but feel daunted by the prospect of sharing my own story, given what I know and have
6928 experienced from the discipline of psychology when it comes to wounded healers (Zerubavel
6929 & O’Dougherty Wright, 2012). As a protective response to this, I have found myself wanting
6930 to keep the reflexive writing contained within this thesis to epistemic and disciplinary
6931 reflexivity, rather than personal reflexivity (Forbes, 2008), even though I understand that
6932 reflexivity, by its very nature, causes the researcher to walk the line between the personal and
6933 the professional. It has been challenging, if not impossible, to write about my epiphanic
6934 experience itself in a way that makes me comfortable with the idea of other people reading
6935 and knowing about my experiences. Absent the gift of anonymity, I have tried what feels like
6936 countless ways to write about my experience – and how that relates to my account of
6937 epiphanic experience presented in Chapter 5 – in a way that does not make me feel
6938 vulnerable.

6939 Beyond these concerns, there remains yet another issue: that it at times feels like an
6940 exercise in futility to try and find the words that might accurately describe something that
6941 exists as much in the felt sense as in any cognitive representations of it (Amos, 2016a
6942 discusses this extensively). Amos (2019) in part addressed this issue by using creative, art-
6943 based methods (in the form of found poetry) to explore the lived experience of an epiphanic
6944 experience. I also found great benefit to exploring epiphanic experience through artistic
6945 mediums, as I found that it permitted me to ‘stay with’ some of the more liminal aspects of

6946 this phenomenon that language may struggle to contain. The reader is directed to Appendix J
6947 for an art-based reflexive account of the some of the reflection I engaged with as a result of
6948 my lived experience of epiphanic experience.

6949 It is harder than I thought it would be to finish this (and by ‘this’, I mean this
6950 particular section, as well as this thesis as a whole – my primary supervisor and I have had
6951 more than one conversation about how to know when the research is actually ‘finished’, as
6952 sometimes it feels like I could eternally keep changing things). Writing about this subject has
6953 at times felt like herding cats or trying to pick up mercury with your hands. It has necessitated
6954 a truly interdisciplinary investigation that has led me to academic literature from fields such
6955 as psychology, philosophy, sociology, neuroscience, physics, literature, anthropology,
6956 biology, and religious studies. Within the bounds of CRist philosophy, I have considered
6957 epiphanic experience from multiple psychological perspectives (psychodynamic, cognitive-
6958 behavioural, humanistic-existentialist, contextual/systemic; Fleuridas & Krafick, 2019). And
6959 now, at the ‘end’ of this, I almost feel like I’m back at the beginning again; as if now that I
6960 have a grip on this subject, I finally feel ready to do it all again, but ‘properly’ this time.

6961 For some, like the participants in this thesis, transformation (i.e., arguably an
6962 objective of therapeutic work) is an event (although the ‘work’ does not stop there), but for
6963 most it is a process. Those of us who do experience transformation as an event (e.g., an
6964 epiphanic experience) provide valuable insight for those going through the process of
6965 transformation (as extreme cases provide a view of the mechanisms of change in ‘purer’ form
6966 than usual; Danermark et al., 2019). Therefore, epiphanic experiences reaffirm that positive
6967 transformation can suddenly emerge from trauma (e.g., Jayawickreme et al., 2021), they
6968 implicate the importance of the body in transformation, alongside practices that facilitate the

6969 diminishment of the ego and unify the embodied personality and transcendently real self,
6970 and they remind us that transformation lives in, and emerges from, the in-between places.

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Appendix A: Reflexions on Choice of Terminology

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I want to take a minute to talk about why I chose the term ‘Epiphanic Experience’,

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rather than any of the other terms that have been proposed in the literature (e.g., quantum

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change, sudden personal transformation, epiphany, etc.). Language is clearly something that

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has the capacity to hinder research into epiphanic experience, as researchers have used

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different terms to describe functionally equivalent phenomena. For example, McDonald

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(2005) suggested that the conceptualisation of quantum change is operationally identical to

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descriptions of epiphany. But first, before I address why I chose ‘epiphanic experience’,

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perhaps I’ll explain why I didn’t choose any of those other terms at my disposal. First,

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‘Quantum Change’, though evocative of the suddenness of these experiences, is problematic

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because it aligns itself with quantum physics (and omits to making a case for why these

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particular ideas are relevant) and it makes the phenomenon sound very New Age-y

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(Wordsworth (2007) also agrees with me) which, whilst not inherently problematic, does

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mean that the concept is robbed somewhat of apparent ‘credibility’ (for lack of a better

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word).

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Second, ‘Sudden Personal Transformation’ is obviously very descriptive, but (to me)

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it takes what is usually a numinous, ineffable, sensuous, revelatory experience, extracts all of

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that, and leaves behind a clinical husk, a linguistic device devoid of any deeper meaning. I

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feel like there’s somewhat of a tendency to do this in psychology, perhaps because of the

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dominance of the psychiatric diagnostic model (Pilgrim, 2019). Depression can be used as an

8648

example of this tendency. Depression emerged from the historical diagnosis of melancholia

8649

(Kendler, 2020). The term ‘depression’ is derived from the Latin ‘deprimere’, meaning ‘press

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down’, aligning with the operationalisation of depression as a mood disorder characterised by

8651

episodes of low mood (Rock, Riedel & Blackwell, 2014). The term appears to be derived

8652 from the modern clinical diagnosis. Meanwhile, ‘melancholia’ comes from the Greek ‘melan-
8653 ’ meaning ‘black’ and ‘kholē’ meaning ‘bile’. Black bile is one of the four humours – a
8654 system of medicine used up until the 1850s when germ theory emerged. Humourism proposes
8655 that an imbalance between the four humours (blood, yellow bile, phlegm, and black bile)
8656 produces specific behavioural patterns (Walshe, 2016). An excess of black bile was proposed
8657 to lead to a mood state that we would now characterise as depression. All this to say, I guess,
8658 is that I appreciate the history and etymology of terminology. It carries a weight to it, a
8659 richness. However, I understand too that terminology grows and changes – and indeed needs
8660 to in order to keep up with our constantly evolving understandings of the world. However, for
8661 me, the term ‘sudden personal transformation’ (unlike ‘depression’ which still conveys a
8662 feeling of sorts, a feeling of being weighed down) goes too far in that clinical and
8663 ontologically monovalent direction.

8664 So, it may come as no surprise that I like the word ‘epiphany’. ‘Epiphany’ is derived
8665 from the Greek ‘epiphainein’ meaning ‘reveal’ or ‘manifest’. And this really gets to the core
8666 of what an epiphany is, I think: a revelation, the unveiling of something that was previously
8667 unknown but is now known, the manifestation of something new. Also, the fact that
8668 ‘epiphany’ has been used primarily in religious contexts also serves to uphold both the
8669 numinous element that many people ascribe to these experiences, as well as the historical
8670 elements of the phenomenon. I’m an atheist, and so I attribute no divine properties to
8671 epiphanic experiences. However, this does not mean that I cannot appreciate the language
8672 and still use it to describe the things that were previously the sole purview of religion and that
8673 can now be explored scientifically. A Judeo-Christian higher power does not need to exist in
8674 order for that word to be meaningful. So, as a term, the very etymology of ‘epiphany’
8675 intimately connects it to the experience itself. However, I acknowledge that ‘epiphany’ is not
8676 the same as ‘epiphanic experience’. Changing the terminology in this way speaks to the

8677 personal and the lived and allows for the recognition of the old and the acknowledgement of
8678 the new.

8679 Fundamentally, by using the term ‘epiphanic experience’ from the start, I’m
8680 facilitating my own enhanced reflexivity. This is because using this term helps me to
8681 maintain a degree of distance from the different conceptualisations of epiphanic experience in
8682 the literature, thereby reminding me to maintain a critical view of the theory at all times.

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Appendix B: Literature Included in the Scoping Review8697 **Anomalous Experience**

Author(s)	Date	Concept
Wilde and Murray	2010	Anomalous Experience
Drinkwater, Dagnall and Bate	2013	Paranormal experience
Drinkwater, Dagnall, Grogan and Riley	2017	Paranormal experience
Kopel	2019	Near-Death Experience
Facco, Pederzoli and Tressoldi	2019	Non-ordinary experiences of consciousness

8698

8699 **Awakening**

Author(s)	Date	Concept
Green, Thompson Fullilove, and Fullilove	1998	Spiritual Awakening
McGee	2019	Spiritual Awakening

Chilton	2015	Epiphany
Neville and Cross	2017	Epiphany/Racial Awakening
Storie and Vining	2018	Environmental Epiphany
McGovern	2021	Epiphany

8704

8705 **Insight**

Author(s)	Date	Concept
Levitt et al	2004	Insight
Topolinski and Reber	2012	Insight
Hill & Kemp	2016	Insight experience

8706

8707 **Mystical Experience**

Author(s)	Date	Concept
James	1902	Mystical States of Consciousness
Witte, van der Wal and Steyn	2008	Mystical Experience
Racine	2014	Mystical Experience

Brymer and Schweitzer 2017 Mystical/Spiritual Experience

Schmid and Liechti 2018 Mystical-type Experience/Profound Alterations of Consciousness

Galadari 2019 Mystical Experience

8708

8709 **Peak Experience**

Author(s) **Date** **Concept**

Liang 2006 Peak Experience

Woodward, Findlay and Moore 2009 Sexual Peak Experience/Mystical Experience/
Mystical Peak Experience/Mystical Sexual Experience

McDonald, Wearing and Ponting 2009 Peak Experience

Scott & Evans 2010 Childhood Peak Experiences

8710

8711 **Quantum Change**

Author(s) **Date** **Concept**

Miller and C'de Baca 2001 Quantum Change

C'de Baca and Wilbourne 2004 Quantum Change

Miller 2004 Quantum Change

Brymer and Oades 2009 Quantum Change/Epiphany

Brymer 2009 Quantum Change/Epiphany

Skalski and Hardy 2013 Quantum Change/Quantum transformation

8712

8713

8714

8715 **Sudden Personal Transformation**

Author(s) **Date** **Concept**

Ilivitsky 2011 Sudden Personal Transformation

Amos 2016a Sudden Personal Transformation

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8717 **Transformative Experiences**

Author(s) **Date** **Concept**

Forcehimes	2004	Spiritual Transformation
Smith	2006	Spiritual Transformation
Vieten, Amorok & Mandala Schiltz	2006	Consciousness Transformation/ Transformative Experience
Levitt, Rattanasampan, Chaidaroon, Stanley and Robinson	2009	Narrative Transformation
Rambo & Bauman	2012	Spiritual Transformation/Conversion
Kirillova, Lehto and Cai	2017	Existential Transformation
Kirillova, Lehto and Cai	2017	Transformative Tourism Experience
Lear	2017	Personal Transformation
Taylor	2020	Posttraumatic Transformation
Naor and Mayseless	2020	Personal Transformation through Peak Experience/Transformative Positive Experience
Russo-Netzer and Davidov	2020	Transformative Life Experience

8718

8719 **Other Unique Terminologies**

Author(s)	Date	Concept
Zimmerman & Zeller	1992	Spontaneous Recovery
Hall	2003	Positive Self-Transition
Murray	2005	The Unencumbered Moment
Gianakis and Carey	2011	Naturally Occurring Change
Lomax, Kripal and Pargament	2011	Sacred Moments
Friedlander, Lee and Bernardi	2012	Corrective Experience
O'Grady & Bartz	2012	Spiritually Transcendent Experience
Civish	2013	Personal Spiritual Experience
Garcia-Romeu, Himmelstein and Kaminker	2015	Self-Transcendent Experience
Rahatz, Bonnell, Goldingay, Warber and Dieppe	2017	Healing Moments
Griffiths, Hurwitz, Davis, Johnson and Jesse	2019	God Encounter Experiences

Van Gordon et al.	2019	Emptiness
<hr/>		
Brouwer & Carhart-Harris	2020	Pivotal Mental States
<hr/>		
Kitson, Stepanova, Aguilar, Wainwright, and Riecke	2020	Profound Emotional Experience
<hr/>		
Rundio, Dixon and Heere	2020	Extraordinary Experience
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Appendix C: The ENTREQ statement (drawn from Tong, Flemming, McInnes, Oliver & Craig, 2012)

No	Item	Guide and description
1	Aim	State the research question the synthesis addresses.
2	Synthesis methodology	Identify the synthesis methodology or theoretical framework which underpins the synthesis, and describe the rationale for choice of methodology (<i>e.g., meta-ethnography, thematic synthesis, critical interpretive synthesis, grounded theory synthesis, realist synthesis, meta-aggregation, meta-study, framework synthesis</i>).
3	Approach to searching	Indicate whether the search was pre-planned (<i>comprehensive search strategies to seek all available studies</i>) or iterative (<i>to seek all available concepts until they theoretical saturation is achieved</i>).
4	Inclusion criteria	Specify the inclusion/exclusion criteria (<i>e.g., in terms of population, language, year limits, type of publication, study type</i>).

5	Data sources	Describe the information sources used (e.g., <i>electronic databases (MEDLINE, EMBASE, CINAHL, psycINFO, Econlit), grey literature databases (digital thesis, policy reports), relevant organisational websites, experts, information specialists, generic web searches (Google Scholar) hand searching, reference lists</i>) and when the searches conducted; provide the rationale for using the data sources.
6	Electronic Search strategy	Describe the literature search (e.g., <i>provide electronic search strategies with population terms, clinical or health topic terms, experiential or social phenomena related terms, filters for qualitative research, and search limits</i>).
7	Study screening methods	Describe the process of study screening and sifting (e.g., <i>title, abstract and full text review, number of independent reviewers who screened studies</i>).
8	Study characteristics	Present the characteristics of the included studies (e.g., <i>year of publication, country, population, number of participants, data collection, methodology, analysis, research questions</i>).
9	Study selection results	Identify the number of studies screened and provide reasons for study exclusion (e.g., <i>for comprehensive searching, provide numbers of studies screened and reasons for exclusion indicated in a figure/flowchart; for iterative searching describe reasons for study exclusion and inclusion based on modifications to the research question and/or contribution to theory development</i>).

10	Rationale for appraisal	Describe the rationale and approach used to appraise the included studies or selected findings (<i>e.g., assessment of conduct (validity and robustness), assessment of reporting (transparency), assessment of content and utility of the findings</i>).
11	Appraisal items	State the tools, frameworks and criteria used to appraise the studies or selected findings (<i>e.g. Existing tools: CASP, QARI, COREQ, Mays and Pope [25]; reviewer developed tools; describe the domains assessed: research team, study design, data analysis and interpretations, reporting</i>).
12	Appraisal process	Indicate whether the appraisal was conducted independently by more than one reviewer and if consensus was required.
13	Appraisal results	Present results of the quality assessment and indicate which articles, if any, were weighted/excluded based on the assessment and give the rationale.
14	Data extraction	Indicate which sections of the primary studies were analysed and how were the data extracted from the primary studies? (<i>e.g., all text under the headings “results /conclusions” were extracted electronically and entered into a computer software</i>).
15	Software	State the computer software used, if any.

16	Number of reviewers	Identify who was involved in coding and analysis.
17	Coding	Describe the process for coding of data (<i>e.g., line by line coding to search for concepts</i>).
18	Study comparison	Describe how were comparisons made within and across studies (<i>e.g., subsequent studies were coded into pre-existing concepts, and new concepts were created when deemed necessary</i>).
19	Derivation of themes	Explain whether the process of deriving the themes or constructs was inductive or deductive.
20	Quotations	Provide quotations from the primary studies to illustrate themes/constructs, and identify whether the quotations were participant quotations or the author's interpretation.
21	Synthesis output	Present rich, compelling and useful results that go beyond a summary of the primary studies (<i>e.g. new interpretation, models of evidence, conceptual models, analytical framework, development of a new theory or construct</i>).

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Appendix D: Participant Communications

8735

8736 Initial Recruitment Email

8737 Hello,

8738 My name is Aura Goldman, and I am a PhD student at the University of Hertfordshire. I

8739 found your contact details on the BPS directory.

8740 I am looking for psychologists with HCPC accreditation who have had sudden personal

8741 transformations (historically referred to as epiphanies!) that have changed them profoundly.

8742 To give you some context, the purpose of this study (ethical protocol number:

8743 aLMS/PGR/UH/03925) is to explore the nature of sudden personal transformations, as

8744 experienced by psychologists. Sudden personal transformations are defined in the literature

8745 as:

8746 · Personal

8747 · Positive

8748 · Lasting

8749 · Profound

8750 · Memorable

8751 · Relatively brief (lasting less than a week)

8752 · An inner experience

8753 I am interested in how psychologists make sense of these experiences. I think that
8754 understanding experiences like these could change the way we view personal change, and the
8755 way in which psychologists practice.

8756 If you think you have had an experience that sounds like this, and would like to volunteer for
8757 this study, your participation would be greatly appreciated and will involve answering some
8758 brief yes or no screening questions by email and, at a later time, talking about your
8759 experience in an in-depth interview.

8760 If you would be happy to participate, please reply to this email so that I can send you a
8761 screening form. Alternatively, please feel free to pass this email onto any of your colleagues
8762 that you think may be interested.

8763 Thank you in advance for your time!

8764 Kind regards,

8765 Aura

8766

8767 **Screening Email**

8768 Hi [name],

8769 Thank you very much for taking the time to reply to my email!

8770 Before scheduling a time for an interview, I need to go through some screening questions
8771 with you (please populate the table below). Please note that none of the questions are meant
8772 to imply that some people's experiences are any more or less legitimate than any others.

Do you believe your experience deeply changed you? For example, your feelings, thoughts, values, and/or behaviours?	Y/N
Would you describe the effect that your experience had on you was ultimately positive (even if it emerged from challenging situations)?	Y/N
Was the experience relatively brief (e.g., less than a week)?	Y/N
Did this experience occur more than a year ago?	Y/N
Would you say the change has been lasting or mostly lasting?	Y/N
Was the experience memorable?	Y/N
Do most of your friends and family believe the change was negative?	Y/N
Did this experience occur as a direct result of a positive external event – for example, getting married, having a child, winning the lottery?	Y/N
Was the experience a result of meeting or associating with the influential leader of a group?	Y/N

8773

8774 If your answers align with the selection criteria, and you agree to participate, here is a brief

8775 summary of what will happen: first, we can decide together on a place to meet that is

8776 convenient for both of us, either at the University of Hertfordshire, at your place of work, or

8777 via Skype. I will go through informed consent with you on the day and will answer any

8778 questions that you have. The interview will last from 60 to 90 minutes and will focus on your
8779 experience and how you have made sense of this experience.

8780 Best,

8781 Aura

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Appendix E: Interview Guide and Exemplar Transcript

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It is recommended that the reader has read Chapter 6, section 2.2 before using this

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interview guide.

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8800

Interview Guide

8801

Note: the following notations have been used to indicate where questions have been taken

8802

from or inspired by. An asterisk () signifies Miller (1991), whilst an exclamation mark (!)*

8803

signifies Ilivitsky (2011).

8804

8805

Specific Questions

8806

1. I will be using a pseudonym instead of your real name. Is there a pseudonym that you

8807

would prefer?

8808

2. What is your gender?

8809

3. What is your age (in years)?

8810

4. How long have you been registered with HCPC

8811

5. What is your highest level of education? (!)

8812

6. What is your/your family's ethnic background? (!)

8813

7. What was your religious background growing up? (*)

8814

8. Do you remember when your experience occurred? (*)

- 8815 9. How old were you when it happened? (*)
- 8816 10. Have you had experiences like this before the one you are describing? How many
8817 times? (*)
- 8818 11. Have you had experiences like this since the once you are describing? How many
8819 times? (*)
- 8820 12. In this study I am using the term “sudden personal transformation”, which is defined
8821 as “a positive, profound, and lasting personal change that follows a relatively brief
8822 and memorable inner experience.” Is there another term that you feel fits better with
8823 your experience? (!)

8824

8825 **In-depth questions**

- 8826 1. Can you tell me a bit about your life in general before the experience? [Possible
8827 prompts: Relationships (with self, partner, family, friends, higher power); Work
8828 (Education, career, hobbies).] (!)
- 8829 2. Can you tell me about the time in your life immediately before the experience?
8830 [Possible prompts: Were there any important concerns that you were dealing with?
8831 Negative life experience? Mental health? Were there any steps leading up to the
8832 experience?] (!)
- 8833 3. How would you describe yourself as a person before the experience? [Possible
8834 prompts: Values, goals, interests, feelings; What gave you satisfaction/happiness?
8835 What would your friends/family say about you?] (!)

- 8836 4. Can you tell me about the experience itself? [Possible prompts: Where were you?
8837 What were you doing just beforehand? Who (if anyone) was with you? How did you
8838 know something out of the ordinary was happening? What did you think/feel/do?
8839 Were there any unusual sensations/sights/sounds? How did the experience end?] (!)
- 8840 5. Can you describe how this experience has impacted your personal life? [Possible
8841 prompts: How do you know it has impacted your life? What changed? What stayed
8842 the same? Has it changed the way you see things, feel, behave, relate to others, relate
8843 to yourself, etc.?] (!)
- 8844 6. Can you describe how this experience has impacted your practice? [Possible prompts:
8845 How do you know that it has impacted your practice? What changed? What stayed the
8846 same? Has it changed the way you see things, feel, behave, relate to clients, or relate
8847 to yourself within practice?] (!)
- 8848 7. How would you describe yourself as a person now? [Possible prompts: Values, the
8849 self, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, interests, goals? What gives you
8850 satisfaction/happiness? If you had to write a profile about yourself, what would it
8851 say?] (!)
- 8852 8. Looking back, can you tell me what you believe produced or caused your personal
8853 transformation? Or do you view your experience as acausal? [Possible prompts: What
8854 factors helped it occur? What happened before that made it more likely? Why do you
8855 think it happened to you (as opposed to someone else)? How would you encourage
8856 this process in someone else? How do you think it was possible? What happened to
8857 you in that moment? What emotional /psychological/social/spiritual/biological etc.
8858 forces or processes were at play? Do you think there is anything about you as a person
8859 that might have facilitated it? (Leave room for multiple interpretations)]

8860 9. If there were a hidden message in your experience to the outside world, what would
8861 that message be? (!)

8862 10. Is there anything else about this experience that you would like to tell me before we
8863 end the interview? How was it for you to talk about this experience? (!)

8864

8865 **Exemplar Transcript**

8866 Below is Scarlett's transcript, which is included to provide the reader a better
8867 understanding of how, and the level of detail at which, the interviews were transcribed, as
8868 well as providing an example of the richness of the data set.

8869

8870 AG [00:00:01] Testing and working. Fab. So just to explain the process a little bit. I've got
8871 about 12 quite specific demographic questions for you, just, it's a spoken survey, essentially.
8872 And then if it's okay with you, then we can go into sort of 10 more in-depth questions about
8873 the experience itself.

8874

8875 S [00:00:21] Yes, no that sounds fine.

8876

8877 AG [00:00:22] OK. Fab. So, I'm going to be using a pseudonym instead of your real name. Is
8878 there, pseudonym that you'd prefer?

8879

8880 S [00:00:29] Scarlett

8881

8882 AG [00:00:30] Scarlett. Oh, I like it. And can you confirm your gender for me please?

8883

8884 S [00:00:36] Yeah. Female.

8885

8886 AG [00:00:37] And do you mind if I ask your age?

8887

8888 S [00:00:39] Yes. Not at all. I'm sixty-three, nex- in a couple of days.

8889

8890 AG [00:00:45] Oh, happy birthday in advance!

8891

8892 S [00:00:49] Yeah so sixty-two. Yeah.

8893

8894 AG [00:00:50] And how long have you been registered with HCPC?

8895

8896 S [00:00:54] Since 2012. Yeah, 2012. It was a little bit complicated because I've got my

8897 doctorate- I didn't go the standard route. OK, so I got my- I did my training and I had to gr- I

8898 had to go through the grandparenting route.

8899

8900 AG [00:01:14] OK.

8901

8902 S [00:01:15] And then 2015, I got my full, sort of, all singing all dancing stuff.

8903

8904 AG [00:01:22] OK. Right.

8905

8906 S [00:01:24] That might crop up as we go through, but anyway.

8907

8908 AG [00:01:28] And can you confirm your highest level of education?

8909

8910 S [00:01:32] Yeah, it was DPsych.

8911

8912 AG [00:01:35] What is your family's ethnic background?

8913

8914 S [00:01:40] British. White British. Yeah.

8915

8916 AG [00:01:43] And did you have a religious background growing up?

8917

8918 S [00:01:46] I suppose I did. Yeah. Yeah. My father was basically very allied to the church
8919 he was a reader and so on. And so, yeah, when I was growing up, it was- we had a fairly
8920 religious background. But that's no more. Not anymore.

8921

8922 AG [00:02:05] So you don't consider yourself religious anymore?

8923

8924 S [00:02:07] No. No.

8925

8926 AG [00:02:08] All right.

8927

8928 S [00:02:09] No.

8929

8930 AG [00:02:09] OK. What would you- would you consider yourself sort of agnostic, atheist?

8931

8932 S [00:02:15] Agnostic is sort of is a non-believer, isn't it?

8933

8934 AG [00:02:18] Oh, atheist is a non-believer.

8935

8936 S [00:02:21] Atheist is a non- agnostic. How do you, sorry, how do you-

8937

8938 AG [00:02:25] Oh uh so if agnosticism is- suddenly tempted to call it fence sitting! [both
8939 laugh] Agnosticism is where you take the position that there isn't sufficient proof either way.
8940 And so, you're just gonna go, well, it's equally likely that God does exist. And it's equally
8941 likely that that he doesn't exist.

8942

8943 S [00:02:46] No I think I'm probably more agnostic then.

8944

8945 AG [00:02:49] OK.

8946

8947 S [00:02:50] Oh atheist!

8948

8949 AG [00:02:51] Atheist.

8950

8951 S [00:02:51] Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

8952

8953 AG [00:02:53] Yeah. OK. All right. Do you remember when your experience occurred?

8954

8955 S [00:02:57] Yes. It was the winter, I don't know the exact date, obviously, but it was it was
8956 in the winter of 2001.

8957

8958 AG [00:03:10] And have you had experiences like this before, the one that you're describing?

8959

8960 S [00:03:16] No. No. No, I don't think so.

8961

8962 AG [00:03:20] And have you had any since?

8963

8964 S [00:03:23] No. No. No, I don't think so.

8965

8966 AG [00:03:25] All right. So, in this study, I'm using the term Sudden Personal
8967 Transformation, which is defined as a positive, profound and lasting personal change that
8968 follows a relatively brief and memorable inner experience. Are you happy with me using this
8969 term or do you think there's another one that suits it better.

8970

8971 S [00:03:42] No that sounds fine. Yeah. Yeah.

8972

8973 AG [00:03:45] All right. Well, those are the more specific questions done. Thank you very
8974 much. And we can move into something a bit more in depth. So, can you just tell me a little
8975 bit more about your life in general before this positive transformation occurred?

8976

8977 S [00:04:02] OK. Where shall I, where shall I start? Yeah, well, I consider myself to have had
8978 a fairly happy childhood, although, you know, looking back in hindsight, there were issues
8979 like there are in any family. Got on well with my parents. My dad was a police officer. And-
8980 which- yeah, and so- and he was he was a basically a village police officer. So, we used to
8981 live in police houses. We didn't own our own house. But we- we had to move when the police
8982 said it's time to move and so on. And I remember thinking that that was I felt very proud of
8983 my dad, and really positive that, you know, he was kind of upholding the law. You realize the
8984 complications when you get a bit older. [both laugh] You know, sort of, less rose-tinted
8985 spectacle bit. But yes, generally it was very positive. My mum had had quite a few
8986 unpleasant experiences. She she'd lost a lot of children when she was pregnant and in the
8987 early, you know, at birth and so on. Although I don't know exactly how many, but I know
8988 that she was actually hospitalized back in the days of in the 50s and had electroconvulsive
8989 therapy and fairly- it was fairly traumatic, and it was something that was not really talked
8990 about too much. 'Cause again, it was the culture of the day that you just sort of have these
8991 experiences and you- you get over them. You know, you've put them behind you and so on
8992 and so on. So, she always had that kind of weakness, I suppose. She was slightly eccentric,
8993 slightly, slightly quirky. But that was just part of her charm as far as I can see. And yeah, and
8994 so things went fairly normally. And I went to university at Portsmouth- it was Portsmouth
8995 Poly at the time, but- did psychology. It was kind of like- it was like coming home. I just sat
8996 the doing psychol- I absolutely loved being a psychologist and doing psychology and yeah,

8997 really proud of that. That's where I met my husband. So, I met him in 1976 and we've been
8998 together ever since.

8999

9000 AG [00:06:19] Wow. That's a long time.

9001

9002 S [00:06:20] That's a long- over for- yeah, over 40 years now. So yeah, and that all seemed
9003 sort of right and good and so on. And then I suppose a lot of things like I started my working
9004 life, and I didn't think about being a psychologist I suppose early on, but I went to be a
9005 teacher. So, I qualified- I did a PGCE in 1980, about 81, started teaching in 81 and did that
9006 and then had two children and so I had two patches of maternity leave. And the second patch
9007 of maternity leave, I just decided I didn't want to go back into the same- I was working in a
9008 big tough secondary school. Not that I was scared of that, but it just didn't feel quite right for
9009 me. And luckily, a friend of mine sort of said one day, oh, have you seen this advert for a
9010 psychologist at [location]? Not [location]. But she was one of these people, that she always
9011 thought she knew better than me. And you know that- and I thought, I'm not going to ask, I'm
9012 not going to ask her what it means. I'll find out. And I found there was this job for a teacher
9013 of psychology. And I suppose that was a water- a real, real watershed for me, 'cause I ended
9014 up- I got the job and absolutely, absolutely loved it. It was just kind of felt like me to a T,
9015 really. Qualified teacher, a good psychologist, loved it and I liked dealing with the children of
9016 that age. So- well, people, young people of that age. So, so I did that for quite a while. Yeah.
9017 Teacher. And then I suppose, you know, life, you get older and older and older. And then my
9018 husband started to feel a bit ill. He couldn't walk so far and breathless and so on. He had had
9019 polio when he was 2. So he had a short- he was one of the last people in this country- he
9020 caught polio and the last major polio epidemic in Britain in the 50s. And- and it was a bit of a

9021 scandal, really, which you may or may not know about, but they didn't- when they realized
9022 there was a big problem with polio in person, they didn't have enough vaccine at the time to
9023 inoculate everybody who really needed it. And his sisters, he's one of six, he was one of six.
9024 His sisters got inoculated because he had twin sisters who were older than him. So, they were
9025 doing it in kind of batches. And so, he missed out. And unfortunately, that that caught him
9026 out because he caught polio on a campsite, because his parents were almost like nomads at
9027 the time. So, he caught polio. And you know at two, and nearly died. And um, and I suppose,
9028 you know, he's the first cohort now who've lived beyond, sort of, well who've survived it,
9029 really. It used to kill most people, or they'd be iron lunged through all of their life and so on.
9030 So, he's a kind of rare cohort if you like. But I suppose because of that, he suffers from
9031 something that they call Post-Polio Syndrome, which is generally a bit of a burden- because
9032 you get through the sort of, initial, you know, you don't die, you then carry on, carry on, carry
9033 on, but you start to sort of feel- you know your muscles start to get a bit sort of worn out
9034 really it sort of. Yeah. The joints and- he's got a shorter left leg than the other right leg. So
9035 that obviously kind of affects balance and walking and hip joints. And I suppose when he
9036 started to become ill, we thought it was something related to polio sort of creeping back in a
9037 slightly different form. And so, we went to the doctors and- and so on. And he did go to a
9038 doctor he had a doctor in Harley Street. And his original doctor obviously had died, and he
9039 had a new doctor, which- who didn't seem to be as caring or as interested, or as observant
9040 perhaps. And I remember the last time he went, he- he didn't- he didn't, um, he didn't really
9041 seem to be that interested in what [husband] was saying. He had two young trainee doctors in
9042 the room, it was all kind of like, oh and this is this case, and they put his x rays up, and they
9043 said- and they were saying, as you can see, there's this blah, blah, blah, blah. And when
9044 [husband] was trying to tell him things like he couldn't walk very well without feeling sort of
9045 breathless and so on. And he just put it all down to yeah, no, that's fine, he said, walk across

9046 the room. And of course, he could walk across the room without any problem. But anyway,
9047 so we just thought, well, that's that, you know. And then he was taking, I think he was taking
9048 blood pressure tablets at the time. So, so- we knew he had that sort of in the background, if
9049 you like but, uh, and then he- he had a heart attack in in Italy. Is it right to- I've kind of like
9050 zipped the background and I'm get-

9051

9052 AG [00:11:37] It's absolutely fine. You can tell the story however you'd like to tell the story!

9053

9054 S [00:11:42] So, you know, so he- so we were thinking, oh, this is our lives now, you know.
9055 And it was, it was getting increasingly difficult because, you know, whereas you've been able
9056 to just sort of- we'd be able to walk into the town, around the town. You know, we'd get about
9057 halfway there and he'd be, what, needing to sit down. And it was at a time when I was
9058 starting to think, okay, this is getting a bit, sort of like, invasive now. Or something you
9059 couldn't ignore. So, we were just thinking, well, how are we going to deal with it? And I
9060 suppose both [husband] and I thought, well, it's not much we can do. It's just how it is. So,
9061 we'll just have to sort of stop more, and rest on the way down to town or, you know, cut our
9062 cloth accordingly, if you like. And I mean, we'd always been used to going to France every
9063 year. Because we have some great French friends. And I started to think- we had very active
9064 holidays, you know, where we'd go, sort of, walking around the coast, you know, etc., etc.
9065 And I used to think, you know, it was starting it was starting to sort of make inroads into
9066 normality, I suppose, and so it was a kind of, you know, this gradual process of- of thinking,
9067 things are changing, we're getting older. Not that we were sort of crying in our pillows about
9068 it, but it was kind of like, ooh, you know, we'll have to try and make some sense of this. Or
9069 how are we going to absorb this and carry on, if you like? And I, and I suppose, yeah, we

9070 were both very busy at the time. He was 45. I was 43-ish. And it was at a time- the boys were
9071 sort of like 17 and 15-ish. So, it was a time where you couldn't just sort of sit back and say,
9072 OK, we're pension- we're kind of old people now [laughs]. We'll sit in the back, you know,
9073 just watching you get on. You have to sort of like, you have to muster yourself and just carry
9074 on. But things were getting, you know, increasingly difficult. And then I suppose we
9075 decided we'd go on holiday to Italy first, before we went to France. So, we thought we'd drive
9076 to Italy and then meet our French friends in Italy, I think, or back at- I can't remember the
9077 details, but we always met up in the summer. And I said to [husband], this- I suppose that
9078 was partly I was thinking we've got to do something different to make ourselves not notice.
9079 I've only just thought of it this way. But in order to sort of say, when you're doing the same
9080 thing all the time, you notice it getting worse and worse and more and more difficult. So,
9081 okay, we'll do something different where we don't have a kind of, ooh, we did it better last
9082 year.

9083

9084 AG [00:14:55] Mmm.

9085

9086 S [00:14:55] So I know, right, OK, we'll do something slightly different. And it was- I used to
9087 say to him- I've been to Italy before I met [husband] and I had a- as an 18-year-old. And, oh it
9088 was just the most, one of the most wonderful experiences, and for all sorts of reasons, which I
9089 probably won't go into [both laugh] it was a very good holiday! And- and I can remember
9090 thinking then, you haven't tasted the real pizza until you taste an Italian pizza. You know,
9091 have a real Italian pizza. Especially like, from a roadside van, you know, whether- it doesn't
9092 matter whether you go to a roadside van or the five-star kind of restaurant. The pizzas are just
9093 sort of to die for, you know, the- char grilled and smoky and oh, just wonderful. So, I said,

9094 let's- let's go to Italy. Let's factor in going to Italy first. Because [husband] wanted to see the
9095 tower- had this thing about seeing the Tower of Pisa. So, we thought, okay. So, we'd not been
9096 to Italy together at all, ever. And so, we looked at a map and we decided we could drive along
9097 the cinque terra, or up or down, whatever. But when you're looking at it on a map, it's a little
9098 wiggly line. In reality, it's- it's a quite a stressful journey by road. You know, you kind of go
9099 up a hill, downhill, up a hill. The actual journey from point A to B is quite short, but the real
9100 journey is quite a lot longer than that, because you get, you know, you're going up and down
9101 the coast. It's wiggly. And so, it was starting to take a lot longer than we'd anticipated. Two
9102 teenagers in the back, bikes on the top 'cause we thought we'd take the boys bikes so they
9103 should go cycling round and all this sort of stuff. And when we arrived at this campsite that
9104 we'd picked out as being suitable for, you know, I don't know, it just looked like a good camp
9105 site and of course everybody else had thought the same, so it was full when we arrived. So,
9106 we le- I think the campsite owner felt sorry for us because we were sort of like a bit frazzled
9107 we'd not- we'd slept in our car, sort of, the night before as though we were a bit kind of, you
9108 know, spaced out. So, he said, look, I've got a German family who are going this morning. If
9109 you go away for a couple of hours and come back, you can have you can have that. So, we
9110 thought, great. You know. So, we went away, and it was like it was scorching hot weather, it
9111 was in it- it was in the thirties, 33, 34 degrees, I don't know. It was it was like scorching hot.
9112 So, we thought, ok the best thing to do is, is get in the sea, have a swim. So, we kind of put
9113 our swimming clothes on and all this sort of stuff and went down to the beach. Now, of
9114 course, the beaches in France that we go to, we know them intimately, you know. You know
9115 their tides, and their, you know, routines are. Never been to this beach before. And it's one of
9116 these beaches that came along on a kind of platform and then suddenly disappeared. So, it
9117 was a- a kind of a rocky coast. And also- but also the bit- the platformy bit, the sea was very
9118 powerful there, and it was literally picking up stones. I shall never forget it. It was picking up

9119 stones on the way in and almost throwing them at your legs. And so, I had all these bruises on
9120 the on the bottom half of my leg from these sort of stones and shingles that it was throwing.
9121 So, you couldn't really swim there. So, we thought, okay, plan B. We went to- no, that's right,
9122 we'd already been to the caf- we'd already been to the cafe and had a coffee. So, we thought,
9123 okay, let's just get back to the campsite. So, we hadn't changed or anything. So, I was still in
9124 my swimming costume because it was so hot and so on and wet. We got to the campsite and
9125 eventually got to the campsite and my husband- that's right, we were putting the tent up. The
9126 boys had started putting the tent up, and we thought we'll take it in turns to go down to the
9127 showers and have a shower. So, the boys had been for theirs and come back and was doing
9128 the tent. I was kind of looking, making sure they were okay. And so, I said, I'll go last. So
9129 [husband] went down, and I saw him coming up and it was like this terraced campsite
9130 because it was like- and it was like desert landscape, sandy, hot. It was unlike anything we'd
9131 ever been to before. So, he was coming up this sort of incline with a fence, a boundary fence.
9132 And he was holding onto the fence, and he just looked terrible. He just looked really, really
9133 terrible. And I thought 'ohh', you know, and so when he got close enough, I said, are you
9134 okay? He said, well, I feel a bit- he was kind of grey, almost green. He just didn't look well at
9135 all. So, I said, okay, you don't look very well. He said, I'll just need to lie down perhaps, you
9136 know, I just need to get to catch my breath. So, he said perhaps if you could ask the boys to
9137 sort of finish the tent or blow the mattress up at least. So, I did that. And then he was lying
9138 down. And he was trying to- he was saying, oh I've got pains in my chest. And I thought, this
9139 is a heart attack. And so- but- I imme- I didn't immediately think, oh God- well no I think I
9140 did. I said, oh, my God, it's a heart attack, I'll call the medics on the campsite. And he said no,
9141 no, no, he's always somebody- don't make a fuss, I'm all right, you know, I don't want to- he
9142 doesn't like to draw attention to himself. So, he said, no I'm fine, especially in front of the
9143 boys. So, I said, oh, oh, well, all right, then you should- just give me an aspirin. And that

9144 might sound really stupid, but actually he was taking an aspirin every day because that thins
9145 your blood and so on and so on and- because of the high blood pressure. So, we gave him an
9146 aspirin. And he was still- it was getting worse about it. I said to the boys- and I can I
9147 remember saying to them, what should I, what should I do? Shall I call the doctor? And I
9148 remember, [son] said, oh, no, don't ask me! You know, and I just suddenly thought, yeah,
9149 look, I've got to- I got to- I've got to do this, I've got to sort it out. So, I said, look, I'm going
9150 to call the doctor whatever you say I'm- so I went to the reception and said my husband's very
9151 ill, I think he needs an ambulance. So, an ambulance came. And they took him, took him, put
9152 him in the ambulance and some of detail forget, 'cause it- that's the trauma does that to you,
9153 doesn't it? But, uh, he went off on his own in the ambulance, I think it was to do with the
9154 Italian sort of system that they couldn't take non patients and you know, blah, blah, blah. So
9155 that left [husband] and I on the camp- myself and the children on the camp site. And I
9156 thought, well I've got to follow him and get there. So, I went up and said, you know is there
9157 any way you can help? And so, the bloke on the reception said, well I've got a van I can take
9158 you. But he couldn't take the children. So, you can imagine, at one point, I got my husband's
9159 somewhere, I don't know where, going towards some hospital in a place that I've never been
9160 to in my life. I'm leaving my two children, and OK they're not babies, but two children, and I
9161 can't say to them, wait there for an hour and I'll be back, because I have no idea, no idea what
9162 was going on. And then there was sort of me going towards this cottage hospital. So, it was
9163 really one of the most, probably the most traumatic experience of my life. And to top it all, I
9164 started my period. At the same time, when you can, you can probably imagine, you know,
9165 wearing- I was just wearing a swimsuit.

9166

9167 AG [00:23:24] Timing.

9168

9169 S [00:23:24] I had nothing with me in the in the van there was just me, didn't have a towel,
9170 didn't have my handbag. Just- just locked everything- left everything. And I just thought, I
9171 can't- you know, how much worse can this get?

9172

9173 AG [00:23:42] Adding insult to injury.

9174

9175 S [00:23:45] [both laugh] And can remember getting to hospital, and he was alive, but they
9176 were saying things like 'myocardial infacto', which is a heart attack. And they- they were
9177 basically saying, we can't look after him here, not- it's a little cottage hospital, so we're
9178 sending him to La Spezia, and I thought, never heard of that. So, I had to say goodbye to him
9179 again. And by this time, we were really scared, as you would be. So, he was off to another
9180 hospital. I was stuck at this hospital, this little hospital. My boys were on the campsite, so I
9181 thought. But they'd waited long enough, and they thought, oh I don't know what's going on.
9182 So, they started to walk. So, when I got back to the campsite, they weren't there because they
9183 were walking - so it was just like, you know, [laughs] it was like, I was just thinking when is
9184 this nightmare going to end? And uh, I mean, shall I zip perhaps to the- the experience now
9185 and then you can- I come back to- yeah?

9186

9187 AG [00:24:53] If that- if you would like.

9188

9189 S [00:24:54] Yeah. Cause I don't want to not give you, you know, the experience if you like.

9190

9191 AG [00:25:00] We'll get there-

9192

9193 S [00:25:01] We'll get there.

9194

9195 AG [00:25:01] I'm happy to get there whenever you're ready to get there.

9196

9197 S [00:25:05] Yeah, well, I suppose it was nice that- or it was good that eventually we all met

9198 up. But it was obvious that [husband] had to stay in Italy because he had to have a heart

9199 bypass operation in Italy. And, so I thought, my boys, I've got one, my oldest one was due

9200 back to start his second year of A Levels. My youngest one was due to go back to start his

9201 first year of A Level. And so, I thought- and they couldn't do anything anyway. So, I thought

9202 I'm going to have to get them home. So, I eventually got a brother-in-law to come over, fly

9203 over, and he took the boys, the camping gear, and the car back. And then after that, I had to

9204 swear, I had to sign an affidavit for my youngest one because he was on my passport still. So,

9205 I had to say that he was going back with my brother-in-law. But if anything had happened to

9206 [husband] in Italy. He- it would have been really difficult stroke impossible for him to get

9207 back because he was on my passport. So that was kind of quite a difficult thing. So anyway,

9208 the boys went off and at this point, we thought he'd had the heart attack. He was just

9209 recovering. Shortly we'd be able to get a flight home. But in the meantime, he started having

9210 chest pains again, even when he was resting. And so, they were saying something's not right

9211 here. Sent him off for an angiogram. And- and then they'd notice that he'd got a constricted
9212 artery, he'd got a blocked artery. And basically, he was like on a knives- you know, his life
9213 was in the balance. And if he didn't have a- and they said we- he needs to have a heart bypass
9214 operation. And I remember saying, oh, right, okay, well, we'll have to take- when can we-
9215 when can I take him back to England to have that? And they went no, no, no, you don't
9216 understand, he can't be moved, he's so dangerously ill, that he's going to have to have a heart
9217 bypass operation here in Italy. And I thought, oh, my God. And I thought- I thought of things
9218 like, oh my God, I'm I have to become an Italian national! [both laugh] Because like, we had
9219 to wait for him to have his operation. And I said, well, well when can you do that? And they
9220 said, well, if he signs permission now, we could do it tomorrow. So, wow, so I had to spend
9221 the- so obviously, he said yes. And I said goodbye to him. And that was a surreal experience
9222 because it was- I didn't know whether I'd ever see him again. If you know what I mean.
9223 Because, if the operation hadn't have been successful, that would have been the end of it. So-
9224 so, I had to spend the night on my own in this hotel, not knowing whether- whether I'd see
9225 him again. And I suppose looking back on it, I think, I didn't go to pieces. I remember
9226 thinking, I'm probably going to go to pieces here, you know, this is not something I can deal
9227 with. But I did. And I went back to the hospital the next day and I had to wait something like
9228 eight hours or someth- eight hours open heart surgery. And the doctor said, I'll come and see
9229 you when it's- when it's ove- when, you know, I've finished the operation. And it was one of
9230 those sort of situations that I would I would- I was researching optimism and pessimism at
9231 the time. Or that's I'd been- I started looking into it. And it was kind of- I remember thinking
9232 it was like optimism and pessimism, almost equally balanced. That- and I wanted to see this
9233 doctor. But I didn't want to see this doctor. Because I knew that when I saw the doctor, that
9234 would be the end of that kind of is he alright, isn't he alright. I would know definitely.

9235

9236 AG [00:29:08] Schrödinger's Cat.

9237

9238 S [00:29:10] Yeah, absolutely. It was just it was just so- it was such a- it was a weird
9239 experience, Because I was on my own, you know, and it was, yeah. I want to see him don't
9240 want to see him. But obviously, I knew that I've got to- you've got to through that, you know.
9241 So anyway, things were okay. So, we then made arrangements to come back to London. And
9242 I suppose it was then that I started I started then to sort of crumble a bit, you know. [husband]
9243 was here, obviously recovering. He had six months to get over it, because he had sort of, the
9244 mark of Zorro, as we say, down his chest, and couldn't lift anything couldn't do- you know, so
9245 had to be at bed rest and whatever. Then I went back to work, and I was teaching nurses at
9246 the time at university. So, it meant going to going to London. And it was about a two and a
9247 half- door to door, probably two and a half hours you're looking at really. Yeah. But, you
9248 know, a relatively long time. And then I suppose I started- when I was at work- I just start to
9249 feel like really, really emotional, like nothing specific, but just sort of like shaky and not quite
9250 myself. And weird. And, yeah, upset. And I started to sort of ruminate on things. I started to
9251 think, what if he has a heart like now, this minute, and I get a phone call from somebody
9252 saying, you know, he's ill and he's been taken to hospital, or, or the boys' phone up and say,
9253 y- dad's you know, ill, come home. And I thought, how would I do that? And I started to
9254 think, well, I'd have to get a tube, another train, and well that would take me about an hour
9255 and a half. And I just sort of- I- I was almost like I daren't be away, because I was thinking,
9256 I'm away from him and something happens, I can't get there. And I just used to sort of burst
9257 into tears at sort of inappropriate times or whatever. My colleague, she was a trained nurse
9258 and a great friend, I've known her for a long time, and she- she basically said, I think you
9259 need some time, some time off. And I suppose in between that just before the year before,

9260 not quite a year before, my mother had died. She had at 70, she had a nasty brain- she had a
9261 brain tumour. Which is a horr- well no, no, nothing's nice like that.

9262

9263 AG [00:31:53] I'm sorry.

9264

9265 S [00:31:54] But it was very quick. We thought it was senile demen- pre-senile dementia. It
9266 wasn't. It was a brain tumour. It was a very aggressive brain tumour. Right in the middle of
9267 her left-hand side of her brain. So, it was inoperable and- and they couldn't even really
9268 happily do a biopsy because they'd have had to have gone through so much of her brain tissue
9269 that it would have lef- it would have caused a lot of damage. So, it was kind of like, uh, it was
9270 palliative care basically. And that was only for about six months. So, she died, very suddenly.
9271 And I suppose I'd start to think things like- I started to sort of almost feel like my mum may
9272 have felt because my dad died- dropped dead of a heart attack at 55. A number of years
9273 before, about 15 years before, my dad had died. And he just dropped dead. And she- so she
9274 didn't have a second chance. And I started to feel really, not guilty, but it was almost like a
9275 survivor g- situation. I was thinking, my poor mum, you know, and she didn't have a second
9276 chance. I've been lucky enough; I've got a second chance. You know, my husband didn't
9277 drop- he had a heart attack, but he didn't die. And then all of that started to sort of, you know,
9278 flow around my mind and I was just starting to think, I'm in a shitty place, you know. And so
9279 eventually I went to the- I went to my doctor. Because I thought, if I'm off sick I'll go to the
9280 doctor. So, I just sort of explained what was happening. I he- and- and I'm really heartened
9281 actually, I was real- I can remember feeling amaz- how amazing he was, he was one of these
9282 doctors- because some of them can be a bit flippant, some of them can be like, you can tell
9283 they're not really listening, you know, whatever. But he sat there, he didn't interrupt. He just

9284 listened to what I was saying. And then he just looked at me and said, Scarlett, life is not a
9285 rehearsal. And I suddenly- it- it suddenly- I just had this sort of sense of [inhales and exhales
9286 deeply], you know, a breath of fresh air, if you like. 'Cause I was starting to think, no, it's
9287 not, is it? You know, because I suddenly realized that that's what I' been- I'd not put that
9288 name on it, that interpretation on it. But I just thought that's exactly what I'm doing- I've been
9289 doing. I've been thinking, all right, if [husband] dies when I'm at work, what am I going to
9290 do? How am I going to- or if [husband] dies when I'm at home with him, what am I going to
9291 do? When he first dies, when I've noticed, what will I do? Will I pick up the- who will I
9292 phone? I've got to tell people. Who would I tell? Who would I want to talk to? Who would I
9293 not want to talk to? What would I do, you know? And I was just starting to think, yeah, I was
9294 kind of mentally rehearsing what I would do when, and if, he died. And I was just- and it was
9295 taking over my head. It was taking over my life. And I was- and I started to then think things
9296 like, well, yeah, he is going to die. I'm going to die. We're all going to die. [laughs] But we-
9297 but how sad it would be, I'm not judging it, but how sad would it be if we all started-
9298 knowing we're going to die, then actually going 'round and constantly practice how it's going
9299 to be, and what we're going to do, and who we're going to speak to. And we'll get to our own
9300 death, and we'll think, what a bloody waste of time! [laughs] You know, I've missed out. I
9301 suddenly realized that I would miss out on so much of living and so much happiness and so
9302 much sort of good times and- and so on. By- by always thinking, ooh is this the last time we
9303 do this, or ooh the last time we did it he was X Y and Z. I know it sounds a bit of a platitude,
9304 and it's sort of very current at the moment, but it's made me realize that you do have to make
9305 efforts to live in the here now, because it is all we've got. My past is gone. The future hasn't
9306 arrived. This is it. [laughs] I can remember a friend- I had a friend of mine, a nurse friend,
9307 and she said, yeah, if you've got one foot in the past, and one foot in the future, you shit on
9308 the present!

9309

9310 AG [00:36:55] I love that. [both laugh]

9311

9312 S [00:36:55] And you can tell some clients that, not all. But it- [laughs] so- so, yeah, and that
9313 kind of anecdote sort of really- I- I get it. You know, I'm not saying we can- we want to wipe
9314 away our past, of course we don't. But- but it's- it's- it's over, and ruminating on pleasant
9315 memories, yeah, that's fine. But keep returning to, you know, bad times, it's not going to do
9316 you any good. And regressing, you know, tox- I think regrets are quite toxic. You have to
9317 kind of move on a bit, don't you? Yeah, so- so I suppose from that point on- I'm not saying
9318 it's been totally easy and so on, and there are times when I still think, oh, God, I'm- I'm in the
9319 last phase of my li- kind of, you know, the later phase of my life, now. But still got quite a bit
9320 to give I hope, you know. Still got a bit of time. But it's kind of, you have to get used to the
9321 fact that you're going to die, I suppose. That's- that's what I I've taken from it, I suppose. And
9322 interestingly enough, I've had a couple of clients in the last few months, who are really
9323 bothered by the sort of, death anxiety. And you- you listen to them, and you think, yeah, I
9324 mean, you can't- I don't- I- I understand it. I do understand it. It's, for human beings, it- it is
9325 one of the most terrible things. I suppose that this sort of thought of you're not going to- you
9326 know, we're not gonna be here like this forever. Because we don't have a mindset for what-
9327 unless you're really religious, of course. But we have a different- you have a different
9328 mindset, but I don't have that mindset.

9329

9330 AG [00:39:05] So this is it.

9331

9332 S [00:39:06] So this is it. This is it. And I think and I think one of the important things that's
9333 come out of it for [husband] and I, is that we do talk about death. We do talk about the fact
9334 that, unless we both die in a car accident together, or something like that, one is going to go
9335 before the other. It's- that's the order of things. But also, we also want one of us to go first- we
9336 want to go first because we don't want- we don't want to outlive our children. That's
9337 something that I think is- I would like- that's- that's my kind of goal, to not outlive my
9338 children. [laughs]

9339

9340 AG [00:39:55] Aim high.

9341

9342 S [00:39:56] Yeah, because even though they'll be sad when we die. Hopefully. I think so. It's
9343 the natural order of things. They will get over- they will get over that. That's how it has to be.
9344 I think when you when you lose a child, I I really don't know how you how you would cope
9345 with- I really don't know how you would cope with that. So, yeah, and that's kind of how I
9346 talk about it to my clients sometimes. You know that that if you asked your parents, for
9347 example, I'm sure they would be like me and say, you are going to have to go through
9348 watching me die, because that's what I want. You know, you may think, oh I'll miss you, and
9349 I can't live without you. You have to do it. It's part of- it sounds all sickly and philosophical,
9350 but it's part of life, you know, you've got to get you've got to get used to that. But not that it
9351 means that you've got to sort of be in a state of suspended animation, just waiting for it to
9352 happen. You've got to live your life as best you can, so that when it comes to your turn, you
9353 have a few a re- you have as little regret about it as possible. So, don't leave things unsaid, if
9354 you think they're important, or, you know, do things- speak to people if you're feeling
9355 bothered, you know, face- face it, if you like. Um. And I suppose it reminds me of an article

9356 that I read when I was doing my doctorate, and it was about these researchers, and they'd
9357 interviewed women whose husbands were dying of renal cancer. And- and it was it was a
9358 quote- nice qualitative study, and they were- and they basically almost separated out two
9359 types of people. It was to do with optimism or pessimism as well because that's- that's what I
9360 do [laughs] in equal measure! But um, yeah, they found out that half of, say, the group of the
9361 women were just trying to sort of be completely positive all the time, you know, not talking
9362 to their husbands about their impending death, or, whatever, whatever, it's just, oh we don't
9363 talk about that cause that's negative, and we have to be positive and we're going to keep
9364 striving and all this sort of stuff. The other group of women basically thought, no, we've got
9365 to, we've got to face this, together, so we'll talk about it, and stuff like that. And when their
9366 husbands died, the study actually spoke to them again, when their husbands had died, they
9367 found that that actually, you know, obviously there were exceptions, but generally speaking,
9368 those women who'd not spoken to their husbands about things were left- and I remember the
9369 quote "left in a very dark place". Because kind of like, I suppose, like their efforts and so on
9370 had actually not brought fruit- not borne fruit, they had not managed to sort of save their
9371 husbands or whatever, whatever. And because they'd not really found out how he was
9372 thinking, and what he was feeling, and what he wanted to do, or what he wanted her to do
9373 after he'd gone, they were all at sea. You know. But the women who'd faced it with a kind of,
9374 good dollop of pessimism, I suppose, were the ones who- who- who were much more
9375 balanced about- who- who- who were dealing with in a in a, a more functional way for them
9376 that they- they were yes, they were bereft and bereaved, but they felt as if they'd- they'd faced
9377 the important things they'd had important conversations, they'd kind of said goodbye as well,
9378 a lot of them, you know, it's sort of, yeah. I can- because I can remember almost pretty much
9379 doing that to [husband] in the hospital when we were- when he was having his heart attack.
9380 He- he- he was wired up all these monitors and I could see the heart monitor and it was beat-

9381 his heart was beating far too fast because, he did actually find out what as well as having high
9382 blood pressure, he was also a type 2 diabetic that we didn't realize, and he had an overactive
9383 thyroid. And those things in combination, he was a heart attack waiting to happen, you know,
9384 [laughs] so you can- we can laugh about it now. And so, his body wasn't able to keep his
9385 heart beating sort of at a normal rate. But it was interesting when I started to have
9386 conversations like, oh, it's terrible, you know, or what happens if you don't- you know I can't
9387 remember the exact conversation, but I was basically trying to say, you know, if you don't
9388 make it, you know, I love you and sorry [tearful]. You know? And the boys all said, look
9389 what you're doing, you know, 'cause you could see that- and they said don't, don't upset him.
9390 And I suppose I did sort of talk it through with them, I said, you know, this is what I feel I've
9391 got to, to do, you know, to sort of- just in case you never get a chance. And, uh, you know,
9392 and luckily, we- we did. But yeah. How're we doing for- I shouldn't be looking at the time.

9393

9394 AG [00:45:52] We're absolutely fine, no problem. No problem. OK. Thank you for sharing
9395 the story with me. That was really powerful. Sounds like a huge amount of trauma, but one
9396 that you kind of ended up in a better place-.

9397

9398 S [00:46:09] Yeah, I think so.

9399

9400 AG [00:46:14] Do you mind if I ask you a couple more questions?

9401

9402 S [00:46:16] No. Yeah, make sure you've got all-.

9403

9404 AG [00:46:17] I've been making some notes as we've- 'cause you've told me the whole story,
9405 so if we could kind of just jump in at different points?

9406

9407 S [00:46:24] Yeah, you must make sure you have the angle you want or the questions that
9408 you need.

9409

9410 AG [00:46:33] So, during the time where you say that things were sort of declining, bit by
9411 bit, and you were kind of noticing year in and year out that things maybe weren't as good as
9412 they were before-

9413

9414 S [00:46:48] Yeah.

9415

9416 AG [00:46:50] What kind of emotional toll did that put on you- place on you, retrospectively,
9417 do you think?

9418

9419 S [00:47:01] I just suppose- I suppose it was a kind of a gradual increase in that kind of a
9420 wistful, a wistful wistfulness. You know, sort of like a bittersweet. It was kind of like
9421 remembering how good and happy things were, and thinking I've got these creep- these
9422 creeping problems, you know, it felt like sort of [sighs] signals were creeping in to say, take
9423 care. Uh, something's going on here. You shouldn't be as happy as you are. You're in denial

9424 about things. Or maybe, yeah, it was kind of like, I was gradually having to notice things and
9425 pay attention to things where I didn't really want to. So, I was in a kind of approach
9426 avoidance kind of land, where I thought, you know, this- I can't just keep blustering on and
9427 carrying on as if nothing has happened.

9428

9429 AG [00:48:16] OK.

9430

9431 S [00:48:16] Yeah.

9432

9433 AG [00:48:17] And do you think that your mental health suffered as a consequence?

9434

9435 S [00:48:25] Yes, but in a quiet- in a kind of quiet sort of way. I don't think it was a- I don't
9436 think I was heading towards a breakdown, as such. I think I just felt it was- I felt almost like
9437 this gradual mental pressure, to change my mind set a bit, or to- I mean, I could have been
9438 heading to something more catastrophic. I don't know. Can I- can I tell you a bit of
9439 psychology that it reminds me of?

9440

9441 AG [00:48:54] Yeah, of course.

9442

9443 S [00:48:56] I was doing -in my reading, I was looking at I think it's Carver and Shear, but
9444 they have a model, a catastrophe model. Have you heard all this stuff about sort of initial
9445 dependence. The chaos effect. Gluck, sort of chaos theory, Mandelbrots fractals, all that kind
9446 of, all that kind of stuff, that there's patterns within chaos. And these two psychologists Shear
9447 and Carver have this cat- catastrophe model that I thought was mir- mirrored what I was like.
9448 That if you fi- I'm an o- I was an optimist. I think I'm probably much more balanced now. But
9449 I was an optimist. And if you are on this optimistic railway, then you- you kind of push aside
9450 all- all- the pessimism, you think, no, no, doesn't apply to me. No, no, no, I'm not listening to
9451 that. No, I'm not going there. But you get- I was getting these increasing messages to say, you
9452 can't sustain that optimism. Look, there's this reason and that reason. And it was almost like
9453 you're under fire, and kind of pessimism is trying to break through. And their models
9454 suggests, you know, we're optimistic, we're optimistic, we carry on, we carry on, we carry on.
9455 But then we're absorbing all these things, and at a certain point, just a tiny little change,
9456 something happens and the whole thing goes into freefall and chaos. And I think they call it a
9457 period of hysteresis or something where you're just spiralling around, you don't know what to
9458 think, you don't know whether to be optimistic, pessimistic. You're just lost in this, you
9459 know, in your thoughts. When they settle, you're actually on the pessimistic road. And then
9460 on the pessimistic road, you gradually find reasons to be optimistic again. So, you build
9461 yourself up. So, it's a kind of- and that's, I think, how I felt, a bit. That that I was kind of
9462 under attack and I had to- there were certain beliefs that I had, that I couldn't sustain any
9463 longer.

9464

9465 AG [00:51:17] Like what?

9466

9467 S [00:51:18] Like, we're incredibly lucky and everything is fine, and even though my
9468 husband's had polio and seems to have got high blood pressure, we're coping with that, it's
9469 not making any major difference. You know, all these- you tell yourself all these kind of- not
9470 fairy stories, but you dress things- you put things in rose tint- you see things through rose
9471 tinted spectacles, don't you? And you sort of, I suppose I could feel this resistance to not
9472 facing, things that I was gonna have to face. Does that make sense?

9473

9474 AG [00:51:54] Yeah, it does it does. Thank you. The- the- to jump forward in time, slightly
9475 now- the appointment that you had with the doctor before taking time off. That that moment
9476 where he said, life is not a rehearsal.

9477

9478 S [00:52:13] Yeah.

9479

9480 AG [00:52:14] Can you tell me kind of thoughts, feelings, sensations, what was- what went
9481 on after that in a little more depth.

9482

9483 S [00:52:27] Um. I just suppose I thought it was- it was just simple, simple sort of- it's
9484 become a bit of a mantra really, to kind of cut through, because I suppose I say to people, my
9485 clients mainly, you know, like if they're OCD- I think was getting a bit OCD-like about
9486 things. And so, when I was having a thought, it was kind of- I couldn't get rid of it. I couldn't
9487 explain it away. I couldn't logic it away. It was just taking over and- and I say to my clients,
9488 you know, I don't want you to push these thoughts away. Because they're trying to tell you

9489 something. So, what we've got to do is you got you gotta be brave, you've got to face- you've
9490 got to find that- you've got to say to yourself, what are these thoughts saying to you? And is
9491 there any truth in it? And if there is, what is that truth? You know, we've got to explore that,
9492 because if you don', evidence seems to suggest that don't go away. You can- you can maybe
9493 distract yourself and you can block them, but they're still there. So, let's have a look. Because
9494 they're coming from your head. They were coming from my head, so, I should be able to face
9495 them. They're mine. I've got to own them. I sounds horrible sort of sickly thing, but I've got to
9496 own them. They're mine. So, I suppose, that- what happened when he said that was-
9497 obviously not immediately, but when I sat down and thought about it after the appointment, I
9498 just thought, I'm wasting my time. Yeah, these- this circle of thoughts that I'm having, I'm
9499 just becoming absorbed. It's taking up too much- it's like I think- people, OCD, people feel
9500 when they finally think enough is enough. I can't bear this any longer. And it was becoming
9501 unbear- yes, it was becoming unbearable. And for him to say life is not a rehearsal. It kind
9502 of- I suppose we work a lot with metaphors, don't we in Psychology. And for me, I was
9503 thinking, yeah, he's absolutely right. I mean, what's the point in running over what is going to
9504 be if I see- if my husband does die before me? How tragic would it be, if by the time I
9505 actually get there, I've spent, however many years beforehand, kind of waiting for it to
9506 happen? No, I mustn't wait for it. It was- it kind of- was like a kind of permission to live my
9507 life. Permission to live my life, knowing that something bad or bad things were going to
9508 happen, but let's not pre-empt them. Let's not, kind of- or else it could become a self-fulfilling
9509 prophecy, perhaps. Or- or when you've got that kind of mindset, it stopped you seeing other
9510 things, doesn't it? If you if you're running around- if I'm running around in my head, oh
9511 what's it going to- who am I going to phone? What's it going to look like? What's it gonna be
9512 like? I'm wake u- I kind of like open my eyes and think, oh, what have I missed? [laughs] So
9513 I kind of- I suppose it made me think, I've got to spend more time looking around me now,

9514 and enjoying what I've got, rather than rehearsing or thinking about what I'm going to miss,
9515 when he does die.

9516

9517 AG [00:56:24] And did that moment have kind of any physical sensation associated with it or
9518 emotional component?

9519

9520 S [00:56:33] I suppose relie- it felt like a relief. You know, it was sort of like, yeah, that's the
9521 answer, isn't it? It's sort of like- it was like a little eureka moment. [laughs] Yeah.

9522

9523 AG [00:56:49] Okay.

9524

9525 S [00:56:50] Yeah.

9526

9527 AG [00:56:50] Thank you. So, could you tell me more about maybe yourself as a person, do
9528 you think that you changed as a person before and after the experience?

9529

9530 S [00:57:09] I think- I think I did. I think I did. And I think, I think I've always been a fairly
9531 cheerful, life and soul of the party, optimistic person. But I was becoming, a shadow of my
9532 former self. I was becoming nervy and upset and- and pessimistic, I suppose, or kind of a bit
9533 all doom and gloom really. I suppose I was beginning to think, oh, the good bit, the good bits

9534 of my life are over now. It's all shit from here on. Or relative shit from here on, you know.
9535 So, everything's going to get worse. There's nothing that's gonna get better. And I think you
9536 then- I then realized, no, that's not quite what it's about. It's about being different, you know. I
9537 do feel different in that I feel, not quite lucky, but I feel that this experience- all you can do
9538 with tragedies and traumas like that is learn from them, isn't it? [mutters something, unclear].
9539 But you can't go back and fix it. You can't not have had it happen, but you can sort of say,
9540 okay, what's the best I can make out of that? And I suppose I am that sort of person, and that
9541 perhaps I'm better now at being that sort of person. About saying, yeah, I accept that death is
9542 part of life, and death will happen. And- and that's a given. We can't stop that. But we do
9543 have a choice as to how we live our lives. And, you know, perhaps we have a duty to
9544 ourselves, certainly, and others around us to live that life as best we can.

9545

9546 AG [00:59:17] That sounds- and please correct me if I'm wrong, like almost a shift in values
9547 or shift in- I don't know if I'm using the right language, tell me if any of it sounds about right.
9548 Yeah, just like already fundamental shift in where you place value, almost.

9549

9550 S [00:59:36] Yeah. Yeah, I suppose. I suppose I up until you have a sort of trauma of that
9551 nature or experience of that nature, you're- you're- you're, in relative terms, you're in cloud
9552 cuckoo land, aren't you? You know, we- and that's partly what I try and say to some of my
9553 clients, really, that in a way, when people become upset or when I became upset about sort of
9554 death and dying and all that sort of stuff. It was partly a reaction to the fact that I'd had a
9555 lucky life, up till that point. And that's what you tend to forget. So, I suppose it's made me
9556 think more about how lucky I've been, if you like. I'm lucky to have got to the point, I was
9557 43, I got to the point of being 43, before I really, really, really appreciated that people die.

9558 You know, 'cause certainly with children, you try to protect children, don't you? You try to p-
9559 but you can't, and perhaps, perhaps we shouldn't. Perhaps that's one of the things that has
9560 changed about me. I feel that we mustn't skirt around death. And certainly, I mean, I'm not
9561 going to be- I've got three grandchildren, one on the way. I'm certainly not going to try and
9562 scare them to death, and sort of talk about you know, we're all going to die! [both laugh] But
9563 you know- but I think they have to- otherwise- I think in a way, we have a duty to try and
9564 protect- is it to try and desensitize ourselves about death a bit?

9565

9566 AG [01:01:32] Is it acceptance?

9567

9568 S [01:01:33] Or accept it. You know, it's- it's just I mean, one of the things I'm reading is on
9569 existential psychotherapy.

9570

9571 AG [01:01:41] Ooh, love a bit of that.

9572

9573 S [01:01:43] I remember looking at that book when I was an undergraduate, so that was like
9574 18, 19, 20. And it scared the bejesus, it scared the bejesus out of me. You know? And I was
9575 thinking, I don't know why I started looking at it, it was a big book, and I thought ooh, big
9576 psychology book, love a big psychology book. And I looked, chapter one death. Chapter two
9577 death. Chapter three grief.

9578

9579 AG [01:02:09] Existentialists love it.

9580

9581 S [01:02:10] You know, etcetera, etcetera. And I just thought, no, no, no. Not having
9582 anything to do with that. And I remember when I had seminars- lectures on elderly people,
9583 and oh can't go there. I really felt I had almost a physical aversion to thinking about death and
9584 facing death and thinking about old age. But that's kind of part of the bubble. That's- that's the
9585 bubble that we create for ourselves, isn't it? We- we tried to create a world where we are
9586 somehow protected. If I don't read that book, I'm all right. If I don't listen to those lectures,
9587 I'm fine. [laughs].

9588

9589 AG [01:02:52] That's really interesting.

9590

9591 S [01:02:53] You know, so it's kind of like in a way, people who come to see me, in their
9592 twenties, thirties, and are suddenly, or relatively suddenly develop this kind of feeling or
9593 thought, I'm going to die! You know, I don't know what they kind of expect in the way, but I
9594 can't- one of the first things I say to them is, yes, you are. Yes. Yes. [laughs] I'm sorry, you
9595 know, I'm not going to- I can't- I'm not going to tell you that I can help you with that. The
9596 way I can help you with that is for you to accept it. Yeah, as you say, that word, acceptance, I
9597 think is probably quite good. And that's what basically Irvin Yalom is talking about, isn't it?
9598 That that there are existential crises. And one of them is we're going to die. And it's, it must
9599 be the most difficult one to kind of get your head around.

9600

9601 AG [01:03:51] I think so, especially in a religious culture where you're told that you're
9602 immortal on some level.

9603

9604 S [01:03:56] Yeah.

9605

9606 AG [01:04:00] It's- it's- it's difficult-.

9607

9608 S [01:04:01] Yeah.

9609

9610 AG [01:04:01] We're a very- we're a very- very sanitised culture.

9611

9612 S [01:04:04] Yeah.

9613

9614 AG [01:04:04] We sanitize death right out of everything.

9615

9616 S [01:04:07] Yeah.

9617

9618 AG [01:04:07] We don't even see old fruit and veg anymore!

9619

9620 S [01:04:09] Yeah- yeah.

9621

9622 AG [01:04:12] Everything is shiny and new and-

9623

9624 S [01:04:15] Everything's all about sort of selfies in the infinity pool, and you know, look at
9625 this, look at this fantastic life I'm having.

9626

9627 AG [01:04:23] Eternal youth.

9628

9629 S [01:04:24] Eternal youth. Life eternal. Or, you know.

9630

9631 AG [01:04:27] Yeah.

9632

9633 S [01:04:30] And I suppose it's sort of, I'll tell you what it reminds me of, it reminds me of a
9634 friend I have who, perhaps had sort of those sort of similar thoughts that if I don't think about
9635 it, if I don't face it, will go away, or it won't happen to me, or I can leave that for a while.
9636 Until he didn't- he was really, really resistant about writing his will, because it was almost
9637 like if I write my will, it means I'm going to die. I sort of was like, well you're going to die,
9638 whether you write your will or not [laughs]. And when you- whether you write your will,

9639 today or tomorrow or next week, it's- there's no connection between that act and your death.
9640 You know, you're going to die, whatever. So, I would, if I were you. I mean, I've written a-
9641 we've written our wills. And I and I found it a completely liberating process, partly
9642 financially as well, because I'm thinking if I died at this point, I've got X amount of thousands
9643 that the taxman will take, and the taxmen have already taxed me on my earnings to get to this
9644 point. So, I'm going to try to make sure that I spend every mortal penny that the taxman
9645 would take to the maximum without tax, for my children, if you like, because I'm thinking
9646 I've not worked for the taxman, you know. So, if they're going to take that anyway, well I'm
9647 going to spend it. So, it's kind of like- kind of liberating that the- yeah. Yeah. Sorry does
9648 that- is that- does that help?

9649

9650 AG [01:06:06] Yes. Yes, very much so, thank you. Two more questions. You've touched on
9651 it sort of throughout, but if you could, sort of almost summarize how your positive
9652 transformation has impacted you- your practice? How as that- has it changed your practice?

9653

9654 S [01:06:25] Okay. [pause] Well, I suppose it's given me a bit of- it- it- I mean, you know, I
9655 feel I use- I've used the experience to kind of positive effect where I can, because I do believe
9656 it is, uh, possible, it is professional sometimes to talk about yourself. If you're in a person-
9657 centred approach, not quite so much. But I kind of like, put all the approaches together really,
9658 when in practice. That's why I wanted to be a Doctor of Counselling Psychology because I
9659 wanted to be able to use it all. If nec- as and when appropriate. So- so, I do sometimes I think
9660 it helps to show clients that, me as a psychologist, I'm not sitting here in my chair thinking,
9661 sort of, exuding this kind of, I'm immune from all this, and because I'm a psychologist, I cope
9662 perfectly with everything. And I'm all kind of zen and calm and sort of all sort of hunky-

9663 everything's hunky dory. You know. We have problems as well. And- or we've had the
9664 experiences that we've had to get over. And things that we- we- we bother about, I suppose, is
9665 part of this sort of normalizing, I suppose to use the CBT language, it's kind of normalizing
9666 people's fears that they find difficult, distasteful, guilty of. Yeah.

9667

9668 AG [01:08:18] Do you think it allows you to relate to your clients differently?

9669

9670 S [01:08:27] I think it makes me a more- a calmer person with them, or a kind of, a kind of- I
9671 feel that because I'm an older person anyway, I feel it gives a kind of edge that I'm a, I'm a
9672 quite a sage- but I'm a very open person. So, I would, I- and I don't think I'm a very
9673 judgmental person, but I think I- I can give off this sort of kind of ambience that kind of I've
9674 been some- I've been through some difficulties and I- I kind of can't qui- completely
9675 understand how you feel, but I think I, yeah, it gives me a deeper understanding, perhaps.

9676

9677 AG [01:09:18] Empathy?

9678

9679 S [01:09:19] An empathy with them, you know. Yeah, I don't know whether it's relevant or
9680 not, but as I- I was sitting with a client a couple of weeks ago, and he- he- he was sort of
9681 talking about his- his wife, who she's had a- she had suffered somebody- a close family
9682 member died. And she seems to have gotten over it. And he experienced a friend dying, or a
9683 friend or a friend, somebody, you know, a bit further away from his circle, dying, and it
9684 seems to have- things are coming crashing around his ears a bit really, in terms of he's really,

9685 really bothered by sort of death, his own death and so on. And one of his issues is what- why
9686 isn't my wife- why am I? I feel guilty. I feel wrong. I feel bad, that I'm sort of like being
9687 pathetic and selfish, and sort of, I'm thinking about my own death, whereas she has had a
9688 death that's much closer to her, and she's getting over it. She's kind of getting on with it. And
9689 I feel, you know, I'm p- in relation to her. And I suppose it made me feel a bit like sort of that
9690 survivor guilt. And I suppose that reminded me of, you know, how I felt when, you know
9691 like, I remember my mother had di- not had a second chance, but I had. And why am I feeling
9692 so pathetic. But in a way, I suppose, it makes me realize that we're- we're all dif- we're all
9693 different, and we do deal with things, incredibly differently. I suppose that's one of the things
9694 that I've kind of empha- that's kind of happened, if you like, since then, is that the enormous
9695 range of responses to death, and to trauma. From sort of some people, who seem to almost
9696 hardly notice it, to people who seem to be really dragged down into it. Um, yeah.

9697

9698 AG [01:11:46] OK. Thank you. And another short- sort of small question. You mentioned
9699 that you're a very open person. Do you think there is anything about yourself, as a person,
9700 that might have facilitated experiencing that sudden positive transformation?

9701

9702 S [01:12:08] I suppose partly that- and lot of my client's sort of say this as well. Sometimes, I
9703 didn't like the way I was becoming. I really, I- I was almost getting to the point I don't
9704 recognize myself. You know, I'm not this weak, sort of vulnerable- I suppose I'd kind of
9705 come to see myself as a fairly powerful, successful, cheerful, you know, if you want a job
9706 doing ask a busy person, kind of person. You know, I'd been the head of department. And
9707 yet, you know, I'd been fairly kind of a dynamic, zipping around. And this wasn't me. And
9708 so, I think I was fairly motivated, to kinds of, not return- you can't ever go back and be who

9709 you were before. But be a more cheer- you know just accept that- acceptance, and then move
9710 on. So, I feel better being released, it's almost like having the burdens of- it's like having a
9711 burden removed, you know, you don't have to practice that- it's going to come anyway. You
9712 don't have to practice it.

9713

9714 AG [01:13:35] Do you feel lighter?

9715

9716 S [01:13:36] Feel lighter, yeah [laughs] Sort of less- and I suppose it reminds me of one of
9717 my mantras is the serenity prayer. Have you come across that? You know, I just think that's
9718 [pause].

9719

9720 AG [01:13:48] Beautiful.

9721

9722 S [01:13:48] I think that's just- I mean, I leave the God bit out but it's sort of you know,
9723 something, myself, give me the serenity to change, no, to accept the things I cannot change. I
9724 mean, that's- that's it, isn't it, really? That's what we have to do. We have to accept that we are
9725 going to die. You can't change it. But, uh, give me the courage to change the things I can and
9726 the wisdom to know the difference. I mean, that's just perfect.

9727

9728 AG [01:14:22] Yeah.

9729

9730 S [01:14:22] Yeah.

9731

9732 AG [01:14:24] Yeah. And that makes it- I can see all the parallels within that Serenity

9733 Prayer-

9734

9735 S [01:14:30] Yeah.

9736

9737 AG [01:14:30] -And your experience.

9738

9739 S [01:14:34] It sort of, it keeps you grounded. But it allows you to also be optimistic as well.

9740

9741 AG [01:14:40] Hmm.

9742

9743 S [01:14:41] 'Cause I have a- I have a view that people can be too optimistic, I suppose. And

9744 I try to help them, not to be. Because I think that there lies the road to disappointment,

9745 continual striving, feeling inadequate, feeling you're not doing things right or, you know.

9746 They think pessimism is all negative, and pessimism, is- is, it keeps you grounded. A bit of

9747 pessimism, you know, not too much so that you've become, uh, mired in depression and can't-

9748 can't progress, and get total apathy and so on. Yeah, but a balance between the two is

9749 important.

9750

9751 AG [01:15:36] And just to finish up, is there anything else about your experience that you
9752 think I should know, or you'd like me to know?

9753

9754 S [01:15:57] No, I suppose- I suppose that with hindsight- well, from my position now, it
9755 really resonates- and that's a word I love and hate- it resonates with the work of Stephen
9756 Joseph. Post-Traumatic growth, have you come across that? I just- I saw him at a conference
9757 a couple of years ago and got his- I'm a real groupie -got his book, and he signed it for me.
9758 But I think his work is amazing. And not- and I do tell clients who've had that sort of trauma,
9759 you know, I'm not saying, ooh, you're ever so lucky to have had that trauma because now you
9760 can learn from it and have some post-traumatic growth. But actually, that's the positive that
9761 can, and often does come out of out of trauma. So, I feel I feel I'm in a sort of minor way,
9762 I'm- I'm living proof that there is growth after- there is life after trauma, I suppose. [laughs]
9763 That you can- and when you read sort of trauma stories, I think what Stephen Joseph has been
9764 doing recent- more recently is looking at Africa, is it the Tutsis and the Hutus that he's
9765 working with, or has been working with, translating their stories. You know how- how given
9766 the just the horrendousness of what they've been through. They're not totally broken, they're
9767 survive- they're surviving. They're growing. They're carrying on. You know.

9768

9769 AG [01:17:47] Yeah.

9770

9771 S [01:17:47] So yeah. So, it gives you- gives me strength. Strength through adversity.

9772

Appendix F: Ethics Documentation

9773

This appendix contains the initial ethics application, alongside the two modifications

9774

to this application that were later submitted. The content of each application is presented,

9775

followed by evidence of ethical approval.

9776

Initial Application

PAPER 7

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE

FORM EC1A: APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL OF A STUDY INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS (Individual or Group Applications)

Please complete this form if you wish to undertake a study involving human participants.

Applicants are advised to refer to the Ethics Approval StudyNet Site and read the Guidance Notes (GN) before completing this form.

<http://www.studynet2.herts.ac.uk/ptl/common/ethics.nsf/Homepage?ReadForm>

Applicants are also advised to read the FAQ General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) before completing this form.

<http://www.studynet2.herts.ac.uk/ptl/common/ethics.nsf/Frequently+Asked+Questions/4AD88CD88D0F3F2D8025829800300621>

Use of this form is mandatory [see UPR RE01, 'Studies Involving Human Participants', Sections 7.1-7.3]

Approval must be sought **and granted** before any investigation involving human participants begins [UPR RE01, S 4.4 (iii)]

If you require any further guidance, please contact either hsetecda@herts.ac.uk or ssahecdca@herts.ac.uk

Abbreviations: GN = Guidance Notes UPR = University Policies and Regulations

THE STUDY

- Q1 Please give the title of the proposed study
Sudden Personal Transformation in Sport Psychologists

THE APPLICANT

- Q2 Name of applicant/(principal) investigator (person undertaking this study)

Aura Goldman

Student registration number/Staff number

14178858

Email address

a.goldman@herts.ac.uk OR auragoldman@hotmail.co.uk

Status:

Undergraduate (Foundation)

Undergraduate (BSc, BA)

Postgraduate (taught)

Postgraduate (research)

Staff

Other

If other, please provide details here:

N/A

School/Department:

School of Life and Medical Sciences

If application is from a student NOT based at University of Hertfordshire, please give the name of the partner institution: N/A

Name of Programme (eg BSc (Hons) Computer Science): PhD Sport Psychology

Module name and module code: N/A

Name of Supervisor: Dr Stephen Pack Supervisor's email: s.pack@herts.ac.uk

Name of Module Leader if applicant is undertaking a taught programme/module:

N/A

Names and student/staff numbers for any additional investigators involved in this study (students should read GN Sections 1.5 and 2.2.1 concerning responsibilities of all members of the group)

Dr Fran Longstaff
Professor Elizabeth Pike

Is this study being conducted in collaboration with another university or institution and/or does it involve working with colleagues from another institution?

Yes

No

If yes, provide details here:

N/A

DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED STUDY

Q3 Please give a short synopsis of your proposed study, stating its aims and highlighting where these aims relate to the use of human participants (See GN 2.2.3)

This study aims to explore sudden personal transformations (SPTs; a positive, lasting, profound personal change, which followed a relatively brief and memorable inner experience) as experienced by sport psychologists. The first study in my thesis used an online survey and found that trainee sport psychologists do have these experiences. This study would seek to gain a more in-depth understanding of SPTs.

Although the phenomena under investigation is relatively uncommon, the study will aim to recruit approximately 10 (maximum 15) individuals who are practitioner psychologists, registered with the Health Care Professions Council (HCPC). The interview schedule to be used for the study will be pilot tested on one individual, based on the recommendations by Connelly (2008) that pilot sample size should be 10% of the sample size for the main study.

- Q4 Please give a brief explanation of the design of the study and the methods and procedures used. You should clearly state the nature of the involvement the human participants will have in your proposed study and the extent of their commitment. Ensure you provide sufficient detail for the Committee to, particularly in relation to the human participants. Refer to any Standard Operating Procedures SOPs under which you are operating here. (See GN 2.2.4).

To explore sudden personal transformations in sport psychologists, a semi-structured interview will be undertaken (proposed interview schedule attached in supporting documentation).

Participants will be recruited via: social media and personal connections.

Prior to interviewing, screening will take place by email (see attached documentation for screening emails) to determine that the participant has experienced a sudden personal transformation. The screening questions are based on previous literature that has explored sudden personal transformations (Amos, 2016; Ilivitsky, 2011). Participants will be required to give informed consent. The interviews will last approximately 1 – 1.5hrs.

- Q5 Does the study involve the administration of substances?

Yes No

PLEASE NOTE: If you have answered yes to this question you must ensure that the study would not be considered a clinical trial of an investigational medical product. To help you, please refer to the link below from the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/317952/Algothrim.pdf

To help you determine whether NHS REC approval is required, you may wish to consult the Health Research Authority (HRA) decision tool: <http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/ethics/>

If your study is considered a clinical trial and it is decided that ethical approval will be sought from the HRA, please stop completing this form and use Form EC1D, 'NHS Protocol Registration Request'; you should also seek guidance from Research Sponsorship.

I confirm that I have referred to the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency information and confirm that that my study is not considered a clinical trial of a medicinal product.

Please type your name here: [Click here to enter text.](#)

Date: [Click here to enter a date.](#)

- Q6.1 Please give the starting date for your recruitment and data collection: 18/11/2019

- Q6.2 Please give the finishing date for your data collection: 28/02/2020
 (For meaning of 'starting date' and 'finishing date', see GN 2.2.6)

- Q7.1 Where will the study take place?

The University of Hertfordshire and other various locations.

Every effort will be made to conduct interviews on campus, but this may not always be feasible for participants.

Please refer to the Guidance Notes (GN 2.2.7) which set out clearly what permissions are required;

Please tick all the statements below which apply to this study

- Q7.2 **Permissions**

This question is about two types of permission you may need to obtain. Depending on the study you may need more than one of each of these:

- i Permission to access a particular group or groups of participants to respond to your study
- ii Permission to use a particular premises or location in which you wish to conduct your study

If your study involves minors/vulnerable participants, please refer to Q18 to ensure you comply with the University's requirement regarding Disclosure and Barring Service clearance.

TICK THE APPROPRIATE BOXES IN EACH COLUMN

(tick)	(i) Permission to access participants	(tick)	(ii) Permission to use premises/location
	I confirm that I have obtained permission to access my intended group of participants and that the permission is attached to this application		Permission has been obtained to carry out the study on University premises in areas outside the Schools and the agreement is attached to this application.
	I have yet to obtain permission but I understand that this will be necessary before I commence my study. <u>For student applicants only</u> : I understand that the original copies of the permission letters must be verified by my supervisor before data collection commences		Permission has been obtained from an off-campus location to carry out the study on their premises and the agreement is attached to this application
	This study involves working with minors/vulnerable participants. I/we have obtained permission from the organisation (including UH/UH Partner Institutions when appropriate) in which the study is to take place and which is responsible for the minors/vulnerable participants. The permission states the DBS requirements of the organisation for this study and confirms I/we have satisfied their DBS requirements where necessary	✓	I have yet to obtain permission but I understand that this will be necessary before I commence my study. <u>For student applicants only</u> : I understand that the original copies of the permission must be verified by my supervisor before data collection commences It may be necessary to travel to other universities to carry out my research and so I will contact each institution as and when I recruit a participant in order to obtain permission, taking into account The School of Life and Medical Sciences Protocols of Safe Working section 2.2
✓	Permission is not required for my study. Please explain why: Permission is not required as there is no relevant gatekeeper for the participants. Participants will either be contacted individually, or the invitation to participate will be shared through social media to appropriate candidates. Participation will be voluntary at the point of briefing and decided on an individual basis.	✓	Permission is not required for my study. Please explain why: Permission is not required as interviews will take place in a staff meeting room (participants would therefore follow the HR standard 'unpaid visitor' process).

HARMS, HAZARDS AND RISKS

Q8.1 It might be appropriate to conduct a risk assessment (in respect of the hazards/risks affecting both the participants and/or investigators). **Please use form EC5, Harms, Hazards and Risks, if the answer to any of the questions below is 'yes'.**

If you are required to complete and submit a School-specific risk assessment (in accordance with the requirements of the originating School) it is acceptable to make a cross-reference from this document

to Form EC5 in order not to have to repeat the information twice.

Will this study involve any of the following?

Invasive Procedures/administration of any substance/s? YES NO

IF 'YES' TO THE ABOVE PLEASE COMPLETE EC1 APPENDIX 1 AS WELL AND INCLUDE IT WITH YOUR APPLICATION

Are there potential hazards to participant/investigator(s) from the proposed study? (Physical/Emotional or other non-physical harm) YES NO

Will or could aftercare and/or support be needed by participants? YES NO

Q8.2 Is the study being conducted off-campus (i.e. not at UH/UH Partner?) YES NO

It might be appropriate to conduct a risk assessment of the proposed location for your study (in respect of the hazards/risks affecting both the participants and/or investigators) (this might be relevant for on-campus locations as well). Please use Form EC5 and, if required, a School-specific risk assessment (See GN 2.2.8 of the Guidance Notes).

If you do not consider it necessary to submit a risk assessment, please give your reasons:
A risk assessment will be conducted – please see form EC5

ABOUT YOUR PARTICIPANTS

Q9 Please give a brief description of the kind of people you hope/intend to have as participants, for instance, a sample of the general population, University students, people affected by a particular medical condition, children within a given age group, employees of a particular firm, people who support a particular political party, and state whether there are any upper or lower age restrictions.

Participants in this study will be purposively sampled sport psychologists of any gender, registered with the HCPC, who self-identify as having experienced a sudden personal transformation (defined as: "a positive, lasting, profound personal change, which followed a relatively brief and memorable inner experience" (Ilivitsky, 2011)).

Participants will be excluded should their experience be: related to a near-death experience, have happened as the direct result of a positive external event, or the result of meeting or associating with the influential leader of a group. These circumstances distinguish sudden personal transformations from other related constructs. Further, it is critical that the experience be the result of an internal, rather than external, event.

There will be no upper age limit, and all participants will be over 18.

Q10 Please state here the maximum number of participants you hope will participate in your study. Please indicate the maximum numbers of participants for *each* method of data collection.

15

Q11 By completing this form, you are indicating that you are reasonably sure that you will be successful in obtaining the number of participants which you hope/intend to recruit. Please outline here your

recruitment (sampling) method and how you will advertise your study. (See GN 2.2.9).

Participants will be purposively sampled through recruitment on social media, and through the researchers' and their supervisors' personal connections.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND CONSENT

(For guidance on issues relating to consent, see GN 2.2.10, GN 3.1 and UPR RE01, SS 2.3 and 2.4 and the Ethics Approval StudyNet Site FAQs)

Q12 How will you obtain consent from the participants? Please explain the consent process for each method of data collection identified in Q4

Express/explicit consent using an EC3 Consent Form and an EC6 Participant Information Sheet (or equivalent documentation)

Implied consent (participant information will be provided, for example, at the start of the questionnaire/survey etc)

Consent by proxy (for example, given by parent/guardian)

Use this space to describe how consent is to be obtained and recorded for each method of data collection. The information you give must be sufficient to enable the Committee to understand exactly what it is that prospective participants are being asked to agree to.

Participants will be sent the consent form and information sheet prior to their attendance of the interview in order to allow them to familiarise themselves with the study. If the participant has not brought completed forms to the interview, or has not yet read them, then the information will be provided and time will be devoted to ensuring that the participant fully understands what their participation in the study will entail.

If you do not intend to obtain consent from participants please explain why it is considered unnecessary or impossible or otherwise inappropriate to seek consent.

N/A

Q13 If the participant is a minor (under 18 years of age) or is unable for any reason to give full consent on their own, state here whose consent will be obtained and how? (See especially GN 3.6 and 3.7)

N/A

Q14.1 Will anyone other than yourself and the participants be present with you when conducting this study? (See GN 2.2.10)

YES NO

If YES, please state the relationship between anyone else who is present other than the applicant and/or participants (eg health professional, parent/guardian of the participant).

N/A

Q14.2 Will the proposed study be conducted in private?

YES NO

If 'No', what steps will be taken to ensure confidentiality of the participants' information. (See GN 2.2.10):

N/A

- Q15.1 Are personal data of any sort (such as name, age, gender, occupation, contact details or images) to be obtained from or in respect of any participant? (See GN 2.2.11) (You will be required to adhere to the arrangements declared in this application concerning confidentiality of data and its storage. The Participant Information Sheet (Form EC6 or equivalent) must explain the arrangements clearly.)

 YES NO

If YES, give details of personal data to be gathered and indicate how it will be stored.

The study will gather the following personal data: (a) name (b) gender, (c) age, (d) occupation, (e) contact details and (f) religion. Names and other clearly identifying data will be anonymised in any subsequent transcripts. The data will be encrypted and stored on a password protected computer, accessible only to the researcher for 72 months after which it will be destroyed under secure conditions. Any identifiable information will be stored separately to the interview transcripts.

PLEASE NOTE: If you are processing personal information you MUST consider whether you need to complete a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA). Please read the DPIA guidance available from the FAQ section of the UH Ethics Approval StudyNet site:

<http://www.studynet2.herts.ac.uk/ptl/common/ethics.nsf/Frequently+Asked+Questions/935D97CD-BC546E69802583A9005213A6>

If you need to complete one, please find the DPIA template in the University's website at the following link:

https://www.herts.ac.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0006/233619/IM08_apxl-Template-Data-Protection-Impact-Assessment.pdf

The DPIA must be completed in consultation with the University's Data Protection Officer and submitted with your application for ethics approval.

Will you be making audio-visual recordings?

 YES NO

If YES, give details of the types recording to be made and indicate how they will be stored.

Audio recordings will be made of the interviews. If any visual material is produced by the participants then photographs of this material will be taken. The files will be stored without names and other clearly identifying data on the file name.

- Q15.2 If you have made a YES response to any part of Q15.1, please state what steps will be taken to prevent or regulate access to personal data and/or audio-visual recordings beyond the immediate investigative team, as indicated in the Participant Information Sheet.

Indicate what assurances will be given to participants about the security of, and access to, personal data and/or audio-visual recordings, as indicated in the Participant Information Sheet.

The data will be encrypted and stored on a password protected computer, accessible only to the

researcher for 72 months after which it will be destroyed under secure conditions.

State as far as you are able to do so how long personal data and/or audio-visual recordings collected/made during the study will be retained and what arrangements have been made for its/their secure storage and destruction, as indicated in the Participant Information Sheet.

The data will be encrypted and stored on a password protected computer, accessible only to the researcher for 72 months after which it will be destroyed under secure conditions.

Q15.3 Will data be anonymised prior to storage?

YES NO

Q16 Is it intended (or possible) that data might be used beyond the present study? (See GN 2.2.10)

YES NO

If YES, please indicate the kind of further use that is intended (or which may be possible).

If NO, will the data be kept for a set period and then destroyed under secure conditions?

YES NO

If NO, please explain why not:

N/A

Q17 Consent Forms: what arrangements have been made for the storage of Consent Forms and for how long?

Consent forms will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, accessible only to the researcher.

Q18 If the activity/activities involve work with children and/or vulnerable adults satisfactory Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance may be required by investigators. You are required to check with the organisation (including UH/UH Partners where appropriate) responsible for the minors/vulnerable participants whether or not they require DBS clearance.

Any permission from the organisation confirming their approval for you to undertake the activities with the children/vulnerable group for which they are responsible should make specific reference to any DBS requirements they impose and their permission letter/email must be included with your application.

More information is available via the DBS website - <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service>

REWARDS

Q19.1 Are you receiving any financial or other reward connected with this study? (See GN 2.2.14 and UPR RE01, S 2.3)

YES NO

If YES, give details here:

N/A

Q19.2 Are participants going to receive any financial or other reward connected with the study? (Please note that the University does not allow participants to be given a financial inducement.) (See UPR RE01, S 2.3)

YES NO

If YES, provide details here:

N/A

Q19.3 Will anybody else (including any other members of the investigative team) receive any financial or other reward connected with this study?

YES NO

If YES, provide details here:

N/A

OTHER RELEVANT MATTERS

Q20 Enter here anything else you want to say in support of your application, or which you believe may assist the Committee in reaching its decision.

[Click here to enter text.](#)

DOCUMENTS TO BE ATTACHED

Please indicate below which documents are attached to this application:

- Permission to access groups of participants
- Permission to use University premises beyond areas of School
- Permission from off-campus location(s) to be used to conduct this study
- Form EC5 (Harms, Hazards and Risks: assessment and mitigation)
- Consent Form (See Form EC3/EC4)
- Form EC6 (Participant Info Sheet)
- Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)
- A copy of the proposed questionnaire and/or interview schedule (if appropriate for this study). For

unstructured methods, please provide details of the subject areas that will be covered and any boundaries that have been agreed with your Supervisor

Any other relevant documents, such as a debrief, meeting report. Please provide details here:

[Click here to enter text.](#)

DECLARATIONS

1 DECLARATION BY APPLICANT

- 1.1 I undertake, to the best of my ability, to abide by UPR RE01, 'Studies Involving the Use of Human Participants', in carrying out the study.
- 1.2 I undertake to explain the nature of the study and all possible risks to potential participants,
- 1.3 Data relating to participants will be handled with great care. No data relating to named or identifiable participants will be passed on to others without the written consent of the participants concerned, unless they have already consented to such sharing of data when they agreed to take part in the study.
- 1.4 All participants will be informed (a) that they are not obliged to take part in the study, and (b) that they may withdraw at any time without disadvantage or having to give a reason.
- (NOTE: Where the participant is a minor or is otherwise unable, for any reason, to give full consent on their own, references here to participants being given an explanation or information, or being asked to give their consent, are to be understood as referring to the person giving consent on their behalf. (See Q 12; also GN Pt. 3, and especially 3.6 & 3.7))

Enter your name here: Aura Goldman

Date 31/10/2019

2 GROUP APPLICATION

(If you are making this application on behalf of a group of students/staff, please complete this section as well)

I confirm that I have agreement of the other members of the group to sign this declaration on their behalf

Enter your name here: [Click here to enter text.](#)

Date [Click here to enter a date.](#)

DECLARATION BY SUPERVISOR (see GN 2.1.6)

I confirm that the proposed study has been appropriately vetted within the School in respect of its aims and methods; that I have discussed this application for Ethics Committee approval with the applicant and approve its submission; that I accept responsibility for guiding the applicant so as to ensure compliance with the terms of the protocol and with any applicable ethical code(s); and that if there are conditions of the approval, they have been met.

Enter your name here: [Click here to enter text.](#)

Date [Click here to enter a date.](#)

HEALTH, SCIENCE, ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY ECDA

ETHICS APPROVAL NOTIFICATION

TO Aura Goldman
CC Dr Stephen Pack
FROM Dr Simon Trainis, Health, Science Engineering & Technology ECDA Chairman
DATE 13/11/19

Protocol number: LMS/PGR/UH/03925

Title of study: Sudden Personal Transformation in Sport Psychologists

Your application for ethics approval has been accepted and approved with the following conditions by the ECDA for your School and includes work undertaken for this study by the named additional workers below:

Dr Fran Longstaff
Professor Elizabeth Pike

General conditions of approval:

Ethics approval has been granted subject to the standard conditions below:

Permissions: Any necessary permissions for the use of premises/location and accessing participants for your study must be obtained in writing prior to any data collection commencing. Failure to obtain adequate permissions may be considered a breach of this protocol.

External communications: Ensure you quote the UH protocol number and the name of the approving Committee on all paperwork, including recruitment advertisements/online requests, for this study.

Invasive procedures: If your research involves invasive procedures you are required to complete and submit an EC7 Protocol Monitoring Form, and copies of your completed consent paperwork to this ECDA once your study is complete.

Submission: Students must include this Approval Notification with their submission.

Validity:

This approval is valid:

From: 18/11/19

To: 28/02/20

First Modification

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE

ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR STUDIES INVOLVING THE USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
(‘ETHICS COMMITTEE’)

FORM EC2: APPLICATION FOR MODIFICATION AND/OR EXTENSION TO AN EXISTING PROTOCOL APPROVAL

1 Title of original application:
Sudden Personal Transformation in Sport Psychologists

Protocol Number:
LMS/PGR/UH/03925

Is this the first modification**/extension request for this study?

Yes

No

If no, please include the most recent approval notification document with your application.

2 Protocol holder details

Applicant name: Aura Goldman
 Student/Staff number : 14178858
 Applicant e-mail address: a.goldman@herts.ac.uk OR auragoldman@hotmail.co.uk
 Work address (if appropriate): [Click here to enter text.](#)
 Supervisor’s name: Dr Stephen Pack
 Supervisor’s School & Department: Life and Medical Sciences
 Supervisor’s e-mail address: s.pack@herts.ac.uk

3 Specify the nature of the modification/extension (please tick all that apply and complete Q4 & 5).

Revised title of study.

Sudden Personal Transformation in Practitioner Psychologists

Amend/extend dates

From: 18/11/2019 To: 27/03/2020

Additional worker(s):

Names and student/staff numbers for any additional investigators involved in this study

[Click here to enter text.](#)

- Change of supervisor from: [Click here to enter text.](#) to: [Click here to enter text.](#)
Please complete declaration below and give reason in Q4

Declaration by new supervisor:

I have reviewed the ethics protocol paperwork for this study and am aware of any conditions which must be adhered to.

Signed [Click here to enter text.](#)

Date: [Click here to enter a date.](#)

- Location of study

Detail new location here

- Other

Participants will be all practitioner psychologists registered with the Health Care Professions Council (HCPC), rather than specifically sport psychologists under the HCPC. Participants will be recruited via: social media and personal connections.

4 **Reason for extension/modification request**

Data from my previous study, and initial data from this study strongly suggests that the fact of being specifically a Sport Psychologist has little to do with having a sudden personal transformation (SPT). The literature and my current data sets strongly suggest that these experiences are more related to personal factors or personality traits. As such, it seems prudent to open the investigation to other branches of Practitioner Psychologists in order to see what the effect of SPTs are on the role of the Psychologist in general.

5 **Hazards**

Does the modification or extension present additional hazards to the participant/investigator?

YES

NO

If YES, please complete a new Form EC5, 'Harms, Hazards and Risks'.

If you are required to complete a School-specific risk assessment (in accordance with the requirements of the originating School), it is acceptable to make a cross-reference from this document to Form EC5 in order not to have to repeat the information twice.

Signature of Applicant : Aura Goldman

Date: 11/12/2019

Support by Supervisor: [Click here to enter text.](#)

Date: [Click here to enter a date.](#)

** modifications include any amendment of documentation to be given to participants, for example Form EC3, Consent, Form EC6, Participant Information Sheet, survey document

HEALTH, SCIENCE, ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY ECDA
ETHICS APPROVAL NOTIFICATION

TO Aura Goldman
CC Dr Stephen Pack
FROM Dr Simon Trainis, Health, Science, Engineering & Technology ECDA Chair.
DATE 18/12/2019

Protocol number: aLMS/PGR/UH/03925(1)

Title of study: Sudden Personal Transformation in Practitioner Psychologists

Your application to modify and extend the existing protocol as detailed below has been accepted and approved by the ECDA for your School and includes work undertaken for this study by the named additional workers below:

Dr Fran Longstaff
Prof Elizabeth Pike

Modification: Detailed in EC2.

General conditions of approval:

Ethics approval has been granted subject to the standard conditions below:

Original protocol: Any conditions relating to the original protocol approval remain and must be complied with.

Permissions: Any necessary permissions for the use of premises/location and accessing participants for your study must be obtained in writing prior to any data collection commencing. Failure to obtain adequate permissions may be considered a breach of this protocol.

External communications: Ensure you quote the UH protocol number and the name of the approving Committee on all paperwork, including recruitment advertisements/online requests, for this study.

Invasive procedures: If your research involves invasive procedures you are required to complete and submit an EC7 Protocol Monitoring Form, and copies of your completed consent paperwork to this ECDA once your study is complete.

Submission: Students must include this Approval Notification with their submission.

Validity:

This approval is valid:

From: 18/12/2019

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9800

- Change of supervisor from: [Click here to enter text.](#) to: [Click here to enter text.](#)
Please complete declaration below and give reason in Q4

Declaration by new supervisor:
I have reviewed the ethics protocol paperwork for this study and am aware of any conditions which must be adhered to.

Signed [Click here to enter text.](#) Date: [Click here to enter a date.](#)

- Location of study

Detail new location here

- Other

Participants may also be interviewed using Skype

4 **Reason for extension/modification request**

Participants are not always able to meet me in person due to several reasons: they are unable to get to the University of Hertfordshire due to geographical constraints, they are not attached to a university from which we can conduct the interview, they do not have a permanent location from which they see clients in which we can conduct the interview, and they may not feel comfortable inviting a stranger (myself) into their home. In cases such as these I feel that Skype may be the only appropriate course of action.

5 **Hazards**

Does the modification or extension present additional hazards to the participant/investigator?

YES NO

If YES, please complete a new Form EC5, 'Harms, Hazards and Risks'.

If you are required to complete a School-specific risk assessment (in accordance with the requirements of the originating School), it is acceptable to make a cross-reference from this document to Form EC5 in order not to have to repeat the information twice.

Signature of Applicant : Aura Goldman Date: 16/01/2020

Support by Supervisor: [Click here to enter text.](#) Date: [Click here to enter a date.](#)

** modifications include any amendment of documentation to be given to participants, for example Form EC3, Consent, Form EC6, Participant Information Sheet, survey document



HEALTH, SCIENCE, ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY ECDA

ETHICS APPROVAL NOTIFICATION

TO Aura Goldman
 CC Dr Stephen Pack
 FROM Dr Simon Trainis, Health, Science Engineering & Technology ECDA Chairman
 DATE 17/01/20

Protocol number: aLMS/PGR/UH/03925(2)

Title of study: Sudden Personal Transformation in Sport Psychologists

Your application to modify and extend the existing protocol as detailed below has been accepted and approved by the ECDA for your School and includes work undertaken for this study by the named additional workers below:

Dr Fran Longstaff
Prof Elizabeth Pike

Modification: Modification as per requested on EC2

Participants are not always able to meet me in person due to several reasons: they are unable to get to the University of Hertfordshire due to geographical constraints, they are not attached to a university from which we can conduct the interview, they do not have a permanent location from which they see clients in which we can conduct the interview, and they may not feel comfortable inviting a stranger (myself) into their home. In cases such as these I feel that Skype may be the only appropriate course of action.

General conditions of approval:

Ethics approval has been granted subject to the standard conditions below:

Original protocol: Any conditions relating to the original protocol approval remain and must be complied with.

Permissions: Any necessary permissions for the use of premises/location and accessing participants for your study must be obtained in writing prior to any data collection commencing. Failure to obtain adequate permissions may be considered a breach of this protocol.

External communications: Ensure you quote the UH protocol number and the name of the approving Committee on all paperwork, including recruitment advertisements/online requests, for this study.

Invasive procedures: If your research involves invasive procedures you are required to complete and submit an EC7 Protocol Monitoring Form, and copies of your completed consent paperwork to this ECDA once your study is complete.

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Submission: Students must include this Approval Notification with their submission.

Validity:

This approval is valid:

From: 17/01/20

To: 27/03/20

Please note:

Failure to comply with the conditions of approval will be considered a breach of protocol and may result in disciplinary action which could include academic penalties.

Additional documentation requested as a condition of this approval protocol may be submitted via your supervisor to the Ethics Clerks as it becomes available. All documentation relating to this study, including the information/documents noted in the conditions above, must be available for your supervisor at the time of submitting your work so that they are able to confirm that you have complied with this protocol.

Should you amend any aspect of your research or wish to apply for an extension to your study you will need your supervisor's approval (if you are a student) and must complete and submit a further EC2 request.

Approval applies specifically to the research study/methodology and timings as detailed in your Form EC1A or as detailed in the EC2 request. In cases where the amendments to the original study are deemed to be substantial, a new Form EC1A may need to be completed prior to the study being undertaken.

Failure to report adverse circumstance/s may be considered misconduct.

Should adverse circumstances arise during this study such as physical reaction/harm, mental/emotional harm, intrusion of privacy or breach of confidentiality this must be reported to the approving Committee immediately.

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Appendix G: Reflexions on Time, Language and Change

9817 I am including these reflexions as an Appendix, rather than in the main body of text,
9818 as these are structures that I believe to be, perhaps not causally impactful, but impactful in
9819 terms of the sensemaking process. There is also something that feels liminal about these
9820 ideas, so I think unpacking them here gives me a different kind of flexibility to talk about
9821 them. To that end, this reflexive chapter will explore the structures of time, language and
9822 change in order to immerse the reader more fully in these notions, and to account for my own
9823 awareness of how my actions either transform or support extant structures. As discussed in
9824 Chapter 1, CR demands the exploration of structure/agency dualisms (Archer, 2003). Bhaskar
9825 (1979) posited that structure is always necessary for agency, and that agency simultaneously
9826 transforms structure. Thus, these concepts can be viewed as separate aspects of an
9827 intertwined whole. Using language as an example (a relevant example as it will be discussed
9828 below), one cannot engage in speech without the pre-existing structure of language, and so
9829 structure always comes before agency. However, if no one spoke, then the structure of
9830 language would not survive. Thus, neither can exist without the other.

9831 Perhaps the most important section of Chapter 2, for me, was the discussion
9832 surrounding the Newtonian paradigm and its influence on thought for both academics and
9833 laypeople. The Newtonian paradigm has hugely impacted the way in which we view our
9834 reality on every level. Indeed, debunking the Newtonian paradigm for myself in the context
9835 of psychology and human behaviour has been revelatory and utterly changed my
9836 understanding of the world around me. As a result of engaging with these ideas, I began to
9837 read more widely, focusing on books and articles that discussed alternate offerings to the
9838 Newtonian paradigm on the physics of the universe. I wanted to understand these ideas at
9839 their most profound, or 'purest', level (without straying into the territory of mathematics). It

9840 is during this time that I noticed something: a parallel between literature I was reading on
9841 epiphanic experience, and the literature I was reading on time. Amos (2016a) noted that her
9842 participants imposed temporal categories on their narratives of epiphanic experience, such
9843 that there was a distinct ‘before’ and ‘after’. Further, she found that they positioned
9844 themselves at the boundary between ‘before’ and ‘after’ so that they could see in both
9845 directions and reconceptualise their previous self, current and future self, and their
9846 transformative experience as a coherent whole (and the participants from my study tended to
9847 employ a similar strategy). This seemed to me to be an unusual way of storytelling as a
9848 layperson, positioning themselves between times, and entering a liminal space, rather than
9849 ‘after’, in their current time, looking back retrospectively. I also wondered if by positioning
9850 themselves in this way, Amos’ (and my) participants were actually positioning themselves
9851 outside of time. In any case, I was noticing something funny, temporally.

9852 This small tidbit of information sat at the back of my mind, regularly prodding me not
9853 to forget about it. It seemed obvious to me that the notion of time, and the notion of change,
9854 are inextricably linked, whereby our view of the possibility of change is constrained by the
9855 manner in which time is perceived. This subject consumed my thoughts for several months.
9856 My first port of call to further explore this idea was to look at it through an anthropological
9857 lens. It can be seen that ancient cultures (such as the Mayans, Incas, Buddhists, and various
9858 Native American cultures) viewed time as cyclical (Bartunek & Necochea, 2000; Calleman,
9859 2004; Lake, 1991; Lizardi & Gearing, 2010). To use Native American culture as an example:

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9861 Western time concepts include a beginning and an end; American Indians understand
9862 time as an eternally recurring cycle of events and years. Some Indian languages lack

9863 terms for the past and the future; everything is resting in the present (Hultkrantz,
9864 1987, p.32-33).

9865

9866 Moreover, to this day there remain cultures in which there is thought to be, according
9867 to Western perspectives, no concept of time. For example, the Piraha Tribe in the Amazon
9868 has a relatively absent concept of time, alongside almost no concept of letters, numbers, or art
9869 (Corballis, 2009; Frank, Everett, Fedorenko & Gibson, 2008; Suddendorf, Addis & Corballis,
9870 2011). For these people, everything exists in the present; when something cannot be
9871 perceived, then it essentially ceases to exist. Cultures such as the Malagasy in Madagascar
9872 view time relatively linearly, but in the opposite direction to those in the West. These people
9873 visualise time as flowing from back to front, whereby time flows into the back of your head
9874 and becomes the past as it appears before you (Dahl, 1995). The future is behind as it cannot
9875 be seen or known; the past is ahead as it is known and seen (I love this ‘flip’ in perspective).
9876 It appears logical, therefore, for me to suggest that these views of time will impact how
9877 change is perceived and constructed. Time provides the context from which we are then able
9878 to understand the happenings around us.

9879 The aforementioned traditions stand as a direct contrast to the Judeo-Christian
9880 tradition, which informs the conditions of Western culture and science. This tradition views
9881 time as strictly linear and directional (Bear, 2014; Eliade, 1959; Rust, 1981):

9882

9883 Profane time, as Eliade points out, is linear. As man dwelt increasingly in the profane
9884 and a sense of history developed, the desire to escape into the sacred began to drop in
9885 the background. The myths, tied up with cyclic time, were not so easily operative ...

9886 So secular man became content with his linear time. He could not return to cyclic time
9887 and re-enter sacred space though its myths ... Just here, as Eliade sees it, a new
9888 religious structure became available. In the Judaeo-Christian religions – Judaism,
9889 Christianity, Islam – history is taken seriously, and linear time is accepted. The cyclic
9890 time of the primordial mythical consciousness has been transformed into the time of
9891 profane man... (Rust, 1981, p.60)

9892

9893 According to this tradition time began with the Abrahamic God's act of creation and
9894 continues accordingly until the 'end times' (Lundin, Thiselton & Walhout, 1999). I can see
9895 this view of time is mirrored in our assumptions about the nature of change – that it is a linear
9896 and objective affair (Overton, 1994). Abram (1996), in his utterly wonderful book 'The Spell
9897 of the Sensuous', attributes the distinct difference in perceptions of time between indigenous
9898 and Western cultures to the existence of a written phonetic (as opposed to pictorial or
9899 idiographic) language that is largely not present in these oral cultures:

9900

9901 It is likely that without a formal system of numerical and linguistic notation it is not
9902 possible to entirely abstract a uniform sense of progressive "time" from the direct
9903 experience of the animate, emergent environment – or, what amounts to the same
9904 thing, to freeze the dynamic experience of earthly place into the intuition of a static,
9905 homogenous "space". If this is the case, then writing must be recognised as a
9906 necessary condition for the belief in an entirely distinct space and time (p.193).

9907

9908 Putting language to one side for a moment, recent developments in the field of
9909 theoretical physics suggest that the perspective of time as not being linear, proposed by oral
9910 and indigenous cultures, to a certain extent holds greater weight than Western culture may
9911 have assumed. In short, research suggests that a linear perspective of time is erroneous. In his
9912 popular work on time, Rovelli (2017) puts forward that our view of time as unified,
9913 directional, independent, and as having some concrete ‘present’ is mistaken. In essence, what
9914 we in the West view as ‘time’ does not exist:

9915

9916 There is no single time: there is a different duration for every trajectory; and time
9917 passes at different rhythms according to place and according to speed. It is not
9918 directional; the difference between past and future does not exist in the elementary
9919 equations of the world; its orientation is merely a contingent aspect that appears when
9920 we look at things and neglect the details... The notion of the ‘present’ does not work:
9921 in the vast universe there is nothing that we can reasonably call ‘present’. The
9922 substratum that determines the duration of time is not an independent entity, different
9923 from the others that make up the world; it is an aspect of a dynamic field. It jumps,
9924 fluctuates, materialises only by interacting, and is not to be found beneath a minimum
9925 scale... So, after all this, what is left of time? (Rovelli, 2017, p.81).

9926

9927 This blew my mind. It was a pretty critical point for me, as although I was already
9928 very open to new ideas, this moment really helped me to let go of any of the remaining
9929 assumptions I held about the way the world worked and just read, and then read some more,
9930 particularly about anything that fell under the umbrella of nonlinear dynamical systems
9931 theories.

9932 So, returning to my original train of thought, if time itself is not linear in the way that
9933 pervasive Newtonian logic has assumed, then the same should be said of change and
9934 epiphanic experiences that are indicative of change. However, it is at this point that the issue
9935 of grammar and language needs to be returned to. Our language is structured around an
9936 objective and linear perception of time, and therefore change, thus impacting the way we are
9937 able to communicate and comprehend nonlinear conceptualisations of time; the very structure
9938 of our language prohibits us for communicating in a way that is not constrained by the
9939 concepts of past, present, and future (Rovelli, 2017). As noted by Havelock (1986):

9940

9941 It is only as language is written down that it becomes possible to think about it. The
9942 acoustic medium, being incapable to visualisation, did not achieve recognition as a
9943 phenomenon wholly separable from the person who used it. But in the alphabetised
9944 document the medium became objectified. There it was, reproduced perfectly in the
9945 alphabet... no longer just a function of “me” the speaker but a document with an
9946 independent existence (p.112)

9947

9948 This idea was exciting to me for two main reasons. First, it suggests that the creation
9949 of language that is non-idiographic (i.e., cannot be visually linked to the thing it describes)
9950 created an abstract ‘realm’ accessible to all those that can understand the alphabet. Second,
9951 and much more relevantly, it is a reminder to be mindful of the impact that the structure and
9952 existence of language can have on accounts of epiphanic experience. This is something to
9953 bear in mind particularly when reflecting on CRist structure/agency dualisms (Archer, 2003).
9954 Language is therefore a structure that both constrains and affords the way in which epiphanic
9955 experience can even be expressed – forcing it into the temporal categories of past, present,

9956 and future that the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Newtonian paradigm have established as
9957 nigh-on unassailable 'truth'. This is something I sought to remain very aware of during my
9958 research, reflecting on the temporal restrictions imposed by language when I was writing, and
9959 being sensitive to this fact when interviewing my participants. Despite this, I am aware that
9960 my 'three phases' of epiphanic experience align with temporal categories, however, this
9961 brings me right back to the constraints of language!

9962 Fundamentally, how people view time, and other foundational ideas of reality, may
9963 provide the foundation from which we are able to understand change. An assumption of the
9964 strict linearity of time logically only allows for linear change. However, acceptance that time
9965 is nonlinear opens the possibility of change also being nonlinear. Further, I wonder if it might
9966 be possible to suggest that a strongly held view of the linearity of time may produce another
9967 particular outcome: that of imposed linearity on thought processes. This is best demonstrated
9968 by the computational perspectives of human cognition that have been dominant in
9969 mainstream psychological theorising for a long time (Bandura, 2001). This perspective
9970 emerged through the suggestion of cognition functioning as a linear input-output model.
9971 Although this model has been developed, becoming more dynamic, and incorporating
9972 multiple processes that occur simultaneously, cognition largely remains conceptualised as a
9973 linear system, whereby a central processor is fed information, and outputs solutions according
9974 to fixed rules (Bandura, 2001). These models have emerged from a positivist, empiricist,
9975 Western, Newtonian tradition which has emphasised, or assumed, temporal linearity. Holding
9976 the belief that time, and therefore cognition, is linear may therefore be factors that predispose
9977 the assumption that change too must be linear. This, I think, is deeply woven into why
9978 epiphanic experience is not taken seriously by psychology (Fosha, 2006; Skalski & Hardy,
9979 2013).

9980 **Appendix H: The Neural Mechanisms Underpinning the Entropic Brain Hypothesis**

9981 The EBH presents an account of the neural mechanisms underlying experience in
9982 high-entropy brain states. Two neural mechanisms, the default mode network, and the medial
9983 temporal lobes, will be discussed in depth before providing a description of how the EBH
9984 proposes they contribute to experienced consciousness.

9985

9986 **The Default Mode Network**

9987 The EBH proposes that the default mode network (DMN) is of core importance to the
9988 experience of consciousness. The DMN is a network of brain regions that are structurally and
9989 functionally connected, and the connections within this network develop ontogenically
9990 (through development), though they are weakened in old age, and by certain conditions such
9991 as attention deficit disorder (Andrews-Hanna et al., 2007; Buckner, Andrews-Hanna &
9992 Schacter, 2008; Castellanos et al., 2008; Fair et al., 2008; Kelly et al., 2009). The anatomical
9993 regions associated with the DMN can be divided into functional subsections (Andrews-
9994 Hanna, Smallwood & Spreng, 2014), and each of these brain regions are densely
9995 interconnected, thereby suggesting that they play an important role in the integration and
9996 directing of information (Hagmann et al., 2008; van den Heuvel et al., 2012). The regions, or
9997 hubs, of the brain specifically associated with the DMN are the posterior cingulate cortex
9998 (PCC), medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC), medial temporal lobes (MTLs), lateral and inferior
9999 temporal cortex, and inferior parietal lobule (Buckner & Carroll, 2007; Fox et al., 2005;
10000 Fransson and Marrelec, 2008; Konishi, McLaren, Engen, & Smallwood, 2015).

10001 This network has a high ongoing metabolic rate, and the regions associated with this
10002 network have been shown to consume and receive greater amounts of energy and blood flow

10003 than any other brain regions by approximately 40 per cent (Raichle et al., 2001; Pfefferbaum
10004 et al., 2011; Raichle & Snyder, 2007; Zou et al., 2009). Yet, the DMN shows diminished
10005 activation during goal-directed cognition, and increased activation during passive rest
10006 (Buckner, Andrews-Hanna & Schacter, 2008; Raichle, 2001). As such, it has been suggested
10007 that there is an inverse relationship in neuronal activity between the DMN and the brains
10008 attention system (Fox et al., 2005).

10009 The function of the DMN, as it is currently understood, includes: the neurological
10010 basis of the ‘self’ (e.g., autobiographical information and self-reference), other-related
10011 cognition (e.g., theory of mind and social evaluation), remembering the past, and thinking
10012 about the future (Andrews-Hanna, 2012; Buckner & Carroll, 2007; Spreng & Grady, 2010).
10013 Therefore, the DMN deactivates during external goal-orientated tasks, except for when the
10014 task involves a role inherent to the DMN, such as an autobiographical task; in this instance
10015 the DMN would work alongside other networks, such as those that govern executive
10016 functioning (Fox et al., 2005; Spreng, 2012). Further, during instances of high functional
10017 connectivity within the DMN, functional connectivity is also increased between the DMN
10018 and other networks (de Pasquale et al., 2012). This is a characteristic of the DMN that is not
10019 shared by other networks and strongly suggests that the DMN performs the role of a central
10020 orchestrator of global brain function (Braga, Leeson, Wise & Leech, 2013; Carhart-Harris &
10021 Friston, 2010; de Pasquale et al., 2012).

10022 The DMN plays no significant role in sensory processing but instead performs roles
10023 related to high-level metacognition and introspection (Fleming et al., 2010; Sepulcre,
10024 Sabuncu, Yeo, Liu & Johnson, 2012; Qin & Northoff, 2011). Studies have shown that resting
10025 state functional connectivity in the DMN positively correlates with depressive rumination,
10026 trait neuroticism, and ratings of internal awareness (Adelstein et al., 2011; Berman et al.,

10027 2011; Vanhaudenhuyse et al., 2011). Further, during such cognitive events as mental time
10028 travel and depression, DMN connectivity is increased (Andrews-Hanna et al., 2010; Farb et
10029 al., 2011; Lemogne et al., 2012). Though knowledge of the DMN has undoubtedly increased
10030 in recent years, there remains some uncertainty with regards to the reasons for the DMNs
10031 incommensurate energy consumption (Harrison et al., 2008; Raichle, 2010; Raichle &
10032 Mintun, 2006). Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a thorough account of
10033 this debate, if the DMN functions in the ways described above, this provides a compelling
10034 account for the experiences participants described as part of their epiphanic experiences.

10035

10036 **The Medial Temporal Lobes**

10037 Though the medial temporal lobe (MTL) is part of the temporal lobe, it is often
10038 referred to as a separate structure due to its significantly different anatomy and function
10039 (Baars & Gage, 2010). The MTL houses a system of anatomically related brain structures
10040 such as the hippocampi, parahippocampal gyrus, entorhinal cortex, and amygdala (Baars &
10041 Gage, 2010; Squire, Stark & Clark, 2004). These structures are commonly associated with
10042 memory and emotional processing. The criticality of the MTL's role in memory, and
10043 particularly declarative memory (long-term memory that requires conscious recollection), is
10044 made evident by the global impairment to memory displayed following lesions to the MTL
10045 (Levy et al., 2003; Squire, Schmolk & Stark, 2001). The upper arc of the MTL, the cingulate
10046 gyrus, is activated during tasks that require the brain to deal with conflicting stimuli or
10047 responses, an aspect of executive function (Baars & Gage, 2010). Research suggests that the
10048 MTLs are connected to the mPFC and PCC nodes of the DMN (Buckner et al., 2008;
10049 Carhart-Harris & Friston, 2010; Fransson and Marrelec, 2008).

10050

10051 **Neural Mechanisms and Consciousness**

10052 Carhart-Harris et al. (2014) proposed that normal waking consciousness (i.e.,
10053 secondary processes) is the result of coupling between the MTLs and the DMN, which allows
10054 for the development of an integrated sense of self. During secondary consciousness, the
10055 mPFC functions to suppress the more primitive cognitive and affective states associated with
10056 primary states (Pietrini et al., 2000; Beauregard et al., 2001). Further, primary states are
10057 proposed to be the result of a collapse in the DMN's organisation, the relinquishment of
10058 mPFC suppression, and a subsequent decrease of coupling between the DMN and MTLs, in
10059 part due to weakened alpha oscillations (brain waves associated with suppressive effects)
10060 (Beauregard et al., 2001; Carhart-Harris et al., 2014; Carhart-Harris & Friston, 2010;
10061 Kilmesch, 2012; Pietrini et al., 2000). In these occurrences, the MTLs are unconstrained by
10062 the suppressing influence of the DMN, and therefore the memories that have been embedded
10063 and stored in the MTLs are unleashed such that unusual perceptual experiences ensue
10064 (Pietrini et al., 2000).

10065 The decoupling of the DMN and MTLs can be achieved in different ways; Carhart-
10066 Harris et al. (2012, 2014) used LSD and psilocybin and found that these compounds reduced
10067 blood flow to the DMN by acting in an antagonistic fashion at serotonin 2A receptor sites,
10068 which are particularly abundant in the PCC, the main node of the DMN. This results in the
10069 changes typical of primary consciousness, where the brain regresses to a chaotic and
10070 primitive state that is less constrained by reality and a stable sense of self. Meditation can
10071 also suppress the DMN through focused attention diverting activity away from the DMN;
10072 both reduced DMN activation and functional connectivity have been observed in long-term
10073 meditators (Brewer, Worhunsky, Gray, Tang, Weber & Kober, 2011; Fox et al., 2014;

10074 Garrison, Zeffiro, Scheinost, Constable & Brewer, 2015; Simon & Engström, 2015). Sleep,
10075 and lack thereof, also impacts the DMN, whereby sleep deprivation has been shown to
10076 decrease functional connectivity within the DMN, therefore providing a physical explanation
10077 for the changes seen during dreaming states and instances of sleep deprivation (McKenna &
10078 Eyler, 2012).

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10093 **Appendix I: Reflexions on Integrating the Critical Realist Ontology of Personhood into**
10094 **Therapeutic Practice**

10095 Over the course of my education, training, and professional life I have become very
10096 familiar with a range of therapeutic modalities, in particular: CBT, Positive Psychology, and
10097 Person-centred Therapy. However, I have found that Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
10098 (ACT) is currently the most congruent way for me to work in alignment with my philosophy
10099 in an evidence-based manner. Since engaging with CRist ideas, I have begun to formulate an
10100 understanding of how my philosophical position might align with how I practice. Although
10101 ACT is a-ontological, this position has been heavily criticised (e.g., David & Mogoşe, 2015;
10102 Herbert & Padovani, 2015; Szabo & Tarbox, 2015), and recommendations made that “ACT
10103 should benefit from acknowledging (as opposite to ignoring) ontology and focus not only on
10104 “what works”, but also on “why does it work”” (David & Mogoşe, 2015, p. 175; David &
10105 Montgomery, 2011), or else risk negative theoretical and practical implications, and limit
10106 ACT’s ability to hone and develop its interventions. Given the importance of ontology within
10107 CR, it at first appeared to me that ACT might not fit in the ‘CRist embrace’ (Bhaskar, 2017).
10108 However, I have come to view the fundamentally nonlinear core processes of ACT as
10109 effectively congruent with the CRist ontology of personhood (and indeed, more or less all the
10110 content in Chapter 1, section 2.6), thereby providing a potential mechanism which might
10111 underpin this a-ontological modality.

10112 Fundamentally, ACT is built upon a foundation of philosophical pragmatism, or more
10113 specifically: functional contextualism (Hayes, 2004). Pragmatism can be considered
10114 complimentary with Critical Realism, though with a different primary focus: critical realists
10115 give primacy to ontology, whilst pragmatists place epistemology at the forefront (DeForge &
10116 Shaw, 2011). Given that, in a practical and therapeutic context, it is impossible to accurately

10117 determine the true nature of phenomena (Pilgrim, 2019), pragmatism, informed by Critical
10118 Realism, I think, is a congruent and helpful foundation from which to work.

10119 Both ACT (underpinned by mindfulness) and Bhaskar (2017) are undeniably
10120 influenced by Eastern philosophies thus illuminating one point of congruence. Also, both
10121 ACT and CR recognise the power of language (Bhaskar, 2017; Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson,
10122 2013). Further, ACT is an approach that works to enhance psychological flexibility (Hayes et
10123 al., 2006), such that the client learns (through experiential exercises) that they are not the
10124 content of their thoughts and feelings (i.e., self-as-content (an ACT term), or perhaps fusion
10125 (an ACT term) with the ego (a CRist term)), but rather that they are the consciousness that
10126 experiences their thoughts and feelings (i.e., the transcendently real self (a CRist term) or
10127 self-as-context (an ACT term)), thereby lessening the influence of the challenging thoughts
10128 and feelings, facilitating acceptance, and enabling the client to make changes that enrich their
10129 lives. ACT is also a polyvagal-informed somatic therapy (i.e., lending itself to the embodied
10130 personality aspect of the self), which I have found to be critical to my practice (I have further
10131 enriched this aspect of my practice with Somatic Experiencing; e.g., Kuhfuß et al., 2021;
10132 Payne et al., 2015), and which I now think is a critical part of facilitating powerful
10133 transformative change.

10134 There are other ways of making sense of this philosophy, other ways of expressing
10135 this philosophy through other therapeutic modalities, but these are some of my thoughts, and
10136 this is how I am currently practicing in accordance with this philosophy, and this will likely
10137 change in the future.

10138

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Appendix J: Personal Reflexions on Epiphanic Experience

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The purpose of this appendix is to share the outputs of my creative reflexive practice.

10142

Whilst art and science appear to many as two extremes on a continuum (Napier and Nilsson,

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2008) it is not uncommon to believe that this is a debilitating and outdated binary that

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prevents these two methodologies from informing, sustaining, and enriching each other

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(Gergen & Gergen, 2012; Goldman, Gervis & Griffiths, 2022). The creative outputs of my

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reflexive practice are shared with the understanding that the act of making art can enhance

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understanding of events and identity, shift perspectives, facilitate theory building, and more

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(Higgs & Titchen, 2008; McIntosh, 2010). Despite this, I am also aware that the information

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contained within the images I make may not be instantly accessible to others. However, these

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images are emotionally charged and convey meaning to me and are not intended to be wholly

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converted into verbal expression. It is often my stance that “the art itself is an adequate

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expression of meaning” (Higgs & Titchen, 2008, p.551; McNiff, 1999).

10153

For as long as I can remember, I have used art and drawing to try and express the

10154

things that I can’t seem to wrestle into sentences. As such, and in particular because of the

10155

ineffable nature of epiphanic experience, art became a key method for me to make sense of

10156

what had caused, and what happened in the time after my epiphanic experiences. This

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appendix will be structured as follows: 1) the reader will see a drawing, and 2) I will indicate

10158

key points of interest, structure, composition, or colour with the understanding that the image

10159

cannot wholly be translated into verbal form (artist Edward Hopper is purported to have once

10160

said “If you could say it in words there would be no reason to paint” – I like this quotation).

10161

Although I have integrated and made sense of my experience, I still view this as ongoing, and

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so I should note that this appendix will not have a conclusive or concluding statement.

10163 Instead, I will share three drawings, that I made at three different points in time, and which
10164 capture three (of myriad) different elements of epiphanic experience through a personal lens.



10165

10166 I drew the above very quickly, about three months after my experience. The focus of
10167 this drawing, for me, is the darkness and the footprint. The rest of the doorway is intended to
10168 be fractured, almost ephemeral. I don't know what's inside, and I didn't yet know what had
10169 stepped out.



10170 I drew the above as another quick sketch about two years after my experience, in the
10171 midst of exploring the disintegrative phase, with particular focus on the intersection between
10172 my research and my lived experience. I should note that, by and large, I am a figurative and
10173 portrait artist, so this kind of subject matter is normal for me. I don't think I need to say
10174 anything else about this drawing, other than it captures a large element of what my
10175 disintegrative phase felt like.

10176



10179 This final drawing was completed in early 2022; it was a personal experiment of sorts
10180 whereby I challenged myself to draw something that could encapsulate the entirety of my
10181 epiphanic experience. Whilst I didn't succeed in drawing something that represented every
10182 element of my lived experience, this drawing certainly feels like it has done a lot of the heavy
10183 lifting towards that aim. Each of the elements contained within this drawing are imbued with
10184 personally relevant symbolism and meaning, and the drawing overall perhaps betrays how
10185 influenced I am by surrealist art. The darkness that was present in the first drawing is present
10186 again, and the shadows from the other figures interact with this darkness. The baby/body/cat
10187 triad is my way of representing my own personhood.