

# **Epiphanies: An Existential Philosophical And Psychological Inquiry**

**By**  
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## **CERTIFICATION**

I, Matthew McDonald, certify that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for a degree at any other institution and that it is the original work of the candidate except where sources are acknowledged.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this inquiry is to investigate the relatively under-researched and under-developed nature of positive change and transformation that is sudden and abrupt, as defined by the term epiphany. A review of the literature across the disciplines of sociology, literary studies, education and psychology pertaining to epiphanies revealed a modest and disparate body of knowledge. As yet only two studies to date have developed and tested a conceptual framework describing and explaining epiphanies, both situated in the theoretical perspectives of developmental, clinical, cognitive and behavioural psychology. Due to the sparseness of the epiphanic literature, a thorough review was undertaken, producing a set of six core characteristics, which were tested and interpreted from a self-identity existential perspective. Existential philosophy and psychology provide an understanding of human experiences based on personal meaning and the essential realities of the human condition. In order to encapsulate an existential theory of knowledge, a narrative approach to methodology was employed to collect, analyse and interpret participants' epiphanies, from which three main conclusions were drawn. Firstly, an epiphany is a profound illumination of the inauthentic and authentic modes of self-identity, which provide the impetus for a more honest and courageous encounter with the conditions of existence. Secondly, the participants' life-stories illustrate that an epiphany is a valid experience as indicated by support for the set of six core characteristics developed from the literature. Lastly, an epiphany is an intentional experience made significant and enduring by the ascription of personal meaning.