Epiphanies: An Existential Philosophical And Psychological Inquiry

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Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Technology, Sydney in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2005

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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.

5 August 2005

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to many people whose support made this thesis possible. In particular I wish to thank the following:

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.

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Viktor Frankl's Epiphany

> The dawn was grey around us; grey was the sky above; grey the snow in the pale light of dawn; grey the rags in which my fellow prisoners were clad; grey their faces. I was again conversing silently with my wife, or perhaps I was struggling to find the *reason* for my sufferings, my slow dying. In a last violent protest against the hopelessness of imminent death, I sensed my spirit piercing through the enveloping gloom. I felt it transcend that hopeless, meaningless world, and from somewhere I heard a victorious 'Yes' in answer to the question of my existence of an ultimate purpose. (Frankl 1984, p. 51)

The powerful moment recounted above is an excerpt from 'Man's Search For Meaning' by the existential psychiatrist and psychotherapist, Viktor Frankl, while he was a prisoner at the infamous Auschwitz Nazi concentration camp. It was at this moment that Viktor Frankl finally understood the purpose of his life and the inexplicable suffering he was made to endure – to survive so that he may one day tell the world of the horrors he had witnessed and to express the importance of finding meaning in one's suffering (Frankl 1984). Frankl's experience can be best described as a sudden, abrupt and positive transformation that was profound and enduring – in short an 'epiphany'.

As much as people enjoy routine, stability and predictability, they also expect their lives to change as well. Human lives are always in transition, however "some

transitions, some periods of change, stand out as especially significant in the life-course" (McAdams, Josselson and Lieblich 2001, p. xv).

1.2 Epiphanies: A Historical Outline

The term epiphany is defined in the Oxford Dictionary (Liebeck and Pollard 2000, p. 268) as the "festival commemorating the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles". It is a celebration of the appearance of some divine or superhuman being in the material world. The Encyclopaedia of Religion (Eliade 1987, pp. 132-133) defines epiphany as the Christian feast of the manifestation of Jesus Christ. For Western Christians the feast is called 'Epiphania' (or manifestation), while for Eastern Christians it is known as 'Theophaneia' (or manifestation of God). Over time, the epiphany holy day has evolved into a celebration of the Feast of the Three Miracles, comprising the visit of the 'Magi', the baptism of Christ, and the miracle of transforming water into wine at the wedding feast of Cana.

The most famous account of an epiphany in Christian mythology is the story of Saul who was transformed into the Apostle Paul - one of Christ's most devoted disciples. While travelling on horseback to Damascus, Saul a hunter and persecutor of Christians, suddenly and abruptly heard the word of God. So powerful was God's word that he was struck blind, fell from his horse and was transformed into Paul (Freed 2005).

The ancient Greeks on the other hand viewed epiphanies as less divine, emphasising instead a moment of sudden and significant insight (Paris 1997). Arnold (2002, p.

246) suggests the term is derived from the Greek word 'epiphainesthai' meaning to 'appear' or 'to come into view' and is generally presented as an experience of great revelation and a catalyst for personal growth. Like the ancient Greeks, the Pagans viewed epiphanies as a luminous experience that could occur at any time and under any circumstances, for instance cooking a meal, sharing time with a loved one or working in a field. In her comparison of the various meanings of epiphany (Christian, Greek, Pagan), Paris (1997, pp. 90-91) argued that Christian mythology stands out as distinctive because of its exclusivity. In her interpretation of Christian texts, Paris observed that only a handful of individuals were ever granted the privilege of hearing the true word of God. In contrast, the Greek and Pagan definition of epiphany describes experiences of sudden and significant insight that can and do occur in the normal course of everyday life.

It was James Joyce who re-introduced the term epiphany into the modern vernacular using it to describe the sudden and profound insights of Stephen Dedalus - the central character of Joyce's book 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man' (Joyce 1916). Joyce believed that artists used their insight into the events of daily life, by transmuting them into a celebration of humanity (Beja 1993, p. 71). What was distinctive about Joyce's contribution to the evolution of the term epiphany was the secular meaning he gave to it; a meaning that was more closely oriented to the Greek and Pagan definitions of the term than the divine meaning it was accorded in Christian mythology (Hayman 1998).

From a scientific psychological perspective, research on positive change and transformation was first carried out in the early twentieth century with the publication

of 'The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study of Human Nature' by William James (1902). By collecting a range of personal narratives, James (1902) asked how one might discover happiness within oneself and in one's relations with others. Since this time there has been extensive research into a range of other positive extra-ordinary experiences such as peak-experience (Maslow 1964), mystical experience (Thomas and Cooper 1978), transcendent experience (Williams and Harvey 2001) and ecstasy (Laski 1961).

However, only two studies to date have specifically developed and tested a concept of epiphany. The first of these was carried out by Jarvis (1997) who defined epiphanies as a "sudden discontinuous change, leading to profound, positive, and enduring transformation through a reconfiguration of an individual's most deeply held beliefs about self and world". The second study was carried out by Miller and C'de Baca (1993; 2001) who developed their own conceptualisation of epiphanies which they termed 'quantum change'. Quantum change is defined as "a vivid, surprising, benevolent, and enduring personal transformation" (Miller and C'de Baca 2001, p. 4).

1.3 Scope And Rationale For The Inquiry

When psychologists contemplate the nature of change they usually refer to two broad areas, the developmental changes that occur over the lifespan (from birth to death) and more specific changes that are effected through counselling and psychotherapy. Developmental change refers to any qualitative (changes in process and function) and quantitative (changes in height, weight and intelligence) modification in the structure and functioning of human beings. This area of psychological functioning falls within

the domain of 'developmental psychology', which focuses on maturational changes across the life span (Lerner 2002).

Counsellors and psychotherapists effect change by working with their clients to overcome their self-limiting problems and helping them gain insight and perspective. Positive change and transformation in this respect is most often a slow and incremental process, lasting anywhere from a period of weeks, months or years. Concepts such as 'working through', and the 'dosing' of traumatic material into consciousness, are common therapeutic terms which convey a lengthy unfolding process (Tennen and Affleck 1998, p. 86). As Bien (2004, p. 494) notes, "The psychotherapist…will observe a series of micro-changes, marked by 'sighs' and other physical indicators as well as increasingly insightful verbal expression, which gradually accumulate into something substantive".

Epiphanies on the other hand are sudden and abrupt insights and/or changes in perspective that transform the individual's concept of self and identity, usually because of the creation of new meaning in the individual's life. Epiphanies are momentary experiences of transcendence that are enduring and distinct from other types of developmental change and transformation.

Due to this distinction, positive change and transformation that is sudden and abrupt has remained relatively under-researched and under-developed. C'de Baca and Wilbourne note:

> While the occurrence of rapid transformations has been noted in psychology since at least 1902, these transformations have been considered mostly anomalies. They do not follow a learning model of behaviour change, e.g. the gradual modification of behaviour, frustrating efforts at explanation. (2004, p. 539)

With only two studies to date that have specifically investigated and developed a conceptual framework for describing and explaining epiphanies, our understanding of the phenomenon has been limited to theoretical perspectives in developmental, clinical, cognitive and behavioural psychology (Jarvis 1997; Miller and C'de Baca 2001). For this reason, and my own initial assessment that epiphanies are triggered by feelings of meaninglessness and personal crises, this phenomenon will be explored from an existential philosophical and psychological perspective.

1.4 Thesis Aims And Objectives

In developing the parameters for this inquiry, the following aims and objectives were established.

Aim:

To understand sudden, significant and transformational experiences as characterised by the term epiphany with a focus on positive change in self and identity from an existential philosophical and psychological perspective.

Objectives:

1. To define the term epiphany by identifying a set of core characteristics from the literature.

2. To relate the set of core epiphanic characteristics to the actual experience of an epiphany.

3. To apply the philosophies of self and identity within the context of existentialism to epiphanies in order to gain a more personally meaningful understanding of the phenomenon.

1.5 The Contribution Of This Inquiry

This inquiry will contribute to the existing body of knowledge by:

1. Providing a new definition of epiphanies by developing and testing a set of core characteristics.

2. Providing a new and alternative interpretation of epiphanies by applying the philosophies of self and identity within the context of existentialism.

1.6 Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce the concept of epiphanies and to outline the basis for a new and alternative inquiry into the phenomenon. The chapter began

by providing an example of an epiphany and outlining some of its historical antecedents. The term epiphany has been defined in both secular and non-secular traditions, the former articulating an inclusive commonly experienced phenomenon, while the latter describes an exclusive supernatural revelation.

It was argued that scientific research on epiphanies, or indeed positive change and transformation that is sudden and abrupt, is largely absent from the psychological literature. The reason for this, it was suggested, is that epiphanies fall outside the commonly observed trends of positive change and transformation. Given the lack of research on epiphanies and my own initial assessment that they are triggered by feelings of meaninglessness and personal crises, this phenomenon will be explored and understood from an existential philosophical and psychological perspective.

In developing the parameters for this inquiry a number of objectives and areas of contribution to the body of knowledge were set out. They are to develop a set of core epiphanic characteristics from the literature, which will then be tested on a sample of participants who have experienced a self identified epiphany, providing a new definition of the phenomenon. The next objective and area of contribution is to apply the philosophies of self and identity within the context of existentialism in order to provide an alternative and personally meaningful interpretation.

CHAPTER TWO – EPIPHANIES

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter, which is in line with the first objective of this inquiry, is to conceptually define epiphanies. In order to achieve this, a literature review was undertaken, which found references to the term in a range of academic disciplines and fields of study. The chapter begins with a discussion on Norman Denzin's (1989; 1990) interactionist[1] perspective and is followed by an exploration of literary studies, education, narrative psychology, traumatic experience, and gay and lesbian literature.

In the next section two studies are explored in detail. The first study was carried out by Ariana Jarvis (1997) and the second study by William Miller and Janet C'de Baca (1993; 2001). Both of these studies are unique in the epiphanic literature because they each developed and tested a conceptual framework for describing and explaining epiphanies.

In the final part of this chapter a set of core epiphanic characteristics is presented, which stemmed from a content analysis of the concepts contained in the literature. This set of core characteristics will provide the basis for an interpretation of the research participants' self identified epiphanies in Chapter Six.

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[1] Interactionism, or symbolic interactionism, is a leading American social psychological theory, which arose out of the work of George Herbert Mead. Interactionism focuses upon the ways in which individuals derive meaning through social interaction (Marshall 1998, pp. 657-659).

2.2 Epiphanies: A Literature Review

2.2.1 References to epiphany in the literature

Denzin (1989, pp.70-71; 1990, pp. 15-18) defines epiphanies as interactional moments that leave a mark on people's lives and have the potential to create transformational experiences for the person. At their core, epiphanies are existential crises that occur in those problematic interactional[2] situations where the participant confronts and experiences a crisis - the effects may be both positive and/or negative. Through epiphanies, personal character is manifested and made apparent; it alters the fundamental meaning structures in a person's life. They are a catalyst for perceptions of new identity. These experiences, Denzin (1989, p. 71) notes, always involve painful emotions and their meaning is always given retrospectively, "they are relived and re-experienced in the stories persons tell about what has happened to them".

Denzin describes four types of epiphanies, the 'major', 'the cumulation', the 'minor or illuminative', and the 'relived':

> In the 'major' epiphany, an experience shatters a person's life, and makes it never the same again…The 'cumulative' epiphany occurs as the result of a series of events that have built up in the person's life…In the 'minor or illuminative' epiphany, underlying tensions and

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[2] Denzin (1990, p. 13) defines problematic interactions as, "interactional sequences that give primary meaning to the subject's life. Such experiences alter how persons define themselves, and their relations with others. In these moments, a person's personal character is revealed".

problems in a situation or relationship are revealed…In the 'relived' epiphany, a person relives, or goes through again, a major turning point moment in his or her life. (1990, p. 17)

In November 2001 Norman Denzin was interviewed at a national conference honouring his work on symbolic interactionism (Ellis, Bochner and Denzin 2002). One of the questions posed concerned a recurring theme in Denzin's writings - the idea of the epiphany. He was asked when he began thinking about epiphanies and how the whole idea evolved in his work. It began, he noted, when he was writing 'On Understanding Emotion' (Denzin 1984). He had been reading Jean-Paul Sartre and Jacques Lacan on language and the self, and Sartre's ideas on human emotion. It was in Sartre's biography of Flaubert that Sartre asked himself "Where do you start with a man who wrote over the course of his whole life"? To which Sartre answered, "You start with a moment that left a mark on his life". This idea of "moments that leave a mark on people's lives" captured Denzin's imagination. When he was laying out his definition of 'interpretive interactionism' (Denzin 1990) he wanted a viewpoint that differed from everyday sociology and ethnomethodology, which he felt took for granted many aspects of a person's life. This change in viewpoint also extended to

traditional symbolic interactionism, which looked at identity from a dramaturlogical[3] and psychoanalytic[4] perspective.

> I wanted to narrow the perspective to make it existentially central to the moments that made a difference. So that's how I came to try and navigate that space. Then you find the notion of the epiphany everywhere once you start to see it. It's in Joyce, for example, and I took a bit from Joyce's The Dubliners. (Ellis et al. 2002, p. 189).

In the area of literary studies, the term epiphany is commonly referred to in the lives and works of various novelists (Nichols 1987; Johnson 1992; Beja 1993; Bidney 1997; Hayman 1998; Coen 2000; Bidney 2004). Beja (1993) examined the idea of epiphanies in the modern novel by focusing on the literary works of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Thomas Wolfe and William Faulkner. Through their writing the four authors used a range of terms to describe sudden, insightful and transformational experiences. For example, James Joyce used the term 'epiphany', Thomas Woolfe used the phrase 'moments of intensity or illumination', William Falkner a 'flash' or a 'glare' and Virginia Woolf 'matches struck in the dark'. The following passage, taken

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[3] Dramaturgy is a theoretical position often allied to symbolic interactionism, role theory, and the work of Erving Goffman. The perspective uses the stage and theatre as an organising metaphor, the idea being that society is a stage and the people that inhabit it, the players. Goffman explored these ideas through modern sociology and the study of the micro order of interaction and the ways in which people are engaged in impression management (Marshall 1998, p. 171).

[4] The term psychoanalysis is used in this context by Denzin to refer to the set of techniques for exploring the unconscious motivations for human behaviour (Reber and Reber 2001, p. 578). The psychoanalytic technique for understanding human biography (psychobiography) was used to great effect by Erik Erikson in his book 'Life History and the Historical Moment' (Erikson 1975).

from Virginia Woolf's novel 'To the Lighthouse', provides an example of how her phrase, 'matches struck in the dark', was used to convey her character's struggle with the meaning of life, and its partial resolution through illuminating and revelatory experiences:

> 'Like a work of art', she repeated, looking down from her canvas to the drawing-room steps and back again…And, resting, looking from one to the other vaguely, the old question which traversed the sky of the soul perpetually, the vast, the general question which was apt to particularise itself at such moments as these…stood over her, paused over her, darkened over her. What is the meaning of life? That was all – a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years. The great revelation had never come…Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck in the dark…Mrs Ramsay bringing them together…Mrs Ramsay making of the moment something permanent…this was the nature of a revelation. In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing was struck into stability. (1927, pp. 175-176)

From his wide-ranging examination of literary epiphanies, Beja developed his own definition:

> I would call it a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether from some object, scene, event, or memorable phase of the mind – the manifestation being out of proportion to the significance or strictly logical relevance of whatever produces it. (1993, p. 18)

Hayman (1998) also examined the use of the term epiphany in the writings of James Joyce, as manifested in Joyce's character Stephen Dedalus. Hayman's (1998) study supports Beja's (1993) argument that epiphanies were commonly experienced by the

novelists he was studying[5]. So important were epiphanies in the creative and spiritual development of these authors, that the concept, or ideas like it, were used to create and develop characterisation in their literary works. Their examples illustrate how epiphanies provide coherence, unity, shape and meaning out of the seeming chaos and meaninglessness of life.

In the same vein as Beja (1993) and Hayman (1998), Bidney (1997; 2004) explored literary epiphanies by examining various nineteenth century authors including, William Wordsworth, Samuel Coleridge, Leo Tolstoy, Fydor Dostoyevsky, Walter Pater, and Barrett Browning. As a basis for his analysis, Bidney made use of Nichols' (1987) definition of epiphany, which is made up of three criteria, 'expansiveness', 'atemporality' and 'mystery'. From this Bidney (1997) offered his own definition of literary epiphanies as moments that are felt to be 'expansive', 'mysterious', 'intense' and worthy of systematic analysis as any other aspects of literary art.

Frick (2001) was also deeply interested in the romantic poetry of William Wordsworth, and his concept, 'spots in time'. 'Spots in time', Frick argues, is related to his own conceptualisations of human development he termed 'the symbolic growth

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[5] Beja (1993) presents evidence for all of his authors' personal epiphanies. For Joyce it was his autobiographical novel 'Stephen Hero', whose main character had epiphanic experiences that mirrored his own (Beja 1993, p. 72). Virginia Wolf was said to have experienced many moments of vision that inspired her writing as evidenced in her diaries (Beja 1993, p. 112); and Thomas Wolfe, Beja notes, had "many moments of intensity or illumination that were included in his books and were ones he himself had experienced – and which he never forgot" (Beja 1993, p. 148).

experience' and 'symbolic latency' – concepts that refer to "powerful images and emotions of youth and childhood that remain latent in their meaning until brought to fruition through additional experience and emotional readiness" (Frick 2001, p. 9).

Herman Hesse, the German Nobel Laureate, infused many of his characters with sudden, profound and positive transformations. One of Hesse's literary characters, the vagabond 'Knulp' (Hesse 1915), was a free spirit who spent his adult life wandering the countryside refusing to tie himself down to any trade, place or person. During Knulp's final wanderings, just prior to his death, he agonises over the worthiness of his itinerant life, when suddenly and abruptly God reveals his purpose to him. "I wanted you the way you are and no different. You were a wanderer in my name and wherever you went you brought the settled folk a little homesickness for freedom" (Hesse 1915, p. 124).

From literary studies to humanistic education, Goud (1995) conceptualised the term 'vital moments' to collectively describe 'peak' and 'ecstatic experience', 'psychological epiphanies' and 'wonder'. These four psychological states, Goud (1995) argues, share many similarities with each other, namely they are brief, totally absorbing and life enhancing. These vital moments, while highly pleasing in themselves, also perform valuable therapeutic, decision-making, and life-validation functions (Goud 1995). Goud (1995, p. 26) defined 'psychological epiphanies' as "a sudden revelation about one's identity or view of life. The abrupt insight usually occurs without purposeful, conscious effort". One essential aspect that differentiates 'peak experiences' from 'psychological epiphanies' is that the former is always

experienced as desirable, while the later is always experienced as un-pleasurable. Like Denzin, Goud characterises the experience of epiphany as a process of crisis and transformation. He elaborates on this idea by discussing his own epiphany, where he realised that the heroes of his youth (Abraham Maslow, Ernest Hemingway, and the jazz trumpeter Maynard Ferguson) were no longer viable guides for the rest of his life's journey.

McAdams, Josselson and Lieblich's (2001) 'Turns in the Road: A Narrative Study of Lives in Transition' contains two contributions from authors who use the term epiphany to described turning points in a person's life. The first was carried out by Schultz (2001) who undertook a narrative study of Oscar Wilde's life while he was in prison, by analysing Wilde's book 'De Profundis' (Wilde 1905). Before prison Oscar Wilde had shunned suffering and sorrow, his resolve was to ignore it, and to treat it as a mode of imperfection. Wilde notes, "It had no place in my philosophy". The experience of prison however dramatically changed Wilde's perspective as Schultz describes:

> Under the old paradigm, suffering was ignored. Wilde's scheme of life demanded that it (suffering and sorrow) be treated like an inconsequential datum. It was not relevant for understanding. In the wake of his ruin, however it became anomalous, and a new scheme of life was created to accommodate it. This new scheme, once established, allowed Wilde to discern things he had never discerned before. It opened up a new world, just like a new paradigm brings with it new perceptions. (2001, p. 79)

Schultz initially analogises Wilde's epiphany as a 'paradigm shift' - a term developed by Thomas Kuhn (1970) to explain the structure of scientific revolutions[6]. Yet he dropped this analogy as a fitting description of life's turning points in favour of William James' more traditional concept of 'religious conversion' – a concept Schultz argues most closely resembles Wilde's epiphany. There is also he notes, a very close resemblance between the Zen notion of 'satori' and the epiphany Wilde describes in 'De Profundis'. The qualities of 'satori' are a) non-intellectual, unwilled, and conative[7], b) Irrefutably authoritative or doubtless, c) Impersonal in nature, d) A feeling of exaltation, e) Sudden or abrupt (Schultz 2001, p. 80).

In a second much briefer contribution Loyttyniemi (2001, pp. 178-180) defined 'epiphanies', or 'key episodes of a life story', as a breaking-down of an individual's expectation structure. In the tumult of a key episode, previous expectations give way to and are replaced by new ones.

In the area of narrative psychology McAdams (1996, p. 308) analysed more than 200 accounts from life-story interviews, from three previous studies, and proposed seven

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[6] Kuhn argued that the history of science was not a gradual linear accumulation of knowledge, as most philosophers believed. Instead, the history of science consisted of long periods of so-called 'normal science' which were punctuated by intellectual revolutions brought about by what he termed, 'paradigm shifts' (Macy 2000, pp. 219-220).

[7] Conative is defined as that aspect of mental processes having to do with volition, striving and willing. The terms 'affect' and 'cognitive' have now generally replaced this term in the psychological vernacular (Reber and Reber 2001, p. 140).

features that make up the structure and content of adult life stories. One of these features McAdams termed 'nuclear episodes', which he defines as:

> A declaration of change, a person may single out a particular event as an epiphany, through which the Me experienced rather sudden or decided transformation, as in a 'loss of innocence', a 'fall from grace', a 'lucky break', and so on. (1996, p. 309)

The term 'post-traumatic growth' has been used by Tedeschi, Park and Calhoun (1998) and Jaffe (1985) to describe the positive transformations that stem from trauma and crisis. Tedeschi et al. note:

> Existential psychologists have long recognised opportunities for growth in trauma and suffering, and have described trauma as a time when meaning may be created and courage found. These views are extensions of the ideas of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche who described the usefulness of suffering for personal development. The "courage to be" or "being mode" is the result of the stripping away of the inauthentic in the crucible of trauma, in coming face to face with non-being. (1998, p. 4)

Tennen and Affleck (1998) discuss the different routes to 'post-traumatic growth', some being gradual and incremental, while others are sudden and abrupt. Tennen and Affleck note:

> There exists a rather compelling though relatively unappreciated theoretical and empirical literature beyond and within psychological inquiry on dramatic transformations that occur abruptly and through mechanisms that are not yet fully appreciated. (1998, p. 87)

Jensen (1999) coined the term 'lesbian epiphany' to describe the process of women who discover and reveal their newfound lesbian sexuality in later life. The focus of Jensen's study was on married women, and the manner in which they established gender orientation before and after their epiphanies. Jensen defined epiphanies as an "emotional realisation, when the essence of something is revealed in a sudden flash of recognition" (Jensen 1999, p. 201). Jensen used the term epiphany to describe the final transformative re-enactment of her participants' insight and acceptance of their new sexual orientation. This transformation was the result of a gradual process of affect[8], sexual and emotional attraction enhanced by cognitive clarity, and recurring behaviours that caused an emotional realisation.

Prior to their lesbian epiphanies, all of Jensen's (1998; 1999) participants had been committed to a heterosexual life through their commitments to marriage and children. However, these women's choices, Jensen explains, were taken because of a lack of self-knowledge:

> Women's learning can be blocked on all three paths, the cognitive, the affective, and the behavioural. As this study has illustrated these women grew in experience as they moved through varied social landscapes. Because they had a predisposition for same-gender attractions, they heard accurate information as it came over the barriers that they constantly rejected-but consciously took in. (1999, pp. 203-204)

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[8] Affect is defined as any kind of feeling or emotion attached to ideas, or idea-complexes (Music 2001).

Jensen's participants gradually became more comfortable performing new behaviours that had been previously unacceptable to them.

> Over time, they began to feel the accumulation of affect, of emotional responses, a build up of emotional tension that they stored away without being fully conscious of. This accumulated affect appears to be what finally pointed them in the direction of the outcome. (1999, p. 204)

Jensen used the analogy of Niagara Falls to describe the psychological journey her participants undertook. The journey begins in a canoe while being carried along by the current of the river towards the towering falls, when after a period of travel they get to a point where the current is too strong for them to be able to successfully turn back. They are now compelled to move ever closer to the falls:

> If she had accumulated enough self-knowledge and information, if the internal or external pressure against her knowing had lifted somewhat, whether or not she had found new role models or a community, if the accumulated affect or feelings were strong enough she was pulled inevitably toward what she felt was her more true gender orientation. She could no longer turn around. Her emotions swamped – overwhelmed – all the conflicting and limiting cognitive messages and expectations. She began to reconstruct her identity. She was lesbian. She was bisexual. She was herself. (1999, p. 204)

2.2.2 The development and testing of a concept of epiphany

In this section, two studies are explored in more detail, which developed and tested a concept of epiphany. The first study was carried out by Ariana Jarvis (1997) while the second was carried out by William Miller and Janet C'de Baca (1993; 2001).

Jarvis (1997, p. v) defined an epiphany as a "sudden discontinuous change, leading to profound, positive, and enduring transformation through reconfiguration of an individual's most deeply held beliefs about self and world". Jarvis formalised her concept of epiphany by testing ten hypotheses that characterised the experience. They are as follows:

1.Epiphany is an experience of profound personal transformation resulting in the reconfiguration of an individual's world assumptions.

2. Epiphanies are experienced as sudden, temporally bounded, affectively intense, ego-syntonic[9], relieving, liberating, and exciting.

3. The details of an epiphanic experience are vividly remembered, similar to those of "flashbulb" memories.

4. Although epiphanies are not equivalent to 'religious conversion'[10] experiences, the content and language used to describe them is often religious, mystical[11] or spiritual.

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[9] Egosyntonic is defined as descriptive of values, feelings and ideas that are consistent with one's ego, that feel real and acceptable to consciousness. An egosyntonic idea feels like it belongs (Reber and Reber 2001, p. 232).

[10] The concept of religious conversion was first developed by William James (1902).

[11] William James (1902) is credited with the first systematic analysis of mystical experience, in which he outlines four main characteristics – 'ineffability' (an experience beyond description), 'noetic quality' (the experience is felt as a valid source of information), 'transience' (the experience is often very brief), and 'passivity' (the experience cannot be willed into action). Over time various researchers have added further concepts to James' initial characteristics. They include unity (a feeling of oneness with the cosmos/God/nature/soul), rapture, and timelessness. Like many experiences in the realm of extraordinary consciousness, mysticism cannot be defined as a single cohesive concept, instead it is a loose constellation of characteristics (Williams 1998).

5. Epiphanic experiences follow a period of internal conflict, emotional turbulence or instability, feelings of alienation, anxiety, and/or depression.

6. The experience of epiphany is followed by a period of productive activity and heightened energy.

7. First-time epiphanies occur in late adolescence or early adulthood.

8. Epiphanic experiences occur in unusual surroundings, which encourage the suspension of disbelief and promote the reconfiguration of an individual's world assumptions.

9. Many of the changes in world assumptions, experienced as a consequence of an epiphany, are enduring.

10. Epiphanic experiences can result in the acquisition of a capacity for "epistemic hovering", the ability to transcend a particular set of world assumptions at a given time, but a more generalised capacity to "hover over" whatever assumptions currently inform an individual's life. (Jarvis 1997, pp. 61-63)

Apart from a brief quote on James Joyce's exploration of epiphanies in his literary works, Jarvis did not use a number of other references to epiphanies available in the literature to develop a formalised concept[12]. For example, Miller and C'de Baca's (1993) study of personal transformation which they termed 'quantum change', shares many conceptual similarities to the definition of epiphany developed by Jarvis. There was also no use of the various non-empirical studies of epiphany carried out by Denzin (1989; 1990), Goud (1995), Beja (1993) and Johnson (1992).

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[12] Jarvis was the second scholar to develop and empirically test a concept of epiphanies, the first was Miller and C'de Baca (1993). Therefore, I can only conjecture that she was unwilling to use previous discussions or references to epiphanies because they were largely anecdotal and/or non-empirical, and therefore not worthy of inclusion.

To develop a formalised conceptualisation of epiphanies, Jarvis (1997, p. 10) opted for a theoretical approach stemming from developmental psychology. The use of developmental theories to understand epiphanies, Jarvis argues, was justified on the basis that it focuses on discontinuous changes in behaviours. In contrast, clinical theories (from the field of clinical psychology[13]), Jarvis argues, pay little attention to the study of sudden and profound psychological changes, particularly those occurring outside the consulting room.

Jarvis's (1997, pp. 63-65) study was intended as a preliminary phenomenological-heuristic investigation. This approach to methodology and data analysis focus primarily on the process of consciousness, subjective thoughts, feelings and personal reflections, in an attempt to understand the individual's inner experiences, as they are experienced. The data was collected using ethnographic interview techniques, which allow the interviewee the opportunity to structure the interview process. Such techniques are effective in investigations that seek to carve out new areas of inquiry and are often used in studies of an exploratory nature (Marshall and Rossman 1989).

From her research participants' epiphanies, Jarvis found their experiences were congruent with six of the ten hypothesised features:

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[13] Clinical psychology is a sub-discipline of psychology concerned with aberrant, maladaptive or abnormal human behaviour. The practice of clinical psychology includes diagnosis, evaluation, classification, treatment, prevention and research. Clinical psychology largely reflects its historical lineage, which is predominantly medical in orientation (Reber and Reber 2001, p. 124).

1. The experience is profoundly transforming.

2. The experience was phenomenologically intense, ego-syntonic, temporally bounded and liberating.

4. The language used to describe the experience was religious, mystical or spiritual.

5. The experience is preceded by a period of significant personal turmoil.

6. The experience is followed by a period of heightened productive activity (sometimes of many years' duration).

9. The results of the experience are enduring. (1997, pp. 141-190)

The remaining four hypotheses were not confirmed by Jarvis' (1997, p. 184) study:

3. The remembrance of the epiphanic experience in its exact detail.

10. The capacity for epistemic hovering.

Only one of the participants each confirmed the remaining two hypotheses, they were:

4. First-time epiphanies occur in late adolescence or early adulthood.

8. The degree of unusualness of the setting in which the epiphany occurs. (1997, p. 184)

In addition to the ten tested hypotheses, three other significant themes were observed in the data. Firstly, the overall content of the experience reflected a significant religious/spiritual theme. The epiphanies however were not religious conversions, instead they all reflected a turning away from organised religion (Jarvis 1997, pp. 186-188), a result that was similarly borne out by Sutherland's (1991; 1992) research into 'near-death experience'. Near-death experiences are similar to epiphanies in that it is common for the individual to view the experience as transformational after they

return to consciousness. Sutherland (1991; 1992) found that as a result of her participants' near-death experiences they developed a stronger commitment to spiritual growth while simultaneously moving away from organised religion. The other related themes Jarvis (1997, p. 187) observed in her participants, was their experience had set them on a new and important path of some kind. This theme was variously described as an 'experiment', 'journey', 'spiritual path' and 'path'. Lastly, all of the participants mentioned the importance of 'service', of living a generative life[14] and making a commitment to bettering the world in some way.

To interpret the epiphanic phenomenon, Jarvis (1997, pp. 191-222) explored a number of themes related to 'discontinuous' change experiences. They included the notions of 'insight' (Maltzman 1955; Mayer 1995), 'creative encounter' (May 1975; Lubeck and Bidell 1985), 'religious conversion' (Rhodes 1986) and the concept of 'mental boundary' (Hartmann 1991). 'Systems' and 'chaos theory' was also used to provide a higher level of abstraction and analysis, out of which Jarvis sought to develop a so-called 'metatheory' of discontinuous psychological change experience, the aim of which was to explain the underlying dynamics of epiphanies. The use of 'systems'

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[14] Jarvis used the term 'generative' as defined by Erikson (1963), who identified three developmental crises that occur over the course of an individual's life. Each crisis roughly corresponds to early adulthood, middle age, and later life. The second crisis identified by Erikson was 'generativity versus stagnation'. During middle adulthood the person begins to prioritise contributions to society for example, the successful raising of children and making important contributions through work and volunteer activities, all of which resolve the issue of being a productive member of society. The opposite of generativity is stagnation, which is associated with self-absorption and personal impoverishment.

and 'chaos theory' provided a way of accounting for changes that are in no way predictable, and which defy predictions that presuppose developmental change from a 'stage analytic process' (see for example Erikson 1963).

Systems theory is most often used in the natural sciences to understand the pattern or structure of a whole, and the relationships between its component parts or units. "A system is thus any structured or patterned relationship between any number of elements, where this system forms a whole or unity" (Marshall 1998, p. 659). For Jarvis (1997, pp. 233-241) systems theory provided two orders of change. The 'first-order change' occurs within the system itself and may involve adjustments and minor fluctuations to the individual's view of the world, however the system (in this case the human organism) is able to maintain a homeostatic unity. The 'second order change' is conceptualised as a whole-system change. This involves a total transformation of the individual's core assumptions that function to frame, organise and interpret their experience of the world. "It is further suggested that a change which results in the restructuring of an individual's world assumptions, an epiphanic transformation, exemplifies the essence of a 'second order change' process" (1997, pp. 240-241).

Chaos theory on the other hand attempts to define the behaviour of 'chaotic systems'. Such systems may be viewed as unpredictable at the local level yet remain globally stable and ordered (Gleick 1987). Furthermore chaos theory:

> Offers a rich set of ideas and metaphors for understanding developmental processes, particularly those which appear to be chaotic at the level of (local) surface behaviour, but

which produce a restructuring of the system that reflects a level of (global) order on a larger

scale. (Jarvis 1997, pp. 245-246)

The chaos-theoretic perspective interprets change as a shift from one equilibrium to another. The actual process or movement that occurs between one equilibrium to another is non-linear and characterised by turbulence and seemingly random behaviour. The end result is a structural re-ordering of the individual's assumptive world (Jarvis 1997, p. 270).

The next major contribution to our understanding of epiphanic experiences was carried out by Miller and C'de Baca (1993; 2001) who developed their own unique conceptualisation of epiphanies which they termed 'quantum change'. Although the authors coined a new term for sudden transformational experiences, my analysis suggests that their concept is almost identical in description to other conceptualisations of epiphanies, as the following review will illustrate.

Miller and C'de Baca (2001) conceptualised two types of quantum change. Type 1, the 'insightful type', typically occurs as a result of a new realisation, or a new way of thinking or understanding. Type 2, 'the mystical type' are experiences quite out of the ordinary everyday and resemble the classic descriptions of mystical experiences. The main distinction between the two types of quantum change is that type 1 does not contain the awe and sense of wonder (the mystical qualities) that accompanies type 2. However, there is a caveat; many of the personal accounts collected by Miller and C'de Baca (2001, pp. 18-22) lie between the border regions of both types, which

suggests the two types of quantum change are not completely separate, representing instead two ends of a continuum.

To develop the quantum change[15] concept Miller and C'de Baca (1993, pp. 253-256; 2001, pp. 3-7) drew on a range of sources beginning with familiar stories (such as Charles Dickens' Ebenezer Scrooge), the lives of extraordinary people, and their own extensive research in the area of alcoholism. Biography and autobiography provided a particularly rich vein of lives suddenly and dramatically transformed, for example, Joan of Arc, the Buddha, Soren Kierkegaard and Leo Tolstoy.

Through their research on alcoholism, Miller and C'de Baca (2001, pp. 24-25) became aware of sudden discontinuous change in their observations of recovering alcoholics . "Alcoholic quantum changers report a sudden and complete loss of the desire to drink, persisting over decades" (Kurtz cited in Miller and C'de Baca 2001, p. 6). Miller and C'de Baca (1993, pp. 256-257) also made reference to James Loder's research on transformational metanoia[16], experiences which describe the permanent revolution or the ongoing transformation of human life under divine initiative (Loder 1981, p. 19). They also referenced the work of Milton Rokeach, best known for his research on values. Rokeach (1973) argues that attitudinal changes are rarely a

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[15] The term quantum change was coined, "because contemporary psychology has no name (let alone explanation) for this phenomenon, we chose the term *quantum change* to describe it, drawing on both the concept of a quantum leap and the unpredictability inherent in quantum mechanics" (Miller and C'de Baca 2001, p. 4).

[16] Metanoia is defined as, "to change one's mind" (Miller and C'de Baca 1993, p. 256).

precursor to behavioural change. However, changes in an individual's core value structure often result in enduring transformation in attitudes and behaviour.

Miller and C'de Baca (1993, pp. 257-258) reviewed the psychological literature and concluded that research on the topic of 'surprising and enduring personal transformations' was largely absent. Therefore, they spent two years in discussions with various academic colleagues developing perspectives on whether quantum change was a distinct phenomenon that could be defined and measured. Having decided that quantum change was a distinct phenomenon that could be measured, the authors sought to undertake an empirical study. They began by forging a definition comprising two main guidelines - personal transformation had to be "sudden and profound" as well as "differing subjectively from ordinary change", the latter guideline having been borrowed from William James (1902). Like Jarvis (1997), Miller and C'de Baca ignored much of the previous non-empirical research carried out on the phenomenon.

In their research on quantum change the authors interviewed and administered questionnaires to 55 participants. The participants were self-selected through a feature story on epiphanies in a large U.S. metropolitan newspaper. The newspaper article asked for volunteers who had been transformed in a relatively short period of time – who had a deep shift in core values, feelings, attitudes or actions. Data was collected from volunteers using semi-structured interviews and the administration of a range of other previously developed questionnaires. Interview questions were drawn from commonly reported aspects of transcendent experience. These questions were

formalised into the Quantum Experiences Retrospective Interview (QUERI). The questionnaires included an assessment of the participant's value priorities (Rokeach 1983) before and after the participant's quantum change experience. A self-description measure (Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum 1978) was undertaken before and after their epiphany, which was used to ascertain how the participant's view of themself had changed. The 'Life Experiences Survey' (Sarason, Johnson and Siegel 1978) was used to yield information concerning life events that occurred in the year prior to the participant's quantum change. The 'Religious Background and Beliefs Scale' (Tonigan and Miller 1990) was used to ascertain current and past religious beliefs and practices; and finally, three personality scales were administered in order to explore traits of potential interest to the quantum change phenomenon. These included Tellegen's (Tellegen and Atkinson 1974) absorption scale, used to measure the degree to which the quantum changers were absorbed in events external to themselves; a locus of control scale (Nowiciki and Duke 1974) to assess trait perceptions of personal versus external control; and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers and McCaulley 1985) which was used to assess four main preference styles: introversion-extraversion (I-E), sensing-intuiting (S-N), thinking-feeling (T-F) and judging-perceiving (J-P) (Miller and C'de Baca 1993, pp. 258-259).

Participants included 31 females and 24 males (55 in total), ranging in ages 30 – 78. It is assumed, because no mention was made in either of Miller and C'de Baca's (1993; 2001) research reports, that 'content analysis' was used to analyse the qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews to give frequencies of the emergent themes. Results of their study are outlined overleaf in Table 1.

Table 1: Subjective descriptions of quantum change

Just before my experience

% True	Antecedent
56	I was emotionally distressed or upset
46	Nothing special was happening
29	I was praying or trying to be close to God
27	Someone was praying for me

During my experience

% True	Experience
87	An important truth was revealed to me
78	I was relieved of a mental burden
60	I felt completely loved
58	I had experiences that are very difficult to explain in words
58	I was surprised and startled
56	I felt at one with or connected to everything around me
55	I felt like I was in the hands of a power much greater than myself
49	I felt a holy presence close to me

After my experience

% True	Experience
95	I saw a new meaning
95	My life was changed
84	The world looked different to me
75	I felt at peace
67	I felt joyful
67	I was a completely different person
64	I felt loved and cared for

Source: Modified from Miller and C'de Baca (1993, pp. 262-263)

The most common personality type amongst the participants was 'intuiting-feeling' (NF), which occurred at twice the US population norm. Unfortunately the authors were unable to determine whether the NF personality type preceded or resulted from the quantum change experience, or simply predisposed their participants to volunteer for a study of this nature. Participants reported their lives were now much better as a result of their quantum change (96%) and were confident that the changes were enduring (93%)[17]. "Overall, the most common quality of the effects of quantum change was a liberation, deeply positive feeling, and a new kind of meaning and perception" (Miller and C'de Baca 1993, p. 264).

For men, values were radically re-ordered. The five highest values in order, prior to their quantum change experience included wealth, adventure, achievement, pleasure and being respected. After their quantum change experience these same five values were ranked (out of 50) in order of 50th, 29th, 26th, 25th, and 33rd respectively. Top ranking value priorities for men became spirituality, personal peace, family, God's will, and honesty. A similar re-ordering also occurred for women yet not to the same degree as the men (Miller and C'de Baca 1993, p. 266).

Miller and C'de Baca (1993, pp. 271-276) reflected on the possible catalysts for quantum change experiences by advancing four possible interpretations. These included 'self-regulation', 'perception shift', 'value conflict' and 'transcendence'. Self-regulation is a behavioural theory that proposes two types of memory or

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[17] In a follow up study with a number of the same participants, C'de Baca and Wilbourne (2004) found that transformational changes that had taken place 10 years earlier had endured to the present day.

behaviour. The first type 'automatic', operates with little conscious awareness, for example when driving and typing, while the second type is more consciously controlled. Automatic behaviours tend to continue unless self-monitoring reveals a significant discrepancy – this discrepancy disrupts the automatic processing, and triggers executive control:

> Such triggering of executive processes and course correction reordering may occur at various levels of behavioural organization. In this view, quantum changes would represent the higher order end of a continuum of self-regulatory shifts. (Miller and C'de Baca 1993, p. 273)

Perception shift is as the name implies. A participant may have a particular perception inhibiting alternatives, when suddenly and abruptly the participant's perception or view is altered. To accommodate this altered perception a reorganisation of the same stimuli takes place. "Our subjects commonly reported major shifts, at the point of quantum change, in their perceptions of themselves, other people, and the world around them" (Miller and C'de Baca 1993, p. 273).

The authors also postulated that quantum change is the result of a dissonance among values. This dissonance is resolved at the moment of quantum change so that new values are integrated leading to new behaviours, perceptions and attitudes (Miller and C'de Baca 1993, p. 276).

In an elaboration on their 1993 research on quantum change (Miller and C'de Baca 1993), Miller and C'de Baca (2001) outlined five further interpretations of the phenomenon. They include, 'breaking point', 'deep discrepancy', 'personal

maturation', 'particular person' and 'sacred encounter' (Miller and C'de Baca 2001, pp. 155-181). Breaking point, or peak-crisis, is described as a turning point in the life journey where the person is unable to continue on their present course. It is a point of desperation where something has to give – the result is a new and dramatically reorganised identity. Deep discrepancy, or the value conflict hypothesis, is based on the idea of a simmering unconscious conflict. The cause of this conflict is a dissonance between competing values that suddenly erupt into consciousness, which lead to changes in perception and behaviour.

Lawrence Kohlberg's (1984) work on parallel stages of moral development was also used by the authors to hypothesise quantum change as an experience of personal integration and moral maturation, which leads to a consolidation of one's identity. The particular person hypothesis is based on the notion that certain personalities have a predisposition to quantum change, as Miller and C'de Baca (2001, p. 170) speculate, "could it be that quantum changers are intuitive types who are just having a larger version of their usual mode of perception?" Those with psychological disorders for example may have easier access to quantum change, or indeed those people whose lives have been torn away from the normal may be better prepared to integrate whatever it is that quantum change has to offer (Miller and C'de Baca 2001, p. 170).

 In their final interpretation the authors suggest that quantum change can be seen as a sacred encounter, an experience of transcendence, or an encounter with the nonmaterial transpersonal realm. This hypothesis, the authors argue is difficult to

measure given its spiritual orientation, and is usually explained by its descriptive features and the personal meaning assigned to it.

Overall, the main strength of Miller and C'de Baca's (1993; 2001) study was the sample size (fifty five participants) and its relative randomness (the study was not strictly random given the self-selection of the participants) which can make a claim to greater generalisability than Jarvis's (1997) study on epiphanies.

2.2.3 Epiphanic characteristics

Given the disparate nature of the epiphanic literature and the limited reviews of the concept by Jarvis (1997) and Miller and C'de Baca (1993; 2001), it was determined that an integrating framework was needed to give some semblance of order to the various themes running through the literature. To this end, a set of core characteristics was created by content analysing the epiphanic literature (Krippendorff 1980) (see Appendix One for more detail on the methodology of the content analysis). The six core epiphanic characteristics that were identified include, 'antecedent state', 'suddenness', 'personal transformation', 'illumination / insight', 'meaning-making' and 'enduring nature'. These core characteristics and a brief description of each are outlined in more detail in Table 2 overleaf.

Table 2: Epiphanic Characteristics

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

2.3 Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to conceptually define epiphanies by identifying a set of core characteristics from the literature. Overall, this literature review suggests that epiphanies provide coherence, unity, shape and meaning out of the seeming chaos and meaninglessness of life. The review began with Denzin's (1989; 1990) interactionist perspective, in which he argues epiphanies arise out of the problematic interactions with others, that give primary meaning to one's life.

References to epiphanies were also found in various literary works, being used by their authors as a device for developing identity and personality in their characters. Other contributions to the understanding of epiphanies were found in the education, narrative psychology, traumatic experience and gay and lesbian literature.

Overall, the literature revealed only two studies that have developed and tested a conceptual framework for describing epiphanies. The first study was carried out by Jarvis (1997) who created a conceptualisation of the phenomenon by proposing ten hypotheses, stemming largely from the sub-discipline of developmental psychology. These ten hypotheses were then tested on five participants using a qualitative methodology. To explain the phenomenon Jarvis applied two perspectives from the realm of natural science, which were systems and chaos theory.

Miller and C'de Baca (1993; 2001) undertook the other study designed to develop and test a concept of epiphanies by coining a new term for the phenomenon - quantum

change - which they tested on 55 participants by employing a combined qualitative and quantitative method. To explain the phenomenon Miller and C'de Baca referred to theories from clinical, cognitive and behavioural psychology.

To complete this chapter a set of core epiphanic characteristics was developed by content analysing the literature. It is argued that this set of characteristics provides a comprehensive and wide-ranging review of the epiphanic literature, as well as offering a new definition and synthesis of the phenomenon by bringing together many new strands of information. This set of core epiphanic characteristics will provide the foundation for a new and alternative interpretation of epiphanies by applying the philosophies of self and identity within the context of existentialism. This will now be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE – THE CONTEXT OF SELF-IDENTITY IN EXISTENTIALISM

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter, which is in line with the third objective of this inquiry, is to explore the philosophies of self and identity within the context of existentialism, in order to provide the foundation for a new and alternative interpretation of epiphanies. The justification for a self and identity existential perspective stems firstly from the epiphanic literature, which indicates that positive change and transformation that is sudden and abrupt is most apparent in one's sense of self and identity (Denzin 1989; 1990; Jensen 1998; 1999; Miller and C'de Baca 2001; Miller 2004). Secondly, the application of existential philosophy and psychology aims to provide an alternative interpretation of epiphanies, one that is based on personal meaning and the essential realities of the human condition. This will provide a contrast to interpretations offered by Jarvis (1997) and Miller and C'de Baca (1993; 2001), whose studies on epiphanies stem from developmental, clinical, cognitive, and behavioural theories of psychology.

This chapter begins with a discussion on the birth and definition of existentialism and its application to psychology and psychotherapy. Following on from this is an introduction to the fundamental concepts of self and identity from an existential perspective. This will provide a precursor to a more in-depth investigation of existential philosophy and psychology through the work of Soren Kierkegaard (1842; 1843; 1845; 1846; 1849; 1854), Friedrich Nietzsche (1888; 1892; 1895), Martin Heidegger (1927; 1961; 1977; 1987; 1988) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1938; 1939; 1943;

1948; 1960) – the four most influential existential philosophers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The chapter concludes with a summary of the themes drawn out from this review and then speculates on how they might provide us with an alternative understanding of epiphanies.

3.2 Existentialism

Existentialism is a diverse set of beliefs and assumptions that is more often labelled an 'attitude' or an 'approach' to life, than a coherent set of philosophical principles (Friedman 1964, p. 3; Macquarie 1973, p. 1; Charlesworth 1975, p. 1; Levin 1992, p. 60; Cooper 2003, p. 2). Kaufmann adds:

> Existentialism is not a philosophy but a label for several widely different revolts against traditional philosophy. Most of the living "existentialists" have repudiated this label, and a bewildered outsider might well conclude that the only thing they have in common is a marked aversion for each other…The refusal to belong to any school of thought, the repudiation of the adequacy of any body of beliefs whatever, and especially systems, and a marked dissatisfaction with traditional philosophy as superficial, academic, and remote from life – that is the heart of existentialism. (1975, pp. 11-12)

The aim of this chapter however is not to reconcile the differences between the varying perspectives of existential philosophy and psychology, as outlined by Kaufman above, but to develop a range of pertinent themes related to self and identity in order to provide an alternative understanding of epiphanies.

Broadly speaking, existentialism explores the meaningfulness of human existence and the manner in which the individual attempts to overcome the various forms of alienation[18] from world, one another, and oneself[19] (Friedman 1964; Craig 1988). The term existentialism was first coined by the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel during World War II as a label for the emerging ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone De Beauvoir (Cooper 1999, p. 1). Nevertheless, Sartre and De Beauvoir's ideas drew inspiration from the nineteenth century philosophers, Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, who become influential forerunners to the existential movement of the twentieth century (Friedman 1964; Kaufmann 1975; Cooper 1999; Guignon 2004c).

From the outset, Sartre (1948, p. 26) made what he termed a "critical distinction" between two opposing types of existentialism, the 'Christian' and the 'atheist' types. Karl Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel, he suggests, are representative of the former because of their professed Catholicism. Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Simone De

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[18] The concept of 'Alienation', first developed by Marx (1844), was used to explain human behaviour in the face of capitalist society - namely the experience of isolation. According to Marx, alienation was the product of an increasing technological means of production, an increase in social wealth, the control of labour in fewer hands, and an increasing division of labour. Existential scholars elaborated upon Marx's economic analysis of alienation by suggesting the individual can become alienated from oneself through self-deception of one's past, or the denial of responsibility for one's future. The individual may also become lost in the superficial concerns of everyday public existence and/or become alienated by a failure to find meaning and purpose in one's life (Kenevan 1999, pp. 5-6).

[19] In fact Critchley (1998, pp. 11-13) suggests the whole of Continental philosophy, since the nineteenth century, can be said to respond to a sense of crisis in modernity, and indeed tries to produce crisis insofar as it endeavours to awaken a critical consciousness of the present.

Beauvoir, and Sartre himself fall into the latter atheist category, which is characterised in part by its hostility toward any form of organized religion, particularly Christianity. Kierkegaard (1854) used the term 'Christendom' pejoratively to define those aspects of Christianity concerned with wealth accumulation, oppression, hierarchies, and the complacent, comfortable institutional falsification of true Christianity[20]. Nietzsche referred to Christianity as a negatively seductive, virtuous hypocrisy; a slave morality based on dogma, in which the faithful are destined to an 'inauthentic' existence because of their unwillingness to become who they truly are (Golomb 1995, p. 73; Robinson 1999, p. 7). The core of Nietzsche's (1895) criticism is based on his claim that Christianity enforces the idea that anything that is not eternal is without value, which is in contradistinction to human existence because its ultimate destination is death. Sartre (1948) was similarly critical of Christianity because it deprived the individual of their 'terrifying freedom', and concomitant responsibility. The denial of freedom, the existential atheists argue, is in fact a reward for the Christian faithful who, rather than express regret at the dimming of their earthly liberties, embrace their servitude with feelings of relief.

For the purpose of this inquiry I will explore existential notions of self and identity through the works of Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre[21] who collectively form the most influential group of existential

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[20] Although he had an almost pathological hatred of the Christian Church as an institution, Kierkegaard still considered himself a Christian (Golomb 1995, p. 35).

[21] Many other scholars have similarly contributed to existential thinking throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Some of these include the Russian novelist Fydor Dostoyevesky, the feminist

philosophers (Kaufmann 1975; Golomb 1995; Cooper 1999; Gordon 1999a; Guignon 2004b).

3.3 Existentialism, Psychology And Psychotherapy

It is generally accepted that psychology and psychotherapy is where existentialism has become most actively and lucidly applied (Friedman 1964, p. 365; Cannon 1999, p. 384). The 'Daseinsanalyst' Medard Boss (1979, p. 7) tells us that Heidegger expressed the hope that, "his thinking would escape the confines of the philosopher's study and become of benefit to wider circles, in particular to a large number of suffering human beings". At its most basic, existential psychology and psychotherapy is a movement within the field of psychology that engages in a dialogue with philosophy, namely existentialism. For Maslow (1968) the application of existentialism to psychology held great appeal because he felt it was critical that scientific psychology and psychotherapy be underpinned by an explicit philosophy, something he felt was sorely lacking (Maslow 1968, p. 10). Jaspers adds:

> There is no escape from philosophy. The question is only whether a philosophy is conscious or not, whether it is good or bad, muddled or clear. Anyone who rejects philosophy is himself unconsciously practicing a philosophy. (1954, p. 22)

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philosopher Simone De Beauvoir, the German poet Rainer Rilke, the Czech novelist Franz Kafka, the Spanish philosopher and journalist Jose Ortega, the German philosopher and medical practitioner Karl Jaspers, the Algerian novelist Albert Camus, the German philosopher Edmund Husserl, the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and the German Jewish philosopher Martin Buber (Friedman 1964; Kaufmann 1975).

Friedman (1964, p. 365) suggests, "The full significance of existentialism and psychotherapy can only be discovered however, through beginning with the existential thinkers themselves – Kierkegaard, Tillich, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Buber, Jaspers – to see what they have said about psychology and psychotherapy". In line with Friedman's idea, this inquiry will focus on existential philosophy by providing an interpretation of the movement's essential ideas. These ideas will be elaborated on by drawing on the work of selected existential psychologists and psychotherapists in order to provide a more varied and richer understanding.

3.4 Self-Identity[22] And Existentialism

3.4.1 Introduction

> With the existential subject we have reached the heartland of existentialism and the area where there is probably the maximum agreement among existentialists. Here each thinker places her/his stress upon becoming a real person, a 'single one', an authentic human being. (Friedman 1964, p. 111)

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[22] For the purposes of this inquiry the hyphenated term self-identity will be used from here onwards to denote the individuals' experience and internal representation of themselves and their world. Levin (1992, pp. 19-20) suggests that, "personal identity and self are not necessarily identical, but there is certainly a close relationship between the two. To have a self is to have an identity, although selfhood may entail more than identity".

Soren Kierkegaard was the first philosopher of the modern era to place the individual existent at the centre of his philosophical system (Baldwin 2000). He set out to critique the objectivist standards of truth, and in particular Descartes' subject-object split, claiming that it purged the world of meaning, interest, and interpretation (Hatab 1999c, p. 446). Kierkegaard believed the individual had been lost in formal systems of philosophy, so he set out to emphasize the truth as lived, personal commitment, the subjective quality of life, the particular over the general, and concrete experience over the universal (Levin 1992, p. 58).

> Kierkegaard…extoll(ed) reflection - thinking infused with feeling - in contradistinction to abstract thought. He argues that reflection is closer to the *individual's concrete existence* than pure dispassionate reason, and because it is, it (meaning reflection) is a better vehicle to discover some kinds of truth. (Levin 1992, p. 59)

Nietzsche (1887; 1892) agreed with Kierkegaard's view that philosophical analysis should be applied to the self, and with it an emphasis should be placed on personal commitment and passion. However, Nietzsche went much further by claiming the very idea of the 'self' to be a human invention. He believed the self was not a universal concept or a philosophical given, that human beings are not endowed with a self at birth like a soul, for example, and that the self is not a fixed or internally derived entity (Nehamas 2004). Instead, Neitzsche believed the self is something that is 'created' through the totality of one's actions.[23] Nehamas notes:

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[23] The idea that self-identity functions as a 'happening' or 'verblike event' is clearly illustrated in existential language which uses many more verbs than substantives or nouns (Condrau 1988, p. 108).

> Both the hero of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and his disciples are constantly described as "creators"; and the book revolves around the idea of creating one's own self or (what comes to the same thing) the *Ubermensch*. (2004, p. 77)

Heidegger (1987, p. 73) built on Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's ideas of the self by attempting to re-orientate its Western understanding by undermining the traditional separation between a unitary bounded self and its world. Heidegger's philosophy challenged Freudian, and other psychoanalytically inspired theories, like Winnicott's (1965) and Kohut's (1971; 1977), which viewed the self as solid, substantial, and discretely separated (van Deurzen 1996). In its place Heidegger proposed a temporal, fluid, and process orientated entity embedded in a cultural and linguistic context; a view that fuses the individual, the Other, and the world into a co-constituted interdependent reality (Condrau 1988, p. 106). Therefore, there is no self for Heidegger, only 'Being-in-the-world' (van Deurzen 1996, p. 56). Protevi adds:

> Dasein is not to be equated with subject, for, as the place where the Being question occurs, Dasein is the locus of the encounter between subject and object, the opening within which the subject can come to address an object. (1999, p. 175)

Sartre (1948, p. 45) followed a similar line of argument by criticising Descartes' 'cogito'; when we say "I think" we are attaining to ourselves in the face of the Other. Sartre's phenomenology posited a self-identity whose entity could only be recognised in Others – "We create a self out of others' perceptions of us" (van Deurzen 1996, p.

58). The individual is unable to obtain any truth whatsoever about itself, except through the mediation of another. The Other is indispensable to the individual's existence, and equally so to any knowledge that one can have of oneself, as Sartre adds:

> Under these conditions, the intimate discovery of myself is at the same time the revelation of the other as freedom which confronts mine, and which cannot think or will without doing so either for or against me. Thus, at once, we find ourselves in a world which is, let us say, that of "inter-subjectivity". (1948, p. 45)

3.4.2 The nineteenth century existentialists: Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche

Kierkegaard's philosophy placed a radical emphasis on subjectivity, individuality and the overwhelming freedom and responsibility that went with it. In his often immodest way Kierkegaard believed:

> That too many individual humans did not see any need to struggle with the direction of their personal existence. They assumed that they already were Christian and modern by birthright…Kierkegaard believed that philosophy should act like a mosquito and sting the complacent individual awake, to direct and experience the course of life or to awaken the individual and oblige him to judge. (Moss 2001, p. 10)

Kierkegaard had great contempt for Christian dogma and the so-called 'objective sciences' of the enlightenment (Kierkegaard 1854). He felt that both were ways of avoiding the anxious conditions of existence (van Deurzen 1995, p. 1). He believed the core message of Christianity had been misunderstood and that human beings must

find guidance on the basis of their own conscience in a one-to-one relationship with God (Guignon 2004d).

The main themes Kierkegaard addressed in his writings were existence, alienation and transcendence. The self according to Kierkegaard, "does not find its identity already given but must undergo an abrupt reversal of its priorities or a conversion in order to realise its uniqueness…The act of conversion is a spiritual process in which the self experiences a radical transposition of its identity" (Schalow 1999, p. 376-377). It is only when the individual becomes confused about their identity that a serious quest for identity can begin. Golomb adds:

> Only one who has deeply experienced the conflict between authentic and inauthentic patterns of life and has frequently struggled to decide between them can become conscious of the importance of being authentic. (1995, p. 34)

'The Sickness unto Death' (1849) and 'Fear and Trembling' (1843) together provide one of the most complete examinations of self-identity in Kierkegaard's philosophy. Kierkegaard believed the self (spirit) is the act of maintaining a dialectical relationship between body and soul; the self is the act of synthesizing the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity. The self is also a social entity, it is a function of the relationship between the individual and the Other, which Kierkegaard termed 'self-as-Other' - an element of 'becoming' concerned with a commitment to God - 'the religious self' - and a commitment to humanity - 'the ethical self' (Kierkegaard 1845).

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According to Kierkegaard, authentic existence is a Herculean task requiring that we 'choose' ourselves in order to overcome or transcend those elements of life that we have no choice over, such as our parentage, biological makeup and place of birth. The act of choosing a self stems from an individual's willingness to encounter the conditions of existence. The act of choice requires that we exercise our will and in so doing make value judgements. As Kirby (2004, p. 260) notes "To choose a self is to choose values, beliefs and ideals, which then serve to underpin and guide action". Yet paradoxically, in choosing a self we are confronted with utter despair in what Kierkegaard referred to as the 'sickness unto death'.

> There is not the remotest possibility of dying of this sickness (despair) in the straightforward sense, or of this sickness ending in physical death. On the contrary, the torment of despair is precisely the inability to die…this tormenting contradiction, this sickness in the self; eternally to die, to die and yet not to die, to die death itself. For to die means that it is all over, while to die death itself means to live to experience dying…Yet despair is exactly a consumption of the *self*, but an impotent self-consumption not capable of doing what it wants. (Kierkegaard 1849, p. 48)

Kierkegaard conceptualised three spheres of existence, the 'aesthetic', 'ethical' and 'religious'. The process by which the individual becomes a self is described by Kierkegaard as ideally moving through three stages, termed the 'stages on life's way', which attempts to demonstrate how the creation of an authentic new kind of individual is possible (Kierkegaard 1845).

The first stage, the aesthetic realm, is made up of a two minor hierarchies. The first is a selfhood given over to the basic pleasures of life - eating, drinking (alcohol), drug

use and various forms of recreation such as sex, gambling and the acquisition of material items. In the aesthetic realm questions about meaning and purpose are avoided through anonymous routine and the close identification with social/status roles (Kierkegaard 1842). Kierkegaard discovered that the pursuit of pleasure and flight from pain was a constant feature of existence and stemmed from an unconscious death wish[24]. Despair, in the aesthetic sphere, is similarly experienced at the unconscious level (Kierkegaard 1845).

Slightly above the aesthete yet firmly within the aesthetic realm are those that inhabit the 'business world'. Like the aesthete, these people's lives are ruled by the pleasure principle, however they seek rewards that are altogether more sophisticated in terms of their refinement and the status that society accords them. These individuals are narcissists; their rewards are wealth in the form of high incomes, luxury items and superficial forms of love. For example, the 'business person' will desire wealthy and/or beautiful love partners in the hope of gaining the envy of their friends and family (Kierkegaard 1845).

According to Kierkegaard (1849) the individual is required to play various socially ascribed roles that one perceives as critical to one's identity. A self-identity constructed along social/status roles, according to Kierkegaard, is no self-identity at all. Social/status roles merely represent a series of meaningless masks.

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[24] Freud (1957a) used these ideas seventy five years later to develop his own theory of the 'pleasure principle'.

Movement from the aesthetic to the ethical realms of selfhood begins with feelings of despair, which begin to appear in consciousness, and culminates in a near derangement of the senses. The four moods of melancholy, irony, anxiety and despair Kierkegaard claimed, colour all other experiences of life. These four moods arise, McCarthy argues:

> Out of an emotional disequilibrium that reflects a deeper disequilibrium. They can appear to be aimless occurrences, unless they are responded to and their hints allowed to become disclosures. Thus, moods are far more than an affect or emotional upheaval. While not voluntary, a mood requires an act of will in order to accept the lesson that it imparts and to surmount it. Moods are often crisis moments that allow a breakthrough to higher consciousness and higher self-realization. Hence, the four moods of aesthetic existence reveal their inner law and disclose a dialectic towards religious awakening, in response to the stirrings of the spirit. (1999, p. 305)

Melancholy, irony, anxiety, and despair are resolved by making a leap into the unknown - a 'leap of faith'. By sheer force of passion, the individual rips themself out of their old form of existence (aestheticism); lose her or his self, while gaining a new self in the process. In leaping toward one's freedom and responsibility, in the act of passion, commitment and courage, the individual becomes truly authentic (Golomb 1995, p. 51). In the act of 'choosing thyself', as a 'subjective existing being', the individual has come to judge the self from a new perspective rather than moral indifference. The ethical stage is marked by choosing to live by the distinction between good and evil (Hatab 1999a, p. 76). In the process of the first movement in the stages on life's way, one's old sick self falls away and the individual enters the

ethical sphere because one has accepted the 'either/or'[25] condition of existence. The importance of this movement is not that the individual has decided to live by a particular moral code, but rather that one has made a decision to hold themself responsible to an ethical code at all. This is a significant step forward because the individual makes a commitment to humanity (Kierkegaard 1845).

Nevertheless, the ethical realm is not without its difficulties and challenges, there is constant self-scrutiny and self-judgement to contend with. Individuals inhabiting this realm also experience what Kierkegaard termed 'ethical despair'. In the final stage on life's way the individual moves from the ethical to the religious realm by answering to God directly. For Kierkegaard, "Answering to God, or standing before God, is the highest degree of one's self-consciousness" (Hannay 1989, p. 7). This second leap of faith is more horrifying than the first (aesthetical to the ethical) because it represents the self, falling away from humanity. In the religious realm of self-hood, the divine guides the individual to what Kierkegaard referred to as fear and trembling, so powerful and awe-inspiring is its existence (Kierkegaard 1843).

Kierkegaard (1843) expounded his prescription for moving from the ethical to the religious realm of selfhood, by referring to the Old Testament. Kierkegaard discusses the story of Abraham's journey to the mythical mountain to sacrifice his son Isaac – a story that illustrates the nature of unquestioned faith in God. It is this level of faith, Kierkegaard (1843, pp. 49-56) argues, that is required to make the final leap into the religious realm.

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[25] 'Either/Or' is the title of one of Kierkegaard's major works.

Not simply content to publish his philosophical works and attack the hypocrisy of the Christian Church, Kierkegaard went to great lengths to actually live an exceptional mission, and as a result was much derided and ridiculed by the Danish ruling classes of the time. Moreover, he forsook a life of middle class comfort and marriage to his true love Regina, because of his belief that doctrine and life must overlap (Golomb 1995, p. 33).

In the same mould as Kierkegaard in terms of immodesty and iconoclastic stature came the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche, like Kierkegaard placed the individual subject squarely at the centre of his philosophy (Nehamas 1985; Nehamas 2004), and although the two philosophers shared much in common, Nietzsche was critical of many aspects of Kierkegaard's work. He was particularly critical of Kierkegaard's notion of the religious realm of selfhood, which he saw as just another form of Christian self-denial. Instead, Nietzsche believed in a truth "that you yourself give it", that one should "become what one is". That one should be engaged in a continually broadening process of appropriation, in order to enlarge one's capacity for responsibility (Nehamas 2004, p. 88). Nietzsche notes:

> Isn't it the discovery that no truth is discoverable except the truth, which *you yourself are*? That there is no truth (sense, meaning) in the world except the truth (sense, meaning) *you yourself give it*? That 'truth' is a concept belonging to the human mind and will and that apart from the human mind and will there is no such thing as 'truth'? (Nietzsche cited in Hollingdale 1969, p. 25)

Nietzsche strongly believed in the capacity of human beings to 'create' (as opposed to discovering) a personally significant (meaning) and committed life (purpose) in the face of universal chaos and meaninglessness (Nehamas 2004). Yalom (1980; 1982) defined the existential capacity of human beings to create meaning and purpose as 'terrestrial' or 'life' meaning, as opposed to 'ultimate' or 'cosmic' meaning, which seeks to explain the meaning of existence in its totality. In proposing a self-created path toward achieving meaning and purpose, Nietzsche was attempting to undermine the traditional approach toward finding meaning and purpose advocated by political and religious dogma[26], both of which he had great contempt for because he saw them as an escape into alienation. "Although potentially creative and powerful, man is afraid of expressing himself freely, fully and uniquely, and hides behind various dogmas" (Golomb 1990, pp. 245-246). Nietzsche's philosophy was distinctive in that his parables were designed to call out and inspire an authentic existence, as the following quote illustrates:

> I entreat you, my brothers, *remain free to the earth*, and do not believe those who speak to you of superterrestrial hopes! They are poisoners, whether they know it or not. They are despisers of life, atrophying and self-poisoned men, of whom the earth is weary: so let them be gone! Once blasphemy against God was the greatest blasphemy, but God died, and thereupon these blasphemers died too. To blaspheme the earth is now the most dreadful offence, and to esteem

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[26] While he loathed the hypocrisy and dogma of the Christian Church, and the mainstream politics of the time, Nietzsche's views on women were similarly hostile and dogmatic (Patton 1993). Kaufmann (1950) argues that Nietzsche's hostility towards women however, had more to do with growing up in a household full of women (including his mother, his father's two older sisters, and his own younger sister), than any deeply held belief that women's characters were inherently flawed.

the bowels of the Inscrutable more highly than the meaning of the earth. Once the soul looked contemptuously upon the body: and then this contempt was the supreme good – the soul wanted the body lean, monstrous, famished. So the soul thought to escape from the body and from the earth. Oh, this soul was itself lean, monstrous, and famished: and cruelty was the delight of the soul! But tell me, my brothers: What does your body say about your soul? Is your soul not poverty and dirt and a miserable ease? (1892, p. 42)

Nietzsche perceived the world, and human society, as a complex interplay of forces devoid of a unifying structure or final end point. This interplay, he suggested, produced an array of power relations that often prevented creativity and expression of the self. Nietzsche conceived of the self as an artistic process of transfiguration, whose example resides in the 'superman'. The superman channels basic life-energy or 'will to power' in order to create higher expressions of humanity (Golomb 1990). "Such relentless self-overcoming epitomizes the 'process' character of human identity as the drive to rise beyond one's present level" (Schalow 1999, p. 377). The individual's task is to overcome a culture's repressive tendencies and to uncover and reactivate one's own creative powers (Golomb 1995, pp. 68-69). Authenticity according to Nietzsche[27]:

Is not an inner self somehow occluded by a false, superficial one, but a self you should strive to become. The self-estranged person is not distanced from a self he actually possesses, but from a goal which he should be pursuing. (Nietzsche cited in Cooper 1999, p. 96)

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[27] Nietzsche did not use the term authenticity specifically, however Golomb (1990, p. 243) argues that Nietzsche's use of the term 'Wahrhaftigkeit' is virtually a synonym for the Heideggerian term 'eigenlich' which later became 'authentisch' or 'authentique' in existential literature.

The creation of an authentic self is a uniquely distinctive work with no template or pre-given standards, which Nietzsche expressed in terms of a literary work.

> Just as the novelist aims at integrating incidents and descriptive passages into a coherent and compelling portrayal of character and plot, so the individual strives to integrate aspects of his or her life into a cohesive character and storyline. (Guignon 2004d, p. 131)

Authenticity, for Nietzsche, does not attach itself to fixed values but is determined by impermanence and becoming (Golomb 1990, p. 247; Golomb 1995, p. 82-85). Within the Nietzschean framework authenticity is created, as opposed to being discovered. Becoming does not aim at a final state (Nehamas 1985; Nehamas 2004) as Golomb adds:

> One is now obliged to create values and patterns of behaviour from one's own mental resources. Here I am not just speaking of the disruption of a given ethos and the disintegration of society and authority, but of something far more traumatic: the death of the highest sanction and the absolute guarantee of our values – the death of God. (1995, p. 13)

The route to authenticity also finds expression in our choice of educators and other exemplars (role models) who liberate by making us responsible for our characters.

> (B)y subjecting our intuitive admiration for exemplary figures to intensive self-analysis we come to realize what we value genuinely and who we really are. Only then is the route to re-creation, namely to authenticity, in principle opened to us. (Golomb 1990, p. 246)

Nietzsche's notions of authenticity were distinctive for the period (the late nineteenth century) because he was critical of the more fashionable ideals of the time, which promoted an authenticity by turning in on oneself. The 'inward turn' is based on the idea that authenticity is the recovery of oneness and wholeness that appears to have been lost with the rise of industrialisation and with it man's separation from nature. It is an authenticity that prescribes the discovery of one's 'true self', which can be found buried beneath layers of superficial masks (Golomb 1990, p. 246; Guignon 2004d, p. 51).

Nietzsche was also critical of the pious religious enticement of the time which, like the romantic ideals of authenticity, promoted concepts and practices of 'going within' as the only method of discovering our true relationship with God (Salaquarda 1996). Nietzsche notes:

> One should not embellish or dress up Christianity: it has waged a *war to the death* against this *higher* type of man, it has excommunicated all the fundamental instincts of this type, it has distilled evil, the *Evil One*, out of these instincts – the strong human being as the type of reprehensibility, as the 'outcast'. Christianity has taken the side of everything weak, base, ill-constituted, it has made an ideal out of *opposition* to the preservative instincts of strong life; it has depraved the reason even of the intellectually strongest natures by teaching men to feel the supreme values of intellectuality as sinful, as misleading, as *temptations*. The most deplorable example: the depraving of Pascal (French philosopher), who believed his reason had been depraved by original sin while it had only been depraved by his Christianity. (1895, p. 129)

Nietzsche's work undermined the enlightenment approach to philosophy by claiming that reason and logic alone could never uncover the truth which had always been

thought to hide behind the veils of mystery (Nietzsche 1888). On the contrary, because of his rejection of objective truth, Nietzsche claimed that philosophy and science merely impose a series of endless interpretations (Robinson 1999).

Nietzsche's use of the term 'idol', in one of his final books 'Twilight of the Idols' (1888), refers to the dimming of human values associated with the enlightenment project and the rise of positivist science. Nietzsche's radical questioning of positivism's truth claims became the forerunner to Derrida's (1967) 'deconstruction' and contemporary 'hermeneutics'. Nietzsche's work was also influential in Foucault's (1981) questioning of the relationship between power and knowledge, which Macy (2000, p. 275) argues stems from Nietzsche's notion of the will to power and his belief that what counted as knowledge was simply that which the strongest imposed on everyone else.

3.4.3 The twentieth century existentialists: Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre

Heidegger always considered himself an ontologist[28], however his philosophy is more often labelled 'existential phenomenology'[29] (Richardson 1991, p. 5), a reference he

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[28] Ontology is a branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of Being, to which Heidegger claimed had yet to be determined in any satisfactory way. In his introduction to 'Being and Time' he noted, "Our aim in the following treatise is to work out the question of the meaning of Being and to do so concretely" (Heidegger 1927, p. 1). See Boss (2000, pp. 211-216) for a more detailed and lucid introduction to Heidegger's philosophy of Being.

always resisted (Spinelli 1989, p. 107). Heidegger's main intellectual influences were Soren Kierkegaard, Wilhelm Dilthey, and his teacher and mentor Edmund Husserl (Zimmerman 1981, pp. 11-12; Caputo 1998, pp. 226-227; Loewenthal and Snell 2003, p. 25). A special place must also be reserved for Nietzsche whom Heidegger considered one of the very greatest philosophers of all time (Heidegger 1961; Kaufmann 1975).

Heidegger used the term 'Dasein' to describe existence - 'Da' meaning (t)here) is connected with 'sein' (to be) - literally translated it means 'being (t)here'. In colloquial German the term means 'to be present' or 'to be there', and is usually applied to people rather than inanimate objects (Macy 2000, p. 82).

> This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being, we shall denote the term "Dasein"…Understanding of Being is itself a definitive characteristic of Daseins Being. Dasein is ontologically distinctive in that it is ontological. (Heidegger 1927, p. 7 and 12)

Dasein, Heidegger's philosophy of the self (Zimmerman 1981, pp. 24-31; Levin 1992, p. 150; Gordon 1999b, p. 32), is located not in the mind, but in the unfolding 'happening' or 'event' of life, which develops along the temporal arc of existence

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[29] Phenomenology is generally associated with the scholarship of Edmund Husserl, a German mathematician and philosopher. Heidegger trained under the tutelage of Husserl eventually becoming his assistant. While there is no doubt that Husserl's work had a significant influence on Heidegger's thinking, his approach to phenomenology became radically different (Craig 1988, p. 9).

(Guignon 2004a, p. 120). An individual's identity can only ever be defined and grasped in terms of her or his life-story (Guignon 1993a, pp. 224-225).

> The fact that my life presents itself as a relatively coherent story connecting past accomplishments and projections into the future is what first makes it possible for me to experience, and to attribute to myself, something like personal identity. (Guignon 1998, p. 568)

Dasein springs forth from the choices one makes at any given moment, for this reason Dasein is a self-making, self-constituting being (Guignon 2004a, p. 125). We are, according to Heidegger (1927, p. 192), free to make choices about our being, but not making a choice is impossible; by not choosing we are still making choices about who we are, and our future possibilities. We act with authenticity when we acknowledge the radical freedom of existence and take responsibility for our actions; thus we come to think of our ourselves as transcendent consciousness (also referred to as 'for-itself') as opposed to thinking of ourselves as mere things in the world (referred to as immanence, facticity or 'in-itself') (Heidegger 1927).

Man first of all exists, encounters her/himself, surges up in the world, and defines her/himself afterwards. If Being is not readily definable, it is because to begin with it is nothing (Heidegger 1927, p. 117). It is not anything until later, and then it will be only what it makes of itself. Thus, there is no 'human nature', because there is no God or other higher authority to conceive of it. Being simply is. The absence of a pre-given human nature means that "Dasein's essence is grounded in its existence" (Heidegger 1927, p. 117). The ontological a-priori status of Dasein's existence means

that it must make a resolute commitment to something that gives its life a defining context, it must take an authentic stand on its situation (Guignon 2004a, p. 128).

Intentionality is central to Heidegger's phenomenology because consciousness is always 'intentional'. No consciousness is devoid of an object; there is no existence devoid of a world (Levin 1992, p. 160). Consciousness does not exist outside itself; it comes into existence through context. Without a context, without a world, there is no consciousness. Consciousness is fundamentally and inextricably immersed in its world[30], this fundamental self-world unity is referred to as 'Being-in-the-world', to emphasise the relationship between Being and the physical-temporal space it occupies (Guignon 2004a, p. 123). Dasein is thoroughly enmeshed in a shared life-world so that there is little distinction between either self and world, or self and others (Guignon 2004a, p. 120).

> For Being-in-the-world is never a property of a subjectivity modelled in thought in some way, but it is from the start the existing of the human being itself. (Heidegger 1988, p. 92)

Being-in-the-world means that Dasein constantly appropriates objects and tools without being aware of them as separate entities (Cooper 2003, p. 18). Heidegger (1927, pp. 102-107) makes a distinction between what he termed as the 'ready-to-hand', that is objects that serve a practical purpose (i.e. utilitarian, instrumental, understood within a network) and the 'presence-at-hand', which are encountered in a

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[30] The core of this philosophical notion stems from the famous Hegelian metaphor of the 'master and slave' (Hegel 1807).

mode of detached contemplation or observation. The 'south wind' according to Heidegger (1927, pp. 80-81) is an example of the 'presence-at-hand'; something to contemplate. Dasein lives in a concrete world, a world it tries to control and manipulate because it is in fundamental relationship with its world (Being-in-the-world), its ready-to-hand and presence-at-hand entities, and its 'Being-with-others' (or 'Being-with') (Heidegger 1927, p. 100). Guignon (1993a, p. 234) notes that authentic Dasein, "achieves self-focusing by articulating its existence in terms of the guidelines laid out by certain paradigmatic stories circulating in our cultural world".

> Thus in characterizing the encountering of Others, one is again still oriented by that Dasein which is in each case one's own…By 'Others' we do not mean everyone else but me - those over and against whom the "I" stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does not distinguish oneself - those among whom one is too…Being-with is an existential characteristic of Dasein even when factically no Other is present-at-hand or perceived. (Heidegger 1927, pp. 118-119)

The task of authentic Dasein is to remain 'in-the-world' while willing a life higher than the average 'everydayness'. Guignon adds:

> It is important to keep in mind that authenticity has nothing to do with such romantic ideals as getting in touch with a deeper inner self or rising above the herd…Indeed, since our own life stories are inseparable from the wider text of the shared we-world, authenticity can be nothing other than a fuller and richer form of participation in the public context…Achieving the narrative continuity of authentic existence is what first makes possible personal identity understood as the "constancy of the self" – its "steadiness" and "steadfastness" – stretched out across the life span. (1993a, pp. 228-230)

Van Deurzen (2002, p. 60) adds that authenticity is by no means perfection; instead it is a mode of living where the chaos and contradictions of existence are negotiated in a personal, constructive, and creative manner.

Heidegger, like other existentialists and continental philosophers, was acutely aware of the pervasive alienation infecting modern society (Heidegger 1977; Zimmerman 1981; Burston 1998). He articulated 'falleness' and 'das Man' (or the 'they') to describe this aspect of human reality, which comprises temptation, contentment, disillusionment, disburdening, tranquillizing, and inauthenticity[31] (Heidegger 1927, pp. 126-130). Dasein may be superficially embraced in a 'public world' of idle talk, pseudo-communication, and meaningless relationships that become an all-absorbing preoccupation with the ready-to-hand, under the sway of the they. The they is defined as the public world inhabited by people tranquillised and obsessed with superficiality, vicarious experiences, and fashion.

> We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as 'they' take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as they shrink back; we find 'shocking' what they find 'shocking'. The "they", which is nothing definite, and which all are, though not as the sum, prescribes the kind of Being of everydayness. (Heidegger 1927, p. 127)

'Falleness' (or falling) describes the idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity of the everyday Being under the sway of the they (Heidegger 1927, pp. 175-180).

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[31] Although a major plank of Heidegger's philosophy was his condemnation of the alienating features of modern society, he was still willing to avail himself of the destructive alienation propagated by the National Socialist Party of Germany in the early 1930s (Collins 2000).

Inauthenticity is conceived as having fallen away from one's ownmost Being. Falling is a condition of Dasein because its existence is 'thrown', that is, its coming into the world was not chosen. The world contains things for which Dasein is not responsible and did not choose. The world that Dasein is thrown into is also not of its making. There are many things outside Dasein's control. Yet while Dasein's existence is not freely chosen, there is freedom within existence, there are endless potentialities for choice and responsibility.

> (A)uthentic existence is not something which floats above falling everydayness; existentially, it is only a modified way in which such everydayness is seized upon. (Heidegger 1927, p. 179)

In order to unify Dasein's seemingly fragmented existence, Heidegger proposed the unifying concept of 'care'. Van Deurzen notes:

> It is the very nature of Dasein to care. This means that things matter to us and we cannot help but be concerned and care about what we are. We are the entity for which the very Being that we are is an issue and our relationship, or rather our attitude, our comportment towards our own Being is of foremost importance to what we become. (1999, p. 115)

A major focus of Heidegger's philosophical works was his re-formulation of time and its relationship to Dasein. As Heidegger notes:

> Whenever Dasein tacitly understands and interprets something like Being, it does so with time as its standpoint. Time must be brought to light – and genuinely conceived – the horizon[32] for all understanding of Being and for any way of interpreting it. (1927, p. 17)

Dasein's existence occurs simultaneously through a trinity of past, present, and possible futures (Heidegger 1927, p. 350). Its understanding exists in the past, whether in repetition or in having forgotten. It also projects itself onto its future possibilities - it is always ahead of itself and 'making a present' (Zimmerman 1981, p. 28). Dasein also lives in the present, dealing with daily concerns such as the ready-to-hand and the they - the present then is a process of having been. Time for Dasein, argued Heidegger (1987, p. 43), is not experienced in the traditional sense of something linear, quantifiable, geometric, or measurable - that is a series of successive nows - instead Dasein springs forth along the arc of temporal transcendence, because transcendence constitutes selfhood. The true self is not the self-conscious ego-subject, but temporal transcendence (Zimmerman 1981, p. 28). Guignon elaborates:

> Where inauthentic existence is lost in the dispersal of making-present, an authentic life is lived as a unified flow characterized by cumulativeness and direction. It involves taking over the possibilities made accessible by the past and acting in the present in order to accomplish something for the future. (1993a, p. 230)

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[32] Heidegger referred to the term horizon, not in the English sense of the word but as "something which can neither widen nor go beyond, but which provides the limits for certain intellectual activities performed 'within' it" (Heidegger 1927, p. 18).

In upholding an existential approach to self-identity, Heidegger and the 'Daseinsanalysts' that applied his ontology to psychiatry, psychology and psychotherapy, did away with deterministic explanations (such as those found in psychoanalysis and behaviourism) and replaced them with the idea that one's past is 'formative' as opposed to 'determinative' (Hicklin 1988, p. 131).

The temporal condition of Dasein's existence means that death is its ultimate destination; existence must be performed within this given. Death must be one of Dasein's future projections, something it has to live as part of its present Being. However, in everydayness, death is rarely looked upon or expressed in anyway by the they:

> (I)t is said that 'one dies', because everyone else and oneself can talk himself into saying that "in no case is it I myself", for this "one" is the "nobody". 'Dying' is levelled off to an occurrence, which reaches Dasein, to be sure, but belongs to nobody in particular. If idle talk is always ambiguous, so is the manner of talking about death. Dying which is essentially mine in such a way that no one can be my representative, is perverted into an event of public occurrence which the "they" encounters. (Heidegger 1927, p. 253)

As Heidegger argues, it is far easier to collapse into fallness than to contemplate death, because the they view the contemplation of death as a cowardly fear, a sign of insecurity and a sombre way of fleeing from the world - "The they does not permit us the courage for anxiety in the face of death" (Heidegger 1927, p. 254). Our state of mind in the face of death has already been determined. The they collectively does not

wish to confront or be responsible for its own finitude (Guignon 1993a, p. 229). "What is fitting according to the unuttered decree of the they is indifferent tranquillity as to the fact that one dies. This cultivation of such a superior indifference alienates Dasein" (Heidegger 1927, p. 254). The avoidance of death is particularly pronounced in neurotic, depressed and psychotic individuals, who like the fallen, have already retired from the rich possibilities of existence (Condrau 1988, pp. 114-115). Being-towards-death stimulates one's priorities, because it is a profound acknowledgement of our existence and humanness, which entails, at some point in time, we must die (Farber 1990). An authentic 'Being-towards-death' is projected existentially and becomes a freedom towards death, "a freedom which has been released from the illusions of the they, and which is factical, certain of itself, and anxious" (Heidegger 1927, p. 266).

> Anxiety, for Heidegger, was the mood of the philosopher and thinker, the mood of any individual man or woman who dares to consider, outside the security of intoxicating belief and compliance, what it means to be a human being. (Craig 1988, p. 10)

The existential approach to psychology and psychotherapy, van Deurzen (2002, p. 35) argues, does not attempt to eliminate anxiety but rather encourages people to face it openly and honestly, because to cure an individual's capacity for anxiety would mean curing them of life itself.

Authenticity lies in unifying the existentials[33] of Dasein's Being, by creating coherence, resolution and direction in one's life so that meaning is derived from the way in which events and actions are focused on realizing something as a totality (Guignon 2004a, p. 131). Dasein must also become open and illuminated to its possibilities, as opposed to being closed off and concealed by the everyday averageness of the they. 'Openness' is the recovery of one's freedom by letting the world occur by experiencing the uncanny; or what Heidegger termed the 'not at home', suggesting that existence is a restless condition (Guignon 1993b, p. 222). An open Dasein is freed up then to experience its own inner condition as thrown (Burston 1998, p. 85). Inauthenticity however closes off the possibility of recognizing Dasein's unity.

> Dasein's absorption in the "they" and its absorption in the world of its concern, make manifest something like a fleeing of Dasein in the face of itself – of itself as an authentic potentiality-for-Being-its-Self. (Heidegger 1927, p. 184)

Authenticity arises out the basic condition of falleness, and feelings of anxiety[34], where Dasein experiences itself called into a disturbing awareness of its Being and its existence.

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[33] Existentials include freedom, responsibility, choice, anxiety, throwness, falleness, temporality, historicity, mortality, and Being-in-the-world.

[34] There is an important distinction to be made here between fear and anxiety. When the object of one's fear is removed, say a spider for example, so in theory one's fear disappears. Anxiety on the other hand is 'objectless'. Existential anxiety is a feeling of apprehension, dread, distress and uneasiness

> Being-anxious discloses, primordially and directly, the world as world…Anxiety throws Dasein back upon that which it is anxious about – its authentic potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world. Anxiety individualizes Dasein for its ownmost Being-in-the-world, which is something that understands, projects itself essentially upon possibilities. Therefore, with that which it is anxious about, anxiety discloses Dasein *as Being-possible*, and indeed as the only kind of thing which it can be of its own accord, as something individualized in individualization. (Heidegger 1927, p. 187)

The paradox of authenticity however is a moving away from the they to a requisite estrangement that heralds self-knowledge and self-awareness (Burston 1998, p. 86).

> If Dasein discovers the world in its own way and brings it close, if it discloses itself its own authentic Being, then this discovery of the world and this disclosure of Dasein are always accomplished as a clearing-away of concealments and obscurities, as a breaking up of the disguises with which Dasein bars its own way. (Heidegger 1927, p. 129)

To reject this call to one's authenticity, Heidegger (1927, pp. 295-297) and Hicklin (1988, pp. 138-139) argue, creates feelings of guilt for failing to live up to one's potentialities.

> The existential Interpretation of conscience is to exhibit an attestation of Dasein's ownmost potentiality-for-Being – an attestation which is in Dasein itself. Conscience attests not by

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concerning the intangible qualities of existence; the meaningless, incomplete, contingent and chaotic condition of the world in which we live (Reber and Reber 2001, pp. 42-43).

> making something known in an undifferentiated manner, but by calling forth and summoning us to Being-guilty. (Heidegger 1927, p. 295)

Avoiding existential guilt requires gathering one's existence from its dissipated immersion in the superficial world of the they (overcoming alienation) and individuating one's own-most Being by making choices towards one's possibilities, and remaining attuned to one's obligatory death (Heidegger 1927, p. 311). This, Heidegger suggests, is the basis of an authentic existence. Authenticity may be achieved but never permanently attained, because the self is inevitably immersed in the average everyday, in alienation, and is continuously drawn toward the inauthentic, suggesting that authenticity is inherently transient (Ciaffa 1987; Flynn 1999).

Heidegger's notion of guilt stems from the experience of having wronged oneself, which is distinct from its more traditional meaning of having wronged someone else. From a psychoanalytic perspective, feelings of guilt are said to arise from a sense of anxiety of having wronged others. This is said to develop when the child's unconscious sexual and aggressive feelings conflict with its fear of destroying its source of love and security - its parents (Singh 2000). In contrast "one can be guilty of something without owing anything to someone else, or coming to owe him" (Heidegger 1927, p. 282).

Heidegger's philosophy became highly influential within the sphere of 'Continental philosophy', particularly for the French philosopher, novelist, and playwright Jean-Paul Sartre. In fact Sartre's 'Being and Nothingness' is said to be an extension of

Heidegger's 'Being and Time'[35] (Guignon 2004c). While 'Being and Nothingness' (1943) was Sartre's major work, it was 'Existentialism and Humanism[36]' (1948) that became the most widely read and cited of his writings (Cooper 1999).

The core of Sartre's philosophy, like Heidegger (1927), is that existence precedes essence, that is we must always begin from the subjective. The self is brought into Being through choices to live a certain way; the responsibility for who and what I am is solely a result of my choices (Hatab 1999a, p. 76). Character is not a predetermined set of essential or innate traits, but merely a set of dispositions. Authenticity is constructed rather than discovered because it lies in the created products of consciousness. Furthermore, authenticity is predicated on actions and awareness of the 'absolute contingency' of existence (Golomb 1995, p. 143).

To explain what he meant by 'existence preceding essence' Sartre (1948) analogised the process of an artisan creating a paperknife. The artisan must first have a conception of the paperknife and an understanding of the pre-existing technique of production, which is a part of that conception and is at its most basic level, a formula:

> Thus the paper knife is at the same time an article producible in a certain manner and one which, on the other hand, serves a definite purpose, for one cannot suppose that a man would produce a paper knife without knowing what it was for. Let us say, then, of the paper-knife

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[35] Heidegger is the most commonly cited scholar in 'Being and Nothingness' (Sartre 1943).

[36] 'Existentialism and Humanism' is a transcription of a lecture Sartre gave in Paris at the end of 1945, the aim of which was to defend existentialism against the reproaches of the French Catholic Church, and to a lesser degree the French Communist Party (Sartre 1948, p. 23).

that its essence – that is to say the sum of the formulae and the qualities which made its production and its definition possible – precedes its existence. (Sartre 1948, p. 26)

When we think of God (in the monotheistic tradition of the word) as creator, we think of a supernatural omnipresent Being who conceived of and willed the universe into existence. When God created the universe she/he had a precise conception of what that universe would look like before its creation took place. In this respect, the process undertaken by the artisan who conceived of and then created the paperknife can be likened to God conceiving and then creating the universe. However, in the absence of God:

> There is one Being whose existence comes before its essence, a Being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. That Being is man, or, as Heidegger has it, human reality. What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing – as he wills to be after that leap towards existence. (Sartre 1948, pp. 27-28)

Consciousness then according to Sartre's (1943, pp. 7-12) ontology is not a substance-like thing or essence but an 'act' and an intentional directedness-towards objects. Consciousness has no content of its own; instead its content comes from outside so that it is a projection beyond itself. Human consciousness is unique because it is

conscious of itself; we as humans have the ability to distance ourselves from ourselves, and our own immediate experiences. Due to our inescapable self-awareness (our inescapable consciousness) human beings are always aware of their behaviour and the choices that confront them.

> What is truly unthinkable is passive existence; that is, existence which perpetuates itself without having the force either to produce itself or to preserve itself. From this point of view there is nothing more incomprehensible than the principle of inertia. Indeed where would consciousness "come" from if it did "come" from something. (Sartre 1943, p. 12)

Our ability to imagine what may not be the case means that human beings are condemned to freedom because of their very existence. Existence preceding essence means that human beings are free to be what they adopt, in contrast, the essence of an acorn is to become an oak tree (Sartre 1948).

The human condition, according to Sartre, is a duality comprising of 'Being-in-itself' with immanence, and 'Being-for-itself' with transcendence – the human being "is at once *facticity* and a *transcendence*" (Sartre 1943, p. 80). Being-in-itself refers to the brute physical and temporal qualities of existence, those things that are resistant to change, and which we share with other objects. For example, a person's past constitutes an immanent feature of their existence because it is not possible to change the past in the present. Nevertheless, we are free to reinterpret the past from a new perspective if we so choose. Being-for-itself, in contrast, is characterised by dynamism, a future orientation, and a continual re-definition of the self. "To be a

transcendent Being is to possess freedom, specifically the freedom to change one's situation by drawing upon the future to establish a present that differs from the past (Weiss 1999, pp. 469-470). Sartre adds:

> Man is all the time outside of himself: it is in projecting and losing himself beyond himself that he makes man to exist; and, on the other hand, it is by pursuing transcendent aims that he himself is able to exist. Since man is thus self-surpassing, and can grasp objects only in relation to his self-surpassing, he is himself the heart and centre of his transcendence. There is no other universe except the human universe, the universe of human subjectivity. This relation of transcendence as constitutive of man (not in the sense that God is transcendent, but in the sense of self surpassing) with subjectivity (in such a sense that man is not shut up in himself but forever present in a human universe) – it is this that we call existential humanism. (Sartre 1948, p. 55)

Human beings strive to possess their 'in-itself', however human consciousness does not allow a static existence – human beings are free to change. Our inescapable self-awareness means we can never be completely ourselves; human beings must learn to live with a perpetual self-questioning. Our inescapable self-awareness means that we can only ever 'play' at being ourselves. Human beings can never truly possess the passive tranquillity of 'Being-in-itself' (Sartre 1943, pp. 55-67).

For Sartre (1943; 1948), individual choices define and constitute identity. Actions are not actions of the self; rather the self is a product of action.

> For humans, identity is always something yet to be achieved. To try and escape the endless search for identity by embracing ready made 'identities' is to adopt a *persona*, literally a mask

and a role, with set speeches and patterns of behaviour. The genuinely free master, on the other hand, will experience continual striving and will always be in the process of becoming, never being. She is dynamic, fluid and ever creative, never ceasing to search for greater self-knowledge and self-transparency. She will always strive to become what she chooses to become, regardless of what others expect, demand or invite her to be. (Sartre cited in Golomb 1995, p. 154)

'Bad faith' is the term Sartre used to explain the embrace of ready-made identities. According to Sartre (1943), bad faith is self-deception and denial of one's existential reality, it is a "vacillation between transcendence and facticity which refuses to recognize either one for what it really is" (Sartre 1943, pp. 55-67). Emotional states, Sartre (1939) claims, are constructed by consciousness in order to escape freedom and responsibility, so that a lack of will to carry out life's freely chosen projects is avoided through the creation of fear, boredom, victimization and alienation. Emotions are not psycho-physiological disorders turning us into unwitting recipients. Instead they are a controlled response to our unique interpretation of pleasure and pain; they are intentional actions strategically organized to signal a change in relation between the individual and their world[37] (Sartre 1939).

Human beings choose themselves, and their emotions by committing to freedom and by constructing a coherent narrative that arises out of one's freely chosen actions. To exist without a prior essence means the individual alone is gifted with the capacity to lack elements of self-identity. Through choice, one moves towards fulfilling some

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[37] See Sartre (1939, pp. 41-43) and Heidegger (1987, p. 166) for examples of the internationality of emotions.

degree of wholeness, so the core of the Sartrean self becomes a process of continuous choosing (Sartre 1948, p. 28). However, some choices are made to avoid choices altogether, or to avoid the conditions of existence. For example, choosing to live by the dictates and ideology of organized religion, is a way of avoiding future choices and a method for assuaging the near vertigo or 'nausea' (the taste of facticity and the contingency of existence) that we experience when confronted with the mysteries and paradoxes of existence (Sartre 1938).

The ability to encounter and negotiate existence will depend on the individual's sense of their own, and other people's, reality and identity (Laing 1960, p. 39). If one's sense of self-identity is not securely established then one is unable to derive assurances from a stable existential position. Laing (1960, pp. 39-61) used the term 'ontological insecurity' to describe this chronic experience of differentiation from the rest of the world, by suggesting that it stems from a lack of recognition and acknowledgement of one's self-identity. As Laing notes:

> If the individual cannot take the realness, aliveness, autonomy, and identity of himself and others for granted, then he has to become absorbed in contriving ways of trying to be real, of keeping himself or others alive, of preserving his identity, in efforts, as he will often put it, to prevent himself losing his self. (1960, pp. 42-43)

When an individual is unable to master their life because of an inability to establish a secure sense of self-identity (ontological insecurity) (Laing 1960, p. 39), they respond by constructing psychological defences or barriers (such as bad faith and/or an escape from freedom) in order to protect and immure themselves from the conditions of

existence and its attendant anxiety (Fromm 1941; Yalom 1980). Awareness of authenticity arises out of a reflection on the deeper structures of life, which is often catalysed by experiences where the individual is confronted with the conditions of existence, such as their own or others' impending death, past regrets, guilt concerning unfulfilled potentialities, physical or mental illness, a major irreversible decision, the experience of alienation, and/or the collapse of some fundamental meaning-providing schema (Yalom 1980, p. 8).

Authenticity requires reflection and a coming to terms with the existential polarities of 'separateness' and 'relatedness'. A firm sense of one's own autonomous self-identity is required for authentic relatedness to others and the world. Without an autonomous self-identity, the individual comes to fear the complete loss of being in their relationships through the ever present potential for depersonalisation and objectification by the other (Laing 1960, p. 44). Like Heidegger, Sartre's authenticity is a balance between separateness and relatedness, so that a clearer interdependent sense of self-identity and reality emerges. Authenticity develops out of an objective transformation of one's self-identity through insight and reflection on the conditions of existence, yet an overindulgence in reflection and introspection can act to poison the self and degenerate into solipsism (Golomb 1995, pp. 136-137).

> (P)henomenological studies make it clear that we cannot create our selves by looking inward into our seemingly given selves, by indulging in emotions or by imagining. Only by action, by changing the world, can the self be created. (Golomb 1995, p. 140)

In order to be human, Sartre (1948) claims, each individual needs to become responsible for humanity as a whole, so that authenticity is defined in part by an activist stance towards the world. Authenticity arises out of a commitment and engagement to political action ensuring the social and cultural conditions that provide opportunities for authentic self-expression. In keeping with his existential beliefs, Sartre (1948) did not set out to produce a set of ethical norms, or an overarching political manifesto to complement these ideas. His view of history, like Heidegger's (1927), emphasises the unique concrete historical situation to which human existence is thrown, thus undermining the universality of guiding political or religious ideologies[38]. Instead, Sartre's (1948) ideas of political engagement were based on a conscious decision to involve oneself in history, rather than evade it, and to sum up each historical situation on its own merits, and to assume social and political responsibility through action.

3.5 Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to explore the philosophies of self-identity within the context of existentialism, in order to provide a foundation for a new and alternative interpretation of epiphanies to be carried out later in this inquiry. My review of Kierkegaard (1842; 1843; 1845; 1846; 1849; 1854), Nietzsche (1888; 1892; 1895), Heidegger (1927; 1961; 1977; 1987; 1988), Sartre (1938; 1939; 1943; 1948; 1960)

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[38] Sartre's views on history and political philosophy were later complicated with the publication of 'Critique of Dialectical Reason' (1960) in which he attempted to systematically combine existentialism with Marxism.

and other key allied existential psychologists and psychotherapists (Fromm 1941; Laing 1960; Maslow 1968; Boss 1979; Yalom 1980; 1982; Condrau 1988; Spinelli 1989; van Deurzen 1995; 1996; 1999; 2002), sought to focus on the main areas of similarity that connect their ideas to the concept of epiphanies. With this in mind, I would now like to summarise by outlining the various commonalities in their work in order to develop a range of interpretative themes to be used in Chapter Seven.

Existentialism sought to critique the objectivist standards of truth that stemmed from Descartes' subject–object split and the enlightenment emphasis on pure dispassionate reasoning. Traditional Western philosophical systems viewed self-identity as a relatively fixed or internally derived substance that one is born with. The existentialists challenged this view by positing a reflexive interactive self-identity that exists in a constant state of impermanence. Existentialism undermines the traditional separation between a unitary bounded self-identity and its world, positing instead a self-identity that is thoroughly enmeshed in a shared life-world (Being-in-the-world), where it is not possible to draw a line between self-identity and world or self-identity and Other.

The existentialists dismiss notions of human nature, referring instead to conditions of humanness, which are not composed of essences but are instead grounded in existence. This non-determinative worldview means that one is entirely responsible for oneself. Each person is duty-bound to define their own self-identity, which is created through choice, and the totality of one's actions. In this sense self-identity is a task or vocation; growth or self-overcoming arises out of the conditions of freedom so

that self-identity is a verb-like happening or event that is defined in terms of an ongoing life-story.

Authenticity lies at the heart of existential notions of self-identity as it denotes the process of overcoming the alienating elements of the modern world. It is impossible to achieve a permanent state of authenticity; instead, authenticity is akin to an ongoing dialogue between inauthentic and authentic modes of existence. Awareness of authentic modes of existence arise from a reflection on the contrasting mode of inauthenticity, which is representative of psychological defences and barriers that seek to protect and immure against the conditions of existence.

Inauthenticity is most powerfully called into consciousness when one is forced to face the realities of existence, such as freedom, death, illness, purpose and meaning. This encounter has the potential to spark a dynamic dialogue between inauthentic and authentic modes of self-identity. Change and growth are characterised by openness, manifested by the renewal and reaffirmation of one's past while simultaneously projecting oneself and one's possibilities into the future. The temporal condition of existence means that death is life's ultimate destination, stimulating a healthy anxiety concerning one's own finitude. Feelings of guilt arise when one rejects this call to one's authenticity, and awareness of one's ultimate destination, for failing to live up to one's potentialities.

Immersion in the world (Being-in-the-world) means that it is impossible to avoid the conditions of alienation, however it is one's approach to the alienating elements of

modernity that enable one to occasionally rise above it. The authentic-self, it is suggested, is located somewhere between the individual and their world; it is a balance between Being-in-the-world and an ongoing reflection on one's consciousness. Authenticity is not a departure from social life but a process of individuation and relatedness that allows one to freely express oneself in the social milieu. Authenticity is characterised by eschewing the sense of potency one might derive from dogmatic ideologies and socio-cultural conformity, by locating the source of one's own power without the need to objectify and manipulate the Other. The process of self-identity requires the creation of meaning that brings purpose to one's life. One's life-story is given coherence in a chaotic meaningless world by following a path or mission that one freely chooses to pursue.

So how then might these ideas relate to epiphanies? An initial analysis would suggest that an individual's encounter with the conditions of existence has the potential to spark a dynamic dialogue between inauthentic and authentic modes of existence. This dialogue, it is speculated, has the potential to spark an epiphanic transformation; a process that would function in much the same way that Kierkegaard (1845; 1849) has described in the movement between his various realms of self-hood, for example, movement from the aesthetic to the ethical and religious realms. Kierkegaard (1845; 1849) claimed that feelings of general alienation turn into explosive despair and a near derangement of the senses, which is resolved by a choice to make a leap of faith toward a higher more authentic existence.

With the development of a set of core epiphanic characteristics, and a range of interpretative themes based on the philosophies of self-identity within the context of existentialism, I will now set out a program for collecting and analysing actual epiphanies from a group of research participants.

CHAPTER FOUR – NARRATIVE INQUIRY

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical, philosophical and methodological basis for collecting and analysing research participants' self identified epiphanies. The chapter opens with a discussion on existentialism and its links with modern hermeneutics and narrative psychology. Allied to narrative psychology is the research methodology of narrative inquiry, which is a type of qualitative research designed to collect, analyse and contextualise human stories.

Narrative inquiry seeks to understand an individual's experience of their life and the significant events that have shaped it – thus its relevance to an investigation of epiphanies. It is argued that an in-depth understanding of epiphanies can only be achieved by obtaining an account of the participant's life history, and with it their unfolding sense of self-identity and the preceding factors that contributed to their transformations.

After discussing the links between existentialism, hermeneutics and narrative psychology, the process of narrative inquiry is introduced. This is followed by an outline of its various components, which include narrative interviewing and sampling, the reading, analysing and interpretation of narrative text, the application of criteria to assess the quality of qualitative research, and a discussion on ethical issues as they relate to narrative research.

The final section of this chapter outlines how the data for this inquiry was collected and analysed. It includes discussions on participant recruitment, the development and use of interview guidelines, the carrying out of interviews, data analysis, the implementation of guidelines to ensure quality in the research process, and a discussion on the strengths and limitations of a narrative approach to methodology.

4.2 Existentialism, Hermeneutics And Narrative Psychology

Existentialism set out to deconstruct claims to privileged scientific knowledge and objectivity, which involved a move away from any attempt to delineate universal truths or principles (Mirvish 1999, p. 126). For example, Kierkegaard (1854) was critical of objectivist standards of truth because of the manner in which they reasoned meaning out of the universe. Nietzsche (1888) alluded to a hermeneutically orientated approach to the production of knowledge by claiming that enlightenment science, far from uncovering any standard of truth, simply imposed an endless series of interpretations.

Heidegger similarly undermined positivist approaches to the theory of knowledge via his hermeneutic approach to phenomenology (Askay 1987; Richardson 1991). The term hermeneutics is said to derive from the Greek god 'Hermes' who "practiced the revelation of divine messages, so hermeneutic thinkers and philosophers practice the discovery and exposition of original meanings" (Craig 1988, pp. 19-20). Along with Heidegger (1927), the development of modern hermeneutics is credited to the scholarship of Wilhelm Dilthey (1887), Hans-Georg Gadamer (1960) and Paul Ricoeur (1969) (cited in Critchley and Schroeder 1999). The upsurge of interest in

hermeneutics at the end of the nineteenth century Guignon (2002, p. 84) argues, was less a matter of developing techniques for interpretation and "more an ontological inquiry into the being of those entities that understand and interpret, that is human beings".

Hermeneutics appealed to Heidegger's (1927, pp. 95-101) ontological inquiries because he believed that Cartesian philosophies of being were defective[39]. Heidegger notes:

> (D)oes this ontology (Cartesian ontology) of the 'world' seek the phenomenon of the world at all, and if not, does it at least define some entity within-the-world fully enough so that the worldly character of this entity can be made visible in it? To both questions we must answer "No". (1927, p. 95)

Heidegger's (1927, pp. 95-101) rejection of Cartesian philosophy prompted him to outline an ontology that sought to access entities in-the-world. "Being-in-the-world must be exhibited even more precisely with regard to knowing the world, and must itself be made visible as an existential 'modality' of Being-in" (Heidegger 1927, p. 59). Heidegger argued that Dasein must be allowed to 'speak for itself' (Boss 2000, p. 211) because human beings create meaning in their world through interpretative sense-making (Guignon 2002, p. 84). Dasein is philosophically constructed as a hermeneutic entity because it discloses its being to the world through interpretation and understanding (Ashworth 2003, p. 20). Zimmerman notes:

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[39] See Richardson (1991) for an expanded discussion on Heidegger's refutation of Cartesian ontology.

We are always in the process of redefining ourselves in light of fresh insights which reveal the limitations of our previous self-understanding. The real subject then, is not the wordless and abstract ego which lives outside of time and change, but the concrete, historically situated, living human being who is always engaged in trying to give meaning to his own life. (Zimmerman 1981, p. 10)

Heidegger eschewed the search for universal theories, advocating instead an understanding of Being from an interpretative ready-to-hand fashion. When Dasein speaks for itself it becomes attuned to the temporal condition of existence and its ultimate finitude (Mirvish 1999, p. 128). Guignon notes:

Heidegger's conception of life as embodying a distinctive temporal structure confirms the view, found in a number of studies, that life has a narrative structure before there is any explicit attempt to put that life into the form of a story. (1998, p. 568)

Consequently, Dasein is thrown into a social, cultural and linguistic context:

Being-in-the-world implies that, instead of trying to gain an objective point of view, a true understanding of Being will involve the recognition of constraints; Dasein operates with perspectives from which it is not possible to completely extricate itself. (Mirvish 1999, p. 128)

Polkinghorne (1988, pp. 125-155) weaved these existential and hermeneutic themes together by linking them to a narrative construction of reality. He argues that the philosophical basis of narrative inquiry is its view of self-identity as an interpretative,

temporal, social, cultural and linguistic Being. This view of human existence is an ongoing process of creating meaning, which is ordered and expressed according to linguistic characteristics. "Thus being human is more a type of meaning-generating activity than a kind of object" (Polkinghorne 1988, p. 126). Therefore, human existence Guignon adds is:

> Understood as a "happening" that unfolds throughout a lifetime, a person's identity can be grasped only in terms of his or her life story as a whole. The temporal unfolding of life, as Ricoeur has pointed out, has the structure of a narrative. (1993a, pp. 224-225)

The experience and interpretation of time is a fundamental of human existence, "narrative is able to structure and organize time according to hermeneutic principles and to present time through multiple levels of interpretation" (Polkinghorne 1988, pp. 126-127); a notion originally conceived by Heidegger (1927, p. 401) as an interacting trinity of past, present and future. Human beings use their social, cultural and linguistic domains to understand themselves, others, and the world as meaningful; as well as retrieving stories that provide models for how actions and consequences are linked (Polkinghorne 1988, p. 135). "Narrative is the discourse structure in which human action receives its form and through which it is meaningful" (Polkinghorne 1988, p. 135).

The idea that self-identity functions as an unfolding narrative or story, is consistent with existential notions because both reject ideas of fixedness and permanence. Self-identity, from an existential perspective, is created rather than something we are born with; it is a task or vocation one pursues, something which is co-constitutionally

defined by one's social and cultural context (Golomb 1995, p. 11; Spinelli 1996, p. 59; Rogers 1999, p. 407; Guignon 2002, p. 96; Guignon 2004a, p. 125). The rejection of fixedness and permanence means that it is impossible to objectively measure self-identity via traditional positivist methods. Instead, self-identity is understood as the expression of a single unfolding story (Polkinghorne 1988, p. 150). Polkinghorne notes:

> If the unity and uniqueness of the self is achieved through the process of narrativity and if one conceives of one's particular existence as a special story and not as a physical or mental thing, then more adequate, hermeneutically oriented research tools will be needed to study personal identity. (1988, p. 151)

Various forms of inquiry (or approaches to methodology) were developed from modern hermeneutic philosophy and the linguistic and discursive turn in the social sciences[40]. The hermeneutic and discursive approach covers researchers whose perspectives include phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, social constructionism, feminism and narrative psychology (Josselson and Lieblich 2001; Ashworth 2003). Narrative psychology itself arose out of three seminal publications: Kenneth and Mary Gergen's (1984) 'The Social Construction of Narrative Accounts', Theodore Sarbin's (1986) 'Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human

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[40]The linguistic and discursive turn in the social sciences defines the movement within twentieth century philosophy that leads to the conclusion that language, or discourse, represents the limit to philosophical investigations into truth. The movement was popularised through the work of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Richard Rorty (Macy 2000, p. 231).

Conduct' and Donald Polkinghorne's (1988) 'Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences' (cited in Murray 2003a, p. 111-112).

Narrative psychology is based on three main tenets:

1. The centrality of stories as a type of meaning-generating activity.

2. Stories facilitate an awareness and understanding of self-identity.

3. Human existence is storied in nature - reality is viewed as a narrative construction (Ricoeur 1984; Sarbin 1986; Bruner 1987; Polkinghorne 1988; Bruner 1991; McAdams 1993).

Allied to narrative psychology is the research practice of narrative inquiry, which can be any type of inquiry that uses or analyses narrative materials. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber note:

> The data can be collected as a story (a life story provided in an interview or a literary work) or in a different manner (field notes of an anthropologist who writes up his or her observations as a narrative or in personal letters). It can be the object of the research or a means for the inquiry of another question. (1998, p. 2)

4.3 The Process Of Narrative Inquiry

4.3.1 Introduction

Narrative inquiry is a type of qualitative research designed to collect, analyse and contextualise human stories; in essence it seeks to explore an individual's experience of their life. Narrative inquiry is most commonly used as a tool for understanding the multidimensional process of self-identity. As Lieblich et al. (1998, p. 168) note, "people create stories out of the building blocks of their life histories and culture, and at the same time…these stories construct their lives, provide them with meaning and goals, and tie them to their culture". Murray (2003b) adds that human identity is shaped by the stories we tell ourselves and others about our lives. Through narrative and the story telling process, we begin to "understand our changing identities and our ways of interpreting the world" (Murray 2003b, p. 110). For example Josselson's (1987; 1996b) studies on identity development in women, McAdams' (1985; 1987; 1990; 1993; 1996) studies on personality and personal myth-making, Singers' (2001) work on the self and drug addiction, and Gergen and Gergen's (1988) theory of the relational-self.

Narrative inquiry has also been successfully employed to interpret the process of change and transformation in an individual's life through the process of psychotherapy and counselling (Tantam 2002), self, identity and personality change (McAdams 1985; Lieblich and Josselson 1994; 1994; Polkinghorne 1996), abusive relationships (Riessman 1992), and significant transitions and turning points over the life-span (McAdams et al. 2001).

In an attempt to understand an individual's experience of their life, narrative inquiry seeks to adopt a discursive approach to analysis (McLeod 2001, p. 104), that is it focuses on the role of language and meaning as constructed through social discourse (Josselson 1995, p. 32; McLeod 2001, p. 99; Willig 2003, p. 159). A common theme with all stories is that they are offered in the natural language of the storyteller leaving them free to construct their life.

Josselson and Lieblich (2001, p. 278) suggest there are two main types of approaches or ends of a continuum the narrative researcher can lean toward. At one end is an emphasis on the way in which language organizes both thought and experience, so that various linguistic modes and structure become the overriding focus (see for example Labov 1972a). The other end of the continuum recognizes the shaping function of language, yet treats it as transparent because the focus is more on the content of meanings that are created out of life events. Given the importance of significant life events to the epiphanic phenomenon, collection of the research participants' life stories will lean toward the latter end of this continuum.

4.3.2 Narrative interviews and sampling

The primary source of material for narrative inquiry is the interview. The purpose of narrative interviewing is to allow the research participant to provide an in-depth narrative account of a particular experience, or their life-story (the most extended version of the personal narrative). Narrative interviews place the participant in a position of control by allowing them to shape and control the interview agenda. The task for the researcher is to shift the responsibility of the interview back to the

participant (Chase 1995, p. 3). At the outset, the researcher will explain to the participant the purpose of the inquiry - which is to learn about the person's life (Murray 2003a, pp. 117-119).

The main difference between standard in-depth interviewing and narrative interviewing is the questioning process and the types of responses elicited. Standard interview questions invite 'reports' whereas narrative interviews invite 'stories'. In an inquiry into women's experiences in a male dominated profession, Chase (1995) discovered through the interviewing process that her participants were providing her with reports in response to her questioning. These report-style replies Chase (1995, p. 5) notes, meant the "burden of interpreting the significance of her response rested with me, the one who asked for it in the first place". Chase's (1995, p. 8) style of interviewing and questioning (the standard approach to in-depth interviewing) did not invite her participants to take responsibility for their answers because the weight of questioning lay in the sociological ideas under investigation. In contrast the elicitation of a life-story, Chase (1995, p. 20) notes, embodies "what we need to inquire: the relation between this instance of social action (this particular life story) and the social world the narrator shares with others".

To effect a successful narrative interview the participant needs to feel the researcher is interested in their narrative accounts, that their stories are deeply valued (Murray 2003b, p. 102). Empathic attunement on the part of the researcher should create a sense of the interview as an 'encounter' in which the listener accepts the story with complete respect and refrains from judging or evaluating it (Josselson and Lieblich

2001, p. 281). Empathy, Josselson (1995) and Josselson and Lieblich (2001) argue, is grounded in the hermeneutic tradition because it "affords the possibility of interpreting others who themselves are engaged in the process of interpreting themselves" (Josselson and Lieblich 2001, p. 281).

As previously mentioned there are two main types of narrative interview, the 'life-story interview', and the narrative account of a particular experience referred to as the 'episodic interview' (Murray 2003b, pp. 103-104). The point of the life-story interview is to elicit an in-depth biographical inquiry of the participant's experience of life so far. It should provide ample opportunity for the narrator to cast a wide narrative net over a chronological sequence of events (Murray 2003b, p. 103). Herman offers a sample guide to how the researcher might begin the life-story interview:

> I want to ask you to tell me how the story of your life occurred. The best way to do this would be for you to start from your birth, with the little child that you once were, and then tell all the things that happened one after the other until today. You can take your time in doing this, and also give details, because for me everything is of interest that is important to you. (cited in Flick 2002, p. 98)

As a part of the active listening process, Murray (2003a, pp. 117-118) suggests the researcher should closely reflect on the participant's story and introduce supplementary questions designed to obtain clarification. This provides the participant with an opportunity for greater reflection on particular elements/experiences in their life-story, as well as providing the researcher with greater depth and understanding.

Fundamental to the process of collecting narrative accounts is the issue of reflexivity. This concerns the researcher's role in co-creating the narrative account through the dialogical act of conducting an interview (Lieblich et al. 1998, p. 166; Murray 2003b, pp. 102-103). Mishler (1986) suggests the joint construction of meaning develops through the mutual reformulation and specification of questions.

> Rather than serving as a stimulus, having a predetermined and presumably shared meaning and intention to elicit a response, a question may more usefully be thought of as part of a circular process through which its meaning and that of its answer are created in the discourse between interviewer and respondent as they try to make continuing sense of what they are saying to each other. (Mishler 1986, p. 54)

Researcher-participant bias and interpretation is created from the very beginning of the interview process. Bias occurs in the first instance by simply being together in the same room, through the stating of the purpose of the interview and through the asking of questions and relating to responses (Lieblich et al. 1998, p. 166; Flick 2002, p. 103-104). The context of the narrative interview may also create a false degree of coherence. Western ideas of a life-lived are often expressed in a linear fashion that may be seen to inhibit some participants from providing an extended life-story. The narrative interview may also emphasise the central role of the narrator to the neglect of all others. The self-centred focus in narrative interviewing can be overcome by encouraging the narrator to reflect upon and comment on the roles of others in their various experiences (Murray 2003b, p. 104). In this respect the researcher is looking to encourage the narrator to articulate the relational and contextual construction of their life and experiences (Gergen 1999).

In terms of sampling, the general aim of qualitative research is not to find some form of representation in the wider population or to increase generalization (Smith and Osborn 2003, p. 54; Parker 2004, p. 99). Instead the aim of qualitative research is to develop an emerging theory, or to provide a new and challenging perspective that opens up new ways of understanding a topic (Yardley 2000; Charmaz 2003). Therefore, qualitative studies usually employ 'purposive' or 'theoretical' sampling'[41], that is a sample for whom the research question will be significant (Charmaz 2003; Smith and Osborn 2003).

Sample size, Smith and Osborn (2003, p. 54) argue, will depend on several factors including, the degree of commitment to the case level of analysis and reporting, the richness of the individual cases, and the constraints one is operating under. In research using interpretative phenomenological analysis (a type of qualitative research) studies have been published with samples of one, four, nine and fifteen research participants. Smith and Osborn (2003, pp. 54-55) suggest that as a rough guide, in studies that aim to understand subjective experience, five or six research participants is a reasonable sample size. Smith and Osborn (2003) argue that five or six cases will provide enough similarities as well as differences, while avoiding the risk of being overwhelmed with data.

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[41] The idea of purposive or theoretical sampling stems out of 'grounded theory' and 'interpretative phenomenological analysis', although these procedures are often used in all types of qualitative research (Charmaz 2003, p. 104; Smith and Osborn 2003, p. 54).

4.3.3 Narrative analysis

There are a variety of methods and models for reading, analysing and interpreting narrative text. For example Riessman's (1993; 2002) 'poetic structures and meaning', Labov's (1972a; 1972b) 'sociolinguistics', Polkinghorne's (1988) 'description and explanation', Frye's (1957) 'literary criticism' and McAdams (1985; 1990; 1993) 'life story theory of identity'. Selection of any one analytic model will ultimately depend upon the phenomenon under investigation and the concomitant research objectives. Therefore I have chosen to use Lieblich's et al. (1998) 'narrative analysis matrix' because of its simplicity and its ability to meet the objectives of this inquiry.

According Lieblich et al. (1998, p. 12) life stories and other narrative material may be analysed along two independent dimensions, (1) 'holistic', and (2) 'categorical'. Dimension (1) refers to the narrative as a whole in terms of its overall plot or structure (holistic). Dimension (2) refers to a word, sentence or paragraph abstracted from the text to highlight a particular unit of meaning induced or deduced by the researcher (categorical) (Lieblich et al. 1998, p. 12). Lieblich et al. explains:

> In working from a categorical perspective, as in traditional content analysis, the original story is dissected, and sections or single words belonging to a defined category are collected from the entire story or from several texts belonging to a number of narrators. In contrast, in the holistic approach, the life story of a person is taken as a whole, and sections of the text are interpreted in the context of other parts of the narrative. (1998, p. 12)

Deciding on whether to employ a 'holistic' or 'categorical' dimension to the analysis process is not necessarily an either/or question. In fact combining both dimensions to the analysis of a single phenomenon counters the potential for analytical dichotomization (Lieblich et al. 1998, p. 169), and allows the researcher to develop multi-layered interpretations by returning to the data to carry out multiple analyses of different aspects of the topic (Camic, Rhodes and Yardley 2003, p. 9).

The aim of holistic analysis is to uncover the manner in which stories vary in their 'structure' as much as their content. Holistic analysis seeks to explore the expression of self-identity, perceptions, and the storyteller's values by analysing the narrative as a whole by seeking to understand its plot and structure. "Analysing the structure of a story will therefore reveal the individual's personal construction of his or her evolving life experience" (Lieblich et al. 1998, p. 88). The holistic approach is a method of structural analysis that targets the individual's life-course (Lieblich et al. 1998, pp. 89-102).

The first phase of holistic analysis is to carefully read the interview transcripts and to look for emergent themes over the individual's life, for example, indicators of change or development in basic assumptions, values, philosophies, social skills, independence and relative changes or permanence in self-identity. The analytical emphasis is not on the identification of the thematic foci of the narrative, but rather the particular course the development takes (Lieblich et al. 1998, p. 91).

The second phase of holistic analysis is to identify the dynamics of plot, which Lieblich et al. (1998, p. 91) notes may be inferred from the narrator's language through tone, emotion and wording. An example of this could be a particular emphasis on evaluative comments about the narrator's life as a whole. The researcher may also wish to query why the narrator brought to a close a particular stage of the life-story, or they may use terms themselves that articulate the structural aspects of the story as a whole by referring to terms or phrases such as crossroads, turning points, epiphanies, watersheds, changes of direction, life-course, route, progress, growth, stuck, downward spiral, rock bottom, depression, turmoil, nadir, adversity and obstacles (Lieblich et al. 1998, p. 91).

In contrast to the holistic dimension of analysis is the categorical approach which is used to make inferences from verbal, symbolic, or communicative data (Lieblich et al. 1998, p. 12). Krippendorff (1980, p. 21) defines categorical analysis as, "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context". Categorically analysing qualitative data involves identifying and evaluating items that appear to be theoretically important and meaningful, and relating them to the central objectives or questions of the inquiry (Sarantakos 1998, pp. 280-285). The process involves reducing the data through integration and generalisation, and then classifying the data into pre-assigned categories, or developing categories from the process itself.

To ensure the development of reliable categories, other researchers are recruited to test the original designations, a process known as 'inter-coder reliability'. The inter-coder analyst is given samples of relevant text and asked to define the categories and

to select the recording units independently. If there is substantial agreement between the categories identified by the researcher and other experts, then the reliability of the categories is considered to be satisfactory (Krippendorff 1980).

4.3.4 Grounding narrative inquiry

Validity refers to the capacity of a measure to accurately capture or reflect some characteristic of objective reality (McLeod 2001, p. 182). However, the term is regarded as an inappropriate criterion for qualitative research because it is historically viewed as being statistically driven and at odds with the discursive approach that qualitative methods seek to undertake (Eisner 2003, p. 25). The debate concerning what constitutes validity in qualitative psychological research is far from straightforward because it is not possible to apply 'quality criteria' in any kind of automatic fashion in the same way as quantitative approaches (Lieblich et al. 1998; Yardley 2000; Barbour 2001; McLeod 2001; Riessman 2002; Eisner 2003). The reasons for this, McLeod (2001, p. 182) notes, are twofold. Firstly, qualitative researchers are influenced by constructivism, social constructionism and hermeneutics – approaches to knowledge production that are based on the principle that there is no fixed or knowable reality; secondly, even if a fixed and knowable reality were to exist the signs that are used to signify this reality are words, which are open to a greater degree of interpretation and meaning than numbers.

Nevertheless, Elliott, Fischer and Rennie (1999), Barbour (2001) and Yardley (2000) have outlined a set of general guidelines for assessing the quality of qualitative research. While it is impossible to dispute McLeod's (2001) arguments concerning the

philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research, this should not dissuade the researcher from attempting to undertake some form of quality control when using qualitative methods. As Yardley (2000, p. 219) argues, "it makes no sense to engage in a process of analysis and then deny that it has any validity!".

Yardley (2000) suggests that qualitative research may be evaluated by applying four main criteria, 'sensitivity to context', 'commitment and rigour', 'transparency and coherence', and 'impact and importance'. The general thrust of these four criteria are also reflected in Riessman (2002, pp. 256-262) and Lieblich's et al. (1998, pp. 171-174) various approaches to validating narrative inquiries. To ensure sensitivity to context, Yardley (2000, p. 220) stresses an extensive grounding in the philosophical and intellectual tradition of the topic and/or approach under investigation. A thorough philosophical understanding provides the basis upon which to explore the myriad perspectives and complex arguments that may be brought to bear on a chosen phenomenon, as well as facilitating a more profound and far-reaching analysis. Commitment and rigour refers to the adequacy of the sample, "not in terms of size but in terms of its ability to supply all of the information needed for a comprehensive analysis" (Yardley 2000, p. 221). Transparency and coherence relates to the persuasiveness of the inquiry's arguments (Yardley 2000, p. 222). The function of narrative inquiry is to construct a version of reality; therefore the story needs to be convincing, as well as resulting in greater comprehension and insight regarding the reader's own life (Lieblich et al. 1998, p. 173). Coherence on the other hand "describes the 'fit' between the research question and the philosophical perspective adopted, and the method of investigation and analysis undertaken" (Yardley 2000, p.

222). Lieblich et al. (1998, p. 173) suggests that coherence in narrative studies can be evaluated in terms of how the researcher's interpretations are related to existing theories and previous research.

Lastly, any inquiry must be judged upon its impact and utility, in other words its ability to become the basis for others' work (Riessman 2002, p. 260). This argument suggests that qualitative studies make their greatest impact when, "they draw on empirical material to present a novel, challenging perspective, which opens up new ways of understanding a topic" (Yardley 2000, p. 223). In contrast, quantitative studies make their greatest impact when they present empirical data that is representative of the population as whole, reliable in the sense that it uses a dependable measuring device, is replicable, and goes some way to explaining, as opposed to interpreting, human behaviour (Mishler 1986, p. 108).

An omission so far from the discussion on validity in qualitative research is 'consensual validation' (Eisner 2003, p. 26), which has been variously termed 'correspondence' (Riessman 2002, pp. 258-259) 'respondent validation' (Barbour 2001, p. 1117), 'verification' (Kvale 1996, p. 111) and 'participant involvement' (Murray 2003a, p. 130). The basis for consensual validation is to provide the narrator (the research participant) with the opportunity to cross check the preliminary analysis and research findings produced by the researcher. Such a process has many positive benefits, yet it also has the potential to throw up a number of problems as well. McLeod (2001, p. 187) notes that follow-up interviews are not always easy to obtain, and that some research participants will be over-impressed by the authority of what

has been written by the researcher, inhibiting the expression of doubt and criticism. Other research participants may disagree yet remain silent out of politeness, while others may be explicit about their disagreements for reasons other than scientific validity.

Another element of validation, in this case independent validation, is the process of 'inter-coder reliability' and 'credibility checks'. In terms of inter-coder reliability, theoretical or other themed categories are initially developed by the researcher to which independent judges make an evaluation of the coding decisions (Lombard, Snyder-Duch and Bracken 2002, p. 587). Credibility checks (Elliott et al. 1999, p. 222) on the other hand are also carried out by independent judges who make an evaluation of analysed material, in this case material other than coding scripts. For example, an independent expert in the topic under investigation would be recruited to look over interview transcripts or other source materials to review the analysis that has so far been carried out by the researcher. The independent expert would suggest corrections and elaborations to the original analysis based on their particular knowledge and experience in the field (Elliott et al. 1999, p. 222).

However, like research participant involvement, the qualitative researcher needs to be aware that inter-coder and credibility checks do not ensure a process of full proof quality, regardless of the credentials of the independent judges. As Bloor (cited in McLeod 2001, p. 188) notes, validation techniques are not tests, but opportunities for reflexive elaboration. McLeod (2001, p. 189) adds by arguing that instead of having one person in agreement with themed categories and/or the analysis of a life-story, the

increase of two or possibly three independent judges is hardly a major increase in validity. Yet a collaborative approach to the development of categories and/or a wider agreement on the content and analysis of a life-story for example, no matter how small, is surely preferable to the researcher working in total isolation.

4.3.5 Ethics and process in narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry raises a number of ethical issues that are summed up by this quote from Bakan:

> (The) misgiving is that narrative inquiry, based on the real lives of people made public, converts what is private into public; can violate privacy; and can cause mental, legal, social, and financial hurt and harm. (1996, p. 3)

The use of an individuals' life-story places the participant in a vulnerable position, more so than other qualitative methods (Chase 1996, p. 46). Therefore the narrative researcher needs to be aware that ethical decisions arise at every stage of the process. In light of these ethical challenges, Kvale (1996, p. 111) developed a useful set of guidelines that comprise seven main elements that include, 'thematizing', 'designing', the 'interview situation', 'transcription', 'analysis', 'verification' and 'reporting'.

Thematizing relates to the principle that the research interview should go beyond scientific exploration and improve the life of the interviewee and the human situation under investigation. Design refers to informed consent and confidentiality as well as being aware that the interview situation has the potential to place stress on the interviewee, and that it might result in changes to self-image (Kvale 1996, p. 111). In

this sense the research interview often functions as a type of therapy for the participant, a claim echoed by Josselson (1996a). Transcription emphasises the need for accuracy in relation to the interviewee's oral statements, while analysis raises questions concerning the degree to which a researcher should and could interrogate an interviewee's life-story. For the narrative inquirer this issue focuses on the types of interpretations applied to the narrator's life. The researcher needs to pay special attention to their own interpretative authority and remain sensitive to the effect that this might have on the narrator's life (Chase 1996, pp. 45-47).

Verification, like consensual validation, requires the researcher to report only information that has been properly verified by the participant (Kvale 1996, p. 111). Kvale also raises the thorny issue of publishing, in part or whole, a respondent's life-story (Kvale 1996, p. 111). Using Freud's patient reports as a model, Bakan (1996, p. 6-7) suggests that publication of a participant's interview, if required, can be guaranteed greater confidentiality and privacy if the researcher uses an individual's case to illuminate the general, instead of the specific. Bakan (1996) suggests that this can be achieved by employing a certain deliberate looseness and fiction (over and above the use of a pseudonym) that can be used when publishing a narrator's story, which still communicates a valuable set of understandings of people generally, without divulging specific details of the narrator's life.

Lastly, ethical guidelines should be judged according to their relevance to a specified situation and context because codes and theories will seldom provide definite answers for the researcher (Kvale 1996, p. 110). Josselson (1996a) adds that guidelines should

be interpreted, rather than simply applied. The overriding aim in debates and discussions concerning ethics in a narrative inquiry is to raise awareness around the potential vulnerabilities of research participants, rather than providing a set of prescriptive rules that should govern each and every element of a narrative inquiry.

4.4 Procedures

4.4.1 Participant recruitment

The aim of this inquiry is to understand sudden, significant and transformational experiences as characterised by the term epiphany with a focus on positive change in self-identity from an existential philosophical and psychological perspective. Given this aim, a theoretical sample (Charmaz 2003, p. 104) was employed which consisted of individuals who had a self identified epiphany. The participants were known by myself, or were recommended by friends and colleagues. As part of engaging with these participants it was necessary for them to demonstrate a capacity for self-reflection and coherent verbal communication.

Potential participants were screened via a preliminary interview (approximately 30 minutes) carried out in person, or by telephone. Prior to the preliminary interview, potential participants were sent information explaining the nature of the inquiry and a request for a short half hour interview in order to ascertain the suitability of their experience for further study. In all, nine potential participants were screened, from which five were recruited.

Of the four potential participants not recruited, two aged 19 and 20 respectively, had experiences that were more closely related to maturation, or adolescent development (Erikson 1971), than sudden and abrupt transformations in self-identity. The remaining two potential participants not chosen had experiences that were transformational, however they could not be classified as epiphanies because they occurred over a period of weeks and months.

The participants' life-stories and epiphanies provided a rich and complex picture of the phenomenon because of the personal insight they were able to bring to their lives. The experiences related strongly to the core epiphanic characteristics and there were enough differences and similarities between each to ensure a degree of variety. The amount of data produced in a life-story interview and the level of analysis required for each, meant the participants' life-stories and epiphanies were treated as individual case studies (Smith and Osborn 2003, pp. 54-55). Therefore, five participants were found to be an adequate sample size to complete this inquiry. A sample size of five is also consistent with Jarvis (1997) who completed her study on epiphanies by recruiting and interviewing four participants, and making use of a secondary source (a single published autobiography), making five cases in total.

4.4.2 Interview guidelines

Guidelines for the in-depth life-story interviews (see Appendix Two) opened with a statement from Hermanns (cited in Flick 2002, p. 98), which was slightly modified in order to elicit information concerning the participant's epiphany. In addition to the opening statement asking for the participant's life-story, the guidelines incorporated a

checklist to find out what elements of the 'epiphanic characteristics' were present in the participant's experience. The checklist also contained a number of points related to self-identity within the context of existentialism.

4.4.3 Interview process

The preliminary interviews acted as a useful primer for the subsequent life-story interviews. At the start of the life-story interviews each of the participants was asked to read and sign a consent form (see Appendix Three), which outlined the nature of the research, contact details of the student and student's supervisor, and a statement ensuring that all information collected for the inquiry would be confidential. Each of the participants was also asked if the interview could be tape-recorded, to which they all consented.

The process of narrating one's life-story requires significant recall and the linking of thoughts, emotions, events and relationships. For this and other methodological reasons, only short prompting questions were used in order to draw out further details and clarification of the participant's life-story. Each of the interviews took between three and six hours and there was no attempt on the part of the interviewer to limit the narrator's time. Each of the interviews was recorded using audiotapes along with brief notes to cover the interview guideline checklist. Completing the checklist often proved difficult because of the need to engage with the participant in an empathic manner as they narrated their life-story. As a result the checklist was poorly completed. Two of the participants also required follow up interviews, the first

because the audiotape had finished before the actual interview; and the second because more detail was required concerning certain periods of the person's life.

The participants' narratives evoked both painful and pleasurable emotions in equal measure. However, in the period following the interviews no negative after effects were observed. In fact, in the days and weeks after the life-story interviews, each of the participants informed me that narrating their life-story had had a very positive effect, and that they were excited to be a part of a research project.

4.4.4 Data analysis

Lieblich's et al. (1998) narrative analysis matrix was used to guide the overall approach to the analysis of the data. The analytic procedures began with the transcription of each of the tape-recorded interviews (this produced over two hundred and fifty pages of doubled spaced transcriptions). The transcriptions were then converted into shorter more succinct chronological life-stories by employing the process of holistic analysis. This was conducted in consultation with each of the research participants (the shorter life-stories appear in Chapter Five). The development of the shorter life-stories represented the longest and most intensive component of the analysis phase. This task was undertaken for five main reasons:

1. *To bring greater clarity, structure and understanding to each of the participant's life-story interviews*. Although each of the participant's life-stories was usually narrated in chronological order, the data was still quite raw, requiring further organization.

2. *To gain a more accurate picture of the participant's unfolding sense of self-identity.* This meant that every meaningful event in the participant's life had to be sequentially ordered, out of which life-themes began to emerge. This also provided the means for a more accurate assessment of the degree of change that occurred before and after the participant's epiphanies. Changes to basic assumptions, values, beliefs and perspectives were revealed with greater clarity and understanding through the shorter life narratives (Lieblich et al. 1998, p. 91).

3. *To discharge my commitment to treat each of the research participants' life-stories and epiphanies as individual case studies (Smith and Osborn 2003, p. 54).*

4. *To provide an initial interpretation of the participants' life-stories and epiphanies for the purpose of consensual validation (Eisner 2003, p. 26).*

5. *To provide the reader a basis for understanding the subsequent analysis and interpretation in later chapters (Chapters Six and Seven).*

The next phase of the analysis procedure (categorical analysis) investigated the significance of the six epiphanic characteristics against the actual epiphanies reported in the participant's life-stories. Each of the transcripts was coded by highlighting sections of text according to their relevance to each of the six characteristics. The coding was then checked for reliability by my principal supervisor.

The main issue that arose during the analysis phase concerned the in-depth uninterrupted nature of the interviews, which meant that some areas of focus for the inquiry were not covered in detail. While it might have been better to use semi-structured interviews to ensure important elements of the inquiry were covered, this would have conflicted with Chase's (1995) ideas concerning the need to invite stories as part of the narrative interviewing process, as opposed to questions which invite reports.

4.4.5 Quality control

A number of procedures were undertaken in line with Elliott et al. (1999) and Yardley's (2000) approach to quality control in qualitative research. To begin with the inquiry was grounded in both the empirical (epiphanic experience) and the philosophical (self-identity and existentialism) traditions of the topic under investigation. The epiphanic and existential literature provided a foundation from which to interrogate and interpret the participants' experiences. The next task was to ensure the information supplied by the participants was pertinent to the topic in order to yield a comprehensive analysis. This was achieved in two ways, firstly by screening each of the potential participants at the recruitment stage and undertaking an initial analysis of the transcripts to ensure that extra participants and further information would not be required. Sample size was also driven by a commitment to treat each of the participants' life-stories and epiphanies as individual case studies (Smith and Osborn 2003, p. 54).

After each of the interviews had been transcribed and shorter life-stories prepared, they were forwarded to the participants for cross checking and verification. The most common issue was their desire to clarify what had been presented in the text. The shorter life-stories, which presented some of my preliminary analysis and interpretation, also required changes because information had been incorrectly understood.

A credibility check (Elliott et al. 1999, p. 222) was also undertaken by a consultant psychiatrist and psychotherapist with twenty four years of clinical experience. This independent judge was employed to check the creditability of each of the shorter life-stories, which as previously mentioned, contained some of my initial analyses and interpretations. Five separate meetings were scheduled to discuss each of the five life-stories. A copy of the life-stories was sent out one week prior to each of the meetings. The psychiatrist was asked to read each of the life-stories separately and to take pertinent notes.

Two important elements were emphasized in my discussions with the consultant psychiatrist and psychotherapist. The first was to ensure that each of the life-stories presented common or readily identifiable content, that is each of the life-stories was not outside the realms of reality. The other emphasis was on my initial analyses and interpretations.

Overall, the credibility checks yielded a rich and alternative understanding of the participants' life-stories and epiphanies. The psychiatrist reported that all of the life-

stories were, to his knowledge and experience, authentic and represented many of the same dilemmas and breakthroughs his own clients had made in the process of therapy, albeit in a more gradual and incremental manner, and that my preliminary interpretations were sound and could be elaborated on in a number of ways.

4.4.6 Strengths and limitations of narrative inquiry

It has been the intention of this inquiry to investigate the process of sudden, significant and transformational experiences from the perspective of positive change in self-identity from an existential perspective. The narrative approach yielded a rich and complex set of life-stories and epiphanies providing ample scope for an alternative understanding of the phenomenon than those currently contained in the literature.

The limitations inherent in narrative approaches to methodology relate to the fledgling nature of qualitative methods in general, and their limited use in understanding psychological phenomena. This is particularly the case in relation to ongoing debates around quality and rigour in qualitative research. Nevertheless, all devices to ensure quality and rigour were applied in this inquiry (Yardley 2000). It is also argued that the independent verification sought from the experienced clinician added greatly to the credibility of the data collected.

The other limitation of narrative inquiry is its inability to make generalisations to the population as a whole, the replicability of such studies, and the emphasis on interpretation as opposed to explanation (Mishler 1986, p. 108). The level of concern

that one might have around these issues will depend largely on one's philosophical and epistemological orientation. For it can be argued that objectivity and explanation are philosophically misguided approaches to the theory of knowledge.

4.5 Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a theoretical, philosophical and methodological basis for collecting research participants' epiphanic experiences. The chapter began by linking existentialism with modern hermeneutics and narrative psychology. A narrative view of self-identity emphasises the interpretative, temporal, social, cultural and linguistic conditions of existence, as well as seeking to understand an individual's experience of their life and the significant events that have shaped it – thus its relevance to an investigation of epiphanies.

Narrative psychology is both a view of reality and a method for collecting and analysing stories. The primary source of material for narrative inquiries is the in-depth interview, which is designed to provide a narrative account of a particular experience, or a participant's life-story - the most extended version of the personal narrative. Reading and analysing narrative text occurs along two main dimensions, the holistic and the categorical, which in combination provide a multi-layered interpretation. To ensure quality in the assessment and evaluation of qualitative research, guidelines and criteria have been developed for researchers to follow. Narrative inquiries place research participants in a vulnerable position, therefore a number of issues related to ethical practice require consideration at every stage of the research process.

Participants for this inquiry were recruited via a preliminary interview comprising individuals known personally to myself or introduced to the inquiry by friends and colleagues. In-depth life-story interviews were carried out on five participants eliciting a rich and compelling source of data. The interview transcripts were analysed by developing a set of shorter life-stories, which crystallised the participants' experience of their life and epiphanies. A number of measures were undertaken to assess and evaluate the quality of the data, including an assessment of potential participants at the recruitment stage, consensual validation and credibility checks by academic colleagues and an experienced clinician. The chapter then concluded with a discussion on the strengths and limitations of narrative inquiries. In the next chapter the first phase of the analysis will be presented.

CHAPTER FIVE – PARTICIPANTS' LIFE-STORIES

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to acquaint the reader with a version of each of the participants' life-stories. Each of the participant's stories is presented in chronological order (i.e. childhood, adolescence, and adulthood) providing an outline of the participant's life up until the present day, and their most meaningful experiences as they saw it during each stage. Each of the life-stories then culminates with the participant's epiphanies, and the positive changes and transformation that occurred as a result.

As previously noted in section 4.4.5, the shorter life-stories were developed in order to bring greater clarity and structure to the data. The chapter provides an understanding of the participants' lives and their unfolding sense of self-identity. It also provides a foundation for Chapters Six and Seven, which will present a subsequent analysis of the participants' experiences as they stem from their life-stories. The presentation of the participants' lives in this format also discharges my commitment to treat each of their life-stories and epiphanies as separate case studies.

The life-stories begin with Peter, followed by Michelle, Stephanie, Janet, and Cathy, all of which are pseudonyms. Place names and other revealing details are either purposely vague or in some cases changed in order to protect the anonymity of each of the participants.

5.2 Peter

Peter lives in Sydney and is the principal and founder of a communications consultancy. Peter has worked with some of Australia's, and the world's largest corporations providing advice on public relations, marketing and research. While Peter does not regret working for these companies in order to "increase their bottom line", he now intends to use his skills and knowledge for what he describes as more "purposeful" work. Over the last 12 months Peter has been talking with a range people and organizations about alternative ways to earn money that contribute something worthwhile to others and self. One area that particularly interests Peter is "emotional resilience"; a personal development program recently developed by U.S. academics, designed to help people better understand and express their emotions.

Peter was born in 1960 in Bathurst, a medium size provincial town in rural New South Wales. He has two siblings, one older and one younger sister. He describes his father as a "carpenter and builder who worked hard, and drank even harder" and his mother a "simple" girl from a Catholic orphanage. Peter came from a poor background. He mentioned that one of the first houses his family lived in was built by his father from concrete blocks on the cheapest piece of land in town.

His first memory as a child was of his parents screaming at each other. Similarly, he re-calls his first day at school as traumatic - having been left alone in a forbidding and alien environment. Peter feels that this "violent start-up at school" was indicative of an anxiety disorder he developed related to a sense of abandonment - "it was emotions that I didn't understand". He believes this phobia was the result of "the internalisation

of the violence and abuse that was a part of my family life". Despite these difficulties, Peter developed his imagination through an interest in horses, horse racing, and playing with the neighbourhood children on parkland close to his home. He talked of his good friends who he used to "muck around with in summer, play cricket until dark, catch frogs, and race boats in the nearby stream".

As Peter grew older though his difficulties became greater. At age 9 while playing with his friends in the park, a group of older boys on bikes descended upon them and began chasing after Peter; they eventually caught him and attacked him with their fists. Peter began to realise that he was being vilified because of his looks, a perceived difference that was exploited by other young boys and girls who used it to tease and harass him. Because of his treatment at the hands of other boys and girls and his seeming inability do anything about it, Peter began to view himself as a coward, something about which he always felt ashamed. When asked to clarify this belief, Peter felt that it was the result of peer pressure. He explained that as a young male living in Bathurst it was critical to your sense of developing manhood that you were tough, could fight, could stand up to intimidation, or at least be seen to display these qualities around your peers in order to gain acceptance and respect.

Peter attended a male only Catholic primary and secondary school, describing the environment as intimidating - "violence seemed a normal part of existence there". The lay teachers, he notes, were much warmer and friendlier than the nuns, except for one male lay mathematics teacher who would humiliate and physically abuse his students. Due to the fear this teacher engendered in the classroom, Peter was unable to

understand the subject matter, and as a result he never developed his mathematics skills in any meaningful way.

Not only did Peter fall behind academically, but because of poor parenting he also fell behind in the development of basic life skills, such as communication, knowing how to dress properly and maintaining good hygiene. When Peter entered high school he soon developed major problems with his teeth. By the age of 15 he was required to wear a denture. This lack of "personal leadership in the home" and "lack of any sense of aspiration" only fuelled Peter's sense of inferiority and difference. In contrast to his own situation, Peter believes that parents of children from higher socio-economic backgrounds spend more time teaching their children because there is so much more at stake. Whereas children from poorer backgrounds have less to lose, so issues such as hygiene and future aspirations are often paid scant attention.

Peter left school at 15 years of age deciding that he wanted to train racehorses, which his father described as "a bloody stupid idea". Nevertheless Peter overcame his father's objection and gained employment at a local horse stable where he remained for the next three years. "It was one of the happiest periods of my life". However, during this period Peter lamented the lack of girlfriends or other meaningful relationships, while his parents' relationship continued to be marred by violence; his father would often come home after late night drinking sessions and smash up their house.

During his work as a horse trainer Peter developed an interest in writing and began publishing articles for a Sydney horseracing magazine. He then made the decision that

he wanted to become a fulltime writer and would go to university to study journalism. Peter recalled the day he received his letter of acceptance from the university's admissions office, describing it as a turning point in his life. University he explained was the "start of my slow awakening". His mother couldn't believe that he had been accepted into university and Peter vividly remembered her screaming out and clapping her hands in joy when she heard the good news.

While at university Peter felt that he still had not developed the requisite social skills to successfully navigate relationships. His university days oscillated between "great times and loneliness". One important opportunity for relationship building presented itself while Peter was studying. It turned out that his older sister happened to work as a cleaner on the same campus where he took his classes; both would often take time out of their workday to talk with one another. During one of their conversations his sister mentioned that she viewed Peter as a hero of the family, a role model for her own future freedom. Three years later his sister enrolled at university and graduated as a schoolteacher. Peter remarked that, like his sister, second chances were the story of his life.

When Peter eventually graduated he still had no clear vision for how he would use his degree in journalism. So he fell into a job with a public relations company as a writer for three years, with which he quickly became bored. "My career had taken a wrong turn and I had arrived at a wasteland". Peter yearned for some sort of underpinning purpose for his work, which he felt would give him some sort of nobility in life. He experienced feelings of angst and a sense of hopelessness over his situation. Peter was

unable to articulate why he was unhappy, although he knew deep down that something was wrong, "that I was doing meaningless work in a role for someone to make a profit. I just felt I was using my communication skills for a very poor purpose".

Peter's career continued to provide him with little personal satisfaction. After his three-year stint in public relations he undertook a range of management and marketing positions for merchant banks, financial advisers, and an editorship for a financial magazine. While all of these roles occasionally provided stimulating work, good salaries, and potential for promotion, there was still something fundamentally missing. He explained that he became "tired of his work identity", and felt that after a while he had no work identity at all. During this unsatisfying period of his life Peter mentioned that his angst developed into a full-blown crises, because of a lack of meaning and purpose in his life. However, these "crisis" periods strangely ended and he fell into what he calls "a deep sleep, an emotional hibernation. In a sense I had become alienated from myself, everyone, and everything around me".

In 1991, aged 31 Peter married Louise. They first met two years earlier at a dinner party, having been introduced to one another by mutual friends. Four years after their marriage they decided to start a family, and in 1995 they had their first child Lucy, and their second child Sophie in 1997. While talking about his relationship with his wife, Peter mentioned that he felt constrained, to some degree, by his wife and in-law's Catholicism. This solidified Peter's belief that Catholicism was a dogma based on subversion and coercion. He often felt that his in-laws would use it in their

relationship with him and others to, "subtly manipulate you without you even realising it. When you yourself are manipulated by the church you begin to learn those lessons and manipulate others".

After twelve years of marriage Peter felt that his relationship had to come to a dead end. "It had become loveless, sexless, and sad…lonely, and very much a cul-de-sac, a very dark place". Due to his unsatisfying marriage and lack of meaning and purpose in his life, Peter became suicidal. He had begun to plan his suicide by checking that his life insurance policy would be payable upon a self-inflicted death, which it was. He had become increasingly dark in his thoughts, his relationships had deteriorated, and he would spend long periods of time on his own feeling remorseful about his past. Peter's sense of despair over his life culminated one night at a dinner party he attended with his wife. Peter had been leading the table in conversation with an impassioned talk about politics and environmental destruction when he looked across the table at his wife who had become very uncomfortable and embarrassed about what he was saying. "That look of hers across the table was 'I don't know this man any more, I never knew this man'!"

As Peter moved closer to taking his own life he began hear an internal voice of reason, "a built in warning system", telling him that he had to do something about his desire to end it all. It was during this time that he had his epiphany. He had come home from work one day and began to dwell on his many financial problems. He felt as though he had gone backwards in his life because of unpaid taxes and other

mounting debts. "I'd had to put $100,000 on our house loan without my wife knowing. There were incredible financial burdens".

That night Peter had a dream that he was giving a speech at his daughter's 21st birthday. In his speech he told the story of his life and how he had reached the "edge of darkness", as described by Joseph Campbell's mythical hero's journey. Upon reaching the edge of darkness he had decided to take the challenge to break through the barrier – to not to give up. During his speech Peter also held up a book he had written and published. He talked freely about what it was like to be Lucy's father, about all of the silly things they had done together, the crazy times, and the inspirational times. In fact he talked for so long that he was eventually told to finish up and sit down.

When Peter awoke the next day he realised that if he kept going as he was, he would not have the right to make that speech. "That future moment, that visioning was my epiphany to say, I want that moment". Peter explained that this very powerful dream still pervades his consciousness today and that he feels it will be with him for the rest of his life, describing it as "an unforgettable vision". So important was this dream that Peter sat down and began to write the speech he would give at his daughter's 21st birthday. "The details seem to rise up in my unconscious mind".

Peter feels that his epiphany made him realise that there was something deeper to be said, that he did indeed have a voice. Peter had always wanted to be a writer, although it was a wish he had always denied, never allowing himself to entertain the idea in

any realistic manner. His epiphany, as he puts it, was to actually choose to have a reason to live.

The morning after his epiphanic dream Peter launched into action by telling his wife he wanted to end their marriage. He simply felt that he and his wife were not growing together and that he needed to take responsibility for his life because he now had an important job to do. One of the biggest changes Peter describes in his life after his epiphany was the permission to open the box titled 'Peter's Identity'. Peter felt his lack of self-knowledge and understanding was due to a life filled with fear, victimization, a lack of parental support/leadership, and a gnawing inadequacy that plagued his childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood years. After his epiphany he began to understand the driving force behind his sense of inadequacy and wanted to overcome his self-imposed limitations. He now understood that life contained opportunities, that he could make a difference, and that he had been living his life as a victim. It is with this new understanding that he feels he can begin to build a new identity, something he describes as a work in progress - with much work still to be done.

Peter also feels that he has become more open to his experiences that he needs to tell more stories about his life in order to continue building his identity. He now intends to pursue work that is purposeful and meaningful, even if it requires some financial sacrifices. When asked about his newfound freedom, Peter feels that he has really earned it through the trauma and stress that previously characterised his life.

5.3 Michelle

Michelle is in her third year of a Bachelor of Nursing degree at Newcastle University. She complements her studies with part-time work in a nursing home, a position she says she thoroughly enjoys. The reason for this, she cites, is the deep personal connections she is able to make with the patients in her care, a contrast to her previous career in the information technology industry. Michelle currently lives in Kurri Kurri, a small rural town 70km west of Newcastle, in New South Wales.

Michelle was born Jessica Jane Williams[42] in 1966 in Newcastle. She has one younger sister. When asked about her first memories as a child she said she could only recall fearful ones. Her grandmother would tell her that the truck often parked nearby their house was used to take away all of the naughty children, something that could well happen to her if she did not behave. Her parents, she explains, ignored her and her younger sister, a pattern of perverse non-communication characteristic of her extended family. She recalls at one stage as a child her maternal grandfather and grandmother not speaking to one another for seven years, communicating only through notes and other people. Attention from her parents was rare, although when it did come it was usually derogatory, "my father actually called me and my sister 'stupid' as a nick name".

As a child Michelle explained that she felt like an "empty shell". She was painfully aware that other children her age had visions of their future life - the types jobs and homes they would like to have when they grew up. Michelle on the other hand felt

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[42] This is an additional pseudonym.

nothing, no wishes or desires. So chronic was this crisis that she remembers asking her mother one day if she could change her name, hoping that would give her an identity. At 13 she experienced her first of many bouts of major depression and thoughts about killing herself. Her parents had no idea how to help her and became quite ashamed of her illness. They were wealthy business people who spent much of their time cultivating a false image of a happy and successful family building their identities around money and forsaking everything else.

Just prior to leaving school Michelle had a defining experience. She felt she might like to one day become a nurse. An opportunity arose for her to undertake a school-organised work placement as a nurse's assistant in a hospital ward for developmentally delayed children. This turned out to be one of the few positive experiences of her childhood. The nurse in charge however wrote a letter to her school career counsellor and parents, noting that she had performed badly in her placement and that she should think about a profession other than nursing. This rejection devastated Michelle and from that time on she suppressed her desire of ever wanting to become a nurse.

At 16 Michelle undertook cosmetic surgery on her nose, a procedure that her parents were willing to allow and pay for. In hindsight Michelle felt that this reflected her parents' unwillingness to understand how she might be feeling about herself. "It doesn't really look that much different to what it did. Yet I just have this vision of caring parents saying, 'you don't need to have a nose job. You're 16 years old. There's nothing wrong with you'. There was none of that. It was OK. It was like

agreeing with me that there was something wrong with me". Looking back Michelle feels that her desire to change the way she looked on the outside reflected how she felt on the inside. She had believed that changing her physical appearance would in some way help change the way she felt about herself. In describing her adolescence Michelle often mentioned that she felt her whole self was empty, like a black hole.

Michelle left school at 16 and began her first job in a credit union as a teller. She also had her first serious boyfriend at this time, a relationship that lasted two years. Michelle decided to end it however because she felt her boyfriend did not share the same aspirations. She also felt she had to find out more about who she was. She had come to the conclusion that she had to make lots of money in order to find happiness - because this is what had made her parents happy. "I think I felt subconsciously that I would never be anything to them if I just met a nice guy and got married and had a couple of kids. They would never love me for that".

From ages 18-21 Michelle travelled overseas. She also found a new boyfriend who physically and sexually abused her. She ended this relationship out of a fear for her life. Shortly after this break up she remembers having a conversation with her mother that she was going to move to Sydney and be earning $100,000 by the time she was 30. So Michelle moved to Sydney and began a career in the information technology industry believing this would be the start to creating her true identity.

At 27 she began a new relationship that lasted three years - a relationship that had many positive aspects. Sadly however her boyfriend left her when she turned 30

believing she would want to settle down and start having children. During this relationship Michelle began psychotherapy, which she remained in for five years. The therapy was based on what she described as "inner child work", a process that takes the adult through painful childhood memories in order to undertake a process of grieving and ultimately understanding. "Understanding that there's a very wounded part inside me. But there is also an adult part of me". Looking back on it now, Michelle feels that although she had physically grown into an adult, her emotional maturity remained at the level of a child. The psychotherapy also revealed that Michelle had a drinking problem and that she needed to do something about it. She attended her first Alcoholics Anonymous meeting and realised that she was indeed an alcoholic - a devastating realisation for her. Michelle was able to stop her drinking, although she described the next 18 months of sobriety as a "living hell".

Dealing with her alcoholism was a mixed blessing because she felt that as the months of sobriety went by she was able to cope less and less. "I guess in my twenties when I started to earn money I had started to develop and kind of feel good about who I was. When I got sober I just started to feel hollow again as I had when I was child". It was during this period that Michelle changed her name from Jessica to Michelle hoping that this would some how alleviate the pain and suffering of not knowing who she was.

Yet her change of name did not have the desired effect, even though she was earning a lot of money. She recalls receiving a commission cheque for $70,000 at the time, yet this did nothing to alleviate her emptiness and depression. She remembers arriving

home on a Friday night when her commission came through, knowing that after tax there would be $35,000 in her bank account. It was supposed to be a celebration of having finally achieved the goal she had set for herself when she was 21, yet to her dismay she felt like she was dying inside. The money suddenly seemed worthless to Michelle and she knew then that it was never going to make her happy, "I didn't feel passionate about anything so what was the point in having it?" Michelle had come to an important and disturbing realisation. What she had once believed would make her happy, provide her with an identity, friendships, and peace of mind had not worked – she described the feeling as "utter desperation". Michelle decided to admit herself to a private rehabilitation clinic where she spent the next 6 weeks. After this she went into denial about her realisations and decided she was now ready for management positions where she could earn even more money. She also gave up therapy at this point because she felt she had had enough.

Over the next two years Michelle was employed in a range of positions, only ever remaining for a few weeks, to a few months at a time. She describes this period as very lonely, "I had become an observer of life rather than a participant".

 Due to her loneliness and growing frustration with the fast pace of corporate life, Michelle decided to escape the city and move to the small country town of Leeton. On her arrival she began a new job and bought herself a dog. It was this move that was to precipitate Michelle's epiphany.

Michelle had asked her mother to send down her videocassette recorder. However, what arrived instead was "a load of junk" Michelle had thrown into a box many years previously and which her mother had mistakenly sent. When she searched through the contents of the box she found the letter written by the nurse in charge of her school placement explaining to her parents that Michelle would be unsuitable for a career in nursing and that she should consider another occupation. The discovery of this letter after such a long time came as a great surprise and shock for Michelle because she had completely forgotten that she had ever harboured any such desire. "I'd talked about being a stuntwoman and all these really bizarre things, trying to work out what I wanted to be and it never occurred to me that I wanted to be a nurse". The pain of having her one and only adolescent dream crushed so quickly and decisively was such a traumatic experience that she blocked it from her conscious mind from that point on. Then suddenly and unexpectedly she was reminded of her adolescent wish. It came as a profound experience for Michelle because she saw it as a powerful message telling her what she should be doing with her life. "I always wanted to be a nurse!…It was like a veil was lifted. I'm going to be a nurse".

The next day Michelle went to work and told her supervisor that she was going to leave her job because she was going to become a nurse, even though she had only moved to the country the week before. Everything in her life, she explained, really started to change from that moment on because she had found a purpose. More than that, Michelle had realised that she did indeed have an identity but its development had never been properly supported by those responsible for her eduction, and more importantly by her parents who had failed to provide her with the necessary love and

support to validate who she was. The letter sent to her parents from the nurse in charge of her work experience placement, she explained, was a sign telling her that she did have an identity, that she once had dreams and desires of doing something noble with her life.

When asked to clarify why nursing has become so important to her, Michelle mentioned that it is much more than, "just sticking up IVs and things like that". Nursing has given her the opportunity to find her place in the world, to connect with other people in a deep and meaningful way. An opportunity she never had as a child. Nursing has become a part of her identity now, "part of who I am". Nursing has also helped her to accept that she has many special and worthwhile qualities; that she has the ability to understand suffering and to empathise with others, to provide care and support that bolsters a patient's dignity and sense of self.

There are many things that have changed in Michelle's life since her epiphany. She mentions that she is better able to express herself emotionally, rather than suppressing her feelings as she always used to. She also reports that she is much more comfortable spending time on her own, something that used to cause her much dread, and even thoughts of suicide. She explains that she still gets lonely at times, living on her own, "but there is more of an OKness about everything now…If I'm having bad times now there's a sort of sense that the universe will sort it out in the long run". She is also much less likely to suffer internal rapprochement when things do not go according plan. Much of this she puts down to knowing now that she is not trying to be someone she is not. She mentions that she did not consciously realise it at the time, but she

hated herself for pursuing a fast paced corporate life because it never reflected who she truly was.

Michelle explained that her ability to relate to other people has really changed as well. Prior to her epiphany she used to look at other people, in an abstract sense, and try and take something from them. Because of her diminished sense of identity Michelle spent much of her time trying to model other people, copying the way they might talk, walk and style their hair for example. However, since her epiphany she now feels that she does not need to be anyone else that it's all right to be herself.

Michelle believes that her growing sense of identity has made her more assertive, given her more of a sense of what she wants and how she wants to be in the world. She explains that once she used to try and avoid conflict at all costs, whereas now if there is something she feels strongly about she is willing to hold her ground and fight for it.

She admits that while her old life had many exciting elements - high salaries, fast city life, large social circle - she has found much more stability and contentment with her current situation – a country cottage, her dog Lucy, university study, and part-time work in a nursing home. This has helped her to develop stronger healthier friendships. She cites her emotional stability as the reason for this positive turn of events; it is easier to have a relationship with someone when they are stable. "You can be so needy when you're unwell".

Michelle now has many plans for the future. She hopes to find a loving partner to share her life with, to have a family of her own, identify which area of nursing she would like to specialise in, and begin to spend more time cultivating the "spiritual aspects of life". Finally, she mentions that she wants to develop greater emotional independence from her parents, because there are still "quite old patterns of behaviour" she tends to repeat when she relates to them.

5.4 Stephanie

Stephanie is a business development consultant currently living in Sydney. Her clients over the years have included investment banks, software companies and agricultural producers. She is currently consulting to a private company that offers a blend of life-coaching, mentorship and investment advice.

Stephanie was born in 1961 on a farm in Arcadia, a rural area just northwest of Sydney. Stephanie has three siblings, an older sister and a younger brother. She describes her life of growing up on a farm with great fondness - the wide-open spaces affording her a sense of freedom that has become one of the defining themes in her life. At age 8 her family purchased a 25,000-acre farm 50km outside Coonabarabran, a provincial town in far northern New South Wales. For Stephanie this was the first "turning point" in her life, describing the move as a "big adventure".

Her father remained in Arcadia for the next four years continuing to run his butcher's shop, while managing the family's smaller farm there. Stephanie only occasionally mentioned her father in her life-story. When asked to describe her relationship with

him Stephanie recounted the times he used to take her horse riding, which she loved, yet, "he was always telling us what to do and what not to do - don't gallop the horses, always wear riding boots".

In contrast Stephanie spoke glowingly of her relationship with her mother. She described the way her mother interacted with her children, always explaining things to them and making even the most mundane chores seem interesting. What sticks in Stephanie's mind most about her mother was her drive and stamina. Stephanie praised the manner in which she ran a large farm singled-handed, raised four children, and still had time to entertain frequent visitors to their farm.

As Stephanie grew older she noticed her parents starting to drift apart. When she was 15 she holidayed with another family on the coast. It was then that she realised the stark difference between her parents' behaviour and how other more "normal" parents behaved, "they communicated, were intimate, planned things together, slept in the same bedroom". In the end Stephanie's parents separated when she was 20. Yet they still worked the farm together, an arrangement that Stephanie described as "very odd". Nevertheless, Stephanie was still "shocked" when her father found another partner, who eventually moved in with him. She explained that her father completely underestimated her mother's anger. The family also began to regard their father with derision because of the way he allowed this new woman to run his life. When Stephanie was 27 her parents divorced, yet they remained near one another, working adjoining farms.

The next "turning point" in Stephanie's life came at age 26 when her older brother and his wife were killed in a car accident at a railway level crossing. "When I heard the news I just felt the blood drain out of my body…My spirit just ran away at that point". It was Stephanie's younger brother Michael who broke the news to their mother. "Mum was working down in the woolsheds. Michael went down there and I then heard this blood-curdling scream…just horrible". Her brother's death heralded a new phase in Stephanie's life, which she described as a period of "deep personal analysis".

Stephanie had taken it upon herself to administer her brother's estate, which after years of hard work and trying to keep everyone happy, ended in disillusionment for her because of a law which precluded her from making decisions about where the assets from the estate could be invested. This again Stephanie describes as a "turning point" as she realised what a thankless task it had been and that all of her hard work had provided little satisfaction. At this point in her life she wanted to give everything up and "just opt out of life for a while". She explained that the issues to do with her deceased brother's estate contained a series of minor realisations that were eventually related to her epiphany.

The first serious relationship in Stephanie's life began with Brian when she was 16. Both Stephanie's parents hoped that she and Brian would one day marry. Yet over time Stephanie came to realise that when it came to making decisions Brian rarely considered Stephanie's feelings. "Brian had planned to buy a farm in Queensland without thinking about how I might feel". She realised then that their relationship was

all about Brian and his needs, and rarely about her. Stephanie felt unacknowledged and completely left out.

When Stephanie was 25 she undertook an 18-month agricultural exchange to Europe. She wrote to Brian regularly throughout this time without ever once receiving a reply. Towards the end of her exchange Stephanie decided that on her return to Australia she would end the relationship, "I loved him, but was not in love". Her parents were absolutely furious with her for ending what they believed was the perfect match. "I think they wanted to excommunicate me for that".

Her next relationship was with a married man that lasted ten years. It was a long-distance relationship - he lived in Dubbo while Stephanie lived 400km away in Sydney. On the whole this was an unsatisfactory relationship for Stephanie. She explained that she had remained very patient, but in the end felt extraneous. There were many times when she tried to break it off, but couldn't bring herself to do it. Eventually Stephanie did break off the relationship, although she explains, "it took me ten long years". The breakdown of this relationship prompted Stephanie to question her motivations for seeking men who were always too wrapped up in themselves to really ever care deeply about her.

While working on the Sydney 2000 Olympic torch relay Stephanie met another man who she eventually forged a strong relationship with. "I felt in my heart of hearts that this was the one". This relationship went on for almost two years. However, in the end it turned out to be less than ideal because he lived in Melbourne while she was in

Sydney. He had recently been through the death of his wife and found it difficult to commit wholeheartedly to a new relationship. It was the end of this relationship that triggered Stephanie's epiphany.

Stephanie recalled standing in her office talking with her boyfriend when she felt a chill run through her body; then suddenly and abruptly she decided that she would never again enter into a relationship with someone who was not prepared to make a serious commitment, that she did not want a long-distance relationship, or a relationship with someone who was already married, and indeed with someone who did not truly love her. In that one moment Stephanie had made a resolute decision that she was entitled to a relationship based on mutual sacrifice. She described the feeling of this decision as a "severing" - she was never going to allow this to happen again in her life. She explained the realisation was about herself, and ultimately about her relationship with herself. She felt that it was nobody's fault except her own, that she had consistently entered into less than ideal, dysfunctional relationships. "I guess the realization was that it's about me and that I don't need anyone else to make me feel free". She explained that this new powerful realisation was also accompanied by a "warm feeling". She described it as, "a flower or a rose bud opening up and these beautiful petals and a sense of knowingness".

From that moment on Stephanie believed that everything would now be all right in her life because she had finally realised and accepted her own wants and needs. Stephanie described her epiphany in mystical terms, suggesting that it was an ineffable experience that made her feel "calm", and that her body had transcended the

realms of physical existence. She said the feeling was uncanny, as though she was, "a cover around the world", something that was bigger and beyond imagination. "If I said I was standing in a corner of the world and the world was everything before me, I was it. I don't know how to describe it any other way".

Stephanie felt that it was "extreme pressure" that triggered her epiphany. It was "perturbation", that is when a force is so great that something has to give. Stephanie had realised that things had not been working out for her and that her body had been trying to send her warning signals. She ignored these signals until her body could take it no longer. This was the moment of perturbation, which she resolved by accepting what her body was telling her. In the process of acceptance, Stephanie realised she could set herself free by asserting her own needs, by expressing the very emotions she had consistently attempted to suppress.

In describing her change and transformation she spoke of the "old" and the "new" Stephanie. The old Stephanie invested a lot of time trying to stay busy and ensuring she always appeared successful and in control of her life. Looking back she feels that much of her behaviour was an attempt to create diversions in her life. Yet she now believes that because of her epiphany she has gained a level of self-trust and acceptance that has enabled her to negotiate her relationships, and life in general, with much greater courage and confidence. The new Stephanie she explains has a sense of entitlement to a relationship based on honesty, sharing and mutual sacrifice. She is now in a new relationship with Peter, which she feels is the most satisfying relationship she has had to date.

Stephanie also spoke of a new sense of spirituality in her life since her epiphany, describing it as a feeling of "being connected. It is a physical feeling that is connected to a source. It's not something that you have to worry about because you always know it's there. It has a very calming affect on my life". She feels as a result that she is less judgemental and more accepting. She describes it as a self-checking mechanism that comes back to a feeling inside of wanting to accept people for who they are. This, she says, makes life much easier to live on a day-to-day basis because it means she can be more comfortable with other people. "I now find it much easier to just be. Stephanie summed up her epiphany by suggesting that, "life is all about relationships…your relationship to other people…but mainly it's about your relationship with yourself".

5.5 Janet

Janet lives in Sydney and currently works as a customer service agent for a teacher's health insurance company, a job she enjoys but which she would like to eventually move on from. Over the next two years Janet plans to begin a period of education in her life, which she feels she missed out on while she was growing up. She hopes that this will one day lead to a more challenging and interesting career.

Janet was born in the beach side suburb of Maroubra, Sydney in 1961. She is the eldest of two sisters. Her father, now retired, was a successful sales representative with a large American company that sold dry-cleaning products. Her mother stayed at home to look after the children. Janet describes her background as "middle class and

privileged". She grew up in a "lovely big house" and was given a bedroom that she described as "amazing". It had two single beds, built-in-wardrobes, and two large glass doors that opened onto a patio and backyard pool. She felt loved and cared for by her parents, so much so that she often felt smothered. "My mother was very touchy feely, yet quite strict all the same. If I asked for anything it was usually given to me. In general I was provided for very well".

The Church of England parish in Maroubra played a large role in the life of the family. Her parents were strong believers and ensured that Christian values and beliefs were instilled into Janet and her younger sister. The Church, she explains, provided a "nice environment in which to grow up in. There were picnics, progressive dinners, and Sunday school where she received gifts for attendance and good behaviour…I was a confident child".

When Janet began to talk about school she commented, "I didn't hate it, but then I didn't love it either". She mentions making friends with a small group of girls at primary school, who all then went on to the same high school together. Janet explained that growing up in Maroubra and having the same friends throughout school provided her with a sense of confidence and stability. Janet worked hard at school and as a result she did well academically. She was placed in the advanced classes for Mathematics and English, although the creative arts were her favourite subjects because it gave her the opportunity for personal expression.

At the age of 8 the first of a number of tragic circumstances was to befall Janet's life. She had made friends with the boy next door who would often visit her house where they played together. One night the boy stayed over in the spare bed that was in Janet's room. He asked Janet to get into bed with him for a cuddle, which she did. He then forced his hands all over her body, from which Janet tried to struggle away from, the boy regained control however and then forced her head into the pillow, effectively smothering her. "I couldn't breath and so I became quite frightened". Angry and upset at what the boy had done Janet decided to tell her parents, who were shocked and upset by the news. They marched next door to confront the boy and his parents with Janet's story. The boy denied that anything had happened, and sadly Janet's parents believed him. "I felt so embarrassed and abandoned. Looking back now I can still recall having an almost out of body experience, as though the connection I had with my parents had been broken".

Not long after this incident Janet and a friend decided to skip a day of school as an "experiment", a one off. However, as coincidence would have it, Janet and her friend were found out because on the same day they skipped school her younger sister was sent to hospital to have her appendix out. Janet's parents contacted the school to leave a message with Janet that she was to go to the hospital after school instead of her normal routine of going home. Looking back Janet feels that being caught out like this instilled a belief in her that she could never do anything wrong, make mistakes, because she would always be found out. From this time on she felt that her parents mistrusted and judged her.

The next tragedy in Janet's life occurred when she was 13. Her parents had a party at their house and had invited a large group of family and friends. Later that night a 46 year old customer of her father's business lured Janet away and sexually abused her. Looking back on it now Janet feels she hid the abuse from her parents because of the embarrassment and abandonment she experienced when her parents had blamed her for the assault that occurred in her bedroom when she was 8. Due to the access this customer had to Janet he was able to continue his sexual abuse, and eventually he raped her.

During and after the period of sexual assaults Janet began to find it almost impossible to concentrate at school, particularly on mathematics - her exam results suffered as a result. The next year Janet was moved down from the advanced to the intermediate mathematics class. Her inability to focus and concentrate on mathematics became a pattern of behaviour that repeated itself in the rest of her subjects. She recalls not being able to finish assigned pieces of work. "It was really strange. I don't know why I behaved like this. I would receive workbooks back from my teachers saying how well I had written half a story, or that I had taken great care to make it neat and tidy, but it just wouldn't be finished, so my teachers would ask 'what happened to the rest of it'?"

Janet felt the most difficult aspect of being raped was integrating what had happened to her in the same year she was to be 'confirmed' by the Church. This Christian rite of passage, she explained, greatly added to her sense of shame for having allowed herself to be sexually humiliated. At around the same time of her confirmation Janet began smoking marijuana. She was caught by her mother who decided to turn her in

to the police. "I was so angry with her for doing that, I just couldn't understand why your own mother would do such a thing".

Shortly after her confirmation (14 years of age) Janet decided to run away from home. The reasons she cites were her parents' strict rules concerning attendance at parties and other outings with her friends. Janet found her parents' rules stifling and hypocritical. "I'd been forced to have sex with a 46 year old yet I wasn't allowed to have relationships with other kids my own age". Janet explained that as a result of being raped she began to experience life in a very different way. Her "innocence", she explained, had been taken away, yet her parents continued to treat her as a child. Janet was unable to articulate these feelings and she became very frustrated and angry with her parents. "They regarded me as wilful and uncontrollable". Nevertheless Janet felt that much of the anger and resentment she held towards her parents stemmed from their abandonment of her when she was 8.

After running away from home Janet lived in a boarding house in a nearby suburb with a 16 year old "friend of a friend", who like Janet was also a runaway. Janet found employment as a door-to-door sales person, holding this job for two months until a family friend spotted her while travelling on a bus. When her parents finally contacted her she decided to go back home voluntarily. Back at home she soon began to feel frustrated again by her parents' hypocritical rules, and once again she rebelled, this time falling pregnant. Her parents were upset and disappointed. They decided the only option was to terminate the pregnancy. "There was never any talk about having the baby, it was like you will have an abortion and then we'll pretend it never

happened". Janet explains that dissociating from her feelings and trying to forget these and other traumas was her main way of coping.

While at home Janet continued to smoke marijuana as well as sneaking out at night to be with her friends. Seeing that her drug taking was becoming habitual, Janet's parents engaged a drug and alcohol counsellor without success. Her parents would often badger her about her behaviour, which she ignored. "I became very good at ignoring things…My parents viewed me in that situation after running away from home as a bad egg, that I was just really difficult to deal with and I was bad news". Janet feels that even today her parents still view her in this unfavourable light and that they are still unwilling to acknowledge the sexual abuse she suffered as a child. "Even to this day my parents really still don't know very much about the sexual abuse I suffered".

At age 16 Janet ran away from home for a second time placing herself, as she describes, in a "very vulnerable situation". Janet was again sexually assaulted - gang-raped in an inner city suburb by a group of youths. After the rape Janet took herself to a nearby police station where two female officers interviewed her. After the interview the two officers told her that she was drunk and inferred the rape was her fault; they then escorted her back to where she was staying at the time. "The police didn't even bother to have me medically examined to confirm my story". When Janet ran away from home for the second time she also decided she would leave school as well, which meant she never received her high school certificate.

By this time Janet had found a boyfriend who she moved in with, however their relationship was one of friction. One night she and her boyfriend got into a "terrible" argument, which turned violent. "He tried to strangle me, it was really traumatic". Janet recalls that this event triggered her to spiral down to a "very dark place" in her mind. She felt that that all of her relationships were "screwed up", and that life wasn't really worth living anymore. Late that night Janet attempted suicide by jumping off a walkway over a sea cliff close to where she lived. Lying unconscious at the bottom of the cliff she was found by a fisherman the next morning who raised the alarm. Janet was taken to hospital where she spent the night. The hospital staff were led to believe that Janet's fall was an accident, so a psychiatric assessment of her mental state was never taken.

At the age of 17 ½ Janet began a new relationship, which lasted for seven years. In the second year of this relationship Janet fell pregnant and gave birth to twin baby girls. Janet loved and adored her two girls and they brought her great deal of joy and satisfaction. After the birth of their twins she and her partner moved to Perth in Western Australia.

At 23 Janet had an affair, which her partner found out about. He reacted violently by physically and sexually abusing her. As a result her life was thrown into turmoil, and she sank into a deep depression. Janet explained the breakdown of this relationship and the abuse she suffered at the hands of her partner led her to mentally spiral out of control. In order to cope Janet began taking pharmaceuticals and other illicit drugs.

Due to her addiction, Janet ended up stealing some surgical medications while visiting a doctor's surgery. She was caught and arrested by the police and released on bail. Janet then absconded from Perth and made her way up the north coast of Western Australia. She was eventually caught by the police and returned to Perth where she was refused bail and placed in a women's prison where she remained for the next two weeks.

It was her first night in prison that triggered Janet's first epiphany. "It was the worst experience I have ever had". While sitting on the edge of her uncomfortable bed Janet began to understand what it really meant to have her freedom taken away and as a result a terrible fear began to rise inside her. So terrible was this fear that Janet began to ask herself questions she had been too afraid to ask before in her life because of what the answers might reveal. She knew she was not a bad or evil person yet she wondered how her life had become so out of control, why society needed to lock her away in prison with criminals, and why she needed to take drugs in order to cope with life. For the first time Janet was coming face to face with her life, her experiences, and her sense of who she was.

She had never reflected on her life like this before and she realised for the first time that she actually hated the "drug lifestyle", especially the people involved. Yet it was the way the drugs made her feel that appealed to Janet and she began to wonder what could be so terrible to make her want to escape from her life all the time. She then made a profound realisation – it was herself that she had been trying to escape from all this time.

Janet had a vague idea that something must have happened in her life to cause her to spiral out of control as a teenager and to take such a self-destructive path. She realised it was, "cause and effect", although she was still unable to make the link between prison and the sexual abuse she had suffered as a child. Nevertheless, Janet made a firm resolve while sitting in her cell that first night that she would do everything in her power to change, that she would stop taking drugs and that she would get her daughters back (by this time Janet had lost custody of her children). Upon her release from prison Janet felt that she had fallen so far into a wasted life that any change was going to be slow and difficult. Yet part of her resolve was that she would never go back to prison and so her life could never be the same again.

Janet's second epiphany occurred when she was 33. Janet's children, aged 13 at the time, had made a special trip from Perth to Sydney to visit her. She had not seen her twin daughters for over three years. Their visit opened Janet's eyes to their vulnerability, innocence and adolescent mentality, all of which made a powerful impression on her. It compelled Janet to look back on her own life when she was 13. As she began to recall the people and events of that time in her life Janet realised that she had lost her virginity at the same age. This set in train a sudden recall of events she had repressed for twenty years. A horrible feeling began to rise in the pit of her stomach. With terrible clarity Janet realised a 46 year old man had raped her. At the conscious awareness of this long repressed memory, Janet began to piece together the chain of events that took place in her life after her sexual assaults; her grades began to

fall, she ran away from home, began taking drugs, behaving promiscuously, fell pregnant, and her relationship with her parents broke down.

This sudden conscious awareness of her sexual abuse completely shifted Janet's sense of identity. Janet had always supposed that she was a bad person, a "bad egg" as her parents had referred to her. Yet now she understood why she had pursued such a self-destructive path, which eventually led to her imprisonment. She could now see how her life had been irrecoverably changed from the day she had been sexually abused and as a result she could now forgive herself because she could see that what had happened wasn't her fault; she had coped with this horrible experience in the only way she knew how, without family support and only the psychological resources of a 13 year old girl. Janet could now begin to atone for her mistakes and all of the guilt and shame she thought she had brought on herself and her family.

As a result of her epiphany Janet resolved to heal her life. She was now ready to face her anger, guilt, shame, and the resentment she held towards the world. Janet explained the healing process was long and very difficult; she experienced severe physical pain and discomfort for many years. Looking back she feels that this was because there were so many painful emotions and experiences locked up in her body. This manifested problems with her digestive system, which still persist today.

Since her epiphany Janet feels she has become more spiritual, and more comfortable with the idea of death and the knowledge that one-day she will die. While Janet now acknowledges the important role that spirituality plays in her life, she stresses that she

is definitely not religious like her parents. Her parents' religiosity and absence of any spirituality has made her "very sceptical of religion", particularly in the way her parents and family practice it. Janet sees their religious faith as having more to do with tradition, in terms of what should be done, rather than any emphasis on compassion.

Another important aspect of the healing process for Janet has been the prosecution of the man that sexually abused and raped her when she was 13. Her primary motivation for this action has been to educate society on the destructive implications of child sexual abuse for victims and their family. She hopes the prosecution and trial of her perpetrator will send a message to the rest of society that even after thirty long years sexual assailants will be brought to justice. Janet would also like her own family to acknowledge that taking her perpetrator to court has been an important step in the healing process. Janet feels though her parents are still in denial about her abuse because this would require them to change the way they view her, and to accept their failure in protecting her.

Janet still feels that she is trying to understand and simply remember many aspects of her life and that there are still some important steps in the healing process she has yet to take. Given the years of upheaval in her life, Janet is now looking for stability, to have her case go to trial and for her perpetrator to be punished.

5.6 Cathy

Cathy lives in a large two-storey house on the central coast of New South Wales with her partner Sue. She currently works as a casual primary schoolteacher, a career she describes as "satisfying and fulfilling". Cathy now feels that after many years of hard work and heartache she has found the right balance between work and leisure, financial security, and exciting plans for the future.

Cathy was born in 1959 in Christchurch, New Zealand and is the eldest of five children. Her mother initially stayed at home to look after the children, returning to full-time work when they were all of school age. Her father worked as a travelling salesman. Both of Cathy's parents were Catholic, although she mentions they never actually attended church. Her mother was of Maori descent while her father was Sicilian.

The lack of extended family and a regularly absent husband made it very difficult for her mother to raise the five children, three of which had significant health problems. As the eldest child, Cathy was expected to look after the three youngest, which she explained was a heavy burden of responsibility.

Cathy's father was a heavy drinker and prone to bouts of violence, which her mother bore the brunt of. Cathy recalls the children often hiding in their bedrooms terrified by the regular beatings their father inflicted upon her. As a result Cathy grew up in a very tense and traumatic environment, "you were always wondering and waiting when it would be your turn". Cathy described her father as "very macho". She feels this was

the result of his own violent upbringing. His idea of being a father was to teach the boys how to be men, and the girls to behave as submissive servants. He believed that it did not matter if the wife went out to work it was still the woman's job to clean, cook and look after the children. He also believed the man of the house was the undisputed leader and decision maker and that his authority should never be questioned.

Her father's violence and aggressive behaviour was a regular occurrence when he was at home. Cathy recalls her father one day placing the family's beloved cat in a sack, taking it out to the tip and shooting it because it had developed ringworm - an easily treatable aliment. Her father spent his free time hunting wild pigs so he kept a number of hunting rifles in the house, which only added to his frightening demeanour. Cathy remembers many years later spending some time with her relatives and seeing a photo of her father standing over a dead pig with a rifle in his hand. "Imagine sending a photo like that to your relatives! Most families send pictures of themselves down at the beach or standing by a house…It just said so much about my father".

Cathy was also unable to develop a close and loving relationship with her mother because she was totally controlled by her father, and together they would often gang up on the children. Yet when her father was away her mother would bitterly complain to the children about him. Because of her behaviour Cathy felt betrayed and found it almost impossible to love and respect her.

On top of the difficulties Cathy faced at home she also felt a strong sense of cultural infringement because of her mixed race background. She often felt in a no-man's land as she tried to straddle both a European and Maori culture. Cathy felt at odds with her indigenous heritage because she was born in the South Island, yet lived in the North Island of the country. For this reason her mother would often warn the children that because of their place of birth there were certain places they should never visit in the North, lest they bring a curse on themselves and their family.

Thoughts of a future career began to ferment in Cathy's mind after watching the film 'The Sound of Music'. Inspired by the film's central character (Sister Maria), Cathy decided she wanted to become a nun and a schoolteacher. Her mother however scoffed at this idea, believing it was the duty of all young women to marry and have children. This belief was underpinned by the idea that not to have children was selfish. In the same vein Cathy had wanted to take her Holy Communion, however her parents did not care enough to take Cathy along, so she felt she had missed out in some way. "I always wanted to wear the veil and the fancy white dress like the other children".

Marriage and children were constantly drilled into Cathy and her sisters. Looking back she feels that it was not unusual for parents of large families to unfairly expect the older female siblings to look after the younger children in order to free the parents of the constraints. These strict gender roles were a common societal attitude in New Zealand during the 1960s and 1970s. "Where I grew up women might be expected to work in a factory, a canteen, or to get some nice little office job before they started

having babies. There were never really any thoughts about university or having a career".

Cathy first remembers feeling attracted to other girls at about age 10 after an innocent experience with her 13 year old cousin. While growing up she had become acutely aware that homosexuality for both men and women was taboo. At age 12 she remembers being taught by a teacher who was a lesbian. When she told her parents, they replied that homosexuality was something that should never be talked about: "you keep these things to yourself". When homosexuality was talked about in the playground or amongst friends it was only ever in a derogatory manner or as a form of verbal abuse.

Cathy had boyfriends as an adolescent and she remembers being well liked by them at school. "Because you were never educated about homosexuality it was something that you never really thought about, let alone considered". Looking back at her years in school Cathy recalls never once being encouraged to develop her academic abilities or even to consider going on to university when she finished. She had grown up with the belief that having children and looking after a husband was a woman's sole purpose. "Your value as a contributor to society in other contexts was never recognised". Cathy explained that in order to re-enter the workforce after having children it was not unusual for mothers to lie about the number of children they had. She remembers her own mother indicating on an application that she had had only two children, not five, in order to increase her chances of employment.

At the age of 14 Cathy had her first sexual relationship, which lasted 12 months. Just after her 15th birthday she fell pregnant. She went to the school nurse for assistance who referred her onto a local doctor who terminated the pregnancy. In Cathy's mind there was no option about keeping the baby, she knew her parents would never have allowed it. "In my heart of hearts I'm not for terminations but there are times in your life you do things where you really don't have much choice. When you're 15 you don't have legal rights either. It was illegal. I was under age".

Throughout her teenage years Cathy recalls meeting a number of women she felt attracted to. "I was fairly naïve but I must have understood on some level that they were giving me a message. With guys it is always fairly obvious, but with women you put that shield up. It's not an obvious thing unless you really know". Cathy left home in her final year of high school. "It had become too difficult to study and live at home". She moved in with her boyfriend and started a full-time job to support her new living arrangement. Shortly after moving out of home she fell pregnant, so she and her boyfriend decided to marry. Marriage, Cathy explains, was a way for her to permanently escape her abusive home life. Until Cathy was married her parents would not visit her because they believed she was "living in sin". Shortly after marrying her boyfriend Cathy gave birth to their first child - a girl - Cathy was 18 years of age.

In 1980 Cathy and her family moved to Australia where she gave birth to two more children. By the age of 30 Cathy's three children were at school and she began to wonder what she was going to do with the rest of her life. After her second child Cathy met a nun who was also a teacher and academic - and who came out as a

lesbian later in life. They both became good friends, which provided Cathy with some badly needed inspiration. She helped Cathy believe that her doubts about becoming a schoolteacher were unfounded and that if she really wanted to, she could go to university and train to become a teacher. In time Cathy applied to university and was accepted into a Bachelor of Education degree.

University provided an entirely new and exciting experience for Cathy. She loved the intellectual stimulation, attending lectures and the discipline of scholarly study. However, she was still running a household and taking care of three children, all of which added up to a heavy burden. Her husband, she explains, was also less than supportive. She mentions that he once said to her in a derogatory manner, "I thought you would have dropped out by now because you always do". She remembers asking her husband if they could employ some outside assistance to help with the cooking and cleaning while she was studying, yet he maintained they could not afford it. Her husband's attitude began to generate a lot of anger and resentment.

Looking back on it now Cathy believes she suffered post-natal depression after her third child, yet was completely unaware of her condition at the time. "You don't know you've got it because who's going to tell you? You're at home, isolated from the outside world and you've got no support networks to rely on". As a result of these and other difficulties Cathy's marriage began to break down. It was during this period of her life that Cathy started to "come out". The stress of her marital breakdown began to raise issues in her life related to her own childhood and adolescence, and in particular the termination of her first pregnancy.

The weeks and months of introspection also raised for Cathy the question of her sexual orientation. It was during this time that she came to the resolve that if she were to ever have sex with a woman then she would remain a lesbian forever more. Her first epiphany, she explains, was triggered by a 3-week fling with a friend who had been pursuing her for the previous 12 months. Having sex with another woman confirmed for Cathy something she had always suspected, although never had the courage to explore further – that she truly was a lesbian. She vividly remembered that everything in her life radically changed from that moment on. Cathy described it as, "crossing a bridge with no return". She knew deep down that this was something she could not ignore. She knew of many lesbians who continued with their marriages despite having affairs with women, yet Cathy had always felt that living like this undermined their true expression as a woman. She also strongly believed that it was wrong to intentionally play around with other people's lives. "You should be serious with what you are doing. Be honest".

Cathy decided that it was she who should leave her husband and three children. The pain of separation she explains was akin to someone, "cutting my heart out with a knife". Her reasons for taking it upon herself to leave were partly financial. Her husband had a job and a career and she was still attending university. She also felt that because her children had always been comfortable it would create undue stress in their lives if they were taken out of school and moved to a new situation. Cathy knew that if she were to take the children they would not be provided for as well as they were under their present circumstances.

Cathy explained that the transformation from a heterosexual to lesbian was not entirely complete after her first affair, or indeed after leaving her husband and three children. The process of coming out completely was a long and difficult journey. She felt that it was not only coming out as a lesbian that she had to deal with, but also coming to terms with the anger and rage she had repressed during her childhood and most of her marriage. It was only after leaving her husband that Cathy felt entitled to begin expressing these painful emotions.

While Cathy was finishing her last year at university she began a new relationship with another woman, a traveller from England. Cathy admitted that she was still naïve at the time and began to suspect that what her partner really wanted from their relationship was permanent residency in Australia. The relationship lasted three years. Overall, Cathy summed it up as horrible. "I realised this woman was a drunk and possibly psychotic, even schizophrenic". The end of this relationship turned very nasty. In retrospect, Cathy always suspected that something was wrong, however it took her three years to acknowledge and act on the signals her body was giving her.

Looking back Cathy feels that it was the slow and painful end of this three-year relationship that provided the build up to her second epiphany. On the same weekend that Cathy moved out of her flat she had been sharing, she was invited out by a group of friends who were meeting at the pub. She mentions feeling particularly vulnerable at the time. Cathy got talking to one of the members of the group she had not met before. She had noticed from her accent that the woman was from New Zealand and

so enquired where exactly she had lived. As chance would have it this woman came from the same town that Cathy had grown up in. Intrigued by this coincidence Cathy enquired further and discovered that this woman knew Cathy's aunty (also named Cathy) very well. Cathy then asked, "Did you know Sue?" to which the woman replied, "Yeah you're talking to her". Although they had only just met Cathy explains that she knew Sue intimately from what her aunt had told her, and she knew that Sue was also a lesbian. This was a profound experience for Cathy because she suddenly felt that everything in her life had now come together. She had believed that her aunt and namesake had been sitting on her shoulder from the day she came out as a lesbian and had directed Cathy toward Sue. From this moment onwards, Cathy felt that she could express herself freely without fear of repercussion – Cathy could now truly accept herself as a lesbian.

Cathy recalls having developed an automatic internal rapprochement because of her abusive childhood; she had always felt fearful and unsure of herself. However, in the moment she met Sue she explained that her fear had suddenly melted away. As a result Cathy began to develop greater self-awareness, and a stronger sense of identity, an understanding of "who I truly was". This made her more assertive and more aware of her own and other people's boundaries - what she is and is not responsible for in her life. She explains that this was something that she had previously found very challenging. There is also, she explained, a greater capacity for self-acceptance. "It's now all right for me to be Cathy".

Her strengthening sense of identity was bound up in the process of coming out, which helped her to overcome the anxiety around her inferiority. Cathy mentioned that she used to always be a 'people pleaser'. She searched for and found acknowledgement and validation in others rather then herself. She now sees herself as very different from the frightened child full of internal rapprochement.

Cathy also feels that since her epiphany she has become much more spiritually engaged. Her own view of spirituality is based on the idea of universal energy, which is most readily identifiable in nature - in forests, oceans and wild animals. After everything she has been through Cathy now sees her life as a journey, and that this is what being spiritual is all about – accepting that life is an ongoing process.

Cathy and Sue have been together now for nine years, sharing every aspect of their lives. On a day-to-day level Cathy mentions that Sue has brought a lot of balance to her life, and vice versa. In the future Cathy would like to further her learning and academic credentials by undertaking a 'teaching English as a second language' course. Cathy and Sue have also recently purchased investment properties in different parts of the country, a venture they both enjoy, as well as hoping it will ensure some level of financial security later in their lives.

5.7 Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to acquaint the reader with a version of each of the participants' life-stories. In developing the shorter life-stories, a particular emphasis was placed on gaining an insight into the participant's unfolding sense of self-identity,

so that a full and rich picture of the individual would begin to emerge. This enabled a better understanding of the participant's self-identity before, and after their epiphany. The life-stories also provide an account of the social and cultural context in which the participants' self-identities were shaped.

The development of these shorter life-stories also represents the first phase of analysis in this inquiry. As such, they reveal a number of elements in common with the concepts (epiphanic) and philosophies (existentialism) explored in Chapters Two and Three. This will now form the basis for a more detailed analysis and interpretation of the participants' experiences in Chapters Six and Seven.

CHAPTER SIX – EPIPHANIC CHARACTERISTICS

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is in line with the second objective of this inquiry, which is to relate the set of core epiphanic characteristics developed in Chapter Two (see Table 3 overleaf) to the actual epiphanies collected from the research participants. To achieve this objective the participants' epiphanies were examined and then related to each of the core characteristics with the support of direct quotes from the participants' interviews. The first section of this chapter is set out using each of the epiphanic characteristics as a heading, under which the participants' pseudonyms are used as a subsequent sub-heading. The reasoning for this was to treat each of the participant's epiphanies as separate case studies.

In the next section of this chapter each of the core epiphanic characteristics is discussed in more detail as it relates to the supporting evidence from the literature review carried out in Chapter Two. While it is acknowledged that each of the participant's experiences was supportive of the six core epiphanic characteristics, two caveats were added to these findings. The first caveat acknowledges the bias in the sample - four out of the five research participants had been subjected to varying degrees of abuse and trauma during their childhood and adolescence. The second caveat refers to the varying degrees of differentiation between the epiphanic characteristics and the participants' actual epiphanies.

Lastly, it is argued that while the set of core epiphanic characteristics are broad and/or general in nature, they provide a new definition of the phenomenon, and a clearer distinction between epiphanies and other types of growth and consciousness raising experiences.

Table 3: Epiphanic Characteristics

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

6.2 Epiphanic Characteristics

6.2.1 Antecedent state: Epiphanies are preceded by periods of depression, anxiety and inner turmoil

The 'antecedent state' was reported by each of the participants who, prior to their epiphanies, experienced periods of depression, inner turmoil and anxiety, ranging from weeks, and some cases months. Similarly, participants reported a range of other painful emotions such as loneliness, suicidal ideation, remorse, despair, anger and abandonment.

Peter

Peter had been depressed in the months prior to his epiphany as was illustrated by his general sense of frustration with life. His depression culminated with a plan to commit suicide.

> I'd been asleep for a long time in my life and I guess the epiphany that I was leading up to was
> an awakening. I didn't actually understand what was happening, where it was going, what was
> going to happen but I had this growing sense that something was happening and something
> was overtaking me. It wasn't just me trying to plan my way out of this or even being aware of
> it in a way. I'd really resigned myself I suppose to living a mediocre life.

Peter's thoughts had become increasingly morbid, his relationships with family and friends had deteriorated, and he would spend long periods of time on his own feeling remorseful about his past. Peter's sense of despair over his life culminated one night at a dinner party he attended with his wife.

That one moment, that one look, that non-verbal communication to me said that you're living a lie here. You're living a lie. Then I went totally silent and I went home that night and I cried in front of her (his wife) for the first time and said that I wanted to leave, that I wanted to kill myself, that I needed to go off and do this and I needed to go and do it myself and not have her involved and that I couldn't find any meaning in life.

Michelle

Michelle had suffered major depression throughout her life, so the antecedent state prior to her epiphany could be said to have begun in childhood when she experienced her first serious mood disorder. Her life-long problem with depression is evidenced by her use of alcohol as form of self-medication.

I was in therapy for five years. It seemed like forever. When I was about 30 ½ the therapist suggested to me that maybe I had a problem with drinking and suggested that I go to A.A. meetings. It was just devastating for me to go. I'll just never forget it. But it was true and I was an alcoholic. The next 18 moths I did stop drinking straight away when I started going to meetings. The next 18 months were like living in some kind of hell. The drinking was getting me through for so many years. I started drinking heavily when I was 16. I was always a binge drinker. Towards my late 20s to early 30s I started wanting to drink at other times. I wanted to drink very strong drinks in the morning. Even though I hadn't got around to doing it, it was certainly always there in my mind. It was like a fantasy going on.

In the period just prior to her epiphany, Michelle's regular bouts of depression became heavily tinged with a sense of alienation.

For two years I just watched the world go by…I worked in North Sydney. I was extremely lonely. It was like I was in this huge city. There were people bustling everywhere and I wasn't

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a part of it. That made it even lonelier…I would think 'Where are they going, what have they got to do? These people have somewhere to go, something to do. They know who they are. They know what to do. They've got a loved one somewhere.' It was always that sense of…not knowing who I am, what I'm supposed to be doing. 'I've got nowhere to go. It doesn't matter where I go I'm still going to feel like this.' For some reason I started to get a feeling that I needed to get into the country and I needed to get a dog.

Stephanie

Feelings of depression, anxiety and turmoil for Stephanie began at the end of her 10-year relationship to a married man.

> There were a few times I tried to break it off but didn't. I eventually did at the end of the day. What it came down to was I said 'Where do we go from here? We've been through this whole process. I guess I feel like I've been patient.' It came back to that same thing. What about me? How can I leave this person that I've been with? So then again I put myself into this situation where again I was with someone who was thinking about himself. That took a long, long time to get over.

At the conclusion of this relationship Stephanie met a work colleague, with whom she began a new relationship and found herself in the same dilemma. It was the end of this relationship that precipitated her epiphany.

> I felt in my heart that this was the one. This relationship went on for almost two years. Again however it turned out to be unsatisfactory because he lived in Melbourne and I was in Sydney. I realized that I didn't want a long distance relationship. I didn't want someone who was with someone else.

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Janet

Janet describes a "spiralling" out of control prior to her epiphany, which was the result of a breakdown in her seven year relationship.

> A lot of nasty things went on there that really unbalanced me. I got into a lot of drugs again and started mentally spiralling out of control.

The spiralling out of control ended with Janet serving a two-week period in a women's prison. She vividly recalls her thoughts on the first night she spent in her prison cell.

> I'm sitting on the edge of the bed and somebody's mouthing off in the next room. Babbling on. I'm looking around and I've been told this is my home for the next 2 weeks until I go to court, and I'm thinking, 'I can't believe I'm in here. I want to get out…why am I here? I'm not a bad person. Why have I ended up here? How is it that my life has become so out of control'?

The situation prior to Janet's second epiphany was quite different in that her life-story did not indicate any major depression or anxiety prior to her experience. Although it is worth conjecturing that being confronted with her twin daughters, who she had lost custody of some years earlier, may have reminded Janet of her own failure as a mother, and this therefore led her to feel more vulnerable and/or sensitive as a result.

Cathy

Cathy's marriage of fifteen years was in the process of breaking down prior to her epiphany. She explained that this was a very tumultuous period in her life.

It was too many years of a breakdown in communication. We'd been to a counsellor. One of my lecturers encouraged me to go because I was crying and couldn't stop crying. We went. The counsellor said to Colin 'What do you want?' And he said 'I want Cathy' and she asked me and I said 'I want me. I want my life'. She said 'you two should have come to see me years ago.' For years I would say 'Colin we've got a problem' and he would say 'no we haven't got a problem'. I just got to that point where I said 'No. No more'.

The turmoil and anxiety that Cathy experienced during the breakdown of her marriage was a catalyst for other issues in her life to come to the fore, these related to the abuse and trauma she suffered during her childhood and adolescence. She also explained that through the process of coming out as a lesbian, she went through a very angry stage. Something she never felt entitled to, or had ever given herself permission to express.

You've had enough and you really don't care anymore about what others might think of you. I just remember asking myself the question 'what about me'? It really becomes about survival. You come to this momentous decision, 'Am I going to live, because I haven't made a decision on that yet? If I am going to live, it's going to be my life, because if I have to keep living like this I am not going to stay around anymore'.

Cathy went through another breakdown in a serious long-term (three years) relationship prior to her second epiphany.

The end of this relationship was very nasty. Yet I always new something was wrong but it took me three years to realise that my body was telling me to walk the other way. I was road-testing lots of new things in my life during this period and I was becoming aware of the fear thing in my body, becoming aware of messages of fear.

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At the end of the same week in which Cathy's relationship broke down, she decided to move out of the flat she had been sharing with her ex-partner. She mentions feeling particularly vulnerable at the time, hurt because her relationship had come to an end, and unsettled because she had just moved out of her apartment.

6.2.2 Suddenness: Epiphanies are sudden and abrupt

Each of the participant's epiphanies was sudden and abrupt, as opposed to other types of positive change and transformation that are slow and incremental.

Peter

> My epiphany came one day when I came home from work. I had a lot of financial problems. I'd gone backwards in my life even though we owned a house in an expensive suburb. I'd gone backwards in my life because of tax debts and other things. I'd had to put $100,000 on our house loan without my wife knowing. There were incredible financial burdens…(That night) I had a dream…The dream was that I was at my daughter's 21st birthday and it was my speech that I was giving. And I told a story about my life, about how I got to this point, to the edge of darkness. To the very mythical hero's journey that Joseph Campbell described in his mythology work about going to the edge of darkness and taking the challenge to break through the barrier – not to give up.

Michelle

In the days just prior to her epiphany Michelle had asked her mother to send down a videocassette recorder to the small country town she had recently moved to. What arrived instead of her videocassette recorder was a box full of "junk" containing items

she had thrown out many years ago, which up until that point she had completely forgotten about.

I started going through it because I lived in this town and knew nobody and had nothing to do. And I found the report that the woman had sent to my parents saying that I would be a terrible nurse. I had just forgotten all those years that that is what I really wanted to be. I'd talked about being a stuntwoman and all these really bizarre things trying to work out what I wanted to be and it never occurred to me that I wanted to be a nurse. Never. I just think it was so traumatic at the time that that's what happened. I just blocked it out. I remember just sitting there and just looking at it. I was on my own thinking 'Oh my god, oh my god, I always wanted to be a nurse. I always wanted to be a nurse!'…It was like a veil was lifted. 'I'm going to be a nurse…It was like a shock to the system. I recognized in that moment the kind of bizarre way that it had come about. I'd sent away for this box and I was sitting there going through it. I also recognized that at the time. It seemed to be, 'Thank god someone has told me or has sent me a sign. Someone has finally told me what I should be doing with my life'.

Stephanie

Stephanie's epiphany was the result of a decision or resolve regarding the increasingly intolerant circumstances surrounding the relationships in her life. Stephanie explained that she consciously willed her new decision into action.

It just happened like that, while I was standing in my office. I felt that I didn't deserve this anymore, that I deserved better. So from that moment on it wasn't going to be a case of taking second best. I said to myself, 'Why should I accept this when I don't have to'?

<u>Janet</u>

Janet's first epiphany occurred during the first night of a two-week stay in prison. Alone at night in her prison cell a terrible anxiety arose in her, an anxiety she had never before experienced. She began to ask herself questions she had been too afraid to ask before in her life because of the answers they might reveal.

'Why have I got to this point? Why am I doing so many drugs?' I started questioning in myself, whereas before I had just gone along and done things without ever thinking or reflecting on them. In fact not really any reflection at all. I was more of an extrovert. I started to have a look inside and realised I didn't want to have this lifestyle…As I started to dry out (imposed on her by incarceration)… I started thinking 'Why, why, why?' I went back through things. I then came up with this vague idea that it could be that something had happened to me to cause me to spiral out of control and head down a path that I didn't want to take and hadn't really chosen for myself. I asked myself was it some cause and effect?

Janet's second epiphany, which took place some years later, occurred while her two daughters were visiting from interstate and whom she hadn't seen for three years. She had been struck by how young and vulnerable her 13 year old daughters were, which led to a chain of conscious recall that led all the way back to when she was raped, all of which lasted less than half an hour (see 6.2.4).

<u>Cathy</u>

It seems open to debate whether Cathy's first epiphany was sudden and abrupt because it stemmed from a resolute decision she had made previously in her life. Nevertheless, her epiphany was sudden and abrupt in so far as her decision was not enacted until the moment she had sex with another woman.

There is no debate however about Cathy's second epiphany, which was sudden and abrupt – being the night she first met her current de-facto partner (see 6.2.3).

6.2.3 Personal transformation: Epiphanies are an experience of profound change and transformation in self-identity

The most compelling element of the participants' epiphanies was the change and transformation that took place in the way the participants viewed themselves and their world. The transformations were varied, for example, finding a voice and expressing a noble purpose, identifying with nursing as a profession and metaphor for empathy and insight into self-identity and others, the discarding of old beliefs about oneself for new beliefs based on entitlement and spiritual tranquillity, the conscious re-call and understanding of the impact of childhood sexual abuse, and the loss of innocence that this entailed, and the creation of a new sexual orientation.

<u>Peter</u>

Peter's epiphanic dream was a symbolic encounter; a sign telling him what was missing from his life – a coherent and purposeful narrative to explain who he was to himself.

> And that was the point I had reached and at last I realised that I was mythologising my life and I gave this speech about how I turned my life around. I was able to hold up a novel that I had published about an idea that I'd always had. And I talked freely about what it was like to be Lucy's father and I talked about laughter and I talked about silly things we did, crazy times, the inspirational times we had together. I talked about so much in that speech that they basically had to boo me off though I was still talking. I woke up the next day and I realised

that the way I was going I was not actually going to have the right to make that speech. That future moment, that visioning was my epiphany to say 'I want that moment'.

Peter feels his epiphany made him realise that there was something deeper he had to communicate, that he did indeed have a voice. He had always dreamed of being a writer, something he had always suppressed, never allowing himself to entertain the idea in any realistic manner. His epiphany as he put it, was to actually choose to have a reason to live. The day after his epiphanic dream Peter approached his wife and said he wanted to end their marriage. He simply felt that he and his wife were not growing together and that he needed to take responsibility for his life because he now had an important job to do.

I realised the incredible cost of that in terms of the emotional draw that it has and the trade off. The trade off of unsettling your children when you think they are supposedly happy is enormous. You have to make a sacrifice in order to make a return. And I had to make that. Doing that was an incredible release but it was also a jettisoning into the darkness again. There was uncertainty and doubt. Your now released of the burden of 'I'm not a victim. I was victimising myself my entire life'.

One of the biggest changes Peter describes in his life, as a result of his epiphany, was giving himself permission to open the box titled "Peter's Identity".

I'm sifting through the rubbish that's in this box and the richness of it and trying to work out what does this mean? What does this long scarf mean? What are the things in this box that actually says the identity of who this person is? And that's pretty exciting and that's keeping

me alive more than anything because now I'm intrigued. I know it's not an empty box anymore.

After his epiphany Peter began to understand the driving force behind his sense of inadequacy and was able to overcome his self-imposed limitations by realising that life contained opportunities, that he could make difference, and that he had been living life as a victim. It is with this new understanding that he felt he could begin to build a new identity, something he describes as a work in progress - with much work still to be done.

Peter also feels that he has become more open to 'experiencing' life, and that he needs to tell more stories about his life in order to continue building his identity. In terms of his career Peter now pursues work that enables him to express his interests and values, even if it requires financial sacrifices. When asked about his newfound freedom Peter feels that now he has really earned it, through the stress and trauma that had previously characterised his life.

> There's a daunting there now, a foreboding. You've got this small gift now, maybe it's a window, and I don't know how long it might be. It may only be a small time in your life. You may only have another 12 months to live, who knows. Make the most of that time.

Michelle

Michelle explained that as a result of her epiphany everything started to change because she had finally found a purpose for her life.

> It's…about connecting with people. That's what really sustains me. The money wasn't sustaining me (in her previous jobs). Money wasn't giving me that sense of connecting with people.

She mentions that nursing represented an acceptance that she has many special and worthwhile qualities; that she has the ability to understand suffering and to empathise with others, to provide care and support that does not demean a patient's dignity.

> I only need to look at people and touch their hand. I don't need to say anything. It is enough for them to start crying. It's just like they are saying 'This person recognizes I'm in pain'.

There are many things that have changed in Michelle's life since her epiphany. She mentions that she is better able to express herself emotionally, rather than suppressing and denying her thoughts and feelings.

> For years that whole black suit thing (corporate working environment). I just hated myself because underneath I knew I was trying to be something I wasn't. It was like I had no choice at the time. I hated myself.

She reports a greater capacity to deal with time on her own, something that used to cause her much dread, anxiety, and even suicidal ideation.

> There is more of an OKness about everything now…If I'm having bad times now there's a sort of sense that the universe will sort it out in the long run.

When it came to role models Michelle mentioned that before her epiphany she used to look at everyone and try and take something from them.

> A lot of them were men like my father that I looked up to. Since the epiphany there hasn't been anyone. I really don't feel like that about people anymore. I don't want to be anyone else. I feel like when I meet people they're not on that pedestal anymore…Since I have more of an identity…there's not that great need to go out and find it in others.

Michelle believes that her increased self-esteem has enabled her to behave more assertively, given her more of a sense of what she wants and how she wants to be in the world.

> Just generally in my day-to-day life I can be quite easy going. But if it gets to something that's really important to me then I'm not easy going. 'No, I'm not doing that' or 'No, I'm not going there'.

Stephanie

> It was like a severing. The epiphany was that this was never, ever going to happen again. The realization was about me, and my relationship with myself. It wasn't about anybody else. I cannot blame any of those people in those past relationships. I guess the realization was that 'It's about me and I don't need anyone else to make me feel free'.

This powerful new insight was also accompanied by a "warm feeling" - Stephanie described it as a "rose bud opening up and these beautiful petals and a sense of knowingness".

> I just knew that everything would be all right from that point on in my relationships. It was about accepting and realizing my own wants. It's hard to put into words. It's not necessarily something you can distil. It runs right through you. A sense of knowingness, that almost defies words being put to it. But it's an amazing sense of calmness. I felt like I was as big as the world. It felt like my body wasn't a part of this equation. I had no boundaries.

Stephanie believes that it was "extreme pressure" that triggered her epiphany, something she describes as "perturbation – when a force is so great, something has to give".

> It wasn't working for me. I could tell physically in my body that this wasn't working. Whereas in previous experiences I would say 'That's OK, just give this person time…I would basically tell my body to 'Just step out of it for now because I'm here and I know what I'm doing.' Not being aware that physically my body couldn't handle it anymore. I made the decision that this is the end of the relationship. And all that's coupled in with those things at the time just went 'pouf'. That's when the epiphany was…Beautifully what happened this time was this massive realization of completeness and wholeness and this wonderful feeling of 'I am so huge.' Not caught up in this little world of just me and my woes with this other person. My realization is I'm actually part of something.

Describing the change in herself Stephanie spoke of the "old" and the "new". The old Stephanie invested a lot of time keeping herself busy to keep up appearances to the outside world. The new Stephanie has a sense of entitlement to a relationship based on honesty, sharing and mutual sacrifice. She is now in a relationship with Peter, which she feels is the most satisfying relationship she has had to date. Stephanie also

describes a new sense of spirituality in her life, which has had many other positive benefits.

> Its' a physical feeling that is connected to a source. It's not something that you have to worry about because you always know it's there. It has a very calming affect on my life…I feel that because of it I'm less judgemental and more accepting of myself and others. It's like a self-checking mechanism that comes back to this feeling inside that you accept people for who they are. It makes life much easier to live on a day-to-day basis because you can be comfortable with other people. I now find it much easier to just be.

Janet

Prison for Janet was a disturbing, life transforming experience. For the first time in her life she came face to face with her existence - her life, her experiences and her perceptions of who she was.

> You keep going along and doing these things and you are locked in that situation without ever looking around at yourself. I was 24. But nothing was said to me. This was a realisation I was coming to myself by being in that situation. I had stumbling blocks. I was 24 and had children. I had twins so I had been very busy for a couple of years. So never focused on myself, my career. When I was sitting in prison I thought 'Where am I? What have I done? That's why I'm sitting in here and they've locked me away. I'm on the edge of society. I've got to change my life. I've got to stop taking drugs so I don't end up in this situation again. I've lost everything and I've got to get my daughters back'!

After her second epiphany Janet decided that she would begin to truly heal her life. She realised that this meant facing the rage and resentment she held towards herself

and the world. As a result she experienced severe physical pain and discomfort for many years. Janet felt that she had been unable to digest the emotional and intellectual residue of the many terrible events she had experienced in her life.

Janet also feels that she has become more spiritual since her second epiphany. She is comfortable with the idea of death and the knowledge that one day she will die. She explains that attempting suicide gave her a unique view of death.

> Attempting suicide was like a near-death-experience, without those feelings and sensations of a near-death-experience. When you've faced it head on, it just doesn't have the same sort of fear that is normally attached to it.

While Janet acknowledges a new more spiritual side to her life, she stresses that she is not religious like her parents. Her parents' religiosity and absence of any spirituality has made her "very sceptical of religion"; particularly in the way her parents and family practice it. Janet views their religious faith as having more to do with tradition, in terms of what should be done, rather than any emphasis on a fulfilling spiritual life.

> And I feel that maybe at the end of the day they won't get to go to heaven because of the way they have always tried to deny the significance of my abuse, though I'm sure they keep thinking they are doing all of the right things.

Another important aspect of the healing process for Janet has been the prosecution of the man that raped her when she was 13 years old. Her primary motivation for this action has been to gain some form of societal acknowledgment – she wants to tell the

world that a very serious crime was perpetrated against her when she was an adolescent and that it had a very damaging effect on her life. Janet would also like her family to acknowledge that she needed to confront and heal her life in order to move forward.

> I wanted to continue healing and I wasn't getting any support from my family, but I felt strongly enough about the issues I was wanting to raise (in a court of law) that I decided to go it alone anyway. I've now been vindicated in a way, even though the case hasn't finished yet. My daughters have always been very encouraging…They (Janet's parents) have always been in denial about my abuse because they would have to re-gear their thinking about me, and how they cut me out of their lives and all of this other stuff. They have to review all of that and where they are, and I just don't think they want to go there because it's just too painful a process.

Cathy

Cathy's epiphanies represent the creation and final acceptance of a lesbian self-identity. Meeting Sue, Cathy's current partner, meant for the first time in Cathy's life that she could express herself freely without fear of repercussion - an automatic internal rapprochement she had developed as a child.

> There was always the invisible control sitting on the back of my shoulder. I was always alert and fearful. I felt unsure of myself.

Free expression enabled Cathy to develop greater self-awareness and a stronger sense of self-identity. This has made Cathy more assertive, more aware of her own and other people's boundaries and what she is and is not responsible for. She feels much

more comfortable about taking responsibility for herself and her own actions. She explains that this was something that she had previously found very challenging. There is also much more capacity for self-acceptance.

It's now all right for me to be Cathy.

Cathy's strengthening sense of self-identity was bound up in the process of coming out as a lesbian, which helped her overcome the anxiety and shame related to her sense of inferiority. Cathy mentioned that she used to always be a 'people pleaser'. She searched for and found acknowledgement and validation in other people rather than herself. Cathy now sees herself as very different.

I feel that I don't need to please others nearly as much as I used to.

As a result of her epiphany Cathy explained that she is much more in touch with the spiritual side of her life.

I see that God is the God of universal energy, it's the same source for all religions; it's the same for everybody. For indigenous people there is no name given to it, it just is, it's just there, it's everywhere, it's in the trees, you can hear it, you can see it in the animals, the ocean. My spiritual life, in fact my life in general has been a search, a journey that still continues today. I think that's what being spiritual is about.

When asked to clarify why a lesbian woman would marry a man, she answered that many women, lesbian women, want the status of having a husband because it is a culturally sanctioned relationship in our society. Lesbian relationships on the other

hand are only barely tolerated; they bring nothing of the status that married heterosexual couples enjoy.

> There is a lot of fear and prejudice around lesbians, or gay couples in general…because you are gay (lesbian), people think that you are attracted to all women. This isn't right. Lesbians are attracted to other lesbians…A lesbian is a woman who is attracted to other lesbians.

6.2.4 Illumination/Insight: Epiphanies are an acute awareness of something new, something which the individual had been previously blind to

Each of the participants experienced a significant insight, which had the effect of illuminating elements of self-identity that had once remained in darkness.

<u>Peter</u>

Peter feels his epiphany made him realise that he had something deeper to say, that he did indeed have a voice. Peter had always wanted to be a writer, something he had always suppressed, never allowing himself to entertain the idea in any realistic manner.

> I thought I was a dumb person all the way through my life. I thought I had no right to have a voice and have ideas; that I didn't have the skills. Any obstacle I could put in the way I did. From that moment on of saying that I'm writing a book for the one person that really matters, that moment to hold it up to Lucy or Sophie at their 21st is the only moment in life that had any worth or any meaning to live. The rest of it was just building up to that one moment. And then I started to turn my life around.

Michelle

In her epiphany Michelle re-connected with her emotionality by being reminded of her adolescent desire to one day become a nurse. She experienced great loss and pain when this had been taken away from her. She explained that this was one of many moments in her life that led her to deny and suppress her emotions.

> I think really from that moment (reading the contents of the box) that I did get a sense that I had a self-identity. That I knew what my self-identity was a long time ago, that I knew what I should have been doing. But it had been taken away from me…(It's a) sense that there is a place for me at the very heart of who I am. I'm really proud to say I'm training to be a nurse. It's part of my self-identity, part of who I am, despite the fact that I now earn $13 an hour.

Michelle had believed that she was too awful a person to reveal to the outside world. Her insight was to see that there was in fact a good and worthwhile person who once held dreams of helping others and living a purposeful life.

Stephanie

In her epiphany Stephanie made a resolute decision that she was entitled to a relationship based on honesty, sharing, and mutual sacrifice.

> I was standing in my office and I was talking to him. I just had this chill through my body. The words came into my head that said 'I will never, ever, ever do this again.' I realized that I didn't want a long distance relationship. I didn't want someone who was with someone else. I didn't want all these things. It was just like an arrow being shot. I knew that I would never ever again do that. The next relationship would be almost like a flower opening inside me. That's how it felt. That's the visual and the feeling of a new relationship going forward.

Janet

While sitting in prison Janet realised for the first time that she had always being trying to run away from herself.

> I…hadn't realised I'd suffered so much in my life. I had quite a privileged childhood, and then I ran off and did different things and lived away from home. When I ran away from home, except for the first time, I always ran away to the country. Travelling around the country was healing in itself, almost spiritual. I was trying to run away from 'me' but 'me' was with me all the time. I didn't really have any profound realisations while I was doing that. It was just an adventure that brought me away from myself; it was movement, no permanence. I didn't have to look at myself, just a journey ahead and another adventure to be had, new people, better maybe? You keep going along and doing these things and you are locked in that situation without ever looking around at yourself. I was 24. But nothing was said to me. This was a realisation I was coming to myself by being in that situation. I had stumbling blocks. I was 24 and had children. I had twins so I had been very busy for a couple of years. So never focused on myself, my career. When I was sitting in prison I thought 'Where am I? What have I done? That's why I'm sitting in here and they've locked me away. I'm on the edge of society. I've got to change my life. I've got to stop taking drugs so I don't end up in this situation again. I've lost everything and I've got to get my daughters back!

Janet, in her second epiphany, was able to begin to understand what had been blocking her path toward growth and self-awareness since her adolescence.

> I looked at my daughters and realised that they were just babies, so young, vulnerable and impressionable.

The impression left by her daughters forced Janet to look at her own life when she was aged 13. This deep contemplation of her own adolescent life sparked the realisation that she had lost her virginity when she was 13. She began thinking.

> My God. I lost my virginity at age 13. How did this occur? What was his age? My God he was 46, married and had a family. Shit I think this had a big impact on my life.

Janet began to trace back in her mind the events that had taken place directly after the abuse she had suffered. She began to piece together that it was at this stage she began taking drugs, running away from home and behaving promiscuously.

> I thought I was being powerful by behaving in a sexually assertive manner. I knew what men wanted and I thought I was controlling them.

Janet was suddenly motivated by this profound realisation, that her life had been irrecoverably changed and damaged from the day she was raped, and eventually with time she was to see that it was not her fault, that she had coped with this horrible event with only limited resources at her disposal. This was a complete shift in Janet's identity; in the way she viewed herself and others. Janet feels that she was able to atone for her past life and the guilt she had suffered, the mistakes she might have made, the shame she thought she had brought on herself, and most of all her family.

<u>Cathy</u>

Although there had been prior intimations of Cathy's lesbianism, they had been brief and fleeting. However, it took the act of having sex with another woman for Cathy's insight to be consummated.

> I always had this feeling that if I ever slept with a woman then that would be it for me. I would never be able to go back to a man. It's like crossing a bridge with no return…It totally changed my life from that day on. I awoke that morning and that was it, a new life, I was a lesbian.

6.2.5 Meaning-making: Epiphanies are profound insights that are deemed significant to the individual's life

Meaning-making was manifested in the participants' epiphanies by viewing life with increased value or worth, the creation of a life's purpose, the linking of childhood experiences with adult emotions and behaviours, and the attribution of great importance and significance to a person, event, or other life circumstance.

<u>Peter</u>

> My epiphany gave me something to live for, to move toward, instead of being dead…In my own way I started to find hope and some meaning about why I was here as I realised that I didn't have a story to tell, the people around me didn't get who I was. My work hadn't been done yet. It was an idea that saved my life - my work hadn't been done yet and I couldn't write my own obituary yet. And then I started thinking, well what does that really mean?

Michelle

Prior to her epiphany Michelle explained that her life lacked any sort of meaning. Her discovery that she had once harboured a desire to become a nurse, suddenly and unexpectedly filled her life with purpose. She now feels her life has more value and significance because of her re-connection to her emotionality, which has given her a much greater sense of who she is.

> I think really from that moment (her epiphany) that I did get a sense that I had an identity. That I knew what my identity was a long time ago. That I knew what I should have been doing. But it had been taken away from me…I'd hate to think where I'd be if I hadn't had this experience.

Stephanie

Stephanie's relationships prior to her epiphany had been frustrating and incomplete, yet she had allowed herself to accept this less than ideal situation. Stephanie's epiphany was meaningful because she had created a new sense of entitlement for herself.

> I knew how important this realisation was for me, to not put up with things like I always used to, because I had this amazing warm feeling in my body.

Janet

The significance of Janet's first epiphany was the discovery that she had a drug addiction, which had landed her in prison.

> I realised that I didn't want to be mixing with these people (in prison). Which was also the case when I was doing hard drugs that were illegal and you get off the streets. I didn't do it for the lifestyle. I didn't really like the people you had to mix with to get the drugs. They become a part of your circle because you are back there to get your supplies to escape reality. I didn't like that so it definitely wasn't about lifestyle. It was for the effect of the drug.

In her second epiphany Janet made a psychological link, an understanding and connection, between her childhood experience of sexual abuse and her adult emotions and behaviours. The powerful impression left by her daughters was the catalyst for Janet to look much more closely at her life when she was 13. By uncovering repressed memories Janet made the shocking realisation that she had lost her virginity at the same age as her daughters then were.

Cathy

Meeting Sue for the first time, Cathy's future de-facto partner, was for Cathy a significant and fortuitous event. There were a number of reasons for this, firstly Cathy and Sue grew up in adjoining towns in New Zealand, they had shared mutual friendships, and Sue had played in the same softball team as Cathy's aunty and namesake. This coincidental meeting enabled Cathy, for the first time in her life, to wholeheartedly accept herself as a lesbian. Although she had begun to create a lesbian self-identity after her first epiphany, Cathy explained that she had yet to fully accept and truly integrate this into her life until she met Sue.

> I could tell you what she (Sue) ate for dinner, I could tell you what she had done on the weekends, what they did on Sunday nights, what her parents would be like, you know the neighbourhood, the whole lot. That just struck me. That was it. It was an epiphany because

everything in my life suddenly came together. My aunty and namesake had been sitting on my shoulder ever since I started coming out…So when I met Sue she was there for me, really there for me…Meeting Sue had made it OK for me to truly come out as a lesbian.

6.2.6 Enduring nature: While the actual insight that is the epiphany is a momentary experience, the personal transformation that results is permanent and lasting

The powerful new illumination/insights coupled with the significance (meaning) attached to it meant the participant's personal transformations were enduring and permanent.

<u>Peter</u>

My epiphany was an unforgettable vision…I feel now that I am able to control the voice of destruction, the edge of darkness voice. He knows (the destructive voice) now he's on a losing battle. Because now instead of just blind hope and faith, now there's a mandate, a vision there to say 'you're on an adventure, you're exploring something. The exploring voice has taken over and says 'what can be?' and 'what if?' As soon as you ask the question 'what if?' it changes the dynamics of it enormously. So there is no turning back. I've always had this problem of goals and achievement and always feel that I haven't achieved them but there's another level of the acceptance of a challenge. It's a higher level, some sort of spirituality, something that actually transcends the day-to-day writing of a list.

<u>Michelle</u>

I could never imagine going back to doing the things I was doing before. I just wouldn't have the energy. It just took so much energy to live in that world. I don't see how you could go back even if you wanted to, I just feel so blessed that my mother accidentally sent me the wrong box…I see nursing as a kind of final acceptance of my personal qualities, it's my

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identity now, I don't think you could ever change that. It's just such a gift to be able to understand suffering and to empathise with others, to provide care and support that does not demean a patient's dignity.

Stephanie

You never lose that knowingness…I was always pushing things down and never dealing with them. For me it would be harder to go back to how I was. I now find it much easier to just be, instead of always keeping myself busy and distracted. The way I live now feels more right…my epiphany was a very spiritual experience, a physical feeling that is connected to a source, so I don't think you could ever deny that, it's just too powerful.

Janet

I'm committed to healing my life now. There was so much rage, anger, resentment I once held toward myself, and the world…I was doing things that I wasn't even aware of, so once you become aware you become more in-tune with yourself…I'll never forget the experience of going to prison and I'll never forget what happened to me when I was 13 and the effect it had on my life…Much of my time and energy is going into this court case because I want society to better acknowledge and protect children from adult sexual predators. To show them the very serious crime that was perpetrated against me, when I was 13 years old, and the damage it caused. I also want my family to acknowledge that I need to confront and heal my issues and that going to court is helping me to do that.

Cathy

Once you realise you're a lesbian you never forget it, you can try and pretend that you're not a lesbian. Some women would stop at this stage and say 'put it behind you; get on with your marriage. You've done it all these years. You can still do it now' I couldn't…I don't believe you should do this. You don't play around with people's lives and your own life. Be serious

with what you are doing. Be honest…Looking back now I feel that I always had a lesbian

heart.

6.3 Discussion

The previous analysis of each of the participant's epiphanies demonstrates a high

level of support for the set of six epiphanic characteristics developed in Chapter Two.

However, there are two important caveats. Firstly, the interview data presented here is

based on a sample containing four participants (Peter, Michelle, Janet and Cathy) who

were subjected to abuse and trauma during their childhood and adolescence.

Secondly, there are varying degrees of differentiation between the core epiphanic

characteristics and the participants' actual epiphanies. I shall now discuss these and

other interpretations in more detail, as well as developing some general conclusions

concerning the definition of epiphany in this inquiry with the support of evidence

from other studies.

In the first characteristic, 'antecedent state', Michelle and Janet indicated histories of

periodic 'major depression' making it difficult to delineate between a chronic illness

and a more general period of anxiety, depression or inner turmoil prior to their

epiphany. Nevertheless, Janet indicated an 'acute' period of depression, more severe

in its anxiety, prior to her epiphany. Michelle found that her depressive symptoms

prior to her epiphany were tinged with overriding feelings of alienation (that is a

disconnection from self-identity and others). Denzin (1989; 1990) and Jarvis (1997)

similarly concur that epiphanies are preceded by painful emotions. Miller and C'de

Baca (1993; 2001) note that 56% of their participants reported feeling 'emotionally distressed' or 'upset' prior to their epiphanies.

In relation to the description of the characteristic 'antecedent state' (epiphanies are preceded by periods of depression, anxiety and inner turmoil) the term 'depression' might be construed as referring to 'major depression' as outlined in the 'Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders' (A.P.A. 2000, pp. 369-376). However, the term 'depression' is used in this context to not only describe 'major depression', but any period of upheaval in emotion or mood[43] state. The other issue regarding depression as an antecedent state is its underlying nature, whether it is dynamic and creative, or static and stagnant. A 'dynamic' or 'creative' depression, as suffered by the participants in this inquiry, was characterised by a mature reflective stance as evidenced by its transformational result (Kierkegaard cited in Yalom 1980, p. 166). In contrast a 'stagnate' depression is characterised as more outwardly focused, an eschewing of responsibility, and a potential for paranoia. Often the result of stagnate types of depression, once the individual's mood has lifted, is a return to old habits and patterns of behaviour.

It was established that all of the participants' epiphanies were 'sudden[44]' and 'abrupt'. The trigger for their respective epiphanies was a resolute decision (this will be argued

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[43] The term 'mood' is used here as the subjective appreciation of an emotion.

[44] Miller and C'de Baca (2001) note that 'suddenness' and 'profundity' are elements that distinguish epiphanies from other types of change. Jensen (1998; 1999) similarly observed that epiphanies were emotional realisations - when the essence of something is revealed in a 'sudden' flash of recognition.

in more detail in Chapter Seven). For example, Stephanie made a decision that she was entitled to a relationship based on mutual sacrifice; for Cathy it is was an undeniable feeling that if she ever had sex with a women then she would never again have sex with a man. Miller and C'de Baca (2001) similarly report that three of their participant's epiphanies were triggered by momentous decisions. "Sometimes it is a simple decision, a logical, wilful process. People weigh up the pros and cons and come to the rational conclusion that change is needed" (Miller and C'de Baca 2001, p. 37).

Cathy's epiphany was also similar in process and content to Jensen's (1998; 1999) observations of women who came out as lesbians in later life. Using the analogy of a canoe heading towards Niagara Falls, Jensen suggests that her participants were compelled by new insights and emotion to reconstruct a new lesbian identity. Cathy similarly came to a point in her life where she was unable to turn around; she had arrived at a point in her life where she would never have another heterosexual relationship.

The characteristic 'personal transformation' was illustrated through the participants' lives in a number of ways - that is there was no particular context or type of event that was common to all of the participants' experiences. Virtually all of the previous research on epiphanies reviewed in this inquiry contained some reference to personal transformation (Denzin 1989; Denzin 1990; Miller and C'de Baca 1993; Goud 1995; Jarvis 1997; Jensen 1998; 1999; Miller and C'de Baca 2001), firmly establishing this as one of the distinctive elements of an epiphany.

The next characteristic 'illumination/insight' was defined as an acute awareness of something new, something which the person had been previously blind to. Denzin (1989) summed up this element when he suggested that personal character is manifested and made apparent. Similarly, Miller and C'de Baca (1993; 2001) observed that each of their participants felt that an important truth had been revealed to them. In the case of this inquiry it was established that all of the participants expressed new elements of self-identity, a result comparable with Jensen's (1998; 1999) investigation where she observed a process of 'identity deconstruction' and 'reconstruction'. The same process was observed in the participants of this inquiry as a period of intense self-identity analysis, much of it taking place in the months and weeks prior to the participant's epiphany. The life-stories indicate that this period of intense analysis was in response to a perceived loss of mastery over one's existence and the failure of one's defence mechanisms. It was also marked by a withdrawal into a private inner sanctum in order to protect oneself from the uncertain and uncontrollable forces of the outside world. This loss of mastery and withdrawal compounded the participant's experience of depression, inner turmoil and anxiety. In an epiphany the subject is able to perceive a new self-identity (Denzin 1989), to re-gain one's mastery over their life, and to continue the process of growth and becoming - a discovery described as 'liberating' because it allowed new and unexpressed freedoms. This experience of liberation was also mirrored in the results presented by Jarvis (1997) and Miller and C'de Baca (1993).

Baumeister (1994) proposes that changes in self-identity can be seen as a process involving the 'crystallization of discontent'. The individual, Baumeister argues, sustains a type of identity status quo by maintaining a commitment to preventing the crystallization of problems, conflicts, costs, objections and other negative features of their life. Problems that arise on a day-to-day level are dealt with and understood singularly, and each one seems outweighed by the broad pattern of positive features and benefits. Baumeister adds:

> Therefore, as long as the person can keep the problems isolated from each other, no major life change is warranted…The crystallization of discontent links together these many problems or costs that previously seemed unrelated. A multitude of problems or costs can outweigh a broad pattern of positive features and benefits, and can therefore provide the impetus to initiate a major change. (1994, p. 294)

It is possible then that the participants' depression, anxiety and inner turmoil was due to a build up of independent problems that when combined could no longer be isolated from each other.

It is also worth briefly discussing at this point the relationship between insight and change. From a psychoanalytic perspective insight into repressed childhood memories is seen as the catalyst for change. In fact, if an analysand fails to overcome their neurotic symptoms then the theory suggests that this is due to not having gained enough insight (Yalom 1980, p. 337). Epiphanies that occurred as a result of insight include Janet's uncovering of childhood sexual abuse, Michelle's adolescent desire to become a nurse, and Cathy's true sexual orientation. However, Yalom (1980, pp. 338-

339) argues that change and transformation are not always the result of a 'sighting inwards'. In fact Yalom has observed that many radical shifts in psychotherapy are the result of a change in 'perspective'. This argument is borne out by two of the participants' epiphanies where we see a change in perspective. For example, Peter's realisation that he could no longer postpone his existence, and Stephanie's realisation that she was entitled to a relationship based on mutual sacrifice.

As the evidence indicates, the process of 'meaning-making' was highly subjective. Each of the participant's epiphanies was meaningful for reasons that were wholly unique. Frick (2001) suggests that when images and emotions of youth and childhood remain latent, and then re-enter conscious awareness in adulthood through additional experience and emotional readiness, their meaning has the potential to stimulate powerful life-altering experiences. This notion, which Frick (2001) labelled 'symbolic latency', is certainly applicable to each of the participants in this inquiry because of their various re-interpretations of childhood experiences, which prompted new meaning in the participant's lives (this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven). Furthermore, Denzin (1989) suggests that epiphanies alter the meaning structures of a person's life, while Miller and C'de Baca (1993) found that 95% of their participants recorded 'seeing a new meaning' or a 'new kind of perception'. However, both Denzin (1989) and Miller and C'de Baca (1993) note that meaning-making is a retrospective process, whereas meaning for Peter, Michelle and Stephanie was proscribed during the experience itself. Janet and Cathy on the other hand constructed meaning retrospectively.

Lastly, the characteristic 'enduring nature' was uniformly agreed to by each of the participants. While it is impossible to give a definitive answer to this question, given that each of the participants is far from the end of their lives, they were able to respond with great confidence that their personal transformations would be permanent and lasting. Other evidence suggests the commonality of this characteristic, for example Denzin (cited in Ellis et al. 2002) suggests that epiphanies leave a mark on the person's life, while Jarvis (1997) and Miller and C'de Baca (1993; 2001) both note in their respective definitions that epiphanies are enduring transformations. In a follow up study on quantum change, C'de Baca and Wilbourne (2004) found the transformational changes the participants had reported ten years earlier had endured to the present day.

The participants' epiphanies also raise a number of other interpretations, which I shall now turn to. The first relates to the trauma and abuse suffered by Peter, Michelle, Janet and Cathy during their childhoods and adolescence. Miller and C'de Baca (1993) provide a starting point by suggesting that individuals whose lives have been torn away from the normal (those that have suffered trauma and abuse at some time in their lives) seem to be better prepared to integrate whatever it is that 'quantum change' (an epiphany) has to offer. The life-stories narrated by these four support Miller and C'de Baca's (1993) speculation. In fact the phenomenon that Miller and C'de Baca (1993) refer to has been labelled 'post-traumatic growth' (Jaffe 1985; Kessler 1987; Tedeschi et al. 1998), which is a positive manifestation of a negative event observed through dramatic transformations that occur suddenly and seemingly without warning (Frankl 1984; Losey 1994; Tennen and Affleck 1998).

The notion of post-traumatic growth and its connection to epiphanies poses another important question: Are epiphanies necessarily positive experiences? Denzin (1989; 1990) and Goud (1995) suggest that epiphanies are often felt as negative or unpleasurable. Nevertheless, suffering and adversity has the potential to transform a person's life. For example, Janet's first epiphany, which occurred because of her imprisonment, was certainly a nadir[45] experience. However, it was responsible for triggering a personal transformation that was ultimately positive and liberating because it motivated her to take responsibility and to begin making positive choices in her life. In terms of Janet's second epiphany, it is not uncommon for repressed experiences of sexual abuse to become conscious at, or around, the same age as the survivor's children (Herman 1992, p. 212). This conscious awareness is often experienced as a sudden flash of profound recognition, as was the case in Janet's experience (Tennen and Affleck 1998). Janet's self-destructive behaviours can also be further understood through Freud's (1957b) theory of 'psychic determinism', which states that psychological processes are causally determined by antecedent factors, in this case repressed memories of sexual assault. Janet's insight and reflection - her experience of imprisonment and the visit by her 13 year old twin daughters – led her to become consciously aware of unresolved conflicts from her childhood[46].

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[45] A 'nadir' experience is defined as the lowest point in one's life, the time of deepest depression (McAdams 1993).

[46] Freud's theory of 'psychic determinism' was recently operationalized (not for the first time) by Rothschild (2001) who investigated the psychophysiological process of trauma experience and post-traumatic stress disorder. Rothschild (2001) suggests that because of the overwhelming nature of

In his description of epiphanies, Denzin (1989; 1990) outlined a typology that included the 'major', the 'cumulative', the 'minor'/'illuminative', and the 'relived'. Some of which can used to describe the various epiphanies experienced by some of the participants in this inquiry. For example, Peter spoke of what he described as a series of 'minor' epiphanies in the days and months after his 'major' epiphany. So fundamental was his major epiphany that it took him weeks and months to fully integrate it. Cathy's first epiphany was cumulative in nature because it was the result of a series of events that had steadily built up over a long period of time, for example the discovery of a role model, the breakdown of her marriage, and her first lesbian affair. Janet's second epiphany was a 'reliving' of a major turning point in her adolescent life - being raped by a 46 year old man at her parent's party when she was 13 years old. Stephanie also described a number of minor realisations prior her epiphany:

> The issues to do with the estate were a series of small realisations that led to my epiphany, because my epiphany is around relationships.

The evidence would suggest that the phenomenology of epiphanies is sudden and abrupt, yet they are actually preceded by weeks, months and in some cases years of

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traumatic experiences, such events bypass the normal memory system and are instead recorded in the limbic system - the primitive part of the brain that regulates survival behaviours and emotional expression. The result is that memories laid down in this area of the brain are often hidden from conscious knowing, only to resurface into conscious awareness many years later.

psychological work in the form of minor insights and minor changes in values, beliefs and behaviours. Yalom elucidates:

> From my interviews with those who have undergone dramatic breakthroughs I have found that these life transformations are by no means sudden: the groundwork for change has been laid over preceding weeks, months, and years. By the time they have reached the point of seeking therapy or some other type of personal growth experience, many individuals have already, at a deep level, done the work and are on the brink of dramatic change. (1980, p. 344)

In the final outcome Jarvis (1997) observed that each of her participants believed they had now set out on a special path or purpose to which they felt compelled to follow. This result was mirrored in the participants of this inquiry who similarly felt that they found purpose and meaning in their lives. For example, Peter feels that he now has a 'voice' he would like to share with others through his writing; Michelle feels that through nursing she is able to express her empathy for others suffering; Stephanie became ready, for the first time in her life, for a relationship based on love and mutual sacrifice; Janet committed to a process of healing from her sexual assault and drug addictions; Cathy has committed to using her freedom to express those aspects of life that were denied her when growing up in New Zealand, and during her marriage.

6.4 Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to test the set of core epiphanic characteristics developed in Chapter Two, with the epiphanies contained in the life-stories of the five participants. The set of core characteristics outlined in Tables 1 and 3, are presented as a constellation of concepts that attempt to encompass an experience that is often as

unique as the individuals who experience them. The characteristics act as a model to provide greater understanding by making a useful distinction between epiphanies and other types of growth and consciousness raising experiences.

The preceding analysis revealed a high level of support for the characteristics as was evidenced from the actual epiphanies reported in this and other epiphanic studies. To begin with, each of the participants experienced periods of depression, inner turmoil and anxiety in the weeks and months prior to their epiphanies. It was conjectured that the participants' depression was of a mature reflective type as evidenced by their subsequent transformation.

Each of the participant's epiphanies was sudden and abrupt, which was the result of a resolute decision to change the way they viewed themselves and their world. The decision to change was manifested by an acute awareness of something to which the participant had either repressed in childhood and/or had been blind to. The period of depression, anxiety and turmoil prior to the participants' epiphanies was characterised by intense self-analysis, the result of which was a major new insight or change in perspective; the content of the new insight or change in perspective was deemed to be highly significant to the participant's life, so much so that it radically altered the perception of themselves and their world. The highly significant nature of the participants' new insights and the resultant change and transformation in self-identity that resulted was enduring, even permanent.

The most conspicuous aspect in the analysis of the participants' epiphanies was the childhood abuse and trauma suffered by four of the participants. This meant that the content of their respective epiphanies was closely related to overcoming the psychic defences they had constructed as a result of their abuse. The other point that this analysis raised is the very broad nature of the characteristics, which could be seen as either weaknesses or as strengths. Nevertheless, the set characteristics provide a useful understanding of the phenomenon as indicated by the participants' epiphanies and the supporting evidence from other studies. This analysis now enables us to move forward toward an alternative interpretation of epiphanies, which will now be taken up in the following chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN – EPIPHANIES, SELF-IDENTITY AND EXISTENTIALISM

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter, which is in line with the third objective of this inquiry, is to apply the philosophies of self-identity within the context of existentialism to the epiphanic phenomenon. Through this application, I hope to provide a new and alternative interpretation of epiphanies, one that provides a better understanding and which is likely to significantly differ from previous interpretations of the phenomenon (see for example Jarvis 1997; Miller and C'de Baca 2001).

This chapter is set out under eleven 'existentials' - that is the fundamental conditions of existence that were identified in Chapter Three through the philosophical works of Kierkegaard (1842; 1843; 1845; 1846; 1849; 1854), Nietzsche (1888; 1892; 1895), Heidegger (1927; 1961; 1977; 1987; 1988) and Sartre (1938; 1939; 1943; 1948; 1960). The eleven existentials are freedom, responsibility, choice, alienation, temporality, Being-towards-death, depression and anxiety, the inter-personal world, dogma and the socio-cultural world, meaning and purpose, and narrative. Each of these sub-headings have been placed under the major heading 'modes of authenticity', in order to signify their relationship to the process of moving toward a more authentic self-identity.

Although each of the existentials is discussed separately, the reality is they each represent an interconnected element of existence (van Deurzen 2002); this will

become apparent through the chapter. Under each of the sub-headings is a discussion on how the existential relates to the epiphanic phenomenon. This discussion is then supported by quotes from the participants of this inquiry, as well as quotes from Jarvis (1997), Miller and C'de Baca (1993; 2001) and Jensen (1998; 1999). Quotes from the participants of this inquiry are identified by their pseudonyms, while quotes from the participants of Jarvis (1997), Miller and C'de Baca (1993; 2001) and Jensen (1998; 1999) are identified by a reference to the author(s) and the page number where the quote was cited.

7.2 Modes Of Authenticity

7.2.1 Self-identity and freedom

> Freedom is not absolute…There are objective conditions of facticity that consciousness does not control: natural laws, physical states, and circumstances independent of my will. Freedom, however, is absolute in the sense that what we make of our circumstances, how we respond to them, the meanings we give to them are free projects that are not compelled or necessitated by objective forces. (Hatab 1999b, p. 161)

Epiphanies represent an appropriation of one's existential freedom, leading to a profound re-assessment of life's freely chosen projects and goals (Heidegger 1987, p. 154). The type of freedom invoked by an epiphany is best described as a newly created courage toward openness and a willingness to create new elements of self-identity; so that self-identity is experienced as 'Being-for-itself' (transcendence), as opposed to 'Being-in-itself' (immanence) (Sartre 1943, p. 80). Human beings strive to possess their 'in-itself', however human consciousness is unable to remain static.

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Human beings are always free to change, so that freedom is equated with uncertainty (Sartre 1943, p. 55).

Learning to appropriate one's existential freedom requires courage in order to encounter and negotiate the condition's existence. Epiphanies are experiences that reveal one's terrifying freedom, giving essence to life (Sartre 1948) and offering insight into the inter-relationship between inauthentic and authentic modes of self-identity. This creates a tension between two polar opposites, which van Deurzen (2002, p. 55) claims "supplies the very energy of life". When a person experiences an epiphany they encounter the conditions of existence and come to see their own inner condition as thrown (Heidegger 1927).

The epiphanic characteristic 'illumination/insight' was defined in Chapter Two as an acute awareness of something new, something to which the person had been previously blind to. The term itself is defined as throwing light upon that which had previously been in darkness. From a Heideggerian perspective the participants' epiphanies marked a new freedom toward openness (as opposed to closedness) and a clarification of their own Being, their physical, social, personal and spiritual world (van Deurzen 2002, pp. 62-93). The early stages of the participants' life-stories reveal they had chosen to eschew their existential freedom. They had become closed off to the full range of their own possibilities for Being and relating (Craig 1988, p. 3), as the following quotes illustrate:

> From that time (the attack in the park) that set in place a chain of insecurity and inferiority about my looks, about who I was, my whole identity. Peter

I just felt the blood drain out of my body. If you were to believe that you were made up of a spirit and a physical body. I'd say that my spirit just ran away at that point in time. It was a totally numb feeling – disassociation. Stephanie

That set the seed with my parents to be very judgemental of me, to write me off later on in life when things happened to me. Janet

It was traumatic and very tense, everyday when he was around you didn't know what was going to happen next, you would get into trouble for something you didn't know that you'd done wrong until he'd start yelling at you…It was just madness. Cathy

The participants' insight into their own inauthentic and authentic modes of existence provided the impetus to appropriate their freedom and to create their own unique self-identity. Their wider world was opened up so that what was once left in darkness (elements of self-identity) now tended toward illumination (see 6.2.4) As Heidegger (1927, p. 129) notes, "Dasein discovers the world in its own way and brings it close, if it discloses itself, its own authentic Being, then this discovery of the world and this disclosure of Dasein are always accomplished as a clearing-away of concealments and obscurities".

We can see this clearing away of concealments and obscurities in Peter's dream (the trigger for his epiphany) where he became open to the possibility of living (as opposed to dying via suicide) so that one day he would speak at his daughter's 21st birthday. Peter became open to the possibility of freedom, by creating a more coherent life-story by drawing together the disparate elements of his life (his past, present and future possibilities). Michelle's life was opened up to the possibility of

living more authentically by casting aside her need to gain approval and validation from her parents and others by seeking wealth and prestige. Stephanie was able to clear away the emotional concealments in her life by becoming more open (in terms of awareness and expression) to her anger, which enabled her to set herself free from accepting dysfunctional relationships. Stephanie achieved this by resolving that in the future she would expect a level of mutual sacrifice in her love relationships, while simultaneously realising that she did not need anyone else to make her feel free. Janet's second epiphany was a clearing away of the concealments that hid her childhood sexual assaults; and Cathy uncovered the possibility and freedom of an alternative sexual orientation enabling her to express her deepest inclinations.

From a Nietzschean (1892) perspective the participants' epiphanies can be seen as experiences of truth belonging to the human mind and will, where the individual creates their own values and patterns of behaviour in the absence of a higher power. This Nietzschean perspective can be seen in Denzin's (1990, p. 13) definition of an epiphany, which he described as an altering of the manner in which an individual defines themselves and their relations to others. Tedeschi et al. (1998, p. 4) similarly notes that sudden transformations stemming from earlier trauma are the result of 'the courage to be' a more creative individual with the strength and freedom to establish new perceptions about one's past. Nietzsche's call to 'become what you are' is illustrated through Jensen's (1999, p. 204) participants who created new lesbian identities, out of the ashes of their marriages, so they became 'more themselves'. This ethic of freedom and self-definition can also be seen in the epiphanies of alcoholics

who report a sudden and complete loss of the desire to drink, persisting over a lifetime (Kurtz cited in Miller and C'de Baca 2001, p. 6).

In other accounts of epiphanies it is possible to see the Heideggerian perspective of 'openness' and 'closedness', for example the description of Oscar Wilde's transformation while he was serving a prison sentence for homosexuality (Schultz 2001). Wilde's realisation of suffering and sorrow - moods and states of mind he once ignored and considered modes of imperfection – opened up and illuminated a world of sorrow, suffering, empathy and compassion, in a way he had never encountered before. Jensen's (1999) participants similarly experienced freedom as an opening up and/or illumination of one's possibilities by uncovering alternative sexual orientations and modes of living not subscribed to by cultural norms. Jarvis (1997, p. 141) noted that her participants described their epiphanies as liberating, while Miller and C'de Baca's (2001, p. 18) participants saw their epiphanies as new realisations, or new ways of understanding; each of these examples illustrating the individual's freedom to create new elements of self-identity. Nevertheless illumination and the conscious awareness of a new insight requires courage for positive change and transformation to be enacted, as the following two quotes from Jarvis's research participant illustrate:

> It was a major opening for me (the epiphany), because what I felt was this enormous freedom and peace from that decision. So it was as if I had created endless space. This enormous encompassing framework that dealt with every question in my life, I had struggled out of, you know like coming out of a chrysalis, like coming out of a cocoon…In the ensuing weeks I felt an immense feeling of openness. The word I would use is spaciousness…Both of the experiences were sudden. Thereafter my life was different…But it took courage. (1997, p. 87)

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At many different points during the interview Arthur referred to courage, the courage that had emerged in him following his first epiphany, the courage to subsequently rethink his life 'from the bottom up' when he needed to whether in regard to his religious framework, his personal life, or his professional aspirations. He noted, "The one quality, the personal quality it has always had to do with is courage. The courage opens up the spaciousness. The kicking in of courage when you realize you can let go of the old structure. (1997, p. 87)

Jensen similarly observed the willing of courage in her participants as they attempted to express their new sexual orientation:

Another aspect of this skill could be the security in herself that allows her to know about her same-gender attractions at some level and to believe her self-knowledge, even when the patriarchal social structure does not "allow" her to know what she knows…Another skill is the confidence leading to the willingness to re-evaluate the decision to marry and to risk the social, economic, and personal consequences of leaving a marriage. (Jensen 1999, p. 190)

7.2.2 Self-identity and responsibility

Being condemned to freedom means being condemned to responsibility. We are responsible for our actions, choices, and the creation and ongoing definition of self-identity. Guilt is the result of Dasein's failure to take responsibility for its Being-toward-possibilities (Heidegger 1927, pp. 295-297). In the absence of essence, and in the absence of God, human beings are free to be what they adopt. Since man is thus self-surpassing, and can grasp objects only in relation to his self surpassing, the individual is at the heart and centre of her/his own transcendence to which she/he must take full responsibility (Sartre 1948, p. 55).

'Bad faith' is the term Sartre (1943, p. 55) used to describe the avoidance of responsibility and commitment toward life's freely chosen projects. Bad faith is a form of self-deception and denial of one's existential reality. In Peter's case it is possible to see an example of bad faith through his eschewing of a purposeful life.

> I realised from the time I began working that I had been pursuing something, chasing something, some sort of purpose that was defined by career and not necessarily by a breadth of who you are, and an identity. So I wasn't building an all-round person. Peter

Nevertheless, Peter continued down the path of avoidance by concealing and obscuring his deeper yearning for a purpose and allowing his angst to develop into a crisis, after which time he fell into what he calls "a deep sleep", an "emotional hibernation" a state of existence he created in order to avoid the responsibility of changing his own life. Michelle similarly avoided taking responsibility for her life by constructing a defence mechanism that enabled her to avoid encountering the conditions of existence because of a fear that she would be diminished or annihilated by them. She achieved this by regressing:

> I really think looking back on my life I was a child trying to live in an adult world. That's how I felt all the time. When there was a problem, whether it was relationships or people at work or when I was under a lot of stress at work, it would be nothing for me to be out in my car four times a week sitting there crying. The corporate world is just too difficult for a 7 year old and that's how it felt. Michelle

In Stephanie's case there was an unwillingness to take responsibility for her dysfunctional relationships:

> There were a few times I tried to break it off but didn't…It took ten long years for me to eventually realise, although looking back now I think I always knew it wasn't right…What it came down to was I said 'Where do we go from here? We've been through this whole process. I guess I feel like I've been patient.' It came back to that same thing. What about me? How can I leave this person that I've been with? So then again I put myself into this situation where again I was with someone who was thinking about himself. That took a long, long time to get over. Stephanie

Nietzsche viewed responsibility as a commitment to a continually broadening process of appropriation and enlargement of one's capacity for a meaningful life (Nehamas 2004, p. 88). The application of this idea can be seen in Nichols' (1987) literary epiphanies which he defined as an expansive experience, where one's life grows in stature so that one becomes more confident in playing a greater role in the lives of others. In another example, Miller and C'de Baca (2001) discuss the idea of a 'breaking point' to explain epiphanies. A breaking point is the point at which an individual is unable to continue on their present course. It is a point of desperation where something has to give, so the individual makes changes in their life to avoid a similar dilemma in the future. However, I would suggest that a 'breaking point' is a point at which the individual has arrived at an existential crisis and where - through courage, will and passion - they resolve to take responsibility for their life and to act by making choices and decisions to define an authentic self-identity.

We can see an example of this in Stephanie's epiphany where she describes a process of perturbation (extreme pressure) because of her years of unwillingness to listen to what her body was trying to tell her. Stephanie had spent most of her life avoiding difficult decisions and negotiating the important elements of her existence. She finally resolved to take responsibility for her life knowing that it was going to be difficult and painful. She realised that taking responsibility would enable her to define and create a life based on authentic beliefs and values (see 6.2.3). While in prison Janet displayed a similar resolve to take responsibility for her life by questioning how she had come to be in such a horrible place and situation. Never before had Janet questioned the direction of her life and the part she played in determining it. While Janet was sitting alone in her prison cell contemplating her situation, she resolved never to return, to stop taking drugs and to regain custody of her two daughters (see 6.2.3).

7.2.3 Self-identity and choice

Choice, like responsibility, is intimately connected to freedom and the radical contingency and non-determined condition of human existence (Golomb 1995, p. 143). With freedom comes responsibility, and with responsibility comes choices for defining one's self-identity. For Heidegger (1927, p. 266) choice is the primary means through which the process of individuation occurs, and the primary mode for overcoming alienation and the appropriation of one's possibilities. Sartre (1939; 1943; 1948) similarly saw choice as a tool for defining and constituting personal identity; essence consists of what the individual chooses to do, so that actions are not actions of the self, rather the self is a product of action. The self is brought into Being through

choices to live a certain way; the responsibility for who and what I am is solely the result of my choices (Hatab 1999a, p. 76).

The participants' epiphanies in this inquiry were predicated on a momentous choice that represented a move toward authenticity. Prior to their epiphanies the participants' capacity for choice making, and more broadly their means of relating to the world, was influenced and shaped by their unchosen (immanent) contexts (family, culture and society), as the following quotes illustrate:

> I…understood the concept of cowardice at a very early age. I knew it was actually wrong to run away from these people…I would run away. Cowardice has been a huge burden in my life. Peter

> I just hated myself because underneath I knew I was trying to be something I wasn't. It was like I had no choice at the time. I hated myself. Michelle

> When someone steals your virginity it opens a door and you begin to experience life in a different way. Janet

> She was totally controlled by my father when he was around, and she played the submissive role. When he wasn't around she would often complain to us children about him, however when he was around it was suddenly her and him against the kids. Cathy

Due to their respective childhoods, the participants' openness to the world had been stunted. As they grew into adulthood they continued to make choices based on an alienated self-identity. Nevertheless, while their life history was formative it was in no

way determinative of their future possibilities (Hicklin 1988, p. 131). Out of the depression, anxiety and inner turmoil that this alienation created, the participants resolved to make a frightening leap toward a more authentic existence by choosing to appropriate their freedom and responsibility. Through sheer force of will and passion, the participants began to create a more authentic self-identity (Kierkegaard 1849). They chose to relate to the world in a different manner. For Peter it was a choice to accept that there was something deeper within him, a voice he could share with the world. For Michelle it was a choice to renew and reaffirm a past passion and desire to become a nurse. For Stephanie it was a choice for greater equity and mutual sacrifice in her love relationships. For Janet it was a choice to accept the impact of sexual abuse in shaping her self-identity and her openness to surrender, which allowed her to reconcile her past life in light of the trauma she suffered as a child. For Cathy it was a choice to leave her husband and children to begin a new and more authentic life as a lesbian. Cathy also made a conscious choice that if she ever had sex with a woman then she would never again have sex with a man. From these experiences it is possible to see the participants' choices were a movement toward freedom and openness, a willingness to explore 'what is' (existence) in all of its complexity and richness by availing themselves of greater options (Hicklin 1988, p. 135).

In the wider epiphanic literature Goud (1995) suggests that epiphanies perform a valuable therapeutic, decision making, and life validating function. In his own life Goud felt that epiphanies and the realisations they contain, provide an awareness of one's freedom to make new choices in light of the impermanent condition of self-identity. Loyttyniemi (2001) similarly notes that epiphanies involve the replacing of

previous expectations with new ones, so that future decisions and choices stem from changes in how one views oneself from a current and historical perspective. Miller and C'de Baca (2001, pp. 36-38) suggest that when people are asked what caused their epiphany they often replied "I just decided". Many of their participants' epiphanies were constituted by a wilful decision - a choice that change was urgently needed, for example:

> I realized that I could set myself free from my past and really live now, that I could choose at any moment in time how I feel…What's in my mind really is my choice. I never had seen it that way before. I'd always been a victim…What I knew in that moment is that it was me. (Miller and C'de Baca 2001, p. 44)

> I knew that day with absolute certainty that things were going to be different. It just felt different from all the half-hearted resolutions I had ever made in my life. I knew for sure that if doctors can't help me, then I'm going to have to do it myself, and that is what I did, starting from that day up till now. (Miller and C'de Baca 2001, p. 45)

Jensen's (1998; 1999) participants, prior to coming out as lesbians, married and had children. In these cases, inauthentic choices were made because of familial, cultural and social pressure to conform to widely held expectations. Epiphanies can also grow out of choices stemming from a newly created courage to transcend suffering and to learn the lessons that result from traumatic experiences (Tedeschi et al. 1998).

7.2.4 Self-identity and alienation

Epiphanies are an overcoming of alienation through crisis, suffering, and profound personal insight about self-identity and world. People become alienated when they try

to avoid the conditions of existence, which include its origins (thrown), its conditions (freedom, responsibility, choice), and its ultimate destination (death). Alienation is an experience manifested by a failure to create meaning and purpose in one's life and an avoidance of responsibility for defining one's self-identity. Kenevan adds:

> Since the self is a temporal process, one can be alienated from oneself, say, through self-deception about one's past or denial of responsibility for one's future; one can also lose oneself in the absorption and preoccupation of everyday public existence. (1999, p. 5)

From the perspective of alienation, the participants' epiphanies in this and other epiphanic studies resulted from an encounter with one's existence – its immanence and transcendence. This crisis of existence (existential crisis) was characterised by despair and a probing of the innermost layers of the individual's turbulent life, where one's basic assumptions were examined. The individual poses fundamental questions such as, 'who am I'? 'What is the purpose and meaning of my life'? 'Is my life worth living'? As the following quotes illustrate:

> I was strongly convinced that I wasn't OK – that there was something inherently wrong with me. I can remember that same guy I was telling you about…telling me that I just didn't see myself right and I think that was true. That it was sort of like being steeped in original sin or something like that. This was something that couldn't be fixed. And I just didn't want to deal with it at all…I think it came from my feelings about my sexuality. I think that I…when I sort of came out to myself, decided that this was something I was going to have to deal with and that was going to be part of my life, if I was to live, this was going to be who I was. (Jensen 1999, p. 66)

I've been questioning and dealing with the questions that came up in that experience ever since because everything came up for question. In a way that became what I do and who I am. (Jarvis 1997, p. 117)

Ontological insecurity (Laing 1960, p. 39) manifests an existential crisis, which results in depression, anxiety and inner turmoil. This often leads to thoughts of suicide and death because of a fear that one's self-identity will splinter and fragment. The epiphany comes as a resolution to existential questioning through illumination, insight, perspective and meaning. This does not necessarily end the individual's suffering. Instead it provides important lessons and potential answers (or in some cases more questions), that in time enable a greater mastery of one's freedom, more positive mood states, and the creation of a more authentic self-identity. Through the process of overcoming alienation the individual confronts their existence by appropriating freedom and responsibility for defining and shaping their self-identity as well as moving toward goals and projects that imbue life with meaning and purpose.

In the wider epiphanic literature Denzin (1989, pp. 15-18; 1990, pp. 70-71) suggests that epiphanies are existential crises that occur in problematic interactional situations. Human interaction, according to Denzin, provides primary meaning to a subject's life and alters how a person defines themselves and their relations with others, so that personal character is revealed. What Denzin describes here is an overcoming of alienation through insight, perspective and an awareness of the basic building blocks of self-identity - human interaction and Being-in-the-world (Heidegger 1927). Jensen (1998; 1999) similarly illustrates evidence of alienation prior to her participants'

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lesbian epiphanies through the repression of alternative identities. Jensen argues that her participants' periods of identity exploration in adolescence and early adulthood had been blocked on the cognitive, affective and behavioural realms:

> If a woman's identity develops in line with the expectations of her family and social circle, she can feel affirmed by others, comforted by her "fitting in". However, if women are not free to consider fully what their intuition, their bodies, their motivation, and their intelligence might be telling them, their choice may be that to fit in, they must feel incoherency, emptiness, a sense of things "not being right". Women with same-gender impulses have experienced an additional level of limitation and, therefore, an additional layer of inauthenticity. (Jensen 1999, pp. 69-70)

Jensen (1998; 1999) also notes a distinct lack of role models to which these women could look to for greater self-awareness and agency, all of which conspired to alienate them from themselves and the world around them. It was exposure to more accurate information that resulted in a gradual deconstruction of their alienated (heterosexual) self-identities. The epiphany represented the final consummation of this process.

Heidegger's (1927) notion of 'fallness', which he describes as a mode of inauthenticity, where the individual falls away from their own-most Being into the world of the they, can be used to better understand the experiences of Jensen's participants. When we fall into the world of the they we assimilate the thoughts, beliefs and values of an impersonal world constructed by religion, culture, media and politics, so that we feel what they feel, believe what they believe. The they secures and manufactures consent to their standards of sexual identity (heterosexuality), marriage (to the opposite sex), and family (gender roles and the production of

children). Falling is a condition of Dasein because its existence is thrown. It is thrown into a world not of its choosing and is required to exist in conditions of freedom and responsibility, which must be negotiated and lived with in all of the inherent paradoxes and contradictions, as the following quote illustrates:

> You have gotten into this mess by taking other people's word for things – your family and your father's friends who told you that your ideals were impracticable, that this was a tough hard world with not enough goods to go around, therefore you must get yours first and then perhaps you can afford the luxury of ideals…But if I am to believe in myself and the validity of my own ideas, I must stop thinking as other people told me to and rely on my own experience. (Jarvis 1997, pp. 110-111)

Kierkegaard (1845) expressed ideas of alienation through his hierarchy of self-hood, which he referred to as stages on life's way. In the aesthetic realm, selfhood is given over to the basic pleasures of life; questions concerning meaning and purpose are avoided through anonymous routine and the close identification with social/status roles. The choice to avoid one's encounter with existence – one's inescapable self-consciousness and terrible freedom – is a choice to avoid anxiety, despair and melancholy[47] by dwelling in the aesthetic realm. While the aesthete's outward

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[47] Kierkegaard's use of the terms despair and melancholy would seem to be describing emotions and moods that would now be labelled depression. In the modern context melancholy and despair are often thought to fall under the wider syndrome of minor and major depression (A.P.A. 2000, p. 356). For the purpose of this chapter the terms melancholy, despair and depression will be used interchangeably to refer to a general lowering of mood and spirit.

appearance would indicate status, beauty, and enjoyment, the inner result is one of guilt, loneliness and despair - in short alienation:

I was earning really good money at the time. At the end of that period I got a commission cheque for $70,000. I just remember getting home on that Friday night when the commission was through, knowing that I'd been taxed half of it so there was $35,000 in my bank account. Thinking that obviously I'd done what I'd set out to achieve when I was younger. That I was starting to make all this money but I just felt like I was dying inside. The more money I earned the more dead I felt. I didn't know what to do with it. Even if I did do something with it, it didn't really make me happy. I had nothing that I wanted to do. I didn't feel passionate about anything so what was the point of having it? Michelle

If you're busy and you're doing things you can create a diversion to things that are real to you. It becomes natural at the end of the day. I guess if I look back at the old Stephanie that's what a lot of time was invested in. Doing all these other things…Because the beauty of Stephanie now is a very good sense of a feeling inside of me, of a sense of knowingness. It's not just related to relationships I don't think. It's a sense of knowingness about the future. If I died tomorrow it wouldn't bother me. It's that kind of feeling. Stephanie

(I)n terms of how I looked from the outside. I mean to all apparent purposes, I was the kid who could do everything. Get the grades, write for the student paper, dazzle everyone with my clarinet playing, and be a social gadfly…I was one of those 'most likely to succeed' kids. But inside I was very disconnected from what I was feeling and who I was. I thought I had it together, but in fact, looking back, it's so obvious that I was really in a lot of anguish. (Jarvis 1997, p. 117)

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7.2.5 Self-identity and temporality

> Whenever Dasein tacitly understands and interprets something like Being, it does so with time as its standpoint. Time must be brought to light – and genuinely conceived – the horizon for all understanding of Being and for any way of interpreting it. (Heidegger 1927, p. 17)

Self-identity is a synthesis of one's past, whether in repetition or in having forgotten, one's future possibilities, and being ahead of oneself in making a present (Heidegger 1927, p. 350). Heidegger's (1987, p. 43) reformulation of time as a simultaneous trinity is very different to linear, quantifiable, geometric or measurable time, which views time as a sequence of successive nows. Linear time alienates because of its preoccupation with the present at the expense of past and future possibilities. Authentic existence becomes lost because linear time denies the narrative structure of self-identity, which is accomplished by cumulativeness, coherence and direction (Guignon 1993a, p. 230).

A temporal analysis of epiphanies begins with the experience of depression in the months and weeks prior to the participants' epiphanies. Time plays a central role in depression because future possibilities are closed off. The pain associated with depression is due to a privation of time (Heidegger 1987, p. 46) because the past is contaminated, and one is unable to meaningfully project oneself into the future. In reference to the past, the participants in this inquiry viewed it either through the prism of victim-hood (Michelle, Janet, Cathy) or omnipotence (Peter, Stephanie). The past was re-lived over and again as a series of either shameful (victim-hood) or guilt (omnipotent) inducing events (see 6.2.1).

Janet's repressed memories of sexual abuse disrupted the temporal coherence of her life so that self-identity was closed off to the richness and complexity of existence. Hicklin (1988, p. 137) suggests that self-victimization stems from omnipotent guilt - in Janet's case, feeling entirely and exclusively responsible for her childhood sexual abuse. Janet's uncovering of her repressed abuse (her second epiphany) enabled her to recognise that her patterns of self-victimization functioned as a barrier between the present and her past pain. Put another way, Janet was able to make links between her past abuse and present behaviour by throwing light onto that which had once remained in darkness. By assessing, renewing and affirming her past, which Janet labelled "healing her life", she was able to integrate the forgotten and/or misunderstood elements of her life-story. This process of "self-healing" enabled Janet to develop a sense of temporal coherence, and in the process create a more authentic self-identity. Moreover, the integration and coherence of Janet's past enabled expressions of self-identity other than victim-hood, even though the past constituted an immanent feature for Janet (in that she was incapable of changing it in the present) she grasped her freedom and set about reinterpreting it (Weiss 1999, p. 469).

Often latent images from youth and childhood provide the revelatory material that trigger epiphanies, as illustrated in Janet's case (Frick 2001). These latent possibilities lie at the heart of many epiphanies so that in adulthood the individual grants time, or makes time, for things to come into Being (Condrau 1988, p. 109). Denzin (1989, p. 71) suggests the meaning of epiphanies are always given retrospectively in reliving and re-experiencing events from the past. An example of this can be seen in

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Michelle's epiphany in which she relived and re-experienced an adolescent desire of one day becoming a nurse. In Heidegger's (1927, p. 17) ontology Dasein springs forth along the temporal arc of existence so that self-identity is conceived as an accumulation. Often an individual's epiphany is preceded by weeks, months and sometimes years of minor realisations and illuminations, which are stored away and consciously accumulate (Jensen 1999, p. 204), giving rise to the idea that epiphanies stem from a type of philosophical and psychological work, which is carried out in the weeks and months prior to the actual epiphanic moment.

Although fleeting, epiphanies and the interpretative significance they contain continue to live on in the participant's memories forever. Previous studies suggest that epiphanies live on through time because of the meaning and significance ascribed to them (C'de Baca and Wilbourne 2004). However, it is commonly hypothesized that the actual transformation in self-identity is seen as an involuntarily reaction, that epiphanies occur without purposeful conscious effort (Miller and C'de Baca 1993; Goud 1995; Jarvis 1997; Jensen 1998; Jensen 1999; Miller and C'de Baca 2001). I would like to argue instead, as previously stated, that epiphanies come into Being through sheer force of will and passion (Kierkegaard 1845). Emotions are strategically and intentionally marshalled in order to make themselves felt in consciousness - we are moved by the need for inner signification of the signified (Sartre 1939, p. 33). Therefore, epiphanies are the result of a conscious wilful choice for change, giving rise to Condrau's (1988, p. 109) idea that individuals grant time, or make time, for things to come into Being.

Epiphanies can also make one acutely aware of the temporal condition of self-identity, that existence occurs through time, and that death is our ultimate destination. In the following quote Peter speaks about his newfound belief in the preciousness of time, which is also an expression of a much deeper resolve that existence can no longer be postponed[48].

> It's that feeling of every day is precious; time is so valuable now. I have to stop letting that be a destructive force as opposed to a liberating force. I want time to be a liberating force and I've got time on my side. Every day now is a gift to me. I get up and I see the sun coming in the window and I say 'that's a gift. Use that gift in whatever way you can during the day and move forward'. Peter

7.2.6 Self-identity and Being-towards-death

Being-towards-death stimulates one's priorities by giving rise to an awareness of the fleeting and ephemeral condition of success, status and material wealth (Kierkegaard 1845; Heidegger 1927). Death, the existentialists argue, can be viewed either as a morbid threat that is duly ignored, or a force for living life through action, commitment, courage and passion. Moreover, it is not the act of dying that is the focus of existential philosophy, "but the problem of how one chooses one's existence in view of, and in spite of the fact that one must die" (Mui 1999, p. 101). As Condrau notes:

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[48] See Yalom (1980, p. 161-165) for case examples of how his own patients came to the realisation that their existence could longer be postponed.

Heidegger and others have shown us that people who cannot die cannot live, and people who cannot live cannot die. (1988, p. 127)

Death evokes a range of fears, most commonly dealt with in a mode of inauthenticity by turning toward the superficial world of the they and accomplishing a disburdening or tranquillisation of one's morbid fears and thoughts. The paradox of this turn toward the they is that it is a form of dying without facing death (Condrau 1988, pp. 114-115). Or we may instead choose to face death by learning to live with the fear of our own, and others' mortality.

Being-towards-death is a state of existence where death is lived as our ultimate destination. Awareness of finitude is most commonly brought into Being when we ourselves are faced with death and loss, either through suffering (accident, illness, depression, the death of a love one) or a desire for death itself (suicide, euthanasia, self-destructive behaviour, war). Death, according to the existentialists, has the potential to act as a catalyst "that can move one, from one state of being to a higher one" (Yalom 1980, p. 160). Suffering evokes many of the same painful emotions as death for example terror, isolation, and destruction, bringing one closer to one's finite existence, and closer to our fellow human beings whom we realise also face the same fallibilities and vulnerabilities as ourselves. Nevertheless there is a difference between experiences of suffering that lead to prolonged suffering, and those that prompt transcendence (Kierkegaard 1849).

For Peter, thoughts of non-existence were a constant companion throughout his depression in the months and weeks prior to his epiphany (see 6.2.1.). Peter's feelings

of pain, suffering and hopelessness, his 'sickness unto death' (Kierkegaard 1849), were borne out of the utter meaninglessness he ascribed to his existence, which he responded to with suicidal ideation and eventually a plan to kill himself. Peter had chosen to face his own mortality, because of the non-existent condition of his life, rather than sink again into alienation knowing that life was not being fully lived. As van Deurzen (2002, p. 215) suggests, suicide is a desire to be cured of life. Nevertheless thoughts of suicide permitted Peter the courage to express his fear of freedom and to overcome his fear of death and God's judgement in the afterlife (Nietzsche 1892). His desire for non-existence was a desperate defence of his self-identity in the face of encroaching meaninglessness and chaos. By contemplating suicide Peter was learning to face his life more honestly by accepting the inherent contradictions of existence. Tedeschi et al. notes:

> Persons experiencing the loss of a loved one, facing their own illness, or dealing with other crises, may be compelled to more honestly face and experience the fundamental existential questions in ways not possible for persons who are not faced with trauma. (1998, p. 14)

It is possible to see Peter's mood (depression and anxiety) as an intentional act (Sartre 1939), which allowed a breakthrough to higher levels of consciousness and self-realization (McCarthy 1999). It is only because Peter had willed the death of everything, that self-identity came to know itself more intimately, because it is in contemplating death that one learns to live their existence (Condrau 1988, p. 127). If death, and the nothingness it entails, can be honestly encountered, then so too can the chaos and contradictions of life. Paradoxically, it was Peter's thoughts of suicide that provided him with the necessary energy and motivation for transcendence, so that

despite his depression and lack of meaning and purpose, he was able to master his existence by expressing courage in the face of terrifying freedom. Farber (1990) describes this contemplation of suicide, without undertaking the act itself, 'the life of suicide':

> (The life of suicide) must be seen not as the situation or state or of mind which leads to the act, but that situation in which the act-as-possibility, quite apart from whether it eventually occurs or not, has a life of its own. (1990, pp. 119-220)

A desire for death represents an acute awareness of our terrifying existence; it stimulates a profound acknowledgement of the meaninglessness and chaos of life, our humanness, and our awareness that we must face death on our own. Through the crisis of non-existence, meaninglessness and chaos, and by undermining the temporal quality of his life, Peter summoned a symbolic image of authenticity (his dream of speaking at his daughter's 21st birthday) by projecting his self-identity into a future filled with purpose and meaning.

The self-same process can be observed in Jarvis's (Jarvis 1997, pp. 83-84) study where one of her participants, aged 17 at the time, began to experience fear and guilt because of minor transgressions against the rules of the Catholic Church to which he belonged. Feelings of guilt coupled with the divorce of his parents led to major depression and thoughts of suicide. His ability to honestly acknowledge his feelings of turmoil and his courage to face non-existence (suicide) became the catalyst for his epiphany:

I had an absolute transformation. That all I needed was courage. It wasn't an intellectual decision. It was just a kind of a vision, and certainly for me it was an epiphany. If I conducted my life with courage, everything would be fine…I felt all this space opening up in front of me. I started to act with courage rather than panic. (Jarvis 1997, p. 85)

The will-to-death was also mirrored in the experience of other participants prior to their epiphanies:

You've had enough and you really don't care anymore about what others might think of you. I just remember asking myself the question 'what about me'? It really becomes about survival. You come to this momentous decision, 'Am I going to live, because I haven't made a decision on that yet? If I am going to live, it's going to be my life, because if I have to keep living like this I am not going to stay around anymore'. Cathy

He had gone through five years of melancholic nightmare…Fuller decided that for the sake of his wife and new baby he had to take his life, so that relatives could take over their care and their wellbeing would be assured. He developed a plan which he was intent on carrying out. He would go to Lake Michigan, and swim to his death. (Jarvis 1997, p. 109)

One night after our son had gone to bed and my husband was gone, I remembered there was a gun in the house. It was a forty-five, a big gun. I thought, 'Life is not worth it, and I can't go on this way'. I thought I could shoot my son – I'd have to take him with me – and then shoot myself. It was not an idle thought. (Miller and C'de Baca 2001, p. 25)

I just felt like there was no reason to live. I'd had those feelings all my adult life, and I kept running from one thing to another looking for satisfaction in my life. (Miller and C'de Baca 2001, p. 103)

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Death in the form of loss may also be seen to play a metaphorical role in the inter-relationship between inauthenticity and authenticity. It is only in dying to ourselves that we come to know ourselves and summon the courage to change (Kierkegaard 1849, p. 48). Through the epiphanic process inauthentic elements of self-identity (barriers that seek to protect and immure against existence) die under the illumination and insight of awareness, and a willing in the form of courage, out of which authentic elements come into Being (openness to mystery, uncertainty and the arbitrariness of existence). This awareness of authentic modes of self-identity is illustrated by the implicit acceptance of the impermanent condition of existence by the participants in this inquiry, who chose to transcend the pain of depression, anxiety and inner turmoil in order to live richer and more fulfilling lives.

Accepting the impermanence of self-identity may also be symbolic of death and loss in the way that depression, anxiety and inner turmoil stimulate one's priorities. For example, the male participants in Miller and C'de Baca's (1993, p. 266) study all experienced a radical re-ordering of their values as a result of their epiphanies. The five highest values in order, prior to their epiphanies, included wealth, adventure, achievement, pleasure and being respected. All of which are characteristic of Being immersed in the superficial world of the they (Heidegger 1927, p. 311). After their epiphanies the same values were ranked (out of 50) in order of 50th, 29th, 26th, 25th, and 33rd respectively. Top ranking value priorities became spirituality, personal peace, family, God's will, and honesty.

7.2.7 Self-identity, depression and anxiety[49]

> Emotion is not an accident, it is a mode of our conscious existence, one of the ways in which consciousness understands (in Heidegger's sense of *Verstehen*) its Being-in-the-world. (Sartre 1939, p. 61)

Depression and anxiety represent a uniquely human experience because unlike animals, human beings are 'open' to their world, which means they are interpretative, temporal, meaning-making creatures (Kierkegaard 1845; Heidegger 1927). The root of depression and anxiety is an overriding sense of meaninglessness concerning one's past, or one's possible future, leading to a closing down of one's possibilities. In contrast to modern theories of psychopathology (Salecl 2004), Kierkegaard (1849) saw melancholy, irony, anxiety, and despair as the beginning of self-hood; they are moods that prompt a deep and penetrating inspection of one's existence, including one's tragedies. Such intense self-questioning, Kierkegaard argues, arises out of the courage to become aware of one's alienation (Craig 1988, p. 10; Moss 2001, p. 10). It is through anxiety, Heidegger (1927, p. 187-188) notes, that Dasein is able to recognise its own fallness, its existence in an impersonal world of idle talk, contentment, and tranquillisation, from which opportunities for authenticity spring forth.

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[49] The term anxiety is used in this context to refer to neurotic anxiety, which is a pathological state synonymous with depression and a general lowering of mood, as opposed to the more typical existential explication of anxiety as a subjective awareness of the conditions of freedom, choice, responsibility and alienation. Van Deurzen (2002) suggests that neurotic anxiety is often the result of avoiding existential anxiety in the first place.

As modes of suffering, depression and anxiety represent an unwillingness to adjust to freedom, responsibility and choice. They are moods synonymous with a deliberate closing down of one's relationship to the world, to the richness and complexity of life, where choices and opportunities offer little interest or enticement. In depression the individual's Being functions in isolation, apart from its world, so that Being-in-the-world is disrupted (Guignon 2004a). Depression and anxiety are a restricted world-openness focused on despair and anguish, stemming from a perceived inability to master one's life.

By looking at each of the participants' epiphanies in this inquiry it is possible to see the closing down of one's openness to the world (see 6.2.1). Closedness coupled with fallness were also common elements in other epiphanic studies, as the following quotes illustrate:

> I got fearful to the degree that I was thinking of suicide, fearing that I was going to have a nervous breakdown…I found I couldn't make decisions easily…I found my world shrank. (Jarvis 1997, p. 84)

> I just felt I was never going to get out. I was sinking, and I felt that I would die there. After a while I stopped trying to get out and just spent my life in bars with other men. I would have killed myself eventually. I entertained the thought several times, to get out of the mess. I had no real love for anyone or anything. I saw no reason for my existence. I wasn't contributing to anything. I wasn't going anywhere. I just spent my time in bars and having fun, or what I thought was fun. (Miller and C'de Baca 2001, p. 27)

When an individual is unable to master and appropriate their existential anxiety, because of an inability to establish a secure sense of self-identity (ontological insecurity) (Laing 1960, p. 39), they respond to the conditions of existence by constructing psychological defences (such as bad faith, isolation, or an escape from freedom itself) in order to protect and shut themselves off from a hostile and uninviting world (Fromm 1941; Yalom 1980). This approach to life becomes a denial of existence itself. Transcendence is viewed with suspicion because the ontologically insecure individual associates change with splintering, fragmentation and annihilation. The depressed person views change and transcendence as seemingly impossible tasks, because of a perceived inability to make choices and decisions. In depression, the deliberate closing down of one's world is accompanied by feelings of guilt, shame[50] and grief, as noted in the following:

> It was about difficulty with intimacy…There was a lot of verbal and emotional abuse that went on in my marriage and this whole terrible price of having secrets and shame brings to you…Anyway, we agreed to separate and subsequently divorced. But after we separated, it took me a little while…For a number of months there, I think what I was doing was grieving, but I don't think I was really grieving him…Part of me was very aware that I was leaving a façade that I'd maintained for many years that had been an important façade for me, and then finally…if I was going to live and have a life, I was going to need to have a sexual life, and it was clear to me that I didn't want to date men. (Jensen 1999, p. 167)

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[50] See Fuchs (2002) for an in-depth discussion on the phenomenology of guilt and shame and its relationship to depression.

The narrowing of one's life, the feelings of guilt, shame, and grief, continue to spiral leading to further depression and eventually thoughts of suicide. Yet even at this point of utter despair one's suffering peaks because of the terrible realisation that one's misery, like existence (but not alienation), must be endured alone. So much so that changes in geographical location and the companionship of others, regardless of how loving, do nothing to relieve the claustrophobia of self-consciousness. In this state, where escape is impossible, where psychological defences, and the avoidance of change do nothing to stave off pain, the individual comes to finally acknowledge their depression and anxiety as a catalyst for change; it is a call to one's conscience, a call back to oneself signalling a period of illumination and insight, and if coupled with courage, an existential leap toward a more authentic self-identity.

The process of depression and transformation (epiphany) can be further understood via a distinction between experiences of depression that are prolonged, and experiences of depression that prompt transcendence. In the former, one's static alienated self-identity is traded for another static alienated self-identity; in the latter, depression is resolved by a frightening existential leap toward a yet to be defined self-identity, as the following quote illustrates:

> It won't appear (a transformed self-identity) until he's first put his foot down…Everything is like that. So basically courage is throwing off some structure and not yet having anything to put in its place. You throw off a structure and you don't have something… Most people will not do it…And so that is exactly why courage is needed. First you put your foot down and if you're lucky the bridge (bridge to a new self-identity) will appear. (Jarvis 1997, p. 88)

Psychotherapists know when a major change takes places in a client's life; the change will bring both losses and gains. The women in this research group talked about the losses, but they described the embracing of their lesbian or bisexual identity as a primarily positive life change. (Jensen 1999, p. 177)

That's when the epiphany was. Instead of pushing it down and avoiding dealing with something. It's a bit like saying 'to get to the other side you've got to sit through the pain for it to happen'. Stephanie

This frightening existential leap is inspired by a newly developed awareness of the inter-relationship between inauthentic and authentic modes of existence. This awareness is an illumination of the barriers (psychological defences) and the inauthenticity of socially and religiously ascribed identities. The individual's self-identity is transformed because of a choice to act differently - by apprehending the world in a different way. The intentionality of consciousness – its a-priori immersion in the world (Being-in-the-world) - means that self-identity and world change together, as illustrated by the following quotes:

I still have trials and tribulations, and the gas bill isn't going down. Reality is the same. Life is the same. It's how I look at things and how things are pointed out to me that has changed. Life has not changed at all. (Miller and C'de Baca 2001, p. 127)

The way I would put it is, we're sort of wearing these clothes that are…the way we sort of interpret the world and the way we make the world. And we think it's the world and the way we make the world. And we think it's the world out there but it's really the way we want the world to be. If your construct don't fit the world, you can alter it…When I had the trauma, the world changed and I found that I had to change somehow and I realized that there's a layer of

the world that I'm wearing and that you can peel it off and actually put on a different one in some sense. (Jarvis 1997, pp. 100-101)

And the way I began to see that we have to be prepared to let go of the old life, the old world. We have to let go and descend into the unknown where no rules work, where everything is new, where our old key won't fit…the sense that I could be in the world in a different way than I thought I could. (Jarvis 1997, pp. 136-138)

I see fresh developments in art and life, each one of which is a fresh mode of perfection. I long to live so that I can explore what is no less than a new world to me…(Before prison) I shunned suffering and sorrow…I resolved to ignore them, to treat them, that is to say, as modes of imperfection. They were not part of my scheme of life. They had no place in my philosophy. (Oscar Wilde cited in Schultz 2001, pp. 78-79)

7.2.8 Self-identity and the inter-personal world

(I)n characterizing the encountering of Others, one is again still oriented by that Dasein which is in each case one's own…By 'Others' we do not mean everyone else but me - those over and against whom the "I" stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does not distinguish oneself - those among whom one is too…Being-with is an existential characteristic of Dasein even when factically no Other is present-at-hand or perceived. (Heidegger 1927, pp. 118-119)

Heidegger's (1987, p. 73) radical critique of the Western philosophical understanding of self as 'ego-subject' undermined the traditional separation thesis between a unitary bounded self and its world. Heidegger offered an alternative notion of self-identity (Dasein) one that was not split between ourselves and the world in which Dasein is

thrown (Condrau 1988, p. 106). Dasein is so thoroughly enmeshed in a shared life-world that there is no way to draw a sharp line between either self and world, or self and others (Guignon 2004a, p. 120).

Following a similar line of argument Sartre (1948, p. 45) criticised Descartes' 'cogito' because when we say "I think", we are attaining to ourselves in the face of the other. Instead, Sartre's phenomenology posited a self-identity that could only be recognised in others. The individual is unable to obtain any truth whatsoever about itself, except through the mediation of another. The other is indispensable to the individual's existence, and equally so to any knowledge that one can have of oneself. Sartre adds:

> Under these conditions, the intimate discovery of myself is at the same time the revelation of the other as freedom which confronts mine, and which cannot think or will without doing so either for or against me. Thus, at once, we find ourselves in a world which is, let us say, that of 'inter-subjectivity'. (1948, p. 45)

From an existential perspective, self-identity is always in context with others, we exist in a relational field. Our fundamental 'relatedness' means that our awareness of ourselves is inter-subjective. The term 'inter-personal world' refers to our relationship with ourselves, as well as other important relationships such as love partners, parents, siblings, close friends, and other intimate social and professional relationships that we might develop over the course of our life. The argument posed here is that our inter-personal world, that is our relationships and our capacity for relatedness, play a critical role in epiphanies.

To understand the inter-personal world of the participants' lives, and the process of positive change and transformation, it is important to go back to the participants' respective experiences of childhood and adolescence, which involved themes of abandonment, loneliness, inadequacy and depression. These maladjusted states stemmed from parental abuse, neglect, and/or the dysfunctional nature of the parents' relationship, which meant the participant did not establish a secure sense of self-identity, as the following quotes illustrate:

My first memories as a child were of my grandmother telling me the truck that parked nearby our house was used to take away all of the naughty children, something that could happen to me and my sister if we didn't behave…My parents ignored my sister and I, it was like this disease that ran through my whole family. At one stage, when I was a child, I remember my maternal grandfather and grandmother not speaking to one another for seven years, they would communicate through notes and other people…Attention from my parents was rare although when it did come it was usually derogatory…My father actually called my sister and I 'stupid' as a nick name…I remember as a child feeling like an empty shell…I was so at a loss as to who I was that I asked my mother if I could change my name to Jessica so than at least I would have an identity. Michelle

It was then that I realised the stark difference between my parent's behaviour and how other "normal" parents behaved, they communicated, were intimate, planned things together, slept in the same bedroom…My parents eventually separated when I was 20. Yet they still worked the farm together…It was just a very odd relationship. Stephanie

I had made friends with the boy next door…One night he stayed over in our spare bedroom. He asked me to get into bed with him for a cuddle, which I did. He then forced his hands all over my body and then stuffed my head into the pillow smothering me…I couldn't breath and

so I became quite frightened…I was so upset by what he'd done that the next day I told my parents who decided that it would be a good idea to march me next door to confront the boy and his parents. The boy lied and said that nothing had happened, and because of that my parents didn't believe me. I felt so embarrassed and abandoned. Looking back on that I remember having an out of body experience, as though the connection I had with my parents had been broken. Janet

The outcome of these initial relationships on the participants' lives was ontological insecurity (Laing 1960), which resulted in a diminished capacity for relatedness that continued into adulthood. The fear and mistrust that resulted from the participants' parental objectification and depersonalisation engendered an irrational fear and mistrust of the world, so that one's sense of self-identity was experienced through differentiation, separateness and irreducible otherness (Kierkegaard 1846). Ontological insecurity became the root cause of the participants' psychological defences and avoidance of their existential freedom (Yalom 1980, p. 9-10). Avoidance strategies dominated the participants' lives prior to their epiphanies, for example the eschewing of responsibility and self-sabotage (Peter), the need for social and material status over the development of deep and intimate relationships (Michelle), attraction to uncommitted men (Stephanie), drug addiction and criminal activity (Janet), and chronic self-doubt (Cathy).

The lack of positive and authentic connection with their parents, and significant others, meant the participants were unable to relate to themselves in a positive way. There was a distinct lack of entitlement, self-regard, and unease with their sense of

self-identity that constrained their ability to develop and sustain intimate relationships:

> I had an enormous ambition to achieve nothing, and quite deliberately sabotaged my career and had gone the other way. I had really destroyed possible work opportunities and relationships. Peter

> Because of my own emotional stability I'm now able to have a relationship with someone that is stable. You can be so needy when you're unwell. Michelle

> I'd always feared authority figures, I don't like people telling me what to do or having people in control of me. Either I fight with authority figures or I just ignore them and avoid them completely…I felt as though my relationships were all screwed up, that life wasn't really worth living so I tried to kill myself by jumping off a sea cliff near where I lived. Janet

> I had gone through life up until that time with a total lack of ethics…I didn't give a great deal of thought to other people's feelings, or their place in my life, or their relationship to me. Once I crossed that line of commitment, I was constantly confronted by my desires and greed, my unkindness and lack of equanimity. (Miller and C'de Baca 2001, p. 68)

As a result of their respective epiphanies each of the participant's capacity for relatedness improved because of increased self-regard, self-awareness, confidence and courage. Their epiphanies illuminated their isolation from, and fear of others. As they grew in confidence they become more honest with themselves and less defensive; they pulled away their masks and learnt to be more open, honest and genuine with others. As Golomb (1990, p. 246) suggests, it is only by changing one's relationship with oneself, that one is then able to change one's relationships with others. The

individual must clarify their relationship with themselves before they can hope to gain clarity with others.

For example, as Peter let go of his victim mentality he was able to finally make a decision to end his loveless, sexless marriage and to renew his relationship with his children. Michelle's increased self-awareness and confidence gave her the courage to let go of her needy-dependence, which enabled her to forge deeper more intimate connections with others. Stephanie was able to let go of her self-sacrificing patterns of behaviour and begin to assert her own needs and wants in her relationships. Janet, for the first time in her life, faced her anger, rage and resentment in an effort to constructively heal her pain, instead of resorting to the use of drugs and alcohol. When she realised she could more honestly face existence, she summoned up the courage to take her rapist to court in order to protect other children from what she had been through. Cathy's existential leap, her coming out as a lesbian, gave her the courage to live her own life, instead of trying to please and gain approval from others (see 6.2.3).

This increased capacity for relatedness was also mirrored in other epiphanic studies, as outlined by the following:

> I now realise the importance of compassion, of doing best for them, but we also have to remember when we're making those inner rules that we are interconnected. When you make a rule for yourself, you have to think how its going to have a ripple effect out there. (Miller and C'de Baca 2001, p. 68)

I have very deep relationships with people now (after the epiphany), long lasting and deep. When friends have something that is troubling them, they usually seek me out. I don't have a lot of just casual relationships. Even if we don't spend a lot of time together, the time we spend is profound. What people say about me is that they can think with me, that they feel smart when they're with me, and can talk about things they see. They feel like they can see things that they don't normally see and can talk about them. (Miller and C'de Baca 2001, p. 134)

I don't really have an explanation for it (the epiphany). I just know it happened. It gave me the courage to deal with some of the marital problems. I went back to school and got a Master's. There were things I had been afraid to do, to really be what I wanted to be, and I wasn't afraid anymore. I was not afraid to take on certain responsibilities…And my daughter made a turnaround. It seemed that when I let up on her, or because of the experience (the epiphany), she and I got along better…My husband was a very strong, powerful person, and I think that I had been sort of living my life as his extension for years. All of a sudden I wasn't his extension anymore. I was me. I had a sort of selfhood or just confidence, and that was wonderful. It was a freedom. (Miller and C'de Baca 2001, pp. 135-136)

Other epiphanic studies also emphasise the important role played by relationships in defining the participant's epiphany. For example, Denzin (1989; 1990) argues that relationships have great transformative potential, a claim that is reflected in his definition of epiphanies. For Nietzsche, one of the routes to authenticity is to be found in our choice of educators and other exemplars (role models) who liberate us by making us responsible for our characters.

(B)y subjecting our intuitive admiration for exemplary figures to intensive self-analysis we come to realize that we genuinely value who we really are. Only then is the route to re-creation, namely to authenticity, in principle opened to us. (Golomb 1990, p. 246)

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The importance of role models was an important factor in Cathy's route to authenticity - her coming out as a lesbian and her gaining of independence. Her encounter with a nun was central to how she viewed herself. She noted that:

> By age 30 I'd had 3 children who were at school and I began to wonder what I was going to do with the rest of my life. After my second child I met a nun who was also a teacher and academic, who just happened to come out as a lesbian later in life. I became good friends with this nun and she provided me with some badly needed inspiration. I suppose looking back she helped me to believe that I could become a schoolteacher and that my doubts, were in fact just doubts. If I really wanted to then I could go to university and become a teacher. She really gave me the confidence to apply for university and do an education degree, which is what I did. Cathy

The importance of role models in the epiphanic process was similarly mirrored in Jensen's study.

> Some examples of resources are a positive lesbian or bisexual role model, that is, a friend or colleague who is lesbian or bisexual and willing or able to offer support; access to a potential community to support the declaration of her same-gender orientation; and a friend or family member who is not lesbian or bisexual, but who supports the woman's personal growth in whatever direction it may take her. (1999, p. 191)

7.2.9 Self-identity, dogma and the socio-cultural world

Nietzsche saw the process of authenticity as an artistic creation to be expressed in much the same way as a writer approaches a literary work (Guignon 2004d, p. 131). The authentic self is a uniquely distinctive creation with no template or pre-given

standards. Such a task while difficult should not be avoided by hiding behind social, political and religious ideologies, and other alienated identities that seek to protect and immure against the conditions of existence (Nietzsche 1895). The individual faces the task of individuation while attempting to live in a society of other individuals and institutions that demand obedience, often causing a loss of freedom (Kierkegaard 1842). One of the great problems Nietzsche set for himself was understanding how individuals renew their capacity for creative endeavour, in the face of societal decadence and alienation (Golomb 1990, pp. 245-246). Nietzsche's parables were written in such a way as to call out to, and inspire an authentic existence, to eschew dogma, and overcome socio-cultural suppression in order to uncover and reactivate one's own creative powers (Golomb 1995, pp. 68-69). This overcoming Golomb adds:

> (O)pen(s) new horizons to new beliefs, but these will function solely as life-enhancing and self-crystallizing perspectives. Once they have lost their usefulness, such beliefs will be discarded and replaced by other perspectives. (1995, p. 73)

Transcending religious dogma was a distinctive element in the participants' epiphanies and their experience of the socio-cultural world. Awareness of the inter-relationship between inauthentic and authentic modes of self-identity resulted in the creation of uniquely distinctive spiritual beliefs and an understanding of the suppressive character of religious ideologies:

> I attended a Catholic primary and secondary school where violence seemed a normal part of existence. The lay teachers were much warmer and friendlier than the nuns, except for one

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male lay teacher that taught mathematics who would humiliate and physically abuse his students. Because I feared this teacher so much I was unable to understand the subject matter in any meaningful way…Catholic schools are very unjust places because they support the strong and subjugate the weak. It's a real survival of the fittest environment, like 'Lord of the Flies'. Peter

I remember my confirmation in church and it just made me feel even more guilty for having allowed myself to be raped. It was around the time of my confirmation that I began smoking marijuana…I have become very sceptical of religion. If you look at my parents they are supposed to be religious, but they're not spiritual people. Their religious faith has more to do with tradition in terms of what should be done rather than any emphasis on a spiritual life. And I feel that maybe at the end of the day they won't get to go to heaven because of the way they have always tried to deny the significance of my sexual abuse, though I'm sure they keep thinking they are doing all of the right things. Janet

Janet also recalled a very telling incident when she asked her aunt (also godmother) to pray for her while she was in court, to which her aunt replied, "God will not hear you, darling, because you're not a Christian"!

Other epiphanic studies illustrate a similar stunting of self-identity in childhood through the dogma of organised religion, leading to a deliberate turning away in adulthood as the result of epiphanic insights:

Belfast was extremely Puritan and fundamentalist. Virtually everything I did was modulated by the Catholic Church or by being Catholic…Looking back the Church had an answer for everything, so thinking wasn't required…I remember hearing from the pulpit that to doubt any of the Catholic teachings was a mortal sin. Therefore you would roast in hell forever if you

doubted any of the teachings…It was in 68, I was in Church and I remember having an experience reciting creed in Latin, still in Latin I think, or maybe English and I suddenly realized I didn't believe any of what I was saying. I kind of turned on my heel, walked out of the Church, and never went back. It was a major opening for me, because what I felt was this enormous freedom and peace from that decision. So it was as if I had created endless space. (Jarvis 1997, pp. 82-87)

Before this experience, I was very much afraid. I was afraid not to believe in God. I was afraid of being punished. I followed all of the rules because I was scared of what would happen if I didn't. I was afraid of everything, even afraid of God. When my son was sick, I felt like I was being punished. I really feel like I had done something wrong in my life and God was punishing me. This experience (the epiphany) changed me in the sense that there's really nothing wrong in this world that I'm afraid of now. I don't mean that in a happy-go-lucky way, like I would get drunk and drive home because I'm not afraid of dying. I just mean that I'm not afraid. I'm not intimidated by authoritative people. People with authority don't scare me anymore. (Miller and C'de Baca 2001, p. 129)

In some cases the overcoming of religious dogma was coupled with a spiritual maturation, and a willingness to accept the mysteries, contradictions, chaos and paradox of existence, as opposed to blindly accepting the easy answers offered by organized religion. As a result of their epiphanies some of the participants articulated newly created beliefs in less tangible ambiguous forms of spirituality, allowing for a unique expression of self-identity:

I draw on that experience (the epiphany) when I face difficulties in my life on a day-to-day level…It's a connectedness right, it's this feeling in my belly, it's connected to a source that it's just not questionable, it's just that you know it's there, and that it has a very calming, calming effect. And I do, I look at people differently. I would describe it that it's a bit like the

judgment, the judgement of other individuals is gone. It's more of an acceptance. It's just harder to judge…it's like a self-checking mechanism…you just learn to be. Stephanie

I see that God is the God of universal energy, it's the same source for all religions; it's the same for everybody. For indigenous people there is no name given to it, it just is, it's just there, it's everywhere, it's in the trees, you can hear it, you can see it in the animals, the ocean. My spiritual life, in fact my life in general has been a search, a journey that still continues today. I think that's what being spiritual is about. Cathy

Since my epiphany I feel I have become a more spiritual person, especially in the way I think about death…I'm definitely more spiritual because of it but I'm definitely not religious like my parents. Janet

Faith is what it takes to try to experiment, to exist, to get into and live it as if it meant something in order to see if it can mean something. Faith is an emphasis, it's living courageously – in a world without certainties – as if, as if God existed…we don't have to believe God exists in order to have faith…Faith is much less, and much more than to believe with certainty in an uncertain God. If there is a God, that God doesn't care if we believe in her existence, she cares about us really living our existence…And so that's what I started to do. Really live my existence. (Jarvis 1997, pp. 134-135)

As well as questioning religious and spiritual beliefs, many of the participants, as a result of their epiphanies, questioned a range of socio-cultural standards by assessing their ongoing usefulness in their life. This did not constitute living beyond socio-cultural standards, for such an approach to life would be impossible. Socio-cultural suppression was a prominent feature of Cathy's epiphany, as she was required to summon the courage to overcome successive layers of suppression in order to express

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an authentic self-identity. The first barrier was her lack of freedom to explore elements of self-identity in childhood and adolescence, due primarily to her father's alcoholism, physical abuse, and strict values concerning gender roles:

> It didn't matter if the wife went out to work, ran the house, and looked after the children. The man of the house still had the status; that was their bonus just for being a man… She (Cathy's mother) was totally controlled by my father when he was around, and she played the submissive role. When he wasn't around she would often complain to us children about him, however when he was around it was suddenly her and him against the kids. Cathy

The exploration of sexual identity in adolescence was also greatly constrained by the socio-cultural expectations that Cathy was exposed to:

> As I was growing up I realised that homosexuality for both men and women was a taboo subject. I remember being taught by a teacher who was a lesbian and when I told my parents they explained that it was something that should never be talked about, 'you keep these things to yourself'…At school homosexuality was only ever talked about in a derogatory manner or as a form of verbal abuse…I had boyfriends at school and remember being well liked by them yet you knew nothing of what it was like to be a lesbian so you just never even considered it. Cathy

The stunting of Cathy's self-identity resulted in a traditional heterosexual marriage and children, both of which ran counter to her adolescent wish of becoming a nun:

> When I told my mother I wanted to become a Nun she replied 'you will definitely not become a nun Cathy. When you finish high school you get married and you have children. Only selfish

people don't have children'. Marriage and children were just constantly drilled into us when I was at home.

Jensen's (1998; 1999) participants, like Cathy, were similarly constrained by familial barriers in childhood, and by wider socio-cultural barriers in adolescence and adulthood. Sexuality, and loving intimate relationships could only be experienced in ways proscribed by the dominant institutions of the time (patriarchy and Christianity). Jensen (1999) sums up why these women, who came out in later life as lesbians, married men:

> Marriage for these women was not presented as an option. This society (US society) presents marriage as the inevitable act of defining adulthood. Heterosexual marriage – that between a man and woman – is part of social law, and there has been, and continues to be, a major social censure for those women who do not marry. The power of the social force to marry creates a script for women's lives that is so powerful that their own internal messages can be, and sometimes are, overwhelmed. (1999, p. 206)

Given the overwhelming socio-cultural barriers that these women faced, Jensen was curious to understand how they established personal identity and sexual orientation in a society dominated by heterosexual standards:

> Their attempts as children, and as adults too, to experiment with a behaviour or to discuss an attitude, feeling, or value at variance with those commonly expressed in their circles were met with resistance or were patronized. Often their experiences were not considered valid. Even for those with supportive parents, setting their own paths to a sense of personal continuity of self over time, to an identity they could embrace, was, at best extremely challenging and, at worst, shame producing. The message they received was don't be who you are. (1999, p. 65)

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Cathy and the women who participated in Jensen's (1998; 1999) study were able to gather together their increasing knowledge, sexual and emotional attraction, enhanced cognitive clarity, awareness of recurring behaviours, and a final profound insight or change in perspective (the epiphany) to overcome the dogma and socio-cultural suppression that had barred their path to authenticity. Jensen's lesbian epiphanies are illustrative of Nietzsche's call to uncover and reactivate one's own creative powers and to define an authentic self-identity through self-knowledge and the destruction of political and religious ideologies through the process of unmasking (Golomb 1990, p. 246).

7.2.10 Self-identity, meaning and purpose

> Isn't it the discovery that no truth is discoverable except the truth, which *you yourself are*? That there is no truth (sense, meaning) in the world except the truth (sense, meaning) *you yourself give it*? That 'truth' is a concept belonging to the human mind and will and that apart from the human mind and will there is no such thing as 'truth'? (Nietzsche cited in Hollingdale 1969, p. 25)

Existentialism holds the position that there is no ultimate answer to the meaning of life. Instead, meaning and purpose are a capacity of human beings to construct a personally significant and committed life in the face of seeming chaos. Yalom (1980) defined this as 'terrestrial' or 'life' meaning, as opposed to 'ultimate' or 'cosmic' meaning. The capacity of human beings to create meaning and purpose, Heidegger claims, is due to the ontological a-priori status of Dasein's existence, which means

that it must make a resolute commitment to something that gives life a defining content, it must take an authentic stand on its situation (Guignon 2004a, p. 128).

A meaningful life, Heidegger argued, begins with a commitment to openness, illumination, insight and a commitment to one's possibilities - as opposed to being closed off, concealed and alienated (Guignon 2004a, p. 128). By accepting the existential notion of self-identity as a task or vocation that one pursues, then an important element of that task is to create something that is worth living and fighting for, even dying for (van Deurzen 2002, p. 32). The paradox of meaning and purpose, is that one must first pass through a crisis of meaninglessness (Sartre 1938), which means confronting utter despair (Kierkegaard 1849). The alternative is a complacent existence where questions of meaning and purpose are avoided through anonymous routine and the close identification with social and religious identities (Kierkegaard 1842).

In the discussion thus far I have explored how a sense of meaninglessness concerning one's past, or one's possible future lay at the root of the participants' depression, anxiety and inner turmoil[51] in the weeks and months prior to their epiphanies. I also explored how depression stems from a privation of time - that is the inability to meaningfully project oneself into the future. The participants' unwillingness to come to terms with the conditions of existence (freedom, choice, responsibility, alienation, death), and the task of defining an authentic self-identity, conspired to erode any sense of significance and commitment; indeed the very motivation for living became

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[51] See Kiser (2004) for a case example of the relationship between meaninglessness and depression.

meaningless. Each of the participants, in their various ways, asked themselves 'how can I continue to exist in a meaningless world'? They had become ontologically separated from self-identity, others, and the world in which they lived (Laing 1960). They were inexorably drawn into an acute crisis of meaning.

Periods of depression, anxiety and inner turmoil offer an opportunity for deep and penetrating reflection; the individual (when willing) learns to listen more carefully to their inner voice, to their deeper inclinations, values, desires and priorities. As van Deurzen (2002, p. 184) notes "purpose and meaning can only be created if we are prepared to make those commitments to our conscious dictates". Listening to one's inner voice offers insight into the contrasting modes of inauthentic and authentic self-identity, which stimulate an awareness and understanding of new meaning. Awareness of these modes of existence offered an alternative view of self-identity, one with new possibilities, priorities, values, and basic assumptions. This provided inspiration and motivation for taking responsibility and defining oneself anew by committing to a new purpose - a new direction in life.

Peter for example was able to create new meaning and purpose in fatherhood through his dream of speaking at his daughter's 21st birthday. By using his imagination he was able to project himself into the future as a proud father with a compelling story to tell. As Peter suggests, he imagined what it would be like to "mythologise" his life by becoming a hero in the eyes of his daughter. Peter's dream and future projection represented a clearing away of his previous meaningless notions of fatherhood engendered by his abusive alcoholic father. Michelle was able to create new meaning

and purpose in her life by re-discovering her adolescent passion for nursing, which symbolised an entitlement to self-worth and positive self-regard – assumptions she had denied because of her childhood and adolescent experiences.

For Janet, making the connection between her behaviour as an adult and her childhood sexual abuse created new meaning and purpose in her life. The most significant of which was her commitment to telling her story and giving voice to the destructive nature of child sexual abuse by taking her perpetrator to court. Janet also joined and became actively engaged in a non-profit association seeking to prevent child abuse. This new approach to her life can be summed up by Sartre's (1948) claims that in order to be human each individual must become responsible for humanity as a whole, so that authenticity is defined in part by an activist stance towards the world. Committing oneself to a mission in life is based on a conscious decision to involve oneself in history, rather than evade it, and to assume social and political responsibility through action (Sartre 1948).

Creation of new meaning and purpose was also mirrored in the wider epiphanic literature. For example, 95% of Miller and C'de Baca's (1993, pp. 262-263) participants reported that because of their epiphany they saw new meaning in their life. "Overall, the most common quality of the effects of quantum change was liberation, a deeply positive feeling, and a new kind of meaning and perception" (Miller and C'de Baca 1993, p. 264), as the following quotes illustrate:

> That one day, I just became aware, very aware of this. I just felt this presence of a real self within me…Before, whichever way life went, I went along with it and did the best I could.

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Now, all of a sudden, I had a sense of myself, that I had a specific course to take, and I couldn't meander any longer. (Miller and C'de Baca 2001, p. 61)

In that moment, I realized what had happened. When I lost my sister, I also lost my father. It killed him. He lived for another 15 years, but it killed him emotionally right then. What I had been remembering before, as my father was only how he had been after her death, when I was a teenager. What came back to me was all of the loving memories of him before that terrible day. I still weep because I feel for that man. All of those years of so much pain, buried so deep. And I knew what had happened. Somewhere inside I had made a decision that anything that could do that to a man, I wanted no part of. It terrified me. It wasn't losing my sister so much as seeing how it destroyed my father, just tore him apart from us and life. That part of me healed in that moment. I understood. As an adult, I could separate my father's pain from myself. (Miller and C'de Baca 2001, p. 43)

My motivations and my whole sense of direction in life have changed (since the epiphany). My values changed. What I thought was important changed. I just completely shifted gears. It's given me a sense of purpose and direction I never had before, a real meaningful purpose in life. I'd always sought that before, and I'd been searching different avenues but never found exactly what I was supposed to be doing. I've tried lots of different things, lots of different jobs, travelled a lot, had lots of experiences in my life. Yet always there was that kind of restless searching, searching. Now I feel like I know exactly what I'm supposed to do. (Miller and C'de Baca 2001, p. 130)

Jarvis (1997, p. 187) also observed the creation of new meaning and purpose in her participants' lives as a result of their epiphanies. Participants reported their experiences had set them on a path of some kind, which was variously described as an 'experiment', 'journey' or 'mission', as the following quotes illustrate:

I knew that this was incredibly important…the full impact…I had some sense it's as if I had seen everything. I saw the way it was or would be or could be…I guess the biggest result in a way was that I became aware that I was after something. It set me on a path…From then on I knew that I had to, that I had a mission. (Jarvis 1997, pp. 98-99)

It was certainly the most sublime experience of my life. I got reconnected from a place of having been disconnected…and when I came out of the integrating period I was still aware of the part of the experience that made me realize that I am here to be of service to something greater than myself. (Jarvis 1997, pp. 124-125)

7.2.11 Self-identity and narrative

Understood as a "happening" that unfolds throughout a lifetime, a person's identity can be grasped only in terms of his or her life story as a whole. The temporal unfolding of life, as Ricoeur has pointed out, has the structure of a narrative. (Guignon 1993a, pp. 224-225)

Dasein discloses its being to the world through interpretation and understanding (Heidegger 1927, p. 95); it (Dasein) embodies a distinctive temporal structure by synthesising its past, present and future (Heidegger 1988, p. 92). Dasein is also thrown into a social and cultural domain, which Heidegger denotes as 'Being-in-the-world' to signify its a-priori relational mode, all of which is ordered and expressed according to linguistic characteristics, either to oneself (internal dialogue) or to others (external dialogue) (Polkinghorne 1988, p. 126). Zimmerman adds:

We are always in the process of redefining ourselves in light of fresh insights which reveal the limitations of our previous self-understanding. The real subject then, is not the wordless and abstract ego which lives outside of time and change, but the concrete, historically situated,

living human being who is always engaged in trying to give meaning to his own life. (Zimmerman 1981, p. 10)

The argument posed here is that by viewing self-identity as a narrative construction, we can further understand the epiphanic phenomenon. By examining the participants' childhoods and adolescence it is possible to observe the impact of the narrow stock of narratives offered by their familial, social and cultural contexts, which functioned to close down the possibility of creating liberating stories. For example, Peter's early life-story was dominated by themes of inferiority, difference, cowardice and abandonment; in Michelle - loneliness, emptiness and devastation; in Stephanie - attachment, loss, freedom, and unfulfilled relationships; in Janet - humiliation, hypocrisy and un-acknowledgement; and Cathy - gender status, expectation, constraint, and sacrifice.

In the discussion thus far I have explored how these life themes from childhood and adolescence, referred to previously as 'maladjusted states', stemmed from parental abuse, neglect, and/or the dysfunctional nature of the parent's relationship, which had a formative influence on the participant's developing self-identity. As a result the participants lived in a state of ontological insecurity (Laing 1960) because of their inability to take responsibility for defining their self-identity, and a lack of alternative, liberating and growth orientated narratives from which they could derive guidance and inspiration. This state of emptiness manifested defensive patterns of behaviour and a seeming inability for openness (Craig 1988, p. 3). This approach to life meant the participant was closed off and concealed from their possibilities; they were alienated from themselves and the world around them.

> I had this growing awareness that I didn't actually have a story to tell. I didn't actually have any achievements. I didn't actually have any ideas about the world. I didn't actually share something with the children. I didn't have anything to leave. I realised that my father had never left me with anything in terms of a story about his life. Peter

This alienation eventually led to periods of depression (the antecedent state in the epiphanic process), which was experienced as a privation of time (Heidegger 1987, p. 46). It also represented a catastrophic breakdown in their respective life-stories. In depression, the implicit connections that make up the fabric of one's life-story, that is the connections between people, the past, the future, values, beliefs and assumptions, cease to make sense, and with it our sense of what we are and why we are here (Crossely 2000, p. 56). Life degenerates into a series of sequential events devoid of any unity or purpose, so that one's life-story becomes incoherent - meaningless (Crossely 2000, p. 57).

In the discussion thus far I have explored how new meaning and purpose was created in the participants' lives through their epiphanies. The participants learnt to listen more closely to their inner voice, their deepest inclinations, values, desires and priorities. As Loyttyniemi notes:

> Knowing our expectations of the world and our living in it are an essential part of knowing, or constructing our selves, and this is why the key episodes of our stories – that is, episodes where the construction of self or identity is at its most intense – are often episodes that are thick in expectation. (2001, p. 178)

In their depressive state, prior to their epiphanies, the participants deconstructed their life-stories (and their self-identities), by illuminating their hidden self-limiting narratives (see also 6.2.4). Insight into their inauthenticity and active deconstruction of their self-identity, while frightening, provided the impetus and inspiration to reconstruct and repair their life-stories in more authentic ways. The participants achieved this by renewing their respective pasts by integrating the disparate elements of their lives into a more unified narrative imbued with meaning, and a potential for possibility and purpose. Through this process the participants became the authors of their lives, which moved from being a closed to an open book, their life-stories were given semblance and coherence (Guignon 2004a, p. 131).

> I started thinking about a way to access the power of other people's stories. From reading obituaries and talking to people about their own stories and their own journeys, and starting to realise that the ordinary every day journeys that people go through are even more powerful than what Hollywood creates. Even more powerful than celebrities have. 'Australian Story' is a good example of the demonstration of the incredible resilience and the traversing of adversity of every day people. I think that's what I want my mission in life to be. Someone who sits there and is a modern day scribe of these things. Someone who can be a philosopher and share those stories with other people in life. That's a mission now. I never realised that it was something that was accessible to me. I never realised that that's the mythology of who I am and what I want to be. So I've started to get to the point of identity. Peter

There were other examples from the literature indicating that epiphanies function as key episodes or turning points in an individual's life-story. For example, Schultz's (2001) study of Oscar Wilde's turning point illustrated Wilde's creation and integration of new elements of self-identity, and the re-authoring of his life-story.

Loyttyniemi (2001) investigated an epiphany in the life a young medical physician, which illustrated the deconstruction of an old outmoded narrative and the creation of a new story based on new values, beliefs and priorities. Epiphanies can also be seen to play an important role in the construction of a coherent narrative in the way they have been used in literature. Beja (1993) argues that James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Thomas Wolf and William Faulkner all used epiphanies in their characterisations in order to bring greater clarity, continuity and understanding of the characters' lives to the reader. The reason for this, Beja argues, is that each of the authors themselves had epiphanies at various times in their lives, which they acknowledged brought greater semblance and coherence to their own life-stories.

7.3 Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to apply the philosophies of self-identity within the context of existentialism to the epiphanic phenomenon in order to gain a more personally meaningful understanding of the participants' experiences. Through this application, I hope to have achieved a new and alternative interpretation of epiphanies.

To summarise, epiphanies are evidence of the existential concept of 'becoming', which rejects the traditional idea that self-identity exists in a relative state of permanence. Epiphanies are experiences that illustrate the human propensity for transcendence, which arises out of ontological insecurity and subsequent depression, neurotic anxiety and inner turmoil. In this state of diminished openness the individual, through insight and courage, chooses to encounter the conditions of existence, namely

their freedom, responsibility, choice, alienation and death. This encounter stimulates a reflection on one's deepest inclinations, and provides the impetus for a re-appraisal and questioning of one's basic assumptions, values and beliefs. This process of questioning and reflection was described as a profound insight into the inauthentic and authentic modes of self-identity. If this new vision of self-identity is compelling and allied with courage, then the individual undertakes a frightening leap (existential leap) into the unknown toward a new mode of existence - representing a momentous choice to define a more authentic self-identity.

The epiphanic process begins as an accumulation of personal processes that occur outside conscious knowing. However, single significant events in the individual's life are often understood as minor insights, realisations and illuminations, yet they occur and are understood as isolated incidents. The epiphany bursts into awareness when a number of minor insights, realisations and illuminations are linked together and appropriated as a life-changing event. For this to occur the person must remain open to its appearance and then resolute in retaining the insight and understanding it brings. Therefore, it is incorrect to suggest that epiphanies occur without purposeful, conscious effort. The participant's linking together of disparate events and experiences is appropriated as significant and meaningful because of a need for inner signification of new and illuminated elements of consciousness. The change and transformation process embodies the appropriation of one's existential freedom, which represents a propensity for greater openness and responsibility for defining one's self-identity.

Epiphanies represent an overcoming of alienation from world and self, which results in an improved capacity for relatedness. Time is reconfigured in the process of the participant's epiphany so that one's past is re-interpreted, enabling a more meaningful and purposeful projection of one's life into the future, and a willingness to live up to one's potentialities. There is a reactivating of one's creative powers by overcoming religious dogma and socio-cultural suppression, making it possible for the creation of a wholly unique self-identity. Overcoming religious dogma and socio-cultural repression also opens up the stock of alternative narratives based on liberation and growth. The participants' epiphanies illustrate how these new narratives provide a source of inspiration and guidance that brings continuity, shape and meaning out of the seeming chaos and meaninglessness of life.

In the following and final chapter I shall conclude by undertaking a review of this inquiry, while providing a discussion on the implications and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER EIGHT – CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

The main argument stemming from an interpretation of the participants' experiences is that epiphanies are 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. In addition, the participants' life-stories illustrate that epiphanies are a valid experience as indicated by the support for the set of six core characteristics. Epiphanies are also intentional experiences made significant and enduring by the ascription of personal meaning.

This concluding chapter summarises by highlighting, through a review of each of the preceding chapters, the main substantive elements of this inquiry. This is followed by a discussion on the implications and potential areas of future research that this inquiry has generated. This section includes a discussion on the definition of epiphanies and its conceptual development, the possible incidence of epiphanies in the wider population, the role that personality plays in epiphanies, and the implications of this inquiry for the practice of psychotherapy.

8.2 A Summary Of The Inquiry

When psychologists contemplate the nature of change they usually refer to two broad areas, the developmental changes that occur in maturation over the lifespan (from birth to death), and the more specific changes that are effected through counselling

and psychotherapy. In both the developmental and psychotherapeutic domains, change and transformation is usually understood as a slow incremental process[52].

Given that it defies the commonly understood trends of psychological change, sudden and abrupt transformations in self-identity that are enduring, are an under-researched and under-developed phenomenon. Therefore, the aim of this inquiry was to understand sudden, significant and transformational experiences as characterised by the term epiphany, with a particular focus on positive change and transformation in self-identity from an existential perspective. The invocation of the term epiphany was reasoned in order to make this inquiry more manageable by focusing on a single, albeit loosely defined concept.

To begin with, a review of the literature was undertaken, which revealed that the term epiphany was referred to in a range of human science disciplines including sociology, literary studies, education and psychology. The most commonly established theme to emerge from the literature was that epiphanies bring coherence, continuity and structure through moments of great insight and illumination, enabling the individual to create new purpose and meaning in their lives.

Overall, the literature contained only two studies to date that had developed and tested a concept of epiphanies on a sample of participants who had had a self identified

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[52] This is not to suggest however that change, which is sudden and abrupt, does not occur in psychotherapy. Instead, sudden and abrupt change in this context is more often the exception than the rule.

epiphany. The first study was carried out by Jarvis (1997) whose initial understanding of epiphanies stemmed from a developmental psychology perspective. Jarvis offered an explanation for epiphanies based on the natural science phenomena of systems and chaos theory. The other study to develop and test a concept of epiphanies was carried out by Miller and C'de Baca (1993; 2001) who created an allied concept they termed quantum change, which they sought to explain through clinical, cognitive and behavioural psychology. Given the disparate nature of the epiphanic literature and the limited reviews of the concept by Jarvis (1997) and Miller and C'de Baca (1993; 2001), a set of core characteristics was developed in order to create a more coherent and representative concept. This was achieved by a content analysing the epiphanic literature contained in Chapter Two.

The decision to employ a self-identity existential perspective to further understand and interpret epiphanies was reasoned firstly because of a need to focus on the area where positive change and transformation was most apparent – one's sense of self and identity. The second reason was that an initial analysis of the phenomenon revealed that epiphanies are triggered by personal crises and feelings of meaninglessness, suggesting that an existential perspective would provide an accurate interpretation of the phenomenon. Furthermore, an existential perspective would offer a radically different interpretation of the phenomenon than those currently offered by Jarvis (1997) and Miller and C'de Baca (1993; 2001).

Existential philosophy and psychology is concerned with understanding personal meaning, what it is to experience life and the fundamental realities of human

existence. It critiques traditional objectivist standards of truth and Western philosophic notions of self-identity as bounded, solid and discretely separated. In its place existential philosophers and psychologists have argued for a reflexive co-constituted self-identity enmeshed in a shared life-world. This alternative perspective suggests that self-identity is not a philosophical given or an internally derived essence, but a task or vocation that one pursues, and which is created via the totality of one's actions. Far from remaining relatively fixed, self-identity exists in a state of impermanence (Kierkegaard 1843; Nietzsche 1892; Heidegger 1927; Sartre 1943).

At the heart of existential notions of self-identity is the idea of authenticity, which is characterised by overcoming the conditions of alienation through the appropriation of freedom, responsibility and choice (Kierkegaard 1843; Nietzsche 1892; Heidegger 1927; Sartre 1943). The existential perspective empowers the individual by allowing them to define their own unique self-identity. Awareness of authentic modes of existence arise from a reflection on the contrasting mode of inauthenticity, which is representative of psychological defences and barriers that seek to protect and immure against the conditions of existence. Inauthenticity is most powerfully called into consciousness when one is forced to face the conditions of existence (freedom, responsibility, choice, death, time, purpose and meaning). If encountered dynamically, an awareness and appropriation of the conditions of existence can act as a catalyst for transformation, changing the way the individual views themselves and their world.

The temporal condition of existence also means that change and transformation is the result of understanding, renewing and reaffirming one's past, while simultaneously projecting one's self-identity into the future with projects and goals that imbue life with meaning and purpose (Heidegger 1927; Sartre 1943). The fundamental condition of temporality means that death is life's final destination, a prospect that is viewed either as a morbid threat to be suppressed and ignored, or a powerful force for living life through action, commitment, courage and passion.

Existentialism views alienation as an unavoidable condition of self-identity because of our Being-in-the-world; therefore authenticity can never be permanently attained. Instead it is an ongoing dialogue between inauthentic and authentic modes of existence (Heidegger 1927). This dialogue is stimulated by an ongoing reflection on one's consciousness and an approach to social life based on individuation, the creation of an ontologically secure self-identity (Laing 1960) and relatedness - the development of relationships that allow for free expression in the social milieu (Heidegger 1927; Sartre 1943).

The existentialists argue that belief in dogmatic ideologies and socio-cultural conformity are a form of inauthenticity and alienation that stems from a fear of freedom and the chaos and meaninglessness of existence. In contrast, authenticity is characterised by locating the source of one's own power and eschewing the need to objectify and manipulate the Other - a common characteristic of submission to religious and political ideologies (Kierkegaard 1842; Nietzsche 1895; Sartre 1943). As well as eschewing religious and political ideologies, an authentic self-identity is

given coherence and continuity by following a unique path or mission that one freely chooses to pursue. These freely chosen projects and goals enable self-identity to unfold over the course of one's life; so that self-identity is understood as a happening or event, which is grasped in terms of one's life-story (Nehamas 1985; Guignon 1993a; 2004d). These existential ideas are summed up by Fromm who notes:

> Birth is really only the beginning of birth in the broader sense. The whole life of the individual is nothing but the process of giving birth to himself; indeed, we should be fully born, when we die – although it is the tragic fate of most individuals to die before they are born. (1955, p. 25)

In order to collect research participants' self identified epiphanies, a narrative approach to methodology was employed for this inquiry. An initial theoretical and philosophical investigation revealed links between existentialism, modern hermeneutics and narrative psychology (Polkinghorne 1988). Narrative psychology is based on the claim that self-identity is storied in nature, and that human reality is a narrative construction.

Allied to narrative psychology is the research practice of narrative inquiry, which is a type of qualitative research designed to collect, analyse and contextualise human stories. Its primary source of material is the in-depth interview, which seeks to provide a narrative account of the participant's life-story. Understanding epiphanies from a narrative perspective enabled a temporal understanding of the phenomenon, which, it is argued, provided a deeper and fuller account of the participants' epiphanies and its impact on their lives.

Participants for this inquiry were screened via a preliminary interview in order demonstrate a capacity for self-reflection and coherent verbal communication. The participants, totalling five in number, comprised four females and one male aged between 38 and 45 years of age. Each were required to undertake a lengthy in-depth interview where they were asked to narrate the story of their life, starting with their very first memory as a child right up until the present day. The first phase of the analysis involved converting the interview data into shorter more concise chronological narratives. The reasoning for this was to bring greater clarity, structure and understanding to each of the participant's life-stories and epiphanies, as well as seeking to treat each of the participant's experiences as separate individual case studies.

The second phase of the analysis involved testing the set of core epiphanic characteristics developed in Chapter Two, with the actual epiphanies contained in the life-stories of the five participants. Overall, this analysis revealed a high level of support for the six core epiphanic characteristics. The data indicated that each of the participants experienced a period of depression, anxiety and inner turmoil prior to their epiphanies. This period was characterised by intense self-analysis and reflection. Each of the participants sought answers to their suffering and discontent in order to alleviate the turmoil in their lives. During this period of reflection and introspection the participants began to piece together the various unconnected and disparate elements of their life, when suddenly and abruptly they summoned a powerful new insight or perspective into consciousness. This was triggered by a range of

occurrences that included a chance encounter with a significant person, the discovery of once discarded belongings, a dream containing a symbolic encounter, feelings of great frustration, incarceration, and the reminder of one's childhood vulnerability and innocence.

The participant's new insight and perspective also had the effect of illuminating areas of life that had once remained in darkness. So momentous was this experience that it precipitated a resolute decision to change the way the participant viewed themselves and their world. The highly significant nature of the new insight and the resultant decision to transform meant that each of the participants believed that it was no longer possible to continue living the way they had. This momentous insight, or change in perspective, set them on a new path from which they felt there was no turning back.

The most conspicuous element of the first and second phases of the analysis was the childhood abuse and trauma suffered by four of the participants. The life-stories elicited from Peter, Michelle, Janet and Cathy suggest that abused children are much more likely to use a range of complex psychological defences that impede the healthy unifying development of their self-identities.

At the conclusion of the second phase of analysis it was suggested that the set of core epiphanic characteristics are a loose constellation of concepts that encompass an experience that is often as unique as the individuals who experience them. The characteristics act as a model to provide greater understanding of the phenomenon and

make a useful distinction between epiphanies and other types of growth and consciousness raising experiences.

In the third and final phase of the analysis the philosophies of self-identity within the context of existentialism were applied to the participants' life-stories and epiphanies in order to provide a new and alternative interpretation. This analysis revealed that self-identity, as the existentialists claim, is not a philosophical given, or a fixed and permanent entity. Instead, the participants' epiphanies demonstrate that self-identity is defined and created by one's encounter with the conditions of existence. It was shown that the participants' transformations and ongoing growth was evidence of the extraordinary capacity for transcendence, and the fluid process of self-identity.

Due to their respective childhoods, the participants' openness to the world had been stunted, and as a result their attempts to establish a sense of security was thwarted by a lack of recognition and acknowledgement of their self-identity (Laing 1960). In the absence of an established self-identity the participants grew into adulthood alienated from themselves and their world. They responded to the conditions of existence by erecting psychological barriers in order to protect themselves from freedom, responsibility and choice (Yalom 1980). Their denial of the conditions of existence was characterised by a lack of meaning and purpose in their lives. They avoided responsibility for defining their own unique self-identity, which manifested existential guilt because of their failure to actualise their potentialities.

The denial of the conditions of existence, the lack of meaning and purpose, and the guilt associated with the deliberate closing down of their possibilities, led to frustration and discontentedness, and eventually turmoil, depression and neurotic anxiety. The participants' psychological defences began to fail, out of which arose a distinctive catalytic depression characterised by intense self-analysis and a penetrating reflection on their situation in the world. They acknowledged and encountered the conditions of existence (freedom, responsibility, choice, time, meaning and death), which provided the impetus for a re-appraisal and questioning of their basic assumptions, values and beliefs, because of a dissonance between the minor insights gained during this period of self-analysis and the past choices they had made in their life. This process was coupled by a significant event, whether coincidental or not, in which the participants responded with sheer force of will and passion by summoning a profound insight or perspective into consciousness, which led to the painful realisation of their inauthentic mode of existence. The participants resolved to overcome their alienation by undertaking a frightening leap (existential leap) into the unknown toward a new and more authentic self-identity, one that recognised and acknowledged the conditions of existence.

This willingness to encounter and negotiate the conditions of existence was demonstrated by the participants through their propensity for greater openness, freedom and the appropriation of responsibility for defining self-identity. The participants' newfound willingness also enabled them to overcome their alienation from self and world, which stimulated a greater capacity for relatedness. A more ontologically secure self-identity also meant the uncertainties of existence could now

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be encountered more honestly and courageously, without the need for psychological defences. The participants, through their epiphanies and their encounter with time, were able to reinterpret their lives by reconciling the disparate elements of their past into a more unified and coherent whole. The illumination of their past also enabled a more purposeful and meaningful projection of life into the future. The guilt associated with the closing down of their possibilities withered in the face of a powerful new willingness to live up to their potentialities.

There was also a significant degree of empowerment as a result of the participants' epiphanies due to the overcoming of religious dogma and other forms of social and cultural suppression, which curtailed their expression and exploration of authentic elements of self-identity in childhood and adolescence. In the process of defining a more authentic self-identity each of the participants began to express their own personal forms of spirituality, as well as breaking free from the destructive social and institutional conventions that blocked their pathways toward growth and liberation.

The participants' life-stories illuminated life-themes that were underpinned by alienation, discontent and self-destruction. Their lack of awareness or acknowledgement of alternative narratives stunted their self-identity, as did a lack of meaningful connections between people, past, present, future, values, beliefs and basic assumptions. The participants' self-analysis and reflection on their situation in the world, and their final profound insight or change in perspective (the epiphany), enabled them to make vital connections between the disparate elements of their life. This brought unity, purpose and meaning out of the chaos and meaninglessness of

existence, in short a more coherent life-story. The participants' epiphanies illustrate how the incorporation of new stories provided a source of inspiration that enabled them to break their alienating and self-destructive patterns of behaviour.

8.3 Implications And Future Research

8.3.1 A definition of epiphanies

The first objective of this inquiry was to define epiphanies by identifying a set of core characteristics from the literature. This was created and subsequently supported by the participants' self identified epiphanies. The conceptual development of epiphanies and its description of positive change and transformation that is sudden and abrupt, provides the discipline of psychology, and other areas of social science such as social work, literary studies and education, another perspective from which to understand the growth and development of human beings.

In addition, a clearer more concise definition of epiphanies provides a comparative contrast with similar yet differing types of experiences, for example religious conversion (Paloutzian, Richardson and Rambo 1999; Mahoney and Pargament 2004), peak experience (Maslow 1964), mystical experience (Thomas and Cooper 1978) and transcendent experience (Williams and Harvey 2001). Future research could investigate the development of a 'transformational experience typology', such as Marigolis and Elifon's (1979) 'religious experience typology', providing researchers and psychotherapists with a tool for accurately identifying and understanding these experiences in more detail.

This inquiry has also contributed to a secular definition of epiphanies, one that I argue is more inclusive, reflecting the roots of Greek, Pagan (Paris 1997) and Joycean (Joyce 1916) concepts of epiphany . By contrast, Christian definitions of epiphany privilege only those who claim to have heard the true word of God. In fact the participants' experiences suggest that throwing off the yoke of organized religion opened their horizons to new beliefs about self-identity and world, and illustrated the potential for uniquely distinctive spiritual beliefs that enable them to transcend their feelings of alienation and meaninglessness.

8.3.2 Incidence of epiphanies

While this and other research (Jarvis 1997; Miller and C'de Baca 2001) has begun to validate epiphanies, it raises the question of just how common are these sorts of experiences? A secular definition would suggest that epiphanies occur more frequently than expected. Many people would be able to identify at least one moment in their life where their sense of self-identity was suddenly and abruptly changed forever.

For example, research results from other studies into higher states of consciousness with the potential for transformation, such as mystical experience, find that at least half the adult population has had a mystical type of experience in their life time (Thomas and Cooper 1978). It is possible to also examine rates of incidence by looking at narrative psychology, particularly its focus on transitions and turning points across the lifespan (McAdams et al. 2001). Many adults could identify one or more

significant transitions or turning points in their life, which could be epiphanic in nature.

However, due to the lack of common knowledge concerning epiphanies, it is unlikely that many people ever formally recognise these experiences, particularly given that most epiphanies occur outside the psychotherapeutic setting. This is not to suggest however that epiphanies do not occur in the consulting room. The closet idea to epiphanies in the psychotherapeutic vernacular is the 'aha!' or 'eureka!' experience that describe moments of increased awareness and insight, which enable a client to solve their problems (Mosak 2000, p. 79). It is very possible that some 'aha!' and 'eureka!' experiences are in fact epiphanies.

Given the speculative nature of this discussion, it would be useful to understand just how common epiphanies are by undertaking a specific inquiry on this question. Future research on incidence could help identify whether epiphanies are rare and obscure, or a common form of growth and development that goes largely unrecognised.

In addition, an inquiry on incidence could provide more insight into the context in which these experiences occur. Such a study would complement the work carried out in this inquiry, by focusing on elements other than self-identity and personal meaning. For example, such a study could explore the role that problematic 'social' and 'interactional' elements play in epiphanies (Denzin 1989, pp.70-71; 1990, pp. 15-18); as well as understand how common is it for epiphanies to occur in psychotherapy, or

how common it is for individuals to gain control over their addiction to drugs and alcohol through epiphanies, as was the case for the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, William "Bill" Wilson (Kurtz 1979, p. 19).

8.3.3 The role of personality in epiphanies

Are certain people, by virtue of their personalities, more likely to experience epiphanies? Miller and C'de Baca's (1993, pp. 258-259; 2001, pp. 169-173) use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers and McCaulley 1985) on their participants provided a partial answer to this question by suggesting that 'intuiting-feeling' (NF) types occurred in their study at twice the U.S. population norm. However, it is not clear whether the NF personality type preceded or was the result of the participant's epiphany, or indeed if the NF personality type makes one more likely to volunteer for a study of this nature.

What this inquiry revealed about personality is that adult survivors of childhood abuse and trauma are likely candidates for epiphanic transformation. Childhood abuse and trauma stunts the victim's psychological development resulting in ontological insecurity (Laing 1960, pp. 39-61) - that is a disconnection from self-identity, other people, and the world (see for example Herman 1992, p. 133; Smith and Jones 1993, pp. 104-105). As was evidenced from the participants' life-stories, maladaptive functioning (i.e. the development of complex psychic defence systems) was a common characteristic in the personalities of Peter, Michelle, Janet and Cathy, before their epiphanies.

The participants' varying degrees of maladaptive functioning meant that when positive growth and development occurred, it came in the form of sudden and abrupt transformations. In some respects one could say that adult survivors of child abuse are 'catching up' with the rest of the healthy population. However, I would argue that such experiences (abuse, trauma and subsequent epiphany) enable the individual to express higher forms of growth and development compared with the rest of the general population.

For example, the participants in this inquiry now live their lives through greater openness, a trait which is related to intelligence and creativity (McCrae 1992); they are more willing to continue growing by expressing ever-new elements of self-identity; they understand and have experienced the personal empowerment that comes from taking responsibility; through pain and suffering they have developed deep personal insight that has enabled them to connect much more deeply with others; they have each created meaning and purpose in their lives by becoming involved in causes larger then themselves; they are able to marshal their inner resources to achieve their goals and they have become more resilient and better at coping with adversity; and they have each developed their own unique forms of spirituality, which has enabled them to connect much more deeply with the world around them.

While acknowledging the participants' growth through adversity, there is also a need to acknowledge that certain positive personality traits were required for their epiphanies to occur in the first place. They are:

1. Courage and perseverance. This was reflected in the participants' willingness to take a mature reflective stance toward their depression, anxiety and inner turmoil by accepting their inauthentic modes of self-identity. They were prepared to search for answers and forsake security in order to make a leap toward psychological growth.

2. Capacity for insight and self-analysis. This was reflected in the participants' ability to make meaningful links between their childhood experiences and adult behaviour.

As a result of the participants' epiphanies the above personality traits were greatly enhanced. Added to these enhanced traits was a range of new and positive personality traits that were outcomes of their epiphanies.

Lastly, this inquiry has illustrated the superiority of narrative psychological methods when inquiring into a participant's identity, self and personality. There are four main arguments for this:

1. The in-depth life-story interview enabled the participant greater powers of access and recall because it vividly brought to light their identity, self and personality through the stories they once told themselves about who they were.

2. The in-depth life-story interview communicates the process by which the participant's personality has evolved and provides the necessary detail for a full and rich picture of the individual to emerge. This benefits the researcher by providing a

clearer and more accurate comparison between the participant's personality before and after their epiphany.

3. The in-depth life-story interview provides an account of the social and cultural context in which the participant's personality was shaped.

4. The yielding of life-stories provides a temporal or process understanding of epiphanies – concepts that lie at the heart of a fluid dynamic self-identity.

8.3.4 The implications of this inquiry for the practice of psychotherapy

Three main implications of this inquiry for the practice of psychotherapy will now be outlined:

1. Some people who have experienced an epiphany, either recently or some time ago, may seek psychotherapy as a result, in order to make sense of, or better understand their experience and its implications for their life.

2. Given the positive benefits of epiphanies, is it possible, or even ethical for a psychotherapist to facilitate this type of change and transformation in their clients?

3. This inquiry has illustrated a process or route by which victims of childhood abuse and trauma maybe able to achieve recovery in adulthood; therefore this inquiry acts as a map or guide for psychotherapists when treating cases of this nature.

Psychotherapists are in a position to provide support for clients who have had an epiphany, either recently or some time ago. The first task of the therapist is to validate the client's experience by providing formal recognition. One way that this can be achieved is to ask the client to narrate their life-story, including their epiphany, in the same way the participants in this inquiry were asked to narrate their life-stories and epiphanies. This will enable the client to better integrate the lessons that their epiphany has taught them by reinforcing its personal meaning and the positive changes that have taken place. It also helps the client to accept that epiphanies are a normal type of change and growth.

Secondly, the therapist can help the client understand that their epiphany was an insight or change in perspective that was appropriated as a life-changing event borne out by their courage to face their inauthenticity. This empowers the client by helping them to appreciate that they possess the ability and the resources to make positive and enduring life changes. The importance of this point cannot be overstated because many people will view their epiphany either as a gift from some higher benevolent being, or a phenomenon in which they played no part (see for example Jarvis 1997; Miller and C'de Baca 2001), and so the opportunity for empowerment and further insight could be lost.

There is also a need for the therapist to reiterate the existential maxim that self-identity is a process of continual growth and becoming. In this respect there is a need for the client to appreciate the limitations of human existence, so that despite their epiphany, life will continue to provide them with challenges and adversity.

Is it possible, or even ethical, for a psychotherapist to facilitate an epiphany? The answer to both of these questions is 'yes'. Nevertheless, while it may be possible for the therapist to facilitate an epiphany, an external party could never induce a transformational experience in another. It has been the contention of this inquiry that epiphanies are the result of an accumulation of personal processes that take place outside of conscious knowing, that suddenly and abruptly burst into awareness, and which are appropriated as a life changing event by the individual's courageous leap toward a new and more authentic self-identity; therefore only they can choose to make this monumental leap in their life and to remain resolute in retaining the insight and change in perspective that it brings. Secondly, given that it is the therapist's primary role to facilitate deep personal insight or significant changes in perspective, the question of whether it is ethical for a psychotherapist to facilitate an epiphany becomes a moot point, because it is these two elements of the therapist's role that would most effectively facilitate an epiphany.

How else then might a psychotherapist facilitate an epiphany? Chapter Six of this inquiry illustrates that epiphanies are preceded by periods of depression, anxiety and inner turmoil – feelings and states of mind that often motivate individuals to undertake psychotherapy. This inner turmoil, and the pain associated with it, provides the motivation to search for answers to one's dilemmas. It is through this search that one's inauthentic and authentic modes of self-identity are illuminated.

Therefore, in order to facilitate an epiphany the psychotherapist should aim to avoid providing easy answers, instant relief, or an opportunity for the client to sidestep the conditions of existence. This will allow the process of insight and illumination to take its course. This however is not to suggest a client should not be offered relief from the symptoms of acute mental anguish. Instead, gentle and supportive exposure to one's pain and suffering and the conditions of existence will stimulate the necessary self-analysis and appropriation of a more authentic self-identity[53]. In addition, the therapist can support and facilitate those personality traits or characteristics identified earlier in this discussion as needing to be present for an epiphany to occur. These include, perseverance, insight, self-analysis, and courage.

The therapist should also be aware that lesser moments of illumination provide life with a degree of coherence and continuity. Indeed these lesser moments of illumination, as revealed in Chapter Six, often provide the necessary groundwork for epiphanies to occur in the weeks, months, and sometimes years to come in the client's life.

Lastly, this inquiry illustrates one of the processes or routes by which adult survivors of childhood abuse and trauma achieve recovery. Therefore, it provides psychotherapists with a new understanding on the nature of growth and development, one that is sudden and transformational. Research in the area of abuse and trauma

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[53] Simpson's (2003) treatment of an abducted teenager illustrates how a client's acute mental anguish can be treated using cognitive behavioural therapy, while ensuring that larger existential questions are not avoided or sidestepped in the process.

counselling contains anecdotal evidence for the occurrence of sudden and transformational changes in adult survivors (Tennen and Affleck 1998, pp. 86-88). However, this is the first inquiry to outline the process of sudden and transformational change in detail, while simultaneously emphasising the larger questions of human existence in the process.

The six core epiphanic characteristics and their interpretation through the fundamental conditions of existence, can be used by psychotherapists as a map or a guide for understanding how adult survivors of child abuse achieve recovery. Chapter Six illustrates the nature of positive change and transformation in adult survivors, while Chapter Seven argues that positive change and transformation is the result of a profound illumination of the inauthentic and authentic modes of self-identity. Facilitating this process can be achieved by helping the client move toward greater openness and illumination (see 7.2.1), which will heighten the awareness and dissonance between the two modes of existence.

The idea that suffering acts as a catalyst for positive change and growth is by no means a new or original idea in existential philosophy and psychology (Kierkegaard 1845; 1849; Nietzsche 1886; Fromm 1976; Jaffe 1985; Kessler 1987; Farber 1990; Frankl 1990; Gruba-McCallister and Levington 1990-1991; Smith and Jones 1993). With the charting of sudden and positive transformations in adult survivors of childhood abuse, this inquiry has supported this existential claim yet again. It therefore raises the question whether other adverse experiences such as physical

illness, divorce, death of a loved one, war, and torture, also stimulate sudden and positive transformations in self-identity.

8.4 Final Comment

In the final analysis I argue that the essence of an epiphany, like Heidegger's Dasein, is for something to 'appear' or 'to come into view' (Arnold 2002, p. 246). The being of authentic Dasein is to make room for things, to illuminate, to observe and to become aware of all there is (Heidegger cited in Boss 2000, pp. 217-218).

This inquiry has argued that epiphanies are experiences of profound transformation, however they are just one type of growth and development amongst many of others. Epiphanies are no more or less important than other slower more incremental types of positive change. Furthermore, authenticity may be achieved through an epiphany, but not permanently attained. Authenticity is a transient state of existence because the self, according to Heidegger (1927), is immersed in the average everyday - in alienation - and so it is continuously drawn toward the inauthentic (Ciaffa 1987; Flynn 1999). Therefore, epiphanies do not represent the final goal or endpoint on a journey toward a more authentic existence. Peter notes:

> Life still has its ups and downs…I enjoy the girls now more than ever and feel blessed for their presence in my life. I still have set backs psychologically but I know that I will never be the person I was before my epiphany. Peter

APPENDIX ONE: CONTENT ANALYSIS

Content analysis is defined as the objective and systematic description of the manifest content of communication (Krippendorff 1980, p. 21). Content analysis involves identifying and evaluating the items of text that appear to be theoretically important and meaningful, and relating them to the central research question(s) under investigation. Krippendorf (1980) outlined an approach for undertaking a content analysis, which I have summarised here into three main steps as it related to the analysis of the epiphanic literature. The first step involved reducing the text through integration and generalisation – the longest and most intensive step in the process. This involved thoroughly reading and re-reading the literature, while simultaneously developing a list of meaningful units of information. The second step involved successively collapsing these meaningful units (fifty two in total) into one another. This involved comparing and contrasting the list of units then collapsing them into one another until there remained a set of six core characteristics, each with a short succinct description. The third and final step was to ensure reliability in the analysis process. This was achieved by seeking inter-coder agreement from an academic colleague. The inter-coder analyst was given the epiphanic literature and the six core characteristics and asked to check their reliability in representing the phenomenon as presented by the literature. A general agreement was reached with the analyst, however changes to three of the characteristics and their descriptions were suggested in order to more accurately reflect their meaning in the literature.

APPENDIX TWO: LIFE-STORY INTERVIEW

GUIDELINES

Opening Question

I want to ask you to tell me how the story of your life occurred. The best way to do this would be for you to start from your birth, with the little child that you once were, and then tell all the things that happened one after the other until today. You can take your time in doing this, and also give details, because for me everything is of interest that is important to you. Please include your epiphany in your life-story and how this experience changed your life.

Epiphanic Checklist

*Antecedent state (depression, inner turmoil, anxiety)
**Suddenness
*Personal transformation
*Illumination/Insight
*Meaning-making
*Enduring nature

Self-Identity-Existential Checklist

*Self-identity change, how (static or fluid, state of becoming, still developing)
*Responsibility
*More accepting of yourself
*Greater purpose and meaning in life
*Existential crisis before epiphany
*Leap of faith (letting go of old self, embracing new self)
*Hiding behind facades or false identities
*Ideal self and self-image
*Entitlement to emotional self
*Less internal rapprochement
*Freedom
*Newfound belief in future
*Social roles (important, less important)
*Child-parent bond
*Societal pressure, materialism, success, self-importance
*Spiritual beliefs
*Role of others in epiphany (relational transformation)
*Decision-making
*Defying conventions and imposed values (dogma and/or organized religion)
*More committed to others and humanity
*Self as action orientated
*Greater self-reflection
*Overcoming alienation from self and world

*Newfound allegiances
*More balance
*Expression of creativity

APPENDIX THREE: LETTER OF CONSENT

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

I _____ agree to participate in the research project Epiphanies: An Existential Philosophical and Psychological Inquiry being conducted by Matthew McDonald at the University of Technology, Sydney PO Box 222 Lindfield NSW 2070 Ph 9514 5368 for the purpose of his PhD degree.

I understand that the purpose of this study is to understand sudden, abrupt and transforming life experiences.

I understand that my participation in this research will involve the sharing of personal information concerning my life-story and transformational experiences.

I am aware that I can contact Matthew McDonald 9514 5368 or his supervisor Stephen Wearing 9514 5432 if I have any concerns about the research. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my participation from this research project at any time I wish and without giving a reason.

I agree that Matthew McDonald has answered all my questions fully and clearly.

I agree that the research data gathered from this project may be published in a form that does not identify me in any way. Pseudonyms will be used in the thesis and any other published material.

_____   ____/____/____
Signed by

_____   ____/____/____
Witnessed by

NOTE:
This study has been approved by the University of Technology, Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research, which you cannot resolve with the researcher, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer, Ms Susanna Davis (ph: 02 - 9514 1279, Susanna.Davis@uts.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

APPENDIX FOUR: SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Matt	OK Michelle, as I mentioned at the preliminary interview I want to ask you to tell me how the story of your life occurred. So the best way for you to do this would be to start from your birth, and the little child that you once were, and then tell me all the things that happened one after the other until today. Now don't worry about the time it takes for you to do this because I would like as much detail as possible. Everything that is important to you is of interest to me. Also use your own words and don't forget to include your epiphany in your life-story at the time it occurred and how this experience changed your life? And I would like it if you could relate your story in terms of your sense of self and identity.
Michelle	My name is Michelle Burgess but I was actually christened Sharon Ann Burgess. Probably that's the first thing that comes to mind as far as trying to have an identity. I have a different name to when I was born. My first memories are form when I was about 3 with my grandmother. I spent the first year of my life with my grandmother. I don't remember any of that. I was always at my grandmother's because my parents were quite young and they were always out doing things so it seemed I was always there. She was a very spiteful, mean woman. We lived in Newcastle. She would take me to town and take me into the police stations. It seemed like every time we went out on a day trip we would go to a police station. She would ask the policeman if she could show me the cells. She would say 'This is where you end up if you are a bad girl!' At 3 years old that was quite a huge experience for me. Quite frightening. We went all over the place. It would be a day trip to go to these police stations. I was staying in a room and there was a truck always parked across the road. I don't know what for. It had a tarpaulin over it all the time. I just have a lot of memories of looking out the door of where I stayed and she would always say that the bad girls were put into the truck and that they were in there waiting to be taken away. I remember thinking 'Why don't they just get out? Why aren't they yelling out?' but I truly believed that. My grandmother and grandfather lived together but they didn't talk to each other for seven years. My grandfather had emphysema and so he was always in the kitchen at the kitchen table. From about the time I was 5 to a teenager I just remember, even if you are in the same room as them both, my grandmother saying 'Can you tell your grandfather this,' or 'Can you tell your grandfather that' or 'Does he want a cup of tea?' even though he was obviously only a few metres away. Later on we actually moved about a kilometre away from them and she would ring up on the phone and say 'I need you to talk to your grandfather about this' to whoever answered the phone. She was quite an abusive woman. She also had this thing about children having fun. We weren't allowed to laugh or have any fun. We

	would get into trouble for laughing. Probably a couple of years after I was 3 I just generally remember about starting school in Newcastle and coming home in the afternoons and looking after my sister. She was about 5 at the time so I would have been 7 or 8. I just remember looking after her after school. We lived in a federation house so it was quite an old house, quite dark inside. We lived in a morbid kind of environment anyway so it wasn't a good atmosphere for young kids. To protect my sister I used to put her in the cupboard in the afternoons because that was all I knew really at the time. I was quite scared in the house by myself. My memories of being about 7 or 8 are mostly of being alone and playing alone. Really not having any communication with anyone. Not even my parents. I was often quite confused because there was no communication. I can't even remember having any conversations with them. They wouldn't talk to us. It was like we weren't there my sister and I. Even going back to when I was living at my grandmother's, we were actually dropped at other relatives for periods of 4-6 weeks. I just have these memories of sitting out the back and them giving me drawings or colouring-in books to keep me occupied while they went about their daily lives. Me just sitting there and being quite lonely. No one talking to me.
Matt	Any happy memories of childhood?
Michelle	No.
Matt	A real sense of abandonment?
Michelle	Actually it wasn't a sense of abandonment because really I just felt like a shell. There was nothing inside. I was always looking at other people and knowing that obviously they knew what was going on in life. They were able to converse with people. Even as children they seemed to have a life. They wanted to go to that party or they had a vision that they wanted to be a fireman. I seemed to be confused about how they knew that. And the fact that they did seem happy. A lot of children fantasize about being a doctor. I suppose I felt that as well but I don't really have any happy memories of being a child unfortunately.
Matt	Mmm, so not very good?
Michelle	Yes. My life seemed like a hole. Just going back to the name change. I remember coming back from primary school and asking my mother if I could change my name to Jessica. And being quite insistent about that. I don't remember there being a girl at school called Jessica. But I think it was 'There is something wrong with me. These girls have got these other names so maybe that's it!' maybe if I changed my name things were going to be different. I didn't change my name until I was 30 in the end. Not that I regret doing it. I felt that even at a young age it was one of the first things I wanted to do to try and obtain some kind of identity. Because obviously there was something wrong. I don't have many more memories of being a child. My parents never fought. There was no talking in the house, no

	negotiation. All this stuff behind closed doors it seemed.
Matt	Can you tell me more about the non-communication?
Michelle	Historically it came through my mother's family like that. I believe there were people beyond my grandparents who did that. If you didn't get on with some one you would just stop talking to them. There was no trying to resolve the relationship. It was either black or white.
Matt	Mmm I see.
Michelle	Later on when I became a teenager there was still no communication. It turned into the notes being left on the kitchen table. That was our form of communication. 'That's what we're doing and here's $20 for the weekend.' It was almost as if I was living in an environment where someone had just recently died. You could almost cut the air with a knife. Even today I can always recognize when my father walks up the front steps. I know how my mother sounds when she is walking around. You'd go straight to your room when people came home or came close. Looking back on it I don't even know what I was trying to escape. I was never physically hit. I was never touched at all. My father I know was sexually abused by some men and so the way he dealt with that was that he never touched us. I only have two memories of my father being physical with me – in a nice way, and there was no other way. I don't have any memories of my mother touching me or talking to me unless she was being pretty nasty to me. My mother was always nasty to me when my father wasn't around. It was a very separate relationship my mother and I had going on from a very early age. I actually don't remember wanting to be anything in particular when I was a child. However whenever I've mentioned going back to university to study, most of the people who I knew when I was younger say, 'That's really good because you always spoke about it then about being a nurse.' I can't remember having those conversations or saying that. I disassociated a lot as a child so there are larger areas where I don't remember. So it's difficult to say specifically. It's more just feelings. My mother and I had a relationship where she was emotionally abusive. She would give me things for my birthday and then a couple of weeks later take them off me.
Matt	That does sound really spiteful.
Michelle	Yes. Going back to when I was about 3, I did have a dog at that time. He was actually my friend at the time. At some stage a couple of years after that, my dad told me he had to be put down because he had a rash. When I was about 30, my dad actually told me that he didn't have a rash at all. He was put down because nobody could be bothered looking after him. I just remember as a child, despite being hollow and not understanding what was going on, I knew that people didn't die of rashes. 'Why does a dog die of a rash because people get rashes and don't die?' I kept getting told that. It was sort of like small lies like that just went on to abuse me as a child and

	as an adult. There was something in me that knew that wasn't right. My gut instinct even as a child.
Matt	You knew something was wrong?
Michelle	I didn't know what the truth was but I knew it couldn't have been that. Coupled with the fact that you have parents who you dote on and believe. You believe in them but know it not to be true. When my father told me, when I was about 30, that he had actually put the dog down, he had really lived with the guilt all those years. He was now ill and having therapy himself and he told me to relieve himself of the guilt. Really with no understanding of how that would impact me. The deceit as a child. My teenage years were pretty much like my childhood years except for the fact that when I turned 13 I started to experience very severe depression. I was still very lonely, still very confused. I couldn't concentrate at school. When I first started school I was in the top of the class in primary school. As the years went by I went downhill. I started to do what most teenagers do which is to be cheeky and say things back to people. That didn't really elicit much response in my house. People would still just ignore you. So I got to the point where I was getting razor blades and putting them next to my bed and keeping them there and saying 'Tonight I'm going to kill myself'. I had an incident where I said 'Tonight I'm going to kill myself. Here's the razor blades.' They would always just say 'Well go ahead, whatever.' And so I finished up just trashing my room. In retrospect it was about just getting some attention. My father called the mental health team, but before they came he called them back and said that everything was all right and they didn't need to come. I don't think it was about them not needing to come. It was more that it was so embarrassing if I was taken to a mental health facility. It would just be shameful for the family. The whole family was built on what we looked like on the outside. My parents were quite well off. So we looked really good. Other children would be quite envious of what we seemed to have but we had nothing. My parents built their own identities around money and forsaked everything else at the time. I was doing really badly in school. I just felt like I thought I was an intelligent person but I was really unhappy at home and really unhappy at school. I asked my father if I could go to boarding school. As a teenager I knew that things weren't right in this house but maybe if I got away. Most people don't want to go to boarding school but I would have gone anywhere. So I asked my father if I could go to boarding school and he said they couldn't afford it. That wasn't true. They just weren't willing to spend any money on us girls. This story is a bit all over the place. Is it all right if I go back?
Matt	Yes, you just construct the story however it comes to you.
Michelle	I felt quite unattractive and ugly as a teenager. I think most teenagers go through that. I left school in the beginning of year 11. I said to my parents that I needed to have a nose job. I was 16 then. There was actually nothing

	wrong with me. They didn't say anything. And so I had a nose job. It doesn't really look that much different to what it did. I just have this vision of healthy parents saying 'You don't need to have a nose job. You're 16 years old. There's nothing wrong with you.' There was none of that. It was 'OK'. It was like agreeing with me that there was something wrong with me. My physical being has always been as important as the inside of me as far as my identity. It seemed to go hand in hand. The whole of me. There was something wrong with the whole of me not just inside of me. That it was everything.
Matt	Mmm.
Michelle	I forgot what I was going to say now.
Matt	Just take you time remembering there's no rush.
Michelle	Yeah, I suppose, that's right I suppose I always felt like I was one big black hole walking around. I did actually have the nose job just when I left school but prior to leaving school I went to Stockton Hospital in Newcastle, which is a hospital where they used to dump children who had Down's syndrome and those who were developmentally delayed. These days they wouldn't be put into an institution like that but they were then. It was horrible. The people who were put in there would always live there. So I went there for 2 weeks for job experience because I wanted to be a nurse. I actually had a really good time and I really enjoyed myself. I don't have many good memories of being a child or adolescent but I do remember that time and having a sense of a positive experience. Subsequently the nurse in charge wrote to the school counsellor and wrote to my parents and said I did a pretty awful job and I would never be a nurse. I should consider other professions. I was really unprofessional and I couldn't handle the situation. She did say I was nicely dressed! This was the story of my life at the time. I was always nicely dressed. I don't remember it being devastating but it must have been. My parents never said anything about it. They would get the school reports and never say anything about it. It was like from that moment on I just forgot that I wanted to be a nurse. It wasn't an option for me because one person had said that I would make a terrible nurse. I don't even understand why I forgot but I really forgot that I wanted to be a nurse. It was like it never existed for me ever. I left school and went on the dole for a while.
Matt	How old were you when you left school?
Michelle	16. At the beginning of year 11 I left school. Got my first boyfriend when I was 16. That was really nice for me because I'd never really been touched before or had anyone to communicate with or anyone to care for me. This guy he really loved me. When I was 18 I dumped him and he was devastated. I dumped him because I just thought I had to go out and find out who I was. I had come to the conclusion that I had to make money. That was important. Because that had made my parents happy. Or I

	thought so at the time. That would make me happy and it would make other people like me. It would mean that I was important. It would mean that I would have a social life. I had this vision of having boyfriends with lots of money with BMWs. I had this vision that at that time I would have made it. That would be the high point of my life if I went for that. So I dumped him when I was 18 because all of a sudden he wasn't good enough for me. Also at that time my mother asked me to leave home. She approached me separate to my dad and sister and said that I should leave home because it would be better for the family. My mother had and still has a deep-seated belief that all the problems in the family really are related to me.
Matt	Did your boyfriend have the same aspirations?
Michelle	No not really.
Matt	I see.
Michelle	No he didn't have the same aspirations that I was at the time developing. I suppose despite the fact that I didn't really like my parents I did idolize them. I respected them for the money that they had earned after coming from nothing. I think I felt subconsciously that I would never be anything to them if I just met a nice guy and got married and had a couple of kids. They would never love me for that. Not only did I not know who I was, I always had a deep-seated guilt about being alive at all. A lot of children who are abused feel like they are not worthy of anything. I always felt that. One of the things that was quite devastating to me as a child, I found out that my mother fell pregnant before they were married so it was quite shameful at the time. They did get married. I think I was about 7 or 8 and I was in the car with my dad and we actually had a conversation about that. I do remember him saying how lucky I was that I wasn't in a jar. I could have been aborted. He was saying 'You're so lucky to be alive. We chose to have you, that you lived instead of died'. Because of all the problems in the family I always felt guilty to be alive. I felt I owed them because they had let me live as opposed to aborting me.
Matt	That's a really cruel thing for your own father to say.
Michelle	Yeah. Yeah it was. It was like I was being allowed to live and that should be enough. It was certainly put to me in that fashion. I've had that conversation with my dad since. I knocked around in Newcastle and went overseas a few times between the ages of 18-21. I had a boyfriend during that time. He was very violent and sexually abusive. I lived with him because I had been asked to move out of home.
Matt	How did you meet this guy and what drew you to him?
Michelle	I started going out when I was 16. I would go out and stay out until 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning, drink like a fish, vomit all over my bedroom floor

	and not clean it up for a couple of days and no one ever seemed to notice. I started binge drinking a lot. I met him at a pub. I don't know what attracted me to him. He was kind of cool. He was about 5 years older than me. He seemed to have some kind of persona or something about him. I think a lot of the men that I've been out with have been about wanting something that they have. Like wanting to be cool or wanting to be rich or whatever. He certainly wasn't rich. I don't know why I was going out with him. He was a boilermaker and I was really ashamed that I was going out with him in the end. I didn't ever take him home to my parents except for once because I knew that he would never live up to their expectations. In the end I left him because I thought he was actually going to kill me. He threw an iron and I was sitting up in bed and it just missed my head and stuck in the wall. If it had hit me in the head it would have killed me. I was starting to feel very unsafe. I rang my mother and said that I needed to move back home. I didn't tell her the reasons and I don't really remember the conversation. She did say I could move back home. I think it was because I approached my father as well. Because I was always a little bit closer to my dad than my mum. When I was 21 I remember having a conversation in the kitchen with my mother that I was going to move to Sydney and be earning $100,000 by the time I was 30. Pretty much within 2 weeks I was living in Sydney. I wasn't earning $100,000 but by the time I was 30 I was earning $100,000. My 20s were about money. Trying to get better jobs and complaining about the money I was earning. Being with men who were ambitious. About how to make money and going out for dinner. I didn't feel like I had really made it in my 20s at that time. But I felt that the path was getting some identity.
Matt	What work were you doing before you moved to Sydney?
Michelle	I was working in a credit union as a cashier. Prior to going to Sydney I'd looked in the Sydney Morning Herald and realised that the people in the computer industry were the ones earning all the money. I thought 'That's the way to go'. I went down to Sydney. Initially I was employed in a couple of small computer companies just as a receptionist and secretary. Then they gave me a traineeship. I worked with them for about five years in a technical capacity. In my late 20s I went into sales. That was when I started to make better money.
Matt	What did you learn on your traineeship? What was that primarily about?
Michelle	Software and putting PCs together and troubleshooting. Because we looked after all the PCs, about 800 of them in the building. As an internal service.
Matt	Did you enjoy the work?
Michelle	No. I felt really inadequate. I felt like any day someone would find me out that I didn't really know what I was doing most of the time. I was just

	bluffing my way through.
Matt	Mmm.
Michelle	At some points I was carrying out what was required from the position and at some points I also had managers who I was friends with. I clearly wasn't doing my job but my relationship with those managers was such that I could get away it. I wasn't having relationships with them outside of work or anything like that….but my relationships were certainly more personal. One in particular, when we both left that company he did contact me and ask me out. That did confirm to me that all that time he really did want to be quite nice to me. And I knew that at the time. When I was 27 I met a man I had a relationship with for three years. That was really nice. He finished up leaving me because I turned 30. He was younger than me so I think he felt he needed to sow his wild oats. He thought I was wanting to settle down and have children. That was devastating.
Matt	Is that what you wanted? To settle down and have children?
Michelle	That wasn't where I was at the time. About midway through that relationship I went into therapy. I was still in therapy when the relationship ended. I was in therapy for five years. It seemed like forever. When I was about 30 ½ the therapist suggested to me that maybe I had a problem with drinking and suggested that I go to AA meetings. It was just devastating for me to go. I'll just never forget it. But it was true and I was an alcoholic. The next 18 moths I did stop drinking straight away when I started going to meetings. The next 18 months were like living in some kind of hell. The drinking was getting me through for so many years. I started drinking heavily when I was 16. I was always a binge drinker. Towards my late 20s to early 30s I started wanting to drink at other times. I wanted to drink very strong drinks in the morning. Even though I hadn't got around to doing it, it was certainly always there in my mind. It was like a fantasy going on. When I was a child I remember climbing up onto the medicine cabinet and drinking the cough medicine because it used to have quite a high alcohol content. My mother always had Sudafeds in the cupboard so they would knock me out as a child. I remember doing that at 8, 9, 10. I was already medicating, using alcohol and drugs at that age. I stopped drinking and the next 18 months were just hell. I had nothing to medicate myself with and my relationship had just broken down. It was really a downhill slide because as the months went by I felt I could cope less and less. I guess in my twenties when I started to earn money I had started to develop and kind of feel good about who I was. When I got sober I just started to feel hollow again as I had when I was a child. I didn't know who I was. I think I just went mad. I just went completely mad. I became suicidal. I'd changed my name by then. The girls at work started to report to my manager that they were really worried about me, that I was obviously unwell. I was earning really good money. At the end of that period I got a commission cheque for $70,000. I just remember getting home on that Friday night when the

	commission was through, knowing that I'd been taxed half of it so there was $35,000 in my bank account. Thinking that obviously I'd done what I'd set out to achieve when I was younger. That I was starting to make all this money but I just felt like I was dying inside. The more money I earned the more dead I felt. I didn't know what to do with it. Even if I did do something with it, it didn't really make me happy. I had nothing that I wanted to do. I didn't feel passionate about anything so what was the point of having it?
Matt	That does sound like you felt really empty.
Michelle	For sure. I just remember that night so clearly, coming home, siting on the floor and just smoking cigarette after cigarette and just feeling so desperate. Because what I thought would work and make me feel better and give me an identity and give me friends and give me some kind of peace of mind, hadn't worked. I think there is a big difference between having a vision about what your identity is and trying to achieve it to actually suddenly be earning $150,000 - $200,000 a year and getting these big pay cheques and knowing that you had attained it and it didn't work. Because whenever you are trying to attain that at least you've got something to work towards. Really that particular pay cheque was the beginning of the end for me. Work was one of the few things I had and after that I didn't even know why I was doing that. So that was the last thing. I was scheduled to go to Perth for a week to work and I was supposed to be leaving that evening. The day leading up to going to Perth was like a big countdown. I always knew in the back of my mind that I'd never be able to go. I just didn't have the energy. I felt suicidal. I was really nervous. I was shaking all the time. It didn't really matter what I did, whether I was with people, whether I wasn't, whether I was being social, whether I was going to 12 step meetings, whether I was in therapy. Nothing was helping. I felt like my only option was to commit suicide. I finished up over that weekend ringing the hospital and saying 'I have to be admitted to the hospital because I'm really unwell.' I'm smart enough to know not to say that I had plans about killing myself. They won't take you. They'll take you if you have suicide ideation but not if you have a plan. So they interviewed me over the phone and said I could come in on Sunday night. I spent 6 weeks in that hospital which is for people who are trying to get sober or are trying to get over drug addictions but also co-dependence, depression, breakdowns. I met someone in the hospital and had a relationship. He was pretty much what I always tried to be. He made lots of money and he seemed happy. He had a yacht and a couple of expensive motorbikes and BMWs. A very successful man. So despite the fact that I was spiritually dead and nearly physically dead because I hadn't really eaten much for months. I was about 8 stone. Under 8 stone. It was like when I came out I was still in that frame of mind that that was going to work for me and he was going to work for me. We had a very sick relationship and he ended up going back to his wife, which was devastating for me. That period when I was about 33 after that relationship

	broke up to when I was 35 was really mad. I was still trying to get good jobs. By then I had gone into management. I went into hospital and when I came out I thought 'I can go into management now and earn bigger and better money.' It seemed like that didn't even help but underneath I knew that something had to change because I started to think about what else I could do. I got jobs. I would just get these jobs that were $100,000 to walk in the door and 3 months later I would just be sitting there at my desk. And just one night at 7pm I just decided I would leave. I packed up my laptop and walked over to someone else that was there and said 'Well I'm going now' and they said 'See you in the morning' and I said 'Well no, I'm going now' and just never came back. Then I got another job looking after 6 telesales people. The same thing happened except I went there quite early one morning and sent them an email saying I'd packed up my things and wouldn't be back. It was like I could get what I wanted but it wasn't what I wanted.
Matt	So it was all pretty erratic?
Michelle	I was living with some friends at the time. Even now they say it was just so mad. I'd come home and I would seriously think I was going to be a writer or I would seriously think I was going to be something that I had no experience in and had never thought about before. For a while I actually thought I was going to be a stunt woman. And that I would go to America and train. I was really out there and open to it. I would talk to people about it and say 'I've got to change careers. What am I going to do?' It was just really, really frustrating and I was really, really depressed. It seemed like my whole life everyone else knew what they were meant to be doing. Those two years when I lived in Sydney and I didn't have a partner and I was in these corporate positions and leaving one and going to another. Having come out of hospital just really raw. I gave up therapy because I just felt five years was enough. I felt it wasn't helping any more. I felt there was still something wrong with me but how much more therapy was going to help me?
Matt	Who were you seeing? Was it a counsellor, or psychiatrist or psychotherapist?
Michelle	I was actually seeing somebody who had previously worked at the hospital that I went to. I was referred to her and that's how I knew about the hospital. It was based on inner child work, the therapy that I did.
Matt	What did the inner child work involve?
Michelle	Talking about memories that I had about my parents and my childhood. There's 100s of them and then just going through a process of crying about them, grieving about them, what am I going to be about them? Understanding that there's a very wounded part inside me. But there is also an adult part of me. At that time there was no adult part of me. I really think looking back on my life, I was a child trying to live in an adult

world. That's how I felt all the time. When there was a problem, whether it was relationships or people at work or when I was under a lot of stress at work, it would be nothing for me to be out in my car 4 times a week sitting there crying. The corporate world is just too difficult for a 7 year old and that's how it felt. Between hospital and the relationship breakdown I just had this vision of myself being in those corporate environments. I wore Country Road very dark suits. For two years I just watched the world go by. I worked in town in North Sydney. I was extremely lonely. It was like I was in this huge city. There were people bustling everywhere and I wasn't a part of it. That made it even lonelier. I just used to stand in places or sit in a coffee shop and watch these people with these dark suits on all trooping somewhere in busy city streets. I would think 'Where are they going, what have they got to do? These people have somewhere to go, something to do. They know who they are. They know what to do. They've got a loved one somewhere.' It was always that sense of 'Here I am again sitting in this dark suit.' Not knowing who I am, what I'm supposed to be doing. 'I've got nowhere to go. It doesn't matter where I go, I'm still going to feel like this.' For some reason I started to get a feeling that I needed to get into the country and I needed to get a dog. This just came out of the blue from somewhere. I looked at the paper and there was a position with a contract for 12 months in a small town called Leeton. I pretty much had the job within 2 weeks and had moved there in 2 weeks of making that decision. I had this vision of living in this old rambling wooden house and sitting on the veranda with the dog. I just felt really exhausted and sitting on this country veranda would give me some relief from that. I moved and there were no old country rambling houses to rent. I finished up living in a very modern townhouse, which was very disappointing. Within a few days of being there I bought Lucy my dog. Because I'd left so suddenly and caught the train down I really only had my clothes. When I found this townhouse to live in there was some furniture sent down with a removalist. But because I had all my stuff in storage it was really quite difficult. So I finished up going out and buying new white goods because I couldn't be bothered with all the old stuff. I didn't know anyone there. I rang my mother and said 'Can you go into my storage and get this box, it's got my video.' I don't know why because I'd gone out and bought a TV, fridge, washing machine. I don't know why I couldn't go out and buy a $200 video. I contacted my mum and said 'I'm pretty sure it's in this box and the box looks like this.' The box was couriered down. When it got there it didn't have the video in it. It had really weird things like a hat stretcher and an old plaster man that I had got for $5. It had my school records in it. It was just like a box I'd thrown junk into and whacked it in storage. I started going through it because I lived in this town and knew nobody and had nothing to do. And I found the report that the woman had sent to my parents. Saying that I would be a terrible nurse. I had just forgotten all those years that that is what I really wanted to be. I'd talked about being a stunt woman and all these really bizarre things trying to work out what I wanted to be and it never occurred to me that I wanted to be a nurse. Never. I just think it was so traumatic at the

	time that that's what happened. I just blocked it out. I remember just sitting there and just looking at it. I was on my own thinking 'Oh my God, oh my God, I always wanted to be a nurse. I always wanted to be a nurse!' I remember going to work the next day. Even though I'd only just moved there, I said 'I'm going to leave because I'm going to be a nurse.' Everything really started to change then. I felt that that was what I needed to be doing.
Matt	How did it feel when you made that realization?
Michelle	It was like a shock to the system. I recognized in that moment the kind of bizarre way that it had come about. I'd sent away for this box and I was sitting there going through it. I also recognized that at the time. It seemed to be 'Thank God someone has told me or has sent me a sign. Someone has finally told me what I should be doing with my life.'
Matt	A sense of relief?
Michelle	That's what it was like. I was really very angry when I received the box because I really wanted the video and I just thought 'Why didn't you open the box and check that the video was in there?' In a small country town I got sent a hat stretcher! There were other equally useless things in the box. And it had cost a fair bit to get the box sent down there. I think really from that moment I did get a sense that I had an identity. That I knew what my identity was a long time ago. That I knew what I should have been doing. But it had been taken away from me.
Matt	Was the identity more than just the nursing?
Michelle	I think it does have to do about the clichés about nurses. I'm not the person who when I finish my degree will be sticking up IVs and things like that. That's not the kind of nursing I want to do. But I think its about me as a person and kind of a final acceptance that I am a really nice person and I have communication skills and I do have a sense when people need to talk. When something's wrong. A sense that there was a place for me at the very heart of who I was in nursing at some position. But not putting up IVs and sticking needles in people.
Matt	Why do you think you've developed that ability to understand people at that deeper level?
Michelle	I don't really know. For as long as I remember, people have always opened up to me or come to me to the point where I don't want them to. It's quite emotionally draining to deal with all the time. I just always seem to get a sense of people being unhappy. Because of my family history of looking good but they weren't, I can tell when other people are in that situation regardless of what they are trying to cover it up with it.
Matt	You can see through the façade?

Michelle	Yes.
Matt	I see.
Michelle	I know that other people don't have that. I see experienced nurses; maybe because they've been in the system so long, they do seem to ignore that whole human side. I have had some really lovely connections with people that no one else has noticed that this person is upset except for me. Everyone tries to leave the room when people are upset because there are emotions and things. 'What are we going to do? They're dying we should just leave.' I've got no problems.
Matt	That sounds quite powerful.
Michelle	I can definitely connect with other people's pain and suffering. Not their anger. I'm not into other people's anger. I only need to look at people and touch their hand and say nothing and that is enough for them to start crying. It's just like they say 'This person recognizes I'm in pain.'
Matt	Mmm.
Michelle	It's about connecting with people. That's what really sustains me. The money wasn't sustaining me. Money wasn't giving me that sense of connecting with people. I know they are trying to make nurses more professional and more technical. I'm really proud to say I'm training to be a nurse. It is part of my identity, part of who I am. Despite the fact that I now I earn $13 an hour.
Matt	When you say it represents you as a person, what's changed, now that you're a nurse as opposed to previously?
Michelle	As opposed to being in the corporate environment?
Matt	Yeah.
Michelle	I've talked about the dark suits in the main streets of Sydney. For some reason that always had an impact on me. I would wear a dark suit. They never suited me. I always felt like I was going to a funeral. I always thought 5.30pm on Clarence Street was like a funeral procession. I always knew too that they were like these suits of armour. Even myself. Sometimes I would wear a colourful T-shirt underneath with my black skirt, black shoes, and black stockings. But if I ever went to a meeting I would put my jacket on because I needed that protection. Or if I was ever going to meet someone at the coffee shop. It could be 35°C I'd still put my jacket on and still see men down there with their jackets on. Like a suit of armour.
Matt	You always felt that sense of needing that suit of armour, that protection?

Michelle	Absolutely. Even though I needed it I hated it at the same time. As soon as I decided to go back to Uni I actually took all my suits to St Vinnies. I swore that I would never, ever wear one again. It was just such a big thing for me. It was this recognition of what was going on in my life. It's also coupled with the fact that it's very male dominated. There is a lot of political to-ing and fro-ing. It's all about money. God help you if you show an emotion or you have a problem at home. That's not to say that there aren't caring people out there because there are. But certainly those kinds of slips would be seen as a weakness. In nursing to me it's really nothing to cry on the ward with someone because a patient is in a lot of pain. I see that as a strength now. It was seen as a weakness before.
Matt	An acceptance of your emotionality?
Michelle	Yes. That's a part of me. For all these years I was trying to control it. Spending 4 days in my lunch-hour crying in my car. It was always a part of me. You can't control something like that.
Matt	A more healthy expression?
Michelle	Yes.
Matt	Mmm.
Michelle	It's been a really important step for me.
Matt	Yes I can see that.
Michelle	The period leading up to the box with the note in it, the 18 months before that were probably the worst. Because I knew there had to be a change but I didn't know what it was or how to do it. Once I had opened that box and seen that note there really was no going back. It was like someone had all of a sudden told me something. Suddenly I knew. I knew that I would never have to wear the dark suits. When that happened a lot of other things started to happen as well. Suddenly when I had that realization I realized I didn't have to make a lot of money. Suddenly material things became a lot less important to me.
Matt	How does that feel?
Michelle	It feels good. I don't want to drop into poverty! I can't be bothered going to shopping centres. It just doesn't seem that important to me anymore. It doesn't do anything for me, going out and buying things.
Matt	Did it use to?
Michelle	Yes. Well I used to think so.

Matt	So you've opened the box in Leeton and things really changed for you. What were you doing there?
Michelle	I was on a 12-month contract supporting one of their financial systems.
Matt	Take me through that in terms of leaving and enrolling to study?
Michelle	Pretty much the next day I did go in. I remember looking at my boss next to me and saying 'I'm going to be a nurse' and him saying 'Great, that's really great'. He didn't even really know me so I don't know why I said it. That became my conversation. It was like a veil was lifted. 'I'm going to be a nurse.' I pretty much started contacting Charles Sturt Uni because I was living down there and I'd actually started a relationship with someone so I thought it would be better to do it down here. The relationship broke up but I did actually study 6 months through their distance education once I'd moved back to Newcastle. My parents had not encouraged me academically all through school. My father actually called my sister and I 'stupid' as a nick name. As time went on, from an academic point of view, by the time I actually applied for university I thought 'I'm going to fail, its going to be a disaster, what am I going to do?' It didn't turn out like that at all. It seemed to be a lot easier. I just had a sense that it was easy because I was doing the right thing and that's what I should have been doing. That's why it seemed easy. Even though I felt that academically there was something wrong with me. It turned out there wasn't.
Matt	So you surprised yourself in a sense?
Michelle	Yes.
Matt	So you left Leeton. You'd done your 6 months at Charles Sturt?
Michelle	I did 6 months back here and then I applied to go to Newcastle Uni. I finished my second year this year so I'll be doing my third year. I bought a house in Kurri Kurri two years ago. Had someone said to me three years ago that in three years you'll be going to university full time, no income, $13 an hour a couple of times a week, I would never ever have believed it. There have also been a lot of other internal shifts as far as coming to a point of accepting who I am and what's best for me. What matches who I am as far as being a nice person, being compassionate, being quite emotional about issues. There have been other shifts. It was very difficult for me to come to the weekends because I'd often feel lost and lonely because I wasn't going to work whereas now it doesn't seem to be. Despite five years of therapy and being in a hospital and doing lots of other things, I always had issues like that. Where now there have been shifts. I do spend a lot of time alone but it's OK. I do get lonely sometimes but there is more of an OKness about everything now. Despite the fact that the story might be the same. I do spend days on my own but it's OK now.

Matt	So you always had a problem with solitude prior to your epiphany?
Michelle	Yes.
Matt	In what sense?
Michelle	Usually really bad anxiety.
Matt	Anything else?
Michelle	Dread, anxiety, suicidal ideation. 'I can't deal with it another minute let alone the whole day.' I think there was a sense of confusion about what the world was doing out there. The world knew what they were doing but I didn't. Whereas I don't feel that to the same degree. I feel a lot more grounded and a sense of wholeness. I'm not saying I don't have my days because I do.
Matt	Is there much more of a sense of belief in the future now?
Michelle	No it's not like that. If I'm having bad times now there's a sort of a sense that the universe will sort it out in the long run. It will be OK. To be honest I must have always had a sense of hope because people who don't, commit suicide. They're the ones who want the suffering ended. So in a way I had more hope when I was going through all of that and having a lot of suicidal ideation than I do now. I feel content with today. I don't really look towards the future as much as I did before. When I was quite ill and depressed and anxious and 'What am I going to do?', I did think 'It's got to get better, it's got to get better, it can't get much worse than it is.' Whereas now today is OK. So I don't need to think 'God I hope next week is better' because today is OK. I have really centred my epiphany around being a career change but really it was a lot more than that. All of a sudden everything just ripped away and it didn't matter that I had less money. I don't know why there was such a big shift around it. There just was.
Matt	Is there less internal rapprochement?
Michelle	Definitely, yes. For years that whole black suit thing, I just hated myself because underneath I knew I was trying to be something I wasn't. It was like I had no choice at the time. I hated myself. Every time I had to go outside and cry I hated myself more because no one else had to do that. There are very few people who leave jobs after a few months. Most people stick it out some length of time. In a corporate environment not many people knew that I'd been into rehab and not many people do. So it was just like 'Oh my God.' It was so shameful at the time. This is the end.
Matt	I see.
Michelle	I think I'm going all over the place again.

Matt	No it's alright this is all good stuff. What about role models?
Michelle	Before the epiphany I used to look at every one and take something from them. 'They do that well, their hair looks great, maybe I should do that.' A lot of them were men like my father that I looked up to. Since the epiphany there hasn't been anyone. I really don't feel like that about people any more. I don't want to be any one else. I feel like when I meet people they're not on that pedestal anymore. Maybe they don't know where they are going in life and they are a bit confused and strange and weird or going through something. So I don't feel the same way about people anymore. Since I have more identity about myself there's not that great need to go out and find it in others.
Matt	Could you ever go back to how you were before your epiphany?
Michelle	I could never imagine going back to doing the things I was doing before. I just wouldn't have the energy. It just took so much energy to live in that world. I don't see how you could go back even if you wanted to, I just feel so blessed that my mother accidentally sent me the wrong box…I see nursing as a kind of final acceptance of my personal qualities, it's my identity now, I don't think you could ever change that. It's just such a gift to be able to understand suffering and to empathise with others, to provide care and support that does not demean a patient's dignity.
Matt	What was it like to be someone else?
Michelle	To be someone else? It took so much energy. I was exhausted.
Matt	What about other internal shifts or shifts in general?
Michelle	I've always had problems with relationships. They don't seem to devastate other people when they end. They certainly devastate me, even if they were really abusive and awful. They still have an impact on me but not to the same degree. I feel age specific now. I don't feel like that 7 year old. Certainly I don't feel like this 100% of the time. But I feel like an adult the majority of the time. Able to make decisions and say 'No' to people. I don't feel like a naughty little girl any more or that I'm going to get in trouble all the time. I'm quite the opposite. At work we're not supposed to smoke yet I'm out there having a cigarette. Its like 'Put me on report, I don't care.' I don't really care about a lot of things I used to care about. I just don't care.
Matt	So you're much more assertive?
Michelle	Yes. I have more of a sense of what I want and how I want to be in the world. Just generally in my day to day life I can be quite easy going. But if it gets to something that's really important to me then I'm not easy going. 'No I'm not doing that.' or 'No I'm not going there.'

Matt	What would those things be for example?
Michelle	My relationship with my mother has broken down in the last month. Because my dad and my niece were going away for Christmas we had Christmas day early. There was a lot of guilt and pressure to go to the Christmas day. Historically I know it would have been awful between my mother and I, a waste of time going. So just made a decision that I wasn't going. I didn't feel bad about it. Even at work if someone asked me to do something and I'm not happy to do it I will just say 'No'. I guess more assertive. My self-esteem is quite good. At the same time an acknowledgement that my life is boring in a way. But I don't mind.
Matt	A contentment?
Michelle	Yes. I had a sense that my old life was kind of exciting, even though it really wasn't. Now it's like I've gone to the other end of the spectrum. I really have moved from one end to the other.
Matt	Mmm.
Michelle	Before I used to always try and keep up appearances.
Matt	Obviously that was important for you to give that sense to the rest of the world?
Michelle	What's happened since I've made this move is that the friendships that I have are a lot better. In retrospect I was all over the place. I was high or very depressed, suicidal. The stability that they see that I have now. It's easier to have a relationship with people when they are stable. You can be so needy when you are unwell.
Matt	Do you think you are more critical?
Michelle	I certainly have a sense of when people are lying or trying to manipulate. I don't actually think that I go out of my way to do, anything about it. I just think 'Oh is that right?' It's enough for me to know that the bullshit is happening. I don't need to sit down and have an argument about it. In a way that's more powerful. At some point they get a sense that you know what's going on anyway.
Matt	What about your ability to communicate?
Michelle	Having come from a background where there was no communication and notes left on the kitchen table. I just never learnt to communicate properly. It had a lot to do with the truth. And the fact that I responded to you and communicated to you and that would be OK. That's my way of being in the world as well. That's not something I would ever have done before. I think it has had a lot to do with it. I'm not a big talker in most situations but coming from not talking at all for many, many years it's a lot different

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	to how it used to be. Even though I was never beaten or touched I lived in fear of being beaten and touched because the silence said that something was wrong and something could happen at any moment. That's how I perceived it; there was a sort of danger in the silence. You can sort danger out in communication. 'Do you love me? Is this working? Do you not want to come to my place on Sunday? Is there a problem? Can we talk about it?' There's a danger in silence. Even if I didn't communicate, I can see underlying fear. What is really going on? I think there is a big problem with communication. Having said that, coming from a corporate environment, people do actually talk but they just talk about superficial things, not who they are as a person or how they feel. It's just talking rather than communicating. Communicating is taking risks. 'This is who I am; would you like to share part of yourself?'
Matt	Can you tell me more about the role of people in your epiphany and the role of people generally in this transformation that's taking place? What has been the importance of other people?
Michelle	The thing that shocked me was saying to my parents 'The note was in the box and I found it and now I'm going to be a nurse' and them saying 'That's really good because you always wanted to be a nurse.' I just felt pissed off. But certainly other people have been really positive. A lot of people I meet, especially older people when I tell them I'm at university studying nursing they say 'That's very honourable.' Nursing is a very honourable. There's a lot of perception out there in the community about what nurses are. Nurses have been voted for ten years in a row of being the most trustworthy profession despite the fact that they may not be. 'Oh there's a nurse here, everything is all right.'
Matt	You've talked a lot about the fast city lifestyle, the corporate world, do you feel that that creates a lot of distraction to fill people's lives up with something, without really attending to the important things?
Michelle	It's so easy in that environment to spend long hours at work. People do. They have their children and they become weekend parents. 'I need to stay back at the office until 7pm which means I don't get back until 8pm which unfortunately means that the boys have already gone to bed by then, but thank God the boys have already gone to bed by then!' I'm saying that because I have actually heard that voiced a couple of times. I'm sure that's what it's about. 'Thank God they've gone to bed by the time I get home. Thank God I have to stay at work until 7pm.' I don't think it's that way for everyone. I wasn't the only one suffering in that lifestyle. Most people suffer in their own way. It probably doesn't impact them as much as it impacted me. Not everyone ends up in hospital for 6 weeks.
Matt	I see.
Michelle	And I have also met people that have had difficult childhoods and seem to go on and don't have long periods of depression and anxiety and difficulty.

	They seem to have their coping mechanisms.
Matt	What were your coping mechanisms?
Michelle	The long-term friends that I had in Sydney. They weren't really like these people I was working with. They were quite different. I still have them. They took me in when I was really sick for a couple of weeks and I lived there for 9 months. They had kids but it was all fine and they looked after me. It was almost like they were being friends with the person that I am now. I don't understand how they could have been friends with the person I was. It was like they loved me despite all my problems. It was really weird.
Matt	They saw the real you?
Michelle	Yes they did. They are still friends even though the turmoil has stopped so obviously it wasn't all the drama.
Matt	Do you feel you have a more balanced life now?
Michelle	Yes definitely. It's like I'm going through a grieving process for that life that it went on for so long and it was such a waste. I'm nearly 38, I'd love to get married and have a couple of kids and it seems like that one of the reasons why those things haven't happened is, not only my abuse, but the life that came after the abuse. There were so many consequences. I feel a great sense of sadness about that. Even though I'm happy on a day to day basis obviously there are things that I feel a great loss about. It seems like it wasn't all necessary. It was such a waste of years.
Matt	What about death? You've talked about suicide, how do you view death now?
Michelle	Obviously I always had hope, and that's why I didn't kill myself at the time. There really is no good day to die. I've seen people die in the hospital. I don't think it really makes any difference to me. I don't believe there is anything after death. I think it's like an ongoing anaesthetic.
Matt	So you don't fear it?
Michelle	No. Really if I'm having a bad day I think 'Oh well, I might as well be dead' but then I think 'Oh well, might as well keep living.' No I don't fear it. I often feel quite frustrated. Patients who are in situations where I don't understand the hope that they have. Because they live in nursing homes and some of them are mentally capable still. But really I don't understand what enjoyment they are getting out of their lives. I don't understand why they want to keep living. I feel like saying to them 'Why don't you go. Because I would.' Not because I don't want them here but I just don't understand it.

Matt	What about the spiritual side of life?
Michelle	Spirituality has always been a funny thing with me. I used to have really bizarre experiences when I was a child. I was kind of aware that maybe there was something going on here. I've really struggled. I said I believed in God for a couple of years and then I hated God. Maybe the universe has this underlying power that's really ruining everything and then I think 'No it can't be. It's all just mumbo jumbo.' I really don't know. I don't know the truth and I never will know.
Matt	You said that nursing has helped you find your place in the world. Would you view that as a spiritual thing?
Michelle	Yes definitely. Because there was some things that came from that. It was like the spirit of me or the essence of me. I view spirituality now as being acceptance of everything really, who I am, where I am, what I am, and what I'm doing.
Matt	When you say that 'essence', what is the essence to you? Is it the child that, having the right kind of upbringing, would have come through?
Michelle	I think it was the child I was even as an abused child but that child is OK now. At the time I thought everything about me was rotten. Really I was a shy child. Whether things would have been different if circumstance had been different I don't know but I think really I was quite shy and sensitive and would never have been the leader of the pack at school. It's just an acceptance that that was the child I was and that child was actually fine. Even though I didn't think that she was, and to agree that who I still am except I am an adult person looking after myself more.
Matt	So what does the future hold for you?
Michelle	I've written a whole book on 2004. Despite the fact I'm not sure if I believe in universal energy or not I have actually asked for a lot of things in 2004. Meeting someone who's right for me and having a family life of my own. I don't want to live on my own any more. I want to have my own child next year. I need to work out what sort of nursing I want to do next year. My own spiritual growth. Lots of things about moving away from my parents' life even more. I still feel like there are things that I do that are quite old as far as my relationship with them. As I recognize them I want to move on so that I am separate to them. So there's a whole book in there about my future. There a real fear in that for me that maybe they won't happen.
Matt	What if it doesn't?
Michelle	I don't know.

Matt	What if some of it does and some of it doesn't?
Michelle	That would be OK. I guess I'm starting to get a sense of I deserve these things. Other people have them, why shouldn't I now. There's no reason why I shouldn't be asking for them and I want them now. As opposed to not really thinking I deserve them. It's quite a long list.
Matt	You've got to ask.
Michelle	I didn't finish school and I didn't get a degree and if I said to someone by the time I'm 30 I'm going to be earning $100,000 that happened, I just think there has to be something in believing in it. I believed it and it happened. I was just believing the wrong things.

APPENDIX FIVE: REFERENCES

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