Epiphanies: An Existential Philosophical And Psychological Inquiry

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

CERTIFICATION .............................................................................................................. 7

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................................. 8

ABSTRACT ....................................................................................................................... 9

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND ........................................ 10

1.1 Viktor Frankl’s Epiphany .......................................................................................... 10

1.2 Epiphanies: A Historical Outline .......................................................................... 11

1.3 Scope And Rationale For The Inquiry ................................................................... 13

1.4 Thesis Aims And Objectives .................................................................................. 15

1.5 The Contribution Of This Inquiry ......................................................................... 16

1.6 Summary ................................................................................................................ 16

CHAPTER TWO – EPIPHANIES ............................................................................. 18

2.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................ 18

2.2 Epiphanies: A Literature Review .......................................................................... 19

2.2.1 References to epiphany in the literature ......................................................... 19

2.2.2 The development and testing of a concept of epiphany .................................. 29

2.2.3 Epiphanic characteristics .............................................................................. 44

2.3 Summary ................................................................................................................ 46

CHAPTER THREE – THE CONTEXT OF SELF-IDENTITY IN EXISTENTIALISM .... 48

3.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................ 48

3.2 Existentialism ......................................................................................................... 49

3.3 Existentialism, Psychology And Psychotherapy ................................................... 52

3.4 Self-Identity And Existentialism ......................................................................... 53
3.4.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 53
3.4.2 The nineteenth century existentialists: Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche .................................................................................................................. 56
3.4.3 The twentieth century existentialists: Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre ......................................................................................................................... 67
3.5 Summary .................................................................................................................. 87

CHAPTER FOUR – NARRATIVE INQUIRY .................................................................... 92
4.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................ 92
4.2 Existentialism, Hermeneutics And Narrative Psychology ...................................... 93
4.3 The Process Of Narrative Inquiry .......................................................................... 99
  4.3.1 Introduction .................................................................................................. 99
  4.3.2 Narrative interviews and sampling ............................................................. 100
  4.3.3 Narrative analysis ...................................................................................... 105
  4.3.4 Grounding narrative inquiry ....................................................................... 108
  4.3.5 Ethics and process in narrative inquiry ..................................................... 112
4.4 Procedures ............................................................................................................ 114
  4.4.1 Participant recruitment .............................................................................. 114
  4.4.2 Interview guidelines .................................................................................. 115
  4.4.3 Interview process ...................................................................................... 116
  4.4.4 Data analysis ............................................................................................. 117
  4.4.5 Quality control .......................................................................................... 119
  4.4.6 Strengths and limitations of narrative inquiry .......................................... 121
4.5 Summary .............................................................................................................. 122

CHAPTER FIVE – PARTICIPANTS’ LIFE-STORIES .................................................. 124
5.1 Introduction ......................................................................................................124
5.2 Peter ...............................................................................................................125
5.3 Michelle ........................................................................................................133
5.4 Stephanie ....................................................................................................141
5.5 Janet ..........................................................................................................147
5.6 Cathy ..........................................................................................................158
5.7 Summary ....................................................................................................167

CHAPTER SIX – EPIPHANIC CHARACTERISTICS ............................................169

6.1 Introduction ..................................................................................................169
6.2 Epiphanic Characteristics ............................................................................172
   6.2.1 Antecedent state: Epiphanies are preceded by periods of depression,
       anxiety and inner turmoil ...........................................................................172
   6.2.2 Suddenness: Epiphanies are sudden and abrupt ......................................177
   6.2.3 Personal transformation: Epiphanies are an experience of profound change
       and transformation in self-identity ...............................................................180
   6.2.4 Illumination/Insight: Epiphanies are an acute awareness of something new,
       something which the individual had been previously blind to ..................190
   6.2.5 Meaning-making: Epiphanies are profound insights that are deemed
       significant to the individual’s life .................................................................194
   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 ...........................................................................................................197
6.3 Discussion ....................................................................................................199
6.4 Summary .....................................................................................................208
8.4 Final Comment.................................................................................................................291

APPENDIX ONE: CONTENT ANALYSIS .............................................................................292

APPENDIX TWO: LIFE-STORY INTERVIEW GUIDELINES.............................................293

APPENDIX THREE: LETTER OF CONSENT ...........................................................................295

APPENDIX FOUR: SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT .................................................296

APPENDIX FIVE: REFERENCES...........................................................................................318
CERTIFICATION

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

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ABSTRACT

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