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A Critical Realist Study of Epiphanic Experiences

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A thesis submitted to the University of Hertfordshire in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

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

In order to address these aims three studies were conducted: (1) a scoping review, (2) a thematic synthesis, and (3) a Critical Realist analysis using a participant sample of practitioner psychologists, whose profession was thought to lend them insight into the process of change and transformation. Findings suggest that whilst epiphanic experiences can be construed as a distinct category of sudden, positive, and profound change, they are intrinsically related to both mystical experiences and the insight experience. Moreover, epiphanic experiences were found to possess the following key markers: (1) brevity, (2)
noetic aspects, (3) somatic aspects, (4) vivid memorability, (5) enduringness, (6) benevolence, and (7) profound, holistic change to the individual. Experientially, epiphanic experiences tended to be preceded by uncertainty, negative life experience, and degrees of disorganisation. Using the Critical Realist ontology of personhood (Bhaskar, 2008, 2020), it is suggested that epiphanic experience constitutes the elimination or diminishment of the ego, such that the embodied personality is able to align with the transcendentally real self, thereby unifying intentionality. An interdisciplinary account of the generative mechanisms proposed to underpin epiphanic experience is provided. Further, the strengths, limitations, and implications of the research are discussed with a particular focus on the impact of this research on applied practice. In particular, practitioners are encouraged to consider how the ontology of epiphanic experience suggested by this research might shape how they choose to implement their therapeutic interventions.

Key words: Epiphanic experience, Critical Realism, interdisciplinary research.
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To my parents for backing me.

To Talia for listening, and then reminding me to shut up and get on with it.

To Misia for being there to bounce ideas off, and for listening to me kvetch.

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

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

We were at work in a trench. 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, and 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 my question of the existence of an ultimate purpose. At that moment a light was lit in a distant farmhouse, which stood on the horizon as if painted there, in the midst of the miserable grey of a dawning morning in Bavaria. 'Et lux in tenebris lucent' — and the light shineth in the darkness. (p.51).

Dostoyevsky’s (1986) intense account of his experiences in a Siberian labour camp detail an event that shares similarities to Frankl in terms of the suddenness, profundity,
benevolence, and the enduring impact generated by a discrete moment in time (Bidney, 2004):

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

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

Indeed, narratives on this revelatory or transformative process can be traced further back still, and seen throughout mythologies the world over (Campbell, 2004). Examples are as evident in ancient Greek tales of deities revealing themselves to unsuspecting humans (Herodotus, 1996), as they are in Buddhist references to concepts of sudden, positive, and profound change that occur as a part of dedicated meditative practice, and which are
exemplified by the enlightenment of the Buddha (Chodron, 2005). It is perhaps unsurprising then, that it is not uncommon for experiences of sudden, positive, and profound change to be considered religious in nature, or even the sole purview of religion, when so many of our cultural exemplars are rooted in it (Harris, 2014; Ilivitsky, 2011).

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

A foundational aspect of this research was its philosophical grounding in Critical Realism (discussed at length in Chapter 1). Psychologists tend to subscribe, be it implicitly or explicitly, to two dominant philosophical paradigms: positivism and postmodernism (Pilgrim, 2019). Critical Realism is a third path, offering the researcher access to the advantages of positivism and postmodernism, but without their philosophical limitations. The development of Critical Realism has been greatly influenced by the discipline of sociology (Gorski, 2013), reflected in the emphasis it places on the interactions that occur between structures and
agents. As such, this research lies at the interface between psychology and sociology, as well as at the interface between psychology and neuroscience. This aligns with the emphasis placed by Critical Realism on interdisciplinarity as a facilitator of deep, ontologically differentiated understandings of phenomena (Pilgrim, 2019). Because this research focuses on an inherently internal and private experience, it was thought to be a good testing ground for the utility of the Critical Realist concepts of the four planar social being and ontology of personhood (Bhaskar, 2020; discussed in Chapter 1, section 2.6) which have very limited, if any, usage in psychological research.

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

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

In order to answer the first research question, Chapter 3 details a scoping review undertaken using Arksey and O’Malley’s (2005) framework. It was important to answer this question as there exists a large volume of terminologies to describe sudden, positive, and profound change experiences, often with conceptual overlap. Therefore, it was considered premature to conceptually distinguish epiphanic experience from other, similar experiences based on a set of experiential markers derived from disparate, and often methodologically opaque, research. This piece of research was therefore an act of under-labouring (Bhaskar, 2017), that permitted for the clarification of epiphanic experience as a distinct phenomenon, as well as the reconfiguration of the key experiential markers of epiphanic experience (noted
in the abstract and again in Chapter 3), in a transparent and methodologically rigorous manner. Using core Critical Realist concepts, in particular the ontology of personhood, permitted a new understanding of epiphanic experience to emerge that fully integrates the embodied nature of epiphanic experience into conceptualisations of this phenomenon.

Because the conceptual distinctiveness of epiphanic experience has, until now, been largely assumed rather than systematically tested, this study demonstrated an investment in the principle of Hermeticism and served to prevent the perpetuation of untested assumptions.

In order to answer the second research question, Chapter 4 details a thematic synthesis undertaken using Thomas and Harden’s (2008) framework and supplemented by the Critical Realist theories of the four planar social being and the ontology of personhood (Bhaskar, 2020), which were found to be very valuable in facilitating a thorough exploration of this question. Analysis revealed that the time preceding an epiphanic experience tends to be characterised by disintegration and disorganisation throughout the four planes of social being (Bhaskar, 2020), in particular through the universal presence of negative life experience and uncertainty. The moment of epiphanic experience tended to involve the advent of new conscious content that represented the emergence of a change in the overall functioning of the embodied personality and a more adaptive way of being. It was important to answer this question because Critical Realism advocates for investigating the intrinsic nature of a phenomenon through the lens of observable experience prior to engaging in processes that permit the underlying generative mechanisms from which the observed reality might have emerged to be identified (Bhaskar, 2009). In this way, this piece of research was not only valuable in terms of answering the second research question, but it also provided part of the foundation for answering research question three.
In order to answer the third research question, Chapter 5 details a Critical Realist exploration of epiphanic experiences undertaken primarily using Danermark et al.’s (2019) framework. This study collected primary data from practitioner psychologists who had experienced an epiphanic experience. This sample was selected as practitioner psychologists were considered experts with insight into epiphanic experience due to the core of their work focusing on the creation of change in others. It was important to answer this question as understanding the generative mechanisms that underpin epiphanic experience would allow therapeutic practitioners to utilise this knowledge of transformative change to enhance their practice.

In Chapter 5, a rich, ontology of epiphanic experience is developed, underpinned by Critical Realism. This ontology integrates epiphanic experiences into a broader understanding of the material world. It does this by drawing upon Critical Realism-congruent nonlinear dynamical systems theories, including Chaos/Complexity Theory (e.g., Guastello, Koopmans & Pincus, 2008; Robertson & Combs, 2014), the Free Energy Principle (e.g., Friston, 2009, 2010, 2012), the Entropic Brain Hypothesis (e.g., Carhart-Harris et al., 2014; Carhart-Harris, 2018), and the broader literature on altered states of consciousness. In so doing, the work contained within Chapter 5 challenges dominant ontological paradigms that are often implicit in psychological theorising (discussed in Chapter 2, section 2). The proposed ontology of epiphanic experience also acknowledges that social structures can influence this phenomenon and provide the context for its’ emergence. Particular consideration is given to the tensions that arise between the social structures of religion and psychology/science when considering epiphanic experience – both in Chapter 5 and throughout the thesis. This ontology also considers the influence of the realm of social interactions between people, exploring how the actions of others can shape epiphanic experiences, both in the moment of transformation, and through their participation in negative life experiences. Finally, underpinned by the Critical
Realist ontology of personhood, this ontology of epiphanic experience considers how the organisation of the self provides the grounds for epiphanic experiences, and how this structure is shaped by this phenomenon. Although there are different ways of framing psychological experience (Fleuridas & Krafcik, 2019), psychodynamic explanations (in conjunction with Critical Realist theory) provided the greatest depth of understanding.

It is recommended that therapeutic practitioners consider the implications that the Critical Realist ontology of personhood and the proposed ontology of epiphanic experience has on their practice. Some suggestions are made by the researcher, including the therapeutic value of meditative activities, the importance of an embodied approach to practice, and the notion of uncertainty and ambiguity as fertile grounds for change. However, it is equally understood that each practitioner will make sense of, and extract value from, the work contained herein differently. It is further recommended that psychologists consider the merits of the Critical Realist embrace as a powerful paradigm from which to conduct research.
Chapter 1: Philosophical Positioning: An Exploration of Critical Realism and Research

1) Introduction

The contribution made by this thesis is not only psychological, but also philosophical. Therefore, before all else, it is important to clarify the philosophical positioning of the work that follows, as philosophy has been taken seriously throughout the research process. Although the academic discipline of psychology has origins that reach back to antiquity, at the turn of the 20th century, Psychology (with a capital ‘P’) legitimised itself as a science by severing these roots, in particular its connection to philosophy\(^1\), and in large part by grounding itself in positivism and empiricism (Jones & Elcock, 2001; Pilgrim, 2019; Pickren & Rutherford, 2010; Richards, 2010; Smith, 1997; Thomson, 2007; Ward & Rivers, 1904). However, this left psychologists in a precarious position, anxious about their scientific legitimacy, making a self-conscious case for empiricism, but without the understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of this position as a form of philosophy (Pilgrim, 2019). This resulted in “psychologists asserting a reliance on empirical neatness, transparency and integrity (methodological rigour). What was not left was a philosophical rationale. The rhetoric of ‘methodologism’ began to substitute for full metaphysical insight and reflection” (Pilgrim, 2019, p.16).

In short, the understanding that psychology has paid a price for losing contact with its philosophical roots is deeply embedded within this thesis\(^2\). As such, the PhD process as a whole was conceived of as an apprenticeship to philosophically informed critical thinking,

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

\(^{2}\) This statement is made with the understanding that the way in which this has manifested is also linked to geographical locale, as the interplay between psychological and philosophical stance has evolved differently between America, Europe, and the UK (Ben-David & Collins, 1966; Murphy, 2013). As this research was undertaken by a British researcher, it is in reference to the evolution of British psychology to which this statement is made (Pilgrim, 2019).
rather than as the production of a narrowly focused set of specialist knowledge (Bosch, 2018). This understanding manifested as a commitment to developing confidence and competence in reflecting on the premises of enquiry, and the process of research, through a philosophical, as well as psychological, lens. As such, the information that follows in this chapter is critical to understanding the foundation on which this thesis was built. To that end, this chapter will: (1) introduce the philosophical positioning of this research, (2) explore the process of knowledge generation, and (3) present an account of reflexivity, inclusive of a reflexive account of the researchers’ journey to the adoption of the philosophy of Critical Realism.

2) Understanding Critical Realism

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

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

Postmodernist and interpretivist standpoints are also found lacking because of their tendency to reduce ontology to epistemology, urging against discourse about the world and focusing instead on discourse about discourse about the world (Bhaskar, 1975, 2008; Mingers, Mutch & Wilcocks, 2013). This is a core issue from a CRist standpoint as this interpretivist view rejects the idea of an objective reality (a notion supported by CR). Moreover, this is particularly problematic when applied to academic psychology, as
postmodernism presumes that all psychological topics are ubiquitously socially constructed, thereby leading to the dissolution of the self by reducing our unique personhood to merely a set of discourses (Archer, 2000; Pilgrim, 2019). This positioning fundamentally overlooks the inherently embodied nature of human existence (Pilgrim, 2019). Indeed, Smith (2011) concluded that “Postmodernism in the end is the abandonment of social science, actually, in favour of antirealist storytelling and identity posturing. That is a dead end.” (p.489). Because postmodernism does not take the totality of reality seriously by way of linguistic reductionism, Sayer (2000) concludes that postmodernists commit ‘ontological vandalism’.

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

2.1) The Six Features of Critical Realism

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

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

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

Here, we can understand under-labouring to be the act of clearing the ground of, and removing, thoughts and beliefs that stand in the way of our knowledge of the world. Therefore, a core aim of CR is to facilitate, or accomplish, the removal of obstacles (e.g., systems of thought) to knowledge. In this way, the removal of an obstacle to knowledge can be thought of as a contribution to knowledge.

2.1.2) Seriousness

Seriousness is a principle of CR based on what Bhaskar considered to be the unserious nature of man’s philosophies. To illustrate this point, Bhaskar references Hume’s claim that “there’s no better reason to leave the building by the ground floor than by the
second floor” (Hume cited in Bhaskar, 2017, p.8). Because Hume was unwilling to incorporate gravity into his philosophical position (as it is not something that can be observed and provides a point of contention to his views on causality) he instead produced what Bhaskar (2013, 2017) believed to be a ludicrous epistemological proposition. It is this unseriousness of philosophy, that toys with unresolvable problems, rather than genuinely considering “real, multiple and possibly contradictory geo-historical grounds and conditions” (Bhaskar, 2008, p.315) that infuriated Bhaskar. CR is therefore a series of philosophical positions that aim to be lived by, and acted by, in the world by taking the world into account (how exactly it does so will become evident below as the discussion continues).

2.1.3) Immanent Critique

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

Whilst this is perhaps the most dominant form of critique utilised within CR, it is not the only form of critique routinely engaged with by CRists. Explanatory critique is a technique whereby how a claim came into being and has been sustained is explored; even if
the claim, and the process by which it came into being, is flawed. For example, although creationist theory is flawed and fundamentally logically indefensible, exploration of its origins and the interests it serves in the world today can be an important source of criticism (Pilgrim, 2019). Another form of critique is omissive critique, which is the exploration of absences or silences in a body of knowledge (Pilgrim, 2019). Therefore, in this instance, the CRist should sensitise themselves not just to what the research is saying (that which is positively present), but also to what is not being said.

2.1.4) Philosophy as a Pre-supposition

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

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

2.1.6) The Principle of Hermeticism

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

2.2) The Transitive versus the Intransitive

In his philosophy of science Bhaskar (1975) argued for two delineated concepts: (1) the epistemological transitive domain (i.e., the manner in which we construe the world) and (2) the ontological intransitive domain (i.e., aspects of the world we cannot change). This distinction, according to Bhaskar, is necessary to maintain the perspicuity of scientific investigation and understanding. The transitive domain refers to inherently fallible,
theoretical interpretations of reality (Cruickshank, 2004), which are “antecedently established
facts and theories, paradigms and models, methods and techniques of inquiry available to a
particular scientific school or worker” (Bhaskar, 2008, p.21). Therefore, the transitive
dimension represents the changing knowledge of things.

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

2.3) The ‘Holy Trinity’ of Critical Realism

The distinction between the transitive and intransitive domains serves to highlight the
‘holy trinity’ of CR, which refers to the compatibility of three elements: (1) ontological
realism, (2) epistemological relativity, and (3) judgemental rationality (Bhaskar, 2008, 2017;
Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2010; Hartwig 2007). CR’s foundation in ontological realism means that it supports the existence of an independent and causally active reality that gives rise to events and non-events autonomously of our awareness and comprehension of it. Epistemological relativity proposes that our knowledge of reality is mediated linguistically, culturally, historically, socially, and can be transformed through human activity. Our beliefs are produced within a social context and are fallible, so our knowledge of the world is relative. However, it should be noted that these two presuppositions do not equate to judgemental relativity. CRists do not support the view that all arguments have equal validity. The principle of judgemental rationality asserts that, although our knowledge of the world is relative, we are able to produce arguments that allow us to favour one set of beliefs over another. Efforts should be made to eliminate less valid arguments, and CR favours retroduction (discussed in section 3 below) in this endeavour (Bhaskar, 2008).

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

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3 This philosophical outcome can be considered in relation to postmodernism as “Whilst both postmodernists and CRists refuse to separate facts from values (contra positivism), this prompts judgmental relativism in the former and judgmental rationality in the latter” (Pilgrim, 2019, p.47).
interpretations there must be a referent to which they respond (Bhaskar, 2017). Therefore, CR brings ‘being’ back into philosophy and re-vindicates ontology.

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

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

2.4) Open versus Closed Systems
Bhaskar (1975) asserted that this alternative understanding of the world was necessary because the existing philosophies and epistemologies did not talk about the world. These old philosophies only talked about the world in terms of Humean causality, wherein constant conjunctions of events underpin the dominant hypothetico-deductive model, and also imply that “the world is fixed, repetitive, unstructured and undifferentiated” (Bhaskar, 2017, p.18).

This kind of ontology depicts a world that is insensitive to complexity, as well as temporal, cultural and historical change, and differences. Therefore, a critical distinction that needs to be made in order to appreciate Bhaskar’s argument for a new ontology is between open and closed systems. Fleetwood (2017) defines open and closed systems as:

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

Bhaskar stated that positions such as empiricism presuppose that the world is a closed system, and so can reasonably then support the idea of constant conjunctions of events (Bhaskar, 2008, 2017). However, Bhaskar argues against this edict, and rejects Humean causality, by arguing that the world, and particularly the social world, is an open system in which there are no constant conjunctions of events (Bhaskar, 2008, 2013). This approach is due to CR being embedded in the Heraclitan tradition which views reality as being in constant flux rather than being fixed (Pilgrim, 2019).
Given that all biological systems are open systems, this position, or pre-supposition, is critical for psychologists to consider as it has practical implications (Pilgrim, 2019; Von Bertalanffy, 1950). For example, the notion of prediction using universal covering laws becomes inappropriate, and instead, focus turns to the discussion of trends and probabilities. This is because in open systems, prediction is frequently practically impossible (Pilgrim, 2019). Another implication is that laboratory-based, controlled, and experimental studies of events that happen in the real world become unsuitable representations of reality. This is because the world is an open system, and a laboratory setting is a misleading, closed, and out of context representation of the world – thereby making the data produced in this context relatively meaningless to a CRist.

2.5) A Stratified Reality

Another distinction that Bhaskar makes is between events, generative mechanisms, and structures – or as Bhaskar termed them: (1) the Empirical, (2) the Actual, and (3) the Real, respectively (see Figure 1.1). The Real relates to the underlying intransitive causal mechanisms and structures at work in the world that are inherently responsible for all observable realities. The Actual refers to the events caused by the Real (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Bhaskar, 2008). The domain of the Actual is not necessarily accessible as it is filtered through perceptual processes. Moreover, this domain also encapsulates the plethora of non-events that may be generated by the domain of the Real. Therefore, the events in the domain of the Actual are necessarily distinguished from their generative mechanisms. The domain of the Empirical refers to observable experience and represents the position of the observer in relation to the Actual and the Real. In this way, Bhaskar presents the case for a
differentiated and stratified world; in essence, a new ontology, or paradigm shift, typified by structure, difference and change (Bhaskar, 2020).

Figure 1.1
Depiction of Bhaskar’s (1978) concept of stratified reality (Radescu & Vessey, 2009, p.2).

An example of these distinctions can be drawn from Pilgrim (2019) who explains that when we hear a bird singing, we are experiencing something in the Empirical domain. If this bird were to then fly away, and land on a branch in a deserted forest to continue singing, this would constitute an Actual event. The bird’s specific physiology and evolutionary history that permit it to sing form part of the Real. This view of reality advocates for ontological differentiation (as opposed to the ontological monovalence generated by a strict empiricist position), by arguing against reducing the mechanisms present in the domains of the Actual or Real to merely events in the domain of the Empirical (see Table 1.1). In essence, this model of the world emphasises that reality and causality do not always align with our
experience of them. As such, CRist research urges the researcher to consider what may be happening in reality and not just interpretations thereof (Collier, 1994; Easton, 2019). As a result of this positioning the investigation of causation, or generative mechanisms, forms a core part of CRist research. A great deal of emphasis is placed on generative mechanisms within CRist thought because CR accepts that they are present, regardless of whether the emergent events are actualised or detected by human senses (Pilgrim, 2019).

### Table 1.1

**Stratified reality and its contents**

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<th>Domain of the Real</th>
<th>Domain of the Actual</th>
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As such, a core construct of CR is the notion that reality is striated or laminated. Stratification is sometimes also referred to as emergence whereby “some substance, entity, property or system… is dependent for its existence upon some other substance, entity, property or system” (Hartwig 2007, p.166). The idea of emergence is intrinsic to a stratified view of the world, and Bhaskar (2009, 2020) identifies three criteria for emergence: (1) unilateral dependence (the notion that higher emergent levels are unilaterally dependant on lower-order levels), (2) taxonomic irreducibility (the notion that higher emergent levels cannot be taxonomically reduced to lower-order levels), and (3) causal irreducibility (the notion that higher emergent levels cannot be reduced to causal explanations of lower-order levels). Bhaskar (2009) further identifies a consequence of emergence: implicit potentiality
(the notion that the higher order level is implicit - sometimes termed ‘enfolded’ - in the lower
order level, and as such, new capacities will emerge from higher levels of systemic
organisation).

Moreover, according to CR, the laminated nature of reality indicates that researchers
are only able to access the relative entirety of our reality through methodological pluralism.
This focus on methodological pluralism aims to provide multiple sources of information from
the domain of the Empirical, which in turn allows for more informed views of the Actual and
Real. Methodological pluralism does not propose the use of any method in any situation, but
rather that different methods are appropriate depending on the nature of the phenomenon
under investigation\(^4\) (Sayer, 2002). In this way, interdisciplinary research is strongly
advocated for by the CRist position (Danermark et al., 2019; Pilgrim, 2019).

2.6) The Ontology of Persons

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

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\(^4\) This is a significant contrast to the methodological rigidity of positivism and postmodernism, whereby the
former is bound to experimentalism and the empirical method, and the latter to the deconstruction of texts
(Pilgrim, 2019).
of Bhaskar’s ideas and their ability to enrich understandings of the nature of personhood and
epiphanic experience. In order to explicate the CRist ontology of persons, the following
subjects will be discussed: (1) the context for persons, and (2) a CRist model of the self.

2.6.1) The Context for Persons

When considering the ontology of persons Bhaskar (2002, 2010, 2020) notes that it is
important to first be sensitised to the idea of open-systemic phenomena as laminated and
emergent. Further, a key feature of Bhaskar’s approach to the social sciences, and to the
notion of personhood, is the acknowledgment of certain dualisms. Examples of dualisms can
be found at the macro-level (e.g., structure and agency) as well as the micro-level (e.g., mind
and body), and CR is conceived of as able to rationally resolve these dualisms (Bhaskar,
2020). A particularly critical dualism to CR is that between structure and agency – which are
considered ontologically distinct (Carter & New, 2004). The term ‘structure’ refers to
“relatively enduring (but not permanent) features of the world that often precede and succeed
our individual lives, but which human agency can reproduce or transform over time”
(Fletcher, 2017; p.186; Archer, 2010; Bhaskar, 1979). Therefore, whilst “structure precedes
everything” (Hartwig, 2007, p.232), agency that is not predetermined by structures is able to
shape structures (Bhaskar, 1979; Elder-Vass, 2011). Agency is made up, not only of
individual action, but also of values, ideas, beliefs, theories, and meanings. The dichotomy
between structure and agency is operationalised by the Transformational Model of Social
Activity (TMSA; Bhaskar, 2008; Collier, 1994; see Figure 1.2), which depicts how social
structures affect intentional agency and how agency may in turn impact social structures.
From this perspective, humans can be seen to exist as both determined, and determining, beings⁵ (Pilgrim, 2019).

**Figure 1.2**
*Depiction of Bhaskar’s (2008) Transformational Model of Social Activity.*

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

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⁵ This stance puts CR at odds with, for example, humanistic-existentialist approaches to personhood which are entrenched in voluntarism (Pilgrim, 2019).
structures in a broad sense), and (4) the plane of the stratification of the embodied personality (personal subjective agency) (Bhaskar, 2020).

2.6.2) A Critical Realist Theory of the Self

The above has served to provide the context for persons, and attention now turns toward how CR conceptualises the self. Hartwig (2007b) suggested that humans are “changing embodied persons who are also transcendentally real selves, profoundly interconnected with each other and the rest of the cosmos.” (p.155). From this it is possible to extract the first two components of a CRist theory of the self: (1) the embodied personality, which constitutes the mind, emotional makeup, and physical embodiment of a person (Bhaskar, 2016), and (2) the transcendentally real self, which is a person’s ‘ground state’, or ‘higher self’ (Bhaskar, 2020). Hartwig (2007b) and Bhaskar (2016) make a third ontological distinction in their model of personhood: (3) the ego, which they saw as the illusory sense that people possess of themselves as separate from everything else (see Figure 1.4).

The CRist four planar social being has been suggested as a useful construct for facilitating interdisciplinary, psychological research (Pilgrim, 2019), though instances of its utilisation are limited (Price & Martin, 2018). The CRist ontology of personhood has yet to be applied to psychological research. As such, this work contributes to the development of Bhaskar’s (2020) thinking by applying these theories to a psychological phenomenon.

Figure 1.4

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6 The reader is directed towards Appendix I for a reflexive account of how the researcher has made sense of this CRist ontology of personhood within the context of therapeutic practice.
The above describes the complex and non-reductionist CRist account of the ontology of persons. Furthermore, it is important to address three further notions raised by the theory above: (1) emergence, (2) free will, and (3) neuro-reductionism (the idea that neurochemical theories are able to explain all mental processes and behaviour). In terms of emergence, CRists do not view a person as the sum of the causal capacities discussed above, but rather that these causal capacities provide the conditions from which personhood can emerge. Because humans exist in an open system, and indeed are open systems themselves, reality is in constant flux meaning that it is important to exercise epistemic humility when exploring the range of capacities that provide the grounds for the emergence of personhood.
In terms of free will CR asserts that no person ever truly becomes an independent decision maker, simply because lives are embedded in the material world and social relationships (Pilgrim, 2019). Moreover, people exist alongside pre-existing social structures that we are not always wholly aware of. In this way, CR rejects the voluntarism that underpins many humanistic-existentialist views of the world (Pilgrim, 2019). Finally, it is important to position CR in terms of its views on the role of the brain. CRists assert that the brain does not cause, but rather, affords thoughts, feelings, and behaviours in conditional contexts (Pilgrim, 2019, 2020). In this way, CR ‘walks the path’ between subjectivist and neuro-reductionist accounts of the human experience (Pilgrim, 2020). Subjectivist accounts of experience privilege lived experience as authentic representations of what it is to be human. In contrast, neuro-reductionists view lived experience as an epiphenomenon of neurochemical activity which can be presented theoretically as covering laws that do not take context into account. Both these positions are cautioned against by CRists as they are not considered complete psychological accounts.

In addition, the CRist ontology of personhood bears some congruence to Frankl’s (1946, 1966, 1970) tripartite model of personhood and Freud’s (1915, 1923, 1940, 1947) metapsychological model\(^7\). Frankl (1946) proposed that personhood was formed by three dimensions, the mental psyche (i.e., the ego), the physical soma (i.e., the embodied personality), and the spiritual (in a non-religious sense) noōs (i.e., transcendentally real self).

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\(^7\) When considering which psychological theories of the self might align with Bhaskar’s (2020) ontology of personhood the researcher considered each of the four forces of psychology, i.e., 1) psychodynamic, 2) behavioural/cognitive-behavioural, 3) humanistic-existential, and 4) contextual/systemic (Fleuridas & Krafcik, 2019). Contextual/systemic theories were incompatible as they tend to be deeply entrenched in post-structuralist and postmodernist philosophies (e.g., Dickerson, 2014; Besley, 2002). Behavioural/cognitive-behavioural theories tend to be ontologically monovalent and therefore incompatible (Pilgrim, 2019). Humanistic-existential theories tend to be incompatible due to their commitment to voluntarism and tendency to not take structures or the material, embodied aspect of human consciousness seriously (Pilgrim, 2019). Whilst the researcher acknowledges that other models from the first force in psychology might enrich interpretations of epiphanic experience (in particular, Jungian and Franklian ideas), this thesis will focus on Freudian ideas as these were found to be most relevant to the research question posed in Chapter 5.
The similarity between the Bhaskarian (2020) concept of the transcendentally real self, and the Franklian noös is acknowledged by Fabry (1991), who noted that “You have a body and a psyche, but you are your noos” (p.127). Frankl observed that each layer of personhood corresponds with a different science, the psychic with psychology, the somatic with biology, and the noetic with philosophy (Hallowell, 2009). This positioning is congruent with the CRist stance that interdisciplinarity facilitates deep, non-reductionist, and ontologically differentiated understandings of phenomena (Pilgrim, 2019).

**Figure 1.5**

*Frankl’s Dimensional Ontology*

Metapsychology was conceived of by Freud for the purposes of communicating his proposition that psychical processes possess three aspects, or coordinates: (1) dynamic, (2) topographical, and (3) economic (Freud, 1915). Cumulatively, he proposed that each of these three coordinates could be used to guide explanations of psychical phenomena and processes (Fulgencio, 2005). Although there remains no complete clarity with regards to what precisely defines each of these coordinates, they can be conceptualised as follows. The dynamic perspective relates to the interactive forces present within the psychical system. This
perspective implicates the existence of basic drives or instincts (Fulgencio, 2005). The
topographical perspective presents the argument that the mind is composed of different
regions, or territories, which are governed by different processes. Freud’s topographical
model of the mind includes the following mental systems: the unconscious, the preconscious,
and the conscious. Freud later revised this model, becoming known as the structural model, to
include the id, ego, and superego (Boag, 2017; see Figure 1.6). The economic perspective
concerns itself with the intensity of psychical events, and the amount of psychical energy
invested into objects of desire (Fulgencio, 2005).

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

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

9 The Bhaskarian ego and the Freudian ego (defined as: “In each individual there is a coherent organisation of
mental processes; and this we call his ego. It is to this ego that consciousness is attached”; Freud, 1923, p.17) both refer
to the conscious sense of self, though due to the psychological nature of Freud’s (1923, 1947) work, his metapsychological structural model of the self contains greater depth as to how this aspect of personhood functions. In particular, Freudian theory implicates the notions of the ego as a force for self-cohesion and
somatic-cohesion, as a reservoir of libido, and as the primary agent of repression (Boag, 2017; Freud, 1923, 1947).
serves to demonstrate that Freudian metapsychological ideas are congruent with CR (Pilgrim, 2019). However, an important caveat to reassert is that these metapsychological ideas are congruent with CR only if they are not treated as covering laws, but rather as tendencies (Pilgrim, 2019). Freudian metapsychological ideas were found to be useful in better understanding the generative mechanisms of epiphanic experience discussed at greater length in Chapter 5.

Figure 1.6

Freud’s model of the psyche (drawn from Fancher, 1966)

A thorough account of the CRist perspective of reality has been provided in this section detailing the premises of enquiry that were established as the foundation from which the research that comprises this thesis was conducted. However, in order to furnish the reader with the fullest possible understanding of CR, and its implications on the research process, it
is necessary to discuss two further topics: (1) the process of knowledge generation, and (2) reflexivity.

3) The Critical Realist Process of Knowledge Generation

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

3.1) DREIC and RRREIC

When considering the application of CR Bhaskar (1994) proposed an optimal sequence for scientific discovery, summarised by two mnemonics: DREIC and RRREIC. The mnemonic DREIC represents the typical process of knowledge generation in experimental settings most commonly attributed to the natural sciences. This process is as follows: (1)
Description of the phenomenon; (2) Retroduction (the cornerstone of CR research, whereby the researcher must ask what the world would need to be like in order for the phenomenon in question to emerge); (3) Elimination of less valid explanations; (4) Identification of the most valid explanation, and (5) Correction of past findings in light of new findings.

However, the mnemonic that is of greater relevance to this research is RRREIC, which typifies the process of knowledge generation in open systems most commonly attributed to the social sciences. This process is as follows: (1) Resolution of the phenomenon into its constituent parts; (2) Redescription of the phenomenon in accordance with relevant or significant theory; (3) Retroduction (defined above) and Retrodiction (“inference from effects to causes or from later to earlier states of systems via retroduced explanatory structures”; Psillos, 2007, p.257); (4) Elimination of other explanations; (5) Identification of the best, or most correct, possible explanation, and (6) Correction of past findings in light of new findings.

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

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

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

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

3.3.1) Danermark, Ekström, and Karlsson’s (2019) Model of Explanatory Social Science

Danermark, Ekström, Jakobsen and Karlsson’s (2019) Model of Explanatory Social Science is perhaps the most dominant CRist methodological framework, and is based on Bhaskar’s (1978, 1989) explanatory models of CR in science (DREIC and RRREIC). The purpose of this framework is to explain events that occur in the social world, and it is grounded in the notion that explanatory social science can be described as a movement from concrete acquisition of empirical knowledge to abstract reasoning, that occurs as a product of the abduction and retroduction that are core to the CRist research process. Research using this framework progresses through six stages (Danermark et al., 2019; Raduescu & Vessey,
2014): (1) description, (2) analytical resolution, (3) abduction, (4) retroduction, (5) retrodiction and contextualisation, and (6) concretisation and conceptualisation. These six stages serve to illustrate the idea of research progressing from ‘concrete’ (stage 1), to ‘abstract’ (stages 2-5), and back to ‘concrete’ (stage 6) (see Figure 1.5).

3.3.1.1) Description.

The description is the culmination of the data coding process and is intended to present the phenomenon under investigation in all its complexity. Therefore, at this stage, the participants’ interpretation of the phenomenon is particularly relevant. Description is reliant
on data coding processes that allow for the identification of tendencies within the data (termed ‘demi-regularities’ and detailed in more depth in section 3.3.1.2 below). Fletcher (2017) states that demi-regularities can be identified using “qualitative data coding” (p.185). However, the term ‘qualitative data coding’ is vague. In the literature on the application of CR to data analysis, ambiguous language such as the following has been used to describe the process: “intensive grounding process in which concepts emerged” (Yeung, 1997, p.69). This language from Yeung (1997) highlights that it is common for Grounded Theory to be paired with CR (Oliver, 2012; Redman-MacLaren & Mills, 2015). Although arguments have been made for this approach the congruence of this method with CRist philosophy is tenuous. The purpose of Grounded Theory is to discover theory that is implicit in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Although there are many forms of Grounded Theory, the clear emphasis placed by CR on starting coding from a flexible deductive standpoint (Fletcher, 2017), appears incongruent with even Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) realist version of Grounded Theory (Dey, 1999).

However, Fletcher (2017) described a particular process of data coding that is more congruent with CRist philosophy. This approach to CRist methodology, though not directly aligned with Danermark et al.’s (2019) model, is one of the few accessible accounts of applied CR in qualitative research. Fletcher describes the application of a CR-congruent process that involves a researcher-driven deductive, yet flexible, coding process. The literature, theoretical frameworks, and CRist concepts serve to aid in generating a list of deductive codes that are applied to the data. These codes should be considered as provisional, and subject to change, additions, substitutions, or eliminations (Fletcher, 2017; Gilgun, 2011; Saldaña, 2013). CR views the world as theory-laden, rather than theory-determined, and so all possible explanations for a phenomenon are fundamentally considered fallible during coding and analysis (Bhaskar, 1979). The views of the researcher and the participant are
equally subject to judgemental rationality. Therefore, whilst the CRist qualitative researcher will act as interpreter to the data, and possible causal mechanisms, the researchers’ own explanation is treated as potentially fallible and able to be challenged by participant experience (Redman-MacLaren & Mills, 2015).

3.3.1.2) Analytical resolution.

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

3.3.1.3) Abduction.

Whilst abduction is emerging as a new ‘trend’ in psychological research (e.g., Halpin & Richard, 2021) it should be noted that the manner in which abduction is being advocated speaks to the tendency for methodologism in psychology (Pilgrim, 2019). Abduction is a long-standing core inferential tool in CRist research which permits the researcher to move beyond the knowledge generated through the primarily deductive, and sometimes inductive
(when new codes emerge), analysis that typifies the description phase (Danermark et al., 2019; Kapitan, 1992; Meyer & Lunnay, 2013). In this way, abduction has been conceptualised as being part of the very basis of scientific enquiry alongside deduction and induction (Kapitan, 1992).

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

3.3.1.4) Retroduction.

Retroduction constitutes the stage within the research process wherein the researcher must consider what causal mechanisms would need to exist in order for the previously identified causally relevant structures to arise. The researcher must therefore pose themselves questions such as: what does the existence of this phenomenon presuppose? What must exist in order for this phenomenon to exist? Thus, the causal links between underlying structures and the phenomenon in question are examined. Therefore, retroduction is a method of analysis that requires the researcher to consider the circumstances without which something cannot exist (Danermark et al., 2019; Meyer & Lunnay, 2012; Sayer, 2002). Retuctive inference is built upon the notion that knowledge of reality is only attainable if the researcher
moves beyond the empirically observable and asks questions akin to those mentioned above, therefore developing a deeper conceptual knowledge of the phenomenon in question (Danermark et al., 2019; Meyer & Lunnay, 2012).

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

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

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

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

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

3.3.1.5) **Retrodiction and Contextualisation.**

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

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

3.3.2) Quality of Inferences

Zachariadis, Scott, and Barrett (2013) examined how the concept of validity in CRist research compares to that which is described in mixed-methods literature. When discussing validity, these authors adhere to Venkatesh et al.’s (2013) classification within which three categories are proposed: design validity, measurement validity, and inferential validity. In qualitative research these categories become: internal and external validity, reliability, and construct validity. Although there is disagreement in the qualitative literature, about the need for the concept of validity (Guba & Lincoln, 2005), there remains an acknowledgment that validation is critical to the potential of science to create a common body of knowledge (Morse et al., 2002; Venkatesh et al., 2013). Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett’s (2013) CRist conceptualisation of validity in qualitative research is presented in Table 1.2 below; they cite Venkatesh et al. (2013) and Johnston and Smith (2010) as critical sources for this endeavour.

As the table below makes evident the focus in Critical Realist research is shifted from empirical events, the conventional focus of attention, to the underlying causal mechanisms.
Table 1.2.

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

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


The above serves to provide the reader with greater depth on the CRist process of knowledge generation. Further practical, methodological, details of how CR was applied to each of the studies in this thesis will be addressed in the methods section of each respective chapter. The narrative now takes one final turn to consider the importance and application of reflexivity within the research process.

4) Critical Realism and Reflexivity

The concept of reflexivity is theoretically diverse but there is agreement amongst many theorists that reflexivity, in a layperson’s context, constitutes “the ability to reflect upon oneself while considering one’s social circumstances” (Elster, 2017, p.6). In an academic context, whilst reflexivity is accepted as being important there is no consensus on why and how humans (should) practice reflexivity (Archer, 2010). For some, reflexivity is conceptualised as the result of disruption to routine that creates disjunctive moments wherein incongruence emerges between an individual’s habitual ways of being and their environs (Akram & Hogan, 2015; Rafieian & Davis, 2016; Stahl, 2015). Reflexivity has also been conceptualised as a mediatory process. In this way, reflexivity is a consistent feature of intra-active processes whereby conversations will regularly occur within the individual about their experience (Archer, 2010). Due to the philosophical approach adopted by this research Archer’s (2003, 2007, 2010, 2012) CRist Internal Conversation Theory of Reflexivity was used as a framework for understanding and undertaking reflexive practice. The CRist operationalisation of reflexivity will first be explored before a reflexive account of CR is presented in order to demonstrate these ideas in practice.
Reflexivity is a highly integral part of CRist research (Bhaskar, 1993, 2017), and is defined by Archer (2010) as “the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa” (p.5). Archer acknowledges that the form of these inner conversations will vary according to the individual, with each individual representing a concrete singularity (a unique expression of a concrete universal phenomenon). As Archer (2000) states, “the ‘inner conversation’ is how our personal emergent powers are exercised on and in the world – natural, practical and social – which is our triune environment” (p.318). As such, reflexivity can be seen as a mental capacity which varies in efficiency and complexity (Pilgrim, 2019).

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

An internal dialogue, a condition of existence in society, which activates the causal powers of structures and allows individuals to project their actions based on the articulation between personal concerns and the conditions that make it possible to
accomplish them. Internal conversations basically consist of the dialogues that people engage in inwardly and through which they define and clarify their beliefs, attitudes and goals, evaluate social circumstances and define projects based on their main concerns (Caetano, 2016, p.3).

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

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

Communicative reflexivity describes internal conversations that need to be discussed and confirmed by others in order to then engage with a course of action; for the current researcher/author this took place in the form of supervisory meetings held continuously throughout the research process. Autonomous reflexivity refers to self-contained inner dialogues that initiate a course of action, absent of external validation; this took the form of a reflexive diary, drawings, mind-mapping, and private reflections, which were also engaged in throughout the entirety of the research process. Meta-reflexivity describes how individuals
engage in reflexive critique of their self-contained inner dialogues in a manner that
exacerbates stress responses and social disorientation; due to the stressors inherent to the PhD
journey, this was often engaged in as the researcher navigated through this process. Fractured
reflexivity refers to a practice performed by individuals with a self-contained inner dialogue
that disallows for dealing with social situations in an optimal manner; any instances of
fractured reflexivity were reflected on in the aforementioned fashions (i.e., conversations
with supervisors, personal reflexive practice).

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

In a nutshell, the historical slate is not wiped clean each time reflexivity is in
operation. Nor is reflexivity merely a present-oriented activity or something that, once
in a blue moon, crops up only as a result of structural disruption. It is a process
embroiled in the past, present and future; it is historically constituted and often
projected towards the time ahead. In other words, there is a temporal dimension to
reflexivity (p.29).
Therefore, as a result of these criticisms, it was deemed necessary to incorporate this additional element into Archer's CRist understanding of reflexivity.

Figure 1.6

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

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

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

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

However, epistemologically, I found myself somewhat on the interpretivist side of the spectrum. Though, I have to admit that the extreme side of this side of the spectrum, particularly positions such as social constructivism, made me more uncomfortable than the more naïve forms of positivism did. They never seemed to talk about anything ‘real’ – it was talk about talk about real things, but I found myself wondering, if the real things existed then surely, they should be a core part of that conversation. I could see a tendency in the literature I was reading to routinely mention ontology as part of the core philosophical assumptions made by the researcher, and then discard that facet of philosophy, because the focus in basically all sources appeared to be almost exclusively on epistemology. Because no one was
talking about ontology and epistemology in the same breath, I questioned how my own nascent philosophical perspectives (ontological realism coupled with epistemological relativism) could co-exist within the philosophical frameworks that I had read about. I am, unsurprisingly, not the first doctoral student to have to navigate this terrain (e.g., Batchelor & Napoli, 2006; DeForge & Shaw, 2011; Mays & Smith, 2009; Pansiri, 2009).

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

I realise now that one of the main reasons why I was unable to move past this viewpoint at that time and find a philosophical position more congruent with my own views, was that I had not yet learnt the language that would allow me to construct oppositional ideas. Moreover, I didn't even know that there were entirely different paradigms to the positivist, empiricist, hypothetico-deductive model that I could explore, because philosophy of science
had never once been mentioned throughout the totality of my education. When I began my doctoral journey, my primary supervisor recommended that I explore my own philosophy, before beginning my research. This provided me with the opportunity to finally make congruent that which had been so incongruent for so long. It forced me to really think about reality, ontology, epistemology, psychology, the mind – which reawakened an intense personal interest in philosophy (that had laid dormant since my A Level Philosophy and Ethics studies with Mr. Moriarty) and provided me with the language I needed to explain why some ideas resonated with me and others didn’t, as well as facilitating my ability to make meaningful interpretations of the world around me.

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

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

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10 I’m aware that my commitment in this thesis to CR positions me in the area where psychology and sociology meet, and that this way of thinking might be more familiar to people with a sociology background because, whilst philosophy is formally taught in sociology programmes, this is rarely the case in psychology.
in this direction, so I trusted it and looked CR up, and never really looked back (Bhaskar’s comments on the re-vindication of ontology were particularly useful in answering my earlier questions about the reduction of ontology to epistemology). This was a philosophy that intuitively ‘fit’, and indeed still fits.

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

A particular challenge for me emerged when it came to translating CR into a living methodological practice. At the start of my doctoral journey (circa 2017) I struggled to find papers specifically in the field of psychology that dealt with operationalising CR as an approach to analysing qualitative data (I’m aware that this is a big statement, but I stand by it, given that Sims-Schouten, Riley & Willig’s (2007) paper deals with Critical Realist Discourse Analysis, and Pilgrim’s (2019) book had not yet been published). So, to get ‘answers’ I had to go further afield. I found that CR had received a large amount of traction in the field of Information Systems research, and I found Fletcher’s (2017) paper which became a key text for me. So, this became my starting point for developing a way to apply CR to my research.
Critics have stated that: CR is too abstract and vague (Roberts, 2014). However, the amount of reading and research I have undertaken in order to be able to discuss this philosophy with any kind of understanding (and dare I tentatively say, authority) suggests the contrary. Basic CR, which encompasses its ontological, epistemological, and judgemental stance, is superficially relatively straightforward but contains a huge amount of nuance. Moreover, I can see how taking CR at this face value could lead some to believe that it is just an ‘anything goes’ philosophy as it enables researchers to engage with a range of methods, because it is not prescriptive with regards to which methods are used to explore which problems (Vincent & O’Mahoney, 2018). However, I believe this criticism to be rooted in methodologism, and enjoy the fact that this philosophy permits the researcher to explore a range of ways of doing research. Further, looking deeper into Bhaskar’s arguments (across all three ‘waves’ of his philosophy), it seems obvious to me that CR provides a very specific view of the world that is anything but abstract, vague, and wantonly methodologically permissive.

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

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

Now that the premises of CRist enquiry have been expounded the narrative will turn to the phenomenon of interest central to this research – that of epiphanic experience. Although there exists a small pool of literature on this kind of change, much of this literature is disparate. Further, attempts to synthesise this pool of literature have tended to lack methodological clarity as well as an explicit awareness of the philosophical pre-suppositions underpinning the researchers thinking. It is with this in mind that an account of epiphanic experience will now be presented that is reinforced by the CRist worldview as well as CRist principles of critique and criticism.
Chapter 2: A Literature Review of Epiphanic Experience

1) Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to represent the current state of literature on the phenomenon under investigation, that of sudden, positive, and profound change – termed ‘epiphanic experience’ (see Appendix A). In order to do this the discussion will proceed as follows. First, the nature of change will be explored; context will also be provided to further explore how and why the discipline of psychology possesses certain views about change. Second, the specifically psychological theoretical conceptualisations of epiphanic experience from the extant literature will be presented and critically evaluated; because Critical Realism (CR) places emphasis on the exploration of generative mechanisms, particular attention will be given to the proposed causes of these experiences. Finally, the chapter will end with a presentation of the research questions this thesis sought to answer.

2) The Nature of Change

The cases of epiphanic experience noted in the introduction preceding Chapter 1 constitute only a few examples of this phenomenon from popular culture. They serve to exemplify that references to this kind of change permeate Western culture, and cultures across the globe. Indeed, these experiences are irrefutably, in greater and lesser forms, a fundamental part of human experience (James, 1902). However, it soon becomes evident that within the discipline of modern psychology the unexpected changes noted above are given little consideration (Fosha, 2006). Change, and in particular change that is considered to be positive and enduring, is generally conceptualised within psychology as a process that occurs gradually, intentionally, in a linear fashion (whereby the change or outcome is proportional to
the stimulus or input), and over a length of time (Baban & Cracium, 2007; Bien, 2004; Forcehimes, 2004; Fosha, 2006; Hayes, Laurenceau, Feldman, Strauss, & Cardaciotto, 2007; Higginson & Mansell, 2008; Ilivitsky, 2011; McDonald, 2005; Miller, 2004; Prochaska, Norcross, & DiClemente, 1994). However, this is a reductionist view of change which ultimately compromises the ability to understand the broader picture of human change in all its complexity.

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

Despite the relatively widespread acknowledgement of the reality, and of the importance, of this kind of change the discipline of psychology has almost entirely excluded sudden positive change from its attention (Fosha, 2006). Further, despite research emerging from various other fields, in recent years only a very small number of psychological studies
have explicitly explored epiphanic experiences. Meanwhile, sudden negative change has been extensively documented and is accepted by psychology as a legitimate phenomenon (Fosha, 2006; Ilivitsky, 2011; Siegelman & Conway, 1978; Skalski & Hardy, 2013). For example, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which can follow either a delayed or, more relevant to this argument, immediate onset (Gray, Bolton & Litz, 2004). Sudden positive change, however, is treated with scepticism with psychology “cautiously maintaining that enduring change need be slow and gradual” (Fosha, 2006, p.590; Naor & Mayseless, 2017). This scepticism could be attributed to the tendency within psychology to pathologise experience (Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2000; Rosenhan, 1973; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). It could also be attributed to the paradigm endemic to modern science and psychology: the Newtonian paradigm (Guastello, 2009; Jarvis, 1997). A critical part of CRist research is understanding context, therefore, it is important to explore the impact of this paradigm as an act of explanatory critique (Bhaskar, 1979).

The disregard psychology has shown to nonlinear, discontinuous change can be explained as the result of the general bias in science, predicated on a Newtonian worldview, towards searching for continuity within phenomena (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009; Jarvis, 1997). Western scientific thought has long favoured the seeking of, and attending to, phenomena and experiences that are continuous rather than discontinuous (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009; Jarvis, 1997). In large part, this is due to the dominance of the Newtonian paradigm, which places significant emphasis on prediction using linear systems (whereby a linear system is conceptualised as one where the whole is exactly equal to the sum of its components) to generate universal covering laws, and which has shaped scientific thought for over two hundred years (Oestreicher, 2007). In essence, the Newtonian paradigm can be surmised as: to describe the world according to the simplest possible universal laws (Doll, 1986). This is predicated on the following axioms: (1) every complex thing is a collection of
simpler components, (2) all complex things can be reduced to their simpler components, and (3) all processes are time-reversible (Jarvis, 1997). Suffice it to say that this runs counter to a CRist worldview (Bhaskar, 2017; Pilgrim, 2019; see Chapter 1).

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

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

In its time, and arguably still today, the Newtonian worldview has been accepted and advocated widely within science, explicitly and implicitly, and particularly by those in alignment with positivism/empiricism (Jarvis, 1997). Researchers have suggested that the readiness with which this perspective was adopted was due to its assumption of a strict universal order, and its simplification of the world to a linear and predictable system. Despite
the misleading reductionism of this paradigm, it is a comfortable worldview to humans, particularly in Western cultures, due to their tendency to view events in a linear fashion, their desire to seek understandable attributions of linearity, causality, and predictability, and their developmental tendency to suppress uncertainty (Carhart-Harris et al., 2014; Doll, 1986; Goerner, 1995; Prigogine & Stengers, 1984; Resnicow & Vaughan, 2006). Epiphanic experiences are decidedly nonlinear (Jarvis, 1997), therefore making them potentially more uncomfortable for many of us, as modern human animals, to process. However, the overapplication of the Newtonian paradigm to systems that are not linear (such as the human mind and human behaviour; Shapiro, 2015) can manifest as a reluctance in the scientific community to investigate the complexities in systems that cannot be explained in a linear fashion (Boker & Graham, 1998; Cavanaugh & McGuire, 1994; Goerner, 1995; Jarvis, 1997).

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

Exerted an effect on our ways of thinking about change in a way that is difficult to estimate. Its implicit assumptions have been subtly and at times almost inextricably woven into our epistemologies about the physical world, the biological world, and all manner of social processes as well, including our collective conceptualizations in psychology regarding the nature of psychological change. (Jarvis, 1997, p.261)
A particular facet of the Newtonian paradigm that has had a strong influence on the formation of psychological views on mental health and psychological change is that of equilibrium (Jarvis, 1997). Because the Newtonian paradigm is only applicable at conditions of equilibrium, or near-equilibrium, this state of being has become the almost exclusive focus of attention in psychological research. Though it is not inherently problematic to understand the behaviour of a system at equilibrium, it is problematic when equilibrium becomes a marker for optimal conditions within a system (Prigogine, 1989).

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

Chaos and nonlinearity are normal and necessary in a healthy, open, biological system as it allows that system to be able to adapt flexibly when it encounters change (Francis, 1995). Moreover, if equilibrium were the only direction in which a system moved, the system would merely return to its previous state when perturbed. Instead, research shows that nonlinear or chaotic systems, such as the human brain, engage in a search for an optimal direction therefore enabling the system to adapt and improve in relation to its changing
conditions (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009). When applied directly to epiphanic experiences it is evident that the Newtonian paradigm has functioned to directly limit the capacity for scientific exploration as:

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

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

Overall, both theoretical and experimental works in the field seem to demonstrate that the advanced tools of nonlinear analysis can much more accurately describe and represent the complexity of brain dynamics than traditional mathematical and computational methods based on linear and deterministic analysis (Mattei, 2014, p.1).
Linearity as a concept is now ingrained into the way in which people understand, and interpret, their world and has even permeated attempts to understand nonlinear change. For example, certain theories of epiphanic experience present linear models of what is fundamentally a nonlinear phenomenon (McDonald, 2005; see section 3.3 below). Therefore, if this kind of change is to be truly understood, then the Newtonian worldview must be divested of its power in the search for answers. This assertion is made for two primary reasons. First, from a pragmatic perspective, it is understood that this paradigm shift – no matter the researcher’s underpinning philosophical stance – is necessary for a more accurate and necessarily complex understanding of human psychology as it exists, as and in, an open system(s) (Guastello, Koopmans & Pincus, 2008). Second, the premises of the Newtonian paradigm are incongruent with a CRist philosophy, as the Newtonian paradigm engenders a view of the world that is fixated on the application of closed system logic to open systems (Hartwig, 2007). By this logic, it is even possible to question the conceptualisation of Type 1 change as merely representing an illusion of linearity, as CR fundamentally views social reality as an open system in which linear predictability is nigh on impossible (Pilgrim, 2019).

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

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

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

Mystical experiences are described by James (1902) as dramatic and profound, and as leading to inner transformations that are conceptually distinct from gradual change. In particular, James (1902) referred to ‘mystical states of consciousness’, which he described as having four defining characteristics: (1) ineffability (difficult to put into words), (2) noetic quality (generates knowledge or possesses a sense of deep significance), (3) transiency (unable to be sustained for longer than between half an hour to two hours), and (4) passivity (sustains itself seemingly independently to the will of the experiencer). This conceptualisation of mystical experience bears similarities to more modern notions of
epiphanic experience that cite ineffability (e.g., Amos, 2016a), insight (e.g., Miller & C’dé Baca, 2001), and brevity (e.g., Ilivitsky, 2011) as notable features.

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

3.1) Conceptualising Epiphanic Experience

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

¹¹ Inclusion of memorability (the ability to subsequently recall the SPT vividly) in the definition suggests that epiphanic experiences are subjectively distinct from normal waking consciousness. Yet, although the ability to provide a detailed account of the event has been deemed necessary for the identification of epiphanic experiences, this has not been explored in relation to memory storage and the process of remembering, thereby leaving a significant gap in attaining a fuller understanding of this phenomenon.
This distinction is less evident in Miller and C’de Baca’s (2001) definition of quantum change as a “vivid, surprising, benevolent, and enduring personal transformation” (p.4). The four main features of quantum change, as indicated by the definition above, are: (1) vividness, (2) surprise, (3) benevolence, and (4) permanence (Miller & C’d de Baca, 2001). Furthermore, Miller and C’d de Baca state that quantum change must be sudden, positive, and profound and differ subjectively from linear change. Further, Miller and C’d de Baca explain that they chose to use the term ‘quantum change’ due to the lack of a distinct term for the phenomenon within modern psychology. The term ‘quantum change’ was created based on the concepts of a quantum leap and quantum mechanics (surmising the sudden and brief nature of the change).

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

¹² Whilst empirical accounts of epiphany are dominant in the literature there have been non-empirical accounts of epiphany (Beja, 1993; Goud, 1995; Johnson, 1992). The typology of epiphany proposed by Denzin (1989, 1990) is particularly influential as it has been used to inform associated empirical research (e.g., Griffiths, Barton-Weston & Walsh, 2016). Denzin’s (1989, 1990) typology distinguishes four categories of epiphany, defined as a turning point after which a person permanently changes: (1) the major (a single event that instantaneously affects all areas of the person’s life), (2) the cumulative (akin to a moment in which the ‘straw breaks the camel’s back’), (3) the illuminative (or minor; an event that creates a change in perspective about previous events that consequently also changes all future events), and (4) the relived (an event that is deemed important at the time, but only later accrues greater meaning through being relived). Denzin’s vision of epiphany is a far broader, and less prescriptive, conceptualisation of epiphany than detailed by McDonald (2005). However, the openness of such a definition also hinders the demarcation of epiphany from other events that are turning points for permanent change (e.g., marriage, parenthood).
epiphany (including Ilivitsky’s (2011) definition of SPT) assert that the transformational experience is: (1) sudden, (2) positive, and (3) profound.

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

3.1.1) The Antecedent Phase

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

Factors such as experiences of negative life events, inner turmoil, emotional distress, loneliness, anxiety, despair, anger, depression, suicidal ideation, and alienation, immediately or recently prior, have previously been identified as being antecedents to epiphanic experiences (Jarvis, 1997; McDonald, 2005, 2008; Miller & C’de Baca, 1994, 2001; Murray, 2006). In essence, the individual about to experience an epiphanic experience will generally
be consciously unhappy and feel a sense of desperation, stagnation, and have experienced internal conflict, isolation, or traumatic discontent (Miller, 2004; Miller & C’de Baca, 1994, 2001). Further, participants from Ilivitsky’s (2011) study identified 13 factors that they believed to be facilitative to their SPT: (1) going through a life transition; (2) hearing unsettling information; (3) feeling put down; (4) feeling miserable; (5) a sense of not caring; (6) feeling exhausted; (7) feeling like they could not resolve their problems; (8) reaching a breaking point; (9) letting go or relinquishing control; (10) a sense of there being “something more” to life or to themselves; (11) an early belief in a higher power; (12) receiving support from others; and (13) hearing others describe a related experience. Therefore, epiphanic experience appears to largely emerge from turmoil, and negative life experience, and may well be inexorably linked to it.

3.1.2) The Transformative Experience

In direct contrast to notions of gradual change, the onset of the transformative experience is not experienced as intentional or volitional (Ilivitsky, 2011; Miller & C’de Baca, 1994, 2001; Murray, 2006). Further, epiphanic experiences are generally categorised in two ways (see Figure 2.1 below). The first is as moments of mental clarity, awareness, and insight when an individual reaches a new realisation or way of thinking (commonly referred to as the ‘insightful type’). These insights appear in a person’s consciousness with a considerable sense of clarity, and power, and leave the person with an innate sense of confidence about the ‘truth’ they have uncovered. Insightful quantum changes were found to have a sense of continuity rather than feeling intrusive (Miller & C’d’e Baca, 2001). Further, insightful quantum changes are experienced as distinctly different to the outcomes of ordinary processes of reasoning, as they appear without volition, but are not entirely beyond
the scope of normal conscious experience. Whilst there is no sense of being acted upon by something beyond themselves these kinds of insight are considered to be sudden, dramatic, and deeply transformative.

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

Figure 2.1
Miller and C’de Baca’s (2001, p.35) model of Quantum Change

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

### Table 2.1

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Description of concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. Meaning making</td>
<td>Epiphanies are profound insights that are deemed significant to the individual’s life (Denzin, 1989, 1990; Frick, 2001; Miller &amp; C’dé Baca, 1993, 2001).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 3.1.3) The Personal Transformation

The consequences of epiphanic experience have been described as benevolent, joyful, and liberating, leading to emotional changes such as feelings of calm, emotional release, and relief (Amos, 2016a; Jarvis, 1997; Miller, 2004; Miller & C’dé Baca, 1994, 2001; Murray, 2006). Participants from Miller and C’dé Baca’s (2001) study referred to: (1) releasing chronic negative affect, (2) finding a pervasive sense of peacefulness, and (3) undergoing a shift in values and priorities that changed their sense of meaningfulness in life (Miller, 2004;
Miller & C’dé Baca, 2001). This shift in core values was particularly significant for men, whilst the female participants experienced a less pronounced change in values (Miller & C’dé Baca, 2001). The men in this study ranked their top five values prior to quantum change in order of importance: (1) wealth, (2) adventure, (3) achievement, (4) pleasure and (5) being respected. When considering these values following a quantum change the men ranked these values 50th, 29th, 26th, 25th and 33rd respectively. The top five values were replaced by: (1) spirituality, (2) personal peace, (3) family, (4) God’s will, and (5) honesty, perhaps indicating a greater shift towards health and wellbeing. Further, the gendered differences found may be due to the gender-role attitudes common in Western society. Within Western society women are expected to be nurturing and family-orientated, and men are expected to be leaders and financial providers (Blackstone, 2003; Fortin, 2005). Therefore, the values that society expects women to have are already closer to the values that men who had experienced quantum change reported.

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

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

3.2.1) Sudden Personal Transformation

To formulate her conceptualisation of epiphanic experience Ilivitsky (2011) drew from three major conceptualisations, each derived from a series of independent studies which previously contained many overlapping concepts, and methodological limitations. These conceptualisations were: (1) the unencumbered moment (Murray, 2006), (2) epiphany (e.g., McDonald, 2005; Jarvis, 1997), and (3) quantum change (e.g., Miller & C’dé Baca, 1994).

Whilst epiphany and quantum change have accrued support in the literature the unencumbered moment remains a term used in isolation. Moreover, Murray’s (2006) study contains several significant philosophical and methodological limitations, such as: circular reasoning, insufficient methodological detail, and a lack of philosophical positioning (Ilivitsky, 2011). Therefore, whilst this research informed Ilivitsky’s work, the unencumbered moment simply has not accumulated sufficient weight in the literature to be addressed as a fully comprehensive conceptualisation of epiphanic experience. Moreover, Ilivitsky was not transparent with regard to the methodological process undertaken to differentiate these concepts, nor the process used to select which concepts would enrich her conceptualisation of SPT – which makes replication challenging.

Another important methodological issue to raise when considering SPT is the nature of the participant sample. Ilivitsky screened participants for unipolar and bipolar depression,
post-traumatic stress, and psychosis, and excluded them from the study on that basis. This decision is counter to those made by scholars on quantum change and epiphany (e.g., Jarvis, 1997; Miller & C’dé Baca, 1994, 2001) and appears to have been made without justification. This is problematic as an exploration of the research reveals that epiphanic experiences are aetiology diverse, and therefore it is reasonable to assume that there should be a strong rationale for the exclusion of a particular aetiology. Indeed, even Ilivitsky’s (2011) own definition of SPT distinguishes between the biopsychological event and its subsequent interpretation; raising further questions about the decision to exclude experiences of this aetiology. Epiphanic experiences often appear to contain elements that overlap with psychotic symptomatology (Brugger, 2001; Conrad, 1958; discussed further in section 3.1.2 below) further suggesting that it was premature to exclude this aspect of investigation.

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

13 It is important to draw attention to McGovern’s (2021) study as it is the only study of epiphanic experience thus far that has utilised therapeutic practitioners as the participant sample, therefore aligning with the purpose of this thesis. McGovern’s study serves to highlight differences between the psychotherapeutic community and the psychological community. As discussed above, whilst modern psychology is sceptical of the concept of epiphanic experience, acknowledgment of this phenomenon has emerged from the psychodynamic context. For example, Freud noted that “sweeping insights could bring about important changes in personality” (in Baumeister, 1994, p.295), and Jung observed an “intuitive way of knowing…where the process is more like making leaps than proceeding step by step” (in Miller, 2004, p.185). As such, it is likely that there is greater acceptance of this phenomenon in the psychotherapeutic community than in the psychological community.
considered sufficient within an IPA framework given its idiographic epistemological
commitment that diverges from the nomothetic approach adopted by mainstream psychology
(Alase, 2017; Smith, Flowers & Osborn, 2013; Smith et al., 2009). From a CRist perspective,
a fixation on sample size in qualitative research could be seen as an inheritance from the
methodologism that permeates psychology (Pilgrim, 2019). What is perhaps more important,
is that none of these studies explicitly philosophically positioned themselves beyond their
chosen methodology so there is room to challenge their premises of enquiry.

3.2.2) Quantum Change

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

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

Therefore, whilst the notion of quantum change is the most theoretically robust
conceptualisation of epiphanic experience there remain issues that could be rectified by a more transparent approach to data analysis, and a commitment to philosophical clarity, with regards to the premises of enquiry.

3.2.3) Epiphany

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

Further, each of these studies has methodological limitations. Despite suggesting that epiphany is not experienced by everyone, Liang (2006) recruited 217 self-selected university students seemingly without formal inclusion criteria, which demonstrates a fundamental
contradiction in their argument. McDonald (2005, 2008) used circular reasoning whereby a
priori predictions about the nature of epiphany gathered from the literature were used to
select the sample. The results were then used to support the predictions. For example, it was
predicted that inner turmoil, depression, and anxiety would be antecedents to epiphany. These
criteria were used to recruit the sample, and then the results stated that the participants had
experienced inner turmoil, depression, and anxiety prior to their epiphanic experience.
Moreover, there is not always congruence between the interpretive categories asserted by
researchers, and the interview data provided (Jarvis, 1997; McDonald, 2005, 2008; Ilivitsky,
2011). For example, McDonald (2005, 2008) found that epiphanies were the result of
“profound change and transformation in self-identity” (2008, p.99). However, the quotations
provided to support that theme did not seem to directly address the construct of self-identity.

3.3) Proposed Generative Mechanisms

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

3.3.1) Non-conscious Thought

Ilivitsky (2011) proposed that formalised activity (e.g., meditation, prayer) can act in
a causal capacity through the mechanism described by non-conscious thought theory (Zhong,
Dijksterhuis & Galinsky, 2008). Non-conscious thought is considered to increase when problems are challenging or complex, or if the individual has weak or abstract prior associations about the problem. Formalised, ritual, activity, it is suggested, distracts individuals from conscious problem solving, and allows for more creative and divergent thinking. This corresponds with other ideas about convergent and divergent thinking (Runco, 2014). The former (convergent) is prevalent when problems are defined in a closed-ended manner - which may occur when large amounts of conscious effort are involved. The latter (divergent) is prevalent when problems are defined in an open-ended manner - which may be inherent to cognitive activity during periods of non-conscious thought.

Although this causal explanation has an advantage of presenting a theory that can be tested (McPhetres et al., 2020) there is a logical inconsistency within Ilivitsky’s argument. An assumption was made that formalised activity is a conduit for epiphanic experience through the mechanism described by non-conscious thought theory (Zhong, Dijksterhuis & Galinsky, 2008). This is problematic as other explanations for how formalised activity engenders epiphanous change can be reproduced. A prime example of such an alternative is experiential absorption which has been defined as “total attention involving a full commitment of available perceptual, motoric, imaginative and ideational resources to a unified representation of the attentional object” (Tellegen & Atkinson, 1974, p.274). Experiential absorption has been found to engender states that result in a restructuring of the self (Jamieson, 2005; Tellegen, 1981). Thus, whilst formalised activity has been found to be a facilitator of epiphanic experience (Amos, 2016a; Ilivitsky, 2011) the precise mechanism through which
this occurs remains unclear\textsuperscript{14}, thereby making the application of CRist philosophy, with its focus on generative mechanisms, of particular utility to the field of epiphanic experience.

3.3.2) Breaking Point

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

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

\textsuperscript{14} It should be noted that the studies referenced within this section did not utilise research philosophies, such as CR, that would permit them to explore and identify generative mechanisms, thereby limiting their ability to theorise on this topic.
However, whilst this accounts for the plane of social interactions between people (see Chapter 1, section 2.6) this remains an incomplete account through the lens of the four planar social being (Bhaskar, 2020).

3.3.3) Deep Discrepancy

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

Reorganisation of the self is a feature of Deep Discrepancy, and also of Breaking Point, that occurs due to the resolution of inner conflict. Miller and C’de Baca (2001) cite Rokeach’s model (see Figure 2.2) as being useful in understanding sudden reconfiguration of
the self as the model allows for the understanding that the level at which the event occurs will impact the effects of the change. For example, changing a belief will impact actions, emotions, and thoughts, but changing a terminal value will set in motion a change throughout the entire structure of the personality. Whilst Rokeach conceptualises personality as a being organised in a laminated system, which appears promising given the philosophical positioning of this research (see Chapter 1, section 2.5), in actuality it does not align with the CRist view of the self largely due to its lack of recognition of the embodied personality (Bhaskar, 2020; see Chapter 1, section 2.6).

**Figure 2.2**
*Depiction of Rokeach’s (1973) Model of Personality*
3.3.4) Personal Maturation

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

Miller and C’de Baca also likened these experiences to self-actualisation, or the realisation of one’s full potential (Maslow, 1954, 1968). Maslow (1968) investigated peak experiences (defined as "rare, exciting, oceanic, deeply moving, exhilarating, elevating experiences that generate an advanced form of perceiving reality and are even mystic and magical in their effect upon the experimenter"; p.96) and initially concluded that those individuals who had a peak experience were most often self-actualised. Later, however, Maslow stated that self-actualisation was not “a king or all-or-none pantheon into which some rare people enter at the age of 60” (Maslow, 1968, p.79), but was instead often a surge in development that could occur at any point in someone’s life. The two previously discussed mechanisms, Breaking Point and Deep Discrepancy, are also resonant of Maslow’s arguments and Rogers’ ideas. Rogers (1974) stipulated that in order to achieve self-actualisation, an individual must first achieve a state of congruence. Therefore, by experiencing a Breaking Point or Deep Discrepancy, inward facing orientation is disrupted,
thereby allowing movement towards a sense of wholeness. By resolving the conflict and
dichotomy between a challenging situation and individual core values self-actualisation
becomes possible (Maslow, 1965).

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

Although Miller and C’dé Baca (2001) posit that quantum change is the result of
natural developmental processes, and in so doing link this to Maslow’s work, they provide
insufficient rationale for this. Moreover, they fail to address the premises of enquiry
stipulated by a humanistic approach, such as voluntarism (the notion in psychology that
human agents are fundamentally free and responsible, and which is rejected by CR; Pilgrim,
2019), as well as the longstanding absence of third force psychology\footnote{Fleuridas and Krafick (2019) delineate four major forces, or paradigms, in the development of psychotherapy: 1) the psychodynamic, 2) the behavioural and cognitive-behavioural, 3) the humanistic-existential, and 4) the contextual/systemic.} from the
developmental psychology literature (DeRobertis, 2012). Furthermore, although they
acknowledge that self-actualisation can occur at any time, this appears to lessen the
credibility of their argument as the developmental models after which they fashioned this explanation present structured and linear developmental changes, with no recognition of the nonlinear nature of these changes (van Geert, 2009).

3.3.5) Particular Person

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

Miller and C’dé Baca’s argument is based on Jungian (1959) personality theory wherein knowing, via the unconscious, is considered a normal method of perception. The authors included the Jungian-based Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI; Myers & McCaulley, 1985) in their research. Focusing on the sensing-intuitive dimension it was found that intuitive (N) and feeling (F) types were overrepresented in their sample, whereby they accounted for 79% of those who had insightful quantum changes, and 60% of those who had a mystical quantum change. Therefore, N and F types were present at twice the rate of the general population suggestive of a relationship between being of an N and F type and having an epiphanic experience (Myers & McCaulley, 1985). As an additional note, because Jungian personality theory has not been integrated into social and personality psychology (Stein & Swan, 2019) it is useful to understand that N and F MBTI types correlate with the Big Five
personality traits of Openness and Agreeableness – although MBTI types are considered more dynamic constructs than the Big Five (Furnham, 1996; McCrae & Costa, 1992, 1997). Therefore, although the CRist approach considers trait approaches to personality (i.e., the Big Five) as reductive (Pilgrim, 2019) combining these two frameworks might provide a more nuanced lens through which to view the transitive domain.

Miller and C’de Baca (2001) further indicated that ‘special realities’ (e.g., mental illness) may also help to explain quantum change. The authors stress that, although mental illness (including unipolar and bipolar depression, post-traumatic stress, and psychosis) was present in their sample, epiphanic experience and mental illness should not be conflated. However, they conceded that mental disorders may facilitate quantum changes. Furthermore, they suggest that profound loss or prolonged distress might open a ‘channel of sensitivity’ that makes epiphanic experience more accessible to certain individuals. However, when considering Miller and C’de Baca’s observation that mental illness was present in their sample, it becomes evident that they fail to address the fact that mental illness may have been present in their sample due to, for example, psychosis, or psychotic bipolar disorder, appearing similar in form to epiphanic experiences in terms of their rich and unpredictable experiential content. Miller and C’de Baca’s assertion, that epiphanic experience and mental illness should not be conflated, is reflected in the literature whereby epiphanic experiences are considered to be non-pathological despite little evidence to support this claim (Lebedev et al., 2016; Parnas & Henriksen, 2016). Instead, this assertion appears to be based on existing tensions between religion and science, and a desire to ‘protect’ these kinds of experience from science, thereby leaving a metaphorical door open for these experiences to be explained as an act of a God (Dawkins, 2006; Harris, 2011).
The Particular Person explanation appears to provide some insight into some of the causal mechanisms that may facilitate epiphanic experiences. In particular, Miller and C’de Baca assert that people who have epiphanic experiences are intuitive types according to the MBTI (Myers & McCaulley, 1985) – which, as noted above, corresponds with the Big Five trait of Openness (Furnham, 1996; McCrae & Costa, 1992, 1997). This argument is also made by researchers on epiphany who implicate related characteristics such as courage and perseverance, insight and self-analysis, and a willingness to engage in personal growth (McDonald, 2005). However, the fact that all measures and discussions of personality from the extant literature took place post-epiphanic experience limits the strength of the argument. As such, whilst personality may play a role in the susceptibility of a person to epiphanic experience, the constraints of the phenomenon (i.e., the impossibility of pre- and post-measures) mean that it would be unwise to build a theory on these ideas alone.

3.6) Sacred Encounter

Miller and C’de Baca’s (2001) suggested causal mechanism ‘Sacred Encounter’, entails sudden change being understood as an experience of transcendence and contact with the divine. The sacred encounter mechanism appears functionally equivalent to Ilivitsky’s (2011) proposed mechanism ‘Transformed by a Process Outside of My Conscious Control (Higher Power or a Wisdom Deep Inside)’ as both refer to a passive transformation that is perceived to occur as a result of connection with a higher power. Although it is now understood that epiphanic experience need not be ‘mystical’ or religious in nature, when addressing causal mechanisms many researchers have left space open such that religious Sacred Encounters, or transformation through a higher power, may be considered a legitimate
account for the emergence of these experiences\textsuperscript{16} (Amos, 2016a; Ilivitsky, 2011; Miller & C’dé Baca, 1994, 2001). Indeed, much of the literature on epiphanic experience describes overtly religious mystical-type experiences which are almost exclusively Christian in nature (Amos, 2016a; Ilivitsky, 2011; Miller & C’dé Baca, 1994, 2001).

Given that judgmental rationality is part of the ‘holy trinity’ of CR, it appears important and relevant to cross the invisible, and often feared, line between science and religion and discuss religious experience (Dawkins, 2006). CR is open to discussions about the existence or non-existence of a God or gods, but there is no formalised position on this issue – different CRists have come to different conclusions and conceptualisations\textsuperscript{17} (Archer, Collier & Porpora, 2004). The inclusion of Sacred Encounter as a legitimate potential generative mechanism is perhaps a matter of unclear philosophy, whereby distinctions have not been made between the domain of the Real and Actual (the actual event and its causal mechanisms) and the domain of the Empirical (interpretations of the event based on experience) (Bhaskar, 1975).

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

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

\textsuperscript{17} Reflexive note: It appears important at this point to exercise reflexivity and briefly position myself with regards to the topic of religion and a higher power, as this has undoubtedly influenced my approach to this proposed generative mechanism (Archer, 2000). I am an atheist, which means that I am unconvinced by any arguments for the existence of a God or gods.
extraordinary enough to support the extraordinary claim of a God or gods of any kind\footnote{Indeed, another weakness of the ‘Sacred Encounter’ argument is that authors appear to have assumed that there exists a shared or universal definition of God, i.e., preference has been given to the Judaeo-Christian God. Therefore, due to the Western, Christian culture within which epiphanic experiences have been studied, the idea of an Abrahamic God has been considered a ‘valid’ belief, whereas Odin, Shiva, Bastet, or Herne the Hunter are not considered credible explanatory devices. Why this God and not others?} (Dawkins, 2006; Deming, 2016; Geertz, 2009; Sagan, 1979). If no evidence can be presented that a God exists, then logically, it cannot be used as a valid causal explanation. Because the existence of a God has never been proven, nor given scientifically acceptable evidence, this research focuses on natural explanations, rather than supernatural ones. As such, arguments for epiphanic experience that rest on a foundation of religious or spiritual belief (in the Mediaeval sense described by Harris (2014), at least) will be considered a meaningful reflection of interpretation, rather than as a direct correlate of ‘reality’. In essence: one cannot use a God as an explanatory device, without first providing robust evidence of the existence of a God.

3.3.7) Existential Theory

McDonald (2005) developed an existential perspective on epiphany based upon the philosophical bodies of work of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre in order to explore the domains of the Actual and Real. McDonald suggested that epiphanies are the consequence of an honest encounter with the conditions of existence that is triggered by profound awareness of authentic and inauthentic modes of self-identity. Self-identity can be considered an “individuals’ experience and internal representation of themselves and their world” (McDonald, 2005, p.53). McDonald identified eleven interconnected existentials, or modes of authenticity, that facilitate the move towards a more authentic self-identity:
1. Freedom; whereby epiphanies are viewed as moments wherein individuals assume their own existential freedom and consequently utilise their newfound openness to reassess the goals and directions they pursue (Heidegger, 1987). In this way they experience self-identity as ‘Being-for-itself’ (transcendence), rather than ‘Being-in-itself’ (immanence) (Sartre, 1943). McDonald noted that participants had often eschewed their existential freedom earlier in their lives.

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

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

4. Alienation; whereby people are understood to be alienated when they avoid the conditions of existence, including “its origins (thrown), its conditions (freedom, responsibility, choice), and its ultimate destination (death)” (McDonald, 2005, p.224). Epiphanies are viewed as the overcoming of alienation through negative life experience (existential crisis, wherein an individual’s basic assumptions about the world are examined) and insight about self-identity and the conditions of existence.
5. **Temporality;** whereby self-identity is viewed by existentialist thought as a temporal entity, a synthesis of past, present, and future (Heidegger, 1927). In this way, time is conceptualised as a simultaneous trinity that is incongruent with the concept of linear time which views time as a series of consecutive ‘now’s’.

6. **Being-towards-death;** which is understood as the stimulation of an individual’s priorities that provides an awareness of the impermanence of status, wealth, success, and indeed, life (Heidegger, 1927; Kierkegaard, 1845). Therefore, the inevitability of death becomes a force for living a life of one’s own choosing.

7. **Depression and anxiety;** understood in existentialist terms as “an overriding sense of meaningfulness concerning one’s past, or one’s future, leading to a closing down of one’s possibilities” (McDonald, 2005, p.238). They arise when there is an unwillingness to adjust to the conditions of existence. Kierkegaard (1849) believed these states mark the beginning of self-hood as they catalyse profound personal questioning about the nature of existence.

8. **The inter-personal world;** understood as the relationships between the self and itself, important others, other social relationships. Self-identity is thought of as always in context with others (Heidegger, 1987; Sartre, 1948). Existence is therefore conceptualised as relational, meaning that others play a significant role in epiphanic experience, and that these experiences are able to increase a person’s capacity for relatedness.

9. **Dogma and the socio-cultural world;** whereby existentialist thought recognises that social, political, and religious ideologies act as preventatives to individuation by dogmatically eschewing the conditions of existence and placing limitations on freedom (Nietzsche, 1895).
Meaning and purpose; in existentialist thought, are concepts to which there is no ultimate answer – one must instead construct their own sense of meaning and purpose. Heidegger (1927) claimed that a meaningful life “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, quoted from McDonald, 2005, p.258).

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

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

Greater attention will be paid to Chaos/Complexity Theory due to its later relevance in the thesis. Jarvis (1997) considered Chaos/Complexity Theory (simply referred to as Chaos Theory from this point onwards) to be well placed to explain, and understand, epiphanic experience. By advocating for Chaos Theory, Jarvis was proposing a complete paradigm shift. Chaos Theory is a nonlinear dynamical systems (NDS) theory (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009; nonlinear dynamical systems have already been touched upon, above, in section 2).

Pincus and Kiefer (2017) suggest that a straightforward way of making sense of NDS is to consider each term separately:

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

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

Chaos Theory is an interdisciplinary mathematical theory, defined by Krippner (1994) as “the branch of mathematics for the study of processes that seem so complex that at first they do not appear to be governed by any known laws or principles, but which actually have an underlying order” (p.49). Researchers applying Chaos Theory have been successful in providing a bridge between higher-order psychological phenomena (e.g., traits, schemata, and norms) and lower-level phenomena (e.g., thoughts, feelings, and movements), as well as explaining previously problematic fields of study in such areas as physics, ecology, and astronomy, and has been suggested by many as providing the capacity to connect the natural and social sciences (Ayers, 1997; Gleick, 1987; Koopmans, 2009; Robertson & Combs, 2014).
As such, Chaos Theory, and NDS theories in general, represent a paradigm shift in the scientific landscape, preceded by such other paradigm shifts as the Copernican revolution, Newtonian causal determinism, and the Einsteinian revolutions; each in search of a universal model that might unify physics (Gleick, 1987; Krippner, 1994; Kuhn, 2012). The universe that Chaos Theory describes is immensely different from the universe the Newtonian paradigm allows for (discussed above in section 2). Chaos Theory demonstrates that the outcomes of dynamical, self-organised systems (see section 3.3.3.2.3) are unable to be predicted at a local level. Instead, Chaos Theory allows for models of real-world phenomena that better correspond with their actual complexity than the causally deterministic and linear Newtonian paradigm.

Chaos Theory (and NDS theories in general) has met with resistance from scientific communities which are reluctant to embrace this paradigm shift (Gleick, 1987; Reniscow & Vaughan, 2006). However, Chaos Theory has gained traction, and formally entered the consciousness of the entire field of psychology with the establishment of the Society for Chaos Theory in Psychology and Life Sciences (SCTPLS) and the Chaos Network in 1991 (Guastello, 2009). Psychology-specific applications of Chaos Theory include psychotherapy, human development, sleep neurophysiology, psychophysics, mind and consciousness, collective intelligence, neurodynamics and electrocortical activity, and psychopathology, amongst myriad others (Gleick, 1987; Gregson, 2009; Krippner, 1994; Lunkenheimer & Dishion, 2009; Minelli, 2009; Sulis, 2009; Tschacher & Junghan, 2009). Unsurprisingly, Chaos Theory first gained attention in disciplines that were already open to interdisciplinary thinking, such as neuroscience, social systems analysis, and organisational behaviour (Guastello, 2009).
Chaos Theory focuses on, and allows for a way of understanding, phenomena, processes, and behaviours that appear locally chaotic and unpredictable, but at a global level are stable and ordered (Gleick, 1987; Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009; Jarvis, 1997; Krippner, 1994; Prigogine, 1991). In this way, Chaos Theory emphasises that order is an emergent property of disorder. This marks a distinct contrast to the Newtonian worldview, shifting from linear to nonlinear, predictable, and controllable, to infinite potentials (Bütz, 1992; Jarvis, 1997). The discussion will now turn to the central premises of Chaos Theory in order to demonstrate the applicability of Chaos Theory to epiphanic experience: (1) the nonlinear system, (2) interdependence, (2) self-organisation, (4) phase space and attractors, and (5) sensitive dependence on initial conditions.

3.3.3.2.1) The Nonlinear System.

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

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

3.3.3.2.3) Self-organisation.

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

It is now accepted that the brain functions in a nonlinear manner (Bob, 2008; Freeman, 1991), and there is strong evidence of chaotic dynamics in the brain, in particular, the electroencephalographic (EEG) activity of the brain has been demonstrated to be a chaotic process (Guastello, 2009; Minelli, 2009; Pijn, Van Neerven, Noest & da Silva, 1991; Pritchard & Duke, 1995; Rapp, 1995; Stam, 2003). The brain is a self-organised system, meaning that it is a complex system, comprised of multiple units, that displays emergent properties as a whole that are beyond those that its individual units are capable of, and that
moves towards higher levels of complexity when perturbed (Carhart-Harris et al., 2014; Chialvo, Balenzuela & Fraiman, 2008; Hollis, Kloos & Van Orden, 2009; Jarvis, 1997; Tognoli & Kelso, 2014). The brain interacts with its environment continually in order to minimise internal chaos, even if that requires it to adopt new patterns of self-organisation as a result of additional chaos in the internal or external environment (Friston, 2010; Gabora, 2017). As such, self-organised systems can be said to possess three main features (Skar, 2004):

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

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

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

This flexibility, being able to function well over a range of conditions, is critical to biological systems, so a biological system becoming functionally ‘stuck’ in one mode can be harmful as it prevents it from adapting to changing conditions (Gleick, 1987; Huberman, 1986). This is reflected in literature on epiphanic experience whereby participants were
documented as often being trapped in modes of being that were unsuited to their environments (Ilivitsky, 2011; Miller & C’dé Baca, 2001).

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

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

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

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

1. Fixed Point Attractors. A fixed-point attractor has only one state and represents a steady state for the system (Goertzel, 1995b). When a system is near a fixed-point attractor it enters that state and does not leave (Goertzel, 1995b). Points that are pulled into the basin of a fixed-point attractor gravitate towards a fixed point, such as the final states of a pendulum that has been dampened (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009; Oestreicher,
If two fixed point attractors are present, then the movement of the object may appear convoluted depending on the strengths and locations of each attractor relative to the other (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009).

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

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

The internal motion within the basin of a strange attractor is chaotic, characterised by three primary features: (1) unpredictability, (2) boundedness, and (3) sensitivity to initial conditions (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009; Kaplan & Glass, 1995). Unpredictability refers
to the fact that the series of numbers that a chaotic function generates does not repeat itself. Boundedness refers to the unpredictability of motion within the boundaries of the attractor. Sensitivity to initial conditions refers to the fact that two points that begin in arbitrary close proximity will increasingly move away from each other over time. If a point within a chaotic attractor basin moves too close to the edge of the basin, motion contracts and the point is pulled inside. If the point moves too close to the centre of the attractor, motion expands, and the point moves outwards. This kind of motion has been described as being similar to a school of fish (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009; Semovski, 2001).

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

3.3.3.2.5) Sensitive Dependence on Initial Conditions.

Sensitive dependence on initial conditions, sometimes referred to by its colloquial nomenclature ‘The Butterfly Effect’ (Gleick, 1987), refers to the fact that a system that appears structurally stable may be highly reactive to even small perturbations that lead to
significant and unpredictable structural changes (Poincaré, 1992). For example, historically
the weather was assumed to be structurally stable, when in reality it is a dynamical system
which is more accurately described in accordance with structural instability. This was first
noted by mathematician and meteorologist Edward Lorenz (Gleick, 1987; Lorenz, 1963,
1972) who demonstrated that the equations used to model the weather were not sufficiently
precise, so as to be able predict the weather beyond two or three days, due to the inherent
structural instability of the weather pattern system.

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

The weather (behaviour change) is an example of a chaotic system. In order to make
long-term weather forecasts (predictions of behavior change) it would be necessary to
take an infinite number of measurements, which would be impossible to do. Also,
because the atmosphere (human behavior) is chaotic, tiny uncertainties would
eventually overwhelm any calculations and defeat the accuracy of the forecast. Even
if it were possible to fill the entire atmosphere of the earth with an enormous array of
measuring instruments, e.g., thermometers, wind gauges, and barometers
(psychosocial, biologic, and environmental measures) uncertainty in the initial
conditions would arise from the minute variations in measured values between each
set of instruments in the array. Because the atmosphere (human behavior) is chaotic,
these uncertainties, no matter how small, would eventually overwhelm any
calculations and defeat the accuracy of the forecast (prediction). (p.3)
Complex, adaptive systems, such as living organisms, are therefore understood to display extreme sensitivity to context and initial conditions that prevents the prediction of the future trajectory of the system (Mitchell, 2009). Indeed, perhaps the most critical point to return to, before discussing the limitations of Chaos Theory, is that living systems are unable to exist either as separate components or as separate to their environment. This is because no living system can be considered closed, linear, and at environmental equilibrium, because this is the thermodynamic definition of death (Shapiro, 2015). As such, the notion that Type 1 change exists (see section 2 above), can be considered fallacious in light of CRist and NDS theory premises of enquiry.

3.3.3.2.6) Evaluating Chaos Theory.

The application of Chaos Theory to psychology presents significant challenges as psychology is an expansive and often interdisciplinary field (Guastello, 2001). Yet, the science of chaos, and its relation to psychological experience, has continued to develop since the completion of Jarvis’ (1997) work. These developments have added support to Jarvis’ arguments and, critically, were found to provide the start of a comprehensive, retroductively constructed, framework for understanding the data from this research and the causal mechanisms that underpin epiphanic experiences (discussed at length in Chapter 5).

Moreover, it is worth noting that CR and Chaos Theory are considered to align, due to overlapping agendas and worldviews (e.g., both are positioned to consider open systems existing in a state of flux, emergence within these systems, and the importance of context; Hartwig, 2007; Pilgrim, 2019), thereby highlighting the congruence of this paradigm within the context of CRist research.
Despite having been extensively applied in both natural and social sciences Chaos Theory has been criticised for being ‘a theory of everything’ (Goerner, 1995; Koopmans, 2009), and some have warned against aggrandising the potential of NDS approaches particularly given the issue of measurement (McSharry, 2005; Richardson, 1991). Indeed, because Chaos Theory views order as an emergent process of a system, rather than a static property possessed by it – modelling, and then applying Chaos Theory based solutions is challenging. The development of these models is often contingent on high-powered, solution-resistant supercomputers that are able to process vast numbers of equations simultaneously (Ward, 2007). Further, in the social sciences, the use of linear statistical measures is the dominant paradigm, but one which prevents the full complexity of data from being evaluated, as what is labelled as the error rate may instead be indicative of the chaotic component of complex human behaviour that is visible when applying a linear equation to a nonlinear phenomenon (Hufford et al., 2003; Resnicow & Vaughan, 2006). Indeed, by narrowing scientific focus to closed and linear systems (i.e., systems near thermodynamic equilibrium), science has arguably restricted itself to providing grossly simplified models of phenomena (Smolin, 2012), thereby highlighting the importance of paradigms such as Chaos Theory.

4) Research Questions

When taking the CRist approach to research it is typical to begin the process with a question, or a problem, that requires solving, and that has been guided by theory (Fletcher, 2017). According to CRist thought, empirical social science and philosophy are intertwined constructs (Bhaskar, 1979). Philosophy acts as a device to set parameters for social science, which in turn examines how structures are operationalised. As such, Bhaskar (1979) notes: “Once a hypothesis about a generative structure has been produced in social science it can be
tested quite empirically, although not necessarily quantitatively” (p.62). Therefore, existing
theory acts as the starting point for any subsequent research. However, as of yet, there exists
no comprehensive underlying theory of epiphanic experience that can be tested. Movement
towards theoretical consensus can be considered critical to the progression of science, and yet
there is a paucity of cumulative theory in the discipline of psychology, both with relevance to
this subject area, and in general (McPhetres et al., 2020). As such, the overarching aim of this
research is to be able to provide a theory of epiphanic experience that is underpinned by
Critical Realism. In order to facilitate this aim, the following research questions were posed:

1. What makes epiphanic experience distinct from other sudden, positive, and
   profound experiences?

2. What are the distinct experiential features of epiphanic experience?

3. What generative mechanisms permit the emergence of an epiphanic experience?

Each of the following three chapters will be guided by each of the respective
questions above. Chapter 3 will present the results of a scoping review of the literature on
sudden, positive, and profound change experiences in order to transparently demarcate
epiphanic experience from similar experiences. Using the results of the scoping review
Chapter 4 will report the findings of a thematic synthesis of the extant literature on epiphanic
experience, that focuses on the experiential features of epiphanic experience in the domain of
the Empirical using a CRist framework. Finally, Chapter 5 will present the results of a CRist
analysis of primary data used as the foundation for an ontologically differentiated discussion
of the generative mechanisms proposed to underpin epiphanic experience.
The purpose of this chapter was to provide the reader with a thorough, and focused, understanding of epiphanic experience as it is represented in current literature. To summarise, although several concepts exist that describe epiphanic experience, current thinking in the literature suggests that it can be distinguished according to a continuum that spans from: (1) moments of insight, mental clarity, and awareness, to (2) mystical experiences in which the individual often feels connected to a higher power (Ilivitsky, 2011; McDonald, 2005, 2008; Miller & C’de Baca, 2001). Further, epiphanic experiences appear to possess a set of common markers i.e., brief, sudden/surprising, inner (insightful or mystical), memorable/vivid, lasting/enduring, positive/benevolent, and profound. However, the current body of literature on epiphanic experience is hindered by a lack of philosophical rigour, and rationale, with many of the studies lacking clarity regarding philosophy as a pre-supposition (excluding McDonald, 2005; see Chapter 1, section 2.1), not explicitly accounting for the nature of open systems (excluding Jarvis, 1997), and in some instances, providing insufficient methodological clarity and reflexivity.

Both content (McDonald, 2005) and concept (Chilton, 2015) analyses on epiphanies have been conducted. However, both of these analyses are undermined by the fact that they provide little methodological detail such that it is not evident how the researchers applied the different frameworks for content analysis they chose, which studies were selected for inclusion, and on what basis. Despite this, these content analyses, as well as individual authors’ interpretations of the literature, have been used to support arguments that assert the distinctiveness of epiphanic experience as a phenomenon. For example, it has been asserted that Maslow’s (1971) concept of ‘peak experiences’, or the ‘spiritual emergencies’ defined by Grof and Grof (1986), may be sudden but do not necessarily engender positive, profound, and
lasting change. Mystical experiences can be positive but need not be profound (Ilivitsky, 2011). Similarly, some examples of profound change, such as ‘religious conversion’, do not follow a brief inner experience but are gradual (Ilivitsky, 2011; Paloutzian, 2005; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 1998). However, without the ability to understand the analytical processes undertaken by the researchers to reach these conclusions, the delineation of epiphanic experience from several other similar experiences appears to have been influenced by a lack of investment in the principle of Hermeticism (Bhaskar, 2017).

Given the volume of terminologies that exist within the literature to describe sudden, positive, and profound change experiences, and the amount of conceptual overlap they possess, it seems premature to make an assertion of the distinctiveness of epiphanic experience based on a set of characteristics derived from disparate, and sometimes methodologically opaque, research without testing this transparently, methodologically rigorously, and with the principle of Hermeticism firmly in mind. As such, attention will now turn to the subsequent chapter, a scoping review with the purpose of exploring if, and on what grounds, epiphanic experience can be considered a conceptually and operationally distinct category of nonlinear lived experience. This is a necessary act of under-labouring (Bhaskar, 2017; see Chapter 1, section 2.1.1) to establish a solid foundation for the research that follows.
Chapter 3: A Scoping Review of Sudden, Positive, and Profound Nonlinear Change

1) Introduction

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

Further, and in line with the second aim stated above, this chapter will provide a methodologically transparent, systematic assessment of the literature that addresses sudden, positive, and profound change, in order to consider the grounds upon which epiphanic experience can be demarcated from similar experiences. This is important and necessary as, to date, it appears as though the distinctiveness of epiphanic experience has been tacitly assumed rather than hermetically postulated (see Chapter 1, section 2.1.6). Researchers have also made claims about the functional equivalence of, for example, quantum change and epiphany (McDonald, 2005), without providing transparent systematic detail of how these
conclusions were reached. If this research is to meaningfully discuss epiphanic experience then it is critical to understand the landscape of terms used to describe epiphanic experience, as well as evidence the delineation of epiphanic experience from other similar experiences. To this end, a scoping review of extant literature on sudden, positive, and profound transformative experiences was undertaken. By engaging with this process, robust evidence can be provided that epiphanic experience warrants demarcation from other sudden, positive, and profound transformative experiences.

2) Method

The purposes of a scoping review are to: (1) provide a rigorous and transparent assessment of a body of research, (2) to map the available evidence, and (3) to identify any gaps therein in order to enhance future research on the phenomenon under investigation (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005; Ludlow & Rogers, 2017; Tricco et al., 2016). Scoping reviews are also of particular utility when used to investigate topics that are heterogeneous, complex, and as of yet under-reviewed (Mays et al., 2001; Pham et al., 2014). As such, a scoping review was considered an appropriate method for identifying the range of concepts that address sudden, positive, and profound transformative experiences in the literature, and the kinds of evidence that have been produced in this field of research (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005; Levac, Colquhoun & O’Brien, 2010; Munn et al., 2018). Moreover, the role of a scoping review is not, unlike a systematic review methodology, to synthesise evidence. Instead, the task is to collate, summarise, and report an overview of all the material that has been reviewed in a narrative fashion (Arskey & O’Malley, 2005).
The researcher’s primary supervisor acted as a critical friend throughout the research process (Deuchar, 2008; Smith & McGannon, 2018; Smith, Sparkes & Caddick, 2014) and the scoping review was underpinned by Arksey and O’Malley’s (2005) framework. This framework was the first methodological framework proposed as a guideline for scoping reviews, and only a few researchers have suggested augmentations to the framework (Pham et al., 2014). Mindful of these suggested augmentations, this study was further supported by the recommendations from Brien et al. (2010), Levac et al. (2010), and Daudt et al. (2013) based on their own experiences using the framework. This facilitated the optimisation of rigour of the scoping review findings (Levac et al., 2010). According to this framework, a scoping review should progress through the following five phases: (1) identifying the research question, (2) identifying relevant studies, (3) study selection, (4) charting the data, and (5) collating, summarising, and reporting the results. For clarity, the structure of this chapter will mirror these recommendations.

### 2.1) Identifying the Research Question

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

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

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

epiphan* OR “quantum chang*” OR “mystical experience*” OR personal W/3 transform* OR “sudden personal transformation*” OR sudden W/3 change* OR unexpect* W/3 change* OR last* W/3 change* OR spontaneous W/3 change* OR discont* W/3 change* OR ineffab* W/3 change* OR mystical W/3 change* OR unusal W/3 change* OR abrupt W/3 change* OR rapid* W/3 change* OR acute W/3 change* OR transform* W/3 change* OR nonlinear W/3 change* OR non-linear W/3 change* OR brief W/3 change* OR positive W/3 change* OR profound W/3 change*

There were no limitations placed on the date of publication, but the search was restricted to literature written in English.
2.3) Study Selection

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

Figure 3.1

Schematic of study selection process
2.4) Charting the Data

‘Charting’ refers to a technique whereby qualitative data is synthesised and interpreted by charting and sorting the material into key themes or issues (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005; Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). As recommended by Arksey and O’Malley (2005), a data charting form was constructed using Microsoft Excel (2012) and included the following information: (1) author(s) and year of publication, (2) study population, (3) aims of the study, (4) methodology, (5) terminology used to describe sudden, positive, and profound...
change, (6) congruence with the markers of epiphanic experience identified in the literature (i.e., brief, sudden/surprising, inner (insightful or mystical), memorable/vivid, lasting/enduring, positive/benevolent, and profound). It should be noted that not all the information was readily available to be charted, as in some instances the authors did not include material that allowed for the points above to be answered.

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

Figure 3.2

Initial deductive charting system with exemplar congruent answers
128

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Marker</th>
<th>Example Congruent Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transformative Experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brief</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sudden/Surprising</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inner</td>
<td><strong>Y/N or Y/N</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mystical</td>
<td><strong>Y/N or Y/N</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Memorable/Vivid</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lasting/Enduring</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Transformation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive/Benevolent</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Profound</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* ‘Y’ = Yes, ‘N’ = No, ‘Y/N’ = both Y and N, ‘?’ = unclear

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

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

**Figure 3.3**

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

*‘Y’ = Yes, ‘N’ = No, ‘Y/N’ = both Y and N, ‘?’ = unclear*
response for all features should be ‘Y’, except ‘noetic’ and ‘somatic’, which can have any combination of responses but cannot contain ‘N’ in both.

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

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

3.1) Study Population

The vast majority of participants in these studies were members of the general public who had experienced the phenomenon in question or possessed the desired characteristics for inclusion in the participant sample (see Figure 3.4). In terms of gender, initial calculations reported a total of 3522 males, 2233 females, and one intergender participant. However, this skew to the data was found to be the result of one specific article from Griffiths, Hurwitz, Davis, Johnson and Jesse (2019). The aim of this study was to compare naturally occurring ‘God encounter experiences’ with those occasioned by classic psychedelic drugs. In the psychedelic group the number of male participants far outweighed female participants (2746 to 730, respectively). This discrepancy is likely to be linked to the research suggesting that males are more likely to use drugs than females, and that females are more likely than males to perceive drug use as being risky (Eaton et al., 2005; Powis, Griffiths, Gossop & Strang, 1996; Spigner, Hawkins & Loren, 1993). Therefore, this data may be more indicative of which gender engages in psychedelic drug use, rather than which gender is more likely to experience the phenomenon under investigation. When the drug group (both males and
females) from this study was removed the gender split changed considerably: 800 males, 1535 females, and one intergender participant, therefore demonstrating a prevalence rate for females having epiphanic experiences at almost twice the frequency of men.

**Figure 3.4**

*Participant groups from the included 67 studies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Groups</th>
<th>Number of Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General public</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional scientists</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholars</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health professionals</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extreme sport athletes</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminary students</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical figures</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced meditators</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No participants</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2) Methodology and Philosophy

It was rare for the studies reviewed to expressly position themselves philosophically ($n = 54$ did not address philosophy; $n = 12$ Phenomenological; $n = 1$ Existential). Moreover, of those few that stated a philosophical position, even fewer explored the premises of enquiry.
associated with this positioning, and others appeared to fall into the trap of methodologism described by Pilgrim (2019; see Chapter 1, section 1). Whilst often used absent of a broader philosophical rationale, a range of methodologies and methods were utilised by the researchers whose work was surveyed. Methodologically, phenomenological approaches were the most favoured ($n = 15$). However, the majority of studies did not specify their methodological positioning ($n = 28$), or simply referred to their research as being ‘qualitative’ ($n = 7$; see Figure 3.5). A large number of studies, particularly – though not exclusively – those that presented a conceptual reading of transformative experiences and did not utilise participants to generate data, did not specify their method. However, the dominant method used by researchers was interviewing of various kinds ($n = 37$; see Figure 3.6).

Figure 3.5

Study methodologies from the included 67 studies
Figure 3.6

0 5 10 15 20 25 30

Methodologies Utilised

- Unspecified
- Qualitative
- Psychobiographical
- Phenomenological
- Naturalistic
- Narrative
- Mixed Method
- Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
- Interpretive
- Heuristic enquiry
- Hermeneutic Phenomenological
- Grounded Theory
- Experimental
- Descriptive Phenomenological
- Autoethnography

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

3.3) Delineating Epiphanic Experience

Collation of the 67 articles yielded many conceptualisations of sudden, positive, and profound change which were grouped into 11 categories: (1) anomalous experience, (2) awakening, (3) awe, (4) epiphany, (5) insight, (6) mystical experience, (7) peak experience, (8) quantum change, (9) sudden personal transformation, (10) transformative experiences, and (11) other unique terminologies. Figure 3.7 below provides a representation of the
weighting of each conceptualisation within the articles reviewed. Whilst these categories may appear independent, 28% of the articles used more than one term within the same paper to describe the same phenomenon. This is interesting in light of the ineffability first attributed to these kinds of experiences by James (1902; Amos, 2016a). However, almost all of the terms used were, to some extent, synonyms of each other. As such, the data from this study demonstrates that, whilst there is scepticism towards these phenomena from within the discipline (Fosha, 2006), many concepts exist within psychology to address change that is sudden, positive, and profound. However, each of the 11 categories listed above demonstrated varying degrees of congruence with the markers of epiphanic experience (see Figure 3.3).

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

**Figure 3.7**

*Terminologies used to describe sudden, positive, and profound change*
3.3.1) The Markers of Epiphanic Experience

Given that the markers of epiphanic experience changed by virtue of the CRist-informed charting process, before addressing the research question each will be briefly operationalised. ‘Brief’ still refers to the notion that epiphanic experiences cannot be sustained for long periods of time, usually less than 24 hours. ‘Abrupt’ is an amalgamation of the terms previously used in the literature ‘sudden’ and ‘surprising’ and is intended to evoke these synonymous concepts. ‘Memorable’ denotes that epiphanic experiences are remembered long after their occurrence. ‘Enduring’ refers to the notion that the changes engendered by an epiphanic experience tend to be permanent. ‘Benevolent’ describes the tendency for epiphanic experiences to, ultimately, be a positive and beneficial force for change. Finally, ‘profound’ represents a ‘deep’, holistic, and often transcendent change in the individual’s internal landscape.
It is worth elaborating on the markers ‘noetic’ and ‘somatic’ given the novelty of this conceptualisation within the literature on epiphanic experience. ‘Noetic’ is a term used to denote activity relating to the mind (or intellect) and is representative of the tendency for epiphanic experiences to involve the emergence of some kind of new object of knowledge or way of knowing. ‘Somatic’ refers to activity pertaining to the body and denotes the tendency for epiphanic experiences to involve changes to physical sensation and perception. The innately embodied aspect of epiphanic experience has previously been noted by Amos (2016), which lends support to establishing this as a core marker of epiphanic experience.

‘Epistemic’ noesis aligns with what the literature has dubbed insightful type epiphanic experience; this kind of noesis is generally experienced as a moment of particularly powerful insight or awareness – it denotes the emergence of a new kind of knowledge or way of knowing, specifically relevant to the life of the individual. ‘Ontic’ noesis aligns with what the literature terms mystical type epiphanic experience; this kind of noesis is often numinous in nature and frequently precedes a change in the individuals’ conceptualisation of the nature of reality. Both these markers (noetic and somatic) reflect the inner nature of epiphanic experiences and together represent a new way of conceptualising the differences in epiphanic experiences previously characterised by the insightful-mystical continuum (see Chapter 2, section 3).

The reason ‘noetic’ and ‘somatic’ were established as separate markers was that the reviewer noticed that epiphanic experience is an embodied, or somatic, experience. Sensitised by Amos’ (2016) work, and Bhaskar’s ontology of personhood which recognises the embodied nature of the self (see Chapter 1, section 2.6), it became evident that, because it had not been recognised in its own right, the pronounced somatic element of epiphanic experience had been tacitly subsumed under the label ‘mystical’. This was considered problematic given that, although somatic changes were more likely to occur in conjunction with ontic noesis.
(previously termed: mystical), this was just a tendency, and not an entirely consistent one at that. Epistemically noetic experiences sometimes included changes to physical sensation and perception, although in a perhaps less rich and pronounced manner than numinous experiences. Because the insightful-mystical continuum does not distinguish between what is noetic and what is somatic, it can lead to the assumption that only experiences on the mystical end of the continuum involve somatic features. Therefore, this new configuration was thought to be able to better accommodate for nuance and represents a novel contribution to the literature.

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

### 3.3.2) Delineating Epiphanic Experience

The data strongly suggests that epiphanic experience can be conceptually and operationally distinguished from other kinds of sudden, positive, and profound change (see Table 3.1 below). Moreover, the categories of epiphany, quantum change, and SPT can all be considered functionally equivalent conceptualisations of epiphanic experience as they each tended to be highly congruent with the markers that were charted in support of extant literature (e.g., Ilivitsky, 2011; McDonald, 2005). However, it is worth noting that the term ‘epiphany’, as an individual term, was more likely to be attributed to experiences without a
numinous component. Further, whilst epiphany, quantum change, and SPT can be considered essentially equivalent categories two unique terms were also used to describe functionally identical experiences: (1) God encounter experience (Griffiths, Hurwitz, Davis, Johnson & Jesse, 2019), and (2) Transformative Positive Experience (Naor & Mayseless, 2020). This suggests that the labelling of these experiences may be less important than the experience itself.

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

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

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

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

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

5. **Mystical experience:** The process of charting illustrated that mystical experiences tend to be brief, ontically noetic, memorable, enduring, benevolent, and profound. This explicitly contradicts the pervading assumption in the literature on epiphanic experience that mystical experiences can be positive, but need not be profound (Ilivitsky, 2011). There was less clarity within the articles as to whether mystical experiences are abrupt and epistemically noetic, though some papers did convey these characteristics (i.e., Galadari, 2019; James, 1902).
6. **Peak experience**: Overall, peak experiences were found to be brief, epistemically noetic, memorable, and benevolent. However, whilst some experiences were profound and ontically noetic, abruptness and enduringness were found to be less critical as features of peak experience.

7. **Transformative experiences**\(^{19}\): There was general consensus that the changes ensuing this category of experience are profound, benevolent, and enduring, and that the experience itself is memorable. However, there was little consensus regarding the other aspects of the transformative experience. Two papers demonstrated congruence with the stipulated markers, one regarding spiritual transformation (Forcehimes, 2004), and another regarding personal transformation that occurred as a result of peak experience (Naor & Mayseless, 2020). However, despite this congruence, other papers that were reviewed on spiritual and personal transformations did not share these characteristics. This may suggest that these labels refer to much broader concepts within which there can occur more variation, or that there is conceptual ambiguity with reference to these terms. In any case, the brevity, abruptness, noetic, and somatic components of epiphanic experience appear less critical to these conceptualisations of transformative experiences.

8. **Other unique terminologies**\(^{20}\): These conceptualisations are unique representations within the literature, therefore making further analysis difficult. However, the majority of these experiences were memorable, benevolent,

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

\(^{20}\) The category of Other Unique Terminologies contained the following terms: (1) corrective experience, (2) emptiness, (3) extraordinary experience, (4) God encounter experience, (5) healing moments, (6) naturally occurring change, (7) personal spiritual experience, (8) profound emotional experience, (9) sacred moments, (10) self-transcendent experience, (11) spiritually transcendent experience, (12) spontaneous recovery, (13) positive self-transition, (14) the unencumbered moment, and (15) pivotal mental states (n = 15 studies).
profound, and many were enduring, abrupt, and noetic. Of the terms used in this
category, only two were congruent with the stipulated markers of epiphanic
experience: God encounter experience (Griffiths, Hurwitz, Davis, Johnson &
Jesse, 2019) and sacred moments (Lomax, Kripal & Pargament, 2011).
Interestingly, analysis of Murray’s (2005) unencumbered moment revealed that
neither brevity nor abruptness were consistent features of this experience. This is
important to note as it was used by Ilivitsky (2011) in her conceptualisation of
sudden personal transformation.

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

The areas of conceptual overlap between epiphanic experience and other categories
can also provide further context for the phenomenon of epiphanic experience. In particular,
the overlap between epiphanic experience and mystical experience, suggested in the literature
(e.g., Ilivitsky, 2011; James, 1902), is supported by this data. Mystical experiences can be
seen to have the tendency to manifest in a very similar manner to epiphanic experiences, but
critically, tend to manifest without a pronounced epistemic component. This may suggest a
continuum of experience on which epiphanic experience and mystical experience coexist.
Further, the fact that epiphanic experiences routinely tend to have an epistemic noetic
component may indicate that the category ‘insight’ also exists on this continuum of
experience. Perhaps then, epiphanic experience can be conceived of as an interface between these two phenomena, embodying varying degrees of both.
Table 3.1

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Sudden, Positive, and Profound Change</th>
<th>Marker of Epiphanic Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anomalous Experience</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awakening</td>
<td>?*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awe</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epiphany</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insight</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystical Experience</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peak Experience</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantum Change</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudden Personal</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* ‘Y’ = ‘yes’; ‘N’ = ‘no’; ‘Y/N’ = ‘both yes and no’; ‘?’ = ‘unclear’; ‘?*’ = no one value attained 60% prevalence. In this table, these response items represent ‘absolute values’ (see section 2.4 above)
4) Conclusion

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

Further, the work contained within this chapter has functioned as an act of underlabouring (Bhaskar, 2017) towards an understanding of the nature of epiphanic experience. This aligns with common conceptualisations of the role of the CRist researcher, which advocate for investigating the intrinsic nature of a phenomenon, before moving towards identification of the underlying generative mechanisms from which the observed reality might have emerged (Bhaskar, 2009; see Chapter 1, section 3). Therefore, it is at this stage that attention turns to the second research question: what are the distinct experiential features of epiphanic experience? Exploration of this question will enable the provision of a more...
intensive account and understanding of the nature of epiphanic experience, which, in turn, will facilitate subsequent explorations into the generative mechanisms underpinning epiphanic experience.
Chapter 4: A Thematic Synthesis of Epiphanic Experience

1) Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an answer to the second research question: what are the distinct experiential features of epiphanic experience? Although there exist content (McDonald, 2005) and concept (Chilton, 2015) analyses of epiphanic experience these are methodologically opaque and outdated given that several studies have been conducted since 2015. Therefore, the contents of this chapter are important, not just as a continued act of under-labouring, but also in explicitly developing as rich an understanding as possible of the domain of the Empirical (see Chapter 1, section 2.5). This intensive account of the nature of epiphanic experience is considered facilitative of any subsequent aims to explore the generative mechanisms underpinning epiphanic experience – which this research seeks to do (Bhaskar, 2009). Therefore, it was deemed important to conduct a synthesis of epiphanic experiences that: (1) included the full scope of the current literature, (2) was presented in a manner that allowed the end-user to clearly see how the researcher arrived at their conclusions, and (3) facilitated the exploration of generative mechanisms that will be detailed in Chapter 5.

Approaches to syntheses of qualitative research are varied and include, for example, critical interpretive synthesis, grounded theory synthesis, meta-study, meta-ethnography, and thematic synthesis (Tong, Flemming, McInnes, Oliver & Craig, 2012). The approach that was adopted for this study was thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008). The rationale for this decision was based on the philosophical positioning of thematic synthesis, which is congruent with CR as it acknowledges that knowledge of reality is mediated by one’s personal perspectives, as well as their socio-political, historical, cultural, and linguistic context (Tong, et al., 2012). Further, thematic synthesis can be considered an appropriate
method from a CRist perspective as it favours intensive qualitative methods for investigating social phenomena (Bhaskar, 2009). The practicalities of thematic synthesis will be explored in the Method section below.

2) Method

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

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

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

epiphan* OR "quantum chang*" OR "mystical experience*" OR personal ADJ3 transform* OR "sudden personal transformation*" OR sudden ADJ3 change* OR unexpect* ADJ3 change* OR last* ADJ3 change* or spontaneous ADJ3 change* OR discont* ADJ3 change* OR ineffab* ADJ3 change* OR mystical ADJ3 change* OR unusual ADJ3 change* OR abrupt ADJ3 change* OR rapid* ADJ3 change* OR acute ADJ3 change* OR transform* ADJ3 change* OR nonlinear ADJ3 change* OR non-linear ADJ3 change* OR brief ADJ3 change* OR positive ADJ3 change* OR profound ADJ3 change *
Additionally, search items were restricted to those written in the English language, and no limitations were placed on the year of publication.

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

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

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

In order to appraise the quality of the included studies the ‘Qualitative Assessment and Review Instrument’ (QARI; Joanna Briggs Institute, 2003) was used. The QARI asks questions which require the reviewer to judge the congruency of various aspects of the research (McInnes & Wimpenny, 2008), and has been found to be a coherent tool, sensitive to aspects of validity (Hannes, Lockwood & Pearson, 2010). The 10-item QARI checklist was selected, rather than other existing tools such as CASP or COREQ (Mays and Pope, 2000), because it emphasises the overarching role of philosophy, and the importance of congruency at each level of the research process (McInnes & Wimpenny, 2008; Spencer, Ritchie, Lewis, & Dillon, 2003). Therefore, using a measure of quality that placed emphasis on philosophy as its primary focus was considered the most CR-congruent act as CRist thought considers empirical social science and philosophy to be fundamentally intertwined constructs (Bhaskar, 1979).
Table 4.1 below presents the QARI items. Each item on the instrument requires rating as either ‘yes’, ‘no’, or ‘unclear’. All included texts were evaluated according to this framework, and the decision was made to exclude any study that did not align with the ten QARI items, with the exclusion of items 6 and 7. These two items were considered ‘non-essential’ as their inclusion was considered to be reflective of the researcher’s personal philosophical positioning. Comprehensiveness of reporting was relatively consistent across studies with between eight and ten of the criteria being reported for each of the included studies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QARI Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. There is congruity between the stated philosophical perspective and the research methodology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. There is congruity between the research methodology and the research question or objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. There is congruity between the research methodology and the methods used to collect data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. There is congruity between the research methodology and the representation and analysis of data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. There is congruity between the research methodology and the interpretation of results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. There is a statement locating the researcher culturally or theoretically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The influence of the researcher on the research and vice versa is addressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Participants, and their voices, are adequately represented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The research is ethical according to current criteria or, for recent studies, there is evidence of ethical approval by an appropriate body.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10. Conclusions drawn in the research report do appear to flow from the analysis or interpretation of the data.

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2.3) Data Extraction

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

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

3216 Figure 4.1

Search Process and Results
### Table 4.2

**Characteristics of included studies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
<th>Research Question/Aim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amos</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>People who had experienced a self-identified Sudden Personal Transformation</td>
<td>6 (4 male, 2 female)</td>
<td>Unstructured interviews</td>
<td>IPA</td>
<td>“Research Question One: How do individuals make sense of their SPT experiences? Research Question Two: How does a SPT impact the lives of those who have experienced them? Research Question Three: How can qualitative research facilitate the expression of lived experience which is considered as ‘more than words can say’?” (p. 20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ilivitsky</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>People who had experienced a self-identified Sudden Personal Transformation</td>
<td>3 (1 male, 2 female)</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>Thematic Analysis</td>
<td>“What are the self-reported facilitative factors and causal mechanisms for individuals who have experienced a Sudden Personal Transformation?” (p. 55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jarvis</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>People who had experienced a self-identified epiphany</td>
<td>5 (all male)</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>Un-formalised coding method</td>
<td>“To explore the nature of the epiphanic experience” (p. v)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDonald</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>People who had experienced a self-identified epiphany</td>
<td>5 (1 male, 4 female)</td>
<td>In-depth life-story interviews</td>
<td>Narrative analysis</td>
<td>“To understand experience termed epiphanies from an existential philosophical and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Approach</td>
<td>Key Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>McGovern 2021 Ireland</td>
<td>Psychotherapists who had experienced an epiphany</td>
<td>8 (2 male, 6 female)</td>
<td>Autoethnography, interviews, and written accounts</td>
<td>Hermeneutic phenomenological</td>
<td>“To explore experienced psychotherapists lived experience of an epiphanic experience that presents as a sudden moment of self-awareness” (p. 46)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miller and C’de Baca 2001 USA</td>
<td>People who had experienced a self-identified Quantum Change</td>
<td>55 (24 male, 31 female)</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Unclear</td>
<td>An open exploration into the phenomenon of quantum change (assumed as not stated by authors)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naor and Mayseless 2020 Israel</td>
<td>People who identified as having had quick positive transformation, taking place in nature</td>
<td>15 (5 male, 10 female)</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Phenomenological analysis</td>
<td>“Research Question 1: How has peak experience in nature led to rapid personal transformation from the perspective of those undergoing that experience? Research Question 2: How was nature implicated in this process?” (p. 871)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skalski and Hardy 2013 USA</td>
<td>People who identified as having had a sudden, transformative experience</td>
<td>14 (7 male, 7 female)</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>A modified grounded theory method that incorporated team consensus</td>
<td>“To capture idiographic, intra-individual, and discontinuous transformation and new consciousness using qualitative research methods.” (p. 165)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
QSR International’s NVivo 12 software was used to code, store, and search the data. However, whilst the issue of what ‘counts’ as data is simple to answer when synthesising quantitative data, it is considerably less simple when qualitative data is the focus of attention as participant data and researcher interpretation often becomes intertwined (Campbell et al., 2003; Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002; Sandelowski, 2004; Thomas & Harden, 2008). The current study followed the example set by the originators of thematic synthesis and included any data subsumed under the labels of ‘results’ or ‘findings’ (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

However, given that some of the research reviewed was in the form of (unpublished) doctoral theses, what constituted as ‘results’ or ‘findings’ differed on a case-by-case basis. Table 4.3 details the chapters/sections that were analysed from each piece of research. It should be noted that whilst Amos (2016a) and McDonald’s (2005) doctoral theses were analysed, both published elements of their theses. However, these individual studies were not included as they contained heavily abridged versions of their doctoral work and as such, their theses were viewed as more complete sources of data.

### Table 4.3

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

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

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

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

2. Stage two involved organisation of the codes into descriptive themes. During this stage, similarities and differences between codes were searched for to group them into
meaningful hierarchies. These groups were assigned new descriptive codes that captured
the meaning of the codes within the group.

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

The subjective nature of this stage of analysis has sometimes raised controversies
(Thomas & Harden, 2008). However, there are perhaps two responses to this
methodological concern. First, the CRist presuppositions about the world advocate for
epistemological relativism and the open nature of social systems (see Chapter 1, section
2.3 and 2.4, respectively), which means that the notion of attaining objectivity appears
specious\(^{21}\). Second, the inherent subjectivity of research in the social sciences was
managed, and supplemented, by continuous reflexivity, particularly through engagement
with communicative reflexivity (largely in the form of critical discussions with the
primary supervisor of this thesis; Smith & McGannon, 2018) and autonomous reflexivity
(Archer, 2003).

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\(^{21}\) Critical Realism rejects both the positivistic assumption that researchers can be entirely objective and value-neutral, and the social constructionist assumption that because researchers cannot be entirely objective and value-neutral, they should capitulate any attempts to attain objectivity. Instead, CR defines objectivity as being true to the object of enquiry (Pilgrim, 2019; Patel & Pilgrim, 2018). In order to be objective, from a CRist standpoint, one should begin with the ontological focus (which for psychologists, broadly speaking, is human behaviour and interiority) and then find ways to take seriously the complex range of foci (e.g., as exemplified by the four planar social being) that might interact with the phenomenon under investigation.
An important additional analytical step incumbent to a CRist approach is the identification of demi-regularities (tendencies for certain patterns in empirical data – see Chapter 1, section 3.3). Given that eight studies were included a demi-regularity was considered ‘strong’ if supported by five or more studies, and ‘very strong’ if it was supported by seven or more studies. However, there are no prescriptive frameworks in the literature to guide what should be considered a demi-regularity. Therefore, these demarcations were set by the researcher in order to ensure a stringent framework that would identify only the strongest tendencies within the data set. Only themes that meet the requirements of a ‘strong’ demi-regularity are discussed in detail.

3) Discussion of Results

Three higher order themes became evident from analysis of the data: (1) disintegration, (2) new consciousness, and (3) integration. Chronologically, each of these higher order themes relate to the time before, during, and after the epiphanic experience, respectively. The rationale behind each of these labels will be detailed below under their respective subheadings. However, it should be noted that this formulation was first proposed by Skalski and Hardy (2013) and was again found to be most appropriate when engaging in analytical coding as these labels are evocative of the overall tone and content of each category. This section will be presented as follows: each higher order theme will be addressed, and, as this study is underpinned by CR, the lower order themes, and sub-themes, that constitute demi-regularities in the data will be critically discussed.

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

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

<table>
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<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disintegration</td>
<td>Material Transactions with Nature</td>
<td>Connection with the Natural World</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Formalised Activity</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Synchronicity</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Interactions Between People</td>
<td>Disintegrative andDisconnected Relationships</td>
<td>Fulfilling and Connected Relationships</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Structures Sui Generis</td>
<td>Cultural Taboos as Harmful</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious Structures</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leaving Structures Behind</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Embodied Personality</td>
<td>The Ego and its Defence Mechanisms</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Embodied Personality in Turmoil</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disconnected from The Transcendentally Real Self</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Life Experience</td>
<td>Abandonment</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Abuse</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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3.1.1) Material Transactions with Nature

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

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

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

Further, in the time directly preceding their epiphanic experience, participants often engaged in some kind of formalised activity. Meditative activity, in particular, was found to be commonly engaged with by participants prior to epiphanic experience. One of Miller and C’de Baca’s (2001) participants provides a particularly clear example of this kind of meditative formalised activity:
There was a meal before noon, which was the only main food we had each day. After
the meal there was a rest period, and then more teachings and questions and answers
in the afternoon, then tea and usually two to three more hours of meditation in the
evening. All this was done in silence for thirty days (p.66).

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

3.1.2) Social Interactions Between People

Many participants were connected to, and had fulfilling relationships with, others.
Most commonly, these significant interpersonal connections were found between the
participant and people they were not related to, as many had destructive and dysfunctional
relationships with their parents and families. For Jason (Ilivitsky, 2011), having support from
his friends was critical as:
Without having that kind of support, without at least just knowing that it was there, I may have, you know, verged over into some real despair… I think, you know, it could have been I may not have – yeah, without having that love in my life I don’t know if I would have been able to approach it in the way that I did (p.67).

Therefore, the other people present in the lives of the participants can be viewed as shaping, and in some cases facilitating, their epiphanic experiences – therefore supporting Ilivitsky (2011) and Miller and C’de Baca’s (2001) conclusions. Despite this, participants generally told stories that emphasised the disconnected and disintegrative nature of their relationships. Tensions within the family unit were common: “My daughter was breaking up her marriage. I thought my son was going crazy, and my husband was drinking. My whole world was falling apart, and I felt that I had nothing to hold on to”, recounted a participant of Miller and C’de Baca (2001, p.25). Further, some participants also spoke of their social isolation and disconnection from others, such as Cathy (McDonald, 2005), who experienced postnatal depression, and reflected that “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” (p.163). Therefore, whilst relationships with others were found to shape epiphanic experiences, a lack of relationships, or difficult relationships, contributing to an overall sense of disconnection, can be viewed as facilitative of destabilisation and therefore contributing to the disintegration of the individual.

3.1.3) Social Structures Sui Generis
Perhaps the most influential structure implicated by the data is that of Religion.

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

3.1.4) The Stratification of the Embodied Personality

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

3.1.4.1) The Ego and its Defence Mechanisms.

The data revealed that participants’ sense of self was generally steeped in negative associations. Participants described lacking confidence and engaging with self-criticism, self-doubt, and self-blame, as well as generally disliking themselves. “I had a lack of confidence,
a really poor self-image” reported one of Miller and C’de Baca’s (2001, p.57) participants. Despite this, many participants described a sense of growing awareness, such as Cathy (McDonald, 2005) who 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” (p.176). Skalski and Hardy (2013) describe this growing awareness as participants having “some understanding [of a tacit, unexpressed consciousness] prior to their experience; it was as if someone whispered to them about a world beyond the trees” (p.171). This is redolent of Baumeister’s (1994) crystallisation of discontent, a theory proposed by Miller and C’de Baca (2001) as having causal explanatory power, whereby the individual begins making connections between the negative aspects of their lives. However, whilst there appears to be evidence for participants forming associative connections between negative features in their lives, there is insufficient evidence to firmly support crystallisation as the cause of the transformative experience itself.

3.1.4.2) The Embodied Personality in Turmoil.

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

The sense of depletion conveyed by participants may also be reflected in their affective states, which were largely characterised by high arousal (Liu et al., 2018; Russell,
negative valence (in particular, sadness and anger), and disconnection. The elevated arousal levels associated with the emotions experienced by participants may provide context for the sense of depletion they felt, as higher levels of arousal would consume more energy (Campbell et al., 2021). Alongside sadness and anger, emotions related to disgust were also referred to by participants who reported feelings of shame, remorse, and feelings of wrongness, such as Michelle (McDonald, 2005), who “believed that she was too awful a person to reveal to the outside world” (p.191). Affective disconnection was evident in participant descriptions of alienation, isolation, and loneliness, as noted by Peter (McDonald, 2005): “a deep sleep, an emotional hibernation. In a sense I had become alienated from myself, everyone, and everything around me” (p.129). Concurrently, participants described feelings of ‘not caring’ that ranged from probable anhedonia to general reduced interest in things, that are encapsulated most simply and clearly by Robert (Skalski & Hardy, 2013): “I didn’t really care” (p.173). In this way, disintegration characteristic of the participants' lives can be seen to have manifested itself throughout the embodied personality.

3.1.4.3) Disconnected from The Transcendentally Real Self.

Several participants described being disconnected from a deeper (or higher) sense of self. Lichtenstein (Jarvis, 1997) explained that “inside I was very disconnected from what I was feeling and who I was…It is hard to describe exactly because on the outside everything looked so, so perfect. But I was so disconnected with what was inside” (p.117 & 164). For some participants, this was attributed to their sense of self being obscured by a particular burden, or activity from the ego, such as Lital (Naor & Mayseless, 2020): “My whole life I carry the burden of being a second-generation Holocaust survivor, the whole identity is so heavy that I don’t really know who I am”. For other participants this was attributed to their
running “away from ‘me’ but ‘me’ was with me all the time… I didn’t have to look at myself, just a journey ahead and another adventure to be had, new people, better maybe?” (Janet; McDonald, 2005; p.192).

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

3.1.5) Negative Life Experience

Almost all participants discussed negative life experiences of some kind, be that:

abandonment, abuse, death, illness (physical or mental), or significant personal challenges. However, participants most commonly referred to the impact of illness and personal challenges. Physical illness was noted by some participants. However, instances of mental illness were more commonly referred to, such as depression. This is clearly represented by a participant of Miller and C’de Baca (2001): “I just felt like there was no reason to live” (p.103). Personal challenges were also prevalent and varied in nature. Participants had to navigate issues pertaining to their families, finances, occupation, and education. Others had problems with the law that ended in arrest or incarceration. Participants frequently explicitly or indirectly alluded to their lives being a struggle, such as Bill (Amos, 2016):
I like imagery, and the image that is in my mind is of this deep-sea diver trudging through the weeds, and the murk at the bottom of the ocean, in the darkness. That’s what life’s like: it’s just a struggle, it’s such an effort to place one foot in front of the other, nothing seems to work, everything is going against me… (p.114).

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

3.1.6) Uncertainty

Another defining feature of participants’ lives before their epiphanic experience was uncertainty. Whilst ‘uncertainty’ as a distinct term was rarely explicitly referred to by participants (or researchers) it permeated their accounts. For example, uncertainty was evident in participants’ language whereby they demonstrated hesitancy and frequent checking for understanding and acceptability when discussing their experience (Tree & Schrock, 2002). They also openly made statements such as “I don’t know” or “Who knows?”. Jason (Ilivitsky, 2011) epitomised the state of uncertainty that was identifiable in almost all participant accounts: “there was a large part of what I was doing, which was just like, ‘I just don’t – I don’t know,’ you know? It was like, ‘I just really, really don’t have the…tools. Like, I just really am at a loss” (p.64).
Whilst uncertainty was implicitly present throughout the data set, turmoil, characterised here as “a state of extreme confusion, uncertainty or lack of order” (Cambridge University Press, n.d.), was explicitly referred to. Turmoil is a facet of epiphanic experience that has been established in the literature and was again found to be of importance in this study. However, critically, in this study turmoil is recognised as a corollary of uncertainty. Anderson (Jarvis, 1997) “recalled the time of his life prior to the experience as one of great personal turmoil” (p.127). Indeed, turmoil was evident right up until the point of epiphany for some participants, such as Hadar (Naor & Mayseless, 2020): “I felt so tired and the rocks looked so big and I had this inner conflict because I really didn’t want to climb, but I told everybody I would” (p.876).

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

Furthermore, uncertainty can be seen to impact, and be impacted by, other lower order themes. Negative life experience can generate uncertainty, as trauma acts as an aversive event that undermines assumptions the individual has made about the world around them (Janoff-Bulman, 1992), therefore boosting uncertainty. By extension, the participants' challenging experiences detailed in the lower order themes above may have further undermined their
world and self-related assumptions therefore exacerbating uncertainty. This represents a novel finding, as existing literature has not explicitly identified uncertainty as a significant experiential feature of epiphanic experience.

3.2) New Consciousness

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

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

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

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3.2.1) The Embodied Personality

An altered cognitive state (conceptualised as a noticeable change to the individuals’ usual experience of their cognitive processes) during the moment of epiphany was ubiquitous across each of the included studies. For example, Lichtenstein (Jarvis, 1997) stated that “I recall the experience at the level of atoms. Like into the space in between the atoms is where the space of my spirit was able to travel ... that's the space that I climbed into” (p.119).

Indeed, there was a wide variety of altered states\textsuperscript{22} described by participants, such as: absorption, non-duality (defined as “those states of being and consciousness in which the sense of separate individuality and autonomy has been metabolized or dissolved into the flow of experience”; Davis, 1998, p.9), and some participants’ epiphanic experiences were the result of a meaningful dream. Another cognitive feature of epiphanic experience was described by participants as a sense of letting go and relinquishing control of various structures. Kevin (Skalski & Hardy, 2013) explained that: “I was almost just compelled to let go [of his understanding of self and world], to let it go… Because if I didn’t, if I held on to that, it’s just going to destroy me” (p.168).

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

\textsuperscript{22} Consciousness is defined by Garcia-Romeu and Tart (2013) as “the subjective awareness and experience of internal and external phenomena” (p.123), whilst references to states of consciousness signify “the spectrum of ways in which experience may be organised” (p.123). Altered states of consciousness are therefore deviations from a “baseline state of consciousness” (Tart, 1975, p.5), where the baseline refers to the discrete state of normal waking consciousness.
experienced forms of high arousal happiness, such as ecstasy. One of Miller and C’dé Baca’s (2001) participants described that:

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

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

Altered sensorial states were referred to in all of the included studies, and constituted the strongest sub-theme subsumed under ‘the embodied personality’. Some participants experienced altered visual experiences, such as Arthur (Jarvis, 1997) who “had a vision of Christ on the cross” (p.85), or one of Miller and C’dé Baca’s participants who recounted that “It was as if there were light in the room…It was like the light was coming out from me” (p.90). Auditory experiences were very common; some attributed the voice to their higher power and others did not make attributions. One of Miller and C’dé Baca’s (2001) participants described that: “A voice came into my mind and said, “Everything will be all
right; I am here to protect you, and I will be with you always’” (p. 78). Although hearing voices is a common symptom of psychosis (i.e., auditory hallucinations; Johns et al., 2014; Ohayon, 2000), it must be stressed that none of the participants pathologised their auditory experiences.

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

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

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23 Metaphor is recognised as an important linguistic tool that allows people to “consolidate and extend ideas about themselves, their relationships, and their knowledge of the world” (Smith & Sparkes, 2004, p. 613).
3615 embodied perspective wherein she conceptualised the lived body as an essential source of
3616 understanding in the context of epiphanic experience. This is a notion that in many ways
3617 contradicts the dominant discourses in psychology that focus on the mind as the source of self
3618 and knowledge (Caldwell, 2018).

3619

3620 **3.2.2) The Transcendentally Real Self**

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

3626 The structure for noesis established in Chapter 3 (section 2.4) held firm, as data from
3627 this study revealed that this noetic quality manifested on a continuum from epistemic noesis
3628 about a particular issue, to a numinous sense of ontic noesis. Epistemic noesis was more
3629 common within the data set and can be represented by examples such as Elisabeth’s (Amos,
3630 2016a) realisation “that one of the major reasons for staying in her marriage was the fear that
3631 if she left, she might never have a baby” (p.65), or Janet’s (McDonald, 2005) “profound
3632 realisation – it was herself that she had been trying to escape from all this time” (p.154).
3633 Ontic noesis was less specific and carried with it more existential implications which could
3634 be operationalised religiously or non-religiously. Examples of a religious sense of numinosity
3635 is evident in the following quotations: “I became so aware again that God is all around
3636 us…God is *us* – God is outside of us and inside of us and through us” (Miller & C’dé Baca,
3637 p.95), and “I just found myself speaking with God” (Patrick, Amos, 2016b, p.114). Examples
3638 of non-religious numinosity include Lichtenstein (Jarvis, 1997), who realised that “I am here
to be of service to something greater than myself” (p.125), and Fuller (Jarvis, 1997) that “You do not belong to you, you belong to the universe” (p.111). Therefore, it becomes evident that, at least in the domain of the Empirical, a significant experiential feature of epiphanic experience is the emergence of noesis from an aspect of the self that possesses a sense of authority and distance from the participants’ sense of self (i.e., ego).

3.3) Integration

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

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

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3.3.1) Social Interactions Between People

A new sense of connection emerged for participants with regards to interpersonal relationships. Skalski and Hardy (2013) found that “Overall, participants were more connected with their spouses, family, and friends after their experience” (p.173), and this was indeed reflected in the current synthesis. Participants described forging new connections with family, friends, and romantic partners, and in other instances described cutting these ties. In many cases, this connectedness to others manifested as a desire to serve others, such as Patrick (Amos, 2016), who found that “every single day, I felt compelled to help others” (p.109). Likewise, “Fuller launched what he called his fifty-six-year experiment of "guinea-pig B," the "B" for Bucky [his name], in which "an average healthy human being" resolved to become a problem solver "on behalf of all humanity”” (Jarvis, 1997, p.111). Indeed, participants became fundamentally more altruistic, and compelled to connect with those around them. This is clearly demonstrated by Michelle (McDonald, 2005) who stated that: “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” (p.183). It is therefore evident that epiphanic experiences profoundly impact how people engage with the dimension of social interactions between people (Bhaskar, 2020), whereby participants consciously shaped this dimension for themselves to reflect their new state of being.

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

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

3.3.3) The Stratification of the Embodied Personality

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

3.3.3.1) The Ego as Changed.

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

Please note that CR strongly criticises the Big Five model of personality for its reductionistic approach to personhood, as well as its history being mired in the political ideology of eugenics (Pilgrim, 2019). Therefore, it is important to carefully operationalise the conditions under which this model is used in this chapter: as the dominant model of personality in modern psychology, the language of the Big Five model of personality is used as an accessible way of describing tendencies in the transitive aspect of reality. Under no circumstances does use of this language allude to the notion that these terms describe anything from the intransitive aspect of reality (see Chapter 1, section 2.2). Further, as will be discussed below, Openness can be thought of as associated – but not necessarily synonymous – with the Jungian-based Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI: Myers & McCaulley, 1985) Intuitive and Feeling types.
What is important to note is that there was no observable trend in the data that suggested Openness was common amongst participants prior to their epiphanic experience. This challenges some of the arguments made by Miller and C’dé Baca (2001) on the subject of personality and epiphanic experience. Miller and C’dé Baca (2001) postulated that people who have epiphanic experiences are people with characteristics that align with the Jungian-based Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI; Myers & McCaulley, 1985) sensing-intuitive dimension, as their study found that intuitive (N) and feeling (F) types were overrepresented in their sample. It is worth noting that N and F MBTI-types correlate with the Big Five personality traits of Openness and Agreeableness (Furnham, 1996; McCrae & Costa, 1992, 1997). However, whilst the current study found agreeableness to be a common trait amongst participants, only one reference was found to language that clearly implicated the presence of Openness prior to epiphanic experience. Perhaps this is due to Miller and C’dé Baca (2001) administering personality tests to their participants after their experiences, therefore making it difficult, if not impossible, to accurately measure personality preceding the experience.

Further, given that the research demonstrates that mystical experiences, which can be similar to epiphanic experiences (see Chapter 3), can produce lasting changes in Openness (MacLean, Johnson & Griffiths, 2011), this strongly suggests that Miller and C’dé Baca (2001) were not necessarily measuring what they thought they were measuring.

### 3.3.3.2) Release and The New Embodied Personality.

All participants described the emergence of a new awareness that appears to be an extension of the noesis that occurred during the experience itself. In particular, participants described a transformation of their view of themselves, others, and the world. For example, a participant of Miller and C’dé Baca (2001) stated that “I experienced just a complete
transformation of my understanding… my view of the world, my whole outlook on life”
(p.52). Similarly, Kevin (Skalski & Hardy, 2013) reflected that:

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

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

Participants also described a sensorial sense of release that stands as a direct contrast
to the depletion (and sometimes tension) that typified sensorial states prior to epiphanic
experience. This sense of release was experienced by participants as a sense of freedom,
liberation, lightness. Patrick described feeling “so much lighter” (p.114), whilst Hadar (Naor
& Mayseless, 2002) explained: “That moment was one of the most liberating moments in my
life, I could choose to let go of all my stories, I could be naked, no family, no degree”
(p.878). Similarly, Arthur (Jarvis, 1997) described this sense as: “there's some inner part of
your being that needs to sing and can now sing and can now be free. Can now dance. Can
now express itself” (p.154). Therefore, the participants can be viewed as describing a sense of release from a previous state of being, and whatever burden they had been carrying they felt physically relieved of following their experience. This lends further weight to the notion that epiphanic experiences can be highly embodied, somatic events.

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

3.3.3.3) The Transcendentally Real Self as Restored.

Whilst disconnection (to meaning and purpose, as well as a higher sense of self) was a common theme prior to epiphanic experience this was not the case subsequent to the experience. Instead, many participants found that, as a consequence of their epiphanic experience, a sense of purpose became illuminated as part of a new sense of connection to a higher sense of self. For example, Michelle (Skalski & Hardy, 2013) explained: “It was just
kind of like a light bulb, that’s what I’m supposed to do” (p.172). For Lital (Naor &
Mayseless, 2020), this connection to meaning and purpose displayed itself when:

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

This illumination of meaning and purpose was critical for participants such as Peter
(McDonald, 2005) who stated that: “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” (p.194). In this way, epiphanic experience can facilitate a sense of
connection to the self, not simply through noesis and the revelation of something that was
previously unknown, but in many instances also through a sense of meaningful purpose.

3.3.4) Disintegrative Responses

It is important to note that not everyone who had an epiphanic experience was able to
accommodate and integrate it. For a small number of participants (n = 4) the experience was
not viewed as positive for some time after the event, although it was eventually integrated in
a helpful way. The two sub-themes of ‘uncertainty’ and ‘disconnection’ are perhaps best seen
in the case of Lichtenstein (Jarvis, 1997) who felt that his experience had led him to being
“free. Too free it turned out’” (p.120):
I was very high then very low. For about six weeks afterward I was in a tizzy… The after-effects looked like a psychotic break, but it's, call it what you will. I mean to me, today looking back, psychic spiral-out, spiritual emergency is definitely what I'd call it. They didn't have the term then. So suddenly I was free-falling in psychological space without any sense of who I was (p.169).

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

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

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

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

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

This was an unconscious change. Like, I didn’t have a choice… It just happened… I just felt that way. The words came, the feeling was there, boom!... Like there was no pre-contemplation, there was no contemplation there was just – there’s nothing in action because I didn’t act. I didn’t do anything. I walked down the street and it was like, ‘ah, I’m free. I’m free’ (p.71).
Participants also made various postulations regarding the cause of this unconscious process. For example, Langton (Jarvis, 1997) believed that it may have been due to “a different brain state maybe?” (p.96) in which his “brain became malleable and I found I could reconfigure my assumptions” (p.101). Rachel (Ilivitsky, 2011) believed her epiphanic experience to have emanated from a deep, inner, wisdom: “It came from inside of me, but there’s lots of parts of me… from deep inside that really got it. Like part of me that just – balls to bones is how I think of it. Like a really ‘hard wisdom’ is a phrase I would use” (p.71). Arthur (Jarvis, 1997) thought that epiphanic experiences were experienced by particular people: “people who can look at some form of reality and find that the template they're using to structure that reality doesn't work for them” (p.178). A participant of Miller and C’de Baca (2001) asserted that: “What really happened is that the lowered tension level allowed my conscious and unconscious to become totally integrated” (p.111). Therefore, whilst epiphanic experiences were generally conceived of as manifesting due to unconscious processes, there was huge variability with regards to the precise mechanism through which this was thought to have occurred. Consequently, this research makes an original contribution by synthesising the range of ways individuals attempted to make sense of their epiphanic experiences.

Another theme to emerge from the data was ‘sensemaking as a process’. The time after their epiphanic experience was frequently conceived of by participants as “the integrating period” (Lichtenstein; Jarvis, 1997, p.124). The amount of time this process of integration took varied greatly from participant to participant. For example, Fuller (Jarvis, 1997) “went into hibernation for two whole years. Hardly spoke a word, only as necessary to Anne [his wife], because what had happened to him was so monumental and he needed quiet time to think and gather himself” (p.144). In fact, some participants described “still trying to make sense of it” (James; Amos, 2016a, p.88).
The process of sensemaking invariably involved the need to find language that allowed for communication of the experience. However, Amos (2016a) noted that “Part of the process of sense-making appeared to be an acceptance of this impossibility to completely and precisely capture the nature of an SPT in all its complexity and wonder” (p.111). Therefore, the ineffability that permeated the experience itself is again visible. Some participants engaged with this issue by declaring, as noted by Jarvis on the subject of Fuller: “a moratorium on words. He would not speak to anyone nor allow anyone to speak to him until he was sure what words he wanted to use” (p.167). Others used metaphorical or religious language to convey the nature of their experiences, such as one of Miller and C’de Baca’s (2001) participants who noted that: “I guess I’ve just had the kind of experience that Saul must have had on the road to Damascus. That’s the closest experience that I can relate this to” (p.94). This tendency to use religious language has been noted in the literature (Amos, 2016; Ilivitsky, 2011; Jarvis, 1997; McDonald, 2005; Miller & C’dé Baca, 2001).

Therefore, it becomes evident that the interpretations the participants assigned to their experiences were often internal and symbolic.

4) Conclusion

The aim of this study was to synthesise the literature on epiphanic experience in order to answer the second research question: what are the distinct experiential features of epiphanic experience? The CRist theories of the four planar social being, as well as the ontology of personhood (Bhaskar, 2020) were found to be very useful in facilitating a thorough exploration of this question. Whilst many themes emerged from this synthesis, through the implementation of CR-informed processes, certain tendencies, that manifested within the domain of the Empirical were able to emerge. The time before an epiphanic
experience was found to be characterised by an overall sense of disintegration which permeated each of the four planes of social being (Bhaskar, 2020). The embodied personality, in particular, was found to be ‘out of sync’ with the transcendentally real self (Bhaskar, 2020) whereby participants regularly used language to describe their embodied personality as being in a state of turmoil, and their transcendentally real self as something from which they had become disconnected. This is problematic as it results in disintegration of the individual's mental state (Bhaskar, 2020). Moreover, the presence of both negative life experience and uncertainty prior to epiphanic experience was universal and impacted each of the four planes of social being.

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

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

After breaking down (the disintegrative phase), and experiencing a new consciousness, the task then turns to integration. Integration is critical, as examples from the theme ‘disintegrative responses’ demonstrates (whilst only four studies supported this demi-
regularity, analysis of atypical cases can be equally illuminating when seeking a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon; Tuckett, 2005). The experience of new consciousness was found to reveal to the individual a different way of being that, ultimately, helped them to better navigate their personal circumstances and contexts. This tended to lead to a greater sense of connection to the self and things found by the individual to be meaningful.

The thematic synthesis presented in this chapter, combined with the scoping review presented in Chapter 3, allows for the conceptual unification of experiences related to the range of concepts subsumed under the term ‘epiphanic experience’ (e.g., quantum change, epiphany, sudden personal transformation, personal transformation). Moreover, a rich and intensive account of the nature of epiphanic experience in the domain of the Empirical has now been presented which is based on rigorous philosophical and methodological rationale. This undertaking has been important, not only as a self-contained act in service of answering a research question, or as part of under-labouring (Bhaskar, 2017), but also as part of a broader process. CR advocates for the use of intensive qualitative research in order to better abstract potential underlying generative mechanisms (Bhaskar, 2009; Roberts, 2014; Zachariadis, Scott & Barrett, 2013). Additionally, CR supports the use of flexible deductive coding (Fletcher, 2017). Therefore, the results from this study were carried into the next study and used as the framework of deductive codes for engagement with the CRist analysis undertaken in the subsequent chapter (Bhaskar, 1975, 1989; Danermark, Ekström, & Karlsson, 2019). In this way, the process of synthesising the extant literature on epiphanic experience was a critical step towards better understanding the nature of epiphanic experience, as well as a key link to being able to answer deeper questions of causality as part of the CRist research process.
Chapter 5: A Critical Realist Exploration of Epiphanic Experience

1) Introduction

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

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

The contents of this chapter will proceed as follows. First, the method will be detailed in order to provide a clear account of the process of CR-informed research. Second, the participants will be introduced to the reader in line with the CRist view of each individual as a concrete singularity (Bhaskar, 2020). Finally, the discussion of results will consider the demi-regularities that emerged from the data, and explore the generative mechanisms implicated by engagement with the data through CR-informed analysis.

2) Method

2.1) Participants

Purposive sampling, the act of deliberately selecting participants based on the qualities they possess, was used to recruit participants (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). This was a useful method as participants with specific knowledge or experience with regards to a particular phenomenon were required (Palinkas et al., 2015). Practitioner psychologists were considered experts who possessed valuable insight into epiphanic experience due to their work centring around the creation of change in others. Moreover, due to the nature of their profession, practitioner psychologists were thought to possess the language and psychological understanding that would enable them to convey their experience in psychological terms (albeit in a manner shaped by their own beliefs and philosophical positioning). This participant group is considerably different from most used in epiphanic
experience research (e.g., Amos, 2016a; Ilivitsky, 2011; Miller & C’de Baca), though McGovern (2021) also explored this topic using a sample of psychotherapists. Participants were purposively sampled on the basis of several selection criteria, in part determined by previous studies of epiphanic experience (Amos, 2016; Ilivitsky, 2011), as well as the unique factors relevant to this study:

1. Using the guidance of existing literature (e.g., Amos, 2016a; Ilivitsky, 2011), participants were required to: believe that their experience deeply changed them and describe the effect it had on them as benevolent.

2. Further, the experience should have been relatively brief (less than a week), enduring, memorable, and have occurred more than a year ago. Participants were selected on the basis that their experience occurred one or more years ago to ensure that the change had been enduring (Ilivitsky, 2011).

3. The experience should have been perceived by friends and family as benevolent, have not occurred as a direct result of a positive external event, and was not the direct result of purposeful influence by leader of a group. This final criterion was to ensure that any cult-like conversions were not included (Amos, 2016; Ilivitsky, 2011). As detailed by researchers such as Siegelman and Conway (1978), these kinds of experiences, though

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25 As discussed in Chapter 2 (section 3.1), psychotherapists and psychologists were considered distinct groups, as although both provide a therapeutic service, each has a distinct history. Psychologists were thought to be fundamentally less open to the notion of epiphanic experience due to the positivist/empiricist inheritance from their discipline (Pilgrim, 2019). This can be contrasted to psychotherapy which remains more open to schools of thought that acknowledge this phenomenon as legitimate (e.g., psychodynamic, and analytical psychology). As such, it is likely that there is greater acceptance of this phenomenon in the psychotherapeutic community than in the psychological community. Indeed, this is perhaps reflected in the number of Counselling Psychologists who participated in the study compared to other types of psychologist (see Table 5.1).
potentially similar in their outcomes, are instigated by a powerful person with the
intention to alter individual awareness. As such, the change is not considered as ‘inner’.

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

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

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

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26 It is worth noting that there was some case-by-case flexibility with regards to how this criterion was operationalised, as two of the participants introduced below will demonstrate (Eunice in section 3.5, and Luce in section 3.12). Luce was raised in a cult, but her epiphanic experiences formed part of her emancipation from said cult and were not the result of influence by the leader of a group. Eunice’s experience was catalysed by a talk given by an influential group leader, but, given that the APA defines a cult as “a religious or quasi-religious group characterized by unusual or atypical beliefs, seclusion from the outside world, and an authoritarian structure. Cults tend to be highly cohesive, well organized, secretive, and hostile to non-members” (https://dictionary.apa.org/cult), Eunice’s engagement with Sufi mysticism was not considered to be participation in a ‘cult’.
Table 5.1

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White British</th>
<th>White European</th>
<th>White Slavic</th>
<th>White Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Religious</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical Psychologist</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling Psychologist</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational Psychologist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Psychologist</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport Psychologist</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2) Procedure

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

The sensitivities inherent to this research process were seriously considered by the researcher, as it was understood that the interviews might elicit emotional distress for the
participants. Due to all participants being psychologists, it was thought reasonable to assume that the participants would possess the training and access to resources that would minimise any potential adverse effects. Despite this, participants were made aware that should they require any guidance or support as a result of their participation, they should contact the researcher who would formally debrief them, refer or support them through the process of getting the help they needed, and remove their data from the study if requested.

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

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

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This stance towards interviewer expertise superficially aligns with positivist positions, and contradicts interpretivist positions (Smith & Elger, 2014). In CRist terms, the research process is theory-driven, and the researcher is the expert about the phenomenon under investigation, placed at the top of a ‘hierarchy of expertise’ (Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Smith & Elger, 2014). However, critically, the CRist researcher is also understood as inherently fallible, and so whilst the CRist qualitative researcher acts as expert about the issue, and interpreter to the data, their own explanations are treated as potentially fallible, whereby the interviewee “is there to confirm or falsify and, above all, refine that theory” (Pawson, 1996, p.299; Redman-MacLaren & Mills, 2015). Indeed, the interviewer and interviewee are conceptualised as possessing different kinds of expertise; the interviewer as having expertise on the wider research context and potential outcomes, and the interviewee as having expertise on explanatory mechanisms (Smith & Elger, 2014).
convenient for the participant: (1) at the University of Hertfordshire, (2) another agreed upon location, or (3) via video conferencing software. Due to the Government induced Covid-19 restrictions from March 2020 onwards, whilst the first six interviews were conducted face-to-face, the remaining interviews were conducted using video conferencing software. Each participant chose, or was given, a pseudonym by which they are referred to. All interviews were recorded on a digital Dictaphone, or the recording feature on the video conferencing software, and transcribed verbatim.

2.3) Data Collection

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

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

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28 Four participants (Anna, Amira, Eunice, and Scarlett; see section 3 below) chose their own pseudonym and the rest were assigned by the researcher.
guide and probe the interviewee in order to facilitate depth and complexity of discussion (Smith & Elger, 2014). Each interview lasted between 40-100 minutes ($M_{time} = 73.4$ minutes), totalling 1175 minutes (or 19.6 hours) of data making this study the second largest empirical study of epiphanic experience to date. Please see Appendix E for an exemplar transcript as a representation of the richness of the data.

2.4) Data Analysis

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

The process undertaken proceeded as follows.

1. **Description.** The themes from the thematic synthesis, detailed in Chapter 4, served as the deductive coding framework for the current study. Therefore, the deductive coding process began with a framework comprising three higher order themes, 13
lower order themes, and 37 sub-themes (as described in Chapter 4). This framework was still considered truly provisional such that it always had the potential to be subject to change (Fletcher, 2017; Saldaña, 2013). Over the course of the coding process these 53 provisional code groups were supplemented, and altered, by themes that emerged from the primary data to produce 59 code groups.

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

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

3. **Abduction.** The demi-regularities identified in the analytical resolution were re-described in accordance with the theoretical causal explanations postulated by previous
researchers on epiphanic experience (Amos, 2016a; Ilivitsky, 2011; McDonald, 2005; Miller & C’dede Baca, 2001). This was a critical process whereby data that fell outside the theoretical frameworks applied to the data was given consideration in order to afford new understandings of the phenomenon of interest. Further, during abduction, it was important to explicitly consider lived experience (the domain of the Empirical) and reality (the domain of the Real) as distinct - a notion supported by CR thought (e.g., Coates, 2007).

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

5. **Retrodiction and contextualisation.** The mechanisms identified during abduction, and retroduction, were assessed with particular reference to the structures that might trigger their occurrence. Therefore, whilst epiphanic experiences were conceived of as a manifestation of an underlying material reality, they were also viewed as shaped by social and structural conditions.
6. **Concretisation and Conceptualisation.** The generative mechanisms identified through the analytical process were directly re-applied back onto the data, case-by-case. This enabled the researcher to consider the proposed mechanisms within the contexts specific to the participants.

**Table 5.2**

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causal Test Question</th>
<th>Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Are the causal factors of the phenomenon actually manifest in the context? | • Confirm that a cited causal factor was in fact part of the context of the phenomenon.  
• Confirm that explanatory information from generalisation applies to the specific context.  
• Ensure causal factors are not idealisations; the causal factor may potentially exist in the realm of the real and not just as an impossible theoretical entity. |
| If the causal factors were part of the context, were those factors causally effective? | • Assess the proposed causal factor to determine if it is a cause of the phenomenon and not an accidental or irrelevant feature of a genuine cause.  
• Determine if the proposed causal factor was in fact preceded by another causal factor of the event. |
| Do the causal factors provide a satisfactory explanation to the intended audience? | • Ensure the causal explanation is not too remote (unspecified links in causal chain or adequate knowledge of links cannot be assumed)  
• Ensure the causal explanation is not too small such that it is just one of a composite of causes producing the observed event. |
| Does the proposed mechanism provide causal depth? | • Assess the *depth of necessity* such that the observed event would have occurred in the absence of the proposed causal factor due to the presence of an alternative causal factor.  
• Assess *depth of priority* to determine if the proposed causal factor is closely preceded by another causal factor significant in explaining the event. |

3) **Introducing the Participants**

Bhaskar (2020) argued that “we must see each person as a concrete singular, that is as containing a universal element, but always and only in association with
specific mediations or differentiations, a particular geohistorical trajectory and a unique irreducible singularity” (p.118). As such, it was considered necessary to provide each participant’s story individually, before considering the trends and commonalities (i.e., demi-regularities) that might unite them.

3.1) Adela

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

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

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

3.2) Amira

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

Once they were in the Maldives, Amira realised that she still didn’t want to go to Sri Lanka and argued with her husband about delaying the flights. After the argument she left
and, on her walk back to their hotel room, had her epiphanic experience. The sky went very bright, and a voice spoke to her, saying that she didn’t have to go to Sri Lanka, and that she didn’t have to argue about it with her husband either! This reinforced her decision not to go to Sri Lanka, and she returned to their room. When her husband and children returned, they continued their discussion and she stated that neither she nor her children would travel on the originally planned date. When her husband asked when she would be going, she described a voice channelling through her and saying: any time after the 27th (December). Coincidentally, it is because of this that Amira and her family avoided being on the beach at the time of the 2004 tsunami in Sri Lanka.

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

3.3) Anna

Anna grew up in a family that moved home every few years, with a father who was violent and physically abusive (later diagnosed as bipolar), and a mother who did not protect her from this abuse. She described experiencing a near-constant state of dissociation as a result of the fear this caused. Further, she was forced by her parents to go to church three
times a day, which ensured her strong belief in a higher power. She was angry at this higher power, but she still believed in it. Anna spent most of her life before her transformative experience feeling worthless, scared, alone, and with a strong sense of self-hatred. She could not wait to leave home, met her soon-to-be husband – who her father disapproved of – and soon became pregnant in order to escape. She had two children and lived as a ‘housewife’. Later, her brother died in a motorcycle accident at age 19, to which she attributed the start of panic attacks and a deep depression that lasted six years, at which point, her husband’s father died which exacerbated her already poor mental health.

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

After her experience Anna developed a personal relationship with her higher power, citing the visions and dreams her God sent her, as well as the conversations they had together. She felt that her actions from that point forward were guided and directed by a higher power (e.g., going to university). A particularly pivotal deity-guided action she started was, alongside five other women, developing a healing ministry in which she described healing memories, emotions, and genetic and generational traumas. Anna described becoming a more non-judgemental, compassionate, and accepting person through Jesus, and chose to practice using compassion focused therapy and CBT as she thought them to be congruent with her Christianity. She also found self-love and self-acceptance through her experience. However,
due to her perception that society doesn’t allow her to talk about her Christianity openly, she
developed two identities, one non-religious and professional, and the other authentic.

3.4) Celine

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

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

Celine stated she made memories much better after her experience. However, because of Celine’s age at the time of her experience, she has found it challenging to tease out what constituted a personal transformation and what might have occurred anyway as part of her
developmental trajectory. Despite this, Celine discussed that, although she can sometimes be
quite self-critical about certain parts of herself, she had always been very confident in her
cognitive abilities, viewing herself as a cognitive person, and valuing understanding. She also
described always having possessed a strong capacity for self-awareness. This has meant that
she also favoured others, in both her professional and personal life, with self-awareness.
Celine’s epiphanic experience became a narrative throughout her life, and a memory that she
has repeatedly rehearsed.

3.5) Eunice

Eunice described his upbringing as “overwhelmingly benign”, though noted some
challenges such as his parents getting divorced when he was five, and his mother being
diagnosed with cancer when he was nine. He had a largely secular and open upbringing,
though his lack of a religious or spiritual framework was something he did not appear to
value. In particular, Eunice referred to finding a conversation he had with his father, at age
four, very challenging to integrate. In this conversation, he asked what happens when you die,
to which his father responded that, that’s it, you’re dead! He contrasted this with the sense of
connection and warmth he felt when he attended church with his grandmother. As an adult,
Eunice described valuing religious tradition and explained that he was both baptised and
confirmed in the Church of England and initiated into the Inyati Sufi order. He therefore
combined traditions from both schools of thought and admitted that at times he could
approach his religious practice in a fervent, unbalanced fashion. Eunice described feelings of
being incomplete and not belonging, and that being in the world in an embodied way could
be a struggle for him at times. He also described a strong sense of seeking something
existential alongside a yearning for community and connection.
Eunice had his epiphanic experience whilst on a spiritual retreat that involved aspects such as: silence, fasting, and sensory blocking to encourage ‘turning within’. At the time of his experience, Eunice was listening to the retreat leader speak about how there is hope, and that in the foreseeable future all the great conflicts will be resolved, there will be peace, and problems such as starvation will be overcome. During this talk, Eunice was overcome with a strong emotion that resulted in what he described a shattering of his heart that came with clarity and ecstasy. In that moment, he felt both the pain of sacrifice and a sense of complete freedom, even from physical constraints. His sense of self also dissolved, and he felt part of a greater collective consciousness. In this moment, it was his spiritual mentor who held him until his breathing returned to normal.

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

3.6) Evelyn

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

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

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

3.7) Frida

Frida rejected Judaism at age 17, and later embraced Buddhism as her philosophy for life. Frida was very involved in the Buddhist community and engaged in Buddhist spiritual practices. She described her family as very close, but closed, and containing a great deal of suffering, not least because family members were often ill. She described herself as someone who was deeply unhappy, pessimistic, in existential pain, and who experienced a lot of anxiety and uncertainty in herself. Though Frida was very self-critical, she was also persevering and wanted change to happen, but didn’t understand how to go about changing.

At the time of her epiphanic experience, Frida was suffering from very extreme chronic allergies, involving a chronic rhinitis. This illness meant that her sleep was profoundly disturbed, and she was exhausted.

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

3.8) George

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

Around half-way through the retreat, George’s experience of meditation changed. He experienced non-dual awareness where the distinction between the self and the rest of the world disappeared. Furthermore, this moment was characterised by the experience of not-self (or anatta in Buddhist terms), in which George’s sense of self, or “I”, dissolved. He described this experience as effortless, tranquil, peaceful, and open. George’s experience led to several changes. He realised that his sense of self was impermanent and not fixed, and that he now had greater access to non-self-referential thought, where before he described having a more egocentric view of the world. He became more empathetic and non-judgmental, his confidence was boosted, and overall, he felt more contentment. George’s experience also
reinforced his choice of philosophy of practice, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, as it is congruent with Buddhist philosophy. In terms of his spirituality, George’s experience left him feeling part of something bigger than himself.

3.9) Hayley

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

In a chance conversation with a faculty manager, she found out that, contrary to what she had been told, there were resources to get more help. This deception caused her to have what she described as a breakdown. When she woke up the next day, she found that she had developed a profound psychogenic stutter which took eight weeks to resolve. Though she went back to work, she described feeling as though she was going to her own execution every day. When half term arrived, she went on holiday to the countryside with her husband and daughter, and whilst there, visited a book festival. As she listened to the authors and looked at the books, she considered her own expertise and academic career and a thought appeared “I
can’t think of any reason why that can’t be me”. At a time characterised by uncertainty, Hayley described this moment as being imbued with certainty and clarity. The consequences of Hayley’s experience involved a leap into the unknown. On her return to work she researched, and then took, an unpaid career break. She was going to write a book, and although she had no contract, she was certain that she could do it. Certainty was a key feature of Hayley’s personal transformation, alongside which she also now felt in control, re-energised, self-aware, empowered, and protected. She was able to reconnect with her values and herself by making space for creativity and setting boundaries on her time.

3.10) Jeremy

When Jeremy was seven his parents divorced. In the moment that they told him, he described starting to feel emotional, but instead of expressing it, he made a vow of emotional restriction, promising himself that he would never feel upset again. Jeremy believed that as a result of his vow, he became disconnected from his true self and engaged in extreme pastimes that allowed him to avoid feeling the pain he had repressed. Jeremy described himself as spiritual, and with a strong drive to become enlightened so as to be of service to others. In order to do so, Jeremy engaged in spiritual practices, most notably: tantra and Christian mysticism. Christian mysticism, specifically the channelled text ‘A Course in Miracles’, was the catalyst for Jeremy’s epiphanic experience, whereby he participated in the first lesson of the book for seven consecutive hours, rather than the recommended one minute in the morning and evening. During these seven hours Jeremy experienced a great many things. He described his awareness moving to the atomic level, then the subatomic level, and then quantum level,
distinguishable by their vibration. Concomitantly, his awareness also expanded externally, past his immediate surroundings, to the world outside, to the vastness of space. He described feeling himself opening to a place of oneness and stillness, in union with the ‘Infinite Source’, where there was no self, time, or space. Jeremy reflected that although time has passed, that moment has never gone, and he is still able to distort time and access it in a way that is as real now as it was then. When he left his meditative state, he experienced a profound disconnection with his body and difficulty making sense of time, space, and himself as a discrete entity. This caused his mother to call an ambulance and he was brought to a psychiatric hospital and diagnosed as having had an acute psychotic episode. During his hospitalisation he reconnected with his body, and also noticed that others in the hospital had had similar spiritual experiences.

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

3.11) Liam

Liam was undertaking his professional doctorate in counselling psychology at the time of his transformative experience. His decision to go back to university to become a psychologist was triggered by a prior transformative experience in Sierra Leone, where six
policemen were set on fire and died, and which caused him to question the value of life.

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

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

As a consequence of this epiphanic experience Liam described having vastly improved meaningful connections with others. He made time for his friendships, even if he had plans to swim or study, and later moved to a new city to be closer to his sister and nieces and be more involved in their lives. The words he used to describe himself also changed, with ‘caring’ becoming a new, and particularly important, descriptor. Liam also became far more flexible, which is reflected in his practice, as although he initially thought he would favour
the more rigid approach of CBT, he instead chose to work from a person-centred or psychodynamic approach which he found more flexible.

3.12) Luce

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

Luce’s first epiphanic experience occurred on an ordinary day. She was shopping for her daughters and saw a double-breasted tweed coat on the rack. When taking the coat to the counter to pay, she noticed that it was double-breasted and instantly had the thought that she couldn’t buy it because it was double-breasted, and she didn’t like double-breasted things. At the thought of this, Luce then described another, quieter, thought emerging, questioning her initial reaction. She then realised that it wasn’t her that didn’t like double-breasted coats, it was her mother. She recounted this realisation as a physical blow that was followed by a tidal
wave of other questions about how many of her thoughts, feelings, and values were hers? She felt complete terror and panic and had the urge to go out and do all the things she had learnt were ‘wrong’, because in that moment her entire sense of morality disappeared as she no longer knew what came from her, and what came from the cult. She knew that she needed to find out who she was, what she thought, felt, and valued without the influence of the cult.

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

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

She no longer had any religious belief and particularly valued Openness. Though Luce described sometimes still feeling a mixture of sadness and anger towards herself, her view of herself changed to become more accepting, aware, and forgiving. Her relationships as a practitioner psychologist and in professional contexts improved, though she still struggles to form friendships.

3.13) Nina

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

After starting to work with these coaches, Nina had a dream. Amongst imagery that Nina interpreted as relating to the fact that she was trying to resolve her issues alone, she
dreamt about the house in which she had been abused. This house was significant as she had had many nightmares about it where the house had taken many forms, sometimes haunted, sometimes possessed, and always negative. In this dream however, the house had changed, the doors had glass in them, there was light, the walls were pale, and it was owned by a firm of solicitors. She had the sense that the house was safe. In the dream, someone said to her, I thought that house was really scary for you. She replied that, no, not anymore, it’s changed. On waking, Nina felt lighter, and as if she had found the solution that she had been so diligently looking for.

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

3.14) Scarlett

Scarlett was on holiday with her family when her husband, who already suffered from Post-Polio Syndrome, had a heart attack. On a scorching hot day, after having spent a night sleeping in their car, they arrived at their campsite. As her sons were putting up their tent, she saw that her husband looked very unwell, and soon started reporting pains in his chest. Not long after, Scarlett called an ambulance and they took him to a small cottage hospital, leaving her and her sons at the campsite. She then left her children to follow her husband. When she arrived, the doctors told her that he needed to be moved to a larger hospital. He recovered, though the chest pains returned, and Scarlett had to organise returning her children to the UK
without her as her husband needed to stay in Italy to have a heart bypass operation as he was not stable enough to travel. Scarlett described the night before his surgery, and the eight hours of waiting for the open-heart surgery to be finished, as surreal, as she had to say goodbye, and didn’t know if she would ever see him again.

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

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

3.15) **Will**

Prior to his transformative experience, Will was employed by his local authority. His professional environment was causing him some adversity as his working relationships were
deteriorating and becoming fractious. Under the pressures of a financial crash, Will spoke to his managers about his concerns that their service was beginning to become unethical in terms of the quality of work they provided. His mental health was beginning to deteriorate, as he was feeling frustrated, defeated, and stuck. Will knew that something needed to change but was resisting this fact for a variety of reasons. His political beliefs and values aligned with the idea that his work should be provided as part of the public sector, and logistically he knew that becoming self-employed was not a good option for him or his family. Moreover, he explained that in his profession, working privately was seen as quite transgressive. A pivotal moment in Will’s spiral downward was when one of Will’s senior managers reprimanded him for speaking about his concerns, telling him that there was no problem, the problem was him because he thought that there was a problem.

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

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

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

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

3.17) Summary

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

4) Discussion of Results

The section above has served to provide the reader with an understanding of each participant’s unique trajectory through their epiphanic experience. Attention now turns to the
demi-regularities that span these narratives, and the causal mechanisms that they implicate. However, before commencing a discussion pertaining to the third research question: ‘what generative mechanisms permit the emergence of an epiphanic experience?’, the output of the data analysis process will first be summarised in order to orient and sensitise the reader to the changes to the code structure and content that emerged. Three higher order themes emerged from analysis: (1) disorganisation, (2) revelation, and (3) integration; each aligns with the higher order themes from Chapter 4 but were adapted to better reflect the evolution of the researcher’s understanding of epiphanic experience.

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Higher Order Theme</th>
<th>Lower Order Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Raw Data</th>
<th>Frequency Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disorganisation</td>
<td>Material</td>
<td>Connection with the Environment</td>
<td>A place where we'd been before, it's kind of very off grid. So, it's kind of off, you know and there's a couple of yurts here, and there's a little cabin up the trees and we'd go there. (Hayley)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transactions</td>
<td>Natural Disaster</td>
<td>They said, ah, there's been an earthquake in, you know, off Aceh, and- and there's been a tsunami. (Amira)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>with Nature</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Interactions</td>
<td>Disorganised and Connected Relationships</td>
<td>My life was gradually becoming: &quot;Hey, Liam, do you want to go out?&quot; &quot;Actually, no. I've got to read this&quot;. &quot;Hey, Liam, you want to come out?&quot; &quot;Actually, no, I'm swimming&quot;. (Liam)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Between People</td>
<td>Fulfilling and Connected Relationships</td>
<td>I had good, good relationships. (Frida)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Structures</td>
<td>Cultural Norms Facilitating Disorganisation</td>
<td>I think I was just still trying to follow the cult mould, which was that women grew up, got married and had kids. We weren't expected to have careers. You know, we weren't expected to study. (Luce)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sui Generis</td>
<td>Religious Structures</td>
<td>I am not Christian and don't subscribe to a lot of the beliefs, and I think that's the, that's probably a lot of the, my problem with religion would be around the fixed belief kind of, rigid framework, kind of. (George)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Formalised Activity</td>
<td>I've been kind of living this [Buddhism] and practicing for a long time since back in the 90s. (Frida)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Embodied</td>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>The Ego and its Defence Mechanisms</td>
<td>But the story is that first of all, I kind of like didn't, sort of ignored it, or not ignored it, repressed it should I say. Didn't really think it happened to me. (Nina)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Embodied Personality in Turmoil</td>
<td>It was the first time I'd kind of started making links between what had happened to me and how I felt about myself. (Adela)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disconnected from The Transcendently Real Self</td>
<td>I didn't- wasn't in touch with- with me, I was still this kind of ex-cult sister, who was still a cult sister, who was still kind of following what she'd been taught. (Luce)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Life Experience</strong></td>
<td><strong>Abandonment</strong></td>
<td><strong>So, my mum left me when I was really little, so before I was one.</strong> (Adela)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Abuse</strong></td>
<td><strong>So, when I was sort of 13, 14, 15 and I don't know the age of it exactly because the memories are quite traumatic. I was abused.</strong> (Nina)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Death</strong></td>
<td><strong>But then I lost my brother, my brother. He was 19. And he died on a motorbike accident. I know. It's horrendous.</strong> (Anna)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Illness</strong></td>
<td><strong>I started to suffer from very extreme chronic allergies, and- which involved a chronic rhinitis.</strong> (Frida)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Personal Challenges</strong></td>
<td><strong>Because I'm chronically ill, I was off sick and under occupational health, and I wasn't happy with the options that I was given at- within my place of work.</strong> (Evelyn)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uncertainty</strong></td>
<td><strong>Seeking</strong></td>
<td><strong>I was looking for this key. This- this mystery feeling inside of me to be different, for me to feel different.</strong> (Nina)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Feeling Uncertain</strong></td>
<td><strong>It felt like someone had pulled the rug under my feet and there wasn't a floor underneath, there was a gaping hole.</strong> (Luce)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Turmoil</strong></td>
<td><strong>Trying to work out what I was doing as a practitioner, who I wanted to be, what my philosophy of practice was going to be, how I was going to have any meaningful impact … a lot of uncertainty.</strong> (Xavier)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Wandering</strong></td>
<td><strong>So, come December, we went to Maldives.</strong> (Amira)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The term ‘revelation’ was chosen to better represent this phase of epiphanic experience as it more broadly evokes the key feature of epiphanic experience: something becoming known that was previously unknown (although the quality of noesis varied on a spectrum from insightful and epistemic to numinous and ontic). All participants experienced some kind of revelation, and analysis supported the relevance of the following themes: (1) the ego, (2) the embodied personality, and (3) the transcendentally real self (see Table 5.4).
**Table 5.4**

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Higher Order Theme</th>
<th>Lower Order Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Raw Data</th>
<th>Frequency Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Revelation</td>
<td>The Ego</td>
<td>Ego</td>
<td>It's like a feeling of your sense of self dissolving. (George)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dissolution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Embodied</td>
<td>An Embodied</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>It felt like I had this complete healing warmth, permeating through my body. It wasn't warmth like a radiator. It wasn't warm like the sun. Um. It wasn't warm like from any external source. It was something that radiated in and radiated out from me and just went through my whole- my- my body, my organs. It was just w- the most wonderful feeling. (Evelyn)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td></td>
<td>Altered Affective State</td>
<td>As he, as he was talking about this, there was a, yeah, just very deep emotion, started building up it, kind of- tears, crying started to build up and become more intense. (Eunice)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altered Cognitive State</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I started looking around. And I looked at the sofa. And I could see it. But then my consciousness went deeper, from the sofa into the atomic level. So, the consciousness goes into the atomic level. Then the consciousness went into the subatomic level. Then it went also into the quantum level. (Jeremy)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Transcendentally Real Self</td>
<td>Noesis</td>
<td></td>
<td>It was like a knowledge that God, God is alive. He's here with me. And I've got nothing to fear. (Anna)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from Others in the Moment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>He just reached his hand out, and he I didn't say anything, he just put his hand on my arm as if he understood what I was struggling with. (Luce)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As previously noted, the word ‘integration’ comes from the Latin word ‘integrat-’, meaning ‘made whole’, which is itself derived from the word ‘integer’, meaning ‘whole’. Therefore, the integration phase of epiphanic experience represents the processes and ways in which participants integrated and reorganised their internal and external landscapes in accordance with their experiences in the Revelation phase. Analysis supported the continued relevance of the following themes: (1) social interactions between people (within which particular attention was devoted to the ways in which the participants therapeutic practice changed), (2) social structures sui generis, (3) the embodied personality, (4) disorganised responses, and (5) sensemaking (see Table 5.5).
Table 5.5

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Higher Order Theme</th>
<th>Lower Order Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Raw Data</th>
<th>Frequency Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>Social Interactions Between People</td>
<td>Fulfilling and Connected Relationships</td>
<td>I worry about them a lot less, and I can just- just like be in them. (Adela)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Changed Therapeutic Practice</td>
<td>I very much practice what I preach on my work side of things as well. (Frida)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Structures Sui Generis</td>
<td>Changed Religiosity and Spirituality</td>
<td>It's made me feel a sense of something greater than us out there. (Amira)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Embodied Personality</td>
<td>The Ego as Changed</td>
<td></td>
<td>I think is it's made me see that there is no kind of part of me that is really fixed. (George)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Release and the Embodied Personality</td>
<td></td>
<td>It's such a relief to have been able to say: it can all go now. I don't need to have that cult mind in my head anymore. So, it was it was a powerful moment. (Luce)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connected to the Transcendentally Real Self</td>
<td></td>
<td>I kind of feel restored to myself... I really recognize, you know, the kinds of things, the passions and the values that organically emerged when I was a child free of all those constraints. That's what I was able to more fully realise. (Hayley)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disorganised Responses</td>
<td>Disconnected Relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td>So, you know, I still struggle with that quite a lot. And with close relationships. I mean, since my husband, I haven't really- there hasn't really been anyone else. You know, which is sad. (Luce)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uncertainty Within the</td>
<td></td>
<td>Obviously, I've been trained that way and it's completely different. I can- I can put my professional face on and leave all that out of it. Yeah. It's like I'm two people, really. Yeah. Because I know in today's world you're not allowed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embodied Personality</td>
<td>to talk about Christianity and that, or your faith and that. So, I- there was a clear line there. (Anna)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friction with Religiospiritual Structures</td>
<td>Yeah, felt like I had very little to offer God or the world or any anyone. (Eunice)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensemaking</td>
<td>A Higher Power at Work</td>
<td>It was outside of me; it was definitely not me… the voice seemed to be real and outside. (Amira)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensemaking</td>
<td>A Conscious Process</td>
<td>You know, it’s not luck. It was- I- I was looking and she was there to be found. (Nina)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensemaking</td>
<td>An Unconscious Process</td>
<td>Something inside my head was leading me in that direction. I think a lot of these things are kind of below the level of consciousness. (Luce)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensemaking</td>
<td>Necessary Suffering</td>
<td>I think the fact that I was feeling really unhappy, a lot of the time, was kind of demonstrating that something needs to change. (Adela)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensemaking</td>
<td>Particular Person</td>
<td>I don't want to not give myself credit for having been able to be open and receptive to that thought when it came. (Hayley)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensemaking</td>
<td>Context as Key</td>
<td>I had to be forced into that situation. I would never have volunteered for it, which is an interesting paradox in a way. (Will)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensemaking</td>
<td>Theoretical Interpretations</td>
<td>The chaos effect. Gleick, sort of chaos theory, Mandelbrot's fractals, all that kind of, all that kind of stuff, that there's patterns within chaos. (Scarlett)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensemaking</td>
<td>Formalised Activity</td>
<td>You know, within the retreats I've done, each time there's been some very profound kind of breakthrough. (Eunice)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensemaking</td>
<td>Sensemaking as a Process</td>
<td>I think it's just a continuing unfolding… there isn't a kind of an end point to any of this (Eunice)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The discussion that follows contains an exploration of the generative mechanisms underpinning epiphanic experience. The discussion will be structured according to the notion of the four planar social being (Bhaskar, 2008, 2020) as it allows for a complex, CR-informed view of humans as biological beings, who are social and sustained by relationships with others, live alongside pre-existing social structures, and who manifest a unique personhood (Pilgrim, 2019). Data from this study, the previous two chapters, and the extant and wider literature are used throughout to support the suggestions made. It should be noted that the theories and models referenced throughout the discussion below were drawn on as the result of engagement with Danermark et al.’s (2019) process of CRist analysis, and as such are presented for the first time in this chapter, rather than the literature review. With necessary reference to reflexivity (Archer, 2000) this discussion should be considered representative of generative mechanisms as they are understood and filtered through the concrete singularity of this particular doctoral researcher.

4.1) The Plane of Material Transactions with Nature

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

4.1.1) Applying Chaos Theory

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

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

This state of being represents a period of personal chaos (be it acute or protracted).
During this period of personal chaos, the participants' assumptive worlds, which are
themselves dynamical systems, become characterised by turbulent disequilibrium. Further,
because the disequilibrium and its outcomes are unpredictable to the individual, uncertainty is
exacerbated, and anxiety often flourishes (Hirsh, Mar, Peterson, 2012). For example, after her
experiences in Italy, Scarlett described that “I was becoming nervy”, indicating the presence
of uncertainty and anxiety.

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

Furthermore, the participants’ transformative experiences often contained strong
elements of ‘randomness’ or chance that led to unpredictable, extensive, change. For
example, Andrew was randomly hit by a bus, Luce randomly decided to go shopping and by
chance encountered the double-breasted tweed coat, and Scarlett randomly saw a doctor who
used precisely the right words at the right time to reach her. During the aforementioned
period of personal chaos, the self- or world-assumptions held by participants exist in a phase
space of many other self-or-world-assumption-strange-attractors that have the potential to
exert an influence over their existing assumptions. In this way, their initial world-assumptions may become dissipative structures that, at an unpredictable critical point or bifurcation (i.e., the transformative experience), can release themselves to the influence of a strange attractor.

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

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

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29 To clarify, bifurcation represents “a pattern of instability in which a system attains greater complexity by accessing new types of dynamical states” (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009, p.14; Nicolis & Prigogine, 1989). A bifurcation structure can manifest as simply as a critical point, though there are multiple kinds of bifurcation structures (Guastello, 2007).
unpredictable (Briggs & Peat, 1989; Bütz, 1995; Gleick, 1987). Secondly, Chaos Theory provides a comprehensive foundation from which epiphanic experiences can be understood as examples of discontinuous change (Jarvis, 1997).

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


The free energy principle (FEP) is another NDS theory that has been posited to act as a unified brain theory (Friston, 2003, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013; Friston & Kiebel, 2009; Friston, Kilner & Harrison, 2006; Friston & Stephan, 2007; Huang, 2008). The FEP states that “any self-organizing system that is at equilibrium with its environment must minimize its free energy” (Friston, 2010, p.127), whereby in its simplest form, free energy refers to the surprise experienced by an agent as a result of the joint occurrence of a particular sensory input and its inferred causes, i.e., the amount of prediction error in a system (Friston, 2009; Friston, Kilner & Harrison, 2006). Derived from mathematical formulations, the FEP demonstrates that adaptive systems, such as the human brain, are resistant to a natural tendency to disorder and disorganisation (Colombo & Wright, 2021; Ashby, 1947; Friston,
Indeed, biological systems are defined by the fact that they are able to maintain their states and forms, even as their environments change (Ashby, 1947; Friston, 2009, 2010, 2012; Kauffman, 1993; Nicolis & Prigogine, 1977). For example, ink dropped into a bowl of water will disperse and dissolve, but a biological organism will not.

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

That biological systems can maintain order in this way distinguishes them from other self-organising systems (Friston, 2010). A biological organism can only access a limited repertoire of sensory and physiological states at any given time. Friston further asserts that biological agents necessarily act to minimise the amount of sensory disorder they experience, which violates the second law of thermodynamics (Evans, 2003; Friston, 2010). In this way, the distal (long-term) imperative of biological systems is to maintain states within physiological bounds. This means that globally, a biological system is predictable. The distal imperative translates into a proximal (short-term) imperative to avoid surprise and sources of uncertainty, as well as movements from one state to another as this can become another
source of uncertainty. However, a system cannot recognise whether the sensations it will experience are surprising as its local environment is unpredictable, and therefore cannot deliberately avoid them (Friston, 2009).

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

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

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30 For reference, CR defines perception as “a dynamic and skilled practical and social activity and accomplishment which may assist in yielding fallible knowledge of the real” (Hartwig, 2007, p.341).
internal states, to minimise free energy. Perceptual processes are thus considered to be an aspect of emergent behaviour that acts to minimise free energy (Friston, Kilner & Harrison, 2006). In this study, the notion that each agent possesses an implicit generative model of the causal mechanisms underlying their experience was supported, though some participants possessed more concrete models than others. For example, Anna, who “knew it was God. I knew it was God. And nowadays, I knew it was through Jesus”, versus Amira, who was comfortable with not knowing: “I can't explain who that was, or what it was, or why it was. I don't know”.

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

The FEP provides a view of how the concepts introduced through Chaos Theory are applicable to biological organisms. Further, the FEP provides a useful perspective on the integration phase of epiphanic experience as a stage in which the individual engages in strategies to reduce free energy. However, recent advances in neuroscience provide additional
vital information if more detailed understandings of the perturbative disorganisation phase and transformational revelation phase of epiphanic experience are sought. As such, attention now turns to the entropic brain hypothesis.

4.1.3) Chaos, Entropy, and The Entropic Brain Hypothesis

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

The term ‘entropy’ originates from the field of thermodynamics and is a measure of order, first described by Clausius (1867), and defined within psychological literature as “the amount of energy within a system that cannot be used to perform work (i.e., cannot be used to transform the system from one state to another)” (Hirsh, Mar & Peterson, 2012, p.305). Formalised as the first and second laws of thermodynamics Clausius (1867) asserted that: (1) the energy of the universe is constant, and (2) the entropy of the universe tends to a maximum. Hence, the net entropy of the universe is always increasing. As such, entropy can be considered to be the amount of uncertainty, or disorder, accompanying a random variable (Shannon, 1948; Wiener, 1961). Entropy in the brain can be measured through the analysis of
electroencephalography (EEG) signals and has become a valuable tool in cognitive neuroscience as it offers researchers the ability to determine the randomness or disorder of a system (Carhart-Harris et al., 2014). However, it is critical to emphasise that although entropy is theorised as ever-increasing, it is equally understood that living, self-organised systems, in accordance with the FEP, enhance their likelihood of survival by constraining or reducing their internal entropy (Friston, 2009; Guastello, 2009; Schrödinger, 1944).

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

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

Although the EBH was developed to account for changes in consciousness as a result of psychedelics, an experimentally controllable method of elevating brain entropy, it intended to provide a theoretical understanding for the full range of conscious states.\footnote{It is not within the scope of this thesis to unpack the hard problem of consciousness (which asks questions about the relationship between the material and mental elements of consciousness). However, using Chalmers (2003) taxonomy of metaphysical positions on consciousness, and Bhaskar’s (2020) conception of consciousness as “a synchronic emergent power of matter” (p.116), allows for the CRist stance on consciousness to be viewed in alignment with a nonreductive approach that accounts for both an external perceived reality, as well as the sensory and phenomenal component of experience (Coates, 2007).} (Carhart-Harris,
Moreover, Carhart-Harris et al. (2014) note that other methods (e.g., meditation) are able to increase entropy in the system, and therefore shift consciousness towards greater criticality. Criticality is an important concept when seeking a comprehensive understanding of the EBH, in particular, the notion of self-organised criticality, which builds on the notion of self-organisation discussed in relation to both Chaos Theory and the FEP (Beggs & Plenz, 2003; Carhart-Harris et al., 2014; Chialvo, Balenzuela & Fraiman, 2008). This concept permits for the additional understanding that, when a complex, self-organised system, such as the human brain, is forced away from equilibrium by regular energy inputs, it displays unusual properties. These properties emerge as a result of the system reaching a critical point between order and chaos.

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

**Figure 5.1**

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

The states of consciousness associated with high-entropy include REM sleep (e.g., Nina), the onset of psychosis (e.g., Jeremy), temporal lobe epilepsy, and psychedelic-induced states of consciousness (Carhart-Harris et al., 2014). States associated with high-entropy and criticality are termed ‘primary states of consciousness’, a term originally used by Freud (1900)\(^3\), and are understood as regressive and primitive states of consciousness that are dominant in pre-ego infancy and are argued to be the style of cognition experienced by

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\(^3\) Freud (1940) explained that “We have found that processes in the unconscious or in the id obey different laws from those in the ego. We name these laws in their totality the primary process, in contrast to the secondary process which governs the course of events in the ego” (p.164). Therefore, Freud postulates the existence of two processes that determine the division of psychical energy.
primordial man. From this evolutionary perspective, primary consciousness can be viewed as a mode of cognition that was suboptimal for the survival of our evolutionary ancestors, and which was replaced by a more constrained cognitive style, and a stable sense of self, or ego (Carhart-Harris et al., 2014).

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

Secondary consciousness gathers information mechanistically from reality and adapts and learns from its experiences, using appropriate constraints (Friston, 2010). Primary consciousness is more chaotic, but as a consequence is also more flexible, capable of expansiveness, and making the non-linear jumps demonstrable when considering epiphanic experiences. Further, the transition from a secondary to primary state involves the brain undergoing a ‘phase transition’, therefore implying that the relationship between these two states of consciousness is not continuous and implicating the yielding of a dissipative structure to a chaotic attractor (Carhart-Harris et al., 2014; Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009; Zeeman, 1973). This phase transition is perhaps most evident in the quotation from Jeremy in Table 5.4.
Critically, Carhart-Harris et al. (2014), alongside providing a theory rooted in cognitive neuroscience (the reader is directed towards Appendix H for an account of the neural correlates associated with the mechanisms proposed by the EBH), also ensured that the subjective and qualitative facets of their hypothesis are noted: “The great merit of applying the measure of entropy in cognitive neuroscience is that it is uniquely adept at bridging the physical and subjective divide; mere flip sides of the same coin - but different sides nonetheless” (Carhart-Harris, 2018, p.168). Carhart-Harris et al. (2014) state that increased entropy in the brain is accompanied by an increase in puzzlement and subjective uncertainty, therefore stressing that ‘uncertainty’ is a qualitative term that signifies the presence of greater brain entropy (Hirsh, Mar & Peterson, 2012), and therefore directly aligns the EBH with the demi-regularity ‘uncertainty’ from this research. For example, when asked which emotions he associated with the time of his life before his epiphanic experience, George reflected that “Probably a lot of, kind of, well, some uncertainty”. In order to further explore the relevance of the EBH (supported by Chaos Theory and the FEP), each of the three phases of epiphanic experience will be considered in turn.

4.1.3.1) Disorganisation.

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

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

Many participants experienced trauma within particular structures or contexts (the plane of social structures sui generis), and often inflicted by others (the plane of social interactions). For example, trauma was sometimes the result of dysfunctional dynamics in the family unit (e.g., Adela: “my mum left me when I was really little, so before I was one, and I lived with other family members”), the workplace (e.g., Evelyn: “I whistle blew on a children's home in the seventies… And I was supported by nobody at work”), and/or religious structures (e.g., Luce: “I was born into the group… which are now considered to be a cult”). Indeed, the range of participant experiences implicate the presence of a range of different types of traumas, including (but not limited to) shock trauma (e.g., Liam), developmental/relational trauma (e.g., neglect: Adela, see above quotation; sexual abuse: 33

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33 Using the four planar social being (Bhaskar, 2020), the following picture of trauma is permitted to emerge. In the plane of material transactions with nature, trauma can be conceived of as an experience that causes the nervous system to become dysregulated (Porges, 2018; Van der Kolk, 2014). In the plane of social interactions between people, trauma can be recognised as something that can be inflicted or facilitated by others, and that can have long-lasting consequences for the individual in terms of their ability to connect with others (e.g., Dorahy et al., 2009). Trauma happens within a context (i.e., the plane of social structures sui generis), which can shape an individual’s exposure to traumatic events, as well as their capacity to navigate their lives post-traumatic event (Ungar, 2013). Further, trauma is an event that creates disturbance in the plane of the stratification of the embodied personality (Horowitz, 2015; Janoff-Bulman, 1992).
Nina: “It was sexual. Yeah. Physical. Sexual.”), complex trauma (e.g., Luce: “I still struggle
trying to remember what actually happened around that time because I think I just dissociated
to deal with it all”), and perhaps also intergenerational trauma (e.g., Frida: “coming from a
Jewish family didn't exactly help really, there's a lot of suffering there”34). Moreover, the
participants traumatic experiences occurred over a range of timescales: past (i.e., adverse
childhood experiences, e.g., Adela), recent (i.e., a recent bereavement, e.g., Anna), and
present (i.e., immediate exposure to trauma, e.g., Liam).

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

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

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34 This was interpreted as tentatively indicative of intergenerational trauma as it pertains to the Jewish experience (e.g., Dashorst, Mooren, Kleber, de Jong & Huntjens, 2019; Firestone, 2019; Scharf & Mayseless, 2011).
entropy states as they are characterised by inflexible cognitive and behavioural patterns, and diminished conscious awareness (Hudetz, Liu, Pillay, Boly & Tononi, 2016; Liu et al, 2018; Schartner et al., 2015). Therefore, participants with psychological inflexibility (e.g., Liam: “over that two and a half years had been this movement towards an increasing rigidity”), negative self-concept (e.g., Nina: “I didn't really feel like I could- I was good enough or I could do- my confidence was very low. My self-esteem was quite low”), sadness (e.g., Adela: “I was feeling really unhappy, a lot of the time”), depression (e.g., Luce: “I got I got quite depressed at times, distressed, um, trying to figure things out”), and PTSD (e.g., Anna: “I was carrying the loss of [brother], not realizing it was PTSD”) would likely have had decreased brain entropy. In this way, the participants whose conscious states were typified by low entropy experiences would have been less able to flexibly respond to their changing circumstances which over time may force the emergence of a critical point (Gleick, 1987).

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

That rigidity was only flexed for my sister. And then outside of that, it was, you know, it wasn't really flexed. So, work first, sport second, anything else third. So, I would say, yes, looking back at it, relationships had become less important.
Andrew being hit by a bus represents perturbation of the system sufficient to trigger the acute onset of turbulent disequilibrium, i.e., a movement towards criticality, wherein the set of self- and world-assumptions Liam had been working with became dissipative structures, as a result of increased entropic activity. Therefore, chronic stress and the long-term consequences of trauma may act as primers to epiphanic experience. As noted by Adela:

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

Suffering is therefore conceptualised as a driving force for transformative change. Whilst this acknowledgment by the participants themselves ($n = 10$) could be understood as participants seeking to attribute meaning to some of their greatest challenges, and not some deeper causal explanation, it appears likely that suffering is deeply linked to epiphanic experience. If the disconnection, discontent, and uncertainty generated by the negative life experiences of the participants is taken to equate with suffering, it becomes clear that this is an important ‘component’, or mechanism, if understandings of causality are sought. The importance of suffering, and its place within narratives of transformation has long been understood (Campbell, 1949, 2004), and the connection between transformation and suffering has been noted in the broader literature (e.g., Barrett, 1999; Fosha, 2009; Fosha, Thoma & Yeung, 2019; Rousseau & Measham, 2007). Although existing literature on epiphanic
experience highlights the presence of suffering prior to transformation (e.g., Ilivitsky, 2011; Miller & C’dé Baca, 2001) the suggestion that suffering is necessary has not yet been explicitly made.

4.1.3.1.2) High Entropy Objects.

Several participants appeared to access the Revelation phase by making meaningful connections in the presence of ‘high entropy objects’. High entropy objects are here defined as persons, objects, or ideas that incite uncertainty, shifting brain entropy closer to criticality. This notion of high entropy objects possesses many similarities to Gabora’s (2017, 2018) conceptualisation of creativity using psychological entropy, termed Honing Theory. Honing Theory postulates that creativity begins when high-entropy material is detected. This kind of material incites uncertainty, which typifies high-entropy brain states. After this material is detected, the process of creativity involves repeatedly considering it from differing perspectives and contexts (thereby ‘honing it’) until the elevated state of arousal provoked by the high-entropy material has dissipated. In so doing, the individual can experience resolution or restructuring. Therefore, it is suggested that participants tended to undergo a similar process, whereby the uncertainty produced or enhanced by the high-entropy object generated sufficient turbulent disequilibrium for them to release and reorganise their self- and/or world-assumptions. Luce already had several disorganising negative life experiences by the time she encountered her high entropy object:

35 It should be noted that Gabora’s model carries greater weight now that Shi et al. (2020) have demonstrated the positive relationship between brain entropy and divergent thinking/creativity.
And I saw this lovely little tweed coat. It was cute. It was adorable. And I wish I still had it because it was so key... as I put it down on the counter, I noticed it was double breasted. And I thought, oh, I can't have this, it's double breasted. I don't like double breasted things. And a little voice whispered in my ear, what do you mean you don't like double breasted things? You like this coat. You've picked it out. You love it because it's tweed. It's like good old English tweed. Reminds you of home. You want this coat. Yeah, but I don't like double breasted coats. And then suddenly it hit me. It wasn't me that didn't like double breasted coats. It was my mother.

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

This notion of high entropy objects is also strongly evocative of Freudian metapsychological ideas, in particular, the notion of cathexis. Initially used by Freud in a physiological manner, whereby he referred to neurons or systems imbued with a certain amount of excitation or energy (Freud, 1894, 1895), cathexis refers to the investment of the libido in a person, object, or idea. It should be noted that ‘object’ can refer to literal objects,
but also symbolic or abstract objects. During cathexis, “the main quota of libido is transferred on to the object and the object to some extent takes the place of the ego” (Freud, 1940, p.21). This reflects the results from this study, as, for example, Luce’s tweed coat can be viewed as the object of cathexis, directing libidinal energy away from the ego, diminishing egoic control, and allowing content from the unconscious to emerge. The high entropy objects therefore appear to be, for many participants, representations of unconscious or repressed content, and as such are entangled in their memories as they pertain to the traumas and neuroses they had experienced. Indeed, Freud (1895) believed that all past experiences (i.e., memories) are represented in the present. Memory is also implicated by the involvement of the medial temporal lobes in the neural causal mechanism proposed by Carhart-Harris et al. (2014) to be responsible for the experiences typified by elevated brain entropy.

4.1.3.1.3) Purposeful Experiential Absorption.

All but two participant accounts (Anna and Celine) implicated the importance of formalised activity (which can be conceived of as the behavioural/agentic manifestations of certain social structures, e.g., mindfulness is a behavioural manifestation of Buddhist structures). Although meditative activities such as chanting (e.g., Frida), mindfulness (e.g., George), and reading (e.g., Adela) were most commonly noted immediately prior to epiphanic experience, the range of formalised activities described by participants (e.g., educational, spiritual, therapeutic) may suggest that the form of the formalised activity matters less than its function. Perhaps the function of formalised activity is revealed when considering the commonalities between the formalised activities that participants engaged in before or during their epiphanic experience, namely: experiential absorption (Jamieson, 2005; Tellegen, 1981). Many of the formalised activities such as meditation, chanting, silent
retreats, or yoga, appeared to act as conduits for experiential absorption, through which participants were able to access different states of consciousness (Ott, 2007).

In almost all cases, participants were absorbed, and their attention was not invested in the conscious deliberation of a problem, therefore allowing them to think more divergently (Runco, 2014). Absorption is proposed to act as a conduit to the Revelation phase, and in most instances was accompanied by the presence of negative life experience. Tellegen and Atkinson (1974) argued that any activity that involves a high degree of absorption also entails a temporary surrender of selfhood. This is again evocative of the Freudian notion of cathexis (Freud, 1940), the application of which permits the following picture to emerge. If varying degrees of libido are transferred to an object, person, or idea, through the vehicle of formalised activity, the ego is replaced in that moment and unconscious or repressed content is permitted to move more freely between the unconscious and preconscious. In instances where the main quota of libido is transferred to the object, person, or idea (e.g., Jeremy), primary processes\(^{36}\) can be induced. Moreover, and because the unconscious is not constrained by the rules of logic (Freud, 1940), in instances where smaller portions of libidinal energy are transferred, individuals tend to be able to think more divergently as a result of greater unconscious accessibility.

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

\(^{36}\) The reader is reminded that primary processes are defined as the “archaic and ontogenetically and phylogenetically regressive primary psychical process. The primary psychical process describes the relatively motile, free-flowing activity of the unconscious mind. The primary psychical process becomes observable when the forces of repression are circumvented by the forces of the unconscious. Such episodes are characterised by a fluidity of association – perceptually and cognitively, and a flooding of affect” (Carhart-Harris, Mayberg, Malizia and Nutt, 2008, p.6).
normally happen to me”). Vivot, Pallavicini, Zamberlan, Vigo and Tagliazucchi (2020) reported that the entropic state the brain experiences during psychedelic experience is similar to that experienced during meditation for long-term meditators (Atasoy et al., 2017; Carhart-Harris et al., 2012; Garrison et al., 2013). Therefore, during meditative states entropy increases. This is relevant to the primary data set as all participants who were meditating before their epiphanic experience (e.g., Jeremy, George) were experienced meditators.

Chanting, or rhythm-induced trance, has also been reported as being able to evoke altered states of consciousness (Block, 1979; Thomason, 2010; Winkelman, 2011; Vaitl et al., 2005). Though there is no literature that directly addresses chanting and its effect on brain entropy, given that the aforementioned research has noted its capacity to induce altered states, this suggests that chanting may have altered the entropic activity in Frida’s brain, particularly in conjunction with her pronounced fatigue (Waters et al., 2014), thereby affording her mind greater flexibility to arrive at divergent conclusions.

4.1.3.1.4) Naturally Occurring Altered States.

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

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37 It is further acknowledged that whilst psychosis may involve hallucinatory experiences, having hallucinatory experiences does not necessarily indicate the presence of psychosis.
states) (Breakspear, 2006; Chadwick & Birchwood, 1994; Gleick, 1987; Huber et al., 2004; Sokunbi et al., 2014; Tschacher & Junghan, 2009; Tschacher & Kupper, 2007; Waters et al., 2018). For example, Amira heard a voice: “a voice spoke to me, then. This disembodied- this huge voice. It sounded like the whole sky”. However, literature suggests that 38.7% of the general population has had a hallucinatory experience suggesting that these are common experiences (Ohayon, 2000). Further, Amira’s experience occurred in nature, a context that has been repeatedly noted in the literature as affording sudden and profound experiences (Bethelmy & Corraliza, 2019; DeMares, 2000; Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999; Harrild & Luke, 2020; Naor & Mayseless, 2020; Storie & Vining, 2018; Williams & Harvey, 2001).

4.1.3.2) Revelation.

When considering primary states of consciousness, it becomes clear that certain participants experienced ‘extreme’ states\(^{38}\), typified by high-entropy, which are characterised as being content-rich but unpredictable and involving perceptual distortions and a disturbance to the sense of ‘self’ (Carhart-Harris, 2018; Cavanna, Vilas, Palmucci & Tagliazucchi, 2017; Tagliazucchi et al., 2014). Jeremy had what was diagnosed as an acute psychotic episode, making his experience a typical example of a high-entropy state, and the most ‘extreme’ case in the data set. It should be noted that meditation has been found to induce psychosis which supports predictions of the EBH’s model (Chan-Ob & Boonyanaruthee, 1999; Dyga & Stupak, 2015; Kuijpers, Van der Heijden, Tuinier & Verhoeven, 2007). Jeremy experienced significantly different modes of perception (also evident in Eunice and George’s accounts) wherein he experienced ego-dissolution and a sense of oneness (Martin et al., 2014):

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\(^{38}\) The reader is reminded that the identification of ‘extreme’ cases is a core CRist retroductive method (Danermark et al., 2019).
It [consciousness] went really, really, really, really big. And really, really, really, really, really, small. Until it went to a place where there was this union of everything and nothing. And in that place, there wasn't self or no self. There wasn't time and space. There was just- [pause] different philosophies, different psychologies…

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The pronounced somatic component to many participant experiences can also be accounted for as a facet of elevated brain entropy. In a meta-review of research on sleep deprivation (a high-entropy state), Waters et al. (2018) found that somatosensory changes were the second most commonly affected sensory modality. This highlights the relationship
between high-entropy states and somatic and perceptual changes. Further, the somatic content of epiphanic experiences illustrate that epiphanic experiences are deeper than just an intellectual shift in understanding, as the term noesis suggests. As noted by Luce: “It's much deeper than that. It usually involves a sort of a change. You know, they know the whole-the way you think about yourself. Just suddenly switches and you've got-it actually can be actually quite scary”.

4.1.3.3) Integration.

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

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

It was by letting go of harmful parts of herself, that Luce was then able to connect with a more authentic sense of self. Will also provided a clear example of releasing a set of beliefs and values:
I suppose at a simplistic level, I've had to let go of something, you know, a belief that I held dear, which was that the kind of service that I provide, was best provided within a sort of a public sector, centrally organised, overseen, budgeted organisation. And I was signed up to that. And I associate that with, you- you- broadly with a leftish political view, and that was congruent with my leftish political views.

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

The magnitude of the changes experienced by the participants was non-linear. If linear, Newtonian logic is used, the outcome of perturbation to the system should be a predictable function of the size of the perturbation. However, the participants showed not only that the consequences of perturbation (i.e., voices, dreams, etc.) were unpredictable, but in many cases the extent of the changes experienced as a consequence of the perturbation far outweighed the magnitude of the perturbation (Oestreicher, 2007). For example, Hayley’s thought at the book festival produced the outcome of her leaving a ‘secure’ job to write a
book, and Frida’s realisation about happiness produced a radical acceptance of her ongoing health issues. These were life changing events for these participants that may not have occurred without perturbation.

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

A particularly significant change that was found was the change in personality or attitude often noted by participants. Literature highlights the ability of psychedelic drugs to produce profound and lasting changes to personality and attitude (Bouso, dos Santos,
Alcázar-Córcoles & Hallak, 2018; McGlothlin and Arnold, 1971; Studerus, Kometer, Hasler & Vollenweider, 2011). Specifically, and despite the truism that personality traits are relatively stable by adulthood (Costa and McCrae, 1997; McCrae and Costa, 1997), Openness was shown by MacLean, Johnson and Griffiths (2011) to have increased, and sustained across 14 months, following an administration of psilocybin. This result has been supported by other researchers (e.g., Bouso, dos Santos, Alcázar-Córcoles & Hallak, 2018). Moreover, this increase in Openness is reflective of the results in this research whereby many participants explicitly described Openness as becoming a new and/or enduring feature of themselves. Nina, for example, explained that she was:

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

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

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

39 Subjectively, attractors are experienced as “patterns of feeling, thinking, and relating that we engage in, either healthy or pathological”, whilst repellors are experienced as “patterns of thinking, feeling, and relating that we are unlikely to follow” (Shapiro, 2015, p.90).
of the participants' lives, alongside their ideas, beliefs, and theories, can be conceived of as a landscape of attractors and repellors within which the participants moved dynamically with the landscape constantly changing as their internal and external environments changed. Attractors, Shapiro (2015) proposed, “gradually transform into a complex network of interconnected channels where our life flows under normal circumstances, while repellors grow into mountain ranges, which we are reluctant or unable to climb” (p.91). For example, Anna’s landscape would be characterised by a deep channel to an attractor basin representative of her religious beliefs. Each participant’s adaptive, dynamic landscape is unique, reflecting the process of sensemaking and interpretation itself.

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

4.1.4) Summary

This section has explored the generative mechanisms identified as influential in the plane of material transactions with nature. Using an understanding of these mechanisms, certain factors can be identified as having the potential to make an epiphanic experience more likely (e.g., negative life experience), but there fundamentally remains no way to predict
these experiences as there is no way (yet) of predicting the myriad factors in an open, complex, and fluctuating system. However, it appears as though these kinds of experiences can be evoked in different ways, to different magnitudes, and on purpose, for example through the use of psychedelics, meditation, or lucid dreaming training (Carhart-Harris et al., 2014).

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

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

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40 Mainstream psychology and psychoanalysis have somewhat of a torrid history that is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully unpack. CR understands the sources of the distain and marginalisation often shown to psychoanalysis by psychology as emanating from two primary philosophical sources: (1) positivism (e.g., Eysenck & Eysenck, 1985; grounded in the political ideology of eugenics, and with considerable anti-Semitic undertones) and (2) critical rationalism (e.g., Popper, 1962, discussed in Chapter 1, section 2) – neither of with CR aligns with (Pilgrim, 2019). The criticisms of Freudian methods, and its apparently ‘self-evident’ weaknesses, are therefore seen by CRists as extensions of taken for granted philosophies in psychology (e.g., Freudian case study methods are seen as legitimate and useful sources of information on concrete singularities
absorption. This is perhaps unsurprising given that Freudian metapsychology is especially congruent with the EBH (Carhart-Harris, 2018; Carhart-Harris et al., 2014; Carhart-Harris, Mayberg, Malizia & Nutt, 2008). Therefore, whilst the EBH permits the understanding that epiphanic experiences largely occur due to changes in self-organised criticality as a result of increased entropic activity in the brain (Carhart-Harris, 2018; Chialvo, Balenzuela & Fraiman, 2008), the notion of cathexis provides additional nuance. Cathexis may act as a mechanism to redirect libidinal energy away from the ego, therefore diminishing its control, shifting towards (or entering into) primary psychical processes, and permitting content from the unconscious to emerge. The ego must then work to restructure itself (i.e., find a new self-organised structure) in such a way that it can accommodate and incorporate the information that has been released from the unconscious into the conscious mind. CR is largely congruent with psychoanalytical ideas, on the proviso that these ideas are taken as a guiding framework, and not as a set of covering laws (Pilgrim, 2019).

Existing theories of epiphanic experience can also be subsumed into this perspective. Breaking Point (Miller & C’dé Baca, 2001; Chapter 2 section 3.2.3.1) can be conceived of as the system entering into criticality. Deep Discrepancy (Miller & C’dé Baca, 2001; Chapter 2 section 3.2.3.2) speaks to conflicting sensory experience and recognition density that results in a non-volitional critical point. Personal Maturation (Miller & C’dé Baca, 2001; Chapter 2 section 3.2.3.3) may be conceived of as the system undergoing a non-linear change in order to become more adaptive to its environment. Particular Person (Miller & C’dé Baca, 2001; Chapter 2 section 3.2.3.4) serves to highlight individual differences in Openness may serve to increase or decrease the likelihood of experiencing an epiphanic experience. Formalised by CR). In fact, CRists “have tended to find merit in psychoanalysis as an approach to human life because it takes both causes and meanings seriously. Not only does it endorse the relationship between ontological realism and epistemological relativism, it also emphasises that inner events can have causal efficacy” (Pilgrim, 2019, p.144).
Activity (Ilivitsky, 2011; Chapter 2 section 3.1.3) is one method by which entropy may be increased in the brain, and cathexis can occur.

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

4.2) The Plane of Social Interactions Between People

Epiphanic experiences are private, internal events, but despite this, other people around the participants were influential, thereby implicating the presence of generative mechanisms in the plane of social interactions between people. For some participants, certain people appeared directly influential to the emergence of their epiphanic experience (e.g., Scarlett, Eunice, Xavier). For other participants, the quality of their social environment (i.e., negative life experience), which includes the actions of other agents, contributed to the emergence of their epiphanic experience (e.g., Hayley, Will, Luce). The majority of participants noted meaningful connections in their lives, such as George: “Good. Close with my family. Very close with my friends, particularly the ones I was living with. I'm still living with a couple of them now. So, yeah, I had a good support network. Good relationships”.

However, most still referred to social connections as being restricted or lacking, such as Luce
who described feeling “pretty isolated, and that relationships were on a superficial level”, and Adela who explained that “I would find it hard to relate to people”. Critically, those who fell more into the latter descriptive category tended to suffer greater impediments to their mental health (Saeri, Cruwys, Barlow, Stronge & Sibley, 2018). In order to explore how the plane of social interactions between people was causally impactful, the following topics will be discussed: (1) support, and (2) key relationships.

4.2.1) Support

Both the presence, and lack, of support was found to have causal implications. Further, many of the participants received support from others in the time before their epiphanic experience. For example, Nina received support in the form of coaching, which she perceived as the catalyst for her experience:

I think the coaching was the- the link. Relationships with two people, um, talking about mind and body rather than just the cognitive, which I stay very much in- in- in most of the time. That shifted it. Plus, you know, more than one person supporting me, more and one person saying, you know, this isn't right, this isn't – that, that wasn't good.

In this way, the support Nina received from coaching allowed her to approach her trauma (which was itself the product of the actions of other agents) in a new way, cognitively, as well as in an embodied fashion. Considering the research detailing the use of body-based
treatment for trauma, this new approach to dealing with her issues, introduced by her coaches’ mere weeks before her dream, could have been a powerful facilitator for Nina’s experience (Van der Kolk, 2014; Wilkinson, 2016).

Other participants described a lack of support. For example, Evelyn identified more than one area in her life in which she did not feel supported. When discussing her illness, she explained that: “You don't get any support with ME anyway in the medical profession. We get nothing like you get with MS, we're just diagnosed and basically told to sling your hook”. Evelyn linked her ME to the whistleblowing case she was involved in that led her to become self-employed, a state of affairs in which she felt “very, very unsupported”. Finally, Evelyn discussed how growing up in a household that had little interest in emotional or spiritual life meant that: “those sorts of experiences weren't really discussed. So, there wasn't anybody around that I would have said that I had these experiences”. This lack of support generated uncertainty in Evelyn’s life before her epiphanic experience. Further, it also meant that after her epiphanic experience, Evelyn had to work hard to change her recognition density (see section 4.1.2 above) as her philosophical perspective (dialectical materialist) disallowed her experiences. The tension between the disorganised and disconnected, and meaningful and connected, relationships in the lives of the participants suggests a duality whereby the individual is disconnected enough for a disorganising, destabilising effect to occur, but connected enough to prevent this from becoming unmanageable.

4.2.2) Key Relationships

Some participants described their epiphanic experience as being facilitated through a key relationship. For example, Xavier recalled receiving support from his partner, the other trainee with whom he was undertaking professional training, and his supervisor. Although
Xavier did not always feel comfortable talking to his supervisor, their support in working through Rogers’ 19 propositions was critical to facilitating his experience:

Kind of facilitated by my – by our supervisor around some of those areas that were more pertinent and actually probably allowed us to even introspect deeper and deeper, just to help develop that sense of self even more…I think obviously the people I had around me made a massive difference. I think, I think my supervisor was great in terms of how she set it up and the exercise itself and getting us to do that.

Xavier’s supervisor therefore played a crucial role in facilitating his epiphanic experience, pointing out the similarities between him and his fellow trainee, and facilitating catalysis of his revelation. By setting up these meetings and using person-centred counselling, Xavier’s supervisor also ensured that there would be a structure (discussed in section 4.3 below) through which Xavier could interpret his experience\(^\text{41}\). Another example can be drawn from Eunice. The two facilitators of Eunice’s retreat were an important element in his experience, as they provided both the content that catalysed his experience and much of the lens through which he integrated it. The course leader, Neil, was an influential figure for Eunice:

\(^{41}\) Xavier’s experience is also implicative of Mezirow’s (1975) theory of transformative learning which proposes that disorientating dilemmas can be used to challenge adult learners’ thinking. In so doing, these individuals are then forced to critically assess and reflect on the accuracy of their beliefs (Howie & Bagnall, 2013). Transformative learning can be conceptualised as a non-linear, dynamical process (O’Sullivan, 2003), and has been linked to creativity, as this kind of learning is seen as an “intuitive, creative, emotional process” (Grabove, 1997, p.90).
I can't say how many retreats I've been on with Neil… and he's just a remarkably kind of magnetic presence and deep pre-safe presence as well. There's always something about that combination of, yeah, feeling very safe with him, he's very kind of – very trustworthy person, but also, somebody who can go to a very deep, you know, been to very deep places, and that can- yeah that certainly, um, took me there.

In addition, his spiritual mentor, Amal, provided him with support during his epiphanic experience, as she “just kind of held me like from behind. Like- it was it was kind of like being held on air, it was very, very gentle. It just felt like my breathing kind of becoming regulated again”. Thus, for Eunice, others were critical in shaping his epiphanic experience. This suggests that, under certain conditions, others were able to constellate a range of unconscious content for the participants. This notion of constellation is Jungian in origin and denotes the activation of a psychical personal complex (i.e., a group of ideas or images with an emotional charge; Jung, 1960, 1969). According to psychodynamic and analytical ideas, if, by whatever method, others are able to constellate complexes for the individual, then a kind of cathexis occurs whereby energy is drawn away from other complexes and invested in the constellated complex (Freud, 1940; Jung, 1960; Krieger, 2013). This not only again implicates the relevance of ideas from psychodynamic theory to the study of epiphanic experience, but also suggests that, in the same way that ideas, beliefs, and theories can act as attractors (Goertzel, 1995a), other people can also be conceptualised as acting as attractors within the participants lives. Other people may act as attractors by facilitating critical points, such as in the case of Eunice, and/or integration, such as in the case of George: “I probably also was in an environment where teachers were there to talk about it..."
and understand it … I think having that support and that framework helped me understand the
experience and it be a positive experience”.

4.2.3) Summary

The majority of participants had meaningful connections with others and received
support from others in some form in the time before their epiphanic experience. However,
there are perhaps two things most critical to note when considering the influence of others:
key facilitative relationships, and restricted meaningful connections. Several participants
noted a particular person who they believed to have directly, or indirectly, catalysed, or
shaped their epiphanic experience. This is reflective of existing literature wherein social
support has been implicated as important (Miller & C’de Baca, 1994). Concurrently, many
participants described their relationships with others as being compromised, or restricted, in
some way, which is suggestive of the state of alienation frequently referred to in literature
(Jarvis, 1997; McDonald, 2005, 2008; Miller & C’de Baca, 1994, 2001; Murray, 2006). This
tension between the presence of supportive and key relationships, alongside fractious
relationships, and a more general state of disconnection and disorganisation, may therefore
have causal implications. This duality, whereby the individual is destabilised by their difficult
relationships, but sufficiently stabilised by their supportive relationships, may contribute to
the entropic landscape by shifting the individual towards greater criticality.

4.3) The Plane of Social Structure Sui Generis

When considering the structures relevant to the causal mechanisms underpinning
epiphanic experience it is important to refer to the concepts of structure and agency, as they
are operationalised within CR by the Transformational Model of Social Activity (TMSA; Bhaskar, 2008; Collier, 1994; see Chapter 1, section 2.6), which explores how social structures effect intentional agency, and how agency may in turn impact social structures. Four structures in the plane of social structures sui generis appeared to play a particularly pronounced and causally impactful role in participant epiphanic experiences, namely: (1) family, (2) ideology, (3) institutions, and (4) psychology. Some participants used their agency to challenge and transform these structures for themselves, though the structures themselves placed limitations on the extent to which they could do this.

4.3.1) Family

Family can be considered a causally impactful structure as it was entangled in many of the participant accounts of epiphanic experience. In this way, the participants' family structures – and the range of phenomena encompassed (e.g., internal working models, attachment style, etc.; Hooper, 2007) – tended to form part of the foundation for the experiences to come. This is evident due to a great many participants relating what they had discovered through their epiphanic experience to their own upbringings. When Adela was very young, she was abandoned by her mother and left to live with her extended family. On the day of her epiphanic experience she found herself to be particularly sensitised to the presence of her friend’s baby: “there was also something about seeing, kind of how defenceless and vulnerable he was, that was quite sad”. Combined with her reading of a psychotherapy book (the key line within which can be considered a high entropy object; see

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42 Please see Appendix G for a reflexive passage on another potentially causally impactful structure: time. This reflexive passage has not been included in the main body of the text due to its more abstract nature which might detract from the flow of this train of argumentation. Despite this, the researcher still considered it important to address this structure.
section 4.1.3.1.2), Adela ultimately found the realisation that the negative way she had thought about herself wasn’t ‘true’, but rather was the consequence of her treatment as an infant, thereby allowing her to transform the structure of family for herself and overcome her own latent fears about parenthood: “I don't know if that was stopping me being a parent, but then I became a parent, sort of like, a year and a bit afterwards. But that made me feel like I could be like a good enough parent”. 

Liam’s experience also implicated the family structure as being causally impactful. Liam described being exposed to a lot of death as a child, losing his mother and three grandparents within the space of four years. He also recounted that “my relationship with my dad wasn't very good”. This meant that Andrew’s death was particularly difficult for Liam – he describes this as “the first significant person who died” – because Andrew had become “definitely a father figure”. Therefore, the trauma inflicted by his death was highly acute, and seemingly sufficient to provoke an epiphanic experience which transformed and reorganised his values such that interpersonal connection, in particular with family, became Liam’s priority: “I recently moved out of [city], moved to [different city]. That was again to be- with the express intention of being closer to my family, which just wouldn't have happened years ago”.

A final example can be drawn from Luce’s case, who explicitly details how her experience with the tweed coat allowed her to understand that her notion of family had become entangled with the cult:

I was equating my mother with the cult, because she- she [mother] more or less merged with them, very much merged with them, even after they left, really. So- you know, it was- you know, the things I liked, the things I disliked, the things I believed
in, the things I didn’t believe in, the things I knew were wrong and the things that I
didn’t know were wrong.

Indeed, it was Luce’s realisation that she did not know herself beyond the structure of
her family (as well as the cult, through entanglement with the family structure) that formed
the basis of her first epiphanic experience, and eventually allowed her to separate, or
individuate, from the family structure and the ideology entwined with it.

The family structure therefore appears influential in terms of the kind of content that
emerged during and after the epiphanic experience. It is well established in the literature that
adverse childhood experiences can impact people profoundly (Boullier & Blair, 2018;
Sheffler et al., 2019). All of the participants in this study had negative life experiences, and
many of them referred to adverse childhood experiences. These adverse experiences disrupt
neurodevelopment, create emotional, cognitive, and social impairments, and can result in the
adoption of high-risk behaviours, disease, disability, and social problems (Felitti et al., 1998;
Hughes & Ostrout, 2020). Childhood development is highly influenced by the family unit
(Anderson et al., 2003). Further, the structure of family is implicated in all participants'
adverse childhood experiences, as family support, and modelling of effective and healthy
coping strategies, facilitates adjustment in children (Hawkis & Manne, 2013; Stevenson et al.,
2020). It is therefore proposed that for many of the participants, early childhood experiences,
in the context of their family structures, created emotional, cognitive, and behavioural
patterns that prevented them from adjusting optimally to their environment in the time before
their epiphanic experiences.
Participants invested in various ideological structures that can be considered causally impactful. These ideologies shaped participants' lives and experiences before their epiphanic experience, as well as informing the integration process. The ideological structures implicated in the data set were particularly influential in terms of the activities that they led participants to engage with. For example, Frida was a Buddhist, and she explained that “I've been kind of living this and practicing for a long time since back in the 90s…my Buddhist practice is central to my life”. Indeed, the chanting that Frida engaged in directly before her epiphanic experience was a core part of her Buddhist practice. Similarly, George made sense of his epiphanic experience in terms of the philosophies (structures) and meditative practices (behaviour/agency) he was engaging with:

I would say, yeah, the silent retreat had a lot to do with it. I think just the general mindfulness practice. I'd say probably my interest in, kind of ACT and then a bit more into kind of, like Buddhist philosophy and getting a bit more interested in those things I think definitely contributing. I think, with the, with the second experience that would obviously have been very directly related to the book that I was reading (George).

Here, George implicated various meditative practices in his epiphanic experience, from the silent retreat he attended, to the literature he was reading at the time. It is suggested that whilst the form of these behaviours varied across the participants (e.g., meditation, chanting, reading), what unifies them is their function: the capacity to enhance cathexis or...
Many participants felt connected to religious structures and ideologies, as many had experienced a religious upbringing, and some were still actively engaged in this sphere of life. A clear example of this can be found in Eunice, who felt connected to the Church of England traditions practiced by his grandmother:

I remember I experienced, one time, being at my grandmother’s house, who did go to church, she’s kind of, I guess, old-fashioned Church of England, kind of, almost out of habit, and just feeling a kind of sense of connection or warmth in relation to that.

This sense of connection to religious ideology is reflected in Eunice’s continued engagement with Christian and Sufi religious structures and ideas. Jeremy’s epiphanic experience was highly influenced by Christian mystical ideologies. He described engagement with two key texts, ‘The Way of Mastery’ and ‘A Course in Miracles’. It was engaging with the suggested activities in these mystic texts, particularly ‘A Course in Miracles’, that preceded Jeremy's experience. Further, because some participants were already deeply invested in religious structures before their epiphanic experience, these structures gained a new sense of importance after their experience. Anna’s Christian ideology was central to the content that emerged during her epiphanic experience, as well as the way in which she made sense of it:
I suppose because I was affiliated to the church, I just I just automatically went that way… I had to give my life, I had to give my life to Jesus and, you know, learn about him… my whole life is working for Jesus.

This aligns with extant literature which asserts that the process of sensemaking is guided by prior conceptual frameworks (Amos, 2016a; Hirsh, Mar & Peterson, 2012; Miller & C’de Baca, 2001). However, other participants, such as Amira, eschewed religious dogma and ideology and described a new sense of spirituality emerging:

I am a spiritual person, and you can be a spiritual person without having formal religion… It's made me feel a sense of something greater than us out there, and, you know, each of us is just a small, you know, tiny, tiny little, you know, we're not much more than a speck of dust, really. But each speck of dust is has its own place and has its own importance.

Indeed, the vast majority of participants classified themselves as non-religious, or as having had a secular upbringing, and few stated this as clearly as Evelyn (who retained these beliefs post-epiphany but incorporated a spiritual dimension to them): “I was brought up as an atheist… I'm not into God. I'm not into gods. I'm not into angels”. In many ways, the prevalence of atheism/agnosticism in the data set, is to be expected given that rates of religiosity are very low, both in the scientific community, and in the United Kingdom (Ecklund, Johnson, Scheitle, Matthews & Lewis, 2016; Larson & Witham, 1998). Indeed, religiospiritual structures were only found to have been influential to the progression of an
epiphanic experience if those structures were deeply embedded into the psyche of the individual (e.g., Anna), and purposefully made relevant by the participant. This is further evidenced by the fact that several participants had religious convictions (e.g., Adela) but did not use them to make sense of their experience. Therefore, whilst religiospiritual structures were shown to have particular relevance to epiphanic experience (Ilivitsky, 2011; Miller & C’de Baca, 2001), this study adds another layer of nuance by clarifying that religiospiritual structures were relevant - but only in instances in which participants chose to make them relevant.

Xavier represents another example of the impact of ideological structures, as he and his supervisory group engaged with Rogerian thought in the form of the 19 propositions of person-centred counselling (Rogers, 1951). Xavier details how engaging with these ideas was conducive to “deeper introspection…stuff was very deep, very personal”. It was from the framework created by this ideology that Xavier’s epiphanic experience emerged. These ideologies shaped the participants' self- and/or world-assumptions in the time before their epiphanic experiences, and in many instances, informed the activities they engaged in prior to transformation. In this way, ideologies can be considered directly causally impactful in terms of their behavioural corollaries.

4.3.3) Institutions

Two types of institution appear to be particularly causally impactful within the specific context of the participants from this study: (1) the medical system, and (2) the workplace. An example of the former can be found in Scarlett’s story, which involves multiple points of contact with the medical system, across two countries (Italy and the UK). Scarlett’s major instance of negative life experience before her epiphanic experience (i.e., her
husband’s heart attack) happened within the context of the Italian medical system. Scarlett’s husband was required to move to different locations to get the treatment he needed, which was even more challenging to navigate as the medical practitioners, obviously, spoke Italian. This most likely would have increased subjective uncertainty for Scarlett. Scarlett’s transformative experience also occurred within the context of the medical system, this time in the UK, which she described as follows:

I thought if I'm off sick I'll go to the doctor. So, I just sort of explained what was happening. I he- and- and I'm really heartened actually, I was real- I can remember feeling amaz- how amazing he was, he was one of these doctors- because some of them can be a bit flippant, some of them can be like, you can tell they're not really listening, you know, whatever. But he sat there, he didn't interrupt. He just listened to what I was saying. And then he just looked at me and said, “Scarlett, life is not a rehearsal”.

Perhaps being seen and heard within the same structure and context that had previously so profoundly destabilised her, was causally impactful for Scarlett. The medical system also appears causally impactful for Evelyn as she recounted receiving no support for her ME from the medical profession. In conjunction with her self-professed ‘spiritual side’ this rejection by the medical system may have encouraged Evelyn to consider other options for healthcare.

Occupational structures also appeared causally impactful for some participants. Will’s working situation was becoming untenable in the time before his epiphanic experience. Will
referred not only to the “brutal cuts to local authority budgets” which impeded his ability to do his job within the organisational structure, but also to the fact that “professional relationships where I work were getting kind of increasingly kind of fractious”. A significant part of Will’s epiphanic experience was reorganising his views on educational psychology provision, which up until his workplace difficulties, had aligned with his organisational structure. Will explained that “I had to rethink all of that, in terms of what my job was about, how I wanted to do it”, indicating his understanding that he needed to use his agency to change his relationship with this structure.

Hayley’s workplace also effectively created the conditions for her epiphanic experience. She recounted developing a “profound psychogenic stutter”, and other health issues, before her epiphanic experience: “I sort of had a kind of breakdown because I realised that not only had I been, you know, overworked when I needn’t have been”. Had Hayley’s managers not behaved in this way, she may never have been so open to the thought that emerged at the book festival, and so ready to leave that occupational structure. After her experience, Hayley moved away from the structure that she felt constrained her, academic psychology. She exercised her agency by rejecting the structure and pursuing a writing career on her own terms. In this way, the institutions in participants’ lives can be seen to be causally impactful, participating in the creation of the conditions from which an epiphanic experience might emerge.

4.3.4) Psychology

Several participants admitted to the researcher after their interviews that they had never disclosed their experience to others in their profession. Despite this, most used their psychological background in order to make sense of what they had experienced, such as
Liam\textsuperscript{43}: “there was definitely a willingness in me to try and understand this in psychological terms and to try and process it in some way”. This tension – trying to create understanding through the use of psychological structures, but also understanding that this experience is perhaps not something to be spoken aloud about within psychological structures – may be due to dominant discourses in psychology which tend to view humans through a lens of pathology\textsuperscript{44}. Seligman and Csikzentmihalyi (2000) reflected that pre-World War II psychology devoted itself equally to healing mental disorder, helping all people to increase their productivity and fulfilment, and the development of those with exceptional talents. However, post-World War II, psychology shifted the vast majority of its focus toward healing mental disorders. This pathological lens thereby serves to exacerbate stigma around epiphanic experiences, and mental health more generally, such that perhaps even Psychologists feel as though this is not a subject they can discuss.

Indeed, both Frida and Will noted the pathological focus inherent to psychology, which they interpreted as constraining. Frida noted that “when I studied psychology, there was no positive psychology. You know, it didn't exist. So actually, what you learn was very negative psychology, the psychology of illness”. She felt constrained by the lack of focus in psychology on the conditions for happiness, whilst Will discussed that working in the pathology-focused field of local authority educational psychology meant that he only came into contact with people with learning difficulties: “you kind of get a feeling that everybody's ill because your professional life is comprised of one ill person after another”. Frida had already immersed herself in Buddhism, and this allowed her to negotiate her relationship with the structure of psychology by finding an alternative structure that placed happiness at its

\textsuperscript{43} Please note that Liam was not one of the participants who professed to not having spoken to others about his experience.

\textsuperscript{44} This can also be linked to the wariness surrounding the wounded healer archetype (Zerubavel & O’Dougherty Wright, 2012; see section 3.17 above).
core, and after her epiphanic experience, she chose to adopt perspectives within her practice that did not have a pathological focus, most notably positive psychology, and Buddhism.

Will’s decision to resign as a local authority educational psychologist and set up his own practice meant that he moved away from this manifestation of psychology and created a space wherein he could navigate educational psychology more freely, and on his own terms.

The consequence of the aforementioned shift in focus in psychology towards pathology may be the emergence of debate around, and fixation on, what constitutes normality and abnormality. However, the distinction that psychology seeks to draw between normal and abnormal, is not as apparent as is often assumed. This argument was most notably advocated for by Rosenhan (1973), whose landmark study explored the validity of psychiatric diagnosis, and concluded that there was a strong tendency for psychological professionals within the psychiatric medical structure to pathologise experience and over-diagnose disorders. This is a clear indication of a particular tendency within psychology which must be acknowledged and challenged. Indeed, the very foundation of the system of psychiatric diagnosis has been seriously questioned by CRists, as despite its descriptive coherence, psychiatric diagnosis lacks aetiological value (e.g., Bentall, Jackson & Pilgrim, 1988; Pilgrim, 2007, 2013).

When contextualised with regards to the kind of epiphanic experiences detailed earlier in the chapter, the tendency to pathologise can pose issues, as these experiences can contain experiential elements that overlap with psychotic symptomatology, such as altered sensory perception and apophenic states of mind (Brugger, 2001; Conrad, 1958; Lebedev et al., 2016; Parnas & Henriksen, 2016). For example, psychosis is considered abnormal within multiple cultures; however, research shows that 37.8 per cent of people will experience a hallucination of some kind, and 10 percent of people in the UK will experience specifically auditory
hallucinations at some point in their lives (Johns et al., 2014; Ohayon, 2000). Moreover, research has shown that many people are not included in these statistics as they simply do not find their experiences distressing – despite the rhetoric pedalled by the psychiatric diagnostic system (Cooke, 2017; Garcia-Romeu & Tart, 2013; Van Os, Hansen, Bijl & Ravelli, 2000; Pilgrim, 2019). Therefore, the psychosis phenotype has been proposed to be part of a continuum of experiences that may also apply to the general population (Guloksuz & van Os, 2017; van Os, Hansen, Bijl & Ravelli, 2000). This view of psychosis as a spectrum challenges prevailing views in psychology and raises questions about the labelling of experience as either normal or abnormal. This perspective also illuminates certain tendencies within psychology that may impact how the kinds of experiences detailed in this research are viewed, even by practitioners within the profession (indeed, Chapter 6 (section 2.1) describes some of the scepticism encountered by the researcher towards this research during participant recruitment).

The above discussion suggests that modern psychology, as a discipline, tends to pathologise experience, and has a penchant for attempting to make clear distinctions between what is normal and abnormal. This tendency is likely a result of psychology’s positivist/empiricist inheritance (Pilgrim, 2019), and may result in a predisposition to pathologise epiphanic experiences, reducing them to mere symptoms of mental illness (e.g., Parnas & Henriksen, 2016 appear motivated to avoid this fate). However, this attitude would commit the fallacy of reductionism – reducing a complex phenomenon to simply a brain disease (Pilgrim, 2007).

Whilst the above serves to demonstrate how the participants negotiated their relationship with the broader structure of psychology, unsurprisingly, the participants epiphanic experiences also tended to impact the way in which they conducted their work as
practitioner psychologists. The participants changed their approach to practice in various ways which were largely dependent on the content of their epiphanic experience as well as the broader context of their work and lives. Participants described their perspectives and interests changing, as well as many choosing to disseminate their new ideas, such as Jeremy: “I’ve been giving lots of talks to, you know, PhD psychology students about my experiences, giving talks to psychiatrists so that they can see a different perspective on mental health, a much broader perspective”.

Further, as a result of their experience, many of the participants changed their choice of therapeutic modality in ways that were consistent with their experience. For example, Adela, whose long-standing issues were in large part rooted in her abandonment by her mother, chose to adopt an attachment perspective. She also “tried to like bring in more embodied aspects into my practice” after her particularly “embodied” epiphanic experience. Another example can be drawn from Anna: “I use CBT mostly exclusively now because that- that links to the Christian message of always thinking nice, and thinking lovely things, and just thinking positively”. Therefore, it becomes clear that the participants chose to adopt therapeutic modalities that were congruent with their new understanding of themselves and the world. In this way, their practice became an authentic extension of themselves as people, and of their newfound philosophies. Moreover, many were aware of the importance of this congruence referring frequently to the significance of ‘practicing what you preach’ (see Hayley’s quotation in Table 5.5 above).

The participants’ view of themselves within practice also changed considerably. This was especially evident with regards to the attributes the participants described seeking to embody as practitioner psychologists. The most commonly noted characteristics that participants referred to were Rogerian in nature (Rogers, 1957, 1959), namely: (1) openness,
(2) non-judgmentalism, (3) empathy, and (4) unconditional positive regard. The following quotation from Xavier is not just evocative of a newfound connection to Rogerian practitioner values, but also of a personal paradigm shift:

I started to, I tried to understand things from other people's perspectives and the difficult people that I was working with… let's understand your story. Let's understand your journey. And let's, let's help improve that journey or let's help make that journey even stronger, if it's not- you're not coming in with a problem or an issue, you just want to improve, how can we look to do that? And I can only really do that through understanding the person, understanding what they want, what their goals for therapy are, what they want that relationship between us to be like.

Because the participants emerged from their epiphanic experiences profoundly changed in some way, it is logical that this change would manifest within their practice. The participants’ personal and professional selves became more congruent leading them to embrace modes of practice that were reflective of their personal philosophies, thereby allowing them to embody a greater degree of authenticity in their work.

4.3.5) Summary

Some of the structures in the participants' lives appear causally impactful. In many instances, the family and/or the occupational structures active in the participants' lives acted as a destabilising force. The destabilising effect of these structures could be acute (e.g.,
Hayley), or could represent the long-standing presence of maladaptive ways of being (e.g., Adela). The destabilising effect of these structures would serve to increase subjective uncertainty – the qualitative component of entropic brain activity (Carhart-Harris et al., 2014). Ideologies could also be causally impactful, particularly when they possessed a behavioural component (e.g., meditation, chanting). These ideology-congruent formalised activities engaged in by participants may have acted as focal points from which epiphanic experiences could emerge (Vivot, Pallavicini, Zamberlan, Vigo & Tagliazucchi, 2020), in addition to facilitating sensemaking. In this way, social structures sui generis can be seen to contribute to the conditions and contexts from which epiphanic experiences could emerge.

4.4) The Plane of the Stratification of the Embodied Personality

The discipline of psychology contains myriad perspectives on personality and what constitutes ‘the self’ (Fleuridas & Krafcik, 2019). However, because this research is grounded in CRist philosophical positioning, the CRist ontological differentiation of the self into a tripartite laminated system (i.e., the ego, the embodied personality, the transcendentally real self) constituted the premises of enquiry (see Chapter 1, section 2.6). This ontology of personhood, in conjunction with the arguments presented above (particularly in section 4.1), is able to provide an understanding of the mechanisms at work in the plane of the uniquely stratified embodied personality.

In the disorganisation phase preceding epiphanic experience, the embodied personality tended to be out of sync with the transcendentally real self, often due to the employment of egoic defence mechanisms. This can be seen throughout many participant’s descriptions of a sense of disconnection from their sense of self. Jeremy described being
disconnected from himself and “living from my head mostly” due to the vow he took at age seven to “never feel upset ever, ever again” after he received the news of his parents’ plan to divorce. For Scarlett, this disconnection is evident in her understanding that she was not in contact with herself: “I was becoming a shadow of my former self...Sometimes, I didn't like the way I was becoming. I really, I - I was almost getting to the point I don't recognise myself”. Luce demonstrated a pronounced consequence of this disconnection, manifesting as a state of dissociation: “I still struggle trying to remember what actually happened around that time because I think I just dissociated to deal with it all”. This fractured sense of self may have been influenced by a tendency for the use of egoic defence mechanisms\(^{45}\). The plane of the embodied personality can therefore be conceptualised as disorganised as, overall, participants described: (1) an ego with a low opinion of itself and a tendency to employ defence mechanisms, (2) an embodied personality in turmoil and principally characterised by elevated levels of psychophysiological arousal, and (3) a largely inaccessible transcendentally real self.

Bhaskar (2020) theorised that when the embodied personality is out of sync with the transcendentally real self, intentionality\(^{46}\) will be split. This notion of split intentionality aligns with the findings that characterise the participants' inner and outer lives as possessing degrees of tumult and disorder prior to epiphanic experience. In conjunction with the ideas discussed in section 4.1, this disorganised quality of the embodied personality can be conceived of as a source of uncertainty, therefore predisposing a movement towards greater criticality (Carhart-Harris et al., 2014). Bhaskar (2020) further asserted that unity with the

\(^{45}\) Many participants displayed a propensity to employ defence mechanisms (e.g., repression, withdrawal, denial) prior to epiphanic experience. For example, Evelyn explained how her lack of a social network, with whom to discuss her more spiritual side, resulted in her repressing certain experiences: “I realised that I’d had all sorts of experiences that I’d just sort of put a lid on because one does if there isn’t anybody to talk about them to”.

\(^{46}\) Intentionality can also be thought of as mental representation. In essence, intentionality is a philosophical term used to describe the property of consciousness whereby the mind can be said to be conscious of, and directed towards, something – be that something external (i.e., transcendent) or internal (i.e., immanent).
transcendentally real self is attained by elimination of the ego (e.g., the ego dissolution experienced by George is an ‘extreme case’ of this occurring; discussed in greater depth below – section 4.4.1.2), such that the embodied personality is able to come into alignment with the transcendentally real self. In this way, incongruence, and disorganisation within the plane of the stratification of the embodied personality can be viewed as having causal implications.

Moreover, Bhaskar (2017) offers further insight into the mechanisms within the plane of the uniquely stratified embodied personality that might generate epiphanic experiences:

I would have liked to have said something about the limitations of the discursive intellect; the intellect, which is concerned with thinking, because thinking virtually never takes you to the solution. It is a necessary condition for it, go through all the possibilities, but what happens when you arrive at the solution of a problem is you arrive by the action of another part of your mind or consciousness, which is above, beyond, or beneath thought; sometimes in the West it is called the unconscious. (p.158).

This quotation not only highlights that Bhaskar's conceptualisation of the ontology of personhood aligns with Freudian ideas (see Chapter 1, section 2.6.2) through the assertion of the existence of the unconscious, but it also provides some insight into the 'essence' of epiphanic experience. In particular, the notion that epiphanic experience is not a purely cognitive phenomenon. Indeed, the understanding generated by an epiphanic experience was suggested by some participants to be powerful because it is an understanding that manifests
in “a more embodied and emotional way” (Adela) that “wasn't just the mind. It was the feeling sense” (Jeremy). For example, Nina reflected that embodied coaching was quite so powerful for her because:

It was useful to kind of get out of my head and get into the rest of me because I was not accessing the whole part of me. It was just accessing in my mind, and how I could think my way through this, and you know, how I could do it. And so actually using the body was a very powerful tool to kind of wake up the rest- or connect the whole of me, really, and to get some feelings in, um, you know the whole process.

This quotation serves to demonstrate that whilst epiphanic experiences constitute a kind of revelatory ‘knowing’, this is not an entirely cognitive way of knowing, but rather one in which the body (i.e., embodied personality) plays an intrinsic role. Moreover, Nina’s quotation also aligns with Bhaskar’s (2020) notion that human growth emerges from the diminishment of the ego (i.e., “it was useful to kind of get out of my head”) and the unification of the embodied personality and transcendentally real self.

Two mechanisms in the plane of the uniquely stratified embodied personality are suggested to play a causally impactful role in participant epiphanic experiences by facilitating the elimination of the ego, such that the embodied personality was able to come into alignment with the transcendentally real self. The mechanisms identified were: 1) cathexis, and 2) Openness. Both mechanisms, alongside the theory they draw from, will be explored in turn.
4.4.1) Cathexis

The notion of cathexis, a suggested property, or tendency, of the psyche emergent from Freudian psychoanalytic theory (Freud, 1940; see Chapter 1, section 2.6.2), was found to have the capacity to describe potential generative mechanisms within the participant sample. Cathexis refers to the investment of the libido in a person, object, or idea (i.e., the dynamic coordinate). It should be noted that ‘object’ can refer to literal objects, but also symbolic or abstract objects. Freud (1940) proposed that during cathexis, the majority of libido (i.e., the economic coordinate) is transferred to the object of cathexis, which then, to some extent, takes the place of the ego (i.e., topographical coordinate), which allows for the emergence of repressed\(^\text{47}\) or unconscious content.

Cathexis, and Freudian metapsychological ideas more generally, can not only be understood in metapsychological terms, but also in terms of modern neuroscientific understanding\(^\text{48}\), thereby giving them a particular interdisciplinary power (Carhart-Harris & Friston, 2010; Carhart-Harris, Mayberg, Malizia & Nutt, 2008; Johnson & Flores Mosri, 2016; Stoléru, 2014). Cathexis can therefore be considered a property, or tendency, of the ego. In order to effectively demonstrate the relevance of this concept to the generative mechanisms underpinning epiphanic experience, the Disorganisation and Revelation phases of epiphanic experience will be considered in turn.

\(^{47}\) Repression is a critical concept within psychoanalysis (Freud, 1914). Freud (1915) explained that “the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious” (p.147). Repression is conceived of as a defence mechanism that is utilised in the presence of ideas which distress the ego, and which involves anticathexis (whereby the ego withdraws libidinal energy from unconscious ideas in order to strengthen psychical structures that block those unconscious ideas from entering consciousness; Freud, 1895, 1915, 1940).

\(^{48}\) Carhart-Harris, Mayberg, Malizia and Nutt (2008) propose that cathexis correlates with activation of the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC). Activation of the DLPFC leads to deactivation of the default mode network (DMN; Raichle et al., 2001). Therefore, cathexis entails the “displacement of libido (energy) from the ego’s reservoir (the DMN) and its investment in objects (activation of the DLPFC)” (Carhart-Harris, Mayberg, Malizia & Nutt, 2008, p.4).
4.4.1.1) Disorganisation.

Cathexis was found to be particularly causally impactful in contexts that involved negative life experience, high entropy objects, and purposeful experiential absorption (see section 4.1.3.1 above). Acute negative life experience describes the generation of significant uncertainty (Hirsh, Mar & Peterson, 2012), with the trauma itself likely becoming the focus of cathexis. For example, receiving the news about Andrew could be considered the focus of cathexis for Liam. The economic intensity of the negative life event would produce a significant discharge of energy from the unconscious, thereby weakening ego control and shifting the individual closer to primary state processes. This would then permit the emergence of a radically new representation of the world for Liam:

None of that stuff was important. Not really. Not in this sort of grand scheme of—of what that relationship was to me. You know, frankly, in comparison to that, all of that is garbage, garbage. And so, that was the immediate thought process that I went through.

Indeed, Nersessian (2014) asserted that subjective uncertainty and anxiety can be attributed to the discharge of psychical energy from the unconscious, and that consistent, and relatively small, amounts of anxiety are discharged in order to impede a large discharge that would weaken ego control (Freud, 1936). As a consequence of a large discharge of energy, the ego tends to be less able to act as guardian to the unconscious, thereby allowing for unconscious content to move into the preconscious and forcing a reorganisation of the ego.
However, for those participants whose experience was not triggered by acute negative life experience, but who were instead exposed to protracted negative life experience (e.g., Luce), consistent discharges of energy from the unconscious would signal the activation of the ego’s defences (Nersessian, 2014). In these instances, not only were egoic defence mechanisms evident, but other experiences (e.g., formalised activity, high entropy objects, naturally occurring altered states, or another negative life experience) tended to be necessary for epiphanic experience to occur. One example of this is Nina, who explained that before her dream, “I kind of like didn't, sort of ignored it, or not ignored it, repressed it should I say. Didn't really think it happened to me”.

The notion of a high entropy object is also congruent with the notion of cathexis (see section 4.1.3.1). It is suggested that in the presence of the high entropy object, cathexis, or hypercathexis (whereby excessive libidinal energy is invested into an object or idea; Freud, 1940), tends to occur. Because the main quota of libidinal energy is transferred to the object, the object takes the place of the ego to some extent (Freud, 1940). The elimination, or diminishment, of the ego allows for freer movement between the unconscious and preconscious. This means that the psyche would behave more in accordance with primary processes (though the dominance of the primary process over the secondary process is conceptualised as a function of the economic investment of libido in cathexis), so not only is repressed or unconscious content more able to emerge, but the individual is also more able to think freely, divergently, and associatively about that content, and in general. Consequently, unconscious, or repressed content is permitted to emerge, therefore necessitating ego re-organisation. For example, the high entropy object of cathexis in Adela’s experience was the sentence she read in her book, which became an external symbol of her internal landscape. Application of this theoretical perspective allows for the view that this moment temporarily
bound her ego and allowed unconscious content to emerge. This appeared to cause a reorganisation of the ego with far-reaching effects on how Adela perceived herself.

Purposeful experiential absorption can also be viewed as a vehicle to cathexis or hypercathexis. In some cases, the object of cathexis was external. Luce’s story not only possesses an external object of cathexis (i.e., the tweed coat), but also represents a case wherein, in strictly Freudian terms, prior to epiphanic experience the super-ego could be conceptualised as powerful enough to paralyse the ego into behaving according to its moral standards. Luce’s superego could have been particularly dominant due to her childhood in a religious cult (Freud, 1940). It can therefore be suggested that Luce’s ego repressed any material that would contradict the strict edicts of her superego. The tweed coat and, later, the text by Carl Rogers, were her external objects of cathexis. During cathexis it is suggested that repressed content was able to emerge, thus forcing the ego to reorganise itself and regain some control over the superego. Bhaskar’s (2020) ontology of personhood does not explicitly account for the superego as a distinct part of the self, but this Freudian notion can reasonably be considered an aspect of the Bhaskarian ego, given that it is largely conceived of as being the internalised aspect of parental influence (Freud, 1949), and therefore separate to the transcendentally real self.

In other instances, the object of cathexis appeared internal. In these instances, varying degrees of libido tended to be transferred to an object, person, or idea, through the vehicle of formalised activity, such that the ego was replaced in that moment and unconscious or repressed content was permitted to move more freely between the unconscious and

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49 The diminishment of the superego is evident from Luce’s comments about feeling as though she had no moral compass in the time after the tweed coat: “I suddenly got this urge to go home, or to go out, anywhere, and start doing all the things that I’d learnt were wrong. I even wanted to go and murder somebody just to find out if it was really a sinful thing to do. Because it felt like all my morals, just all of a sudden had vanished because I no longer knew what were mine, and what belonged to the cult.”
preconscious. Application of this Freudian theoretical perspective allows for the view that George’s experience appears to be most strongly related to hypercathexis through formalised activity. It can be suggested that the intensity with which libidinal energy was focused on meditative activity (through a focus on the breath) bound his ego such that it broke off its relations with external reality, and he entered a primary state. Therefore, in instances where the main quota of libido was transferred to the object, person, or idea (i.e., they were highly absorbed, if Tellegen and Atkinson’s (1974) theoretical framework is applied), primary processes were found to be induced (e.g., Jeremy). Moreover, and because the unconscious is not constrained by the rules of logic (Freud, 1940), in instances where smaller portions of libidinal energy are transferred, individuals tended to be able to think more divergently as a result of greater unconscious accessibility and consequent availability of primary process thinking.

Despite the apparent relevance of cathexis and the associated emergence of repressed psychical content, not all participants appeared to deliberately access their epiphanic experience through this mechanism. For some, there was an apparently organic shift in the mode of functioning of the psychical apparatus towards the primary processes. In instances such as these, through the lens of Freudian metapsychology, the ego would withdraw its anticathexes, such that unconscious material from the unconscious would enter into the ego, thereby becoming pre-conscious and knowable. Freud (1940) differentiated two ways in which this could occur: (1) unconscious material gathers sufficient strength to break through to the ego, or (2) an urge from normal waking consciousness finds reinforcement from the unconscious. In this way, the cathexis discussed above can be seen as a mechanism to access primary process states, within which unconscious content can emerge.
Nina’s dream is a classic example of the naturally occurring primary process. Nina experienced abuse as a child, which she repressed. She experienced a lot of discontent, disconnection, and uncertainty in the time before her dream. If the mechanisms detailed above are applied to this case it can be suggested that her unconscious had been discharging small amounts of energy for a prolonged period of time (Nersessian, 2014). She was also actively seeking change indicating that her desire to heal was conscious\(^{50}\). During her dream, this was potentially reinforced by an unconscious element and informed her dreaming state. Freud (1949) believed that during dreaming the ego is focused only on the wish to maintain sleep (i.e., this is the focus of cathexis). Therefore, when the dream forms, the ego is predisposed to wanting to remove any impediment to sleep, and so meets the demands of the dream (thereby removing the disturbance) through wish fulfilment. Nina’s unconscious and preconscious desire to release her fear may therefore have been met by her sleeping ego.

4.4.1.2) Revelation.

Using the notion of cathexis, the revelation phase of epiphanic experience can be considered the whole, or partial, activation of primary state processes via the diminishment of the ego. Only a small number of participants wholly entered what might be considered a primary state (e.g., Nina, Jeremy, George), although some experienced strong elements of this (e.g., Amira, Anna). The cathexis that characterised almost all participant experiences to some extent may have diverted the investment of libidinal energy away from the ego, and its

\(^{50}\) Many participants described seeking something, whether that be change, understanding, or something more ineffable. Participants knew that there was something they needed to find but were not certain of how to find it. As explained by Nina: “I was looking for this key. This mystery feeling inside of me to be different, for me to feel different”. Participant’s recollections of seeking change suggests that they adopted an epistemic approach, a behavioural strategy whereby the capacity for learning is enhanced by the assumption that there is something to be learnt, therefore making uncertainty unavoidable, and suggesting a move towards greater criticality (Carhart-Harris & Friston, 2019; Friston et al., 2017).
repressive tendencies, to an object, person, or idea – therefore aligning with Tellegen and Atkinson’s (1974) argument that any activity that involves a high degree of experiential absorption also entails a temporary surrender of selfhood. In so doing, egoic control is tempered and activity from the unconscious tends to be freer and more able to move into the conscious, enhancing the individual’s ability to make cognitive and perceptual associations often accompanied by strong emotions. The content that emerges from the unconscious is sometimes unusual, perhaps repressed, and almost universally unknown (it is interesting here to note that the German for 'unconscious' is 'das unbewusste', which is not typically translated as ‘unconscious’, but rather as 'not consciously known', which supports this point far better).

The ego (Freud, 1923) is therefore a critical feature of primary states, as within primary states, the sense of self is dissolved. Three participants experienced ego-dissolution (e.g., Letheby & Gerrans, 2017) during their epiphanic experience, a phenomenon which is clearly described by George: “it's like a feeling of your sense of self dissolving”. This was echoed by Jeremy, who found that during his intense meditation, “in that place, there wasn't self or no self”, and that after finishing his practice he experienced concerns that his mother would ask questions he couldn’t answer:

She's gonna ask, how am I? She's going to say hello and how am I going to be able to say how I am? Because what is that? How am I? What is that? I had no idea what that meant. How am I?

For Eunice, this sense of ego-dissolution appeared to have been informed by the Jungian (1960) concept of the collective unconscious:
If we can- are able to kind of let go of our ego, or that sense of our identity, maybe not permanently, but at certain moments that we can, yeah, we can have a much broader sense of who we are, in terms of a kind of more collective consciousness... It [the ‘end’ of his experience] felt then, the kind of bringing back to a sense of being- being mys- you know, ego, self, Eunice again, rather than this connection was- kind of was far beyond me.

The objects of cathexis are therefore proposed to be, for many participants, representations of unconscious or repressed content, and as such are entangled in their memories as they pertain to the traumas and neuroses they had experienced. Indeed, Freud (1895) believed that all past experiences (i.e., memories) are represented in the present. Memory is also implicated by the involvement of the medial temporal lobes in the neural causal mechanism proposed by Carhart-Harris et al. (2014) to be responsible for the experiences typified by elevated brain entropy (see Appendix H). This perhaps permits the suggestion that high entropy objects act as totems to unconscious material. It is this entanglement with memory, and the high specificity and personal relevance of the focus of cathexis, that is proposed to engender such specific and personally relevant noetic outcomes. Repressed or unconscious content and memories are largely accessed through cathexis, thereby allowing the content against which the ego has built defences to emerge, and after which reorganisation of the ego is necessary.

4.4.2) Openness
One of the most commonly noted outcomes of the connection to the transcendentally real self noted in the integration phase was Openness. This aligns with research which has illuminated that changes in Openness can occur as a result of elevated entropic activity in the brain (Bouso, dos Santos, Alcázar-Córcoles & Hallak, 2018; Erritzoe, Smith, Fisher, Carhart-Harris, Frokjaer & Knudsen, 2019). This also aligns with Tedeschi and Calhoun’s (1996) findings that openness to experience facilitates post-traumatic growth. However, several participants noted Openness as a characteristic they possessed before their epiphanic experience, such as Evelyn: “I was always- I was- I have always been very open”51. This aligns with Miller and C’dé Baca’s (2001) findings, despite the issues with their argumentation discussed in Chapter 2 (section 3.2.3.4). In this way, whilst Openness does not appear to be a prerequisite for epiphanic experience (e.g., Liam professed to not being particularly open preceding his epiphanic experience), it may tend to act as an individual difference that lowers the threshold to experiencing this kind of transformative event. Therefore, the individual difference of Openness may act in a facilitative capacity for some people preceding epiphanic experience. Hayley explained that: “you have to be able to be open to it because, I mean, I could've dismissed the thought”. This notion of needing to be open in order to experience an epiphany was also articulated by Luce:

My mind at that point was open to it. Because had I had that same experience a year earlier, I might have just shoved the coat back on the rail and walked out the shop without it. So, I suspect that psychologically, what my mind was doing was beginning to wake up. Someone said to me once actually, that once you open the door, even a

51 Evelyn’s negotiation with the temporal nature of epiphanic experience is also evident in this quotation, as she searches for the best tense and sentence construction to use. This quote denotes a demarcation point in her sense of self as ‘I was’ becomes ‘I have always been’.
tiny little bit for a for an enclosed mind, a mind that isn't free to think, you can never shut it again. You can't close it again because it's been opened, and the person has got a glimpse of what's out there.

It is suggested that the mechanism by which Openness (a descriptive term for the transitive domain) facilitates epiphanic experience can be revealed by exploring the relationship between Openness, creativity, and psychoticism – all constructs that have been associated with elevated entropic activity (e.g., Carhart-Harris et al., 2014; Ramey, Klingler & Hollibaugh, 2021; Shi et al., 2020). Moreover, Openness to experience has not only been found to be linked to creativity, but may afford it (Tan, Lau, Kung & Kailsan, 2016; Käckenmester, Bott & Wacker, 2019; Kaufman et al., 2016; King, Walker & Broyles, 1996; McCrae, 1987). Similarly, positive associations have been found between Openness and psychoticism, as well as between creativity and psychoticism (e.g., Blain et al., 2020; Fink et al., 2014). This suggests that these similarities in the domain of the Empirical may share common generative mechanisms. Indeed, it is not unusual for creative individuals to report perceptual distortions similar to those described by schizophrenics, such as loose associations, a sensitivity to pattern detection, magical ideation, and apophasia (Blain, 2019; Preti & Vallante, 2007; DeYoung, Grazioplene & Peterson, 2012). It is also interesting to note that some studies have reported increased creativity amongst first-degree relatives of people with psychosis (Sandsten, Nordgaard & Parnas, 2018). This again suggests that

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52 Whilst in this study individual differences were framed using the five-factor model of personality (McCrae & Costa, 1992, 1997), Openness can be seen to align with the intuitive and feelings dimensions on the Jungian-based Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI; Myers & McCaulley, 1985) used by Miller and C’d’e Baca (2001) (Furnham, 1996). Through the amalgamation of these frameworks of individual differences a richer profile of the ‘kind’ of person who might be more susceptible to these experiences may emerge.

53 It is understood that although the definition of creativity is hotly debated, the current body of literature on creativity distinguishes between two perspectives on creativity: the personal view and the social view. Moreover, definitions of creativity usually involve the following features: originality, effectiveness, surprise, authenticity, inconclusiveness, potential, and discovery (Runco & Beghetto, 2019).
psychoticism, Openness, and creativity may be underpinned by similar generative mechanisms.

It is suggested that the underpinning mechanisms may relate to the Freudian notion of primary process thinking (which, in turn, can be understood according to the mechanisms detailed in section 4.1 above), which is evident in all disorders clinically classified as psychotic, as well as being linked to creativity within non-psychotic populations (Holt, 2012, 2019; Russ, 2001). As detailed in section 4.1, psychosis is an example of a high-entropy brain state (Carhart-Harris et al., 2014), and creativity has also been attributed to increased entropic activity (Gabora, 2017, 2018; Shi et al., 2020). The interconnectedness of these constructs appears to have two main implications. First, it implies a continuum between psychosis and creativity (Dimkov, 2018) that can be attributed to the elevated entropy of primary states and primary process thinking. Second, it implies that Openness, as an individual difference, involves a higher tolerance of entropic activity in the brain, thereby making primary processes and epiphanic experiences more accessible (McCrae & Costa, 1985; Ramey, Klingler & Hollibaugh, 2021).

4.4.3) Summary

When considered through the lens of Bhaskar’s (2020) ontology of personhood, in conjunction with Freudian metapsychological ideas, the participants’ accounts revealed certain properties or tendencies of the uniquely stratified embodied personality that appeared to function in a generative capacity. These properties of the self appeared to allow for the elimination of the ego, which was found to be critical to bringing the embodied personality in line with the transcendently real self, thereby unifying intentionality (Bhaskar, 2020). The participants tended to largely attain the whole or partial elimination of their egos through
cathexis. This elimination, or temporary binding, of the ego is suggested to have permitted the emergence of primary states or primary processes that allowed for participants to think more freely, divergently, and associatively, and in some cases allowed for repressed or unconscious content to emerge.

The individual difference of Openness is further proposed to act as a facilitator to epiphanic experience, as it is suggested that more Open individuals have greater access to primary process thinking styles. This line of argumentation allows for the integration of Miller and C’dé Baca’s (2001) proposed generative mechanism: Particular Person, as it is understood that Openness tends to be associated with Intuitive and Feeling types (Furnham, 1996; Furnham, Dissou, Sloan & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2007). The above has provided a conceptualisation of the generative mechanisms at play in the uniquely stratified embodied personality using theory that is congruent with CRist philosophy. Together, these theories and ideas constitute a suggested metaphysical account of what the embodied personality would need to be like in order for epiphanic experiences to occur.

5) Conclusion

This chapter has served to present a theoretically informed, ontologically differentiated, and interdisciplinary understanding of the generative mechanisms underpinning epiphanic experience across all four planes of the CRist social being. Grounded within a wider landscape of CR-congruent NDS theories, the mechanisms detailed throughout this chapter allow for a causal understanding of the participant’s experiences to emerge, thereby providing an answer to the third research question: what generative mechanisms permit the emergence of an epiphanic experience? The CRist theories of the four planar
social being and the ontology of personhood (Bhaskar, 2020) were invaluable frameworks throughout the research process, serving to ensure a thorough exploration of the potential generative mechanisms at work.

Prior to an epiphanic experience, participant’s lives were characterised by varying degrees of disorganisation across the four planes of the four planar social being. This was routinely associated with the acute or protracted presence of negative life experience and uncertainty. The epiphanic experience itself can be understood in material terms as a consequence of elevated entropic activity in the brain, which can occur as a result of trauma, as well as through formalised activities such as meditation (Carhart-Harris et al., 2014). In terms of the uniquely stratified embodied personality, epiphanic experiences represent the whole or partial diminishment of the ego’s repressive hold on the unconscious through transference of libidinal energy away from the ego, primarily via cathexis. Freer movement between the unconscious and conscious is suggested to allow for greater psychical fluidity and plasticity, divergence, and transformation. However, whilst the disorganisation phase demi-regularities identified enhance turbulent disequilibrium (Chaos Theory; e.g., through traumatic life experience), brain entropy (the EBH; e.g., through meditative formalised activity), and/or change the focus of libidinal energy or attention (Metapsychology; e.g., through cathexis), the moment of transformation itself remains unpredictable at a local level (Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009).

Highly elevated brain entropy is proposed to induce what Freud (1940) termed primary state processes, whilst brain entropy that shifts closer to criticality/primary processes is proposed to be capable of greater flexibility and non-linear, discontinuous, insightful experiences. The enhanced psychical flexibility, and more fluid access to the unconscious, engendered by increased entropic activity in the brain allows for the emergence and
dissipation of entrenched psychical patterns linked to unconscious or repressed material. This is proposed to have led to the whole or partial restructuring and resolution of the issues relevant to the participants, as well as the emergence of a new system order, as by latching onto a new configuration, or solution, to the increased entropy, a new kind of self-organisation occurs (Guastello, 2001). Moreover, this process was found to be intimately shaped by the participant’s relationships, and emergent from the social structures sui generis that the individual is exposed to prior, during, and subsequent to their epiphanic experience. Attention now turns to the final chapter, in which the limitations and implications of the work contained within this research will be discussed and evaluated.
1) Introduction

The work contained within this thesis makes sense of a vast landscape of interrelated terminologies and presents a philosophically informed, and ontologically differentiated, conceptualisation of epiphanic experience. In the domain of the Empirical, epiphanic experiences tend to be defined according to the following key markers: (1) the epiphanic experience itself is brief, lasting less than a week, with an abrupt onset, (2) the epiphanic experience involves the emergence of noetic content (on a continuum spanning from epistemic to ontic), (3) the epiphanic experience usually involves noticeable somatic aspects, (4) the experience is vividly remembered, (5) the changes are enduring, and continue to evolve, (6) the changes are ultimately experienced as benevolent, and (7) the experience engenders profound, holistic change within a person.

In the domain of the Actual, epiphanic experiences tend to be preceded by negative life experience, uncertainty, and disorganisation throughout the four planar social being. Using Bhaskar’s (2008, 2020) ontology of personhood, the data indicates that in the domain of the Real, prior to an epiphanic experience, the embodied personality tends to be out of sync with the transcendentally real self. Moreover, the moment of epiphanic experience itself is often facilitated by events or activities that engender object cathexis such that the ego is wholly or partially diminished, thereby facilitating the alignment of the embodied personality and transcendentally real self. Individuals who have an epiphanic experience tend – though not exclusively – to be naturally open, intuitive, and feeling orientated. This means that they may have a higher tolerance for uncertainty (McCrae & Costa, 1985; Ramey, Klingler & Hollibaugh, 2021), and suggests that the epiphanic experience is an exaggerated version of their normal mode of functioning (Miller & C’dé Baca, 2001).
Furthermore, epiphanic experiences appear part of a spectrum of conscious experience ranging from divergent and insightful thinking through to mystical and transcendent experience (see Figure 6.1 for an abstract visual conceptualisation of these ideas). Both insight and mystical experience have been linked to entropic activity in the brain (Johnson, Hendricks, Barrett, & Griffiths, 2019; Peill et al., 2022; Stephen & Dixon, 2009), thereby supporting the suggestion herein that epiphanic experiences exist at the interface of these two phenomena, and as such are likely also the consequence of elevated brain entropy within a particular context and concrete singularity. It is proposed that as a consequence of elevated brain entropy, the psychical activity of the mind tends to shift closer to primary processes, thereby engendering greater conscious richness and fluidity, and the emergence of unconscious content. This emergence necessitates ego reorganisation, which is subjectively experienced as, for example, a transformation of fundamental axioms with far-reaching effects. However, in line with the CRist positioning of the work, the mechanisms detailed throughout this thesis should not be considered as a set of covering laws but rather a set of tendencies (Pilgrim, 2019).

Figure 6.1

Abstract conceptualisation of epiphanic experience as the interface between insight and mystical experience with participants as exemplars
This research has provided a rich ontology of epiphanic experience whereby this phenomenon can essentially be considered a dynamical psychical process, through which an individual experiences a reorganisation of the uniquely stratified embodied personality, that better enables them to adapt to their environment. Discussion now turns to the critical evaluation of the research contained within this thesis. In order to do this, three subjects will be addressed: (1) the limitations of the research and the challenges faced over the course of researching and writing, (2) the implications raised, and contributions made by the research, and (3) the research from a personal and reflexive perspective. Recommendations are made throughout.
2) Limitations and Challenges

Although myriad limitations and challenges were encountered throughout the research process, two particular challenges stood out: (1) issues pertaining to the nature of epiphanic experience and the type of data collected, and (2) issues surrounding the chronology of the research, and (3) the issue of language. Each will be discussed in turn, though it is emphasised that this is not intended to be an exhaustive list of every challenge encountered, but rather a broader indication of the limiting tendencies the researcher encountered.

2.1) Qualitative Versus Quantitative Research

Perhaps the most pervasive limitation to impact this research, as well as the existing research on epiphanic experience, is that it is nigh-on impossible to gather meaningful quantitative data on epiphanic experiences, or indeed to study them in-situ without the use of entheogens or similar entropy-enhancing processes. Due to the nature of epiphanic experiences making them impossible to predict, data (e.g., electroencephalographic data on entropic activity in the brain) is not realistically accessible for the investigation of naturalistic epiphanic experiences. It was through the CRist process of retroduction that theorisation of the role of brain entropy in the causality of epiphanic experience – embedded in a broader understanding of the ontological implications of NDS theory⁵⁴ – was possible. Whilst brain entropy can be considered the quantitative component of an epiphanic experience, it should again be stressed that the qualitative component of increased entropic activity is uncertainty,

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⁵⁴ It is recognised that there is acknowledgement in the field of neuroscience that traditional approaches to the study of cognition (i.e., symbolic representation) lack the capacity to adequately explain a range of mental phenomena (including insight and mystical experience). Instead, it is proposed that cognition is better described and explained according to the principles of NDS theory (Stephen & Dixon, 2009). This positions NDS theory, and associated constructs (e.g., entropy) as a more appropriate ontological paradigm for the study of human interiority.
personal chaos, and internal conflict. In essence, uncertainty, personal chaos, and internal
conflict are qualitative terms that are thought to signify the quantitative presence of greater
brain entropy (Carhart-Harris, 2018; Carhart-Harris et al., 2014; Hirsh, Mar & Peterson,
2012). Indeed, the originators of the entropic brain hypothesis state that: “The great merit of
applying the measure of entropy in cognitive neuroscience is that it is uniquely adept at
bridging the physical and subjective divide; mere flip sides of the same coin - but different
sides nonetheless” (Carhart-Harris, 2018, p.168).

Because of the causal focus of CRist research, this physical, chemical, and biological
strand of argumentation was heavily emphasised throughout the thesis as it was thought
important to provide the reader with a strong grounding in the ontological principles –
identified through retroduction – that are interwoven into each layer of argumentation.

These principles demonstrate how the nature of our material world and physical bodies
provide the grounds from which our psychological and sociological realities can emerge (see
Chapter 1, section 2.5 regarding emergence). Although currently impossible to measure, the
argument for the relevance of chaos and entropy to the subject of epiphanic experience may
be supported by new and emerging research on the impact of psychedelics on mental ill
health (e.g., Carhart-Harris & Friston, 2019; Vargas et al., 2021), mystical experience (e.g.,
Barrett & Griffiths, 2018; Luce, 2020), and insight (e.g., Shi et al., 2020; Stephen & Dixon,
2009). Essentially, not only have experiences similar to epiphanic experience been attributed
to elevated entropic activity and subsequent self-organisation into a novel structure, but so
too have the antecedents and outcomes of epiphanic experience. As detailed in Chapter 6,

55 Using the CRist four planar social being, the notions of chaos and entropy in the plane of material transactions
with nature (Chapter 6, section 4.1) can be seen throughout each ‘layer’ of reality. Tension, conflict, uncertainty,
and trauma were found in the plane of social interactions between people. Chaos and uncertainty was present in,
and generated through, the plane of social structures sui generis. Disorganisation was evident in the plane of the
stratification of the embodied personality. Throughout each plane of reality, the presence and effects of
quantitative entropy can be observed, qualitatively.
both uncertainty and negative life experience can be operationalised in terms of chaos and entropy (e.g., Carhart-Harris, 2018; Carhart-Harris et al., 2014; Hirsh, Mar & Peterson, 2012). Moreover, the changes to personality and sense of self, as well as overall wellbeing, have also been documented as a consequence of experiencing a high-entropy state (e.g., Aïxalà et al., 2018; Bouso et al., 2018). Therefore, whilst these assertions are primarily theoretical, and are based on qualitative research, there is enough early evidence and recognition of the qualitative aspects of elevated entropy (e.g., Carhart-Harris, 2018) and associated quantitative evidence to indicate that the theory of epiphanic experience presented in this thesis may be a promising and worthwhile avenue for future research.

Despite the aforementioned limitations with regard to measurement, more recent advances in NDS theory are beginning to provide statistical and analytical methods that are more accessible to social scientists (Guastello, 2009; Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009). In the social sciences, the use of statistical measures is a dominant paradigm, but one which has been suggested to prevent the full complexity of data from being evaluated, as what is labelled as the error rate may instead be indicative of the chaotic component of complex human behaviour that is visible when applying a linear equation to a non-linear phenomenon (Hufford et al., 2003; Resnicow & Vaughan, 2006). This is a critical issue as, ultimately, the measurement of dynamical constructs remains critical to a fuller evaluation of the claims being made (Guastello, 2009).

Contemporary advances in NDS have provided statistical and analytical methods that are more accessible to social scientists. This is necessary, as whilst mathematicians, biologists, and physicists are generally able to generate data to test chaotic processes of their choice, social scientists must use different methods (Guastello, 2009; Guastello & Liebovitch, 2009).

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56 It should be stressed that the researchers’ intention here is not to rule out other theories or explanations, but rather to demonstrate the validity of this line of argumentation within a CRist approach.
The method that appears to be of particular relevance to the kind of data collected in the field of epiphanic experience is symbolic dynamics, an area of mathematics that discovers patterns in qualitative data pertaining to the nonlinear dynamics of self-organising phenomena (Guastello, 2009; Robinson, 1999). However, it was not the purpose of this study to apply quantitative methods to the data set given that CR advocates for qualitative data in the first instance as a way of generating intensive, epistemologically valid data (Bhaskar, 1979, 2009; Roberts, 2014; Zachariadis, Scott & Barrett, 2013). Instead, the application of symbolic dynamics is suggested to be a fruitful avenue for future research that might permit a fuller evaluation of the claims made, and theory built, within this thesis.

2.2) Chronology

Another limitation of the work contained herein is that, fundamentally, there’s an aspect of this research that’s back-to-front. This aspect is frustrating to the researcher but is nonetheless an important part of the overall trajectory of the research. In order to explain this issue, the chronology of the work needs to be discussed, and this was considered by the researcher to be best accomplished by utilising a reflexive voice:

I started this PhD, almost entirely philosophically naïve. I had done an A Level in Philosophy and Ethics that I absolutely adored, and a second-year module in epistemology during my Psychology BSc that briefly caused me to feel like I was losing my mind. So, when I was set the task of ‘establishing’ my philosophy by my primary supervisor, I got to work looking for ‘answers’. At the time, I was not yet aware that this attitude was likely a product of my implicitly positivistic education.
The understanding of CR that I had amassed before beginning to collect the data presented in Chapter 5 was, I can now retrospectively see, insufficient for me to methodologically operationalise this philosophy to the level at which I would now be comfortable with. I had a basic/good understanding of the ‘holy trinity’ of CR, the transitive and intransitive, structure and agency, open versus closed systems, and stratified reality, but the depth of my appreciation of how these ideas translated into the practicalities of research had still not fully developed. Further, the literature that would introduce me to the four planar social being (Bhaskar, 2020; Pilgrim, 2019), which has been acknowledged as very useful to psychological research (Pilgrim, 2019 – and I agree), was not yet accessible to me. Please note that I started in my PhD in 2017 so Pilgrim's indispensable text had not yet been published. However, despite this, I do realise that the notion of the four planar social being was introduced by Bhaskar in 2008 but was an idea that I struggled to extricate from Bhaskar’s linguistically opaque writing style at the start of my journey. Therefore, at the start of my journey, I was, in essence, taking a well-informed stab in the dark – but completely unaware that what I was doing could be considered as a stab in the dark (I am perhaps being too harsh on myself here, and allowing my frustration to speak for me). This is because I was informed (I could have rattled off a decent explanation of any of the aforementioned concepts if you had asked me), but I didn’t yet understand the full implications of CRist philosophy.  

Retrospectively, I can acknowledge that my own thinking was still constrained by my academic inheritance (discussed in Chapter 1, section 4.1), which seems to have contributed to my unconscious commitment to the methodologism characteristic of psychological research (Pilgrim, 2019). So, armed with a basic understanding of CR (hard-won from a period of deep immersion in the CRist literature) and a bunch of unconscious tendencies
rooted in methodologism, I began the “doing” of the research. This meant that in the early-
to mid-stages of my work I was not entirely philosophically congruent - which impacted the
methodological decisions I made. For example, the decision to ground the interview guide in
previous guides was made due to my then-understanding that it was important to begin to
generate some methodological continuity within the field of epiphanic experience. This, I
believe, was influenced by the fact that I had not yet understood the CRist position on
methodologism, such that I prioritised method over full metaphysical insight and reflection. I
also used the concept of sudden personal transformation to ground my research in as it was
the most up to date conceptualisation of epiphanic experience – not yet realising that a CRist
approach provided me with a lens through which I would be able to evaluate more critically,
not just the empirical concept of epiphanic experience, but the foundation upon which these
conceptualisations sit. I had not yet done any of the thinking that is detailed in Chapters 3 and
4 because that place in my mind had not yet been opened by my evolving understanding of
CRist philosophy.

However, the most obvious reason for which Chapters 3 and 4 were chronologically
conducted after Chapter 5 was that conducting a scoping review was recommended by one of

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58 Reflexive note: as a further point of chronological clarification, and with reference to the documentation included in Appendix F, it may be useful for the reader to be aware of the pilot study conducted before the primary data study detailed in Chapter 5. The aim of the pilot study was to explore epiphanic experiences within the context of trainee sport and exercise psychologists. This focus was chosen as research on trainee sport and exercise psychologists indicates that neophytes have moments in which their perspective of their profession significantly alters (Holt & Strean, 2001; Owton, Tod & Bond, 2014; Tod, Andersen & Marchant, 2009; Tod & Bond, 2010; Woodcock, Richards & Mugford, 2008). Oftentimes, this is also coupled with a greater understanding of themselves, and how this relates to effective practice (Woodcock, Richards & Mugford, 2008). These features of neophyte experience were at the time considered relatable to the idea of epiphanic experiences. The literature on trainee sport and exercise psychologist experiences also repeatedly points to the emotional difficulties inherent to the training process, whereby neophytes commonly experience anxiety, self-doubt, low self-efficacy, frustration, loneliness, isolation, and disillusionment (Nel & Fouché, 2017; Owton, Bond & Tod, 2014; Tod, Andersen & Marchant, 2009, 2011; Tod & Bond, 2010; Tod, Marchant & Andersen, 2007; Tonn & Harmison, 2004; Woodcock, Richards & Mugford, 2008) – all of which are comparable to the experiences people tend to have before epiphanic experience. This initial thrust to the research was superseded by the current body of research as the results of the pilot indicated that the participants being trainees and/or sport and exercise psychologists had little to do with having an epiphanic experience, and instead appeared more linked to personal factors and personality traits.
my assessors in my doctoral progression viva. Further, my second assessor was an expert in CR and showed me some of the gaps in my understanding, which was critical given that none of my supervisors were familiar with this philosophical position. So, after my progression viva I set to work, going back to the CRist literature and re-immersing myself in texts that were old and new to me. I see this period of time as the most vital to the research as a whole as it is when I really got to understanding CR. This led me to re-clarifying my research questions, conducting a scoping review, and then a thematic synthesis.

‘Starting again’ in this way was challenging but empowering. The latter because I was becoming aware of how much more I understood philosophy and the implications philosophical awareness and competency has on the research process. The former because it was hard work. Engaging with this philosophy on its own terms, rather than a watered-down version of CR that really only pays lip service to the ‘holy trinity’ in order to justify any methodology, is something that involved, for me, not only a strong understanding of the fundamental premises of the philosophy, but a continued dedication to intense reflexivity. Because I was now aware of how unconscious and implicit my positivistic assumptions were, I became far more vigilant and questioning of every assumption I made throughout the research process. ‘Starting again’ also meant that when I arrived back at the point where my interview data was needed, I was in a rather different position in terms of my (1) philosophical understanding, (2) understanding of CR-informed methodology, and (3) understanding of epiphanic experience.

This pronounced shift in the landscape of the research was emotionally charged for me. I was proud that I had made progress, but anxious about what this meant about the methodological decisions I had previously made – was my data still useable? In order to deal with my concerns, I decided to map out the (it turns out, minor) incongruencies between my
Chapter 5 methods, and the ideal methods I would have used had I conducted the study detailed in Chapter 5 according to my then-current understanding. The main incongruencies I found were as follows. First, I used the term ‘sudden personal transformation’ in all participant communication and in the interview itself (see Appendix D and E). However, I don’t believe this to be innately problematic because the language around this phenomenon varies so greatly. Further, my experiences recruiting participants for the study taught me that using language like ‘epiphany’ could cause me to run into a lot of scepticism and perhaps some resistance to my study (this is discussed at greater length below in section 2.3). Second, I screened for epiphanic experience during the participant recruitment phase using the following criteria: personal, positive, lasting, profound, memorable, relatively brief, and inner (see Appendix D). If I had a time machine, I would screen according to the criteria I established in Chapter 3. However, it is important to note that the criteria I actually used did not impede me from identifying people with relevant experiences. Therefore, whilst this represents a small degree of incongruence, I do not think it has impacted the quality of the data itself.

Another question that I kept asking myself was whether I could have designed the interview guide differently had I known then what I know now. In order resolve my anxieties, I took a copy of my original interview guide, pulled it apart, and reformed it (without referring to the original guide) according to what I now thought would be most appropriate (I took a flexible deductive approach, if you will). This was highly effective in resolving my concerns as I found that the shape and content of the interview guide barely changed. What little did change was usually related to the integration of CRist notions, such as the four planar social being, more explicitly into the guide. However, critically, it would be very unlikely that these changes have been noticeable to participants – it was more about making
the CRist ideas more obvious to me. I think I would have still asked the same kind of
questions, in the same kind of order.

I continued to run into moments when I realised that I didn’t understand CR as well as
I thought I did (for example, I briefly fell into the trap of neuro-reductionism; Pilgrim, 2019),
and doubtless will continue to do so. I now know that I have a strong understanding of this
philosophy, and that I am able to apply it to the research process more or less fluently. I also
know that this knowledge will continue to grow through engagement and exposure to these,
often complex, but incredibly satisfying ideas.

2.3) Language

Another considerable, and persistent, challenge that emerged related to the issue of
language. Chapters 2 and 3 make evident the wide variety of terminology that exists to
describe epiphanic experiences and related concepts (e.g., peak experience, mystical
experience, etc.) and, indeed, when engaging with this topic it was found to be necessary to
think carefully about how language was used. Language can be noted as a structure that had a
profound impact on the research in terms of: (1) the restrictions imposed by grammar on the
participants ability to communicate these experiences (discussed in Appendix G), (2) the
terminologies used to describe these experiences (discussed in Appendix A, and Chapters 2
and 3), (3) the ways in which others reacted to the language and terminologies surrounding
epiphanic experience, and (4) who was willing to participate in the study on the basis of the
language used. It is these two final points that will be the focus of discussion in this section as
the first two are addressed elsewhere.
The assuagement of scepticism from the scientific community was a primary concern for the researcher when gathering primary data. The concern was that the use of language like ‘epiphany’ could result in cynicism, and perhaps some resistance to the study, as it may trigger associations that lead the individual to viewing the research as ‘unscientific’. This cautiousness was revealed to be well-founded as even the use of ‘sudden personal transformation’ managed to evoke scorn from some practitioner psychologists, such as in the following message that was received in response to the recruitment email: “Nice idea but I don’t think you will find any Psychologists naïve to interpret any change as you describe! Certainly not me – try Abraham Maslow.”

Another kind of response that the researcher predicted could be evoked by language such as ‘epiphany’, and wanted to avoid, was from people with rigid religious beliefs. This was not from any sort of bias towards religious people, but rather because it was considered important to be able to have curious, exploratory, and open-minded conversations with the participants (and this was possible, as evidenced by Anna, who was very religious, but also open to exploring her experience). This concern too proved valid as the following message from a potential participant demonstrated:

I had a born again experience which changed my life very radically and as a result of which I went from being a Management Trainer in US Investment bank and a consultant with an international City of London based Consultancy, to going back to University and becoming a Chartered Counselling Psychologist. God has been very faithful to me right from the start and I had some 23 clients in the first few weeks and months in my first year of doing my course, whilst all the others were struggling to find 3 counselling clients required for the course. I went straight into private practice.
and somehow BUPA called me and said could I take clients for them and have had a
busy since 1995.

When this participant was sent the screening questions (which were worded neutrally
so as to be applicable to all interpretations of epiphanic experience – not just ones ascribed
numinous properties; see Appendix D), they deselected themselves from the recruitment
process with the explanation that: “From some of your questions I am not sure that my
experience fits - it was an actual epiphany type experience”. Therefore, because the
researcher did not actively concur with them that their experience was the result of divine
intervention, they wanted no part in the study\(^59\). Therefore, the structure of language was
shown to be a consideration and challenge that was deeply intertwined with the study of
epiphanic experience. Future researchers are recommended to think carefully about the
language they choose to operationalise these experiences. This researcher would recommend
the use of ‘epiphanic experience’ as a term that bridges old and new perspectives on this
phenomenon\(^60\) (discussed at greater length in Appendix A).

3) Implications and Contributions

Although it is conceivable that this research possesses many implications and
contributions, two stand out in particular: (1) the use of CR and the importance of having a

\(^{59}\text{Reflexive note: In instances such as these I did not enter into dialogue with the individual as I did not see it as my role to debate with someone who has already made up their mind!}\)

\(^{60}\text{Reflexive note: I think it’s important to note here that the people who have these experiences tend to not be particularly fussed about what this experience is called – they are generally just happy to have had it (Amos, 2016a also found this) – and so this debate around language is perhaps more relevant to the academic study of epiphanic experiences than anything else.}\)
philosophically grounded approach to research, and (2) the implications of the research on therapeutic practice. Each will be discussed in turn.

3.1) Critical Realism and a Philosophically Grounded Approach to Research

The application of CR permitted the exploration of the research questions in a philosophically robust, and methodologically rigorous, manner. Further, a large part of the originality of this research has been a commitment to the re-philosophisation of psychology, through the establishment of philosophical fundamental premises of enquiry, that explicitly permeated the entirety of the research process. Indeed, a major contribution made by this work is the consistent application of CRist philosophy towards the goal of answering a set of research questions regarding a psychological phenomenon. There remain few examples of this kind of research within psychology, meaning that this thesis serves as an example of how CR can enrich research processes within this discipline.

Despite the utility of CR to this research, and although Bhaskar’s philosophical system has been argued to offer conceivably the best starting point for post-positivist social science research (Fryer, 2020; Pilgrim, 2019), it is important to stress that there will always be another theory that rivals even the most powerful philosophies (Zhang, 2023). With reference to the Duhem-Quine holism thesis, Zhang (2023) argues that CR is not the only post-positivist school of thought to accrue support, and that CRist theory would benefit from debating schools of thought other than the ‘easy targets’ of naïve positivism and strong constructivism/postmodernism. Indeed, some scholars have gone further, and questioned the

61 CRists argue that this is because the positivist search for universal laws is naïve, and the constructivist denial of reality beyond meaning and discourse prevents deeper exploration of causation (e.g., Fryer, 2020; Pilgrim, 2019).
fundamental CRist notion that social science ought to be performed under the management of philosophy (Kemp, 2005). Whilst this research benefitted from such guidance, it should be acknowledged that adherence to strict a priori guidelines may restrict the scope of investigative and exploratory social science research. However, whilst this argument has merit, it loses some potency by the presence of the a posteriori argumentation and forms of inference embedded in CR (i.e., abduction, retroduction, and retrodiction).

Zhang (2023) raises further issue with CRist philosophy by suggesting that CRist scientific theory may be masquerading as philosophy of science. In practical terms, this raises several questions about the nature of CRist ontological models; for example, is the four planar social being philosophy or theory? Has Bhaskar built ontological arguments on nothing more than beliefs about features of the social world? As such, whilst these theories have been demonstrated to be useful throughout this research process, future researchers are encouraged to exercise discernment around where the boundary between philosophy and theory may lie.

Recent CRist theorising has further critiqued the CRist ontology. In particular, arguments have been made that there is insufficient reason to distinguish the Empirical from the Actual (Elder-Vass, 2007, 2022; Fryer & Navarrete, 2022). Elder-Vass (2022) explains that, not only are these distinctions anthropocentric, but they serve the primary function of critiquing empiricist philosophy of science. For an empiricist, whatever is currently being experienced is the event, is the world. Therefore, any distinction between the Empirical and the Actual serves as an explanatory device to demonstrate the limitations of strict empiricism. A further distinction is proposed by Elder-Vass (2022), between the Actual, and the ‘real-but-not-actual’ (for which Elder-Vass proposes a new moniker: the Potential). The Actual representing the “things that exist and the events that occur to them” (Elder-Vass, 2022, p. 4),
and the Potential representing causal powers and “the unrealised potentials of the world that only become activated in certain circumstances” (p. 4). These are compelling arguments which further the CRist enterprise, as well as demonstrating the innate flexibility of this living philosophy of science.

Another issue that can emerge from engagement with CRist philosophy is the realisation that some aspects of this philosophy are not sufficiently elaborated in Bhaskar’s writing\(^\text{62}\), thereby leaving the researcher to independently tackle any ambiguity in the research process (Gorski, 2013; Pilgrim, 2019). In particular, this research found that, although psychology-specific engagement with CR is increasing (e.g., Fryer, 2020; Pilgrim, 2019), there remains insufficient investment by CRists in the application of this meta-philosophy to the psychological sciences. For example, whilst the theory of the four planar social being has been identified as useful for psychologists (by this research and others, e.g., Pilgrim, 2019), there remain few applied examples of its use and integration into psychological research. Additionally, whilst the sociologically derived CRist theory of the ontology of personhood was found to be very helpful in this research, it requires far more critical reflection from researchers whose academic focus centres on the intra-personal, rather than the inter-personal\(^\text{63}\). Indeed, there is a recognition within CRist circles that there remains work to be done (Gorski, 2013), and this researcher would argue that there is considerable space for exploration at the intersection between CRist philosophy and the discipline of psychology.

\(^{62}\) This has meant that other CRists have served to carry forward the metaphorical baton. For example, Archer (2000, 2003, 2010) developed a much of the CRist theory on reflexivity, structure, and agency. Likewise, Danermark (e.g., Danermark et al., 2019) developed much of the CRist theory on research design, causal inference, and concept building. This is a philosophy that, in many ways, is being built in real-time.

\(^{63}\) Reflexive note: The ontology of personhood is one of the very few CRist forays into the intra-personal (CR, after all, did emerge from sociological theory) and if CR is to be functional for psychologists, then greater attention needs to be paid to this element of the philosophy. I have offered some critical reflection on this in Appendix I, but more engagement with this theory from psychologists would be welcome and essential to the continuing growth and development of the philosophy so that it might continue to enrich psychological research.
However, CR poses barriers to psychologists seeking to use, and engage fully with, this philosophy, as much of the literature surrounding it is accessible only if the reader possesses a considerable degree of philosophical understanding. Given the de-philosophised nature of the discipline of psychology (discussed in Chapter 1), this may pose genuine limitations to psychologists looking to adopt a CRist research paradigm. As such, more work needs to be invested by CRists into generating CR-congruent approaches and methods to research that are firmly grounded in CRist philosophy, and do not succumb to the methodologism that pervades the discipline (Pilgrim, 2019; Reicher, 2000). This thesis contributes to the circumnavigation of these issues, and makes an original contribution to literature by: (1) providing an accessible guide to the core tenets of CRist philosophy at this point in time (see Chapter 1), (2) providing an exemplar of the utilisation of key CRist theories of particular relevance to psychologists (i.e., the CRist four planar social being, and the ontology of personhood), and (3) providing a view of the development of CRist approaches to scoping reviews, thematic syntheses, and qualitative analysis, which have received little to no attention in psychological research.<ref>

Despite the aforementioned weaknesses of a CRist approach, the utility of taking a philosophically grounded approach to research, and in particular a CR-informed approach, must be emphasised (Pilgrim, 2019). CR was found by this researcher to be an invaluable set of meta-philosophical positions that provided clarity and structure with regards to the premises of enquiry. In particular, the CRist four planar social being, and ontological model of personhood were found to be invaluable. This thesis serves as one of the few examples of

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It should be noted that it is not only research that might benefit from the development of CR by psychologists – CR may be a mechanism through which approaches to psychotherapy might be enriched. Appendix I provides an example of how CRist metaphysical ideas might be relevant, and applied, to psychotherapeutic work – as does section 3.2 below. A CRist metaphysics of personhood has implications for how a practitioner might practice. The implications of these metaphysical notions in relation to existing therapeutic paradigms and modalities would be a fruitful future path of enquiry.
these theories being applied in psychological research. Humans were seen as part of the natural world, existing in relation to others, thrown into a world of pre-existing social structures, and with a uniquely stratified embodied personality. This foundation ensured that a necessarily complex view of epiphanic experiences could emerge. Moreover, the CRist ontology of personhood was found to provide a particularly helpful way of making sense of the changes that occurred as a result of epiphanic experience.

This view of the world also necessitated an interdisciplinary approach to research, which Pilgrim (2019) argues enriches understanding of the phenomenon under investigation – a sentiment echoed by the current researcher. By engaging with a philosophy that emphasises interdisciplinarity, a laminated view of epiphanic experience across physical, biological, psychological, social, and cultural levels – i.e., a maximally inclusive ontology (Bhaskar & Danermark, 2006) – was permitted to emerge. It is recommended that future researchers consider the merits of applying a CRist position to their research65, and in so doing continue to develop interdisciplinary inquiries into epiphanic experience, and more broadly throughout the field of human science. As such, this researcher echoes the calls of other CRist researchers (e.g., Fryer, 2020; Pilgrim, 2019) in advocating for a CRist approach to research in the social sciences.

In more pragmatic terms, the CRist underpinnings of this research facilitated methodological decision-making. Appleton and King (2002) asked: “Can one make methodological decisions without considering the ontological and epistemological origins first?” (p.647), and, based on the process of undertaking this research, the current researcher's

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65 Reflexive note: A large part of the strength of a CRist philosophy lies in the power of the retroductive inferential process (Fryer, 2020). During the CR analytical process, I found a particular love for the process of retroduction. Retroduction as a process, I think, is an act of scientific imagination, and the more options you can generate, the more theories you can explore, the more perspectives you can peer through, the better. You are limited only by your own creativity (I refer to Simonton’s (2018) conceptualisation of ‘creativity’ as a “multiplicative product of originality, utility, and surprise” (p.87) – I know the term can be controversial!).
answer is ‘no’. Without serious consideration of the ontological and epistemological foundation of the researcher’s worldview, generic methodological research steps seem unavoidable. This has the potential to be problematic as philosophical assumptions, and frameworks, are tacit in all psychological theories, whether the researcher is aware of them or not\(^66\) (Smith, 2010). Therefore, it is recommended that attempts should always be made to attain as much philosophical literacy and understanding as possible, particularly with regards to the premises of inquiry, when undertaking research.

Furthermore, it should be noted that immersion in CRist philosophy enables more than just the production of methodologically sound research. Bhaskar argued that one of the unique strengths of CRist philosophy is that it facilitates emancipation from dominant structures, often through consideration of structure-agency dualisms (Bhaskar, 2017; Gorski, 2017; see Chapter 1, section 2.6). The dominant structure from which CR facilitated emancipation in the case of this thesis was academic psychology. If philosophy is never taught or discussed during the education of psychologists, then the structural power of the academy (which favours positivism/empiricism; Pilgrim, 2019) remains implicit and unchallenged. Therefore, CR is able to function as a meta-philosophical vehicle through which psychologists can exercise their agentic powers and challenge these structures\(^67\) – thereby emancipating themselves and their research, should they desire. For example, the emphasis placed by CR on identifying causal powers, encourages researchers to uncover, and perhaps challenge, the ideologies implicit within psychology that might ‘misrepresent’ reality. Additionally, the notion of the transitive versus the intransitive challenges long-held positivist assumptions that the natural and social world can be treated equally. In essence, by

\(^66\) Nietzsche is purported to have once expressed that everyone is the unconscious proponent of some dead philosopher; perhaps then, it is preferable to be philosophically informed rather than philosophically ignorant.

\(^67\) Reflexive note: I have done this at several points throughout the thesis. For example: research philosophy (see Chapter 1), Newtonian versus chaos/complexity paradigms (see Chapter 2, section 2), psychodynamic theory within psychology (see footnote 40).
fully engaging with CRist perspectives – and stepping into the CRist embrace – researchers are able to transform their relationship to the academy, as well as perhaps the academy itself.

3.2) Therapeutic Practice

Perhaps the greatest implication this research has is on therapeutic practice. In order to explore what the current researcher perceives to be the main therapeutic implications of the research, the following topics will be discussed: (1) Cartesian dualism and CRist approaches to therapeutic practice, (2) psychedelics and meditation, and (3) uncertainty.

3.2.1) Cartesian Dualism and Critical Realist Approaches to Therapeutic Practice

As previously noted, subjectively, epiphanic experiences tend to contain both noetic and somatic content. This is suggested to constitute a holistic, embodied way of knowing wherein both body and mind are involved. The influence of the body (i.e., embodied personality; Bhaskar, 2020) has long been overlooked within the discipline of psychology, most likely as a result of the philosophical inheritance of Cartesian Dualism - but this position is changing (see e.g., Caldwell, 2018; Clapp, Aurora, Herrera, Bhatia, Wilen & Wakefield, 2017; Porges, 2018; Van der Kolk, 2002, 2014). Therefore, the noetic and somatic content discussed clearly reflect the socially imposed, separate interpretive categories of body and mind, that are, in reality, a unified dynamical system (Shapiro, 2015). With this in mind, it is suggested that conscious dissolution of Cartesian body/mind dichotomy will enhance therapeutic practice, particularly for individuals with a history of trauma (Kuhfuß, Maldei, Hetmanek & Baumann, 2021; Payne, Levine & Crane-Godreau, 2015; Van der Kolk,
2002; Warner et al., 2014). It is recommended that practitioners consider the value of a CRist ontology of personhood in facilitating the dissolution of this dichotomy.

Specifically, this research has supported Bhaskar’s (2020) suggestion that the task for human beings is “of eliminating their egos and moving their embodied personalities into alignment or unity with their ground states” (p.118). Indeed, this research suggests that the unification of intentionality through this mechanism is a necessary condition for epiphanic experience, and human growth. Further, the research within this thesis has considered the dynamical tendencies and behaviours of the uniquely stratified embodied personality, such as cathexis, which permits the description of one way in which the ego might be diminished or eliminated. It is recommended that future research further explore and build upon this ontology of personhood in order to see how else it may enrich understandings of human nature and experience.

This suggestion is made not only as a result of the research contained within this thesis, but also due to the understanding that CR has been used to support and enhance therapeutic practice. CR has been proposed as a suitable metatheory for counselling and psychotherapy that enables the integration and inclusion of multiple theoretical frameworks and therapeutic approaches (O’Hara, 2014). Because of the CRist focus on the dissolution of dualities (see above regarding the mind/body duality, and Chapter 1, section 2.6), O’Hara (2014) proposes that CR can act as a common meta-framework capable of holding theoretical differences, thereby enhancing integrative psychotherapeutic practice. Indeed, Pocock (2015) furthers this argument by suggesting that CR enables systemic psychotherapists to be able to integrate approaches to practice from realist, pragmatist, and constructivist positions. In this way, Pocock (2015) proposes that CRist perspectives encourage deeper contemplation of

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68 However, Pocock (2015) also notes that naïve realist and strong constructivist positions cannot be integrated.
interacting causal tendencies as described by a range of theoretical positions and therapeutic modalities. In practice, this is proposed to facilitate deeper, and more purposeful, exploration of, for example: the sociocultural impact of the specific culture the person is embedded in, how the issue is socially constructed within their social contexts, and the dynamical aspects of development, attachment, and adaptation.

CR has also been applied to therapeutic practice through analysis of the dominant model of functional psychiatric diagnosis (Pilgrim & Bentall, 2009). Pilgrim and Bentall (2009) performed a CRist analysis of the concept of depression, exploring the biological, sociological, and structural aspects of this diagnosis. They contrast the realist/positivist vision of depression as a real and intransitive disease entity, with the constructivist notion of depression as a consequence of the mental health system and mental health professionals. Through a process of CRist analysis, the authors find both the realist/positivist and the constructivist positions lacking. Realist ideas do well to study the phenomenon empirically but fall into the trap of confusing epistemology (context-mediated ideas of depression) with ontology (the intransitive conceptualisation of depression). In other words, they confuse the map with the territory. Conversely, constructivist ideas are proposed to do well to emphasise the sociocultural and historical aspects of depression but make problematic statements regarding the rejection of all empirical claims on the causality and reality of depression.

Pilgrim and Bentall (2009) instead propose a CRist vision of depression that does not confuse the map with the territory and takes account of the complex social and historical conditions from which the depression diagnosis was able to emerge (e.g., melancholia, neurasthenia, and ‘mopishness’). The authors note the relative absence of the depression diagnosis in many other cultures (e.g., Marsella, 1981), as well as the ambiguity that exists between depression and other phenomena (such as dysphoria, anxiety, and madness). Therefore, a CRist approach to therapeutic practice can be conceived of as attending equally to internal attributed
meanings and external reality – beyond the symptoms of distress defined by contemporary psychiatry.

Whilst the extant literature on how and why CR might be advantageously applied to therapeutic practice raises interesting and useful ideas, it is still limited and warrants further attention. However, as noted in section 3.1 above, the issues around the accessibility of CRist philosophy may pose challenges in this regard. To that end, interdisciplinariness is advocated for as a way of facilitating research into the application of CR to psychotherapeutic practice. The researchers’ nascent ideas on how an understanding of the CRist set of ontological presuppositions about the nature of the self (see Chapter 1, section 2.6) could be applied to therapeutic practice can be found in Appendix I. It is hoped that the argumentation contained within this thesis stimulates discussions, further thought, and research into how CR might facilitate and enhance therapeutic practice.

3.2.2) Psychedelics and Meditation

On the subject of psychedelics, whilst this research suggests that changes in brain entropy may quite suddenly create profoundly positive and therapeutic psychological change without the administration of psychoactive substances, early research suggests that perhaps the most direct way of creating this kind of change (that doesn’t require people to master the art of meditation or suchlike), alongside the reduction of various negative psychological symptomatology, is through the use of psychedelics or psychedelic-assisted therapy (Earleywine & De Leo, 2020; Garcia-Romeu & Richards, 2018; Luoma, Chwyl, Bathje, Davis & Lancelotta, 2020). Moreover, entheogens have a very long history of being used for healing purposes (Morgan, McAndrew, Stevens, Nutt & Lawn, 2017; Goldsmith, 2010; Rosa, Hope & Matzo, 2019; Tupper, 2009a, 2009b). As a caveat, it should be clarified that
psychedelics are not being suggested as a panacea for all manner of psychological health concerns. Indeed, this seems premature given that, for example, psychedelic use can lead to increases in the personality trait of openness to experience (Bouso, dos Santos, Alcázar-Córcoles & Hallak, 2018; Erritzoe et al., 2019), which may be problematic for individuals high in neuroticism. Instead, it is suggested that the ‘new’ science of psychedelics, implicated by the research herein, may provide a fresh lens through which to view therapy.

Early evidence and understandings of the therapeutic value of psychedelics also implicate the power of meditative activity and focused attention. Research has demonstrated that there are phenomenological and neurophysiological overlaps between the psychedelic state and the meditative state (e.g., Millière et al., 2018; Simonsson & Goldberg, 2023). Indeed, this research has highlighted the transformative potential of activities that involve focused attention, contemplation, and movement; the potency of nature, art, music, literature, dance, chanting, breathwork, meditation, and more. Literature supports that meditative activity (e.g., meditation, prayer, chanting, reading) has the potential to create the grounds for powerful positive change (e.g., Malviya et al., 2022; Kwak et al., 2019). Most of the participants were experientially absorbed at the time of their epiphanic experience, thereby implicating the efficacy of meditative, or focused, activity in facilitating change. Therefore, therapeutic modalities that have integrated meditative practices (e.g., Acceptance and Commitment Therapy; Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson, 2013), are suggested to have greater potential to facilitate transformative change.

3.2.3) Uncertainty

The research contained within this thesis suggests that ambiguity, destabilisation, and uncertainty are powerful tools for change that need to be experienced rather than avoided or
controlled (this position is supported in literature, see e.g., Hayes & Strauss, 1998). Given the findings from this research it is suggested that talking therapies may be most effective, in the long-term, if they are able to mimic the processes inherent to the states that have the potential to create the greatest change. This section of text from psychologist and mythologist Sharon Backie (2021, email communication) articulates this point well:

Sometimes, this inner country can feel like a frightening place. A place of uncertainty, of ambiguity. Uncertainty might seem to be threatening, but to me, it’s an apprenticeship to mystery. It’s an antidote to our desperate need to know, to predict, and therefore to control. In the old native traditions of these islands where I was born, uncertainty wasn’t a threat, it was a natural condition of existence. The people we now call the Celts had a particular love of ambiguity, an explicit comfort with not-knowing. A riddle was a gateway to the Otherworld, piercing the veil between this reality and the one which envelops it; formulaic koan-like questions jolted the listener into the heart of ambiguity. First, such questions and riddles produce confusion; then they engage the suppleness of the imagination. They break down the rational, over-intellectualised categories that limit our perception to the everyday, and teach us how to break the spell of ordinary reality. To embrace them, you need to have faith in enigma, and you must be able to be comfortable in a twilight state where all things are equally possible, but nothing yet actually is. This ability to be in contact with mystery, with the dark, fertile realms of infinite possibility, is crucial to the work of inhabiting a meaningful life. We have to stay rooted in the chaotic unknown, in the shadow-haunted wild places of the psyche.
It is therefore suggested that, if indeed the aim of therapeutic interaction is to create transformational change, more thought is channelled into evaluating therapeutic modalities in accordance with their ability to: (1) work holistically with the mind and body (i.e., ego, embodied personality, and transcendentally real self), (2) hold space for ambiguity and uncertainty, and (3) account for the brain-mind functioning in a nonlinear and dynamical fashion. There is existing research that has begun to engage with this idea that addresses, for example, the application of NDS theories to applied therapeutic practice (e.g., Bussolari & Goodell, 2009; Hayes & Strauss, 1998; Marks-Tarlow & Shapiro, 2021; Shapiro, 2015; Skar, 2004), though more attention is still needed.

A particularly interesting contribution from the literature is Shapiro’s (2015) psychodynamically informed Dynamical Systems Therapy (DST). As the name suggests, DST is a nonlinear therapy, which is critical given that biological processes are inherently nonlinear. Moreover, an understanding of NDS theories naturally leads to the conclusion that therapies which present linear models of human functioning and therapeutic treatment present a gross simplification of these processes. This is what makes Shapiro’s work so enthralling; he has not only embedded DST in fundamental NDS principles such as self-organisation, attractor/repellor configurations, and emergence, but he has also ensured that it is a biopsychosocial approach, therefore establishing itself as a complex and integrative approach that accounts for notions raised by the CRist ontology of personhood (Shapiro & Scott, 2018). It is recommended that greater work is needed to evaluate the efficacy of DST (Marks-Tarlow, 2015). Moreover, if therapists seek to facilitate epiphanic experiences in their clients, DST appears to provide a suitable framework from which to work.

4) Final Reflexions

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Bhaskar argued that the ultimate aim of CRist philosophy and research is to aid in human flourishing and emancipation (Bhaskar, 2017; Gorski, 2017). I believe that my work has contributed to this axiological cause, both in terms of understanding a phenomenon that engenders powerfully positive transcendent change, and in terms of my own ‘flourishing’. Like many researchers before me, I wanted to study epiphanic experiences because I had personal experiences of this phenomenon. It is here that I run into a dilemma. I cannot help but feel daunted by the prospect of sharing my own story, given what I know and have experienced from the discipline of psychology when it comes to wounded healers (Zerubavel & O’Dougherty Wright, 2012). As a protective response to this, I have found myself wanting to keep the reflexive writing contained within this thesis to epistemic and disciplinary reflexivity, rather than personal reflexivity (Forbes, 2008), even though I understand that reflexivity, by its very nature, causes the researcher to walk the line between the personal and the professional. It has been challenging, if not impossible, to write about my epiphanic experience itself in a way that makes me comfortable with the idea of other people reading and knowing about my experiences. Absent the gift of anonymity, I have tried what feels like countless ways to write about my experience – and how that relates to my account of epiphanic experience presented in Chapter 5 – in a way that does not make me feel vulnerable.

Beyond these concerns, there remains yet another issue: that it at times feels like an exercise in futility to try and find the words that might accurately describe something that exists as much in the felt sense as in any cognitive representations of it (Amos, 2016a discusses this extensively). Amos (2019) in part addressed this issue by using creative, art-based methods (in the form of found poetry) to explore the lived experience of an epiphanic experience. I also found great benefit to exploring epiphanic experience through artistic mediums, as I found that it permitted me to ‘stay with’ some of the more liminal aspects of
this phenomenon that language may struggle to contain. The reader is directed to Appendix J for an art-based reflexive account of the some of the reflection I engaged with as a result of my lived experience of epiphanic experience.

It is harder than I thought it would be to finish this (and by ‘this’, I mean this particular section, as well as this thesis as a whole – my primary supervisor and I have had more than one conversation about how to know when the research is actually ‘finished’, as sometimes it feels like I could eternally keep changing things). Writing about this subject has at times felt like herding cats or trying to pick up mercury with your hands. It has necessitated a truly interdisciplinary investigation that has led me to academic literature from fields such as psychology, philosophy, sociology, neuroscience, physics, literature, anthropology, biology, and religious studies. Within the bounds of CRist philosophy, I have considered epiphanic experience from multiple psychological perspectives (psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioural, humanistic-existentialist, contextual/systemic; Fleuridas & Krafick, 2019). And now, at the ‘end’ of this, I almost feel like I’m back at the beginning again; as if now that I have a grip on this subject, I finally feel ready to do it all again, but ‘properly’ this time.

For some, like the participants in this thesis, transformation (i.e., arguably an objective of therapeutic work) is an event (although the ‘work’ does not stop there), but for most it is a process. Those of us who do experience transformation as an event (e.g., an epiphanic experience) provide valuable insight for those going through the process of transformation (as extreme cases provide a view of the mechanisms of change in ‘purer’ form than usual; Danermark et al., 2019). Therefore, epiphanic experiences reaffirm that positive transformation can suddenly emerge from trauma (e.g., Jayawickreme et al., 2021), they implicate the importance of the body in transformation, alongside practices that facilitate the
diminishment of the ego and unify the embodied personality and transcendentally real self,
and they remind us that transformation lives in, and emerges from, the in-between places.
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Appendix A: Reflexions on Choice of Terminology

I want to take a minute to talk about why I chose the term ‘Epiphanic Experience’, rather than any of the other terms that have been proposed in the literature (e.g., quantum change, sudden personal transformation, epiphany, etc.). Language is clearly something that has the capacity to hinder research into epiphanic experience, as researchers have used different terms to describe functionally equivalent phenomena. For example, McDonald (2005) suggested that the conceptualisation of quantum change is operationally identical to descriptions of epiphany. But first, before I address why I chose ‘epiphanic experience’, perhaps I’ll explain why I didn’t choose any of those other terms at my disposal. First, ‘Quantum Change’, though evocative of the suddenness of these experiences, is problematic because it aligns itself with quantum physics (and omits to making a case for why these particular ideas are relevant) and it makes the phenomenon sound very New Age-y (Wordsworth (2007) also agrees with me) which, whilst not inherently problematic, does mean that the concept is robbed somewhat of apparent ‘credibility’ (for lack of a better word).

Second, ‘Sudden Personal Transformation’ is obviously very descriptive, but (to me) it takes what is usually a numinous, ineffable, sensuous, revelatory experience, extracts all of that, and leaves behind a clinical husk, a linguistic device devoid of any deeper meaning. I feel like there’s somewhat of a tendency to do this in psychology, perhaps because of the dominance of the psychiatric diagnostic model (Pilgrim, 2019). Depression can be used as an example of this tendency. Depression emerged from the historical diagnosis of melancholia (Kendler, 2020). The term ‘depression’ is derived from the Latin ‘deprimere’, meaning ‘press down’, aligning with the operationalisation of depression as a mood disorder characterised by episodes of low mood (Rock, Riedel & Blackwell, 2014). The term appears to be derived
from the modern clinical diagnosis. Meanwhile, ‘melancholia’ comes from the Greek ‘melan-
’ meaning ‘black’ and ‘kholē’ meaning ‘bile’. Black bile is one of the four humours – a
system of medicine used up until the 1850s when germ theory emerged. Humourism proposes
that an imbalance between the four humours (blood, yellow bile, phlegm, and black bile)
produces specific behavioural patterns (Walshe, 2016). An excess of black bile was proposed
to lead to a mood state that we would now characterise as depression. All this to say, I guess,
is that I appreciate the history and etymology of terminology. It carries a weight to it, a
richness. However, I understand too that terminology grows and changes – and indeed needs
to in order to keep up with our constantly evolving understandings of the world. However, for
me, the term ‘sudden personal transformation’ (unlike ‘depression’ which still conveys a
feeling of sorts, a feeling of being weighed down) goes too far in that clinical and
ontologically monovalent direction.

So, it may come as no surprise that I like the word ‘epiphany’. ‘Epiphany’ is derived
from the Greek ‘epiphainein’ meaning ‘reveal’ or ‘manifest’. And this really gets to the core
of what an epiphany is, I think: a revelation, the unveiling of something that was previously
unknown but is now known, the manifestation of something new. Also, the fact that
‘epiphany’ has been used primarily in religious contexts also serves to uphold both the
numinous element that many people ascribe to these experiences, as well as the historical
elements of the phenomenon. I’m an atheist, and so I attribute no divine properties to
epiphanic experiences. However, this does not mean that I cannot appreciate the language
and still use it to describe the things that were previously the sole purview of religion and that
can now be explored scientifically. A Judeo-Christian higher power does not need to exist in
order for that word to be meaningful. So, as a term, the very etymology of ‘epiphany’
intimately connects it to the experience itself. However, I acknowledge that ‘epiphany’ is not
the same as ‘epiphanic experience’. Changing the terminology in this way speaks to the
personal and the lived and allows for the recognition of the old and the acknowledgement of
the new.

Fundamentally, by using the term ‘epiphanic experience’ from the start, I’m
facilitating my own enhanced reflexivity. This is because using this term helps me to
maintain a degree of distance from the different conceptualisations of epiphanic experience in
the literature, thereby reminding me to maintain a critical view of the theory at all times.
## Appendix B: Literature Included in the Scoping Review

### Anomalous Experience

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<th>Concept</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>2013</td>
<td>Paranormal experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drinkwater, Dagnall, Grogan and Riley</td>
<td>2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kopel</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Near-Death Experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facco, Pederzoli and Tressoldi</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Non-ordinary experiences of consciousness</td>
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### Awakening

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>de Castro</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Enlightened/Mystical/Awakened Experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Sudden Spiritual Awakening or Permanent Spiritual Awakening</td>
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<td>Bonner and Friedman</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Awe</td>
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<td>2018</td>
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<td>Neville and Cross</td>
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<td>McGovern</td>
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<td>Epiphany</td>
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8705 **Insight**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Levitt et al</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Insight</td>
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<td>Topolinski and Reber</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Insight</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hill &amp; Kemp</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Insight experience</td>
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8707 **Mystical Experience**

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<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Mystical States of Consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witte, van der Wal and Steyn</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Mystical Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racine</td>
<td>2014</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brymer and Schweitzer</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Mystical/Spiritual Experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schmid and Liechti</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Mystical-type Experience/Profound Alterations of Consciousness</td>
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<td>Galadari</td>
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**8708 Peak Experience**

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<td>2006</td>
<td>Peak Experience</td>
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<td>Woodward, Findlay and Moore</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Sexual Peak Experience/Mystical Experience/Mystical Peak Experience/Mystical Sexual Experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>McDonald, Wearing and Ponting</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Peak Experience</td>
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<td>Scott &amp; Evans</td>
<td>2010</td>
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**8710 Quantum Change**

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420
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<td>Miller and C´de Baca</td>
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<td>Quantum Change</td>
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<td>C´de Baca and Wilbourne</td>
<td>2004</td>
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<td>Miller</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>Quantum Change/Epiphany</td>
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<td>Brymer</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Quantum Change/Epiphany</td>
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<td>Skalski and Hardy</td>
<td>2013</td>
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8715 **Sudden Personal Transformation**

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<td>Ilivitsky</td>
<td>2011</td>
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<td>Amos</td>
<td>2016a</td>
<td>Sudden Personal Transformation</td>
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8717 **Transformative Experiences**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forcehimes</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Spiritual Transformation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Smith</td>
<td>2006</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vieten, Amorok &amp; Mandala Schiltz</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Consciousness Transformation/Transformative Experience</td>
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<td>Levitt, Rattanasampan, Chaidaroon, Stanley and Robinson</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Narrative Transformation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rambo &amp; Bauman</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Spiritual Transformation/Conversion</td>
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<td>Kirillova, Lehto and Cai</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Existential Transformation</td>
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<td>Kirillova, Lehto and Cai</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Transformative Tourism Experience</td>
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<td>Lear</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Personal Transformation</td>
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<td>Taylor</td>
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<td>Posttraumatic Transformation</td>
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<td>Naor and Mayseless</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Personal Transformation through Peak Experience/Transformative Positive Experience</td>
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<td>Russo-Netzer and Davidov</td>
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8718

8719 **Other Unique Terminologies**
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zimmerman &amp; Zeller</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Spontaneous Recovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hall</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Positive Self-Transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murray</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>The Unencumbered Moment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gianakis and Carey</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Naturally Occurring Change</td>
</tr>
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<td>Lomax, Kripal and Pargament</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Sacred Moments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friedlander, Lee and Bernardi</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Corrective Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Grady &amp; Bartz</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Spiritually Transcendent Experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civish</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Personal Spiritual Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garcia-Romeu, Himelstein and Kaminker</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Self-Transcendent Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rahtz, Bonnell, Goldingay, Warber and Dieppe</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Healing Moments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Griffiths, Hurwitz, Davis, Johnson and Jesse</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>God Encounter Experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>Van Gordon et al.</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Emptiness</td>
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<td>Brouwer &amp; Carhart-Harris</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Pivotal Mental States</td>
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<td>Kitson, Stepanova, Aguilar, Wainwright, and Riecke</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Profound Emotional Experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rundio, Dixon and Heere</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Extraordinary Experience</td>
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## Appendix C: The ENTREQ statement (drawn from Tong, Flemming, McInnes, Oliver & Craig, 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Guide and description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Aim</td>
<td>State the research question the synthesis addresses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Synthesis methodology</td>
<td>Identify the synthesis methodology or theoretical framework which underpins the synthesis, and describe the rationale for choice of methodology (&lt;em&gt;e.g., meta-ethnography, thematic synthesis, critical interpretive synthesis, grounded theory synthesis, realist synthesis, meta-aggregation, meta-study, framework synthesis&lt;/em&gt;).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Approach to searching</td>
<td>Indicate whether the search was pre-planned (&lt;em&gt;comprehensive search strategies to seek all available studies&lt;/em&gt;) or iterative (&lt;em&gt;to seek all available concepts until they theoretical saturation is achieved&lt;/em&gt;).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Inclusion criteria</td>
<td>Specify the inclusion/exclusion criteria (&lt;em&gt;e.g., in terms of population, language, year limits, type of publication, study type&lt;/em&gt;).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Data sources</td>
<td>Describe the information sources used (e.g., electronic databases (MEDLINE, EMBASE, CINAHL, psycINFO, Econlit), grey literature databases (digital thesis, policy reports), relevant organisational websites, experts, information specialists, generic web searches (Google Scholar) hand searching, reference lists) and when the searches conducted; provide the rationale for using the data sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Electronic Search strategy</td>
<td>Describe the literature search (e.g., provide electronic search strategies with population terms, clinical or health topic terms, experiential or social phenomena related terms, filters for qualitative research, and search limits).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Study screening methods</td>
<td>Describe the process of study screening and sifting (e.g., title, abstract and full text review, number of independent reviewers who screened studies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Study characteristics</td>
<td>Present the characteristics of the included studies (e.g., year of publication, country, population, number of participants, data collection, methodology, analysis, research questions).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Study selection results</td>
<td>Identify the number of studies screened and provide reasons for study exclusion (e.g., for comprehensive searching, provide numbers of studies screened and reasons for exclusion indicated in a figure/flowchart; for iterative searching describe reasons for study exclusion and inclusion based on modifications to the research question and/or contribution to theory development).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Rationale for appraisal</td>
<td>Describe the rationale and approach used to appraise the included studies or selected findings (e.g., <em>assessment of conduct (validity and robustness), assessment of reporting (transparency), assessment of content and utility of the findings)</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Appraisal items</td>
<td>State the tools, frameworks and criteria used to appraise the studies or selected findings (<em>e.g.</em>, <em>Existing tools: CASP, QARI, COREQ, Mays and Pope [25]; reviewer developed tools; describe the domains assessed: research team, study design, data analysis and interpretations, reporting</em>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Appraisal process</td>
<td>Indicate whether the appraisal was conducted independently by more than one reviewer and if consensus was required.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Appraisal results</td>
<td>Present results of the quality assessment and indicate which articles, if any, were weighted/excluded based on the assessment and give the rationale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Data extraction</td>
<td>Indicate which sections of the primary studies were analysed and how were the data extracted from the primary studies? (<em>e.g.</em>, <em>all text under the headings “results /conclusions” were extracted electronically and entered into a computer software</em>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Software</td>
<td>State the computer software used, if any.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Number of reviewers</td>
<td>Identify who was involved in coding and analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Coding</td>
<td>Describe the process for coding of data (e.g., <em>line by line coding to search for concepts</em>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Study comparison</td>
<td>Describe how were comparisons made within and across studies (e.g., <em>subsequent studies were coded into pre-existing concepts, and new concepts were created when deemed necessary</em>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Derivation of themes</td>
<td>Explain whether the process of deriving the themes or constructs was inductive or deductive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Quotations</td>
<td>Provide quotations from the primary studies to illustrate themes/constructs, and identify whether the quotations were participant quotations of the author’s interpretation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Synthesis output</td>
<td>Present rich, compelling and useful results that go beyond a summary of the primary studies (e.g. <em>new interpretation, models of evidence, conceptual models, analytical framework, development of a new theory or construct</em>).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Initial Recruitment Email

Hello,

My name is Aura Goldman, and I am a PhD student at the University of Hertfordshire. I found your contact details on the BPS directory.

I am looking for psychologists with HCPC accreditation who have had sudden personal transformations (historically referred to as epiphanies!) that have changed them profoundly.

To give you some context, the purpose of this study (ethical protocol number: aLMS/PGR/UH/03925) is to explore the nature of sudden personal transformations, as experienced by psychologists. Sudden personal transformations are defined in the literature as:

- Personal
- Positive
- Lasting
- Profound
- Memorable
- Relatively brief (lasting less than a week)
- An inner experience
I am interested in how psychologists make sense of these experiences. I think that understanding experiences like these could change the way we view personal change, and the way in which psychologists practice.

If you think you have had an experience that sounds like this, and would like to volunteer for this study, your participation would be greatly appreciated and will involve answering some brief yes or no screening questions by email and, at a later time, talking about your experience in an in-depth interview.

If you would be happy to participate, please reply to this email so that I can send you a screening form. Alternatively, please feel free to pass this email onto any of your colleagues that you think may be interested.

Thank you in advance for your time!

Kind regards,

Aura

**Screening Email**

Hi [name],

Thank you very much for taking the time to reply to my email!

Before scheduling a time for an interview, I need to go through some screening questions with you (please populate the table below). Please note that none of the questions are meant to imply that some people’s experiences are any more or less legitimate than any others.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Y/N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you believe your experience deeply changed you? For example, your</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feelings, thoughts, values, and/or behaviours?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you describe the effect that your experience had on you was</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ultimately positive (even if it emerged from challenging situations)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was the experience relatively brief (e.g., less than a week)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did this experience occur more than a year ago?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you say the change has been lasting or mostly lasting?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was the experience memorable?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do most of your friends and family believe the change was negative?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did this experience occur as a direct result of a positive external</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>event – for example, getting married, having a child, winning the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lottery?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was the experience a result of meeting or associating with the</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>influential leader of a group?</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If your answers align with the selection criteria, and you agree to participate, here is a brief summary of what will happen: first, we can decide together on a place to meet that is convenient for both of us, either at the University of Hertfordshire, at your place of work, or via Skype. I will go through informed consent with you on the day and will answer any
questions that you have. The interview will last from 60 to 90 minutes and will focus on your experience and how you have made sense of this experience.

Best,

Aura
Appendix E: Interview Guide and Exemplar Transcript

It is recommended that the reader has read Chapter 6, section 2.2 before using this interview guide.

Interview Guide

Note: the following notations have been used to indicate where questions have been taken from or inspired by. An asterisk (*) signifies Miller (1991), whilst an exclamation mark (!) signifies Ilivitsky (2011).

Specific Questions

1. I will be using a pseudonym instead of your real name. Is there a pseudonym that you would prefer?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your age (in years)?
4. How long have you been registered with HCPC
5. What is your highest level of education? (!)
6. What is your/your family’s ethnic background? (!)
7. What was your religious background growing up? (*)
8. Do you remember when your experience occurred? (*)
9. How old were you when it happened? (*)

10. Have you had experiences like this before the one you are describing? How many times? (*)

11. Have you had experiences like this since the once you are describing? How many times? (*)

12. In this study I am using the term “sudden personal transformation”, which is defined as “a positive, profound, and lasting personal change that follows a relatively brief and memorable inner experience.” Is there another term that you feel fits better with your experience? (!)

In-depth questions

1. Can you tell me a bit about your life in general before the experience? [Possible prompts: Relationships (with self, partner, family, friends, higher power); Work (Education, career, hobbies).] (!)

2. Can you tell me about the time in your life immediately before the experience? [Possible prompts: Were there any important concerns that you were dealing with? Negative life experience? Mental health? Were there any steps leading up to the experience?] (!)

3. How would you describe yourself as a person before the experience? [Possible prompts: Values, goals, interests, feelings; What gave you satisfaction/happiness? What would your friends/family say about you?] (!)
4. Can you tell me about the experience itself? [Possible prompts: Where were you? What were you doing just beforehand? Who (if anyone) was with you? How did you know something out of the ordinary was happening? What did you think/feel/do? Were there any unusual sensations/sights/sounds? How did the experience end?] (!)

5. Can you describe how this experience has impacted your personal life? [Possible prompts: How do you know it has impacted your life? What changed? What stayed the same? Has it changed the way you see things, feel, behave, relate to others, relate to yourself, etc.?] (!)

6. Can you describe how this experience has impacted your practice? [Possible prompts: How do you know that it has impacted your practice? What changed? What stayed the same? Has it changed the way you see things, feel, behave, relate to clients, or relate to yourself within practice?] (!)

7. How would you describe yourself as a person now? [Possible prompts: Values, the self, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, interests, goals? What gives you satisfaction/happiness? If you had to write a profile about yourself, what would it say?] (!)

8. Looking back, can you tell me what you believe produced or caused your personal transformation? Or do you view your experience as acausal? [Possible prompts: What factors helped it occur? What happened before that made it more likely? Why do you think it happened to you (as opposed to someone else)? How would you encourage this process in someone else? How do you think it was possible? What happened to you in that moment? What emotional/psychological/social/spiritual/biological etc. forces or processes were at play? Do you think there is anything about you as a person that might have facilitated it? (Leave room for multiple interpretations)]
9. If there were a hidden message in your experience to the outside world, what would that message be? (!)

10. Is there anything else about this experience that you would like to tell me before we end the interview? How was it for you to talk about this experience? (!)

---

**Exemplar Transcript**

Below is Scarlett’s transcript, which is included to provide the reader a better understanding of how, and the level of detail at which, the interviews were transcribed, as well as providing an example of the richness of the data set.

***

AG [00:00:01] Testing and working. Fab. So just to explain the process a little bit. I've got about 12 quite specific demographic questions for you, just, it's a spoken survey, essentially. And then if it's okay with you, then we can go into sort of 10 more in-depth questions about the experience itself.

S [00:00:21] Yes, no that sounds fine.

AG [00:00:22] OK. Fab. So, I'm going to be using a pseudonym instead of your real name. Is there, pseudonym that you'd prefer?

S [00:00:29] Scarlett
AG [00:00:30] Scarlett. Oh, I like it. And can you confirm your gender for me please?

S [00:00:36] Yeah. Female.

AG [00:00:37] And do you mind if I ask your age?

S [00:00:39] Yes. Not at all. I'm sixty-three, nex- in a couple of days.

AG [00:00:45] Oh, happy birthday in advance!

S [00:00:49] Yeah so sixty-two. Yeah.

AG [00:00:50] And how long have you been registered with HCPC?

S [00:00:54] Since 2012. Yeah, 2012. It was a little bit complicated because I've got my doctorate- I didn't go the standard route. OK, so I got my- I did my training and I had to gr- I had to go through the grandparenting route.
And then 2015, I got my full, sort of, all singing all dancing stuff.

That might crop up as we go through, but anyway.

And can you confirm your highest level of education?

Yeah, it was DPsych.

What is your family's ethnic background?


And did you have a religious background growing up?
I suppose I did. Yeah. Yeah. My father was basically very allied to the church. He was a reader and so on. And so, yeah, when I was growing up, it was we had a fairly religious background. But that's no more. Not anymore.

So you don't consider yourself religious anymore?

No. No.

All right.

S [00:02:07] No.

Agnostic is sort of is a non-believer, isn't it?

Agnostic is sort of is a non-believer, isn't it? Oh, atheist is a non-believer.
Atheist is a non-agnostic. How do you, sorry, how do you-

AG [00:02:25] Oh uh so if agnosticism is- suddenly tempted to call it fence sitting! [both
laugh] Agnosticism is where you take the position that there isn't sufficient proof either way.
And so, you're just gonna go, well, it's equally likely that God does exist. And it's equally
likely that that he doesn't exist.

S [00:02:46] No I think I'm probably more agnostic then.

AG [00:02:49] OK.

S [00:02:50] Oh atheist!

AG [00:02:51] Atheist.


AG [00:02:53] Yeah. OK. All right. Do you remember when your experience occurred?
Yes. It was the winter, I don't know the exact date, obviously, but it was in the winter of 2001.

And have you had experiences like this before, the one that you're describing?

No. No, I don't think so.

And have you had any since?

No. No, I don't think so.

All right. So, in this study, I'm using the term Sudden Personal Transformation, which is defined as a positive, profound and lasting personal change that follows a relatively brief and memorable inner experience. Are you happy with me using this term or do you think there's another one that suits it better.

No that sounds fine. Yeah. Yeah.
AG [00:03:45] All right. Well, those are the more specific questions done. Thank you very much. And we can move into something a bit more in depth. So, can you just tell me a little bit more about your life in general before this positive transformation occurred?

S [00:04:02] OK. Where shall I, where shall I start? Yeah, well, I consider myself to have had a fairly happy childhood, although, you know, looking back in hindsight, there were issues like there are in any family. Got on well with my parents. My dad was a police officer. And- which- yeah, and so- and he was he was a basically a village police officer. So, we used to live in police houses. We didn't own our own house. But we- we had to move when the police said it's time to move and so on. And I remember thinking that that was I felt very proud of my dad, and really positive that, you know, he was kind of upholding the law. You realize the complications when you get a bit older. [both laugh] You know, sort of, less rose-tinted spectacle bit. But yes, generally it was very positive. My mum had had quite a few unpleasant experiences. She she'd lost a lot of children when she was pregnant and in the early, you know, at birth and so on. Although I don't know exactly how many, but I know that she was actually hospitalized back in the days of in the 50s and had electroconvulsive therapy and fairly- it was fairly traumatic, and it was something that was not really talked about too much. 'Cause again, it was the culture of the day that you just sort of have these experiences and you- you get over them. You know, you've put them behind you and so on and so on. So, she always had that kind of weakness, I suppose. She was slightly eccentric, slightly, slightly quirky. But that was just part of her charm as far as I can see. And yeah, and so things went fairly normally. And I went to university at Portsmouth- it was Portsmouth Poly at the time, but- did psychology. It was kind of like- it was like coming home. I just sat the doing psychol- I absolutely loved being a psychologist and doing psychology and yeah,
really proud of that. That's where I met my husband. So, I met him in 1976 and we've been together ever since.

AG [00:06:19] Wow. That's a long time.

S [00:06:20] That's a long- over for- yeah, over 40 years now. So yeah, and that all seemed sort of right and good and so on. And then I suppose a lot of things like I started my working life, and I didn't think about being a psychologist I suppose early on, but I went to be a teacher. So, I qualified- I did a PGCE in 1980, about 81, started teaching in 81 and did that and then had two children and so I had two patches of maternity leave. And the second patch of maternity leave, I just decided I didn't want to go back into the same- I was working in a big tough secondary school. Not that I was scared of that, but it just didn't feel quite right for me. And luckily, a friend of mine sort of said one day, oh, have you seen this advert for a psychologist at [location]? Not [location]. But she was one of these people, that she always thought she knew better than me. And you know that- and I thought, I'm not going to ask, I'm not going to ask her what it means. I’ll find out. And I found there was this job for a teacher of psychology. And I suppose that was a water- a real, real watershed for me, 'cause I ended up- I got the job and absolutely, absolutely loved it. It was just kind of felt like me to a T, really. Qualified teacher, a good psychologist, loved it and I liked dealing with the children of that age. So- well, people, young people of that age. So, so I did that for quite a while. Yeah. Teacher. And then I suppose, you know, life, you get older and older and older. And then my husband started to feel a bit ill. He couldn't walk so far and breathless and so on. He had had polio when he was 2. So he had a short- he was one of the last people in this country- he caught polio and the last major polio epidemic in Britain in the 50s. And- and it was a bit of a
scandal, really, which you may or may not know about, but they didn't- when they realized 
there was a big problem with polio in person, they didn't have enough vaccine at the time to 
inoculate everybody who really needed it. And his sisters, he's one of six, he was one of six. 
His sisters got inoculated because he had twin sisters who were older than him. So, they were 
doing it in kind of batches. And so, he missed out. And unfortunately, that that caught him 
out because he caught polio on a campsite, because his parents were almost like nomads at 
the time. So, he caught polio. And you know at two, and nearly died. And um, and I suppose, 
you know, he's the first cohort now who've lived beyond, sort of, well who've survived it, 
really. It used to kill most people, or they'd be iron lunged through all of their life and so on. 
So, he's a kind of rare cohort if you like. But I suppose because of that, he suffers from 
something that they call Post-Polio Syndrome, which is generally a bit of a burden- because 
you get through the sort of, initial, you know, you don't die, you then carry on, carry on, carry 
on, but you start to sort of feel- you know your muscles start to get a bit sort of worn out 
really it sort of. Yeah. The joints and- he's got a shorter left leg than the other right leg. So 
that obviously kind of affects balance and walking and hip joints. And I suppose when he 
started to become ill, we thought it was something related to polio sort of creeping back in a 
slightly different form. And so, we went to the doctors and- and so on. And he did go to a 
doctor he had a doctor in Harley Street. And his original doctor obviously had died, and he 
had a new doctor, which- who didn't seem to be as caring or as interested, or as observant 
perhaps. And I remember the last time he went, he- he didn't- he didn't, um, he didn't really 
seem to be that interested in what [husband] was saying. He had two young trainee doctors in 
the room, it was all kind of like, oh and this is this case, and they put his x rays up, and they 
said- and they were saying, as you can see, there's this blah, blah, blah, blah. And when 
[husband] was trying to tell him things like he couldn't walk very well without feeling sort of 
breathless and so on. And he just put it all down to yeah, no, that's fine, he said, walk across
the room. And of course, he could walk across the room without any problem. But anyway, so we just thought, well, that’s that, you know. And then he was taking, I think he was taking blood pressure tablets at the time. So, so- we knew he had that sort of in the background, if you like but, uh, and then he- he had a heart attack in in Italy. Is it right to- I've kind of like zipped the background and I'm get-

AG [00:11:37] It's absolutely fine. You can tell the story however you'd like to tell the story!

S [00:11:42] So, you know, so he- so we were thinking, oh, this is our lives now, you know. And it was, it was getting increasingly difficult because, you know, whereas you've been able to just sort of- we'd be able to walk into the town, around the town. You know, we'd get about halfway there and he'd be, what, needing to sit down. And it was at a time when I was starting to think, okay, this is getting a bit, sort of like, invasive now. Or something you couldn't ignore. So, we were just thinking, well, how are we going to deal with it? And I suppose both [husband] and I thought, well, it's not much we can do. It's just how it is. So, we'll just have to sort of stop more, and rest on the way down to town or, you know, cut our cloth accordingly, if you like. And I mean, we'd always been used to going to France every year. Because we have some great French friends. And I started to think- we had very active holidays, you know, where we'd go, sort of, walking around the coast, you know, etc., etc. And I used to think, you know, it was starting it was starting to sort of make inroads into normality, I suppose, and so it was a kind of, you know, this gradual process of- of thinking, things are changing, we're getting older. Not that we were sort of crying in our pillows about it, but it was kind of like, ooh, you know, we'll have to try and make some sense of this. Or how are we going to absorb this and carry on, if you like? And I, and I suppose, yeah, we
were both very busy at the time. He was 45. I was 43-ish. And it was at a time- the boys were
sort of like 17 and 15-ish. So, it was a time where you couldn't just sort of sit back and say,
OK, we're pension- we're kind of old people now [laughs]. We'll sit in the back, you know,
just watching you get on. You have to sort of like, you have to muster yourself and just carry
on. But things were getting, you know, increasingly difficult. And then I suppose we
decided we'd go on holiday to Italy first, before we went to France. So, we thought we'd drive
to Italy and then meet our French friends in Italy, I think, or back at- I can't remember the
details, but we always met up in the summer. And I said to [husband], this- I suppose that
was partly I was thinking we've got to do something different to make ourselves not notice.
I've only just thought of it this way. But in order to sort of say, when you're doing the same
thing all the time, you notice it getting worse and worse and more and more difficult. So,
ookay, we'll do something different where we don't have a kind of, ooh, we did it better last
year.

AG [00:14:55] Mmm.

S [00:14:55] So I know, right, OK, we'll do something slightly different. And it was- I used to
say to him- I've been to Italy before I met [husband] and I had a- as an 18-year-old. And, oh it
was just the most, one of the most wonderful experiences, and for all sorts of reasons, which I
probably won't go into [both laugh] it was a very good holiday! And- and I can remember
thinking then, you haven't tasted the real pizza until you taste an Italian pizza. You know,
have a real Italian pizza. Especially like, from a roadside van, you know, whether- it doesn't
matter whether you go to a roadside van or the five-star kind of restaurant. The pizzas are just
sort of to die for, you know, the- char grilled and smoky and oh, just wonderful. So, I said,
let's- let's go to Italy. Let's factor in going to Italy first. Because [husband] wanted to see the
tower- had this thing about seeing the Tower of Pisa. So, we thought, okay. So, we'd not been
to Italy together at all, ever. And so, we looked at a map and we decided we could drive along
the cinque terra, or up or down, whatever. But when you're looking at it on a map, it's a little
wiggly line. In reality, it's- it's a quite a stressful journey by road. You know, you kind of go
up a hill, downhill, up a hill. The actual journey from point A to B is quite short, but the real
journey is quite a lot longer than that, because you get, you know, you're going up and down
the coast. It's wiggly. And so, it was starting to take a lot longer than we'd anticipated. Two
teenagers in the back, bikes on the top 'cause we thought we'd take the boys bikes so they
should go cycling round and all this sort of stuff. And when we arrived at this campsite that
we'd picked out as being suitable for, you know, I don't know, it just looked like a good camp
site and of course everybody else had thought the same, so it was full when we arrived. So,
we le- I think the campsite owner felt sorry for us because we were sort of like a bit frazzled
we'd not- we'd slept in our car, sort of, the night before as though we were a bit kind of, you
know, spaced out. So, he said, look, I've got a German family who are going this morning. If
you go away for a couple of hours and come back, you can have you can have that. So, we
thought, great. You know. So, we went away, and it was like it was scorching hot weather, it
was in it- it was in the thirties, 33, 34 degrees, I don't know. It was it was like scorching hot.
So, we thought, ok the best thing to do is, is get in the sea, have a swim. So, we kind of put
our swimming clothes on and all this sort of stuff and went down to the beach. Now, of
course, the beaches in France that we go to, we know them intimately, you know. You know
their tides, and their, you know, routines are. Never been to this beach before. And it's one of
these beaches that came along on a kind of platform and then suddenly disappeared. So, it
was a- a kind of a rocky coast. And also- but also the bit- the platformy bit, the sea was very
powerful there, and it was literally picking up stones. I shall never forget it. It was picking up
stones on the way in and almost throwing them at your legs. And so, I had all these bruises on
the on the bottom half of my leg from these sort of stones and shingles that it was throwing.
So, you couldn't really swim there. So, we thought, okay, plan B. We went to- no, that's right,
we'd already been to the cafe- we'd already been to the cafe and had a coffee. So, we thought,
okay, let's just get back to the campsite. So, we hadn't changed or anything. So, I was still in
my swimming costume because it was so hot and so on and wet. We got to the campsite and
eventually got to the campsite and my husband- that's right, we were putting the tent up. The
boys had started putting the tent up, and we thought we'll take it in turns to go down to the
showers and have a shower. So, the boys had been for theirs and come back and was doing
the tent. I was kind of looking, making sure they were okay. And so, I said, I'll go last. So
[husband] went down, and I saw him coming up and it was like this terraced campsite
because it was like- and it was like desert landscape, sandy, hot. It was unlike anything we'd
ever been to before. So, he was coming up this sort of incline with a fence, a boundary fence.
And he was holding onto the fence, and he just looked terrible. He just looked really, really
terrible. And I thought 'ohh', you know, and so when he got close enough, I said, are you
okay? He said, well, I feel a bit- he was kind of grey, almost green. He just didn't look well at
all. So, I said, okay, you don't look very well. He said, I'll just need to lie down perhaps, you
know, I just need to get to catch my breath. So, he said perhaps if you could ask the boys to
sort of finish the tent or blow the mattress up at least. So, I did that. And then he was lying
down. And he was trying to- he was saying, oh I've got pains in my chest. And I thought, this
is a heart attack. And so- but- I imme- I didn't immediately think, oh God- well no I think I
did. I said, oh, my God, it's a heart attack, I'll call the medics on the campsite. And he said no,
no, no, he's always somebody- don't make a fuss, I'm all right, you know, I don't want to- he
doesn't like to draw attention to himself. So, he said, no I'm fine, especially in front of the
boys. So, I said, oh, oh, well, all right, then you should- just give me an aspirin. And that
might sound really stupid, but actually he was taking an aspirin every day because that thins your blood and so on and so on and- because of the high blood pressure. So, we gave him an aspirin. And he was still- it was getting worse about it. I said to the boys- and I can I remember saying to them, what should I, what should I do? Shall I call the doctor? And I remember, [son] said, oh, no, don't ask me! You know, and I just suddenly thought, yeah, look, I've got to- I got to- I've got to do this, I've got to sort it out. So, I said, look, I'm going to call the doctor whatever you say I'm- so I went to the reception and said my husband's very ill, I think he needs an ambulance. And they took him, took him, put him in the ambulance and some of detail forget, 'cause it- that's the trauma does that to you, doesn't it? But, uh, he went off on his own in the ambulance, I think it was to do with the Italian sort of system that they couldn't take non patients and you know, blah, blah, blah. So that left [husband] and I on the camp- myself and the children on the camp site. And I thought, well I've got to follow him and get there. So, I went up and said, you know is there any way you can help? And so, the bloke on the reception said, well I've got a van I can take you. But he couldn't take the children. So, you can imagine, at one point, I got my husband's somewhere, I don't know where, going towards some hospital in a place that I've never been to in my life. I'm leaving my two children, and OK they're not babies, but two children, and I can't say to them, wait there for an hour and I'll be back, because I have no idea, no idea what was going on. And then there was sort of me going towards this cottage hospital. So, it was really one of the most, probably the most traumatic experience of my life. And to top it all, I started my period. At the same time, when you can, you can probably imagine, you know, wearing- I was just wearing a swimsuit.
S [00:23:24] I had nothing with me in the van there was just me, didn't have a towel, didn't have my handbag. Just locked everything- left everything. And I just thought, I can't- you know, how much worse can this get?

AG [00:23:42] Adding insult to injury.

S [00:23:45] [both laugh] And can remember getting to hospital, and he was alive, but they were saying things like ‘myocardial infacto’, which is a heart attack. And they were basically saying, we can't look after him here, not- it's a little cottage hospital, so we're sending him to La Spezia, and I thought, never heard of that. So, I had to say goodbye to him again. And by this time, we were really scared, as you would be. So, he was off to another hospital. I was stuck at this hospital, this little hospital. My boys were on the campsite, so I thought. But they'd waited long enough, and they thought, oh I don't know what's going on. So, they started to walk. So, when I got back to the campsite, they weren't there because they were walking - so it was just like, you know, [laughs] it was like, I was just thinking when is this nightmare going to end? And uh, I mean, shall I zip perhaps to the- the experience now and then you can- I come back to- yeah?

AG [00:24:53] If that- if you would like.
Yeah. Cause I don't want to not give you, you know, the experience if you like.

We'll get there.

We'll get there.

I'm happy to get there whenever you're ready to get there.

Yeah, well, I suppose it was nice that- or it was good that eventually we all met up. But it was obvious that [husband] had to stay in Italy because he had to have a heart bypass operation in Italy. And, so I thought, my boys, I've got one, my oldest one was due back to start his second year of A Levels. My youngest one was due to go back to start his first year of A Level. And so, I thought- and they couldn't do anything anyway. So, I thought I'm going to have to get them home. So, I eventually got a brother-in-law to come over, fly over, and he took the boys, the camping gear, and the car back. And then after that, I had to swear, I had to sign an affidavit for my youngest one because he was on my passport still. So, I had to say that he was going back with my brother-in-law. But if anything had happened to [husband] in Italy. He- it would have been really difficult stroke impossible for him to get back because he was on my passport. So that was kind of quite a difficult thing. So anyway, the boys went off and at this point, we thought he'd had the heart attack. He was just recovering. Shortly we'd be able to get a flight home. But in the meantime, he started having chest pains again, even when he was resting. And so, they were saying something's not right
here. Sent him off for an angiogram. And- and then they’d notice that he’d got a constricted artery, he’d got a blocked artery. And basically, he was like on a knives- you know, his life was in the balance. And if he didn’t have a- and they said we- he needs to have a heart bypass operation. And I remember saying, oh, right, okay, well, we’ll have to take- when can we- when can I take him back to England to have that? And they went no, no, no, you don't understand, he can't be moved, he's so dangerously ill, that he's going to have to have a heart bypass operation here in Italy. And I thought, oh, my God. And I thought- I thought of things like, oh my God, I'm I have to become an Italian national! [both laugh] Because like, we had to wait for him to have his operation. And I said, well, well when can you do that? And they said, well, if he signs permission now, we could do it tomorrow. So, wow, so I had to spend the- so obviously, he said yes. And I said goodbye to him. And that was a surreal experience because it was- I didn't know whether I'd ever see him again. If you know what I mean. Because, if the operation hadn't have been successful, that would have been the end of it. So- so, I had to spend the night on my own in this hotel, not knowing whether- whether I'd see him again. And I suppose looking back on it, I think, I didn't go to pieces. I remember thinking, I'm probably going to go to pieces here, you know, this is not something I can deal with. But I did. And I went back to the hospital the next day and I had to wait something like eight hours or someth- eight hours open heart surgery. And the doctor said, I'll come and see you when it's- when it's ove- when, you know, I've finished the operation. And it was one of those sort of situations that I would I would- I was researching optimism and pessimism at the time. Or that's I'd been- I started looking into it. And it was kind of- I remember thinking it was like optimism and pessimism, almost equally balanced. That- and I wanted to see this doctor. But I didn't want to see this doctor. Because I knew that when I saw the doctor, that would be the end of that kind of is he alright, isn't he alright. I would know definitely.
Yeah, absolutely. It was just it was just so- it was such a- it was a weird experience, Because I was on my own, you know, and it was, yeah. I want to see him don't want to see him. But obviously, I knew that I've got to- you've got to through that, you know. So anyway, things were okay. So, we then made arrangements to come back to London. And I suppose it was then that I started I started then to sort of crumble a bit, you know. [husband] was here, obviously recovering. He had six months to get over it, because he had sort of, the mark of Zorro, as we say, down his chest, and couldn't lift anything couldn't do- you know, so had to be at bed rest and whatever. Then I went back to work, and I was teaching nurses at the time at university. So, it meant going to going to London. And it was about a two and a half- door to door, probably two and a half hours you're looking at really. Yeah. But, you know, a relatively long time. And then I suppose I started- when I was at work- I just start to feel like really, really emotional, like nothing specific, but just sort of like shaky and not quite myself. And weird. And, yeah, upset. And I started to sort of ruminate on things. I started to think, what if he has a heart like now, this minute, and I get a phone call from somebody saying, you know, he's ill and he's been taken to hospital, or, or the boys’ phone up and say, y- dad's you know, ill, come home. And I thought, how would I do that? And I started to think, well, I'd have to get a tube, another train, and well that would take me about an hour and a half. And I just sort of- I- I was almost like I daren't be away, because I was thinking, I'm away from him and something happens, I can't get there. And I just used to sort of burst into tears at sort of inappropriate times or whatever. My colleague, she was a trained nurse and a great friend, I've known her for a long time, and she- she basically said, I think you need some time, some time off. And I suppose in between that just before the year before,
not quite a year before, my mother had died. She had at 70, she had a nasty brain- she had a
brain tumour. Which is a horr- well no, no, nothing’s nice like that.

AG [00:31:53] I'm sorry.

But it was very quick. We thought it was senile demen- pre-senile dementia. It
wasn't. It was a brain tumour. It was a very aggressive brain tumour. Right in the middle of
her left-hand side of her brain. So, it was inoperable and- and they couldn't even really
happily do a biopsy because they'd have had to have gone through so much of her brain tissue
that it would have lef- it would have caused a lot of damage. So, it was kind of like, uh, it was
palliative care basically. And that was only for about six months. So, she died, very suddenly.
And I suppose I'd start to think things like- I started to sort of almost feel like my mum may
have felt because my dad died- dropped dead of a heart attack at 55. A number of years
before, about 15 years before, my dad had died. And he just dropped dead. And she- so she
didn't have a second chance. And I started to feel really, not guilty, but it was almost like a
survivor g- situation. I was thinking, my poor mum, you know, and she didn't have a second
chance. I've been lucky enough; I've got a second chance. You know, my husband didn't
drop- he had a heart attack, but he didn't die. And then all of that started to sort of, you know,
flow around my mind and I was just starting to think, I'm in a shitty place, you know. And so
eventually I went to the- I went to my doctor. Because I thought, if I'm off sick I'll go to the
doctor. So, I just sort of explained what was happening. I he- and- and I'm really heartened
actually, I was real- I can remember feeling amaz- how amazing he was, he was one of these
doctors- because some of them can be a bit flippant, some of them can be like, you can tell
they're not really listening, you know, whatever. But he sat there, he didn't interrupt. He just
listened to what I was saying. And then he just looked at me and said, Scarlett, life is not a rehearsal. And I suddenly- it- it suddenly- I just had this sort of sense of [inhalles and exhales deeply], you know, a breath of fresh air, if you like. 'Cause I was starting to think, no, it's not, is it? You know, because I suddenly realized that that's what I' been- I'd not put that name on it, that interpretation on it. But I just thought that's exactly what I'm doing- I've been doing. I've been thinking, all right, if [husband] dies when I'm at work, what am I going to do? How am I going to- or if [husband] dies when I'm at home with him, what am I going to do? When he first dies, when I've noticed, what will I do? Will I pick up the- who will I phone? I've got to tell people. Who would I tell? Who would I want to talk to? Who would I not want to talk to? What would I do, you know? And I was just starting to think, yeah, I was kind of mentally rehearsing what I would do when, and if, he died. And I was just- and it was taking over my head. It was taking over my life. And I was- and I started to then think things like, well, yeah, he is going to die. I'm going to die. We're all going to die. [laughs] But we- but how sad it would be, I'm not judging it, but how sad would it be if we all started- knowing we're going to die, then actually going 'round and constantly practice how it's going to be, and what we're going to do, and who we're going to speak to. And we'll get to our own death, and we'll think, what a bloody waste of time! [laughs] You know, I've missed out. I suddenly realized that I would miss out on so much of living and so much happiness and so much sort of good times and- and so on. By- by always thinking, ooh is this the last time we do this, or ooh the last time we did it he was X Y and Z. I know it sounds a bit of a platitude, and it's sort of very current at the moment, but it's made me realize that you do have to make efforts to live in the here now, because it is all we've got. My past is gone. The future hasn't arrived. This is it. [laughs] I can remember a friend- I had a friend of mine, a nurse friend, and she said, yeah, if you've got one foot in the past, and one foot in the future, you shit on the present!
AG [00:36:55] I love that. [both laugh]

S [00:36:55] And you can tell some clients that, not all. But it- [laughs] so- so, yeah, and that kind of anecdote sort of really- I- I get it. You know, I'm not saying we can- we want to wipe away our past, of course we don't. But- but it's- it's- it's over, and ruminating on pleasant memories, yeah, that's fine. But keep returning to, you know, bad times, it's not going to do you any good. And regressing, you know, tox- I think regrets are quite toxic. You have to kind of move on a bit, don't you? Yeah, so- so I suppose from that point on- I'm not saying it's been totally easy and so on, and there are times when I still think, oh, God, I'm- I'm in the last phase of my li- kind of, you know, the later phase of my life, now. But still got quite a bit to give I hope, you know. Still got a bit of time. But it's kind of, you have to get used to the fact that you're going to die, I suppose. That's- that's what I I've taken from it, I suppose. And interestingly enough, I've had a couple of clients in the last few months, who are really bothered by the sort of, death anxiety. And you- you listen to them, and you think, yeah, I mean, you can't- I don- I- I understand it. I do understand it. It's, for human beings, it- it is one of the most terrible things. I suppose that this sort of thought of you're not going to- you know, we're not gonna be here like this forever. Because we don't have a mindset for what- unless you're really religious, of course. But we have a different- you have a different mindset, but I don't have that mindset.

AG [00:39:05] So this is it.
So this is it. This is it. And I think and I think one of the important things that's come out of it for [husband] and I, is that we do talk about death. We do talk about the fact that, unless we both die in a car accident together, or something like that, one is going to go before the other. It's- that's the order of things. But also, we also want one of us to go first- we want to go first because we don't want- we don’t want to outlive our children. That's something that I think is- I would like- that's- that's my kind of goal, to not outlive my children. [laughs]

Aim high.

Yeah, because even though they'll be sad when we die. Hopefully. I think so. It's the natural order of things. They will get over- they will get over that. That's how it has to be. I think when you when you lose a child, I I really don't know how you how you would cope with- I really don't know how you would cope with that. So, yeah, and that's kind of how I talk about it to my clients sometimes. You know that that if you asked your parents, for example, I'm sure they would be like me and say, you are going to have to go through watching me die, because that's what I want. You know, you may think, oh I'll miss you, and I can't live without you. You have to do it. It's part of- it sounds all sicky and philosophical, but it's part of life, you know, you've got to get you've got to get used to that. But not that it means that you've got to sort of be in a state of suspended animation, just waiting for it to happen. You've got to live your life as best you can, so that when it comes to your turn, you have a few a re- you have as little regret about it as possible. So, don't leave things unsaid, if you think they're important, or, you know, do things- speak to people if you're feeling bothered, you know, face- face it, if you like. Um. And I suppose it reminds me of an article
that I read when I was doing my doctorate, and it was about these researchers, and they'd interviewed women whose husbands were dying of renal cancer. And- and it was it was a quote- nice qualitative study, and they were- and they basically almost separated out two types of people. It was to do with optimism or pessimism as well because that's- that's what I do [laughs] in equal measure! But um, yeah, they found out that half of, say, the group of the women were just trying to sort of be completely positive all the time, you know, not talking to their husbands about their impending death, or, whatever, whatever, it's just, oh we don't talk about that cause that's negative, and we have to be positive and we're going to keep striving and all this sort of stuff. The other group of women basically thought, no, we've got to, we've got to face this, together, so we'll talk about it, and stuff like that. And when their husbands died, the study actually spoke to them again, when their husbands had died, they found that that actually, you know, obviously there were exceptions, but generally speaking, those women who'd not spoken to their husbands about things were left- and I remember the quote "left in a very dark place". Because kind of like, I suppose, like their efforts and so on had actually not brought fruit- not borne fruit, they had not managed to sort of save their husbands or whatever, whatever. And because they'd not really found out how he was thinking, and what he was feeling, and what he wanted to do, or what he wanted her to do after he'd gone, they were all at sea. You know. But the women who'd faced it with a kind of, good dollop of pessimism, I suppose, were the ones who- who- who were much more balanced about- who- who were dealing with in a in a, a more functional way for them that they- they were yes, they were bereft and bereaved, but they felt as if they'd- they'd faced the important things they'd had important conversations, they'd kind of said goodbye as well, a lot of them, you know, it's sort of, yeah. I can- because I can remember almost pretty much doing that to [husband] in the hospital when we were- when he was having his heart attack. He- he- he was wired up all these monitors and I could see the heart monitor and it was beat-
his heart was beating far too fast because, he did actually find out what as well as having high
blood pressure, he was also a type 2 diabetic that we didn't realize, and he had an overactive
thyroid. And those things in combination, he was a heart attack waiting to happen, you know,
[laughs] so you can- we can laugh about it now. And so, his body wasn't able to keep his
heart beating sort of at a normal rate. But it was interesting when I started to have
conversations like, oh, it's terrible, you know, or what happens if you don't- you know I can't
remember the exact conversation, but I was basically trying to say, you know, if you don't
make it, you know, I love you and sorry [tearful]. You know? And the boys all said, look
what you're doing, you know, 'cause you could see that- and they said don't, don't upset him.
And I suppose I did sort of talk it through with them, I said, you know, this is what I feel I've
got to, to do, you know, to sort of- just in case you never get a chance. And, uh, you know,
and luckily, we- we did. But yeah. How're we doing for- I shouldn't be looking at the time.

AG [00:45:52] We're absolutely fine, no problem. No problem. OK. Thank you for sharing
the story with me. That was really powerful. Sounds like a huge amount of trauma, but one
that you kind of ended up in a better place-.

S [00:46:09] Yeah, I think so.

AG [00:46:14] Do you mind if I ask you a couple more questions?

S [00:46:16] No. Yeah, make sure you've got all-.
AG [00:46:17] I've been making some notes as we've- 'cause you've told me the whole story, so if we could kind of just jump in at different points?

S [00:46:24] Yeah, you must make sure you have the angle you want or the questions that you need.

AG [00:46:33] So, during the time where you say that things were sort of declining, bit by bit, and you were kind of noticing year in and year out that things maybe weren't as good as they were before-


AG [00:46:50] What kind of emotional toll did that put on you- place on you, retrospectively, do you think?

S [00:47:01] I just suppose- I suppose it was a kind of a gradual increase in that kind of a wistful, a wistful wistfulness. You know, sort of like a bittersweet. It was kind of like remembering how good and happy things were, and thinking I've got these creep- these creeping problems, you know, it felt like sort of [sighs] signals were creeping in to say, take care. Uh, something's going on here. You shouldn't be as happy as you are. You're in denial
about things. Or maybe, yeah, it was kind of like, I was gradually having to notice things and
pay attention to things where I didn't really want to. So, I was in a kind of approach
avoidance kind of land, where I thought, you know, this- I can't just keep blustering on and
carrying on as if nothing has happened.

AG [00:48:16] OK.


AG [00:48:17] And do you think that your mental health suffered as a consequence?

S [00:48:25] Yes, but in a quiet- in a kind of quiet sort of way. I don't think it was a- I don't
think I was heading towards a breakdown, as such. I think I just felt it was- I felt almost like
this gradual mental pressure, to change my mind set a bit, or to- I mean, I could have been
heading to something more catastrophic. I don't know. Can I- can I tell you a bit of
psychology that it reminds me of?

AG [00:48:54] Yeah, of course.
I was doing - in my reading, I was looking at I think it's Carver and Shear, but they have a model, a catastrophe model. Have you heard all this stuff about sort of initial dependence. The chaos effect. Gluck, sort of chaos theory, Mandelbrots fractals, all that kind of, all that kind of stuff, that there's patterns within chaos. And these two psychologists Shear and Carver have this cat- catastrophe model that I thought was mir- mirrored what I was like. That if you fi- I'm an o- I was an optimist. I think I'm probably much more balanced now. But I was an optimist. And if you are on this optimistic railway, then you- you kind of push aside all- all- the pessimism, you think, no, no, doesn't apply to me. No, no, no, I'm not listening to that. No, I'm not going there. But you get- I was getting these increasing messages to say, you can't sustain that optimism. Look, there's this reason and that reason. And it was almost like you're under fire, and kind of pessimism is trying to break through. And their models suggests, you know, we're optimistic, we're optimistic, we carry on, we carry on, we carry on. But then we're absorbing all these things, and at a certain point, just a tiny little change, something happens and the whole thing goes into freefall and chaos. And I think they call it a period of hysteresis or something where you're just spiralling around, you don't know what to think, you don't know whether to be optimistic, pessimistic. You're just lost in this, you know, in your thoughts. When they settle, you're actually on the pessimistic road. And then on the pessimistic road, you gradually find reasons to be optimistic again. So, you build yourself up. So, it's a kind of- and that's, I think, how I felt, a bit. That that I was kind of under attack and I had to- there were certain beliefs that I had, that I couldn't sustain any longer.

AG Like what?
Like, we're incredibly lucky and everything is fine, and even though my husband's had polio and seems to have got high blood pressure, we're coping with that, it's not making any major difference. You know, all these fairy stories, but you dress things- you put things in rose tint- you see things through rose tinted spectacles, don't you? And you sort of, I suppose I could feel this resistance to not facing, things that I was gonna have to face. Does that make sense?

AG Yeah, it does. Thank you. The- to jump forward in time, slightly now- the appointment that you had with the doctor before taking time off. That that moment where he said, life is not a rehearsal.

S Yeah.

AG Can you tell me kind of thoughts, feelings, sensations, what was- what went on after that in a little more depth.

S Um. I just suppose I thought it was- it was just simple, simple sort of- it's become a bit of a mantra really, to kind of cut through, because I suppose I say to people, my clients mainly, you know, like if they're OCD- I think was getting a bit OCD-like about things. And so, when I was having a thought, it was kind of- I couldn't get rid of it. I couldn't explain it away. I couldn't logic it away. It was just taking over and- and I say to my clients, you know, I don't want you to push these thoughts away. Because they're trying to tell you
something. So, what we've got to do is you got you gotta be brave, you've got to face- you've
got to find that- you've got to say to yourself, what are these thoughts saying to you? And is
there any truth in it? And if there is, what is that truth? You know, we've got to explore that,
because if you don', evidence seems to suggest that don't go away. You can- you can maybe
distract yourself and you can block them, but they're still there. So, let's have a look. Because
they're coming from your head. They were coming from my head, so, I should be able to face
them. They're mine. I've got to own them. I sounds horrible sort of sicky thing, but I've got to
own them. So, I suppose, that- what happened when he said that was-
obviously not immediately, but when I sat down and thought about it after the appointment, I
just thought, I'm wasting my time. Yeah, these- this circle of thoughts that I'm having, I'm
just becoming absorbed. It's taking up too much- it's like I think- people, OCD, people feel
when they finally think enough is enough. I can't bear this any longer. And it was becoming
unbear- yes, it was becoming unbearable. And for him to say life is not a rehearsal. It kind
of- I suppose we work a lot with metaphors, don't we in Psychology. And for me, I was
thinking, yeah, he's absolutely right. I mean, what's the point in running over what is going to
be if I see- if my husband does die before me? How tragic would it be, if by the time I
actually get there, I've spent, however many years beforehand, kind of waiting for it to
happen? No, I mustn't wait for it. It was- it kind of- was like a kind of permission to live my
life. Permission to live my life, knowing that something bad or bad things were going to
happen, but let's not pre-empt them. Let's not, kind of- or else it could become a self-fulfilling
prophecy, perhaps. Or- or when you've got that kind of mindset, it stopped you seeing other
things, doesn't it? If you if you're running around- if I'm running around in my head, oh
what's it going to- who am I going to phone? What's it going to look like? What's it gonna be
like? I'm wake u- I kind of like open my eyes and think, oh, what have I missed? [laughs] So
I kind of- I suppose it made me think, I've got to spend more time looking around me now,
and enjoying what I've got, rather than rehearsing or thinking about what I'm going to miss, when he does die.

AG [00:56:24] And did that moment have kind of any physical sensation associated with it or emotional component?

S [00:56:33] I suppose relief- it felt like a relief. You know, it was sort of like, yeah, that's the answer, isn't it? It's sort of like- it was like a little eureka moment. [laughs] Yeah.

AG [00:56:49] Okay.

S [00:56:50] Yeah.

AG [00:56:50] Thank you. So, could you tell me more about maybe yourself as a person, do you think that you changed as a person before and after the experience?

S [00:57:09] I think- I think I did. I think I did. And I think, I think I've always been a fairly cheerful, life and soul of the party, optimistic person. But I was becoming, a shadow of my former self. I was becoming nervy and upset and- and pessimistic, I suppose, or kind of a bit all doom and gloom really. I suppose I was beginning to think, oh, the good bit, the good bits
of my life are over now. It's all shit from here on. Or relative shit from here on, you know.

So, everything's going to get worse. There's nothing that's gonna get better. And I think you then- I then realized, no, that's not quite what it's about. It's about being different, you know. I do feel different in that I feel, not quite lucky, but I feel that this experience- all you can do with tragedies and traumas like that is learn from them, isn't it? [mutters something, unclear].

But you can't go back and fix it. You can't not have had it happen, but you can sort of say, okay, what's the best I can make out of that? And I suppose I am that sort of person, and that perhaps I'm better now at being that sort of person. About saying, yeah, I accept that death is part of life, and death will happen. And- and that's a given. We can't stop that. But we do have a choice as to how we live our lives. And, you know, perhaps we have a duty to ourselves, certainly, and others around us to live that life as best we can.

AG [00:59:17] That sounds- and please correct me if I'm wrong, like almost a shift in values or shift in- I don't know if I'm using the right language, tell me if any of it sounds about right.

Yeah, just like already fundamental shift in where you place value, almost.

S [00:59:36] Yeah. Yeah, I suppose. I suppose I up until you have a sort of trauma of that nature or experience of that nature, you're- you're- you're, in relative terms, you're in cloud cuckoo land, aren't you? You know, we- and that's partly what I try and say to some of my clients, really, that in a way, when people become upset or when I became upset about sort of death and dying and all that sort of stuff. It was partly a reaction to the fact that I'd had a lucky life, up till that point. And that's what you tend to forget. So, I suppose it's made me think more about how lucky I've been, if you like. I'm lucky to have got to the point, I was 43, I got to the point of being 43, before I really, really, really appreciated that people die.
You know, 'cause certainly with children, you try to protect children, don't you? You try to p-
but you can't, and perhaps, perhaps we shouldn't. Perhaps that's one of the things that has
changed about me. I feel that we mustn't skirt around death. And certainly, I mean, I'm not
going to be- I've got three grandchildren, one on the way. I'm certainly not going to try and
scare them to death, and sort of talk about you know, we're all going to die! [both laugh] But
you know- but I think they have to- otherwise- I think in a way, we have a duty to try and
protect- is it to try and desensitize ourselves about death a bit?

AG [01:01:32] Is it acceptance?

S [01:01:33] Or accept it. You know, it's- it's just I mean, one of the things I'm reading is on
existential psychotherapy.

AG [01:01:41] Ooh, love a bit of that.

S [01:01:43] I remember looking at that book when I was an undergraduate, so that was like
18, 19, 20. And it scared the bejesus, it scared the bejesus out of me. You know? And I was
thinking, I don't know why I started looking at it, it was a big book, and I thought ooh, big
psychology book, love a big psychology book. And I looked, chapter one death. Chapter two
death. Chapter three grief.
Existentialists love it.

You know, etcetera, etcetera. And I just thought, no, no, no. Not having anything to do with that. And I remember when I had seminars- lectures on elderly people, and oh can't go there. I really felt I had almost a physical aversion to thinking about death and facing death and thinking about old age. But that's kind of part of the bubble. That's- that's the bubble that we create for ourselves, isn't it? We- we tried to create a world where we are somehow protected. If I don't read that book, I'm all right. If I don't listen to those lectures, I'm fine. [laughs].

That's really interesting.

You know, so it's kind of like in a way, people who come to see me, in their twenties, thirties, and are suddenly, or relatively suddenly develop this kind of feeling or thought, I'm going to die! You know, I don't know what they kind of expect in the way, but I can't- one of the first things I say to them is, yes, you are. Yes. Yes. [laughs] I'm sorry, you know, I'm not going to- I can't- I'm not going to tell you that I can help you with that. The way I can help you with that is for you to accept it. Yeah, as you say, that word, acceptance, I think is probably quite good. And that's what basically Irvin Yalom is talking about, isn't it? That that there are existential crises. And one of them is we're going to die. And it's, it must be the most difficult one to kind of get your head around.
AG [01:03:51] I think so, especially in a religious culture where you're told that you're immortal on some level.

S [01:03:56] Yeah.

AG [01:04:00] It's- it's- it's difficult-

S [01:04:01] Yeah.

AG [01:04:01] We're a very- we're a very- very sanitised culture.


AG [01:04:04] We sanitize death right out of everything.


AG [01:04:07] We don't even see old fruit and veg anymore!
Yeah.

AG [01:04:12] Everything is shiny and new and-

AG [01:04:15] Everything's all about sort of selfies in the infinity pool, and you know, look at this, look at this fantastic life I'm having.


AG [01:04:30] And I suppose it's sort of, I'll tell you what it reminds me of, it reminds me of a friend I have who, perhaps had sort of those sort of similar thoughts that if I don't think about it, if I don't face it, will go away, or it won't happen to me, or I can leave that for a while. Until he didn't- he was really, really resistant about writing his will, because it was almost like if I write my will, it means I'm going to die. I sort of was like, well you're going to die, whether you write your will or not [laughs]. And when you- whether you write your will,
today or tomorrow or next week, it's- there's no connection between that act and your death.
You know, you're going to die, whatever. So, I would, if I were you. I mean, I've written a-
we've written our wills. And I and I found it a completely liberating process, partly
financially as well, because I'm thinking if I died at this point, I've got X amount of thousands
that the taxman will take, and the taxmen have already taxed me on my earnings to get to this
point. So, I'm going to try to make sure that I spend every mortal penny that the taxman
would take to the maximum without tax, for my children, if you like, because I'm thinking
I've not worked for the taxman, you know. So, if they're going to take that anyway, well I'm
going to spend it. So, it's kind of like- kind of liberating that the- yeah. Yeah. Sorry does
that- is that- does that help?

AG [01:06:06] Yes. Yes, very much so, thank you. Two more questions. You've touched on
it sort of throughout, but if you could, sort of almost summarize how your positive
transformation has impacted you- your practice? How as that- has it changed your practice?

S [01:06:25] Okay. [pause] Well, I suppose it's given me a bit of- it- it- I mean, you know, I
feel I use- I've used the experience to kind of positive effect where I can, because I do believe
it is, uh, possible, it is professional sometimes to talk about yourself. If you're in a person-
centred approach, not quite so much. But I kind of like, put all the approaches together really,
when in practice. That's why I wanted to be a Doctor of Counselling Psychology because I
wanted to be able to use it all. If nec- as and when appropriate. So- so, I do sometimes I think
it helps to show clients that, me as a psychologist, I'm not sitting here in my chair thinking,
sort of, exuding this kind of, I'm immune from all this, and because I'm a psychologist, I cope
perfectly with everything. And I'm all kind of zen and calm and sort of all sort of hunky-
everything's hunky dory. You know. We have problems as well. And- or we've had the
experiences that we've had to get over. And things that we- we- we bother about, I suppose, is
part of this sort of normalizing, I suppose to use the CBT language, it's kind of normalizing
people's fears that they find difficult, distasteful, guilty of. Yeah.

AG [01:08:18] Do you think it allows you to relate to your clients differently?

S [01:08:27] I think it makes me a more- a calmer person with them, or a kind of, a kind of- I
feel that because I'm an older person anyway, I feel it gives a kind of edge that I'm a, I'm a
quite a sage- but I'm a very open person. So, I would, I- and I don't think I'm a very
judgmental person, but I think I- I can give off this sort of kind of ambience that kind of I've
been some- I've been through some difficulties and I- I kind of can't qui- completely
understand how you feel, but I think I, yeah, it gives me a deeper understanding, perhaps.

AG [01:09:18] Empathy?

S [01:09:19] An empathy with them, you know. Yeah, I don't know whether it's relevant or
not, but as I- I was sitting with a client a couple of weeks ago, and he- he- he was sort of
talking about his- his wife, who she's had a- she had suffered somebody- a close family
member died. And she seems to have gotten over it. And he experienced a friend dying, or a
friend or a friend, somebody, you know, a bit further away from his circle, dying, and it
seems to have- things are coming crashing around his ears a bit really, in terms of he's really,
really bothered by sort of death, his own death and so on. And one of his issues is why
isn't my wife- why am I? I feel guilty. I feel wrong. I feel bad, that I'm sort of like being
pathetic and selfish, and sort of, I'm thinking about my own death, whereas she has had a
death that's much closer to her, and she's getting over it. She's kind of getting on with it. And
I feel, you know, I'm p- in relation to her. And I suppose it made me feel a bit like sort of that
survivor guilt. And I suppose that reminded me of, you know, how I felt when, you know
like, I remember my mother had di- not had a second chance, but I had. And why am I feeling
so pathetic. But in a way, I suppose, it makes me realize that we're- we're all dif- we're all
different, and we do deal with things, incredibly differently. I suppose that's one of the things
that I've kind of empha- that's kind of happened, if you like, since then, is that the enormous
range of responses to death, and to trauma. From sort of some people, who seem to almost
hardly notice it, to people who seem to be really dragged down into it. Um, yeah.

AG [01:11:46] OK. Thank you. And another short- sort of small question. You mentioned
that you're a very open person. Do you think there is anything about yourself, as a person,
that might have facilitated experiencing that sudden positive transformation?

S [01:12:08] I suppose partly that- and lot of my client’s sort of say this as well. Sometimes, I
didn't like the way I was becoming. I really, I- I was almost getting to the point I don't
recognize myself. You know, I'm not this weak, sort of vulnerable- I suppose I'd kind of
come to see myself as a fairly powerful, successful, cheerful, you know, if you want a job
doing ask a busy person, kind of person. You know, I'd been the head of department. And
yet, you know, I'd been fairly kind of a dynamic, zipping around. And this wasn't me. And
so, I think I was fairly motivated, to kinds of, not return- you can't ever go back and be who
you were before. But be a more cheer-
you know just accept that- acceptance, and then move
on. So, I feel better being released, it's almost like having the burdens of- it's like having a
burden removed, you know, you don't have to practice that- it's going to come anyway. You
don't have to practice it.

AG [01:13:35] Do you feel lighter?

S [01:13:36] Feel lighter, yeah [laughs] Sort of less- and I suppose it reminds me of one of
my mantras is the serenity prayer. Have you come across that? You know, I just think that's
[pause].


S [01:13:48] I think that's just- I mean, I leave the God bit out but it's sort of you know,
something, myself, give me the serenity to change, no, to accept the things I cannot change. I
mean, that's- that's it, isn't it, really? That's what we have to do. We have to accept that we are
going to die. You can't change it. But, uh, give me the courage to change the things I can and
the wisdom to know the difference. I mean, that's just perfect.

Yeah. And that makes it- I can see all the parallels within that Serenity Prayer.

Yeah.

And your experience.

It sort of, it keeps you grounded. But it allows you to also be optimistic as well.

Hmm.

'Cause I have a view that people can be too optimistic, I suppose. And I try to help them, not to be. Because I think that there lies the road to disappointment, continual striving, feeling inadequate, feeling you're not doing things right or, you know. They think pessimism is all negative, and pessimism, is- is, it keeps you grounded. A bit of pessimism, you know, not too much so that you've become, uh, mired in depression and can't progress, and get total apathy and so on. Yeah, but a balance between the two is important.
AG [01:15:36] And just to finish up, is there anything else about your experience that you think I should know, or you'd like me to know?

S [01:15:57] No, I suppose- I suppose that with hindsight- well, from my position now, it really resonates- and that's a word I love and hate- it resonates with the work of Stephen Joseph. Post-Traumatic growth, have you come across that? I just- I saw him at a conference a couple of years ago and got his- I'm a real groupie -got his book, and he signed it for me.

But I think his work is amazing. And not- and I do tell clients who've had that sort of trauma, you know, I'm not saying, ooh, you're ever so lucky to have had that trauma because now you can learn from it and have some post-traumatic growth. But actually, that's the positive that can, and often does come out of out of trauma. So, I feel I feel I'm in a sort of minor way, I'm- I'm living proof that there is growth after- there is life after trauma, I suppose. [ laughs]

That you can- and when you read sort of trauma stories, I think what Stephen Joseph has been doing recent- more recently is looking at Africa, is it the Tutsis and the Hutus that he's working with, or has been working with, translating their stories. You know how- how given the just the horrendousness of what they've been through. They're not totally broken, they're survive- they're surviving. They're growing. They're carrying on. You know.


Appendix F: Ethics Documentation

This appendix contains the initial ethics application, alongside the two modifications to this application that were later submitted. The content of each application is presented, followed by evidence of ethical approval.
UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE

FORM EC1A: APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL OF A STUDY INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
(Individual or Group Applications)

Please complete this form if you wish to undertake a study involving human participants.

Applicants are advised to refer to the Ethics Approval StudyNet Site and read the Guidance Notes (GN) before completing this form.

http://www.study.net2.herts.ac.uk/pb/common/ethics.nsf/Homepage?ReadForm

Applicants are also advised to read the FAQ General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) before completing this form.

http://www.study.net2.herts.ac.uk/pb/common/ethics.nsf/Frequently+asked+Questions/4AD8B8CD8D0F3F2D862582$8003018671

Use of this form is mandatory [see UPR RE01, ‘Studies Involving Human Participants’, Sections 7.1-7.3]

Approval must be sought and granted before any investigation involving human participants begins [UPR RE01, S 4.4 (b)]

If you require any further guidance, please contact either hsetecda@herts.ac.uk or sshpecds@herts.ac.uk

Abbreviations:  GN = Guidance Notes  UPR = University Policies and Regulations

THE STUDY

Q1  Please give the title of the proposed study

Sudden Personal Transformation in Sport Psychologists

THE APPLICANT

Q2  Name of applicant(s)/principal investigator (person undertaking this study)

Aura Goldman

Student registration number/Staff number

14178858

Email address

a.goldman@herts.ac.uk OR auragoldman@hotmail.co.uk

Status:

☐ Undergraduate (Foundation)  ☐ Undergraduate (BSc, BA)

☐ Postgraduate (taught)  ☐ Postgraduate (research)

☐ Staff  ☐ Other

Form EC1A individual/group 3 April 2019
If other, please provide details here:
N/A

School/Department
School of Life and Medical Sciences

If application is from a student NOT based at University of Hertfordshire, please give the name of the partner institution: N/A

Name of Programme (eg BSc (Hons) Computer Science): PhD Sport Psychology

Module name and module code: N/A

Name of Supervisor: Dr Stephen Pack   Supervisor's email: s.pack@herts.ac.uk

Name of Module Leader/If applicant is undertaking a taught programme/module:
N/A

Names and student/staff numbers for any additional investigators involved in this study (students should read GN Sections 1.5 and 2.2.1 concerning responsibilities of all members of the group)

Dr Fran Longstaff
Professor Elizabeth Pike

Is this study being conducted in collaboration with another university or institution and/or does it involve working with colleagues from another institution?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

If yes, provide details here:
N/A

DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED STUDY

Q3 Please give a short synopsis of your proposed study, stating its aims and highlighting where these aims relate to the use of human participants (See GN 2.2.3)

This study aims to explore sudden personal transformations (SPTs; a positive, lasting, profound personal change, which followed a relatively brief and memorable inner experience) as experienced by sport psychologists. The first study in my thesis used an online survey and found that trainee sport psychologists do have these experiences. This study would seek to gain a more in-depth understanding of SPTs. Although the phenomena under investigation is relatively uncommon, the study will aim to recruit approximately 10 (maximum 15) individuals who are practitioner psychologists, registered with the Health Care Professions Council (HCPC). The interview schedule to be used for the study will be pilot tested on one individual, based on the recommendations by Connelly (2008) that pilot sample size should be 10% of the sample size for the main study.
Q4 Please give a brief explanation of the design of the study and the methods and procedures used. You should clearly state the nature of the involvement the human participants will have in your proposed study and the extent of their commitment. Ensure you provide sufficient detail for the Committee to, particularly in relation to the human participants. Refer to any Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) under which you are operating here. (See GN 2.2.4).

To explore sudden personal transformations in sport psychologists, a semi-structured interview will be undertaken (proposed interview schedule attached in supporting documentation).

Participants will be recruited via social media and personal connections.

Prior to interviewing, screening will take place by email (see attached documentation for screening emails) to determine that the participant has experienced a sudden personal transformation. The screening questions are based on previous literature that has explored sudden personal transformations (Amos, 2016; Illitsky, 2011). Participants will be required to give informed consent. The interviews will last approximately 1 – 1.5hrs.

Q5 Does the study involve the administration of substances?

☐ Yes ☐ No

**PLEASE NOTE:** If you have answered yes to this question you must ensure that the study would not be considered a clinical trial of an investigational medical product. To help you, please refer to the link below from the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/317952/Algorithim.pdf

To help you determine whether NHSREC approval is required, you may wish to consult the Health Research Authority (HRA) decision tool: http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/ethics/

If your study is considered a clinical trial and it is decided that ethical approval will be sought from the HRA, please stop completing this form and use Form EC1D, ‘NHS Protocol Registration Request’; you should also seek guidance from Research Sponsorship.

I confirm that I have referred to the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency and I am satisfied that my study is not a clinical trial of a medicinal product.

Please type your name here: Click here to enter text.

Date: Click here to enter a date.

Q6.1 Please give the starting date for your recruitment and data collection: 18/11/2019

Q6.2 Please give the finishing date for your data collection: 28/02/2020

(For meaning of ‘starting date’ and ‘finishing date’, see GN 2.2.8)

Q7.1 Where will the study take place?

The University of Hertfordshire and other various locations. Every effort will be made to conduct interviews on campus, but this may not always be feasible for participants.

Please refer to the Guidance Notes (GN 2.2.7) which set out clearly what permissions are required.

Please tick all the statements below which apply to this study

Q7.2 Permissions

This question is about two types of permission you may need to obtain. Depending on the study you may need more than one of each of these.
1. Permission to access a particular group or groups of participants to respond to your study  
2. Permission to use a particular premises or location in which you wish to conduct your study  

If your study involves minors/vulnerable participants, please refer to Q18 to ensure you comply with the University's requirement regarding Disclosure and Barring Service clearance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(i) Permission to access participants</th>
<th>(ii) Permission to use premises/location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I confirm that I have obtained permission to access my intended group of participants and that the permission is attached to this application</td>
<td>Permission has been obtained to carry out the study on University premises in areas outside the Schools and the agreement is attached to this application.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have yet to obtain permission but I understand that this will be necessary before I commence my study. For student applicants only: I understand that the original copies of the permission letters must be verified by my supervisor before data collection commences.</td>
<td>Permission has been obtained from an off-campus location to carry out the study on their premises and the agreement is attached to this application.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This study involves working with minors/vulnerable participants. We have obtained permission from the organisation (including UH/UH Partner Institutions when appropriate) in which the study is to take place and which is responsible for the minors/vulnerable participants. The permission states the DBS requirements of the organisation for this study and confirms we have satisfied their DBS requirements where necessary.</td>
<td>✓ I have yet to obtain permission but I understand that this will be necessary before I commence my study. For student applicants only: I understand that the original copies of the permission must be verified by my supervisor before data collection commences. It may be necessary to travel to other universities to carry out my research and so I will contact each institution as and when I recruit a participant in order to obtain permission, taking into account The School of Life and Medical Sciences Protocols of Safe Working section 2.2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Permission is not required for my study. Please explain why: Permission is not required as there is no relevant gatekeeper for the participants. Participants will either be contacted individually, or the invitation to participate will be shared through social media to appropriate candidates. Participation will be voluntary at the point of briefing and decided on an individual basis.</td>
<td>✓ Permission is not required for my study. Please explain why: Permission is not required as interviews will take place in a staff meeting room (participants would therefore follow the HR standard 'unpaid visitor' process).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Harms, Hazards and Risks**

Q8.1 It might be appropriate to conduct a risk assessment (in respect of the hazards/risks affecting both the participants and/or investigators). Please use form ECS, Harms, Hazards and Risks, if the answer to any of the questions below is 'yes'.

If you are required to complete and submit a School-specific risk assessment (in accordance with the requirements of the originating School) it is acceptable to make a cross-reference from this document
to Form EC5 in order not to have to repeat the information twice.

Will this study involve any of the following?

Invasive Procedures/administration of any substances? □ YES □ NO

IF ‘YES’ TO THE ABOVE PLEASE COMPLETE EC1 APPENDIX 1 AS WELL AND INCLUDE IT WITH YOUR APPLICATION

Are there potential hazards to participant/investigator(s) □ YES □ NO from the proposed study? (Physical/Emotional or other non-physical harm)

Will or could aftercare and/or support be needed by participants? □ YES □ NO

Q8.2 Is the study being conducted off-campus (i.e. not at UH/UH Partner)? □ YES □ NO

It might be appropriate to conduct a risk assessment of the proposed location for your study (in respect of the hazards/risk affecting both the participants and/or investigators) (this might be relevant for on-campus locations as well). Please use Form EC5 and, if required, a School-specific risk assessment (See CN 2.2.8 of the Guidance Notes).

If you do not consider it necessary to submit a risk assessment, please give your reasons: A risk assessment will be conducted – please see form EC5

ABOUT YOUR PARTICIPANTS

Q9 Please give a brief description of the kind of people you hope/intend to have as participants, for instance, a sample of the general population, university students, people affected by a particular medical condition, children within a given age group, employees of a particular firm, people who support a particular political party, and state whether there are any upper or lower age restrictions.

Participants in this study will be purposively sampled sport psychologists of any gender, registered with the HCPC, who self-identify as having experienced a sudden personal transformation (defined as: “a positive, lasting, profound personal change, which followed a relatively brief and memorable inner experience” (Livitsky, 2011)).

Participants will be excluded should their experience be related to a near-death experience, have happened as the direct result of a positive external event, or the result of meeting or associating with the influential leader of a group. These circumstances distinguish sudden personal transformations from other related constructs. Further, it is critical that the experience be the result of an internal, rather than external, event. There will be no upper age limit, and all participants will be over 18.

Q10 Please state here the maximum number of participants you hope will participate in your study. Please indicate the maximum numbers of participants for each method of data collection.

15

Q11 By completing this form, you are indicating that you are reasonably sure that you will be successful in obtaining the number of participants which you hope/intend to recruit. Please outline here your
recruitment (sampling) method and how you will advertise your study. (See GN 2.2.9).

Participants will be purposively sampled through recruitment on social media, and through the researchers’ and their supervisors’ personal connections.

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**CONFIDENTIALITY AND CONSENT**

(For guidance on issues relating to consent, see GN 2.2.10, GN 3.1 and UPR.RE01. SS 2.3 and 2.4 and the Ethics Approval StudyNet Site FAQs)

Q12 How will you obtain consent from the participants? Please explain the consent process for each method of data collection identified in Q4

☐ Express/explicit consent using an EC3 Consent Form and an EC6 Participant Information Sheet (or equivalent documentation)

☐ Implied consent (participant information will be provided, for example, at the start of the questionnaire/survey etc)

☐ Consent by proxy (for example, given by parent/guardian)

Use this space to describe how consent is to be obtained and recorded for each method of data collection. The information you give must be sufficient to enable the Committee to understand exactly what it is that prospective participants are being asked to agree to.

Participants will be sent the consent form and information sheet prior to their attendance of the interview in order to allow them to familiarise themselves with the study. If the participant has not brought completed forms to the interview, or has not yet read them, then the information will be provided and time will be devoted to ensuring that the participant fully understands what their participation in the study will entail.

If you do not intend to obtain consent from participants please explain why it is considered unnecessary or impossible or otherwise inappropriate to seek consent.

N/A

Q13 If the participant is a minor (under 18 years of age) or is unable for any reason to give full consent on their own, state here whose consent will be obtained and how? (See especially GN 3.5 and 3.7)

N/A

Q14.1 Will anyone other than yourself and the participants be present with you when conducting this study? (See GN 2.2.15)

☐ YES  ☐ NO

If YES, please state the relationship between anyone else who is present other than the applicant and/or participants (eg health professional, parent/guardian of the participant).

N/A

Q14.2 Will the proposed study be conducted in private?
YES □ NO

If 'No', what steps will be taken to ensure confidentiality of the participants' information. (See GN 2.2.11):

N/A

Q15.1 Are personal data of any sort (such as name, age, gender, occupation, contact details or images) to be obtained from or in respect of any participant? (See GN 2.2.11) (You will be required to adhere to the arrangements declared in this application concerning confidentiality of data and its storage. The Participant Information Sheet (Form EC6 or equivalent) must explain the arrangements clearly.)

□ YES □ NO

If YES, give details of personal data to be gathered and indicate how it will be stored.

The study will gather the following personal data: (a) name (b) gender, (c) age, (d) occupation, (e) contact details and (f) religion. Names and other clearly identifying data will be anonymised in any subsequent transcripts. The data will be encrypted and stored on a password protected computer, accessible only to the researcher for 72 months after which it will be destroyed under secure conditions. Any identifiable information will be stored separately to the interview transcripts.

PLEASE NOTE: If you are processing personal information you MUST consider whether you need to complete a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA). Please read the DPIA guidance available from the FAQ section of the UH Ethics Approval StudyNet site:


If you need to complete one, please find the DPIA template in the University’s website at the following link:

https://www.herts.ac.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0006/233619/IM01_Template_Data-Protection_Impact-Assessment.pdf

The DPIA must be completed in consultation with the University's Data Protection Officer and submitted with your application for ethics approval.

Will you be making audio-visual recordings?

□ YES □ NO

If YES, give details of the types recording to be made and indicate how they will be stored.

Audio recordings will be made of the interviews. If any visual material is produced by the participants then photographs of this material will be taken. The files will be stored without names and other clearly identifying data on the file name.

Q15.2 If you have made a YES response to any part of Q15.1, please state what steps will be taken to prevent or regulate access to personal data and/or audio-visual recordings beyond the immediate investigative team, as indicated in the Participant Information Sheet.

Indicate what assurances will be given to participants about the security of, and access to, personal data and/or audio-visual recordings, as indicated in the Participant Information Sheet.

The data will be encrypted and stored on a password protected computer, accessible only to the
researcher for 72 months after which it will be destroyed under secure conditions.

State as far as you are able to do so how long personal data and/or audio-visual recordings collected/made during the study will be retained and what arrangements have been made for its/their secure storage and destruction, as indicated in the Participant Information Sheet.

The data will be encrypted and stored on a password protected computer, accessible only to the researcher for 72 months after which it will be destroyed under secure conditions.

Q15.3 Will data be anonymised prior to storage?

☐ YES  ☐ NO

Q16 Is it intended (or possible) that data might be used beyond the present study? (See GN 2.2.10)

☐ YES  ☐ NO

If YES, please indicate the kind of further use that is intended (or which may be possible):

If NO, will the data be kept for a set period and then destroyed under secure conditions?

☐ YES  ☐ NO

If NO, please explain why not:

N/A

Q17 Consent Forms: what arrangements have been made for the storage of Consent Forms and for how long?

Consent forms will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, accessible only to the researcher.

Q18 If the activity/activities involve work with children and/or vulnerable adults satisfactory Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance may be required by investigators. You are required to check with the organisation (including LH/ULH Partners where appropriate) responsible for the minors/vulnerable participants whether or not they require DBS clearance.

Any permission from the organisation confirming their approval for you to undertake the activities with the children/vulnerable group for which they are responsible should make specific reference to any DBS requirements they impose and their permission letter/email must be included with your application.

More information is available via the DBS website:
https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service

REWARDS

Q19.1 Are you receiving any financial or other reward connected with this study? (See GN 2.2.14 and UPR RE01, S 2.3)

☐ YES  ☐ NO

Form EC1A individual/group 3 April 2019

9790

9791
If YES, give details here:

N/A

Q19.2 Are participants going to receive any financial or other reward connected with the study? (Please note that the University does not allow participants to be given a financial inducement.) (See UPR RE01, S2.3)

☐ YES ☐ NO

If YES, provide details here:

N/A

Q19.3 Will anybody else (including any other members of the investigative team) receive any financial or other reward connected with this study?

☐ YES ☐ NO

If YES, provide details here:

N/A

OTHER RELEVANT MATTERS

Q20 Enter here anything else you want to say in support of your application, or which you believe may assist the Committee in reaching its decision.

Click here to enter text.

DOCUMENTS TO BE ATTACHED

Please indicate below which documents are attached to this application:

☐ Permission to access groups of participants
☒ Permission to use University premises beyond areas of School
☐ Permission from off-campus location(s) to be used to conduct this study
☒ Form EC5 (Harms, Hazards and Risks: assessment and mitigation)
☒ Consent Form (See Form EC3/EC4)
☒ Form EC6 (Participant Info Sheet)
☐ Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)
☒ A copy of the proposed questionnaire and/or interview schedule (if appropriate for this study). For
unstructured methods, please provide details of the subject areas that will be covered and any
boundaries that have been agreed with your Supervisor.

☐ Any other relevant documents, such as a debrief, meeting report. Please provide details here:

Click here to enter text.

DEclarations

1 DECLARATION BY APPLICANT

1.1 I undertake, to the best of my ability, to abide by UPR RE01, "Studies Involving the Use of
Human Participants", in carrying out the study.

1.2 I undertake to explain the nature of the study and all possible risks to potential participants.

1.3 Data relating to participants will be handled with great care. No data relating to named or
identifiable participants will be passed on to others without the written consent of the participants
concerned, unless they have already consented to such sharing of data when they agreed to take
part in the study.

1.4 All participants will be informed (a) that they are not obliged to take part in the study, and (b) that they
may withdraw at any time without disadvantage or having to give a reason.

(NOTE: Where the participant is a minor or is otherwise unable, for any reason, to give full consent on
their own, references here to participants being given an explanation or information, or being asked to
give their consent, are to be understood as referring to the person giving consent on their behalf. (See
Q 12; also GN Pt. 3, and especially 3.6 & 3.7))

Enter your name here: Aura Goldman  
Data 31/10/2019

2 GROUP APPLICATION

(if you are making this application on behalf of a group of students/staff, please complete this
section as well)

I confirm that I have agreement of the other members of the group to sign this declaration on their behalf

Enter your name here: Click here to enter text.  
Data Click here to enter a date.

DECLARATION BY SUPERVISOR (see GN 2.1.6)

I confirm that the proposed study has been appropriately vetted within the School in respect of its aims
and methods; that I have discussed this application for Ethics Committee approval with the applicant
and approve its submission; that I accept responsibility for guiding the applicant so as to ensure
compliance with the terms of the protocol and with any applicable ethical code(s); and that if there are
conditions of the approval, they have been met.

Enter your name here: Click here to enter text.  
Data Click here to enter a date.

Form EC1A individual/group 3 April 2019
HEALTH, SCIENCE, ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY ECDA

ETHICS APPROVAL NOTIFICATION

TO          Aura Goldman
CC          Dr Stephen Pack
FROM        Dr Simon Trainis, Health, Science Engineering & Technology ECDA Chairman
DATE        13/11/19

Protocol number:  LMS/PGR/UH/03925

Title of study:  Sudden Personal Transformation in Sport Psychologists

Your application for ethics approval has been accepted and approved with the following conditions by the ECDA for your School and includes work undertaken for this study by the named additional workers below:

Dr Fran Longstaff
Professor Elizabeth Pike

General conditions of approval:

Ethics approval has been granted subject to the standard conditions below:

Permissions: Any necessary permissions for the use of premises/location and accessing participants for your study must be obtained in writing prior to any data collection commencing. Failure to obtain adequate permissions may be considered a breach of this protocol.

External communications: Ensure you quote the UH protocol number and the name of the approving Committee on all paperwork, including recruitment advertisements/online requests, for this study.

Invasive procedures: If your research involves invasive procedures you are required to complete and submit an EC7 Protocol Monitoring Form, and copies of your completed consent paperwork to this ECDA once your study is complete.

Submission: Students must include this Approval Notification with their submission.

Validity:

This approval is valid:

From:     19/11/19
To:       20/02/20
**First Modification**

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE
ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR STUDIES INVOLVING THE USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
(ETHICS COMMITTEE)

**FORM EC2: APPLICATION FOR MODIFICATION AND/OR EXTENSION TO AN EXISTING PROTOCOL APPROVAL**

1. **Title of original application:**
   Sudden Personal Transformation in Sport Psychologists

   **Protocol Number:**
   LMS/PGR/UI/03925

   **Is this the first modification/extension request for this study?**
   Yes

   If no, please include the most recent approval notification document with your application.

2. **Protocol holder details**

   **Applicant name:** Aura Goldman

   **Student/Staff number:** 14178659

   **Applicant e-mail address:** a.goldman@herts.ac.uk OR auragoldman@hotmail.co.uk

   **Work address (if appropriate):** Click here to enter text.

   **Supervisor's name:** Dr Stephen Pack

   **Supervisor's School & Department:** Life and Medical Sciences

   **Supervisor's e-mail address:** s.pack@herts.ac.uk

3. **Specify the nature of the modification/extension (please tick all that apply and complete Q4 & 5).**

   ☒ **Revised title of study.**
   Sudden Personal Transformation in Practitioner Psychologists

   ☒ **Amend/extend dates**
   From: 18/11/2019 To: 27/03/2020

   ☐ **Additional worker(s):**
   Names and student/staff numbers for any additional investigators involved in this study

   Click here to enter text.
☐ Change of supervisor from: Click here to enter text.  to: Click here to enter text. Please complete declaration below and give reason in Q4.

Declaration by new supervisor: I have reviewed the ethics protocol paperwork for this study and am aware of any conditions which must be adhered to.

Signed: Click here to enter text.  Date: Click here to enter a date.

☐ Location of study: Detail new location here.

☐ Other: Participants will be all practitioner psychologists registered with the Health Care Professions Council (HCPC), rather than specifically sport psychologists under the HCPC. Participants will be recruited via social media and personal connections.

4 Reason for extension/modification request
Data from my previous study, and initial data from this study strongly suggests that the fact of being specifically a Sport Psychologist has little to do with having a sudden personal transformation (SPT). The literature and my current data sets strongly suggest that these experiences are more related to personal factors or personality traits. As such, it seems prudent to open the investigation to other branches of Practitioner Psychologists in order to see what the effect of SPTs are on the role of the Psychologist in general.

5 Hazards
Does the modification or extension present additional hazards to the participant/investigator?

YES ☐ NO ☒

If YES, please complete a new Form EC5, ‘Harms, Hazards and Risks’.

If you are required to complete a School-specific risk assessment (in accordance with the requirements of the originating School), it is acceptable to make a cross-reference from this document to Form EC5 in order not to have to repeat the information twice.

Signature of Applicant: Aura Goldman  Date: 11/12/2019

Support by Supervisor: Click here to enter text.  Date: Click here to enter a date.

**modifications include any amendment of documentation to be given to participants, for example Form EC3, Consent, Form EC6, Participant Information Sheet, survey document**

Form EC2, 1 Sept 2019  Page 2 of 2
HEALTH, SCIENCE, ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY ECDA
ETHICS APPROVAL NOTIFICATION

TO Aura Goldman
CC Dr Stephen Pack
FROM Dr Simon Trains, Health, Science, Engineering & Technology ECDA Chair.
DATE 18/12/2019

Protocol number: at.MS/PGR/UH/03925(1)
Title of study: Sudden Personal Transformation in Practitioner Psychologists

Your application to modify and extend the existing protocol as detailed below has been accepted and approved by the ECDA for your School and includes work undertaken for this study by the named additional workers below.

Dr Fran Longstaff
Prof Elizabeth Pike

Modification: Detailed in EC2.

General conditions of approval:

Ethics approval has been granted subject to the standard conditions below:

Original protocol: Any conditions relating to the original protocol approval remain and must be complied with.

Permissions: Any necessary permissions for the use of premises/location and accessing participants for your study must be obtained in writing prior to any data collection commencing. Failure to obtain adequate permissions may be considered a breach of this protocol.

External communications: Ensure you quote the UH protocol number and the name of the approving Committee on all paperwork, including recruitment advertisements/online requests, for this study.

Invasive procedures: If your research involves invasive procedures you are required to complete and submit an EC7 Protocol Monitoring Form, and copies of your completed consent paperwork to this ECDA once your study is complete.

Submission: Students must include this Approval Notification with their submission.

Validity:

This approval is valid:

From: 18/12/2019
Second Modification

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE
ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR STUDIES INVOLVING THE USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
(ETHICS COMMITTEE)

FORM EC2: APPLICATION FOR MODIFICATION AND/OR EXTENSION TO AN
EXISTING PROTOCOL APPROVAL

1  Title of original application:
   Sudden Personal Transformation in Sport Psychologists

   Protocol Number:
   LMS/PGR/UH/03925(1)

   Is this the first modification/extension request for this study?
   Yes ☐  No ☑

   If no, please include the most recent approval notification document with your
   application.

2  Protocol holder details

   Applicant name:  Aura Goldman
   Student/Staff number:  14178858
   Applicant e-mail address:  a.goldman@herts.ac.uk OR
                             auragoldman@hotmail.co.uk
   Work address (if appropriate):  Click here to enter text.
   Supervisor’s name:  Dr Stephen Pack
   Supervisor’s School & Department:  Life and Medical Sciences
   Supervisor’s e-mail address:  s.pack@herts.ac.uk

3  Specify the nature of the modification/extension (please tick all that apply and
complete Q4 & 5).

   □  Revised title of study.

   □  Amend/extend dates

   From:  Click here to enter a date.    To:  Click here to enter a date.

   □  Additional worker(s):

   Names and student/staff numbers for any additional investigators involved in this
   study

   Click here to enter text.

Form EC2, 1 Sept 2018  Page 1 of 2
☐ Change of supervisor from: [Click here to enter text.] to: [Click here to enter text.]

Please complete declaration below and give reason in Q4.

Declaration by new supervisor:
I have reviewed the ethics protocol paperwork for this study and am aware of any conditions which must be adhered to.

Signed: [Click here to enter text.] Date: [Click here to enter a date.]

☐ Location of study

Detail new location here

☐ Other

Participants may also be interviewed using Skype

4 Reason for extension/modification request

Participants are not always able to meet me in person due to several reasons: they are unable to get to the University of Hertfordshire due to geographical constraints, they are not attached to a university from which we can conduct the interview, they do not have a permanent location from which they see clients in which we can conduct the interview, and they may not feel comfortable inviting a stranger (myself) into their home. In cases such as these I feel that Skype may be the only appropriate course of action.

5 Hazards

Does the modification or extension present additional hazards to the participant/investigator?

YES ☐ NO ☒

If YES, please complete a new Form EC5, 'Harms, Hazards and Risks'.

If you are required to complete a School-specific risk assessment (in accordance with the requirements of the originating School), it is acceptable to make a cross-reference from this document to Form EC5 in order not to have to repeat the information twice.

Signature of Applicant: Aura Goldman Date: 16/01/2020

Support by Supervisor: [Click here to enter text.] Date: [Click here to enter a date.]

** Modifications include any amendment of documentation to be given to participants, for example Form EC3, Consent, Form EC6, Participant Information Sheet, survey document.
HEALTH, SCIENCE, ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY ECDA

ETHICS APPROVAL NOTIFICATION

TO          Aura Goldman
CC          Dr Stephen Peck
FROM        Dr Simon Trains, Health, Science Engineering & Technology ECDA Chairman
DATE        17/01/20

Protocol number:  eLMS/PGR/UH/03925(2)

Title of study:  Sudden Personal Transformation in Sport Psychologists

Your application to modify and extend the existing protocol as detailed below has been accepted and approved by the ECDA for your School and includes work undertaken for this study by the named additional workers below:

Dr Fran Longstaff
Prof Elizabeth Pike

Modification:  Modification as per requested on EC2
Participants are not always able to meet me in person due to several reasons: they are unable to get to the University of Hertfordshire due to geographical constraints, they are not attached to a university from which we can conduct the interview, they do not have a permanent location from which they see clients in which we can conduct the interview, and they may not feel comfortable involving a stranger (myself) into their home. In cases such as these I feel that Skype may be the only appropriate course of action.

General conditions of approval:

Ethics approval has been granted subject to the standard conditions below:

Original protocol:  Any conditions relating to the original protocol approval remain and must be complied with.

Permissions:  Any necessary permissions for the use of premises/location and accessing participants for your study must be obtained in writing prior to any data collection commencing. Failure to obtain adequate permissions may be considered a breach of this protocol.

External communications:  Ensure you quote the UH protocol number and the name of the approving Committee on all paperwork, including recruitment advertisements/online requests, for this study.

Invasive procedures:  If your research involves invasive procedures you are required to complete and submit an EC7 Protocol Monitoring Form, and copies of your completed consent paperwork to this ECDA once your study is complete.
Submission: Students must include this Approval Notification with their submission.

Validity:
This approval is valid:
From: 17/01/20
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Please note:
Failure to comply with the conditions of approval will be considered a breach of protocol and may result in disciplinary action which could include academic penalties.
Additional documentation requested as a condition of this approval protocol may be submitted via your supervisor to the Ethics Clerks as it becomes available. All documentation relating to this study, including the information/documents noted in the conditions above, must be available for your supervisor at the time of submitting your work so that they are able to confirm that you have complied with this protocol.

Should you amend any aspect of your research or wish to apply for an extension to your study you will need your supervisor’s approval (if you are a student) and must complete and submit a further EC2 request.
Approval applies specifically to the research study/methodology and timings as detailed in your Form EC1A or as detailed in the EC2 request. In cases where the amendments to the original study are deemed to be substantial, a new Form EC1A may need to be completed prior to the study being undertaken.

Failure to report adverse circumstance(s) may be considered misconduct.
Should adverse circumstances arise during this study such as physical reaction/harm, mental/emotional harm, intrusion of privacy or breach of confidentiality this must be reported to the approving Committee immediately.
Appendix G: Reflexions on Time, Language and Change

I am including these reflexions as an Appendix, rather than in the main body of text, as these are structures that I believe to be, perhaps not causally impactful, but impactful in terms of the sensemaking process. There is also something that feels liminal about these ideas, so I think unpacking them here gives me a different kind of flexibility to talk about them. To that end, this reflexive chapter will explore the structures of time, language and change in order to immerse the reader more fully in these notions, and to account for my own awareness of how my actions either transform or support extant structures. As discussed in Chapter 1, CR demands the exploration of structure/agency dualisms (Archer, 2003). Bhaskar (1979) posited that structure is always necessary for agency, and that agency simultaneously transforms structure. Thus, these concepts can be viewed as separate aspects of an intertwined whole. Using language as an example (a relevant example as it will be discussed below), one cannot engage in speech without the pre-existing structure of language, and so structure always comes before agency. However, if no one spoke, then the structure of language would not survive. Thus, neither can exist without the other.

Perhaps the most important section of Chapter 2, for me, was the discussion surrounding the Newtonian paradigm and its influence on thought for both academics and laypeople. The Newtonian paradigm has hugely impacted the way in which we view our reality on every level. Indeed, debunking the Newtonian paradigm for myself in the context of psychology and human behaviour has been revelatory and utterly changed my understanding of the world around me. As a result of engaging with these ideas, I began to read more widely, focusing on books and articles that discussed alternate offerings to the Newtonian paradigm on the physics of the universe. I wanted to understand these ideas at their most profound, or ‘purest’, level (without straying into the territory of mathematics).
is during this time that I noticed something: a parallel between literature I was reading on epiphanic experience, and the literature I was reading on time. Amos (2016a) noted that her participants imposed temporal categories on their narratives of epiphanic experience, such that there was a distinct ‘before’ and ‘after’. Further, she found that they positioned themselves at the boundary between ‘before’ and ‘after’ so that they could see in both directions and reconceptualise their previous self, current and future self, and their transformative experience as a coherent whole (and the participants from my study tended to employ a similar strategy). This seemed to me to be an unusual way of storytelling as a layperson, positioning themselves between times, and entering a liminal space, rather than ‘after’, in their current time, looking back retrospectively. I also wondered if by positioning themselves in this way, Amos’ (and my) participants were actually positioning themselves outside of time. In any case, I was noticing something funny, temporally.

This small tidbit of information sat at the back of my mind, regularly prodding me not to forget about it. It seemed obvious to me that the notion of time, and the notion of change, are inextricably linked, whereby our view of the possibility of change is constrained by the manner in which time is perceived. This subject consumed my thoughts for several months. My first port of call to further explore this idea was to look at it through an anthropological lens. It can be seen that ancient cultures (such as the Mayans, Incas, Buddhists, and various Native American cultures) viewed time as cyclical (Bartunek & Necochea, 2000; Calleman, 2004; Lake, 1991; Lizardi & Gearing, 2010). To use Native American culture as an example:

Western time concepts include a beginning and an end; American Indians understand time as an eternally recurring cycle of events and years. Some Indian languages lack
terms for the past and the future; everything is resting in the present (Hultkrantz, 1987, p.32-33).

Moreover, to this day there remain cultures in which there is thought to be, according to Western perspectives, no concept of time. For example, the Piraha Tribe in the Amazon has a relatively absent concept of time, alongside almost no concept of letters, numbers, or art (Corballis, 2009; Frank, Everett, Fedorenko & Gibson, 2008; Suddendorf, Addis & Corballis, 2011). For these people, everything exists in the present; when something cannot be perceived, then it essentially ceases to exist. Cultures such as the Malagasy in Madagascar view time relatively linearly, but in the opposite direction to those in the West. These people visualise time as flowing from back to front, whereby time flows into the back of your head and becomes the past as it appears before you (Dahl, 1995). The future is behind as it cannot be seen or known; the past is ahead as it is known and seen (I love this ‘flip’ in perspective). It appears logical, therefore, for me to suggest that these views of time will impact how change is perceived and constructed. Time provides the context from which we are then able to understand the happenings around us.

The aforementioned traditions stand as a direct contrast to the Judeo-Christian tradition, which informs the conditions of Western culture and science. This tradition views time as strictly linear and directional (Bear, 2014; Eliade, 1959; Rust, 1981):

Profane time, as Eliade points out, is linear. As man dwelt increasingly in the profane and a sense of history developed, the desire to escape into the sacred began to drop in the background. The myths, tied up with cyclic time, were not so easily operative ...
So secular man became content with his linear time. He could not return to cyclic time and re-enter sacred space though its myths ... Just here, as Eliade sees it, a new religious structure became available. In the Judaeo-Christian religions – Judaism, Christianity, Islam – history is taken seriously, and linear time is accepted. The cyclic time of the primordial mythical consciousness has been transformed into the time of profane man... (Rust, 1981, p.60)

According to this tradition time began with the Abrahamic God’s act of creation and continues accordingly until the ‘end times’ (Lundin, Thiselton & Walhout, 1999). I can see this view of time is mirrored in our assumptions about the nature of change – that it is a linear and objective affair (Overton, 1994). Abram (1996), in his utterly wonderful book ‘The Spell of the Sensuous’, attributes the distinct difference in perceptions of time between indigenous and Western cultures to the existence of a written phonetic (as opposed to pictorial or idiographic) language that is largely not present in these oral cultures:

It is likely that without a formal system of numerical and linguistic notation it is not possible to entirely abstract a uniform sense of progressive “time” from the direct experience of the animate, emergent environment – or, what amounts to the same thing, to freeze the dynamic experience of earthly place into the intuition of a static, homogenous “space”. If this is the case, then writing must be recognised as a necessary condition for the belief in an entirely distinct space and time (p.193).
Putting language to one side for a moment, recent developments in the field of theoretical physics suggest that the perspective of time as not being linear, proposed by oral and indigenous cultures, to a certain extent holds greater weight than Western culture may have assumed. In short, research suggests that a linear perspective of time is erroneous. In his popular work on time, Rovelli (2017) puts forward that our view of time as unified, directional, independent, and as having some concrete ‘present’ is mistaken. In essence, what we in the West view as ‘time’ does not exist:

There is no single time: there is a different duration for every trajectory; and time passes at different rhythms according to place and according to speed. It is not directional; the difference between past and future does not exist in the elementary equations of the world; its orientation is merely a contingent aspect that appears when we look at things and neglect the details… The notion of the ‘present’ does not work: in the vast universe there is nothing that we can reasonably call ‘present’. The substratum that determines the duration of time is not an independent entity, different from the others that make up the world; it is an aspect of a dynamic field. It jumps, fluctuates, materialises only by interacting, and is not to be found beneath a minimum scale… So, after all this, what is left of time? (Rovelli, 2017, p.81).

This blew my mind. It was a pretty critical point for me, as although I was already very open to new ideas, this moment really helped me to let go of any of the remaining assumptions I held about the way the world worked and just read, and then read some more, particularly about anything that fell under the umbrella of nonlinear dynamical systems theories.
So, returning to my original train of thought, if time itself is not linear in the way that pervasive Newtonian logic has assumed, then the same should be said of change and epiphanic experiences that are indicative of change. However, it is at this point that the issue of grammar and language needs to be returned to. Our language is structured around an objective and linear perception of time, and therefore change, thus impacting the way we are able to communicate and comprehend nonlinear conceptualisations of time; the very structure of our language prohibits us for communicating in a way that is not constrained by the concepts of past, present, and future (Rovelli, 2017). As noted by Havelock (1986):

> It is only as language is written down that it becomes possible to think about it. The acoustic medium, being incapable to visualisation, did not achieve recognition as a phenomenon wholly separable from the person who used it. But in the alphabetised document the medium became objectified. There it was, reproduced perfectly in the alphabet… no longer just a function of “me” the speaker but a document with an independent existence (p.112)

This idea was exciting to me for two main reasons. First, it suggests that the creation of language that is non-idiographic (i.e., cannot be visually linked to the thing it describes) created an abstract ‘realm’ accessible to all those that can understand the alphabet. Second, and much more relevantly, it is a reminder to be mindful of the impact that the structure and existence of language can have on accounts of epiphanic experience. This is something to bear in mind particularly when reflecting on CRist structure/agency dualisms (Archer, 2003). Language is therefore a structure that both constrains and affords the way in which epiphanic experience can even be expressed – forcing it into the temporal categories of past, present,
and future that the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Newtonian paradigm have established as unassailable ‘truth’. This is something I sought to remain very aware of during my research, reflecting on the temporal restrictions imposed by language when I was writing, and being sensitive to this fact when interviewing my participants. Despite this, I am aware that my ‘three phases’ of epiphanic experience align with temporal categories, however, this brings me right back to the constraints of language!

Fundamentally, how people view time, and other foundational ideas of reality, may provide the foundation from which we are able to understand change. An assumption of the strict linearity of time logically only allows for linear change. However, acceptance that time is nonlinear opens the possibility of change also being nonlinear. Further, I wonder if it might be possible to suggest that a strongly held view of the linearity of time may produce another particular outcome: that of imposed linearity on thought processes. This is best demonstrated by the computational perspectives of human cognition that have been dominant in mainstream psychological theorising for a long time (Bandura, 2001). This perspective emerged through the suggestion of cognition functioning as a linear input-output model. Although this model has been developed, becoming more dynamic, and incorporating multiple processes that occur simultaneously, cognition largely remains conceptualised as a linear system, whereby a central processor is fed information, and outputs solutions according to fixed rules (Bandura, 2001). These models have emerged from a positivist, empiricist, Western, Newtonian tradition which has emphasised, or assumed, temporal linearity. Holding the belief that time, and therefore cognition, is linear may therefore be factors that predispose the assumption that change too must be linear. This, I think, is deeply woven into why epiphanic experience is not taken seriously by psychology (Fosha, 2006; Skalski & Hardy, 2013).
Appendix H: The Neural Mechanisms Underpinning the Entropic Brain Hypothesis

The EBH presents an account of the neural mechanisms underlying experience in high-entropy brain states. Two neural mechanisms, the default mode network, and the medial temporal lobes, will be discussed in depth before providing a description of how the EBH proposes they contribute to experienced consciousness.

The Default Mode Network

The EBH proposes that the default mode network (DMN) is of core importance to the experience of consciousness. The DMN is a network of brain regions that are structurally and functionally connected, and the connections within this network develop ontogenically (through development), though they are weakened in old age, and by certain conditions such as attention deficit disorder (Andrews-Hanna et al., 2007; Buckner, Andrews-Hanna & Schacter, 2008; Castellanos et al., 2008; Fair et al., 2008; Kelly et al., 2009). The anatomical regions associated with the DMN can be divided into functional subsections (Andrews-Hanna, Smallwood & Spreng, 2014), and each of these brain regions are densely interconnected, thereby suggesting that they play an important role in the integration and directing of information (Hagmann et al., 2008; van den Heuvel et al., 2012). The regions, or hubs, of the brain specifically associated with the DMN are the posterior cingulate cortex (PCC), medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC), medial temporal lobes (MTLs), lateral and inferior temporal cortex, and inferior parietal lobule (Buckner & Carroll, 2007; Fox et al., 2005; Fransson and Marrelec, 2008; Konishi, McLaren, Engen, & Smallwood, 2015).

This network has a high ongoing metabolic rate, and the regions associated with this network have been shown to consume and receive greater amounts of energy and blood flow.
than any other brain regions by approximately 40 per cent (Raichle et al., 2001; Pfefferbaum et al., 2011; Raichle & Snyder, 2007; Zou et al., 2009). Yet, the DNM shows diminished activation during goal-directed cognition, and increased activation during passive rest (Buckner, Andrews-Hanna & Schacter, 2008; Raichle, 2001). As such, it has been suggested that there is an inverse relationship in neuronal activity between the DMN and the brains attention system (Fox et al., 2005).

The function of the DMN, as it is currently understood, includes: the neurological basis of the ‘self’ (e.g., autobiographical information and self-reference), other-related cognition (e.g., theory of mind and social evaluation), remembering the past, and thinking about the future (Andrews-Hanna, 2012; Buckner & Carroll, 2007; Spreng & Grady, 2010).

Therefore, the DMN deactivates during external goal-orientated tasks, except for when the task involves a role inherent to the DMN, such as an autobiographical task; in this instance the DMN would work alongside other networks, such as those that govern executive functioning (Fox et al., 2005; Spreng, 2012). Further, during instances of high functional connectivity within the DMN, functional connectivity is also increased between the DMN and other networks (de Pasquale et al., 2012). This is a characteristic of the DMN that is not shared by other networks and strongly suggests that the DMN performs the role of a central orchestrator of global brain function (Braga, Leeson, Wise & Leech, 2013; Carhart-Harris & Friston, 2010; de Pasquale et al., 2012).

The DMN plays no significant role in sensory processing but instead performs roles related to high-level metacognition and introspection (Fleming et al., 2010; Sepulcre, Sabuncu, Yeo, Liu & Johnson, 2012; Qin & Northoff, 2011). Studies have shown that resting state functional connectivity in the DMN positively correlates with depressive rumination, trait neuroticism, and ratings of internal awareness (Adelstein et al., 2011; Berman et al.,
Further, during such cognitive events as mental time travel and depression, DMN connectivity is increased (Andrews-Hanna et al., 2010; Farb et al., 2011; Lemogne et al., 2012). Though knowledge of the DMN has undoubtedly increased in recent years, there remains some uncertainty with regards to the reasons for the DMNs incommensurate energy consumption (Harrison et al., 2008; Raichle, 2010; Raichle & Mintun, 2006). Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a thorough account of this debate, if the DMN functions in the ways described above, this provides a compelling account for the experiences participants described as part of their epiphanic experiences.

The Medial Temporal Lobes

Though the medial temporal lobe (MTL) is part of the temporal lobe, it is often referred to as a separate structure due to its significantly different anatomy and function (Baars & Gage, 2010). The MTL houses a system of anatomically related brain structures such as the hippocampi, parahippocampal gyrus, entorhinal cortex, and amygdala (Baars & Gage, 2010; Squire, Stark & Clark, 2004). These structures are commonly associated with memory and emotional processing. The criticality of the MTL’s role in memory, and particularly declarative memory (long-term memory that requires conscious recollection), is made evident by the global impairment to memory displayed following lesions to the MTL (Levy et al., 2003; Squire, Schmolk & Stark, 2001). The upper arc of the MTL, the cingulate gyrus, is activated during tasks that require the brain to deal with conflicting stimuli or responses, an aspect of executive function (Baars & Gage, 2010). Research suggests that the MTLs are connected to the mPFC and PCC nodes of the DMN (Buckner et al., 2008; Carhart-Harris & Friston, 2010; Fransson and Marrelec, 2008).
Neural Mechanisms and Consciousness

Carhart-Harris et al. (2014) proposed that normal waking consciousness (i.e., secondary processes) is the result of coupling between the MTLs and the DMN, which allows for the development of an integrated sense of self. During secondary consciousness, the mPFC functions to suppress the more primitive cognitive and affective states associated with primary states (Pietrini et al., 2000; Beauregard et al., 2001). Further, primary states are proposed to be the result of a collapse in the DMN’s organisation, the relinquishment of mPFC suppression, and a subsequent decrease of coupling between the DMN and MTLs, in part due to weakened alpha oscillations (brain waves associated with suppressive effects) (Beauregard et al., 2001; Carhart-Harris et al., 2014; Carhart-Harris & Friston, 2010; Kilmesch, 2012; Pietrini et al., 2000). In these occurrences, the MTLs are unconstrained by the suppressing influence of the DMN, and therefore the memories that have been embedded and stored in the MTLs are unleashed such that unusual perceptual experiences ensue (Pietrini et al., 2000).

The decoupling of the DMN and MTLs can be achieved in different ways; Carhart-Harris et al. (2012, 2014) used LSD and psilocybin and found that these compounds reduced blood flow to the DMN by acting in an antagonistic fashion at serotonin 2A receptor sites, which are particularly abundant in the PCC, the main node of the DMN. This results in the changes typical of primary consciousness, where the brain regresses to a chaotic and primitive state that is less constrained by reality and a stable sense of self. Meditation can also suppress the DMN through focused attention diverting activity away from the DMN; both reduced DMN activation and functional connectivity have been observed in long-term meditators (Brewer, Worhunsky, Gray, Tang, Weber & Kober, 2011; Fox et al., 2014;...
Sleep, and lack thereof, also impacts the DMN, whereby sleep deprivation has been shown to decrease functional connectivity within the DMN, therefore providing a physical explanation for the changes seen during dreaming states and instances of sleep deprivation (McKenna & Eyler, 2012).
Appendix I: Reflexions on Integrating the Critical Realist Ontology of Personhood into Therapeutic Practice

Over the course of my education, training, and professional life I have become very familiar with a range of therapeutic modalities, in particular: CBT, Positive Psychology, and Person-centred Therapy. However, I have found that Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is currently the most congruent way for me to work in alignment with my philosophy in an evidence-based manner. Since engaging with CRist ideas, I have begun to formulate an understanding of how my philosophical position might align with how I practice. Although ACT is a-ontological, this position has been heavily criticised (e.g., David & Mogoase, 2015; Herbert & Padovani, 2015; Szabo & Tarbox, 2015), and recommendations made that “ACT should benefit from acknowledging (as opposed to ignoring) ontology and focus not only on “what works”, but also on “why does it work”” (David & Mogoase, 2015, p. 175; David & Montgomery, 2011), or else risk negative theoretical and practical implications, and limit ACT’s ability to hone and develop its interventions. Given the importance of ontology within CR, it at first appeared to me that ACT might not fit in the ‘CRist embrace’ (Bhaskar, 2017). However, I have come to view the fundamentally nonlinear core processes of ACT as effectively congruent with the CRist ontology of personhood (and indeed, more or less all the content in Chapter 1, section 2.6), thereby providing a potential mechanism which might underpin this a-ontological modality.

Fundamentally, ACT is built upon a foundation of philosophical pragmatism, or more specifically: functional contextualism (Hayes, 2004). Pragmatism can be considered complimentary with Critical Realism, though with a different primary focus: critical realists give primacy to ontology, whilst pragmatists place epistemology at the forefront (DeForge & Shaw, 2011). Given that, in a practical and therapeutic context, it is impossible to accurately
determine the true nature of phenomena (Pilgrim, 2019), pragmatism, informed by Critical
Realism, I think, is a congruent and helpful foundation from which to work.

Both ACT (underpinned by mindfulness) and Bhaskar (2017) are undeniably
influenced by Eastern philosophies thus illuminating one point of congruence. Also, both
ACT and CR recognise the power of language (Bhaskar, 2017; Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson,
2013). Further, ACT is an approach that works to enhance psychological flexibility (Hayes et
al., 2006), such that the client learns (through experiential exercises) that they are not the
content of their thoughts and feelings (i.e., self-as-content (an ACT term), or perhaps fusion
(an ACT term) with the ego (a CRist term)), but rather that they are the consciousness that
experiences their thoughts and feelings (i.e., the transcendentally real self (a CRist term) or
self-as-context (an ACT term)), thereby lessening the influence of the challenging thoughts
and feelings, facilitating acceptance, and enabling the client to make changes that enrich their
lives. ACT is also a polyvagal-informed somatic therapy (i.e., lending itself to the embodied
personality aspect of the self), which I have found to be critical to my practice (I have further
enriched this aspect of my practice with Somatic Experiencing; e.g., Kuhfuß et al., 2021;
Payne et al., 2015), and which I now think is a critical part of facilitating powerful
transformative change.

There are other ways of making sense of this philosophy, other ways of expressing
this philosophy through other therapeutic modalities, but these are some of my thoughts, and
this is how I am currently practicing in accordance with this philosophy, and this will likely
change in the future.
Appendix J: Personal Reflexions on Epiphanic Experience

The purpose of this appendix is to share the outputs of my creative reflexive practice.

Whilst art and science appear to many as two extremes on a continuum (Napier and Nilsson, 2008) it is not uncommon to believe that this is a debilitating and outdated binary that prevents these two methodologies from informing, sustaining, and enriching each other (Gergen & Gergen, 2012; Goldman, Gervis & Griffiths, 2022). The creative outputs of my reflexive practice are shared with the understanding that the act of making art can enhance understanding of events and identity, shift perspectives, facilitate theory building, and more (Higgs & Titchen, 2008; McIntosh, 2010). Despite this, I am also aware that the information contained within the images I make may not be instantly accessible to others. However, these images are emotionally charged and convey meaning to me and are not intended to be wholly converted into verbal expression. It is often my stance that “the art itself is an adequate expression of meaning” (Higgs & Titchen, 2008, p.551; McNiff, 1999).

For as long as I can remember, I have used art and drawing to try and express the things that I can’t seem to wrestle into sentences. As such, and in particular because of the ineffable nature of epiphanic experience, art became a key method for me to make sense of what had caused, and what happened in the time after my epiphanic experiences. This appendix will be structured as follows: 1) the reader will see a drawing, and 2) I will indicate key points of interest, structure, composition, or colour with the understanding that the image cannot wholly be translated into verbal form (artist Edward Hopper is purported to have once said “If you could say it in words there would be no reason to paint” – I like this quotation).

Although I have integrated and made sense of my experience, I still view this as ongoing, and so I should note that this appendix will not have a conclusive or concluding statement.
Instead, I will share three drawings, that I made at three different points in time, and which capture three (of myriad) different elements of epiphanic experience through a personal lens.
I drew the above very quickly, about three months after my experience. The focus of this drawing, for me, is the darkness and the footprint. The rest of the doorway is intended to be fractured, almost ephemeral. I don’t know what’s inside, and I didn’t yet know what had stepped out.
I drew the above as another quick sketch about two years after my experience, in the midst of exploring the disintegrative phase, with particular focus on the intersection between my research and my lived experience. I should note that, by and large, I am a figurative and portrait artist, so this kind of subject matter is normal for me. I don’t think I need to say anything else about this drawing, other than it captures a large element of what my disintegrative phase felt like.
This final drawing was completed in early 2022; it was a personal experiment of sorts whereby I challenged myself to draw something that could encapsulate the entirety of my epiphanic experience. Whilst I didn’t succeed in drawing something that represented every element of my lived experience, this drawing certainly feels like it has done a lot of the heavy lifting towards that aim. Each of the elements contained within this drawing are imbued with personally relevant symbolism and meaning, and the drawing overall perhaps betrays how influenced I am by surrealist art. The darkness that was present in the first drawing is present again, and the shadows from the other figures interact with this darkness. The baby/body/cat triad is my way of representing my own personhood.