

**Moments of Insight:  
Sudden Change in Ego Development**

Margo Orum

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“Over time the mature person evolves the ability to tolerate and to hold strong emotion in consciousness. He or she learns to differentiate, to modulate, but never to ignore the passions.”

(Vaillant, 2002, p. 256)

## **Abstract**

Moments of insight – dramatic shifts in perspective in how a person sees him or herself or the world – may provide us with glimpses of how accelerated change might happen in Loevinger’s (1976) stages of ego development. Identifying moments of insight as potentially being structural phenomena, and the marrying of them into ego development theory is original to this thesis.

Ego development proceeds in successive stages that Loevinger described as “self-paradigms”, somewhat like Kuhn’s (1962) view of paradigms. If this metaphor holds, then at least sometimes, people would be expected to experience sudden, revolutionary paradigm-style changes in their stage of ego development. However only one substantial theory exists as to how stage-changes happen, and that is a theory of gradual change (Kegan, 1979), which is likely the most common form of change. A theory of sudden, revolutionary, paradigm-style change, then, would seem to address a theoretical gap in the concept of how ego development proceeds. This thesis seeks to address that gap.

A total of 80 participants were tested in regard to their ego development level and a range of secondary measures, and invited to tell stories of their moments of insight: 15 through the medium of interviews (3 of whom became “case studies” and a fourth, a “counter example”), while 65 wrote their stories in questionnaires.

Analysis was conducted through theoretical argument, through qualitative analysis backed by evidence from story data, and by quantitative analysis of the common themes apparent in the moment of insight stories. Criteria were developed from the data for identifying

prototypical examples of moment of insight stories, and criteria for judging ego level change in transcripts were Loevinger's (1976) empirically derived stage descriptions.

It was shown that these prototypical experiences were those most readily linked with, and potentially indicative of the connection between moments of insight and ego level advancement. The counter example case study also powerfully revealed the conflict felt, even at a high ego level, when there is no "crystallisation of integration" afforded by a moment of insight experience.

The evidence suggests that moments of insight may indeed be times of sudden ego development change.



# Chapter 1

## Preamble

Like a person, this thesis started out as a simpler version of itself, and over time, grew in substance and complexity. It began as a wish to understand more about how people undergo sudden change. In the early stages, the aim was “to investigate ‘moments of insight’ and the role they might play in the way people construct, maintain or update their sense of self”. The term “moments of insight”, in the context of this project, refers to deeply felt shifts in perspective or “ah-ha” experiences, during which a person may suddenly see her/his self and world in a qualitatively different light.

Research on this initial definition of the project unfolded to the point where interviews had been conducted with 15 members of the public who had volunteered their stories of “moments of insight”, and the data from those interviews had been analysed using qualitative methods.

However, the project suddenly took a turn and changed in tone and outlook, when a major re-alignment of the conceptual foundations was embraced. The original or core aim remained essentially the same, but it now sprang from a different assumptive world, a different “look and feel” in the specifics and substance of the project. The impetus for that major re-alignment was my discovery of the depth and breadth of Loevinger’s (1976) conception of ego development. This led to the conviction that my research aims were better able to come to life and flourish within that impressively inclusive conceptual

framework. More specifically, the idea had occurred to me that sudden change phenomena like moments of insight might potentially play a role in the process of transition from one ego level to the next. The impressions I had already gathered from the interviews suggested this may be so.

However, there was a problematic conceptual overlap between the general term I had been using (“sense of self”) and Loevinger’s conception of “ego”. The attraction for me previously, in using the construct of “sense of self” had been that its relative vagueness and ambiguity represented a theoretical freedom – there was no need to align with and thus possibly be restricted to any particular former theory. The attraction of the construct of ego development was almost exactly the opposite. Here was a richly described and intuitively appealing developmental construct which had been substantially refined and fine-tuned with continuing feedback from data, which had also received substantial empirical support (Manners & Durkin, 2001; Westenberg, Blasi & Cohn, 1998). Most importantly, it could be operationalised with a highly reliable psychometric test, and it would provide this project not only with the opportunity to compare people’s experiences of moments of insight at different ego level stages, but also to explore the possibility that moments of insight might play some kind of role in the means by which some people move between ego development stages.

Furthermore, the construct of ego development was so broad and encompassing that little, if anything, would be lost in terms of theoretical scope, by abandoning the more diffuse construct of “sense of self” and in its place adopting as my project’s “paradigm”, the construct of “ego development”. This made sense, furthermore, in that my other key construct, “moments of insight”, was itself relatively vague and unexplored as yet in the



theoretical arena, and thus the more substantial and well-established notion of ‘self’ (ego development) would provide much stronger theoretical anchorage against which to examine moments of insight.

This process in which my initial research aims became subsumed by a more sophisticated conceptual framework or paradigm, parallels to some extent the very kind of change and growth that Loevinger (1976) describes in the stages of developmental growth in ego development, which she sometimes referred to as “paradigms” of self. Kegan (1979) has proposed, in line with Loevinger’s expectation, that transitions between stages tend to be gradual and incremental. However no theory has yet been proposed to suggest how more sudden transitions between stages might take place – which might be expected if the metaphor of a “paradigm” is an appropriate one.

The primary aim of this thesis is to open up debate as to whether “moments of insight” might sometimes play a role in facilitating or even fast-tracking movement from one level of ego development to the next.

The secondary aims of the project are to explore the phenomenon of moments of insight per se, and to investigate any further relationships between these experiences and ego levels.

### **Theoretical constraints**

Psychologists have been theorising about constructs such as sense of self, ego, and personality for more than a century (and philosophers much longer) and the body of literature in that field is vast, diverse, and ever growing. No single thesis review of such a

broad and fundamental construct could ever claim to be comprehensive. As Baumeister (1998, p. 681) commented, “trying to keep abreast of the research on self is like trying to get a drink from a fire hose”. Any introductory review must be created out of a selective presentation of the most pertinent background theory to the current research. In this particular thesis, however, the available space for achieving this has been constricted even further.

This was due chiefly to the inescapably “word-hungry” methods of presenting qualitative data (such as sample quotes from participants) in order to illustrate the substance and validity of the theoretical arguments being presented. In addition, both qualitative and quantitative data were utilised in this project; and in order to provide a suitable background context for the theoretical arguments that would be made in this thesis, the complex foundational conception of ego development and other key related theories had to be presented in a sufficiently thorough form.

It has thus been decided that the more traditional format of an introductory “review of the field” approach would need to be too constrained to serve the project well. A more minimal approach was taken whereby background was provided only in respect to the more critical theories and theorists whose contribution had a direct bearing on this thesis. Those theories could then be discussed in more appropriate depth to set the context for the theorising to come. Many of the theorists cited in this thesis (eg. Epstein, 1973, Kegan, 1979; Loevinger, 1976; Manners & Durkin, 2001; Westen, 1998) have themselves reviewed and cited a great number of influential thinkers over the last century, and thus together they represent and draw upon a considerable legacy of ideas pertaining to

constructs of self, ego and personality. It is fully recognised that this thesis only gains its particular vantage point by standing on the shoulders of many layers of such giants.

## Overview of introductory chapters

The case I wish to make in this thesis is that *sometimes* a deeply felt moment of insight might play a role in the process of change by which a person moves from one stage of ego development to the next. That is, it is hypothesised that a profound moment of insight experience may generate, reflect, or otherwise be involved in the kind of substantial change in a person's sense of self and/or world, that is implied by a change in ego level. (In this thesis, the terms "stages" and "levels" of ego development will be used interchangeably).

The kind of change being referred to here is structural change – the kind that resembles accommodation more than it does assimilation, because it implies qualitative change in the way a person construes his/her self and/or world. In extreme cases, where the structural change occurs in deeply fundamental self-world belief systems, it will be argued that the term "paradigm change" is indeed an appropriate term to describe the phenomenon we are investigating.

One of the main tasks of the introductory sections of this thesis is to lay the theoretical groundwork for what is meant by the term "structural" or "paradigm" change – and more specifically, the structural or paradigm change that Loevinger (1976) believes applies to her concept of ego development.

It may be helpful at this point to supply a brief orienting definition drawn from Loewald's (1951) understandings of structural change. In his view, "structural change" refers to a change in the *relationships between elements* of a person's web of cognitive and affective associations in relation to self and world. While the term "structural change" provides a sense of the form of the change, the term "paradigm change" evokes an additional sense that important, fundamental attitudes and meanings have also changed within the person (or other knowledge organisation) that has undergone a paradigm change. We will review Piaget's (1936; 1967) understanding of paradigm-like stages in the development of intelligence, as well as Kuhn's (1962) understanding of the revolutionary nature of paradigms, and also Blasi's (1998) understanding of what structural change in humans entails. All three of these notions were integral to Loevinger's conception of ego development and thus are also critical to the argument this thesis will advance: that moments of insight resemble structural change and might possibly be involved in ego level transitions – which are theorised to be a form of structural, stage, or paradigm change.

It would be very difficult or near impossible to attempt to estimate structural change in personality, if it were not for Loevinger's (1976) conception of ego development, which provides an empirically validated test for assessing ego development levels, or stages. Loevinger's concept of "ego" is a structure in the sense that it is an organisation of self- and world-knowledge which develops in a hierarchical sequence of paradigm-like stages, each of which is qualitatively different from the prior stage.

Because her conception supplied the theoretical framework for this thesis, a thorough description of each of the stages will be supplied, as will consideration of the

most important theoretical concepts from which Loevinger's conception of ego development was derived. In particular, Loevinger (1976; 1993) credits three theories which she adopted from Freud's (1914b; 1920; 1923; 1930) later theorising about the ego as providing a succinct description as to how she believes the ego develops. Those three core theories of Freud's will be utilised when analysing themes in the stories of moments of insight that this study has gathered, as a theoretical check. If the moment of insight stories appeared to contain elements of these three theoretical tenets, this would constitute supportive theoretical evidence of ego level change.

If we are to see the self as an 'organisation of knowledge' (a structure or paradigm) that develops in a hierarchical sequence of stages, and if our focus of inquiry is to better understand how that change might happen, then we need to ask:

- a) first, what holds people steady in stages?
- b) in what manner do people change or develop from one stage to another?
- c) what prompts people to move or develop towards the next stage?

Part a) above will be addressed mainly in the introductory chapters, by reference to Piaget's (1936) notions of assimilation, accommodation and most specifically, equilibration. Further arguments will be noted from various theorists who posit that we are cognitively conservative by nature (Greenwald, 1980), often balancing a resistance to change against a desire for ego growth or mastery (Epstein, 1973; Loevinger, 1976). Parts b) and c) however, besides being addressed in the introductory chapters, will be pursued through the data analyses, as moments of insight are hypothesised to be one possible way that the manner of change in part b) above, might be explained. Furthermore, in seeking to

understand in the data what prompts moments of insight and the contexts in which they happen, part c) will also be addressed.

As a starting point to considering new ideas as to how ego levels might change, we will first review how change in ego levels has so far been theorised to take place. As we shall see, Loevinger had little to say on this topic, beyond naming Freud's three theories and leaving their implications abstract. (Loevinger preferred not to theorise without the back-up of a solid body of data against which to check her theory. This preference appeared to be her greatest strength and also, perhaps, something of a weakness.) She did, however, suggest that people appear to be prompted towards growth and mastery by "pacers"—that is, encouraging stimulators in a person's environment.

There appears to be only one major theory as to how transitions in ego development could take place, offered by Kegan (1979) and further developed by Kegan et al. (1998). This formulation articulates a means by which a person might *gradually* make the transition from one ego level to another, through shifts in what the person believes they are *subject to*, as opposed to what they consider to be *objective* aspects of their personality and world, under their control. Although the progress of change via this theory is gradual, this thesis will argue the possibility that *sudden* transitions in ego level might sometimes occur as an acceleration of the steps along the way.

An important distinction that will be made about the apparent "suddenness" of moments of insight, will be that, in most cases it is supposed that the groundwork for paradigm change will have been laid and ready for some time, before the final moment of insight "clicks" into place, with the recognition of a new schema or paradigm.

Baumeister's (1994) "crystallisation of discontent" posits a theory as to how such sudden changes in perspective can spring forth apparently from "nowhere", but he makes the point that the groundwork for the crystallisation had long been accumulating, although in a disconnected way, until the moment of crystallisation. This study will suggest that the main principles of Baumeister's theory can be applied to moments of insight – which might well be viewed as instances of "crystallisation of integration".

It appears the phenomena here called "moments of insight" (with which the study began as an independent notion) have not previously been researched as such. However, other very similar phenomena have been subjected to research, and can supply valuable clues and potential common factors for consideration along with these data. Most particularly are theories of the nature of sudden change phenomena such as James' (1902) study of religious conversion experiences, and Miller and C'deBaca's (1994) study which explored a range of "sudden and profound" experiences of change, which they labelled collectively "quantum change". Although this study's concept of "moments of insight", and Miller and C'deBaca's "quantum change" appear to have striking similarities as phenomena, the focus of the research is different. Miller and C'deBaca (1994) mounted a large exploratory study which sought to understand more broadly, the nature of sudden and profound change. The focus of the current study is more narrow - to specifically investigate whether moments of insight (which may sometimes be a form of "quantum change") might be involved in ego development growth – that is, a form of structural or "self-paradigm" change.

Finally, as part of the exploration of the nature of sudden change, some ideas from theories of therapeutic change will be drawn upon. In particular it will be noted that some

theories of trauma describe a process which appears to be quite the opposite of an experience of a moment of insight. In trauma, the self becomes distressed, dissociated and fragmented, whereas in a moment of insight the sense of self seems to cohere into a joyous, conscious sense of integration.

With the skeletal shape of the argument to come now exposed, we can venture into fleshing out the details.

## **Structure, stages, paradigms**

If we are to assess whether moments of insight could indeed be a form of structural change, and more specifically, ego level or paradigm change, then we need to have a clear notion of what structural or ego level change processes might ‘look like’ – that is, what particular processes or principles of structural or ego level change might be recognisable in a moment of insight experience.

Loevinger’s (1976) conception of ego development as structural change was influenced by Piaget’s (1936) and Kuhn’s (1962) notions of how stage shifts, or paradigm shifts, might take place. Paradigm shifts could be considered the largest and most comprehensive form of structural change.

Piaget’s (1936) notions of the processes of assimilation and accommodation were the driving forces in producing his conception of stages of cognitive development, which he believed were held in place for periods of time, by the stabilising process of



equilibration. Piaget believed the child's early reflexes such as sucking and grasping were the precursor to intelligence, being "schemes of action" that were initially applied to anything and everything in the environment. Any objects which could not be sucked or grasped would not exist for the infant, because he/she has no 'scheme' for them. As the child continues to use and repeat the schemes (applying the process of assimilation indiscriminately at first) he/she begins to make more discriminations (eg. food versus non-food), and gradually acquires the sensorimotor version of a concept of suckability and graspability. Thus the schemes gradually becomes interiorised, and more abstract as an understanding. Piaget's understanding of this kind of repetition of patterns has parallels with Freud's (1914a) notions of the repetition compulsion and its role in eventually mastering experience. This was an important point for Loevinger, and an important one for this thesis also, as a case will be made that moments of insight appear to have many parallels with notions of mastery of experience.

According to Piaget, the precursor to the process of accommodation (an example of which may well be a moment of insight), was the modification of schemes by imitating others. As complexity increases, the child reaches a point where he/she is able to imitate or accommodate from models that are simply remembered – rather than just those that are present. This development from being fully in the present to understanding there is a future - that is - from the concrete to the abstract or imagined, repeats a similar progression to that which happened in a simpler form, when the child achieved an understanding of object permanence. The principle of growth described by Piaget, in which the child begins to objectify knowledge in mental images about the world, and about him/herself, is central to Kegan's (1979) conception of how ego development progresses, which we will come to in more detail later.

An important concept for Piaget (1936), and for subsequent stage conceptions like ego development, was the regulatory factor of equilibration. Operating in a similar fashion to homeostasis in physiological systems, equilibration is the deep structure which stabilises development at a certain stage. For certain periods of time, equilibration appears to hold development at a point, or stage, where there is an inner coherence. The deep structure which stabilises development in a stage is what Loevinger refers to as “ego”. That same process of holding ego or self-concept relatively stable is what cognitive theorists refer to as cognitive conservatism (Epstein, 1973; Greenwald, 1980). We will consider possible reasons for this stability or conservatism in due course.

In his work with children, Piaget had noted that when the task of accommodation is too great, a new form of operation (in Loevinger’s terms, “paradigm”) would be needed to be able to accommodate that material. With the new form of operation (paradigm) established, the processes of assimilation and accommodation would then continue on again, until such time as accommodations would again become too large for the current paradigm.

Piaget’s (1936) four stages, from the bodily sensorimotor, to the egocentric preoperational, to the pragmatic, worldly concrete operational, to formal operation where abstractions are developed, and hypothetical thought and reflexivity is possible, provides a useful model against which to compare Loevinger’s (1976) empirical evidence as to what happens in ego developmental stages. Ego development too, begins with bodily preoccupations, moves on to simple egocentricity and pragmatics, extends outward into seeking mastery in the external world, and finally deepens into a more abstract, reflexive and deeper self-others-world understanding.

Piaget envisaged learning and growth as proceeding mostly in very gradual, incremental steps. Likewise, Loevinger (1976) imagined that change in ego development would usually be gradual. This thesis, however, suggests that moments of insight – a sudden and often dramatic form of change – may be implicated in, or a form of ego development. It is suggested that in this case, ego level change would not be experienced as gradual. The fact that there appears to be, as yet, no theory of “sudden” ego development change is puzzling, given that Loevinger acknowledged Kuhn’s (1962) notions of “revolutionary” paradigm change were important to her conception of ego development. Although Kuhn was describing paradigms in scientific progress, rather than in processes of self, the parallels with Piaget’s notions of the development of intelligence are clear.

Kuhn (1962) saw science as a puzzle-solving activity – one that could not cope with too many radical changes at once. Thus progress was uneven, sometimes going through periods of relative stability, other times going through major theoretical upheavals, prompted by a great ‘new discovery’ or radical new ideas. Often, what was considered as scientific data in the new paradigm would never have been considered as data in the old one. Scientists either ignore or cannot work with data that they cannot fit into their theoretical paradigm. This observation was similar to Piaget’s (1936; 1937) observation that children either ignore or cannot integrate information that is beyond the scope of their capacities. This notion as to ‘what is considered data’ is of particular relevance in ego development theory, as people who reach a new level of ego development perceive contingencies that they were simply unable to perceive at lower levels.

Loevinger perhaps mainly employed the metaphor of Kuhnian style paradigm changes as a means of understanding ego development as a whole (that development follows a sequence of stages, each of which builds upon and grows out of the former stage, but each of which is also a distinctly different qualitative jump, or new paradigm). However she did not utilise the metaphor of a paradigm to speculate about the *process* of ego level change. Only in a most brief and dismissive comment in her 1976 book (which we will come to later) did she acknowledge one could consider the possibility that paradigm changes in ego could be sudden revolutionary upheavals somewhat like Kuhnian paradigm changes in science.

Let us further explore Kuhn's (1962) ideas with an eye to how they might apply not only to ego development change, but also to moments of insight. In Kuhn's view, each 'settled' period of a scientific paradigm was taken for granted until a growing uneasiness of radical new ideas would begin to threaten its validity. If the crisis of uneasiness grew strong enough, the fundamental assumptions of the old paradigm would be questioned, and in this period of instability, a new paradigm on offer would be able to overthrow it. At such a time of upheaval, there is no clear superordinate set of rules that can be used to guide the process, because each paradigm would have its own rules. These principles in particular are strongly evocative of what might happen in the lead up to a moment of insight, as we shall see.

A time of sudden transition between ego levels may well be a time of upheaval where the person may become anxious or depressed or otherwise generally de-stabilised, no longer so sure or confident of the old self-paradigm, but not yet having comfortably accommodated to a new "set of rules" or beliefs. A time of de-stabilisation such as this

could be construed as a time of apparent regression – when the person feels in flux and is no longer sure of what he/she believes. Loevinger would see this kind of regression as a key preliminary aspect of ego level growth. One of the main tenets of ego development that Loevinger retained from Freud (1914b) was the principle that *progression is, or may be, based on regression*. This will be discussed further when we come to details of Loevinger's formula for ego development change.

Both Piaget and Kuhn's notions, when extrapolated, suggest that there may well be a time of uncertainty and even regression during a time of transition between paradigms, or ego stages. At such a time, a person might well be more vulnerable, more open to radical new ideas (McIlwain, 1994), or simply more willing to entertain a new perspective, than at times of equilibrated stage stability. These transitional times may be the times when a moment of insight might be more likely. The sense of uncertainty a person experiences at such times may seem like chaos, but perhaps some degree of relaxing or suspension of old rules may be necessary – some degree of a regression – to allow sufficient fluidity for a new paradigm to be recognised and adopted.

Although Loevinger did not directly take up the metaphor of Kuhnian style paradigm change as a model for sudden changes in ego development, her colleague, Blasi's chapter in Loevinger (1976) described human (organismic) developmental change as typically being a succession of upheavals and apparent discontinuities (this description could apply, though, to either gradual or sudden change). In a structure, he said, the many elements or parts are not simply "an aggregate, an assemblage, as in a heap of stones, but are related to each other so as to form a well-defined order" (Blasi in Loevinger, 1976, p. 32). Thus developmental change implies the instigation of a new structure or the changing

of an old structure to form a new one. In terms of this thesis, this kind of process can imply the formation of a new self schema (Baumeister, 1994), the accommodation of new data to change an existing schema, the gradual changes of an ego paradigm via incremental processes of accommodation (Kegan, 1979), or the entire re-organisation of the self-paradigm (stage or ego level) to form a new self-paradigm (Loevinger, 1976). Theoretically, a moment of insight could be involved at any of these levels of change – from the smallest “ah-ha” moments to minor schema change, to the most major form of schema change – self-paradigm change.

Ego development change conceptualised by Blasi and Loevinger in 1976 was presented as a series of equilibrated structures or stages, each one related to the previous one in an invariant hierarchical sequence. Loevinger (1987) claimed that her conception, having been influenced by Piaget’s notions of developmental change, had its theoretical “home base” in the paradigm of cognitive developmentalism. However Blasi (1998) later argued that ego development does not fit comfortably within the paradigm of cognitive developmentalism, because distinctions between subject and object, and about personal significance, are crucially important to it, whereas these concerns are not of so much import to Piaget’s notions of the development of intelligence. The world is quick to provide learning experiences which will disconfirm perceptions involving general intelligence that are not based in reality, and in that sense, the acquisition of the basics of intelligence can be conceived of as a mainly logical progression. In ego development, however, all objects have a certain kind of relationship (often a polarised one) with the person’s needs, goals, anxieties and interests.

Thus relations between objects are not established within some dispassionate ground, but rather in respect to subjective interests. Blasi (1998) noted that a person at the E4 Conformist stage of ego development does not dispassionately learn rules about friendship, such as trust and reciprocity, and then apply them in a ‘significance vacuum’ – they are learning these rules while simultaneously battling the former ego level’s E3 Self-Protective impulses and feelings of insecurity. The equilibrium in psychoanalytic structures would not be cognitive in nature, he argued, but rather a matter of affective or motivational states (including defences) striving to satisfy impulses, manage anxiety, and maintain self-esteem. Blasi believed that Loevinger’s structures were best understood as being located somewhere between the extremes of a cognitive-developmental and a psychoanalytic view and that, also, is the theoretical “home ground” this thesis would claim.

Personality, according to Blasi, was simply a different kind of reality than that addressed by cognitive theories.

“If it is true that the content of ego development consists of relations between the person-subject and the person’s emotions, interests, needs, values, and so on, rather than of object-to-object relations, then the structuring of ego developmental units is guided by self-consistency and not necessarily by logical coherence. (Blasi, 1998, p. 19)

The problem of how to reconcile the differences between the kind of equilibration Piaget speaks of, and the kind of equilibration implied in the psychoanalytic paradigm was solved to some extent, Blasi believed, by observing differences in the mastery motivation

at each of the different ego stages. As a motivation, mastery is unique in that it simultaneously orients towards the self and the world. While the focus is self - the ability to cope and the maintenance of self-esteem – the manifestations of mastery must be acquired mostly by interaction with the external world, and furthermore, such manifestations require a “respect for the properties of those objects and activities” that one seeks to master (Blasi, 1998, p 21).

Blasi gave an example of a person at the Conformist stage (for whom the primary preoccupation is interpersonal relationships rather than cognitions), who may be motivated to distort certain knowledge in order to maintain an important friendship – because the paramount manifestation of mastery at this stage is seen in terms of ability to maintain friendships. To carry this speculation a step further, one can imagine that at later stages, when mastery preoccupations revolve around say, responsibility (for the Conscientious stage) or independence (for the Individualistic stage), the priority in dealing with such knowledge would be in accordance with its contribution to mastering responsibility or independence, respectively.

Before we venture further, let us now look in detail at Loevinger’s conception, and the aspects of it that might provide clues to ego development change in moment of insight stories.



## Chapter 2

### Loevinger's Conception of Ego Development

Loevinger (1976) acknowledged many theories which influenced her original conception (most notably the theoretical contributions of Harry Stack Sullivan, 1953; Piaget, 1936; Loewald, 1951; 1971; Ricoeur 1970; and Erikson, 1950; but also Isaacs & Haggard, 1956; Sullivan, Grant and Grant, 1957 for their templates of staged development). However the most fundamental theoretical debt she acknowledged was to Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Specifically:

“The three fundamental tenets of ego development contributed by Freud's writings remain: (1) Experience is mastered by actively repeating what one has passively undergone [Freud, 1920]. (2) Interpersonal relations shape and drive intrapersonal differentiation [Freud, 1923; 1930]. (3) Progression is, or may be, based on regression [Freud, 1914b] .” (Loevinger, 1987, p. 40)

As these are indeed fundamental tenets of ego development, the analysis of moment of insight stories will include consideration of whether the story provides any suggestive evidence of attempts at mastery through repetition of patterns. Or whether the stamp of the particular quality of an interpersonal relationship can be seen in the way the person subsequently (after the moment of insight) relates to themselves. Or whether “progression” via moments of insight appears to be based on, or preceded by (or even sometimes followed by) regression?

The essence of ego functioning, Loevinger maintained, was the search for coherent meaning, the striving to master, integrate, and make sense of experience (a description intuitively compatible with a major moment of insight experience). Because of the distinctive, milestone nature of each stage of development – each re-integration of experience - the eight ego level stages can also be seen as eight distinctly different character types. Thus ego development can be regarded as both a developmental theory and a theory of individual differences. This thesis will compare responses from its participants according to their ego level stages, thus operationally treating the stages as categories of individual differences, even while the main research seeks to investigate a developmental question.

The eight stages of ego development (Hy & Loevinger, 1996), summarised in Table 1 and described in detail in Appendix A, are conceived of as an increasingly complex, hierarchically organised sequence of developmental stages.

“What changes during the course of ego development is a complexly interwoven fabric of impulse control, character, inter-personal relations, conscious preoccupations, and cognitive complexity, among other things.” (Loevinger, 1976, p. 26).

To expand upon the components of that quote: development of *character* includes an increasing capacity for *impulse control*, which results in a greater sense of choice of behaviours and increasing moral development. (Loevinger, 1976, claimed that ego development subsumed moral development, however in more recent research, Snarey, Kohlberg, & Noam, 1983, suggest that neither moral development nor ego development

can claim primacy. Their research found that the two constructs were correlated – but in what manner remained unclear.) Attitudes towards *interpersonal relations* are deeply affected by ego level, and as a person progresses through the stages, his/her understanding of self and others tends to govern the style and quality of preferred relationships.

*Conscious preoccupations* refers to the focus of a person's conscious thoughts, emotions and behaviour. These include the predominance of issues of control for the Self-Protective person – both seeking to be in control and avoiding control by others; the desire to conform and uphold rules for the Conformist; the accent on responsibility, duty and achievements for the Conscientious person; concerns about independence and striving to avoid emotional dependence for the Individualistic person; and an appreciation of others' need for autonomy for the Autonomous person.

The notion of increasing *cognitive complexity* refers to such attributes as ability to understand increasingly complex conceptions, emerging from the chaotic thought and behaviour of the earliest stages into simple understandings and concrete concepts, which gradually increase in capacity for abstract thinking, such as an appreciation of reciprocity in relationships, and a tolerance for ambiguity and paradox.

Insert Stages Table here

Table 1

Importantly, Loevinger stresses that the development of all the various personality attributes implicated in ego developmental stages is not always linear, or polar in nature. Some characteristics, for example, conformity and spontaneity, have been shown to have curvilinear relationships with ego development, whereby conformity peaks in the middle of the scale, while spontaneity has the reverse curve, noticeably subdued during conformist stages (Loevinger, 1976).

Ego development proceeds via sequential milestone stages, each of which are subsumed by the next, more complex stage or self-paradigm, which builds on and grows out of the last, re-incorporating aspects of the old stage in the new. In this process, the relationships between elements of a person's value system and their assumptive world are overhauled. In other words, the person's psychic structure has changed to a new level of equilibration – or stage.

Loevinger regarded ego development as the “master trait” of personality, second only to intelligence as a “hidden hand” in determining individual differences on any kind of psychological test (Hy & Loevinger, 1996). Early factor analysis of a diverse sample of test protocols (Loevinger & Wessler, 1970) had supported this bold claim: only one interpretable factor had emerged – ego development – which had accounted for 20% of the variance and which had correlated with the sum of the item ratings.

There are inherent psychometric difficulties in trying to measure points along a stage sequence when the successive points are different structures rather than behaviours, because structures can only be inferred (Loevinger, 1993b).

“The conception of ego development as a sequence of *stages* that also constitutes a set of personality types is necessarily an *abstraction*. The fundamental characteristics of the ego are that it is a *process*, a *structure*, *social* in origin, functioning as a *whole*, and guided by *purpose* and *meaning*. Development implies *structural change*, but the mechanistic philosophy of some structuralists forecloses our topic of study. We acknowledge both *consciousness* and the possibility of freedom and the validity of the *dynamic unconscious*; so the ego is not the same as the whole personality. It is close to what the person thinks of as his [sic] self. (Loevinger, 1976, p. 67) [Italics are Loevinger’s]

The ego maintains its coherence and stability by selectively gating out observations that are inconsistent with its current state, or rather, it may be more accurate to say that the current state of the ego can only permit or make use of information that is assimilable or easily enough accommodated. Beyond a certain point, accommodations of new forms of data cannot be incorporated without a paradigm change – an expansion and *re-organisation* of the whole of the current way of seeing self or world – in other words, a change upwards in ego level. As with intelligence and scientific revolutions, each successive stage of ego development builds upon and retains a great deal of the former stage, within the re-organised structure. A person’s beliefs, associations and assumptions about self and world take on a different *relationship in respect to each other* and thus the *structure* is altered or re-organised. Furthermore, each stage of ego development increases a person’s range of possible behaviours. Regressive behaviours from former stages always remain an option, but higher stages imply greater choice as to whether or not one ‘indulges’ the former impulse, or decides to opt for alternative behaviour.

## **Construct validity of ego development: the concept and the test**

Loevinger (1976, 1998) claims to be first and foremost a psychometrician and sees as her most unique and valuable contribution to the field of personality, the fact that she developed a substantial, valid and reliable methodology which utilised many rounds of testing and data feedback in order to extract, develop and fine-tune the conception of the stages of ego development.

In a recent critical review of the validity of ego development theory and its assessment instrument, the Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT), Manners and Durkin (2001) found that after 20 years of research into Loevinger's (1976) conception, there remains, overall, "substantial" empirical support for the conceptual soundness of both the theory and its measure. Westenberg, Blasi and Cohn's (1998) recent volume has also attested to the strong theoretical, empirical and clinical support for the concept.

### **The design of the WUSCT and test manual**

The production of a manual to guide the assessment of a projective test (sentence completions) was no small feat, and this manual was the first of its type. It succeeded in converting qualitative data into a highly valid and reliable quantitative assessment instrument (Loevinger, 1993b).

The decision to use a projective test, rather than an objective one, was not so much a choice as a theoretical necessity. Only with a projective test would respondents be left with no option but to project their own frame of reference onto the test items, thus

revealing clues as to that frame of reference: their stage of ego development. In objective tests (such as in paired-choice tests), the items are supplied by, and thus limited to, the test author's frame of reference.

Interestingly, many of the sentence stems used in the test are not unique to the WUSCT and the validity of the test does not appear to hinge on the use of any particular item stems (Loevinger, 1998). Experienced raters can rate items with new stems about equally well without a manual, armed with only their understanding of the conception of ego development as a guide, plus the invaluable practical knowledge they have gleaned from practice in rating similar types of responses.

The test manual integrates a training manual for new raters, and it has been found that new raters, trained only by the manual, are able to achieve almost the same level of interrater agreement as highly experienced raters (Loevinger, 1998). This finding suggests that the conception of ego development is sufficiently coherent to be communicable via the manual. Yet Loevinger (1998) warns that it is not possible to rate with reference only to the stage names and vague theoretical descriptions.

The major evidence as to the structural validity of the test is its high level of homogeneity, or internal consistency, shown by an alpha coefficient of .91 on the 36 item test (Loevinger, 1998). In refining the manual, the criterion of internal consistency was repeatedly used, so that all items reflected the same underlying variable - ego level - represented by the total protocol rating (TPR).



### **WUSCT manual rules imitate ego level change**

The WUSCT contains a number of scoring rules in relation to compound responses, which provide a clue as to how people might progress from one level to the next, in terms of incrementally gaining experience with cognitive complexity.

Compound responses in the WUSCT contain two or more contrasting ideas or alternatives aspects of a situation, eg “Being with other people – can be stimulating or boring”, or “Raising a family – may be hectic, but never dull” (Hy & Loevinger, 1996). If the combination of elements generates a more complex level of conception, they are rated at one step higher than the level of the highest element. Loevinger (1976), like Piaget (1936), noted that the capacity to hold in mind two contrary or contrasting ideas was perhaps a precursor to acquiring the ability to move to the next more complex level. This capacity, according to Loevinger begins at the Conformist stage. The process Loevinger described in relation to the WUSCT rules is similar to the process of incremental ego level growth described by Kegan (1979).

### **Unity of the Construct**

On several occasions, the claimed unity of the test has been underlined by other researchers’ failures to identify subsets of the construct. Lambert (cited in Loevinger, 1976) was unable, even with a large and diverse sample, to differentiate a “moral” subset of items, using the WUSCT and Kohlberg’s (1964) test of moral maturity. Similarly, Blasi (cited in Loevinger, 1976) was unable to separate out an apparent “responsibility” subdomain; while Loevinger (1993b) reported failing to find evidence of the hypothesized relationship between lower ego stages and psychosexual stages.

Only one study has to date attempted to test Loevinger's (1976) claim that ego development is a "master trait" which subsumes other developmental constructs. Using structural equation modelling, Novy, Frankiewicz, Francis, Liberman, Overall, & Vincent, (1994) tested various models of potential relationships between ego development and the four key personality constructs of impulse control, interpersonal style, conscious preoccupations, and cognitive style. Their results indicated the model that fit the data best was one in which all four personality constructs, as well as ego development, appeared to be part of the same process. They suggested that ego development may not be as dominant as Loevinger claimed. However Novy et. al (1994) noted that there were measurement limitations to their study. They had used a range of measures to approximate each of the four personality constructs, while the construct of ego development rested on its one test, the WUSCT. Furthermore, some of the personality measures used objective tests which relied on true/false answers, which may have inflated the contribution of those personality characteristics, while the more vague projective answer on the one single test (the WUSCT) for ego development may well have had the reverse effect, making comparability of measures uncertain. Self-report measures and projective measures typically don't correlate well in any case, as self-report measures tend to tap conscious needs, while projective tests tend to capture implicit needs (McClelland, Koestner, & Weinberger, 1989).

### **Sequentiality**

Because ego development is postulated to be a developmental variable, it needs to demonstrate *sequentiality* – that there is, indeed, a developmental sequence. Evidence suggestive of its sequentiality has been gathered from the following sources. Cross-sectional studies have shown an increase by grade, which also implies an increase by age,

in various studies of school children (Loevinger, 1998). More pertinently, in longitudinal studies, high school samples re-tested at intervals of between 1.5 to 6 years showed significant gains, proportional to the time lapsed between tests (Redmore & Loevinger, 1979). College freshmen showed an increase in ego level after 2 years of college, but no further rise after 4 years (Loevinger, 1976). More recently, Cohn (1998) has shown that ego development is steady during adolescence, but levels off markedly for most adults. His large scale reviews of cross-sectional studies found correlations between age and ego level of  $r = .40$  during adolescence, compared with  $r = .04$  during adulthood. Longitudinal data correlations for college age adults was  $r = .13$ .

Loevinger had originally believed that regression in ego levels would be quite rare, perhaps happening in circumstances such as people joining the army or going into prison, where the pressure to conform might be great. While the Manners & Durkin (2001) review found support for sequentiality of the stages, several studies had found examples of regression. A longitudinal study by Hauser, Powers and Noam (1991) which followed 133 teenagers found that 9 regressed over the time of the study. It seems that regression may be more common than Loevinger first supposed.

Evidence of sequentiality can be found in the phenomenon of 'assymetry of comprehension', that is, the fact that people can understand thinking at their own level or below, but they are unable to fully comprehend thinking at levels above their own. Blasi's subjects (1971, 1976) had difficulty playing roles higher than their own levels, and sometimes distorted the story to eliminate those characters, or misconstrued their roles. Similarly, when Redmore (1976) re-tested fairly sophisticated groups, this time asking them to make a good or bad impression, the subjects had no difficulty lowering their scores

to make a bad impression, even to the E3 Self-Protective level. However when asked to make a good impression their scores either stayed the same or were raised only half a level higher. Indeed, some women who had originally tested above Conformist, actually lowered their scores when instructed to make a good impression. Not only does asymmetry of comprehension provide evidence of sequentiality, and thus evidence that the construct is developmental, but it also means at a more pragmatic level, that it is very difficult for subjects taking this test to “fake good”.

### **Attempts to facilitate ego level**

In general, attempts to facilitate ego level rises, through theory-relevant interventions between pre- and post-tests, have made only modest gains. Blasi (1971, 1976) split sixth-grade children into groups according to ego level on pre-test, and used stage-appropriate moral dilemmas in an attempt to increase ego level, in a series of 10 meetings spread over a fortnight. No increase was found on post-test, but the observational data concurred with the theorised behavioural manifestations of the Impulsive (E2) to Self-Aware (E5) levels.

Mosher and Sprinthall (1971) used deliberate psychological education in the form of peer counselling and teaching of children in lower grades. The children who received the education made gains on both the WUSCT and Kohlberg's (1969) test, while the control group did not. In a program of education for adults, Lasker (1977) pre-tested company workers on the island of Curacao and found the modal level for workers was between Self-Protective (E3) and Conformist (E4), while the modal level for staff was the Self-Aware (E5) level. A training program built around group meetings over several months managed to achieve a small rise in ego level for those below the Conformist stage, but had no

apparent effect on those at or above it. It was concluded that group meetings (being inherently conformist in nature) could facilitate a rise to Conformist level, but were less effective in facilitating rises above it.

More recently Blumentritt, Novy, Gaa and Liberman (1996) tested two experimental groups with a control group on the revised Form 81. One of the experimental groups was asked to complete the items as an Integrated (E9) person would. As a guide to how an Integrated person might think, they were provided a one-page version of Maslow's (1954) description of a self-actualising person. The other experimental group were simply asked to complete the sentences in the most complex and thought-provoking ways they could muster. Despite these manipulations, the majority of those in the experimental groups either stayed at the same level or increased by about one level, differing significantly from the control group, but not from each other.

### **External Validity**

The WUSCT has been correlated with various external variables, notably tests of other developmental-stage theories, the chief one being Kohlberg's (1969) Moral Judgement Instrument. The correlation between the two tests using six subsamples differing widely in age and education was .80, or with age partialled out, .60 (Loevinger, 1998). In a complex study by Rock (cited in Loevinger, 1998), 50 interview subjects, selected to maximise variability in ego level, were asked to work with the TAT and interpret their own stories. Their responses were scored by an adaptation of Luborsky's (1953) self-interpretation scoring. Subjects were also given Heath's (1968) Perceived Self Questionnaire (another measure of personal maturity). These two measures of self-insight correlated almost as highly with the WUSCT as with each other (.53 and .52).

Lasker (cited in Loevinger, 1998), working with McClelland's motivational training groups, also using the TAT, noted that achievement scores were low for people below the Conformist stage and rose to a peak in the Conscientious stage – all of which is compatible with the description of ego-level stages. Furthermore, the power motive peaked in the transition between the E3 Self-Protective and E4 Conformist stage, also a compatible finding with the notion of ego development as milestone sequences.

In a more simple external test of validity, experienced WUSCT raters' global judgements of people in interviews were found to correlate with the WUSCT by between .32 and .51 (Loevinger, 1998). These correlations are considered to be as high as could be expected, given that there is no manual for global assessment in interviews.

A number of studies have compared descriptions of behaviours with ego levels of subjects, which had been separately determined. In all cases, those of delinquents (Frank & Quinlan, 1976); young male offenders (Powitzky, cited in Loevinger, 1998); and prison inmates (Mikel, cited in Loevinger, 1998); the behaviours were highly compatible with that theorised for the subject's ego level.

### **Possible Obstacles to Validity**

Loevinger (1976) nominated three external factors as being possibly confounding factors in evidencing high ego level scores: they are intelligence; verbal fluency (manifested as high word counts for item responses); and high socioeconomic status.

Firstly, she noted that a certain level of intelligence would seem to be an intuitive prerequisite for ability to achieve high ego level, and that one would not expect to find many Impulsive level students in college.

Secondly, there was a strong correlation between the number of words used on a protocol and ego level attained. Loevinger and Wessler (1970) found in their sealed sample for developing the 1970 manual, that the sum of item word counts was more reliable ( $\alpha=.95$ ) than the sum of item ratings ( $\alpha=.91$ ). Yet when correlated with the criterion TPRs, the word count sum correlated by only .58, compared with .93 for the item sum scores. Word counts alone, then, could not produce high ego levels, because that would require displaying complex thinking and ideas about relationships, including mentioning concerns about development, and understanding psychological causation, among other things.

Thirdly, it has been noted that higher WUSCT scores were found in subjects who belong to higher social and economic strata in Japan, Curacao and the United States.

However, Manners and Durkin (2001) now claim that discriminant validity studies have suggested these three factors (intelligence, verbal fluency, and socioeconomic status) are indeed separable from ego development. While correlations with verbal fluency and intelligence existed, as would be expected, they were relatively low, and there was also no discernible relationship with background socioeconomic status - rather only a relationship with personal levels of education. Manners and Durkin claim this finding in relation to socioeconomic status has released the theory from charges of elitism and class bias.

### **Age and ego levels**

Loevinger resisted allocating average ages to stages, as these can vary widely, within limits at the extremes. It is rare to find people in the earliest stages after childhood, while the highest stages are impossible in early childhood, and quite rare even in adolescence. On average, of course, ego development level increases with age (otherwise it would hardly be a developmental construct). However most people stop developing in their early twenties, after an active period of ego level growth through their childhood and adolescence (Cohn, 1998).

Sets of longitudinal data, involving 16 studies, 39 samples, and 1,862 test-re-test respondents were recently analysed by Cohn (1998). The test-re-test periods ranged from 1 to 9 years. The estimated population correlation between age and ego level was .41 for adolescents, but only .13 for college-age adults. Cross-sectional studies had found a correlation between age and ego level of .40 for adolescents, but only .04 for adults. Analysis of 252 sample means by age of sample, using data recovered from 79 studies involving 11,032 participants revealed significant linear and quadratic trends in respect to age and ego level, with a Pearson correlation of .52 and the multiple R (combining linear and quadratic components ) at .68. The mean scores for adult samples in this review were between the E5 Self-Aware and the E6 Conscientious level. These studies clearly suggested that ego level increases during adolescence and stabilises during adulthood.

### **Adjustment and ego levels**

While people at the highest ego levels are characteristically somewhat better adjusted, Hy and Loevinger (1996) stress that it is a mistake to assume that adjustment climbs as ego level does. There are well-adjusted people at all stages, and many children



at lower levels who are well-adjusted. Adults who remain below the Conformist level may be described as maladjusted, although this does not mean they cannot become successful in life. Conversely, because the higher levels allow for much greater awareness of inner conflict, there are some at the highest levels who may not be well adjusted. Inner complexity does not guarantee adjustment – it just makes more options available.

Pals and John (1998) have noted three personality “types” identified in women: *Individuated*, *Traditional* and *Conflicted*. The latter type is associated with poor adjustment. As the name suggests, the *Individuated* type predominates at the high ego level “region”, representing 62% of women at the Individualistic, Autonomous and Integrated ego levels. Their descriptions of the Individuated type were: reached high levels of self-actualisation and creativity; values independence; has high aspirations; and is warm and affectionate. The *Traditional* type predominated in the medium ego level “region”, representing 45% of those at Conformist, Self-Aware and Conscientious ego levels. Traditional types were described as having: concerns with duties and responsibilities; adapts to the needs of others; prone to guilt; adopts cultural norms; wants to belong and gain acceptance, even at the cost of self-expression. Finally, the *Conflicted* type accounted for all of those at the low ego level “region”, which included those at the Impulsive and Self-Protective ego levels. However, interestingly, Conflicted types also appeared in substantial minority numbers in the medium (18%) and high (14%) ego level “regions”. The Conflicted type is described as having marked feelings of ambivalence, mainly concerning autonomy and intimacy, and may have psychological problems involving intrapersonal and interpersonal difficulties. Often hostility, fear and anxiety are present, as well as a dissatisfaction with self, and a sense that life lacks meaning. These researchers

suggest that a combination of information as to a person's ego level as well as their type, may provide benefits in discerning a more detailed personality profile.

The most telling research, however, as to the parallels and paradoxes between ego levels and adjustment comes from Vaillant's (eg. 2000; 2002) Study of Adult Development. In this mammoth undertaking three cohorts, each of which were prospectively studied for over half a century, provided the most comprehensive and continuous research findings into positive mental health ever assembled. The first group was one hundred men, "the College sample" selected from Harvard University in 1938 on the basis of their academic ability, current good health and their likelihood of "doing well" because of their positive mental health. The second group, 456 men, "the Core City sample" were selected for their relative mental health, as nondelinquent controls for a study of juvenile delinquency. The third group was a subsample of 90 women, "the Terman women sample", selected from a larger cohort of gifted women who were studied since 1920 (Vaillant, 2000).

As part of the Study of Adult Development, an attempt was made to understand whether ego levels, as measured by the WUSCT, could predict successful aging. One would think that if any group could show a relationship between high ego levels and successful aging, these cohorts would. But they did not. As Vaillant (2002, p. 263) remarked elsewhere, "if you wish to maintain pet theories intact, refrain from longitudinal study." Vaillant's understanding of these findings was that the WUSCT, being a pencil-and-paper test (indeed what he had considered to be their best such test as a measure of "wisdom") was limited by being a measure of what people "write" rather than being a measure of what people "do". The latter predicts the future so much better. The measure

that had the closest congruence with wisdom was the use of “mature defences” (coping mechanisms) in the study participants – again, he felt, because defences reflect behaviour and not words. He identified as “mature” those involuntary defence mechanisms (anticipation, altruism, humour, sublimation and suppression) which his research had shown to be powerful predictors of being happy and psychologically well adjusted in older age.

Although the current study cannot investigate mature defences further, there seems a possible link between suppression and moments of insight, in that the moment of insight may be a matter of “timing” for the breaking through and connecting up of material that had previously been suppressed, just beyond the reach of consciousness. Vaillant said of suppression that, although it was not as elegant as sublimation (it always sacrifices beauty for truth), when used effectively it was like “a well-trimmed sail: every restriction is precisely calculated to exploit, not to hide, the winds of passion” (Vaillant, 2000, p. 94).

## Chapter 3

### How Might Ego Stage Change Happen?

If we are to posit that moments of insight might play a role in ego development, we need first to consider how stage change is envisaged, and importantly, what it is that changes when people move from one stage of ego development to another. We will start with Loevinger's ideas of trans-stage change, show their derivation in Freud's theorising, which describes "what it is" that changes (i.e. ego differentiation), and then move on to Kegan's (1979) and Kegan et al.(1998) process conception of how ego development might proceed. This thesis will argue that the role played in ego development by moments of insight is a facilitative one, that could be seen as being compatible with all these major formulations.

As mentioned earlier, Loevinger (1976) wrote remarkably little, even speculatively, about how she thought change or transition between stages in ego development might happen. She did, however, identify five kinds of possible trans-stage theories, only one of which she found to be theoretically satisfactory.

#### Loevinger's views on trans-stage change

The first, *monolithic or single motive theories*, attempt to apply the same motivational explanation to all stages. Loevinger (1976) found single motive theories

insufficient, as she believed there must be a transformation of motives and concerns, as ego develops. Examples of single motive theories that Loevinger provided were Golstein's (1939) and Rogers' (1959) self-actualization as a master motive, and Bentham's (1962) search for pleasure and avoidance of pain. She pointed out that self-actualization is a motive typical only of the highest ego levels, while seeking pleasure and avoiding pain equates to the level of the Self-Protective stage. (It is, however, viewed as possible in this thesis that seeking pleasure and avoiding pain could be construed as general motivations of which the motivation of mastery is one example - albeit a very important and major example – which may simultaneously achieve the dual aims of seeking pleasure and avoiding pain.)

*Time-and-tide* or maturational theories point to many aspects in the environment that may account for development. Loevinger found these always relevant to theories of change, but not convincing as a principal force.

*Dialectical theories*, such as Baldwin's (1906-1915) showed how the two parties to a dialogue are construed simultaneously, and thus become intimately related. For instance, the dialogue between ego and alter progressively impacts on and connects the perception of both. However, early versions of dialectical theories were missing a key theoretical concept, in Loevinger's view: that of structure.

*Structural theories*, especially those advocated by Schafer (1972) sought to avoid anthropomorphism in description, and the notion that structure somehow implied a "place". Structure, in this strict sense, meant that the ego was stable in its functioning, slow to change, and that its functions could be grouped together by similarities. Loevinger

insisted the kind of structure she refers to is a structure of *organisation*, and explicitly *not* a spatial concept – however, she found metaphors such as “internalisation” and “inner” helpful in portraying a difficult and abstract subject.

The fifth kind of theory she reviewed, *psychoanalytic theories*, combined the principles of both dialectics and structure. The most famous example of this is Freud’s (1923; 1930) structural theory of psychoanalysis, whereby the superego and ego take on some of the aspects of the relationships which helped to forge their differentiation. For example, the dialectic of ego and instinctual impulse merges with the dialectic of roles embodied by the child’s impulses and the role of the parent, as first “borrowed” by the ego. Thus the dialogues in the ego are simultaneously impulse versus control, and dependence versus mastery.

With Loevinger’s endorsement of Freud’s structural theory and her own accent on the mastery motive, she had returned to a single motive theory – despite the fact that she had rejected other single motive theories. However, what made mastery acceptable as a single motive theory in this case, was the fact that the ego must master both the inner (impulsive) and outer (external) worlds simultaneously – and thus one must master his/her own experience *which may be different at different stages*. “The impulse to master operates like a drive and seeks gratification in many alternate ways.” (Loevinger, 1976, p. 358)

Blasi (1998, p. 21) referred to Loevinger’s stages as, “landmarks in the development of mastery” whereby psychological logic, rather than Piaget-style or mathematical-style logic, determines the ordering of the mastery hierarchy. By utilising

some of the key-words from the Impulse Control column of Table 1, we can construct some examples. It makes sense that a person would need to control impulses before he/she could develop a respect for rules, and that such respect for (of understanding of ) rules must precede the understanding that exceptions to rules are allowable. Further, without that understanding, one would not be able to develop self-evaluated standards (to be proud of difference) and still maintain self-esteem. Similarly, without an appreciation that others have inner lives and motives, one could not be expected to develop tolerance and appreciation of their separate and unique individuality.

To follow a similar line of argument through, working also from key-words from the Conscious Preoccupations column of Table 1: while one is engaged in the struggle to master respect for rules, it makes psychological sense that one's main preoccupation will be with appearances and behaviour (is this behaviour acceptable according to the rules?). While struggling to master the development of self-evaluated standards, the natural preoccupation is with one's own motives, traits, and the achievements that will provide some proof of that personal sense of mastery. Once those self-evaluated standards are in place, one can then go on to fine-tune and develop a deeper sense of oneself as an individual, because one's foundational values have been "workshopped" and sufficiently mastered.

To recap, the dialogues of impulse versus control, and the various motivations of mastery (each stage prioritising different mastery concerns) are crucial theoretical underpinnings to Loevinger's understanding of how the ego develops or grows through stages. Let us consider for a moment the particular theories originating with Freud, which provided Loevinger with her foundational mechanisms of ego level change and growth.

## **Freud's structural theory: ego differentiation**

The differentiation of aspects of the ego into the superego are the mainstay of ego development, as proposed by Freud (1923; 1930). Earlier in his theorising, Freud believed the superego was forged as a result of the sexual drive's struggles first with narcissism, lending the superego its perfectionistic, striving, idealistic nature through the formation of the ego-ideal, and later with the Oedipal struggle, providing a more complex legacy of in terms of mastery strategies for containing impulse and gaining control over self. Later in his theorising, Freud believed the superego was largely forged by the aggressive drive, which led to his notion of the superego as having a more controlling, demanding, authoritarian nature, and which determined the quality of the particular relationship the child would have to 'obedience to authority'. Each of these aspects of the superego – the idealising aspect, the mastery aspect, and the aggressive demanding aspect – are theorised by Loevinger to play an important role in ego development. It would seem they play especially important roles in prompting transitions in ego levels and sometimes, by extrapolation, moments of insight.

Loevinger's (1976) examples as to how differentiation of the ego and superego could proceed may be helpful here, to illustrate how this process, so crucial to ego differentiation and development, might happen in "real life". These first two examples describe ego growth or differentiation via the Oedipus Complex.

At an early age, a little boy will go through a time when he sexually desires his mother and wants to get rid of his father, whom he sees as daunting competition (and in his guilt may fear his father will cut his penis off – the most literal form of castration anxiety).



How he responds to this particular dilemma is an important milestone in the development of the boy's superego. The best outcome for the dilemma is for the boy to give up his desire to expel his father and possess his mother, by identifying with his father. This move to identify with father serves to separate the boy from mother, and to establish a sense of independence from her. The process of differentiation of his ego happens when, in identifying with his father, the boy takes on some aspects of his father's character (some real, some imagined) as his own. This is what Freud (1917) meant, in *Mourning and Melancholia* by "the shadow of the object falls upon the ego".

The process of differentiation via the Oedipus complex applied to little girls is somewhat similar. The little girl desires father and wishes to possess him exclusively, but cannot do without mother. Instead of fearing she will have a penis cut off, a little girl's greatest fear is separation from mother and loss of her love. Girls' resolution to give up their exclusive claims for father in order to keep their mother's love entails no painful separation and isolation from their original love object (mother), as happens with boys. Moreover, identification with mother implies a continuation of their identification with her as same sex, whereas identification with father for boys entails a realisation of *difference* from their first love object, and the forging of a new kind of gendered identity. Thus to generalise, girls' greater ease with, or prizing of intimacy, and boys greater ease with and prizing of independence, may spring from this difference (Gilligan, 1982). For both boys and girls, after the Oedipus complex is resolved, the danger the ego fears most, creating anxiety for both sexes, is disapproval from its own superego, which was forged in the processes of identification with same sex parents.

Let us now look at how Freud (1914b) described the formation of the ego ideal through struggles with narcissism. Freud's suggested that infants are born in a state of total, or primary narcissism, and that this state could be considered the earliest form of sexual drive. However as the child grows and gains a more realistic awareness of his or her own limitations, he or she is forced to surrender that all-encompassing self-love. As the pain of this loss would be too unbearable, the child instead transfers that self-love to his or her ego-ideal, swapping a belief in one's absolute perfection here and now, for aspirations of perfection. The child has traded some accuracy in reality perception for this position. The giving up of complete narcissism was progression, but the strategic re-locating of it in an ego-ideal was something of a slipping back, a regression to narcissism. Thus the paradoxical result was that *progression can be based on regression*. The principle generalised from this example is that whenever object love is frustrated, the libido returns regressively to the narcissistic position of retreat to the ego ideal. This is what Freud called secondary narcissism - a kind of instinctual stance of self-preservation.

How did Freud then later envisage the superego might be formed from the aggressive drive? In the *Ego and the Id* Freud (1923) presented the notion that the task of the ego is mastery, and that the ego serves three masters: the id, or instincts; the superego or conscience; and reality, or the environment. The imagined scenario here which Loevinger (1976) presented, was the case of a little boy who wants to hit his brother, but is confronted by his father, who stops him. Frustrated at having his aggressive instinct stemmed by his father, the boy would like to lash out against him, but father is too big, and further, the child needs his father's love. The solution, again, is for the child to identify with the father, and control his own impulses - taking vengeance on himself, or his impulses, by assuming the role of the parent. (In treating himself as he imagines his father

might have treated him, it is conceivable he might become a tougher task-master on himself than his actual father might have been.) The boy is now divided: on one hand, he is still the impulsive child, on the other, he has taken on within himself the role of the controlling father, as part of his superego or conscience, which will play the role of “authority” watching over the potentially errant ego.

In the case of the little boy taking on the parent role within, the Freudian principle involved is that *experience is mastered by actively repeating what one has passively undergone*. This was the great discovery (in the Kuhnian sense) that Loevinger (1987) identified as heralding what she called Freud’s “ego paradigm”, which provided the basis of her conception of the mechanisms of ego level growth. That experiential repeating happened *within* the psyche of the little boy – although the principle of repeating can also be acted out in the environment.

Further, as the examples above demonstrate, it is through the impetus and pattern provided by interpersonal relationships, that intra-personal differentiation comes about, and unwittingly takes on something of the particular quality of the external relationship that had been its model.

The interpretation of Freud’s theories in respect to these processes that Loevinger claimed to admire most was that offered by Loewald (1951; 1971). Loewald was adept at looking at reality from the infant’s point of view. He noted that in the beginning, mother and child were a biological and psychological union. Before the ego is formed during the period of primary narcissism, reality is not outside, but rather, reality and ego are one. Instinct is not construed as something inside and hostile to the ego, nor is reality something

outside and hostile to the ego (Loevinger, 1976). For the child, reality and self are constituted simultaneously with each subsequent differentiation of the ego, as it develops out of this common matrix. In later stages, when the child regresses to the strong tie to mother, there is a sense of threat, as this return implies a regression to a less differentiated self. Loewald also suggested that the father may also play a more positive role than many Oedipus complex descriptions implied. That is, he may supply an identification figure for the child to defend itself against ego regression. This suggestion implied both positive and negative feelings (ambivalence) for both parents over an extended period, rather than in a few traumatic events, and such ambivalence is postulated as an essential component in fostering ego growth.

Ego development does not occur by the child changing his/her relationship to fixed objects, Loewald pointed out. Rather, it occurs via the child's internal restructuring of self, adults and love objects which change for him/her only as the child's reality and relation to the environment changes. This is an important distinction – not the outside, but the inside changes, giving a different view of the outside. In respect to the process of internalisation of images of the parents, Loewald asserted it was the style of the *relation* with parents that is established within the child's psychic structure during this differentiation. The old relation is destroyed, and the new structure, incorporating that internalised style of relating between superego and ego makes the child different, and thus the child has a different view of his/her parents. Repression alone would simply make constituent elements unavailable for integration – but a *re-structuring* makes the new structure out of the elements of the old.

The internalised image of the mother includes her attitude to, perception of, and relation with the child. Ideally, she perceives the child not only as he is but as he will be at later stages. This is conveyed to the child and internalised by him, helping establish his feelings of identity. There is a tension between the stage of the child's present level of functioning and the more mature stage represented by the mother and the mother's hopes for his future. There is a similar tension between the level of the patient's ego functioning and that of the analyst and the analysts' appreciation of the patient's potential growth. The tension between what one might be at best in the future and what one is at present exists not only between parent and child, between analyst and patient, but also between superego and ego. Thus the condition for psychic growth is itself internalised. Internalisation means the process by which the relations between the person and his environment become transformed into intrapsychic relations. The inner world thus constituted establishes new and more complex relations with the environment. (Loevinger 1976, p.382 on Loewald).

An early form of the superego in Loewald's view was the child's attempts to recapture narcissistic perfection by seeing parents as perfect and omnipotent. Thus the idealisation may go in both directions: the doting parent's idealised views of the child, and the child's idealisation of the parents. Once the superego forms, though, the contents of the superego would change as developmental hurdles were achieved and mastered and thus assimilated into the ego, and at the same time, new aspirations, consonant with the developmental stage, would replace old ones in the superego.

Repetition is, in Loewald's (1971) view, a basic fact about the functioning of the ego. When the repetition is repressed, unconscious and thus compulsive, it is impervious to change, and the repetition is passive, and can go unnoticed to a large degree. However when a person becomes aware of the repetitive nature of certain self aspects, the repetition

is amenable to change because the awareness has elevated the experience to the notice of the ego, which may then attempt to integrate the experience. Loewald believed that active repetition was the stuff of mastery, because the problem was not hidden away, but rather available to be dissolved and reconstructed. Furthermore, he noted that gaining satisfaction in integrating and creating structure implied a push to *absorb* stimuli, leading to a higher level of equilibrium (rather than to *reduce* stimuli, as Freud's earlier tension-reduction model had implied).

Four lines of evidence had led to Freud's (1914a) discovery of the *repetition compulsion*. One was the fact that children tend to play over and over again problematic or frustrating experiences, rather than pleasurable ones; a second was the fact that people tend to return in their dreams to traumas that appear to be implicated in traumatic neuroses; a third was the fact that some people seem to repeatedly get themselves into the same kind of problems over and over again (some women marry one alcoholic after another); and a fourth was the fact that the most frustrating experiences are those most likely to be repeated in therapy through transference. The third line of evidence – that we tend to get ourselves into the same kind of problems over and over again until finally awareness and the drive to mastery help us deal with them - is one that could be seen as linked to moments of insight, as these may be the “ah-ha” times when a person first notices their repeating patterns.

In summary, Loevinger pointed out that the division between impulse and control, as illustrated above, was not only a major step forward in ego development, but a description of the general process by which ego development proceeds – that is – the process by which the individual gains progressively greater mastery over his or her

impulses. Freud's (1933) formula "Where id was, there shall ego be", was another way of expressing that same process of converting what was purely compulsive or unconscious (id) to that which is under conscious scrutiny and control (ego). Most importantly to this study of moments of insight, the motivation of mastery was seen by both Loevinger and Loewald as being compatible with a drive to "integrate" – a term which suggests the experience of "crystallisation of integration". Ego development was seen as a process of gaining a sense of choice in respect to behaviours where before no choice had existed, because previously the behaviour had been produced compulsively from unconscious sources.

Let us now turn to consider Kegan's (1979) and Kegan, Lahey and Souvaine's (1998) understanding of how this process actually happens

## **Kegan's subject-to-object shift**

Kegan's (1979) presented an impressive argument for viewing the process of ego differentiation as a "subject-to-object" shift. In place of Loevinger's notion of impulse versus control, (which Loevinger might express as "what I cannot control" versus "what I can control") Kegan posited the notion that at any one point in time, a person perceives themselves as being *subject to* certain aspects of self or world (assuming one's subjective reality is a given) as compared with aspects of self or world they regard as being *objects* under their control (I *have* certain perceptions which I can question, believe or ignore).

Although parallels could easily enough be drawn between Kegan's formulation and Freud's maxim "where id was, there ego shall be" (and indeed Loevinger, 1979, did so in a somewhat dismissive manner in her response to Kegan's 1979 paper, suggesting his main contribution was to "elaborate" on Freud's ideas) such parallels miss the subtle power of this shift in understanding. In this view, not only is the process of differentiation re-interpreted, but it supplies a new way of understanding and even observing incremental processes in ego development, where before only the gross existence of apparent stages could be discerned. This conception goes far beyond an "elaboration", making a vast and original theoretical contribution to extend and augment both Freud's and Loevinger's notions of ego development. It also supplies a framework within which to better speculate about the role that might be played by moments of insight in ego development. One of those speculations, in respect to the stories presented in the data later, will be that some moments of insight appear to happen in the early period or transitional phase, and others appear to happen near or at the end of a transitional progression.

In order to estimate where a person might be in terms of incremental steps in transition between stages, Kegan et al. (1998) have developed an interview method which allows them to tap into and observe people's construals at various incremental steps. Kegan et al. claim their theory and methods take Loevinger's "central tendency" claim (that at any one time, the ego operates from a central tendency which reflects the particular structure of the developing ego) one step further, "from taxonomy to ontogeny". That is, they believe Loevinger's methods and measure (the WUSCT) have produced an excellent taxonomy, but that they have limited her to a method which can only "signal" or "point to" stages, and in so doing her understanding has been blocked as to how people might actually progress from one stage to another. The subject-object interview method seeks to



*demonstrate* what they call meaning-making processes in action. (The interviews were developed in the tradition of Piaget's semi-clinical interviews, which sought to understand *how* children were coming to their conclusions).

“The Subject-Object Interview (Lahey, Souvaine, Kegan, Goodman & Felix, 1988) clarifies what aspects of meaning-organising one has control over, can make use of, reflect upon (what is “object” in one’s meaning-making), and what aspects control one, what aspects one is captive of, identified with (what one is “subject” to in one’s meaning-making). Longitudinal study shows that if people change the underlying structure of their meaning-making, they do so in a developmental direction, that is, they differentiate from structures to which they were subject, thus making those structures into objects; and integrate these structures into a more complex organisational principle to which they are newly subject.” (Kegan et al., 1998, p. 42)

This theory in particular underlines that ego development must proceed in a sequential, hierarchical manner, each stage building upon and reincorporating the former. There are common developmental paths which can be observed at the level of cognitive, sociocognitive, and intrapersonal domains, which Kegan et al. (1998) suggest may be produced by that single line of development: ego development. As an example, they noted similarities and a common theme in the developmental paths of these three domains in capacities that emerge during latency. In the cognitive domain the child begins to understand that objects exist independently of one’s sensing them (object permanence); while in the social-cognitive domain there comes a recognition that people exist separately

from oneself; and in the intrapersonal domain, one develops the capacity to distinguish between inner sensation and outside stimulation.

For all of these three domains, Kegan et al. (1998) see just one epistemological principle being used: the capacity to construct objects, others and self as a mental set, or class, or *category* that possesses *properties*. Things have properties (liquid has quantity) despite what my perceptions see; others have intentions that are not determined by my wishes; one's own self has the property of having preferences ("I don't like spinach"). These properties of self are seen at first as ongoing and permanent, rather than something that could possibly be transitory. When these "durable categories" are moved from being subject to object – they can then be seen as properties of self (which could potentially be manipulated or changed), rather than being regarded as immutably permanent, inexorable qualities of self. The movement from subject to object is in effect a step back (or up) so that a new perspective of self-as-object can be seen. At the same time, a more complex organisation has evolved, and one now has some perspective over the properties one has newly objectified. One is now, however, *subject to* the new organisation.

Kegan et al. (1998) identified five orders of consciousness, according to this epistemological principle, which can be seen to dovetail closely with Loevinger's stages of ego development.

In the *first* order of consciousness, there are just perceptions and impulses. These are objectified in the *second* stage, in which the subjective viewpoint is now concrete in nature, locked in a certain point of view, which holds enduring dispositions (somewhat like the Self-Protective stage). When these aspects are in turn objectified, the new and *third*

order of consciousness is one where subjectivity is now capable of abstractions (ideals, values), mutuality, interpersonalism (eg. role reciprocity), and awareness of inner states. This is the order which gives rise to Loevinger's Conformist stages. In the *fourth* transition, all of those categories are again objectified under a new perspective that can now see abstract *systems* (eg ideology), institutions (eg. multiple role consciousness) and furthermore the person is now capable of self-authorship (self-regulation, autonomy, individuation). The fourth transition is the one which gives rise to Loevinger's Conscientious stage. In the final, *fifth* transition, which would appear to correspond with Loevinger's Autonomous and Integrated stages, a view of the dialectic nature of things is possible (eg. trans-ideological, post-ideological, embracing of paradox), and inter-institutional relationships are perceived (eg. relationships between forms, interpenetration of self and other), and self-transformation is possible (through interpenetration of selves and inter-individuation).

This brief run-through of the five orders of consciousness renders into a single paragraph the skeletal aspects of Kegan et al.'s (1998) conceptual diagram. It cannot begin to communicate the depth of the conception sketched therein, but must suffice for present purposes. Kegan described this principle of turning what was subject into object, of pulling back to gain a wider focus or view or perspective of oneself and one's world, as follows.

“Every ego equilibrium amounts to a kind of “theory” of the prior stage; this is another way of speaking about subject moving to object, or structure becoming content. Stage 2 is a “theory” of impulse; the impulses get organized or ordered by the needs, wishes or interests. Stage 3 is a “theory” of needs; they get ordered by

that which is taken as prior to them, the interpersonal relationships. Stage 4 is a kind of theory of interpersonal relationships; they get rooted in and reckoned by the institutional. Stage 5 is a theory of the institutional: the institutional is ordered by that new self which is taken as prior to the institutional.” (Kegan, 1979, p. 17)

The emergence of a sense of self at Stage 5 in which one no longer “is” one’s “work”, “relationships”, and “roles”, means that one is also no longer so vulnerable to the threat of losing one of those roles, because the performance or the role is no longer “ultimate”. (We shall see some evidence suggestive of this point in the data presented later.)

“The self seems available to “hear” negative reports about its activities where before it *was* those activities and therefore literally “irritable” before those reports. (Every balance’s irritability is simultaneously testimony to its capacity to grow and its propensity to preserve itself.) Every new balance represents a capacity to listen to what before one could only hear irritably, and the capacity to hear irritably what before one could hear not at all.” (Kegan, 1979 p. 17)

Kegan et al. (1998) support Loevinger’s claim that there is a central tendency or consistency in *how* people *construct* meaning, that is, at any given moment in a person’s development, there is just one epistemological *structure* (which Loevinger calls ego, and which Kegan et al. refer to as the meaning-making structure). A person’s behaviour, concerns or position on issues can change without a change in that structure – but when the structure itself changes, *all* domains of self are similarly “updated” to the new perspective or framework.

A case in point provided by Kegan et al. was that, despite the commonsense notion that people construct their work conflicts versus their love conflicts differently, doctoral research by Lahey had found an “extraordinary degree of epistemological consistency” (p. 55) across these domains. Where an apparent mix of epistemologies is present, they posit the person is most likely in a transitional phase, between two frameworks. Kegan et al.’s interview method is highly sensitised to picking up qualitative differences or gradations in transitional progress (for example, six possible increments or gradations between stages 3 and 4 can be identified, showing the relative extent to which each stage appears to be predominant).

Although by no means wishing to imply there is a finite “quantity” of the “subject” (what James, 1902, might call the “knower”) which is gradually “reduced” by transferring aspects of self to what is “object” – I nonetheless wish to speculate that the progressive objectifying of aspects of self that one was previously “subject to” may in some way confer a sense of being “lighter”, or less cluttered by presumptions about “who I am”. We will return to this point below in reviewing Epstein’s (1973) notions about “self-theories”, with a view to making a similar point about the likely value of parsimonious ones.

How can Kegan et al.’s (1998) claim for consistency of epistemological structures hold up to criticism that people sometimes regress under stress, or have some of their experiences ‘split off’ or dissociated, apparently trapped in earlier structures? Where is the consistency in their formulation then? The answer, according to Kegan et al. is that the current epistemological structure is the one that is discomfited by regression, or that is disturbed by dissociation. If we are keeping out or holding back (repressing) aspects of the self from being integrated, the defensive structures that are called into service are those

which are consistent with the self's most complex way of organising. Thus development towards complexity can, if pressed, find ever more elaborate ways of hiding unintegrated parts of the self. This is where the person's use of defence mechanisms can be seen to play a vital role, as Vaillant (2002) envisaged. A person employing mature defences might cope with extra levels of complexity more elegantly. Although these defences are by definition involuntary, and thus cannot be "chosen", Vaillant believed that mature defences such as humour and anticipation were closer to the border of consciousness than lower level defences such as projection and reaction formation. "Over time the mature person evolves the ability to tolerate and to hold strong emotion in consciousness. He or she learns to differentiate, to modulate, but never to ignore the passions." (Vaillant, 2002, p. 256)

According to Kegan et al. (1998) a telling point in respect to understanding the principle that at any one time there is only one epistemological framework from which we view the world, is that when, under circumstances of stress, we regress, "we do not like the way we feel". A simple example they provided from everyday life is the experience parents often have of "losing it" with their children. A parent at the fourth order of consciousness, yelling at the kids when they are really angry at someone else, might later feel terrible about that because they "lost" their usual ground. It is only because they are so identified with their more complex ground that they feel themselves to have deviated from who they feel they usually are. These experiences are disturbing because they are ego-dystonic. It is presumed that when those same people were actually developing through those earlier stages, they did not feel disturbed to be acting in such a way. But regressing from a more complex stage to an earlier stage "feels wrong". And it is the current meaning making structure, or self, that makes this evaluation. Kegan (1979) noted

that the notion of stages should not imply that the ego is weaker at say Stage 3 than at Stage 4. The difference is qualitative, not quantitative, he asserts.

“The stages do not describe the logical, ethical, epistemological, or theological “answer” the person *has* for the world, so much as the “answer” he or she has *become in* the world.” (Kegan, 1979, p 32)

This quote of Kegan’s suggests something similar to what Epstein (1973) proposed when he advanced his notion that the self can be viewed as a “self-theory”. Although Epstein’s views did not come from what Loevinger (1987) would call the “paradigm” of cognitive developmentalism, his proposal to treat the self as a “self-theory” suggests that the self can be viewed as a paradigm. His framework provides a most useful heuristic for this thesis in exploring how moments of insight might be involved in ego level change.

### **Epstein’s self-theory: a heuristic for paradigm change**

Epstein (1973) first proposed his “self as self-theory” argument as a means of keeping the study of the “self” in the province of psychology. The “self-concept” debate that had been current at the time had revolved around notions that the “knower” self may not be sufficiently scientific a construct for the field of psychology, and that it should be relegated to the field of philosophy. The “knower” self being referred to here was the “subject” part of James’ (1902) division of self into subject versus object, or “knower” versus “known”. (Kegan’s 1979 conception above employs the same general principles in his particular vision of how ego development proceeds.)

This threat of the loss of what Epstein originally called the “self-concept” from psychology’s purview resulted in him finding an ingenious way of solving the problem at the time, by finding a way to construe the self as a scientific construct. This solution placed the concept of the knowing self under the general rubric of a structure or organisation of knowledge or “self-theory” which facilitates the comparisons that will be made here between Loevinger’s structural concept of ego, and scientific style theories and paradigms.

Epstein’s notions however did not envisage the self-theory as progressing in developmental stages – the aspect which so distinguishes Loevinger’s construct. Nonetheless, his review of some of the great thinkers about self-concepts and the “composite photograph” (p. 405) he constructed from that review is a highly useful depiction of how the self might operate at any point in time, and is itself evocative of the notion of self as “paradigm”. Epstein put it in the form of a riddle:

“What is it that consists of concepts that are hierarchically organised and internally consistent; that assimilates knowledge, yet, itself, is an object of knowledge; that is dynamic, but must maintain a degree of stability; that is unified and differentiated at the same time; that is necessary for solving problems in the real world; and that is subject to sudden collapse, producing total disorganisation when this occurs? The answer, by now, should be evident. In case it is not, I submit that the self-concept is a self-theory. It is a theory that the individual has unwittingly constructed about himself as an experiencing, functioning individual, and it is part of a broader theory which he holds with respect to his entire range of significant experience.” (Epstein, 1973, p. 407).



Epstein made the point that scientific theories have a division within themselves which is comparable to the divisions of self into the “knower” and the “known” which had been considered problematic. A scientific theory, he argued, is an object of knowledge, and yet it also influences and generates further data acquisition. That is, a scientific theory can be conceived, like a self, as being both a subject and an object of knowledge.

In practice, Epstein’s suggestion was that a self-theory, like any “scientific” theory could be evaluated on the strength of the degree to which it meets the traditional evaluative criteria for scientific theories: the extent to which the theory is “extensive, parsimonious, empirically valid, internally consistent, testable, and useful” (Epstein, 1973, p. 408). Let us follow his suggested applications to self-theory, in relation to each of these evaluative criteria.

Good theories are *extensive* in scope and become more differentiated as data are added, whereas “poor theories are not only restricted, they are restrictive” (p. 408). It is not at all difficult to think of people who could be said to typify these two extremes of extensive versus restrictive self-theories. The person with an expansive self-theory will necessarily have a greater understanding of his/her own feelings, abilities and characteristics, which would be perceived as multi-faceted or multi-layered, while the person with a restricted view will have a simpler, more rigid, less flexible view of self.

*Parsimony*, it will later be argued, is conceivably a crucial aspect for good (healthy) adjustment to life, and a possible “refreshing” outcome of a moment of insight. Epstein made the point that a self-theory low in parsimony would require many separate postulates for each separate behaviour and thus lack stability (presumably because it would lack

integrative power). In the absence of clear guiding principles, values would have to be “made up” as one went along, leaving the person vulnerable to being situationally determined. By contrast, a self-theory high in parsimony would have “broad, integrative postulates and an efficiently organised set of subpostulates” (p. 409). The self-theory would be guided by a few basic principles or postulates, but have the flexibility and discriminating power (i.e. choice) that the lower order postulates would represent.

The *empirical validity* of a self-theory refers to the accuracy of the self-theory in respect to understanding the nature of self and the world. However, since we develop these understandings by means of making inferences about reality, and by adopting significant others’ values vicariously, especially during childhood, the resulting “maps” of self and world may well be distorted, according to the biases of those whose values were vicariously acquired. Epstein felt the most that one could hope for would be that a self-theory would be self-correcting. Those that are not self-correcting, he felt, were likely to be those under high stress or anxiety, because at such a time, very little new information can be assimilated (much less accommodated). The self-theory has to shut out input that could destabilise it and thus threaten its organisation. A person could also insulate themselves from the potentially destabilising effect of having corrective experiences by repressing the experience or insight. He believed an effective defense system would “allow awareness of reality to progress according to the rate at which it can be assimilated” (p. 410).

In respect to *internal consistency*, Epstein noted that, just like any scientific theory, the self-theory would be deeply compromised if it were to discover contradictions between its own postulate system. However, importantly, it was not inconsistency itself that prompted disorganisation in an individual, but the *awareness* of inconsistency breaking

through. This point is central to this thesis, and internal consistency will be discussed later as the reverse side of what Miller and C'deBaca (2001) have termed “deep discrepancy”. The breaking through to awareness of an inconsistency might well result in what Baumeister (1994) calls a “crystallisation of discontent”, or perhaps the awareness of inconsistency could spark a momentary cognitive dissonance that could be resolved in the form of a moment of insight – a fresh new way of seeing things – what could be called a “crystallisation of integration” that accompanies a moment of insight. In Kegan’s (1979) terms, the shift is in no longer being subject to the state of inconsistency, but rather, there would be awareness of inconsistency, as an object of thought. A moment of insight in respect to internal consistency (or lack of) could be a time of awakening to the repetitive nature of what one has been experiencing, and with that shift in perspective, a move could be made in the direction of mastery.

If a person’s experiences provide them with opportunities to *test* their self-theory against ‘reality’, then one also has the opportunity to learn from experience and to correct one’s self-theory accordingly, gradually increasing its validity. This is the case as children are growing up. However, if the self-theory contains postulates that simply are not *testable*, then experience can never provide a corrective experience, and the beliefs may remain intact. The price a person pays when a concept in the self-theory is disconfirmed and requires updating is presumed to be anxiety. Thus, there is some motivation to avoid testing some self-theory components, especially if they are important ones, as the loss of those convictions would create anxiety and be destabilising.

Self-theories are the vehicle through which we navigate our experience of life. Epstein noted that the final scientific criterion he had named, *usefulness*, applied to self-

theories in the following way. A useful self-theory was one that could effectively “maintain a favourable pleasure/pain balance in life, maintain self-esteem, and assimilate the data of experience” (p. 410). If these tasks or functions were not adequately met by a self-theory, the organisation of it and thus the stability would be threatened, so that it could not effectively assimilate or learn from experience or interpret self or the world with an adequate degree of accuracy.

### **What prompts ego level change?**

The foregoing discussion has provided a grounding in what ego is, and what ego level change might in fact entail, in order to facilitate judgements about whether the moment of insight stories presented later in the data can be recognised as potential ego level shifts. We now turn to consider what kinds of things we might expect to observe in the data in relation to the prompts or triggers for ego level change, and conversely, what kinds of things might be expected to prevent changes in ego level – and thus also moments of insight – from happening.

### **Pacers as agents of change in ego development**

One of the small pragmatic clues that Loevinger (1976) offered in relation to what might prompt ego level change was Dember’s (1965) notion of “pacers”. A pacer is something in the environment, or within oneself, that encourages or motivates a person to “think beyond” their current status quo, to strive towards growth. This is one of the most visible and obvious themes which appeared in the data of this thesis in relation to moments of insight. The great majority of stories told to this study alluded to external cues in the

environment that had prompted participants' moments of insight. What, according to Dember, though, would people find most motivating as a pacer? The answer, according to his laboratory experiments was: those things that are novel and just slightly more complex than a person can easily work out. When people were allowed to choose from a variety of objects of varying complexity, they most often chose to spend time on a stimulus which had a level of complexity just a little beyond their capabilities. Although we will sample above and below our level of complexity, the most rewarding and interesting stimuli are those just slightly more complex than our capabilities. The most appropriate stimulus, then, could also be seen as a reward. Research into intrinsic motivation has since shown that we do indeed value interest for interest's sake (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and by the same token, we can see the motivation of mastery as providing its own rewards.

In Loewald's (1951) view, the superego or conscience (what Freud had called the "voice" of the superego) operated as an internal pacer because it represented a more organised or more mature psychic structure, within a less organised, less mature one. Originally it was the child's mother who was the keeper of hopes and ideals and aspirations for the child's future, but as the child internalised those views into his/her own superego, it carried on that same function. As goals are achieved, they become part of the ego, and the person forms new aspirations in the superego, which always plays the role of embodying the idealised future in the present.

Loevinger (1976) commented that pacers were a means by which the ego grows incrementally, without undergoing a revolution, and this, apparently, was the main mode of change she imagined. Indeed she almost foreclosed the possibility of a person experiencing sudden change – a theoretical gap which this thesis has identified and seeks

to fill. In discussing her own use of the metaphor of “paradigms”, Loevinger noted that a relevant question might be to ask whether ego development might proceed in the manner of scientific revolutions, amid what would have to be some “mental turmoil”. However, she preferred to think that the significant qualitative differences between stages were more likely effected by an accretion of small changes, as appears to happen with intelligence. She obviously did not want to over-apply the metaphor of scientific paradigm change to people. In this cautionary stance, she added, “real growth, as opposed to religious conversion must take place gradually, over time” (Loevinger, 1976, p. 310). This thesis would contest her use of the word “must” there. Although it is agreed that ego level change is probably mostly achieved in gradual accretions, there seems no need to rule out the possibility of sudden change (or more accurately, change that is *experienced* as sudden). It will later be argued that real growth may *sometimes* be experienced as sudden and may, though *not necessarily* be part of a religious conversion.

As mentioned earlier, Loewald made the point that the mother’s view of the child’s potential and the therapist’s view of the patient’s potential, may operate as pacers – as well as the superego’s internalised “view” of the self’s own potential. Loevinger also saw pacers as being internalised in the superego, from what were originally external, interpersonal pacers.

“The central task and motive of the ego is mastery of its instinctual drives, of the environment, of its own moral imperatives. Indeed experience is what must be mastered, by actively repeating what has been passively suffered; that is the ultimate momentum.” (Loevinger, 1976, p. 425)

Note that Loevinger's use of the word "suffered" here implies that only negative experiences are fuelled by a compulsive kind of momentum – perhaps because they are the experiences that strip us of a sense of mastery.

Through compulsively repeating what we have suffered then, over and over again, we may eventually come to master that aspect of life and bring it within the control of the ego, so that it is no longer an unconscious impulse. In doing so we create for ourselves a greater range of choice about how we might act in relation to it – and we may have moved up an ego level. Each time this happens, moreover, we appropriate the object or the role of alter (eg mother) into the ego, and having thus expanded to take on these aspects, the ego itself has been changed. Do we get to a point where we have converted all impulse to come under the ego's control? Loevinger thinks not. She believes that life will always draw its vitality from impulsive sources. We are not so simple as creatures, to use up all the impulse there is. And furthermore, she believes the superego continually finds new aspirations to act as pacers, just a little further ahead than we currently stand, as old ones are mastered and come under the ambit of the ego.

Loevinger suggested that therapists can sometimes play the role of pacers. There are a number of ways that this pacer effect might be "delivered" in therapy. Clients would first be helped by the therapist's "hopeful" attitude of anticipating they can change, and holding in mind a vision of the person's potential. If all goes well, the client may eventually appropriate that attitude into their superego. How this might work in practice is suggested by extrapolating from findings by Hubble, Duncan and Miller (2000), who sifted through 40 years of outcome research in search of what is most effective in therapy – what "works" in therapy. They found the four most potent factors in therapy, according to client

reports of the percentage of improvement in psychotherapy as a function of therapeutic factors were: *chance or extra-therapeutic factors* (accounting for a therapist-humbling 40%); *the client's view of the therapeutic relationship* (30%); *placebo, hope and expectancy* (15%); and *therapeutic models and techniques* (15%). They argued that, given these findings, psychotherapists should abandon their destructive infighting and the “search for the winner” mentality in respect to particular techniques, and instead concentrate on these pan-theoretical factors which appear to be most important in effecting change. They suggested that attention should be concentrated on making conscious use of chance factors that happen in-between sessions (which in the context of this thesis is interpreted as stimulating the motivation for mastery); developing a strong therapeutic alliance (accentuating the interpersonal pacer influence and thus hopefully also, eventually, the intrapersonal pacer of superego adoption of the positive expectations); facilitating hope and expectancy (again accentuating pacer effects both interpersonally and intrapersonally), and working with and incorporating the client's strengths (activating the client's in-built pacer, the ego ideal, and motivation for mastery).

One of the important considerations for therapists attempting to help client achieve change – is the awareness of a client's “readiness” for change. Prochaska & DiClemente (1992) researched how it was that people managed to change, both with and without the help of therapy. They found that people tend to cycle through five “stages of change”, whereby the person is at very different levels of readiness to take action and change, and that effective treatment must take into account the level the person is currently at, in order to facilitate movement towards change. This raises the question as to whether moments of insight might be more or less likely, according to a person's particular stage of change. The five stages are:



1. Pre-contemplation – at this stage, the person was not ready to recognise they had a problem, and resisted attempts to change if “pushed”.
2. Contemplation – at this stage a person is ready to recognise that a problem exists, and to discuss it as a problem, but is not yet ready to commit to action.
3. Preparation – some small concessions may now be made towards action, but no real whole-hearted commitment yet.
4. Action – this is the point where the person is ready to make significant behavioural changes and to attempt to commit to change.
5. Maintenance – the attitude of wanting or needing to keep the changes in place must now be worked on in order to be maintained.

The most obvious estimate of where moments of insight might be expected to break through appears to be in, say, the transition between stage 3 and 4. However, due to the mysterious nature of moments of insight and their tendency to come apparently “out of the blue”, it is difficult to make any estimate with confidence. It may be that moments of insight might be most likely at stage 1, while a person is still unwilling to frame the behaviour as a problem, or at stage 2, when they are first beginning to engage with it.

Pacers, in Loevinger’s (1976) and Dember’s (1965) views were always positive – at least in terms of their explicit definitions, of being just a little ahead, an encourager. And yet, Loevinger’s identification of the principle of *progression via regression* certainly attests to her strong belief that ego level change was often, if not always, prompted by some form of regression.

In the data of this thesis, many themes arose that suggested that moments of insight are quite often prompted by negative circumstances. During the course of the research a habit formed of using the term “pacers” to refer to both positive and negative prompts or motivators for moments of insight. Let us look at some theoretical notions which could be considered as referring to both “positive” and “negative” pacers.

### **Possible selves, undesirable selves: positive and negative pacers**

Markus and Nurius (1986) proposed that self-schema theories in general had been over-preoccupied with core aspects of self (which are thought to be chronically accessible and thus determine what stimuli are attended to) and that this emphasis had neglected another potentially important angle in regard to self-schemas. They proposed that people also hold images of either desired or feared “possible selves”, which although not always chronically accessible, may well, at times, be highly powerful motivating forces. These “possible selves” may be positive hopes, dreams and goals representing a future one wants to move towards, but they may also be feared images of a sad, tragic self that the person fervently wants to avoid. The positive possible selves could be liberating, but Markus and Nurius felt the negative possible selves could serve to imprison a person by stifling their motivation.

Research by Ogilvie (1987) however, has suggested that the negative selves may be the most powerful motivators. Ogilvie found we are much more highly motivated to avoid the “undesired self” than we are motivated to line up with our “ideal self”. His research found that the greater the distance a person judged themselves to be from their undesired self, the greater their level of life satisfaction. This implies that the “positive pacer” of the

ideal self was not nearly so compelling nor powerful as the “negative pacer” of the “undesired self”.

In either case – whether the mobilising or motivating force is positive or negative, it could be understood in terms of ego development as an overall motivation to master experience through seeking pleasure and avoiding pain (Carver, Lawrence & Scheier, 1999).

One more offering from therapeutic change theory will be offered at this point, in relation to pacers as motivators of change. That is – our bodies could be seen as providing pacers in the sense of prompting us with a “gut feel” or as Gendlin (1996) put it a “felt sense”. Gendlin described the source of the felt sense as being in a “border zone” between consciousness and unconsciousness. It was, he believed, a different layer of consciousness from Freud’s preconscious, which described the entire store of available material. He saw the material in the “felt sense” as being that material which is likely to come up next – first sensed bodily, and then spoken. And perhaps sometimes – as a moment of insight? When a person cries, Gendlin says, they can be encouraged to turn their attention to the inward “crying place” from which their emotion springs. Although they may be able to discern it only vaguely at first, clients will usually be able to narrow their inward search to a spot in say, their throat or chest, which contains the “felt sense” of their emotion.

With practice, a person can be guided to experience their felt sense as an intricate bodily whole. This comes as a relief. Once the sense of a bodily whole has been achieved, it is experienced as “something you have” rather than “something you are”. The person can look back on the way they were as an object to which they can attend.

“When a step comes from a felt sense, it transforms the whole constellation. It might be a big dramatic step or a very small one, but it is a change in the nature of the whole. Such a change or “shift” is experienced unmistakably in the body. One has a sense of continuity, the sensed whole is altering, and one senses this altering directly and physically... A felt sense lets one discover that one is not the felt sense. When one has a felt sense, one becomes more deeply oneself.” (Gendlin, 1996, p. 20-21)

The notion of altering the “whole” is compatible with the kind of change that might be envisaged as a paradigm shift in ego development. Furthermore, Gendlin’s expression and imagery here is strongly compatible with Kegan’s (1979) notion of ego development change being basically a division between what a person is “subject to” as opposed to what they feel may be objectified, under their control. In all likelihood, a moment of insight, and ego level change, are also attended by such a “felt sense”, as the data later will suggest.

### **What stops change in the ordinary course of things?**

Whatever holds a person steady in a particular ego level stage, is by definition a force that is also holding change at bay. More specifically, it is most probably also a force that would preclude a moment of insight from breaking through to consciousness. As mentioned earlier, assimilation as conceived by Piaget (1936), is the process mainly credited with holding the ego stable, or equilibrated. The ego is biased in that we are so attuned by our internal frameworks that we can only “perceive” that information which is potentially assimilable – that is, information that is compatible with the ego’s internal

structure. Data that don't fit are either ignored and not assimilated at all, or they are distorted to conform to expected schemas. Sometimes the new information is accommodated if we are able to alter or stretch our existing schemas sufficiently. A useful analogy which the supervisor for this project, Dr. Doris McIlwain suggested was to think of a computer. If we are upgrading a piece of existing software, the upgrade in that particular domain can happen without too much difficulty. But if we change the operating system, the change is total and dramatic. Everything must be re-configured to fit the new "paradigm", and new things become possible.

In a sense, it is the limitations of the ego that hold ego level stable. Loevinger credited Sullivan (1953) with being the first to articulate a theory of ego stability and development. This theory holds that at each stage of ego development, a person's motivation and interpersonal interaction are consonant with the ego's own mode of functioning. The screening out of observations that are contrary to its frame of reference were what Sullivan called *selective inattention* – a phenomenon that was useful because it avoided the painful task of too often having to revise one's frame of reference. Cognitive theorists call this process "cognitive conservatism". Greenwald (1980) has in fact claimed that the ego's cognitive bias towards retaining the organisation's status quo operates in a manner comparable to the 'information control' strategies used by totalitarian governments. The "totalitarian ego" keeps the organisation stable and unchallenged by change by welcoming in any information that is confirming of the existing knowledge structure, and discrediting (or banishing from awareness, or mis-filing) any disconfirming information. This in-built resistance to change serves to protect the hard core of knowledge and assumptions in the ego.

One could easily imagine that this resistance to change would also “protect” the ego from moments of insight – especially during times of comfortable equilibration within a particular stage of ego development. This point will be kept in mind later as we consider the circumstances under which a moment of insight might be most or least likely to happen.

### **Why do people stall in their ego development?**

The fact that the vast majority of adults equilibrate or stabilise at the E5 Self-Aware ego level - a stage which falls far short of their theorised potential - remains a conundrum. Loevinger speculated about the differences between the way intelligence is equilibrated, as compared with ego development. In the case of intelligence, there is plentiful disconfirming evidence from the natural environment as a child is growing to continue pushing people to the highest developmental stage, which is reached in early adolescence. However, evidence that is either affirming or disconfirming of ego level expectations cannot be gleaned from the natural environment, but rather, must be gleaned from one's interpersonal relationships.

If a young adult, for instance, remains in interpersonal relationships with people who largely confirm their expectations, they will find no disconfirming evidence to act as a pacer, and thus remain at their current level. When parents cease to disconfirm expectations, leading to growth, and instead begin to confirm the child's expectations, they are no longer pacers but factors of equilibration, which holds the stage steady. In the absence of pacers, there is nothing to suggest the person need “stretch” at all. Indeed, Loevinger noted that a child living in a dog-eat-dog environment changes at their own

peril. The notion of growth may often be too costly or daunting, requiring difficult interpersonal changes and even changes in living circumstances. Breaking away from so much that is habitual takes courage. Because we tend to elicit behaviour in accordance with our own level of development, and because of our tendency to distort information as we assimilate it, we can easily be led to settle into a state of consistency and equilibration.

For Sullivan (1953), the main motive for stability was reduction of anxiety. For Loevinger the main motive for growth was ‘mastery of experience’. These two motives can be seen to be complementary. In many cases mastery of an experience would reduce anxiety, and conversely, high anxiety would undermine a sense of mastery. The attempt to regain a sense of mastery in the face of high anxiety would have to involve reducing anxiety. As mentioned above, the motives to achieve mastery and reduce anxiety could be seen as some of the ways we seek pleasure and avoid pain.

Having now examined the major theories as to how ego development might happen, (and might stand still) and in particular having identified the major theories as mostly being “gradual” theories of change – we are ready to address the theoretical “gap” that this thesis wishes to fill – the possibility of “sudden” change in ego level. We will first examine instances of sudden change in general, and then move on to experiences of sudden change which appear to be most like moments of insight – and thus could be considered as potential instances of ego level change. Let us first explore some characteristics of sudden change experiences in general.

## Chapter 4

### Theories of Sudden Change

In this thesis, all mentions of “sudden” ego level change or moments of insight refer to the fact that the *experience* of the change was sudden, but (as has been noted) it is assumed there was probably always or most often, an unconscious lead-up in the person’s psyche that had them in a state of readiness for a moment of insight to break through, facilitating what was phenomenologically felt to be sudden change.

One theory which presents a compelling argument for how such a lead-up might happen is offered by Baumeister (1994).

#### **Baumeister’s “crystallisation of discontent”**

Baumeister (1994), noted that sometimes the way in which we interpret our most important roles and relationships can change suddenly, in what he called the “crystallisation of discontent”. The most surprising thing about this phenomenon was that often there appeared to be no so-called objective, external circumstances to which one could attribute the change.

He theorised that this might happen because people maintain their role or relationship commitments through a certain attributional style, his description of which is reminiscent of Greenwald’s (1980) “totalitarian ego” that operates to hold change at bay. When people are committed to roles and relationships, Baumeister noted, they have an



attributional style of welcoming into their perceptions any new information that is confirmatory of their current roles and relationships, and furthermore they easily incorporate that information as an elaboration to the existing well-connected schema which supports the continuation of those commitments. The reverse side of the same attributional style that maintains these commitments is the tendency to ignore, derogate, or dismiss as temporary any perceptions or new information which is contradictory to those schemas, or which might otherwise cast the role or relationship in an unfavourable light. Thus commitments are maintained through connecting favourable information to known schemas, as well as by isolating, or keeping disconnected, unfavourable information, so that a negative schema is less likely to form. Each negative thought or incident is treated as rare, or an exception or aberration from the rule, and this allows the commitment to remain relatively intact, stable and unchallenged.

The motivation for such an attributional style may be to avoid cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), or to maintain the status quo through cognitive conservatism (Greenwald, 1980).

Baumeister's theory was that when a person undergoes a "crystallisation of discontent" that whole commitment-maintaining attributional pattern reverses. they begin to connect a number of negative incidents together, not as a string of isolated or disconnected incidents, but rather as a pattern of negative events that now appear to be *typical* of the particular role or relationship, and with that, the discontent has effectively crystallised into a new schema. "Instead of a variety of bad days, the person recognises a bad year" (Baumeister, 1994, p. 287)

With the crystallisation of discontent, not only is the past seen in a different light, with associations now made between previously disconnected events, but the future also now promises more of the same negative pattern. As long as the negative events were before identified as exceptions, they were not expected to pop up again in the future, but when they become part of a pattern, the future now contains more expectable disappointment. Baumeister gave as examples the experiences of people who had been drawn to political or religious thought-systems, who had previously been able to see some shortcomings of the value system, but were able to disregard them as being exceptions to the rule, which could eventually be ironed out. After the crystallisation of discontent, however, they cited as their reasons for leaving the very same reservations, which they had now come to see as endemic and symbolic of the unworkability of the system, rather than insignificant imperfections.

Sometimes leaving a former commitment requires a re-writing of personal history to account for such defection. Baumeister cited cases where a couple (while still happily married) might describe the way they first met in affectionate terms that hinted at the meeting being portentous, an unfolding of personal destiny. However after divorce, the same couple would describe the first meeting in much less affectionate terms, insinuating that they met at a time of personal weakness, and chose the relationship for all the wrong reasons.

An important aspect of the concept of the crystallisation of discontent is the notion of the “focal incident” when the discontent coalesces. Baumeister pointed out the focal incidents themselves are usually relatively minor and insignificant. For example, a single argument or a spouse forgetting a birthday may spark such an incident. If this incident

came in what was otherwise a strong and happy relationship it would be unlikely to precipitate the partner wanting to leave. But the same incident, coming after many other disappointments or let-downs, may suddenly appear to be an exemplar which brings forth a crystallisation of discontent, which had, until that moment, remained out of conscious awareness. “Things that once seemed unrelated are now related” (p. 292). (Many of the stories told in the data later will provide incidents where such focal incidents can be seen as prompting moments of insight.)

The new view of self, world or relationship that emerges from such crystallisation is one where the person’s values are now related to each other in a different way. In principle, the crystallisation of discontent can occur without any change in the ratio of positive or negative events or incidents. It is the formation of links and the discernment of a pattern among existing features of the role or relationship, that is salient, and not necessarily the addition of new bad features. A crystallisation of discontent changes the person’s global appraisal of that entire aspect of his or her life.

Although the actual process of the change is to bring to consciousness a pattern of negatives, the outcome of Baumeister’s (1994) crystallisation of discontent can easily enough be seen as a positive motivating force, if it prompts a person to leave an unsatisfactory role or commitment. Many of the participants we will meet later in the study made choices to leave unhappy relationships.

Baumeister did not claim his theory extended as far as personality change per se, but he believed it was fundamentally similar. It describes the emergence of a new schema to consciousness, out of material that was previously unrelated to consciousness. This

thesis would argue for a somewhat broader applicability for this theory. The process underlying Baumeister's crystallisation of discontent could perhaps be extended to apply to schemas that are not consciously in operation, whether or not the content of those schemas is negative. It may be they remain unconscious because they threaten to destabilise conscious ego values in other ways – for example, a person may suppress a skill or ability for fear it may threaten a relationship. Thus it may not be discontent necessarily that crystallises (although attributional style would make discontent the most common case), but simply a schema made up of parts that had previously been building or accumulating in the unconscious, which is suddenly connected and brought forth to consciousness by a focal incident. Such a new schema could well be a moment of insight.

Now we turn to consider change that is: 1) sudden and traumatic, and 2) sudden and positive, (often transforming). As the data later will show, moments of insight are mostly, but not always, an example of the latter type.

## **Negative sudden change**

Theoretical descriptions (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Meares, 2000) suggest that some of the processes that people undergo in traumatising experiences are in many ways the reverse of what happens when a person has a moment of insight. Generally speaking, in a traumatic experience, a person's sense of self falls apart, becomes dissociated or fragmented. In a moment of insight, or other positive sudden change experience, a

person's sense of self appears to coalesce, to form into a "new unity", a new sense of wholeness and integration. First to consider the change that "shatters".

### **Janoff-Bulman: shattered assumptions**

Janoff-Bulman's (1992) notions about "shattered assumptions" evocatively describe a traumatic experience that could hardly be more precisely the opposite of a moment of insight. What is lost in trauma, she says, is often the simplicity and sense of invulnerability that our core assumptions confer on us. As the stories presented in the data show, what is gained in moments of insight is a new sense of coherence, a more simply "do-able" sense about self and life. Janoff-Bulman identified three fundamental beliefs or core assumptions which people tend to carry from childhood, and hold as givens until such time as experience challenges or shatters them. Those core assumptions are: the world is benevolent; the world is meaningful; the self is worthy.

If we consider that the modal ego development level in the United States is E5 Self-Aware, then it is possible that these assumptions that Janoff-Bulman identified might well have reflected the beliefs of adults who are predominantly at a low to mid-range ego level.

Re-building of these assumptions through therapy is not, as might be assumed, a simple matter of returning a person back to their former beliefs. Janoff-Bulman stresses that trauma survivors cannot go back to that simplistic state. Rather, after therapy, their assumptions contain many more contingencies about the nature of life:

"The world is benevolent, but not absolutely; events that happen make sense, but not always; the self can be counted on to be decent and competent, but helplessness

is at times a reality. Survivors are often guardedly optimistic, but the rosy absolutism of earlier days is gone” (p 174)

These rehabilitated beliefs appear to be a more accurate map of the world and thus less likely to “shatter” again, because they recognise the possibility of contingencies. This would seem to imply that people at higher ego levels, for whom contingencies and more complex reasoning is familiar and comfortable may be better equipped to recover to this state, and that those at lower ego levels may be less well equipped because of their lesser facility with handling contingencies. Similarly, it would seem that people at the lower ego levels might be those whose assumptions in the first place might have been more absolute and brittle and thus likely to “shatter”. We will see evidence of this in the data.

### **Meares’ traumatic memory system**

Another trauma theorist whose views are pertinent to the topic of moments of insight is Meares (2000), who, like William James, believes that our sense of self develops with, and is mainly represented by our stream of consciousness. His theory of what happens in response to trauma, also, posits a process which is uncannily opposite in its phenomenological effects, to a moment of insight.

Meares believes that what is dissociated in trauma is in fact the stream of consciousness and its rich connections with our episodic memory system. He adopted William James’ division of the self into a) the subjective “I”, the knower or perceiver who directs our attention and produces the sense of being unified, and b) the objective “me”, the known or embodied self. However Meares believed a third entity was called for in order to

better understand the process of trauma. The third entity he proposed was the notion of “myself” as illustrated in the following sentence: “I was not myself when you saw me last” (Meares, 2000, p. 9). The entity “myself” had a greater variability and appeared to lack the stability of the “I” and “me” in that sentence, Meares proposed. This more variable view of “myself” was one that developed through active contact with others in the external world, starting with childhood experiences, especially those in which intimacy was learned, such as copying mother in games of peek-a-boo. Earlier in the child’s development, the mother would play both roles until such time as the child could learn to take on his/her own role. Later, the child would learn to represent both roles within his/her own inner or intimate *conversational relationships* – having adopted and internalised mother’s prototypes of intimacy.

This capacity for *inner intimacy* develops into a sense of self that provides a kind of background familiarity – the inner conversation of our stream of consciousness - which helps us to judge whether or not we are resonating intimately with others, and whether our sense of self is accepted or reflected by our experiences in the world. When we feel we are matching with others and with our experiences, there is a “warmth and intimacy” of self, and we feel validated and worthy. When there is a mismatch, we may feel invalidated, unworthy, fragile, even under threat. It is this familiar background sense of self – the stream of consciousness which helps to connect us to our experiences, which Meares believes gets lost, or dissociated, during trauma.

The shock and dissociation of trauma stunts the operation of this fragile sense of self, and thus the aliveness and activity underpinning the person’s stream of consciousness is deeply compromised or virtually absent. The person may feel a vacancy, a kind of lack of self, like a black hole. Instead of the usual familiar “babble” of stream of consciousness

enriching their inner life, the person cannot inhabit their own stories, or make connection with current and past experience, as one who was there in both instances (the present and the past). They have lost their own sense of playfulness or inner intimacy. Thus, Meares has noted that those who have been traumatised often tell their stories in therapy in a lifeless chronicle, listing every step of their day, relating the data of their experience, but without the usual context of emotional emphases, imagery and past memories “playfully” intertwining their narratives. He felt the reason for this is that the traumatic event itself would have been repressed from memory, and the accompanying feelings and value-tones would not be recorded as episodes (in episodic memory), but rather as facts (in semantic memory), such as the “fact”: “I am worthless”.

Which part of this picture is being presented as having relevance to our topic of moments of insight? It is in Meares’ notion of matching and mismatching. We are constantly matching our models of the world, formed in the past, against those appearing in the present, and simultaneously attempting to trace likeness and unlikeness. When we find a mismatch (unlikeness), the result can be derealisation – a sense of strangeness and unreality which accompanies dissociation. The self feels different and altered – ‘not myself’. The data presented later will show that a moment of insight is the very opposite of this process. A moment of insight is a moment of “matching” – a moment of realisation rather than derealisation – in which a person senses a deeper, more congruent sense of self. The self feels different and new, but at the same time ‘more myself’ than ever. One can only wonder if a moment of insight is, by extrapolation, a restoration of the operations of episodic memory, which perhaps had been hampered or compromised somehow before the moment of insight. Now to turn to positive experiences of sudden change.



## **Positive sudden change**

It seems almost unfair that some people desire and work hard to make positive changes in their lives, sometimes for years on end, in therapy or on their own, with very little apparent effect, while others are almost ‘blindsided’ by spontaneous experiences of change, the immediate effects of which seem to reach into the core of their sense of self and turn an invisible key. These are the kinds of experiences we will now examine through two major contributions to the understanding of positive and transforming sudden change experiences. The phenomena they describe bear a close resemblance to our topic of moments of insight, and thus the processes and general principles proposed to explain their occurrences are also potentially explanations that could be applied to moments of insight.

### **James’ view of conversion experiences**

At the beginning of the last century, William James (1902) became the first (and for a very long time the last) psychologist to openly and enthusiastically embrace the topic of sudden change through religious conversion experiences:

“Were we writing the story of the mind from the purely natural-history point of view, with no religious interest whatever, we should still have to write down man’s liability to sudden and complete conversion as one of his most curious peculiarities.” (James, 1902, p. 230)

William James’ (1902) views on conversion experiences were influenced by Professor E.D. Starbuck’s work, *The Psychology of Religion*, in which two types of

conversion were identified – the *volitional* type (conscious and voluntary), and the *self-surrender* type (unconscious and involuntary). The *volitional* type of change was usually gradual, piecing together and building up a new set of spiritual habits, with occasional critical times of rapid growth, interposed by partial self-surrender experiences.

The *self-surrender* type of conversion was so named because in this type, the self-surrender was apparently absolute, and was seen as the indispensable last step in this type of conversion. In the precipitating moments of this sudden change conversion, the will had to be given up, resistance had to cease, and all efforts to go in a certain direction had to be abandoned. James commented that besides being more interesting in general, this type of conversion was much more striking, dramatic and sudden, and was also more permanent in its effects. More recently, the question as to whether sudden versus gradual conversion experiences are more powerful has been addressed by Paloutzian, Richardson and Rambo (1999). They claim that research into the phenomenon of conversion and personality has found that profound, life-transforming changes to a person's identity and life meaning appear to occur in response to conversions that are both sudden and gradual, active and passive, and that these changes happen in respect to a range of belief systems including Eastern, Western and new religious movements.

In attempting to explain the process of self-surrender, James used the minor everyday example of a person trying to remember a name that won't come. Sometimes the harder one tries to remember, the more the name seems jammed, inaccessible. But upon relaxing, giving up the attempt, and letting time pass, the name will inevitably come "sauntering" back into one's consciousness as if it had never been bidden. The original

will, or effort, to remember, though, had set in motion a process which nonetheless carried out the work of remembering.

It seems possible that a somewhat similar process might happen with moments of insight. When a person is striving in a certain direction towards goals but just can't make it happen, it might be that if they "stop forcing it", their unconscious mind might come up with a solution that is congruent with both conscious and unconscious "strivings" – and produce a moment of insight.

The examples James supplied of these self-surrender conversions included stories of people who had been "drunkards" and heavy smokers, who had given up their drinking and smoking in that one moment of conversion, and were never even tempted again. Most of them were people who for one reason or another were in some kind of despair or turmoil, and they had somehow reached a point of surrender where they cried out to God or Jesus, often asking for help or guidance, because they no longer knew how to help themselves. Many of these people then suddenly saw things such as a bright light filling the room, or felt as if their very being was filled with light, so that they were actually radiating light. Some saw visions of Jesus, or else keenly felt the presence of what they took to be the Holy Ghost. Some said they were filled with such a strong feeling of love that they would have been happy to die and not return to their lives. Some experienced changes in perceptions afterwards, seeing everything more vibrantly, and appreciating the beauty of nature as they never had before. All of them felt an absolute certainty, during and after their conversion, of the existence of God and a divine realm, and a deep sense of commitment to carry out the rest of their lives in accordance with their new sense of personal meaning, gained during this transforming experience.

Every one of these phenomena, in a variety of similar forms, have featured in the stories of those who have reported near-death experiences, after which the reported effects have also usually also been transforming and permanent (Ring, 1984; Sutherland, 1992).

In attempting to supply a psychological explanation of what might happen during a conversion experience, James (1902) spoke of “hot” places in a person’s consciousness – places of emotional interest, where the most important ideas to which the person is devoted are gathered, defining the “point of view from which the aim is taken” (p. 196). He applied this description to any ideas that dominated consciousness, whether spiritual or not. In the case of conversion, he surmised that ideas which had been peripheral suddenly switched to become central and hot, the place the person now “aims from”. Whereas before the person’s religious beliefs were rather perfunctory, now they become the “hot” centre from which the person draws his/her most important energy. Another example he gave was of an athlete who suddenly becomes committed, heart and soul, where before the commitment was less centralised.

“We have a thought, or we perform an act, repeatedly, but on a certain day the real meaning of the thought peals through us for the first time, or the act has suddenly turned into a moral impossibility. All we know is that there are dead feelings, dead ideas, and cold beliefs, and there are hot and live ones; and when one grows hot and alive within us, everything has to re-crystallise about it.” (James, 1902, p. 197)

We have already seen that many years after James, Baumeister (1994) had also put the metaphor of crystallisation to good use when describing the creation of sudden new self-priorities or schemas. James believed that whether the experience of conversion itself

was brought on by divine sources, or prompted by a psychological process, was not the important question. Conversion, he said, must be judged by its fruits. Since most of the more striking, self-surrender conversions had permanent, positive results (all of the examples he had encountered) he believed they could be assumed to be experiences of high spiritual significance.

The general nature of mind, according to James, was as a stream or wave of consciousness, whereby its various fields of objects which are central to thought at any one time, fade out at the margins of our attentive thought, so that some of the ideas at the margins are not accessible to our attention, but yet they still have effects on our behaviour and can guide our attention to move in certain directions, rather like a magnetic field moving a compass needle. He believed the width or breadth of such waves of consciousness would be different for different people, and even within the one person the vista of thought available to consciousness at one time may vary considerably according to current mood, and during good versus bad health. Those lucky enough to have a wide field see many truths simultaneously, and “get glimpses of relations which we divine rather than see, for they shoot beyond the field into still remoter regions of objectivity, regions which we seem rather to be about to perceive than to perceive actually”. (p. 231)

This evocative description supplied by James seems to complement well the point that Gendlin (1996) made, noted earlier, about the “felt sense” which consists of thoughts and material which is ready to break into consciousness next – that which we are sensitised by in that moment, and yet its form lies just out of conscious reach, unattended as a muted, bodily “felt sense”.

*Holding positives and negatives in mind together*

James believed that those who were candidates for conversion experiences usually had two main preoccupations: a sense of despair, incompleteness or sin that they wanted to escape; alongside a positive ideal that they wished to achieve. Yet the despair and self-loathing were usually far more palpable.

“Now with most of us the sense of our present wrongness is a far more distinct piece of our consciousness than is the imagination of any positive ideal we can aim at. In a majority of cases, indeed, the ‘sin’ almost exclusively engrosses the attention, so that conversion is a process of struggling away from sin rather than of striving towards righteousness.” (James, 1902, p. 209)

This is an explicit expression, made a full century ago, of what was discussed earlier – that the pacer effect which helps us strive towards the ego ideal is probably not so strong a motivator as the need to escape from the “undesired self” (Ogilvie, 1987). In the possibly unusual circumstances when both the positive and negative motivations are held in awareness simultaneously, each striving towards mastery, a compelling push and pull effect (in the same direction) may be set up – the person knows in agonisingly intimate detail what he/she wants to escape from, and at the same time has some inkling of the direction they want to move towards. (Such a congruence of motivation might just be enough to break through one’s usual “protection” of cognitive conservatism?)

This very effect of holding both the positive and negative motivations in mind at the same time is aimed for in the form of therapy called motivational interviewing, which seeks to help people change through exploring their ambivalence and highlighting the

discrepancy between their goals and their behaviour (Miller and Rollnick, 1991). Draycott and Dabbs (1998) found that this technique matches the steps one would need to take to induce cognitive dissonance. An important point they made about the inducement of cognitive dissonance, though, was that it lasts only a short time before it is resolved - by largely automatic processes - usually in the direction of the least pain. Thus the discrepancy would need to be agonisingly well developed, and the positive goals of the person held vividly in awareness, for the resolution to fall automatically in favour of change over the status quo.

In the case of a moment of insight which suddenly “proposes” a solution to a problem or struggle, the solution to the discrepancy would have been developing unconsciously. The “undesired” visions of self might have been mobilising resources, but until the moment of insight, the motivation of mastery might have been stalled for want of a direction to move in.

It is speculated that this principle might be at work when “affirming” therapists respond with empathic reflecting to a client who is exploring negative feelings. Greenberg Rice and Elliott (1993) described a phenomenon they called a “polar shift” in which a client who has been able to express their negative feelings fully and completely to an empathic listener, may often spontaneously reach a point where he/she will swing back in a more positive direction of his/her own accord. It seems paradoxical that when people express their worst fears it is usually a strengthening experience (that is, when the listener is empathic). However, what is strengthening is most probably the affirming attitude of the therapist, who holds firm to positive aspirations for that client, even while they explore their darkest fears. This allows the client the opportunity to become much more intimately

in touch with their darkest fears than they otherwise might, and thus make intimate contact with their most undesired self – that most powerful of motivators. This process would be, furthermore, a repeating of the means by which our sense of self gradually comes into being in our early life, as we share our darkest fears and are comforted and re-inspired, by one who believes in us.

In this scenario there is clearly an aspect of the principle of progression via regression. Positive motivation was achieved by a descent into the negative, and a determination to escape the threat of an “undesired self”.

#### Why we can't “will” sudden change

The problem with exercising the personal will in attempts to resolve some problems, James points out, is that the person remains stuck in the region where the imperfect self is the “hot” centre of one's consciousness. As long as the sickly, despairing self continues to occupy and thus define the central place of consciousness, there is no opportunity for another, more positive view of self, to occupy the central place. What is required is an absence of self from that central place for at least just a moment, an abdication from responsibility, a willingness to admit defeat, or even an attitude of ‘I don't care any more - let a greater power take over’. This kind of moment before a sudden conversion is so common that it defines this type – the “self-surrender” conversion. Only in that moment of surrender, does a person give up all attempts to control their fate, and leave their mind ‘unattended’ long enough for a completely different kind of “hot” emotional centre to be established as the place to “aim from”.



James' view was that most revivalist religious practices – those which attempt to induce a conversion experience, are mimicking the “real thing”, which happens spontaneously. He believes there is no benefit in studying those who try to copy. More salient was to go to the source and study only those genuine cases, which happened spontaneously. He was profoundly disinterested in studying institutionalised religion as he found it uninformative about the personal experience of religious conversion and belief.

In their research into the practices of cults, Conway and Siegelman (1995) described a similar but more sinister act of “copying” the kinds of experiences described by James. An important distinction between the two phenomena is that the conversion experiences James described usually happened to an individual spontaneously while alone, and the outcomes were generally positive. The phenomenon Conway and Siegelman (1995) describe as “snapping” is brought on by group or cult indoctrination practices – and significantly, it also brings on sudden change in a person's personality by the act of “surrendering”, or “letting go”. After being deprived of usual metabolic needs such as eating and sleeping, being refused access to the toilet, and tired to the point of exhaustion, the new cult member may approach the point of “snapping”. They are then exhorted by other cult members to stop doubting or questioning, and encouraged to let things just float, to simply surrender. The sinister side of these ‘forced enlightenment’ experiences is the fact that while some people do experience some amazing phenomena - feelings of love and warmth, overwhelming bliss, for a time – there are others who may also react by becoming severely mentally de-stabilised, delusional or even psychotic.

It seems very likely that the new “knowledge” gained in cult-style experiences is someone else's dogma, rather than one's own idiosyncratically gained insight.

### **Miller and C'deBaca's Quantum Change Study**

The range of experiences described in Miller and C'deBaca's (1994) quantum change study were very similar to many of moment of insight experiences described in the data of this thesis. Miller and C'deBaca (1994) had given themselves a charter to study any kind of "sudden and profound" change, in an admirable spirit of open curiosity, somewhat similar to James' approach. Their definition of quantum change was almost synonymous with my definition of "moments of insight", with the exception that my working definition for questionnaire participants did not use the term "profound", and rather asked participants if they had ever had "a fairly spontaneous shift in perspective where you suddenly saw yourself or your world in a different light".

Miller and C'deBaca (2001, p. 4) described the typical quantum change experience as "a vivid, surprising, benevolent, and enduring personal transformation". Whereas the more usual form of change (Type I change) was like a canoe drifting down a river, quantum change (a form of Type II change) was like suddenly hitting the rapids, being propelled downstream very quickly, and finding oneself in a very different place. Type II change, they said, could hit without warning, and could be brought on by accidents, illness, fires, and lotteries, as well as by more mysterious kinds of sudden personal growth. Not all people undergoing Type II change brought on by change in circumstances will experience a quantum change in their personality. However, some do – and what changes is their values, life goals, perceptual style, and even that (usually) most unchanging aspect of personality: temperament.

Whitaker (1986) described Type I change as simple adaptation, and Type II change (which he also chose to call quantum change) as being like changing gears, as opposed to pressing on the accelerator.

Setting out to study any kind of “quantum change” is not, unfortunately, something one can do prospectively, unless one has an enormous budget and the luxury of a lot of time, as it is very difficult to predict just who might have such an experience. Thus Miller and C’deBaca (1994) had to be content (as did this study) with investigating the “butterflies”, rather than the “caterpillars”. The volunteer participants in their study, 31 women and 24 men, struck the researchers as a diverse range of “largely ordinary individuals who had had extraordinary experiences” (Miller & C’deBaca, 1994, p. 260). About half of the experiences occurred when the person was doing nothing special, such as watching television, walking to a night club, having an argument - even cleaning a toilet.

“Their experience was not of a completed change but the opening of an evolution, a new capacity for seeing and understanding, a new link to the universe” (Miller & C’deBaca, 2001, p.17).

Precipitating factors often appeared to be friction, turbulence, or trauma of some kind. Yet there were also many which struck seemingly out of the blue, from nowhere (Miller & C’deBaca, 2001).

### Description of Quantum Change Experiences

The quantum change experiences tended to fall into two groups: the *insightful* type and the *mystical* type. “Both usually involve a significant alteration in how one perceives

other people, the world, oneself, and the relationships among them.” (Miller & C’deBaca, 2001, p. 21) These experiences usually happen over a few hours or days, but quite often they lasted only a matter of minutes.

The *insightful* type of quantum change were those kinds of change which tended to flow on from a person’s life experiences and development – the kind of change one might expect to happen in psychotherapy. However, this kind of quantum change has nothing of the usual deliberative ‘making up one’s mind’ about it, which is characteristic of other, more common Type II change experiences. Rather, insightful quantum change is instantaneous, dramatic, and surprising – often described as being like a lightning bolt - and carries with it a sure sense of confidence in its truth and permanence. Indeed, the effects usually do prove to be permanent. Here is an abbreviated example of one of the “insightful” quantum change stories Miller and C’deBaca collected:

- *While holidaying on an island with his wife, this middle-aged man was sitting on the beach, watching his wife out on the water, and reading books on alcoholism. He was trying to help an employee with a drinking problem. When later he tried to run along the beach he found he was out of breath, out of shape, and a long way from his former athletic days. It occurred to him that his own drinking was a problem, that he was sick of waking up with a foggy head. “I decided, ‘I have a problem with alcohol, and the only way to deal with it is to simply put it aside’. And all of a sudden it just dropped away. At that moment I turned into somebody who didn’t use alcohol. I haven’t had a drink since that day two years ago.” (Miller & C’deBaca, 2001, p. 35-36.)*

The *mystical* type of quantum change, or *epiphanies*, are more extraordinary again, as these experiences do not tend to have a sense of continuity with a person's life experience, as does the insightful type. In mystical quantum change, there is a sense that something momentous has happened, and that the person will never be the same again. Mystical changes have a "noetic" sense of being acted upon by something or someone greater than oneself. Miller and C'deBaca note that not all mystical experiences are necessarily quantum changes. Some mystical experiences come and go, and while they may inspire some awe in the short term, they can fade from memory. The type of mystical experiences they classify as mystical quantum change are the type which leave an indelible mark on the person, so that their life story tends to be told in terms of "before" versus "after" the experience. (My study would nominate those experiences as worthy of investigation as to whether they might be changes in ego level.)

Those who had *mystical* epiphanies were much more likely to remember the exact time of day it occurred, even though on average many more years had elapsed since their experiences, than for those who told of *insightful* quantum change. They were also much more likely to recount the experience of feeling loved, having visions, hearing voices, feeling themselves to be in the presence or will of a higher power, and five times more likely to report that someone else was praying for them at their time of quantum change. Here is an abbreviated account of one of the stories of mystical quantum change:

- *A woman whose family was falling apart had begun to contemplate a murder-suicide. Her daughter's marriage was breaking up, her son was "crazy" and her husband was drinking. She went to bed one night, thinking she would have to use the gun in her house to shoot her son first, and then herself – she felt resolved she must take her son*

*with her and that there was no other answer. She couldn't sleep, and at about two in the morning she suddenly remembered some of the things she had read from her Christian background. "I am not a church member, not a religious person... so this is not going to be one of these born-again Christian stories... I asked for help. 'Please, help me!'" From the bottom of my heart, I asked for help. I said, "Please, show me what you want me to do". Suddenly it was like this angel appeared in my mind, and this voice said to me, "Turn to me". Just like that. I felt a presence. I didn't really see a vision. There was just a feeling of light. I opened my heart, and something came in. Whether it was from me going out or something coming in I can't say. It was the meaning that was important. ... I didn't see a blinding flash or anything else, but somehow I just knew everything from then on was going to be all right. It was like I suddenly burst through and let go, and everything, everything just changed. There was help right there, right there. (Miller & C'deBaca, 2001, p. 86.)*

The insightful versus mystical types of quantum change are not mutually exclusive, and although some experiences distinctly fall into one rather than the other description, there were many experiences which seemed to occupy grey areas in between. This grey area did not trouble Miller and C'deBaca (2001) as they were not seeking to set up a taxonomy so much as to gain a clearer idea of the nature of the phenomena they were dealing with.

Miller and C'deBaca (2001) reported attempts by others, however, to classify these kinds of mystical experiences. William James (1902) identified four general characteristics of conversion experiences:

- *ineffability* (more like feelings than thoughts; defying adequate expression in words),

- *noetic* quality (providing revelation of deep significance; knowledge which has unquestioned authority which is *known* as the truth, there is no doubt; having directly experienced the nature of existence),
- *transiency* (lasting only a brief time, usually no more than half an hour),
- *passivity* (personal will seems to be suspended; there is a sense of being under the control of a higher power).

Five more common characteristics were added to James' list by physician and pastor, Walter Pahnke, in his 1963 doctoral dissertation supervised by Timothy Leary (Miller & C'deBaca, 2001). They were:

- *unity* (internal and external unity of self with the environment),
- *transcendence* (of space and time, giving perspective of timelessness; may be inside and outside body at same time),
- *awe* (sense of sacredness, an intuitive response to the presence of inspiring realities),
- *positivity* (positive emotions such as joy, peace, love, blessing),
- *distinctiveness* (although transient, the experience is felt to be quite different from ordinary experience).

Many of the themes in the quantum change study were similar or identical to those reported by people in the current study as "moments of insight". Examples are: "I saw a new meaning", "the world looked different to me", "an important truth was revealed to me", "the experience began suddenly rather than gradually", "I felt at peace", "I was a completely different person", "I was emotionally distressed or upset just before". Most of the participants reported that their lives had been better since the experience.

*How Miller and C'deBaca account for quantum change*

Miller and C'deBaca (2001) came up with five perspectives as to the possible means by which quantum change might occur.

*Perspective 1: Breaking Point*

Perhaps, as some participants' stories literally state (in both the Miller and C'deBaca study and the current one), the person might reach a kind of turning point whereby they feel they simply cannot continue on their current course. Things have become so miserable or desperate and the person so despairing that he/she could not endure more of the same. Something had to give. Having faced the worst or 'hit bottom' – from feeling that the various parts of their identity had been fractured and displaced - somehow quantum change suddenly erupted and all the various broken pieces of their identity coalesced, came together again, and reorganised into a much more positive view of self and world. They seem to themselves, and to others, like a new version of who they were before – but now a more integrated one.

A similar phenomenon in gradual change is the "low turning point" identified as part of a recovery pattern in some people suffering from severe mental illnesses such as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia (Rakfeldt & Strauss, 1989). This phenomenon begins with the individual having had an initial rigid coping mechanism – such as focussing solely on their work to alleviate stress. When the descent into depression, inability to function, and the failure of their coping mechanisms (decompensation) gets to a critical "low turning point", they finally relinquish their former rigid focus. Their recovery involves the gradual adopting of more fluid coping techniques, which appears to lead them to a more adaptive approach to life and more positive functioning than ever before.



The “breaking point” process has much in common with the points made earlier about the dissociative effects of trauma on the personality, being opposite in nature to the effects of moments of insight. Whereas the ‘powerfully traumatic’ disintegrates, the ‘powerfully positive’ appears to re-integrate.

### *Perspective 2: Deep Discrepancy*

Some of the people who described quantum change experiences were clearly not currently at a breaking point like those discussed above (nor were many who described moments of insight in this study). Many, however, were aware that at some level there were discrepancies in their lives – clashes of values about where they felt they should be in life. Miller and C’deBaca wondered if those who did not experience a breaking point were somehow, nevertheless, incubating conflict or distress – some kind of deep discrepancy – unconsciously, until such time as a subconscious solution was immanent, and an insight could suddenly break through, “out of the blue” at a conscious level. The insight is “recognised” as truth – the right way to go – because it is already “known” or has been forming at the subconscious level. These ideas of incubating conflict unconsciously have much in common with Baumeister’s (1994) notion of the crystallisation of discontent.

The concern, for Miller and C’deBaca, in offering a psychodynamic explanation such as “deep discrepancy” was the danger of making a facile circular argument. Freud and psychoanalysis have long been criticised for theories that are unprovable and unfalsifiable. However Westen (1998) has gathered together an impressive body of evidence from research in the fields of neuropsychology and cognitive science connectionist modelling that support not only the existence of the unconscious, but that the unconscious appears to operate in the manner psychoanalytic theory would predict. He

claims this research “demonstrates unequivocally that affective evaluations can develop unconsciously and that multiple influences on affective associations can be combined outside of awareness” (Westen, 1998, p. 71). Westen also reviewed a body of literature that suggested that conscious motives guide behaviour only when that behaviour is *chosen consciously*, but that when those motives are not consciously held in mind, we revert to automatic, unconsciously primed behaviour, which is our “default” way of being. This is evidence which speaks strongly in favour of a psychodynamic, deep discrepancy argument.

It may be that when motivating pacers start to jog a new set of conscious goals or values which are at odds with older unconsciously primed values, equilibration begins to fail and our psyche may begin to become destabilised as the discrepancy begins to mount. Miller and C’deBaca suggested that the deep discrepancy scenario could be understood in the context of self-regulation arguments. In this view, we have two distinct kinds of cognitive systems, or modes in perceiving that direct our behaviour and thus experience. One is the *automatic* mode, which usually operates below conscious awareness, so long as there is nothing unusual (or discrepant) which alerts us to divert to our other system - our more *controlled or effortful* mental processing. Miller and C’deBaca (1994) speculated that quantum change may happen when self-monitoring reveals an impending collision course between, for example, long habituated automatic behaviour, and important values that the person has only suddenly become aware that they are violating. With the awareness of an impending clash, something snaps.

Miller and C’deBaca believed that Rokeach’s (1973) conception of how we organise personal values and beliefs gave a clue to what might be behind the deep discrepancy. Rokeach suggested we have about a dozen and a half of terminal values, such

as “a comfortable life”, “true friendship” and “equality”, and five or six dozen instrumental values, such as being “forgiving” or “loving” or “honest”. If a central value or standard changes, the effects can be far reaching, whereas more peripheral aspects of self, such as behaviours or beliefs, may have little effect unless they come into conflict with a deeper value. In that case, the more peripheral aspect is thought to be the one that will change. Conflicting values in one’s core identity are only likely to cause change if one is experiencing contradictions. If so, this sudden change could be the result.

In a famous study, Rokeach (1973) inadvertently induced lasting changes in study participants, using cognitive dissonance. He had induced value conflicts in university students who rated Freedom higher than Equality in a values ranking exercise. The experimental group of students were given the pejorative interpretation that they were more interested in their own freedom than others’ freedom. It was later found that the dissonance effects were retained for much longer than the three month follow up. Two years later, other follow up research ascertained that the experimental group, relative to the control group, were more likely to become volunteers, had more interracial eye contact, were twice as likely to select ethnic studies, and eight times as many changed from natural to social sciences or education. These changes in behaviour suggested the students had attempted to correct the insinuation that they were disinterested in others’ equality or concerns.

Another explanation which Miller and C’deBaca (1994) considered was that the quantum change may come about in much the same way as a Gestalt style reorganisation of figure/ground salience. A visual example of this phenomenon is the well-known line drawing whereby one can see either a beautiful young woman or an ugly old woman,

depending on visual perception shifts between figure and ground. They suggested that initial perceptions from childhood conditioning may dominate one's attention and inhibit another way of seeing until "in an identifiable moment" the subject sees the figure (or a different configuration of information) in a new way. Instantly the information is understood in relation to a different pattern or gestalt, which in the case of quantum change, is often a more satisfying way of understanding self and world. This particular suggestion is a simple and particularly powerful one for facilitating understanding, not only of quantum change, but of how moments of insight (the type that might mean shifts in ego development) might happen. We will explore these ideas further in the Discussion.

*Change of values in quantum change participants:* If the notion of deep discrepancy was indeed linked to an impending values change, then did the participants' of the quantum change study change their values before versus after the experience? Miller and C'deBaca (1994) asked their participants to rank order a list of 50 values for the time before versus after their quantum change. For both men and women, there was a noticeable reversal of values, "before" versus "after" change. In both cases, the values "before" their change experience reflected stereotypes of the genders (for the men, the top five values had been wealth, adventure, achievement, pleasure, and being respected; for the women, the top five were family, independence, career, fitting in, and attractiveness). The "after" values for men were spirituality, personal peace, family, God's will, and honesty. Women's "after" change values were growth, self-esteem, spirituality, happiness and generosity.

Note that the new values "after" quantum change were much more alike for the two genders than they had been beforehand, and that "after" change, each gender tended to

include values which were opposite to their usual stereotypes. It is a hallmark of high ego development (in women at least) to be able to integrate both masculine and feminine strengths (White, 1985). Again, we can speculate as to whether some of these changes in values by quantum changers might have been part of a change in ego levels.

In respect to the shift in stereotypes, one of the participant's experiences, quoted in Miller and C'deBaca (2001) clearly illustrates this sense of leaving behind stereotypical thinking and developing a greater sense of authenticity.

“I realised that I was now identifying with what it is to be a real human being instead of with stereotypical attributes of what a person should be. I remember saying to myself, before all this happened, that it's important to be friendly, gentle, caring, helpful – all those things – but I was intellectualizing it all. With the change, it seems like now I feel it inside. It's amazing to go from thinking about your feelings to actually feeling your feelings. Somehow or other I got in touch with that, and as I did, the walls started to break down and it all started to come in on me.” (Miller & C'deBaca, 2001, p. 161)

More remarkable, perhaps than the shift that occurred in their top five values for both genders was the fact that in each case, their “before” top five values, with one exception, were banished to below 20<sup>th</sup> ranking in their “after” change priorities. The one exception was “family” for women, which ranked 12<sup>th</sup> after change. For the men, “wealth” plummeted from first to last (50<sup>th</sup>) place.

A note of caution might be sounded here that the participants would have an investment in perhaps exaggerating (consciously or unconsciously) the change before versus after, in an attempt to highlight the fact that their experience was indeed significant and that they did in fact change as a result of it (Berger and Luckman, 1966). However, the dramatic differences that people reported in the quantum change study would seem to leave more than sufficient margin for error.

Finally, the notion that quantum change follows the gathering of unconscious processes is consistent with the sense that people reported that the experience appeared to come from external sources – that it was “not me” controlling or willing it. Freud’s original term for “id” was “The It”, indicating that unconscious material (including some in the superego) was experienced as foreign (Loevinger, 1976). Thus the surfacing to consciousness of material which previously was unconscious often feels like an intrusion into consciousness of foreign thoughts or ideas.

### *Perspective 3: Personal Maturation*

Miller and C’deBaca (1994) speculated that quantum change could possibly be understood as a milestone or turning point – some kind of developmental jump. This thesis would suggest that the jump in maturity would be a change upwards in ego development. One of the contributions of Miller and C’deBaca’s study was the fact that it established that quantum change experiences, some of which match well to Maslow’s (1970) descriptions of peak experiences, happened to people who were not necessarily outstanding in terms of development, nor “self-actualised”, as Maslow would have predicted. These were ordinary people having extraordinary experiences. They started out from a wide range of different starting points, yet they reached very similar kinds of destinations as a

result of their experiences – destinations which appeared to be consistent with maturation. Moreover, many people who have more than one experience tend to regard them as part of the same process – which they tend to see in terms of maturation. Most people in Miller and C'deBaca's study noted that they don't regard the changes they have been through as an achievement, but as a gift that gave them a sense of oneness with humanity – a notion which tends to go with highly developed rather than lower forms of consciousness.

Many of the people in the Miller and C'deBaca study reported dramatic religious or spiritual experiences, in which their religious or spiritual attitudes underwent some kind of change – usually the outcome was a deepened sense of a spiritual dimension. It seems possible that these particular experiences could be construed as phenomenon which perhaps signal important transitions in their way of construing religious or spiritual beliefs.

A developmental process described by Fowler (1981) as “stages of faith” provides an understanding of how the quest for meaning and the application of and understanding of one's “faith” can undergo stages that are very similar to Loevinger's ego development stages. Both Loevinger and Fowler were influenced by Erikson (1950) and Kohlberg (1969), both take a strong cognitive developmentalist stand, and their descriptions and clues as to the general epistemologies of each stage, and the progression of stages, contain many astute similarities. The name of Fowler's conception, “stages of faith”, has been criticised as being too broad by people from opposing interests – those who feel his conception is not sufficiently religious and those who feel his considerable psychological contribution will be tainted by the use of the term. Yet he stands by his conception, claiming that faith is not always religious and that it is not exactly ego development he

speaks of, but rather, faith “as a dynamic existential stance, a way or leaning into and finding or giving meaning to the conditions of our lives” (Fowler, 1981, p. 92).

Fowler (1981) presents six stages of faith: Stage 1: Intuitive-Projective faith – the fantasy filled phase of a small child; Stage 2: Mythic-Literal faith – whereby the child or person takes on the normative stories and beliefs that symbolise his/her community: Stage 3: Synthetic-Conventional faith – whereby the faith must synthesize the conventional values already there to provide identity and outlook (the person is subject to the “tyranny of the “they”); Stage 4: Individuative-Reflective faith – whereby a person achieves a critical distancing from one’s previous assumptive value system and an executive ego emerges, no longer subject to the “tyranny of the they” (the danger is over-assimilating reality into one’s own executive view); Stage 5: Conjunctive faith – whereby there is what Ricoeur called a ‘second naivete’ in which symbolic power is reunited with conceptual meanings (there is now a critical recognition of one’s own unconscious, a confidence and openness to hear truth from others, and one is alive to paradox and the truth in apparent contradictions); Stage 6: Universalising faith – an exceedingly rare stage, whereby the self is “spending and being spent” in the service of transformation of present reality in the direction of a transcendent actuality. One of this study’s case studies of moments of insight (Louise’s story) fits well a description of a person undergoing transition from Stage 3 to Stage 4 faith.

#### *Perspective 4: Particular Person*

Miller and C’deBaca (1994) also addressed the question as to whether these experiences only happen to a particular kind of person. When participants in the study were tested by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers & McCaulley, 1985), introverted,



intuitive and feeling types were over-represented relative to US norms. The four profiles with NF (intuitive and feeling) were the four most over-represented, occurring at about twice that in the US population. Intuitive types made up 79% of insightful quantum changers and 60% of mystical quantum changers.

Another distinguishing feature of many quantum changers was that they seemed to suffer from depression, alcoholism, drug dependence – suggesting that somehow, painful life experiences may be a catalyst. William James (1902) was adamant that these types of negative experiences – suggesting psychological instability - should not disqualify the experience itself as being regarded ‘legitimately’ spiritual or religious. These experiences should be judged by their “fruits” and not by the biological or psychological symptoms that precede or accompany them, he said. Miller and C’deBaca made the same argument. Even if mental disorders could be totally biologically explained, they asserted, the experiences stand as meaningful, especially when their effects are lasting.

#### *Perspective 5: Sacred Encounter*

The question as to whether some of the experiences might actually have been encounters with a spiritual or religious realm was also discussed by Miller and C’deBaca (2001). They noted that 90% of people in the United States believe in the existence of an unseen spiritual dimension – either belief in God or an afterlife, or other things that transcend material existence (Miller & C’deBaca, 2001). Most of those who reported mystical quantum change felt a clear sense of being in the presence of some “holy Other” such as God or Jesus or some other kind of divine being. Just under half of those who reported insightful quantum changes (42%) also reported having sensed such a presence.

Many of the quantum change participants indicated they were spiritually receptive at the time – having made a conscious decision to become open to a spiritual realm - calling out to God or a Higher Power for help. The most common antecedent to this point - what James called “self-surrender” - was emotional distress. The “low turning point” described earlier was another kind of self-surrender, in that the old rigid coping mechanisms were abandoned, and a subsequent gradual adoption of more flexible coping strategies became the path to recovery. Perhaps the self-surrender is an important part of the process, in order to give up control over beliefs and values for long enough to allow the accommodation of something that will undoubtedly “re-arrange” their entire knowledge structure, while in this receptive state?

Miller and C’deBaca suggested that perhaps the transcendent quality of quantum change may come about as a combination of all five perspectives mentioned above. The first three perspectives – breaking point, deep discrepancy and personal maturation - are all highly integral to the argument this thesis will present in relation to moments of insight.

## Chapter 5

### Summary of Introductory Theory

To recap where the discussion has led us so far, it has been suggested that moments of insight might be a phenomenon like accommodation, implicated in ego development change. The exploration of data following will seek to provide supportive evidence for that proposition.

In the foregoing discussion, we have considered theoretical understandings of what the ego is and how it appears to develop. Freud's (1930) theory was that the ego first differentiates into ego and superego during the Oedipal period, incorporating aspects of the child's interpersonal relationships (both idealising aspects, and demanding, authoritative aspects) in the new inner relationship that has been forged between the ego and superego. This is the fundamental means by which the *interpersonal shapes the intrapersonal* – one of the three tenets Loevinger adopted.

Loevinger's (1976) view of this was that the fundamental aspect of ego development was as Freud described, and that it was best understood as being progressive differentiations of the ego into one part that is 'impulsive' and another part (the superego) that is 'control'. In her view, the drive to mastery, which manifested in a variety of ways, provided the motivation for this development. Her empirically informed formulation suggested that there are recognisable stages of ego development, each of which has typical concerns and preoccupations, around which their mastery motivation will be oriented.

Kegan's (1979) formulation was to re-conceptualise the process of ego differentiations in terms of 'what we feel subject to' versus 'what we are able to objectify'. By objectifying aspects of self and world, we gain some perspective over them. Kegan's subject-object understanding of ego development provides the first understanding of how ego development might progress as incremental shifts between stages. His notion which implied a progression of gaining more and more "perspective" on oneself and one's world is intuitively highly compatible with the notion of moments of insight. It provides a theoretical grounding against which to understand how some moments of insight appear to happen either "earlier" or "later" in the developmental progression between stages.

The discussion went on to consider the effects of pacers as prompts or triggers to ego development. One of the most powerful forms that pacers were theorised to take was the general stimulation provided by interpersonal relationships, particularly with those at more advanced ego development stages. The effects of other's expectations and aspirations - external pacers - could be eventually be transformed into internal pacers, through the incorporation of those aspirations into one's own ego ideal. Examples of this were a mother's hopes for a child's future or a therapist's high opinion of the client's potential – in both cases those positive aspirations are eventually internalised by the child or client to operate as "superego" pacers. The internalisation of other's aspirations or attitudes in regard to oneself is an example of *actively repeating what one has passively undergone*. This active repeating, for Loevinger, is the "royal road" to *mastering experience*. In examining the data to come, the possible pacer effects of other people, or interpersonal relationships, in prompting the moment of insight (and perhaps ego level change) will be considered.

Importantly, it was noted that pacers or triggers to change are not always positive, and that, according to Ogilvie (1987) and James (1902), negative “pacers” such as moving away from an undesired self may well be a more powerful motivators for change than the allure of moving towards the desired self. Evidence of this also will be also be noted in the data.

The discussion then moved on to theories of sudden change - that is, change that is experienced as sudden. Baumeister’s (1994) notion of the crystallisation of discontent provided a useful template for how the material for a new schema may be gathering unconsciously, before a focal incident (similar to a moment of insight) sparks off the crystallisation of the new schema. Miller & C’deBaca (2001) made similar points about the possibility that a “deep discrepancy” may have been forming outside of awareness before a quantum change experience (again, very similar to a moment of insight) erupts into awareness. Most often, quantum change experiences were positive and transforming (as were James’, 1902, conversion experiences). A large sub-set of moments of insight also appear to fit this same pattern.

In exploring the negative side of sudden change experiences, it was noted that the processes theorised to be operating in the case of traumatic experiences were just the opposite of what appears to take place in a quantum change experience and the moments of insight reported to this study. When people are traumatised, their core assumptions are shattered (Janoff-Bulman, 1992) – which in itself is a shattering experience - leaving them with a damaged self-theory especially in terms of *empirical validity* (Epstein, 1973), and the loss of a warm inner conversational sense of self through the loss or dampening of their stream of consciousness (Meares, 2000). The possibility that this kind of negative effect

might be operating through trauma or life turbulence before a moment of insight “re-integrates” some of what has been dissociated, will be kept in mind in analysing the data to come, as instances of *progression via regression*.

It seemed theoretically probable that the phenomenon James called “self surrender” may be a factor in the lead-up to moments of insight, and that in principle, it may help to understand why so many experiences are preceded by disruptive circumstances. The principle referred to here is that we may well need to relax our “hold” on our sense of self sometimes, in order to “loosen” the paradigm sufficiently to allow a new central point of view to become the focus. Many of the experiences reported in Miller and C’deBaca’s study were preceded by some kind of trauma and turmoil and thus seemed to fit this general principle. Again, what we are talking about here is an example of Loevinger’s tenet that *progression is, or may be based on regression*.

### **Main theoretical themes to be pursued in the data**

As the purpose of this study is to suggest that moments of insight may play a role in ego development, it will be necessary to look for evidence of ego developmental themes in the stories of moments of insight. Thus, we will consider if there is any evidence for or against Loevinger’s, or Freud’s three fundamental tenets that:

- (1) Interpersonal relations shape and drive intra-personal differentiation.
- (2) Experience is mastered by actively repeating what one has passively undergone.
- (3) Progression is, or may be, based on regression.

How might we go about looking for evidence of these principles in the data?

Point (1) above will be addressed by asking: was there any evidence in the stories of moments of insight that important relationships affected the way the person subsequently viewed themselves? Did the storyteller leave clues that they had undergone a kind of paradigm (or ego level change) in the way they saw themselves or their world? If a paradigm shift was apparent in the person's sense of self, world or others, was that shift in keeping with what would be expected in Loevinger's four main domains as shown in Table 1: impulse control, interpersonal mode, conscious preoccupation and cognitive complexity:

*Impulse control.* Was there a shift in which the person considered themselves, after the moment of insight change, to have gained a greater sense of control over their behaviours and their world? If so, this could signify a shift upwards in ego level in terms of impulse control. From Kegan's (1979) point of view, transitions from one ego level to the next would take place via gradual, incremental shifts in which the person, bit by bit, becomes able to objectify more aspects of their own subjective domain. The person's subjective 'reality' would be expanding with every incremental shift, and eventually they would become "subject to" a new self paradigm, or way of seeing self, world and others. The case study stories will be checked for clues that are suggestive of this.

*Interpersonal relations.* Did the person's relationships with others change in some recognisable way, reflecting the kind of change that typifies ego stages? For instance, did they appear to shift from an intense, responsible attitude typical of the

E6 Conscientious level, to the more mutual interpersonal mode of the E7 Individualistic level, where reciprocity becomes a major concern.

*Conscious preoccupations.* Did the moment of insight resolve or substantially address some struggle in relation to one or more of the preoccupations that typify the stages of ego development? If so, the nature of the preoccupation provides a clue as to ego level. If, for instance, the moment of insight was a realisation that the storyteller did not have to be a slave to appearances, but could allow him/herself to be different from the group with which he/she had been identified, this would be suggestive of a shift from a E4 Conformist to a E5 Self-Aware preoccupation.

*Cognitive Complexity.* Was the shift one in which the person's self or worldview increased in cognitive complexity, such as an increased sensitivity or appreciation of differences and personal uniqueness in self, world, and/or others?

Point (2) above was "experience is mastered by actively repeating what one has passively undergone". This can be investigated by asking: did any stories have themes either suggestive or disconfirming of mastery as a motivation, or that somehow the storyteller had been actively repeating experiences (which they may have previously undergone)? It would seem likely that a moment of insight might come at a point in time when a person begins to recognise a particular (usually problematic) pattern repeating in their life. The moment of insight would most likely present a different way of seeing the problem and its solution. If so, the result would likely be a sense of mastery.



Point (3) above was “progression is, or may be, based on regression”. This can be investigated by asking: was the moment of insight an integrating experience which took place after some kind of disintegrating experience? Such disintegrating experiences might be apparent trauma, turmoil or despair, or clues as to a person having been through a “low turning point” shortly before the insight. Both Miller and C’deBaca (1994) and James (1902) noted the presence of personal turmoil as a common phenomenon just before the kinds of sudden change they studied. Similarly, the phenomenon of “self-surrender” or “letting go” had been noted by both. Stories will be studied for similar signs of “regression”. If regression seems apparent, the question for consideration will be - at what point did the moment of insight happen in relation to the “regression”, and what role did it apparently play in the change?

Also implicated as a theoretical aspect of moments of insight and ego level change (being a structural or paradigm change) is the notion that the whole of oneself has changed in some fundamental “felt sense”. Is a moment of insight experienced as an integrated bodily “feeling” as Gendlin (1996) suggests. Do the stories support this “felt sense” view?

Overall, three ways are envisaged that moments of insight could conceivably play a role in shifts in ego level:

- (1) They might prompt the beginnings of a shift in ego level, operating like a ‘wake-up call’ to seeing things a different way (but the actual shift could still take months or years to complete, if ever). This type of phenomenon would probably be best understood as happening very early in the type of process described by Kegan et al. (1998), whereby the moment of insight might have shifted the person along from their

past state of comfortable equilibration to a state of being in transition between stages – at a point like that envisaged by Kegan et al., which might represent their having taken some early incremental steps towards the next level.

- (2) Moments of insight might be the vehicle of change themselves, in a sudden, dramatic change in which the person makes a “quantum leap” from one ego level to the next, substantially within the time of the moment of insight.
- (3) Or the moment of insight might act as a final catalyst, completing a shift in ego level that had already been in progress, in the manner described by Kegan et al., for some time.

It is emphasised that moments of insight are proposed to be *only one way* transitions in ego levels could happen. Although sudden and profound change is not rare (Miller and C’deBaca’, 1994), the usual manner of transition in ego levels is presumed to be the more gradual and less dramatic, incremental style of change.

Finally, some further aspects of this project that were not able to be included in the body of the thesis need to be noted here. This project involved asking participants to fill in a questionnaire for the WUSCT, and so the opportunity was taken to include a number of other questionnaire measures to investigate some secondary measures in relation to self and worldviews, which could be compared according to ego level groups and moment of insight experience. The secondary measures were: religious or spiritual attitudes; satisfaction with parents at various critical times; personal pressures in relation to roles and responsibilities; sense of coherence; age; and current health and wellbeing. However, there

was insufficient space, theoretically and practically speaking, to include analyses of these data in this thesis (with the exception of age). They will be utilised in future research. For interest, however, a brief summary of those findings is included in Appendix B.

We now turn to this project's specific aims.

## **Aims of the Study**

### **Research Question**

Do moments of insight sometimes play a role in the means by which people make the transition from one ego development level to the next?

### **Aims**

1. To investigate, better describe, and better understand the phenomenon of “moments of insight” (and develop a prototypical definition).
2. To investigate the relationship, if any, between prototypical moments of insight and ego levels in the quantitative data analysis.
3. To investigate the data of the study, both quantitative and qualitative, for supporting or disconfirming evidence of theoretical conceptions of how ego development (as structural or paradigm change) is believed to proceed, as outlined in the introductory chapters.
4. To speculate about the possible theoretical connection, if any, between moments of insight and ego levels.

## Hypotheses

Only two statistical hypotheses were made.

*Hypothesis 1: The higher the ego level, the greater would be the incidence of reporting prototypical moments of insight.*

If moments of insight were involved in ego level change, then it would follow that people who have experienced a *prototypical* moment of insight would be more likely to have experienced ego level change and thus be at higher ego levels.

*Hypothesis 2: There will be a positive relationship between ego levels and age, whereby age will rise with ego level.*

Because ego development is a developmental construct, it follows that ego levels would rise with age.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Method**

#### **Overview of Method**

There were two main stages to this study. Stage One represents the progress made under the initial aims of exploring moments of insight and sense of self using a qualitative approach of discovery of concepts “grounded in the data” of the interviews. Phases 1 through 3 below were almost fully completed when the concept of ego development was ‘discovered’ and the decision taken to amend and extend the format and aims of the study. Stage Two of the study then introduced questionnaires and combined quantitative and qualitative data and methods in order to test for ego development levels and explore the question of whether moments of insight might play a role in ego development. A summary overview of the Stages, and the Phases within them, follows.

#### **Stage One – aims were those of initial study**

##### **Phase 1: First interviews, gathering stories of moments of insight**

**Aim:** To investigate from first hand reports the role of moments of insight in constructing our sense of self, world, and others.

**Method:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 members of the public who responded to a newspaper article asking them to volunteer stories of moments of insight.

## **Phase 2: Themes and concepts in interviews were analysed**

**Aim:** The transcripts of the 15 interviews were analysed in depth for themes and concepts (see Appendix S on the Compact Disk).

**Method:** Qualitative coding and analysis of interview transcripts was done within each interview participant's story (a case study approach).

## **Phase 3: Analysis documents prepared for participants' feedback**

**Aim:** Participants were invited to comment on the accuracy and validity of the researcher's summary version of their story, and on the plausibility of the initial interpretations in relation to their story.

**Method:** A 2-3 page summary of each participants' story was written by the researcher in order to condense the stories to a manageable size for reporting in the thesis (the Summary Stories are in Appendix C). A longer document was also produced, containing initial interpretive speculations as to the meanings the researcher drew from the stories. The two documents were held, ready to send to participants in the week preceding their second interview, so that the material would be freshly received before the second interview, with a few days allowed for

participants to think about and prepare feedback. (Shortly before second interviews were conducted, however, the theory of ego development was “discovered” and Stage Two of the study was implemented.)

## **Stage Two – aims amended to incorporate ego development**

### **Phase 4: Questionnaires sent to interview participants**

**Aim:** In order to explore the new major hypothesis (that moments of insight may be implicated in the process of ego development) a questionnaire was developed to test participants’ ego levels (using the WUSCT), and at the same time, a range of secondary measures of related interest.

**Method:** The questionnaire set was developed and mailed to interview participants. This questionnaire set was ultimately administered to participants twice: the first time tested their “after” (or current) ego development and attitudes, and on the second occasion (see Phase 6) it tested their retrospective ego development and attitudes “before” their moment of insight. (The “before” versus “after” comparisons were later removed from the main part of the study and are presented in Appendix D.)

### **Phase 5: Second interviews: gathering feedback from participants**

**Aim:** Gathering feedback from the interview participants (on the summary story and interpretations documents in relation to their first interviews) had been delayed



by implementation of the questionnaires, but was now gathered in the second interview.

Method: The second interview again used a conversational style and a semi-structured question schedule to elicit participant's comments and feedback, and also to ask follow-up questions. Question prompts used for the semi-structured first and second interviews are supplied in Appendix E.

### **Phase 6: Extra data gathered from 65 questionnaire-only participants**

Aim: Questionnaire data were gathered from 65 questionnaire-only participants to provide extra stories of moments of insight, and to provide numbers to boost statistical power for testing hypotheses in relation to ego development levels.

Method: Questionnaires were adapted for questionnaire-only participants – 49 of whom were first year psychology undergraduates, and 16 of whom were members of the public. All questionnaire forms are supplied in Appendix F.

### **Phase 7: “Before versus After” study**

At the end of the second interview, the second questionnaire set, designed to tap the participants' “before” sense of self and world, was administered following a retrospective time/mood induction by the researcher. The before versus after study was later “downgraded” and is presented in Appendix D.

## **Phase 8: Falsification study checked if “before-after” effects replicable**

A falsification study was conducted to see if the differences found between interview participants’ “before” versus “after” ego levels might have been an artefact of the method (the retrospective instructions), rather than reflecting ego level change. Questionnaire-only participants who had reported no moments of insight in the previous five years filled out an identical retrospective questionnaire, but from their point of view 4-5 years ago. Most of their ego levels remained the same, indicating that the retrospective method itself was probably not, in itself, generating the almost uniformly lower “before” ego levels found for the interview group. These results lent a little extra credence to the retrospective method used. (However the falsification controls had no apparent motivation to exaggerate differences “before” versus “after”, as did the interview participants, who had stories to tell of how they had changed.) Details of the falsification study are shown as part of the “before” versus “after” study results in Appendix D.

## **Comments on the method**

### **First interviews were “blind” to ego development theory**

The first interview was conducted “blind” of ego development theory (because the researcher was not aware of it at the time of conducting the first round of interviews). This was an advantage in that it eradicated researcher bias in terms of inadvertent “steering” of the interview. However it meant that the opportunity for asking questions in order to

directly gather theoretically relevant information was lost. The interview material, then, is in some senses, “found” interview material.

### **Rationale for gathering feedback from interview participants**

The aim of gathering feedback from participants in Phase 5 above was to check the accuracy of the summaries I had written of their stories, and to gain their feedback in relation to the first round of interpretations I had made. This was done for the following reasons. Obviously, it gave participants an opportunity to comment on, challenge, and if necessary, correct aspects of my rendering of their story, as well as my initial round of interpretations, before the analysis proceeded any further. This checking back was not only respectful to the participants who supplied the stories – but it was an important means of establishing a form of theoretical ‘baseline validity’. It meant the study’s theoretical speculations would be founded on at least a first level of analysis that had been subjected to accuracy testing by the original storytellers. Inherent in this method was the recognition that in formulating summary stories and initial interpretations, I may possibly make some errors or mis-attributions of meanings, some of which could easily be detected and corrected at this point. One of the hazards of all types of psychological inquiry is that, consciously or unconsciously, there will unavoidably be a ‘researcher tendency’ to disproportionately select and infuse data with meanings shaped by one’s own theoretical frameworks and biases. At a conscious level, I did my best to avoid this, but at a philosophical level, I believe no method can protect us entirely from framework bias. The best we can do is to acknowledge its influence and take steps to minimise its distortions as much as possible, where practicable.

In general, participants' corrections to both the written summaries of their stories and the interpretations document, were minimal. Some, upon reading their story, decided to change further identifying details to protect their anonymity. A few corrected things such as the sequence or timing of events, which had not been clear from the original interview. Many of the participants commented favourably on the accuracy of both the summaries and interpretations documents. Such accuracy, of course, had been purposely striven for, by working very closely from transcripts of the first interviews, and endeavouring to use as much of the participant's own language as possible.

Some of the participants had emotional reactions to "reading about themselves" at such tender moments of their lives. For one person, reading the documents had released an upwelling of emotions and tears, and he "lost an entire Saturday" to this emotional outpouring in recognising how much he had been through. For another, reading about her life had been somewhat confronting, in terms of feeling exposed (but she wished to continue on with further identity changes). A couple of participants were pleased but unmoved by the documents, as there was nothing that was particularly new to them. For the majority of participants, the interpretations contained new thoughts, new angles, or a new sense of understanding how the many threads of their situation had come together. Several of the participants (including both Kasandra and Sarah who will be featured in the case studies presented later) commented that reading these documents had been like a form of therapy. (Note that all participants, upon entering the study, were supplied with a contact details of a number of psychologists, in case the interviews raised issues they wanted to follow up with counselling. Two told me they did enter counselling later, in order to continue exploring their experiences.)

My approach in regard to participants' corrections to the Interpretive Speculations had always been that if a participant disagreed with an interpretation that I had made, and yet on reflection I still felt it was valid and wished to make the point, then I would retain the point, giving the reasons why I believed it remained valid, but making sure to include the reasons the participant gave for their objection. However this occasion did not arise. There were a few instances whereby a participant challenged an assumption or interpretation of mine, but upon their explanation I was fully persuaded by them and happy to stand corrected.

## **Participants**

There were two main groups of participants in this study:

- interview or case-study participants (who completed both interviews and questionnaires) and
- questionnaire-only participants.

### **Interview Participants**

Interview participants were the potential “case-study” participants in this study. They were members of the public, 15 people in all (8 women and 7 men), who volunteered to tell their stories of moments of insight. From these original 15, three stories were selected for analysis as case studies, and one as a counter example.

All interview participants were of Anglo-Saxon origin, except for one of the men, who was Indonesian and for whom English was his second language.

Table 2 below shows the ages of interview participants at the time of their first interview (ranging from 31 to 72); as well as their ages at the time of their sudden self-change experiences (ranging from 27 to 59), and the number of years elapsed since that change (ranging from 1 to 31). The mean age of participants at the time of their first interview was 48, while the median age of this group was 44. The mean age at which they reported having had their first moment of insight experience was 38, while the median was 37. Overall, in this group, moment of insight experiences appeared predominantly when people were in their late twenties to early forties. The average length of time elapsed since each participant's first moment of insight was 10 years, while the median was 6 years.

Table 2

*Age of Interview Participants at First Interview; When Moments of Insight were Experienced; and Years Since Moment of Insight.*

Pseudonym	Gender	Age at first interview	Age at moment of insight	Years elapsed since moment of insight
Catherine	f	41	37; 39	4; 2
Emily	f	53	27	26
Jacinta	f	40	29	11
Kasandra	f	41	39	1
Anna	f	35	29; 30; 32	6; 5; 3
Louise	f	57	52	5
Sarah	f	35	28	7
Vanessa	f	50	39	11
Andrew	m	60	50	10
David	m	63	32	31
Ozmate	m	72	50	22
Pancho	m	60	58	2
Philip	m	31	29; 31	2; 1
Richard	m	44	40; 42	4; 2
Tristan	m	33	32	1

Note. Catherine, Anna, Philip and Richard told of more than one moment of insight experience.

Although only four of the original 15 interview participants were analysed in detail in the body of this thesis, the Summary Stories and Interpretive Speculations of all 15 interview participants are supplied in Appendices C and G respectively, and together with

the information supplied in Table 2 they represent a valuable resource of information as to what might be expected from a community volunteer sample.

### **Questionnaire-only Participants**

A total of 65 questionnaire-only participants were recruited from two sources.

1. Macquarie University first year psychology undergraduates were recruited in two separate semesters, 26 on the first occasion, and 23 on the second occasion. In both cases the students participated in the study as a means of earning course credits.
2. At the same time as the first recruitment of students, 16 members of the public were also recruited from a convenience sample of visitors to a Macquarie University Open Day (they appeared to be either parents of prospective students, or prospective mature-age students themselves). Originally there were 17 people recruited this way, but one of the men was later recruited to become an interview participant.

When initially recruiting from both students and the public for questionnaire-only participants, a preference was stated for volunteers to be over the age of 25. The intention of the preference was to ensure that a majority of participants would have had at least some years of experience as an adult (i.e. to have had a chance to develop an adult sense of self). This strategy worked almost too well, as 34 of the 42 first round participants were aged over 25. Their mean age was 36, and the median was 35. The range of ego levels for this group was found to be uniformly high, creating a ceiling effect, which limited scope for comparisons between ego levels.

As younger people as a group would be expected to have generally lower ego levels (Cohn, 1998), it was decided to recruit a second round of student participants, this time stating no age preference, so that the majority of younger students would be reflected in this second sample. As expected, of the extra 23 recruited, 17 were aged under 21.

The final combined sample of 65 questionnaires-only participants was comprised of 48 (74%) females and 17 (26%) males as shown in Table 3. The mean age of this combined group then became 30, and the median was 26. This mix of ages was more likely to result in a range of ego levels.

Table 3  
*Age and Sex Statistics of the 65 Questionnaire-only Participants*

Age range	Female <i>n</i> =48	Male <i>n</i> =17	Total <i>N</i> = 65
17-19	15	4	19
20-24	6	3	9
25-29	7	4	11
30-39	7	3	10
40-49	6	3	9
50-54	7	0	7

### **Comparability of the psychological-mindedness of the two participant groups**

*The interview participants* were members of the public who responded to a local newspaper article describing the study and calling for people to tell their stories of “moments of insight” or spontaneous “shifts in perspective”. The fact that these participants were willing (even keen) to take part in a university psychology study signals a certain level of comfort or confidence about making such contact, and being willing to offer up important personal information to the scrutiny of a researcher. People who are shy



or lacking confidence in their ability to articulate their stories would seem less likely to submit them for psychological scrutiny, or to offer themselves up as volunteers.

*The questionnaire-only participants* were made up of two further groups of people who would seem somewhat comparable to the interview participants in the sense that they too were volunteers who could be assumed to have at least some minimal level of comfort, confidence and interest in taking part in a psychological study – being either psychology undergraduate students themselves, or people who had visited the psychology department on the university's Open Day.

Thus both groups of volunteers – the interview and questionnaire only groups - were to varying extents self-selecting and open to psychological scrutiny.

## **Questionnaire measures**

### **The basic questionnaire set**

The basic form of the questionnaire set (Appendix F on the Compact Disk) tapped various personality measures, some of which were scaled measures, and some of which required brief written responses. With the exception of the WUSCT, all of those which required written responses were developed by the author. In order of appearance in the questionnaire, the scaled instruments were: Health, Wellbeing, Satisfaction with Parents, Spiritual Orientation, Personal Pressures, and Sense of Coherence. The items requiring brief written responses were: the Washington University Sentence Completion Test

(WUSCT) of ego development; Beliefs about Myself, the World and Others; and Three Memories. The set takes about two hours to complete.

### **Scaled measures**

As analysis of all the scaled measures (Health, Wellbeing, Satisfaction with Parents, Spiritual Orientation, Personal Pressures, and Sense of Coherence) was reduced in importance and relocated to Appendix B, the description of each of these scales is also provided in Appendix B.

### **Measures requiring brief written responses**

*The Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT)* for ego development (Hy & Loevinger, 1996) provides the main theoretical linch-pin for this study, and thus details of its conception and its construct validity have been discussed in detail in the introductory chapters. Additional detail of its history and development are provided in Appendix M. The 36 item version of the WUSCT Form 81 was the first instrument included in the Basic Questionnaire Set. The first 18 of the 36 items were used as a short form of the test for the “before” versus “after” study. Interrater reliability using the earlier versions of the WUSCT and manual were excellent, being .90 for both item ratings and the total protocols. Internal consistency was also good, achieving a coefficient alpha of .90 (Loevinger, 1998). When testing reliability for Form 81, Novy and Francis (1992) drew a sample of 265 adults from a wide social spectrum. Coefficient alpha was .90 for the 36 item version of the test, and .84 and .81 for the first and second halves of the test, respectively. Interrater agreement based on the item-sum scores of the 36-item test

was .94. Eight objective tests were also correlated with the 36-item version of the test, and with each half separately. Novy and Francis (1992) concluded that the corresponding correlations were so similar that each half could be considered equivalent to the other, and virtually equivalent to the 36-item version. However basic reliability theory tells us the 36 item test must always yield more accurate TPRs than the 18-item version (Loevinger, 1998).

In a further study by Novy (1993) Form 81 was scored by the ogive rules (based on cumulative distributions of item scores), and again produced an interrater agreement of .94. In addition to these findings, Novy (1992) also concluded that the men's and women's forms of Form 81 were comparable, and not biased with respect to gender. This outcome was expressly sought by the revisions in constructing Form 81 (Loevinger, 1985). Finally, in testing Form 81 for robustness under manipulation of instructions, Blumentritt, Novy, Gaa and Liberman (1996), readministered the test to students one week after initial testing. The control group, who received the standard instructions again, evidenced a slight but non-significant drop in scores overall, with a test-retest reliability of .72 for the item sum scores, and .79 for the ogive TPRs. The drop was attributable to the hazards of retesting in a short time without a plausible explanation. What had been lost were the "little extra" qualitative comments that respondents tacked on to their responses in the initial test (that raised the level of those responses).

The *Definitions* item was added to questionnaire-only participants' instruments to provide a range of definitions in relation to moments of insight. Similar definition questions had been asked of interview participants. A quarter page was provided for each of the four definitions: "How would you define a moment of insight?"; "What kind of

experience would you say is the opposite of a moment of insight?”, “Would you say a moment of insight differs from learning? (circle) Yes/No. Please explain.”; “What would you say is the common theme of your moment/s of insight? (if applicable).” Analysis of the first and main definition is included in the body of the thesis. However analysis of all four definitions was carried out, and theme elements identified are shown in Appendix H.

*Beliefs about Myself, the World and Others* was essentially another sentence completion task aiming to tap beliefs about these three core domains. All participants, including interview participants, completed this item as part of their questionnaires. Instructions were to complete the sentence stem “I believe that...” in response to: “beliefs you currently hold about yourself”, ... “the nature of the world, or life in general”, and “others”. A third of a page was provided for each response. This item was included to explore differences, if any, in beliefs about self, world and others according to ego levels and moment of insight status. Theme elements identified in the initial analysis of these results are shown in Appendix J.

The *Moments of Insight or Shifts in Perspective* item was added to questionnaire-only instruments to gather a range of brief written stories about moments of insight for comparison according to ego levels. It was also to provide a store of stories about moments of insight, for comparison with the longer case study examples. Participants were asked if they had ever had a moment of insight, and if so, how frequently. Responses to these questions were intended to supply information as to the incidence and frequency of moments of insight. The instructions to this item supplied participants with a definition of moment of insight which was couched in similar terms to that provided in the newspaper articles which had called for interview participants. A half page was provided for

participants to write their story of a moment of insight. They were asked to include their thoughts and feelings, and what effect the experience had on them. Analysis of these stories forms the basis of the theme analyses reported in the Results section.

The *Three Memories* item asked participants to write about a memory from their early childhood; as well as one from their adolescence; and one from their adult life. This was an exploratory item, the data of which was not analysed for this study, in recognition that the scope of the study was already so large as to be unwieldy and further qualitative analysis would have been prohibitive in terms of both time and space for comment. The memory data will be explored in future research projects, but for completeness, the responses are provided in Appendix L.

### **Size and scope of study reduced to retain Stage two focus**

As has been already indicated, in order to maintain a workable size and central focus for the study under the Stage two aims, many sections of the study findings had to be cut or “downgraded” to appear only in Appendices. Those parts were:

- *11 interview participant’s moment of insight stories.* When the aims of the study changed in Stage Two it was necessary to find only a few best exemplar stories for case study presentation, and so strict selection criteria had to be applied to the interview participants stories, to find those in which signs of an ego level shift might be most evident. Three stories were chosen for case studies, and one was chosen as a “counter” example for close analysis. Some brief mentions have been made of some of the

others, but in the main, the 11 remaining stories are presented only in Appendix C, where for completeness, all 15 stories are shown. (Note that there is no burden here to show evidence that *all* stories of moments of insight must show observable signs of ego development growth, as it is assumed only the more profound experiences would be linked observably to ego level change – the current aim is only to find *some* cases in which links seem apparent). Note also that the Interpretive Speculations on the 15 interview participants' stories (generated in Stage One, Phase 3 above), are supplied in Appendix G which can be found on the accompanying Compact Disk. The participants' feedback is noted in these documents in italics.

- *The “Before versus After” study.* As reservations were held in regard to the reliability of using retrospective WUSCTs, this study was removed to Appendix D, as already indicated.
- *Definitions items in questionnaire.* The definitions item included four definitions, one of which was the primary definition of a moment of insight, which was analysed in the main part of the study. A list of the most commonly endorsed theme elements for all four definitions is supplied in Appendix H. The Definitions item data (transcripts of participants' definitions) is in Appendix I.
- *Beliefs items in questionnaire.* The beliefs items were analysed in draft form, and summary tables of the most-commonly endorsed belief theme elements are supplied in Appendix J, and the data (transcripts of participants' beliefs) in regard to their beliefs about self, world, and others are in Appendix K.

- *The Three Memories item in questionnaire.* As explained above, these data are provided in Appendix L.
- *Secondary variables (all scaled items) in questionnaire.* There was insufficient room in the thesis for consideration of the relationships represented by the secondary variables. They are more suitable for a follow-up study. However, statistical analyses were performed to test relationships between these secondary variables and each of the main two variables: moment of insight status and ego levels. Brief outline results of these tests are presented in Appendix B.

## **Procedure**

### **Stage One: Interviews**

Interview participants were recruited on two separate occasions. First, an article was placed in the local paper (Appendix N), calling for women volunteers over the age of 30 to volunteer their stories of moments of insight. The appeal was initially limited to women in order to avoid possible gender difference complications. The newspaper article had used the phrase “moments of insight” as the study’s main emphasis but it also called for stories of less dramatic or everyday style “ah-ha’s and turning points”. At this point it had seemed prudent to keep the door open for a wide range of stories in case only a few would be offered.

Eight women and (to my surprise) one man responded to the article. The man wrote a letter asking me to hear his story – a spiritual experience - and begged that the study not be restricted to women. His appeal struck a chord with me, as I had already begun to wonder what kinds of stories I would get from men. I interviewed that man (David in Appendix C), and some months later, my curiosity and sense of balance won out, and I ran a similar article in the same local paper (Appendix O), this time calling for male volunteers. Although the phrase “moments of insight” was again mentioned, it was not quite so prominent in the second article, nor did the second article invite smaller instances of change experiences, as by then it was clear they would not be needed. The newspaper omitted that the preferred age was over 30, but the five men who volunteered were all over 30 anyway. Another man was recruited later from the Open Day questionnaire respondents’ pool. Finally, another man volunteered for the study after hearing this study’s primary supervisor, Dr. Doris McIlwain, speaking on national radio about a related topic: “mid-life crisis”. The latter two men were given the newspaper article calling for male volunteers upon their recruitment, so that they would begin the study with the same information as the other men. Thus the final contingent of interview participants became eight women and seven men.

In the first, discovery stage of the study, the 15 interview participants were interviewed in conversational style, semi-structured interviews which were designed to allow the person to tell their story with relatively little interference from the interviewer (myself). After the main story had been told, a number of standardised questions (Appendix E) were asked of all participants.



All but one of those participants returned for a second interview a year or two later to comment on, validate or challenge the points made in the Summary Story or Interpretive Speculations documents in respect to their story. Shortly before completion of this phase, the construct of ego development was “discovered” and the aims of the project were changed, and Stage Two described below was implemented.

## **Stage Two: Questionnaires**

### **Questionnaire sets administered to interview (case study) participants**

The basic questionnaire set described in the Measures section above was administered to interview participants on two separate occasions, with minor alterations on each occasion.

Questionnaire Set 1 (Appendix F), which was administered first, attempted to tap the participant’s current sense of self and world. It was mailed to interview participants about a year to 18 months after the first interview. In this set, an item was added at the end, asking participants to describe in a couple of sentences the particular moments of insight they had spoken of in our first interview. This item was added to check if the person had retained, over time, a strong memory of the moment of insight.

Questionnaire Set 2 (Appendix F), which was administered second, was the same questionnaire, to be answered from the participant’s retrospective point of view, “a year or two” before the moment of insight. It was split into two parts, 2a and 2b. Questionnaire

2a contained only the 18-item version of the WUSCT (for reasons explained below), and was administered at the end of the second interview. On its completion, 2b was given to participants to take home and complete in the following day or two and return by mail. All participants complied with this request.

There were two further changes in set 2b. The Three Memories item was omitted in the second set, as it would be redundant a second time. The Satisfaction with Parents item was also changed to ask only for their point of view in the year or two before their experience of change. The results of this are in the “before” versus “after” comparisons provided in Appendix D.

Questionnaire 2b, which participants took home to complete, contained reminder instructions asking participants to project themselves back in time to the year or two before the change experience, and to answer as they imagined they would have back then. The wording in all of the items in 2b had been changed to past tense, and included time-frame prompts in all statements in all scales. For example, in the Personal Pressures scale, the item “You felt deeply disappointed or let down about something”, was changed to read “*Back then*, you felt deeply disappointed or let down about something”.

### **Questionnaire set for questionnaire-only participants**

Questionnaire-only participants completed the Basic Questionnaire Set described above, but with the addition of the following two items described above: *Definitions* and *Moments of Insight or Shifts in Perspective*. The questionnaires were mailed out to participants for completion at home and return by mail.

## Analysis of Data

The primary thrust of this study is explorative. It is not seeking closure in respect to its research questions, but rather it is seeking to open up a new angle, to stimulate further inquiry into a particular combination of ideas that, with this project, have only just met. Thus the primary contribution of this thesis is envisaged as being the identification of potentially fruitful areas for future research, through the generation of analysis leading to more precise, astute and penetrating questions. The approach taken in analysing all the various forms of the data in the following chapters reflects this exploratory stance.

### The two main variables

There were two main variables of interest in this study: moment of insight status (explained in chapter 7) and ego level, the groupings in each of which were treated statistically as non-ordered, categorical data.

The three levels of moment of insight status were: *prototypical* (the person's story met prototypical criteria developed in this study); *non-prototypical* (the person's story did not meet the prototypical criteria); and *never had* (the person reported never having had a moment of insight). For the analyses of story themes, only the two groups who had told a story were analysed, and the "never had" group was excluded.

The three ego levels were groupings created in this study, the rationale for which is explained later. The groupings were: *high* (including ego levels E7 and E8); *medium* (level E6); and *low* (levels E3, E4, E5).

### **Rationale for treating the main variables as categorical data**

The decision to treat the ego level groupings as non-ordered, categorical data was taken after some consideration, as this data could have been considered ordinal, given the *low*, *medium* and *high* level groupings. Loevinger (1976) claimed that ego levels were ordinal in nature - but that was in the context of describing ego levels as part of a unified whole – the overall construct of ego development. More importantly, she claimed the construct of ego development has both polar and milestone aspects. The milestone aspects are part of its distinctive stage-by-stage development – each stage having qualitatively different combinations of characteristics to the one before. The characteristics of ‘conformity’ and ‘spontaneity’, for example, have curvilinear relationships with ego level. Loevinger’s advice to researchers was to select test methods which reflect and tap the salient aspects for the particular inquiry.

Since this project’s task is to evaluate a great number of small ‘meaning-bits’ (descriptive thematic elements of Moments of Insight stories) in terms of their relationships to the study’s two main variables, it would be expected that at least some of those elements would have non-linear relationships with ego levels (and possibly also with moment of insight status, which is an unknown variable). Thus the most appropriate and conservative statistical decision was to treat the ego level variable as categorical and non-ordinal. This was also the basis for choosing the Goodman-Kruskal tau effect size, described below, for indicating the relative strength of relationships, as it does not assume a linear relationship, but rather, its calculations are based on reduction of error.

## Four analytical sub-domains

There were four sub-domains of analysis in this project, each of which required somewhat different analytical approaches:

1. The relationship between the main variables, ego levels and moments of insight was tested with a chi-square test of independence, using the Monte Carlo computation of p values, as explained below. A chi-square test of independence was also performed to test the relationship between age and ego levels. As two tests were involved, the Bonferroni rule was applied to control Type I error and an overall alpha of .05 was applied, giving an alpha of .025 for each of the two tests.
2. Written responses to the *Definitions* questionnaire item and the half-page *Moments of Insight* stories were analysed for common thematic or descriptive elements. Each theme element identified was tested to see if it had differential relationships with the levels of each of the study's two main variables. The data in this case were qualitative, converted to quantitative.

In the first stage of the analysis, the overall content and themes were analysed by first jotting down all apparent themes and subject matter categories in order to compile a list of the most commonly used descriptive elements. If one participant's response contained several elements, each element was marked as having been mentioned. (In some cases, particularly those participants at *high* ego levels, participants would express the *same* element twice within their definition, by qualifying it two or more different ways. In that case the participant was recorded only once per element.)

Counts were made as to the number of times each element was endorsed, and the most commonly endorsed elements were reported, as well as any apparent relationships between each element and the two main variables. The statistical methods for comparing theme elements in terms of their relationships to ego levels and moment of insight status are described below.

3. Six of the questionnaire participants' stories and three case studies selected from the original 15 interviews were analysed to assess whether the lead up, consequences, and thematic elements in the moment of insight stories suggested that these experiences could have been part of a shift in ego development growth. The data here were purely qualitative.
4. Scaled instruments in questionnaires (which were of secondary interest) were tested for strength of relationship with each of the two main variables: moment of insight status and ego level. The data in this case were purely quantitative, and the results are supplied in Appendix B.

### **Statistical methods for analysing themes in qualitative questionnaire data**

In choosing statistical methods for the analysis of themes in the first analysis sub-domain listed above, one of the most important considerations was to find a statistical means suitable for evaluating a large number of thematic or descriptive element variables in relation to each of the two main variables. For example, in analysing the *Definitions* of a moment of insight, 37 theme elements were identified, and the strength of their relationships with both ego levels and moments of insight status needed to be tested.

Although chi-square significance tests were carried out on the theme elements as a point of interest, the need to control Type I error with so many theme elements to be tested (37) made significance testing in relation to themes unusable. Under the Bonferroni rule, with 37 elements identified, the significance level would have had to be adjusted to an unreasonably low level ( $.05/37$ ) to reflect the number of elements tested, and such a low significance level would then make Type II error unacceptably high. Therefore it was decided instead to use as a statistical guide, the comparison of magnitude of *effect sizes* for each theme element, in relation to the two main variables of interest. The effect size chosen in this case was the Goodman-Kruskal tau statistic, which is a measure of association, calculated on the marginal proportions in contingency tables. Values range from 0 to 1 inclusive.

The *Goodman-Kruskal* tau is a measure which “is the relative reduction in the error of predicting the B category of an individual resulting from knowledge of his or her A category” (Liebetrau, 1983, p. 26). (By A versus B categories here, Liebetrau is referring to rows versus column categories of a contingency table.) One can assign the values of one variable to be treated as an independent variable, to improve the predictability of the other, assigned to be the dependent variable. In other words, if two variables are associated, knowing what category they are in on one variable, will improve prediction of what category they are in on the other, above chance. That is, error will be reduced.

For the purpose of this study, the main variable (either moment of insight status, or ego level) was treated as the independent variable – that which was known – and each of the elements were treated as dependent variables – that which was being predicted, assisted by knowledge of the main variable values. An example interpretation from this study

would be “given that this person’s ego level is known to be in the *high* group – how likely is it that he/she may have defined a moment of insight using this particular theme element of definition (eg, see yourself differently)?” As the analysis will reveal later, a person in the *high* group would be more likely to mention that particular definition element, than those in the other two groups, as only people in the *high* group mentioned it. The numbers in each ego level group for that element would show this, and suggest statistically that in allocating a person (randomly chosen from the population) with a *high* ego level, error would be reduced by assigning that person to the condition in which that element was more likely to be mentioned (rather than not mentioned).

The main variables of interest (moment of insight status, and ego level) were most suited theoretically to being designated the independent variables, as they could reasonably be expected to be of more help in predicting a person’s behaviour (their probability of mentioning certain theme elements), than vice versa.

The Goodman-Kruskal tau effect sizes would serve to indicate the relative strength of relationships between each of the descriptive theme elements and each of the main variables, so that the theme elements could be rank ordered according to their relationships with ego level and moment of insight status. A nominal cut-off effect size of .040 was chosen to indicate which themes would be considered to have a relationship with the main variable or not. Any themes achieving an effect size of .040 or more would be discussed in the analysis. An effect size of .040 may be understood as indicating that 4% of the variance as to whether that theme was mentioned or not was due to its relationship with the main variable of interest: either ego levels or moment of insight status. However, there still remained the problem of how to interpret which of the three levels (where applicable) were



most responsible for creating the effect. In order to aid these interpretations, the *adjusted standardised residuals* were consulted.

In analysing variables where there is greater than 1 degree of freedom, (as in this study, where both main variables have three levels each) the adjusted standardised residuals can assist interpretations by indicating which cells in the contingency table showed the greatest departure from the model of independence. Unusually large residuals (by convention, residuals of 2 or greater) are useful indicators of departures from the model, even when the associated test statistics are not large (Haberman, 1974). The adjusted standardised residual is the observed minus the expected values in a cell, divided by an estimate of its standard error. Because the residuals are standardised, comparisons can be made proportionally with other cells, without distortion from different group numbers. The general rule adopted in the following analyses was that if the effect size was sufficiently large to indicate a potential relationship, the residuals were consulted to help with interpretation. In most cases at least one of the residuals would be above or just below 2.

Finally, in recognition of the familiarity of  $\chi^2$  significance testing, each of the Tables in this analysis will also indicate (as a point of interest only) those elements which were “significant” at an *unadjusted* alpha level of .05. However, it must be remembered that there is a high likelihood of Type I error with unadjusted alpha levels in this kind of analysis.

The method of analysis just described was designed specifically to meet the needs of the second analytical sub-domain listed above (for analysing descriptive theme

elements). Part of this method – the use of Goodman-Kruskal tau effect sizes and interpreting with the help of adjusted standardised residuals - was also adopted as the best means for analysing the fourth analytical sub-domain (secondary variables), due to the large number of tests that would need to be carried out.

### **Use of Monte Carlo test statistic for Chi-Square tests**

When chi-square tests of independence were performed in relation to the main test of the relationship between ego levels and moments of insight, and between the theme elements and the main variables as explained above, it was sometimes found that the distribution of data in each of the cells failed to conform to the rule of thumb that the expected frequency should not fall below five in any cell, or (when larger degrees of freedom are involved) that the expected frequency should not be below five in more than 20% of the cells. It was thus decided that those tests of independence should be calculated using the Monte Carlo test statistic, for the following reasons.

The default in SPSS is to calculate Chi-Square statistics in Crosstabs using the asymptotic method – which assumes, when estimating p values, that the data, given a sufficiently large sample size, conform to a particular distribution – which leads to the requirement that the data should be distributed such that the expected frequencies are not too small in any cell. If these asymptotic assumptions, however, cannot be met, their methods become less reliable, and Exact tests are preferable. The Exact method considers all of the possible outcomes which could occur in a given reference set, and sums the exact probability of those outcomes that are at least as extreme as the one observed. Exact tests

are recommended when the data set is “small, sparse, contains many ties, is unbalanced, or is poorly distributed” (Mehta & Nitin/SPSS Inc., 1995, p.1). However, exact tests have the disadvantage of being computationally intensive as well as time consuming, and furthermore, they often exceed computer memory limits. They are most suitable for sample sizes of less than 30. In this study, the sample sizes were more than twice that size. In a case such as this, the Monte Carlo sampling method provides a good alternative (Mehta & Nitin/SPSS Inc., 1995).

The Monte Carlo sampling method estimates the Exact p value by sampling from all possible outcomes a large number of times, so that it results in an accurate estimate of that which would have been obtained with the exhaustive method used to calculate the Exact p value. It is a steady, reliable procedure, that takes a predictable amount of computing time, and can make its estimation within a tight confidence interval, and without relying on the assumptions required by the asymptotic method. This study has accepted the SPSS default settings whereby the Monte Carlo calculations were based on 10,000 samples and a confidence interval of 99%.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Preliminary Results**

#### **Protocol for deciding ego levels**

The protocol used for determining ego levels via the WUSCT closely followed the instructions in the manual (Hy & Loevinger, 1996), whereby all the responses to each of the 36 items were first listed as a group by a typist, so that each completion could be rated blind to the context of the particular protocol it came from. Next the level of the total protocol for each participant was estimated by the principal rater (myself), and these estimated ratings were compared with the manual's two automatic algorithms – one based on the item-sum score, and the other, called the ogive score, based on the cumulative distribution of item ratings for each participant.

Rules for arriving at total protocol ratings (TPRs), for the 36-item SCT Form 81 used in this study had been established by Hy and Bobbitt (cited in Loevinger, 1998) in two studies, one of which used a pool of 1,028 participants from 13 subsamples, the second of which used 10 subsamples and 686 participants, comprising approximately equal numbers of male and female participants. It was found that when using the 36-item forms, ogive TPRs were superior to the item-sum TPRs, and to all other scoring algorithms (Loevinger, 1998).

The current study adopted these rules for determining the final TPRs when in doubt. The only exceptions were, as the manual suggested, instances where the rater's estimation of the total protocol level overrode the automatic rules because there were clear non-psychometric signs that the TPR should be rated lower (or higher) (Hy & Loevinger, 1996). In this study, the rater overruled the automatic rules on only two occasions, to lower the ego level by one level. The reason in both cases was the high level of repetition of thematic content and cliché answers in the protocols (low indicators according to the manual). In all other cases the rater's estimated TPRs agreed with either one or other of the automatic rules' TPRs.

At all times during rating both raters were blind to the identity of the participants.

### **Modification of WUSCT instrument**

Due to a minor typing error, all WUSCTs in this study had the gender swapped for item 22, "At times she/he worried about". In the manual, the gender of the pronoun in the stem is the same as for the participant, but in this study, participants were answering for the opposite gender. Thus item 22 on this study's *male* form read "At times *she* worried about" and on the *female* form read "At times *he* worried about". Given that a) the validity of the test does not hinge on the use of any particular stems (Loevinger, 1998); and b) that a small number of items can be replaced by the researchers' own items without any significant loss of psychometric properties (Loevinger, 1998); and c) that the manual has been designed specifically to score answers from men and women alike, with a mix of stems about both men and women, this small error is considered too fine a detail to have had any appreciable affect on the overall total protocol ratings (TPRs).

### **Inter-rater reliability**

Inter-rater reliability was calculated at Kappa ( $N=727$ ) = .83; or Pearson's  $r = .91$ . It has been experimentally established that suitable new raters for the WUSCT, who have been trained only by the manual's training program, can achieve a level of proficiency comparable to most experienced raters (Loevinger, 1998). In this study, both raters, myself and the study supervisor, Dr. Doris McIlwain, were new to rating. Each of us trained separately via the manual. We were well-acquainted with the theory behind the test before undertaking the manual's training program. As the chief investigator and primary rater, I rated all of the items and TPRs. Dr. McIlwain completed ratings on a random selection of 25% of the items – in keeping with generally accepted practice that inter-rater reliability calculated on 25% of the data will provide an accurate estimation of the level of agreement that could be expected on 100%. After ratings had been completed separately, all items on which there was initial disagreement were resolved by the two raters. In the clear majority of those cases, upon viewing both ratings, the correct one was immediately obvious to both raters. Thus there is strong confidence that the actual level of agreement was well above .83. The mean ratings were  $M=5.75$  for myself, and  $M=5.74$  for Dr. McIlwain.

### **Allocation of ego level groups**

All 80 participants (both the questionnaire and interview groups) were sorted into *low*, *medium* and *high* ego level groups, as shown in Table 4. The *low* ego level group was comprised of participants at the E3 Self-Protective, E4 Conformist and E5 Self-Aware

levels (1 x E3, 3 x E4 and 15 x E5, making a total of 19). The *medium* group contained only the E6 Conscientious participants (26 in all); and the *high* group combined the E7 Individualistic and E8 Autonomous responses (29 x E7 and 6 x E8, making a total of 35).

Table 4

*80 Participants by Recruitment Groups and Ego Level Groupings*

Groupings by Ego Level	Questionnaire Participants ( <i>n</i> =65)	Interview Participants ( <i>n</i> =15)	Total ( <i>N</i> =80)
<i>Low:</i>			
E3 Self-Protective	0	1	1
E4 Conformist	3	0	3
E5 Self-Aware	15	0	15
<b>Total low</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>19</b>
<i>Medium:</i>			
E6 Conscientious	26	0	26
<b>Total Medium</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>26</b>
<i>High:</i>			
E7 Individualistic	19	10	29
E8 Autonomous	2	4	6
<b>Total High</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>35</b>

The groupings of *low*, *medium* and *high* were divided to maximise the best split taking into account both the group numbers and theoretical differences in ego levels. The E4 and E5 levels combine well in terms of theory as they are both considered to be basically conformist in outlook. Just one E3 participant, at the lower, pre-conformist level, in which the primary outlook or preoccupation is “self-protective”, is combined with them. The *medium* group, containing all those at the E6 level, is a distinctively different ego-paradigm, as the conformism of the E4 and E5 levels has given way to self-evaluated standards and conscientiousness as the driving preoccupation. Finally, the combination of the two higher groups, E7 and E8, also makes sense theoretically, as there is again a distinctive change from conscientiousness to a more individualistic personal stance at the E7 level, which is maintained into the E8 level, as the sense of individualism is augmented and mellowed by a greater appreciation of self and others’ individual autonomy.

### Ego level groups and age

As predicted, there was a positive relationship found between age and ego levels when participants were split at the median age of 33 and tested,  $\chi^2 (2, N = 80) = 22.77, p < .025$ .

The average age of the *low* ego level group was 22; the average age of the *medium* ego level group was 31, and the average age of the *high* ego level group was 41. These figures would appear to make a very clear statement that ego level tends to rise with age – a finding that is compatible with the conception of ego level as a developmental construct, although more exaggerated than might be expected (Cohn, 1998). The implications of this will be considered in the Discussion.

### Ego level and age profiles of recruitment groups

The two recruitment groups (the 65 questionnaire-only participants, and the 15 interview participants) were compared in terms of mean and modal ego levels, and age, as Table 5 shows.

Table 5  
*Ego Levels and Age Profiles of Recruitment Groups in this Study*

	Ego Level		Age	
	<i>Mode</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Range</i>
Questionnaire participants (n=65)	E6	E6	30	17 – 54
Interview participants (n=15)	E7	E7	48	31 – 72



For the *questionnaire-only participants*, both the modal and mean ego level were at E6 Conscientious. The *interview participants* were one level higher, with a modal and mean ego level of E7 Individualistic.

The mean ego level of adult samples in a large-scale US study, combining data from more than 12,000 participants, has been found to fall between E5 Self-Aware and E6 Conscientious (Cohn, 1998). A national probability sample by Holt (1980) found that E5 Self-Aware was the modal level for young adults.

In considering the differences in modal ego levels between the two recruitment groups in this study (as with ego level groups above), it is necessary to keep in mind that age differences will be creating most of that effect. Table 5 shows that the mean age of the 65 questionnaire-only participants was 30, as compared with a mean age of 48 for the 15 interview participants.

As a check on the potentially confounding factor of age, 15 participants from the questionnaire-only group were matched as closely as possible for ages with the interview group. The mean age of the age-matched questionnaire group was 44. The modal ego level for this group was E7 (the same as for the interview group), while the mean ego level of the matched group was 6.5.

It was also found that the mean, median and modal ego levels of the youngest 15 people in the sample, aged 17 to 19, was E5 Self-Aware. These results are compatible with the findings of Cohn (1998) and Holt (1980), but appear to be edging slightly higher,

especially in the case of the interview participants. Possible reasons for this will be discussed later.

### **Allocation of moment of insight (MOI) status groups**

Of the total 65 questionnaire participants, 52 (80%) reported having had at least one moment of insight, and 13 (20%) reported that they had never had a moment of insight. Those participants who claimed they had experienced a moment of insight were further allocated into groups according to whether or not their story met the criteria for a *prototypical* moment of insight. (The development of criteria for determining *prototypical* moments of insight will be fully explained later). Thus the variable, “Moment of Insight Status” (MOI Status) was formed, comprising three levels shown in Table 6 below: those who reported a *prototypical* moment of insight (29 or 45%), those who reported a *non-prototypical* moment of insight (23 or 35%), and those who reported they had *never had* a moment of insight (13 or 20%).

**Table 6**

*Moment of Insight Status of the 65 Questionnaire Participants*

MOI Status	N=65
Prototypical	29 (45%)
Non-prototypical	23 (35%)
Never had a moment of insight	13 (20%)

### **MOI status and age**

As the mean age of the 65 questionnaire-only participants was 30 and the median was 26, it could be expected that the ages of those reporting they had never had a moment

of insight might also be split above and below the mid twenties. However, 76% (10) of the 13 participants who reported they had *never had* a moment of insight were 25 years or younger, indicating an over-representation of younger people who reported never having had a moment of insight, or conversely, an over-representation of adults over 25 who have had them. This suggests that moments of insight, or sudden self-change, may be more common in adulthood, after the mid-twenties. There is also a simpler observation: that older people have simply had the opportunity of ‘more time’ in which to experience a moment of insight. As this study did not test people under the age of 17, the question as to whether younger people experience moments of insight will remain unanswered.

### **Incidence and frequency of moments of insight**

The 15 interview participants could not be included in estimations of incidence and frequency, as they had volunteered for the study because they had particular stories of moment/s of insight to tell. The estimation based on the 65 questionnaire participants may also inflate the incidence to some small degree, because the notices for recruitment said the study was about “moments of insight”. Some participants who had experienced a moment of insight may have felt drawn to participate in the study, while those who had not experienced one might have decided not to participate, because of their lack relevant experience or interest. (It needs to be kept in mind also that the questionnaire-only sample does not claim to be representative of the community, but rather only of university students and to some further extent, visitors to university on open day. Generalisations as to incidence and frequency become unreliable beyond those groups.)

The questionnaire item *Moments of Insight or Shifts in Perspective* asked questionnaire-only participants:

- If they had ever had a moment of insight experience, and if so, to estimate
- how many times, “roughly”, and
- how frequently, “roughly”.

The first question was asked in order to gauge *incidence* in the sample, and the following two questions canvassed the question of *frequency* of the phenomenon. The word “roughly” was used in order to encourage participants to estimate if unsure.

### **Incidence of reporting moments of insight**

As Table 6 above indicates, 80% of the 65 participants reported having had a moment of insight, however only 29 (45%) of the sample stories supplied were assessed as being *prototypical* moments of insight.

### **Frequency of moments of insight reported**

As mentioned above, when participants were asked how many times and how frequently they had experienced a moment of insight, the word “roughly” had been added to embolden participants to make an estimate, as it was envisaged these questions might be difficult to answer with any great accuracy.

The wording, however, possibly gave them too much license, as the range of answers was extremely variable (which nonetheless is information in its own right). A first group of answers covered a range that was approximately what had been expected, such as, “one major one”, “2 or 3, once a decade”, “every couple of years”, “once a year”, “3-4 times a year”, “every few months”, “twice a month”, “almost on a daily basis”; but there was a second group of answers which were much more vague, such as “too many to count, it’s sporadic”, “a thousand, all the time”, “a few, every few years”, “unsure”, “don’t really know”, or “all the time”.

When the responses above were sorted to include only to those people who had reported *prototypical* moments of insight, it became clear that this group accounted for almost all the responses from the first, more expected group of answers, while the more vague answers were given mainly by people from the *non-prototypical* group.

Although the range of answers made groupings according to “frequency” a difficult task, three “frequency” groups were eventually decided upon, for the reasons given below: those who reported they had *never had* a moment of insight; those who reported *1 or 2*; and those who reported *3 or more*, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7

*Frequency of Moments of Insight for the 65 Questionnaire Participants*

	N=65	%
Never had a moment of insight	13	20
1 or 2 moments of insight	13	20
3 or more moment of insight	39	60

The theoretical rationale that led to these three frequency groupings was as follows. In the absence of guidance from previous research into this topic, it was considered

hypothetically possible that it may take only one “effective” moment of insight to move a person up an ego level. As adults in the United States have been found to be at a modal level of E5 Self-Aware (Loevinger 1976), a working hypothesis was that adults in Australia may also have a modal level of E5. If so, with just one “effective” moment of insight, they might move to the E6 level (the *medium* group in this study). A second or subsequent “effective” moment of insight could possibly (although not necessarily) lift them further, to the E7 level (the *high* group in this study). Hypothetically, then, by the time a person had experienced only two or three moments of insight, they could have progressed to the *high* ego level, and any further moments of insight would not make any further difference to their ego level rating. (Some of the interview participants had mentioned that the first one or two moments of insight were highly significant ones, but then several smaller ones followed.) Given these considerations and the variability of the responses in the data, the frequency groupings in Table 7 seemed the most practical and theoretically justifiable allocations.

The frequency by MOI status is shown in Table 8. Due to the variability of responses in regard to frequency, these data are presented at a descriptive level only.

There appeared to be little difference between those who told *prototypical* stories of moments of insight, and those who told *non-prototypical* stories of moment of insight, in regard to the frequency with which they reported having such experiences.

**Table 8**  
*Frequency of Moments of Insight, by MOI Status, for the 52 Questionnaire Participants who Reported Moments of Insight*

Frequency of MOI	MOI Status			Total <i>N=65</i>
	<i>Never had n=13</i>	<i>Non-prototypical n=23</i>	<i>Prototypical n=29</i>	
None	13	0	0	13
1 or 2:	0	7	6	13
3 or more:	0	16	23	39

Table 9 shows the break-down of frequency groupings in regard to ego level. The distribution according to the ego level groups appeared to be proportionally similar for those who reported 1 or 2 experiences, and those who reported 3 or more. Those who reported none were of course the same group as those in the MOI status “never had” group, above.

**Table 9**  
*Frequency of Moments of Insight by Ego Levels, reported by 65 Questionnaire Participants.*

Frequency of MOI	Ego Levels			Total <i>N=65</i>
	<i>Low n=18</i>	<i>Medium n=26</i>	<i>High n=21</i>	
<i>None</i>	7	5	1	13
<i>1 or 2</i>	3	5	5	13
<i>3 or more:</i>	8	16	15	39

## **Relationship between MOI Status and ego levels**

In accordance with the study’s research question that moments of insight could be one means by which people might make the transition from one ego level to the next, it was hypothesised that:

*Hypothesis 1: The higher the ego level, the greater the incidence of reporting prototypical moments of insight.*

**Summary Findings:**

Those at *high* ego levels were more likely to tell *prototypical* stories of moments of insight.

Those at *low* ego levels were more likely to report they had *never had* a moment of insight.

As explained in the Analysis of Data section of the Method, the Monte Carlo test statistic was used to assess significance of the chi-square test of independence. That test found there was a significant relationship between moment of insight status (MOI status) and ego levels, whereby the higher the ego level, the more likely it was that the person's story would be *prototypical*:  $\chi^2 (4, N = 65) = 12.50, p < .025$ . The Monte Carlo p value was  $p = .011$ , with a 99% Confidence Interval range of  $p = .009$  to  $p = .014$ .

The adjusted standardised residuals (see explanation of their use in the Analysis of Data section of Method) were consulted to help with interpreting the results. The residuals showed in Table 10 that in respect to the *prototypical* moment of insight group, a large proportion – about half – fell within the *high* ego level group (52% or 15, being 3 standard deviations more than expected), and further, that only a small proportion fell within the *low* ego group (14% or 4, being 2.2 standard deviations less than expected). In other words, 52% of the *high* group, 35% of the *medium* group, and 14% of the *low* group told *prototypical* stories of moments of insight.



**Table 10***Relationship between MOI Status and Ego Levels in 65 Questionnaire Participants*

MOI Status	Ego Levels			Total
	<i>Low</i> <i>n=18</i>	<i>Medium</i> <i>n=26</i>	<i>High</i> <i>n=21</i>	
<i>Prototypical:</i>				<i>N=65</i> <i>29</i>
Count	4	10	15	
% Row	(14%)	(35%)	(52%)	
Adj. St. Resid.	<b>-2.2</b>	-.8	<b>3.0</b>	
<i>Non-prototypical:</i>				<i>23</i>
Count	7	11	5	
% Row	(30%)	(48%)	(22%)	
Adj. St. Resid.	.4	1.0	-1.3	
<i>Never had:</i>				<i>13</i>
Count	7	5	1	
% Row	(54%)	(39%)	(8%)	
Adj. St. Resid	<b>2.4</b>	-.1	<b>-2.1</b>	

Conversely, with respect to those who had *never had* a moment of insight, a large proportion – again about half - fell within the *low* ego level group (54% or 7, being 2.4 standard deviations above expected) while a small proportion fell within the *high* ego level group (8% or 1, being 2.1 standard deviations below expected). Thus, 54% of the *low* group reported *never having had* a moment of insight, as compared with 39% of the *medium* group, and only 8% of the *high* ego level group.

Finally, it was noted that about half of the *non-prototypical* moment of insight group (48%) was comprised of those from the *medium* ego level group.

As a check, when treated as ordinals, the three MOI Status groups (*never had*, *non-prototypical* and *prototypical*) and the three ego level groups (*low*, *medium*, *high*), arranged in that order, were significantly correlated:  $r=.42$ ,  $p=.000$ .

## Creating Criteria for Prototypical Moments of Insight

The term, “moments of insight” is in common usage but nonetheless may mean different things to different people. Given this, it seemed possible that the stories of moments of insight reported by the study participants may fall along a continuum of being closer to, or further from, the phenomenon this project sought to study. In order to create criteria with which to identify *prototypical* moments of insight, the participants’ definitions of a “moment of insight” were analysed to:

- a) check whether consensus suggested that “moments of insight” was an appropriate phrase to describe the “sudden change” phenomenon of interest to this study, and similarly,
- b) check whether there was an acceptable consensus among the participants and myself as to what the term “moments of insight” meant, and if so,
- c) establish data-derived theoretical criteria for selecting only “good” examples of “moments of insight” – *prototypical* examples – for close analysis.

All 80 participants taking part in this study supplied definitions of moments of insight. The 65 questionnaire participants supplied them in Definitions item of their questionnaires, and the 15 interview participants supplied them verbally in their interviews. (They were asked to define a moment of insight as a general concept, before telling their story of a moment of insight.)

The rationale for establishing criteria for identifying *prototypical* moments of insight was that the criteria could be applied to allocate participants into three groupings for analysis on the basis of “Moment of Insight status”, as has already been mentioned. The three groups were: 1) those who supplied *prototypical* examples of stories of moments of insight; 2) those who supplied *non-prototypical* examples, and 3) those who reported they had *never had* a moment of insight.

Identifying participants who had reported *prototypical* moments of insight would be useful in order to pay heed to the voice of experience. It would be useful to be able to confine some of the analysis in the study to this group only (representing the “best” examples), and to compare responses from these participants with those who had reported a moment of insight that was *non-prototypical*. Appendix I provides the definitions supplied by the 65 questionnaire participants (the definitions supplied by interview participants are in their interview transcripts).

The method of analysing the theme elements in the definitions has been described in the Analysis of Data section in the Method.

### **Analysis of themes in definitions of moments of insight**

It is possible that when questionnaire participants were formulating their definitions, some of them could have looked ahead in the questionnaire and been influenced by a partial definition which I had supplied as part of an instruction on a later item. My initial instructions had sought to avoid this problem by asking participants to complete the questionnaires in the order presented. However if participants had looked

ahead and found my definition, this would not be considered a serious problem, as my partial definition was necessary as an ‘orienting concept’ to elicit the telling of appropriate stories. (The possible effects of orienting concepts which had been used to draw participants to the study will be discussed in more detail below.) Mitigating these concerns, however, was the fact that it was apparent from the individualised range of definitions supplied, that most people had supplied their own definition. Furthermore, many themes which were mentioned had not been part of my orienting definitions.

As Table 11 shows, the four most commonly endorsed elements by participants in defining moments of insight, were that they were “sudden” experiences in which a person might “see things more clearly”, or “look at life/things differently”, or in some other way, “gain understanding”.

Many other terms were used with similar implied meanings, such as “realisation”, “awakening”, “revelation”, “makes sense”, “things coming together”, “falling into place”, and “seeing a connection”. The notion of “suddenness” was indicated directly, and indirectly with words such as “brief moment”, “instantaneous”, and “a point in time”, and was also implied with phrases such as “your brain clicks”, the “penny drops”, “you get it”.

There were also various mentions of certain previous states, when one had “viewed things differently”, been “struggling with a concept beforehand”, when something had “previously not been obvious”, or that moments of insight followed “distressing, confusing” times. Mentions were also made of finding the “right path”, a sense of having “no doubt”, that things were “meant to be”, and of knowing “exactly what to do”.

Table 11  
*Themes in Definitions of “Moments of Insight”, Endorsed by 10% or More of 80 Participants.*

Element of definition	% of participants who mentioned it
1. sudden, happens in a brief moment in time	66%
2. things became clear/clarity of thought	29%
3. see, look at life/things differently	25%
4. gain understanding (in general)	24%
5. changes perspective	18%
6. realise, realisation	15%
7. awakening, revelation	15%
8. understand why events happen / how things work	14%
9. struggling with a concept beforehand	11%
10. previously distressing, confusing	10%
11. answer, solution to a problem	10%

Note: The top 4 unshaded items were combined into the consensus definition.

Note: One cannot add the percentages for two similar concepts together without risking inflating the numbers. One person may have been counted in mentioning more than one element, eg. a person who responded “when you are struggling with some problem that is confusing or upsetting”, would have been counted in both elements 9 and 10.

In considering the most commonly endorsed items in Table 11, (those endorsed by 10% or more of participants) it can be seen that all of the items, with the exception of items 9 and 10, can be conceptually subsumed by the top four items. Item 5 is conceptually similar to item 3; items 6 and 7 (and perhaps more arguably, item 11) seem to be covered jointly by items 2, 3 and 4. Item 8 can be subsumed by item 4. Items 9 and 10 suggest a new point - that moments of insight may often be preceded by some distress, confusion, or a struggle with a concept beforehand. However, as these items were endorsed by only 10-11% of participants, it seemed prudent to leave them out of the *prototypical* definition, and thus maintain the cut-off for definitional elements at the stronger minimum endorsement of 24%.

Further distilling the ideas contained in the top four items (suddenness, clarity, seeing things differently, and understanding,), it seemed self-evident that there were two

main ideas being expressed: a) the idea of suddenness; and b) the idea of seeing things differently, more clearly or through better understanding. As these three items (2, 3 and 4) were conceptually similar and overlapping, it appeared they would best operate as three alternatives expressing one main part of the definition.

In the end, the consensus definition settled upon for a *prototypical* moment of insight was:

A moment of insight is an experience which:

- a) happens *suddenly*, in a *brief, definable moment in time*, in which we
- b) *gain clarity, understanding, or see things differently*.

Let us now look at how this definition aligns with my own definition at the beginning of the research, and the potential priming of definitions that may have taken place in order to recruit participants and elicit appropriate stories.

## **Orienting concepts in recruiting and instructing participants**

The questionnaire participants were recruited with notices which described the study as being about “*moments of insight and sudden shifts in perspective*”. The consent form said “you are invited to participate in a study of *moments of insight, or in other words, spontaneous shifts in perspective*.” The consent form for both questionnaire and interview participants also said that the purpose of the study was “to better understand the *nature of moments of insight, and the meanings they have for a person’s sense of themselves, their relationships, and their life in general*”.

In recruiting the interview participants through newspaper articles (Appendices N and O), the defining words in the first article (inviting women participants to apply) were “*a spontaneous experience when everything shifts... it changes the way you think about yourself*”. The second article, published in the same newspaper months later (asking for men to participate) used the following defining words, “*spontaneous shifts in perspective ... in the way they view themselves or life in general*”. Both articles included references to the term, “moments of insight” as general terms for these shifts in perspective.

Finally, orienting wording used in one questionnaire item which participants may possibly have looked ahead to read - was: “Have you ever had a *moment of insight, or a fairly spontaneous shift in perspective where you suddenly saw yourself or your world in a different light?*”

### **Comparing orienting concepts and participants’ consensus definition**

Were the participants’ definitions primed by my orienting concepts? The first, most obvious meaning implied by myself in recruiting and instructing participants was the notion that “moments of insight” would entail a “shift in perspective”. This notion finds agreement with the participants’ definition, being covered in part b) “seeing things differently”. The phrase “moment of insight” itself implies seeing things at least somewhat differently, and thus agreement between myself and participants could be expected.

The second most obvious notion of “suddenness”, or as I expressed it, “spontaneity”, was necessary to convey to participants, in order to ensure they would supply stories of

sudden rather than gradual change. The word “moment” implies “suddenness” anyway, and again, agreement could be expected.

These two concepts agreed upon so far (seeing things differently, and suddenness) were implied by my orienting concepts and may have influenced participants’ definitions, but they are also intuitively obvious.

The other two definitional elements in part b) of the participants’ consensus definition (“gain clarity” and “understanding”) were directly attributable to participants’ constructions, as they had not been mentioned in any of my orienting concepts. Previous research suggests they are, however, entirely appropriate (Baumeister, 1994; James, 1902; Miller & C’deBaca, 1994).

I was therefore able to accept without further alteration, the participants’ consensus definition as my criteria for selecting *prototypical* moments of insight stories from those offered by questionnaire participants. When it came to selecting *prototypical* stories for case study analysis (from the stories supplied by interview participants) some further criteria were added, as will be explained when the case studies are presented.



## Chapter 8

### Stages 1-2: Analysis of Themes in Stories of Moments of Insight

The aim of this analysis was to find the most common story themes or elements in stories of moments of insight. Initially the analysis began using only the stories supplied by the 65 questionnaire participants, but later the 15 interview participants' data were added to it. The Moments of Insight questionnaire item asked participants to write a half-page account of an example of a moment of insight from their own experience.

The instructions in the questionnaire contained the following guide to participants as to what kind of experience was sought:

“[Have you ever had] a fairly spontaneous shift in perspective where you suddenly saw yourself or your world in a different light. It might have been in relation to yourself, your work, a relationship, an idea, or a way to proceed with something? It might have happened recently or many years ago.”

Participants' stories were read through many times initially and various story elements or themes were generated from them, following the analysis strategy explained in the Method section (point 2, p. 145). After this initial round of analysis was completed, the 15 interview participants' stories, verbally told in their interviews, were then consulted in order to see if they appeared to contain sufficient similarities to justify adding counts of their themes elements to those themes already identified in respect to the questionnaire

stories. There were indeed sufficient similarities at that level of analysis, and so the data from the two groups' stories were combined.

Before final tabulations of story themes could proceed, however, it was first necessary to exclude from the total of 80 participants, those who had reported they had *never had* a moment of insight (being 13 participants), as they had not told a story and thus no themes could be recorded from that group. Thus only the 67 "storytellers" were included in the story themes analysis.

## **Aims of Story Themes Analysis**

The main aims of collecting these story themes were:

1. It would provide a wealth of information in its own right, for exploring the phenomenon of moments of insight and recognising common themes.
2. It would maximise statistical power for comparisons between groups (those who told *prototypical* versus *non-prototypical* stories), and ego level groups.
3. It would provide a databank of profiles of stories of moments of insight which could assist in interpreting case-study stories.

## Stages of Story Themes Analysis

This analysis was conducted in four stages:

1. First, story elements were identified and the most commonly endorsed themes were rank ordered in order to get a picture of the consensus view of common themes in moment of insight experiences.
2. Second, the theme elements were analysed to establish those more favoured by participants in the *prototypical* versus *non-prototypical* groups. The *prototypical* groups' most favoured themes could be considered the "voice of experience".
3. Third, the theme elements were analysed to establish those favoured differentially by the *high*, *medium* and *low* ego level groups. This could aid understanding as to the potential links between the constructs and if so, add information to the construct of ego development.
4. Fourth, the moment of insight themes and selected stories were examined in order to explore whether or not a change in ego level seemed apparent from the story, and if so, what kind of role the moments of insight appeared to play in that apparent change. For this analysis, the storyteller's specific ego level (eg. E4 or E7) was the reference, not their grouping in this study (*high*, *medium* or *low*). The analysis focussed on the description of the lead up to the moment of insight experience; the nature of the experience itself; and the consequences that the storyteller indicated flowed from it. Speculation centred on whether the story suggested a shift from the participant's

former ego level to the one they were currently assessed at. A similar approach, but in more depth, will be taken with the case-studies in chapters 12-14.

Before moving on to Stage One, it may be helpful at this point to give a preview of two of the *prototypical* examples of moments of insight gathered from the questionnaire participants.

### **Two sample prototypical stories of moments of insight**

*Example 1.* When I was 22 and had just returned from 3 years travelling and working overseas I was in two minds as to what to do with myself. On returning home I decided to shower to clear the travel cobwebs. My reflection in the full length mirror stopped me dead. An insight and shift in perspective, for want of better words, occurred. Until that moment my life had been lived by two me's. One rich but sometimes deluding life lived inside my imagination, and the social me whom I perceived to be a separate individual. Heads and tails were finally on the same coin. From that day on I have consciously tried to integrate these two people, with some success and a much deeper pleasure in life.

*Example 2.* I came to the conclusion that I do not like my job about 15 months ago. Up until then I had been endeavouring to educate myself by attending night school and aspiring to study psychology, so "I was moving on" but I can recall a moment when I discovered that I really don't give a "rat's arse" about my job. It was doing one of the many things that I have to do. I have quite a lot of responsibility in my job and many of the things I do are quite mundane but nevertheless have to be done. I was reaching out for something, and as I extended my hand out I had a moment that can be "likened to turning on a light in a dark room", the impact of it made me stop what I was doing and realise that I just don't want to do this. That feeling has remained with me since and I often have to

force myself to do the mundane things at work. It was at that moment I think when I realised that “yes” I am going to be a psychologist, as opposed to wanting to study psychology at university.

## Stage 1: Analysis of MOI story themes by Consensus

The first stage of the story analysis was to read through the stories many times over, and select the potential theme elements as described in the Analysis of Data in the Method. The main themes and content ideas that emerged while reading were jotted down to form a list of story themes. If one storyteller’s story contained several themes, each element was marked as having been mentioned. Table 12 shows the top 11 most-endorsed story themes, each of which was indicated by more than 50% of storytellers.

**Table 12**

*Moment of Insight Story Themes, endorsed by 50% or more of the 67 Storytellers.*

Story Element	%
Seeing clearer a new angle or "truth"	87
Insight prompted by something/someone	75
Insight was adaptive	72
More positive outlook.	69
Made me stronger, more able to cope	64
Became more individuated	64
A sudden realisation, "definable moment" of insight	61
Insight about self	60
Feel more comfortable with, accepting of, peaceful about life	52
Increased sense of agency	51
Instant change to self or self-beliefs	51

Note. Although all themes required judgement by the researcher for selection, the shading indicates that the element was imposed for theoretical reasons rather than as a direct response to the data.

Let us take a little narrative licence to put together a profile which combines those top 11 themes, in order to gain a clearer picture of what they appear to suggest:

### **Consensus profile of moment of insight themes**

Moments of insight are usually prompted by something or someone in a person's external world. They happen suddenly, in a definable moment, rather than slowly or gradually, and they often bring about an instant change to one's self-beliefs. Usually they are a clarifying experience, a time when a person senses or sees a new angle or "truth", most often about him/herself. The person usually regards the experience as having been generally positive (and it is manifestly clear from their description that the insight was an apparently adaptive experience – rather than an apparently neutral or maladaptive one). Often the outcome is that the person becomes more positive in his/her view of self, others, or life, and feels generally stronger or more able to cope. The person may also feel more comfortable with, accepting of, or peaceful about life. Most stories of moments of insight are those in which the person appears to have increased in their sense of agency, and undergone some kind of process of individuation.

A full list of the consensus usage of story theme elements is presented in Appendix

P. Now we move on to compare themes according to storyteller group status.

## Stage 2: Analysis of story themes by MOI storyteller status

The exclusion of the *never had* group from this “storytellers” analysis, meant that the MOI status variable was reduced to only two levels: those who reported *prototypical* moments of insight (36); and those who reported *non-prototypical* moments of insight (31), making a total of 67 storytellers, as shown in Table 13. In order to distinguish between the 3-level variable of MOI Status, and the abbreviated 2-level version for this analysis, the latter will be referred to as the MOI Storyteller Status.

Table 13

“MOI Storyteller Status” Groups in Story Themes Analyses (N=67)

MOI Storyteller Status	Total
Prototypical group	36
Non-prototypical group	31
“Never had” group excluded	13
Total MOI storytellers	67

The statistical approach to comparing storyteller groups (*prototypical* versus *non-prototypical*), is once again as described in the Analysis of Data section in the Method. However, because there are only two groups involved in storyteller status, there will be no need to consult the adjusted standardised residuals for interpretation. The Goodman Kruskal tau effect sizes will be used to rank order the theme elements in order of the magnitude of the relationships between theme elements and storyteller status. Goodman-Kruskal tau effect sizes equal to or greater than .040 will be considered indicative of a relationship between MOI Storyteller Status and the theme element. The nominal cut-off effect size of .040 may be understood as indicating that 4% of the variance as to whether

that theme was mentioned was due to its relationship with MOI Storyteller Status – that is, whether it was differentially indicated by the *prototypical* versus *non-prototypical* groups.

### **How the “analysis of themes” information will be presented**

Upon inspection of the full list of themes, it was apparent that they tended to fall into four broad organising categories:

1. *Context*: the lead up to or situation at the time of the moment of insight.
2. *Nature*: the type of experience, its phenomenological aspects.
3. *Content*: the personal meanings in the insight – what it was “about”.
4. *Outcome*: the flow on or consequences of the moment of insight.

In order to maintain consistency across the various stages of analysis, the results of each analysis will be reported in the order of these categories (and their sub-categories). Within the analysis Tables following, the story themes will be rank ordered within sub-categories according to the strength of the effect size.

Further, as each individual story theme is listed for discussion, a percentage figure will be provided in parentheses next to it to indicate the percentage of the total 67 storytellers whose stories used or indicated that particular story theme.



## Category 1: Context

The context or setting prevailing at the time of the insight was important information in gaining a sense of what was happening, both internally and externally for the person, at the time the moment of insight came upon them. The sub-categories within the context category are: *internal versus external prompts; mood beforehand; disruptive circumstances*.

### Internal versus external prompts

The attribution of *internal* versus *external* prompts or triggers for one's moment of insight was theoretically important, as ego development theory suggests that people at *high* ego levels are more self-directed and psychologically minded than those at lower stages. Making this discrimination was a way of testing that characteristic – for both MOI Storyteller Status and ego level groups.

The task of making these judgements - as to whether the story as told implied the storyteller was attributing the *main* prompt, or trigger for the insight to *internal* versus *external* forces - was a highly subjective judgement on the part of the researcher, more than most other judgements about themes. In making these judgements, the strategy was to extrapolate from the way the story was told, what the experiencer might have nominated as being the main prompt or trigger for the insight. The individual theme elements listed in Table 14 are discussed below.

*Internal prompts attributed as main triggers or change agents (42%)*

Table 14 shows a strong relationship, indicated by the effect size, between *internal prompts attributed as main triggers or change agents* and MOI Storyteller Status, whereby the *prototypical* group appeared to believe their moment of insight was prompted internally, more so than did the *non-prototypical* group.

Table 14

*Themes Mentioned in Category 1: “Context: Internal versus External Prompts”, by Strength of Relationship with MOI Storyteller Status. N=67*

Story themes, rank ordered by effect size	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>	MOI Storyteller Status	
		<i>Prototypical</i> <i>n=36</i>	<i>Non-prototypical</i> <i>n=31</i>
<i>Internal Prompts:</i>			
Internal processes attributed as main trigger/change agent *	.233	23	5
<i>External Prompts:</i>			
Education/suggestion, eg book/therapy/advice triggers	.010	10	6
Others' views of me triggered my new perception of me	.008	7	4
Others' perceptions of others /world triggered mine (to copy)	.006	8	5
Insight prompted by something/someone	.006	28	22
Reaction to others' positive behaviour	.003	6	4
Reaction to others' negative behaviour	.002	9	9

Note: Shading in grey indicates effect size < .040, and no apparent relationship with MOI Status.

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes calculated by Goodman Kruskal tau (described in Method) are rank ordered.

\*  $p < .05$  in  $\chi^2$  test using unadjusted  $\alpha$  of .05 per element (see method text.)

None of the other prompts in this sub-category, all of which were external prompts had any apparent relationship with MOI Storyteller Status. Rank ordered by their degree of endorsement by the entire 67 storytellers, they are:

- *education/suggestion, eg book/therapy/advice triggers (24%)*
- *others' views of me triggered my new perception of me (16%)*
- *others' perceptions of others /world triggered mine (to copy) (19%)*
- *insight prompted by something/someone (75%)*
- *reaction to others' positive behaviour (15%)*
- *reaction to others' negative behaviour (27%)*

### Mood beforehand

In terms of mood before the reported moment of insight, about a third of people (34%) indicated they were unhappy or dissatisfied in some way, before the moment of insight. However, as Table 15 shows, there was no apparent relationship between the moods participants indicated beforehand and MOI Storyteller Status:

- *neutral beforehand (25%)*
- *unhappy/dissatisfied (34%)*
- *happy beforehand (18%).*

Table 15  
Themes Mentioned in Category 1: “Context: Mood Beforehand” by  
Strength of Relationship with MOI Storyteller Status. *N*=67

Definition elements or themes, rank ordered by effect size	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>	MOI Storyteller Status	
		<i>Prototypical</i> <i>n</i> =36	<i>Non-prototypical</i> <i>n</i> =31
Neutral beforehand	.016	11	6
Unhappy/dissatisfied beforehand	.011	14	9
Happy beforehand	.002	7	5

Note: Shading in grey indicates effect size < .040, and no apparent relationship with MOI Status.

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes calculated by Goodman Kruskal tau (described in method) are rank ordered.

### Disruptive circumstances

It was apparent that many moments of insight had come about in the context of some kind of disruptive circumstance, which might well have shaken the person's usual cognitive patterns and assumptions. However, all of the disruptive circumstances appeared to apply fairly equally to both the *prototypical* and *non-prototypical* stories, as there was no apparent relationship between any of these themes and MOI Storyteller Status:

- *dissatisfaction with job/career (19%)*
- *death and dying (12%).*
- *traumatic life event/s (18%)*
- *turbulence in life (37%)*
- *travelling or relocating (27%)*

The circumstances which were gathered together under the heading of *traumatic life events* were: car accidents, abandonment after pregnancy, coping with cancer, facing death, and re-surfacing memories referred to as “traumatic”.

Table 16  
Themes Mentioned in Category 1: “Context: Disruptive Circumstances”, by Strength of Relationship with MOI Status. N=67

Definition elements or themes, rank ordered by effect size	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>	MOI Storyteller Status	
		<i>Prototypical</i> <i>n=36</i>	<i>Non-prototypical</i> <i>n=31</i>
Dissatisfaction with job/career	.034	5	9
Death and dying	.025	6	2
Traumatic life event/s	.013	5	7
Turbulence in life	.009	15	10
Travelling or relocating	.008	11	7

Note: Shading in grey indicates effect size < .040, and no apparent relationship with MOI Status.

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes calculated by Goodman Kruskal tau (described in Method ) are rank ordered.

The theme *turbulence in life* refers to kind of disruptive circumstances that would fall short of being classed as “traumatic”, but which nonetheless implies chronic dissatisfactions and the likelihood of ongoing stress, usually in the context of dissatisfaction with relationships and/or work or career (as the Content category shows).

Despite the lack of differences according to groups, a summary of the incidence of *disruptive circumstances*, may be useful, because of their theoretical significance.

Overall, slightly more than a third (37%) of people indicated there was some *turbulence* in their life at the time their moment of insight occurred, while the next most common disruptive circumstance was *travelling or locating*, reported by 27% of participants. About a fifth were *dissatisfied with their job or career* (19%) and a similar proportion had their insights in the midst of *traumatic life event/s* (18%). It was unsurprising that themes of *death and dying* were also represented (12%).

Given the unpleasantness of these disruptive circumstances, and their relatively *high* endorsements in this study, they seem to suggest that moments of insight in general do appear to strike at times when people are undergoing difficult or disruptive times. Given that the moments of insight are usually a positive experience, this also suggests they are a helpful and adaptive type of experience in times of trouble, and may potentially represent the “progression” that comes via “regression”.

## Category 2: Nature

The nature, or phenomenological aspects of the moment of insight refers to the “type” of experience, such as whether it was experienced as sudden or as a mystical style of experience. There were a surprising paucity of phenomenological aspects mentioned in the moment of insight stories. This may have been due in part to the fact that storytellers had answered the Definitions items in the previous pages of the questionnaire, and thus they may have felt they had already covered some of the defining aspects of moments of insight.

Alternatively, it may be that a moment of insight has such a strong cognitive component (in “realising” something that is personally meaningful) that the “gut-feel” experiential aspects may have been less attended to at the time, and/or not so accessible to recall. (A similar observation was made in respect to the interviews, whereby participants tended to be more intent on telling the background of the story than the phenomenological details).

Table 17 shows that three of the four themes describing the nature of the insight were differentially endorsed by the MOI Storyteller Status groups.

### *A sudden realisation, "definable moment" of insight (61%)*

The *prototypical* group, more than the *non-prototypical* group, indicated the moment of insight was sudden, reflecting the fact that suddenness was a defining criteria for allocation to the *prototypical* group. A few people from the *non-prototypical* group had mentioned suddenness without also mentioning the other *prototypical* themes.

Table 17  
*Themes Mentioned in Category 2: "Nature", by Strength of Relationship with MOI Storyteller Status. N=67*

Story themes, rank ordered by effect size	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>	MOI Storyteller Status	
		<i>Prototypical</i> <i>n=36</i>	<i>Non-prototypical</i> <i>n=31</i>
A sudden "definable moment" *	.736	36	5
Mystical or inexplicable shift *	.223	16	1
General, no specific instance	.054	0	3
Vision of the future	.012	3	1

Note: Shading in grey indicates effect size < .040, and no apparent relationship with MOI Status.

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes calculated by Goodman Kruskal tau (described in Method) are rank ordered.

\*  $p < .05$  in  $\chi^2$  test using unadjusted  $\alpha$  of .05 per element (see Method text.)

### *Mystical or inexplicable shift (25%)*

This theme refers to moments of insight that include religious or spiritual experiences, dreams, and visions of the future. These stories are those which had a numinous quality, an aura of mystery, and/or an intensity that seems inexplicable by conventional psychological reasoning.

These types of moments of insight are of interest to this study because of the similarity of epiphany types of experiences described by Miller and C'deBaca (1994). Appendix Q indicates the stories which contained what appeared to be *mystical or inexplicable shifts*. Some characteristic themes were: hitting rock bottom and finding a way out, with finding a more personal meaning in life and living according to that; with finding an answer; with matters of life and death: and with change that is like turning a switch or clicking on a light.

Below are provided two examples of *mystical or inexplicable shifts*.

E6: I was extremely ill in hospital with anorexia nervosa. I was at a very low weight and was medically compromised. I wanted to die because I was sick of life. I wasn't able to do anything except think or be in my own thoughts. Suddenly, I felt as if my body and soul were no longer connected, I thought I was dying. I was able to look at myself from a distance and for the first time I really disliked what I saw. I decided I didn't want this sort of a life any more, this was the first time I had felt this way and had felt a need to change. I began to see a way out of the illness, there was a possible solution rather than death. It has changed me as a person as I am more determined and perseverant. More patient and am able to put things in better perspective than I used to. I also understand how I feel a lot better also.

E6: The most important moment of insight came after a string of let downs in my life. I couldn't talk to my mum, someone I loved had passed away and I realised that people won't always be there for you and you can't put your hope in them. I believed in God but never really experienced him. This one day throughout a talk I felt as though the shields over my eyes had finally been lifted. I knew will everything I was that I could rely on God and he would never forsake me. I felt an enormous weight lifted off my back and realised for the first time I didn't have to deal with things alone. God wanted to share my pains. At that moment I realised life made sense. This experience changed my life. I will never be alone or never need to feel afraid.

Stories of a *mystical or inexplicable shift* were almost exclusively offered by members of the *prototypical* group. Almost half of the *prototypical* group reported this type of story compared with only one from the *non-prototypical* group. This effect, although stronger than expected, reflects an expectation that stories of moments of insight may sometimes be similar to the mystical types of experiences studied by Miller and C'deBaca (1994).



*No specific instance given, just general definition (5%)*

A few of the *non-prototypical* group, only, gave a general description of a moment of insight without providing a specific instance. Again this result is an artifact of the definitional criteria – this theme would automatically classify a story as *non-prototypical*.

*Vision of the future (6%)*

There was no apparent relationship between MOI Storyteller status and this theme.

### **Category 3: Content**

The content of the insight refers to what the insight was about - the personal knowledge or meanings encapsulated within it for the experiencer.

Many of the stories of moments of insight contained more than just the one content theme, the list of which are shown in Table 18. For example, many insights were about both self and personal relationships. Where stories appeared to be about multiple content themes, each theme was counted if it was considered integral to the insight or had otherwise illuminated that particular theme in some way for the experiencer.

*Seeing clearer a new angle or "truth"(87%)*

The theme *seeing clearer a new angle or "truth"* was very close in meaning to the two *prototypical* criteria themes of, *gain clarity, understanding, or see things differently*, and thus the strong effect size reflected the fact that the entire *prototypical* group had invoked this theme, while not all of the *non-prototypical* group did.

Table 18

*Themes Mentioned in Category 3: “Content of Moments of Insight”, by Strength of Relationship with MOI Storyteller Status. N=67*

Story themes, rank ordered by effect size within sub-categories	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>	MOI Storyteller Status	
		<i>Prototypical</i> <i>n=36</i>	<i>Non-prototypical</i> <i>n=31</i>
Seeing clearer, new angle or truth *	.180	36	22
Insights about self *	.113	27	13
Insights about God or spiritual/religious matters *	.109	10	1
Insights about work/career *	.100	5	13
Insights about others (in general)	.049	8	2
Insights about personal relationships	.001	14	11
Insights about world/life (non-religious/spiritual)	.000	12	10

Note: Shading in grey indicates effect size < .040, and no apparent relationship with MOI Status.

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes calculated by Goodman Kruskal tau (described in Method) are rank ordered.

\*  $p < .05$  in  $\chi^2$  test using unadjusted  $\alpha$  of .05 per element (see Method text.)

#### *Insights about self (60%)*

Table 18 shows that the *prototypical* group more often than the *non-prototypical* group had insights about *self*.

#### *Insights about God or spiritual/religious matters (16%)*

Those in the *prototypical* group reported more *insights about God or spiritual/religious matters* than did the *non-prototypical* group.

#### *Insights about work/career (27%)*

The *non-prototypical* group had more insights about *work/career* than the *prototypical* group. This is the only content theme which the *non-prototypical* group endorsed more heavily than the *prototypical* group.

*Insights about others (in general) (15%)*

The *prototypical* group had more insights about others in general (as distinct from close personal relationships) than did the *non-prototypical* group.

*Insights about personal relationships (37%)*

There was no apparent relationship between this theme and MOI Storyteller Status

*Insights about world/life (non-religious/spiritual) (33%)*

There was no apparent relationship between this theme and MOI Storyteller Status.

To summarise the main points - about two-thirds of the participants had insights about self, and the majority of those came from the *prototypical* group. About a third had insights about personal relationships; about the world or life in general; and about work or career. However the latter group (work or career) were mainly those from the *non-prototypical* group. About a sixth of people had insights about others (in general) and about God or spiritual matters, and in each case these people were mainly from the *prototypical* group.

## **Category 4: Outcome**

The outcome of the insight, or the consequences that flowed from it, either immediately or more gradually afterwards, is an important consideration in establishing if change appears to accompany moments of insight. The outcome themes are grouped under the following sub-themes:

- a) *Instant versus non-instant change*
- b) *Positive outcomes*
- c) *Negative outcomes*
- d) *Work and relationships*
- e) *Individuation and agency*

a) *Instant versus non-instant change*

The distinction as to whether *change* happened very suddenly or instantly – as distinct from whether the *moment of insight* happened suddenly – is a critical one. If a story indicates that the moment of insight happened suddenly, and in addition, *change* immediately followed, we can have much more confidence in attributing the change to the moment of insight experience (or at least entertaining the idea that the moment of insight was somehow implicated in producing or reflecting that change). However, if the moment of insight happened suddenly, but change followed much more gradually, there can be much less confidence about attributing that change to the preceding moment of insight.

Table 19 shows the results in relation to themes that indicated the *change* was instant versus non-instant. The high effect sizes are not surprising, as one of the *prototypical* criteria was for the moment of insight to happen *suddenly, in a “definable moment”*. However this check was warranted because it could not be assumed that having a sudden moment of insight would automatically equate with *change* also occurring instantly, or almost instantly. (In this study, “instantly” was expanded to take in a matter of moments or hours, and also included some insights which might have taken some days or weeks.)

Instant change:

The *prototypical* group accounted more than the *non-prototypical* group, for almost all instant change:

- *instant change to self or self-beliefs (49%)*
- *instant change to beliefs about the nature of world (27%)*
- *instant change to beliefs about others (22%)*

Table 19

*Themes Mentioned in Category 4: “Outcomes: Instant versus Non-instant Change”, by Strength of Relationship with MOI Storyteller Status. N=67*

Story themes, rank ordered by effect size	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>	MOI Storyteller Status	
		<i>Prototypical</i> <i>n=36</i>	<i>Non-prototypical</i> <i>n=31</i>
Instant change to self or self beliefs *	.676	32	2
Non-instant change to self or self beliefs *	.494	0	20
Instant change to beliefs about nature of world/life *	.316	18	0
Non-instant change to beliefs about nature of world *	.253	0	12
Instant change to beliefs about others *	.248	15	0
Non-instant change to beliefs about others *	.204	0	10

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes > .040, calculated by Goodman Kruskal tau (described in method) are rank ordered.

\*  $p < .05$  in  $\chi^2$  test using unadjusted  $\alpha$  of .05 per element (see method text.)

Non-instant change:

The converse finding was that the *non-prototypical* group accounted more than the *prototypical* group, in fact for all those for whom change was non-instant:

- *non-instant change to self or self beliefs (31%)*
- *non-instant change to beliefs about nature of world (18%)*
- *non-instant change to beliefs about others (15%)*

b) Positive outcomes

Positive outcomes, shown in Table 20, would be expected from *prototypical* moment of insight stories if they did, as seemed likely, represent a similar phenomenon to the quantum change stories studies by Miller and C'deBaca (1994).

Table 20

*Themes Mentioned in Category 4: "Outcomes: Positive", by Strength of Relationship with MOI Storyteller Status. N=67*

Story themes, rank ordered by effect size	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>	MOI Storyteller Status	
		<i>Prototypical</i> <i>n=36</i>	<i>Non-prototypical</i> <i>n=31</i>
Feel more comfortable with, accepting, peaceful about life *	.138	25	10
Adaptive insight *	.120	31	17
More positive outlook *	.116	30	16
Made me stronger, more able to cope *	.059	27	16
No longer fear life (found God, or learned secret of life)	.015	8	4

Note: Shading in grey indicates effect size < .040, and no apparent relationship with MOI Status.

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes calculated by Goodman Kruskal tau (described in Method) are rank ordered.

\*  $p < .05$  in  $\chi^2$  test using unadjusted  $\alpha$  of .05 per element (see Method text.)

*Feel more comfortable with, accepting of, peaceful about life (52%)*

The *prototypical* group more often indicated that they felt more comfortable, accepting and peaceful about life, than did the *non-prototypical* group.

*Adaptive insight (72%)*

The *prototypical* group told more stories which appeared to have adaptive themes than did the *non-prototypical* group.

Assessment as to whether moments of insight experiences were adaptive or maladaptive (or neither) were again a highly subjective judgement on the part of the

researcher (myself). This judgement was based on whether or not the change that followed the insight appeared to have been adaptive (empowering, or facilitative of health or growth generally) or maladaptive (disempowering or undermining of processes of growth) overall, or neither.

*More positive outlook (69%)*

The *prototypical* group told more stories which appeared to have a positive outlook than did the *non-prototypical* group.

*Made me stronger, more able to cope (64%)*

The *prototypical* group more often told stories in which the outcome appeared to make them stronger or more able to cope than did the *non-prototypical* group.

*No longer fear life (having found God, or learned the secret of life) (18%)*

There was no apparent relationship with this theme and MOI Storyteller Status. It was included because some stories appeared to have a strong theme of having found the secret to life, of no longer fearing life. Some, but not all, of those stories came to that new position via insights about the nature of God.

To summarise – all of the positive outcome themes (with the exception of the one immediately above) were more strongly endorsed by the *prototypical* group than by the *non-prototypical* group.

c) Negative outcomes

Table 21 shows that the reverse effect was found in respect to themes expressing negative outcomes, whereby it was the *non-prototypical* group who more often told stories with negative themes.

*Just world theory shattered, or disillusioned with world/life (13%)*

The *non-prototypical* group told more stories containing this theme of deep disappointment, than did the *prototypical* group.

*More negative outlook (12%)*

The *non-prototypical* group told more stories in which the person had a more negative outlook in general after the moment of insight, than did the *prototypical* group.

Table 21  
Themes Mentioned in Category 4: “Outcomes: Negative”, by Strength of Relationship with MOI Storyteller Status. *N*=67

Story themes, rank ordered by effect size	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>	MOI Storyteller Status	
		<i>Prototypical</i> <i>n</i> =36	<i>Non-prototypical</i> <i>n</i> =31
Just world theory shattered or disillusioned with world/life *	.062	2	7
More negative outlook	.045	2	6
Made me weaker, more damaged/traumatised	.037	1	4
Maladaptive/defensive insight	.000	1	1

Note: Shading in grey indicates effect size < .040, and no apparent relationship with MOI Status.

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes calculated by Goodman Kruskal tau (described in Method) are rank ordered.

\*  $p < .05$  in  $\chi^2$  test using unadjusted  $\alpha$  of .05 per element (see Method text.)

The following two themes had no apparent relationship with MOI Storyteller

Status:



- *made me weaker, more damaged/traumatised* (8%)
- *maladaptive/defensive insight* (5%)

To summarise the relationships between MOI Storyteller Status and both the *positive* and *negative* outcomes themes – there was a clear division. Of all the themes with effect sizes greater than .040, those with *positive outcomes* were more characteristic of the *prototypical* group; while the only two themes with *negative outcomes* were reported more often by the *non-prototypical* group.

Of the total 67 stories told, 8 (12%) were stories which indicated the negative outcomes mentioned in this section. Only 2 of the 8 negative outcome stories came from the *prototypical* group – and thus these are the stories we would consider to be ‘exceptions’ to the ‘rule’ (the rule that most moments of insight lead to positive outcomes). We will examine the two *prototypical* stories which had negative outcomes in detail as part of the ego levels analysis in the next chapter.

### Work and Relationships Outcomes

Work and relationships themes, shown in Table 22, figured strongly in many stories, which is understandable given how critical these factors can be in determining our sense of self, and our quality of life. (It was our capacity to work, love and play that Freud nominated as crucial indicators of mental health.)

Only two of these themes, however, achieved effect sizes stronger than .040, indicating a relationship with MOI Storyteller Status.

*Perceived work differently (13%)*

The *non-prototypical* group told more stories in which the outcome was that they *perceived work differently* than did the *prototypical* group. This result reflects the finding in the Content category earlier, that the *non-prototypical* group had more insights about work or career.

*Realised I would have to leave romantic partner (15%)*

The *prototypical* group told more stories in which they *realised I would have to leave romantic partner* than did the *non-prototypical* group.

There was no apparent relationship between MOI Storyteller Status and the remaining three work and relationship themes:

- *perceived important relationship/s differently (43%)*
- *realised I would have to leave work (9%)*
- *need to escape/leave former undesirable situation (34%)*

Table 22  
Themes Mentioned in Category 4: “Outcome: Work and Relationships”,  
by Strength of Relationship with MOI Storyteller Status. *N*=67

Story themes, rank ordered by effect size	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>	MOI Storyteller Status	
		<i>Prototypical</i> <i>n</i> =36	<i>Non-prototypical</i> <i>n</i> =31
Perceived work differently *	.062	2	7
Realised I would have to leave romantic partner	.049	8	2
Perceived important relationship/s differently	.007	17	12
Realised I would have to leave work	.001	3	3
Need to escape/leave former undesirable situation	.001	12	11

Note: Shading in grey indicates effect size < .040, and no apparent relationship with MOI Status.

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes calculated by Goodman Kruskal tau (described in Method text) are rank ordered.

\*  $p < .05$  in  $\chi^2$  test using unadjusted  $\alpha$  of .05 per element (see Method text.)

### Individuation and Agency

The judgement as to whether the storyteller “*became more individuated*” as an apparent outcome of the moment of insight was another particularly subjective judgement on the part of the researcher. Increased *individuation* was interpreted as being an apparent outcome if the storyteller indicated feeling in some way more differentiated from others than before, or if they reported feeling more reliant on their own views than previously, or (more arguably) if they indicated an increased awareness of their own inner processes such as thoughts and emotions.

Outcomes grouped under this sub-heading tended to involve a predominance of themes of “breaking away” from others’ influence. An important part of the act of individuation, it would seem, is to go through the experience whereby one rejects the influence of others, and places greater trust in ones’ own opinions.

Judgements as to whether storytellers appeared to evidence increased or decreased *agency*, were similarly difficult and subjective. Estimates were based on whether the story indicated the experiencer had increased (or decreased) in terms of seeing themselves as having choices, and whether they appeared to see themselves (in an everyday sense) as being the originator of their own actions and choices, given the exigencies of their environment.

*Freed from other's opinions or influence (25%)*

Table 23 shows that the *prototypical* group told more stories in which the storyteller felt *freed from other's opinions or influence* than did the *non-prototypical* group.

*Increased sense of agency (51%)*

Similarly, the *prototypical* group told more stories in which the storyteller appeared to have experienced an *increased sense of agency* as an outcome.

The fact that the *prototypical* group more strongly endorsed the above two themes than the *non-prototypical* group supports the notion that moments of insight may be intimately associated with mechanisms of growing independence and mastery, namely ego development.

Table 23  
Themes Mentioned in Category 4: "Outcome: Individuation and Agency",  
by Strength of Relationship with MOI Storyteller Status. N=67

Story themes, rank ordered by effect size	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>	MOI Storyteller Status	
		<i>Prototypical</i> <i>n=36</i>	<i>Non-prototypical</i> <i>n=31</i>
Freed from other's opinions or influence *	.112	14	3
Increased sense of agency *	.080	23	11
Decreased sense of agency	.037	1	4
Became more individuated	.033	26	17
Change in opposite direction to other's (attempt to) influence	.008	7	4
Broke away from parents' or authority's views to use my own	.007	4	2

Note: Shading in grey indicates effect size < .040, and no apparent relationship with MOI Status.

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes calculated by Goodman Kruskal tau (described in Method) are rank ordered.

\*  $p < .05$  in  $\chi^2$  test using unadjusted  $\alpha$  of .05 per element (see Method text.)

There was no apparent relationship between MOI Storyteller Status and the remaining four themes:

- *decreased sense of agency* (8%).
- *became more individuated* (64%)
- *change in opposite direction to other's (attempt to) influence* (16%)
- *broke away from parents'/authority's views to use my own* (9%)

It is puzzling that the theme *became more individuated* was so strongly endorsed by both groups (64% of all storytellers endorsed it) and yet there was no apparent relationship with MOI Status. Ego level growth is acknowledged as probably happening more often in a gradual manner than through moments of insight, and thus perhaps it may be that the theme of being freed from other's influence is one that accompanies a moment of insight more often than more general themes of individuation. Themes evocative of agency also seem to be more easily linked to moments of insight than general themes of individuation.

This concludes the analysis of themes in respect to their differential endorsements by the *prototypical* versus the *non-prototypical* groups. Before going on to summarise these findings, it may help first to consider an example of a *non-prototypical* story, as a counter example.

### **Example of a non-prototypical story – a “counter” example**

The *non-prototypical* story below has been chosen because on first consideration, it sounds very much like many *prototypical* stories. It tells of the storyteller's decision to leave a romantic relationship, and also of the greater personal awareness of values or

priorities (satisfying one of the *prototypical* criteria of gaining understanding) that flowed on from that decision. There is little doubt that this experience was a powerful one for the storyteller, which apparently led to some growth and possibly also ego level change. However, no sudden, brief, defining moment was mentioned. (There could have been a sudden moment of realisation, but since it has not been mentioned, it cannot be assumed.) Lacking that important criterion, the change mentioned is assumed to have been more gradual.

I had been travelling and working (moving about every 3 months) and was desperate to settle down, at least temporarily. I was in a relationship for six months that at times was very emotionally draining. The relationship was excellent for two months and then it just became very difficult, mainly due to an ex-fiancee of the person I was seeing. I was drawn to this person very much but repelled at the same time. The experience made me realise that there are only a few important things in life, mainly that trust and respect and relationships are all that really matter, and provide happiness.

Now to summarise the themes favoured in *prototypical* and *non-prototypical* stories.

### **Summary of themes characteristic of *prototypical* moments of insight**

Note that the 36 people who make up the *prototypical* group were comprised of 22 participants from the *high* ego level group; 10 participants from the *medium* ego level group; and 4 participants from the *low* ego level group. Thus the themes favoured by the

*prototypical* group will reflect to a large extent, the profile of themes favoured by the *high* ego level group, which will be summarised at the end of the ego levels analysis.

*Context:*

Internal process attributed as main trigger/change agent

*Nature:*

A sudden realisation, "definable moment" of insight  
Mystical or inexplicable shift

*Content:*

Insight about self  
Insight about God or spiritual/religious matters  
Insights about others (in general)  
Seeing clearer / a new angle or "truth"

*Outcome:*

Instant change to self or self-beliefs  
Instant change to beliefs about nature of world/life  
Instant change to beliefs about others  
Adaptive insight  
More positive outlook  
Made me stronger, more able to cope  
Feel more comfortable with, accepting of, peaceful about life  
Realised I would have to leave romantic partner  
Increased sense of agency  
Freed from other's opinions/influence

## **Summary of themes characteristic of *non-prototypical* moments of insight**

The themes which were utilised more often by the *non-prototypical* group than by the *prototypical* group were:

*Content:*

Insights about work/career

*Outcomes:*

Just world theory shattered or disillusioned with world/life \*  
More negative outlook  
Perceived work differently \*  
Non-instant change to self or self beliefs \*  
Non-instant change to beliefs about nature of world \*  
Non-instant change to beliefs about others \*

The *non-prototypical* group told more stories about work and career, and thus more stories where they perceived work differently. The only two other themes endorsed more by the *non-prototypical* group were negative ones, being outcomes in which they reported a generally more negative outlook, or that they were disillusioned with the world or life, or had their just world theory of life shattered.

The fact that they told more stories of non-instant change was simply a reflection of the *prototypical* versus *non-prototypical* selection criteria.

### **“Voice of experience” profile: composite of prototypical themes**

Looking back on the consensus profile at the beginning of this chapter which combined the top 11 themes, we can now ask how much it needs to change to make it reflect the *prototypical* group profile? No subtractions from that original statement were necessary. However, some additions were made. They are indicated with the dotted underline.

Moments of insight are usually prompted by something or someone in a person’s external world, but the trigger for them is felt to be internal. They happen suddenly, in a definable moment, rather than slowly or gradually, and they often bring about an instant change to ones self-beliefs as well as beliefs about others, the nature of the world or life, about God or spiritual/religious matters. Sometimes the insights themselves are mystical experience or are otherwise inexplicable by usual psychological explanations. Usually they are a clarifying experience, a time when a person senses or sees a new angle or “truth”, most often about him/herself. The



person regards the experience as having been generally positive (and it is manifestly clear from their description that the insight was an adaptive experience – rather than a neutral or maladaptive one). Often the outcome is that the person becomes more positive in his/her view of self, others, or life, and feels generally stronger or more able to cope. There may be a sense of having been freed from other's opinions or influence, and often this sense will take the form of realising that it is time to leave one's romantic partner. The person may also feel more comfortable with, accepting of, or peaceful about life. Most stories of moments of insight are those in which the person appears to have increased in their sense of agency, and undergone some kind of process of individuation.

## Chapter 9

### Stage 3: Analysis of Story Themes by Ego Level

The moment of insight story themes which were identified and analysed in the last chapter in respect to MOI Storyteller Status will now be re-analysed so that comparisons can be made as to their differential use by the *low*, *medium* and *high* ego level groups.

The statistical procedure outlined in the Method section was adopted in order to select themes with Goodman Kruskal tau effect sizes of .040 or greater. Because this analysis involved a variable with three levels (ego level groups), it was necessary to consult the adjusted standardised residuals to aid interpretation as to which levels were involved in creating the effect. As in the last analysis, the theme elements will be rank ordered in the Tables according to the magnitude of their effect sizes and discussed in descending order of their effect size with ego level.

As mentioned earlier, the 13 participants who reported they had *never had* a moment of insight and thus had told no story were excluded from the total of 80 participants, leaving 67 “storytellers”. Their distribution across the respective ego level groupings was: *low* ego level (12); *medium* ego level (21); *high* ego level (34).

The four main organising categories: *context*, *nature*, *content* and *outcome* were again utilised to organise discussion.

It is important to note that in the following analysis, the terms *above* and *below expectation* refer to the frequency of observations in each cell being above or below the statistical expectations of *chance*, rather than above or below theoretical expectation. Indeed, most of the results that were not statistically expected by chance were indeed expectable by or compatible with ego level theory.

## **Category 1: Context**

### *Internal versus external prompts*

The researcher task of distinguishing between *internal* and *external* prompts, as shown in Table 24, grew noticeably more difficult as ego levels became higher.

Storytellers in the lower ego levels attributed their moments of insight to external triggers more unambiguously.

### *Internal processes attributed as main trigger/change agent (42%)*

The adjusted standardised residuals indicate that the storytellers in the *high* ego level group tended to suggest, more than chance, that the moment of insight experience was fundamentally an *internally generated* event, while the *low* group was well below chance expectation in endorsing this theme. This result is highly compatible with ego development theory – that as ego develops, the person becomes more aware of and concerned with inner processes.

Table 24

*Themes Mentioned in Category 1: “Context: Internal versus External Prompts”, by Strength of Relationship with Ego Levels. N=67*

Definition elements or themes, rank ordered by effect size	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>	Adjusted Standardised Residuals		
		Ego Levels		
		<i>High</i> <i>n=34</i>	<i>Medium</i> <i>n=21</i>	<i>Low</i> <i>n=12</i>
<i>Internal Prompts:</i>				
Internal processes attributed as main trigger/change agent *	.152	<b>2.9</b> <sup>b</sup> (20) <sup>c</sup>	-.9 (7)	<b>-2.6</b> (1)
<i>External Prompts:</i>				
Education/suggestion, eg book/therapy/advice triggers	.082	-1.2 6)	-.6 (4)	<b>2.3</b> (6)
Others' perceptions of others /world triggered mine (to copy)	.076	-1.6 (4)	.0 (4)	<b>2.2</b> (5)
Reaction to others' negative behaviour	.047	.5 (10)	-1.6 (3)	1.3 (5)
Others' views of me triggered my new perception of me	.047	.9 (7)	-1.7 (1)	.9 (3)
Insight prompted by something/someone	.034	-.8 (24)	-.4 (15)	1.5 (11)
Reaction to others' positive behaviour	.033	-1.4 (3)	.6 (4)	1.1 (3)

Note: Shading in grey indicates effect size < .040, and no apparent relationship with ego levels.

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes calculated by Goodman Kruskal tau (described in Method text) are rank ordered.

<sup>b</sup> Adjusted standardised residuals of 2 or more are shown in bold.

<sup>c</sup> Figures in parentheses are observed counts.

\*  $p < .05$  in  $\chi^2$  test using unadjusted  $\alpha$  of .05 per element (see Method text.)

By definition, of course, all moments of insight are internal experiences, but the particular triggers the experiencer attributes to them would become an integral part of the meanings drawn from the experience, and the potential ongoing effects it might have on that person's sense of self. External attributions may well distance or delay self change, while internal attributions may well facilitate it.

A comparison of two stories, one each from the *low* and *high* ego levels respectively, may help to illustrate this point. In the first story, an E5 Self Aware storyteller from the *low* group spent most of the story setting the scene and mentioned the

actual insight (one that may have been powerful and life-changing) only briefly in the last sentence. The possible impact of this will be discussed after the second example.

E5: It was my HSC year and I had been seeing a psychotherapist for about two and a half years at this point for in retrospect not a lot, but at the time an adolescent acting out. We had worked through a lot and I felt I had learnt how I worked so to speak but I was still being led into places. One session I sat down and said hello and then waited for her to start, but she never did. Over the hour there were many inclinations but I remained quiet also, so the whole session nothing was said. It made me realise that I had to take the lead in my life and not expect others to do things for me.

In the second example, an E7 Individualistic storyteller from the *high* group, divided her story into three parts and clearly gave more prominence and thus perhaps emphasis to the internal aspects of her realisation.

E7: Preamble – I was in an abusive marriage, feeling trapped etc. Felt hopeless – felt I'd spent my whole life locked in a cage. Now marriage was “the cage.” Experience – Sitting on the floor, I “saw” myself locked in a cage, trapped and terrified. I prayed and then “understood” that the “cage” I felt trapped in also had the purpose of protecting me from worldly terrors. I felt suddenly able to open the door of the “cage” and walk out. Then felt fearful of the “worldly terrors”, but knew I now had a choice. Effects – Entered therapy, separated from husband, got a life beginning to happen ☺

For the latter E7 storyteller, the abusive marriage would certainly qualify as an external trigger, but as that situation had been long ongoing, the trigger for the actual turning point appeared to be considered by the experiencer to be more internally generated, through her thoughts and prayer.

The E5 participant's telling of her story indicated that she probably regarded her realisation as something directly prompted by the immediate external situation of her therapy, and under the circumstances this seems quite reasonable and obvious. However, the experience itself sounds like a very powerful one in terms of personal growth. Perhaps for the first time, this person caught a glimpse of the extent and power of her own potential agency. Hypothetically, it could have been a moment of insight strong enough to play a role in moving her from the former E4 Conformist level, to the greater self-awareness of the E5 level. The main point here, however, is the fact that she neglected to expand on the realisation itself in this particular telling of it, and spent most of the story on the lead-up external circumstances. Her use of the words "it made me realise", rather than, say, "I realised", was a further clue that the descriptive weighting given in her story was to the external prompt situation, rather than to her own meaning-making processes, or to the personal change that might have flowed from that realisation.

*Education/suggestion, eg book/therapy/advice triggers (24%)*

Storytellers from the *low* ego level group had more moments of insight than expected in response to external prompts such as some kind of *advice, education or suggestion* from others. For some it was therapy, for others it was advice from friends or family, and for another, reading books.

*Others' perceptions of others /world triggered mine (to copy) (19%)*

Participants in the *low* ego level group, more than chance, adopted views of other people or views of the world that friends or family members had expressed to them.

Others' views, then, provided both the context and content of their moments of insight, which tended to be about the external world, more than the other two groups.

*Reaction to others' negative behaviour (27%)*

The *medium* group were less inclined than expected to mention this theme – probably because their insights tended to be less about personal relationships.

*Others' views of me triggered my new perception of me (16%)*

The *medium* group were less likely than chance would predict, to endorse this theme.

*Insight prompted by something/someone (75%)*

The idea that the *insight was prompted by something or someone* – in other words, that there was an *external prompt* of some kind - was indicated by the great majority of storytellers (75%), yet there was no apparent relationship between use of that theme and ego levels.

*Reaction to others' positive behaviour (15%)*

There was no apparent relationship between this element and ego levels.

### Mood beforehand

#### *Neutral beforehand (25%)*

As shown in Table 25, the *low* ego level group told more stories in which their mood immediately before the moment of insight appeared to be *neutral*. This finding could suggest that perhaps the *low* group might be more taken by surprise by their moments of insight.

Table 25

*Themes Mentioned in Category 1: “Context: Mood Beforehand”, by Strength of Relationship with Ego Levels. N=67*

Definition elements or themes, rank ordered by effect size	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>	Adjusted Standardised Residuals		
		Ego Levels		
		<i>High</i> <i>n=34</i>	<i>Medium</i> <i>n=21</i>	<i>Low</i> <i>n=12</i>
Neutral beforehand *	.198	-1.5 (6) <sup>c</sup>	-1.4 (3)	<b>3.6</b> <sup>b</sup> (8)
Happy beforehand *	.100	<b>2.5</b> (10)	-1.2 (2)	-1.8 (0)
Unhappy/dissatisfied beforehand	.016	-.9 (10)	1.0 (9)	-.1 (4)

**Note:** Shading in grey indicates effect size < .040, and no apparent relationship with ego levels.

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes calculated by Goodman Kruskal tau (described in Method text) are rank ordered.

<sup>b</sup> Adjusted standardised residuals of 2 or more are shown in bold.

<sup>c</sup> Figures in parentheses are observed counts.

\*  $p < .05$  in  $\chi^2$  test using unadjusted  $\alpha$  of .05 per element (see Method text.)

#### *Happy beforehand (18%)*

The *high* ego level group told more stories than expected in which they appeared to be *happy beforehand*. None of the *low* ego level group reported indicated they were *happy beforehand* – a finding well below chance.

#### *Unhappy/dissatisfied beforehand (34%)*

There was no apparent relationship between this theme and ego levels.



Disruptive circumstances

*Turbulence in life (37%)*

Table 26 shows the *high* ego level group reported *turbulence in life* much *more* than expected, and the *medium* group reported it much *less* than expected.

Table 26

*Themes Mentioned in Category 1: “Context: Disruptive Circumstances”, by Strength of Relationship with Ego Levels. N=67*

Definition elements or themes, rank ordered by effect size	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>	Adjusted Standardised Residuals		
		Ego Levels		
		<i>High</i> <i>n=34</i>	<i>Medium</i> <i>n=21</i>	<i>Low</i> <i>n=12</i>
Turbulence in life *	.109	<b>2.7</b> <sup>b</sup> (18) <sup>c</sup>	<b>-2.1</b> (4)	-1.0 (3)
Travelling or relocating	.040	1.0 (11)	.2 (6)	-1.6 (1)
Traumatic life event/s	.024	.6 (7)	-1.2 (2)	.7 (3)
Death and dying	.008	.7 (5)	-.4 (2)	-.4 (1)
Dissatisfaction with job/career	.005	.5 (8)	-.3 (4)	-.4 (2)

**Note:** Shading in grey indicates effect size < .040, and no apparent relationship with ego levels.

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes calculated by Goodman Kruskal tau (described in Method text) are rank ordered.

<sup>b</sup> Adjusted standardised residuals of 2 or more are shown in bold.

<sup>c</sup> Figures in parentheses are observed counts.

\*  $p < .05$  in  $\chi^2$  test using unadjusted  $\alpha$  of .05 per element (see Method text.)

This strong finding in relation to *turbulence* is compatible with the findings of Helson & Roberts (1994) that *high* ego levels in women were associated with “difficult times” that involved construction of new schemas during their first two adult decades. These women were required by necessity to address their difficulties, and thus to undergo the more effortful process of accommodating, rather than just assimilating new perspectives.

### *Travelling or relocating (27%)*

At the time of their moment of insight, the *low* ego group reported *travelling or relocating* somewhat less than expected. Quite a number of storytellers (27%) mentioned they were travelling or relocating or were at junctures in their lives where they were trying to make decisions about life direction, or were between jobs. Perhaps the *low* group's younger age and relative lack of opportunity to have travelled may have been an influence in the fact that they mentioned this theme less often.

### *Traumatic life event/s (18%)*

There was no apparent relationship between this theme and ego levels.

### *Death and dying (12%)*

There was no apparent relationship between this theme and ego levels.

### *Dissatisfaction with job/career (19%)*

There was no apparent relationship between this theme and ego levels.

## **Category 2: Nature**

### *Mystical or inexplicable shifts (25%)*

Table 27 shows there was a strong relationship between ego levels and *mystical or inexplicable shifts*, whereby the *high* ego level group reported more than expected, while the *low* ego level group reported less than expected. The clear majority of these stories (13 or 76%) came from the *high* group, while the remaining 4 (24%) came from the *medium* group, and none at all were from the *low* group.

Table 27

*Themes Mentioned in Category 2: "Nature of Moments of Insight", by Strength of Relationship with Ego Levels. N=67*

Definition elements or themes, rank ordered by effect size	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>	Adjusted Standardised Residuals		
		Ego Levels		
		<i>High</i> <i>n=34</i>	<i>Medium</i> <i>n=21</i>	<i>Low</i> <i>n=12</i>
Mystical or inexplicable shift *	.112	<b>2.5</b> <sup>b</sup> (13) <sup>c</sup>	-.8 (4)	<b>-2.2</b> (0)
A sudden "definable moment" *	.103	<b>2.6</b> (26)	-1.5 (10)	-1.5 (5)
No specific instance, general story only	.049	-1.8 (0)	1.3 (2)	.7 (1)
Vision of the future	.018	.0 (2)	.8 (2)	-1.0 (0)

Note: Shading in grey indicates effect size < .040, and no apparent relationship with ego levels.

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes calculated by Goodman Kruskal tau (described in Method text) are rank ordered.

<sup>b</sup> Adjusted standardised residuals of 2 or more are shown in bold.

<sup>c</sup> Figures in parentheses are observed counts.

\*  $p < .05$  in  $\chi^2$  test using unadjusted  $\alpha$  of .05 per element (see Method text.)

#### *Sudden, brief, definable moment in time (61%)*

The *high* ego level group described their moments of insight as happening in *sudden, brief, definable moments in time* more than expected, while the *medium* and *low* ego level groups did so *less* than expected. This reflects the fact that about half of the *high* ego level group was made up of those from the *prototypical* moment of insight group.

#### *No specific instance, general story only (5%)*

Three storytellers from the *medium* and *low* ego level groups supplied brief general descriptions of moments of insight, but neglected to supply a story of a specific instance. None from the *high* ego level group did so.

### *Vision of the future (6%)*

There was no apparent relationship between this theme and ego levels.

## **Category 3: Content**

Themes which reveal the content of the insight are shown in Table 28 – that is, themes as to what the insight was about - the personalised meanings encapsulated within moments of insight.

Table 28

*Themes Mentioned in Category 3: “Content of Moments of Insight”, by Strength of Relationship with Ego Levels. N=67*

Definition elements or themes, rank ordered by effect size	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>	Adjusted Standardised Residuals Ego Levels		
		<i>High</i> <i>n=34</i>	<i>Medium</i> <i>n=21</i>	<i>Low</i> <i>n=12</i>
Insights about work/career *	.101	<b>2.1</b> <sup>b</sup> (13) <sup>c</sup>	-.4 (5)	<b>-2.3</b> (0)
Insights about personal relationships	.082	.7 (14)	<b>-2.1</b> (4)	1.7 (7)
Insights about self	.056	1.8 (24)	-.8 (11)	-1.4 (5)
Insights about others (in general)	.026	1.3 (7)	-.8 (2)	-.7 (1)
Insights about world/life (non-religious)	.019	.4 (12)	-1.1 (5)	.7 (5)
Insights about God or spiritual/religious matters	.011	.3 (6)	.4 (4)	-.8 (1)
Seeing clearer / a new angle or "truth"	.006	-.3 (29)	.6 (19)	-.4 (10)

Note: Shading in grey indicates effect size < .040, and no apparent relationship with ego levels.

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes calculated by Goodman Kruskal tau (described in Method text) are rank ordered.

<sup>b</sup> Adjusted standardised residuals of 2 or more are shown in bold.

<sup>c</sup> Figures in parentheses are observed counts.

\*  $p < .05$  in  $\chi^2$  test using unadjusted  $\alpha$  of .05 per element (see method text.)

*Insights about work or career (27%)*

A strong effect was created by the *high* ego level group's tendency to have *insights about work or career* more than expected, and the *low* ego level group's tendency to have insights about work or career *less* than expected. The average ages of those groups may well contribute to some of that effect. Many of the *low* ego level group were still in their late teenage years, and so had not had much opportunity to have insights about work or career.

*Insight about personal relationships (37%)*

The differences in relation to moments of insight being about *personal relationships* were interestingly *non-linear* in terms of ego levels – a finding which reinforces the need to treat ego development stages as milestone changes, rather than as an ordinal sequence. The residuals show that the *medium* group told *less* stories concerned with *personal relationships*, than expected by chance. The *low* group told somewhat *more* stories than expected about *personal relationships*, while the *high* group were within expectation in their use of this theme.

Let us take a closer look at the qualitative differences between the three groups in relation to stories of personal relationships, in order to gain a better understanding of the group differences. For the purpose of this exercise, it will be useful to indicate which summaries were from *prototypical* stories. In order to provide a clearer snapshot for comparison purposes, Table 29 provides key-word summaries of all the insights in which *personal relationships* was recorded as a theme.

Table 29

*Key-word Summary of “Personal Relationships” Content in Moment of Insight Stories, by Ego Levels and MOI Storyteller Status.*

Low ego level group:

*Prototypical:*

Therapist and I stayed silent all session – realised I sometimes had to take the lead.  
Realised at last my father loved me (mother had tried to turn me against him).

*Non-prototypical:*

Boyfriend treated me badly, dumped me when I lost baby, no friends/parent support.  
Friends were not caring towards me after my car accident – disillusioned with them.  
Felt betrayed when learned man at work could no longer be trusted.  
Friend set me right on how my bad behaviour was damaging to me.  
When mum found new man I was forced out, got act together, questioned everything.

Medium ego level group:

*Prototypical:*

In talk with mum realised how much I loved and appreciated her.  
After relationship over, realised my friend and I were similar, but didn’t grow closer.

*Non-prototypical:*

Had my own children, realised my therapist-demands of parents had been too high.  
After uni and work, rejected parents’ views, became less distant and closer to others.

High ego level group:

*Prototypical:*

Husband rejected me, I almost suicided, vision of my children at funeral saved me.  
One bad night after long struggle, decided I must leave alcoholic husband.  
Decided to end my long crush on man, formed own views, rejected parents’ views.  
Drew picture of self after break-up with man – realised brother treated me similarly.  
Left affair with man – he made me feel insecure – realised I sparkle with own friends.  
Shook hands with strange man, his emotional openness challenged me to change.  
At uni others called me genius, realised capable of more, left cynical wife & bad job.  
Woke up one morning, “wasted my life”, tried to change relationship with boyfriend.  
Realised “I’m all alone in world, and I have choices”, I can manage, left marriage.  
Left the “caged protection” of bad marriage, bravely encountered “worldly terrors”.

*Non-prototypical:*

Left relationship after turmoil with his ex – realised trust and respect most important.  
Moved from bad influence of friends in country to better life in city.  
Worked through relationship and work problems while climbing a mountain.  
Not happy at work or in marriage, trying to change, but blocked, can’t leave kids.

From the summaries above, a theme seems evident in the *low* ego level group’s insights in relation to personal relationships. That is, they seem to revolve around one of two related things: either having experienced bad treatment from others (being dumped,

feeling betrayed); or becoming more aware of their own poor adjustment towards, or bad treatment of others (waiting for others to take the lead, acting out).

The *high* ego level group's insights about personal relationships also appeared to have a discernible pattern or main theme. For the clear majority, that theme was perceiving the need to leave damaging or unhappy relationships (or deeply reflecting on them). Despite the chronic unhappiness which seemed to be a lead-up to many of these *high* ego level stories, there is also a sense in which these stories of "leaving relationships" were life-affirming or empowering (which may not be so apparent from the key-word summary). The decision to leave was usually made in the context of valuing one's self enough to make a move out of chronic unhappiness, towards the hope of a better future. This particular aspect stood in contrast to the majority of stories told by members of the low group (four of the seven), who tended to highlight the hurts or hard truths they had learned in a context of relative helplessness – they did not appear to have solutions to the problems they highlighted, but rather offered their stories as examples of how difficult the world can be, and that attitude appeared to be an impasse for them.

Unlike the *high* and *low* groups, the defining theme in the *medium* group's insights was not so much "troubled relationships", but rather more about the delineation and fine-tuning of the place of relationships in their lives - the deepening of appreciation of self or others, the loosening and re-defining of bonds. It is not surprising, therefore, that this group had relatively fewer moments of insight about relationships, as their focus seemed much more on understanding and refining them, than being damaged by, or leaving them. It is understandable that the greater potential for moments of insight about personal

relationships would lie with the two groups who experienced more conflict (which may have acted as a prompt for the insights).

*Insights about self (60%)*

Table 28 earlier also showed that the *high* ego level group had more than expected *insights about self*, while the *low* ego level group had somewhat less than expected.

The pattern implied by the residuals, whereby insights about self increased with ego levels, appears to be compatible with the notion of ego development being a continual expansion of complexity of the self paradigm. As the paradigm expands and becomes more complex, it would seem there might be more opportunity or need for having more insights about one's own nature or inner complexities.

*Insights about others (in general) (15%)*

There was no apparent relationship between ego level and stories which were about *others (in general)*.

*Insights about world/life (non-religious) (33%)*

There was no apparent relationship between ego level and insights about non-religious aspects of the nature of the world and/or life.

*Insights about God or spiritual/religious matters (16%)*

There was no apparent relationship between ego level and the insights about spiritual or religious matters. Note that this theme refers to moments of insight which were



*about* spiritual/religious matters, as distinct from the *mystical or inexplicable type* of moments of insight noted above in category 2 - Nature of moments of insight.

As insights about this subject matter may help to supply extra information as to the qualitative differences between the ego level groups and the nature of spiritual/religious beliefs, we will explore some examples from each level.

*Qualitative comparisons of insights about spiritual/religious matters, by ego level*

We will begin this exploration by considering the four stories from participants in the *medium* ego level group. Three of these four had insights specifically about coming to a deeper understanding of, or forging a closer *relationship* with God. These three experienced the insight as what appeared to be an enrichment of a relatively traditional religious worldview. For one of these people, the insight came after a “string of let-downs” and loss of a close relationship. During a “talk” she felt her eyes opened to the notion that she could rely on God and that she felt no longer alone. In a second story, the person was eight years old and reading her bible. She suddenly ‘got’ that “Christianity is not a religion – it’s a relationship” and for the first time she accepted the notion of having a personal relationship with God, and letting that be her “purpose” in life. In the third story, the storyteller said the insight was “understanding that God loved me no matter what I did” and that the relationship “wasn’t based on what I did but on who God is”. This insight gave her a sense of freedom to talk freely with God and be honest with herself. The fact that all three tended to see the *relationship* with God as the focal point of their insight, suggests that prior to the insight, their religious beliefs had been perhaps less internalised or ‘personalised’, and possibly, we could speculate, more simplistic.

Accepting God as a personal relationship seems a most fitting stage of religious evolution for a person at the *medium* level. It also seems compatible with the finding just mentioned, that the *medium* ego level group's insights tend to consolidate relationships, rather than come into conflict over them. If a person's relationship with God also deepens and becomes more "personal", this would seem to come from the same kind of epistemological base as those other insights. Furthermore, deepening one's relationship with God would provide a coherent "big picture" of the nature of life, the world, and self, thereby meeting other key concerns that appear to typify this group. A more personal relationship with God would also have the apparent authority, might and power to salve the existential ache of loneliness, that for some would have begun to feel at the E5 Self-Aware level in muted form, with the awakening of oneself as a separate, differentiated individual, and then even more as they made the shift to self-evaluated standards at the E6 Conscientious level.

The fourth person from the *medium* group who reported a mystical style near-death experience was the person with anorexia nervosa, whose story was told on page 197. The insight that she needed to change, and that death wasn't the only solution seemed to change her relationship with herself. Some important 'meaning-making' process or structure had been "updated" to see things a different way. Perhaps, in the case of the other three, they updated their 'meaning-making' reference point (their religious doctrine beliefs) from a (possibly) simpler acceptance of doctrine to a more sophisticated, and more personally meaningful understanding of the same set of religious beliefs. Similarly, for the woman with anorexia, after the moment of insight she was able "to put things in better perspective" and she added "I also understand how I feel a lot better also". Her beliefs framework, like the other three, had become more invested with personal meaning.

Now let us compare the insights about *God/spiritual/religious* matters from the *low* and *high* ego level groups.

The one story from the *low* group involved an insight which was experienced at the age of 8 years. This person was disillusioned with the church when they would not allow her to be an altar ‘girl’. All that needs to be noted at this point is that the content of this story appeared to be more political or social than an insight about personal religious beliefs. (The full story will be explored in the next chapter in regard to possible ego level change.)

Another story of disillusionment with religious institutions came from the *high* ego level group, and this time, the subject matter was more specifically religious – being an adjustment in this person’s beliefs about the nature of God. The storyteller had been speaking with Jehovahs Witness missionaries, and suddenly drew the *opposite* conclusion to their message, that God would *not* take sides in religion (as if endorsing only members of a certain club), and so she came to the view that religious rituals don’t matter. This insight about her own religious beliefs, was arrived at idiosyncratically, rather than being “received” doctrine, and this aspect, perhaps is characteristic of the *high* ego level group, whereas the more social insight in the former story (the 8 year old child) appeared to be in the service of better understanding “how the world works” – something that this study has noted in the *low* ego level group stories.

In another of the *high* ego level group’s stories, a woman who was feeling rejected by her husband felt so low one day that, while standing on the railway platform, she briefly considered jumping under a train. Instead, she prayed for help, and then ‘saw’ her children

crying at her funeral. This vision stopped her from suicide and has remained a safety reminder for her since. This insight, or vision, was again quite idiosyncratic and unlike the more traditional stories told by the three in the *medium* group, who reported deepening their relationship with God.

Another storyteller in the *high* group had her insight after reading the Tibetan Book of Living and Dying (which explains aspects of Buddhism). This insight could be said to be somewhat similar to the three in the *medium* group, as it involved adopting, at least to some extent, an established spiritual doctrine. However, her expression of the change in her seemed to remain quite unaffected by any “jargon” that might imply indoctrination. She said simply that reading the book made her “think differently” about other people, and that she was less anxious with people and more at ease with negative emotions. She felt validated in her feeling that “there was more to life than work or a career”. Feeling more at ease with negative emotions (or inner conflict) would seem compatible with her membership in the *high* ego level group, and thus hypothetically, the insight could have been involved in a transition from E6 (Conscientious) to E7 (Individualistic). Her comment that she felt validated that work was not the most important thing, also suggests a transition from the achievement focus of E6 to the higher level of appreciation of herself and others typical of the higher group (E7: Individualistic).

A defining feature of any kind of religious doctrine is the fact that it is a pre-formulated worldview – one already put together by others. It seems likely that people at different ego levels would find different kinds of religious doctrines (or different aspects of the same one) appealing. Fowler (1981) has shown there are various levels of religious belief (similar to ego development), whereby at the *low* level, people have more simplistic,

concrete beliefs adopted from the culture, which gradually evolve into a more personalised understanding and belief system.

The sense of having to rely less on pre-formulated doctrine may well be fostered by having the capacity to evaluate, interpret and accommodate, if desired, the ‘spirit’ of many different types of religious/spiritual messages, without being fazed by apparent conflicts, and without feeling bound by the particular “packaging” others have decided upon.

Where atheism might fit into this picture is hard to say. If spiritual/religious beliefs tend to evolve from “more simple” to “more complex” as ego level rises (as do most knowledge frameworks), what happens to a person’s atheism as ego level rises? Do atheists develop a more complex understanding of what it is they don’t believe in, and why? More likely, they develop a more complex understanding of what they do believe in, and those beliefs continue to rule out the adoption of spiritual beliefs. For many atheists, perhaps, the entire spiritual/religious domain can be fairly simply excised from their worldview, without having to engage in much of an inner dialogue about why. After all, few people engage in committed attempts to understand the complexities of worldviews they find to be unconvincing.

*Seeing clearer a new angle or "truth" (87%)*

There was no apparent relationship between ego levels and this theme, which was the most strongly endorsed theme.

#### **Category 4: Outcome**

The themes in relation to the outcomes or consequences of the moment of insight, were further grouped under the following sub-themes.

1. *Instant versus non-instant change*
2. *Positive outcomes*
3. *Negative outcomes*
4. *Work and Relationships*
5. *Individuation and agency*

It was noted that overall, the *high* ego level group endorsed more *outcome* themes at rates greater than chance, than did the other two ego level groups combined.

1. *Instant change versus non-instant change*

The distinction between whether the *change* happened “*instantly*” or not, as explained earlier, is an important theoretical question for this thesis – and a different matter to whether the *moment of insight* experience happened suddenly. Only one of the six themes in Table 30 had an apparent relationship with ego levels.

*Instant change to self or self-beliefs (49%)*

The *high* ego level group told *more* stories than expected in which the change to self or self-beliefs was instant, while the *low* ego level group told *less* of these stories than expected.

This finding may reflect the fact that the *low* ego level group had a higher proportion of those who had *never had* a moment of insight, and a lower proportion of those who had had *prototypical* moments of insight.

Table 30

*Themes Mentioned in Category 4: “Outcomes: Instant versus Non-instant Change”, by Strength of Relationship with Ego Levels. N=67*

Definition elements or themes, rank ordered by effect size	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>	Adjusted Standardised Residuals		
		Ego Levels		
		<i>High</i> <i>n=34</i>	<i>Medium</i> <i>n=21</i>	<i>Low</i> <i>n=12</i>
Instant change to self / self-beliefs *	.095	<b>2.3</b> <sup>b</sup> (22) <sup>c</sup>	-.9 (9)	<b>-2.0</b> (3)
Non-instant change to beliefs about others	.022	-.1 (5)	-.8 (2)	1.1 (3)
Instant change to beliefs about others	.017	.8 (9)	-1.1 (3)	.2 (3)
Non-instant change to beliefs about nature of world	.010	-.7 (5)	.2 (4)	.7 (3)
Non-instant change to self	.008	.5 (11)	-.7 (5)	.3 (4)
Instant change to beliefs about nature of world/life	.001	-.1 (9)	.2 (6)	-.2 (3)

Note: Shading in grey indicates effect size < .040, and no apparent relationship with ego levels.

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes calculated by Goodman Kruskal tau (described in Method text) are rank ordered.

<sup>b</sup> Adjusted standardised residuals of 2 or more are shown in bold.

<sup>c</sup> Figures in parentheses are observed counts.

\*  $p < .05$  in  $\chi^2$  test using unadjusted  $\alpha$  of .05 per element (see Method text.)

There was no apparent relationship between ego level and each of the five remaining themes:

- *non-instant change to beliefs about others (15%).*
- *instant change to beliefs about others (22%)*
- *non-instant change to beliefs about nature of world (18%)*
- *non-instant change to self (31%)*
- *instant change to beliefs about nature of world/life (27%)*

## 2. Positive Outcomes

Each of the first four themes indicating *positive outcomes* in Table 31 had a relationship with ego levels, and they were each also endorsed by a majority of storytellers.

Table 31

*Themes Mentioned in Category 4: “Outcomes: Positive”, by Strength of Relationship with Ego Levels. N=67*

Definition elements or themes, rank ordered by effect size	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>	Adjusted Standardised Residuals		
		Ego Levels		
		<i>High</i> <i>n=34</i>	<i>Medium</i> <i>n=21</i>	<i>Low</i> <i>n=12</i>
Feel more comfortable with, accepting of, peaceful about life	.068	<b>2.1</b> <sup>b</sup> (22) <sup>c</sup>	-1.0 (9)	-1.4 (4)
Adaptive insight	.050	.9 (26)	-1.8 (12)	1.0 (10)
More positive outlook	.044	1.4 (26)	-.2 (14)	-1.5 (6)
Made me stronger, more able to cope	.041	1.6 (25)	-1.4 (11)	-.5 (7)
No longer fear life (found God, or learned secret of life)	.039	-.7 (5)	1.5 (6)	-1.0 (1)

Note: Shading in grey indicates effect size < .040, and no apparent relationship with ego levels.

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes calculated by Goodman Kruskal tau (described in Method text) are rank ordered.

<sup>b</sup> Adjusted standardised residuals of 2 or more are shown in bold.

<sup>c</sup> Figures in parentheses are observed counts.

### *Feel more comfortable with, accepting of, peaceful about life (52%)*

The *high* ego level group told more stories than expected in which they claimed to *feel more comfortable with, accepting of, or peaceful about life*.

### *Adaptive insight (72%)*

The *medium* ego level group had less *adaptive insights* than expected.



*More positive outlook (69%)*

The *low* ego level group tended to have *less* moments of insight in which the storyteller was left with a *more positive outlook*, while the *high* ego level group tended to have *more* of those than expected.

*Made me stronger, more able to cope (64%)*

The *high* ego level group appeared to have more insights than expected in which they felt the experience *made me stronger, more able to cope*. The *medium* group, however, had *less* than expected of these.

*No longer fear life (found God, or learned secret of life) (18%)*

This was the *only* theme the *medium* group endorsed more than chance would predict. The effect size of .039 was marginally under the nominal .040 cut-off, however it is included in this discussion because of the closeness to the cut-off and because it reflects a trend noticed in the qualitative data – that the *medium* group, on the whole, tended to portray an attitude of “having found the answer” to life – sometimes a religious or spiritual one, sometimes a more secular one.

### 3. Negative outcomes

Four themes with negative outcomes were noted in Table 32, but only one had a relationship with ego levels.

Table 32

*Themes Mentioned in Category 4: “Outcomes: Negative”, by Strength of Relationship with Ego Levels. N=67*

Definition elements or themes, rank ordered by effect size	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>	Adjusted Standardised Residuals		
		Ego Levels		
		<i>High</i> <i>n=34</i>	<i>Medium</i> <i>n=21</i>	<i>Low</i> <i>n=12</i>
Just world theory shattered or disillusioned with world/life	.074	-1.1 (3) <sup>c</sup>	-.6 (2)	<b>2.2</b> <sup>b</sup> (4)
Maladaptive/defensive insight	.037	-1.5 (0)	.6 (1)	1.2 (1)
More negative outlook	.006	.0 (4)	-.4 (2)	.6 (2)
Made me weaker, more damaged/traumatised	.005	.4 (3)	-.6 (1)	.1 (1)

Note: Shading in grey indicates effect size < .040, and no apparent relationship with ego levels.

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes calculated by Goodman Kruskal tau (described in Method text) are rank ordered.

<sup>b</sup> Adjusted standardised residuals of 2 or more are shown in bold.

<sup>c</sup> Figures in parentheses are observed counts.

#### *Just world theory shattered or disillusioned with world/life (13%)*

The *low* ego level group told more stories than expected in which their *just world theory was shattered or they become disillusioned with the world/life*. Such an outcome would be quite devastating, as not only is the person's sense of fairness and conviction about what is “right” is shattered, but also their sense of having an accurate view of the world is compromised.

The remaining negative outlook themes had no apparent relationship with ego levels:

- *maladaptive/defensive insight (5%).*
- *more negative outlook (12%)*
- *made me weaker, more damaged/traumatised (8%)*

As mentioned in the previous analysis, the most common outcomes of moments of insight in this study have been positive, reflecting similar results for other studies of

sudden change (Miller & C'deBaca, 1994). In light of this, any stories which reported or implied negative outcomes – in particular, those from the *prototypical* group in this study - were worthy of closer examination. Being “exceptions to the rule”, they could have valuable information to impart. Only 2 of the 8 negative outcome stories in this study were *prototypical* moments of insight.

### Examination of 2 prototypical stories with negative outcomes

#### *From the high ego level group*

One of the two was interview participant, Kasandra, whose story will be examined in more detail as one of the case studies (chapter 14). Kasandra was recorded as having experienced a *more negative outlook* because her first emotional response to the experience was fear of change in the first moments, followed by many negative emotions over the first few months afterwards, as the ramifications of the change experience she felt drawn to caused upheaval and confusion in her life. However, the negative outlook was always part of mixed emotions and eventually she developed a greater sense of confidence in herself and a deeper overall sense of herself as an individual, than she had previously had.

#### *From the medium ego level group*

The other *prototypical* story came from a questionnaire participant from the *medium* ego level group. This was the only story in the study which registered as having *all four* of the negative outcome themes identified in this study: *just world theory shattered, disillusioned with world/life; maladaptive/defensive insight; more negative outlook; made me weaker, more damaged/traumatised*.

E6: I have had several moments of insight. I usually mature a lot after them. One of the most important ones to me is the time I realised that not everything works out right, the way you planned, not even if you put all your effort into it. I was visiting my family in Spain with my mother. My grandparents were very sick and it was a rather sad holiday to see them in the state they were in. I was looking forward to returning home and seeing my friends and partying, as I had just completed my exams. We had booked a taxi to take us to the airport over 6 hours early, so we would not miss the plane. I was very eager. We left early that morning to the airport. But problems kept arising. Such as a traffic jam, a motor accident, the tyre going flat etc. I suddenly realised that we were not going to make the plane. We missed the plane that day, even though we tried so hard to get to the airport, eg. By taking different routes. At the age of 15, on that day, I realised that sometimes, no matter how hard you try, or how prepared you are, things can go wrong and in life, you don't always get what you want (eg going home). Even though it may have been obvious to some people, prior to that point, I had always thought that if you tried hard enough – you would get what you wanted. It made me feel very sad to realise this was wrong and it also gave me a rather pessimistic outlook on life ever since. Now I am never sure whether what I want will happen. Yet before that experience – I was always positive that things were going to happen if I tried hard enough.

The over-riding negative element in this case would seem to be the fact that this person's *just world theory had been shattered*, and she had become to some extent, *disillusioned with world/life*. (Before this experience, she had believed that by being prepared and trying hard, you can get the things you want.) This experience made her feel *more negative* about what was possible for her personally to achieve, and it also appeared to make her feel less in control, thus *weaker and less able to cope*. Her more pessimistic outlook was to a mild extent, *maladaptive and defensive in nature*. It is possibly unlikely that a person at a higher ego level would have experienced the same degree of ongoing

pessimism in response to an experience such as this, as they would probably already be well aware that life is not always fair or controllable. Therefore although the situation might well frustrate them in a similar way to the storyteller, it is unlikely that it would challenge their worldview, to leave them feeling more pessimistic overall. The conclusions this person came to were not helpful ones.

#### 4. Work and Relationships

The themes related to work, relationships, and the related theme, of leaving other undesirable situations in general, are shown in Table 33.

##### *Realised I would have to leave romantic partner (15%)*

This result, perhaps more than all others, was entirely unanticipated and is a most interesting discovery from the data of this study. A very strong effect size accompanied the findings that *only* members of the *high* ego level groups told stories of moments of insight, in which they made decisions to leave their romantic partner. (Six of the 10 people involved were questionnaire participants, and four were interview participants). The exclusivity of this finding to the *high* ego level group could signal that either the decision to leave is made once a person is operating at the *high* ego level, or alternatively, that the decision to leave is part of an actual shift to a higher ego level. Leaving an undesirable relationship may require a strong act of individuation, or a strong push in that direction. In leaving a relationship, a person also leaves behind many long-habituated strains and stresses and blocks to changing, that had grown to become a part of the relationship. Leaving can be seen as a vote of confidence in oneself and one's potential future, in that a

better life has been envisaged, the need to change the status quo has been faced, and the usually hard decision to de-invest oneself from the current relationship has been embraced.

Table 33

*Themes Mentioned in Category 4: “Outcome: Work and Relationships”, by Strength of Relationship with Ego Levels. N=67*

Definition elements or themes, rank ordered by effect size	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>	Ego Levels		
		<i>High</i> <i>n=34</i>	<i>Medium</i> <i>n=21</i>	<i>Low</i> <i>n=12</i>
Realised I would have to leave romantic partner *	.170	<b>3.4</b> <sup>b</sup> (10) <sup>c</sup>	<b>-2.3</b> (0)	-1.6 (0)
Perceived work differently	.047	1.7 (7)	-1.4 (1)	-.6 (1)
Realised I would have to leave work	.045	1.7 (5)	-.8 (1)	-1.2 (0)
Perceived important relationship/s differently	.040	1.1 (17)	-1.6 (6)	.5 (6)
Need to escape/leave former undesirable situation	.010	.7 (13)	-.1 (7)	-.8 (3)

Note: Shading in grey indicates effect size < .040, and no apparent relationship with ego levels.

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes calculated by Goodman Kruskal tau (described in Method text) are rank ordered.

<sup>b</sup> Adjusted standardised residuals of 2 or more are shown in bold.

<sup>c</sup> Figures in parentheses are observed counts.

\*  $p < .05$  in  $\chi^2$  test using unadjusted  $\alpha$  of .05 per element (see Method text.)

It may also be, however, that a high level of ego development might help a person to feel sufficiently empowered or confident to entertain the notion of making such a “big” change – which is often undertaken in mid-life (as most of the *high* ego level group were).

Leaving a relationship, then, is a contender for being considered a characteristic marker, signalling possible transition from the *medium* to *high* ego levels.

*Perceived work differently (13%)*

The *high* ego level group mentioned this theme more than chance, and the *medium* ego level group mentioned it less than chance (despite the *medium* groups' theoretical preoccupation with achievement and career). If, however, moments of insight are indeed implicated in change in ego level, then those at the *medium* level, preoccupied with career, may have moved on to the *high* ego level, wholly or partly upon having had such a shift in perception about work.

*Realised I would have to leave work (9%)*

The *high* ego level group seem somewhat more inclined to endorse this item than expected. In all cases, those who realised they would have to leave work conveyed the notion that it would be in the best interests for their happiness and personal development.

*Perceived important relationship/s differently (43%)*

Despite the similarity of this theme to the one in which people reported *leaving* relationships, the findings as to those who *perceived important relationship/s differently* showed only a very mild relationship with ego levels, whereby the *medium* group endorsed it *less* than expected. This result reflects the finding that the *medium* group had less insights in general about personal relationships.

*Need to escape or leave former undesirable situation (34%)*

There was no apparent relationship between this theme and ego levels. This was despite the fact that a substantial number of people (34% of the total sample) had insights in which it suddenly became clear to them, either for the first time or much more intensely than previously, that they must leave the job, location, or the relationship they were in.

## 6. Individuation and Agency

Ego level theory would suggest that a person's individuation and sense of agency would climb as ego level develops.

### *Freed from others' opinions or influence (25%)*

The act of individuation is almost by definition a process in which one becomes *freed from others' opinions or influence*. Table 34 shows this theme evidenced a very strong effect size and the residuals were also very strong in magnitude, showing that the *high* ego level group tended far more than expected, to tell stories in which they freed themselves from others' influence (reflecting their greater tendency to leave relationships). The *medium* ego level group were on the other hand, clearly much *less* inclined than expected to tell stories of breaking free from others' opinions or influence – even much less so than the *low* ego level group. Again, this reflects the fact they told less stories about personal relationships.

### *Became more individuated (64%)*

Compatible with ego development theory, the *high* ego level group evidenced a stronger than expected tendency to tell stories in which *became more individuated* was judged to be a key theme. Less obviously, the *medium* ego level group were decidedly below expectation (lower even than were the *low* ego level group) in terms of supplying stories of *individuation*. This may reflect also their tendency not to have insights involving conflicts in personal relationships.



Table 34

*Themes Mentioned in Category 4: “Outcome: Individuation and Agency”, by Strength of Relationship with Ego Levels. N=67*

Definition elements or themes, rank ordered by effect size	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>	Adjusted Standardised Residuals		
		Ego Levels		
		<i>High</i> <i>n=34</i>	<i>Medium</i> <i>n=21</i>	<i>Low</i> <i>n=12</i>
Freed from other’s opinions or influence *	.192	<b>3.6</b> <sup>b</sup> (15) <sup>c</sup>	<b>-2.6</b> (1)	-1.5 (1)
Became more individuated *	.151	<b>3.1</b> (28)	<b>-2.5</b> (9)	-1.1 (6)
Broke away from parents’/authority’s views to use my own	.069	-.9 (2)	-.8 (1)	<b>2.1</b> (3)
Change in opposite direction to other’s (attempt to) influence	.047	.9 (7)	-1.7 (1)	.9 (3)
Increased sense of agency	.027	1.3 (20)	-.9 (9)	-.7 (5)
Decreased sense of agency	.005	.4 (3)	-.6 (1)	.1 (1)

Note: Shading in grey indicates effect size < .040, and no apparent relationship with ego levels.

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes calculated by Goodman Kruskal tau (described in Method text) are rank ordered.

<sup>b</sup> Adjusted standardised residuals of 2 or more are shown in bold.

<sup>c</sup> Figures in parentheses are observed counts.

\*  $p < .05$  in  $\chi^2$  test using unadjusted  $\alpha$  of .05 per element (see Method text.)

*Broke away from parents’/authority’s views to use my own (9%)*

The *low* ego level group told more stories than expected about *breaking away from parents’ or authority’s views to use their own*. This was in keeping with what might have been expected from ego level theory. Further, the *low* ego level group in this sample, on average, were younger and just coming into adulthood, and possibly beginning the early processes of individuation by challenging parents and authorities, to find their own voices.

*Change in opposite direction to other’s (attempt to) influence (16%)*

Many of the stories within this theme are those in which the storyteller became disillusioned with friends or family, and changed in the opposite direction to the influence that was being applied to them, despite the attempts to influence them otherwise, or despite

what might have been expected. A brief keyword summary list of what is meant by “opposite directions”, listed by each of the ego level groups, may help demonstrate what is being referred to here.

- Low:*           took opposite view to church;  
                       rejected mother’s view;  
                       became strong despite cruel treatment from boyfriend/friends.
- Medium:*       rejected parents’ worldview.
- High:*           insight was opposite to Jehovahs Witness message;  
                       rejected others’ advice for own dream advice;  
                       rejected husband’s offer of job to take up new career;  
                       left bad friends in country for the city;  
                       rejected wife’s low assessment of academic talent and instead fulfilled potential.  
                       read devout paper on Moses, realised bible not literally true  
                       talk with minister re losing faith, decided to leave the church

The *medium* ego level group endorsed this theme somewhat *less* than expected.

This may be because the *medium* ego level group tended to have less insights involving personal relationships.

#### *Increased sense of agency (51%)*

There was no apparent relationship between *increased agency* and ego levels.

#### *Decreased sense of agency (8%)*

There was no apparent relationship between *decreased agency* and ego levels.

Five people, (8%) indicated they had felt a *decreased sense of agency* as a result of their story experience. Of those five stories, only one qualified as *prototypical*. It was one

of the negative stories explored above, in which the storyteller, at 15, missed her plane and became disillusioned.

### **Summary story themes characteristic of *high* ego level group**

There were many story themes that the *high* ego level group *endorsed more than expected by chance*, but only one theme that that they *endorsed less than expected by chance*.

#### Themes endorsed more than expected by chance by the high ego level group

##### *1. Context*

Turbulence in life \*

Happy beforehand \*

Internal processes attributed as main trigger/change agent \*

##### *2. Nature of MOI*

Mystical or inexplicable shift \*

A sudden "definable moment" \*

##### *3. Content*

Insights about work/career \*

Insights about self

##### *4. Outcome*

Freed from other's opinions or influence \*

Realised I would have to leave romantic partner \*

Became more individuated \*

Instant change to self / self-beliefs \*

Feel more comfortable with, accepting of, peaceful about life

Perceived work differently

Realised I would have to leave work

Made me stronger, more able to cope

Themes endorsed less than expected by chance by the high ego level group

2. *Nature*

No specific instance, general story only

**Summary story themes characteristic of *medium* ego level group**

The distribution of *medium* ego level story themes shows a reverse of the pattern, in that it was the under-endorsement of themes that characterised the *medium* ego level group – and there was only one theme which they marginally over-endorsed. This reverse pattern however, involved a different mixture of themes than those that produced the *high* ego level group's profile.

Themes endorsed more than expected by chance by the medium ego level group

4. *Outcome.*

No longer fear life (found God, or learned secret of life)

Themes endorsed less than expected by chance by the medium ego level group

1. *Context*

Turbulence in life \*

Others' views of me triggered my new perception of me

Reaction to others' negative behaviour

Traumatic life event/s

3. *Content*

Insights about personal relationships

4. *Outcome*

Freed from other's opinions or influence \*

Realised I would have to leave romantic partner \*

Became more individuated \*

Adaptive insight

Change in opposite direction to other's (attempt to) influence

Perceived important relationship/s differently

## Summary story themes characteristic of *low* ego level group

The *low* ego level group, more than the other two groups, evidenced a spread of story themes at rates both *above* and *below* that expected by chance.

### Themes endorsed more than expected by chance by the low ego level group

#### *1. Context*

Neutral beforehand \*

Education/suggestion, eg book/therapy/advice triggers

Others' perceptions of others /world triggered mine (to copy)

#### *4. Outcome*

Just world theory shattered or disillusioned with world/life

Broke away from parents'/authority's views to use my own

### Themes endorsed less than expected by chance by the low ego level group

#### *1. Context*

Travelling or relocating

Internal processes attributed as main trigger/change agent \*

#### *2. Nature*

Mystical or inexplicable shift \*

#### *3. Content*

Insights about work/career \*

#### *4. Outcome*

Instant change to self / self-beliefs \*

More positive outlook

## Summary of the four categories and ego level group characteristics

A pattern emerged from the analysis, whereby those people at *high* ego levels favoured or “over-endorsed” a large range of themes (15 in all) which were broadly

representative of the themes found in *prototypical* stories, and further, the *high* ego level group under-endorsed only one theme. A very different pattern emerged for those in the *medium* ego level group, who favoured only one theme: *no longer fear life (found God, or learned secret of life)*, and “under-endorsed” 12 themes, making the *medium* ego level profile most noticeable for its under-endorsements. The pattern in respect to the *low* ego level group was a more even spread of themes which were “over-” and “under-endorsed”. The following is a summary of the general trends in ego level group endorsements, within each of the categories.

Context:

The *high* ego level group told more stories in which life turbulence was featured as a context, and the *medium* ego level group told less stories with life turbulence as a context.

The mood before moments of insight was most often unhappy, whereby 34% of all participants indicated being unhappy just before the moment of insight, as opposed to 25% who indicated their mood was neutral, while 18% indicated they were happy. The *high* ego level group more often indicated they were happy beforehand than the other two groups, and the *low* ego level group more often indicated they were neutral beforehand.

The *high* ego level group more often tended to attribute their insights to internal processes, while the *low* ego level group did so less often than expected.

The context or setting for the *medium* group members' insights tended to have less than expected number of themes involving life turbulence or traumatic events, and similarly, less themes than expected in which they were reacting to others' negative behaviour, and less where others' views triggered their new self-perception.

This was in contrast to the *low* group's tendency to have more insights in which their insights were a response to forms of education, suggestion or advice from others, and in which they were influenced by others' perceptions of other people or the world in general.

*Nature:*

The *high* ego level group tended to more strongly endorse the *prototypical* theme that their moments of insight happened in a sudden, definable moment. They were also more likely than the other groups to have mystical experiences, or inexplicable shifts, whereas the *low* group were less inclined to report this type of experience. None of the *high* group told a general story with no specific details, as did members of the other groups.

*Content:*

The *high* ego level group tended to have more than expected insights about work or careers, and more insights about self than expected. The *low* ego level group had less than expected insights about work or career (a result that may have been confounded by their

younger ages), while the *medium* ego level group had less than expected insights about personal relationships.

Outcome:

The outcomes for the *high* ego level group were in general more positive than for the other two groups. The *high* group reported more than expected outcomes in which they underwent *instant change to their self or self-beliefs*, in which they *became more individuated; freed from others' opinions or influence*; in which they believed the insight *made them stronger, more able to cope*; and after the insight they *felt more comfortable with, accepting of, peaceful about life*. More often than expected, they *perceived work differently, realising they would have to leave work*. There was an exclusive tendency for members of the *high* group to have realisations that they *would have to leave their romantic partner*. No-one from the other groups reported insights with this theme.

As mentioned above, the only theme which the *medium* ego level group mentioned more often than expected was the outcome that they *no longer feared life (found God or learned secret of life)*. Many of the themes which were “over-endorsed” by the *high* ego level groups were the same themes which the *medium* group “under-endorsed”, namely: *freed from other's opinions or influence; realised I would have to leave romantic partner; became more individuated; adaptive insight*. In addition, the *medium* group were also less likely to endorse the following two themes, each of which seems to exemplify the fact that the *medium* ego level group had less insights about personal relationships, as noted above: *change in opposite direction to other's (attempt to) influence; perceived important relationship/s differently*.



## Non-linear results

A check was made to determine which of the story elements were endorsed in a non-linear fashion, by checking which themes the *medium* ego level group endorsed more than the other two groups, and which they endorsed less than the other two. As noted earlier, the *medium* ego level group tended to under-endorse most elements. Those elements in which the effect size was greater than .040, and in which there was a clear non-linear pattern of endorsements by the three groups are shown below. The list of themes presented here is similar, but not identical to, the list presented above.

The first story theme, *no longer fear life (found God, or learned secret of life)*, was an exception in that the *medium* ego level group endorsed this theme *more* strongly than did the *high* and *low* ego level groups. In the following 13 story themes, the *medium* ego level group endorsed each of the elements *less* strongly than both the *high* and *low* ego level groups. Note that the first seven of the group of 13 themes which the *medium* ego level group under-endorsed were themes relating to personal relationships, about which the *medium* ego level group told less stories.

*Themes endorsed by the medium group more than the other two groups:*

No longer fear life (found God, or learned secret of life)

*Themes endorsed by the medium group less than the other two groups:*

Reaction to others' negative behaviour  
 Others' views of me triggered my new perception of me  
 Insight about personal relationships  
 Freed from others' opinions or influence  
 Realised I would have to leave romantic partner  
 Change in opposite direction to others' (attempt to) influence

Perceived important relationship/s differently  
 Made me stronger, more able to cope  
 Perceived work differently  
 Adaptive insight  
 Turbulence in life  
 Became more individuated  
 Insight about world/life (non-religious)

## Word Counts and Ego Level

Although Hy and Loevinger (1996) reported convincing evidence that *word counts* of the Sentence Completion Tests were positively correlated with ego level (although nowhere near as reliably as inter-rater estimations), this “word count” effect did not appear to hold in this study in respect to reporting of moments of insight. When adjusted to include only those storytellers who told stories of moments of insight, the mean word counts for each of the three ego levels were quite similar: 110, 108, and 122 for the *low*, *medium* and *high* groups respectively. It may be that because the majority of this study’s participants have tertiary eligibility, they may be somewhat more literate or verbally fluent, across all the presenting levels, than a more representative sample of the general population.

Having analysed in detail the differential endorsements of themes by ego levels, we now turn to a summary profile of each of the three ego levels, showing which themes each ego level group characteristically over-emphasised or under-emphasised.

## Characterising moments of insight by ego level groups

In considering the profiles that emerged from the foregoing analyses of data, it is important to keep in mind that the groupings of ego level in this study, adopted through statistical necessity, will inevitably miss some of the finer distinctions that could have been made between single ego stages if numbers had permitted. However it has been fortunate that at least the E6 Conscientious level has been separated from the more clearly Conformist levels below (E4 and E5), and the more clearly Individualistic levels above (E7 and E8).

In general, the *low* ego level group in this study tended to be preoccupied with learning about the external world and how life works. The *medium* ego level group appeared to be concerned with consolidation of self and mastery of the world, and the *high* ego level group was characterised by a deepening concentration on individuation and internalisation. All of this equates with Loevinger's (1976) characterisations.

### *Low ego level group*

The *low* ego level group's insights were more negative overall than the other two groups. The *low* group tended to have more outcomes where the person was left feeling disillusioned, even with their "just world theory" shattered. They were also less likely to have outcomes in which they were left with a more positive outlook. They appeared to be at the beginning of processes of individuation, because they were most likely to mention themes like "breaking away from authority or parent's views". Yet the *low* ego level group were also characterised by having insights which were part of a learning experience

whereby they were influenced by advice or guidance, and they also tended more often to adopt the perceptions or ideas of others as the content of their insight.

The *low* ego level group were less likely to have mystical or inexplicable shifts; less likely to undergo an instant change to their self beliefs; and less likely to attribute their insights to internal processes as being the main trigger for the insight. Probably because of their younger age overall, they were less likely to be travelling or relocating at the time of their insight, and less likely to have insights about work or career. The *low* ego level group were more likely to report insights in which their mood was neutral beforehand.

#### *Medium ego level group*

The *medium* ego level group's insights tended to happen in a rather invisible kind of neutral zone, reflecting the fact that the majority of themes were endorsed in a linear fashion, such that the *medium* group were usually in the middle of that linear trend. Their endorsement of themes were thus both less positive and less negative than the other two groups. Their insights happened less often in contexts of life turbulence and trauma, suggesting that perhaps the transition to the E6 Conscientious level may not usually be one prompted by interpersonal conflict (as they had less insights about personal relationships). Instead, it seems possible the more likely kind of insight is one which reveals some "higher truth" about the nature of life. The latter point was made because the only time the *medium* group endorsed a theme more than expected (and then only marginally) was in relation to insights in which they conveyed a sense of no longer having so much to fear in life, because they had found God or felt they had learned some important secret of life.

To some extent, this theme, suggesting the feeling of having “found the answer” was evident in both Sarah’s and Louise’s cases – both of whom appeared to shift from the *low* to *medium* ego level (E5 to E6) at the time of their insight. For Sarah, the “secret of life” she had discovered was that she was all alone in life, yet could be responsible for herself, and could make her own choices. For Louise, the new “secret of life” was that the bible wasn’t literally true, and that she could go ahead and interpret wisdom and religious “truths” in her own way, without having to reconcile so much “inconsistency” as before. Most striking for this group, they tended to under-endorse themes suggestive of individuation in general, evidencing the opposite of the pattern of individuating themes that characterised the *high* group. Specifically, the *medium* group under-endorsed being freed from others’ influence; were less likely to be judged as becoming more individuated; and less likely to have insights which appeared to be generally adaptive.

They were less likely to have insights about personal relationships, and thus less likely to endorse themes about perceiving relationships differently, and changing in the opposite direction to other’s influence. None of the *medium* group had insights in which they realised they would have to leave romantic relationships – a result that was well below chance.

### *High ego level group*

The *high* ego level group’s favoured themes tended to characterise their moments of insight as being primarily about an escalation of individuation processes. For the *high* ego level group, insights happened in varying contexts – at times when they were experiencing life turbulence, but also at times when they were feeling happy beforehand.

People at the *high* level tended to attribute the trigger for their insights as being an internal process, even though in most cases external prompts were also evident. The *high* ego level group especially told insights that were sudden and happened in a definable moment – reflecting the fact that more than half of this group told *prototypical* moments of insight. It was mostly members of the *high* ego level group who related stories which told of mystical experiences or a shift that was otherwise inexplicable by ordinary psychological reasoning.

In terms of content, the *high* ego level group tended to be characterised more by stories about self and about work or careers. Furthermore, the change in their sense of self or self-beliefs tended to happen instantly. Their insights tended to be about moving on in life. This group told stories in which they perceived work differently, and in which they realised that they would have to leave their current work.

Most striking for the *high* ego level group however was the fact they were the *only* ones whose insights led them to leave their romantic partner, usually because of a realisation that their current relationship was destructive. The particular outcome themes which indicated individuation were: they more often felt freed from other's opinions or influence; they felt generally stronger and more able to cope; and they had more outcomes directly judged as being individuating experiences. Mostly, the themes in regard to leaving work and relationships seemed to be acts of individuation – rather than “running away”. Finally, the *high* ego level group more than the other two were left participants feeling more comfortable with, accepting of, or peaceful about life.

## Chapter 10

### Stage 4: Examining Stories for Evidence of Ego Level Change

This part of the analysis will examine a selection of the *prototypical* moment of insight stories in order to qualitatively explore the hypothesis that such experiences may have played a role in the transition from one ego level to the next.

#### Selection of stories

The stories selected for this analysis were those in which sudden or substantial ego level change at the time of the moment of insight seemed most likely or demonstrable.

Ego development theory was used as a guide to select those stories whose themes; language and expression styles; and preoccupations and concerns appeared to typify, or be close to, the themes, language and preoccupations which are characteristic of particular stages of ego development (as summarised in Table 1).

The main question being asked of the data is “what ego level does this person appear to be operating at, before, during and after the incident they describe?”. Does the person in this story appear to have shifted in ego level immediately following the moment of insight? If so, what role did the moment of insight appear to play in that shift? (These questions are asked in the context of knowing the person’s current ego level, which can be taken as a likely ceiling ego level for that person.)

Stories were selected if they appeared to contain ego level shifts from the ego level immediately below their current one. However some incidents which happened many years earlier, could well have been transitions at even earlier ego stages.

Where possible speculations will be made as to whether the *context, nature, content and outcomes* described in the sample stories seemed consistent, not only with a shift in terms of ego development theory, but also with any common themes identified in this study's ego level groupings in the preceding analysis. Unfortunately, this study was restricted to statistically analysing themes which characterised ego level groupings (*high, medium and low*) rather than each of the specific ego levels (E3 through to E8) because of the small numbers overall. Some finer distinctions are lost in those groupings, making comparisons with single ego level shifts, as in this particular analysis, less accessible.

All of the selected examples are taken from questionnaire participants' half page written stories. A similar but more in-depth analysis will be conducted with case studies drawn from the interview participants' stories, in the following chapters.

The first task was to assemble a key-word summary of the content of all the *prototypical* moments of insight reported at each level, to gain an overview of what might be thus exposed.

### **Possible ego level transitions in *low* ego level group stories**

Table 35 shows a key-word summary of the *low ego* level group insights. The content of these tends to be about "self" learning how to operate in the world, or how to



interpret events or experiences. They tended to be insights whereby the storyteller identified and corrected some of their former misunderstandings or poor ways of coping.

*Table 35*

*Key-word Summary of 4 prototypical Stories of Moments of Insight Provided by Questionnaire Participants at the Low Ego Level.*

*Low Ego Level Group:*

- *8 years old, asked to be an “altar girl”, but church would only let boys do it. Lost faith in church, realised women not given a fair go but “we can do same as men”.*
- *In therapy, realised I’ve always felt I don’t have a father, but that’s not true, he did love us. Mother had tried to turn us against him to get our loyalty.*
- *One therapy session waited for therapist to start, but she never did. Sat the whole hour in silence. Made me realise I sometimes have to take the lead.*
- *Travelling, one night it hit me that I felt I’d never achieved anything, but I had. Realised others just get on with their lives, and I should appreciate myself.*

The first example in the *low* group is a person rated at the E4 Conformist level (one level lower than most of the *low* group, who are rated at E5 Self-Aware) whose story was considered earlier in relation to religious/spiritual insights. If this person’s moment of insight was indeed one that helped her to make the transition from E3 Self-Protective to E4 Conformist, then what possible evidence does her story offer to support that idea? Does the insight contain themes or ideas suggestive of giving up some measure of self-protective E3 thinking, and/or does it suggest that through this experience, she took on a greater measure of E4 Conformist themes? One of the most defining aspects of E4 conformism is the strong sense of allegiance to a group identity – the need to belong to that group (family, race, school, religion) and to be loyal to it. Consider the insight story in full.

### Example 1

Could this insight have been part of a transition from E3 Self-Protective to E4 Conformist?

*E4: I was about 8 when this happened. I had been brought up in a moderately religious family (catholic) and we generally attended church. I remember one day asking the priest if I could be an altar girl – but he told me no, because I was a girl and only boys could do the job. In that moment I lost my faith in the church (though not the religion) and I realised that women weren't always given a fair go. Since then I have had little interest in the church and I believe more than ever that women can do anything that men can.*

If it were not for the tone of defensive protectiveness of her chosen “group” in the last sentence, this story could quite conceivably have come from a higher, post-conformist level. However, that strong switch of group allegiance demonstrated in the last sentence is a clue that the predominant paradigm was conformism – the need to identify with and belong to a particular group. The storyteller switched from a “moderately religious” acceptance of the church, to a rejection of the church, in favour of strengthening her identification with women – the very group which had been discriminated against, but one from whose membership she could not so easily retire. The tone of this strong sense of group solidarity with women (as a fairly undifferentiated, homogenous, idealised group), “*I believe more than ever that women can do anything that men can*” strongly combines both a sense of protectiveness (E3) and allegiance to a group (E4). That this storyteller so strongly defended this notion suggested a belief that some kind of external authority might not allow it. The mixture of E3 Self-protective and E4 Conformist themes in this insight seems to me amenable to the proposition that the insight could have played a role in her transition from E3 to E4. Exactly what kind of role is impossible to know – whether it marked the beginning or end of a more gradual process, or whether it was, in itself, the

moment when the transition happened. My sense is that it is unlikely to be the latter. More likely, especially given her age, it may have marked the beginning of a long, slow transition from E3 to E4, taking weeks, months or even perhaps years to complete.

The three remaining examples from the *low* ego level group examples above, all rated at the E5 Self-Aware ego level, can similarly be examined, this time with the aim of speculating, in the first instance, as to whether there are any likely traces of a transition taking place between the E4 Conformist paradigm, and the awakening of greater self-awareness of individual differences, typical of the E5 Self-Aware level. All three of these E5 examples appeared to contain the theme of becoming more individuated and more responsible for their interpretations of the world, as would seem fitting for someone moving from the group conformism and attachment to stereotypes which typify E4 Conformism, to the greater sense of differentiation from the group, of the E5 Self-Aware level. Consider the following example.

### **Example 2**

Could this insight have been part of the transition from E4 Conformist to E5 Self-Aware?

*E5: I'd just finished Uni (completed my degree) and I didn't know what I wanted to do or that if I'd achieved anything. After 4 months of travelling, I was about to go to bed in a youth hostel one night when it hit me. All the people that I'd met and spent time with seemed to get on with their life. I was feeling bad because I thought I hadn't achieved anything, but then I realised that there were so many things that I had done and dismissed as nothing that were really something. I decided that I was looking for perfection without actually having any definition of it and that it was pointless. I should just appreciate where I was and let everything else flow.*

This person seemed to be implying that before this insight she had a largely unconscious drive for perfection, that tended to invalidate or dismiss her achievements on the grounds that they had not reached some vague notion of perfectionism. Although this drive towards perfectionism may sound individualistic in nature, the fact that she had only a vague notion of how perfection might be achieved, earmarks that perfectionism as one of the likely traps of E4 style conformism. One of the legacies of stereotyping is that it tends to invoke expectations of vague, unattainable perfection, such as “the perfect mother”, “the perfect job”, “the perfect house”, and so on (Braiker, 1986). These expectations are elusive, compelling, and very often largely unconscious, setting us up for what has to be, ultimately, a losing struggle. Opportunities for success are minimal or impossible, while opportunities for failure are legion. When this storyteller realised that she had been blocked by (something like) this trap, she was freed to “appreciate” herself in a more accepting and less demanding way, and to “get on” with her life, as she realised others were able to do. The act of appreciating where she was in life, of learning from others, and making a change within herself, could easily be seen as an act of becoming more aware, more differentiated (from the stereotypes) than before.

Her moment of insight would thus seem reasonably consistent with the notion that this experience may have been integral in her making a shift from the stereotyping traps of E4 Conformism to the greater individual freedom of E5 Self-Awareness. Furthermore, the fact it happened while she had been travelling and meeting others would have allowed her many opportunities to compare her outlook with others, and to be in a flexible enough mode (a transitional phase of life too, between studies and work) to fully contemplate the insight and accept its wisdom. While there can be no certainty that a shift in ego level accompanied this insight in “real time”, it seems possible in this case.

## Possible ego level transitions in *medium* ego level group stories

The *medium* group's main concern, as Table 36 shows, appeared to be with the deepening or enriching of their understandings about how the world (or religion) works.

Table 36

*Key-word Summary of 10 prototypical Moments of Insight provided by Questionnaire Participants at the Medium Ego Level.*

*Medium Ego Level Group:*

- *Split from friends in Vietnam, was afraid but realised I wanted to stay, I'd rather die than regret not doing this, it would made me grow. This thought relaxed me.*
- *In heart-felt talk with mum realised how much she sacrificed, and how much I loved and appreciated her, and her me.*
- *Very ill with anorexia, suddenly body and soul not connected, saw myself from a distance and didn't like it, felt need to change, now more determined and patient.*
- *Traffic jam stopped us catching plane home, realised sometimes no matter how hard you try, things can go wrong, became more pessimistic.*
- *Lying in Hyde Park watching people, realised they can live without boundaries or obligations. Was a shock.*
- *After a breakup with partner I had nothing in common with, was with a friend, suddenly realised we were so alike in almost every way, but we didn't get close.*
- *String of let downs, lost someone I loved, at a talk felt the shields over my eyes had been lifted, and that I could rely on God, will never be alone or afraid.*
- *Sitting on train, thought of life as a clothesline on which I hung one experience after another, felt clarity that I had worked out how to live without regrets.*
- *Reading bible, 8 years old, realised Christianity is not a religion, it's a relationship. Feeling a personal relationship with God changed my life.*
- *Usually not interested in school, but given essay I was interested in, spent time on it, got great marks, teacher commented I was good student, realised my potential.*

The *medium* group's insights seem to have a sense of gaining momentum, of piecing together secrets as to how the world works, divining clues as to how best to operate in the world to gain mastery over it and themselves. Their outlook in general seems to be expansive – a reaching further forward from the self-awareness of E5 to a more enriched

and conscientious sense of self at E6, now with self-evaluated standards. Two examples which seem likely to have played such a role are examined below.

### **Example 3**

Could this insight have been part of a transition from E5 Self-Aware to E6 Conscientious?

*E6: I was in Vietnam by myself after splitting up with friends because of a massive fight. This was my first time travelling in an overseas country and I had just turned 25. The night before I was the most afraid I have ever been in my life, but I didn't even think about going home. I couldn't eat my breakfast that morning and my hands were shaking as I packed to get a flight to the north of the country. As I was going to the airport, I looked out of the car and remember thinking if I don't do this and enjoy it, I will regret it for the rest of my life. And that I would rather die doing this than to not face it and return home? At that moment I relaxed and it felt like I was in tune with the whole universe and that it would all work to grow me and expand my mind. And it did.*

The fear of the shift from the lingering conformism of E5 (which here could be the former reliance on friends' company during travel overseas) to reliance on self, and one's own standards of E6 Conscientiousness, is (possibly) highlighted in this story. The "life turbulence" of having a fight with friends and being in an unfamiliar country would seem to put this person into a high probability of an ego paradigm change, where the importance of the company of friends, (not just a conformist need, but an important human value) must take back seat to the importance for sticking with one's own ideals, or plan – with the sense that personal growth must take precedence. Her statement "I would rather die doing this than to not face it and return home" could hardly be a stronger statement of the importance of going her own way, at this time in her life. That statement also possibly

hints at the terrible threat of regressing back to an earlier state of being. Indeed, the looming threat of regression, teamed with her belief that she *must* continue on with her plans in order to grow, appeared to provide a ‘push and pull’ effect that suddenly coalesced in her sense of commitment that she had taken the right action.

Her sense of relaxation that followed suggested a new sense of congruence within her self and a sense of confidence in her future – which now she perhaps saw as being more within her control – because she had proven to herself that she could make courageous decisions on her own behalf and see herself through difficult situations, when all else fails. Considering the turmoil and fear this person felt, her initial nervousness at her decision, and her relaxation when she fully committed to the difficult decision she had made, it seems likely that this insight might have been an integral part of a “real time” shift from E5 Self-Aware to E6 Conscientious. (It would be assumed, however, that much momentum would have been building before this time – and that the moment of insight finalised and sealed the transition.)

#### **Example 4**

Could this insight have been part of a transition from E5 Self-Aware to E6 Conscientious?

*E6: I was sitting on a train going from Cheltenham to the city in 1997. I was sitting by myself and had nothing else to do but think. I had been working as an accountant for a couple of years but was very unsatisfied and was contemplating a career change. I was struck by the idea of what life was. I saw my life as a long clothesline upon which I hang an experience after experience. I was in control of what type of experience I hung up, either trivial or significant, selfish or helpful, rare or common. Each experience I hung up would influence the following experiences so I had to consider every action I did within the*

*context of my entire life. I had a very strong sense of clarity and knew I had worked out how to live my life. I was very pleased and I decided that I was never going to miss out on having an experience on my line ie. I was going to avoid regretting not attempting something when I reflected on my life.*

The lead up to this insight was that the storyteller had been dissatisfied, presumably at work, and contemplating a career change. When he came up with the metaphor for a clothesline for his life (and yes, this is a male), he saw, apparently for the first time, the way his current choices could affect his next choices, and how the sequence of choices would affect his whole life. This was, in a sense, a “big picture” view that gave him a sudden sense of how to live life. His pleasure at having ‘cracked this secret’ to life, was invested in the idea that he would never miss out on something he wanted, nor have need for any regrets. Further, this secret to life appears to have burst forth in his psyche in this one moment of insight. Its effect could easily be seen as enriching, as it appeared to prioritise the individuation process that would have started at the E5 Self-Aware level. The insight contained a sense in which he felt he had taken a step forward in mastering life and now ‘knew’ the way to go about it. Yet the detail of how to do that seemed somewhat over-simplified. The reader may doubt that this metaphor - obviously helpful though it seems – could really be applied and extended in a way that could guarantee power impressive enough to neutralise all possible vagaries that life might sling across his path. A key characteristic of the E6 Conscientious level is the evolution of self-evaluated standards. This insight appears to be perhaps a first breaking into consciousness of adopting that way of thinking. It is also characteristic of a shift towards the general idealist style of conscientiousness, that appears to typify the E6 Conscientious level. The fact that the insight came after some discontent in his life with his work or career, suggests that it



might well have been prompted partly by discontent. In short, he seemed to have made a “first contact” with E6 Conscientious thinking through this insight, and yet the detail of this new paradigm, at this moment in time, was still only sketchily understood, in principle. Even so, the excitement of having found a new principle would be experienced as a significant shift, which may itself fuel momentum for the consolidation.

### **Possible ego level transitions in *high* ego level group stories**

The examples of insights from the *high* group seem to show a tendency to return to “correction-mode” – somewhat similar to the *low* group - although for the *high* ego level group, the discriminations were more fine-grained.

Ego level theory would predict that the *high* group’s insights would be those which had taken people from the duty and responsibility of E6 Conscientiousness, to the greater preoccupation with independence, particularly emotional independence, of the E7 Individualistic level. Some of these examples suggest the transition may be largely about retracting the focus from a positive push to master the ways of the world, to looking more closely at personal choices, and evaluating how well those choices have served quality of life considerations. This is the time when hard decisions are made as to what the next step must be. In order to move on towards a better, healthier, more satisfying quality of life, some former choices and investments must be left behind. As the examples in Table 37 show, for many, the “next step” was to leave life partners whom they had come to see as being a destructive or debilitating force in their lives, one that would impede their chances of growth or satisfaction, if they continued to stay in the relationship.

Table 37

*Key-word Summary of 15 prototypical Moments of Insight Provided by Questionnaire Participants at the High Ego Level.*

*High Group:*

- *Feeling rejected by husband, standing on railway platform, felt like jumping in front of train. Cried out to God, could “see” my children at funeral – stopped.*
- *Alcoholic husband, controlling and verbally abusive, 2 small children. One difficult evening realised I was emotionally out of marriage, later left it.*
- *Returned from travel, realised had to let go of crush on man to move on with life, realised also I had my own thoughts, feelings, and no longer puppet of parents.*
- *After father died, was afraid of the pain and process of dying, felt a weight of foreboding in my thoughts - suddenly lifted, peace and calm, no longer fear death.*
- *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying made me think differently about others, less anxious, more at ease with negative emotions. Validated “more to life than work”.*
- *Went to counsellor after break-up, she asked me to draw myself after the relationship, realised my brother’s treatment had affected me the same way.*
- *Involved with married man 13 years, saw him annually overseas. Last time I realised I was bored with him, I’m more witty and relaxed with friends, left him.*
- *When 22, returned from 3 years travel and after shower, saw reflection of “two me’s”. One rich but deluded me in imagination, one social. Tried to integrate.*
- *At uni residential, other students called me a genius. Realised my vision of myself had been skewed, next day realised I was capable of more. Left job and marriage.*
- *Let Jehovahs Witness in to practice English. Discussing God, had sudden flash of understanding that it was silly to think God would prefer a particular religion.*
- *Burnt out from too much travel, went to personal development course, indirectly had insight that negativity has been a life script – risked the switch to positive.*
- *Trapped in abusive marriage, felt whole life locked in a cage. Prayed, understood that cage had protected me from worldly terrors. Now had choice, could leave.*
- *Happily used to believe I was perceptive and intuitive, often right about people. One day realised how different others’ views can be – became more tolerant .*
- *Traumatic period of life, repressed emotions from childhood and adolescence surfacing. Listening to others, but my own beautiful dream gave best advice.*
- *15 months ago decided I don’t like my job. Was at work, reaching out for something, and like “turning on a light in a dark room” realised I don’t give a rat’s arse about my job, and want to be a psychologist.*

### **Example 5**

Could this insight have been part of a transition from E6 Conscientious to E7 Individualistic?

*I had been involved with a married man for 13 years. Had returned to Australia 5 years ago to “get over him” but still saw him annually in Europe. The experience recently of seeing him for 2 weeks and being bored and uncomfortable with him, knowing that I could*

*be relaxed and witty with other friends, and realising I didn't want him in my life was such an insight. The thoughts were quite rational. I felt surprised at myself, how easy it was to admit to myself that I didn't want to see him again. The effect was that I saw him in a totally different light, eg an insecure man who liked making me feel anxious and I re-evaluated my entire past 13 years with him.*

This woman had spent 5 years apparently half-in, half-out of this relationship, but suddenly - in the space of a two-week visit – she saw both herself and her lover differently. What changed was her realisation that she was not as comfortable *with herself* when she was with him, as she was when with her other friends. This insight made the decision to end the relationship “easy”, probably because the relationship was no longer congruent with her current sense of herself (and may not have been for some time). It had possibly survived much longer as a long-distance, annual affair than it might have as a more regular relationship. One gains the sense from this story that this woman had to some extent already moved on to a new sense of self or ego level before the insight happened, and that the insight served to finally alert her consciously to that fact. Once the insight had occurred, the ease of the severing of the relationship and the fact that she saw her lover in a different light (which included greater apparent psychological understanding of his character) all pointed to the insight being perhaps a final formalisation, or clear consciousness of the fact that, unconsciously at least, she had already moved on from perhaps a conscientious sense of loyalty to the relationship, to the new more emotionally independent paradigm of E7 Individualistic.

### Example 6

Could this insight have been part of a transition from E6 Conscientious to E7 Individualistic?

*E7: “Shift from Negative to Positive” (at age 53). I was “burnt out” from over [illegible] and too much travel, so I went to a personal development course. As an indirect result (the course content had nothing to do with this), I got the insight that negativity had been a life script. I turned everything around and have changed direction, attitude and personal daily routine from destructive to constructive. At the time of the insight it was as if I had simply turned a switch. It was so easy to change once this had happened. At the time I just had to take the risk to be positive rather than negative – however, it also appeared as if there was no choice, as if it were the only path to follow.*

Here is a story of a clear shift in attributional style – from a generally negative way of viewing life, to a generally positive one. Travel and life turbulence were clearly evident before the insight, which was like turning a switch. This is reminiscent of some of the quantum change stories in Miller and C’deBaca’s (1994) study. This person used an interesting turn of phrase: “it was so easy to change ... I just had to take the risk to be positive”. The use of the word “risk” shows how deeply personally this change was felt. This was clearly not just a matter of someone trying to be more positive. It was a risk – the kind of risk one might feel in venturing to try a whole new paradigm in thinking and attitude to life. The instantaneous nature of the insight and the change, and the fact that the insight appeared to be a ‘fait accompli’ with only one “path to follow”, are all indicators that the change in ego level might have happened fairly suddenly and substantially during the time of the insight, and consolidating very shortly afterwards. This does not preclude the possibility that this woman’s attitudes might have been gradually shifting in that direction beforehand – but it does suggest that in terms of her consciousness, the change happened with the insight – it all came together, perhaps again because of a combination of

push and pull factors – the regressive factors of “burn-out” and the pacer factor of the personal development course (even though the content of the course may not have explicitly addressed the content of her insight, the general direction of a personal development course is growth). Because of the lack of detail provided in this story, as to any particular issues that might have been involved, there are no clues, beyond going from a negative to positive worldview, as to which particular ego level shift might have been involved. In the preceding analysis which identified typical themes for *low*, *medium* and *high* ego level groups, the themes closest to this shift would be *feel more comfortable with, accepting of, peaceful about life*; and *made me stronger, more able to cope*. These themes were characteristic of the *high* ego level group, and thus this provides supportive suggestions that the shift described her may have been from the E6 Conscientious (*medium* group) level to the E7 Individualistic (*high* group) level.

### **General Comments**

One difference that seems apparent from the “corrections” of life course made by those in general in the *high* ego level group, as compared with the “correction” to life orientation made by those in general in the *low* group, was the element of great personal risk, encapsulated in their decisions. They were leaving marriages for “worldly terrors”, “risking” a positive versus negative attitude, admitting they had been in long-standing unhealthy relationships. It takes not easy to admit that something one has invested one’s life in for so long, is no longer a good idea. It risks invalidating all of one’s past with that person or that job. This particular step towards individuation is not only risky, but can be a lonely business. Quite often, it has to be done while withstanding the critical glare of

friends, family, and social mores. Withstanding that kind of isolation and pressure is probably strengthening of a person's sense of self.

A similar "risk" might often accompany a person's decision to leave a job or career for a new job or career – such as the example in which the storyteller was leaving accountancy for psychology. One can speculate that some part of that person's identity might have once been invested in the first career, and that it may feel highly risky to make such a major shift in career, to a whole new field. Some adjusting of identity may need to happen before the new career would feel like a comfortable fit. In cases like this, there appears to be some kind of breaking with the old self-paradigm, and a re-fashioning into a new self-paradigm. Bravely forging one's own way, beyond the reach of easy conformist principles, seems to characterise the *high* ego level group's stories.

These elements of risk, however, are not apparent in the stories told by members of the *low* ego level group. Their insights seem to be much more a pulling *into line* with social mores or with fitting into commonly accepted wisdom as to how one "should be" or act.

As mentioned earlier, it is envisaged that the particular role played by moments of insight would differ from experience to experience. Some moments of insight might prompt the beginning of an ego level shift, but the shift itself may not take place for some time. Some moments of insight might seal a shift that was already under way, or almost complete, save for the person's conscious recognition of the fact they had been changing. And there may even be those most dramatic kinds of insights, whereby the shift happens more comprehensively in the moment of the insight, with perhaps less preparatory

observations to “ease” the way. In the examples above, it seemed possible to nominate candidates for all of those types of experience. Examples 1 and 4 appeared to be initial “introduction to the new paradigm” types of changes, whereby more consolidation seemed likely to be required before they would be “at home” in the new level. Example 5 appeared to be the kind of shift which put a final seal on a transition that had mostly already taken place, but which had not been fully recognised until the time of the insight. Finally examples 3 and 6 (and less clearly due to lack of clarifying detail, also 2) seemed possible as the more dramatic shifts whereby a leap to a new paradigm seemed to have been substantially completed at the time of the insight.

One other scenario is possible for moments of insight. There may be some that deepen a person’s conscious experience of their current paradigm. An example of a such a deepening into what appeared to be a current ego level was in the story told by interview participant, Catherine (Appendix C). At a difficult point in her life, long after she had become accustomed to thinking of herself and operating as a competent person, she experienced a “click in her brain” and had the insight “I choose to cope” at a point when her world seemed to be falling into chaos. This insight appeared to be a deepening of commitment to what was estimated as her (then) current E6 Conscientious paradigm – which had already long served her well. Later in her story, the conscientiousness could no longer serve her well, as she was physically disintegrating under an inordinate amount of stress. At this point, she had a further moment of insight which appeared to mark a shift her to the E7 Individualistic level, whereby she realised she must give up her conscientious orientation, and even sacrifice the job she loved, in order to preserve her health and reinstate her quality of life.

After a 6 month break, she started a new business and was more fulfilled than ever in a new, more Individualistic orientation to life.

It is obvious that working with short stories like the bulk of the stories above, supplied in the questionnaires, quickly runs into limitations. In every case, more information would have helped enormously, and this entire chapter can claim to be no more than a carefully constructed speculation based on the barest minimum of information. That is why there was a need to explore at least a few stories at much greater depth, so that more data could be brought to bear on speculations as to probable ego level shifts.



## Chapter 11

### Looking for Signs of Ego Level Change in Case Studies

There are two main aims in this more in depth analysis of the case study stories of moments of insight, provided by interview participants:

1. To explore stories of *prototypical* moments of insight in some depth.

Interview participants provided a wealth of details about the context of the lead up to their moment of insight, details of its content and meaning, and more detailed outcome information than the questionnaire participants. Thus they provided “close-up character portraits” in this ideographic approach to exploring moments of insight.

2. To assess whether moments of insight appear to be involved in changes in ego level.

Within the uniquely personal details of each case, the person’s probable ego level *before* versus soon *after* the particular moment of insight experience – and whether the change was ongoing - was assessed from interview transcripts. (The assessment of ego level *before* versus *after* is regarded as synonymous to assessing whether there appears to be a different self-theory or self-paradigm *before* versus *after*.)

As mentioned earlier, in previous studies, trained raters' estimates of ego levels based on interview material correlated well with the WUSCT, from .32 to .51 (Loevinger, 1998). However these raters were blind to the ego levels of the people whose interviews they were rating.

In this study, the situation is more complex. When writing the original Summary Stories and the Interpretive Speculations, I was blind to ego levels, and even blind to the existence of the concept. The current analysis, however, has been conducted by me since knowing the ego levels of the participants. However my task here is *not* to assess the participant's current framework or ego level. That has been established by the WUSCT. My task is to assess the probable ego levels *before* and *after* the participants' moment of insight experiences, from the story they have told. In two of the three cases, the experience happened many years ago. Thus there can be no certainty that their ego level at the time of the experience was the same as the current level. In that sense, this attempt at assessment is "somewhat blind". It has the advantage of knowing the probable ceiling ego level (the current one), and it has the disadvantage of assessing information in a retrospective report. However, as noted earlier, this is a phenomenon that is most difficult to assess in any way other than retrospectively, as the prospective wait for any person to have such an experience may be long and costly.

Loevinger (1976) claimed that the logic of the conception of ego development was such that a trained rater would be able to rate any behaviour sample adequately, as long as it was "sufficiently unstructured to permit the subject to project and the rater to discern the subject's frame of reference.... Not the specific content but the thought structure it reveals is decisive." (p. 235).

The astute point that Loevinger made in this quote had earlier decided the issue over how much confidence to place in the “before versus after” study. The study was withdrawn from the main thesis chiefly because a WUSCT seemed likely to be a poor vehicle for retrospective assessment – as it was so honed to pick up the current level of functioning through projection. An interview transcript, however, in which the person was given room to tell a full story and express many angles in relation to it, seemed likely to have more flexibility for gaining a more accurate “common-sense picture” of the person’s ego level at the time they were describing. There is, after-all, no other way of gathering retrospective information, than by asking the person, or by trying to assess via a test instrument. In this case, the more straightforward method seemed the more likely to be reliable.

Given these strengths and weaknesses, then, the merits or reasonableness of my arguments must rest primarily on the relevance of the interview data that will be produced as supporting evidence for the estimations of ego levels.

The estimation process will involve assessing whether participants’ behaviour, attitudes, concerns and expressions appeared to exemplify recognisable aspects of a particular ego level (as summarised by Hy and Loevinger, 1996, in Table 1) in the lead up to the experience, as well as whether those aspects changed to resemble the behaviour, attitudes, concerns and expressions of the ego level following. The closer in time the changes were to the moment of insight experience, the more strong would be the case that the moment of insight might have been involved in bringing about the change in ego level, if one appeared to have taken place.

The fact that, at the time of conducting the first interviews in which the stories were told, I was “blind” to the ego level theory I would later adopt as the focus of the study, also conferred some advantages and disadvantages. An advantage was that I could neither consciously nor unconsciously manipulate interview participants into following certain lines of thought to suit theoretical biases in regard to ego level. The disadvantage, however, was I lost the opportunity to gather more pertinent material in the part of the interview which was semi-structured.

### **Criteria for selection of case studies**

In selecting stories for case study analysis, five criteria were applied in order to maximise chances that the stories selected were both *prototypical* moments of insight, and also stories in which changes in ego levels seemed feasible or likely. These criteria built upon the criteria developed earlier for selecting *prototypical* stories provided by the questionnaire participants. However, the criteria for case studies were a little more strict. (Remember that it is envisaged that many moments of insight may happen without an attending change in ego level, and vice versa. Here the aim was to examine stories where the best possible examples of the two possibilities converged.) Thus the five criteria for selection as case studies were that:

- a) the moment of insight happens *suddenly*, in a *brief, definable moment in time*, in which the storyteller
- b) *gains understanding, gains clarity, or sees things differently* (in a major way, in terms of *self, world or others*);
- c) the experience is *memorable* over time,

- d) the *change is experienced almost immediately* (in the space of a few days or at most, weeks)
- e) and in which potential ego level change is apparent from *cognitive, emotional and behavioural clues explicitly expressed or clearly implied* in the participant's telling, so that theoretical inferences from myself could remain minimal.

Criterion c), that the experience should be memorable over time, was imposed because one would expect a “paradigm-changing” experience to be memorable. Other studies have established that similar sudden change experiences are so memorable that storytellers tend to divide their life stories into “before” versus “after” that experience (Miller & C’deBaca, 2001). In order to test for “memorability”, an item was added at the end of the first questionnaire set, which was presented to participants 6-12 months after the first interview. The item asked participants to briefly summarise the moment of insight story they had told in the first interview. Those who could not remember the particular story they had told in the first interview were excluded from this analysis. It turned out that none of those stories were considered *prototypical* by the other criteria, either. (It may be that “memorability” may be useful discriminative criteria for determining *prototypical* moments of insight.)

In respect to criterion d), it was clear that the changes that flowed from these experiences were not always completed within the space of time during which the moment of insight took place. (Change often continued to emerge in the weeks, months and even years afterwards, as presumably, the person continued to assimilate new information to the new paradigm.) However, the story was selected if, in its telling, the moment of insight was the clear apparent *beginning* of change.

Criterion e) attempted to ensure that the story contained sufficient clues explicitly in the data that the reader would be able to see the evidence alluded to, so that only a minimum of theoretical interpretation would be necessary. In short, the aim was to select stories where there appeared to be a different “self-theory” or paradigm before versus after the moment of insight.

Four of the 15 stories met these criteria. One, however, had to be excluded as that participant had lost contact with the study before giving her feedback as to whether the story summary and interpretations were accurate and acceptable. This left three stories remaining for case study analysis. (All interview participants’ Summary Stories and Interpretive Speculations are supplied in Appendices C and G respectively.)

This process of culling was painful for me – I had come to know all of the stories very well, and had to “let go” of some wonderful details of human struggles and triumphs, of change and attempted change, in order to stay with the amended focus of the study. Furthermore, it seemed more than evident that some of the stories which had not met the criteria for case study analysis were nonetheless most probably stories of more gradual ego development change.

One of the stories which did not meet the criteria for selection, Philip’s story, was chosen for examination as a counter example to the case studies. Here was a person who was in a process of changing, and wanted to change further, but had not yet had anything like a moment of insight to help him complete that change. Thus he was left struggling with much uncertainty, and his story provided a telling example of someone at a very high ego level who was yet “in search of a moment of insight”.

Let us now turn to look in detail at each of the case studies, and critically consider the hypothesised possibility that these moments of insight may have been involved in moving participants from one ego level to another, or from one “self-theory” to another.

The format for presenting the case studies will be to present first, the Summary Story which I had written and participants had read and/or corrected, and then follow with the analysis for that story, guided by a number of sub-headings which were used for each case study to ensure that key elements of ego development theory would be addressed for each.

## **Chapter 12**

### **Case Study 1: Sarah**

Seven years had passed between the time of Sarah's insight and her participation in this study. At the time of the insight she was 28. It is argued that her moment of insight was part of a shift from the E5 Self-Aware level to the E6 Conscientious level. Sarah's WUSCT placed her current ego level at E7 Individualistic.

#### **Sarah's "Summary Story"**

Sarah referred to herself affectionately as "a drama queen who likes to tell a good story". The drama queen image appealed to her because she liked to be able to feel life intensely. Her moment of insight came at the peak of a long lead-up of "marital strife" in her first marriage. Her husband had been having an affair with her best friend for some years, but had consistently denied it, using the excuse of Sarah's post-natal depression (since having their fourteen-month old twins), to suggest that Sarah was just imagining things. Sarah's depression had been so severe that her mother and husband had begun discussing the option of putting Sarah into a psychiatric clinic. This had frightened her deeply.

Sarah felt she had been like a "little girl" in the early part of her marriage, very dependent on her dominant husband, both emotionally and financially. Her father, a minister in the church, had been a similarly dominant presence in her life, before her husband. Even though she had been something of a rebellious teenager for a short time,



upon getting married she felt comforted by the security of her husband's dominance, and renewed her interest in the church, attending bible studies. In retrospect, she felt that her motive in doing this had been to enlist Jesus and God as her protectors, because she believed at the time they were "all powerful" and "God pre-destines everything".

Around the time of her 28<sup>th</sup> birthday, Sarah's husband flew to Perth to see his family during the New Year. After he'd gone, Sarah found out that her best friend had been booked on the same flight. At last she knew for sure there was in fact an affair going on. In an act of secret retaliation, she went out of her way to find babysitting so that she could go to a New Year's Eve party with a girlfriend. At the party Sarah did something extremely bold for her at that time. She drank alcohol, met a man, and slept with him. For the next few months she saw him intermittently. At that stage, the main thing she had in mind was that if her husband was being unfaithful and wouldn't look after her, then maybe this new man would. It didn't take long before her husband suspected something and found out about the affair by dialling redial on the phone. He was furious and hit Sarah for the first time. Then he retaliated by finally telling her about his own affair with her best friend. Despite all this, he insisted that their marriage would get over this bad patch.

Although Sarah had known of his affair, this cruelly delivered revelation hurt her deeply and she threatened to leave him and go to her new man. Her husband taunted her that no man would ever want a depressed woman with three children, and he challenged her to try it – apparently certain that it would never happen. But Sarah did go off to see the other man. There she was to get another shock. The new man said in effect "don't count on me, I'm not legal in the country (he was English) and I can't get dragged into a divorce. However I think you're fantastic and will be there for you in the short term - but don't

leave him for me - leave him for yourself - you can do it if you want to". She drove back home, still a mass of indecision, and walked in to find her husband lying unconscious on the lounge room floor, having attempted suicide by overdosing on pills and wine:

He was lying on the floor of um my lounge, our lounge-room, um ... fourteen month old twin babies asleep in the bedroom and a two and a half year old, who he was supposed to be caring for, and he was lying on the floor and he was unconscious. And I saw him, and the moment of insight was that I suddenly realised that: "really we're all alone in the world". And as for the first time I actually realised that I was a grown-up, and that I had choices and decisions that I would make in my life - I could make them - that I didn't need a husband or a mother or a father to look after me. That I could live my life like that if I chose to live my life like that, thinking always that other people were ultimately there to have responsibility and to make the decisions. That I could pretend that but it wasn't being true to me. And it was like a flash! 'Wow Sarah, you know, you're actually - you're on your own in this world even if you're married to someone or even if you're in the middle of your family and your loved ones and your friends - you're on your own. And you've got ultimate responsibility for yourself - who you are.'

And that was um, oh it was a wonderful moment of insight because three weeks earlier I would've lost it and I would have been either on the phone to my mother or my best friend in Brisbane or the ambulance. As it was I kicked him a few times, I went and looked in the bin to see if I could work out what he'd taken - I finally rang the hospital and I said I don't REALLY [said lazily] know what I should do and they were screaming at me to call the ambulance. But I actually knew I had choices! I had choices. I was a grown-up and I had choice - if I didn't want to ring the ambulance, if I wanted him to die I could do that. If I wanted to ring the ambulance I could. If I wanted to ring the lover that I'd known about for five years and refused to acknowledge it and it had all come to a head over, I could. If I

wanted to ring the man that I'd been unfaithful to this man with, for the past three months, I could ring him. But I - I could do nothing - I could just go to bed. I could do anything I wanted or I could ring the ambulance. It was my choice and that was - it was an incredible moment of insight. That was it - all plugged into one - with this man going greyer and whiter by the minute, you know.

Before doing anything else, her first action had been to check on the children – the twin babies and the two and a half year old were all sleeping soundly. It was after that, in a strangely detached and methodical manner, that Sarah had gone through the rubbish bin to see what he had taken, before ringing the hospital and the ambulance. Then she rang her husband's lover who came over and went with him in the ambulance to hospital. After they had all gone, Sarah rang her closest friend and told her all about it, still uncharacteristically detached and in control. There was none of her usual "drama queen" behaviour in this incident. From the moment she saw him she never panicked once.

One of the main differences Sarah felt in herself after that moment of insight was that she felt powerful and grown-up, rather than a little girl who was dependent. The moment had empowered her to start taking on the responsibility of looking after herself.

The next day Sarah's husband rang and asked her to collect him from hospital. On the way home, she was taken aback that he now appeared to assume that, because of his suicide attempt, she would now stay with him. He was so certain the matter was settled, that she found the courage to rebel, coolly telling him that, no, she had decided to leave. He was thunderstruck at the change in her and emptied their joint account so that she was left with nothing but one week's worth of cash. He also took the car keys and told her, "you're on your own". Sarah was not put off. Empowered by her new vision of herself as

a person with choices, she was determined to do whatever she had to, to get through this crisis. She sought help from community help agencies and legal aid, and within 3 weeks had moved with the children to a new house, and was learning how to manage money.

Within eight weeks of the move, she had also begun to review her religious upbringing. She went to the library and read up on Christianity as well as Buddhism and other religions. In a second hand bookshop she was amazed to find an old bible that included some books which had since been excluded from the bible –the books of Bable and Suzanna. True to her new attitude that “I can’t make choices in my life if I don’t have information”, she decided to find a minister who was not too close to her father and ask him over to discuss her questions and the reasons she felt she was losing her faith. For the first time she felt like an equal while talking to a religious person. She demanded “what’s all this shit about the Council of Nicaea?” She asked him who decided to get rid of those books, and how someone could ever decide that what was left was the “one truth”. In questioning the minister, she felt she had more in common with the rebellious teenager she had been 11 years earlier, than with the frightened woman she had become in recent years. The minister was unable to mount a satisfactory argument against her criticisms, so she decided to abandon her religion and adopt a more generalised spiritual orientation.

Her insight about having choices in how she reacted to situations became a key principle that she “tries to live by” in her everyday life. It has had an impact on her most intimate relationships, and also her broader friendships. She “cut people like dead wood”, noting with amusement that she can now say “no” to tupperware parties, but more importantly, she is much more careful about who she lets into her “inner sanctum” of friends. She now gives herself credit for doing her best as a mother, rather than thinking in

black and white terms of being a “good” versus “bad” mother. Finally, she has lost some of her fear of death, because she now trusts herself to make her own decisions and to ensure that she lives a full life. She divorced her husband and eventually married her new man. She sees her new marriage as an equal partnership with mutual respect, based upon wanting, rather than needing, each other. For the sake of her children, she chose to maintain a cordial relationship with her husband, who eventually married the woman with whom he’d had the affair.

## **Analysis of story details**

### **Identifying the focal moment of insight /ego level shift**

“I saw him, and the moment of insight was that I suddenly realised that: ‘really we’re all alone in the world’. And as for the first time I actually realised that I was a grown-up, and that I had choices and decisions that I would make in my life - I could make them - that I didn’t need a husband or a mother or a father to look after me. ... And it was like a flash! ‘Wow Sarah, you know, you’re actually - you’re on your own in this world even if you’re married to someone or even if you’re in the middle of your family and your loved ones and your friends - you’re on your own. And you’ve got ultimate responsibility for yourself - who you are.’”

### **Lead-up to (context of) the moment of insight**

The following list details the factors which Sarah agreed were relevant in the lead-up to the moment of insight (some she had not previously thought of, but agreed with).

1. Sarah's father had been a dominant force in her life, and her upbringing had been one in which traditional gender roles were assumed. Because her father was also a religious minister, Sarah's religious views at that time were also strongly tied to, or associated with, her parent's worldview.
2. When she married and went back to bible school, despite her husband's disinterest in it, she was probably searching for some authority to point her towards "the right way" to live in adult life.
3. Initially it had seemed natural for Sarah to marry a husband who was a dominant like her father, because that made her feel secure. But this also meant she lost any chance to develop her own sense of autonomy.
4. When Sarah was struggling to manage with three small children through the debilitating fog of post-natal depression, her husband denied her accusations he was having an affair on the grounds her depression was making her unrealistic. This incitement to doubt her own reality would have further eroded the integrity of her "self-theory" (its empirical validity), and her dependency was fuelled by the depression making her dependent on her mother's help with the children.

5. When her husband and mother considered putting Sarah in a psychiatric hospital Sarah felt frightened and betrayed. For the first time, perhaps, the traditional arrangement whereby her parents and husband assumed responsibility for her and thus control of her, began to feel more like a threat than a safe haven. Her protectors no longer seemed so benevolent, and this might have awakened in her a need to stand up for herself, to assume more independence and self-responsibility.
  
6. When Sarah found out about her husband affair just before New Year's Eve, she was galvanised into action, organising access to money, clothes and babysitters so that she could make it to a friend's party. This signified her first highly motivated acts of independence, in which she pulled away from both the depression and her husband's influence, being determined to make it to the party, even though her husband had not left her with enough available money to cover those costs. This mobilisation to action might have possibly signalled a shift from the E4 Conformist level (her prior adherence to strong traditional stereotyping, and being dependent on her husband suggest this) to the E5 Self-Aware level, (whereby exceptions to rules are embraced). The exception to rule she embraced with this rebellion was the defiance of her husband's authority and her willingness to venture out into the world, arranging babysitters and even "throwing a tantrum" in the bank when she found that her signature had not been updated on the account, leaving her with no access to money for babysitters.

7. Meeting the new man at the party might have given Sarah an affirming sense of renewal in the way she saw herself. Rather than the depressed, powerless, suspicious woman she felt she had become (in the eyes of her husband), she became the “fun”, rebellious, desirable woman reflected in the eyes of her lover. A new self-theory was beginning to emerge.
  
8. Importantly, the 24 hours preceding the moment of insight were a highly traumatic and emotional time. Sarah’s husband found out about her affair, hit her, revealed his own affair, and then challenged her to ask the other man if her would look after her. At this point, both Sarah and her husband still appeared to believe that she needed a man to look after her. However the lover refused to “rescue” her, but insisted she could rescue herself if she wanted. This stark contrast in the two men’s assumptions about her options and abilities, possibly began to coalesce as two different “possible future selves” (Markus and Nurius, 1986) for her: one was a helpless, suspicious wife who could not survive without a man, the other was a potentially independent self that had begun emerging – being “brave” or bold enough to conduct her own clandestine affair.
  
9. From all these developments in the last 24 hours, Sarah’s sense of self had quite possibly entered a tenuous state, with beliefs about her husband, her marriage and her own capabilities having been thrown into a state of uncertainty and flux – the self-paradigm was beginning to disintegrate – leaving her in a state of “readiness” for making a self-paradigm change.



10. In this tenuous state she received the emotional shock of finding her husband unconscious, having attempted suicide. The striking thing about this scene was that the usual power dynamics between the two of them were suddenly reversed. The once powerful partner lay utterly helpless, and the once helpless partner could choose whether to let him live or die. No wonder it was an empowering moment. Seeing him lying there helpless and dependent on her whim, might have driven home to her that he was not, by some God-given law, always all-powerful over her, and that she was not, by some God-given law, always powerless in relation to him. A core assumption, perhaps, shattered in that moment.
11. Sarah's first emotions when she discovered him were flashes of anger and contempt for both him and herself. She was angry that he had neglected his duty in minding the children (and that's partly why she kicked him). But she also felt anger and contempt towards herself, for her "stupidity" in being so cowed and worried, moments earlier, driving home: "How pathetic, you know, I've spent 10 years, 11 years of my life with this man, since I was a teenager! And here I am driving back here [parodying herself] "Ooh what am I going to do, what am I going to do?" In her previous self-paradigm, only "half-an-hour earlier", she was still "subject to" the view of herself as a helpless, dependent woman. But the moment of insight had moved that particular self-view from subject to object, and she felt contempt for herself for having been subject to that sense of self. Her anger at herself and her husband seemed to come from an indignant new self-theory, in which she no longer respected her husband, or the way she had previously been with him. Her anger and contempt were

“aiming from” a different place – a broader perspective, from which she could objectify the way it had been. At some level, she had realised that her emotional ‘survival’ was too critical to leave in anyone else’s hands – and now felt safest taking responsibility for herself.

12. This situation drew together many threads of “readiness” to “update” her sense of self. The situation with her husband had become so “undesirable”, and the scene painted by her lover (of her being capable of leaving and managing on her own) perhaps provided that potent mix of motivation from both the positives and negatives both pushing in the one direction – that the moment of insight was invoked. She “could” make her own choices.

13. On another day, perhaps, that same scene might just as easily have terrified or traumatised her, had those “threads of readiness” been even only slightly differently aligned.

### **The meaning (content) of the moment of insight for Sarah**

The most direct content or meaning in this insight was that Sarah felt she could make her own choices and assume ultimate responsibility for herself, instead of being dependent on others. This is highly suggestive of a shift to E6 Conscientious, whereby a defining feature is a shift to self-evaluated standards. She suddenly realised that she was an individual, separate from her family and friends. It was clear she saw the experience as a sudden awakening to the notion that she possessed agency, or personal power.

The realisation ‘really, we are all alone in the world’, appeared also to be a personal awakening to a classic and profound philosophical observation of the human condition. While some might experience an existential ache, nausea or loneliness in response to such a realisation, Sarah’s experience was just the opposite. She felt that she had just thrown off some very burdensome shackles, and was reclaiming a stronger sense of self, that she had all but forgotten (a sense of self which included something of the rebellious teenager she had once been).

In the second interview, she indicated that before the insight happened, she had never thought of being alone in the existential sense:

“I don’t think it had ever occurred to me that I was all alone. Really ... And that’s really quite strange because if you look back on the post natal depression stuff ... you know, there were moments I would sob and I would cry ‘I am all alone with the babies’ and all of that, but you know, it never occurred to me, that you know, I came to the world alone, and I’m alone, I am always going to be alone, its only me. And shit deal with it girl.”

Being alone in that helpless way had moved from subject to object. It seems possible that the despair in her post-natal depression might have been linked with her sense of having little or no choice in changing her feelings or situation, and perhaps also with feeling overburdened by the responsibilities that her situation (especially with three small children) had thrust upon her. If conformist stereotypes (which are still present at both the E4 Conformist and E5 Self-Aware level) were her touchstone of how she “should be”, then she was no doubt violating them because her depression made it impossible for her to be a “good mother and wife”, in stereotypical terms. She was not enjoying those stereotypical roles at all. If, in her depression, she had wanted at times to be freed from or helped with

the heavy burden of the children, such taboo thoughts would have violated the “shoulds” of conformist views on mothering. In contrast, when she had the moment of insight, and realised she was free to make her own choices, she no longer had to keep trying to fit the stereotypical mould that formerly she had probably unconsciously assumed, or believed to be an imperative (been subject to). Her insight was a discovery of E6 “self-evaluated” standards.

The general meaning of the moment of insight (that she had choices and is ultimately responsible for herself) has remained with Sarah as a principle which she tries to live by, even though she admits she is not always able to live up to her most lofty principles.

### **Consequences (outcomes) that flowed from the experience**

Sarah’s actions at the time, on the following day, and ever since have strongly suggested that she took a first leap forward in the direction of individuation with her insight.

1. In the very first moments after her insight, Sarah began to think and behave in a very different manner to her usual self. No longer a “drama queen”, she was suddenly uncharacteristically detached, methodical and purposeful, despite the dramatic nature of the crisis. She kept her head, checked on the children, went through the rubbish bin, rang the ambulance, even rang her husband’s lover to go with him, and finally rang her friend in Brisbane. They were her first “conscious”

choices, made from what appeared to be a new “self-theory”. Before, she had simply assumed (been subject to the view that) she must depend on others.

2. Her decision to escape from the marriage the next day reflected the new, more independent self that had emerged. The fact that she had a lover was an important support, both morally and practically, for her to be able to contemplate and carry out the big step of moving out to live as a sole parent.
  
3. When Sarah announced her decision to leave in such a sure and determined way, she was enacting one of the rare moments in their relationship up to that point, when she held all the power. Nothing her husband could say would now shift her resolve. He could no longer play on her doubts and insecurities, because they were part of the old self-theory, which had been dismantled in the transformation into her new self-theory. His bargaining power was gone. She had inexplicably (to him) become a much stronger and more determined version of herself. While she had remained dependent on him and that relationship, she had very little power. But when she no longer depended on the relationship, she had the power to stay or leave as she desired.
  
4. Within a couple of months Sarah radically reviewed her spiritual beliefs, and rejected the religion of her upbringing, which in a sense, was also a rejection of her parents and her traditional upbringing. She was *breaking free from others' influence*.

“My mother used to say ... ‘God will never give you anything that you can’t bear’ and, you know, all these things caused me terrible anguish, because I used to think ‘well, if God’s giving me all these things and I can’t bear them...what’s wrong with me? I must be able to bear them! And yet I’m not bearing them!’ So tied in that moment of insight was realising that I was responsible for my own life, not God.”

Sarah’s rejection of traditional religious beliefs for a more generalised spiritual orientation reflected the social changes she had just made in her life. She rejected the more traditional role of being dependent on her husband, in favour of the less traditional role of single parent. This is an example of what Kegan et al. (1998) refer to as the “central tendency” or single epistemology that underlies all domains of a person’s “self-theory” at any one time. Sarah contacted a minister in her father’s church to discuss her doubts (a convenient symbolic stand-in for her father) and rejected that religious view. Arguing her concerns out with this man was extremely empowering for her, as she felt able to debate with him as an equal. Perhaps it would have been too difficult to do this with her father, so she created the experience of confronting him and saying her piece to a man somewhat like him.

Sarah’s discovery that someone had edited the bible had somehow made it seem less sacred. In the next case study, Louise, similar issues are raised. Traditional religious values now appeared to Sarah to be a ‘set of beliefs’, which one could adopt or reject, rather than the status quo (again, a shift from subject to object). After rejecting her childhood religion, Sarah explored other religious and spiritual beliefs, creating for herself a much more personalised spiritual framework from which to understand her world. This search is similar to the theme identified in the foregoing analyses, favoured most by those in the *medium* or E6 Conscientious group, *no*

*longer fear God (found God or learned secret of life)*, and is therefore suggestive that Sarah's shift may indeed have been to the E6 level.

"I suddenly realised that I had some principles that I lived my life by, because I'm a spiritual person. I actually gathered them together and bundled them into a, in a sense, like a woman's spirituality, like a way that I could express my spiritual nature of who I am, and the philosophies that I lived by, because I didn't have a religious skirt I could put on."

This more personalised view differed from her former traditional religious view, in that she now felt able to choose her collection of beliefs, whereas before, in going to bible classes, she felt bound to accept or reject that traditional package of beliefs as a whole. This shift is similar to that reported by many who have experienced sudden change (Miller & C'deBaca, 1994).

5. Sarah made significant changes to her social support networks after the moment of insight. Again, this speaks to the 'one central tendency' argument that a shift in ego level is indeed a paradigm shift (Kegan et al., 1998). Beforehand, she had simply assumed the people she must look to for support were her parents and husband and it never occurred to her to question the membership of that group of "protectors". Friends played only a secondary support role. Afterwards, however, she stopped deferring to her husband and parents and "promoted" certain friends and her new partner to become her "inner sanctum". Her social sphere had become an object which she could manipulate.
6. Sarah believed that before the moment of insight she had been a drama queen "inappropriately", possibly through following her father's example, and her lack of

experience in relationships. Now, she could “have emotions and feel that they were OK”. (Instead of being helplessly subject to her emotions, her emotions had become objectified to some extent, with her apparent shift in ego level. She was not pressed up against her experience, consumed by it, but able to gain some perspective on it). She gained more of a sense of identity, started listening to her intuition, and became a more aware ‘entity’ in her relationships. “I am more true to myself now. I am comfortable presenting the way I do now, and knowing that I am a nervous, anxious insecure person underneath.” One of her friends had long urged her, “Sarah, just be true to yourself”. At the time, she had replied “yeah, yeah, yeah”, but the deeper meaning of being “true to herself” didn’t sink in until the moment of insight turned on a special kind of light in her understanding (and perhaps lit up a new paradigm or way of seeing herself), so that she now lived within a completely different set of assumptions and understandings.

7. At some point during the seven years that elapsed since that experience and the time of her participation in the study, she apparently made the transition, perhaps more gradually, to the E7 Individualistic level, at which she was rated.

### **Sarah’s definition of a moment of insight**

Sarah defined a moment of insight as a moment “where things stop”:

“it’s almost like the cartoon ... everything stops, flat picture, there’s a little thing above your head that goes “bink” and a light comes on and it’s – I’d describe it where you stop and something comes into your mind that has never been there before ... there’s a difference, it’s all about solutions: ‘That rings true for me – there’s been a change in me now’”.



She said of that moment, “it was like getting a great big syringe of energy”.

### **Summarising similarities with previous theme analysis findings**

The most striking similarity with themes from the preceding themes analysis was that Sarah, like many others in the *prototypical* and *high* ego level groups, reported having left a relationship as an outcome of her insight, and the changes that flowed from it carried multiple strong themes of individuation and increased agency. Her search for a different religious orientation - a “higher truth” not long after the insight, was evocative of the theme of *no longer fear life (found God or the secret of life)*, which was endorsed most strongly by the *medium* (E6 Conscientious) ego level group.

#### *Matches between Sarah’s themes and prototypical group themes*

##### *Context:*

Internal process attributed as main trigger/change agent

##### *Nature:*

A sudden realisation, "definable moment" of insight

##### *Content:*

Insight about self

Seeing clearer / a new angle or "truth"

##### *Outcome:*

Instant change to self or self-beliefs

Instant change to beliefs about nature of world/life

Adaptive insight

More positive outlook

Made me stronger, more able to cope

Feel more comfortable with, accepting of, peaceful about life

Realised I would have to leave romantic partner

Increased sense of agency

Freed from other’s opinions/influence

Matches between Sarah's themes and high ego level group themes

*1. Context*

Turbulence in life \*

Internal processes attributed as main trigger/change agent \*

*2. Nature of MOI*

A sudden "definable moment" \*

*3. Content*

Insights about self

*4. Outcome*

Freed from other's opinions or influence \*

Realised I would have to leave romantic partner \*

Became more individuated \*

Instant change to self / self-beliefs \*

Feel more comfortable with, accepting of, peaceful about life

Made me stronger, more able to cope

The strength of fit between Sarah's story, and other stories told by questionnaire participants at the *high* ego level could suggest that Sarah jumped from E5 to E7 in one transition – in an accelerated ego level change. This, however, seems unlikely. An alternative interpretation is that perhaps she (and perhaps also many people in the *high* ego level group) may have been relating the most powerful moment of insight, or most “instant” ego level change in her experience – which appears to have been a shift between the lower stages, from E5 Self-Aware to E6 Conscientious. One reason this seems plausible is that the modal level in the US is E5, and it has been something of a mystery why people tend to stop there in their personal growth. Perhaps one reason may be that the shift from E5 to E6 may be a particularly difficult one, or an unattractive one, for some people. Leaving behind the comfort and safety of the generally conformist thinking of E5 to take on the responsibility of self-evaluated standards is probably exceedingly challenging, and may stop many people from embracing that change. For those who do make the shift, it may be that the ensuing shifts from E6 to E7 and beyond do not entail

such an obvious a change in the self-paradigm thinking. Indeed, it seems that for most people, shifts in ego level *via a moment of insight* might happen only once or twice in their experience, and the remainder of shifts in ego level are probably made more gradually. It seems feasible that each person's constellation of personality characteristics might determine the form in which their ego level shifts might take place.

### **“Before versus After” study questionnaire assessments of Sarah**

The data in Table 38 in respect to Sarah's attitudes have been supplied by the “before versus after” study (Appendix D). Despite some reservations about that study, in this ideographic case study approach, comparisons before versus after in respect to these “secondary variables” (see Appendix B) may provide information of interest that adds to the picture of Sarah and the other case study participants. The comparisons in Table 38 are: the year or two before her moment of insight, versus currently.

For the “before versus after” study only, Sarah's ego levels “before” the moment of insight, versus her “current” level, were assessed using 18-item short-form versions of the WUSCT, which rated her at E5 Self-Aware (low ego level group) for “before”, and E7 Individualistic (*high* ego level group) for “current”. Sarah's 36-item form estimated her current level at E7.

Table 38

*Year or Two “Before” MOI versus “Current” Test Results for Sarah*

Questionnaire tests	Year or two “Before” the MOI	Current <sup>a</sup> (at time of first Questionnaire)	Possible Range
WUSCT (ego level)	E5	E7	E2 – E8
Health (physical)	1	3	0-10
Wellbeing (happy within myself)	1	9	0-10
Satisfaction with mother	9	10	0-10
Satisfaction with father	9	6	0-10
General Spiritual Orientation	83	97	0-130
Belief in God	10	5	0-10
Have an assortment of religious or spiritual beliefs	0	10	0-10
Importance of spiritual or non-spiritual orientation	8	10	0-10
Western religious/spiritual beliefs orientation	9	2	0-10
Eastern religious/spiritual beliefs orientation	0	8	0-10
Personal pressures	78	45	0-80
Sense of coherence	58	128	29-203

<sup>a</sup> The results for the “current” test show Sarah’s test results at the time of the study, and should not be taken as an indication of her ego level immediately “after” the moment of insight, which happened 7 years before the time of the study.

## Questions from ego development theory

### Evidence of progression via regression?

The shock and fear Sarah felt when her mother and husband considered admitting her to a psychiatric hospital possibly invoked her “undesired” self (Ogilvie, 1987) in a form more richly described than ever. Her husband’s deceit and affair, to which she responded by starting her own affair, possibly also began to destabilise her old sense of self. In terms of more general regressive experience, Sarah’s difficulty in trying to care for

three small children, two of whom were twins, while feeling helpless and despairing with post-natal depression, also possibly served to make her old paradigm no longer one she felt she could sustain.

### **Potential pacers for ego level growth?**

The main “people” pacers apparent in Sarah’s story were her friend in Brisbane, who urged her to “be true to herself” and her lover, whose willingness to help her, but not rescue her, seemed to be highly significant on the day of the insight.

### **Evidence of mastery through actively repeating?**

Sarah had an affair mainly because her husband had betrayed her this way, and yet in this act of repetition, she became guided towards greater mastery, as her new lover eventually became a pacer and doorway to growth. She appeared to be repeating her upbringing and her parent’s worldview, when, after marrying, she returned to the religious behaviour she believed befitted a young married woman.

### **Interpersonal schemas shaping intrapersonal differentiation?**

It seems the acts of repetition, above, finally ‘wore thin’ and the more equal and respectful relationships that Sarah had with her friend and with her lover may have become the new models for the more respectful and equal relationships she could forge within herself and as time went by, with others.

### Checking “from” and “to” change against Loevinger’s three domains

Overall, the E5 Self-Aware to E6 Conscientious transition described by Loevinger in Table 1 fits best.

#### *Impulse control:*

*From E5 “exceptions allowable” to E6 “self-evaluated standards, self-critical”.*

This shift did indeed seem to be all about switching from an E5 basically conformist view where exceptions were allowable (she was able to have the affair because her husband had), to a new paradigm in which Sarah could determine and evaluate her own standards. Sarah intensely felt the difference of no longer having to ask her mother, friend or husband what to think – but could ask herself what she wanted and make her own choices.

#### *Interpersonal mode:*

*From E5 “helpful, self-aware” to E6 “intense, responsible”.*

The E5 interpersonal mode of being helpful and self-aware is not evident in Sarah’s story, possibly due to the fact that she was in a state of depression and turmoil over the betrayal of her husband in the time preceding her moment of insight. It may be that part of her depression could have been fuelled by a belief that she should be more helpful to her children, and furthermore, what was making her miserable was a feeling of helplessness, and that would have directly contradicted an inner imperative that to be “good” she should be helpful. However these speculations are going beyond the data. She was, before the insight, the one “being helped” and the one “becoming aware” (and due to the negative circumstances of her life at that time, all of which would have contributed to the regression of her former “self-theory”) her focus and behaviour was more defiant and self-protective

than helpful. At the time of the insight, however, her *interpersonal mode* switched suddenly and powerfully into a feeling of overwhelming and intense consciousness that she could assume responsibility for herself – and her behaviour immediately changed to reflect that switch. She clearly became more intense and responsible.

*Conscious Preoccupations:*

*From E5 “feelings, problems, adjustment” to E6 “motives, traits, achievements”.*

Sarah’s *conscious preoccupations* moved from being overwhelmed by feelings of depression and worthlessness to finding a new sense of self and independent thought. Her motives became important, in that she wanted to make her choices according to her own sense of self. Leaving her distressed relationship, starting a new, more egalitarian relationship, and searching for a more suitable spiritual framework to support who she felt she was – her new self-theory - underlined the extent of the change in her self and worldview, and she regarded that personal growth as a very precious personal achievement.

## Chapter 13

### Case Study 2: Louise

Louise's moment of insight happened when she was 52, approximately 5 years before she entered the study. It is suggested that her moment of insight, like Sarah's, was part of a shift from the E5 Self-Aware level to the E6 Conscientious level. Louise's WUSCT placed her at the E7 Individualistic level.

#### Louise's "Summary Story"

At 57, Louise was a retired Occupational Therapist, married with two daughters. For many years she had been dealing with long-standing bouts of depression. Louise said depression "gallops" through her family and she had been taking medication for it more or less ever since her father died, when she was 28. She described herself as having a "drunken dad" and a mother who had "given up". In her younger school years she and her siblings had been shunned because of her father's drinking, and her mother's depression.

In her bid to deal with her own depressions over the years, Louise had seen a number of psychiatrists, but had recently stopped looking to them for guidance beyond managing her medication. She noted with intentional irony that she had decided she had less problems than they did. In particular she had not found them helpful in navigating the conflicts in her marriage, which stemmed mainly from a feeling of "oppression" because of her husband's unwillingness to accept an equal share of household responsibilities.



Furthermore, she had long disliked the feeling that others who could apparently cope with their lives seemed to know something about how to cope with life that she didn't.

Her moment of insight came in the context of what she described as her oppressive fundamentalist religious upbringing. Louise was brought up "in Sydney Anglicanism", and in her search for a more satisfying belief system in her adult years she visited the Nazarinnes, the Uniting Church and at the time of the interview was interested in the Catholic faith, although not attending church. She had always felt most uncomfortable about the "immense contradictions" she saw in the bible, as well as her observation that often the very people preaching THE TRUTH were not truthful. She couldn't cope with these glaring inconsistencies and indeed they bothered her so much she often felt physically ill.

When she had gone to University late in life to study religious topics, the first reading she opened said "the bible is not the word of God" and she noted (with a characteristic mischievous smile) "well that's a relief". The relief was that there were religious scholars out there who shared some of her misgivings, who also believed God surely could not be as capricious and immature as he had been portrayed. "I mean I would expect God to be a tad more mature than I am, but in the bible he's not represented that way at all, like he zaps people for upsetting him." But this new view of God was not yet her moment of insight. In a later part of her studies she was reading a paper written by a devout Monk, who was firm in his belief that the bible was the word of God.

"At one point he was talking about the effect of Moses on the whole stream of everything that followed and he said "and if Moses hadn't existed we would have had to make him

up”. And I thought “Shit. We did!”. And then see that - just everything went “bleu!” after that. Because, you know, Jack Munday couldn’t have got people to do what Moses is supposed to have got people to have done. You know, 40 years back in the desert. I don’t think so! Ha! So ... then I started reading in other places, and realising at the same time, that all these books were written for virtually political purposes. I’m not suggesting it was all just a sham, because at that time political and religious purposes were all one. But stories were combined to, to give the ‘right’ view of history.”

With this insight, Louise’s whole perspective instantly and dramatically shifted: the story of Moses (and by extrapolation, other parts of the bible, too) was *not* literally true. It was not necessarily the word of God, but rather, someone’s interpretation. From that moment on she felt free to make her own interpretations of things. “From being bowed, I stood straight up”. Her own life struggles became just as valid as anyone else’s: “if Paul Davis is telling us more about the Universe, then why hang about for something that’s 2000 years’ old? ... the whole story stopped being Cecil B. deMille and started being [her suburb]!”. She didn’t have to accept the word of a minister or saint, but could make her own way as an independent thinker. Much of the chronic sickness in her stomach and feelings of oppression started to dissipate after that realisation, although her general anxiety and depression remained.

Further flow-on effects were that she had a more relaxed attitude to other people. She no longer felt she had a “duty” to convert or help people or to sort out their problems, because now she no longer believed they were bound for hell anyhow. She could please herself about the degree to which she wanted to get involved in helping people.

Some of her close relationships, however, became more turbulent, as she attempted to speak up more for herself. She engaged in more frank and open conflict with her

husband and her elder sisters, expressed more anger, and became more forthright in protecting her home and family from her sisters' interference. This change was in contrast to her earlier more compliant stance in relation to her sisters – when she had believed that her sisters would treat her as an “upstart” if she didn't play along with the little sister role.

Another way the moment of insight changed Louise's life was that she no longer felt she *had* to do things so much any more, like keeping her house “tidy” beyond a reasonable state. The words “have to” and “should” figured less in her vocabulary.

Some time after that main moment of insight, Louise discovered a quote during her studies which she now holds especially dear. It was: “Tentativeness is our rational response to what the mystics have persistently termed the ineffable vision of God. It is our passing, changing certainties that are our problem, not our tentativeness.

## **Analysis of story details**

### **Identifying the focal moment of insight /ego level shift**

The part of the story considered to be the moment of insight was the moment when Louise had the revelation that Moses might well have been “made up”:

“He said “and if Moses hadn't existed we would have had to make him up”. And I thought “Shit. We did!”. And then see that - just everything went “bleu!” after that.

In that instant Louise's perspective of the bible - which had always been highly influential in defining her self and worldview – shifted from being something she had been

‘subject to’ (and this felt oppressive) to something she could objectify and gain some perspective on.

### **Lead-up to (context of) the moment of insight**

Louise’s entire lifetime of religious searching and her attempts to escape from many different forms of oppression were the background context which she believed led up to her insight.

1. Louise felt oppressed by her upbringing. Her parents had not provided her with role-models she could admire, and indeed she had been shunned at school because of them. She felt oppressed by the judgement of psychiatrists and the problems in her marriage, and keenly felt the gender-role oppression of her husband’s expectations that she should carry the main housework load. She felt oppressed by her own depression and sickness, and the feeling that others seemed to know some secret of how to cope and she didn’t. She felt oppressed by the feeling that her elder sisters believed she should tow the line and not be an “upstart”. (Her sisters’ view of her in adult life echoed her mother’s attitude when Louise had come second in her class at school. Her mother’s response had been, “don’t be too sure of yourself”.) Her constant struggles with oppression would no doubt have imbued her self-theory with a worrying sense of being *internally inconsistent*, and *empirically invalid*. This deep sense of compromise, perhaps, was partially behind what was making her feel depressed, anxious and sick on the stomach.
2. Although Louise had long harboured a deep sense of dissatisfaction with the religious worldviews being presented to her, and with others’ views or rules (such

as her sisters), she still nonetheless felt a need to abide by those rules in general. This indicates a generally conformist self and worldview, but due to the level of tension in trying to abide by those rules, the E5 Self-Aware level would be most indicated.

3. Most specifically in relation to her insight, she had always felt oppressed by the “primary school” nature of religious doctrine, especially her early Anglican upbringing, which portrayed God as “capricious and immature”. She also felt oppressed by religious leaders and their short-sightedness, whom she felt should have been examples and role-models, but she found instead they were usually “hypocrites”. There appeared to be an absence of pacers which could help direct her to a more satisfactory interpretation of religious ideology.
4. When she had gone back to University to study religion, she at last found some like-minded souls, with more scholarly approaches to religious doctrine, who confirmed her long-held sense that the notions of God she had previously learned had been simplistic. This sense of allegiance with religious scholars was a tremendous comfort, and it seems possible that this paved the way for her to feel free to think even more critically about religious doctrine, and the nature of the “truth” that the bible represented.
5. Louise’s search for a religious “truth” that she could believe in as credible and sacred was highly motivated – and perhaps all the more because she had never had role-models in her family that she could admire. With her naturally inquiring mind, she had long wanted and needed to find a more meaningful ‘big picture’ – within

which she could find a context and place for herself – a paradigm within which she could feel comfortable. Her insight gave her this place.

### **The meaning (content) of the moment of insight for Louise**

“Not only does the bible not need to be the word of God - it doesn't even need to be factual truth! It's just the history of a struggle of a people to know their God and that's it. And in that way it's sacred. But if I can't line myself up with it, I don't need to beat myself around the head with it because my struggle is different from their struggle”.

With this insight Louise felt freed to be herself – with all her idiosyncracies - so much more. She felt free to indulge her freedom to think critically about religious doctrine, and yet still honour her own struggles as valid. She also felt free to think of God differently, and especially, to think about the messages in the bible and its stories differently, because she could see them from a new perspective. She was also able to stop punishing herself, and trying to fit in with bible's messages so literally.

The meaning was, moreover, a tremendous validation of her discomfort and cynicism with all the inconsistencies she had perceived earlier, but perhaps this new wider perspective was one that previously she had only been able to hear “irritably” (Kegan, 1979).

The meanings described by Louise appear to be highly evocative of one of the transitions that Fowler (1981) describes in “stages of faith”. As mentioned earlier, Fowler's and Loevinger's conceptions of stages have many parallels. In this instance, however, Fowler's transition from the Synthetic-Conventional faith of Stage 3, to the

Individuative-Reflective faith of Stage 4 seems to very closely describe the faith and meaning dimensions of Louise's experience. For a long time, Louise had been trying to do as others do at Stage 3, but could not feel satisfied with that – something in her was straining at the bit, searching for something more than the simplistic (and conformist) ideas that she had been hearing. Those at the Stage 3 level of faith are usually content to take symbols and normalising beliefs and synthesise them together to construct a sense of identity, but for Louise this wasn't enough. Through her discomfort and reflecting, she finally broke through to Stage 4 style thinking, whereby she was able to separate the symbol from the meaning in a very big way – to realise the bible was not literally true. With the Stage 3 “tyranny of the they” (conformism) now rejected at Stage 4, and the capacity for critical reflection given full reign, the danger of Stage 4 thinking would be, according to Fowler, that “Individuative-Reflective faith wants to bring the symbolic representation into its (Stage 4's) circle of light and to operate on it, extracting its meanings” (p. 187). It entails a tension of individuality versus being defined by the group or roles or commitments.

### **Consequences (outcomes) that flowed from the experience**

Louise experienced a tremendous liberation from the sense of oppression she had always carried with her, as she “felt” her self-theory shift in that moment of insight.

1. The chronic sick feeling in her stomach from trying to make sense of so many inconsistencies dissipated immediately following her moment of insight. “From being bowed, I stood straight up”.

2. Her own personal struggles suddenly became more valid, as she interpreted the bible's messages more as "truths" in spirit, rather than literally. She felt more free to follow her own conscience (to become a more individuated person), and to make her own rules, such as how much housework was meaningful and necessary for her. All of this entails a shift towards self-evaluated standards.
  
3. If the bible was a non-literal interpretation of a people's history in coming to know their God, then other works of wisdom could likewise be consulted in order to understand the nature of the world, and one's own life and concerns. The insight freed her to develop her own idiosyncratic, personalised religious notions and the nature of God. Her long-standing yearning for a more sophisticated view of the bible and its messages became validated. It seems she had long been in transition from the old self-theory to the new one, and it was a relief to finally arrive at a place where she 'felt right'.
  
4. At the time of her participation in the study, the organised religion which attracted her most was Catholicism, because she found the Catholic view of God as the "unknowable" more acceptable than other religious faiths she had tried. She liked the idea that God was not a place or a person, but rather a kind of ineffable force. This more sophisticated view of God was personally chosen by her (as Sarah's new approach to spirituality had been chosen by Sarah) and again this exemplifies a shift to self-evaluated standards.
  
5. Her sense of having more right to her own voice led her into some escalated conflicts with her sisters, as now she spoke up for herself and defended her own



territory (especially arrangements in her house) more vigorously than before. She admitted that she has still not mastered the skill that many other people have, of being able to disagree with others silently - to resist the urge to speak up and defend or explain her viewpoint.

6. The piece of verse that Louise read out as a favourite indicated her *high* ego level in that it invited an appreciation of both complexity and paradox:

“Tentativeness is our rational response to what the mystics have persistently termed the ineffable vision of God. It is our passing, changing certainties that are our problem, not our tentativeness.”

It is poignant that Louise was so taken with this piece, as one of her greatest challenges still remaining was to find a way to “silently disagree”, to abandon some of her certainties. Most of us do this – find fascination in the very things that we are still working on to ‘master’ – things that are, as yet, still a pacer for us.

### **Louise’s definition of a moment of insight**

Louise’s definition of her insights as not being unique to her, show that she believes they are part of the stuff of life, but perhaps limited to people who are “thinkers”.

I don’t think it has to be sort of “unique”... Other insights – more esoteric – they’re not mine alone, but I think they’re only things known by people who think a lot. I don’t think I have made any ground-breaking discoveries in my insights, I think other people have the same insights, it was just my turn”.

### **Similarities between Louise's themes and previous analyses themes**

The most striking matches between Louise's insight and themes identified in the themes analyses were that her insight was *about God and spiritual/religious matters*, which was most typical of the *prototypical* group, and like some of the questionnaire participants, Louise's insight went in the *opposite direction* to the message she was hearing at the time of her insight.

Her experience also matched well with the theme which the *medium* ego level group used marginally more often than chance: *No longer fear life (found God, or learned secret of life)*. Louise found God in the sense that she found a personally acceptable way to believe in God, and her confusion with life improved after the insight. This is suggestive that Louise's moment of insight was a shift between E5 Self-Aware and E6 Conscientious. Finally, in the wake of her insight she has evidenced the theme: *feel more comfortable with, accepting of, peaceful about life*, which is typical of the *high* ego level group to which she belongs.

### *Matches between Louise's themes and prototypical group themes*

#### *Context*

Internal process attributed as main trigger/change agent

#### *Nature*

A sudden realisation, "definable moment" of insight

#### *Content:*

Insight about God or spiritual/religious matters  
Seeing clearer / a new angle or "truth"

#### *Outcome:*

Instant change to beliefs about nature of world/life  
Adaptive insight  
More positive outlook  
Made me stronger, more able to cope

Feel more comfortable with, accepting of, peaceful about life  
 Increased sense of agency  
 Freed from other's opinions/influence

*Matches between Louise's themes and high ego level group themes*

*1. Context*

Turbulence in life  
 Internal processes attributed as main trigger/change agent \*

*2. Nature of MOI*

A sudden "definable moment"

*4. Outcome*

Freed from other's opinions or influence  
 Became more individuated  
 Instant change to self / self-beliefs  
 Feel more comfortable with, accepting of, peaceful about life  
 Made me stronger, more able to cope

**“Before versus After” questionnaire assessments of Louise**

The data in Table 39 in respect to Louise's attitudes were supplied by the “before versus after” study (Appendix D) and show her attitudes in relation to the “secondary variables” (Appendix B) before the moment of insight, versus currently.

For the “before versus after” study only, Louise's ego levels “before” the moment of insight, versus her “current” level, were assessed using 18-item short-form versions of the WUSCT. The levels assessed by these short-form WUSCTs were E5 Self-Aware (low) for “before”, and E7 Individualistic (*high*) for “current”. Louise's 36-item form also estimated her current level at E7.

Table 39

*Year or two “Before” MOI versus “Current” Test Results for Louise*

Questionnaire tests	Year or two “Before” the MOI	Current <sup>a</sup> (at time of first Questionnaire)	Possible Range
WUSCT (ego level)	E5	E7	E2 – E8
Health (physical)	0	0	0-10
Wellbeing (happy within myself)	5	10	0-10
Satisfaction with mother	3	5	0-10
Satisfaction with father	0	0	0-10
General Spiritual Orientation	63	73	0-130
Belief in God	10	6	0-10
Have an assortment of religious or spiritual beliefs	8	7	0-10
Importance of (spiritual or non-spiritual) orientation	10	10	0-10
Western religious/spiritual beliefs orientation	5	2	0-10
Eastern religious/spiritual beliefs orientation	0	0	0-10
Personal pressures	63	33	0-80
Sense of coherence	110	145	29-203

<sup>a</sup> The results for the “current” test show Louise’s test results at the time of the study, and should not be taken as an indication of her ego level immediately “after” the moment of insight, which happened 5 years before the time of the study.

## Questions from ego development theory

### Evidence suggestive of Kegan’s (1979) subject to object shift?

Louise’s sense of self was no longer subject to religious doctrines which she found simplistic and inconsistent. It seems probable, given her story, that she may have been in transition between stages (E5 to E6) for quite some time – because she had long been feeling oppressed (perhaps by the old self-theory’s inability to respond more satisfactorily to the pressures she felt). With the moment of insight, she finally gained access to a new, more workable “worldview” and gained a broader perspective, no longer subject to those

simplistic beliefs. Before, she had only suspected them of being simplistic. With the shift in perspective, she *knew* they were simplistic and more importantly, that she had a right to stand in judgement on them. The beliefs became something she dissect, analyse, and have opinions or make interpretations *about*, rather than them being intractable aspects of life to which she must conform. To a large extent, it may be true to say that Louise's worldview or religious beliefs were what moved from subject to object – yet they were so inextricably tied to her self-paradigm that her self beliefs were dramatically altered also – as Kegan would say, there was just one epistemological viewpoint that shifted, and everything was affected by the change in perspective.

### **Evidence of progression via regression?**

Louise's long-standing battle with depression and anxiety was probably linked to her family background and its lack of healthy or intimate role-models. There was also a high likelihood of her having a genetic predisposition for such illness. However the deep incongruence she felt in her self-and-world theory was probably an aggravation that kept her depressed and anxious for much of her life. It seems possible that Louise had an unparsimonious self-theory because her basic belief system was for so long so apparently conflicted. The regressive element in her case was a long-standing, chronic disturbance in her sense of self, perhaps due to being “stuck” in transition between stages for a long time. This conjecture, however, is going beyond the data.

### **Potential pacers for ego level growth?**

The other religious scholars who entertained similar misgivings to hers in relation to the way God had been portrayed, might have acted as external pacers and contributed to her state of “readiness” for her insight.

### **Evidence of mastery through actively repeating?**

Louise’s depression and anxiety was a repeating of her parents’ depression and anxiety, and Louise became a depressed and anxious parent herself. The insight marked the point where she consciously broke free of that repetition, and she was rewarded with an unprecedented sense of liberation and mastery, because she had been freed to pursue her religious life in her own way.

### **Interpersonal schemas shaping intrapersonal differentiation?**

The religious scholars possibly also provided a template which she could adopt internally – that of critically evaluating their religion, while not rejecting it.

### **Checking “from” and “to” change against Loevinger’s three domains**

Overall, the E5 Self-Aware to E6 Conscientious transition, as shown in Table 1 fits best.

#### *Impulse control:*

*From E5 “exceptions allowable” to E6 “self-evaluated standards, self-critical”.*

Loevinger’s reference to “exceptions allowable” was in reference to the E5 Self-Aware stage being basically similar to the E4 Conformist stage, but that some exceptions to the stereotyping rules are now tolerated. However, the shift to self-evaluated standards

is a major change in how one measures one's beliefs. The group no longer dictates the rules against which one measures oneself, either in terms of conforming to them, or in the sense of being "allowed" some flexibility or difference from them. Self-evaluated standards do not use the group as a yardstick, but rather, one's own idiosyncratic value system (which may still of course reflect some influence from the group). However, the conscious thought that one's own values matter more than what certain groups might "think" or "expect" is what is characteristic of the transition to self-evaluated standards. Louise's sudden joy and sense of freedom in being able to interpret religious ideas or doctrines "her way" instead of "the church's way" was a clear example of her discovering her own "self-evaluated standards". Earlier she felt bound to see things the way the external authorities saw them. She had been trapped in a conflict of interests, which she had not been able to separate or identify.

*Interpersonal mode:*

*From E5 "helpful, self-aware" to E6 "intense, responsible".*

Louise's "before" beliefs (Appendix R) suggested a softer, kinder, more forgiving (but she would probably also say "more naive") sense of herself and the world – one that would be compatible with what Loevinger meant by "*helpful*". Those beliefs suggested that Louise felt the world (a keen focus for her) could be "helped" and sorted out. However, like Sarah, Louise's state of mind in the time before her insight was dominated more by depression and anxiety than by having the opportunity to be *helpful*. Her insight certainly helped her to find a focussed *intensity* of belief, and to take *responsibility* for her own views, for the first time consciously elevating them above others (such as the church, and her sisters).

*Conscious Preoccupations:*

*From E5 “feelings, problems, adjustment” to E6 “motives, traits, achievements”.*

Louise’s depression and anxiety certainly fit the E5 preoccupations of “*feelings, problems, adjustment*”. A major preoccupation before the insight was her mental health and trying to adjust to life. After the insight, however, the “*motives, traits and achievements*” that Louise appeared to be preoccupied with most were those of the people who had originally written the bible, and how much one could respect their version (motives) as having rendered “the truth” or “a truth”. This greater understanding of the *motives* of those who produced the bible freed her to make her own interpretations.



## **Chapter 14**

### **Case Study 3: Kasandra**

Kassandra's moment of insight happened when she was 39, approximately one year before she entered the study. It is suggested that her moment of insight was part of a shift from the E6 Conscientious level to the E7 Individualistic level. Kasandra's WUSCT placed her at the E7 Individualistic level.

#### **Kassandra's "Summary Story"**

Kassandra worked as a real estate agent and was married with three teenage children. She had worked mainly part-time since having her children, but in the last two years had moved to full-time work, and had completed further tertiary studies.

In earlier years, she had moved with her husband and children several times, following her husband's work. During that time Kasandra said she and her husband had developed into an "insular, in-house" type of relationship as they moved around, with just the five of them in the family unit. There was no external support mechanism for her, as she was not close to her parents or her two sisters. At the time of the interview, however, they had been settled in one spot for about eight years and had been living "a very comfortable, very easy life", which was lived on an "even keel". At some stage, and she was unsure exactly when, a thought had occurred to her that there was "more than this – there's more than this", but she wasn't sure what that "more" might actually be. Apart

from that passing thought, there had been no other indication for her that at age 39, while attending a conference shortly before graduating with her degree, she was about to be abruptly jolted out of her comfortable existence.

Kassandra described her moment of insight as a “blinding flash” kind of experience. It happened soon after she had arrived at the conference, when her course convenor was introducing her to a friend called Lance - a short, physically unremarkable fellow (compared with her tall, very attractive husband). They were introduced in an entirely normal manner, but as this man looked at her and shook hands, the thought “Yes!” suddenly flashed through Kassandra’s mind, and she was struck, inexplicably, with the profound conviction that this moment was going to change her life forever. “It was like stepping out over the edge of this cliff and knowing that ... life was never going to be the same again”. She was “scared...really scared” and her first instinct was to “bolt” – to run away from this threat, back to her “lovely life”. In fact she acted on this impulse and immediately went outside and manufactured a reason to phone her husband, in an attempt to touch base again with safety and normalcy, before preparing to go back inside to the conference.

What was it about this man that had so struck her?

“I wish I knew. I truly do. I think a large part of it is his emotion, emotional ability to communicate with females, I think that was a very strong thing. Um - blue eyes - I don’t know if it was the blue eyes - nah - it wasn’t anything sort of strongly physical, in any sense, you know? I mean he’s not - he’s a short bloke, he’s - and I have a six foot, absolutely gorgeous husband - it wasn’t this physical reaction - it was something beyond that. I think that’s why it scared me so much, because to a certain degree, a lot of the

relationships I've had, have always been very, you know, appearance-based. So it was the unknown, because I hadn't had to deal with anybody on that sort of level."

Kasandra felt that the most potent element in this experience for her was the fact that this man seemed to be so "emotionally open", and she had never sensed such an emotional openness before in a man. She felt that in some way, he could see the "clichéd" person she was, and yet he also seemed to be "pulling her out" towards him, in a sense challenging her to become more "herself". When pressed to describe the meaning, or the message that she gleaned from him in that moment, she speculated:

"I don't know how I sensed this all in this one little minute ...Maybe something like 'take a good look at yourself, just realise who you are ...what you have to offer...take that step forward, you can do this!' ...Whether it was something in the way he smiled, or just, you know, that he had an open body stance, I don't know. I have no idea. I just knew."

Despite feeling rattled by the experience, Kasandra went back inside to the conference and over the next few days was able to feel quite comfortable in Lance's presence. On the final day they sat together and found they had many things in common, including their histories of marriage and children. Kasandra told him about the impact their meeting had made on her, and although they developed a friendship, their contact did not escalate into an 'affair', partly due to the fact that he lived on the other side of Australia, so they did not see each other after the conference, although they shared a few phone calls.

In the first few days after that powerful moment, and up to about a month afterwards, Kasandra tended to interpret it in what she called the more "face value", or

“cliché” romantic sense of “love at first sight”. She felt very drawn to be with him, because he was so different from all the men she had ever been with. Being an attractive woman herself, Kasandra’s choice of men had always been, as she said, somewhat “appearance based”. Not only that, but in recent years had she realised that to some extent she had always allowed her male partners to subtly dictate the way she “should” behave. Now, by stark contrast, she had met a man who she felt was challenging her to become more truly herself.

As time unfolded, Kasandra began to interpret the meaning of the experience much more philosophically. She came to believe that Lance was in some sense her soul-mate – a kind of reflection or other side of herself – who was “sent” by fate or destiny to help her to grow and become more herself, rather than letting other people’s expectations guide her thoughts and behaviour. She came to accept that it was for the best that an affair never eventuated with him – indeed, she felt it might have been “horrible and seedy” and the deeper meaning of the impact she had felt (a call to personal growth) might have been lost to her. However, this more serene interpretation took some time to arrive at.

For at least six months after the experience, she remained convinced that she must at least leave her marriage, in order to be true to herself. She had explained the situation as best she could to her shocked husband and to the extended families, in preparation to leave. At about this time, however, coincidentally, her husband’s work took him to another city for the duration of each week, so that he returned home only on weekends. This gave Kasandra enough “space” to feel able to stay temporarily, and in the end, neither she nor her husband could bear to live without the children. Since she was still able to get along well with her husband, and indeed had become “less dependent” and was more able to state

her own preferences in the face of his “strong but charming” personality, they eventually renegotiated their understanding of their marriage. Kasandra no longer assumed it would be permanent or “fixed” as she had previously, but rather, now understood it as a temporary arrangement that might well change as the future unfolded. Indeed, she felt her relationship with her husband eventually improved and he came in the end to learn from the experience as well.

“We have a great time, you know, we do a lot of things together, and we talk really well. Still don’t quite talk emotionally, but, I think that’s just never going to be, which is why I don’t ever look long term any more. I don’t think you can! Life changes too much.”

Many of her other relationships began to change, also. Five months after her moment of insight, Kasandra instigated a reinvention of her relationship with her sisters, from whom she had always been distant. They began to discuss and understand some of the difficulties in their mutual background better, in particular acknowledging that their mother had tended to play each one off against the other. However now they began to open up to the possibility of offering each other support.

Furthermore, Kasandra began to feel freed of the imperative to play roles expected of her by others. Whereas at previous Christmas gatherings she had felt an obligation to play the role of the “party girl” as she always had, she now developed a new kind of quiet confidence that allowed her to go to bed early if she so wanted, rather than feeling obliged to party until late. At work, there were similar changes in her approach. She no longer felt timid about applying for promotions, or devastated at the prospect of receiving knockbacks. Rather, she felt able to “float” along on the top of things, interested and involved, but not unduly emotionally caught up in things.

“I no longer see the world that I live in, in terms of what’s ‘normal, what’s socially acceptable to you or to others’. You know I had a tendency to always run my life by everybody else’s expectations and perceptions ... that’s a hard thing to outgrow, and while I still do it to a degree - it’s less, much less. So I now look at it in MY eyes. Still consider other people’s feelings - that’s really important. Stronger - I’m just a stronger person... to a lot of people I still appear very much the same, but it’s very much an inner strength that I’ve developed, which has been really nice.”

Overall, she said, her moment of insight was a “big awakening” that was all about growth. Although it was initially “devastating”, it had eventually brought some “great results” in “the way that I deal with my relationships or with my work, my family and friends”.

## **Analysis of story details**

### **Identifying the focal moment of insight /ego level shift**

The moment of insight was Kasandra’s reaction when she shook hands with the man at the conference:

The thought “Yes!” suddenly flashed through Kasandra’s mind, and she was struck, inexplicably, with the profound conviction that this moment was going to change her life forever. “It was like stepping out over the edge of this cliff and knowing that ... life was never going to be the same again”.

### **Lead-up to (context of) the moment of insight**

The factors which might have lead up to Kasandra's moment of insight are not immediately obvious. At first glance, it seemed to happen out of the blue. However, on looking at the constellation of factors, a picture begins to emerge as a possible explanation.

1. Kasandra, at 39, was not only approaching the traditional mid-life milestone age of 40, but her identity had begun to shift in recent years, from that of a mother working part-time with young children, to an individual with a growing sense of achievement, as she was about to graduate with a degree, and to enter into a more "professional" field of work and stage of life.
2. Her romantic relationships had always been somewhat "appearance-based" and she had often felt a need to play the roles her partners expected of her. Although her marriage had been good, and initially a safe retreat from her strained family relationships, her relationship with her husband had begun to feel "insular", and she had been disappointed that her husband had never been able to open up at a deep emotional level
3. Her relationship with her father, although loving, was distant and strained, and she described her mother as an "emotional blackmailer" who had turned Kasandra and her sisters against each other.
4. She had good relationships with her children and she felt her daughter in particular had taught her the meaning of "unconditional love", despite Kasandra's early misgivings that she might do to her daughter what her own mother had done to her,

in terms of emotional blackmail. (She was intuitively aware of the general principle of actively repeating what she had passively undergone.) Her close relationship with her daughter may have been the first time in her life that Kasandra had experienced an intimate relationship which had the quality of being “emotionally open”.

5. Kasandra’s previous vague notions that there must be “something more” to life might have been a yearning to interact with other adults at a more “emotionally open” level.
  
6. When Kasandra went to the conference at a time when she was about to enter into a new, more professional field, and was introduced by her trusted supervisor to a respected colleague in that field, this man’s look of “emotional openness” - of apparently being able to see her potential as an individual, sounds very much like projection at work – she was indeed “seeing herself through new eyes”. His ability to represent this new way of being that she was edging towards (unconsciously) had a mysterious and powerful impact on her. Perhaps, too, the experience struck a deep chord of yearning within her for a deeper emotional connection with an adult. If so, that yearning was still largely unconscious, as she could not fathom her own intense feelings. There was just the frightening “gut feel” and sense of certainty that her life was about to change. Major supports for the old self-paradigm had taken a direct hit, but as yet the old self-paradigm structure still stood, albeit shakily, while Kasandra sorted out the basic premises she needed for the new one. This “teetering” in transition between self-paradigms seems to be the place of most suffering in people’s lives. For Sarah, Louise and Kasandra, the times of probable



transition were times of inner turmoil. As Kuhn (1962) said, there are no superordinate rules to make a final decision when neither the old nor the new paradigm are firmly in place.

7. What appears to set apart Kasandra's story from many of the other moments of insight is the fact that she was basically happy and comfortable in her life before the insight, and that she went through a high level of turmoil directly afterwards, although in the long run the consequences were a deep sense of personal growth. Kasandra had held no strong conscious desire to change her life – indeed, the very thought of it was initially frightening to her. Her insight was much more of an emotional event than a cognitive one.

### **The meaning (content) of the moment of insight for Kasandra**

The immediate meaning of the insight was the “knowledge” that her life was going to change – but the details of just how or why remained shrouded in confusion for some time. This insight, more than most, seems to have been her ‘first contact’ with a new paradigm – and the contact was made at a largely unconscious level. In Kegan et al.'s (1998) terms, she was probably in the early stages of transition from E6 Conscientiousness to E7 Individualistic, when the moment of insight propelled her further at an unconscious level, leaving her conscious understanding scurrying along behind, trying to catch up with the changes in her emotions.

When she first shook hands and met the eyes of this man who so affected her, she had the sense that he had seen through her, to the “real cliched person” she had become, and she felt a challenge to become more “herself” (more Individualistic perhaps). The fact that, in that moment, she regarded herself as having “become” a cliched person indicates

that at some level she was already somewhat dissatisfied with herself. Perhaps she was finding it harder and harder to reconcile the kind of person she felt herself to be (at this turning point time of her life) with the kind of person she saw herself as “having become”. The subject to object shift was in progress. Indeed, it was quite clear that all of the interpretations as to the meaning of this event came from Kasandra, as the man had said nothing beyond a standard greeting.

Kasandra’s initial interpretation of the experience possibly being “love at first sight” would seem a reasonable idea for someone in our Western culture to come up with, in the absence of any other obvious explanation – especially given that Lance seemed able to offer her “emotional openness” whereas her husband could not. Yet as time went on, she doubted it was “love at first sight” – as others continually suggested.

“Look I’ve gone through ALL of the cliches and I had them all said to me at the time, and I listened and I thought, “yeah, they could all be true”, but I just know, you know, that it won’t matter what happens the rest of my life - that this was big, but what I do with it is what’s important.”

From the outset she had been confused that the man was had not been particularly physically attractive to her. It was his apparent ability for emotional openness that had struck her as so special, that had seemed to reach out towards her, challenging her to be herself, to rise to her potential. This kind of message had a slightly different tone to what one might expect from a “love at first sight” kind of “lightning bolt”. Her stronger sense was that this man was a kindred spirit or soul-mate, rather than a lover, and in the long run she saw the meaning of the experience as being a call to personal growth. (However, when we canvassed an appropriate myth to describe the experience, Kasandra nominated

Camelot as a compelling metaphor. For her, this man was Lancelot, while her husband was the good, dependable Arthur.)

Kasandra believed it was fate or destiny that caused this experience, that it was “meant to be”, and that things like this “happen for a reason”. It had a numinous quality. Part of her seeing this man as a soul-mate, was that she felt he was a reflection of herself, showing her another side of herself.

This is possibly a very accurate way to understand it, and demonstrates the power of interpersonal relationships in providing both the impetus and the models for subsequent intrapersonal differentiations. Kasandra eventually “became” a person who had much greater “emotional openness” following the example which she recognised in this man. In Loevinger’s terms, we could say that she “recognised” her own ego ideal projected on to the form of another person, but since this aspect of her superego was as yet unconscious, the “recognition” had a numinous, external, or foreign “feel” about it.

Perhaps something about what this man represented had the sense of the “something more” she had been yearning for – (possibly a close emotional relationship with a man – her father in the first instance, and her husband in the second). This same process of “recognition” of one’s unconscious desires or issues, projected onto people or situations in the external world could also possibly be one way of seeing some of the stories of quantum change supplied by Miller and C’deBaca (1994), in which the people who experienced quantum change felt the change to come as a “gift” – as something that was prompted externally. As Freud had noted, when a person’s unconscious motivations manifest as symptoms or actions in “the real world”, the person experiences them as

“foreign” and perplexing, and they may have a numinous quality. Like James (1902), I do not feel that such explanations necessarily rule out the “spiritual value” of such experiences – they simply mean that an explanation can be offered at a psychological level.

### **Consequences (outcomes) that flowed from the experience**

The experience heralded changes in most of Kasandra’s important relationships.

1. Her relationship with her husband changed and she renegotiated the terms of her marriage. In doing so, ironically, she created a greater emotional openness between herself and her husband – as they negotiated a new, less traditional or binding relationship.
2. The insight inspired a re-invention of her relationship with her sisters, as she gathered them together and began to forge a new, closer relationship with them (with more trust and honesty than before).
3. She was able to reconcile her long-standing feelings of guilt about keeping her parents at a distance, because she became more able to accept that they would be unable to change.
4. It changed her way of being with her extended family-in-law at family gatherings, in that she felt more free to be herself rather than behaving according to expectation.

5. At work, she began to feel more able to explore or to dare to try more, rather than getting caught up in unhelpful emotional undercurrents.
6. Kasandra “regressed” into depression in the early weeks and months after the moment of insight, as she struggled to decide what to do about her marriage, and keenly felt the impact that her own struggle was having on “everyone”. After 8-12 months she began to emerge back out of the depression, as she became more sure-footed in her new “self-theory”.

As she had sorted things out and recovered to become more confident again, her relationships had to change, if for no other reason than that she was no longer the same. In terms of the interpersonal shaping the intrapersonal, Kasandra was in all likelihood on the other side of that equation now, in respect to her husband and sisters. She became a pacer and motivator for them to grow. Her values and assumptions had changed, and along with them, the kind of future and relationships she needed to create – even with the same people.

Kasandra held firm to a conviction that the experience and the change that followed it was “meant to be”, and this belief may have given her the strength to follow her heart and honour her need to change, despite the difficulty this caused her. The sense that it was “meant to be” is possibly a gut-level indicator that a person has happened upon a “matching” of their ego ideal, with an “other” in the real world who represents that same potential. In that sense, “meant to be” would seem a very accurate interpretation.

One consequence of this experience for her, then, was her desire to see the process as one of ‘going beyond’ the ordinary rules, cliches or stereotypes that had tended to dominate her everyday life up to that point. This is suggestive of the E7 Individualistic approach. The experience set in train an accelerated phase of deepening her sense of being a unique individual. The day after meeting Lance, she suddenly decided to do a conference paper for the next conference, and attributed her sudden boldness to his admiration, when he commented that she was “brilliant”. She had never thought of herself like that before. This was a powerful pacer.

By the second interview, however, almost two years later, Kasandra no longer looked up to this man as her mentor. They were still friends who spoke on the phone (with her husband’s knowledge), but their positions had actually reversed a little. She now feels more progressive and willing to take risks, and believes that he is being somewhat loathe to take risks. She had grown or adopted her new paradigm to the point where Lance no longer was “up there” as a mentor, but an equal.

In the second interview Kasandra said “I am still not quite at that point that I am meant to reach... not actually doing what I should be doing”. She felt she had to go a step further in being willing to risk more, to leave the security of permanent work. This is despite having had three job changes in the two years since the first interview, and having grown and developed considerably in the kind of work she would attempt, feeling at ease giving conference papers now. She lost some friendships because she was now so different to the person she had been before, however she noted that the experience of changing jobs meant that she had also made some new lifelong friends.

Her sense was the “step” yet to come was “I actually want to go off and study astrology and those sort of mystic sciences, but that’s taking a bit of a further step out” (away from the more conservative and professional work she was currently engaged in). She had been learning to trust her intuition more and more, since the moment of insight, and she felt that she would ‘know’ when the time would be right to make that next step, intuitively. She was by now, apparently, quite comfortable in the new paradigm and could trust her own “self-theory” to determine her moves, rather than relying on the opinion of others, as she had once done.

The longer-term outcomes of the changes to her sense of self were that she felt generally calmer, more in charge of her own behaviour and choices, more assertive, less dependent and fearful, and able to tolerate more uncertainty, especially in terms of leaving the future open in regard to her marriage and work. Perhaps that sense of calm was due to the strengthened trust she had in herself to be able to deal with whatever came her way. It is possible she might also have felt buoyed by an increased sense of herself as being ‘special’ because she had experienced such an unusual and dramatic experience.

In the interpretive speculations, I had asked her what the “something more” was, that she mentioned in our first interview. She believed that it was probably a yearning for a more spiritual dimension, or a yearning for a different way of relating to others (for a new self-paradigm?). However she felt her growth was not complete as she still at times felt unduly influenced by people’s emotions. However, now she was not “subject to” them.

An important development in her relationships which occurred shortly before her second interview, two years after her first, was a change in her relationship with her father, prompted by the fact that he had recently been diagnosed with cancer. She had been very keen to try to tell him how much she loved him, and to tell him of times when he had meant a great deal to her, but found it very difficult to break through a barrier that existed between them. It was a barrier that stopped them from speaking frankly with each other, and she believed he preferred to hide behind that. In order to soothe her own inner turmoil about this inability to ‘make contact’ with him, she eventually wrote him a long letter, telling him all of the things she had never been able to voice – both the good and the bad. (The main negative point she made was about the frustration she had felt when he had withdrawn from battles that she and her sisters had had with her mother.)

This concerted effort at pushing for completion in some very long-standing “unfinished business” seems to highlight her greater capacity to be emotionally open, in a relationship that had long been emotionally closed. The moment of insight had been all about an unconscious push towards a new sense of mastery – the ability to be “emotionally open”. Fortunately Lance’s presence was able to invoke and represent that quality sufficiently to bring forth Kasandra’s long held yearning to be emotionally open with the first most important man in her life – her father. By repeating the emotional distance with her husband and “mastering” that relationship, she was ready to move on to master more. Lance helped her do that, by providing the interpersonal pacer and embodying the very issue that she “recognised” as where she longed to go next.

### **Kasandra’s definition of a moment of insight**

I guess an insight in some senses I think is light like this blinding flash that just goes wham and hits you in the face and you get it right then. Intuition is just this sense of something



that you need to, to work through. Don't know whether I get insight, I'm actually learning just to trust in my intuition about things I have a pretty strong sense of. It's all about trusting and believing.

### **Similarities between Kasandra's themes and previous analyses themes**

Kasandra did not leave her romantic relationship, but she strongly considered doing so and instead, radically re-negotiated it to gain a greater degree of "emotional independence" – a strong theme indicating the E7 Individualistic stage. Kasandra left the old relationship and began a new one – but it was with the same person. She also made many changes in her work and became bolder about the type of work she would attempt. Both of those themes typified the *high* ego level group, and leaving a relationship was also typical of the *prototypical* group. In the lists below of themes which matched her experience, note that many of the positive changes listed happened eventually, but not immediately.

### *Matches between Kasandra's themes and prototypical group themes*

#### *Context:*

Internal process attributed as main trigger/change agent

#### *Nature:*

A sudden realisation, "definable moment" of insight  
Mystical or unexplainable shift

#### *Content:*

Insight about self

#### *Outcome:*

Instant change to self or self-beliefs  
Adaptive insight  
More positive outlook  
Made me stronger, more able to cope  
Feel more comfortable with, accepting of, peaceful about life

Realised I would have to leave romantic partner  
 Increased sense of agency  
 Freed from other's opinions/influence

*Matches between Kasandra's themes and high ego level group themes*

*1. Context*

Happy beforehand \*  
 Internal processes attributed as main trigger/change agent \*

*3. Nature of MOI*

Mystical or unexplainable shift \*  
 A sudden "definable moment" \*

*3. Content*

Insights about self

*4. Outcome*

Freed from other's opinions or influence \*  
 Realised I would have to leave romantic partner \*  
 Became more individuated \*  
 Instant change to self / self-beliefs \*  
 Feel more comfortable with, accepting of, peaceful about life  
 Perceived work differently  
 Realised I would have to leave work  
 Made me stronger, more able to cope

**“Before versus After” questionnaire assessments of Kasandra**

The data in Table 40 show Kasandra's attitudes in the “before versus after” study (Appendix D) in respect to “secondary variables” (see Appendix B).

For the “before versus after” study only, Kasandra's ego levels “before” the moment of insight, versus her “current” level, were assessed using 18-item short-form

versions of the WUSCT, which rated her at E6 Conscientious (*medium*) for “before”, and E7 Individualistic (*high*) for “current”. Kasandra’s 36-item form also estimated her current level at E7.

Table 40.

*Year or Two “Before” MOI versus “Current” Test Results for Kasandra*

Questionnaire tests	<i>Year or two “Before” the MOI</i>	Current <sup>a</sup> (at time of first Questionnaire)	Possible Range
WUSCT (ego level)	E6	E7	E2 – E8
Health (physical)	7	5	0-10
Wellbeing (happy within myself)	4	5	0-10
Satisfaction with mother	1	2	0-10
Satisfaction with father	7	4	0-10
General Spiritual Orientation	59	96	0-130
Belief in God	2	1	0-10
Have an assortment of religious or spiritual beliefs	6	9	0-10
Importance of spiritual or non-spiritual orientation	4	9	0-10
Western religious/spiritual beliefs orientation	3	1	0-10
Eastern religious/spiritual beliefs orientation	4	7	0-10
Personal pressures	39	52	0-80
Sense of coherence	104	136	29-203

<sup>a</sup> The results for the “current” test show Kasandra’s test results at the time of the study, and should not be taken as an indication of her ego level immediately “after” the moment of insight, which happened 1 year before the time of the study.

## Questions from ego development theory

### Evidence suggestive of Kegan’s (1979) subject to object shift?

Before Kasandra’s experience, her former assumptions about marriage had been unquestioned – the marriage was a permanent commitment. Afterwards, the terms of her

marriage were no longer an imperative she was subject to, but a choice with which she was grappling - an object or agreement that could be manipulated or changed to match one's values. Kasandra's sense of being "seen" to be "cliche" might also have marked the moment when that thought suddenly rose to consciousness in her for the first time, thus she was no longer subject to the cliché expectations, but saw through them herself, and in her projection, also felt "seen through". She now began to grapple with the new sense of self to which she had newly become subject – that of a person becoming "herself", becoming an emotionally independent and open individual, rather than being defined by a cliché role.

### **Evidence of progression via regression?**

Kasandra's immediate response was to recoil from the certain thought that her life was about to change. She rushed outside and called her husband to touch base the familiar and known. This is a regression in the sense of a child running back to mother for comfort when frightened by something. We seek comfort in the familiar when frightened – but it can be a regression. Kasandra's turmoil in her marriage and her re-negotiation of all her relationships was also a highly confusing and disruptive time, which can also be seen as a form of regression, as she worked her way through to her emerging, more emotionally independent sense of self.

### **Potential pacers for ego level growth?**

Kasandra had been engaged in professional training, and was on the brink of completing that when she met a man who represented a competent or respected person in that new profession. His emotional openness struck Kasandra powerfully –it was an

overwhelming pacer in her story. His admiration and comment that she was “brilliant” was a powerful motivator for her to think of herself differently.

### **Evidence of mastery through actively repeating?**

Kasandra married a man who was emotionally inexpressive, like her father. The marriage worked well and Kasandra lived a happy but (in the end, she felt) stereotypical or “cliche” life, which was very pleasant but at times she sensed there might be something more. The something more came in the form of her sudden shock in finding a man in whom she sensed something she had been yearning for – emotional openness and depth. In Loevinger’s terms, her motivation for mastery was carrying her into new emotional territory. In the turmoil that followed, Kasandra actively put her husband at an emotional distance, as well as many of her family and friends. She possibly did this in a different way (at a higher ego level) to the manner in which emotional distance had been inflicted on her as a child, but nonetheless, the effect was that she became the emotionally distant one for a time. Instead of being the compliant one, she became the one that other people had to tip-toe around. This is not to imply that this was done capriciously nor consciously. She was simply responding to a crisis in her life.

The fact that she decided to stay with her romantic partner, rather than leave, and achieved a greater level of emotional openness with him (albeit not as much as she would like) can be seen as a form of mastery – perhaps even more difficult to achieve than beginning a new relationship. Indeed, the consequence of that appeared to be growth for both herself and her partner. The flow on effects in her work, with her sisters, and finally, perhaps more centrally, in her letter to her father, in which she found a way to express the

many feelings she had long held in regard to him, might have been another crucial aspect of achieving mastery through finding a balance between emotional openness and distance.

### **Interpersonal schemas shaping intrapersonal differentiation?**

Kasandra experienced a shift or differentiation within her own sense of self that was modelled on the quality of the “emotional openness” she saw in Lance. The message that she believed he gave her was to “become herself” and to stop being consumed by roles. In her own sense of self, she began to think that way, internalising the message of the insight, and Lance’s apparent high opinion of her potential, rather than interpreting it only as a romantic prospect.

### **Checking “from” and “to” change against Loevinger’s three domains**

Overall, the E6 Conscientious to E7 Individualistic transition in Table 1 fits best.

#### *Impulse control:*

*From E6 “self evaluated standards, self-critical”, to E7 “tolerant”.*

By “tolerant” above, Loevinger meant “respect for individuality”. Individual needs or goals are appreciated and striven for in an E7 Individualistic person. In Kasandra’s case, her sudden desire to “become herself” underlines that change. Her story had no strong clues as to whether self-evaluated standards were uppermost before her insight, but her decision to re-train (a long term goal and work achievements) fits an E6 Conscientious orientation. Most importantly in locating Kasandra’s ego level after the shift was the meaning of her desire to be “emotionally open”. The preoccupation with emotional independence is a key concern for those at E7 Individualistic.

*Interpersonal mode:*

*From E6 “intense and responsible” to E7 “mutual”.*

For Kasandra, up until the time of her insight, she had taken a generally *responsible* attitude (being a good, responsible wife and mum). From the time of the insight, her shift to a search for *mutual* values was also evident in her need to create different kinds of relationships with her husband and sisters and father and even workmates, within which she could be emotionally open, where mutuality was present, rather than dependence. The fact that this change was so broad, across many domains of her life also attests to the notion of the change being a shift in one central epistemology – her self-paradigm or ego stage.

*Conscious Preoccupations:*

*From E6 “motives, traits, achievements” to E7 “individuality, development, roles”.*

Kasandra’s contempt for herself as someone who was living a “cliché” life indicates that she no longer liked that view of herself and desired more individual qualities. Kasandra’s story does show quite clearly that her conscious preoccupation had catapulted into a search for *individuality*, and *self-development* and a new perspective of and questioning (objectifying) of her old *roles*. People at the E7 ego level have as a prime concern, differentiating their inner life from their outer.

## Chapter 15

### Case Study Counter Example: Philip

#### In search of a moment of insight

One of the interview participants whose story did not include a moment of insight (as defined by this study) was apparently in the throes of more gradual ego level change which appeared to have left him in the jaws of a dilemma. Philip was deeply conflicted and troubled, actively searching for answers at the time of his first interview. His story highlights the qualitative difference between change that might take place effortfully and slowly, as against change that takes place suddenly and (usually) effortlessly, through a moment of insight.

It has become apparent through the preceding analysis of story themes and case studies, that change via a moment of insight is often preceded by much struggle and emotional pain, and therefore it seems possible that Philip might well be someone who is “ready” for a moment of insight, which has not yet come (and may not) – although it seems highly probable that change of some kind will occur.

The following brief edited version of his Summary Story highlights the differences between his “disintegrating” experiences, and the moment of insight experiences we have been reading about, which tend to bestow a sure sense of “integration”. Philip’s full Summary Story is in Appendix C and the Interpretive Speculations are in Appendix G.



### **Philip's dilemma**

Philip, aged 31, was a successful marketing executive, and was married with two small children. He had met his wife 13 years earlier and had been married for six years. In the previous two to three years, he had become progressively more and more dissatisfied with both his marriage and his work.

“I suddenly sat back and I found myself saying to myself, what the hell have I been doing for the last however many years? I seem to have suddenly hit a brick wall, um, seems like that everything I've been doing has been worth nothing. I said I feel like I've achieved nothing, and I feel like I'm going nowhere with it.”

Philip's references to suddenness throughout his interview referred to his feeling that his attitude to his work and marriage had changed in only a matter of a few months, and that this felt “sudden” to him. It would not be regarded as a sudden moment of insight however in the context of this project. In regard to his work in recent months, he said: “I suddenly looked at myself and started seriously considering the value that my work was adding to the world.” He asked himself:

“What is my cause? I don't have a cause, I don't have any real direction here ...to me marketing was just becoming bullshit, and I felt like I was contributing nothing.”

His slow, agonising version of Baumeister's (1994) crystallisation of discontent came into sharper focus when, without any planning or intention, he suddenly became attracted to a woman at work and began a relationship with her.

“Suddenly there’s this whole new component of me ... I don’t really know what love is, so anyway, but I suddenly ‘discovered’ it with this person, to the point where I wanted to be with them all the time, I certainly wanted to connect with them, verbally, cerebrally, I just wanted to, I don’t know, I mean obviously there was a lot of physical attraction as well, all of these sort of things that I’d, I’d lost or never had or something with my wife, because I really feel that she’s on this planet, and I’m on that planet ... whereas this person, not only were we on the same planet, we were probably in the same town. *That* connected. And ah, it was just, it was very upsetting, it shook the ground I was on, because suddenly I was on very unstable ground in everything.... This awakening, or emotional connectivity with this person gave me an insight into what I would describe as being a, a loving, dynamic, exciting, interesting relationship with somebody, whereas the so-called love my wife is describing to me is much more sedate, much more familiar, much more interdependent.”

Philip went to a counsellor for help (and received little). The crux of the problem was that he wanted to leave his wife but simply could not face leaving his small children. He decided the only way out was to recommit to his wife and terminate the relationship with the woman at work. Gathering together his considerable strength of will, he did so, but after many sleepless nights and a drinking binge at home alone, he came to the realisation that this solution wasn’t working.

“I didn’t have an answer for what I could, should, or would like to be ... I really just knew that I was completely lost, I didn’t know who I was. Didn’t know who I should be, didn’t know who I was... That’s why I got wasted. ... basically I just needed to separate myself from that horrible realisation. ...I just didn’t know who I was, what I was doing, where I was going to go, what I should do. I thought that I had made a decision to go back to my family.”

His decision to go back to his wife had been “tainted” by his father’s words of warning that his children would hate him if he left. But he had been unable to sustain a sense that staying with the family was the right course for him, and so his doubts had culminated in that “vortex” of distress. At the time of the interview, only a month after that night, the uncertainty was still with him

“I am in a quandary. Absolute quandary. I know that I just want to stop this path that I’m on now, work-wise, relationship-wise, family-wise, extended family-wise. Everything, and just do a ninety degrees.”

“I’m desperate to leave the work that I’m in, I want to go out and do something totally different, totally new ... if I could go off and become a carpenter I would .... If I could go off and become a physicist I would. ... I feel like, I’m, I’m a different person, but in this, in the world that I have always been in. Displaced person. ... I don’t know what my sense of self is ... Who the hell am I? Am I aggressive, an active, dynamic, energetic person who likes to change the world, am I a person who intrinsically would like to go and sit in a tree house somewhere and write poetry and draw? Am I a family man? Am I a bachelor, should I be a bachelor? And enjoy the fruits of the world? These are the different me’s that I see ... The problem is they all contradict each other. That’s a paradox for me, because I feel I want to be this person, but I feel I should be this person. And I feel that I’d *love* to be this person.”

By the end of the interview, Philip said he realised that the “bottom line” for him was that he needed an “outcome”.

“I can’t exist, I can’t go on like this, it’s, it’s absolutely driving me insane, it’s just not the way I am, and I’m just treading water at the moment ... I’ve got to make sure that I, I actively seek a solution.”

Philip did go to counselling after the interview, and received some helpful ongoing support.

### **Comments on Philip’s story**

Philip’s ego level was E8 Autonomous – the highest level this study recorded. However, it was noted that his score might have been recorded at E9 Integrated, if the scoring rules for this project had allowed. It seemed highly likely that Philip was in transition between these two stages. The over-riding concern of the E9 Integrated level is that of identity. Philip’s struggle certainly seemed to be revolving around identity. It is clear that he had not yet, at the time of the interview, been able to resolve the many issues in his dilemma. Being a good father was extremely important to him, and he could not imagine being an absentee father. His work was also a tremendous source of dilemma and pain in itself, as lately it had begun to feel meaningless. By the time of the second interview, a year after the first, Philip had received an impressive promotion into a related but more high-powered area, where he felt he could make a meaningful contribution. Thus in the domain of work, he had found some satisfaction. However, his promotion meant that he would have to spend a period of some months away from his family. He welcomed this opportunity to test how that might feel. He had settled into a more comfortable compromise of remaining in relationship with his wife, but could not imagine finding the kind of love he yearned for, with her. That remained a dilemma.

We can speculate that for someone else, perhaps someone at a lower ego level, the dilemma might have been solved more simply, by leaving his wife and doing his best to retain a close relationship with his children. But for Philip, there were no easy answers. As a father, he wanted to be there when the children came home from school – not to be catching up on the weekend about the events of their daily lives. Furthermore, he could not imagine being happy by taking what felt like a “selfish” option and living separately from the children. Every solution he thought of had complications.

Let us pause here and look to Pals and Johns’ (1998) formulation to see what light might be shed on Philip’s dilemmas, by considering which of the three personality types he might be closest to (keeping in mind Pals and Johns formulated their types in relation only to women). As Philip is at a very high level of ego development, he is most likely, statistically, to fall within the Individuated personality type. This type was described by Pals and John as reaching high levels of self-actualisation and creativity; valuing independence; having high aspirations; and being warm and affectionate. Much of this seemed to apply to Philip.

Yet another possibility, given the high level of ambivalence Philip was enduring, was that he might also have some of the characteristics of the Conflicted type, which usually described people at the lowest ego levels, but the Conflicted personality type was also found at the *medium* and high ego levels. Earlier, in the introductory chapters, the Conflicted type was described as “having marked feeling of ambivalence, mainly concerning autonomy and intimacy, and may have psychological problems involving intrapersonal and interpersonal difficulties. Often hostility, fear and anxiety are present, as

well as a dissatisfaction with self, and a sense that life lacks meaning.” Much of this also seemed to apply to Philip.

Philip was well aware of a great deal of inner conflict which had arisen from his “distant” relationship with his father, whose “convenient” religion always had the answers, yet Philip had found them unsatisfactory, and relating with his father difficult. He felt this was a major issue for him, and believed his own personal development - especially his own characteristic emotional detachment had been due to the model of his early “distant” relationships with his father. In various ways, Philip had been *actively repeating what he had passively undergone*. He had been emotionally distant in most of his relationships up to the time when he fell in love with the woman he worked with, when he began to “master” a new form of relating which was highly desirable. It (or his previous struggle) may even have accompanied the beginning of a transition into the next ego level (E9). His dilemma, too, was given extra sting because he so fervently did not want to be a “distant” father to his own children, as he felt his father had been to him. And yet if he stayed close physically to his children in a relationship with his wife that was disappointing and regressive, he might well become depressed, resentful and bitter (repeating his own father’s model of emotional inaccessibility to his children) and thus fulfil the “distant father” prophesy.

It was clear that Philip was highly intelligent, and it was also clear that he was riddled with ambivalence. His “self-theory” (Epstein, 1973) was openly contradicting of itself, and thus *internally inconsistent*, and Philip was well aware of much of this – which only added to his pain. Furthermore, his self-theory possibly lacked *parsimony* – there was no fundamental set of principles with which he could touch base to re-align himself, or

come to some final answer. His principles were strong, but they appeared to be complicated and tended to lead to dead-ends in terms of finding an answer. The awful sense he had of not having an answer – of not even knowing who he was - is highly evocative of Kuhn's point that when overthrow of a paradigm is immanent, there is no clear set of superordinate answers one can appeal to.

It seems possible that high intelligence combined with a Conflicted (or somewhat) style of personality might be a disadvantage. High intelligence may be capable of sustaining a bulky and complicated, *unparsimonious* self-theory where perhaps a person at a lower level of intelligence would not be able to hold all the conflicting elements in mind more or less simultaneously, and thus their dilemmas might be more likely resolved through the expediency of cognitive dissonance – or perhaps even a moment of insight.

Philip's pain and ambivalence was deep, and he felt that he was stuck in an inescapable trap. Having glimpsed a mature form of love that he deeply desired, he could not go back to his old life and excise that memory from his heart and mind. Yet he could not move on without his children, and could not take them from his wife. For Philip, a clarifying moment of insight would be a blessed relief.

We must leave the examination of moment of insight stories now, and move on to revisit the three fundamental tenets of ego development, in light of the data.

## Chapter 16

### Revisiting Three Theoretical Tenets of Ego Development

If moments of insight are instrumental in ego development change, then we might have expected to observe in stories of moments of insight, some evidence or clues as to the workings of the three most basic theoretical tenets of the construct of ego development that Loevinger (1987) identified from Freud's theorising:

- (1) Experience is mastered by actively repeating what one has passively undergone.
- (2) Interpersonal relations shape and drive intrapersonal differentiation.
- (3) Progression is, or may be, based on regression.

Let us briefly review the evidence that has arisen in respect to each of these three tenets, keeping in mind that separating them out for discussion is an inherently difficult and artificial business, because they are so inextricably intertwined – in particular the first two tenets.

#### **(1) Experience is mastered by actively repeating what has been passively undergone**

Earlier it was noted that Loevinger (1976) believed the impulse to master operates like a drive and seeks gratification in many alternate ways. Mastery as a motivation was a special case, because it was always a matter of balancing inner needs against outer needs -



the ability to indulge impulses but to do so in a way that would help one to operate well in the world.

Furthermore, Loevinger believed that mastery was the motivation for each ego development stage, but that the form of the mastery would manifest differently at each stage, depending on the particular orientations and preoccupations of that stage.

Was a stage-specific kind of motivation noticeable in this study's stories of moments of insight? Unfortunately, this study's analysis was restricted to three groupings of ego levels (*high*, *medium* and *low*) and could not delineate further between individual stages. However, the theme analysis data supplied some evidence that was suggestive of mastery as a motivation.

It was significant theoretically, that the three largest effect sizes in the statistical analyses earlier were those which showed the *high* ego level group's greater tendency towards individuation themes – hence mastery themes. Those themes with high effect sizes were:

- freed from other's opinions or influence
- became more individuated
- realised I would have to leave romantic partner.

These themes are compatible with Loevinger's suggested preoccupations of individuality, individuation, and gaining a sense of emotional independence as the main mastery preoccupation of the E7 Individualistic level, and the *high* ego level group in this

study bore that out. The strong themes of individuation overall for the *high* ego level group was evident also in their tendency to leave work and relationships more than did those in the other two groups. Many of the themes which the *high* ego level group favoured were also those favoured by the *prototypical* group over the *non-prototypical* group. (Note, however, that the general theme above *became more individuated* was equally endorsed by the *prototypical* and *non-prototypical* groups.)

There were scant clues coming from the *medium* ego level group overall, as they endorsed (faintly) only one theme more than did the other two groups. However that one theme had an unmistakeable ring of a newly acquired sense of mastery:

- no longer fear life (found God or learned the secret to life).

The potential mastery themes evidenced more by the *low* ego level group in this study suggested that their tasks of mastery were learning about how the world “works” and how best to fit into or adapt to it. Thus their insights tended to be about, or concern:

- education/suggestion
- others’ perceptions of others/world triggered mine (to copy)
- just world theory shattered or disillusioned with world/life
- broke away from parents’/authority’s views to use my own

These themes were generally compatible with Loevinger’s view of the *low* group’s (E5) mastery preoccupation being “feelings, problems, adjustment”.

Similar evidence was available in the three case studies, in which it appeared that Sarah and Louise were making the shift from the *low* ego level group (the E5 Self-aware level) where adjustment problems were the main concern, to the *medium* ego level group's (E6 Conscientious level) sense of greater personal mastery and self-evaluated standards – and their motivated search for a more personally meaningful “higher truth”. Kasandra, meanwhile, was in the throws of moving from the *medium* group (E6 Conscientiousness), to the E7 Individualistic level where Loevinger would predict that mastering emotional independence would be a main concern, as it clearly was. Philip appeared to be in transition between the E8 Autonomous level and the E9 Integrated level, and as ego development theory would predict, his regressive pain and dilemma all appeared to revolve around issues of “identity”. What this implies is that in order to resolve his pain, he must master the issue of “identity” and decide (somehow) who he wants to be (which may mean amending his notions of what a “good” father can be). These are possibilities only, as it is recognised that no-one but Philip can find the answers that will amount to a sense of mastery and relief in regard to these issues. As Gendlin (1996) said, it is impossible to predict how growth may manifest, and mastery can manifest in a myriad of ways.

In respect to the second part of this particular tenet – the “how” of mastery - *actively repeating what has been passively undergone* – the case studies, again, were the primary source of data.

For Sarah, her own affair was actively repeating what her husband had done to her, and also her return to religious life when first married appeared to be a repeating of her parent's “married life” worldview. Repeating her lover's and friend's attitudes of respect

toward her (by developing her own greater sense of respect for herself as an individual) led, perhaps, to her own moment of insight and greater mastery.

Louise's depression and anxiety were repeating her parent's experience, and she then became a depressed parent herself. This was regressive, but the repeating that led her to mastery was the religious scholars' example. In the case of Kasandra, emotional distance and emotional openness were the themes that were being repeated and through that struggle, mastered. As mentioned above, Philip appeared to be "stuck" in a bind of actively repeating his father's emotional distance.

Loevinger argued that ego development proceeds via a process of differentiation of the ego, whereby the child splits his/her ego between that which he/she can control and that which remains impulse. Through the process of identification, the child "borrows" a notion of self-control and learns to master some impulses. The beginning stages of ego development seem to be a process of creating and adding to the superego (which holds aspects of the ego ideal that can operate as a pacer). It is interesting to speculate that this process of building up a strong superego may well keep building up to and perhaps peak at the E6 Conscientious stage, where the shift to self-evaluated standards is still dominated by a strong sense of duty and responsibility. These attributes of the E6 stage seem to combine the dominant aspects of both the idealism and the authority consciousness of the superego. The subsequent shift to E7 Individualistic appears to be the first shift that perhaps might go in the direction of relaxing or reducing both the idealistic (ego ideal) and authoritarian aspects of the superego, in favour of a more complex and individuated ego. It seems we may reclaim some ground for the ego back from the superego as part of the process of individuation, which gathers extra momentum in the shift to E7 Individualistic.

### **Pacers as part of the mastery motivation**

The data suggested many possible pacers that may provide impetus for a moment of insight, and thus ego level change and mastery. These pacers seem apparent both externally through other people and situations, and internally (theoretically) through the superego's demands for growth. Observing others (like parents, friends or mentors) who seemed masterful or admirable in some way is theorised to prompt in us the desire to have the same level of mastery (this is the process of identification).

There were three themes in the *context* data which could imply the presence of positive pacers (while there were six themes implying negative contexts). The latter are discussed in relation to regression below. The three positive pacer context themes were: travelling or locating (endorsed by 27% of participants); reaction to others' positive behaviour (15%) and education/suggestion (24%).

The fact that there were more negative context themes than positive context themes seemed to underline the sense that emerged in the qualitative analysis of the data that while triggers for change appeared to be both positive and negative, the negatives were possibly more compelling. James (1902) made the point that self-loathing provided a far more palpable and powerful motivation for change, as did Ogilvie (1987).

The mastery motivation then may, as theorised earlier, incorporate both a push and pull effect, where pacers provide the pull of ideas which might guide the direction of the change, while life circumstances and difficulties (life turbulence, trauma, etc) provide the push, or deeper motivation.

Possibly the reason the undesired self (Ogilvie, 1987) is such a good motivator is that it produces cognitive dissonance and values conflict and incongruity, and it thus becomes difficult to keep assimilating or protecting the self-structure status quo, so that change becomes more attractive and practical, as a way out of that discomfort.

## **(2) Interpersonal relations shape and drive intrapersonal differentiation**

To what degree did change appear to be prompted by interpersonal relationships? And did the change appear to reflect the form of that relationship? Again, the case studies were the main source of data which could throw light on these questions.

Sarah's friend and her new lover's encouragement to take responsibility for herself were the most important and obvious relationships which acted as pacers for change and mastery. Her husband, however, was also a relationship that provided a model – to have an affair. Her own affair then led to Sarah's finding a better relationship to model, and this eventually led to her growth and mastery.

For Louise the only apparent models were the religious scholar's example (that it was an acceptable and intelligent thing to question the scriptures).

For Kasandra her "emotionally distant" father was a model which was a forerunner to her choice of husband, with whom she could only have an emotionally distant relationship (though a happy one). The model supplied by Lance, who struck her as being "emotional open" was particularly powerful because it represented unfinished business – grist for the mill of mastery. In this case too, there was a clear consequence of Kasandra

taking on the mantle of “emotional openness” herself, and transforming most of her important relationships.

In the case of Philip, the woman he fell in love with at work was the first adult who had touched him deeply emotionally, and he had been coaxed out from behind his protective core of emotional distance. Having tasted what such a mature love might feel like, returning to his former life was now like living in an emotional wasteland. This woman’s way of being in the world represented a model of a kind of partner he could have, that having once absorbed it, he could never forget. People cannot “un-grow”, instead they regress and it feels painful, as Kegan et al. (1998) suggested.

For Sarah, her relationship with her former husband could also be seen as a “negative pacer” – life with him became so difficult that she was prompted to change. For Louise, the “negative pacers” were her nagging anxiety about the inconsistencies she noticed that made her religion dissatisfying. For Kasandra, there was no obvious negative pacer, apart from the vague discontent with her relationship and the feeling there must be “something more”.

In the theme analysis studies overall, 37% of insights reported were directly about personal relationships, which could be seen as potentially driving intrapersonal differentiation. The themes which invoked the interpersonal were: travelling or relocating (27%); turbulence in life (37%); traumatic life events (18%); death and dying (12%); reaction to others’ negative behaviour (27%); reaction to others’ positive behaviour (15%); others’ perceptions of me triggered my new perception of me (16%); others’ perceptions of

others/world triggered mine (to copy) (19%); insight triggered by something/someone (75%); education/suggestion (24%).

It may be, as speculated above, that processes of identification may slow markedly in adulthood, and something of a reverse process might start to operate, whereby the most dramatic shifts may be those in which we dis-identify with destructive relationships and claim more ground for self.

Sarah pulled away from her relationship with her husband dramatically upon her moment of insight. Only hours before she had imagined she couldn't live without a man to look after her. Yet when the insight happened, she suddenly felt contempt for that helpless person she had been. This contempt is possibly suggestive of the shift from subject to object – feeling contempt for having been so “caught up” in that previous paradigm. Even Kasandra, whose relationship with her husband had been happy, felt sudden contempt for herself as that “cliche” person she had been, perhaps because her perspective had shifted and she no longer identified with that “cliche” person. Contempt for one's former self might well be an indicator to look for in assessing potential ego level change.

Consider again the mastery themes discussed in part (1) above, which most typified the three ego level groups. These themes are also highly evocative of the second tenet, *interpersonal relations shape and drive intrapersonal differentiation*. What those themes point to is that we appear to master impulse to “become ourselves” via identification and the shaping of other's influence at the *low* ego levels; we seek to understand and master the world at the *medium* ego level; and we begin to set ourselves free from others' influence, seeking mastery through “constructing ourselves”, at the *high* ego level.



Another way of looking at it is that moments of insight in relation to personal relationships seem to teach us first about how to get by in the world, and as we come to reach the higher levels and realise our individuality and how that has worked to construct our world, they teach us about ourselves and our priorities.

### **(3) Progression is, or may be, based on regression**

In the context of this thesis, this principle of ego development (in short, *progression via regression*) is taken to be the process or processes that precede a sudden upheaval or “paradigm” change (in ego level). Regression, of course, is also an integral theoretical component of gradual, incremental change in ego level as well. The difference in the case where moments of insight are involved is that the regression would probably be more noticeable or dramatic. The data have shown us that sudden change via moments of insight tends to happen after some kind of struggle or life disturbance. Again, it is important to note that “sudden change” via a moment of insight is change that is *experienced* as sudden and revolutionary in a conscious sense, but as the data and theory suggest - unconscious priming and motivations will have most likely been gathering for some time before the insight surfaced to consciousness. For each of Sarah, Louise and Kasandra, this appeared to be so. Philip appears to be in the midst of a shift.

Let us sketch the principle envisaged as to how “progression via regression” might manifest in relation to moments of insight.

First, if we regard ego level as a structure or organisation of knowledge, the regression that precedes progression would be the gradual disintegration and destabilising of the old paradigm before the structure ‘re-assembles’ and develops into the next

paradigm. The regression is the “in-between” period of instability, similar to that which Kuhn (1962) described as happening when the old order or paradigm no longer could hold sway, and the new order was not yet firmly established.

With no clear superordinate set of rules that could be referred to in order to settle conflicts, a person experiencing, or about to experience a transition between ego levels might well find themselves in a time of upheaval, depression or anxiety, where they are no longer so sure about their most important guiding principles. Philip’s agony bears witness to that.

Because of cognitive resistance to change, the old order or self-paradigm would have to be seriously threatened before the process of accommodation could no longer take place, and the paradigm would begin to break down. When that point is reached, however, overthrow of the old paradigm would be immanent. The cognitive “grip” on the old self-paradigm might weary and loosen somewhat, as it becomes more difficult to reconcile inconsistent information. This general process of degeneration, and finally loosening of hold on that paradigm would be seen as a form of regression that allows disintegration, and be experienced as anything from unpleasant and stressful to outright traumatic. However this loosening of hold, this “loss of faith” in the old paradigm may be the only way that re-alignment and re-integration through accommodation to a whole new “self-theory or paradigm (progression) can take place.

In this study, many painful experiences which could be construed as potential examples of “progression via regression” were evident. Life turbulence was present in 37% of stories, and 34% of storytellers indicated being unhappy or dissatisfied before the

experience. The latter finding reflected the fact that 34% of storytellers felt a need to escape from or leave a former undesirable situations (including work and romantic relationships). For 25%, their moment of insight was a reaction to others' negative behaviour, 18% were experiencing traumatic life events, 12% were reacting to themes of death and dying, and 19% were feeling dissatisfied with their job or career. All of the above negative themes implying stress and tension, in other words - regressive experiences - applied statistically equally to both the *prototypical* and *non-prototypical* groups. It is worth remembering that stories of moments of insight, whether they meet the *prototypical* criteria or not, are quite possibly most often stories of ego level growth. The *prototypical* stories just helped us to narrow down those most likely to contain moments of insight – what is proposed as the sudden form of ego development.

Given that so many of the stories of moments of insight were set in contexts of regressive experiences, it is somewhat surprising that most of the stories, the vast majority, had such positive outcomes. The only exceptions in the *prototypical* group were the two people mentioned in the findings, who reported negative outcomes. One was Kasandra, whom the case study showed had a negative reaction at first, but later many positives flowed from her experience. The other was the woman who, as a 15 year old, realised that no matter how much she might plan, sometimes she couldn't get what she wanted, and she was left with a pessimistic worldview.

When participants' definitions of moments of insight had been analysed as a preliminary step in this study, it was found that 11% of participants endorsed the theme *struggling with a concept beforehand* and 10% of participants endorsed the theme previously *distressing, confusing*.

The principle of “progression via regression” is close to the ubiquitous theme of “overcoming obstacles” or “hardship preceding growth” which sustains popular psychology and self-help literature - which is compatible with the notion of a general mastery motivation. Kegan’s (1979) question as to whether crisis is an opportunity for growth, or whether growth is an opportunity for crisis, is pertinent. Do we struggle with concepts because we are growing (because we can) or do we grow because life throws concepts in our path with which we must struggle?) The people around us, with whom we have interpersonal relationships are tremendously powerful as shaping forces in terms of supplying pacers, models of certain qualities of relationships, and they also supply the quality of the friction and turbulence that will make us grow to escape the undesired aspects of ourself.

Most of the therapy methods mentioned earlier in this thesis work on the assumption of facilitating change via some kind of regression. Freud’s word association techniques invited his patients to slip (regress) into primary process thinking while working on dreams. Greenberg et al. (1993) sought to work via creating or re-organising emotional associations in the presence of the (usually distressed) emotion. Gendlin (1996) asks his clients to focus on an at first inchoate bodily “felt sense”. Meares (1993) aims to help the client achieve a dreamy “play state”.

One particular form of regression that appears to precede many sudden change experiences such as conversion experiences (James, 1902) and quantum change experiences (Miller and C’deBaca, 1994) are what James referred to as the “self-surrender” phenomenon.

## **Self-surrender phenomenon**

James defined the most interesting cases of conversion experiences as being “self-surrender” experiences. They were so-named because it was felt the person had to loosen their hold on their psychic structure long enough to allow a new place in consciousness to become the new centre of “hot” beliefs from which “the aim is taken”.

The interview participant, David (Appendix C), told of two moment of insight experiences, each of which had elements of self-surrender – the first most clearly. In that experience, David was a young man filled with despair. While shaving one morning, he cried out “If there is a God, please show me something! Anything at all! To prove that you exist, or there’s a meaning to it all.” For about 6 seconds, David saw his reflection in the mirror as an embodiment of God’s love, looking at him with “indescribable” unconditional love. The experience changed the course of his life into a never-ending spiritual search. Unfortunately this insight happened 31 years previously, and details were scant as to the immediate circumstances which followed it.

In the stories of moments of insight gathered by this study, there were few, if any, classic examples of self-surrender beyond David’s. Some of the questionnaire stories were suggestive of it, but did not explicitly enough describe it.

There are many potential explanations that spring to mind when speculating about self-surrender experiences as a form of regression. It may be that the sense of “letting go” of old beliefs that don’t appear to be “working”, the person may temporarily abdicate or let go of their usual attempts to maintain a sense of mastery. It may be that as we lose faith in our old self-paradigm, we may also drop or abandon the defence mechanisms that were an

integral part of that paradigm, leaving us temporarily “defenceless” and thus open to entertain new ways of seeing things. Kegan (1979) noted that in order to “hear” the problem one has, at some point a person must be willing to stop shoring themselves up against it. He believes that when that person becomes able to “leave” the problem without a sense that it will destroy them the moment they turn their back on it, then transition may be indicated.

Vaillant’s (2002) longitudinal studies have shown that people change in their use of defence mechanisms over a lifetime, and that the use of what he identifies as more mature defences are linked to successful aging. The defensive styles that people evolve through as they are maturing may be part of the “relational package” they absorb at formative times of identification. Perhaps when we take on the quality of the other’s emotional style, we inherit the defence mechanisms that make up part of their character. Further, perhaps the only time a person can become open enough to transform in such a radical way is when they are regressed, in transition, or self-surrender, so that they can “let go” of the old way and allow a new way to take up central position – the place they now “aim from”, both consciously and unconsciously.

### **Moments of insight and the three tenets of ego level change**

The stories of moments of insight told to this study, in particular the case studies, appear to exemplify many aspects of the three theoretical tenets of ego development change. Supportive evidence also comes from the theme analysis study, where both the statistical and qualitative findings were uncannily comparable to the theoretical tenets. This ease of finding evidence in the data of course, to some extent reflects the breadth of

the construct of ego development – that it is a theory of personality, a theory that we operate from one particular paradigm at a time (or as Kegan, 1979, has shown, from transitional places in between paradigms that nonetheless still represent one central tendency at any one time). Furthermore, the developmental progression of paradigms follows a sequence of stages that are recognisable, and which have long been empirically established by Loevinger (1976).

What this thesis suggests is that, since we have found evidence of that theory in certain types of stories of change – stories of moments of insight – that “look like” a form of ego development, it is likely that moments of insight are indeed a mechanism of ego development change. In particular, they “look like” an accelerated form of ego development – that sometimes propels people along at a faster rate than is usual.

In requesting study participants to tell a story of their experience of a moment of insight, this study sought only the tiniest slice of information about their life and personality. Yet in that particular microcosm, rich descriptions of personal change were revealed, in which could be discerned major theoretical indicators of ego development change. We will pursue this point further in the discussion to come.

## Chapter 17

### Discussion

Moments of insight appear to be, as hypothesised, a sudden form of change in ego development. Those who have experienced moments of insight often describe them as life-changing and transforming. The theoretical and empirical evidence this study has assembled suggests that this may be so because ‘what has changed’ appears to be nothing less than the paradigm from which they look out at the world, and in towards themselves.

This thesis represents a combination of ideas that open up two new areas of research. One is the exploration of the nature of moments of insight as a phenomenon *per se*, and in particular, as a theorised structural phenomenon (a re-organisation of self-knowledge) that could have application for many kinds of schema-based research.

The second and more major contribution of this thesis is the identification of moments of insight as a mechanism of sudden change in ego development. This notion fills a long-standing gap in ego development theory. Loevinger’s (1976) ego development theory was strongly influenced by Kuhn’s (1962) notions of scientific paradigm change, for which a defining feature is revolutionary periods of upheaval. Loevinger proposed that ego development stages progressed in a sequence of self-paradigms, but neither she nor others have suggested how change might happen in the form of a “sudden” paradigm-like upheaval – which might be expected if one is using the metaphor of a paradigm to understand how ego development progresses. An articulate and comprehensive vision of



how ego level change might happen via gradual, incremental steps (probably the most common form of ego level change) has been provided by Kegan (1979) and Kegan et al.(1998). The contribution of the current thesis, however, is to suggest a less common means of ego level change – the revolutionary, sudden, paradigm-style upheaval that moments of insight suggest.

The findings of this study suggest that interviews and case studies supply the richest source of data for exploring theoretical aspects of the particular role that moments of insight might play in ego stage change.

However, the questionnaire data and both qualitative and quantitative analyses of half-page written reports of moments of insight proved to be highly generative data also, for understanding a broader range of experiences and for comparing characteristics of moments of insight, by ego level groupings.

Because moments of insight are highly memorable experiences, they can be reasonably easily accessed through retrospective report. The method used in this study of analysing interview transcripts appeared to be fruitful. The transcripts were analysed to identify the person's probable ego level before versus after the moment of insight itself. Evidence of ego level change was based on the person's reported behaviour, emotional and cognitive styles, and how closely they matched with the characteristics of particular ego stages which have been identified by Loevinger's (1976) empirical research.

It seems likely that research in respect to moments of insight will always be somewhat hampered by the fact that, as phenomena, they are probably always going to be

difficult to predict and thus to observe happening “in vivo”. However, this study’s contribution in establishing data-driven *prototypical* criteria has also provided an estimate that approximately 45% of stories will meet *prototypical* criteria in the array of samples similar to those used in this study (primarily Western culture adults, comprising psychology students, members of the public who visited the university Open Day, and members of the public who volunteered to tell their stories in response to a newspaper article). It is envisaged that fruitful research can be carried out using these criteria for *prototypical* stories as a starting point, in order to narrow down the stories to those in which the ego developmental change happened suddenly. In this study about a fifth of the *prototypical* stories were deemed to be probable examples of ego level change.

### **The role moments of insight appear to play in ego stage change**

The moments of insight themselves appeared to be the first moments of conscious recognition by a person that there may be another way to see self and world, and that new way, or paradigm, was (usually) instantly more convincing to them than the old way or paradigm. This common conviction about the “rightness” of the new way of seeing things suggests that some unconscious preparation had taken place before the moment of insight, so that the actual moment of recognition appears to be not so much a case of assembling all the pieces of the jig-saw puzzle for the first time, but rather, like shining a light from an different angle across existing pieces of a puzzle, so that an entirely different pattern can be discerned. As happens with perception processes in the famous line drawing of the old lady/young lady, the recognition of the different pattern is usually instant and convincing. The place one is now “aiming from” as James (1902) would put it, suddenly takes on an entirely different character.

Moments of insight are envisaged as playing at least three somewhat different kinds of roles in ego development change that is experienced as sudden:

1. Some moments of insight appear to be triggers which happen near the beginning of the process of change, whereby the sketchy outline of the new way of seeing things can be discerned (convincingly) for the first time. In this case the person may yet take some time (assimilating and even accommodating more information into that broad new view), before their new ego level or self-paradigm is comfortably equilibrated and comprehensively connected as a new sense of self. In the process described by Kegan et al. (1998) this kind of moment of insight would happen at one of the earlier incremental steps between levels.
2. Other moments of insight appear to come near the end of the process of stage-change, almost with as sense of a ‘fait accompli’, finally sealing a transition that has already long been under way, but the person had not become fully conscious of the connecting contours of their new paradigm until the moment of the insight alerted them to the fact that they had already undergone substantial change. In Kegan et al.’s (1998) process, this kind of moment of insight might come at one of the later or final incremental steps between stages.
3. Finally, there are moments of insight in which the transition from one self-paradigm or ego level to another appears to take place substantially in “real time”. That is, in the space of time during which a person experiences a dramatic “ah-ha” moment of recognition of a “new angle”, they experience a deep sense of discovering for the first time, a whole new territory of thought and understanding.

The person may feel very different indeed to the person they felt themselves to be only moments before the shift in paradigm. This experience has the sense of a ‘complete’ shift – a “one-way door” kind of change similar to some of the quantum change experiences described in Miller & C’deBaca’s study (1994).

Even in this third and most dramatic type of change, it is proposed that either conscious or unconscious forces that did not match or fit with the old paradigm had been gathering for some time (in a disconnected manner similar to that described by Baumeister, 1994), but no other way of seeing things had ever been envisaged or even considered possible, until the moment of insight revealed a new view. This kind of insight probably “leaps” several or all incremental steps between stages (steps such as those described by Kegan et al, 1998), and thus might come as a greater shock to conscious awareness. Both Sarah and Louise had experiences somewhat like this, but Kasandra’s experience was more cryptic. Its meaning lay shrouded in intrigue and mystery for quite some time, and it was only after effortful attempts to accommodate the experience that she was able to interpret it more surely as an “awakening” to personal growth. It seems probable that her insight was most like those described in scenario 1 above. Hers appeared to come as a dramatic “beginning” to a new self-paradigm – made all the more mysterious because her previous stirring of personal discontent was much less obvious.

It is quite probable that there are also moments of insight in which the insight serves mainly to consolidate the existing paradigm, and may provide reassuring confirmation that the person is “on the right track”. As mentioned earlier, the interview participant, Catherine, had one experience that appeared to be like this, and later had a second insight in which the change to her current E7 Individualistic level seemed likely.

However the effect of this kind of insight – the kind that “digs deeper into one’s current paradigm” (and thus repeats what one knows) - would be considered, temporarily, as a function of equilibration rather than change, and therefore of less immediate import to this thesis.

### **Statistical relationships between ego levels and moments of insight**

The central research question in this study was answered in the affirmative: there was a relationship between ego levels and moments of insight, whereby those people who told *prototypical* moments of insight stories were more likely to be in the *high* ego level group. Furthermore, those people in the *low* ego level group were less likely to report having ever experienced a moment of insight.

These findings are compatible with the speculation that those in the *high* ego level group may have achieved part of their ego level growth through the vehicle of moments of insight.

### **Age and ego level**

There was a clear positive relationship found between age and ego level, and also a high overall ego level in the study sample, especially compared with previous research in the United States which found that modal ego levels tend to level off at E5 Self-Aware (Holt, 1980) for most adults. Cohn (1998) has shown that ego level growth slows remarkably when people enter their early twenties, usually halting at the modal E5 Self-Aware level.

Yet in this study, the mode and mean of the questionnaire group (containing the youngest participants) was E6, somewhat high, while for the interview group the mode and mean was E7, very high. Further, the average ages for the *low*, *medium* and *high* ego level groups differed markedly, being 22, 31, and 41 respectively. This strong apparent effect of age seems more exaggerated than would be expected according to Holt's and Cohn's research. What was consistent with their research was the fact that a check of the youngest 15 participants in this study had been found to have a modal ego level of E5 Self-Aware.

What could be inflating the ego levels in this study, beyond the very slight average growth that research has determined for this developmental construct (Cohn, 1998)? One explanation may be that the topic of the study tended to attract those people who had experienced moments of insight (particularly in the case of interview participants and perhaps to some degree also for questionnaire participants). Given the findings of this study that moments of insight are indeed linked to higher ego levels, then people who have had moments of insight would be likely to evidence higher ego levels.

Furthermore, it is possible that moments of insight don't occur so frequently until people reach adulthood. Perhaps ego level change *via moments of insight* may be largely an adult phenomenon that tends to happen after the early twenties, or even perhaps, mainly after the E4 Conformist and E5 Self-Aware level. Growth or movement via moments of insight would seem intuitively compatible with "seeing beyond" the strictures of conformist thinking. These are questions for further research.

### **Why do people stop developing at E5?**

A few speculations are offered here as to why people on average do not tend to grow in ego level beyond the modal E5 Self-Aware stage. At the E5 Self-Aware level a person is sufficiently functional that he/she could easily enough have a pleasant and satisfying life without further growth in adulthood. When one considers that most people are not motivated to achieve their absolute best in other fields, such as health and fitness, education, and career – it would not be surprising if many were not tempted to go to the effort of further growth – especially when that further growth entails going out on a limb of self-evaluated standards, which the next step to E6 Conscientiousness entails. The transition of leaving behind the general yardstick of conformism which is still evident at the E5 level, in order to take on the responsibility of making ones own standards, of having no-one to blame or appeal to as a higher “authority”, may be a major hurdle for many.

It is also possible that some may fail to grow further due to a lack of positive pacers for further growth, and more importantly, perhaps, through a “lack” of life difficulty or dissatisfaction with self that - (as theorised earlier, and indicated in the story theme analyses and dramatically portrayed in the case studies) - may tend to stimulate growth and motivation for mastery.

Finally, people’s bodies stop changing from child to adult form by their early twenties, and that coincides with the time that ego development seems to slow or completely stall for many, at the E5 Self-Aware level. We don’t tend to hear of children having moments of insight. Perhaps it might also be because children’s self and worldviews are more constantly growing, and it is only in adulthood, perhaps, that we

develop a more ‘set’ or equilibrated “paradigm” through which we interpret ourselves and our world.

### **Linear versus milestone changes**

It was noted that 14 of the 103 story theme elements (14%) identified in the analysis of stories, were non-linear in their endorsement by the three ego level groups. This suggests that the decision to treat these data as non-ordered categorical data, rather than ordinal data, was appropriate, and it highlights Loevinger’s (1976) point that the stages are indeed milestone progressions, even though a majority of elements tested will usually have a linear relationship with ego levels. There will have been some blurring of the polar versus milestone effects in this study, however, as the ego stages could not be tested singly, but rather had to be grouped together into the less specific, *low*, *medium* and *high* ego level groupings.

### **Description of a *prototypical* moment of insight**

The following description of a *prototypical* moment of insight was developed in the first instance, through the analysis of participants’ definitions of moments of insight, and subsequently through analysis of story themes comparing *prototypical* with *non-prototypical* story themes. In all, 45% of stories were categorised as *prototypical*.

This following composite description of a *prototypical* moment of insight contains the most commonly endorsed themes by all participants who told stories, as well as those themes which the *prototypical* group endorsed more strongly than the *non-prototypical*



group. The full list of story themes is provided in Appendix P. The themes favoured by the *prototypical* group in particular are shown in dotted underline:

Moments of insight are usually prompted by something or someone in a person's external world, but the trigger for them is felt to be internal. They happen suddenly, in a definable moment, rather than slowly or gradually, and they often bring about an instant change to ones self-beliefs as well as beliefs about others, the nature of the world or life, about God or spiritual/religious matters. Sometimes the insights themselves are mystical experience or are otherwise inexplicable by usual psychological explanations. Usually they are a clarifying experience, a time when a person senses or sees a new angle or "truth", most often about him/herself. The person regards the experience as having been generally positive (and it is manifestly clear from their description that the insight was an adaptive experience – rather than a neutral or maladaptive one). Often the outcome is that the person becomes more positive in his/her view of self, others, or life, and feels generally stronger or more able to cope. There may be a sense of having been freed from other's opinions or influence, and often this sense will take the form of realising that it is time to leave one's romantic partner. The person may also feel more comfortable with, accepting of, or peaceful about life. Most stories of moments of insight are those in which the person appears to have increased in their sense of agency, and undergone some kind of process of individuation.

In essence, this *prototypical* definition of a moment of insight is now also – given this study's overall findings – a tentative summary definition of a "sudden change in ego development".

## **Nature of moments of insight: speculative comments**

It is possible to see a moment of insight as analogous in some respects to the focal incident in the crystallisation of discontent (Baumeister, 1994). However the difference appears to be that a focal incident often represents nothing particularly new or dramatic, whereas a moment of insight is a new thought or understanding or way of seeing things. A moment of insight is, however, more analogous to the moment following the focal incident, when the person makes the “final” determination that they no longer want to be committed to that role or relationship. It is possible that this time in a person’s life might have a sense of a shift in perspective – and yet the actual moment of that shift has not been concentrated on in Baumeister’s (1994) formulation. Rather, the focus was the “final straw” type of incident that brought about the shift in perspective. The similarity in Baumeister’s understanding of the crystallisation of discontent and the focus of this thesis on moments of insight, is the assumption that the schema had been forming unconsciously.

Let us take a step back at this point and give speculation full reign to consider how a moment of insight might take place.

It is imagined that in a person’s mind, a unique arrangement of beliefs and values (perhaps as Rokeach, 1973, envisaged them) may be formed into structures such as schemas or schemes (perhaps as Markus and Nurius, 1996, and Greenberg et al., 1993, envisaged them) which themselves are connected within a self-belief organising structure (perhaps as Epstein, 1973, or Loevinger, 1976, envisaged). Many layers of relationships and inter-connection are envisaged between various elements within these schemas (or schemes) and those are arranged idiosyncratically within the person’s consciousness.

Through Epstein's notion of self as self-theory, and Loevinger's notion of character or ego level, we can appreciate that certain postulates within the self-theory will be more highly self-defining and important to that person's sense of self.

Earlier, Meares (2000) was cited for the point he made about the dissociative impact of trauma being in part, a loss of episodic memory. My point, in relation to that, is the observation that where trauma disintegrates, a moment of insight integrates. It is therefore relevant to ask whether perhaps a moment of insight restores the flow of episodic memory and the ability to connect and make sense of many things that previously were difficult to assimilate. This seems theoretically possible, especially when we invoke Epstein's (1973) notion of self as a self-theory, and apply the scientific criteria terms to the old self-theory structure, versus the new self-theory structure after a moment of insight. In a self-theory structure such as an ego stage or paradigm which has begun to fail in its ability to satisfactorily assimilate new material, the scientific self-theory attributes would possibly be simultaneously compromised.

Take for example a person at the E5 Self-Aware level, shortly before a transition to E6 Conscientious level. This person has long accepted the basic values of conformity, and the transition from E4 Conformism to E5 Self-Aware was marked by a recognition of individual differences, and the appreciation that there are often exceptions to rules – despite a continuing basic acceptance of conformist principles.

As this person begins to “wear out” (through repetition) in the E5 stage and develops towards the transition to E6 thinking, it may be that she has already made so many “exceptions to the rule” that her self-theory is becoming deeply compromised in

terms of *parsimony* – she no longer feels so much confidence in a clear set of principles, and may feel more and more pushed and pulled by situational factors. Some kind of “deep discrepancy” (Miller & C’deBaca, 2001) has been growing within her psyche, perhaps leading to a paralysing kind of ambivalence, as her conscious and unconscious motivations cancel each other out. Her self-theory no longer feels so *extensive*, because it cannot account for as much as it once did, and she may be finding that more and more exceptions are needed in order to feel a sense of mastery or control. Her self-theory is beginning to feel restrictive. Further, her self-theory would no longer feel quite so *internally consistent* as it once did, as some contradictions in main understandings have recently surfaced to awareness and more are possibly suspected at a gut level. Similarly, the *empirical validity* of this person’s self-theory is now highly suspect – it no longer appears to be an accurate account of how reality works, as the aspects of it that are *testable* have failed to be convincing in recent times, further promoting anxiety. Given all that, the theory’s *usefulness* as a means of maintaining a good pleasure-pain balance is declining, self-esteem is down, and the self-theory is no longer assimilating the data of experience in a manner that promotes a sense of mastery. This is the descent into *regression* that is proposed to lead to *progression*.

Finally there may come a time when a certain kind of experience or thought allows the person to glimpse “another way” of thinking, another way of organising those elements within consciousness – not through an effortful conscious re-shuffle of values - but more like shining a different light across the knowledge “terrain”, which highlights a different and more workable set of basic assumptions that facilitate a better self-and-world understanding. At that moment, the old self-theory structure postulates would be thrown into shadow and almost instantly downgraded in importance, as a sleek new set of better-connected main postulates would provide a new structure or paradigm, which effortlessly

re-arranges and provides solutions for many of the pieces of information that, under the old postulate system, were highly problematic. The new set of connections would likely engender a tremendous feeling of renewal, because the new self-theory would feel much more *extensive* than the old one and provide a *newly parsimonious* ordering of values of beliefs – about which the person feels no doubt or ambivalence at all. The new set of connections would likely feel more *internally consistent*, and *empirically valid*, immediately passing the criteria of being “*testable*” (because usually the moment of insight will be a response to a problem in the external world – although it may feel internally triggered). The usefulness of the new theory would thus be already convincing and apparent, endowing the person with a positive sense of renewal, a palpable feeling of congruence (between conscious and unconscious values) and a triumphant sense of mastery.

Perhaps one of the reasons that progression often proceeds via regression is that the regression brings us face to face with unpleasant truths, and may activate that most powerful motivator, the “undesired self” (James, 1902; Ogilvie, 1987). It may even be that the ambivalence of being in transition between stages may help to bring the “pros” and “cons” to a person’s awareness at the same time, or almost simultaneously. This is the method used by the motivational interviewing technique (Miller and Rollnick, 1991), to help people move in the direction of change. If, as Draycott and Dabbs (1998) suggest, the motivational technique works in terms of resolving cognitive dissonance in favour of the way out that is least painful – then the undesired self (the unsatisfactory old self paradigm) might need to be powerfully invoked in order for the cognitive dissonance to be resolved in the direction of structural ego change as being “least painful”.

Returning to our example story, though, the early phases of seeing life through a whole new ego stage paradigm would be somewhat of a “honeymoon” phase. Often we see people excitedly espousing their new belief systems, which they may have gained through a moment of insight, or some other personal growth experience. In the early phase of a new paradigm the self-system would indeed easily assimilate and even accommodate much more information than before, because the new stage has a broader “reach” – a greater sense of “perspective over”. Episodic memory would be invigorated with a fresh flow of information that is no longer blocked off by the old paradigm’s inability to assimilate. With episodic memory restored and a (relatively) unimpeded flow of consciousness reinstated, the person with a new self-paradigm would have the strong sense of seeing many things through new eyes. Over time, however, (months or years) the process of accommodation to that paradigm may eventually become more effortful, and once again, the self-system would begin to feel inconsistent and pressured, and the process would begin over again. The person may begin to experience doubts and dissonant thoughts, as the boundaries of their current paradigm become stretched and again begin to show signs of destabilisation.

The case studies analyses were assisted and enriched by adopting Epstein’s (1973) view of “self” as “self-theory”. This approach helped to throw light on how the pressures and dilemmas for the case study participants might have been forming or interacting. For example, Louise’s battle with *internal inconsistency* was partly resolved when her paradigm changed and she was able to feel more confident in her self-theory because it had greater *empirical validity*.

As has been already noted, this process of upheaval through successive paradigm changes does not necessarily continue to the highest points for most people, but instead the person's self-theory will reach a comfortable point of equilibration and remain there for the rest of that person's life. This would seem most likely in the context of a generally happy and fortunate life, with no strong pacers at hand, and no serious dissatisfactions with self or circumstance to produce regressive experiences or the "undesired self" to stimulate an active mastery motivation.

The speculations above as to how the old ego level or self-paradigm might "wear out" and become replaced with a new one suggests a further potentially useful theoretical possibility in respect to Epstein's (1973) general formula for a self-theory, and many others similar (eg. Greenwald, 1980). Theories which postulate cognitive conservatism tend to suggest that the self-system must be maintained in order to survive and to avoid collapse. Usually the form of such collapse is imagined to be psychosis. It is submitted that theories tend to be rather too all or nothing in that respect. The scenario painted above describes a "collapse of a self-theory" in the form of a paradigm-change, and thus the form of collapse here is not total disintegration, but rather a loosening into regression, whereby enough flexibility is gained (through questioning the old theory and dropping the guard on that paradigm) to transform the elements of the old theory into a new theory. This explanation more clearly recognises the general resiliency of most self-theories. When threatened, they often respond with growth. Even psychosis is more correctly seen as a regression, as people mostly recover to some semblance of a new self-theory.

Although this study was unable to tease out much information in relation to the "felt sense" (Gendlin, 1996) of a moment of insight – it is proposed that this is an

important aspect of the phenomenon in general that requires more study. The case study stories made clear there was a different “feel” to their sense of self, after the moment of insight. Sarah felt she got “a great big syringe of energy” and indeed the post-natal depression and confusion and helplessness all vanished in that moment of insight, and a world of possibilities opened up. Louise said that “from feeling bowed, I stood straight up” and immediately lost the sick feeling in her stomach, although the depression and anxiety remained. Kasandra “bolted” in fear of the “truth” that her life was going to change, and rang her husband for comfort.

The “felt sense” of sudden change experiences would seem to have great relevance in the case of stories (Miller & C’deBaca, 2001) where people were able to give up drinking or smoking instantly – and never be tempted again. This suggests some literal form of change in a person’s physiology (reflecting, possibly, a sudden release from deep stress and conflict). Could there literally be a different “feel” to a schema or paradigm change? Most therapists (eg. Gendlin, 1996; Greenberg et al. 1993) would probably assert that there is a different “feel” involved in a therapeutic shift in perspective.

Although the self-surrender phenomenon seemed to be an interesting form of regression that is often present before progression, there were only a handful of moments of insight stories told to this study which appeared to include clues suggestive of self-surrender. As mentioned earlier, the most classic such story came from the interview participant, David, whose two experiences would be classified as mystical style insights, and examples also of self-surrender – the first, most obviously. It seems possible that the self-surrender phenomenon may be more common in moments of insight when people are actually seeking or reach out for spiritual guidance.



Finally, Loevinger (1976) commented that in the determination of stages, one of the clear clues as to the need to delineate a new stage was the fact that the language in the responses had changed. When a new style of language was warranted, a new stage was also warranted. This strengthens the case that shifts in ego level are indeed paradigm shifts. Similarly, a person whose language changes after a moment of insight is possibly signalling that they have undergone a change in ego level.

### **Parsimony of self-theory and adjustment: speculations**

Some speculations are offered here in respect to parsimony of self-theory potentially promoting healthy adjustment. From the speculations above, it seems likely that for a self-theory to work well in terms of adjustment, it would need to be founded on a good workable set of flexible basic values, and that as each paradigm shift in ego levels takes place, one aspect of the new paradigm would be that it is likely more expansive or *extensive*, but also more *parsimonious*, being able to re-arrange its basic postulates into a more efficient arrangement (in terms of *internal consistency*).

Kegan's notion of the subject-object differentiation could also possibly be understood in terms of gaining parsimony for the "subject", with each progressive "pull-back" in perspective. With each shift in ego level, the subject has less clutter to sort through as basic postulates, and has pulled back to a simpler but more expansive overview, and this would seem to make for better adjustment.

In analysing Philip's story, it was noted that the Conflicted type of personality described by Pals and John (1998) is a personality style whose description implies it lacks parsimony. A person with high intelligence (like Philip) might be able to find many ingenious ways of accounting for conflicted and unworkable postulates about self and world, than might a person of lower intelligence. High intelligence might actually be a disadvantage in that it could allow a person to continue carrying forward into new ego stages an unparsimonious arrangement of beliefs in the basic self-theory.

Finally, there may be clues to links between parsimony and adjustment through considering Vaillant's (2000) understanding of mature defence mechanisms, which are the most reliable predictors of successful aging. Defence mechanisms are a behavioural measure of adjustment, which are independent of ego levels, social class, education and IQ (Vaillant, 2000, 2001). In Vaillant's (2002) descriptions of many people who aged well (many of them of extremely high intelligence) their 'wisdom' seemed characterised most by a 'deep simplicity' of values. This, one would think, might be an indicator of parsimonious self-theories (although of course the 'quality' and 'wisdom' of the particular basic values people adopt cannot be captured in this formula).

### **Speculations on moments of insight and ego level groups**

A form of evolution through the ego level groupings, via moments of insight, appears to be that people have their assumptions shattered when they are at the *low* level, rebuild them (often in the image of 'big picture' idealism) at the *medium* level, and finally

re-adjust their priorities to match their more individualistic sense of self at the highest levels.

In terms of mastery, the *low* level group are concerned most with finding out the “rules of the game”, or “how things are”. Their motivation may be either to comply with or defy the rules, but the assumption seems to be that there is ‘one’ game or reality to be ‘figured out’ and mastered – the external world.

The *medium* group’s main task, it seems, is to consolidate and master their newly gained set of self-standards, to master themselves-in-the-world. They are looking both to the internal and external world, but they are still seeking their answers and approval in the external world. In particular, the *medium* group are searching for a more meaningful or idealistic ‘big picture’ of how things work – one ‘true’ path, or ‘secret of life’, that will lead them to, even guarantee, greater happiness. They may be more predisposed than others, to start or renew a search for spiritual or religious “higher truths”.

The *high* ego level group tend to focus mainly inward for their sense of mastery, concentrating on their unique qualities, on assessing the kind of world they have constructed for themselves, and in particular on reviewing the quality of their work and relationships – leaving those commitments which fail to honour - or threaten to damage - the sense of who they believe they have become, and want to become in the future. Understanding their own and others’ inner complexity is now a core preoccupation- their work and relationships are an important mirror in which they reflect, in order to gain greater self-knowledge. Many of the *high* ego level group appear to realise that meanings and ideals are not so easily pinned down or mastered as some of those at the E6

Conscientious (*medium*) level appear to believe. Their insights, more than the other groups', were about moving on in life. It is as if people at the transition into the *high* ego level are standing at the interface of their beliefs and the world, realising the extent to which their beliefs have constructed that world to date. The *high* ego level group's greater sense of comfort with and acceptance of the world may be facilitated by their having a comforting sense of agency and thus mastery in respect to being able to deal with and negotiate their way in the world, coming to peace with it, to some extent.

Ego level theory, as described in the manual, suggests that at the E6 Conscientious level, work tends to be seen as an achievement or accomplishment, and that at E7 Individualistic it becomes part of the individualised striving towards self-development. This might explain why the *high* ego level group tended to have more insights about work – as the quality of the relationship to work may have changed as work became a means of mastery through what it could offer (or not) in terms of self-development, rather than being more simply an achievement.

Two competing theories have emerged through the analyses in relation to expected characteristics of the transition from the E5 Self-Aware ego level to the E6 Conscientious level. The story themes analysis found that the *medium* ego level group transitions were not prompted by interpersonal factors as much as the other two groups, and that perhaps that may be why the *medium* group's insights appeared to be less trauma or conflict-ridden than the other two groups. The only main tendency of the *medium* group was to have "secret of life" style of insights.

In the analysis of Sarah's case study, a speculation was offered that perhaps some people in the higher ego level groups might have reported moments of insight that were from earlier stage transitions than the most recent one, and that one such earlier transition might be the proposed "big leap" from the conformism of E5 Self-Aware to the self-evaluated standards of E6 Conscientious. But the theme analyses would suggest it may be the smallest leap, or in any case, the least conflicted? It is probably different for different sub-sets of people. This must remain an open question for further research.

### **Comments on use of the WUSCT**

In the case studies of Sarah, Louise and Kasandra, the participants stories were analysed with the intent of drawing clues *only* from the data of their stories as to their estimated ego levels before versus after their moments of insight. It turned out, however, that for all three, the clues drawn from the qualitative story data indicated "before" ego levels which matched the "before" ego levels assessed by their retrospectively filled out 18 item WUSCT (Appendix D). Note, however, that the "after" levels rated by the 18 item WUSCT's in this study tended to rate some participants at a slightly higher level than their 36 item tests, which are more reliable. The implications of this are that the "before" levels for the three case study participants should perhaps be considered as possibly erring towards the high side. This would cause little problem for the case study analyses, as it was the "destination" characteristics (the ego level they appeared to "enter" immediately "after" the moment of insight) that was the most crucially defining in nominating the likely to-from shift.

It is now more than 20 years on from the major revision of the WUSCT into its current Form 81 (Loevinger, 1985), and it seems possible that the manual could now be

lagging behind somewhat, on modal social attitudes. However, this problem pertains only to exemplars of the content, and not to the more important structural components of typical responses that determines the various ego level ratings. It may be that the samples in this study, being university students and volunteers to a university study - may represent a group with a relatively high level of intelligence (being correlated with ego level), compared to the general population. However, the 15 youngest university students had a mode of E5, which matched the US modal level for their age. The 15 interview participants, by contrast, who were drawn from the community, and six of whom had no university training, had a mode of E7 – two levels higher.

It seems possible, therefore, that the distinguishing feature of the interview group which could explain their high ego levels overall is not just their greater age, but the fact that they had a story of a moment of insight to tell. Although this study went to some lengths to identify criteria for *prototypical* moments of insight, that exercise was one of expediency in finding, at the outset, the “best possible examples” of sudden change, so that the study would have less “noise” to sift through. However, all of the stories were offered by participants as their idea of a moment of insight and it seems highly probable that many of the stories judged to be *non-prototypical* were quite likely also stories of ego level change or transition in progress – at the more incremental level.

## Conclusions

Moments of insight give us glimpses of ego stage-change in progress. They are moments when transitional processes suddenly “speed up” and produce an intense

experience of “crystallisation of integration” – a realisation that a new, more congruent self-paradigm is in place, albeit sometimes only sketchily. These impressive feats of psychological “alchemy” often take place under times of greatest stress, and thus testify to our incredible psychic resilience.

One of the most fruitful potential areas of further research into moments of insight as accelerated moments of ego developmental change would be to investigate these phenomena in the context of Kegan’s (1979; Kegan et al, 1998) process conception of incremental change. Moments of insight appear to happen at varying points along Kegan’s proposed incremental transitions between ego stages, and the experience appears to accelerate a persons progress along those points to varying degrees - sometimes a minor shift, sometimes a very major one.

In addition, the method employed in this study of consulting Loevinger’s table of stage characteristics (for impulse control, interpersonal mode, and conscious preoccupation) as a guide to estimating ego levels in stories before versus after the moment of insight, appeared to be a useful and fruitful method of retrospectively estimating ego level from interview transcripts. It would be unreasonable to expect every person to display every one of the stage characteristics mentioned, but the type of dominating concern in the transitional struggle before, or after the moment of insight itself, were in this study at least, easily comparable to the concerns listed in the stages table. It seemed highly evident that Sarah and Louise were discovering E6 self-evaluated standards for the first time. Kasandra’s issues of emotional openness, and emotional independence were also highly suggestive of the shift to E7, Philip’s deep concerns with who he wanted to be, or

could be, at many levels suggested strongly that he was indeed struggling in a transition that involved “identity”.

The analysis of story themes for moments of insight turned up many similarities, as was envisaged, to the quantum change phenomena described by (Miller & C’deBaca, 2001). It seems likely that at least some of the quantum change stories described in Miller and C’deBaca’s study could also be described as moments of insight, or times of sudden ego level change.

None of the themes in the story themes analyses suggested any changes or contradictions with ego development theory (apart from the main thesis being that ego level transition can sometimes happen suddenly). The purpose of this study, however, was not to critically challenge the construct of ego development (the high, *medium* and *low* ego level groupings would have blurred most distinctions anyway), but rather to add something to it that appeared to be missing.

The key identifying features of moments of insight, as opposed to similar conceptions like Baumeister’s (1994) crystallisation of discontent, and Miller and C’deBaca’s (1994) quantum change, is that moments of insight are here conceived of as phenomena involved in “structural change” - and further, that the experience is one in which the meaning involves “gaining understanding”, in particular about self. These are important distinctions to be accented, if studying these phenomena in relation to a structural paradigm such as ego level growth.



Although moments of insight are difficult phenomenon to study as they happen, the memorability of these experiences is helpful in gathering retrospective reports. Even if one were to catch a person in the process of having a moment of insight, the experience is so “internal” that any report, even on the spot, would be only a pale interpretation of the experience of the event. As a phenomenon, moments of insight are fascinating, highly generative of theory and worthy of more study.

## Appendix A

### Characteristics of Ego Development Stages

There are eight stages of ego development identified or measured by the Washington University Sentence Completion Test. They are referred to as E2 through E9, omitting an E1 which is hypothesised in recognition of the fact that an earlier period pre-dates the first stage that can be measured by the test.

The earliest stage is that of the newborn baby, which Loevinger (1976) noted included two main ego development tasks. The first of these was the Presocial stage, in which the task of the baby is to differentiate self from surroundings, and to come to some kind of understanding that there is such a thing as *object permanence*, as described by Piaget (1967). Things and people exist, even when not here and now. In the Symbiotic stage that follows, the need to separate gradually from the symbiotic relationship with mother (or carer) continues the task of differentiating self from non-self, assisted greatly by the gradual acquisition of language. The lack of language during these early periods of life make them largely inaccessible to us later in life.

The following description of ego levels have been presented here as faithfully representative of the current Hy and Loevinger (1996) manual, which was used to score the protocols in this study, with some additional points drawn from Loevinger's (1976) descriptions.

## **E2: Impulsive stage**

Physical needs and impulses characterise this stage, which is generally characteristic of ‘normal’ development young children up to school age. Those who remain in this stage at school age or beyond tend to function poorly as they grow older, and to be seen as impulsive personalities. For the child at this stage, others must provide control or constraint, and the beginnings of a separate sense of self are demonstrated mainly by an emphatic “No!” and an insistence on “Do it by self!”. The child’s need for others is demanding or dependent, and others are dichotomised in the simplest terms, being good or bad, clean or dirty. Those who give to me are good, those who are mean to me are bad. The main preoccupation is with bodily impulses. Emotions are intense, but not discerned from physical feelings. Rules are poorly understood, and punishment is arbitrary or retaliatory. Orientation is to the present, not to the past or future, and trouble is seen as located in a place, rather than in a situation (so the child may run away to escape it).

## **E3: Self-Protective stage**

Learning to control one’s impulses is the first step towards self-control (rather than control being supplied by others). People at this stage tend to be characterised as opportunistic hedonists. They have not yet gained sufficient complexity to be capable of self-criticism. However, having now learned how to delay impulses for immediate advantage, the self-protective child now also understands rules, but uses them mainly to their own advantage, with the primary rules being “Don’t get caught”, or “Don’t get into trouble”. They are protective of self and wary of others, because they see interpersonal relationships as exploitative, and will freely exploit others for their own ends. For children at this stage, rituals and traditions are often a preoccupation. Adults who remain at this stage can have a successful life “given good luck, good looks, intellectual brilliance, or

inherited wealth” (Hy & Loevinger, 1996, p. 5). However these adults tend towards hostility and usually see life as a zero-sum game: if you win, I lose. Work is seen as onerous, and a good life is an easy one with plenty of money and nice things. (Loevinger noted that most nations operate at the self-protective level.)

#### **E4: Conformist stage**

Usually during school years, a child will make the transition from the egocentricity of the Self-Protective stage to the group-centred orientation of the Conformist stage. Loevinger describes this as the stage with the greatest cognitive simplicity: there is a right way and a wrong way for most everyone – and the rules of the group make that clear and simple. The group may be parents, teachers, or peers. Self and others are perceived in terms of stereotypes (particularly gender stereotypes) rather than individual differences. Rules and stereotypes will usually be applied to broadly defined demographic groups, such as sex, age, race, nationality. Conventional, socially approved behaviour is right; behaviour that draws social disapproval is wrong. Friendliness and social niceness is highly valued, as well as appearance, reputation, material things, social acceptance, and importantly, a sense of belonging. Emotions are described in terms which border on the physical (eg, sick, upset, mad excited) and inner states are simply conceived (eg. sad, happy, glad, angry, love and understanding). Self and others are usually perceived in a socially acceptable light, and thus the way self and others are - and the way they ‘ought to be’ - is somewhat undifferentiated. Actions, rather than feelings, are the most potent interpersonal interaction, and talking is the most prototypical form of interpersonal action recognised. The transition from Self-Protective to Conformist can be understood in terms of group pressure and a need to belong.

### **E5: Self-Aware stage**

The transition from Conformity to the Self-Aware stage is thought to be prompted by the pressure of competing rules or stereotypes, as the child or adult gathers more diverse experience. As it becomes clear that self or others cannot always follow the rules and uphold all stereotypes simultaneously, one must choose one over another and so personal preferences begin to emerge. “Once ‘what I am’ is untied from ‘what I ought to be’, the way is open to begin examination of the self” (Hy & Loevinger, 1996, p. 5). Instead of actions, feelings begin to predominate, and a self-conscious distinction is made between self and group. Inner life expands in complexity, alternatives are perceived and allowable instead of absolute rules, and loneliness is more prevalent. Contingencies and qualifications of rules emerge, but as yet they still are tied closely to Conformist notions of demographics. Thus a behaviour or feeling is OK if one is, say, a young woman, rather than OK because one personally desires it. For this reason, the Self-Aware stage is simply a more complex version of what is basically still a Conformist outlook.

### **E6: Conscientious stage**

The shift to the Conscientious stage is major and distinctive in theoretical terms, even though in behavioural terms the change may not be so readily apparent. The crux of that shift is that Conformist values are replaced by self-evaluated standards - Conscientiousness. One feels guilty not so much about breaking a rule, as for hurting someone. Instead of looking to family, peers or authorities for approval or what is right, one looks to one’s own values. “As Freud (1930) pointed out, so long as sanctions for misdeeds come from outside oneself, they can be escaped, but a bad conscience is ineluctable punishment” (Hy & Loevinger, 1996, p. 5). The Conscientious person is reflective and thus self-critical, although not totally self-rejecting. Self and others are

described in vivid, differentiated, and reflexive terms. (At lower levels, the only reflexive traits mentioned regularly are self-consciousness and self-confidence.) Striving for goals, living up to ideals and improving the self are now typical, as the perception of multiple choices and alternatives now appears. Motives and consequences take on more importance than rules; priorities and appropriateness are considered, and moral issues are distinguished from conventional rules. Work is no longer onerous, but an achievement, and achievements in general are highly valued, both in social approval terms, and in terms of one's own standards.

A sense of responsibility comes to the fore, and taking on responsibility for others may even be excessive. Reasons why people make this major shift to self-evaluated standards differ. Psychoanalytic theory posits we do this through identification with loved, admired or even feared others. Social learning theory suggests that in the long run, social punishments or approvals shape us in that direction. Hy and Loevinger (1996) find the social learning explanation more suitable for explaining growth to Conformity, less so past that stage.

### **E7: Individualistic stage**

The shift here is to a sense of individuality, of one's personality as a whole. There is now greater tolerance of individual differences, an understanding that people are different in different roles (Loevinger noted that not all clichés are Conformist), and a recognition of differences between physical, financial, and emotional dependence – in particular there is concern about emotional dependence. “Relationships with other people, which have been becoming deeper and more intensive as the person grew from the Conformist to the Conscientious stage, are recognised as being partly antagonistic to the striving for achievement and the sometimes excessive moralism and responsibility for

others at the Conscientious stage” (Hy & Loevinger, 1996, p. 6). (The point about antagonism from relationships is borne out by this study’s original and unexpected finding, discussed later, that people who left unsatisfactory relationships tended to come from the high ego levels). Awareness opens now to the development of personality or traits (psychological causation), and this aspect is more fully developed in the Autonomous level. Distinctions between inner and outer self are differentiated (an aspect which appears to have grown out of concerns at the Conscientious level about deceptive behaviour).

### **E8: Autonomous stage**

The characteristic which gives this stage its name is the capacity to recognise others’ need for autonomy: the ability to let others find their own way or make their own mistakes (in particular one’s own family or children). There is a general freeing up from the excessive striving and sense of responsibility of the Conscientious stage, as well as the preoccupations with dependence and independence of the Individualistic stage. The search now turns to self-fulfilment and a deepened appreciation of one’s important relationships. Inner conflicts in oneself and others are recognised more fully, and understood to be the human condition, and thus there is a high toleration for ambiguity and paradox. Instead of moral dichotomies, the multifaceted character of real people and situations is recognised. Humour is rarely hostile, but rather, existential, highlighting the ironies of the human condition.

### **E9: Integrated stage**

Hy and Loevinger’s (1996) manual supplied very little information on the characteristics of the integrated stage, and suggested that Maslow’s (1954) description of the self-actualizing person was probably the best guide. They went on to suggest that

because exemplars of this stage are so rare (less than 1% of people in the United States), present data were not sufficient to describe this theoretical high point, and thus this stage was best combined with the Autonomous stage. This study followed that advice. However Loevinger's (1976) original description did mention that the consolidation of identity was the key characteristic, and that the integrated person was able to transcend to some extent, the inner conflicts of the Autonomous stage. She further warned that a difficulty for psychologists trying to study this stage was the need to acknowledge one's own limitations as a possible hindrance to comprehension, and that point also is taken.

### **Questioning construct validity of the lower three levels**

Westenberg, Jonckheer, Treffers and Drewes (1998) recently raised questions as to whether the description of the lowest three stages, Impulsive, Self-Protective and Conformist, might need updating in respect to their application to children and adolescents. Westenberg et al (1998) developed a Dutch scoring manual, for which most of the 2,773 respondents were children and adolescents. Data from this study suggested that young people at the Impulsive, Self-Protective and Conformist stages were in general less hostile, less poorly adjusted and more balanced in terms of positive versus negative attributes, than the current manual (and observation of children) suggests. They questioned whether there may be a need, for instance, to discriminate between an 8-12 year old sub-type of the Impulsive stage, and contrast that sub-type against an adult person who has remained at the Impulsive level.

While these concerns as to the lower levels profiles for children raise important points, they do not have immediate impact on this thesis, as adults are the focus of interest for this project.



## Appendix B

### Secondary Variables' Relationships to Study Variables

In the earlier phases of the study, it had been hoped that it would be possible to investigate the relationships between both ego levels and moment of insight status with the secondary variables, listed below. However as the study grew in size there was unfortunately not sufficient space to include a full analysis of secondary variables. Due to limited space, here also, only bare details of the hypotheses and results can be provided. More details are available if requested. The secondary variables canvassed in the questionnaires were:

- Beliefs about self, world and others
- Sense of coherence
- Personal pressures
- Satisfaction with parents
- Health
- Wellbeing
- Age
- Spiritual beliefs

### Description of Secondary Variables' Scales

*Beliefs about self, world and others* was the only secondary variable that was not a scale, but rather, it was a questionnaire item that required a written response. The

responses were analysed in terms of whether the overall theme of the response positive or negative (or neither), for each of the three belief items self, world, and others.

*The Sense of Coherence Scale* was developed by Antonovsky (1979) to operationalise his ‘sense of coherence’ construct. He used facet design to ensure systematic variation across a variety of stimuli in the items, such as expectations about cooperation, fair treatment, the future, control, trust, and whether problems were soluble. The scale has a high level of content, face and construct validity, as well as criterion validity in the domains of global orientation, stressors, and health and wellbeing (Antonovsky, 1993). Antonovsky claims the three subscales, comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness are inextricably intertwined and do not lend themselves to separate empirical analysis. The scale is available in a 13 item version, or the 29 item version used in this study. Each item has a 7 point scale, giving a range of possible scores from 29 to 203. For each item a stem statement is given with different semantic anchors, which apply to that statement. For example, the item “Most of the things you do in the future will be:” is anchored by “completely fascinating” or “deadly boring”. Internal reliability is high, with Cronbach’s alpha ranging between .82 and .95, and test-retest reliability is .63 (Antonovsky, 1987).

*The Personal Pressures Scale* was developed by McIlwain (1990) to measure ‘nagging’ stress and disappointment with one’s personality. It was initially used as a small scale of eight checklist items. For this study, however, it was modified to a Likert Scale design, which allowed participants to indicate levels of agreement, instead of the dichotomous method of simply placing a tick beside the statement. Its visual analogues numbered 0 to 10 were anchored by “completely disagree” and “completely agree”,

respectively. Statements include “You felt there were major things you’d like to change about yourself”, and “You feel continuing strain in one of your roles or responsibilities”.

The *Satisfaction with Parents Scale* comprised two statements (one for each parent) taken from the more detailed Family Relations Questionnaire, developed by McIlwain (1990). In McIlwain’s study, these two simple statements were as powerful as the entire questionnaire as predictors of her core topic, openness to new religious movements. These scales were also couched in the positive extreme (in fact they were the models copied in designing the above Health and Wellbeing forms). Participants were asked to estimate their satisfaction with their parents at three different times in their lives: during their early childhood, during their adolescence, and currently, as an adult. Visual analogues numbered 0 to 10 supplied the anchors “completely disagree” and “completely agree” for each statement. For example, the “mother” statement for early childhood was: “If I could rewrite my early childhood and choose any type of mother I liked I would choose one who was *exactly* the same as my own mother”. The corresponding “father” statement was the same, simply substituting the words “mother” for “father”. The possible range was 0 to 10 for each parent for each time scale, or 0 to 30 for each parent overall, or 0 to 60 for both parents together overall. In the second Questionnaire set, 2b, participants were asked to estimate their satisfaction with parents in the year or two before their main sudden change experience.

Each of the *Health and Wellbeing Scales* were designed by the author as a simple index of participants’ perceived health and wellbeing at the time of completing the Questionnaires. They consisted of just one direct statement, each couched in the positive extreme: “I am feeling the best I’ve ever felt in terms of physical health”, and “I am feeling

the best I've ever felt in terms of feeling happy within myself". Visual analogues numbered 0 to 10 supplied the anchors "completely disagree" and "completely agree". The possible range for each scale was 0 to 10, or as a combined scale, 0-20.

*Age.* For the purpose of this analysis, participants were split into two groups at the median age of 33.

The *Spiritual/Religious Beliefs Orientation Scale* used in this study was adapted from a more detailed scale called the *Spiritual Orientation Scale*, originally developed by McIlwain (1990) to study the predispositional beliefs of those drawn to new religious movements. In the original scale, which used Coombs Unfolding Technique, subjects were required for each item to rank order five statements according to their level of agreement. There were 33 items tapping a range of spiritual topics, for which the three subscales achieved very high internal consistency: general spiritual beliefs .98; eastern beliefs .92; and western beliefs .88. For this study, eight of the items were adapted and re-written into one statement per item, another six items were added by the author. All 14 items in this scale were anchored by "completely disagree" and "completely agree" on visual analogues numbered 0 to 10. The items were counterbalanced such that five items required reversal of scores (items 2, 5, 9, 10 and 13). The main subscale, *General Spiritual Beliefs*, assessed the degree of endorsement of various religious or spiritual beliefs and was made up of all items except item 11 (which was a stand-alone item, explained below). Two examples from the *General Spiritual Beliefs* subscale are "Usually when life lacks meaning, it is because it lacks spiritual meaning" and "Some experiences in life are simply meant to be – they are designed by a higher power than me". The item 11 stand-alone subscale was "The fact that I do [ ] / do not [ ] hold spiritual/religious beliefs is important

in contributing to the meaning of my life. (*Tick box for 'do' or 'do not'*)." This subscale was attempting to gauge the level of commitment to, and personal meaning drawn from whatever the person believed, whether the beliefs were spiritual/religious or not. Three of the items within the *General Spiritual Beliefs* subscale were also used in this study as subscales, as they were linked directly to hypotheses. They were as follows. Items 3 and 4, respectively, were "A Western style spiritual belief system (eg. Christian) is central in helping me understand and live my day to day life", and "An Eastern style spiritual belief system (eg. Buddhist) is central in helping me understand and live my day to day life". The third such item was item 7: "I hold an 'assortment' of spiritual beliefs that don't match any one religious or spiritual doctrine".

## Reliability of scales

Table B1 shows the internal reliability achieved for those scales for which the measure of internal consistency is meaningful.

Table B1  
*Internal Reliability Achieved in Scale Measures*

Scale	Coefficient Alpha
Sense of Coherence	.92
Personal Pressures	.77
General Spiritual Beliefs	.75
Satisfaction with parents (6 scales combined) <sup>a</sup>	.81
Health and Wellbeing (combined)	.64

<sup>a</sup> Satisfaction with parents combined 6 scales: satisfaction with each of mother and father for early childhood, adolescence, and adulthood

## Hypotheses:

### MOI Status and Secondary Variables

#### 1) MOI and Beliefs about self, world and others

*Those who reported prototypical moments of insight would report more positive beliefs about self, world and others.*

#### 2) MOI and Sense of coherence

*There would be no relationship between sense of coherence and MOI Status.*

#### 3) MOI and Personal pressures

*There would be no relationship between personal pressures and MOI status.*

#### 4) MOI and Satisfaction with parents

*Those who reported prototypical moments of insight would report higher overall levels of satisfaction with parents.*

#### 5) MOI and Health

*Those who reported prototypical moments of insight would have lower health.*

#### 6) MOI and Wellbeing

*Those who reported prototypical moments of insight would have higher wellbeing.*

#### 7) MOI and Age

*Those who reported prototypical moments of insight would be older.*

#### 8) MOI and Spiritual beliefs

##### a) General spiritual outlook

*Prototypical moments of insight will be positively related to general spiritual outlook.*

##### b) Assortment of spiritual beliefs

*Prototypical moments of insight will be positively related to holding an assortment of spiritual beliefs.*

##### c) Importance of spiritual beliefs to meaning in life

*Prototypical moments of insight will be positively related to endorsing the importance of one's orientation to spiritual beliefs (either holding spiritual/religious beliefs, or not holding such beliefs) in contributing to the meaning of life.*

##### d) Endorsement of Eastern beliefs

*Prototypical moments of insight will be positively related to endorsement of Eastern spiritual beliefs.*

### **Ego Levels and Secondary Variables**

#### 1) Ego Levels and Beliefs about self, world and others

*Ego levels will be positively related to positive beliefs about self, world and others.*

#### 2) Ego Levels and Sense of coherence

*A non-linear relationship with ego levels is expected whereby ego levels E4, E6, and E8 appear to have a stronger sense of coherence than levels E3, E5, and E7.*

### 3) Ego Levels and Personal pressures

*A non-linear relationship with ego levels is expected whereby ego levels E3, E5, and E7 would experience greater personal pressures than those at E4, E6, and E8.*

### 4) Ego Levels and Satisfaction with parents

*Ego levels are expected to be positively related to overall satisfaction with parents*

### 5) Ego Levels and Health

*Ego levels will be negatively related to health*

### 6) Ego Levels and Wellbeing

*Ego levels will be positively related to wellbeing*

### 7) Ego Levels and Age

*Ego levels will be positively related to age.*

### 8) Ego Levels and Spiritual beliefs

#### a) General spiritual outlook

*There would be no relationship between general spiritual outlook and ego levels.*

#### b) Assortment of spiritual beliefs



*There will be a positive relationship between the holding of an assortment of spiritual beliefs and ego level.*

c) Importance of spiritual beliefs to meaning in life

*Ego levels will be positively related to endorsing the importance of one's orientation to spiritual beliefs (either holding spiritual/religious beliefs, or not holding such beliefs) in contributing to the meaning of life.*

d) Endorsement of Eastern beliefs

*Eastern spiritual beliefs are expected to peak at the medium level, the E6 Conscientious level.*

9) Additional Hypothesis: Strength of commitment to Beliefs:

*Those who **do** hold spiritual/religious beliefs will be more committed to their belief orientation as opposed to those who **do not** have spiritual/religious beliefs.*

## **Secondary Variables Results**

The results as shown in Tables B2 and B3 were calculated using the Goodman-Kruskal tau effect sizes to rank order the variables by strength of relationship with the main variable of interest. Effect sizes equal to or greater than .040 were considered to indicate a relationship. The adjusted standardised residuals were consulted to aid interpretation, as detailed in the Method section under “analysis of data”.

Table B2

Secondary Variables by Strength of Relationship with Ego Levels. N=80

Secondary variables, rank ordered by effect size	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>	Adjusted Standardised Residuals		
		Ego Levels		
		<i>High</i> <i>n=35</i>	<i>Medium</i> <i>n=26</i>	<i>Low</i> <i>n=19</i>
Age (33 years and over)	.285	<b>4.3</b> (27)	-1.0 (11)	<b>-3.9</b> (2)
Health (6-10)	.084	-1.8 (13)	-.3 (12)	<b>2.5</b> (14)
Assortment of spiritual beliefs (6-10)	.081	<b>2.5</b> (24)	-1.7 (10)	-1.0 (8)
3 Parent Satisfaction Total (39 and over)	.077	<b>-2.4</b> (12)	1.0 (15)	1.7 (12)
Eastern beliefs central (6-10)	.075	<b>2.2</b> (7)	<b>-2.2</b> (0)	-.1 (2)
Positive beliefs about others	.049	<b>2.0</b> (21)	-1.1 (10)	-1.1 (7)
Western beliefs central (6-10)	.046	-1.9 (12)	.9 (14)	1.2 (11)
Negative beliefs about others	.039	-1.7 (9)	.8 (11)	1.2 (9)
Sense of Coherence (140 and over)	.035	1.4 (21)	-1.6 (10)	.1 (10)
Wellbeing (6-10)	.013	-.7 (20)	1.0 (18)	-.3 (11)
Sex (counts are females)	.007	-.7 (23)	.4 (19)	.4 (14)
General Spiritual Outlook (80 and over)	.006	.5 (20)	.0 (14)	-.6 (9)
Positive beliefs about self	.004	-.3 (28)	.5 (22)	-.3 (15)
Positive beliefs about world	.003	-.3 (9)	.5 (8)	-.1 (5)
Negative beliefs about world	.003	-.5 (16)	.2 (13)	.4 (10)
Negative beliefs about self	.001	.0 (3)	-.2 (2)	.3 (2)
Personal Pressures (42 and over)	.001	-.2 (17)	.0 (13)	.3 (10)

Note: Shading in grey indicates effect size < .040, and no apparent relationship with ego levels.

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes calculated by Goodman Kruskal tau (described in method text) are rank ordered.

<sup>b</sup> Adjusted standardised residuals of 2 or more are shown in bold.

<sup>c</sup> Figures in parentheses are observed counts.

Table B3

*Secondary Variables by Strength of Relationship with Moment of Insight Status N=80*

Secondary variables, rank ordered by effect size	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>	Adjusted Standardised Residuals		
		Moment of Insight Status		
		<i>Prototypical</i> <i>n=36</i>	<i>Non-prototypical</i> <i>n=31</i>	<i>Never Had</i> <i>n=13</i>
3 Parent Satisfaction Total (39 and over)	.177	<b>-3.5</b> (10)	1.7 (19)	<b>2.6</b> (10)
Eastern beliefs central (6-10)	.100	<b>2.8</b> (8)	-1.8 (1)	-1.4 (0)
Age (33 years and over)	.070	1.8 (22)	-.2 (15)	<b>-2.1</b> (3)
Western beliefs central (6-10)	.065	<b>-2.1</b> (12)	<b>2.1</b> (19)	.0 (6)
Assortment of spiritual beliefs (6-10)	.057	1.8 (23)	-.6 (15)	-1.7 (4)
General Spiritual Outlook (80 and over)	.050	-1.5 (16)	<b>2.0</b> (21)	-.6 (6)
Positive Beliefs about others	.047	.9 (19)	.6 (16)	-1.9 (3)
Sense of Coherence (140 and over)	.046	-1.1 (16)	1.9 (20)	-1.0 (5)
Wellbeing (6-10)	.042	1.8 (26)	-1.4 (16)	-.6 (7)
Negative beliefs about others	.037	-1.4 (10)	.4 (12)	1.4 (7)
Positive beliefs about self	.032	1.6 (32)	-1.3 (23)	-.4 (10)
Sex (counts are females)	.027	1.4 (28)	-1.4 (19)	-.1 (9)
Health (6-10)	.026	1.1 (20)	-1.4 (12)	.4 (7)
Negative beliefs about self	.012	-.1 (3)	-.6 (2)	.9 (2)
Personal Pressures (42 and over)	.010	.9 (20)	-.7 (14)	-.3 (6)
Negative beliefs about world	.005	.7 (19)	-.5 (14)	-.2 (6)
Positive beliefs about world	.002	.1 (10)	.2 (9)	-.4 (3)

**Note:** Shading indicates effect size < .040, no apparent relationship with Moment of Insight status.<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes calculated by Goodman Kruskal tau (described in method text) are rank ordered.<sup>b</sup> Adjusted standardised residuals of 2 or more are shown in bold.<sup>c</sup> Figures in parentheses are observed counts.

## Combined Results Brief Summary

### Age (33 years and over)

Ego level – more older group in *high* ego group, less older group in *low* group

MOI – more older group in *prototypical* group, less older group in *never had*

### Sex (counts are females)

Ego level – No difference

MOI – No difference

### Health (6-10)

Ego levels – less healthy in high group, more healthy in low group (age confound)

MOI – No difference.

### Wellbeing (6-10)

Ego levels – No difference

MOI – *prototypical* higher wellbeing

### Parent Satisfaction

Ego levels – less *high* satisfaction high group, more satisfaction *low* group

MOI – Much less satisfaction *prototypical* group, high satisfaction both other groups  
(especially *never had* group)

Sense of Coherence (140 and over)

Ego levels – No difference (slightly less for medium group)

MOI – high sense of coherence for *non-prototypical* group

Personal Pressures (42 and over)

Ego levels – No difference

MOI – No difference.

*Positive Beliefs: Self*

Ego levels – No difference

MOI – No difference.

*Positive Beliefs: World*

Ego levels – No difference

MOI – No difference.

*Positive Beliefs: Others*

Ego levels – *High* group more positive re others

MOI – *Never had* group less positive others

*Negative Beliefs: Self*

Ego levels – No difference

MOI – No difference.

Negative Beliefs: World

Ego levels – No difference

MOI – No difference.

Negative Beliefs: Others

Ego levels – No difference

MOI – No difference.

Spiritual/Religious BeliefsWestern beliefs central (6-10)

Ego levels – Less western in *high* group

MOI – Less western in *prototypical*, more in *non-prototypical* group

Eastern beliefs central (6-10)

Ego levels – More eastern in *high* group, less in *medium* group

MOI – More eastern in *prototypical*, less in *non-prototypical*

Assortment of spiritual beliefs (6-10)

Ego levels – More assorted beliefs in *high* group, less in *medium* group

MOI – More assorted beliefs in *prototypical*, less in *never had*

General Spiritual Outlook (80 and over)

Ego levels – no difference

MOI – Less in *prototypical*, More in *non-prototypical*

Strength of Commitment to Beliefs:

An Goodman-Kruskal tau effect size of .375 indicated a very strong relationship between Belief Orientation (those who *do* versus *don't* hold spiritual/religious beliefs), and the Strength of Commitment to those beliefs.

Table B4

*Low versus High Meaning according to those who Do versus Don't hold Spiritual/Religious Beliefs. N= 80*

	Do Hold Beliefs	Don't Hold Beliefs
Low meaning	6	15
High meaning	53	6

## **Appendix C**

### **Summaries of Stories told by Interview Participants**

The following summaries of stories of moments of insight were written by the researcher to capture briefly the main points of the stories told by participants in their first interview. All participants (with the exception of Vanessa) read their stories and provided feedback on them and agreed that the summary captured the main points of their experience. Corrections offered by the participants were made to the summaries below, which have also been minimally further edited to conserve space. For completeness, all 15 stories (including those of Sarah, Louise, Kasandra and Philip whose stories were featured in the body of the thesis) are included in this Appendix, in alphabetical order.

#### **Andrew's Story**

Andrew was 60 at the time of the interview, and still getting over the trauma of having been forced into bankruptcy several years earlier. His shift in perspective came as a direct result of the events that precipitated that trauma.

Born and raised in England, Andrew had migrated to Australia when he was 23. At the time of the interview he had been happily married to Nancy for 40 years, and had an adult son and daughter, each of whom were married with young families. He described himself as having always been close to his immediate family, despite having been a “workoholic” in his earlier years, and at work, “an unloved senior manager” who had difficulty relating informally to his staff.

For the greater part of his working life Andrew had been a successful and scrupulous manager of both money and human resources. He had worked on the stock exchanges in London Sydney, and Melbourne, and in various work roles he had been a systems analyst, a financial controller and a general manager of large commercial enterprises. In the latter position, Andrew's way of doing business had always been “my word is my bond”, and he was proud of the fact that he had always acted responsibly and in good faith. The banks he had dealt with had trusted him so completely that on occasions they had been willing to lend his company hundreds of thousands of dollars to cover cashflow for a few extra days, simply on his verbal request, and he had never defaulted on those agreements.



At the age of 47, Andrew decided it was time to create a change of life for himself, “a watershed”, and so he left his salaried work, and decided to try his hand at housing development. Two main projects were ‘brainstormed’ by himself, his brother-in-law, and his bank manager in a series of joint meetings, where verbal agreements as to each party’s contribution were made. Andrew’s brother-in-law promised to provide \$600,000 as part of the finance arrangements, while Andrew was to take on responsibility for the management of the entire project, which eventually comprised the construction of eight town houses in a desirable location just outside Sydney, and at a second, similarly desirable site, five town houses and five villas. Throughout the project, as agreed, Andrew regularly provided detailed written reports to the bank manager. During this time, Andrew’s mother decided to relocate and because it seemed mutually beneficial, her new unit was funded by Andrew and Nancy, with a view to it becoming part of their superannuation in the long run. Further family involvement came when Nancy’s sister and husband decided to buy a house from the project, which had been purchased as part of the project’s site acquisitions.

All seemed to be proceeding well until Andrew’s brother-in-law (his business partner) admitted that he could not longer supply the \$600,000 of financial backing which he had promised, as his own investments had failed. In an emergency meeting, the bank manager assured Andrew that there would be ways around this, and he kept the deeds to Andrew’s mother’s unit as informal surety instead. A short time later, however, the bank manager called Andrew in and asked him to help clarify the status of the project. It was clear to Andrew at that meeting that the bank manager’s paperwork was in a mess, that he had not been reading Andrew’s reports, and for the first time, there was a witness present at their meeting. Shortly afterwards, the bank manager told Andrew he had been “promoted” to another bank (but it was a smaller branch) and had to leave almost immediately. A few days later, the regional office of the bank froze the accounts for the project and refused to explain or speak to Andrew about it, beyond telling him to wait until they could have a better look at the accounts. For Andrew, this move by the bank was like “a bolt from the blue”. He thought “this can’t be happening, no logical person could do this”, and for a while, he felt like his legs were still running, because part of him still believed it was just another problem to solve, while for another part of him, it was “like having a car accident – you go into shock ...disbelief”. The awful thought occurred to him “if they continue with this, this is all going to go down the drain and then its like – strike - where are we with mum's unit?.”

At this point the project was just three weeks before completion of construction at one of the sites, and because no money was available to pay the builders, construction had to cease. Andrew was aghast and horrified that the bank seemed unable to understand that freezing the accounts would effectively mean the project would “bleed to death”, and furthermore, they would miss the peak selling and marketing time, for which brochures had already been prepared. By missing the peak marketing time, not only was Andrew denied the opportunity to complete construction and sell the properties to pay off the debts, but the bank also “shot itself in the foot” by losing money on what was to become its own assets. They lost around \$25,000 on each of the townhouses when they eventually sold after long delays, and an estimated two million dollars overall.

The day the banks froze the account, Andrew suffered the first jolt of a downwards spiral as his perspective shifted from disbelief that the bank’s actions completely flaunted good business sense, to personal devastation, a shattered sense of self, and a deeply embittered and cynical view of the business world in general. It took about four months of frustration and disillusionment before he could take in the full import of what had happened. Not only was it a financial disaster which led to bankruptcy for himself and his wife, but his mother’s house and security had been put at risk, and to cap it all off, his sister-in-law and her husband, who had purchased a house from the project and could have lost it, sought legal advice which directed them to accuse Andrew of having attempted to defraud them.

For Andrew, his sister-in-law and husband’s suspicions hurt intensely, given that he felt he had lived by honourable standards all his life, and he expected them to have more faith in him. “It was absolute emotional resentment. ‘You really don't know who I am and what I believe in and how I

behave’.” His other brother-in-law and business partner deserted him again in this time of need by largely avoiding him, and making only a token gesture of appearing in court for support, when the battle with the bank had continued all the way to the Supreme Court, before it was lost and formalised the bankruptcy. Part of the reason that the legal battle was lost, was that Andrew and Nancy both felt ethically obliged to do whatever they could to disentangle their family members from being involved. Thus Andrew agreed to a deal which removed some of the evidence involving the bank’s incompetent handling of his mother’s and sister-in-law’s homes. Although this relieved the pressure his family being involved, the loss of that evidence meant that Andrew’s case against the bank and in particular the negligence of the bank manager, was weakened.

Andrew blamed himself for being naïve when he began the project. “I assumed everybody’s word is their bond.” He felt in particular, he had been naïve to trust his brother-in-law to live up to his verbal promise of financial backing. After this experience, he says, in respect to business dealings, “I don’t believe a word anybody tells me”.

The devastation to his self-esteem denied Andrew, for a time, of the ability to benefit from the loyalty and support of his wife, as he firmly believed she could not possibly want to stay with him.

“I had zero self esteem. There’s a squashed toad in the road. That was me. Why on earth do you want to be with THAT? ... I knew she loved me, I couldn’t understand on the logical side of the emotion why on earth she would want to and why she would get up, we were still in [suburb], putting her on a train at 7 o’clock in the morning to come down to town to earn money while I go home and do nothing because no one wants to know me. So in the emotional sense it was ‘why on earth do you want to be with me?’ I don’t know. Like you say you love me, how come? Every body else is saying I’m not worth knowing, why are you, what’s up with you? You know, why do you think I am worth knowing. Life has never been so bad for us in thirty years.”

“I thought of committing suicide, and I thought of ways of doing it and ... by hindsight, I was in danger of committing suicide because I’d convinced myself she’d be better off without me. Had I thought she had a need for me there wouldn’t have been a risk.”

Fortunately, Andrew never acted on his suicidal thoughts. At about the lowest point in this time of devastation, Andrew’s daughter had her first child, Phoebe, and the joy of his first grandchild, and that child’s unquestioning love for him, helped to lift Andrew out of the mire of depression he had fallen into. Gradually, he also came to be able to accept his wife’s love and support, too, and began a painful climb back towards a new life. There were three main things that sustained him through those dark times before he began to recover - the unfailing support of his wife and children, his faith in God, and the acceptance of his experience and ability by the people he came to know at the Toastmasters club, which he and Nancy had joined in an effort to begin re-making their life. That acceptance from Toastmasters was important in beginning to revive in him some sense of self-worth again.

In trying to embrace the working world again, Andrew was faced with a difficult problem in that the kind of work he had always done and was most skilled at would seem to be the last kind of work he would be able to get. As he said, with ironic tone, “How does a bankrupt get a job as a financial controller?”

In the end, he decided to try something completely different. He had always felt that his rather austere and serious approach as a senior manager in his early “workaholic” years had not allowed him to show his true appreciation of people. “I took a big change of direction and thought, well I really love people. People ought to know I love them.”

He had initially decided to do a Bachelor of Ministries with the purpose only of getting to know God better, but as the years passed, he eventually began to see a potential career for himself in pastoral care. At the time of the interview, he had almost finished the degree, and had recently

been made Deacon in a small church community. He still battled feelings of guilt that his wife, at retirement age, was working full-time to support them.

Although Andrew feels he still has to try hard not to get drawn into being a workaholic again, his perspective has changed in that he can now have heart to heart talks with his daughter and son, in a way he simply didn't before. However, he still feels that he has some "problems" in terms of his ability to relax and enjoy life. During his Ministry studies, they were told that to be well-adjusted, a person 'should' have at least three friends and also some personal hobbies or interests of their own. Andrew judged himself lacking on both counts. He didn't have three friends, nor, he realised, did he have anything in particular that he could name that he likes doing for his own private pleasure.

"I don't know WHAT to do, that makes me happy. My happiness is seeing my wife or kids having fun ... Is there a human need that I MUST have a pleasure that's all mine? That I say that we do once a month or something - because I can't."

This pattern of taking his happiness vicariously by arranging for others to be happy, was one that Andrew realised dated right back through his career. When he had left one of his main jobs after 12 years, not only was he hurt that his 70 staff basically ignored his departure, but when his boss made a gesture of inviting him to bring two couples over to dinner, Andrew asked two couples who were business associates, whom he thought his boss would like. Indeed, the boss and the other two couples all got along so well that Andrew and his wife ended up feeling rather left out.

Overall, the shift in perspective Andrew experienced was something of a split. On the personal relationships side of his life, it led to a deepening of connections and a new career designed to nurture the softer side of his nature. However on the career side of his life, he remained anxious about making a new start late in life, and far more embittered and cynical about the commercial world and basically, trusts no-one.

### **Anna's Story**

Anna described herself as being 35 and committed to a single lifestyle. She said she would identify herself as being heterosexual, working class, and a radical Marxist feminist. She added that she used to be a Catholic, and that was important because "once you're a Catholic, you are always a Catholic". She felt the values, ideas and guilt learned early on in that religion tended to stay with a person. Anna was an anthropologist and had been working as a university academic for 12 years and for much of that time had felt deep ambivalence about her work, partly because she found the workload excessive. Another factor in her discontent was that was the fact she had originally worked at a university which had a radical culture and encouraged her own radical dress and ideas, but later she moved to a new one that was more conservative and that compounded her feeling of "not fitting in".

There were three main points in her life that Anna identified as moments of insight, although she preferred to see them as parts of a continuing process of development. She refers to the third one as her "feminist conversion" experience, and the first two can be seen as lead-ups to that.

The first incident was shortly after her 29th birthday, when many of her friends had recently been turning 30. For most of her twenties, Anna had aspired to be a "free spirit" deliberately rejecting conventional values and expectations as unnecessary restrictions on her freedom. At the time of

this incident she had been in a relationship with a musician for about six months. Seemingly totally out of the blue, Anna woke up one morning with the sudden awful thought:

“‘Fuck! I’m 29 - what have I done with my life? Where am I going? I don’t have a mortgage, I don’t have a house, I don’t have a decent relationship, I’m not married, what the fuck am I doing?’” [She explained...] Before that I had never wanted to be married, I’d never wanted to have a mortgage, I’d just gone out, had a good time, fucked around, done a lot of pissing on, just sort of really tried to be wild and live a really sort of wild, radical life, and this one day - it was just like this one morning, there was no warning - I just woke up and thought ‘Shit! What am I doing with my life?’ you know, I’d done nothing. And from that point I really tried to shape that relationship into something that I thought I should want - so, you know the fully committed thing, getting married, the 1.9 kids or whatever.”

Earlier in Anna’s relationship with the musician they had agreed to re-negotiate the relationship in six months, once they knew if he would be on tour. The six months mark was about the time of this incident, but he had avoided her attempts to instigate that conversation. After this “moment of insight” type of incident, Anna had tried hard to make the relationship work in a more conventional sense. However this didn’t work and only made her feel more miserable. “I just had this constant feeling that I was failing and that I was never going to fit in anywhere.”

She became deeply depressed, turning her anger at him and the whole situation inward on herself, lost a lot of weight, and came to believe she was ugly (despite having previously known and enjoyed the fact that she had always been attractive to men). At times she felt so paralysed that she would crawl under the kitchen table and sit rocking herself. Because she had invested so much in the relationship, she didn’t want to “throw it away”. In retrospect she felt what had kept her stuck there was the feeling that, as a single woman, she needed the relationship to be more accepted – “people took me more seriously because I had a man in my life”.

One night she was crying hysterically to her boyfriend on the phone, trying to get him to talk to her. He promised he would meet her after work, but didn’t turn up. She later rang the studio and was told they had all gone on to a nightclub. “I was just at my wits end, I just got a razor blade and I just opened, just cut my wrists, and thought I can’t stand this any more”. She watched the blood run all over the bathroom floor, then finally she tried ringing people she knew, but could contact no-one. Even when she finally got to speak to a counsellor on a help line, he assumed she was joking. “At this point I just got the shits and bandaged my wrists and got in the car and went to the hospital.” Again, she was treated in a cavalier manner. The staff stitched her up and sent her home with one Valium tablet. It gave her three hours sleep, but then she was wide awake again and decided she simply had to confront her boyfriend. Again she packed herself into her car and drove to his place, only to find him in bed with another woman. She finally felt she had reached the end of the line, and booked in to start therapy with a psychiatrist on the following Monday.

About a week after her suicide attempt, she went into a bookstore and had her second, (but smaller) moment of insight. “I just saw this book on herbs and I just looked at it and I thought ‘this is what I want to do with the rest of my life’ – and it was just like this flash”. Although this was a positive experience (and she did later enrol in a Botanical Medicine course and study herbs concurrently with her academic work) her depression didn’t lift immediately. It took a long time to get over, but seeing the book on herbs had made a noticeable difference.

“At least I had made a decision to do something so I wasn’t quite as paralysed as I’d felt beforehand ... I felt emotionally stronger in a way because at least I’d done something to take control over my life.”

It was not until three years after these events, when she was in a different relationship and again feeling there was an imbalance of power in favour of her boyfriend, that she had her “feminist

conversion". She had come home from work one day, feeling "really pissed off" with her boyfriend. He had been failing to call her when he promised, and although he said he was still interested in her, his behaviour was indicating otherwise.

"So just before I picked up *The Women's Room* again to read it, I was feeling 'damn you, I will not take responsibility for what you're feeling. If you want to break up with me, you break up with me, I don't care how badly you treat me, I don't care what you do, I'm not breaking up with you. You have to take responsibility for what *you're* feeling and piss me off . . . rather than doing the typical guy thing and being really passive-aggressive about it ."

Anna had attempted to read "*The Women's Room*" twice before in her life, but the first time she had been student at uni and as she put it, "busy being a strumpet". Her view of feminists at that time had been that they were "man-haters" who couldn't get a man. This didn't fit her self-image at all, as being desirable to men was a high priority for her. The second time she had begun reading it was when she was in a relationship, but didn't want to finish the book because it was "too close to the bone". But on the third occasion, she was more than ready to read about the deep-rooted effects of patriarchy on our society and relationships. She devoured the book in a day and a half.

"It was seriously like finding God. Once I had read that book I could not go back to seeing things the way I'd seen them before".

Reading the book gave Anna a sense of sisterhood with the author. It was tremendously validating for her because she no longer felt so much like a failure about her relationships. Now she could say to herself, "it's not me, it's the way this society is structured". Anna said she would never now sit in a relationship and feel as bad as she did with those former boyfriends: "I would just walk. I would have the courage of my convictions and I would say 'I'm not happy with this, I'm out of here.'" In particular, reading it made her feel empowered, "almost like I have a stronger sense of self". However Anna qualified this statement by noting she still sometimes sits waiting for the phone to ring when she has met a new man. "*That* sort of behaviour just disgusts me . . . it just shows *how* strong your socialisation is, that it is still a major issue for me to pick up that phone and say 'listen you little shit, I don't like the way you're treating me.'"

There have been times when Anna feels very tired of what feels like "fighting a one-woman fight against patriarchy" for the right to choose her "look" (wild) and how she lives her life. Sometimes she believes it would be easier to just "have a bloke and do the things - sort of, you know, cook his dinner and clean the house", but she feels she would all too soon feel suffocated because she is so accustomed to doing her own thing, and she is convinced that the notion of equality in relationships is an urban myth – even with so-called sensitive New Age men. Even when equality is aimed for by both parties, she notes, it is only possible because the *man* has agreed, and as soon as he tires of it, she would be back to carrying the bulk of the housework and the emotional work of nurturing the relationship.

Anna identified the common theme in her moments of insight as being a revision of self, working towards greater integration. She noted they tend to occur in and around relationships. While explaining this point, a new idea occurred to her, and she declared that she was having a moment of insight NOW! Her new thought was that, because she chose to be single as a political statement of who she wanted to be, she had been forced into forging a new identity for herself. "I just feel that as a woman, relationships define who you are and by not having one in the way society says that I should have one, it's almost meant that I've had to re-work who I am."

Anna was not in a relationship at the time of the interview, and was relatively settled in both her academic work and her herbal studies, but with a mind to keeping her options open.

## Catherine's Story

At the time of her first interview, Catherine was 41 and beginning a new management business from home, having left her former career as a high level project manager after the second of her two major moments of insight. Catherine had been married 17 years and had three daughters aged 8, 6 and 4. She described herself as an organised person, a planner who could look ahead, and a serious career person who loved working.

Catherine's first moment of insight came when she was 7 months pregnant with her third daughter. Her other daughters were four and two years old. At this time Catherine was working three days a week in her demanding managerial-style job (which she loved and was very good at). Her husband worked 70 hours a week. In the midst of this busy time of her life came the news that her mother had suddenly developed a fast-growing cancer, and probably had only a few months to live. Catherine immediately assumed responsibility for her mother's care (her father had died several years earlier). She made time in her already hectic schedule to be with her mother, to take her to doctors, and to co-ordinate her medical arrangements, as well as being the main point of contact for the extended family, in particular her brothers and her aunt. She believed this responsibility naturally fell to her, as she was the only girl and the eldest of her siblings. This, she said, was simply the way she had been brought up.

However, it soon became evident that juggling her work, caring for her mother, along with getting kids to day-care, preparing for the birth of her baby, and providing support to her own and her extended family was too much. It all began to feel too big for her to handle. She had always been an excellent manager, but this was a situation she couldn't get herself out of by making decisions. She began to wonder if in fact she could survive her mother's dying, which would be a terrible loss in itself. It seemed that her choices were either to cope or to sink. The latter seemed all too easy, and she was afraid that if she did sink she would sink for a long time, and "everyone's lives" would "go into chaos" – her small children, her new baby, her husband, and her brothers. Part of the fear of sinking was also her dread of post-natal depression pulling her down again, as it had after her second child, before she had gone back to work.

One day she was sitting on the couch in her family room in total despair and confusion. She felt there was no hope and no way out. Then suddenly, she experienced a "click in the brain". And the click was "I choose to cope", deeply felt. She said "I chose to deal with the issue that I had".

From that moment on, Catherine did cope and decided to get in whatever help it took. She employed the help of a nanny and when she went into hospital to have her baby, she decided to allow herself to treat the five days she was there as a real "holiday". Then as soon as she got out of hospital she took the new baby every day to visit her mother who was by now in hospital. In this period Catherine breast-fed the baby and "did the works". "I put everything into the managerial part of my mind", and that was how she coped. "Ask anyone, they would say that I was totally amazing!". She was going 12 hours a day "just solid – just getting everything happening". Looking back, Catherine still feels it was an "amazing" thing she did and she felt that she showed herself that she does have huge strength within her, not only for being able to cope with so much in a managerial way, but also in being able to give as much care as she did to all the members of her own and her extended family in a difficult time.

Four weeks after her baby was born, Catherine's mother died, and about a month later she went back to work. However, she still couldn't stop and couldn't sleep and found she could only grieve in the middle of the night, while she was up feeding her baby. Again, following her decision to get whatever help she could, she went to a psychologist who taught her how to do "structured grieving" - setting aside a certain time each day to think about her mother and to grieve for her.

Catherine found this very helpful. She wanted to “go through the grieving as positively and as quickly as I could so as not to impact on the family [but] my husband would say that I was a wreck for two years”. Catherine and her mother had been very close, and her mother was still relatively young and very active at the time she died, leaving a big gap for Catherine emotionally, and a lot of organisation work in preparing the properties of her complex estate for sale. “It took a long time to get through the loss of her in all my life”.

A year or so after starting the structured grieving Catherine found she was continually suffering from terrible migraines and disorientation and exhaustion. She was delivering her children to three different places each day – school, pre-school and family care, and she had had to cut back her work hours to six hours a day to fit in with school hours. This wasn’t easy as Catherine’s work mattered very much to her. She believed it was philosophically important work and she had special skills that equipped her well for achieving important objectives. She was under pressure from work to increase her hours to full-time, and although she didn’t want this, she was finding it hard to do her work properly within the restricted hours available to her. Meanwhile she was also continually under stress at home, trying to get her three children to all their various activities.

One day, about two years after her mother died, Catherine was driving down the hill to work, in a disoriented daze, as had become usual for her. These days, she was almost always shaking, stiff and disoriented. Seemingly out of nowhere she had another profound “click” in her brain. Her own voice inside her head announced “Catherine you are going to take six month’s leave from work, and you will put the application in today and take the leave in six months’ time” (when her current project would be nearly finished). As this thought occurred to her she felt a sense of calmness “like this sort of grey, silver, pale-blue light that just sort of goes ‘haa, that’s the thing to do’”. This thought, she felt, was triggered by a desperate need to preserve her body –she needed to do it to survive. Yet even then, she couldn’t let herself have the time off until six months later, when her work project was almost finished.

Catherine acted on the insight and straight away put in her application for the time off. However during the six month wait for her leave, she became more and more ill and went through a great deal of anxiety about the thought of leaving work. It “was unbelievably radical that I could possibly even conceive dropping this project...AND I wasn’t going to work for six months AND I wasn’t having a baby at the same time! ... [But] I knew that the time was for me to get well”. It seemed so “outrageous” and she was so “tortured” that she went to the psychologist for a second time and began to review why work was so important, and began an ongoing process of reviewing many of her life priorities and especially her parents’ values.

By the time she gave up work, she was very ill with exhaustion and migraines. She had had ideas of doing gardening and redecorating and similar things, but did none of them. Instead she kept reviewing her priorities and especially her work options. After the break she decided not to go back to her old job, but rather she started her own management business from home. Although she left a “lovely secure job” where she was always in demand, she liked the new flexibility she found in that she was able to “go out and invent something for myself, simply by my own energy”. Now she is applying all her work business skills and intuition to making her own business successful.

For Catherine the meaning of the first insight about coping with her mother’s death was “preservation of my sanity and my ability to deal with my family”, while the second insight about leaving work was “preservation of my body”. She said that responsibility for her family and for her work were fundamental values she had learned from her parents.

She remains very positive about the outcomes. Essentially Catherine feels she has been through a mid-life crisis a little earlier than most, and that now she is more free to be her own person, especially because her mother is no longer alive. She felt that if her mother was still alive she might have stuck in the life she had turned out in. “But her dying said – life isn’t always the same – it’s different – and you can choose to truly live or not live.”

## David's Story

At the time of our first interview, David was 63. Born in London three years before the Second World War, his early childhood years were disrupted by many moves to avoid war hot-spots. On three occasions (when between the ages of 4 and 9) his family sent him to live with carers for several months. David remembered there being tension between his parents (his mother was a sophisticated woman and the daughter of a British Raj army captain, while his father was an army “buck private” and prize fighter). When he was 14 his parents separated and he left the technical school where he’d been studying engineering, to emigrate to Australia with his mother and siblings. As soon as he was old enough, David joined the navy and spent six years as a radio operator, serving on many different kinds of craft. At 23, he married and started a family - somewhat sooner than he had planned. His new family responsibilities prompted him to leave the navy and join the Department of Civil Aviation (DCA), again as a radio operator. This new “adventurous” career took him and his family to live in various different locations in Australia and Papua New Guinea.

In his late twenties, David completed the equivalent of today’s Higher School Certificate by correspondence. He also began to take an interest in writing and around the same time met a colleague at work who encouraged him to explore his creativity, mainly in the form of practicing to be a spiritual medium through “automatic writing”, whereby it is believed the writer becomes a “channel” for a spiritual entity to communicate through the writing. (In the many years since, David believes his automatic writing has conveyed messages from numerous friendly spiritual entities, including his dead niece and grandmother).

The main moment of insight that David described happened a few years after practicing automatic writing, when he was about 32. He had recently been demoted from the DCA job he had loved in New Guinea, and had been sent back to Australia to a job he hated and found boring. At the time he had two young children and another one on the way. David felt “utterly depressed, almost to the point of suicide”. He couldn’t understand why he should feel so angry and despondent when his job was still a respected one, and he had a nice wife and family and house. “In theory I had everything but inside I was crying”. One morning while at the mirror shaving, in an angry cry he asked “if there is a God, please show me something to show that you exist, or there’s a meaning to it at all!” Immediately his perspective shifted, for perhaps five or six seconds. He suddenly saw himself in the mirror as if looking at another person and felt “incredible love” for himself.

“It was indescribable but wondrous ... me looking at my reflection and loving ‘him’, as if I were looking at myself from a completely different and God-like perspective ... and the immediate realisation was that part of us is God. At the deepest level of our being, we *are* God.”

Before this moment, David had been tossed around by anger, frustration and the apparent meaninglessness of life. Although he felt this experience did not change him noticeably on the outside, it was a powerful reassurance that got him “over the hump” and able to “turn the corner” towards maintaining a faith in God and a spiritual dimension, which he then continued to explore, develop, and nurture within himself. The experience made him kinder towards others, because he felt more linked to them. It had given him the deep conviction that when you pray to God you are “praying to the innermost, most sacred part of yourself”. This conviction remained with him after the intensity of the moment faded, even despite the “inevitable” return of “all the conditioning and duality –that God’s out there and you pray to him”.

The second moment of insight that David recounted was nine years later, when he was almost 41 and stationed in the Antarctic as a radio operator. On one occasion during his days off, he was exploring the island alone, and with nightfall approaching, was hurrying to make it back to a shelter hut. He had been following a small stream, jumping across it here and there, and with one jump, he landed plonk in the middle of deep mud and sank right up to his thighs. The suction of the mud was so intense that he could not get either his boots or his feet out. He was stuck fast. “The panic really started to well up in me. Then the anger, then the realisation that ‘I’m going to die here - I



haven't got a radio, I can't get out, the nearest people are 20 miles away'". He knew no-one would be looking for him for at least another day, but in that climate he would die overnight, stuck there. In anger and rage he thought, "why me? I'm only young! I've got to get out, I've got to get home, see my kids, I've got more living to do". Eventually came the resignation that he would never get out.

"And there came a total acceptance. When there's nothing you can do, and you know you're going to die, and there's no way out - there's no hope - there comes a great peace. And I just waited, and I felt this enormous sadness, and I accepted it. And in the peace, I heard a voice as clear as day, and it just said three words: 'spread the weight'".

He knew what he had to do. He took off his jacket and lay it out in front of him with his backpack, and stretched his upper body on it, lying down, until bit by bit he freed one leg, then finally the other, and could reach some reeds to pull himself out.

"It was the most invigorating feeling. I'm alive! I'm alive again! There's more of life! And then something happened ...almost as though I was being rewarded for my effort because I walked further down the stream, and I'm looking at the beach in front of me. And on the beach were half a million penguins. They covered every spot on the beach, big as Bondi - all the little white faces and chests gleaming - and beyond them there was a rain squall and a double rainbow - it was the most incredible sight. And it just lifted my spirit. I felt 'this is it - this is something telling me something'".

Having faced death and survived it in this way, David sensed that his life had a specific purpose. When asked whether the voice that saved him had come from within or without, David said "inside or outside – you know it's not you". This experience was one of many others that reinforced his faith in the spiritual dimension and the particular purpose for his life, as a seeker, searching for meaning.

Following that path in more recent years, David has mastered various methods of honing his concentration, again with great dedication. At the encouragement of another work colleague mentor, he became a devotee of Buddhist Vipassana meditation techniques, which he continues to practice.

## **Emily's Story**

Emily's moment of insight, she said, had been partly responsible for her first meeting her husband, James, to whom she had been married for eight years. They met through the fact that they shared two mutual interests: a love of historical things, particularly Australian history, and a love of classical music. They met when Emily had taken up the position of Saturday afternoon receptionist at the volunteer-run classical music station, 2MBS-FM. James was one of the station's founders. From time to time they would chat about historical buildings. James was fascinated to learn that Emily knew a great deal about them and had been an active member of the National Trust for some time. Emily's moment of insight, several years earlier, had been the reason she became actively involved with the National Trust.

Emily had originally joined the National Trust along with her parents when she left school. "We used to go around and see various places and suburbs and country towns and beautiful properties that just no-one ever sees." As time went on, being single with no boyfriend, Emily found herself feeling at a bit of a loose end and was "looking for more". This was despite the fact that she had always kept herself busy, learning jazz ballet, interior decorating and dressmaking, as well as being

a keen supporter of the theatre. She described herself as someone who had always, from a young age, been a bit different, not a “run of the mill type” because she had never been great at sport, and had always had an interest in cultural things such as history and music.

“My parents were always interested in that sort of thing, and so I really felt in a way that I didn’t fit in, but it didn’t deter me. I just thought - well, people just think I’m very - and I was, I was very, very shy, and I think you’re hiding shyness, but you’re not able to fit in with other people. But now I realise that I was probably more advanced in my thinking because I knew what I really liked.”

Back then, as now, Emily worked as a legal secretary, and very much enjoyed that work, particularly the field of personal injury work, because it requires a lot of “delving” and “investigating”, more so than some other fields of law.

Thus when the National Trust decided to form a junior group that would require using similar talents, the idea immediately appealed to Emily. She recalled in particular a moment at the junior group AGM, when one of the women stood up and started talking about one of the sub-committees, historic research. Emily’s moment of insight was that this would be something fascinating which she could enjoy, while mixing socially with people her age, with whom she would be sharing a common interest. She thought to herself:

“I really feel this is something that I CAN DO, and I think I’ll enjoy doing it” so I thought, ‘this is where I might really meet and get to know people ... If I join a sub-committee, I get to know people more closely, because you are doing something, you’re not just going to functions, whereas going to functions you just sort of meet people. Doing something, you get to know people’ ... I suppose there was a feeling of, there’s other things besides just functions - it’s what goes on behind the scenes... I can’t really pinpoint the emotions but it was a feeling of happiness that, I mean I’ve always been a sort of happy person, but this feeling of contentment, that, “Ooh I can DO something” and put, put your abilities to use.

Later at the meeting Emily was further impressed with the woman who had spoken about the sub-committees: a librarian who was “vital without being demanding or overpowering”. It was “as if she welcomed you with open arms”. Emily joined two of the three junior group sub-committees - historic research and historic buildings. The other sub-committee organised activities. Later, as her involvement grew, Emily worked with that group, too. She felt that working on historic research was already “part of me”, and “something that a lot of people are not really interested in”. But now she had found a group of young people who shared those interests.

About 7 years after joining, Emily described a second insight that suddenly came to her as a solution to a problem, again involving the National Trust. It was after she had moved into organising Trust activities. Through doing this work in particular, she felt that she had grown personally because it involved a different set of challenges. It had required her to develop a sense of diplomacy and an ability to talk to all kinds of people because often she had to persuade home owners to open up their homes for activities. On this occasion, she had been trying to organise an activity involving historic homes and architect designed homes in a certain exclusive area. Unfortunately, all home owners in that area had turned her down except one – and yet that one owner happened to have by far the best and most interesting house. Emily was determined not to lose this opportunity, but had no idea what kind of event she could run with just one home. Around the same time, she attended a seminar and slide show by a visiting architect. By coincidence, he showed a slide of the same house:

“And I had that flash of insight during that meeting. We were in the dark because he was showing slides, and he showed this house in [suburb], as being an example of an Australian architect who’d done his training in America ... Now suddenly I thought [whispering] ‘I

know what I can do'. And a few of the people - there were quite a few of my friends there - 'what on earth is Emily doing, she's writing in the dark!' I'm writing away. And of course I take shorthand. I suddenly had this insight. 'I can make a DIFFERENT type of activity. A totally, totally, different, from this lecture.' So I came out of the meeting and I thought 'I'll try this' so I called the activity 'American Influence' ... and so I saved the day by having been to that meeting."

Over the years, Emily's interest in historical matters extended to photographing a large variety of historical buildings and advertising signs. She had always been keenly aware of her environment, and laughed about the fact that she knew every back street in Sydney. She told of her dismay at how some people can seem quite disinterested in their surroundings. One example she gave was a woman in Parramatta who had never been to Sydney, despite living on the train line. The other was a woman she met in a small town in England, while on an overseas trip. On that day, Emily had travelled a considerable distance from London and was stopping off in the town for lunch, before resuming her travels to see Elizabeth the First's original home. When they met over lunch, the woman was amazed to learn that Emily would travel so far in a day. When the woman admitted she had never been out of that town, Emily was equally astonished.

Emily's insight that the National Trust was somewhere she would "fit", appeared to have pointed her in a fruitful direction. She thoroughly enjoyed the 10 years she spent working there as a volunteer, and only left when the organisation re-structured and closed down its volunteer operations. However, she still has the friends she made back then, and she met her husband partly through that shared interest. Not only did she develop a high level of expertise in that specialised area, she felt that she personally grew and developed through meeting the various challenges of her work there.

### **Jacinta's Story**

Jacinta was in her 40<sup>th</sup> year at the first interview, and described herself as a country girl at heart. She grew up in country NSW but moved to the city to find work after high school. She worked in various jobs including work in cruises, restaurants, and running a ski lodge with her husband, but her main career had been in the travel industry, organising travel groups. Although Jacinta enjoyed this work and was good at it, she found it hard to cope with being "enclosed in an office, being confined with ten people in a room". Every two years or so she felt a need to "run away" or "escape" because she would be "climbing the walls" but then she would return and be able to cope with it.

Jacinta believed her need to get away was linked to an important experience when she was about 10 years old. She had been very ill, not able to sleep or eat, and suffering partial fits from what she described as a chemical imbalance in her brain. Her parents decided to take her to their homeland, Italy, to see if that might help. After three or four months away she was "a new kid" and came home completely recovered. Jacinta feels that every time she travels some sort of chemical change happens in her body and triggers off a new line of events in her life. For her, travelling had almost always sparked a renewal or regeneration of energy.

Jacinta defined moments of insight in two ways. They could be momentary things when you might suddenly think "What's my life about?", but they could also be longer periods of change that come and go. She saw them as shifts in energy that are "pretty definite" that change your life. There were two main experiences that Jacinta spoke of as being such definite periods of change in her life. The first was the distress and confusion that followed her two miscarriages, and the second was the fantastic experience of climbing the Himalayas.

These experiences were intertwined, in that Jacinta's decision to climb the Himalayas came at a time in her life when she was feeling baffled, angry, and resentful (primarily towards her husband) about losing her first baby to a miscarriage. The loss made her feel that somehow as a person, she was not "whole" or "good". Besides feeling some ambivalence and friction in her relationship with her husband, she was also experiencing a deepening discontent with her work at the travel agency. So when her boss suggested she go on a Himalayan climb with her, it seemed like a wonderful opportunity. "I really felt like I needed to climb something".

The trek itself was intensely physically challenging, but exhilarating and "absolutely wonderful". Jacinta saw it as a general metaphor for coping with life. For her, the climb proved that she had stamina and endurance. "It showed that I had all the qualities it was going to take me to climb through my life". During the trek she forged close friendships with another woman who remained a close friend, and also with a man with whom she kept in contact on a less regular basis. She also found she appreciated her husband more and felt reassured that she had made her life with a good man. She learned she could have different levels of relationships with other people.

Yet when she came back she had very mixed feelings and found it hard to settle back into life at home. Not long afterwards, she had her second miscarriage and again hit "rock bottom". It was around this time that her friend from the trek, Jeannie, suggested she do a massage course and think about leaving work in the travel industry, as she had not been happy there for a long time. Jacinta loved this suggestion, and started the massage course. Shortly afterwards she fell pregnant, and this time did not miscarry. Then at work, something happened to give her the final prompt to leave the travel industry at last. A man who had been conducting psychological tests on Jacinta and her work colleagues, told her that she was a hands-on "doer" who likes to get results straight away. He commented that an office wasn't really the place for her. She found the suggestion "liberating" and "wonderful" because it seemed like confirmation of how she'd always felt about herself. So she left work and concentrated on the massage course and prepared to have her baby.

After she had her son, however, Jacinta went through another difficult time for a year or so, not being well. She found being a parent another big challenge, because she felt that being a mother meant she lost her identity in some sense, and was no longer such a "whole" person. It was "one of the hardest things" she ever did. Added to that was the pressure of expectation from people around her that she "should" have another child – that it somehow wasn't good to have an 'only' child. However Jacinta didn't really want another child. She did fall pregnant again, but this time she had an ectopic pregnancy. Finally she thought "enough is enough" and decided to be happy with just the one child.

For Jacinta, her moments of insight and change have all revolved very much around these key events: the first miscarriage and the resulting confusion and anger; the exhilaration of the Himalayan climb and its affirmation that Jacinta had the endurance to climb through life; the fall back to rock bottom with the second miscarriage, which preceded her decisions to take up massage and leave the travel industry; and finally having her son and engaging with the demands of parenting.

There is a further aspect, however, to Jacinta's story. She feels her spiritual beliefs have sometimes been important in prompting moments of insight. An example was when she was water-skiing with friends and quite suddenly overcame her fear of being left in the water after falling off. She was amazed at this abrupt lack of fear, but then she remembered having received some spiritual healing from a woman months earlier (which aimed to change a person's 'life blueprints'). Jacinta felt quite certain that the healing work she had done with that woman had been responsible for overcoming her fear. This explanation was compelling for her because it tied in with other recent healing work she had done, whereby she had remembered a past life in which she had drowned, which seemed to explain her earlier fear of the water. Jacinta felt that somehow, whether "physically, chemically or spiritually", the contact with these healers, particularly the first one, had been instrumental in bringing about that change within her.

Jacinta finds her spiritual beliefs to be a continued source of support in difficult times. She is now a masseur, and plans to keep developing her skills in energy work.

### **Kasandra's Story**

Kasandra was 41, worked as a real estate agent, and was married with three young teenage children. She had worked mainly part-time since having her children, but in the last two years had moved to full-time work, and had completed a tertiary degree.

In their earlier years, she had moved with her husband and children several times, following her husband's work. During that time Kasandra said she and her husband had developed into an "insular, in-house" type of relationship as they moved around, with just the four of them in the family unit. There was no external support mechanism for her, as she was not close to her parents or her two sisters. At the time of the interview, however, they had been settled in one spot for about eight years and had been living "a very comfortable, very easy life", which was lived on an "even keel". At some stage, and she was unsure exactly when, a thought had occurred to her that there was "more than this – there's more than this", but she wasn't sure what that "more" might actually be. Apart from that passing thought, there had been no other indication for her that at age 39, while attending a conference shortly before graduating with her degree, she was about to be abruptly jolted out of her comfortable existence.

Kasandra described her moment of insight as a "blinding flash" kind of experience. It happened soon after she had arrived at the conference, when her course convenor was introducing her to a friend called Lance - a short, physically unremarkable fellow (compared with her tall, very attractive husband). They were introduced in an entirely normal manner, but as this man looked at her and shook hands, the thought "Yes!" suddenly flashed through Kasandra's mind, and she was struck, inexplicably, with the profound conviction that this moment was going to change her life forever. "It was like stepping out over the edge of this cliff and knowing that ... life was never going to be the same again". She was "scared...really scared" and her first instinct was to "bolt" – to run away from this threat, back to her "lovely life". In fact she acted on this impulse and immediately went outside and manufactured a reason to phone her husband, in an attempt to touch base again with safety and normalcy, before preparing to go back inside to the conference.

What was it about this man that had so struck her? Two years later in our interview, she still found it difficult to explain.

"I wish I knew. I truly do. I think a large part of it is his emotion, emotional ability to communicate with females, I think that was a very strong thing. Um - blue eyes - I don't know if it was the blue eyes - nah - it wasn't anything sort of strongly physical, in any sense, you know? I mean he's not - he's a short bloke, he's - and I have a six foot, absolutely gorgeous husband - it wasn't this physical reaction - it was something beyond that. I think that's why it scared me so much, because to a certain degree, a lot of the relationships I've had, have always been very, you know, appearance-based. So it was the unknown, because I hadn't had to deal with anybody on that sort of level."

Kasandra felt that the most potent element in this experience for her was the fact that this man seemed to be so "emotionally open", and she had never sensed such an emotional openness before in a man. She felt that in some way, he could see the "clichéd" person she was, and yet he also seemed to be "pulling her out" towards him, in a sense challenging her to become more "herself". When pressed to describe the meaning, or the message that she gleaned from him in that moment, she speculated:

“I don’t know how I sensed this all in this one little minute ...Maybe something like ‘take a good look at yourself, just realise who you are ...what you have to offer...take that step forward, you can do this!’ ...Whether it was something in the way he smiled, or just, you know, that he had an open body stance, I don’t know. I have no idea. I just knew.”

Despite feeling rattled by the experience, Kasandra went back inside to the conference and over the next few days was able to feel quite comfortable in Lance’s presence. On the final day they sat together and chatted and found they had many things in common, including their histories of marriage and children. Kasandra told him about the impact their meeting had made on her, and although they developed a friendship, their contact did not escalate into an ‘affair’, partly due to the fact that he lived on the other side of Australia, so they did not see each other after the conference, although they shared a few phone calls.

In the first few days after that powerful moment, and up to about a month afterwards, Kasandra tended to interpret it in what she called the more “face value”, or “cliché” romantic sense of “love at first sight”. She felt very drawn to be with him, because he was so different from all the men she had ever been with. Being an attractive woman herself, Kasandra’s choice of men had always been, as she said, somewhat “appearance based”. Not only that, but in recent years had she realised that to some extent she had always allowed her male partners to subtly dictate the way she “should” behave. Now, by stark contrast, she had met a man who she felt was challenging her to become more truly herself.

As time unfolded, Kasandra began to interpret the meaning of the experience much more philosophically. She came to believe that Lance was in some sense her soul-mate – a kind of reflection or other side of herself – who was “sent” by fate or destiny to help her to grow and become more herself, rather than letting other people’s expectations guide her thoughts and behaviour. She came to accept that it was for the best that an affair never eventuated with him – indeed, she felt it might have been “horrible and seedy” and the deeper meaning of the impact she had felt (a call to personal growth) might have been lost to her. However, this more serene interpretation took some time to arrive at.

For at least six months after the experience, she remained convinced that she must at least leave her marriage, in order to be true to herself. She had explained the situation as best she could to her shocked husband and to the extended families, in preparation to leave. At about this time, however, coincidentally, her husband’s work took him to another city for the duration of each week, so that he returned home only on weekends. This gave Kasandra enough “space” to feel able to stay temporarily, and in the end, neither she nor her husband could bear to live without the children. Since she was still able to get along well with her husband, and indeed had become “less dependent” and was more able to state her own preferences in the face of his “strong but charming” personality, they eventually renegotiated their understanding of their marriage. Kasandra no longer assumed it would be permanent or “fixed” as she had previously, but rather, now understood it as a temporary arrangement that might well change as the future unfolded. Indeed, she felt her relationship with her husband eventually improved and he came in the end to learn from the experience as well.

“We have a great time, you know, we do a lot of things together, and we talk really well. Still don’t quite talk emotionally, but, I think that’s just never going to be, which is why I don’t ever look long term anymore. I don’t think you can! Life changes too much.”

Many of her other relationships began to change, also. Five months after the conference, Kasandra instigated a reinvention of her relationship with her sisters, from whom she had always been rather distant. They began to discuss and understand some of the difficulties in their mutual background better, in particular acknowledging that their mother had tended to play one off against each other. However now they began to open up to the possibility of offering each other support.

Furthermore, Kasandra began to feel freed of the imperative to play roles expected of her by others. Whereas at previous Christmas gatherings she had felt an obligation to play the role of the “party girl” as she always had, she now developed a new kind of quiet confidence that allowed her to go to bed early if she so wanted, rather than feeling obliged to party until late. At work, there were similar changes in her approach. She no longer felt timid about applying for promotions, or devastated at the prospect of receiving knockbacks. Rather, she felt able to “float” along on the top of things, interested and involved, but not unduly emotionally caught up in things.

“I no longer see the world that I live in, in terms of what’s ‘normal, what’s socially acceptable to you or to others’. You know I had a tendency to always run my life by everybody else’s expectations and perceptions ... that’s a hard thing to outgrow, and while I still do it to a degree - it’s less, much less. So I now look at it in MY eyes. Still consider other people’s feelings - that’s really important. Stronger - I’m just a stronger person... to a lot of people I still appear very much the same, but it’s very much an inner strength that I’ve developed, which has been really nice.”

Overall, she said, her moment of insight was a “big awakening” that was all about growth. Although it was initially “devastating”, it had eventually brought some “great results” in “the way that I deal with my relationships or with my work, my family and friends”.

### **Louise’s Story**

At 57, Louise was a retired Occupational Therapist, married with two daughters. For many years she had been dealing with long-standing bouts of depression. Louise said depression “gallops” through her family and she had been taking medication for it more or less ever since her father died, when she was 28. She described herself as having a “drunken dad” and a mother who had “given up”. In her younger school years she and her siblings had been shunned because of her father’s drinking, and her mother’s depression.

In her bid to deal with her depressions over the years, Louise had seen a number of psychiatrists, but had recently stopped looking to them for guidance beyond managing her medication. She noted with intentional irony that she had decided she had less problems than they did. In particular she had not found them helpful in navigating the conflicts in her marriage, which stemmed mainly from a feeling of “oppression” because of her husband’s unwillingness to accept an equal share of household responsibilities. Furthermore, she had long disliked the feeling that others who could apparently cope with their lives seemed to know something about how to cope with life that she didn’t.

Her moment of insight came in the context of what she described as her oppressive fundamentalist religious upbringing. Louise was brought up “in Sydney Anglicanism”, and in her search for a more satisfying belief system in her adult years she visited the Nazarinnes, the Uniting Church and at the time of the interview was interested in the Catholic faith, although not attending church. She had always felt most uncomfortable about the “immense contradictions” she saw in the bible, as well as her observation that often the very people preaching THE TRUTH were not truthful. She couldn’t cope with these glaring inconsistencies and indeed they bothered her so much she often felt physically ill.

When she had gone to University late in life to study religious topics, the first reading she opened said “the bible is not the word of God” and she noted (with a characteristic mischievous smile) “well that’s a relief”. The relief was that there were religious scholars out there who shared some

of her misgivings, who also believed God surely could not be as capricious and immature as he had been portrayed. “I mean I would expect God to be a tad more mature than I am, but in the bible he’s not represented that way at all, like he zaps people for upsetting him.” But this new view of God was not yet her moment of insight. In a later part of her studies she was reading a paper written by a devout Monk, who was firm in his belief that the bible was the word of God.

“At one point he was talking about the effect of Moses on the whole stream of everything that followed and he said “and if Moses hadn’t existed we would have had to make him up”. And I thought “Shit. We did!”. And then see that - just everything went “bleu!” after that. Because, you know, Jack Munday couldn’t have got people to do what Moses is supposed to have got people to have done. You know, 40 years back in the desert. I don’t think so! Ha! So ... then I started reading in other places, and realising at the same time, that all these books were written for virtually political purposes. I’m not suggesting it was all just a sham, because at that time political and religious purposes were all one. But stories were combined to, to give the right view of history.”

With this insight, Louise’s whole perspective instantly and dramatically shifted: the story of Moses (and by extrapolation, other parts of the bible, too) was *not* literally true. It was not necessarily the word of God, but rather, someone’s interpretation.

From that moment on she felt free to make her own interpretations of things. “From being bowed, I stood straight up”. Her own life struggles became just as valid as anyone else’s: “if Paul Davis is telling us more about the Universe, then why hang about for something that’s 2000 years’ old? ... the whole story stopped being Cecil B. deMille and started being [her suburb]!”. She didn’t have to accept the word of a minister or saint, but could make her own way as an independent thinker. Much of the chronic sickness in her stomach and feelings of oppression started to dissipate after that realisation, although her general anxiety and depression remained.

Further flow-on effects were that she had a more relaxed attitude to other people. She no longer felt she had a “duty” to convert or help people or to sort out their problems, because now she no longer believed they were bound for hell anyhow. She could please herself about the degree to which she wanted to get involved in helping people.

Some of her close relationships, however, became more turbulent, as she attempted to speak up more for herself. She engaged in more frank and open conflict with her husband and her elder sisters, expressed more anger, and became more forthright in protecting her home and family from her sisters’ interference. This change was in contrast to her earlier more compliant stance in relation to her sisters – when she had believed that her sisters would treat her as an “upstart” if she didn’t play along with the little sister role.

Another way the moment of insight changed Louise’s life was that she no longer felt she *had* to do things so much any more, like keeping her house “tidy” beyond a reasonable state. The words “have to” and “should” figured less in her vocabulary.

Some time after that main moment of insight, Louise discovered a quote during her studies which she now holds especially dear. It was: “Tentativeness is our rational response to what the mystics have persistently termed the ineffable vision of God. It is our passing, changing certainties that are our problem, not our tentativeness.”



## Ozmate's Story

Ozmate, at 72, said his “supportive and religious upbringing” in Sydney had made it easy for him to distinguish right from wrong, although at times, he said, it had prompted some guilt. Each of his parents died at age 93 after a devoted 60 year marriage. Ozmate was the eldest of his siblings, with a brother and sister, eight and ten years younger, respectively, than he. He had been married to his wife Maureen for 45 years and had three sons, aged 35, 33 and 31 – all of whom still lived in their large home, including one who was married, along with his wife.

While Ozmate's working life had been high-profile and entrepreneurial, in that he had travelled the world and “seeded” numerous business projects and joint ventures in many countries, his three sons had not followed the same interests, being a watch maker, a sales representative and a mechanic, respectively.

Work, according to Ozmate, had been his whole life. He had started out in production engineering, moved on to gain qualifications in finance and accounting, and from there moved up into management consulting to industry, working with various of Australia's largest companies, as well as consulting to a major hospital, which resulted in him being sought out to work for British Medical Laboratories. As General Manager and later Managing Director there, he formed the subsidiary company Cenovis (now a well known vitamins company). Developing the Cenovis vitamins business took him overseas to set up packing plants in many places in East and South Africa, including Malawi, Zimbabwe and Zambia.

Ozmate's time in Africa was marked by stark contrasts. On one hand, it was a place of danger where, on one occasion, he was lucky to outrun a gang of murderous youths, and on another occasion, he contracted (but eventually recovered from) a potentially fatal illness from swimming in the river. Yet on the other hand, he met people whose capacity for happiness and simple living deeply impressed him. One of his favourite such memories was when he was in Malawi, where crime was almost non-existent. The women would sing while working on the packing line, packing in rhythm, and at night they welcomed him and his agent to join them in dancing around the fire, each one taking turns to dance into the centre.

One particular contrast that Ozmate noted, which stirred his compassion for the African people, was, he believed, a factor in motivating a later idea for an innovative product. On this particular occasion he had been sitting in the “sumptuous” Lusaka Continental Hotel in Zambia, looking out at the broad desolate landscape with its poor villages. He was struck by the “tremendous difference” between people's living conditions. “Here was I sitting in this sumptuous hotel, dining of the best, and these poor people out there are hungry and starving. That really brought that home to me.” He said he has always reflected on that moment as a point when his compassion and love of people and nature came to the fore.

Some time later, when Cenovis was developing yeast technology, Ozmate had the spontaneous insight to recycle the waste products from starches to produce cheap foods, which could be distributed to undeveloped countries. This was long before the concept of biotechnology and recycling had come into vogue. His idea was to use a fermentation process which would convert the waste starches from yeast into a single cell protein, from which different products (mainly biscuits) could be made.

“It did come out of the reading that I was doing, it didn't come from ‘anywhere’, but my insight was, ‘now wait there, I can see an opportunity or a need for a total fermentation complex’. And that was fairly spontaneous and over probably a few hours that I developed the thought. ‘Now there must be a way here to use the yeast to convert starches and so on into multi products by both aerobic and anaerobic processes’ and I could visualise this

complex recycling all this waste material. It was just an insight, that that could happen. And it did happen.”

Thus Ozmate became the Founding Director of Biotechnology Australia, which he established not only in Australia, but through his marketing of the technology overseas he also inspired a billion dollar operation in Canada which to this day reprocesses their excess low grade wheats by this method.

Eventually Ozmate sold out his involvement in Biotechnology Australia because his company, British Medical Laboratories, wanted him to concentrate on his involvement in Cenovis. He has since felt disappointed that he had not received a suitable financial package for selling out his part in the company.

At the time of the interview, Ozmate was nursing another “hobby horse” vision, which he had been developing for the past two years. It was a vision of how Australia could develop into a “wonderful nation, both economically and socially”. It was an insight that he said, “just came to me”, but it was based, like the previous one, on the foundation of his accumulated knowledge of production and finance and marketing processes. He had been managing director of a company associated with coal mines, and had learned about coal liquefaction and how coal mines operate. He had thought to himself “why is Australia bringing this equipment from overseas when we send our coal and iron ore over there and bring it back value added for someone else’s benefit, like Japan or USA?” The insight had started with his question, “how do we reverse that?” and at the time of the interview, Ozmate was not ready to go further into those thoughts.

The two preceding “visions” had come to him, he believed, primarily because of his wide experience in the relevant fields, and also because of his ability to think laterally, and to be able to imagine a business outcome and then work his way towards a creative solution that would be beneficial in both an economical and social sense. In the case of Biotechnology Australia, the benefits were widely spread – making use of waste products, setting up financially viable projects, and delivering cheap food to underdeveloped countries. In the second case, again Ozmate envisaged both social and economical benefit for Australians.

In terms of personal benefits or outcomes from insights or visions - Ozmate felt that was largely to do with gaining the approval of others. He felt the underlying personal benefit was all about ego and acceptance, whereby insights provided opportunities to be recognised, or to get a pat on the back. He believed this motivation went back to his childhood days, when he dearly wanted to please his parents and seek their approval.

There was one more insight which Ozmate described as being more like a sudden “flash of inspiration”. This was when he was a young man working for a company that made motors and transformers. They had large stocks of copper wire and it was causing a problem. It was in the years before aluminium was used in that context. While talking to his managing director, he said “it suddenly just came to me. I said well why don’t we look at aluminium”. The company took up the suggestion and began to use aluminium, which proved to be better suited to that purpose.

Throughout his working life, from beginning to end, Ozmate’s approach was always to hang back and listen to others’ ideas, and to think over his own ideas very carefully before presenting them for scrutiny. Despite his talent for lateral thinking and creative ideas and negotiating joint ventures on the world stage, he did not see himself as a leader in meetings, despite being a veteran of thousands. Although he often came up with good ideas and even insights in a meeting, he would be loathe to suggest them until he felt fairly sure they would not be rejected, or attract too much argument. He was a very good planner, strategist and tactician – to the point, sometimes, of over-preparing. Sometimes he felt annoyed at himself for assuming that others were wiser than he in meetings, because often it turned out they were not.

His personal experience of having insights then, was shaped very much by the fact that most of them happened in meetings and required collective approval to be acted upon. In the moment when he would originally come up with an idea, Ozmate felt excited. But very soon his excitement would be dampened by the anticipation that his idea may be rejected. So it was a two-stage experience.

At the time of the interview, Ozmate was retired, but still working on developing his “Australian vision”. For the previous eight years, his health had been compromised as he had suffered from the degenerative illness, syringomyelia, which wastes the muscles and nerves below his chest. Mentally and emotionally he had coped well with the illness over the past eight years, and had continued working for much of it. However, he said, “just recently I am starting to sort of miss having legs”. Basically, his attitude has been to treat the illness as a challenge and a “spur to achieve”.

Ozmate’s life has been a remarkably full one in business terms. Indeed, the full extent of his business achievements can only be broadly sketched here – although the basic theme or motivation behind his ideas has usually been to find creative solutions which have positive social and economical outcomes. In his own words:

“I think a moment of insight is the insight you gain from your experiences, your environment, your upbringing and so on, and you have this sudden insight that’s elicited by the things that have happened at that particular moment. But the insight itself is based on your natural, well, not natural, but your experiences and your environment and your background and your past and your present situation. And that elicits the insight.”

### **Pancho’s Story**

Pancho was in his early 60’s and semi-retired. At the time of the interview he was in the process of re-evaluating some of his long-held attitudes to life. This re-evaluation followed in the wake of two very deep disappointments which had left him feeling disillusioned and seriously questioning some of the values he had always believed in. Rather than describing a shift in perspective from his past, he was describing a shift in perspective that was for him, still very much ongoing.

Pancho’s background was that he had grown up poor and working class, and he had remained proud of that background, in particular the “old-fashioned” values of courtesy, reliability and loyalty which he had learned from his parents. When he left school he had spent two years doing accountancy, and then went into a Catholic seminary for six years. Although he has fond memories of friends he met there, he eventually found the “regimented” lifestyle unbearable. He felt they were being moulded into “robots” whereby everyone was expected to act the same, do the same things at the same time every day, and even dress the same when they were out in public.

Upon leaving the seminary, Pancho’s highest priority was to find work that would allow him flexibility. He spent a couple of years truckdriving, then worked for St Vincent de Paul for another two years as a store assistant, before going to university and completing a social work degree. Afterwards he worked as an officer with Child Welfare, but within a couple of years he had “burned out” and took extended leave travelling overseas, hoping that he would be able to return and recover his enthusiasm. However, he couldn’t face the work again on his return and resigned, and has since remained “a little regretful” to have left that helping profession behind. Again he spent time truck-driving and eventually worked at the State Fisheries licences department for a few years. During this period he began working in a casual capacity as an interviewer for the job of

researcher in the Commonwealth Government, having been attracted by that job's flexibility. He stayed in both the latter two jobs for about four years, until leaving Australia once again.

The reason he left this time was that Pancho had met his wife-to-be, who was South American. Three years after they met, they decided to go and live in her home country for two years. However, Pancho became very homesick and they returned to Australia within six months. At this point, Pancho made a "big decision" concerning his work, and resolved to go back to his government research work, and commit to that interviewing work as his only job. The reason that this was a big decision was the work was only casual, and while he enjoyed the close contact with people and the listening skills it required (and the fact that he was good at it), it also meant that he missed out in the long run on permanent employee benefits such as superannuation.

"I am really starting to flounder in modern day society. To a certain extent. Because there is very little courtesy, loyalty. No loyalty in work. I mean I just, if my health was better I would have liked to have continued to work, but there's no loyalty. You know. I did a damn good job for twenty five years in the job and if you are going to go well ta-ta, mate, see you."

The disillusionment Pancho expressed above was related to lack of loyalty in the workplace. However, fuelling this disappointment were the two major events which contributed to him losing faith in the idea that life rewards honest effort.

Throughout his life, Pancho had believed in being "frugal" with money and had worked hard to pay off a house in Sydney as well as another holiday home in a coastal village. After years of paying off the mortgage on the holiday home, his mother had helped him pay out the remaining lump sum, with forwarded inheritance money. He was so thrilled with this at the time that he framed the final bank statement and put it up for all to see with a note, "Good on you, mum". His dream had been to retire, rent or sell one of the houses, buy a four wheel drive and travel around Australia with his wife, eventually settling down in the remaining house with money still left over to enjoy. However, the dream began to crumble when he discovered his wife was having an affair with a man friend from her home country. Pancho discovered this when a postcard she had sent the other man was returned to sender by the post office. "It was like a kick in the guts".

Six months later, Pancho started suffering angina pains – a condition which he was told had quite likely been brought on, or exacerbated by the stress of the shock and hurt about his wife's affair. Within a few months, he had a heart bypass operation, and also suffered a small heart attack during the operation. Again, he felt that life had let him down. He had always kept himself very fit, being a keen runner, and now he felt all that had been in vain.

"I have never smoked, and I haven't gone out with wild women. Why didn't I? It didn't make much difference. I did all the things that you should do to have good health, but it didn't make any difference."

Whereas Pancho had always previously believed that if you "put in the hard yards you will reap the rewards", he now felt that belief had led him astray. The only difference that his fitness had made was in helping him to recover from the heart operation, but it hadn't saved him from the heart problems in the first place. Furthermore, he had always believed that marriage was for life, and yet, by the time of the interview, he had been separated from his wife for almost a year, while the divorce proceedings were under way. She had left him for a second man. As part of the separation and divorce, he also lost the holiday home. He still strongly felt that place properly belonged to him and his (now late) mother, rather than to his wife.

Pancho said he remembered well a similar feeling of disillusionment which dated back to his childhood days. His father had said to him "if you can get first in the class, if you study hard and all that, I'll get you a dog". Pancho did study hard, but when he actually did come first in the class,

his father gave him a toy dog. His immediate feeling back then was “I was robbed”. Fifty years later, it was a very similar feeling he had after the heart operation and again when his wife left him. On these occasions he felt “I was robbed” because in both cases, he had again “put in the hard yards”, and yet he had not reaped the rewards that seemed due.

In speaking of these disappointments in his life, Pancho was quick to add “but I can see the blessings in my life too”. He referred to innocent women and children in other countries suffering traumas and said “so I sort of think well stop being a bloody whinger”. While he continues to try to find a way to adjust to his new life by himself, he has gone back to work part-time as a researcher in his old job. He said friends and family keep advising him to move out of his house and get right away, but he stays because:

“It is the only secure thing that I have got in my life now at the moment and until I feel a bit more stable and stronger I am not going to sell that up and bring on possible hassles... if I do decide that will be another big step but ... I am not going to plan anything any more. I am not even going to save if I can.”

In response to these two major disappointments and his loss of faith in the “put in the hard yards and reap the rewards” belief, Pancho has been making a determined effort to change his perspective to a more free-wheeling, easy-going, risk-taking attitude. He has been considering entering into a “sell-stay” arrangement with his house, whereby he can sell it and receive 40% of the cost to spend, but stay in it until he dies. He still has plans of travelling, but can muster little enthusiasm for them without a partner to share the travelling with.

He talks to friends and seeks their counsel, and some say stay and some say go. Pancho tried one short trip away which worked out well (but a fortnight was enough). One of the things he has begun to realise was that as a young man he had confidence to travel to Australia’s outback by himself, but now, having been used to sharing his life, it is harder to do things on his own as he lacks the youthful confidence.

One past-time that Pancho always enjoyed was getting close to the land and nature and learning from Aboriginal people about the land. As part of his social work degree, he had done a placement with Aboriginal people in Alice Springs. Since the separation with his wife, Pancho had been tempted to do an adventure tour which combined both helping and learning from Aboriginal people, about the land. While considering this tour (which he had to decline because it was too expensive) the man leading the tour told him that he would get his strength back from the land.

“I liked going to the country a lot, and he said, “you’re close to the land, you are going to get your strength back from the land”. I thought gee, that –THAT was an insight by the way. I mean a different sort of an insight. But yes ...I *do* feel close to the land and to nature. It was like a, what do they call those things, a ‘*wow*’ thing, you know. I thought well gee you are *spot on*. That’s right. I go away to the country, I fossick for gem stones up at Oberon and we trout fish in the same streams and that’s my medicine. That’s to remove the stress of modern living.”

Pancho was amazed that someone who was almost a stranger could say something so right that he’d never realised himself, so clearly, until that moment. Through the course of the interview he made the point that he is not one for fancy clothes or sophisticated ways. He likes to think of himself as a simple man who likes to be earthy and close to the land, and believed that keeping that thought in mind would help him to struggle with what to believe of life, and what to do with himself, now that his world had changed.

### Philip’s Story

Philip, aged 31, was one of five children of an Anglican minister, and was raised in country New South Wales. He moved with his family to Sydney when he was 17 after having attended boarding school for four years, and did an undergraduate degree in Nursing, but only worked as a nurse for about a year before going backpacking in Europe, both nursing and travelling for another year before returning to Australia. On his return he couldn't find nursing work in a teaching hospital, which was his preference, so he decided to look for work further afield and took a job as a sales representative in a pharmaceuticals company. From there he was promoted several times into management positions, and at the time of the interview, he was in a high ranking position in the pharmaceuticals marketing industry, and was just two months off completing a Business Masters degree. He was married with two small children, having met his wife 13 years earlier, and having been married for six years.

For Philip, the moment of insight, or shift of perspective he related was still very much in process.

"I've had, for the last two to three years, progressive dissatisfaction, unhappiness, pressure, anxiety, all of those sort of things that suddenly just consolidated or suddenly came to a bit of a head towards the beginning of this year, where I suddenly sat back and I found myself saying to myself, what the hell have I been doing for the last however many years? I seem to have suddenly hit a brick wall, um, seems like that everything I've been doing has been worth nothing. I said I feel like I've achieved nothing, and I feel like I'm going nowhere with it, and, that, for me - a very rational, logical, organized, planned person was, ah, was actually quite devastating."

During those last couple of years, he had been feeling more and more distanced from his wife, as they "tag-teamed" in and out of the house on different work schedules, exhausted by parenting, and doing very few things together just as a couple.

"I was not happy at home at all. I felt detached, I felt detached from both my partner and my children, even though I love my kids to death. There's, there's something automatic and, and very natural about the way that I love my kids, there's no question there. Um, but I felt like I'd just stopped loving my wife."

He felt they had been living in different worlds and he strongly believed that the lack of love between them was mutual. From time to time they had had heated discussions about how they were losing touch and Philip had attempted to build in more time alone for them as a couple, trying to convince his wife to have some weekends away, but with limited success, as his wife was fearful of leaving the children with babysitters. He had also dropped back on his university course-load in an attempt to build more time in together, and that had reduced some of the pressure, but not enough.

Also adding to this general sense of growing discontent, Philip had been becoming disillusioned with his work, more acutely in recent months. "I suddenly looked at myself and started seriously considering the value that my work was adding to the world." He asked himself:

"What is my cause? I don't have a cause, I don't have any real direction here ...to me marketing was just becoming bullshit, and I felt like I was contributing nothing. Everything that I did, I did ethically ... it doesn't work otherwise. But, marketing as a concept, when it comes to illness and sickness, suddenly started bothering me badly. Um, people that I was working with I thought very callous, shallow, arrogant, I couldn't stand them, and two of my very good friends were promoted overseas, whereas my position change was here locally."

His new promotion was equal to his friends', but little comfort to him, as the loss of his friends and mentors from his work environment left a big gap.

Then three months prior to the interview, something happened that brought his discontent into sharper focus. Without any planning or intention, he suddenly became attracted to a woman he had known at work for some time, while they were away in another city at a work conference, and began a relationship with her.

“Suddenly there’s this whole new component of me ... I don’t really know what love is, so anyway, but I suddenly ‘discovered’ it with this person, to the point where I wanted to be with them all the time, I certainly wanted to connect with them, verbally, cerebrally, I just wanted to, I don’t know, I mean obviously there was a lot of physical attraction as well, um, all of these sort of things that I’d, I’d lost or never had or something with my wife, because I really feel that she’s on this planet, and I’m on that planet ... whereas this person, not only were we on the same planet, we were probably in the same town. *That* connected. And ah, it was just, it was very upsetting, it shook the ground I was on, because suddenly I was on very unstable ground in everything.”

“This awakening, or emotional connectivity with this person gave me an insight into what I would describe as being a, a loving, dynamic, exciting, interesting relationship with somebody, whereas the so-called love my wife is describing to me is much more sedate, much more familiar, much more interdependent.”

He went to see a counsellor to try to understand and clarify what he was going through, but instead of providing a safe place for him to explore his feelings, the counsellor (contrary to accepted counselling practice) ignored his new experience and sense of dilemma, expressed her opinion that that it was tragic this rift was happening in his family, and gave him advice on various ways of salvaging his family life. She also advised him to fully involve his wife in his decisions. He walked out of there feeling “terrible, very guilty about the whole thing”. However he agreed with her suggestion to involve his wife, as he had no wish to be “the bastard father who got up and walked out of the house”.

He arranged to have the children minded, took his wife out of the house and told her “everything”. While still shocked and taking in the news, she went for a walk and called her sister-in-law from her mobile phone. Philip said “instantly I knew that my decision to tell my wife had been a mistake”. This was because she rang and told not only her own friends, which he felt was understandable, but she also rang and told his friends and the entire extended family. This then began a flow of emails and letters to Philip from some members of her family, with whom he felt he had no emotional connection, “pretending to give me advice, recommendations”, but which all contained the general theme that he must stay with the family and mend his ways. Both the extended families were religious people, and most of this advice was given under the “guise of support”. Philip was angered by this and resolved never to see his wife’s family again, as he felt the only connection they had was artificial – they did not “add value” to his life, and he didn’t “add value” to theirs. Philip received similar advice to stay in the marriage from his brother and father, but felt that they were again, more interested in trying to influence him to uphold traditional values, rather than in helping him resolve his inner feelings of dilemma.

A few days later Philip went to his favourite spot overlooking the ocean and said to himself, “OK, time to make some decisions”. From his mobile phone, he rang and spoke to his girlfriend, his wife and his father. During the latter conversation, his father told him that if he decided to leave, his children would hate him. By the end of that afternoon, he had decided there was no other way forward than to stay with his family, as the idea of leaving his children was too hard to contemplate. He rang his girlfriend and ended their relationship, and resolved to make every effort to set things right with his family, and to stay with his wife and children. He felt that he had to deny himself the strong urge to leave, because that alone, in his own eyes, didn’t give him justification for leaving. Furthermore, he doubted whether the good feelings he would gain by leaving would balance out the “immense stress and anxiety and guilt” that he would feel if he left.

With the decision made that day, he expected that over time, things would become easier again as he adjusted back to life with his family. However things only seemed to get worse. From the day he decided to stay with his family he spent many sleepless nights, thinking about everything. Finally after about two weeks, he was home one night alone, feeling terribly depressed and listening to a dark passage of Mozart which he had chosen to play to match his mood. He started drinking brandy and ended up getting totally “wasted”. When his wife came home she found him “running around the house, bawling” about the fact that Mozart had died and his students had had to finish his work. That night he slept on the floor, but still managed to get himself up the next morning and pull himself together enough to do an early presentation at work. Then he came home and spent the rest of the day “throwing up”. Prior to his drinking binge the night before, his thoughts had started spiralling downwards into what he described as a “vortex”, densely full of thoughts, whereby he had had the “horrible realisation” that:

“I didn’t have an answer for what I could, should, or would like to be ... I really just knew that I was completely lost, I didn’t know who I was. Didn’t know who I should be, didn’t know who I was... That’s why I got, that’s why I got wasted. ... basically I just needed to separate myself from that horrible realization. ...I just didn’t know who I was, what I was doing, where I was going to go, what I should do. I thought that I had, I thought I had made a decision to go back to my family.”

In retrospect, however, he felt that his decision to stay had been “tainted” by his father’s warning that his children would hate him if he left. Around this time, adding to the pressure he was feeling, his younger brother sought Philip’s confidence in reviewing some aspects of their childhood. While Philip had always seen his childhood as having difficult patches, and their relationship with their father as very distant, his younger brother had previously always believed his childhood had been very happy. However since having some therapy his brother had begun to feel a lot of anger at their father, and to remember his past in a different light. In supporting his brother during these conversations, Philip became aware of some of the differences between them.

While his brother was having trouble integrating his religious beliefs with his new insights following therapy, Philip had no dilemma about having rejected his father’s “convenient” religion. However, during those conversations Philip became more aware that he had always believed he had a certain “essence” within him, which had guided him. It was the part of him that kept him going when things were tough, the part that would say “just pick yourself up, and do this next thing” – the same part that had picked him up and helped him function at work on the morning after his drinking binge. And it was again, the same “essence” that had made his decision to stay with his family. On that occasion, though, he had been unable to sustain a sense that this was the right course for him, and his doubts culminated in that “vortex” of distress and the “horrible realisation” that he really didn’t know who he was or which way to go. At the time of the interview, only a month or so later, the uncertainty of that night was still with him

“I am in a quandary. Absolute quandary. I know that I just want to stop this path that I’m on now, work-wise, relationship-wise, family-wise, extended family-wise. Everything, and just do a ninety degrees.”

“I’m desperate to leave the work that I’m in, I want to go out and do something totally different, totally new ... if I could go off and become a carpenter I would .... If I could go off and become a physicist I would ... if my wife turned to me tomorrow and said, ‘look, this is just not working ... we need to be apart’, I would be pleased about it. That would help me.”

A big part of the problem, in Philip’s view, was that he felt no sure sense of who he was or could be.



“I feel like, I’m, I’m a different person, but in this, in the world that I have always been in. Displaced person. ... I don’t know what my sense of self is ... Who the hell am I? What am I? Am I aggressive, an active, dynamic, energetic person who likes to change the world, am I a person who intrinsically would like to go and sit in a tree house somewhere and write poetry and draw? Am I a family man? Am I a bachelor, should I be a bachelor? And enjoy the fruits of the world? These are the different me’s that I see ... The problem is they all contradict each other. That’s a paradox for me, because I feel I want to be this person, but I feel I should be this person. And I feel that I’d *love* to be this person.”

By the end of the interview, Philip said he realised that the “bottom line” for him was that he needed an “outcome”.

“I can’t exist, I can’t go on like this, it’s, it’s absolutely driving me insane, it’s just not the way I am, and I’m just treading water at the moment. So borne from this insight that I know that I have and from my, the energy that I want to put into resolving this, um, I’ve got to make sure that I, I actively seek a solution.”

### **Richard’s Story**

Richard described his background as “fairly standard”. He was the youngest of five children and at the time of the interview he was 44, and happily married with three teenage children. His life had been “pretty normal” with “no major dramas ... no sickness, no-one died”. He had done well at school and afterwards had gone on to do a Business Studies degree in marketing.

Around the time his second child was born, he and his wife and family moved overseas to live in Malaysia, where he worked for three years, during which time their third child was born. This was an exciting time for Richard and his family, and he felt that they came back better people. He felt it had opened their eyes to the fact that people in other parts of the world really have nothing, and thus he felt they became more compassionate and more willing contribute in social ways, like becoming involved in the local school.

Throughout his working career, Robert had been “fairly mobile and aggressive” in looking for advancement and better jobs. He had also been retrenched on two occasions. In the first instance, his company had moved its state offices from Sydney to Melbourne and he had been offered the choice to move or be retrenched. He chose the latter. In the second instance, his company had been acquired by another larger company, and he and all his colleagues had been given six months’ notice to find other jobs. Again, this had been a simple and painless process for him.

The job he found following the second retrenchment was a higher profile job than before – now he was a National Sales and Marketing Manager with a very large company. It was “a really good job... good fun”, and he had worked very hard and happily at it for about four years, when he was retrenched again, under rather different circumstances. This time, the process was very painful for him, as it took him by surprise.

“I had been on two weeks holidays, at Christmas time. Came back on the Monday morning and I was gone on the Monday morning. So there was a number of people went at the same time. But I got there at 8.30 to work, and there was an envelope waiting, and, thanks very much, straight back out the door. And I had, I had recently turned 40... I was over the magic mark, and I was on a really good salary package and the whole thing, and things were cruising along really nicely. ... It really stunned me. It really stunned me.

Because that was the first time in my career that I had something happen outside of my control. And I know that all the valid reasons were that they had two streams, a retail stream and a commercial stream and they decided to put them together. And I had an equivalent in that other stream, and he got the job and I didn't.

When Richard had arrived at work that morning, the General Manager had called him in and told him the reasons he no longer had a position and that he was retrenched immediately.

"It was done and dusted. I just said 'fine'. The terms were in the letter. I said 'are these negotiable', he said 'no'. And I said 'well, I would like to keep the car for a month at least, if I can'. He said 'that's fine'. I signed a couple of bits of paper and walked out... It didn't dawn on me straight away. Like, you take it and you collect a few things out of your office, like a classic case of, everyone is sort of watching, and I found that quite hard too. In that everyone knew that you had just been given the flick. And people were very good, quite supportive. And I just wanted to get out of there... I didn't even bother saying goodbye to a couple of people, it was quite pointless. And plus I didn't just feel like it, you know. I just literally, just wanted to walk out."

"I remember driving home and thinking well that's really unfair, because I believed I was doing a good job, and it wasn't warranted, and I had seen people, done it myself, you know, people had been sacked and retrenched and that before, and this would never happen to me."

Richard's wife, being a school teacher, was home with the children that day and for the rest of that week, so in a sense, Richard felt a sense of just being at home on holidays for the rest of that week, but the following Monday, he began to think about what it meant for him more deeply.

"The thought of looking for a job didn't really phase me all that much because I had done it several times before ... But my concern was that I had peaked. I had peaked. And I thought, 'oh is this the beginning of the end'? And that was really my self doubt. To say that I've, I was on a really good wicket, really good job, and having been retrenched from that job, would I find difficult to get into something else? ...On the Monday when they all went back to school, there was myself and the dog, and that's it. You're home by yourself. And that's when I thought, I really sat down and I thought well what's this really mean. And you start re-evaluating and thinking, well I am a sort of fairly practical person, so you start thinking 'well financially have I got the right investments in place', you think, 'what sort of superannuation have I got'. What are our commitments, how long are the kids going to be around? Start thinking about all these things and you start thinking well God, I am going to be working for fifteen, twenty years, I'd better, you know, I can't allow myself to peak yet. I have got to get back in and do something fairly strong, and how do I go about doing that? Will I be able to do that? And it even, even self doubts creep in about your ability. You start, I even started thinking, well, maybe I wasn't doing as good as I thought I was. And small things play in your mind. And you think well no one's perfect. You do some things better than you do other things. There are certain things that you are perhaps not as strong at, as someone else."

For about three or four months, Richard was at home, looking for work and otherwise trying to keep himself busy around the house. He painted the house and did a lot of gardening, but essentially he was "bored out of my brain ...the kids are busy at school, and they all had plenty of things to do and I was sort of, I was just a bit of a lost sheep, you know." Eventually a potential interim job came up that offered about half his former pay. It was a very easy, very casual state manager's job, only three minute's drive from home. He decided to take it and be earning something and be occupied, rather than continuing on in that "boring" home lifestyle, holding out for the "ultimate job". This job lasted for about a year, with him coasting along, feeling the whole time as if he were on holidays. Although it was "too easy", there were distinct family advantages

to it. He got to pick his daughter up from school and meet his wife for lunches, and get to and from work in less than five minutes, often wearing only board shorts and T-shirts to work. Finally, that job, too, ended in a retrenchment – but this time, he felt very differently to the last time. This time, he saw the retrenchment as a welcome turning point.

“The guy from Adelaide, it was an Adelaide company, and he came up and I met him at the airport, we met at the Qantas lounge. He sat down and he said, and I already knew that the company was in trouble, and he just said “its all over”. The company has gone into receivership. The divisions in NSW are over. There’s your cheque, its all over. I remember saying, I said ‘look, I said ‘its fine. Its not a problem.’ Because he was in the same boat. And I said, ‘look quite honestly, it doesn’t bother me’. I just said ‘can I have my car for a month?’, went through that again [he said chuckling]. But I felt more in control with that because I sort of knew it was coming... I wasn’t really losing anything. And then I went home and same sort of thing, but, in very positive mode. Said great, done, lets go. So, I did. It was a, call it a moment of insight or not, but it was an absolute turning point.”

This time, the retrenchment galvanised Richard into action and he found a good new job within seven weeks – the one he has remained in. It was another high profile job, similar to the one he had enjoyed so much before the former retrenchment. However, although the job is similarly challenging, he feels he has changed.

“I still work hard. I work fairly long hours, I travel a lot, and I bring stuff home at night, but its on my terms. Its at my pace. So I don’t think I am doing any less. I am just doing it with a different attitude... I lost a few years in the middle, but I’m back to the levels I was at before. And second time round I went at it one hundred percent positive. First time round I really struggled...”

“I think, the first job I had, I saw myself as an up and comer. The job I have got now, that’s not important to me any more. I can sort of take it, the step across, to say that, well I no longer want to be like el supremo. Maybe I never really wanted to be that but I thought I did, but I am satisfied in doing well where I am. And quite honestly I wouldn’t want to go any further. I don’t particularly want to work harder. And there’s no real point in learning more. I am satisfied with the level I am at. So I probably have peaked... I think its accepting what you are and where your abilities lie, except for the fact that you are probably never going to get to where you might think you want to get to. And you become more of a father figure or something, I don’t know. Its terrible terminology. But the whole place is full of younger people.

“It’s interesting because all those young people think of me as an old person. It’s a different relationship ... and you realise that you have all this experience and this knowledge and you can do things in far better and more mature and professional ways than they do, but its just because you’ve been around longer.”

### **Sarah’s Story**

Sarah referred to herself affectionately as “a drama queen who likes to tell a good story”. The drama queen image appealed to her because she liked to be able to feel life intensely. Her moment of insight came at the peak of a long lead-up of “marital strife” in her first marriage. Her husband had been having an affair with her best friend for some years, but had consistently denied it, using the excuse of Sarah’s post-natal depression (since having their fourteen month old twins), to

suggest that Sarah was just imagining things. Sarah's depression had been so severe that her mother and husband had begun discussing the option of putting Sarah into a psychiatric clinic. This had frightened her deeply.

Sarah felt she had been like a "little girl" in the early part of her marriage, very dependent on her dominant husband, both emotionally and financially. Her father, a minister in the church, had been a similarly dominant presence in her life, before her husband. Even though she had been something of a rebellious teenager for a short time, upon getting married she felt comforted by the security of her husband's dominance, and renewed her interest in the church, attending bible studies. In retrospect, she felt that her motive in doing this had been to enlist Jesus and God as her protectors, because she believed at the time they were "all powerful" and "God pre-destines everything".

Around the time of her 28<sup>th</sup> birthday, Sarah's husband was preparing to fly to Perth to see his family during the New Year. After he'd gone, Sarah found out that her best friend had been booked on the same flight. At last she knew for sure there was in fact an affair going on. In an act of secret retaliation, she went out of her way to find babysitting so that she could go to a New Year's Eve party with a girlfriend. At the party Sarah did something extremely bold for her at that time. She drank alcohol, met a man, and slept with him. For the next few months she saw him intermittently. At that stage, the main thing she had in mind was that if her husband was being unfaithful and wouldn't look after her, then maybe this new man would. It didn't take long before her husband suspected something and found out about the affair by dialling redial on the phone. He was furious and hit Sarah for the first time. Then he retaliated by finally telling her about his own affair with her best friend. Despite all this, he insisted that their marriage would get over this bad patch.

Although Sarah had known of his affair, this cruelly delivered revelation hurt her deeply and she threatened to leave him and go to her new man. Her husband taunted her that no man would ever want a depressed woman with three children, and he challenged her to try it – apparently certain that it would never happen. But Sarah did go off to see the other man. There she was to get another shock. The new man said in effect "don't count on me, I'm not legal in the country (he was English) and I can't get dragged into a divorce. However I think you're fantastic and will be there for you in the short term - but don't leave him for me - leave him for yourself - you can do it if you want to". She drove back home, still a mass of indecision, and walked in to find her husband lying unconscious on the lounge room floor, having attempted suicide by overdosing on pills and wine:

He was lying on the floor of um my lounge, our lounge-room, um ... fourteen month old twin babies asleep in the bedroom and a two and a half year old, who he was supposed to be caring for, and he was lying on the floor and he was unconscious. And I saw him, and the moment of insight was that I suddenly realised that: "really we're all alone in the world". And as for the first time I actually realised that I was a grown-up, and that I had choices and decisions that I would make in my life - I could make them - that I didn't need a husband or a mother or a father to look after me. That I could live my life like that if I chose to live my life like that, thinking always that other people were ultimately there to have responsibility and to make the decisions. That I could pretend that but it wasn't being true to me. And it was like a flash! 'Wow Sarah, you know, you're actually - you're on your own in this world even if you're married to someone or even if you're in the middle of your family and your loved ones and your friends - you're on your own. And you've got ultimate responsibility for yourself - who you are.'

And that was um, oh it was a wonderful moment of insight because three weeks earlier I would've lost it and I would have been either on the phone to my mother or my best friend in Brisbane or the ambulance. As it was I kicked him a few times, I went and looked in the bin to see if I could work out what he'd taken - I finally rang the hospital and I said I don't REALLY [said lazily] know what I should do and they were screaming at me to call the ambulance. But I

actually knew I had choices! I had choices. I was a grown-up and I had choice - if I didn't want to ring the ambulance, if I wanted him to die I could do that. If I wanted to ring the ambulance I could. If I wanted to ring the lover that I'd known about for five years and refused to acknowledge it and it had all come to a head over, I could. If I wanted to ring the man that I'd been unfaithful to this man with, for the past three months, I could ring him. But I - I could do nothing - I could just go to bed. I could do anything I wanted or I could ring the ambulance. It was my choice and that was - it was an incredible moment of insight. That was it - all plugged into one - with this man going greyer and whiter by the minute, you know.

Before doing anything else, her first action had been to check on the children – the twin babies and the two and a half year old were all sleeping soundly. It was after that, in a strangely detached and methodical manner, that Sarah had gone through the rubbish bin to see what he had taken, before ringing the hospital and the ambulance. Then she rang her husband's lover who came over and went with him in the ambulance to hospital. After they had all gone, Sarah rang her closest friend and told her all about it, still uncharacteristically detached and in control. There was none of her usual "drama queen" behaviour in this incident. From the moment she saw him she never panicked once.

One of the main differences Sarah felt in herself after that moment of insight was that she felt powerful and grown-up, rather than a little girl who was dependent. The moment had empowered her to start taking on the responsibility of looking after herself.

The next day Sarah's husband rang and asked her to collect him from hospital. On the way home, she was taken aback that he now appeared to assume that, because of his suicide attempt, she would now stay with him. He was so certain the matter was settled, that she found the courage to rebel, coolly telling him that, no, she had decided to leave. He was thunderstruck at the change in her and emptied their joint account so that she was left with nothing but one week's worth of cash. He also took the car keys and told her, "you're on your own". Sarah was not put off. Empowered by her new vision of herself as a person with choices, she was determined to do whatever she had to, to get through this crisis. She sought help from community help agencies and legal aid, and within 3 weeks had moved with the children to a new house, and was learning how to manage money.

Within eight weeks of the move, she had also begun to review her religious upbringing. She went to the library and read up on Christianity as well as Buddhism and other religions. In a second hand bookshop she was amazed to find an old bible that included some books which had since been excluded from the bible – such as the books of Babel and Suzanna. True to her new attitude that "I can't make choices in my life if I don't have information", she decided to find a minister who was not too close to her father and ask him over to discuss her questions and the reasons she felt she was losing her faith. For the first time she felt like an equal while talking to a religious person. She demanded "what's all this shit about the Council of Nicaea?" She asked him who decided to get rid of those books, and how someone could ever decide that what was left was the "one truth". In questioning the minister, she felt she had more in common with the rebellious teenager she had been 11 years earlier, than with the frightened woman she had become in recent years. The minister was unable to mount a satisfactory argument against her criticisms, so she decided to abandon her religion and adopt a more generalised spiritual orientation.

Her insight about having choices in how she reacted to situations became a key principle that she "tries to live by" in her everyday life. It has had an impact on her most intimate relationships, and also her broader friendships. She "cut people like dead wood", noting with amusement that she can now say "no" to tupperware parties, but more importantly, she is much more careful about who she lets into her "inner sanctum" of friends. She now gives herself credit for doing her best as a mother, rather than thinking in black and white terms of being a "good" versus "bad" mother. Finally, she has lost some of her fear of death, because she now trusts herself to make her own decisions and to ensure that she lives a full life. She divorced her husband and eventually married her new man. She sees her new marriage as an equal partnership with mutual respect, based upon wanting, rather than needing, each other. For the sake of her children, she chose to maintain a cordial relationship with her husband, who eventually married the woman with whom he'd had the affair.

## Tristan's Story

Tristan, at 33, felt that his whole life so far had revolved around “a lot of problems”. His decision to volunteer as a participant in the research was fuelled by a desire to try to understand a period of “significant change” he had been through and to attempt to “rediscover” himself.

Tristan was born in Indonesia and came to Australia when he was 13. He was the second-eldest of four children. When he was 16 his parents separated and his mother left the family. Not long afterwards his elder brother left to find work, leaving Tristan as the eldest of the three remaining children, and as such, the main one to bear the brunt of his father's frequent angry outbursts. Tristan's father had suffered severe head injuries in a motor bike accident in his youth, and as a result he had remained emotionally highly volatile and quick to anger. Because Tristan very much wanted to complete his schooling, he felt he had no choice but to persevere with life at home until he finished school. Upon finishing school he left home and found work to support himself while studying at university. Unfortunately, though, he didn't achieve high enough marks to get into his preferred areas of study, computer science and business, so he began studying in his third choice, electrical engineering. However, he found working and studying very difficult. The course was harder than he had thought, and he began to realise it would take him much longer to complete the degree than he had first anticipated. After a few years he gave up and found a full-time job in a bank.

Although the work wasn't what he really wanted to do, Tristan liked his manager and eventually persuaded him to give him an opportunity to move into the area of the bank he was most attracted to – IT and data management. All went well for him in this new preferred area for a short time, but to Tristan's lasting regret, he “did something silly” and lost that opportunity. He had gone overseas for a holiday and met a girl he liked. When he came back, he had used his work access card to make a number of overseas calls from various different phones at work. Soon his feelings of guilt overcame him, and he went to a trusted colleague for advice on how to go about telling his manager. However without letting him know, the colleague went straight to the manager and told him about Tristan's calls. Tristan felt betrayed by his colleague, because he was caught out before he had his chance to confess. He was given two options – to resign with no questions asked or to go through an internal investigation. Deeply regretting the whole episode, he chose to resign. “And that was the end of my career basically”.

When he found another job in a different bank, it was not in data management, but in a clerical area which didn't pay as much, yet was more pressure. Further, he found his manager in this second bank difficult to get along with. “Basically it was a complete turn around from my previous job, and I felt, you know, how good was my job when I was with the [first] bank. It was like a privilege, you know.”

By this time Tristan had been married (how long?) to Mary (background to meeting and marrying?) and had settled into a routine. By the time he had been married almost four years he felt that his life was “in a rut”.

“I would work, come home, work, come home, or basically work, sleep and eat. You know, and I just, I wanted to move along, ... like move further with my career, get something better, but I just wouldn't you know, I just, it felt like I didn't have anything, like I don't have the qualification, and my really my skills are limited ... so you know I wasn't happy.”

He was bored and felt that he was not working efficiently. But then something happened that “instantaneously” changed his feelings about himself and life. He fell in love with a new girl who had began working in his department at work. Her name was Caroline.

At first Tristan had felt no attraction to her and had no intention of trying to start a relationship with her. He would sometimes give her a lift home from work as she lived near him. She also had similar interests to him, and they would sometimes talk about investing in shares. One day she said she had a problem with her home computer, so Tristan volunteered to go around and fix it.

“She just got back from having lunch with a friend, and she was wearing this dress ... I always like women wearing dress, feminine things... and she was wearing a bit of make up and she looked pretty. I mean prettier than usual... Anyway I was having a conversation with her and ... I kept looking at her and I was attracted to her, I mean at that time. And I said to myself I feel like I was going to kiss her! Just right there ... but I didn't of course.”

After that moment, Tristan's attraction to Caroline grew quickly, and he was keen to find any opportunity to be with her. She also would find reasons to ask him over and they were soon spending almost every Saturday together.

“In the beginning it was very subtle but it grew strong very quickly. She would ask me, do you play sport? ‘Yeah I play sport.’ And I would go around to play squash, but then she would say ‘let's do something else’. All right, let's do something else.’ And we ended up going out for a drive.”

They would drive to Canberra and back in a day, or to the Jenolan Caves, and for Tristan the main attraction of the drives was not to go to Canberra or the Caves, but simply the opportunity to spend time with her. Caroline knew Tristan was married and Tristan's wife knew that he was with Caroline, although Tristan had told his wife he was just “helping a friend” and assured her there was nothing to worry about. From time to time he was consumed with guilt, especially one day when he refused to pick his in-laws up from the airport, because he couldn't give up a Saturday with Caroline. On this day, as before, he persisted with his excuse that he was “helping a friend”. In this way, he said, “from white lies become lies”. However, the happiness he felt when he was with Caroline, as if “a new world had opened up”, remained so strong that it overrode his guilt.

Caroline continued to look to Tristan to help her with many things – not only with her computer, but also in writing business letters. As she was Chinese, English was her second language, as it was also for Tristan. She complimented him on his ability to write letters so easily, and this praise made Tristan very happy. In fact, for Tristan, one of the reasons he felt so strongly about Caroline was that she was so “responsive” in the sense of understanding his meaning when they were communicating and her ability to understand him quickly and effortlessly. By comparison, he found communication with his wife Mary had to be much slower and more literal and he had to put things very carefully so that she would understand. English was also her second language.

As an example of the different level of communication he had with Caroline, Tristan mentioned one of his favourite memories of being with her. He was driving the car and Caroline was in the passenger seat. When he approached a red traffic light he didn't slow down because he knew the lights were about to turn green. Caroline asked him how he knew they were going to change, and he told her he could see the reflection of the cross-street lights, which had turned amber, indicating his lights were about to turn green. Her interest in how he worked this out astounded him. He said Mary would never even think about such a thing, or ask him such a question. What he loved about Caroline was her sense of adventurousness, her questioning mind, and her desire to “look for something better” in life. “I liked the way she thinks.”

“Basically I have got someone now that I can communicate with. I mean that is a new feeling. I mean, I can relate to. That's the word. Relate to. You know, that's yeah, that's

the right word. That's the perfect word. That's someone I can relate to. My wife is very hard to relate to."

For about three months Tristan and Caroline continued to see each other almost every Saturday, both "pretending" to be friends, playing the game they had set in motion. On the one hand, Tristan wanted to take the relationship further to a sexual relationship, but on the other hand, he was somewhat ambivalent about that, as he didn't want to take a chance that he might be rejected and lose what they had. Furthermore, he had been continually assuring his wife Mary that he and Caroline were just friends and not sleeping together. Mary had Caroline's number and so as time went on, she threatened to ring Caroline and break the relationship up. Unable to appreciate how his actions and words might be interpreted by Mary at the time, Tristan implored her not to break up his relationship with Caroline:

"I just like her company. So its a new thing for me. So don't break it up, because if you break it up, you know, basically, you kill my heart. You break my heart, and there is nothing left for me. You know. I want her. You know, I know what I am like ... If you want me to break it up, don't do it so quick. Don't do it so sudden."

In the end, Mary rang Caroline's place one afternoon and left a message with her flatmate that she wanted her husband to come home and stop going out with Caroline. For Tristan, the agony of this sudden end to the relationship was deep. Earlier that very day, he and Caroline had been especially close. They had just returned from a trip to Canberra late in the afternoon, and it seemed very likely that they were about to take their relationship to another level, perhaps to a sexual level. She had been "nicer" to him, and after Mary's call she had said "something special" to him like "I was going to be nice to you, but I'd better not now". One of Tristan's lasting regrets is that he didn't have the chance to find out what she meant by that.

Tristan returned home devastated and had great trouble pulling himself together to go to work the next day. He was angry with Mary for breaking up the relationship:

"“You might as well grab a knife and stab me in the back. And you know, why avoid it, you might as well do it”. That's literally at the time [how] I was feeling. Because I had lost my feelings... And I said how I am, how I can live through this ... I wanted to walk out of the door and, you know, and I no longer do. But that's the feeling I had. But you know, in some ways because I feel like I'm a responsible person I didn't want to. But I said to my wife that's what I feel like. I feel like doing that. I really do. But I am holding back.”"

It took months before Tristan was able to appreciate how much the relationship with Caroline had hurt Mary. For him, immediately afterwards he was suffering from the added devastation that the break-up did not seem to have affected Caroline at all. She ignored him at work, and appeared not to be the least bit upset about it. Tristan interpreted her behaviour as a betrayal. He felt that if she could toss the whole thing away without feeling hurt or concerned, then he could not really have meant very much to her. Some months later, both Tristan and Caroline applied for the same position that came up at work and Caroline got it. Tristan felt resentful about this because he had helped her improve her skills while they had been together. In fact, this highlighted the feeling he had had that overall, she had gained a great deal out of their friendship, and he had gained very little. He began to regret the fact that they had never taken their relationship to a sexual level, because then at least he would have "got something" out of it, instead of feeling used by it.

Once again, with the passing of that relationship, Tristan experienced the familiar feeling that his life was characterised by lost opportunities. He now wonders if he can ever experience the kind of happiness he had with Caroline, ever again. He is re-building his relationship with Mary and remains vigilant to guard against another attraction taking him by surprise again.



“She found a key to my, to my heart probably. I don't know. And she unlocked that. And that's a very dangerous moment.”

### **Vanessa's Story**

*[At the time of the first interview Vanessa appeared happy to participate in the study, but contact was lost with her before her feedback on this summary story could be sought.]*

At the time of our first interview, Vanessa was 50 years old and working as a real estate agent, having recently gained her real estate agent's licence. For three years before that she had been a bank manager. Vanessa had been divorced for 10 years and had seven children between the ages of 14 and 26 (Note - details have been altered slightly to protect identity).

Although mainly quiet and unassuming in her manner, Vanessa had a strong fighting spirit when it came to matters of social justice. She was particularly proud of her involvement in “championing” nursing mothers’ rights to breast-feed in public, two decades earlier. More recently, Vanessa had been horrified to learn of her own church’s discrimination in refusing gay and lesbian people communion. Although she had no personal ties with gay and lesbian people, she decided she must back up her outrage with action, and thus became an active Rainbow Sash member.

Vanessa sees herself as an open-minded person, always willing to listen to the other person’s opinion – a form of interpersonal respect that she learned from her father’s example. However her tolerance in this respect had recently been tested when one of her young adult daughters had joined a “dangerous” religious sect (a sect that tends to try to alienate their members from their families). Vanessa was proud of her ability not to “go off the deep end”, and to keep communication flowing with her daughter, despite being very worried about it.

Vanessa’s own religious upbringing had been a very strict ‘old school’ Catholic upbringing whereby she had never been allowed to read the bible, because it was feared that children might misinterpret it. Throughout her childhood she felt she had been very naïve. When she left school at the age of 15, Vanessa believed that her development had been arrested at that point, so that she became, in her own eyes, a naïve adult. One particular legacy of her religious upbringing was her tendency to interpret most of the ‘bad’ or negative things that ever happened to her as being punishment from God for some transgression:

“God was this person who was like, punishes you for this, and there’s the ten commandments, he punishes you for that - and you have to suffer and, um, if you step out of line, it’s God punishing you. So all the bad things in my life I thought was God punishing me, but I didn’t know what for, but I thought maybe I must have done things that weren’t quite right and you can always find things that weren’t quite right. ... My God was like a, not a loving God, but a God with a big stick. Big stick God, like, in charge of me. That sort of hit me when I did the wrong thing. But that was OK because not too many bad things had happened to me and if they did they were only minor. So I was able to, you know, I lived fairly comfortably within that framework.

Given the fact that she left school at 15 and felt disadvantaged in some ways by that, Vanessa did, however, feel pleased with her ability to change and to learn new things from her children, especially from observing the diversity of opinions they have come to represent, through their different personalities and viewpoints.

Vanessa's moment of insight came when she was still married and her youngest child was about 8 months. She was encouraged by a friend to go along to a Charismatic church seminar and bible studies. Every day course participants had to read a short scripture and for the first time she started learning about the New Testament and "this loving and caring God" whom she'd never heard of previously. In particular she was taken with the idea that she could be loved unconditionally and accepted with all her faults. This idea hit her with real force during the second week of the course, when someone said to her "isn't it great that God loves us unconditionally", and she said "yeah!" and realised she'd had "a completely wrong view of God".

"At the end of the second week, um, I read a scripture and I totally realised that it said "I am the way, the truth and the light, and no-one comes to me unless the Father sends him". And I thought, fantastic! You know, I must have been sent by the Father, he must love me, he must care for me, unconditionally! And so my whole view of God changed, in an instant, that this was not a person who'd punish me, this was a person who loved me and accepted me with all my faults and failings. And so half way through the course, it was at that moment, I was in there and I thought, it just struck me on the next, second week I went, I think it ran for about two hours, that that was, I'd had a completely wrong view of God! I couldn't stop thinking about it - I couldn't stop thinking about it! And so within an hour of me sort of coming to that realisation, everything changed for me."

The idea of being accepted with all her faults was so fantastic that she found it hard to believe – she said she was "gobsmacked". Then within two days, something further happened that Vanessa saw as a strong confirmation that her new understanding of God was true. Her youngest child, an eight month old baby girl, was struck down with meningitis. This was a very frightening experience, which Vanessa would formerly have thought of as being a punishment from God. However the way Vanessa felt about and handled the entire crisis was completely different, she felt, from the way she would have handled it before her perspective changed.

On the day the meningitis was diagnosed, Vanessa had taken her baby to three doctors, all of whom had dismissed the problem as being the flu. However Vanessa knew there was something more serious and persisted by taking her on to the Children's Hospital, where they immediately saw the seriousness of the problem, did a spinal tap, diagnosed the meningitis and put her on an antibiotic drip. The doctors told Vanessa and her husband that there were two forms of meningitis, one that could be fatal and one that was not. Unfortunately, their daughter had the potentially fatal kind. They said that within 24 hours she would either be dead or she would have pulled through the dangerous time. While Vanessa's husband went home to look after the other children, Vanessa stayed behind to spend the night with her daughter in the High Dependency ward, knowing her baby may well die.

"And I was sitting at the end of the bed and she couldn't cry because her voice was paralysed. She made this funny rattly sound instead of crying. She couldn't feed or do anything. And I said to God "look, it's OK, I'm willing to give her up". I didn't, no longer thought that God was punishing me. I would've thought that that was a terrible punishment by God and that I was a terrible person - but I no longer thought that - and I said "look God if you want her, you can have her, and I know that you will give me the strength to go on, but if you need her, that's fine, that'll be OK". And I had this sense of sitting there, knowing that I could live without her, knowing that God wasn't punishing me, just knowing that it was a terrible illness, and that's all it was. And I got this peaceful feeling come over me that felt like "no, it's OK, you can keep her", kind of feeling. Didn't hear voices or anything fantastic, but I felt so peaceful that she wasn't going to die, that I lay down and went to sleep on the floor. Probably til about six in the morning. And in the morning it had turned and she - they said she would live."

The baby made a "remarkable recovery", partly because of the advantage of being breast fed, as she was able to take breast milk much earlier than other food. A month afterwards, she developed

epileptic fits as a result of the scaring from the meningitis, but Vanessa took this easily in her stride, as she felt so happy that she hadn't lost her, and that she was able to feel peaceful despite all these problems.

Indeed, Vanessa underwent such a marked personality change after that moment of insight, and felt so much more peaceful and serene that the change unsettled her husband. He asked her if God had "done this" to her because she was dying. Although she assured him she wasn't, he remained thrown by these positive changes in her, whereby she was no longer as dependent or as stressed as she had formerly been. In the long run, their relationship could not survive the positive change in her, and they eventually divorced.

Although her more rosy view of God and life remained with her after her moment of insight, Vanessa did go through some depression in later years. Even then, she never lost faith in that loving God. She later came to believe that the depression had been brought on by her tendency to be too much of a perfectionist, especially in trying to be unconditionally loving towards others, whilst judging herself in very strict and "ruthless" perfectionistic terms. At those times she felt she had essentially lost sight of God, because she had forgotten that it was OK for her to be imperfect. When finally, at a friend's urging, she reminded herself that "you don't have to be perfect" and that "you can be ordinary", she reached a turning point in the depression and straight away began to move towards recovery again.

## **Appendix D**

### **“Before versus After” Study**

Besides testing participants’ current levels on the WUSCT, it was thought worthwhile to attempt to assess their levels “before” their moment of insight, by asking them to fill out a second questionnaire (part-way through the study) from their retrospective point of view one to two years before their moment of insight. This became referred to as the “Before versus After” study.

#### **Participants**

Only 22 participants in all (15 interview participants and 6 selected questionnaire-only participants for the falsification study) were involved in the “before versus after” study.

#### **Procedure**

When the questionnaires were first devised, it had been decided to attempt to assess participants’ ego levels “before” versus “after” their moments of insight. The current, or “after” ego level was assessed in the first questionnaire set, which was sent to participants to complete some months before they returned for their second interview. Only at the conclusion of that second interview, were they told that the second questionnaire set they were now to complete was the same again as the first set, but this time they were to complete the questionnaire from their retrospective point of view, a year or two before their moment of insight.

The reason the chronological order was swapped was to ensure that the “current” answers (“after” answers) would be completed first, without the knowledge that

these responses would be one half of a “before-after” measure. Thus participants would be less likely to consciously or unconsciously try to enhance any apparent difference in answers, at least in the “after” measure. This left them free to try to enhance the difference for the retrospective “before” answers – but that problem would be present and unavoidable in any case where one asks participants to answer from a retrospective point of view, before a time of perceived self-change.

The retrospective “before” questionnaire was delivered in two parts, 2a and 2b. The 2a part, administered at the end of the second interview, contained only the WUSCT, which was also considered to be the most difficult item to fill out from a retrospective point of view. A mood induction was given to participants immediately before they completed the WUSCT. The rest, 2b, was given to participants to take home and complete. Only the first 18 items were administered for this retrospective version of the WUSCT. (At the end of a two hour interview, it seemed unreasonable to expect participants to have the energy to fill out 36 items and retain accuracy, given the added difficulty of answering from a retrospective time-frame.) The mood induction was as follows:

Mood Induction for 2<sup>nd</sup> Questionnaire Set, to be answered as if “Before” Change

Preamble:

I want to ask you to do now just two pages of sentence completions like the ones you did in the earlier Questionnaire – except this time I want you to complete the sentences as you imagine you would have in the year or two before your main moment of insight. To help you set the scene, let’s write in on the front of this form the moment of insight or shift in perspective we are referring to. And write in here the approximate dates of the year or two that preceded that shift in perspective, and your age at that time.

Mood induction:

Now I just want you to close your eyes or look down at one spot for a couple of moments and cast your mind back to when you were .....(ages) while I prompt you with some thoughts to bring back that time as vividly as possible in your mind. Don't answer these questions out loud, just stay with your thoughts:

(10 second pauses were left after each question)

*What were you doing or working at in those couple of years?*

*Where did you live? Bring a picture of it to mind.*

*Which family members, if any, were you in regular contact with?*

*How did that contact feel at the time?*

*Who were your friends or work colleagues, and how often did you see them?*

*What sorts of things were you doing on a day to day basis?*

*What did life 'feel' like back then?*

*What attitudes did you have to life and how the world worked?*

*What kinds of attitudes and beliefs did you have about yourself, back then?*

OK, then, I'd like you to try to keep hold of that mindset – and complete these sentences now as if you were completing them from your point of view when you were .....(ages).

**Results**

The results of the “before” versus “after” study were pleasing, showing an almost uniform increase from “before” to “after” in ego levels in 13 of the 14 interview participants, who completed both WUSCTS, as Table D1 shows. The one exception was a regression in ego level, which was perhaps understandable given the “shift in perspective” story was not a moment of insight but rather a story of falling in love, followed by the very painful loss of that love – see Tristan's story in Appendix C.

It was noted that the WUSCT “Before” results for Sarah, Louise and Kasandra matched the estimates made of their ego levels before their moments of insight, in the case study analyses. The case study estimates, however, were based on theoretical clues in the interview data.

### **Rationale for “falsification” study**

It was considered possible that the uniform increase in the other 13 participants’ ego levels may have been artificially induced by the method – specifically, that perhaps the inherent difficulty of projecting one’s mind back several years may result in impoverished responses, which would lower ego levels.

A way to check if the results were partly mediated by the method was to seek out questionnaire-only participants who had not had a moment of insight in the last several years, and ask them to do a similar retrospective test. If the retrospective instructions alone were causing the difference in ego levels, then these participants should manifest a similar difference in ego levels. If not, then the retrospective instructions would appear to be somewhat exempted from the charge of artificially producing the effect.

Table D1  
*Ego Levels of Interview Participants Before versus After Change,  
 Assessed by 18-item WUSCTs*

Name	Ego Level			
	Before Change (18 item form)	After Change (18 item form)	Change in Ego Level	After Change (36 item form)
David	5	8	+3	8
Louise	5	8	+3	7
Jacinta	6	8	+2	7
Kasandra	6	8	+2	7
Sarah	5	7	+2	7
Catherine	7	8	+1	7
Emily	7	8	+1	7
Anna	7	8	+1	8
Ozmate	7	8	+1	8
Pancho	6	7	+1	7
Philip	7	8	+1	8
Richard	7	8	+1	7
Andrew	7	7	0	7
Tristan	5	3	-2	3
Vanessa completed only the 36-item “After” WUSCT				7

Note. Only the first 18 of the 36 items were used for the “After” rating, to make comparisons for both Before and After based on 18-items (which rate slightly higher than 36-item forms).

### **Falsification study**

Questionnaire-only participants aged at least 25 (so that 5 years earlier they would be at least 20) who had reported never having a moment of insight, as well as those who reported none in the last five years, were re-contacted and administered a retrospective test. They were asked to fill out the same questionnaires used for the “before” interview participants, except that the falsification group’s instructions were to fill them out from their perspective “four or five years ago” (see Appendix F). Four to five years was chosen as the most reasonable length of time to test the “before versus after” effect, while still maximising the potential number of questionnaire-only participants who could be approached for “before” reports.



Unfortunately, of the total 65 questionnaire-only participants, only six participants were able to complete this part of the study. Three of the six participants selected (aged 25, 46 and 48) had reported never having had a moment of insight; two (aged 34 and 48) reported none in the last five years and one (aged 51) was unsure (indicating no memorable experiences). A further four eligible participants had ticked a box on their original forms indicating that they did not wish to be re-contacted for further participation. One was eliminated because she was aged only 18.

In all possible respects the wording and conditions were kept almost identical to those the interview participants experienced. Whereas the researcher had read out the mood induction to interview participants at the end of the second interview, the falsification study participants were mailed a cassette tape of the researcher reading the mood induction, along with the falsification study questionnaire forms.

### **Results of falsification study**

The results were pleasing, in that they suggested retrospective instructions alone did not produce increases from “before” to “after”. Table D2 shows that the majority, or 4 out of 6 questionnaire participants who said they had not had moments of insight in the previous five years, still produced the same ego level ratings with their responses to the retrospective WUSCT, suggesting their retrospective responses were not impoverished as compared with the current responses. The falsification questionnaires were completed by most applicants 6-12 months after they had completed the first questionnaire (depending on which of original recruitment intakes they were in). They were mixed in with the second round of WUSCT ratings of questionnaire participants, so that raters were blind to

which questionnaire responses were part of the “falsification” study. These results added some credence to the retrospective method used.

Table D2

*Falsification Study: Ego Levels Before versus After 4-5 year Period Assessed by 18-item WUSCTs*

Identity Code	Ego Level		
	Before: 4-5 yrs Ago (18 item form)	After: Current (18 item form)	Change in Ego Level
f: 009 <sup>a</sup>	6	6	0
f: 015	5	6	+1
f: 017	6	7	+1
f: 022	8	8	0
m: 124	6	6	0
f: 188	6	6	0

Note. Only the first 18 of the 36 items were used for the “After” rating, to make comparisons for both Before and After based on 18-items (which rate slightly higher than 36-item forms).

<sup>a</sup> Identity code = gender: identity reference number.

Despite the pleasing results of the falsification study, there remained a lingering discomfort with theoretical problems in employing a projective test (the WUSCT) which aims to capture the person’s current framework, as a retrospective test. The decision was finally made not to place undue faith in the retrospective data, in particular the retrospective WUSCT results. There were possibly too many potential layers of abstraction intervening. The verbal accounts in interviews, despite also being retrospective, were considered a more appropriate way to attempt to understand and assess participants’ ego levels retrospectively. It was decided to “demote” the “before versus after” study, including the falsification study, to secondary status and supply these highlights in the Appendix.

The 15 interview participants’ and 6 Falsification study participants’ “Before versus After” Beliefs are supplied for comparison purposes in Appendix R.

## Appendix E

### Interview Question Prompts

#### First Interview:

1. Before we start, can you tell me some background context about you as a person?
2. How would you define a moment of insight?
3. Now please go ahead and describe your main moment of insight in detail.
4. What were your thoughts before, during, and after moment of insight?
5. What were your feelings/emotions before, during, after moment of insight?
6. What was going on in your life at the time?
7. What sparked it off?
8. What was the meaning for you at the time?
9. What was the meaning for you since?
10. Did the moment of insight change your perspective?
11. Did the moment of insight change your thinking?
12. Did the moment of insight change your emotions?
13. Was the experience linked to other experiences in your life?
14. Did the experience change your relationships?
15. Did the experience change your sense of self?
16. Did the experience change your life?
17. Have you had any other moments of insight? How many?
18. How often do they happen?
19. How would you describe a moment of insight to someone who's never heard of one?
20. How would you describe the opposite of a moment of insight?
21. How does a moment of insight differ from learning something new?
22. What would be the common theme in your moments of insight?

#### Second Interview:

1. Was there anything that struck you in our last interview - that stayed in your mind?
2. When did those thoughts/feelings come up? (During or after first interview)
3. I suggested you make a note of anything you want to add in the meantime. Was there anything like that you wanted to note?
4. What are your comments on the summary and interpretations? Do you have any alterations you'd like to make to them?
5. Were there any new thoughts in any of it? Something you'd never thought of before at all – or in that way?
6. Any bits you love or hate or that strike a chord?
7. What made you decide to do the first interview?
8. Would you like to have more moments of insight, or shifts in perspective, in future?
9. Have you had any more, big or small, since the last interview? (Limit to a brief description). How did that change your sense of yourself or your world.
10. Check all pseudonyms used.
11. (Further specific follow-up questions for this participant.)

## Appendix H

### Theme Elements from Definitions Items Analyses

Table H1

*Theme Elements in Definitions of “Moment of Insight”. N = 80*

Theme Elements Rank Ordered by Percentage of Those Who Endorsed Them	%
suddenness, brief moment in time	66
things became clear/clarity of thought	29
see, look at life/things differently	25
gain understanding (in general)	24
changes perspective	18
realise, realisation	15
awakening, revelation	15
struggling with a concept beforehand	11
previously distressing, confusing	10
answer, solution to a problem	10
previously not obvious	9
clicks/pops into head/penny drops	8
things coming together/falling into place	8
can cause dramatic changes	8
understand truth or wisdom re something	8
correction of way of seeing things	6
sense of direction, purposeful action	6
new interpretation or meaning	6
changes past/present/future ideas	5
an experience that makes you reflect	5
see yourself differently	5
realise you misunderstood the world before	5
when you “get” it	4
makes sense	4
seeing a connection	4
know exactly what to do	4
learn something	4
think differently	4
see deeper meaning	4
previously viewed things differently	3
right path	3
no doubt	3
when you sense what is going to happen	3
a time of self-knowledge	3
can never go back to before	3
wonder I didn’t think of it before	3

Table H2

*Theme Elements in Definitions of “The Opposite of a Moment of Insight”*  
*N = 80.*

Theme Elements Rank Ordered by Percentage of Those Who Endorsed Them	%
Blocked or blinded by emotions or feelings	24
Failing to make meaningful connections, unable to relate things	21
Stuck in the dull, boring, trivial, or bogged down in day to day routine	21
Ignoring or oblivious to facts, ignorance, acting on instinct only	16
Confusion, bafflement, bewilderment, or an inability to understand	14
Not being able to solve a problem	8
The opposite (eg, a block) may become a moment of insight	5

Table H3

*Theme Elements in Definitions of “How a Moment of Insight Differs from Learning”* *N = 80.*

Theme Elements Rank Ordered by Percentage of Those Who Endorsed Them	%
Different – because there is a different quality to what is learned	44
Different - while moments of insight are sudden or instant, learning is a slow or gradual process	30
Not different - a moment of insight is a type of learning	19
Different – because a moment of insight can’t be willed or taught	10

Table H4

*Theme Elements in Definitions of “Common Theme of Your Moments of Insight”* *N = 80.*

Theme Elements Rank Ordered by Percentage of Those Who Endorsed Them	%
Content - thoughts or ideas experienced during a moment of insight	59
Circumstances or process by which moments of insight tended to occur	23
Outcome of moments of insight	8
No themes - every moment of insight was different	6

Note: Table 11 in the main thesis shows the themes found in definitions of “moments of insight”, which were endorsed by 10% or more of participants.

## Appendix J

### Beliefs Theme Elements for Self, World and Others

Table J1 shows a snapshot of the first 12 most commonly endorsed beliefs, and reveals a pattern which could be summarised as: positive beliefs about self; negative beliefs about world/life; positive beliefs about others. By far the most popularly endorsed beliefs were compassionate/accepting of self (85%) and positive beliefs about self (81%). There was then a very sizeable drop in frequency to the next most commonly endorsed beliefs, which were negative beliefs about world/life (49%) and positive beliefs about others (48%).

Table J1

*Top 12 Most Commonly Endorsed Beliefs Theme Elements Rank Ordered by Frequency of Endorsement (N=80)*

Belief Element	%
Compassionate/accepting of self	85
Positive beliefs about self	81
Negative beliefs about world/life	49
Positive beliefs about others	48
I can/want to achieve my goals	46
My intentions are good	44
Compassionate/accepting of others	40
World is badly managed/cared for	36
Negative beliefs about others	36
People's intentions are mostly good	36
Positive view of future or self-development to come	34
Compassionate/accepting of world	30

Table J2

*Themes Elements of Beliefs about Self, Rank Ordered by Frequency of Endorsement (N=80) .*

Self Beliefs Elements	(%)
Compassionate/accepting of self	85
Positive beliefs about self	81
I can/want to achieve my goals	46
My intentions are good	44
Positive view of future or self-development to come	34
Awareness of inner complexity – self	29
Accepting mention of self-flaws	28
Self and others are same, share similar facets	21
I am still learning/developing	20
Hard work to get ahead	13
My choices determine who I am	11
Negative beliefs about self	9
I/my life has a purpose	8
Critical or defensive mention of flaws	8
Unsure about self	6
Worldview given instead of self-view	4

Table J3

*Beliefs about World/Life, Sorted by Frequency of Endorsement (N=80)*

Beliefs about the World/Life	%
Negative beliefs about world	49
World is badly managed/cared for	36
Compassionate/accepting of world	30
Positive beliefs about world	28
Caretaker attitude needed for world/social issues	26
World is daunting, beyond control, untameable	25
Neutral beliefs about world	20
Life is cruel, harsh, unfair,	19
Decry materialism/technology	19
God/spiritual dogma	10
God makes me who I am	9
Life is what you make it	9
God/spiritual uniquely expressed	8
World is fair	4

Table J4  
*Theme Elements of Beliefs about Others, Sorted by Frequency of Endorsement*  
 (N=80)

Others Beliefs Elements	(%)
Positive beliefs about others	48
Compassionate/accepting of others	40
People's intentions are mostly good	36
Negative beliefs about others	36
People's intentions are mostly bad	24
People are shallow, misguided	23
Awareness of others' inner complexity	23
Self and others are same, share similar facets	21
Seeing psychological causes in others' negative behaviour	21
Others are selfish, greedy	20
Neutral beliefs about others	19
Seeing both good and bad in self and others	11
Relationships are important to me	9
People are mean, rude, etc	8
All people are different	8
People judge others unfairly	6
People blame others, don't accept responsibility	6
Others' choices determine their lives	4



## Appendix M

### History of Development of the WUSCT

Parts of the following history of the development of the Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT) for ego development are drawn from and follow a similar structure to Loevinger's (1998) book outlining the technical foundations, historical development and psychometric properties of the WUSCT. All citations drawn from that source have been cited in the usual manner, instead of using secondary citation format, which would have become clumsy in this context.

The Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT) for ego development was developed by Loevinger & Wessler (1970) and Loevinger, Wessler and Redmore (1970). It emerged out of a series of studies in the 1950s and 1960s which explored women's attitudes to problems of family life as well as personality characteristics in general in women (Loevinger, Sweet, Ossorio & LaPerriere, 1962). Loevinger et al. (1962) developed paired-choice tests and analysed them with a quasi-factorial method that came up with the unexpected finding that the largest cluster of items appeared to be best described as *punitiveness versus permissiveness*. However, it puzzled them that some items in that cluster had no reference to punishment, such as "A father should be his son's best pal". Women high on that largest cluster were remarkably similar to the "authoritarian personality" noted in studies of men (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson & Sanford, 1950). Loevinger et al (1962) went on to develop the

Authoritarian Family Ideology (AFI) scale for women, but two things caused them to broaden the concept further. One was the clinical observation that authoritarianism did not appear to be at one end of a linear continuum, but rather a midpoint of a broader concept. Rather than a trait-like variable, it seemed to be a milestone sequence, with qualitatively different markers along its developmental course. One of the study group, Abel Ossario, suggested that the construct they were testing was much broader, and best described as *ego development*. Although the term was used differently by psychoanalysts, it seemed to describe what they were measuring better than anything else. In order to test this construct of *ego development* more appropriately, the group decided a projective test was called for, and settled upon a sentence completion test. They became the first authors of such a test to develop a scoring manual.

While Harry Stack Sullivan's (1953) emphasis on the interpersonal nature of the ego provided the most basic conceptual foundations for Loevinger's conception, in conceiving the first stages for the WUSCT, Loevinger looked to theorists of stage-types for her starting points. The two most influential of these were the formulations of personal integration by Sullivan, Grant & Grant (1957) and Isaacs' (1956; Isaacs & Haggard, 1956) relatability scale.

Sullivan, Grant & Grant's (1957) notion of levels of personal integration, whereby development implies increasing involvement with others, provided the following ordering of stages: integration of separateness (the infant must master self from non-self); integration of non-self differences (people and objects are crudely manipulated); integration of the rules (rules and controls are arbitrary, used with no guilt, an externalised

superego); individuation of response (seeing self as different, an anxious stage); integration of continuity (perceiving behaviour of self and others in patterns, capacity for empathy and differentiated role conceptualisation; but may wonder which role contains “the real me”); integration of self-consistency (separation of self from roles, self-consistency despite roles); integration of relativity, movement, and change (perceives integration processes in self and others, increased capacity for understanding).

Loevinger’s main reservation about this formulation was Sullivan, Grant & Grant’s tendency to be led to descriptions of maladapted character types at each level. Where their conformist was a confidence-trickster, hers could also be cheerful, good-natured, trusting and salt-of-the-earth.

Loevinger made the opposite comment about Isaacs’ (1956; Isaacs & Haggard, 1956) notion of a relatability scale. She believed Isaacs over-idealised the “good” characteristics of stages. Basically the scale was a sequence of increasing differentiation of self from others, and a corresponding increasing emotional awareness and appreciation of others. At the lowest or Zeta level, the baby has fantasies with no distinctions with self and other objects. At Epsilon, self is appreciated as separate, but interaction is not yet understood and gratification is within oneself. At Delta interpersonal interactions are understood as one person acting on another, affects are personal (eg. shame, disgust, anxiety), identification with and pity for others is new, and the group is perceived to have a unitary mind. At Gamma two-way personal relations are perceived, and formality and rules assist with impulse control. At this level true sympathy emerges, giving and receiving is important, as is considerateness, tenderness and sharing. The Beta level marks a more objective state of being able to stand back with some perspective and view the activity of self and others, and to apprehend a more differentiated and complex

understanding of self and others' emotions. What marks this level is the intra-psychic separation of self from others, and the process of struggling to dis-identify with and rearrange aspects of earlier identifications. More genuine consideration for others is now possible. Finally, the Alpha level marks the point of interpersonal maturity, whereby the struggle toward individuality is over. No longer trapped by the struggles of the earlier stages, freed from guilt, strivings for control, definition of ego boundaries, or feeling trapped by others' feelings, the Alpha level person has more affective warmth available and can extend it with full appreciation for the individuality of the other person.

Other influential stage theories were those by Bull (1969), who saw moral reasoning as being social in origin; Kohlberg (1963, 1964, 1969, 1971) whose focus on ideology and moral reasoning is well-known; Peck & Havighurst (1960), who stressed behaviour; and Perry (1970), who devised an intriguing test of developmental stages in students' meta-thinking which traces their development from dualistic to relativistic worldviews.

The first WUSCT, based mainly on Sullivan, Grant and Grant's (1957) notion of stages, began with just four scoring stages: Impulsive, Conformist, Conscientious and Autonomous. Raters, though, soon found a need for a stage between Impulsive and Conformist, and thus the Self-Protective stage was inserted, modelled on the "opportunistic" stage described by Isaacs' (1956). Later stages were added through on-going procedures of testing, scoring and developing the manual. They were the Self-Aware stage, between Conformist and Conscientious; the Individualistic stage, between Conscientious and Autonomous, and finally the highest level, Integrated, was added.

Although the WUSCT began as a test for women, manuals for men were also developed (Redmore, Loevinger & Tamashiro, 1978-1981) but more importantly, both the test items and manual underwent a major revision (Loevinger, 1985), involving de-coding and reassessment of 1,160 cases drawn from 13 studies to make it suitable for both sexes. The forms for men and women in the revised “Form 81” WUSCT have only very slight differences, such as: changing pronouns (he/she); changing nouns (man/woman); and repeating content (eg “A good father” or “A good mother”). Matching was not considered necessary for all possible items, for instance “A man’s job” and “A girl has a right to” were left as is. The first and second pages, containing 18 items each, were designed for use as abbreviated alternate forms. The first page (identical for both men and women) could be used as a short form. The item validity (correlation of item ratings with total protocol rating) was found to be slightly higher for women (about .50) than for men (about .46). However this difference was accounted for by the difference in the variance of the samples.

The samples used in the “Form 81” WUSCT revision were all opportunistic samples, and never claimed to be “normative” (Loevinger, 1998). They nonetheless covered a reasonable range of people (from private school children to university graduates, to technical school graduates, to mothers from a range of social stratas, to county employees, senior adults, health professionals, and adult delinquents). Added to this list were 142 men from the Vaillant & McCullough, (1987) study, who, being Harvard graduates tested in mid-life, supplied a good proportion of rare high-level responses, which helped to broaden the conception of ego development.

The manual thus evolved over many years from an *exemplar* manual in the earliest phase, to a *categorised* manual (Loevinger, & Wessler, 1970), which attempted to provide further clues for raters, to its final evolution as a *rationalised category manual* (Hy & Loevinger 1996), which provides introductory blurbs to each item, and grouping categories, where possible, within over-riding common themes, which not only aids the rater's search for matches, but enhances their understanding of the overall concept.

## **Appendix N: First Article in Newspaper**

**Appendix O: Second Article in Newspaper**



## Appendix P

### Moment of Insight Story Themes

Note that Table P1 shows themes by frequency of endorsement, while Table P2 shows themes by analysis categories and sub-categories. Grey shading indicates the themes favoured by the group who told prototypical stories.

Table P1

*Moment of Insight Story Themes, Rank Ordered by Frequency of Endorsement by the 67 Storytellers*

Story Element	%
Seeing clearer / a new angle or "truth"	87
Insight prompted by something/someone	75
Adaptive insight	72
More positive outlook.	69
Made me stronger, more able to cope	64
Became more individuated	64
A sudden realisation, "definable moment" of insight	61
Insight about self	60
Feel more comfortable with, accepting of, peaceful about life	52
Increased sense of agency	51
Instant change to self or self-beliefs	51
Perceived important relationship/s differently	43
Internal process attributed as main trigger/change agent	42
Insight about personal relationships	37
Turbulence in life	37
Unhappy/dissatisfied beforehand	34
Need to escape/leave former undesirable situation	34
Insight about world/life (non-religious)	33
Non-instant change to self	30
Travelling or relocating	27
Reaction to others' (negative) behaviour	27
Instant change to beliefs about nature of world/life	27
Insight about work/career	27
Mystical or unexplainable shift	25
Neutral beforehand	25
Freed from other's opinions/influence	25
Education/suggestion eg Book/therapy/advice triggers	24
Instant change to beliefs about others	22
Dissatisfaction with job/career	21
Others' perceptions of others/world triggered mine (to copy)	19
Traumatic life event/s	18
Happy beforehand	18
Non-instant change to beliefs about nature of world	18

No longer fear life (found God, or learned secret of life)	18
Others' perceptions of me triggered my new perception of me	16
Insight about God or spiritual/religious matters	16
Change in opposite direction to other's (attempt to) influence	16
Insight about others	15
Reaction to others' (positive) behaviour	15
Non-instant change to beliefs about others	15
Realised I would have to leave romantic partner	15
Just world theory shattered /disillusioned with world/life	13
Perceived work differently	13
Death and dying	12
More negative outlook	12
Realised I would have to leave work	09
Broke away from parents'/authority's views to use my own	09
Made me weaker, more damaged/traumatised.	08
Decreased sense of agency	08
Vision of the future	06
No specific instance, general story only	05
Maladaptive/defensive insight	03

Table P2.

*Moment of Insight Story Themes, Rank Ordered by Frequency of Endorsement by the 67 storytellers, within Sub-categories*

Story Element	%
<b>1. Context</b>	
<i>Internal versus external prompts</i>	
Insight prompted by something/someone	75
Internal process attributed as main trigger/change agent	42
Reaction to others' (negative) behaviour	27
Education/suggestion, eg book/therapy/advice triggers	24
Dissatisfaction with job/career	19
Others' perceptions of others/world triggered mine (to copy)	19
Others' views of me triggered my new perception of me	16
Reaction to others' (positive) behaviour	15
<i>Mood beforehand</i>	
Unhappy/dissatisfied beforehand	34
Neutral beforehand	25
Happy beforehand	18
<i>Disruptive circumstances</i>	
Turbulence in life	37
Travelling or relocating	27
Traumatic life event/s	18
Death and dying	12
<b>2. Nature of Insight</b>	
A sudden realisation, "definable moment" of insight	61
Mystical or unexplainable shift	25

Vision of the future	6
No specific instance given, just general definition	5

### 3. Content

Seeing clearer / a new angle or "truth"	87
<i>Insights about Self</i>	
Insight about self	60
Insight about work/career	27
<i>Insights about Others</i>	
Insight about personal relationships	37
Insight about others	15
<i>Insights about World/life</i>	
Insight about world/life (non-religious)	33
Insight about God or spiritual/religious matters	16

### 4. Outcomes

<i>Instant versus non-instant change</i>	
Instant change to self or self-beliefs	49
Non-instant change to self	31
Instant change to beliefs about nature of world/life	27
Instant change to beliefs about others	22
Non-instant change to beliefs about nature of world	18
Non-instant change to beliefs about others	15
<i>Positive outcomes</i>	
Adaptive insight	72
More positive outlook	69
Made me stronger, more able to cope	64
Feel more comfortable with, accepting of, peaceful about life	52
No longer fear life (found God, or learned secret of life)	18
<i>Negative outcomes</i>	
Just world theory shattered/disillusioned with world/life	13
More negative outlook	12
Made me weaker, more damaged/traumatised	8
Maladaptive/defensive insight	5
<i>Work and Relationships</i>	
Perceived important relationship/s differently	43
Need to escape/leave former undesirable situation	34
Realised I would have to leave romantic partner	15
Perceived work differently	13
Realised I would have to leave work	9
<i>Individuation and agency</i>	
Became more individuated	64
Increased sense of agency	51
Freed from other's opinions/influence	25
Change opposite direction to other's (attempt to) influence	16
Broke away from parents'/authority's views to use my own	9
Decreased sense of agency	8

## Appendix Q

### Stories of Moments of Insight provided in Questionnaires

*Stories are presented within the study's ego level groupings. Codes are as follows:*

- E4 – E8            Indicates ego level. See Appendix A for description of ego levels.
- [f: 066]           Indicates [gender: story identity reference number]
- \*                   Asterisk \* indicates the story met the prototypical moment of insight story criteria developed in this study.
- M                   Indicates the story was of the type “Mystical or inexplicable shift”. Four of the interview participants also told stories of this type. (Kasandra's (E7) was one of the case studies; David's (E8) first experience; Catherine's (E7) second experience, and Vanessa's (E7) experiences.

#### Low Ego Level Group

E4: I was about 8 when this happened. I had been brought up in a moderately religious family (Catholic) and we generally attended church. I remember one day asking the priest if I could be an altar girl – but he told me no, because I was a girl and only boys could do the job. In that moment I lost my faith in the church (though not the religion) and I realised that women weren't always given a fair go. Since then I have had little interest in the church and I believe more than ever that women can do anything that men can. [f: 066] \*

E4: Not much going on. On one of my sessions with doctor [name] I suddenly felt how I have never had a father and how this was not true. My mother put us against my father because she needed our loyalty. Although I had many years before confronted my father and rationally ascertained that he loved us, it was only at this moment that I felt the pain of being denied the right to love my father and being loved by him. [f: 185] \*

E5: I had been with my boyfriend for about 6 months when I became pregnant. He then started to treat me extremely badly, he would never call or see me, he told me he had “better things to do” and he would send me SMS calling me a “bitch” and stuff. It made the whole situation worse and my best friend was too busy sleeping around to care. When I lost the baby, he dumped me and it made me realise that people aren't what they seem, and at the end of the day you have to rely on your own strengths in life. (I couldn't tell my parents the situation because they would have thrown me out). This sounds like a negative experience, but it made me stronger and now I realise what they mean when they say it is stronger to cry and admit defeat. [f: 043]

E5: ‘That things happen for a reason.’ If you believe that, there is nothing really to worry about. My mother always told me that, but I only really started to live my life like that in the last couple of years. It was put to the test when my brother had a very serious car accident. Right from when it happened, I accepted it and believed it really did “happen for a reason”. My whole family did. Having that perspective has turned around an experience that most would see as one of the worst things that could happen, into one of the most positive and rewarding times of my life. [f: 058]

E5: The man I was working with came across to me as intelligent, trustworthy, honest and a person of integrity. We worked well together and I had a lot of respect for him. It became clear to me via

information from a close friend that this person was not someone I could trust or someone that deserved my respect. I conduct myself at work in a completely different way now. I have to be careful what I say and what I do. I felt betrayed and disappointed. [f: 062]

E6: After a close relationship with my mother it stopped at a halt with a new father figure. Once the fighting began leading to a final bad incident, it just became clear that there wasn't enough room for me anymore. After feeling hurt and angry and sorry for myself I realised that I should get my act together. This experience made me question every moral I had ever had and even though a few wrong decisions were made I felt one day I will look back without regret. [f: 079]

E5: It was my HSC year and I had been seeing a psychotherapist for about two and a half years at this point for in retrospect not a lot, but at the time an adolescent acting out. We had worked through a lot and I felt I had learnt how I worked so to speak but it [I?] was still being led into places. One session I sat down and said hello and then waited for her to start, but she never did. Over the hour there were many inclinations but I remained quiet also, so the whole session nothing was said. It made me realise that I had to take the lead in my life and not expect others to do things for me. [m: 085] \*

E5: I had been acting totally out of character and against my standards I had for myself because of certain things that had happened, and things I was angry at. My best friend talked to me and told me the way I was behaving and the things I was letting myself do wasn't me, and was because of issues with myself etc. It made me realise that stupid things we do just because we feel like it, should be re-thought about seriously. Because when you act against your principles and morals you start to change the direction you're heading, and you aren't moving towards who you're really meant to be. And life becomes meaningless – totally based on your feelings. I've learnt to put actions in perspective and look ahead at what my actions might bring about and this way I have less to regret and feel ashamed about. [f: 094]

E5: I don't remember one huge change in perspective, but often have things click in my brain, a moment of insight, through talking to people, reading books and something I've been thinking about will make sense and it'll all come together. [f: 108]

E5: I'd just finished Uni (completed my degree) and I didn't know what I wanted to do or that if I'd achieved anything. After 4 months of travelling, I was about to go to bed in a youth hostel one night when it hit me. All the people that I'd met and spent time with seemed to get on with their life. I was feeling bad because I thought I hadn't achieved anything, but then I realised that there were so many things that I had done and dismissed as nothing that were really something. I decided that I was looking for perfection without actually having any definition of it and that it was pointless. I should just appreciate where I was and let everything else flow. [f: 139] \*

E5: I had just been in a car accident and my friends had come to where it happened. After having a near death experience in this car accident my friends who I'd been out with came to pick me up. When they arrived 20 mins later from a destination about 2 mins away not one of them asked how I was or even got out of the car. They wanted me to show them the car so I walked to the site where it happened whilst they drove behind me. My friend who was driving the car at the time of the accident hadn't wanted anyone to be there, just his family and me. So I told them this but they ignored me. Once arriving at the site I learnt they had been arguing over car seats and that's why they had taken so long to get there. Not one of them offered me any comfort whatsoever. This experience for me was a very hurtful moment of insight as I thought my friends would have reacted differently to such a serious situation. The fact that not one of them cared made me realise how differently I cared about them to how they cared about me because if roles had been reversed and I had been them their safety would have been my primary concern. I suppose this made me recognise the truth in these relationships. [f: 158]

## Medium Ego Level Group

E6: I was in Vietnam by myself after splitting up with friends because of a massive fight. This was my first time travelling in an overseas country and I had just turned 25. The night before I was the most afraid I have ever been in my life, but I didn't even think about going home. I couldn't eat my breakfast that morning and my hands were shaking as I packed to get a flight to the north of the country. As I was going to the airport, I looked out of the car and remember thinking if I don't do this and enjoy it, I will regret it for the rest of my life. And that I would rather die doing this than to not face it and return home? At that moment I relaxed and it felt like I was in tune with the whole universe and that it would all work to grow me and expand my mind. And it did. [f: 002] \*

E6: I was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 20 and was treated with radiotherapy for 6 weeks and chemotherapy for 19 months. Following this active period of treatment I was overwhelmed with a sense of loss and displacement, which manifested itself as depression. Once I had climbed out of the deep well of depression, I started to take part in the world again. My moment of insight was when I realised that back on "the round-about of life", I would continue to have my share of bad luck, just like everyone else. [f: 011]

E6: I don't remember the exact circumstances (16 years old) in detail but I was having a heart to heart really deep talk with my mum about my life. Suddenly I realised how much she has sacrificed for us and how much she cares and loves us. I've always been very close to my mum, but the emotion I felt at this exact moment was so strong it brought me to tears even though the conversation was not related to this at all. That moment of realisation has just brought me closer to her and I love and appreciate her (and her me) even more. [f: 013] \*

E6: Worked for 4 or 5 years in a job I didn't really like. Went overseas for 8 weeks, then that put in motion a sequence of events that set me on a new course. I think I feared change than [then?] I realised I needed to embrace this and start looking for things I wanted, that I was able to move forward. It was good because I broke out of my routine and made me feel that I can do whatever I wish. [m: 030]

E6: I was extremely ill in hospital with anorexia nervosa. I was at a very low weight and was medically compromised. I wanted to die because I was sick of life. I wasn't able to do anything except think or be in my own thoughts. Suddenly, I felt as if my body and soul were no longer connected, I thought I was dying. I was able to look at myself from a distance and for the first time I really disliked what I saw. I decided I didn't want this sort of a life any more, this was the first time I had felt this way and had felt a need to change. I began to see a way out of the illness, there was a possible solution rather than death. It has changed me as a person as I am more determined and perseverant. More patient and am able to put things in better perspective than I used to. I also understand how I feel a lot better also. [f: 046] \* M

E6: I have had several moments of insight. I usually mature a lot after them. One of the most important ones to me is the time I realised that not everything works out right, the way you planned, not even if you put all your effort into it. I was visiting my family in Spain with my mother. My grandparents were very sick and it was a rather sad holiday to see them in the state they were in. I was looking forward to returning home and seeing my friends and partying, as I had just completed my IGCSE exams. We had booked a taxi to take us to the airport over 6 hours early, so we would not miss the plan. I was very eager. We left early that morning to the airport. But problems kept arising. Such as a traffic jam, a motor accident, the tyre going flat etc. I suddenly realised that we were not going to make the plane. We missed the plane that day, even though we tried so hard to get to the airport, eg. By taking different routes. At the age of 15, on that day, I realised that sometimes, no matter how hard you try, or how prepared you are, things can go wrong and in life, you don't always get what you want (eg going home). Even though it may have been obvious to some people, prior to that point, I had always thought that if you tried hard

enough – you would get what you wanted. It made me feel very sad to realise this was wrong and it also gave me a rather pessimistic outlook on life ever since. Now I am never sure whether what I want will happen. Yet before that experience – I was always positive that things were going to happen if I tried hard enough. [f: 048] \*

E6: Just after I came to Australia (I was 24 years old) in 1987 I was lying down in Hyde Park and watching people around. Then I suddenly felt that people can live freely without any boundaries of obligations. It was sort of shock to me by then. [f: 092] \*

E6: During one moment of insight I had just broken up with a partner who I felt I had nothing in common with. I was with a friend who I have known for many years and it was suddenly clear to both of us that we were so alike in almost every way. This experience has made me feel completely different about my friend, but has not really assisted me in getting to know them as more than a friend. [m: 097] \*

E6: The most important moment of insight came after a string of let downs in my life. I couldn't talk to my mum, someone I loved had passed away and I realised that people won't always be there for you and you can't put your hope in them. I believed in God but never really experienced him. This one day throughout a talk I felt as though the shields over my eyes had finally been lifted. I knew will everything I was that I could rely on God and he would never forsake me. I felt an enormous weight lifted off my back and realised for the first time I didn't have to deal with things alone. God wanted to share my pains. At that moment I realised life made sense. This experience changed my life. I will never be alone or never need to feel afraid. [f: 101] \* M

E6: I was sitting on a train going from [a suburb] to the city in 1997. I was sitting by myself and had nothing else to do but think. I had been working as an accountant for a couple of years but was very unsatisfied and was contemplating a career change. I was struck by the idea of what life was. I saw my life as a long clothesline upon which I hang an experience after experience. I was in control of what type of experience I hung up, either trivial or significant, selfish or helpful, rare or common. Each experience I hung up would influence the following experiences so I had to consider every action I did within the context of my entire life. I had a very strong sense of clarity and knew I had worked out how to live my life. I was very pleased and I decided that I was never going to miss out on hanging an experience on my line ie. I was going to avoid regretting not attempting something when I reflected on my life. [m: 118] \*

E6: I was having difficulties with work – mostly conflict with management. I started thinking “why am I banging my head against a brick wall?”, “what am I doing here?”, “is this job important to me?” I realised that no matter what I did, the bureaucracy wasn't going to change. So instead of stressing myself out by trying to change the situation, I changed jobs and I'm currently retraining for a new career. Although nothing has changed at my former workplace, I'm much happier and I feel I've moved on with my life. [f: 121]

E6: I would have been only about eight years old when I was sitting in my bedroom reading my bible one day. I regularly read my bible and prayer because my parents taught me to. But on this particular occasion my eyes were opened to the fact: that Christianity is not a religion – it's a relationship. I had known a lot about God, but it had all been head knowledge until this stage. It really hit my heart when I read a verse that said “If God is for us, who can be against us?” This made everything “click into place” for me. Jesus loved me so much that he was willing to DIE for me! I knew all the stories about Jesus dying for the world, but I received an insight that the God of the universe let his son die so that he could have a personal relationship with me! This changed my whole life. I suddenly had purpose in my life – to tell others about this wonderful news so they could have life, and life to the full – forever! [f: 126] \* M

E6: Prefer not to! [f: 149]

E6: Seeing a different culture. Coming from a sheltered life in Australia where problems consist of “what am I going to wear today” to seeing the native people of Thailand struggling to keep food on the table and yet all the while they were ever giving to us. Problems from then on seems so trivial in home life. [f: 153]

E6: As a single, career oriented person, I had very definite opinions of how committed parents were to their child’s life. I expected a lot of extra work to be done at home (on top of school work) to supplement my therapy. I have put unreasonable pressure on family members. After having a family of my own, I realise how precious time with your kids is, how prioritising is important and how humbling an experience it is. Insight into the realities of parenthood has helped me to change my style of communication with parents as well as my expectations of them. [f: 168]

E6: Understanding that God loved me no matter what I did. Our relationship wasn’t based on what I did but on who God is. The effect on my life was to give me enormous freedom to be who I was and to be able to make mistakes. It also gave me a lot of freedom in my relationship with God. To talk freely with him and to be able to be very honest with myself. [f: 173]

E6: I went to a government school in Strathfield for my secondary education. Up until year 10, I saw myself as the regular guy without being conscious of my potentials. I do the things an average student does – performing an average in my academic work, hanging out with friends, truanting, participate in no extra-curricular activities and did little sport. Every day I wished school would have finished earlier. At the beginning of year 10 however, I was given an English essay to write which I was actually interested in. I spent 3 days thinking and 2 days writing the essay and it scored an unprecedented 19/20. My English teacher was so impressed that, in handing back my essay she walked into my geography class and proclaimed how good a student I am. At that instant, I suddenly realised my potentials and changed the way I look at myself. This change had subsequently got me into a selective school before I came to Macquarie Uni. [m: 175] \*

E6: Probably when I was about 20 years old – having studied at uni and worked I realised that my parents had instilled in me from an early age ideas that I now did not believe were right. I guess I began to really think for myself through my own life experiences/actions. It basically had to do with how I perceived/judged people. I began to be closer and less distant – more willing to see their reasons for views/attitudes. [f: 179]

E6: Can’t remember – but know it’s happened. Always with work or in an education environment after struggling for some time to understand what the teacher is getting at. [f: 188]

E6: I am living with my wife in a small 1 bedroom apartment and we don’t own very much at the moment. What happened is like a dream, I can see myself in a nice house with my kids around me and it seems that I have everything I need. Now the effect of it on me is that I believe in it and I know that one day, I will not have to worry about being happy (because I will be all the time) or worry about being in need of something that I don’t have. [m: 191] M

E6: Being engrossed in work, 14 hour days, seven days a week and coming to the realisation that I did not want to be doing this anyway. The bluff of do it my way or go should have happened 12 months earlier but I was too busy doing it to stop and think about what I was doing. [m: 194]

### **High Ego Level Group**

E7: At 20 years old I decided to find work and live alone. I was to finish university studies in the US by correspondence. Inevitably what I wanted to do was move to Australia. I had little money, so my insight was a goal to move to Australia. I needed ambition and dedication so I saw my life as



a person striving hardly [sic] for what he wanted. I worked 3 jobs. 1 – during the day, 1 – during evenings, 1 – on weekends. The rest is history since I am here now. [m: 003]

E7: This is not the most important – there are many times. One time I was feeling down emotionally. I was feeling unloved and rejected by my husband. I had had lunch with him and he kept looking at his watch and saying he needed to get back to work. I was on the railway platform – my emotions took a sudden dive for a short moment I felt like jumping in front of the next train. My mind told me to go and sit down and don't do something so obviously disastrous. I cried out to God in my emotions and mind and I could "see" one of my children crying at my funeral. This image had a big impact on me and the experience comes back whenever I even remotely think that it may be attractive to give up on life. [f: 006] \* M

E7: My ex-husband gradually became an alcoholic, when my two children were quite small. He became very verbally abusive and attempted to restrict/control my life. I had struggled with trying to improve things, but after a particularly difficult evening, realised that (for the first time) I was emotionally totally out of the marriage, and that I would have to leave. I then began to think of many alternative futures for me and the children and finally left within five years. [f: 008] \*

E7: 1993. I had been working for 7 years in the same place (managing a [healthcare] practice and had just returned from a 3 month backpacking trip around Europe. The insight was multifaceted. I had had quite a crush on a good friend for about 10 years and suddenly realised that I had to let go of it in order to move on with my life. It didn't mean I couldn't still be his good friend anymore but I didn't have to try and make his life perfect. It felt like a great relief. Also, I realised that I did have thoughts, feelings and ideas, which were mine, not my parent's and that made me feel more confident in myself as a worthwhile thinking person. I did not have to blindly go along with what my parents thought – they are fallible. This had the effect of making me feel like I have something worthwhile to offer – I was no longer a puppet of my parents. [f: 017] \*

E7: I was around 20-21. My father had died about one and a half years before. I was afraid of dying – of being nowhere after dying and afraid of the pain in the process of dying. I wasn't depressed or lonely, just alone and thinking about it. I had strong feelings of foreboding, and death and what it means and a great sadness – I felt that way for a few hours and it came to a point where it was like a weight in my thoughts. Suddenly without warning the feeling left and I felt peaceful and calm and the weight lifted. Since then I don't fear death – I don't like the idea of being in pain but I accept dying as a natural process. Now I'm more worried about the people I love dying. [f: 022] \* M

E7: I had no other books left to read so I started the Tibetan Book of Living and Dying which I had bought about 6 years before and never read. I had taken a voluntary redundancy from work and had time to explore other interests. Reading the book made me think quite differently about other people (ie. I was less anxious about meeting new people, slightly more at ease with negative emotions.) It validated my feeling that there is more to life than work or a career. [f: 023] \* M

E7: I had been travelling and working (moving about every 3 months) and was desperate to settle down, at least temporarily. I was in a relationship for six months that at times was very emotionally draining. The relationship was excellent for two months and then it just became very difficult, mainly due to an ex-fiancee of the person I was seeing. I was drawn to this person very much but repelled at the same time. The experience made me realise that there are only a few important things in life, mainly that trust and respect and relationships are all that really matter, and provide happiness. [m: 025]

E7: I can really only describe the moment of insight that led me to enrol at Uni after so many years. Just before the moment of insight, I had been undergoing IVF to try for a second child – with little success. I had enrolled my daughter at preschool (to start January this year). At the time, I was thinking about how much time I was going to have on my hands when she started school and my husband suggested I should do some work at his office. I knew I didn't want to do that and I

started thinking about a career that would allow me flexibility to work school hours so that I would still be available to my daughter. I thought about the things that I liked and was good at and it just occurred to me that speech pathology would be perfect. I then did the research etc and here I am. I felt excited about finding a career of interest; nervous and excited about going back to uni after so long. [f: 029]

E7: Certainly not the most important but the most recent memory is: I had gone to a counsellor to speed up getting over a break-up. She had asked me to draw myself after the relationship and then asked who else in my life made me feel that way. I then realised how badly my brother's treatment of me had affected / was affecting my life. The experience had a comforting affect on me, as well as fascination. [f: 037] \*

E7: I had been involved with a married man for 13 years. Had returned to Australia 5 years ago to "get over him" but still saw him annually in Europe. The experience recently of seeing him for 2 weeks and being bored and uncomfortable with him, knowing that I could be relaxed and witty with other friends, and realising I didn't want him in my life was such an insight. The thoughts were quite rational. I felt surprised at myself, how easy it was to admit to myself that I didn't want to see him again. The effect was that I saw him in a totally different light, eg an insecure man who liked making me feel anxious and I re-evaluated my entire past 13 years with him. [f: 052] \*

E7: When I was 22 and had just returned from 3 years travelling and working overseas I was in two minds as to what to do with myself. On returning home I decided to shower to clear the travel cobwebs. My reflection in the full length mirror stopped me dead. An insight and shift in perspective, for want of better words, occurred. Until that moment my life had been lived by two me's. One rich but sometimes deluding life lived inside my imagination, and the social me whom I perceived to be a separate individual. Heads and tails were finally on the same coin. From that day on I have consciously tried to integrate these two people, with some success and a much deeper pleasure in life. [m: 068] \* M

E7: I was at a uni residential sitting at a table with about 15 women. I felt shy, and was intimidated by these 'senior' students. I knew my marks were good, but my ex-wife made me feel as if this was average. One lady at the table introduced me to everyone as a 'genius', which attracted attention toward me. After discussing my marks, my job and my life, I became acutely aware that my vision of myself had been skewed because of people in my life and many internalised beliefs. The next day I was taken aback by the insight that I was capable of so much more. In time I was able to leave my dangerous job and my unhappy marriage, and took the risk of going to studies full-time – all based around that original moment of insight. [m: 098] \*

E7: I was having a bad time leaving school after the HSC and living in a country town for a year. I was hanging around people who were taking advantage of me and feeling very depressed. I then made the decision to get out and move to Sydney. Things just worked out really well, and armed with new knowledge from my bad experience and the liberation of escape and the choices I made I was on a high for months and very happy. I had changed from a victim to the victor by my change in perspective. It has stayed with me – that feeling. [m: 104]

E7: One day about seventeen years ago the Jehovah Witness people knocked at my door. I let them in because they seemed very nice, and they wanted to talk about God, and I needed practice in English. Until that day I never thought about God in terms of who or what he/she/it is. Discussing with these people my beliefs caused sudden flash of understanding: God is above it all. Our life is according to our choices and we are allowed to make them and to learn from the experience. It is silly to think that God would prefer those who join a particular religion – like joining a club – pay the fees and you are in. Rituals don't matter. Jehovah Witnesses were disappointed, but this is the core of what I believe til today. [f: 116] \* M

E7: “Shift from Negative to Positive” (at age 53). I was “burnt out” from over work and too much travel, so I went to a personal development course. As an indirect result (the course content had nothing to do with this), I got the insight that negativity had been a life script. I turned everything around and have changed direction, attitude and personal daily routine from destructive to constructive. At the time of the insight it was as if I had simply turned a switch. It was so easy to change once this had happened. At the time I just had to take the risk to be positive rather than negative – however, it also appeared as if there was no choice, as if it were the only path to follow. [f: 137] \* M

E7: Preamble – I was in an abusive marriage, feeling trapped etc. Felt hopeless – felt I’d spent my whole life locked in a cage. Now marriage was “the cage.” Experience – Sitting on the floor, I “saw” myself locked in a cage, trapped and terrified. I prayed and then “understood” that the “cage” I felt trapped in also had the purpose of protecting me from worldly terrors. I felt suddenly able to open the door of the “cage” and walk out. Then felt fearful of the “worldly terrors”, but knew I now had a choice. Effects – Entered therapy, separated from husband, got a life beginning to happen ☺ [f: 146] \* M

E7: I was happily going about my everyday life believing that I was a very perceptive/intuitive person who was very often right about people. One day I became very aware of the notion that other people see/experience things differently to me and therefore react differently to how I would to a certain experience. I now am a great deal more tolerant and patient with other people and always attempt to put myself in their situation in an attempt to understand their actions. [f: 156] \*

E7: I was going through a traumatic period in my life. A lot of repressed emotions from my childhood and adolescence were coming to the surface and I had not dealt with something like this before. I went through a period of listening to other people about what was best for me. Then I had a beautiful dream, which I still keep, that showed me what it was that I had to do. I looked at the situation completely differently when I accepted the significance of what my unconscious was showing me. I felt completely free of other people’s limitations and advice, I felt strong. I was able to move forward in my life and realise that I only needed to listen to my true self for the direction I seek. [f: 198] \* M

E8: I can’t name one specifically but they usually occur when I have been driving towards a goal I thought I wanted and either not succeeded or changed my mind at the last minute. The most recent example I can name would be getting into a graduate law programme (which had been my goal for 3 years at uni – actually longer – since high school) only to find out that I didn’t really want it and the thought of pursuing law actually didn’t make me feel as happy as I thought I’d be. (Just couldn’t visualise myself doing it – too boring). I realised I would have been settling for a 2<sup>nd</sup> preference job because I didn’t think I had it in me to pursue what I really wanted. [f: 001]

E8: I came to the conclusion that I do not like my job about 15 months ago. Up until then I had been endeavouring to educate myself by attending night school and aspiring to study psychology, so “I was moving on” but I can recall a moment when I discovered that I really don’t give a “rat’s arse” about my job. It was doing one of the many things that I have to do. I have quite a lot of responsibility in my job and many of the things I do are quite mundane but nevertheless have to be done. I was reaching out for something, and as I extended my hand out I had a moment that can be “likened to turning on a light in a dark room”, the impact of it made me stop what I was doing and realise that I just don’t want to do this. That feeling has remained with me since and I often have to force myself to do the mundane things at work. It was at that moment I think when I realised that “yes” I am going to be a psychologist, as opposed to wanting to study psychology at university. [m: 111] \* M

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