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**THE EXPERIENCE OF INSIGHT:
AN EXISTENTIAL-PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**

by

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Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu

A person becomes a person through other persons

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ABSTRACT

In the last fifteen to twenty years there has been increasing agreement about the phenomenon of insight, but a clear mechanism for insight is not yet understood.

The present study examines nine different approaches to the experience of insight: the holistic approach of gestalt psychology; the existential approach of phenomenological psychology; the puzzle-problem approach of cognitive psychology; the creative approach of genius, dreams, design and invention; the representational approach of models; the case-study approach of great minds; the metaphors-of-mind approach; the intersubjective approach of psychotherapy, and the body-mind-spirit continuum approach of spirituality to insight.

The distinctive value of this qualitative research lies in the opportunity to interview the research participants to get rich descriptions, not only about their experiences of significant insight and the conditions under which they occurred, but also to investigate the results of their insights.

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu's insight, in prayer before the Soweto Uprising, resulted in him writing a historic letter of warning to the Prime Minister. Debbie Brown had a series of insights in therapy and while listening to music, about responding to her husband's long-term infidelity; the results were totally unexpected and expressed in a contemporaneous e-mail. Sir Roger Penrose's experience of insight was subliminal as he crossed a road and needed to be remembered later from a lingering feeling of elation; it resulted in a scientific proof about black holes. Tony Grogan's insights and associations occurred while scanning the news and were expressed in a socio-political cartoon form for the *Cape Times* newspaper.

The particular findings include the necessity for awareness and disposition of openness, the importance of confronting and containing the problematic raw material, and the significance of the moments of 'impact' and 'interpreting'. Insight is seen as crucial to the quality of understanding, transcending the usual or dominant way of seeing things, as key to a self-actualising process and as self-authenticating yet tested in the public realm. At each occurrence of insight understanding develops and action is enabled. The relationship between insight and

sight, foresight and humour, is discussed. The qualitative research findings are considered in relation to recent neurobiological research.

Key Terms:

Insight	Spirituality	Impact
Intuition	Experience	Phenomenology
Existential	Gestalt	Creative
Affective	Metaphor	Interpreting
Cognitive	Body-Mind-Spirit	Intersubjective
Behavioural		

Conventions

A number of atypical, or potentially unclear uses, meanings and typography of words are used in this thesis because of the distinct political context in South Africa at the time. For example, groups of people are referred to as “Black”, “White”, or “Coloured” and the apartheid regime as “Government”.

In addition, a number of words are hyphenated to indicate a slightly different emphasis to the usual use of the word. For example, psycho-logical, re-member and re-imagine or re-image.

The text of the transcribed interviews in Chapter **5** is in bold type to make a clear distinction between the text and the analysis of, or comments on, the text. Numbers of chapters, as in Chapter **5** above, are also in bold, as are numbers of sections, figures and cartoons. The names of the research participants, in Chapters **6** and **7** are also in bold, to enable greater clarity about who’s experience is under discussion.

Single quotation marks around a word or phrase indicate key terms, whose meaning and significance are defined in the study.

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