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What are Coaches Afraid of? An Exploration of Courage and the Path to Coaching Mastery

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Abstract

Coaching is a growing industry focusing on helping individuals perform better at work and in their lives. Coaches specialize in facilitating a conversational, relationship-based process that assists individuals in attaining meaningful personal and professional goals. As clients work side by side with coaches, they may experience varying degrees of internal psychological, and emotional barriers. As a result, courage for the client has often been discussed in popular coaching literature (Kimsey-House, Kimsey-House, Sandahl, & Whitworth, 2011), and is considered an important aspect of the client's success much of the time. However, during a review of the psychological literature on courage it was determined that, compared with the client, courage of the coach is something that has been explored much less, or not at all. More precisely, the internal psychological or emotional barriers coaches often face, and whether or not courage is seen as an important aspect of a coach's ability to deliver high quality coaching are concepts that appear to have no empirical foundation. The objective of this study is to better understand the experience of leading coaches. Specifically, the following qualitative interview-based research aims to explore opinions and attitudes regarding common professional obstacles, primarily centered on the emotion of fear. This series of structured interviews asked participants to report on their own professional experiences and to articulate steps they have taken in facing and overcoming fear within their professional role, and throughout the course of their coaching development. Additionally, the interviewers inquired as to whether or not participant coaches perceived the construct of courage as an important factor in the professional development of coaches, in delivering high quality coaching, and ultimately in achieving mastery as a coach.

Keywords

Coaching, mastery, courage, fear, bravery

Disciplines

Other Psychology

What are coaches afraid of?
An exploration of courage and the path to coaching mastery

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A Capstone Project Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Applied Positive Psychology

Advisor: Robert Biswas-Diener

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Coaching is a growing industry focusing on helping individuals perform better at work and in their lives. Coaches specialize in facilitating a conversational, relationship-based process that assists individuals in attaining meaningful personal and professional goals. As clients work side by side with coaches, they may experience varying degrees of internal psychological, and emotional barriers. As a result, courage for the client has often been discussed in popular coaching literature (Kimsey-House, Kimsey-House, Sandahl, & Whitworth, 2011), and is considered an important aspect of the client's success much of the time. However, during a review of the psychological literature on courage it was determined that, compared with the client, courage of the coach is something that has been explored much less, or not at all. More precisely, the internal psychological or emotional barriers coaches often face, and whether or not courage is seen as an important aspect of a coach's ability to deliver high quality coaching are concepts that appear to have no empirical foundation. The objective of this study is to better understand the experience of leading coaches. Specifically, the following qualitative interview-based research aims to explore opinions and attitudes regarding common professional obstacles, primarily centered on the emotion of fear. This series of structured interviews asked participants to report on their own professional experiences and to articulate steps they have taken in facing and overcoming fear within their professional role, and throughout the course of their coaching development. Additionally, the interviewers inquired as to whether or not participant coaches perceived the construct of courage as an important factor in the professional development of coaches, in delivering high quality coaching, and ultimately in achieving mastery as a coach.

Preface

"The ability of a coach to generate courage in a client is essential. It is one of the most important things. My ability to see and experience my client's heart and then work with them…that's how they are going to transform, that's how they are going to evolve. They need to leap courageously into the next part of their life, and my job is really to be there with them as they are doing that"

-Leadership coach, courage and coaching study, 2015

"Why aren't you taking any risks?" I sat in silence. My desk chair offering little reprieve from the discomfort associated with the feeling that I had failed in some way. I looked out my window, thinking about how I might respond, even though part of me had known from the moment she first asked the question. *I was afraid.*

Before we reviewed any more of the recording of my coaching session, my mentor's voice came across the other end of the line again, "If you don't step outside your comfort zone, if you don't share what is really going on, if you don't ask the hard questions, what does that teach your client?" Again all traces of sound left the call, as she sat and waited for my response to the rhetorical gauntlet she had just thrown out onto the table.

Reflecting back on this moment I realize that there are times in our lives when someone articulates the truth of our experience in such a way that it can feel like we have been punched in the gut. The wind gets knocked out of us for a moment, and we may stagger, or even fall. The sting of their critique coming, not from a feeling of being hurt in some way, but rather, from the realization that they have cut through any outer exterior we may have put up, and have gone directly to the core of what matters most in that given situation. Thankfully, built into every fall, is an opportunity to get back up, to take an honest look at our lives, and to grow stronger. That summer afternoon was no exception.

The lesson my mentor instilled in me that day was that being a good coach often means we must lead from a place of bravery. Built into this idea is the recognition that while a step-by-

step approach, or methodology, may serve a valuable purpose in our coaching development, it also can be the very thing that limits us, and limits our clients. Courageous leadership in coaching therefore is not about tidiness, order, or following directions. Instead it is about leaving those things behind, and choosing to intentionally develop the qualities of our character that allow us to meet our clients authentically, empathically, honestly, vulnerably, and with compassion. The emphasis on what we are "doing" with our clients is lessened, as our attention is reoriented to focus more on the way we are "being" with them in the coaching relationship. There is no script for this, no road map, and thus when we move in this direction we show our clients that it is ok to take risks, it is ok to be wrong, it is ok to fail, it is ok to trust, and it is ok to be uncomfortable, or even afraid. When a client sees their coach begin to do this, to step courageously off the beaten path, they may be inspired to follow in the coach's footsteps. If, or when, they do, the client may begin to realize that they are more courageous, resilient, and capable than they had previously imagined.

Over time, I have learned that successful coaching does not just translate into a client doing things differently. It is also about them being, and becoming the person they have always wanted to be. This realization has not only shaped the way I strive to show up for my clients, and for the coaches I work with, but also has served as a catalyst for the pages you hold in your hand. Upon finishing this paper and putting it out into the world, it is my hope that its contents may offer coaches, and other readers out there what my mentor offered me on that fateful day: inspiration to live life more courageously, and to empower others to do the same.

"What lies behind us, and what lies before us, are tiny matters compared to what lies within us."
-Ralph Waldo Emerson

Dedication

To my best friend, and wife Laura, thank you for always believing me, and for loving me in a

way that gives me the courage to pursue dreams big enough to scare me.

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I. BACKGROUND ON COACHING

One of the more natural vehicles for applying positive psychology research findings, theories, tools, and ideas may be coaching (Biswas-Diener, 2010). It doesn't take much reading of the literature on positive psychology, and coaching to see why. There are many commonalities that exist between these two fields, and while it would be easy to spend time delving into all of them, that effort would not align with the purpose of this paper. So instead, I plan to narrow our focus and hone in on three similarities that I see as being the most important and relevant to this discussion. The first, and most foundational of which is that the main underlying assumption in both positive psychology, and coaching, is that people are generally healthy, have mostly normal levels of psychological functioning, and are inherently oriented toward intrapersonal growth and optimal ways living and being (Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007). In coaching this is embedded into the core worldview of the coach, which is often described as the stance a coach takes toward his or her clients. The basic belief within which is that coaching clients are creative, resourceful, and whole. They are not viewed as broken, nor are they seen as needing to be fixed (Kimsey House et al., 2011). This perspective drives the coaching process, as coaches strive to meet their clients where they are, and empower them to then move forward to where they want to go. These assumptions are not simply unfounded idealism either, but rather serve as practical guidelines for targeting a normal functioning population, in both coaching, and positive psychology research and interventions.

The second plot of common ground between these two disciplines is the alignment that exists between their overarching goals. Scientists study positive psychology constructs in an effort to uncover what enables individuals, organizations, and communities to thrive (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) They do this by way of controlled experimentation, cutting-edge

empirical methods, and advanced statistical techniques (Biswas-Diener, 2010). While coaches

are also interested in human flourishing, they tend to focus less of their attention and energy on

understanding the science behind human flourishing, and more of it on direct application that is

intended to move clients toward thriving. The definition for coaching offered by the International

Coach Federation (ICF) is an example of what is meant here. Coaching is: "Partnering with

clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal

and professional potential. This process helps clients dramatically improve their outlook on work

and life, while improving their leadership skills and unlocking potential" ("International Coach

Federation," n.d.).

A third commonality, which in my view is perhaps the most important reason why

coaching has been a medium of choice for practicing positive psychology (Biswas-Diener, 2010),

is that the coaching approach may be an effective means for determining person-activity fit

(Lyubomirksy, 2007) for empirically validated interventions and tools that come out of positive

psychology. In other words, experienced coaches often use various coaching skills like mindful

attention, in combination with their genuine presence, to assist in identifying people's readiness

for change, motivation, and when, and how, to bring various tools and techniques into the

conversation. This last point remains somewhat speculative in nature, and needs to be tested

empirically, however psychologists within positive psychology have previously suggested that

coaching is an effective method for using a variety of tools with clients (Biswas-Diener, 2010).

There are some caveats here however, as well as possible opportunities for the future. For

example, Biswas-Diener (2010) reminds us that coaches planning on integrating positive

psychology with coaching should be prudent and thorough in understanding the various nuances

of the science, the contextual factors that may impact effective practice, as well as find ways to

stay up-to-date with the latest research findings. Positive psychology is a growing field and new studies can emerge that show that the findings scientists initially thought were true, need to be modified, or in some cases thrown out all together. As for opportunities, coaches and researchers within positive psychology may be able to help one another move forward. Coaches often use tools, techniques, and methodology that they discover work from their own experience, that they learned in coach training, or that they have heard work from other coaches. While this may be working well on many fronts, there often remains a deficit here: Many of the practices within coaching have not been empirically tested, or validated. Thus, insights into the mechanisms responsible for success are in many ways still waiting to be ascertained. Positive psychology researchers can fill this void by conducting research on coaching practices and techniques that coaches have found to work in the trenches. In doing so, other practitioners and people within the field of positive psychology could benefit, because the number of validated interventions, tools, and ways of working with people could grow.

This brings us to an important conclusion; in order to improve, expand on, and grow a field we need to discover both what works, and what doesn't work so well. As we do, the practices that work can be cultivated, expanded upon, and used to create a sustainable foundation for future practice (Williams & Menendez, 2015). At the same time, the practices found to be ineffective can be abandoned. This is important not only in terms of carrying the field forward, but also in providing ethically sound and valuable practices for clients, as well as, helping coaches and practitioners to discern what it takes to be the best they can be (Vella-Brodrick, 2014; Williams & Menendez, 2015). There is a growing body of research within positive psychology that is already providing some guidance for coaches around evidence-based theory and practices including, but not limited to, the science behind curiosity, strengths, solution

focused inquiry, positive emotion, negative emotion, mindset, and more. However, there are many topics that still need to be investigated and much that remains unknown. For instance some questions that I have been grappling with both as a coach, and now as a student of positive psychology, are what separates good coaches from those who are considered masterful? What holds coaches back on the road to mastery? And, do courage, fear, or both, play an important role in high quality coaching? This paper, including my exploratory qualitative research study on courage and coaching, are an initial attempt to discover empirical answers to these questions.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Positive Psychology

Positive psychology has been previously defined as the empirical study of strengths, virtues, and what makes life worth living (Peterson, 2006; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Since Martin Seligman's indoctrination of the field in 1998 (Lopez & Gallagher, 2009), modern scientists have been empirically validating the underlying assumption of positive psychology: the alleviation of suffering is not synonymous with the experience of optimal living, nor does the absence of misery necessarily mean that people feel fully alive (Seligman, 2002). This guiding paradigm has, in many ways, been a departure from psychologists' more traditional emphasis on trauma, pathology, and healing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Peterson (2006) reminds us however, that positive psychology is not meant to disregard the more negative psychological aspects of the human experience. Nor is it meant to be a replacement for the approaches, treatments, or methodologies found in traditional psychology. Interventions for mental illness remain vital. However, positive psychologists have also identified an entire population of people who maintain normal levels of psychological functioning, yet are interested in taking their lives

to the next level. Positive psychology then may be viewed as an attempt to meet the needs of this

population. More specifically, it is an addition to psychology that has opened the door to new

lines of scientific inquiry, investigation, and discovery into the causes and correlates of human

happiness and wellbeing (Seligman, 2011).

The implications of such a trajectory in psychological science are far reaching. As we

begin to understand what enables the most extraordinary ways of living and working, we will

likely implement what we know. Thus, researchers have suggested that the science of positive

psychology may end up acting as a catalyst for restructuring the ways in which we conduct

ourselves as individuals, groups, and larger societies, in domains including but not limited to

healthcare, policy, law, economics, education, and technology (Deci & Ryan, 2001).

While positive psychology researchers have captivated the attention of the public in

recent years, by focusing on topics like meaning, purpose, engagement, positive emotion,

strengths, resilience, and positive relationships, these concepts were not born out of the field of

positive psychology. People have been fascinated with what makes life worth living for

millennia (Duckworth, Seligman, & Steen, 2004), which is perhaps why positive psychology is a

field said to have " a very short history, but a very long past" (Peterson, 2006, p. 4).

Famous examples of this are sprinkled throughout history. For instance in his early

writings, Aristotle claimed that happiness was the highest aspiration of the human race, and that

all other goals people sought after, including fame, fortune, and power were in service of this

greater end (Aristotle, 1999; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Additionally, past religious leaders such

as Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, and Thomas Aquinas dedicated their lives to pursuing and

realizing answers to questions about enlightenment, virtue, and transcendence (Peterson, 2006).

Contemporary spiritual leaders such as the Dalai Lama have followed suit, teaching us that the

main purpose of human life is to be happy, and offering insights into how we might be more fulfilled in our lives (Cutler & Dalai Lama, 1998).

In the late 19th, and early 20th centuries psychologists joined the fray. Carl Jung, for example, focused his studies on discovering how humans could develop themselves in order to realize all they were capable of (Linley & Joseph, 2004), and William James, who many consider the father of modern psychology, dedicated much of his time to the study of positive habit formation, focused attention and transcendence (James, 1892/1984). James was convinced that these practices and pursuits could have transformational effects on the human experience and provide a path toward optimal human functioning (Rathunde, 2001). As time passed, interest in such subjects evolved into 2 of the 3 original missions of psychology: identifying and nurturing high talent, and enhancing the lives of all human beings by making them more productive and fulfilling (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). However, before modern research methods could be applied to many of these early philosophical, spiritual, and psychological hypotheses, World War II arrived and the direction that the field of psychology had been headed in, changed.

After the war, troops began to return home suffering from numerous psychological disorders, and with them came an increased need for psychological services. Because of this, resources in the field were reallocated. Practicing clinicians, as well as psychological researchers, were now granted funding through governmental and public agencies, specifically dedicated to furthering the understanding and application of effective diagnoses, treatments, and cures for mental illness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This changing tide produced two major consequences. First, large strides were made in the domain of mental illness in regards to both research and practice. Second, scientific advances around the nature of optimal human functioning slowed down significantly.

While major changes were occurring in the field, not all psychologists moved in the direction of the disease model. For example, Deci and Ryan (2001) remind us that the rise of the humanistic movement during the 1960's and 70's, was actually the first major period where interest in human potential, optimal experiences, and self-actualization peaked within psychology. Theories and practices such as Rogers' (1961) conception of the fully functioning person, and advocacy of client-centered therapy, as well as Maslow's hierarchy of needs, idea of self-actualization, and related theories of human motivation (Maslow, 1968) demonstrate how some psychologists remained committed to the study of healthy psychological functioning. In considering its popularity and theoretical congruencies with positive psychology, one may wonder why humanistic psychology did not gain more traction in mainstream science or academia. Part of the thinking on this is that humanistic psychology had a shortage of quantitative evidence behind it. Many humanists were said to have believed that controlled laboratory experiments often failed to capture the complexity of the human experience, and frequently resulted in an oversimplification of psychological constructs, motivations, and behaviors (Peterson, 2006). Or, perhaps it was for other reasons. Interestingly however, this deficit in research may have been what created the opportunity for the modern science of positive psychology to take hold (Peterson, 2006).

Modern psychologists interested in the positive have introduced more sophisticated, rigorous, and advanced methods of scientific investigation for studying well-being. Theories and ideas that have been presented throughout history are now being systematically investigated for validity and reliability. Topics previously thought to be 'soft' now have hard evidence behind them and as a result psychological researchers have been able to show that what is good in life is real, and should not be dismissed as disingenuous, nor as some sort of ungrounded, unrealistic

fluff (Peterson 2013). Examples of this abound. Fredrickson (2013) has demonstrated, (through measuring cardiac vagal tone), that experiencing moments of positive connection with others improves physiological functioning. Additionally, Diener's (1984) seminal work on subjective well-being (SWB) has helped provide a backbone for positive psychology in that he has shown that well-being can be effectively measured not just by looking for, and quantifying the absence of what is bad, (negative affect in this case), but also by simultaneously assessing and evaluating the presence of what is good in life, (positive affect, and life satisfaction).

Researchers within the field of positive psychology are on a mission to understand the complexity of well-being, and all that contributes to it. Aristotle originally suggested that happiness meant engaging in a life of virtue, nobility, and moral goodness. He termed this type of happiness *Eudaimonia* (Deci & Ryan, 2001). Modern scientists have now taken this idea and constructed empirically validated theories of eudaimonic wellbeing. Ryff (1989) for instance, in developing her model of psychological well being (PWB), used factor analysis to arrive at 6 distinct determinants of well being: self-acceptance, positive relationships, personal growth, autonomy, environmental mastery and purpose in life. Deci and Ryan (2001) have theorized that human beings have three overarching needs which include autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When these are needs are met, part of the result is a positive boost in an individual's well-being. Seligman (2011) has suggested an alternative theory of well-being, captured in the acronym PERMA, identifying positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning in life, and achievement as five important factors of human flourishing. Additionally, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) put forth his theory of flow which suggests that the best times in our lives are not when we feel passive, or comfortable, but instead occur when we feel challenged, and fully engaged in what we are doing.

Part of the benefit of the modern science of positive psychology is that researchers can now effectively highlight patterns and incongruences related to well-being and back them up with quantifiable data, as can be seen by the many theories listed above. What we risk however is what the humanists eluded to early on, a potential oversimplification into the nature of human existence (Peterson, 2006). Are there really only 5 or 6 major elements of well-being? Is a there really a well-being hierarchy? Waterman (1993) reminds us, in his study demonstrating the strong positive correlation between hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing, that happiness may not be as easily divvied up as we might like it to be. Biswas-Diener (2015) follows this up in suggesting we would be wise to remember this, remain curious about the inner workings of well-being that could be at play, and not be too hasty to draw conclusions. On a related note: while positive psychology was reintroduced as an effort to add to psychology, as well as to balance out psychologists' majority interest in illness, scientists are discovering that there can be too much of a good thing (Ciarrochi, Kashdan, & Harris, 2013). Focusing one's attention solely on building, and using strengths to navigate through life may hinder progress in certain situations and contexts, and can have damaging psychological effects (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & Minhas, 2011). In addition there are times and specific situations where negative emotions, and strategies are much more effective in helping us to move forward, than their positive counterparts (Biswas-Diener & Kashdan, 2014). Thus it is important that we continue to think critically, understand nuances of the science and to remember that a balanced approach may continue to move us toward a healthy future within the field (Ciarrochi et al., 2013).

Relevant Constructs

Taking action and changing behavior are not necessarily easy for people to do (Arloski, 2014), which is perhaps why psychologists, and coaches have long been interested in questions

related to motivation. These questions become more challenging to answer however, when

attempting to understand when and why people may choose to act in the face of fear.

Psychologists have recently begun exploring this line of inquiry and are starting to gain a better

understanding of the psychological and emotional processes behind courageous actions (Pury &

Starkey, 2007). There is still much that remains unknown however. In the following section I

will explore four relevant constructs to courage, coaching, and what may be behind people taking

action in an effort to provide a theoretical and structural foundation for the rest of our discussion.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy has been defined as our belief in our ability to succeed in what we set out to

do (Maddux, 2009). Bandura's (1977) seminal work on this construct points out that self-

efficacy does not refer to our belief that we will achieve a goal, but instead it is about whether we

believe that we have the internal capacity to do so. Are we capable of doing it? That is a defining

question in the self-efficacy literature. Furthermore, the answer to this question has been

described to be a key determinant in what actions and behaviors people will decide to engage in

throughout the course of their lives, simply meaning: we are more likely to start climbing

mountains that we believe we are capable of conquering. The mountain analogy here is

intentional, as researchers point out that self-efficacy is not particularly important in the smaller

more trivial matters we face in our lives (Maddux, 2009). Furthermore, high levels of self-

efficacy are positively correlated with increased energy and perseverance in our pursuits, or put

another way, if we take action toward a goal, but have low self-efficacy, we likely will spend less

of our energy toward it, and will probably give up (Bandura, 1977).

Hope

Seligman & Peterson (2004) sum up the historical thinking on hope in the following definition: "Hope refers to positive expectations about matters that have a reasonable likelihood of coming to pass," (p. 571). Hope is not only thought of as an emotional experience, a way of thinking, or a virtue however. Recently it has been developed into a concrete theory within the field of positive psychology.

Snyder's (2002) research has shown that people have a desire to move in the direction of what is positive. Specifically, he has developed hope theory, which has three core elements consisting of goals, agency, and pathways. Goals refer to the personally desirable outcomes that someone is looking to achieve, agency consists of their motivation for taking action toward those goals, and pathways represent the number of possible ways they might be able to accomplish what they are looking to do. Hope seems to be a vital aspect of continuing to strive for what is worthwhile in life.

Resilience

Resilience has been previously defined as, "good outcomes despite serious threats to adaptation or development," (Masten, 2001, p. 228). In short resilience is about our ability to bounce back from adversity (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). Additionally, Brown (2015) proposes that resilience and courage go hand in hand. If we are resilient it means when we fall, we dust ourselves off, get back up, and keep going. This is a process that takes courage. We have to risk falling in the first place, and then once we fall, we have to rise and put ourselves at risk all over again. Interestingly, psychologists have discovered that resilience is both an ordinary part of being human (Masten, 2001), and is something that can be cultivated through cognitive skills training. When people have more resilience they can more effectively navigate life's hurdles,

which psychologists have shown to be positively correlated with well-being (Reivich & Shatté, 2002).

Altruism and Empathy

Can people be motivated to act solely because by doing so they may positively impact another person's wellbeing? This is a question that people have long been interested in, and is what psychologists refer to as altruistic motivation. There have been many arguments against this idea, the most common of which is essentially that as long as people are driven, even a little bit, by ego, they are incapable of purely altruistic actions (Batson, Ahmad, & Lishner, 2009). There has been significant research done to disprove this idea however. Much of which has come from findings related to the empathy altruism hypothesis, which has provided support to show that empathy can boost altruistic motivations, and that people may be more willing to act solely to benefit the welfare of others than has been previously thought (Batson et al., 2009). This holds powerful theoretical implications, in that if we can increase our levels of empathy we will be more likely to make the lives of those around us better.

III. COURAGE

Historical Roots of Courage

In order to fully grasp the historical and theoretical roots of courage, we must look outside the field of psychology. The reasons for this are likely two fold. Firstly, psychological research and courage do not share a long history together (Woodard, & Pury, 2007). Rather than psychologists dedicating their time and energy to studying the virtuous nature of courage (Seligman, Petersen, 2004), many within the field have chosen to spend a greater majority of their time focusing on courage's darker shadow side (Rachman, 2004). The most notable element

of which is fear (Pury & Lopez, 2010). In hindsight, a parallel can be drawn here between

courage and positive psychology. To some extent both topics appear to have been left out in the

cold by psychological researchers, and temporarily neglected.

The second reason for searching beyond the bounds of psychology is that that scholars

within other disciplines, such as philosophy, have explored the nature of courage for millennia

(Rachman, 2004). Putman (2010) took note of this when he leaned on the shoulders of early

philosophers to tell a more complete origin story of courage that included a review and

dissemination of many of the philosophical underpinnings of this construct. In the coming pages

we will follow in his footsteps and explore some of the historical roots of this virtue together, as

well as how the thinking on courage has evolved and grown in the modern era. Additionally, it is

worth clarifying that while a comprehensive review of the complete philosophical and academic

study of courage would be ideal, it would also likely fill the pages of multiple books and thus is

beyond the scope of this paper. Thus this paper will attempt to be as thorough as possible,

covering key findings throughout the years by some of the most highly cited philosophers and

psychologists on the subject, yet will also realistically leave some territory unexamined, which

opens up the possibility for further academic review in the future.

What is courage? This question, found in the early writings of Plato (Plato, 1961),

seems to be as natural a place as any to start our conversation. After all, if we can parse out a

definition it will ground us in a common understanding, and simultaneously serve as a platform

for our future discussion to launch from. On top of being a logical place to begin, this initial

question also should be reasonably easy to answer as examples of courage abound throughout

time (Lopez, O'Byrne, & Petersen, 2003). One might remember a man with a briefcase standing

up to a line of tanks in a famous square, a woman refusing to go to the back of a bus where she

was "supposed to be", the prisoner of a concentration camp whose story inspired millions, and a man who emphatically shared with the world he had a dream. Do these acts strike you as courageous? In other words, do they all exemplify courage? I would wager that most people wouldn't think twice before answering, yes. The tougher question however is, what is it that makes them so? Courage is a concept, which might be described as simultaneously both foreign and familiar. We intuitively recognize courage when we see it, but often struggle to describe it upon being asked to do so. This might be fine in casual conversation, but doesn't do us much good when trying to better understand it through a scientific lens (Lopez et al., 2003; Rate, 2010). Unfortunately for our purposes, the initial question we posed looks as though it will be more difficult to answer than first thought.

Courage is a complex and multifaceted part of the human experience (Pury et al., 2007), the complete depth and breadth of which has evaded some of the greatest minds of our time. Thousands of years ago Laches, Nicias, and Socrates came up short when trying to define courage (Plato, 1961), and it could be argued that modern day philosophers and psychologists haven't gained much ground since (Lopez et al., 2003; Rate, 2010), at least when it comes to finding a unifying operational definition for this construct (Rate, Clark, Lindsay, & Sternberg, 2007). There are many reasons why this might be. One of those conceivably being that scientists haven't studied courage long enough to unearth all of its various nuances and correlates (Pury, Kowalski, & Spearman, 2007), or, maybe it is because courage evolves with the times, and thus has dynamic and expanding definitions (Rate, 2010). Rate et al., (2007) corroborate this in their review of the courage literature where they found well over 29 different definitions of courage, including many that were rendered outdated or obsolete (Rate et al., 2007). This begs the additional potentiality that there may not be a universal definition to be had. Instead it remains

plausible that many different types of courage exist which possess some truly distinct qualities from one another, and cannot be neatly tied together with a common thread. Whatever the case may be a final lingering question remains; not having a standard definition to build off of, how might we best begin to review the construct of courage? I believe the answer is as any good scholar does, by examining some of the best thoughts on the subject up to this point and constructing an argument from there.

      Some of the most important contributions to the conversation on courage come to us from the early Greeks. Philosophers like Aristotle, classified courage as one of many virtues, which were considered to be an integral part of the life well lived (Aristotle, 1999). Aristotle's rationale for this can be found embedded in his proclamation that the highest order of man is to be happy, or to live the "good life" (Aristotle, 1999; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), and that the road to achieving this aim is a road that begins and ends with virtue. The good life referred to in this context is not necessarily associated with what is easy or pleasant, but rather has to do with uncovering meaning, discovering purpose, practicing virtue, and realizing one's potential. Additionally we are reminded that this type of happiness, what Aristotle calls the soul's pursuit of excellence, requires conscious choice and deliberate action. Passivity is not an option (Melchert, 2002). Perhaps the most extreme example of the arduous nature of exercising virtue can be found when considering the noble death of a soldier in the line of duty. While for some this may not sound like an aspect of the good life, it is important to remember that life has a beginning and an end, and for Aristotle it was this type of ending that he thought represented the virtue of courage in its purest form (Sanford, 2010). With all of this in mind, I would suggest that the conception of the road to the good life as beginning and ending with virtue could be slightly modified to, "the road to the good life begins and ends with courage." For choosing to embark

upon the road less traveled is not a choice to be taken lightly, nor is it one that may be considered easy or comfortable. It is a courageous choice, and one that may lead to life's ultimate rewards.

In light of our recent discussion it would be easy to infer that courage, as we have been referring to it, is the opposite of cowardice. Although rational, this assumption about Aristotle's notion of courage would be an inaccurate one. An important distinction will help clarify why, and to do so, we must examine both Aristotle's larger view on virtue, as well as his thoughts about what types of acts qualify as courageous, and which do not. Aristotle posited that virtue is the 'golden mean' between two extremes, and that virtues are necessarily moral in nature. In other words, they must be carried out for a noble purpose. One of his most famous sayings demonstrates this idea quite nicely. "Anybody can become angry, that is easy. But to be angry with the right person and to the right degree and at the right time and for the right purpose and in the right way that is not within everybody's power and is not easy" (Aristotle, 1999). There are three important points to pull out of this statement. The first two are simply how it reinforces the ideas of the moral nature of virtue, and that virtue is indeed a mean, as opposed to an extreme. When this latter part is applied to courage, the mean is found between cowardice and rashness, or what is sometimes referred to as foolhardiness (Sanford, 2010). While the first two points are important to advance our understanding of courage, it is the final point, which highlights the idea that practicing the mean is not in everybody's power, that may be the most worth taking a closer look at.

Aristotle's definition of courage is inherently limited in its scope. The first part of this is that as he defines it, courage remains applicable only to soldiers in battle (Olsthoorn, 2007). This eliminates the possibility of women and children practicing courage. Additionally, Aristotle mentions there are many types of fake courage, acts that appear to be courageous at first glance,

but on closer inspection are actually impostors (Sanford, 2010). For the purposes of this paper it

is not necessary to go into the details of all of these acts but simply to clarify that all of these

involve a failure to act nobly by the actor. The main sources of these failures are thought to be

expertise, intention, or an actor who doesn't possess the right inner character (Sanford, 2010).

Aristotle's philosophical insights have offered up excellent contributions to the conversation on

both courage and virtue, though it seems that some of his thinking is becoming a bit outdated.

Dying a noble death in battle may still be one of the most highly praised acts of heroism (Pury,

2008), however in our modern world, with declining levels of violence (Pinker, 2011), and

increasing levels of affluence and comfort (Biswas-Diener & Kashdan, 2014), the need to

expand our thinking on courage has become more pronounced.

Modern psychologists attribute some of the important philosophical expansions in the

thinking on courage to the stoics and the existentialists (Putman, 2010). In the hope of offering

clarity on these points, I think it would be wise to first take a step back briefly, and offer some

contextual background into the general nature of these philosophies. Firstly, I would offer that

the essence of stoicism could be captured in this way: It's not what happens to you that matters,

it's what you choose to do with it. For the stoics, part of being human means accepting the idea

that what inevitably befalls us in our lives, whether it is challenging, easy, or otherwise, is almost

entirely outside of our control (Putman, 2010). Common examples of this may include natural

disasters, accidents, unexpected job loss, medical diagnoses etc. The list goes on and on. One of

the darkest illustrations of this point however, and one which I want to use in order to highlight

the practicality of stoic courage, even under extreme conditions (Holiday, 2014), was the

creation of concentration camps during World War II. As the war waged on, Nazi soldiers were

tasked with capturing individuals, families, and the like, and sending them off to be locked up,

tortured, and ultimately killed. For some of the victims there may have been opportunities to hide, or flee, however the citizens who were captured didn't have any real control over the Nazi invasions. This was simply the unfortunate turn their lives took.

At this point, one might think that the stoic view is quite reactive (Putman, 2010). After all, the basic assumption seems to be, terrible stuff happens, you can't control it, too bad. With this view in place it is curious why we wouldn't just submit to life, give up, and let it run its course. According to philosophers and psychologists, this is exactly where the opportunity for stoic courage presents itself (Putman, 2010).

A profound example of stoic courage in action resides in the inspiring case of a concentration camp survivor, Viktor Frankl. In his book, Man's Search for Meaning, he sums up stoic courage in one fell swoop. "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing; the last of the human freedoms- to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way" (Frankl, 1959, p. 66). Courage for the stoics means maintaining a sense of mastery over one's inner domain. It is about standing guard at the door of our mind, and carefully monitoring what thoughts we let in, and what thoughts we let out. When people choose to do this, it is often associated with personal integrity, freedom, and righteousness (Frankl, 1959). Stoic courage provides an important point of departure from Aristotle's view as well, in that acts of stoic courage do not necessarily include the risk of physical harm, or mortal danger, which may make it more relevant for our more modern industrialized world (Putman, 2010). In this respect, sometimes the stoic path is just about small daily decisions. This could translate into saying no when social conformity pushes us to say yes. A specific example of this might be choosing to stand up for what is morally right, in the face of ostracism, alienation, or rejection (Putman, 2004). It might also mean choosing to meet hostility with compassion, stressful situations or

people with patience, or anger with empathy. Holiday (2014) reminds us that at the heart of stoic philosophy is the notion that in every adversity, even those that are the most dire or challenging, exists am opportunity to practice virtue. The courageous path for the stoics then is marked by consciously choosing the perspective that not only serves us, but unlocks possibilities. A path I would argue is far from reactive.

The existentialist view on courage appears to share two major similarities with that of the stoics. The first is that courage does not necessarily have to be physical in nature, as Aristotle proposed, and the second is that human beings always have a choice about how they will respond to situations. There is a famous existentialist ideal that, "existence precedes essence," which translates into the notion that we have no preordained destiny. Instead our lives are a reflection of the choices that we make. This concept, that we always have a choice, can stir up a good deal of anxiety, discomfort, and fear as people reconsider what it means to be responsible in their lives. Moving toward a place where we are no longer claim that we must, that we have to, or that we have no choice in matters related to our experience, is where opportunities for courage exist. Bravery then, does not reside in the act of doing, or not doing, but rather hinges on a person recognizing and accepting responsibility for the choices they have, and owning them. Philosophers have suggested that acting in this way leads to a more authentic way of living, free from the constraints imposed by a life of constant reaction (Putman, 2010).

In the following passage, Covey (2004) offers insight into what is meant by this in his related description of what he calls the proactive person:

> "The ability to subordinate an impulse to a value is the essence of the proactive
> person. Reactive people are driven by feelings, by circumstances, by conditions, by their
> environment. Proactive people are driven by values-carefully thought about, selected and

internalized values," he goes on to say, "Until a person can say deeply and honestly, I am

what I am today because of the choices I made yesterday, that person cannot say, I

choose otherwise" (Covey, 2004, p. 72).

By proposing varied viewpoints on courage, early philosophers have highlighted how this

construct may look different based upon people's beliefs, and circumstances. In addition, it

seems that our societal perspectives on courage may evolve over time. All of these initial

observations have helped lay down a rich and important theoretical foundation for modern

research.

Modern Research on Courage

One of the biggest contributions of modern scientists has been to broaden our theoretical

and empirical understanding of what makes up courage. The scientific method has enabled

researchers to systematically explore common implicit theories of courage, as well as develop

explicit theories of how courage is conceptualized, and carried out in modern times (Rate, 2010).

At the same time courage, as it naturally occurs in the environment, has been a construct that is

notoriously hard to measure by way of laboratory experimentation (Seligman & Peterson, 2004).

Receiving approval to induce risky situations where participants have to demonstrate courage is

not something institutional review boards make easy, or even possible, which is perhaps why

only a few quantitative courage scales have been developed (Howard & Alipour, 2014).

Seligman & Peterson (2004) note that this has posed additional challenges in answering the

question of whether there are courageous people. While individuals may casually refer to a

person as courageous, the majority of empirical researchers mention how exceedingly difficult it

is to define what makes a person courageous, and then measure whether or not they fit these

criteria. It would seem that one would have to follow a person throughout their life as they

confronted risky situations, and note every single courageous action they have taken over time, and then compare the results to an operational definition. Considering that researchers have a difficult time doing individual laboratory experiments with courage, it seems that a longitudinal study may be nearly impossible.

These challenges have led researchers to focus their efforts mostly on survey research, qualitative interviews, and having participants identify and describe actions they consider courageous, and why they believe them to be so (Seligman & Peterson, 2004). Over time these studies have helped researchers to forward the thinking on courage, and move toward their collective goal of coming up with a universal definition. While this has not yet been realized (Rate, 2007), researchers have made significant empirical advancements along two related lines: the classification of different types or brands of courage, and the identification of components of bravery thought to exist across all courageous actions (Pury & Lopez, 2009). In addition, researchers have gained a more thorough understanding of the psychological and emotional process that people experience when exhibiting courage. More recently this has included studies aimed at being able to predict whether or not people will take courageous actions (Pury & Starkey, 2007), determining whether or not courage can be learned (Pury, 2008), and if courage, which has been labeled a virtue, is always a good thing (Pury, Starkey, Kulik, Skjerning & Sullivan, 2015). This section will seek to explore some of these recent findings, however it is outside the scope of this paper to include all of the modern research on courage, and thus further analysis of the literature is recommended.

Two of the most prototypical, and highly lauded, forms of courage can be found in actions that involve an individual risking their life to save another, or involve them standing up for what is morally right in the face of potential alienation, ostracism, or physical harm (Pury,

Kowalski & Spearman, 2007). These are what modern researchers have labeled physical and

moral courage respectively, and are two brands of courage that have intrigued academics and

philosophers for centuries (Pury, Britt, Zinzow & Raymond, 2013). Pury and colleagues (2007)

would deem these acts as forms of general courage, which are defined as actions that are

recognized as courageous by the majority of people.

     Modern psychologists have expanded upon the concept of general courage however, and

are now offering up evidence showing that people from all walks of life can perform courageous

actions in different ways, and to varying degrees (Rate et al., 2007). Pury et al. (2007) refers to

the more mundane forms of courageous action as personal courage, which in essence is the idea

that there are various behaviors, which may be considered courageous for an individual yet are

not recognized as such by larger society. There are a number of brands of courage that fit within

this category. Psychological courage for example, came out of clinicians work with patients

undergoing therapy. Psychologists noted that throughout the therapeutic process patients will

often confront things that are personally scary for them, may perceive that they are at risk of

losing control over their psyche, and ultimately could be ostracized or looked down upon for

seeking help with these challenges. All of which, may require significant personal courage (Pury

et al., 2007), however, to an outsider may be observed as much more benign (Putman, 1997). In

relation, Finfgeld (1999) has helped us to understand vital courage, which is the idea that those

managing medical challenges, or those who are suffering from chronic disease and may be

facing uncertain death, often are courageous as they continue to persevere. Examples of this

abound in modern society. Take for instance, children who choose to bear the burden of painful

treatments as they wait for a call, which may never come, telling them that their heart transplant

has been approved. These acts may be much quieter in nature, in that they are not garnering

much attention, yet it seems that they are brave nonetheless. Another example of personal courage comes to us from the research on vulnerability. Using grounded theory to analyze the data from hundreds of qualitative interviews it was discovered that there were no participant examples of vulnerability, defined as uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure, that were not associated with personal courage (Brown, 2012).

These findings collectively demonstrate a couple of ideas. The first is the thinking on what courage is continues to evolve. More evidence for this comes when looking at how courage is understood as individuals go through developmental stages of the lifespan, which might include the transitions from childhood to adolescence, and then adolescence on to adulthood. Kids for instance often associate bravery with superheroes, or with risking one's life to save the world (Szagun, 1992). Whereas teens and adults may conceptualize bravery more broadly, and may have an easier time relating to acts considered to be morally, psychologically, or personally courageous (Evans & White, 1981; Seligman & Peterson, 2004; Szagun & Schauble, 1997).

The second idea conveyed here seems to be that even though different operational definitions for courage exist, there are common components, which unite them. Rate and colleagues (2007) backed up this sentiment in their studies on implicit theories of courage. After analyzing their data, they discovered 3 universal components of courage:

1) That an act must be carried out voluntarily

2) That there must be a perception of risk, or personal threat by the actor

3) That the act must be in pursuit of a noble goal

They also found that the fourth common component across courageous actions was fear, however, in this particular study it was determined that this was not necessary for courage to occur. This may be surprising considering that fear is commonly associated with courageous

action, both inside, and outside the lab. Seligman & Peterson (2004) for example contend that

without fear, there is no bravery. They address some of the criticisms of this statement, including

the idea of fearlessness, by discussing evidence from qualitative interviews, which shows: even

those who have cultivated high levels of self-efficacy for confronting dangerous situations, such

as policemen and women, or firefighters, still feel fear each time they act. In essence, fear

doesn't go away for them, they just believe in their ability to successfully follow through in life

or death scenarios. This may also be true in less physically threatening situations as well. There

has not been consensus on the specific relationship between fear and courage, and thus

researchers suggest that further exploration is warranted (Rate, 2010).

The last point on courage that I will explore in this section is whether or not it can be

cultivated. There has been much speculation that individuals can indeed grow courage, however

there is little empirical evidence that either confirms, or denies this sentiment at this point in time

(Pury, 2008). While more research is needed on this topic, researchers have offered some initial

informed suggestions for how we might cultivate courage (Biswas-Diener, 2012, Pury, 2008).

Some of these include:

a) Increasing self efficacy, confidence, and intentionality

b) Decreasing risks

c) Increasing the likelihood of success

d) Drawing more attention to the noble goal one is pursuing

e) Getting angry

In conclusion, I would argue that there is much waiting to be discovered about courage,

and scientists should continue their efforts to do so. Courage remains an important and

intuitively understood phenomenon within the human experience. Our lives are not always

pleasant or easy journeys, nor are they entirely composed of peak experiences. There are challenges and adversities that we will inevitably bump into along the way, and it may be our courage, which helps us to transform them into stepping-stones toward future success and well-being. Thus we must continue to examine this construct through a scientific lens, figure out its causes and correlates, understand the situations and contexts where it is either self-defeating or self-enhancing, and whether it can be cultivated. We might also ask if we can create conditions for others where they can grow their own courage in pursuit of self-determined noble goals. Answers to these questions may not only enable us to live the good life, but also contribute to a more positive future for humanity.

IV. COURAGE AND COACHING STUDY

Purpose of the study

Coaching is a growing industry focusing on helping individuals perform better at work and in their lives. Coaches specialize in facilitating a conversational, relationship-based process that assists individuals in attaining meaningful personal and professional goals, which are often associated with desired changes in attitudes, and behaviors. As clients work side by side with coaches, they may experience varying degrees of internal psychological, and emotional barriers, in addition to environmental setbacks. As a result, courage for the client has often been discussed in popular coaching literature (Kimsey-House et al., 2011), and is considered an important aspect of the client's success much of the time. However, during a review of the psychological literature on courage it was determined that, compared with the client, courage of the coach is something that has been explored much less, or not at all. More precisely, the internal psychological or emotional barriers coaches often face, and whether or not courage is seen as an important aspect of a coach's ability to deliver high quality coaching, or ascend from

the ranks of a good coach to a masterful coach are concepts that appear to have no empirical

foundation.

The objective of this study is to better understand the experience of leading coaches.

Specifically, the following qualitative interview-based research aims to explore common

opinions and attitudes regarding common professional obstacles, primarily centered on the

emotion of fear. This series of structured interviews asked participants to report on their own

professional experiences and to articulate steps they have taken in facing and overcoming fear

within their professional role, and throughout the course of their coaching development.

Additionally, the interviewers inquired as to whether or not participant coaches perceived the

construct of courage as an important factor in the professional development of coaches, in

delivering high quality coaching, and ultimately in achieving mastery in coaching. This

exploratory study was the first of its kind, and I remain hopeful that it serves as an important first

step in providing scientific evidence that will enhance the coaching profession.

Procedure

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Pennsylvania approved the

current study aimed at a qualitative exploration of the potential role of fear and courage within

the context of professional coaching. Participant coaches were selected for the study, and a series

of 50-60 minute semi-structured qualitative interviews were scheduled and carried out during the

months of May and June of 2015. The basic demographic information about the sample can be

seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Basic Characteristics of the Participants

Participant #	Gender	Years of experience	Type(s) of coaching currently and previously practiced
1	F	13	Executive, Business
2	M	26	Leadership, Life
3	F	27	Leadership
4	M	35	Transformational leadership development, executive, coaching high level athletes on mental states for peak performance
5	F	15	Wellness, executive
6	F	20	Life
7	M	25	Leadership, life, wellness, executive
8	M	18	Health and wellness, life, business, executive
9	F	23	Life, executive, group, transformational
10	F	21	Entrepreneurial, business
11	M	36	Life, coaching leaders, coaching high net worth clients
12	M	8	Executive, coaching in education
13	F	23	Business, executive, leadership development, athletic

Note that since all participants in the study currently train, mentor, or teach coaches, (or have done so previously), it was not included in the table.

Candidate coaches were part of a convenience sample that was recruited for this study based on two primary factors: years of professional experience and the target population with which they work. With regards to the former I selected coaches with a minimum of five years of professional coaching experience; however, most coaches in the final sample had been coaching for closer to 20 or 30 years, with the average being 22.3 years of professional experience. In terms of the second selection criterion-- the coach's client population-- I recruited coaches that represented as wide a swath of coaching domains as possible. Ultimately, this degree of overall professional representativeness was achieved as evidenced by the final sample. It included coaches specializing in executive coaching, leadership coaching, business coaching, athletic coaching, life coaching, wellness coaching, health coaching, coaching in education, coach

training, and mentor coaching. Many of the coaches specialized in more than one area, and all coaches were currently, or had been, coach trainers, mentors, or coaching instructors.

While gender was not one of the primary factors for selection, there was a nearly even distribution of males and females within the sample selected for interviews, with a total of 7 females and 6 males. This is important to note as it indicates that, although the overall sample is small, any problems with representativeness of the current findings are not likely to be attributable to gender biases. Additionally, many of the coaches involved in the study were identified as thought leaders in the field of coaching, were centrally involved with the founding of the coaching industry, and are noted for their contributions to coaching models and processes through the sale of millions of copies (collectively) of books on the subject. Also, the participants have collectively trained over 60,000 coaches worldwide, largely through coach training programs accredited by the International Coach Federation. Taking all these factors into consideration it can be argued that the participants would likely be able to offer a more thoughtful point of view with regards to coaching than novice, or even moderately experienced coaches. Primarily this is because participant coaches would be well positioned to offer a subjective evaluation of their own experience as seasoned professional coaches, with thousands of client coaching hours, as well as, of the experiences of new to moderately experienced coaches. Since one of the major goals of this study was to explore the potential relationship between fear, courage, and becoming a masterful coach, coach trainer's viewpoints were thought to perhaps be particularly relevant.

After identifying candidates who fit the primary selection criteria, a call was put out through my professional network and prospective participants were contacted via email. The recruitment emails for this study included; a brief overview of the study, a note mentioning the

voluntary nature of the study, an informed consent form, the estimated time required for participation, the dates within which the interview would need to take place, and background information regarding the fact that the study was being conducted as part of a capstone project for the Master of Applied Positive Psychology Program at the University of Pennsylvania. A total of 21 potential candidate coaches were contacted. Of this initial pool 13 participated in the interviews. Among those who did not participate in the study, 3 declined due to scheduling conflicts, and 5 did not respond.

All participants received and signed an informed consent approved by the IRB, and were informed that the research team would keep their identities confidential. Additionally, all participants granted their permission for the interviews to be recorded for the specific purposes of data collection and analysis by the research team following the interviews.

There were 12 open-ended interview questions developed as a result of two primary sources. First an initial pool of items was created as a result of discussions with my capstone advisor, Dr. Biswas-Diener. These discussions focused especially on the potential role of emotion in coaching development, and effectiveness. Adding to this, additional items were generated as a result of reading through peer reviewed journal articles, published academic papers, and non-fiction research based books, all focusing on the topics of: fear, the construct of courage, positive psychology, and coaching. The 12 questions can be seen in Table 2.

The interview began with questions concerning the coaches' background, years of experience, and personal history of coaching skills development. Additionally, participants were asked about their greatest success, and their greatest challenge within the context of their own coaching development. From there the interview progressed into questions about potential fears related to coaching. There were two major reasons for exploring the role of fear within the

context of the participants' development as coaches. The first is that in order to achieve mastery

in coaching, there are experiential lessons, skills, strengths, capacities, and states of being that

will likely enable an individual's success. Equally, there are challenges, barriers, and situations,

which can hinder or halt progress. After a series of conversations with my mentor, I

hypothesized that emotions may be part of the latter category, with coaches' fears suggested to

be particularly salient in regard to their development, and successful realization of mastery.

Table 2. Qualitative question set asked to participants in interviews

Question set for coaching interviews
1. How long have you been a coach?
2. Where did you receive your coach training?
3. What type of coaching do you do?
4. Consider your own coaching development. This might mean formal coursework or it might be experience acquired over time. When you think of your coaching development what has been your greatest success?
5. What has been your greatest challenge?
6. What are some things you have done to address (your own) fear as a coach?
7. Tell me about a time when fear showed up in your coaching. What happened?
8. In terms of your own coaching, what are you, or have you been, most afraid of?
9. How important do you believe courage is in good coaching?
10. For coaches to go from good to great, how important is it that they be courageous?
11. Share about a time when you were courageous in your coaching. What occurred?
12. *If you are a coach trainer,* what are some of the fears that you see in your students?

The second reason for including questions on fear is that in the academic literature, fear often shows up as a major component in many operational definitions and implicit theories of courage, and although research has shown that it is not considered to be a universal component of courage, there is evidence demonstrating that, for many researchers and lay people alike, fear is still a component often associated with courage (Rate, 2010; Pury et al., 2015). Taking this into account I expanded my hypothesis. Courage may be an important part of coaches achieving mastery, because courage is part of what enables coaches to move past their fears.

After exploring coaches' fears, the interview closed with 3 questions about courage, and one final question regarding the fears that coach trainers see in their students. The questions about courage were designed to get at coaches' attitudes about the role of courage in high quality coaching, and coaching development. Additionally, a behavioral question was included to explore what participant coaches subjectively considered a demonstration of courageous action in their professional role. I felt it was important to delve into cognitive attitudes and perspectives on courage and fear, but also to look at how these concepts showed up behaviorally for two reasons. Firstly, asking participants to describe examples of courageous actions aligns with how courage is often operationalized and measured in experimental studies (Pury & Starkey, 2007). Secondly, I thought it would be useful in coding and analyzing the data for this study because I could potentially determine what participants considered to be components of courageous action in coaching, especially when considering that no standard definition of courage was given to participants, nor was one directly asked for. The main reason for this was that the participants' perceived relationship between courage and coaching was thought to be a more interesting and important research question for this study. On top of that it was considered probable that participants would describe their implicit, and explicit theories of courage during the interviews.

Measurement

When the interviews had concluded I met with an independent rater to determine guidelines and protocols for coding and qualitative analysis. To protect the confidentiality of the participants in the study, the independent rater signed a confidentiality agreement. We determined that we would code three main categories of responses; fear, courage, and other. In reference to fear we were primarily interested in what types of fears the coaches reported experiencing in their own coaching, as well as, what types of fears coach trainers reported observing in their students. The rater and I agreed not to develop a priori categories for fear. Instead we would begin coding independently, and during our analysis we planned to note all of the different types of fear described by participants, as well as cognitive and behavioral strategies they used to address fear. Upon finishing, we would meet to discuss our findings, specifically, commonalities, differences, and outliers that showed up in our data. After doing so, we would develop broader categories of fear, under which related types of fear could be organized.

Our reasoning for a more open-ended coding procedure in regards to fear types was partially due to time constraints, and partially because we didn't know the extent to which they might show up in the data. We also decided that we could likely synthesize the types of fear into larger categories just as effectively after an independent round of coding as we could have if we did so beforehand.

Regarding courage the rater and I were interested in how important coaches thought courage was in high quality coaching, and whether or not coaches perceived courage as an important factor in going from good coaching to great coaching. Additionally, we were interested in how coaches described moments of courage in their own coaching. To develop a coding scheme for the final question on courage, the rater and I used prior empirical findings that

show courage has distinct components. We created a priori categories based on four main evidence-based components of courage, 3 of which are thought to be universal features, and must be present for actions to be considered courageous (Rate, 2010; Pury, 2015) The universal components of courage reported on in the literature are:

1) that an action must be voluntarily carried out,

2) perception of risk or threat to the actor must be present,

3) the action must be in service of a noble goal.

The fourth component that is often associated with courage, although not necessarily universal, is the presence of fear (Rate, 2010). Our team agreed that we would code for these components when participants discussed possible behavioral examples of courage, or, described what they deemed to be courageous actions they had taken as a coach. By doing so, we would be able to determine whether or not the actions thought to be courageous by coaches mirrored scholarly findings. To ensure that both raters would be coding in a reliable way we spent five minutes coding the behavioral courage question together. This initial calibration appeared effective as both raters were in agreement about how to proceed. The final category, "other", was established as a way to code for any outliers. Going into this study I had a hypothesis about what may show up in the data, however part of the scientific process is recognizing that a hypothesis could be totally wrong, and that we never really know what will show up in the data until we conduct the study. It is important then to be ready for anything and we wanted to ensure that this was the case by creating an "other" category.

Results

In the coming pages I will discuss the results of the qualitative questions regarding fear, and courage that were addressed in the interviews. Additionally I will use direct quotations from

coaches to demonstrate and highlight various examples of our findings, and show how we coded various categories.

   After the interviews were complete the rater and I met to discuss our findings. The initial topic we addressed was the types of fear that had shown up in the data. We evaluated this from two different vantage points and used the participants' answers to the four questions they were asked about fear (see table 2). The first vantage point was the coaches' own self-reported fears in regards to their experiences as a coach, which included what they reported being most afraid of. The second was in the context of the participants' experiences training coaches, which covered the types of fears they reported observing in their coaching students. The rater and I had both noted dozens of fears reported within each paradigm during our independent analysis. When comparing our analyses, we saw significant overlap amongst the different fears, which we used to develop a coding scheme that synthesized them into broader thematic categories of fear. We were in 100% agreement on 5 larger categories of fear for participant coaches, and 6 larger categories of fear in regards to their students. We also were in total agreement that these categories captured nearly all of the fears expressed in the interviews, aside from the presence of two outliers, which we named "fear of success" and "values conflicts". One coach expressed a fear that they had early on in their experience about being capable enough, skilled enough, and smart enough to be very successful in coaching. The shared that they were afraid of the implications that this could hold, if their belief turned out to be true.. Two other coaches meanwhile reported that they had previously experienced a fear that they would not be able to offer the coaching they knew they were capable of due to what they deemed to be internal values conflicts. Due to these situations being outliers, and reported as occurring rarely, the discussion around them is limited, to make room for the major findings of this study. It would be worth

COURAGE, AND COACHING MASTERY keeping them in mind for related future research however, and if they show up in future data to

revisit them at that point. Table 3 shows the 5 larger categories of self-reported fears of the

participant coaches, along with all of the individual fears originally stated by participants, which
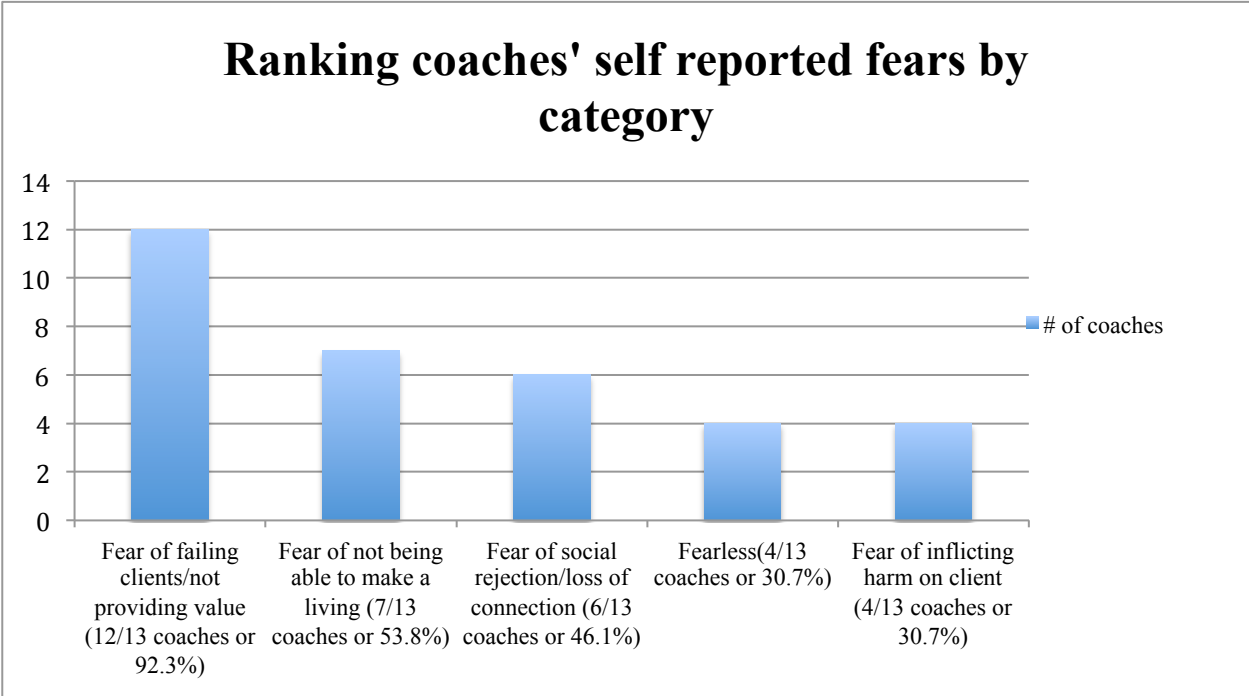
make up the contents of each distinct category.

Table 3. Coaches' self-reported fears during their own coaching, and development

Categories of coaches' fear agreed upon by raters	Specific types of fear mentioned by participant coaches
Lack of professional worth, not being able to make a living	• Fear to charge clients • Fear of charging more • Fear of not being able to make a living • Health problems preventing coach from making a living • Fear of being fired • Fear of losing account/business
Failing clients/not providing value	• Fear of not being of value • Fear of not making a difference • Fear of not doing well with client • Fear of not making progress with client • Fear of not being effective for client • Fear of incompetency • Fear of not knowing enough • Impostor syndrome • Fear of failure • Fear of not knowing what to do or say • Fear of humiliation/criticism due to incompetence • Fear of the unknown • Fear of having no script or formula • Fear of projecting one's own stuff on client, not living up to standards/expectations as a coach • Fear of complacency • Fear of burnout • Fear of boredom • Fear of missing something important
Social Rejection/disapproval/loss of connection	• Fear of rejection • Fear of being laughed at/ridiculed • Fear of not being liked • Fear of lack of social approval • Fear of clients getting mad

Social Rejection/disapproval/loss of connection continued	• Fear of asking tough questions • Fear of saying what is on coach's mind/truth telling • Fear of intimacy • Fear of silence (doubts about client's approval, are they mad?)
Fear of inflicting harm (unintentionally) on client	• Fear of being in territory outside scope of coaching • Fear of doing harm • Fear of enormity of the job • Fear of the wrong timing • Fear of going too far • Fear of crossing a boundary • Fear of pinning someone up against the wall with energy and not being aware of it • Fear of client not being ready • Fear of addressing ethical concerns
Fearless/no fear	• No experience of emotion of fear • Fearless • Fear used to be there but is very rare now

In addition, we wanted to know which type of fear was most prevalent for participants. Were there certain situational circumstances, either cognitively or behaviorally, which were particularly frightening for coaches? Were there categories of fear that seemed to have very little effect on coaches? To answer these questions, we graphed the total number of coaches who had reported experiencing fears in each distinct category. We then translated these numbers into percentages by comparing the number of coaches who had reported experiencing fear within a given category to the sample size of 13. The results can be seen in table 4.

Table 4. Percentage of coaches who reported experiencing fears within larger categories

Ranking coaches' self reported fears by category

Category	# of coaches
Fear of failing clients/not providing value (12/13 coaches or 92.3%)	12
Fear of not being able to make a living (7/13 coaches or 53.8%)	7
Fear of social rejection/loss of connection (6/13 coaches or 46.1%)	6
Fearless (4/13 coaches or 30.7%)	4
Fear of inflicting harm on client (4/13 coaches or 30.7%)	4

The most common category of fear reported, (with 92.3% of coaches reporting some form of it), was coaches' fear of failing their client, or not being able to provide value to the client in some way. A high prevalence of this same fear was seen again in respondents answers to the question, "in terms of your own coaching, what are you, or have you been, most afraid of?" Eight out of 13 coaches reported that failing the client in some way/not providing value was what they were most afraid of. An example that illustrates this category of fear can best be seen in this passage from a life coach who has 36 years of experience and works with leaders.

> "My biggest fear is not making a difference. I worked with a guy for two years and my fear was that I wasn't going to be of value. I think I was of value, but I always wondered, gosh am I really going to be of value? Just like when I am working with world leaders. I am thinking wow! I could be wasting this person's time, and I don't want to do that. I want to help them think. I want to help them be successful."

A study conducted by Pury and Kowalski (2007) may provide some insight into potential reasons why failing clients/not providing value was consistently the highest ranked category of fear among coaches, and coaching students alike. While the connection being proposed may be a bit of stretch, it could be considered plausible, and thus remains intriguing.

Pury and Kowalski (2007) surveyed 298 undergraduates and asked them to describe a time where they acted courageously. After the students had done so, they were then asked to rate their courageous action based on each of the 24 Values In Action character strengths. The idea behind this was to determine what strengths and virtues might be expressed during the students' self-reported courageous acts. Fittingly three of the four strengths that make up the virtue of courage, (bravery, perseverance, and integrity), were listed as top five descriptors for courageous action, by participants in the study. Students' fourth and fifth ranked descriptors of courageous action (hope and kindness) however, were more of a surprise. Not only does this finding offer support for the idea of courage being a master virtue, but it also brings up questions about situational and contextual factors that might effect the degree to which strengths and virtues act as complements to one another. For example, courage paired with kindness, or courage paired with wisdom, could be particularly complementary virtue dyads within a coaching context.

One participant in our study, a leadership coach with 27 years of experience, expressed a possible reason why students in the aforementioned study cited kindness as a top 5 descriptor of courageous action.

> "Coaches care a lot. They come to coaching because they care about people. So they are afraid that they are not going to get the job done for their client, and they are afraid that they are going to fail their client."

Pury and Kowalski (2007) in describing the findings of their study, share a similar sentiment in which they explicitly link kindness and courage. They quote MacIntyre (1981):

"If someone says that he cares for some individual, community, or cause, but is unwilling to risk harm or dangers on his, her, or its own behalf, he puts into question the genuineness of his care and concern. Courage…has a role in human life because of this connection with care and concern" (p. 179)

It appears that courage has a role in coaching because of the coach's care and concern for their client. Another two participants in our study, a leadership coach with 26 years of experience, and an executive coach with 35 years of experience, seem to help close the gap here by sharing their perspectives on courage in coaching. The leadership coach stated:

"If I am coming from my heart and I am taking a big risk with someone and I'm looking over there as a coach and saying for the sake of your transformation I'm gonna lay myself down, I'm gonna jump up and down, I'm gonna pull my hair out, you know whatever I do. Then, that's courage from the coach."

The executive coach also thoughtfully offered up his view on the matter:

"I think maybe, at least theoretically, it's possible to be courageous and direct. But not in relationship, because you increase defensiveness and hurt, and the person wants to avoid you. So courage and care, you know, courage and compassion, these complementary character traits are really important versus isolated traits."

Our next set of findings relate to the categories of coaches' fears that were ranked as least prevalent. The first of which, the fear of harming clients, was mentioned by four out of thirteen coaches. Only one of whom also reported that causing a client harm is what they are most afraid

of. Upon inspecting the data in regards to this, the rater and I agreed that at the base of this fear were likely two interwoven subjective concerns from coaches. One was a violation of professional ethics, and the other one was a violation of personal morals. Specifically, we speculated that coaches likely feel that harming a client is wrong both professionally, and on a personal level. As per the coach's comment above, individuals tend to be drawn to become coaches so that they can make a positive difference in people's lives. To do otherwise would be in direct contradiction with that desire.

The second category within the fear realm that also was ranked least prevalent, was actually not fear at all, but rather a lack of it. 30.7% of coaches in the study mentioned being fearless, or experiencing very little fear as a coach. Some of these participants discussed their sense of fearlessness as a developmental phenomenon, which is reflected in a comment from a life coach with 20 years of experience here:

"I don't know that there's anything I'm afraid of, to be honest, at this point. There were two things that I used to be really afraid of, way back when. One was silence, because I figured, oh my god I've said something now and the client hates me, or is leaving, or hung up on me. So silence used to be the really scary thing for me. And the other really scary thing, way back when, was asking for money. This was in the beginning, when I first started coaching. Now? I honestly don't have any fears."

Other coaches however, reported more of a trait-like quality of fearlessness that could be traced back to the beginning of their coaching experience. A comment from a wellness and executive coach with 15 years of experience highlighted this well when I inquired about her own fears as a coach:

"I don't have the emotional sensation of fear when I coach…I don't have an example of a time fear showed up in my coaching. When I coach, I feel alive. I feel like I am making a difference. Interesting you ask because in reflecting it has come naturally from the beginning. I have never had that thought before, that it has come naturally from the beginning…two of three in my top five VIA character strengths are also in the courage category."

Her last sentiment assumes that fear and courage are connected, which brings up a lingering question: is courage a fixed trait-like quality, or can it be learned? Researchers have been grappling with this for some time, and from an empirical standpoint a definitive answer still remains up in the air. However, there has been a good amount of speculation pointing to the notion that courage likely can be learned (Biswas-Diener, 2012; Pury, 2008) especially when the definition of courage is expanded to include the operational definition of personal courage, and when courage is looked at in terms of a process that the actor goes through, as opposed to an accolade that is awarded to them (Pury, Starkey, Breeden, Kelley, Murphy, & Lowndes, 2014) Our initial data seem to offer support for these early speculations as well, that courage can be cultivated, within the context of coaching.

In continuing down this path, it is worth mentioning that when discussing the questions about fear, and her trait-like experience of fearlessness as a coach, this participant did so largely through comparing her experiences as an executive and entrepreneur to her experience as a coach. She mentioned how much more challenging her executive and entrepreneurial experience had been for her, and how much more courage those professional roles took for her personally:

"In my view, it takes way more courage to be an entrepreneur than it does a

coach…Maybe its because when you are an entrepreneur you have to face your own fears.

So you are not afraid of what will show up with a client."

The last part of this statement, which gets at addressing personal fears, brings up

additional questions. Do coaches' fears decrease when they face them? Is the choice to face our

own fear, an important component of courage for coaches? From our initial inspection of the data,

I would argue that the answers to these questions are likely yes. More importantly, if courage in

coaching is associated with the idea of facing and overcoming one's fears for the greater good of

the client, and if this happens to be necessary to assist certain clients in achieving success, as it

appears might be the case from this study, then it could be argued coaches might never achieve

mastery without courage.

Fears in coaching students

As mentioned earlier, the rater and I adopted the same coding procedure in regards to the

fears that participant coaches reported observing in their students. For students we agreed on 6

broader categories of fear, which are captured in table 5 below.

Table 5. Fears coach trainers reported observing in their students

Categories of coaching students' fears reported by coaches and agreed upon by raters	Specific types of students' fears reported by coaches
Lack of professional worth/making a living	• Fear of marketing • Fear of public speaking • Fear of not being able to make a living • Fear of asking for money • Fear of starting a practice • Fear of losing a client • Fear of being fired
Failing clients/not providing value	• Fear due to lack of experience • Impostor syndrome • Fear of not coming across as

Failing clients/not providing value *continued*	professional (won't lighten up and be themselves) • Fear of not providing value • Fear of disappointing oneself and others • Fear of incompetency • Fear of failure • Fear of not knowing enough • Fear of not having the answer • Fear of not being able to solve problems • Fear of the unknown • Fear of failing the client • Fear of not getting the job done • Fear that they don't know what they are doing
Failing in (coaching) student development	• Fear of not doing it right (desire to get an A) • Fear of criticism • Fear of being graded • Fear of not doing it well • Fear of not getting credential • Fear of not meeting program expectations • Fear they may never be a good coach, harder than they thought • Fear of looking bad (generally addicted to looking good and getting it right)
Fear of addressing personal development	• Fear of working on one's own development • Fear of dealing with emotions
Social rejection/disapproval/loss of connection	• Fear of making client mad • Fear of offending a client • Fear of intimacy • Fear of asking tough questions • Fear of saying what is on their mind/truth telling
Fear of inflicting harm (unintentionally) on clients	• Fear of harming clients • Getting into situations outside of expertise • Fear of dealing with emotions • Fear of ruining somebody

The first relevant finding based upon the recent discussion is that none of the participant coaches in the study reported observing a lack of fear, or sense of fearlessness, in their students. See table 6 for a full description of fears observed in students.

Table 6. Fears participants reported seeing in their coaching students

Ranking fears coach trainers see in their students by category
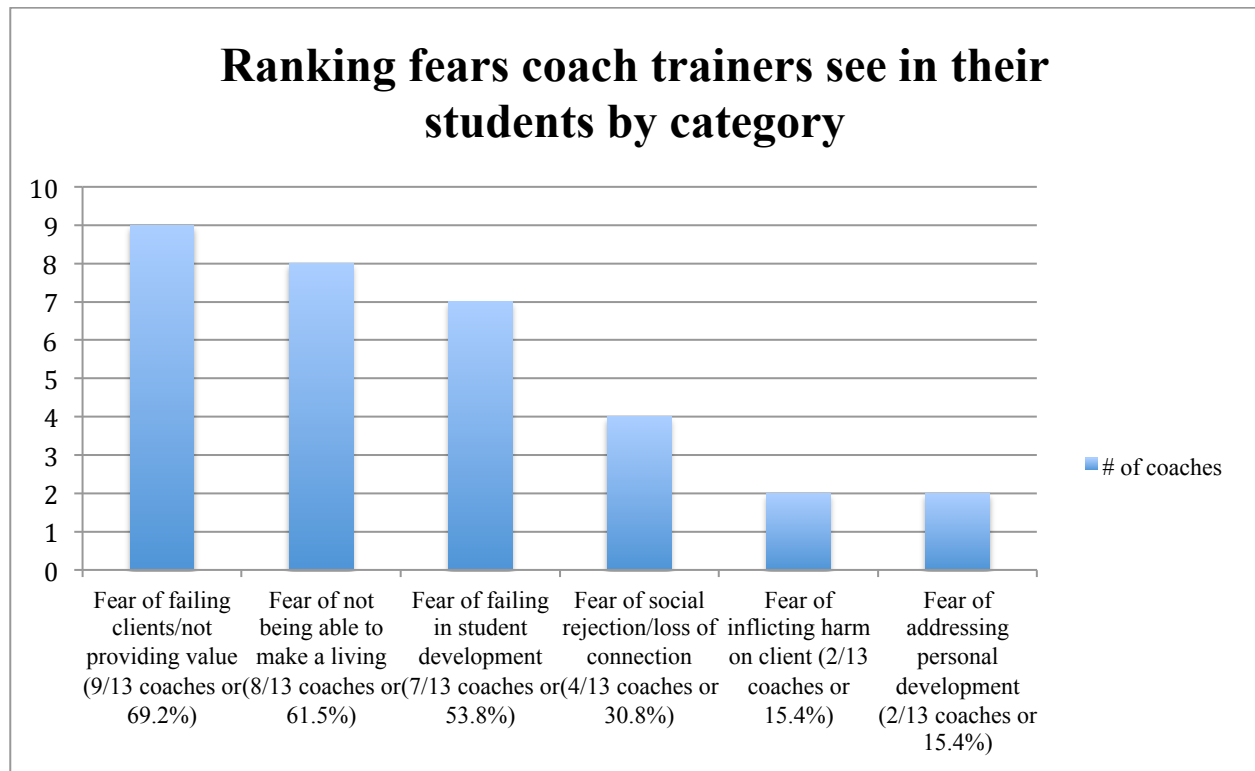
Instead, when asked, "what are some of the fears that you see in your students?" the majority of coaches responded with some version of "so many." This provides further evidence to suggest that fears coaches feel early on in the developmental process may lessen as they gain more experience. For some coaches this may ultimately result in an experiential absence of the emotion of fear when they coach. While this is, (to our knowledge), the first qualitative research study to focus on this concept within the coaching domain, there is evidence from prior studies on courage that supports this idea.

Walk (1956) did an experiment where he measured fear in paratrooper trainees before and after their practice jumps. In order to gather data, he used pre and post surveys that asked

participants to rate their subjective levels of fear during those times. His findings showed that even though the majority of participants had reported moderate levels of fear prior to their early jumps, by their fifth jump their fear had reduced substantially.

In a related study, Cox and colleagues (1983) tested the level of perceived fear, and fear arousal in decorated and non-decorated bomb disposal operators, and civilians. To do so, all three groups were put under stressful laboratory conditions where they were tasked with making key cognitive distinctions while under the threat of being electrically shocked by researchers. Afterward the researchers found that the groups of bomb disposal operators reported feeling less fear during the test, had lower levels of physiological fear symptoms, including lower heart rates during the most stressful parts of the experiment, and were able to handle higher levels of shock and discomfort compared to the civilian group. The researchers in this study were unable to discern whether or not these responses were due to the particular type of people in the study, i.e. people who choose to diffuse bombs may be less prone to fear than the general population, or whether it was due to training and experience, or some combination of all of these factors. That being said, researchers were able to find some differences between members of the bomb disposal operator group, which is thought to support the idea that fear can be lessened through training and experience, and courage may be able to be grown.

Another one of our findings related to students was that when compared to experienced coaches, students experience fears specific to their roles as learners. Participants in the interviews cited a diverse sample of fears their students experience in this category, including fears about assessment, grading, not saying the right thing, getting critiqued, receiving an A, not being able to attain credentialing etc. Upon review, the rater and I agreed that these fears were not too surprising. Test anxiety, and students' fear of assessment are findings that have been

reported in academic domains for many years. There was another category however that

garnered more discussion. We decided to name this "fear of addressing personal development".

During our initial analysis, the data didn't suggest that this category was of any particular

importance. Only two out of thirteen participant coaches directly mentioned it when asked about

fears they see in their students. During our discussions however, and as we reviewed the data

more thoroughly we observed that this category was mentioned indirectly by numerous coaches,

in various other places throughout the interviews. Examples of this include references in coaches'

responses to questions related to courage in coaching, and when asked about their greatest

success. Additionally, many participants named a personal achievement having to do with

addressing, or overcoming fears related to their own personal development. One coach for

instance said that her greatest success was being able to laugh at herself. Another life coach with

20 years of experience named personal development more directly:

> "I would say it's the personal growth work. Going through my own personal
>
> growth probably has contributed the most to my success. It has given me more insight
>
> into people and understanding human behavior. It has helped me to be more aware of
>
> people and what they go through."

Additionally, other coaches discussed this theme in their responses to other questions

throughout the interview. One executive coach who focuses on transformational leadership and

has 35 years of experience shared:

> "It's important for the coach to be courageous with their own development. That's
>
> where it all starts. Do we go in to those dark corners of ourselves? Just like we're going
>
> to ask our clients to do? A lot of times you think of courage as an action or behavior, but
>
> it begins with self-courage and do we really do our work or not? Because if we don't,

then we become a real critic. Oh they don't get it. Well no, maybe you don't get it as a

coach. Right? There's that judgment that's often a shadow projection. We got it, the

client would probably get it because they see the authenticity and the relevance and then

the light bulb goes on for them."

Finally, when a wellness coach with 18 years of experience was asked the question, how

important do you believe courage is in good coaching? He responded with:

"I think courage is essential. Courage is really a lot about confidence in yourself

and your abilities, it's also being aware of your limitations. That's all really critical to the

coaching process, because if you really aren't secure enough in yourself to feel

uncomfortable, you are probably not going to help a client get uncomfortable either. And

most of the growth that we really experience, our growing edge, is out there where it is

pretty uncomfortable quite often. You are probably going to hold back on that challenge

to a client. You are probably going to hold back on inquiring about something that's

coming up that seems important and relevant and may be a key to further progress and

you are always asking the client if they want to get into it, but do you not even ask

because you are afraid you can't handle what it might open up."

To see such a diversity and abundance of responses dedicated to the notion of personal

development makes me think that this area is potentially critical in terms of mastery. If coaches

overcoming fears that arise when going through their own personal development process is

important, and if courage is a major part of coaches successfully doing so, then from the

scholarly point of view it would be helpful to understand why. What outcomes result from

practicing courage and overcoming fear? Do coaches develop other capacities and virtues along

the way? Are a coach's propensities for qualities like empathy, kindness, compassion increased? Are they more easily able to ask tough questions, or offer unconditional positive regard toward their clients? These are questions that are worth exploring. If researchers are able to empirically determine what enables coaches to be extraordinary, and to perform masterful coaching, then perhaps it would be possible to develop more effective training and developmental practices targeted at cultivating these skills, and qualities. Additionally, it would be useful to understand any potential downsides or dangers of doing so.

If these comments seem somewhat unfounded based upon the data up to this point, there is further evidence that bolsters my argument. The rater and I noted that when participants were asked about what they have done to address their own fears as coaches the vast majority, or 12/13 coaches, responded that they face their fear head on, or choose to delve into it when it shows up. A life coach in the study described his view of this:

> "The way I choose to deal with my own fear is to be afraid. Instead of trying to avoid the fear, or pacify the fear, or rationalize the fear, or run away from it, I just deeply delve into the fear. The way to deal with fear is to delve into it deeply, to experience it fully, and almost always it disappears."

Other coaches talked about how they embrace fears as a guide. An example can be seen here from one of the leadership coaches in the study:

> "If I just always am committed to keeping it comfortable then I get bored. So when fear comes up in me it actually becomes for me a trigger of a place to go. It becomes a destination. The fear actually provides the destination to go with the person. I feel some fear, oh I know that's going to be uncomfortable, than I have to head in that direction."

Finally, we found that not one coach in the study mentioned running from, or hiding from fear as a way to address it in coaching. For them, the path to mastery is instead about choosing to lean into our own discomfort, and about embracing our fears.

Our findings show that leading coaches are courageous. There are many possibilities as to why this could be the case, and in order to determine which ones may be valid, further research is needed. Initially though, questions arise related to the length of time a coach has been practicing. Participants in our study had an average of 22.3 years professional experience. Are experienced coaches more courageous than novice, or moderately experienced coaches? Our data show that coaches in our study reported reductions in personal fears related to their own coaching over time. Also, observed student fears outnumbered those of participant coaches. This might suggest, as was mentioned earlier, that courage can be learned. If it can, this could bring about a host of opportunities for the future development of courage interventions in coaching. Another possibility is that individuals who self-select for coaching have higher levels of courage than the general population. Perhaps the reason we found such a high percentage of coaches to be courageous is due to sampling biases. Until more research is conducted we cannot rule these possibilities out, nor can we rule out the notion that courage may be necessary to achieve mastery in coaching.

Courage in coaching

The end of each interview involved questions that related to participants' views about the importance of courage in high quality coaching. The resulting answers to the question, "how important is courage in good coaching?" can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7. Participants' subjective views on the importance of courage in good coaching
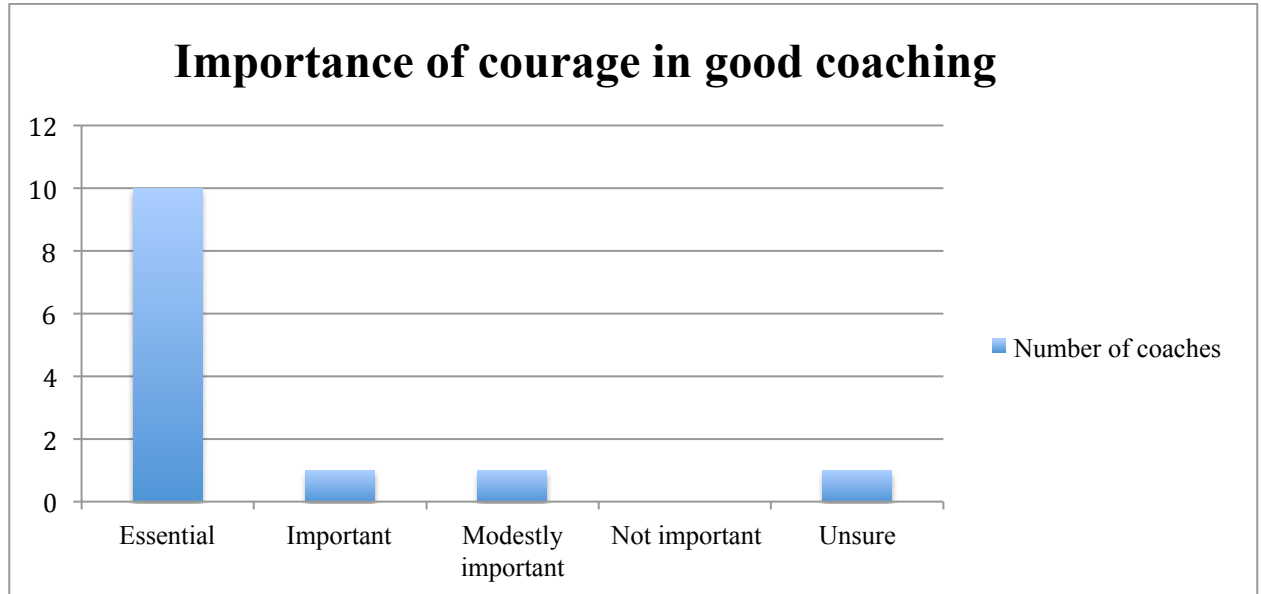
As can be seen, the majority (77%) of the respondents indicated that courage is an essential component of high quality coaching. Many of the coaches within the "essential" category spontaneously used the word essential in their descriptions while others implied it with responses such as "It's A number 1 in terms of importance," and "It's probably number 1, and if it's not number 1 than it is numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7," and, "the difference between mediocre coaching and good coaching is courage." Interestingly one respondent felt that that they couldn't answer the question because they were not sure what courage really meant and described it as a "jargon word." Out of the other two responses, one mentioned courage being important, and the other participant shared, "courage is modestly important in terms of good coaching, but it is critical in great coaching."

The next question was perhaps more targeted at what I was curious about. Is courage important in terms of coaches going from good to great? In this instance, "great" was considered synonymous with mastery. The answers to this question can be seen in table 8.

Table 8. Participants' views on the importance of courage in going from good to great

Importance of courage in going from good to great (mastery)
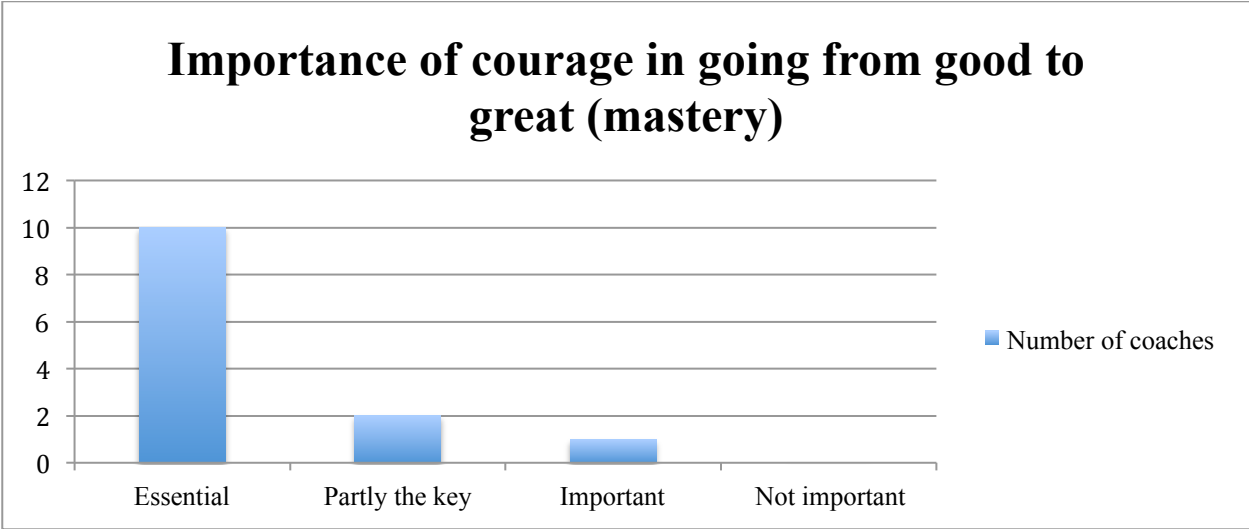
In regards to both of these questions on courage and coaching, not a single coach described courage as not being important, either in terms of high quality coaching, or in terms of closing the gap between good and great coaching. Additionally both questions yielded the majority of respondents (77%) saying that courage was essential in both respects. When asked how important courage was in terms of good coaching one participant, a life and executive coach with 23 years of experience shared:

> "Honestly I think it's essential. Without courage you cannot step into a bold relationship with someone. If you have courage you can test perspectives, you can test beliefs. You can explore, and be on an adventure with the client versus being afraid of your own words, your own adequacy in the task, your own efficacy. Courage is an essential aspect of coaching."

In the question about going from good to great, the participants who did not directly say courage was essential, mentioned that it was partly the key, or at the very least, considered it important. An example depicting the importance of courage in a coach going from good to great can be seen in this participants' response, a leadership and executive coach with 23 years of experience:

"But then there's that other step, to mastery. The most courageous step of all. You must leave your script behind, and that is like stepping over a chasm. Stepping or jumping over a very deep canyon. Because mastery is not for everyone. It is not achievable by everyone or it wouldn't be mastery. It is truly the unknown. It's being willing to give up the known."

The theme of embarking into the unknown was one the rater and I noticed participants expressed being nearly unanimous with mastery. To this point, another participant shared their response to the same question:

"Without a doubt. They are not going to get there without being courageous…There's a metaphor about the edge of an abyss. Because you can't settle for how you are now. You have to move into the unknown place of where you're not. Courage has to be there."

Finally, a leadership coach with 26 years of experience shared their perspective along the same line:

"The difference between a mediocre coach that works on technique and a good coach is courage. It's the courage of the coach to be authentic, tell the truth, trust their intuition, you know, to do all that kind of stuff. And then the leap from being a good coach to a great coach is absolutely amped up courage. It's like, will I go deeper? Will I jump higher?...Courage is about throwing their heart over the wall of their comfort zone and then following it into the unknown mysterious place."

The last interview question on courage asked participants to name a time when they were courageous in their coaching, and what occurred. When coding for the components most highly associated with courageous actions i.e. (that an action must be voluntarily carried out, perception

of risk or threat to the actor must be present, and the action must be in service of a noble goal),

the rater and I discovered, and were in 100% agreement, that 11/13 coaches had all 4

components present in their examples, while 2/13 coaches seemed to only had 3 components

present.

To clarify details around our coding process and procedure consider the following

example. One of the coaches shared this experience of acting courageously:

"I was worried that we (the coach and the client) weren't getting anywhere. And

the room felt a little bit stuffy. And I was thinking, I don't know if this is going to work

out. My coachee was really frustrated at not being able to move forward. I thought if I

pushed this a lot further it's going to damage our relationship. If I kept saying what else

can you do? Or, let's think again, or lets come back to this again. But I was worried that

saying let's take a break might look like I didn't know what I was doing. So I guess that's

where the courage came in. Where I asked the person, I said how are you feeling at the

moment? We've been doing x amount of time. The person said I am really frustrated. I

said well here's an idea, why don't we take a little break and move around a little bit?

You know, this room feels a little bit stuffy…And that was quite significant, it led to a

huge shift. So I guess in that example it took courage to admit that maybe it wasn't

working at that moment but that lead to a shift that was needed for myself and the client.

I guess we were individually a little bit low on hope…And together we were kind of

stuck as well, as a partnership…Interestingly enough I felt the courageous thing to do

was to call it and to say yeah we are slightly stuck. So I think taking the courageous

decision there made a huge difference. It really changed the atmosphere. And I think it

was really good because we shared the responsibility for being stuck, and I didn't feel it

was my problem that I am not a good coach because we are stuck, and the coachee didn't

feel useless, you know my coach is doing their best."

The rater and I found all four components present in this example. We agreed that the

noble goal component was present in 2 ways. Firstly the coach wanted to help the client move

forward toward their goals, and make progress. Secondly, the coach made the decision to act

based upon the wellbeing of the client, which can be seen when the coach stated that continuing

to press on could damage the relationship. In terms of the voluntary action component, the coach

said that they chose to act of their own volition. Finally, the coach directly stated that they

experienced fear, and also implied that there was risk in choosing to take a break because by

doing so it might look like they were incompetent.

Outliers and "other" category

As mentioned earlier, we found outliers in our data. Specifically, when coaches were

asked about the importance of courage in moving toward coaching mastery two coaches

responded that courage was important, however also spontaneously named confidence as

crucially important, perhaps even more so than courage. These participants discussed how

coaches need to have both courage and confidence to achieve mastery, primarily because without

some confidence, they thought it unlikely that coaches would take risks. Additionally, they added

that without courage, coaches may not develop confidence. One of these coaches went on to say

that the relationship between courage and confidence in coaching could be considered "a sort of

chicken and egg thing," stating both are needed but it is unclear which order they are needed in,

and which one a coach might need more of. These two coaches did express the similar view that

as coaches are more courageous in their actions, they will gain confidence, and in turn will

experience reduced fear. Furthermore, they will then be able to take bigger risks with clients.

Two other coaches indirectly referred to confidence as well. One stated "courage is essential, well that, and practice. Those are probably the two essentials in going from good to great." When asked about what fears they saw in their students, another participant said "they just don't have enough experience." It could be inferred here that this relates to the comment about practice, as well as a possible perceived correlation between experience, reduced fear, and confidence. These claims are not unfounded as they are backed up by some empirical findings on courage. For example, evidence has shown correlations to exist between rising self-efficacy, and reduced levels of fear as people carry out courageous acts (Rachman, 2004).

These coaches' statements made me wonder if there is a key point, or time period in a coach's development where courage interventions may be more appropriate. For example, should courage interventions be delivered when a coach is a novice? Or would this be too early? Would it be better for coaches to engage in courage interventions after they have established a sufficient skill set, and have a certain level of self-efficacy built up? Perhaps carrying out personally courageous acts in our coaching development needs to happen only after coaches have gained a sufficient amount of experiential learning and proficiency in their skills and abilities.

Limitations

The current study offers an initial exploration into a new area of coaching: the role of courage. Despite its potential contributions this research is, of course, not without certain limitations. First, the current study employed a small convenience sample. Considering this, we must use caution when generalizing the findings beyond the current study, because the sample was neither large enough nor broad enough, to be confident that these results represent the coaching profession as a whole. Further caution is warranted because the participants in this

study were specifically recruited based on their status as senior coaches. While this means that

their sentiments are likely not representative of more novice coaches, it also means that these

leading coaches have insights into coaching that very few individuals in the world likely possess.

To clarify what I mean here, remember that the coaches selected for this study were likely more

advanced than most coaches in almost every associated professional role of coaching: as coaches,

as trainers, as mentors, as authors on the subject, and as leaders in the profession. This can be

seen in the following two ways. First, participants within the study have gone from novice to

master during the course of their own coaching development. Second, many of them have also

assisted mentees, and coaches they have trained, to do the same. This combination of experience

would arguably provide these 13 coaches with a means of understanding the various emotional,

psychological, and behavioral experiences coaches undergo on the path to mastery. In addition,

these coaches would also have a more expansive level of knowledge about what is required more

generally for coaches to go from good to great; including the role of fear and courage within this

context. This is knowledge that more novice coaches would most certainly not have. By

definition, novice coaches have not attained mastery themselves, nor have they facilitated this

developmental process for others. Thus while we must remain cautious of generalizing the

results of the current study, we also must consider the depth and breadth of experience present in

the current sample, and the related implications.

There are two other characteristics of the sample that should be taken into account before

dismissing the generalizability of the data. One is the nearly even number of female participants

and male participants. There were 7 female coaches in the study and 6 male coaches, which helps

to remove concerns regarding any potential gender biases. Finally, effort was made to attain a

sample of coaches who worked in all domains of coaching. I was successful in this regard and

believe that this, along with the previously mentioned reasons, add enough value and merit to the findings to potentially outweigh any known limitations.

      The findings from this exploratory study on courage and coaching are promising in many ways. However, since this study was the first of its kind, this study can be improved upon, and to do so more research is needed. For future researchers here are some of the recommendations I would offer for various improvements. Researchers in future could incorporate the use of random sampling from a larger pool of candidate coaches of all levels of experience. Additionally, it would be beneficial to attain a more internationally diverse sample. Coaches in the current study were located in only four countries, with the majority (10/13), residing in the United States. Coaching is a global profession, and as such it would likely be necessary to sample coaches from more countries to account for potential geographical or cultural differences. Finally, I would advise future researchers to consider using a variety of different measurements for courage and fear. This could include the use of surveys, vignettes, or various other approaches. Examples of this could be having coaches with varying levels of experience offer their personal definitions of courage. This could offer additional insight into how courage might evolve throughout the course of a coach's development. Another example might be to have coaches at various stages of development, and experience, identify what they consider to be courageous acts performed by other coaches. Again, this may get at how courage is defined within coaching, and how that might change with experience. This list of recommendations for future research is not exhaustive, however they provide an important starting point. In order to better understand the role of courage within coaching, and the potential value of this construct for coaches, we must continue to refine related research questions, use more sophisticated methods for empirical investigation, and engage more researchers in the process.

Discussion and future precautions

The findings from this study offer new insights into the role of fear and courage in coaching, with implications for coaches, and coach training programs alike. As with most scientific investigations however, the findings should be considered thoughtfully, and appropriate precautions should be taken before jumping to conclusions. In this section I will sum up the major insights from this study, and explore related implications regarding future practice and research.

The first insight gleaned is that courage is an important, but often under discussed topic in coaching. While there are some popular coaching books that mention courage, they typically reference the importance of courage for the coaching client. The role of a coach's own courage in their development, and in their ability to deliver high quality coaching is a topic that is explored less often, if at all. To further illustrate this point, the core competencies for the International Coach Federation, the largest governing body of professional coaching in the world, do not mention courage directly, nor is courage a topic directly addressed in most coach training programs. Furthermore, a search for courage and coaching within the academic literature yielded zero results. The leading coaches in this study however, all mentioned that courage for the coach was important, with 10 out of 13 stating that it is essential both in high quality coaching, and in ascending from being a good coach to being a masterful coach. In addition there were no participants in the study who said that courage for the coach was unimportant. These initial findings support the notion that courage is a construct that is worth exploring further in coaching, and that if courage is addressed more directly in the coaching literature, in core competencies, methodologies, and coach trainings that it may facilitate the cultivation of more effective coaches.

The second point worth noting is that the coach's subjective experiences of courage and fear, as well as their attitudes and beliefs regarding what it means to be courageous as a coach, appear to shift throughout the course of their development. Evidence supporting this point shows up in the data in the following ways:

a)   Clear distinctions between the categories of fear that coaches reported experiencing themselves, and the fears they reported observing in their students, and mentees.

b)   Participants' reference to confidence and experience. Both of which were reported to support them in taking bigger risks, and engaging in acts they considered being more courageous in terms of their role as a coach. At the same time, some of the acts they had considered personally courageous at various points throughout their development ceased to remain so as they progressed as a coach.

In regards to the first point, I have listed the categories of fear mentioned by participants on both fronts; their subjective experience of fear, and the fears that they have observed in their coaching students, or mentees. The different categories of fear coaches mentioned personally experiencing are listed here:

1) Fear of failing a client/not providing value

2) Fear of not being able to make a living

3) Fear of social rejection/loss of connection

4) Absence of fear/fearless

5) Fear of inflicting harm on the client

Below are the categories of fear that coaches reported observing in their students or mentees:

       1) Fear of failing a client/not providing value

       2) Fear of not being able to make a living

       3) Fear of failing in student development

       4) Fear of social rejection/loss of connection

       5) Fear of inflicting harm on the client

       6) Fear of addressing personal development

When comparing these lists, there are three clear differences that show up in the data. Senior coaches did not report fears of failing in student development, or addressing their own personal development. Also, the category of fearlessness was absent from the fears observed in students. I would contend that these developmental differences offer valuable insights into future directions for coach trainers, mentors, and students of coaching. If courage interventions for coaches were to be developed, or practiced effectively, one component to consider, based upon the current study, would likely be the experience level, or developmental stage of the coach. Specifically, coach-training programs could incorporate courage interventions centered on students' fear of failure and fear of engaging in their own personal development, as these seem to be unique to beginning coaches. Furthermore, to develop more comprehensive stage-appropriate interventions, I would recommend a review of the literature on courage interventions, and related constructs. Please reference page 31 for more on this. Examples of this might include exploring evidence-based strategies for increasing self-efficacy such as role modeling, and mastery experiences (Bandura, 1979), cultivating a growth mindset (Dweck, 2008), and developing resilience skills like the ABC model, thinking traps, and an awareness of iceberg beliefs (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). It may also be valuable to offer the findings from this study to coaches in an effort to normalize their experiences and the fears that they encounter along the way. In regards

to developing courage interventions for the categories of fear shared by senior coaches and

student coaches I would urge a similar approach; to review the related literature around each

individual category of fear, as well as the literature on courage interventions, and then develop

informed trainings that may or may not target courage directly. For more, please reference page

31. For example, I would posit that a potentially effective approach for addressing a coach's fear

of harming their client would be to train them in professional ethics, and might include

mentoring or peer consulting with coaches when confronted with particularly difficult challenges

(Williams & Anderson, 2006).

     Finally, this brings us to the third discussion point, which is that while the results of this

study may be seen as exciting, it is also the first research ever done on this topic and thus I would

urge a thoughtful and cautious approach in drawing conclusions, and taking next steps. It might

be easy to see the finding, "courage is essential in high quality coaching," and make the leap to,

"let's develop trainings for all coaches that focus specifically on cultivating courage." After all,

coaches aim to assist their clients in making self-directed, meaningful changes in their lives,

which promote optimal ways of living and working. From this view, the idea of striving to

directly increase the personal courage of coaches seems to be a beneficial endeavor for both

coaches and their clients. However, recent research may suggest otherwise. Biswas-Diener and

colleagues (2011) found for instance that there are a number of contextual factors that impact the

beneficial effects associated with strengths use, and in some cases using strengths can be

psychologically detrimental. These findings while not directly related, may offer useful insight

here. The appropriateness of conducting courage interventions with coaches likely depends on

the situation, the person, and the purpose for which courage is trying to be cultivated. Specific

examples may include a coach's level of efficacy, readiness, safety, knowledge of ethics, and

current support. The internal psychological and emotional mechanisms and processes of human beings are complex. They can become increasingly so when combined with people's prior experiences and internal belief systems. Coaches are no exception, and thus it would probably be wise to avoid blanket suggestions, and to engage in thoughtful deliberation before recommendations are put forth about diving into the dark corners of ourselves so that we might overcome our fears.

Another factor to consider along this same line of thinking may be found when inspecting the nuances of a coach's emotional experience of fear. Biswas-Diener (2012) proposes that fear can be a gift. From an evolutionary standpoint attending to fear has promoted survival. When we experience the emotion of fear, it can be an important internal warning sign that danger may be present. An example of this within the current study comes in the form of a coach's fear of harming a client. There are situations in coaching when a coach may experience fear because they are getting into territory with a client that is outside the scope of the coach-client relationship. Instead of trying to overcome this fear, it would be advisable for the coach to use it to inform how they will proceed, and then work with the client in getting the type of support they may need beyond coaching. If the coach does not, there may be unintended psychological, emotional, or physiological damage done to a client.

The final piece of discussion in relation to the idea of being careful about when and how we develop courage interventions for coaches concerns morality. Pury and colleagues (2015) found evidence to show that there is such a thing as bad courage. This is the idea that all 3 components of courage are present for the actor, (voluntary action, personal risk/threat, and value/nobility of goal) (Rate, 2010), however while the actor finds the goal to be valuable and worth striving for, society at large finds exactly the opposite. Examples given in the study are

acts of terrorism, killings, and suicides. A large percentage of people carrying out acts of bad courage in the study, viewed what they did to include all 3 components of courage (Pury et al., 2015). While it is unlikely that coaches would ever touch on any of these subjects in their work, it still brings up the question; can coaches exhibit bad courage? Are there times when coaches perceive their acts as courageous, but when viewed by outside observers they are seen as dangerous, harmful, or abhorrent? The research on bad courage is a reminder that we must be prudent, and cautious as we move forward in this domain.

This brings us to the final discussion point in from the study. Upon a review of our findings so far it seems that cultivating courage in coaches could yield numerous benefits, however to do so responsibly means considering multiple contextual factors. I would argue that one of these factors is that courage (within the context of coaching) may be a virtue that is best carried out in the company of other strengths and virtues, as opposed to on its own. This idea is not an unfounded one. It has been previously conceptualized in the literature as strengths constellations. In essence this is the idea that there are certain situations where it is beneficial to express multiple strengths in tandem in order to navigate through more effectively. To do this well it can help to understand which strengths complement one another in varying contexts (Biswas-Diener et al., 2011). In terms of courage, one participant coach mentioned that coaching for them is "courageous compassion." That courage from the coach means being courageous in a way that betters the client. I think that this is an excellent representation of complementary strengths at work in service of the greater good. Another example would be coaches calling upon their wisdom when choosing to step courageously forward. In order determine what constellations of strengths may work best with courage and coaching I would recommend that coach trainers, and coaches first ground themselves in the Values In Action classification of

character strengths and then begin to consider what strengths may be complementary to courage based upon where they are in their coaching development.

If we are to focus on increasing courage in individuals we must do so thoughtfully, with compassion, and in noble service of the coach and the client. I would say, however that when the conditions are right, and a coach is ready, that cultivating personal courage may be one of the most worthwhile endeavors coaches can engage in. The reasons being that the coach will likely; be able to provide more value for their clients, become more effective in their coaching, have a deeper understanding of themselves, their strengths and limitations, and will move toward mastery. Ultimately I see that this could effect positive change on a larger scale, as coaches might make a deeper and more profound positive impact in the lives of all of those with whom they work.

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