

**A qualitative investigation into how the practice of  
coaching impacts students and coaches in a Bahraini  
context**

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## **Abstract**

Cultural intelligence and cultural competence are much needed skills in our ever changing world. As coaching psychology continues to spread around the globe, culturally sensitive coaching practice is a prerequisite. Culture influences our perceptions, however over the years, psychology has been accused of being culture blind in the sense that the research which has been conducted and the resulting psychological theories and models, have been based upon Western cultural norms. This study pertains to coaching in Bahrain and seeks to explore the experience of Bahraini university students who engage in a coaching skills programme and also the experience of Western coaches who practice in Bahrain. Two studies were undertaken. The methodology used for both studies was interpretative phenomenological analysis, as this is well suited to cultural research and allows for an in-depth exploration of the richness of individual experience. Study one gathered data from Bahraini university students (n=7) through a focus group interview and study two gathered data from Western coaches who practice in Bahrain (n=5). Results of both studies were integrated and there were a number of concordant findings which specifically pertain to coaching practice in Bahrain. Both studies found that family, culture and religion have a powerful influence upon both the perceptions and the practice of coaching in Bahrain and that cultural sensitivity is vital for Western coaches who wish to practice in Bahrain. The integration of psychological approaches such as indigenous psychology, existential psychology and transpersonal psychology into coaching practice may contribute to culturally sensitive coaching practice in Bahrain.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The freedom to think as one chooses without being bound by 'the ruts of tradition and conformity' (Thoreau, 1854 p. 243) holds the deepest importance for me and when working with university students I am interested to know what they think about themselves, their lives, their possibilities, and why? I moved to Bahrain in 2009 from Ireland to take up a position in the newly established Bahrain Polytechnic University. This was a new educational initiative of the Crown Prince with the objective of providing a world class educational institution which would provide work ready graduates with 21st century skills. The university was headed up by a team of educational experts from New Zealand who were very open to diverse and creative approaches to education. It was against this background that I received approval to develop a Coaching Skills Elective for students. Having personally experienced the benefits of participating in a coach training programme, I was curious to find out what impact participating in this Coaching Skills Elective would have upon Bahraini students, in particular how it might influence their way of thinking and behaving, in relation to themselves and others. I therefore sought approval from the University Research and Ethics Committee to conduct a pilot study. This pilot study was a mixed-methods study with two assessment points, one before the students commenced the elective and the other upon completion of the elective, six weeks later. The participants comprised of 98 third level Bahraini students; the experimental group (N=75: 65 females and 10 males; mean age: 19) and the control group (N=23: 18 females and 5 males; mean age: 19). The study sought to explore the impact participating in this elective would have particularly on students'

personal and social skills. This was assessed by a culturally contextualized version of two aspects of the Universal Integrative Framework Questionnaire (Law et al., 2007) which comprised of 39 questions that measured 'Personal Competence' and 27 questions that measured 'Social Competence'. Items were rated on a seven point likert scale. The findings of this study show that a six week Coaching Skills Elective has a positive effect upon students perceived personal and social competence. The quantitative data provided useful information however, when analyzing the qualitative data which was collected via a focus group interview, it was clear that the data produced was much richer. It included participant comments such as :

"It made me think of things I never thought of."

"Now I have a stronger belief in myself."

"You try observing things from others' point of view before judging."

"My perspective towards different things, family, social life, study, there has been a shift actually."

"Sometimes I can't talk to others about how I feel but coaching has helped me to express my feelings."

"It has helped my relationships and attitudes with other people, I have learned not to judge people."

"I am now thinking about a situation in a different way."

"It's like standing, you know, being a third person in your own situation."

"I can see things in different perspective."

“Coaching made me feel free.”

These comments really sparked my curiosity, especially the final comment, “Coaching made me feel free” as it resonated so much with my own values and I found myself really wanting to find out more, to go deeper, in terms of the very personal experiences of the students who engaged in this course. This led to my further developing the course from a six week elective to fifteen week course which would be completed within one term. I believed that this would make an interesting research project particularly if it used a methodology suited to deeply exploring personal experiences which would allow for rich and insightful data. This led to my future decision to conduct a PhD study on this topic using the qualitative methodology of interpretative phenomenological analysis. I began researching this topic when interest in coaching in the Middle East was still in its infancy. Since then, some interesting studies have been undertaken (e.g. King & van Nieuwerburgh, 2020; Barrington et al., 2019; Lambert et al., 2020) and the Middle Eastern Journal of Positive Psychology is now in its 7th year, having been launched in 2015.

This chapter provides an overview of the emergence of coaching psychology and concludes by outlining the research aims. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature pertaining to coaching psychology. My epistemological and methodological position is laid out in Chapter 3. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 pertain to Study One and include the research method, results and analysis and discussion. Chapters 7, 8 and 9 pertain to Study Two and likewise include the research method, results and analysis and discussion. Chapter 10 concludes with an integration of the findings of both studies and proposals for future research.

## **1.2 The role of culture in psychology**

Understanding present day psychology requires understanding the past processes, environments, and constraints that led to that psychology (Muthukrishna et al., 2021). Psychology had its roots firstly in Europe and subsequently in North America. As a consequence, the approaches and models that developed did so within the culture of the West (Berry et al., 2011). Psychology which is rooted in the West has been challenged as it is considered by some authors to be both culture bound and culture blind (e.g. Grzanka & Cole, 2021; French et al., 2020; Salzman, 2018; Berry et al., 2011; Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008; Sue & Sue, 1977).

Kirmayer et al., (2018) argue that historically, psychological research has utilized western participants and the results of these studies have led to the development of theories which then make global assumptions about human psychology and that these are put forward as universally accepted facts rather than facts which are understood to be particular to both place and time, however ethnographic and philosophical studies that seek to understand cultural constructions of identity have been undertaken with the required cultural awareness and sensitivity. This view is supported by Chaudhary & Sriram (2020) who argue psychology has historically been guilty of thinking locally and then assuming this to have global relevance rather than thinking globally and then adapting to the local culture.

Some authors assert that identity is culturally constructed and reflects a society or culture's collective understanding of behaviour and phenomena (Kirmayer et al., 2018; McLean et al., 2017; Jia & Krettenauer, 2017) however as psychology has been shaped historically by the Euro-American culture of colonialism, some authors argue that this

has led to differing cultural perspectives being undermined (Adams et al.; 2015, Kirmayer et al., 2018; Macleod et al., 2020; Bobowik et al., 2018).

According to Passmore et al., (2019), the development of coaching in the Middle East was in response to the growth of coaching in Europe and North America, however, it has evolved somewhat differently due to cultural factors. Our world and societies continue to evolve in ways which bring together increasingly culturally and ethnically diverse communities, families and individuals, which may differ in terms of beliefs, religion, histories and economies and psychological interventions which are based upon a Western view of the world can have damaging consequences (Marsella, 2011).

This recognition of the role of culture in psychology has continued to gain momentum and has contributed to a number of organisations reviewing and revising their multicultural guidelines, including The American Psychological Association (APA) (Clauss-Ehlers, 2019). The APA published their first multicultural guidelines in 2002 however due to the increased focus upon this topic throughout the following years, they revised these guidelines in 2017 to reflect the fact that our identity is influenced by a wide variety of factors including “age, generation, culture, language, gender, race, ethnicity, ability status, sexual orientations, gender identity, socioeconomic status, religion, spirituality, immigration status, education and employment among other variables.” (Clauss-Ehlers, 2019, p.233).

The British Psychological Society’s Code of Ethics makes very clear statements about the duties of psychologists to respect the cultural values of others (British Psychology Society, 2018). Section 3.1 of the code asserts “Respect for the dignity of persons and peoples is one of the most fundamental and universal ethical principles across



geographical and cultural boundaries, and across professional disciplines.” (British Psychological Society, 2018, p.5). Therefore, when practicing coaching with clients from Middle Eastern cultures whose values, beliefs and perspectives may differ significantly from those of the coach, cultural awareness and sensitivity is a pre-requisite for successful coaching practice in this culture (van Nieuwerburgh, 2016).

### **1.3 Research aims**

The aim of this investigation is to explore the factors that influence coaching within a Bahraini culture from the perspective of the person being coached (client) and from the perspective of the coach. Particularly, it focuses on the role that Bahraini culture plays in individuals' perceptions of coaching psychology. The research exploring the area will be divided into two separate studies.

Study One: The experience of Bahraini university students who participate in a coaching skills programme.

Study Two: The experience of Western Coaches who practice in Bahrain.

### **1.4 Conclusion**

This chapter explored the role of culture in psychology and outlined the research aims for this study. Coaching is still considered to be a relatively new area of psychology and clearly more research is needed to support coaching practice, taking into consideration the complexities of cultural and intercultural communications (van Nieuwerburgh & Allaho, 2017). It is in this way that this study hopes to make a contribution to both practice and knowledge in this highly contemporary and important field. The next

chapter provides an overview of coaching psychology from the literature as it pertains to this study.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter explored the evolution of coaching psychology. It also set out the research aims for this study. This chapter will explore some of the key influences on coaching psychology and the various psychological approaches that have been integrated into coaching practice.

### **2.2 The development of coaching**

The British Psychological Society defines coaching psychology as 'the scientific study and application of behaviour, cognition and emotion to deepen our understanding of individuals' and groups' performance, achievement and wellbeing, and to enhance practice within coaching' (Division of Coaching Psychology - the British Psychological Society, n.d.).

Coleman R. Griffith's book *The Psychology of Coaching : A Study of Coaching Methods from the point of view of Psychology*, published in 1926, is often viewed as the foundation of modern coaching psychology; followed by Gorby's research in 1937 on coaching in organisations (Palmer & Whybrow, 2018). Gorby (1937) found that coaching was of benefit to organisations and Bigelow (1938) also found this to be the case particularly with regard to the effectiveness of training programmes. The first peer reviewed paper relating to coaching was written by Gorby and published in *Factory, Management & Maintenance* in 1937 and from that point onwards there was a growing interest and awareness surrounding areas such as human potential, personal growth

and organisational psychology and it was at that stage that we began to see a slow but gradual move towards coaching in organisations (Koopman et al., 2021).

Other early proponents of coaching proposed that coaching techniques should be incorporated into training programmes and used following performance reviews with the objective of improving interpersonal skills and supporting productivity and behaviour changes (Mold, 1951; Hayden, 1955). Subsequently, Mahler (1964) focused upon training managers in coaching skills in organisations.

In a study on senior managers, Locke & Lathan (1990) found that managers who worked with a coach were more likely to set specific goals and to seek ideas for improvements from their colleagues. Using a psychometric approach to evaluate individual coaching outcomes, Student6son (1993) found that participants' overall effectiveness improved as a result of coaching and Graham et al. (1993) found a positive change in managers who had received coaching. Similarly, Kilburg (1996) found coaching to have a positive impact on organisational change and this was further supported in his studies of 2000, 2001 and 2004 and Diedrich (1996) argued that coaching had a beneficial effect upon organizational change. In a study by Thach (2002) it was found that, as a result of coaching, leadership effectiveness increased between 55% and 60% whilst in a smaller study, Luthans & Student6son (2003) found that coaching (combined with multi-source assessment) resulted in an improvement in the attitudes of both managers and their employees, along with an increase in organizational commitment; whilst also finding an increase in levels of satisfaction with their job, their supervisors and their co-workers. Lowman (2005) also found that coaching brought about improved performance.

Kampa-Kokesch (2001) highlighted seven coaching impact studies in a review of coaching research. Of particular interest is Olivero et al. (1997) which was a comparative study of training in a public service agency. Their findings show that training which integrated behavioural coaching increased performance by 88% whereas training alone brought about a 22% increase in performance. Also notable is Gegner (1997) who found that management coaching brought about a behavioural change in between 70% and 93% of executives.

In research conducted by Wang & Wentling (2001), a training programme which involved a three-week course followed by six months of online coaching, resulted in an increase in motivation and an improvement in both relationships and problem-solving abilities. Kampa-Kokesch (2002) found that coaching had a positive impact on leadership behaviour. This was further supported by Smither & London (2003) in a longitudinal study of over 400 managers which showed that coaching brought about an improvement in management performance. A study of managers in a public sector organisation by Evers et al. (2006) found that behavioural coaching had a positive impact upon the ability to act in a balanced way and in self-efficacy pertaining to individual goal setting. As the field of coaching is becoming more established with an increasing focus upon evidence based research, more studies are being conducted on coaching effectiveness in the workplace with positive findings (eg., Gan et al., 2021; Bozer et al., 2014; Abizu et al., 2019).

Coaching is widely acknowledged as being an integral aspect of most corporations' employee development approaches (Knights and Poppleton, 2007) and is effective in terms of goal setting and attainment (Fischer & Beimers, 2009). However, apart from

goal related outcomes, McGuffin & Obonyo (2010) noted a higher degree of personal growth following coaching intervention and Kombarakaran et al. (2008) found improved professional relationships as a result of coaching. Greater flexibility of management (Jones et al., 2006), higher levels of productivity (Olivero et al., 1997) and higher levels of wellbeing were also attributed to coaching interventions in the workplace (Grant et al., 2009). Whilst acknowledging that numerous studies have found coaching to be an effective intervention in the workplace, Peitzmeier (2021) found that a number of factors relating to the client have an impact upon how effective the coaching intervention will actually be, namely whether or not the client is open to change and also their levels of competence, interest and autonomy.

In spite of the evident benefits of coaching, research has historically been scant when compared with the high levels of growth of the coaching industry (Grant, Passmore, Cavanagh & Parker, 2010). Coaching has expanded globally in recent years with 85% of European companies and 95% of those located in the UK using coaching as a tool for professional development. From the Fortune 500 companies, 40% use coaching, of which 99% stated that the tool can bring concrete benefits to individuals and companies, while 96% said that coaching is an effective way to promote entrepreneurial learning (De Melo et al., 2015).

### **2.3 The coaching relationship**

Coaching is a relationship between the coach and the client which is based upon equality and trust and often involves input from managers and other stakeholders with the objective of increasing effectiveness (Trevillion, 2018). Coaching is distinct from other workplace interventions including mentoring (Brockbank & McGill, 2012) and peer

coaching (Parker, Kram & Hall, 2013). In a mentoring relationship, the mentor is considered to be an experienced professional with the expertise necessary to guide a less experienced colleague, usually over a prolonged period of time (Eby et al, 2013). However, peer coaching is a reciprocal relationship involving mutual support, where both parties of equal status gain equal benefit from the arrangement (Parker et al., 2013). Workplace coaching has been found to be effective in numerous studies (Gan et al., 2021; Albizu et al., 2019; Ballesteros-Sánchez et al., 2019; Van Oosten et al., 2019).

According to O'Broin & Palmer (2018) the relationship between the coach and the client is essential and in fact foundational to the success of coaching. This was also found to be the case by Graßmann et al., (2020) in a meta-analysis which showed that a main factor in successful coaching outcomes was the relationship between the coach and the client regardless of client types, expertise of the coach, Coach/client perspectives or the number of coaching session that the client had. Van Oosten et al., (2019) found a direct correlation between coaching outcomes and the quality of the relationship between the coach and the coachee within organizations and also found that through a successful coaching relationship, coachees can develop their emotional and social competencies thus leading to improvements in both engagement, performance and satisfaction.

Interestingly, Lai & Palmer (2019) found successful executive coaching is more likely when the coach initially focusses upon the personal development of the client in terms of self-awareness and self-actualization and that these areas should initially take priority over short term developmental goals. They also found that executive coaching can be successful in terms of both client motivation to change and the ability to think realistically (Lai & Palmer, 2019). Although most studies have found executive coaching

to be effective, there have been some studies which have had mixed results, for example whilst finding executive coaching to be an effective intervention (assuming a positive relationship between the coach and the client), de Haan et al., (2020) found that in longitudinal studies, the relationship between the coach and the client has a strong impact on coaching effectiveness at the beginning of the coaching relationship, but not in the long term. Lai & Palmer (2019) proposed that in order to adopt evidence-based approaches, more rigorous evaluation techniques should be used which would examine areas such as psychological well-being, commitment to the organisation, self-efficacy beliefs and 360 degree feedback.

## **2.4 Key influences on coaching psychology**

The British Psychological Society defines coaching psychology as 'the scientific study and application of behaviour, cognition and emotion to deepen our understanding of individuals' and groups' performance, achievement and wellbeing, and to enhance practice within coaching' (Division of Coaching Psychology - the British Psychological Society, n.d.).

According to Passmore & Sinclair (2020) coaching has evolved to include a variety of psychology approaches including :

Person-Centered – whereby healing, development and growth can occur as a result of the nature of the relationship between the coach and the client which is based upon unconditional positive regard, authenticity and warmth.

Behavioural – widely used in organizational management and focusses upon rewards and punishments. The GROW model of coaching is a behavior based approach.

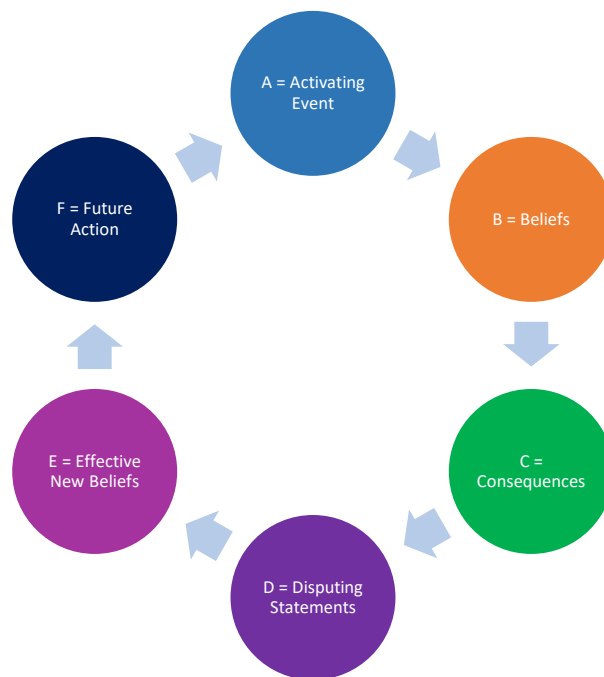




**Figure 2.1 GROW Model (Whitmore, 1992)**

Cognitive-Behavioral - the idea that development, learning and change are possible due to the synergy between cognition, emotion, behavior and an external event.

The ABCDEF model is associated with this approach.



**Figure 2.2 ABCDEF Coaching Model (Ellis, Gordan, Neenan & Palmer, 1997)**

Gestalt – which focuses upon awareness, views clients as a unique combination of spirit, body, mind and emotions and focuses upon the present moment and developing self-confidence and understanding.

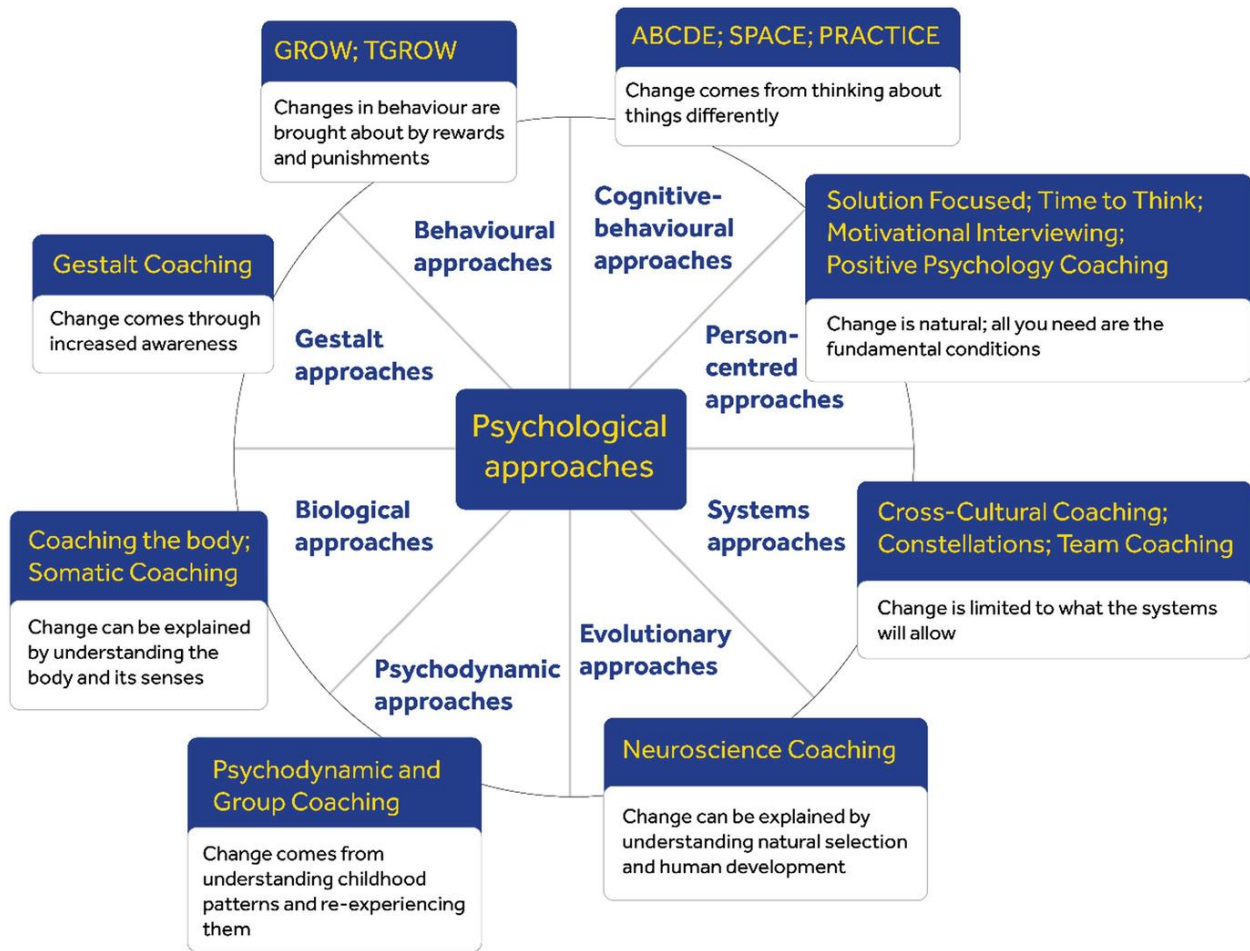
Systems – widely used in organizational coaching and explores how systemic factors such as economic sector, type of organization, teams within organisations and individuals influence behavior.

Psychodynamic – focusing on the dynamic unconscious with the view that our feelings and behavior are influenced by our unconscious mind

Evolutionary – explores human evolution, how and why our evolutionary traits have developed and which has informed neuroscience coaching.

Biological – explores nature (genes) and nurture (environment / relationships) and to what extent these influence human behavior.

The Universal Coaching Model encompasses all of these approaches.



**Figure 2.3 The Universal Coaching Model, Henley Business School (2020)**

Palmer & Whybrow (2018) also cite a number of psychological approaches as having had an influence as can be seen in Table 2.1 below which shows the percentage of coaching psychologists and coaches who integrate these approaches into their coaching practice.

**Table 2.1 Psychological Approaches**

| Approach | % Coaching Psychologists | % Coaches |
|----------|--------------------------|-----------|
|          |                          |           |

|                                        |    |    |
|----------------------------------------|----|----|
| Positive Psychology                    | 63 | 57 |
| Cognitive Behavioural                  | 57 | 46 |
| Mindfulness                            | 48 | 46 |
| Solution Focused                       | 43 | 42 |
| Strengths Based                        | 42 | 48 |
| Goal Focused                           | 42 | 49 |
| Adult Learning                         | 40 | 32 |
| Behavioural                            | 37 | 40 |
| Cognitive                              | 31 | 21 |
| Solution Focused Cognitive Behavioural | 29 | 21 |
| Person-centred                         | 28 | 41 |
| Humanistic                             | 28 | 28 |
| Action Focused                         | 27 | 30 |
| Motivational Interviewing              | 27 | 22 |
| Developmental                          | 22 | 31 |
| Narrative                              | 22 | 17 |
| Systemic                               | 19 | 17 |
| Existential                            | 16 | 11 |
| Trasactional Analysis                  | 15 | 25 |
| Co-active                              | 14 | 25 |
| Neurolinguistic Programming            | 14 | 30 |
| Problem Focused                        | 14 | 15 |
| Psychodynamic                          | 13 | 10 |

|                            |    |    |
|----------------------------|----|----|
| Rational Emotive Behaviour | 12 | 7  |
| Gestalt Approaches         | 12 | 17 |
| Compassion Focused         | 11 | 13 |

From this we can see that coaching psychologists and coaches draw widely upon positive psychology and integrate this approach into their coaching practice. It is therefore pertinent to explore literature relating to positive psychology and its contribution to coaching psychology.

#### **2.4.1 Positive psychology**

It is interesting to note that the Australian Psychological Society's Interest Group in Coaching Psychology (APS IGCP) originally considered coaching psychology to be an applied positive psychology, describing it as "an applied positive psychology, draws on and develops established psychological approaches, and can be understood as being the systematic application of behavioural science to the enhancement of life experience, work performance and wellbeing for individuals, groups and organisations who do not have clinically significant mental health issues or abnormal levels of distress" (APS IGCP, retrieved 2007). They subsequently changed their name to the APS Coaching Psychology Interest Group (CPIG) and offered an amended definition of coaching psychology which omitted the term 'applied positive psychology' stating that "Coaching Psychology can be understood as the systematic application of behavioural science to the enhancement of life experiences, work performance, the wellbeing and potential of individuals, groups, and organisations" (APS CPIG, 2020).

Some authors view positive psychology as having had a significant effect on how coaching psychology is understood and perceived (Kauffman & Scoular, 2004; Linley, 2004). Positive psychology has evolved from a theoretical approach to an applied psychology which focuses upon human functioning at the optimal level (Linley & Joseph, 2004). Coaching psychology and positive psychology are both relatively new fields which are closely associated, have many similarities and can be used in a variety of settings including education, health and organisations (Panchal Palmer & Green, 2018). Coaching psychology and positive psychology can be considered in a sense to be a natural fit, both focusing upon how we can function best as human beings and both diverging from the more traditional approaches to psychology (Linley & Harrington, 2005). This view is supported by Green & Palmer (2019) who see both fields as complementary to one another and having similar aims whilst also recognizing that enhancing wellbeing is the key focus of positive psychology whereas coaching psychology focuses to a greater degree upon goal attainment. In a somewhat similar vein, Lomas (2019) states that coaching psychology can be considered to be a positive psychological intervention if it particularly focusses upon wellbeing rather than for example, simply goal attainment. According to Passmore & Evans-Krimme (2021), although both positive psychology and coaching have evolved from a variety of disciplines, they have both emerged from the Human Potential Movement of the 1960s and have many similarities including their collective focus upon wellbeing and peak functioning.

It is therefore unsurprising that a new coaching psychology approach emerged, Positive Psychology Coaching, which can be defined as “coaching approaches that seek to

improve short term wellbeing (i.e. hedonic wellbeing) and sustainable wellbeing (i.e. eudaimonic wellbeing) using evidence based approaches from positive psychology and the science of wellbeing - and enable the person to do this in an on-going manner after coaching has completed” (Oades & Passmore, 2014).

Psychologists who have made notable contributions to positive psychology include Martin Seligman one of the main pioneers of positive psychology, which was central to the work he did when elected as president of the American Psychological Association in 1998; Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, whose work focused upon states of flow and Christopher Peterson, who is regarded for his work on the study of hope and optimism (Taher, 2021). According to Seligman (2022b) positive psychology supports societies and individuals, by focusing, in a scientific manner, upon their talents and abilities, which allows them to flourish; based upon the belief that by cultivating their innate talents, people can lead more enriched and rewarding lives.

#### **2.4.2 Which coaching approach?**

In their book ‘Handbook of Coaching Psychology : A Guide for Practitioners’, Palmer & Whybrow (2018) outline six different coaching approaches : cognitive behavioural; humanistic, existential, being focused, constructive, systemic.

Cognitive Behavioural : Palmer & Szymanska (2018, p.108) define cognitive behavioural coaching as “an integrative approach which combines the use of cognitive, behavioural, imaginal and problem-solving techniques and strategies within a cognitive behavioural framework to enable coachees to achieve their realistic goals”.

Humanistic : The humanistic approach “offers ways of seeing the world and insights into how as human beings, we might make sense of and engage with the world” (Whybrow, 2021 p. 52).

Existential : Spinelli & Horner (2018, p. 169) view existential coaching psychology as focusing upon “the structured exploration of coachees’ way of being as expressed through both the meanings which they generate and the relations they adopt in the world. Arising directly from its philosophical grounding, an existential approach argues that human experience is unavoidably uncertain and thereby always open to novel and unpredicted possibilities.

Being Focused : Being-focused coaching includes ontological coaching which seeks to explore the clients’ view of their world and sense of being (Shabi & Whybrow, 2018) and somatic coaching which seeks to deepen the clients’ awareness of their personal narratives and patterns as they evolve into the person they wish to become (Aquilina & Strozzi-Heckler, 2018).

Constructive : “Constructionism in a narrow sense would refer to personal and relational construct psychology while constructionist approaches would include narrative psychology, appreciative inquiry and solution-focused psychology” (Pavlović, 2021, p.2).

Systemic : Whittington (2020) views systemic coaching as an approach which recognizes that individuals function within certain systems and he stresses the importance of clients recognizing the inter-connectedness of these systems.



As my research explores the personal, lived experiences of students and coaches in Bahrain in relation to coaching, the humanistic approach has particular relevance. It also aligns with the methodology I have chosen for my research, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which allows for an in-depth appreciation and understanding of the personal experiences of individuals which encompass deeply felt emotions, complexity and ambiguity (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

### **2.4.3 Humanistic psychology**

The Society for Humanistic Psychology describe humanistic psychologists as “dedicated to understanding and appreciating people holistically, phenomenologically, and systemically; as continually evolving; and as uniquely situated in their intersecting sociocultural and eco-psycho-spiritual contexts” (Society for Humanistic Psychology (Division 32), n.d.)

Humanistic Psychology gained momentum in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century partly as a reaction to the perceived shortcomings of Skinner’s behaviourism theory and Freud’s psychoanalytic theory and in contrast to both of these, focused upon the ability of individuals to express their own abilities, creativity and potential and engage in a process self-actualization. (Rowan & Glouberman, 2018).

According to Passmore & Evans-Krimme (2021) both coaching psychology and positive psychology have emerged from humanistic psychology which focused upon human beings thriving. Humanistic psychology has significantly contributed to the development of coaching psychology (Castiello D’Antonio , 2018; Tkach & DiGirolamo 2017; Williams, 2012; Askeland, 2009; Williams, 2008; Spence, 2007; Stober, 2006) as

humanistic approaches underpin both coaching psychology and practice in the sense that self-awareness and self-understanding, both key elements in humanistic psychology, are necessary in order for the coach to work effectively on an emotional level with the client (Whybrow, 2021, Rowan, 2005).

Humanistic psychology and coaching are both concerned with human growth, development and potential and are thus viewed as 'natural bedfellows' (Biswas-Diener, 2010, p. 4). Similarly, Gregory & Levy (2013) posit that humanistic coaching, a person-centred approach, is concerned with taking the principles of humanistic psychology and applying them to coaching practice, the goal being to allow the client to fulfil their potential.

Humanistic coaching views the relationship between the coach and the client as vital in terms of successful coaching outcomes (Gregory & Levy, 2012; Cain, 2002; de Haan, 2008; Joseph, 2006; Kauffman, 2006; Passmore, 2006; Stober, 2006). The main factors which support the development of such a coaching relationship are the same qualities that are valued in humanistic psychology and include unconditional positive regard, empathy, authenticity and trust (Gabriel et al., 2014).

Humanistic Psychology, although originally considered somewhat unconventional, is now widely accepted as relatively mainstream and it is generally accepted that the 'new' positive psychology has emerged from humanistic psychology (Maurer & Daukantaitė, 2020; Snyder & Lopez, 2002) and similarly, the 'new' approaches to coaching have taken much from the humanistic tradition (Cox, Bachkirova & Clutterbuck, 2010).

Within the realms of practical coaching, humanistic approaches emphasise the importance of techniques including emotional and physical listening, paraphrasing and re-statement, reflection and summarizing as useful techniques which are rooted in the humanistic approaches of Rogers and Maslow (Segers, Vloeberghs, Hendericks & Inceoglu, 2011).

Notable figures in the development of humanistic psychology include Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers (Whybrow, 2021). Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers were interested in the phenomenological characteristics of human experience, Maslow being concerned with how people discover meaning and value in their lives and Rogers focusing on the role of love and acceptance as a means of becoming a fully functional person and the emergence of client-centred, humanistic approaches focused upon human potential as opposed to pathology or neurosis (Williams, 2012).

Abraham Maslow (1943, 1954) posited that human motivation is based on people searching for fulfilment and change through personal development and growth and that individuals who have reached their full potential and capabilities are in essence self-actualized. Maslow is best known for his Hierarchy of Needs which sees us as needing to fulfil our basic needs first, then our psychological needs and finally our self-fulfillment needs (Maslow, 1943).

Maslow's theory continued to evolve over a number of decades (Maslow, 1943, 1962, 1987) and his later Hierarchy of Needs is more flexible than the original form and has more movement with regard to the differences between individuals in the sense that different aspects of the Hierarchy of Needs may be of greater importance to different individuals; for example, for some people, love would be less important than self-

esteem (Maslow, 1987). He stated that “any behaviour tends to be determined by several or all of the basic needs simultaneously rather than by only one of them” (Maslow, 1987, p. 71). Thus the model was subsequently adapted to incorporate cognitive and aesthetic needs (Maslow, 1970a) followed by transcendence needs (Maslow, 1970b). Maslow (1971) believed that humanistic psychology would allow individuals to become stronger, healthier, and allow them to take their own lives into their hands to a greater extent and that with this responsibility and a clear understanding of their values, they could not only change their own lives but also the society in which they lived. He believed that ‘The science of psychology has been far more successful on the negative than on the positive side It has revealed to us much about man’s shortcomings, his illness, his sins, but little about his potentialities, his virtues, his achievable aspirations, or his full psychological height. It is as if psychology has voluntarily restricted itself to only half its rightful jurisdiction, and that, the darker, meaner half’ (Maslow, 1954, p.354). In Maslow’s later book *Toward a Psychology of Being* (1968) he wrote about the human process of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ and the concept of living with purpose and striving to grow and reach our potential, thus laying the ground work for what would later become coaching psychology (Williams, 2012).

Carl Rogers agreed for the most part with Maslow however he also believed that in order for an individual to evolve, it is necessary to have an atmosphere of acceptance, which he described as unconditional positive regard, empathy and genuineness, which would allow the individual to be forthcoming and open (Rogers, 1951).

Rogers (1959) also theorizes that the most powerful human motivation is to achieve self-actualization which is the fulfilment of one's potential to the greatest degree possible. He believed that individuals have both a self-image, how we view ourselves, and an ideal-image, how we would like to be and the nearer these two images are to one another, the better we will feel about ourselves; if these images are very far apart from one another we feel a sense of incongruence which can interfere with positive progress towards actualization.

Rogers (1951) believed that our self-concept incorporates self-worth, self-image and our ideal self and that children have deep needs for self-worth and unconditional positive regard, particularly from their parents. Our psychological wellbeing is deeply contingent upon how we view ourselves and our level of self-worth and this is thought to influence our ability to self-actualize; individuals who have a strong sense of their own worth have the ability to cope with the challenges life presents and are more likely able to demonstrate resilience and a sense of positivity in the face of adversity whereas individuals with low self-worth tend to shy away from challenges and find it difficult to accept that the experience of living can, at times, be painful (Rogers, 1959).

## **2.5 Coaching psychology and education**

As the participants of Study One are university students, it is relevant to review literature pertaining to coaching in educational settings. Coaching in education has been defined as a “one-to-one conversation focused on the enhancement of learning and development through increasing self-awareness and a sense of personal responsibility, where the coach facilitates the self-directed learning of the coachee through questioning, active listening and appropriate challenge in a supportive and encouraging climate” (van Nieuwerburg, 2012, p. 101). Coaching has been found to be an effective intervention within the education sector (Lofthouse, 2019; Fletcher & Mullen 2012; Van Nieuwerburgh & Barr 2016; Devine et al., 2013). Lofthouse (2019) found that within the field of education, coaching helps clients to manage their interests, dilemmas and challenges and that it may be successfully used to increase staff retention. The effect of coaching within the educational sector is significant and in order to enhance coaching within this field, all stakeholders need to be aligned (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012).

Ross (1992) originated the study of coaching research within the field of education and found that student achievement was higher in the classrooms of teachers who interacted more extensively with their coaches and that student achievement was also higher in the classrooms of teachers with high teacher efficacy beliefs; he also suggested that it is credible that coaching and teacher efficacy may be interlinked. Earlier work on the link between teacher efficacy and student outcomes is also relevant; for example McLaughlin & Marsh (1978) who demonstrated a link between teacher efficacy and student results and subsequently, Ashton & Webb (1986) who found a relationship between teacher efficacy and student achievement. Webb (1996) also

found a connection between teacher efficacy and student outcomes. Research conducted by Smylie (1988), Stein & Wang (1988) and Anderson (1988) found similar results. Tschannen-Morean et al. (1998) argued that teacher efficacy increased as a result of close, consistent modelling. Research on a teacher coaching programme conducted by Knight (2007) found a positive correlation between coaching and teacher efficacy and Shidler (2009) also found a positive correlation between teacher coaching and student results. One of the largest influences upon student success is considered to be the actual practice of teachers, therefore supporting the professional development of teachers, including coaching, is viewed as potentially having a substantial impact (Lofthouse, 2019; Nelson & Bohanon, 2019; Piper et al., 2018; Knight, 2009; Bush, 2009; Cornett & Knight, 2009; Joyce & Showers, 1987) and in this regard, coaching has been found to be effective in terms of facilitating change in teaching practice (Cilliers et al., 2020; Elek & Page, 2019; Cantrell & Hughes, 2008; Cobourn & Woulfin, 2012; Sailors & Price, 2010; Steckel, 2009; Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009; Walpole, McKenna, Uribe-Zarain, & Lamitina, 2010).

According to Devine, Meyers & Houssemand (2013) coaching can be useful in terms of supporting both the development and learning of teachers, students and school management. The nature of education is changing and we are seeing a shift from traditional didactic teaching to coaching and facilitation of learning (Byers et al., 2018; Kariippanon et al., 2018; McCabe & O'Connor, 2014; Griffiths, 2005; Whitmore, 2002) with an emphasis on a holistic approach (Seligman et al., 2009; Cohen, 2006; Huitt, 2011). This shift is also evident in the field of medical education (Riley et al., 2021; Singh & Kharb, 2013; Compton et al., 2020; Orr & Sonnadara, 2019).

The current Covid pandemic has seen education going completely online which has brought education into a new phase requiring additional facilitation and interpersonal skills (Albrahim, 2020; Schaefer, 2019; Ramírez-Montoya et al., 2021; Farhana et al., 2020; Tuma et al., 2021; Prasad et al., 2020).

The growing literature also has provided for greater knowledge based upon developing methods to integrate coaching elements into educational programming. Knight & van Nieuwerburgh (2012) report that over the past twenty years, there has been increasing interest in the implementation of coaching in schools around the world and in the UK, and a wide range of coaching interventions are being accepted by educators and students. Coaching within the field of education seeks to improve student performance (Green et al., 2007; Locke 1996; Grant et al. 2010; Passmore & Brown, 2009) and has been found to have a positive effect upon students' wellbeing, goal striving, resilience and hope (Lane & De Wilde 2018; Green et al., 2007; Grant et al., 2010, Rolo & Gould, 2007; Bettinger & Baker, 2014).

Concerning coaching in educational institutions in the Middle East, Wilson (2011) found that clients had concerns about trust and rapport in their relationships with their coaches and they also felt that the coaching models used by the coaches were not relevant. However subsequent studies found that some educational organizations in the Middle East which have integrated coaching with a view to goal attainment in the areas of leadership and performance have been successful and this has had a positive impact upon the development and growth of the institutions (Jones et al., 2016; Netolicky, 2016).



In the Middle East, higher education institutions and universities are clearly beginning to value to benefits of coaching in terms of organizational and professional development and according to Hakro & Mathew (2020) their research on coaching in higher education institutions in Oman demonstrates this. Similarly Nadeem & Garvey (2020) found that in universities in the Middle East, coaching can help educational leaders to develop both insights and strategies that will enable them to deal with the complexities and challenges they encounter in their roles. In a study on a Higher Education Institution in the Middle East, Matthew (2022) found that participants highlighted clarity of thinking and reflection as a coaching outcome, as well as an increase in both professional and personal development, however culture and trust issues were seen as potential obstacles to the success of coaching.

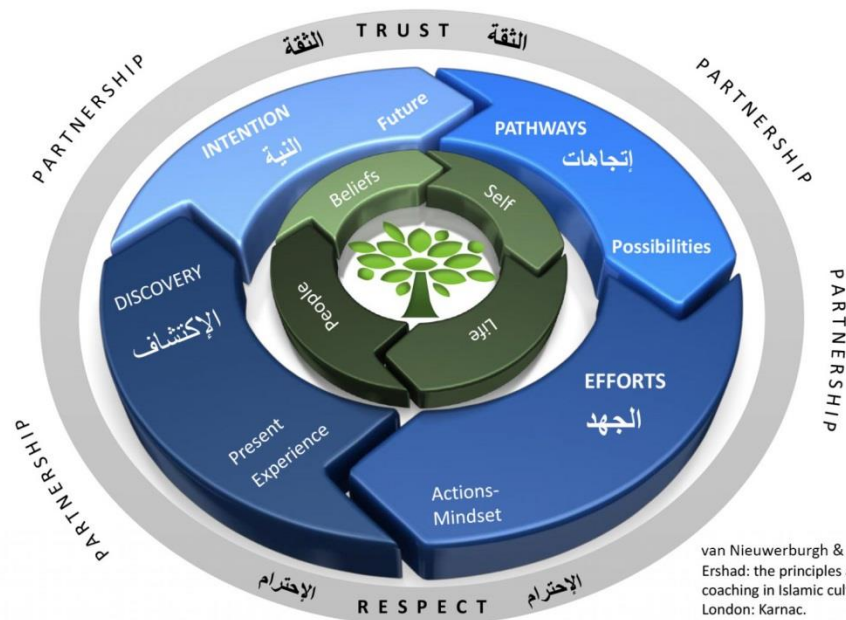
Historically, in the Middle East, educational systems have been linked with colonial powers who made education compulsory and access to education was limited due to the fact that skills and knowledge might result in the indigenous population challenging the colonial powers (Akarri, 2004). The Middle East has experienced more power politics for 200 years than any other region, leaving a distinctive mark on its politics that continues to the present day and education is sometimes used to nurture nationalism in the region (Saltman & Means, 2018; Goldschmidt & Boum, 2018; Andersen et al., 2020; Kivimäki, 2021). Within the field of education in the Middle East, entrepreneurship is regarded as a priority (Kirby, 2018) however instead of implementing reforms that have been developed in the West, it may be beneficial for Middle Eastern countries to engage in policy learning so that they can implement reforms that are more attuned to their needs (Romanowski, Alkhateeb & Nasser, 2018). Countries within the Middle East

have traditions that incorporate hierarchy, achievement and uncertainty which may hinder efforts to adapt western designed educational reforms (Khan, 2018) and rote learning is still prevalent in the Middle East (Hassan & Qureshi, 2018; Khan, 2018).

## **2.6 Coaching psychology and culture**

As this research is exploring coaching within a specific cultural context, it is pertinent to review literature relating to coaching and culture.

Similar to the growth of coaching in Europe and the US, coaching in organizations in the Middle East is also growing, however it is forging its own distinct path both in terms of national and cultural diversity (Passmore et al., 2019). Coaching models have mostly been developed in the west which raises the question of whether more culturally sensitive models may be more suitable in certain cultures, such as the Middle East (van Nieuwerburgh, 2016). The Ershad Framework of Coaching was developed specifically for practice in the Middle East by van Nieuwerburgh & Al-Laho (2017) based upon the foundational values of trust and respect. Of growing interest in the Middle East is the idea of a coaching approach which is rooted in indigenous psychology (King et al., 2021).



**Figure 2.4 The Ershad Framework of Coaching (van Nieuwerbrug & Al-Laho, 2017)**

The field of Cultural psychology whilst relatively recent has seen rapid growth over the past years and includes scholars from a diverse range of disciplines including psychology, education, linguistics, anthropology, communication, neuroscience and social work; of pivotal interest is the concept that culture is a key constituent of human development and psychology (Jensen, 2011). Within the field of psychology, culture and

its influence upon the behaviour of human beings has largely been sidelined and the focus has been upon psychological theories and approaches particular to European and American cultures (Spering, 2001). In the domain of cross-cultural psychology, culture can be seen to contain both objective aspects such as infrastructure and subjective aspects which include a group's values, norms and beliefs, in essence, their perception of their social environment (Triandis et al., 1972; Thomas, 1994). According to Matsumoto (2002), cross cultural research has played a large role in our understandings of self and the realization that our culture influences our perceptions of our own sense of identity. Culture has developed according to historical behaviour and in turn molds future behaviour (Segall et al., 1999). Historically, culture was attributed to three aspects, language, place and time (Student7s & Berry, 1995; Triandis, 1980) and limited to national boundaries (Hofstede, 1989). However there has been a shift in recent years whereby culture is now understood to be dynamic, unlimited by national borders and evolving over time (Hong & Chiu, 2001; Barth, 2010; Fang, 2012; Winschiers-Theophilus et al., 2022).

Formal cross-cultural studies can be traced back to the late 1800s when psychology was establishing itself as a discipline (Spering, 2001). Some theories posit that culture is a form of evolutionary adaptation (Barkow et al, 1992; Tomasello, 1999; Heyes, 2018; Boyd & Richerson, 2020). According to Krebs & Janicki (2004) cultural perceptions of morality have been determined by evolution including group solidarity, interpersonal helping, social responsibility, obedience and reciprocity. Evolution is also thought to influence cultural norms pertaining to morality, sharing and sexual behaviour (Pinker, 2002; Kameda et al. 2003, Kenrick et al. 2003; Atari et al., 2020; Kennair, 2021).

Some evolutionary perspectives focus on aspects related to reproduction and survival and argue that people will communicate this affectively charged information (Kenrick et al., 2002). Other perspectives on the development of culture are based upon psychological needs such as terror management theory which argues that culture emerged in response to anxiety about our own mortality and that many cultural beliefs protect us from this fear, for example religious beliefs concerning life after death (Solomon et al. 2004; Greenberg et al, 1997; Bulut, 2021). Greenberg et al. (1993) and Harmon-Jones et al. (1997) hypothesized that enhanced self-esteem as a result of belonging to a meaningful culture also serves to reduce anxiety relating to mortality. Conversely other authors posit that it is the awareness of our mortality that supports adherence to cultural worldviews and results in the subjugation of alternative worldviews and the punishment of those seen to contravene the accepted cultural norms (Rosenblatt et al., 1989; Florian & Mikulincer, 1997; Greenberg et al, 1995). The epistemic perspective argues for a need for certainty in our perceptions of our understanding of the world and that a sense of shared reality is necessary in order to validate our own construction of reality (Hardin & Higgins, 1996). An alternative perspective on the development of culture argues that culture is a by-product of interpersonal interaction. Dynamic social impact theory posits that persuasion, within normal interpersonal interaction can shape culture (Muthukrishna & Schaller, 2020; Latané, 1996; Harton & Bourgeois, 2004; Latané & Bourgeois, 2001). Within communities, some will be more persuasive than others and this ability to influence will result in different groups of beliefs and consequently behaviours (Latané & L'Herrou, 1996; Bourgeois & Bowen, 2001; Guimond & Palmer, 1985). If interpersonal interaction

is the basis of the development of culture then particular aspects of culture will be shaped by individual-level processes and beliefs and behaviours that are more transferable will more easily become normative (Heath et al., 2001; Schaller, 2001; Schaller et al. 2002; Sperber, 1984).

Coaching has been developed based upon Western values and concepts with little consideration of adaptation or an understanding of potential cultural bias (Geber & Keane, 2013; Plaister-Ten, 2009; Nangalia & Nangalia, 2010) and coaching models which have been developed in the West are not necessarily helpful in different cultures, such as the Middle East (van Nieuwerburg, 2016). According to Coultas et al. (2011) not much progress has been made in terms of culturally sensitive models of coaching. The Asian tsunami disaster of 2004 provides a useful example whereby well-intentioned Western therapists and counsellors created additional problems for survivors as they did not have an understanding of the culture in which they were working, for example they did not realise that mental illness was seen as taboo and that the individuals they were trying to help would be stigmatized (Christopher et al., 2014). Psychotherapeutic approaches which have been developed and aligned with the cultural perspective of their clients have been found to be more effective (Benish et al., 2011; Wampold, 2015).

According to Hands (2017) the field of psychology is considered relatively new within the Middle East/North Africa region and even more so in the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) nations. There is still a stigma attached to seeking help for mental health issues in the Middle East (Javed et al., 2021; Mohammadzadeh et al., 2020; Clausen et al., 2020) and individuals have tended to describe psychological problems more as

physical symptoms due to concerns about being labelled as having a mental illness (Al-Krenawi, 2005).

The Middle East is a collectivist culture and community and religious values shape personal values, therefore, to a very large extent personal choices align with religious, family and community expectations which understandably has an influence on the coaching process (Palmer & Arnold, 2013). The collectivist culture and tribal traditions of Arabs along with their practice and values are important to all facets of their lives (Palmer & Arnold, 2013). Low internal focus of control, which is also supported by religious belief, can lead to individuals believing themselves to be less accountable for their choices and decisions therefore where culture is such a strong foundation for how people behave, understanding the dynamics of how culture influences the psychological process of behaviour change and vice versa is critical to an effective coaching relationship (Palmer & Arnold, 2013).

That is not to say that coaching cannot be successful within a Middle Eastern culture, but rather that in order to be most effective, coaches must be aware of the different cultural dimensions and a coaching model must be developed which incorporates these differences (Law et al., 2007, Flight & Law, 2012). Findings from the ICF 2016 Global Coaching Study show that coaches in the Middle East believe to a large extent that coaching is able to influence social change (International Coaching Federation, 2016).

### **2.6.1 Coaching psychology and identity**

Culture has an influence on individual evolution and perceptions of self. According to Geertz (1966) culture is a model for self, in that it defines what self is and also dictates

self-management in daily life. Abi-Hashem (2014) posits that individuals' behaviour is only pertinent within the social and cultural contexts in which they exist. Cross cultural research into the construction of self, reveals differences in the construction of self between interdependent cultural paradigms and independent cultural paradigms (Rhee et al., 1995; Wang, 2001). Different personal development goals are also evident between interdependent cultural paradigms and independent cultural paradigms. According to Iyengar & Lepper (1999) self-development goals within an independent cultural paradigm are self-direction, the pursuit of personal excellence and the actualization of one's inner potential. In contrast, Heine et al. (2000) found that within an interdependent cultural paradigm, the objective of self-development is to move beyond the individual and focus upon the collective good. According to Darrin et al. (2004) self-worth is built upon different psychological foundations and different cultural paradigms dictate alternative paths to self-worth for example in some cultures, self-worth is based upon the social standing of one's group as well as individual appraisal as with East Asians, who view group failure as ego threatening but are less likely to feel the same way about personal failure. (Chen et. al, 1998). The converse is true in Western cultures and an area of obvious importance for coaching is locus of control or agency which is a cultural construct and consists of personal and collective agency (Bandura, 2002). Personal and group agency may differ according to cultural paradigms, for instance, personal agency is more evident in North Americans whereas group agency is more likely in East Asians (Chiu et al., 2000; Menon et al., 1999). These are referred to as disjoint and conjoint models of agency whereby disjoint agency originates in the independent self and is distinct from the actions of others and conjoint agency



originates in the interdependent self and is impelled by others (Markus & Kitayama, 2002). Conjoint agency is dominant in the Middle East and most societies in the Middle East share some common characteristics, namely, an emphasis on community and social identity, strong family bonds, a sense of generational heritage and a connection to the land, an emphasis on hospitality and openness to others (Abi-Hashem, 2011c; Barakat, 1993; Hourani, 1991; Nydell, 2006; Patai, 2010).

There are some very specific challenges which face cross-cultural workers in the Middle East, in particular the necessity to check their own assumptions, cultural lens and world view and to enhance their self-awareness as some interventions may unwittingly cause more harm than good, such as suggesting strong personal boundaries and self-reliance in a culture which highly values close family relationships and friendships (Abi-Hasen, 2014).

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This chapter examined literature pertaining to the evolution and development of coaching psychology and also explored the role that coaching psychology plays in different fields. Of particular interest to the researcher is the influence of existential psychology on the development of coaching psychology and this branch of psychology has a particular bearing on this study. The next chapter examines the epistemological and methodological position of the researcher.

## **Chapter 3 : Epistemological & Methodological Position**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The preceding chapter explored the influences of different psychological approaches on the development of coaching psychology and the role that coaching psychology plays in different fields. Of particular importance to this study is the interrelationship between coaching psychology and culture, particularly in the Middle East.

This chapter discusses the philosophical approaches which have influenced my methodological and epistemological position and how I approached this cultural research within a social constructivist philosophy. It also outlines the theoretical foundations of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and provides the rationale for my choice of methodology.

### **3.2 Epistemology**

#### **3.2.1 The philosophical foundations of epistemology**

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy and to understand epistemology we must start with its philosophical foundations (Scherer et al., 2015). Philosophy is concerned with the use of reason in understanding such things as the nature of the real world and existence, the use and limits of knowledge, and the principles of moral judgment (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021).

Philosophy encompasses metaphysics, epistemology and ethics (Payne, 2015).

Metaphysical issues are concerned with the nature of reality, epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge and justified belief and ethics is concerned with what we

ought to do, how we ought to live and how we ought to organise our communities (Payne, 2015).

Our search for understanding starts in the Ancient World with the birth of Thales of Miletus (c.623 – 545 BC), who was the first philosopher to describe natural phenomena as having a cause other than retribution from the mythological Greek gods (Schmitz, 2018). Our journey of philosophy brings us from this Ancient World, through the Middle Ages, The Renaissance, the Age of Enlightenment, the Nineteenth Century and up to the present Modern Age (Smith, 2017).

It is unlikely that any two philosophers would agree upon an exact definition of philosophy and how to approach it as it has meant different things to different philosophers throughout history and whether philosophers have been searching for wisdom, attempting to understand elements of the divine, examining human moral responsibilities or seeking to understand the universe, there has rarely been any absolute consensus (Stroll et al., 2021).

### **3.2.2 Construction of reality and perception**

In his *History of Philosophy*, Turner states “The dangers to be avoided in the study of the history of philosophy are eclecticism, which teaches that all systems are equally true, and skepticism, which teaches that all systems are equally false.” He goes on to say that “a right concept of the ultimate meaning of reality and correct notion of philosophical method are the essentials for which we must look in every system” (Turner, 1903, p.1)

One might ask if there can actually be a right concept of the ultimate meaning of reality? Can there ever be an ultimate meaning of reality or are there a multitude of meanings informed by our multitudinous perspectives?

Russell (1912, p.243) in contrast to Turner asserted that “The value of philosophy is, in fact, to be sought largely in its very uncertainty ... though unable to tell us with certainty what is the true answer to the doubts which it raises, is able to suggest many possibilities which enlarge our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of custom”.

Considering how reality is created, Berger & Luckmann's (1966) seminal book *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* is relevant and is considered influential in the creation of the field of social constructionism. A number of philosophers inspired Berger and Luckman's ideas including Student<sup>7</sup> Herbert Mead, Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim and Mead's theory on symbolic interactionism which views social interaction as being responsible for the construction of our identity was of particular influence to the development of this field (Vinney, 2021). An earlier book *In Public Opinion* was of equal importance where, Lipmann (1922), posits that individuals create biased and subjective understandings of their worlds which is in a sense fictional in that although we exist in the same material world, how we feel and think is very different and that we create what can essentially be viewed as a pseudo-environment.

Viewing reality as a social construct means that people shape their experience of reality through social interaction and social constructionism takes the view that phenomena do not have an independent foundation outside the mental and linguistic representation that people develop about them throughout their history, and which becomes their shared reality (Berger & Luckmann, 2011).

We find evidence of social constructionism in the works of the 16th century philosopher Michel de Montaigne who believed that it is necessary for us to interpret our interpretations rather than simply to interpret things (Montaigne & Cotton, 2017) and in the works of Friedrich Nietzsche who posited that we only have our interpretation of facts rather than facts themselves (Nietzsche, 1887).

Montaigne was himself influenced by the stoic philosopher Epictetus (Sellars, 2014) who explained to his students that it is not actual events that affect us, but rather our perceptions of these events (Epictetus, 2020) and what influences our perceptions is to a large degree determined by our culture, which with different beliefs and values influences our perception of reality (Ou, 2017).

Culture influences our perception and also our epistemological beliefs, however the influence of culture on epistemological beliefs has received little attention in the literature (Sheehy et al., 2019; Chan & Elliot, 2004; Schraw, 2001). Interestingly in one of the few studies of its kind, Craig & Shams (1998) found that epistemology has been a main focus of Muslim philosophers throughout the ages, with the assertion that knowledge is necessary in order to attain happiness. Epistemology considers knowledge in terms of its limitations, origin and nature and concerned with what is understood to be truth (American Psychological Association (APA), 2020).

Knowledge and the truth were subjects which preoccupied the French philosopher René Descartes, who has been considered a leading figure in the field of Epistemology since the 1600s and his philosophy, considered radical by many, claimed proof of the existence of the Self and God and offered a different perspective on human / animal nature and the physical world (Descartes & Maclean, 2006).

Although Descartes is perhaps most widely known in the field, epistemology can be traced back to the very origins of philosophy and has continued to interest philosophers throughout the ages (Niiniluoto et al., 2014).

### **3.2.3 Moral epistemology**

Moral epistemology which has received increased attention in recent years, is based upon moral philosophy and is concerned with moral knowledge and related phenomena; of particular interest is the scientific study of moral development and moral judgment and their origins in cultural evolution (Zimmerman, 2014).

Moral philosophy is concerned with what is required from human beings in terms of how we choose to live our lives (a topic which was greatly considered by Socrates) however it provides no simple answers and there are numerous rival theories which prescribe how we ought to live (Drummond & Embree, 2013).

Writings pertaining to moral philosophy can be traced back as far as Herodotus (circa 400 BCE), where different conceptions of right and wrong have been observed in different cultures (Rachels & Rachels, 2021). This brings us into the sphere of moral relativism which views morality as being relative to culture (cultural relativism) or being relative to individuals (ethical relativism) and there are no universal moral truths (Wiegand, 2012). Moral relativism takes the view that rather than one moral truth, there are many possible moralities and our view of whether something is morally acceptable or not is a relative matter (Harman, 2014). This distinction is important in the field of cross-cultural research where the researcher's view on morality may differ significantly from the participant's view (Marshall & Batten, 2004).

### **3.2.4 My epistemological position**

My epistemological position is that of social constructionism. Constructionism differs from positivism in the sense that in constructionism, knowledge and reality are seen as human constructs based upon our experiences and interactions with the world and therefore are subjective whereas positivism views knowledge and reality as being verified through scientific methods (Hasa, 2020).

The underlying premise of social constructionism is that reality is culturally, historically and socially constructed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2000; Neuman, 2000; Schwandt, 2000). Therefore, social phenomena can be understood from a context-specific point of view and is seen as value-bound instead of value-free in the sense that the process is influenced by both the context and by the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

There are different categories of constructionism (e.g. radical, social, biological, cognitive, phenomenological) but they all take the view that knowledge is based upon our personal / social process of making meaning; there are no universal truths (Hacking, 2000).

I have lived and worked in many different cultures throughout my life including Europe, the Middle East, Russia, US and Caribbean and have learned so much from these experiences. I believe that they have greatly influenced my epistemological position as I have personally experienced and observed how reality is constructed and interpreted differently in different societies. I find a Social Constructivist approach to be respectful to different cultural beliefs and allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the multiple realities of the participants.

### **3.3 The theoretical foundations of interpretative phenomenological analysis**

The methodology I have chosen is interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) which particularly focuses upon giving voice to individual experiences (Smith et al., 2012).

Smith & Osborn (2015) posit that IPA allows for an in-depth appreciation and understanding of the personal experiences of individuals which encompass deeply felt emotions, complexity and ambiguity. Although IPA is regarded as a modern approach, grounded in psychology, which gained momentum in the 1990s (Eatough, 2012), the origins of IPA can be traced back to the late 1800s / early 1900s, to William James and Gordon Allport and their interest in personal accounts and subjective experience (Smith & Eatough, 2017).

Initially used primarily in the disciplines of health and clinical/counselling psychology, IPA has gained popularity in many other fields including education (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013; Thurston, 2014); organizational studies (de Miguel, Lizaso, Larranaga & Arrospide, 2015; Tomkins & Eatough, 2014), the humanities (Hefferon and Ollis, 2006) and health (Seamark et al. 2004, Cassidy et al. 2011). IPA has its roots in phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith et al., 2009).

#### **3.3.1 Phenomenology**

Brentano was considered to be an influential figure in the subject of phenomenology which in its simplest sense is the study of experience (Fréchette, 2020) and his students Carl Stumpf (1848-1936) and Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) made notable contributions to this field (Jacquette, 2004).



Intentionality and consciousness are two important concepts brought into contemporary philosophical discussion by Brentano (Potrč, 2002). Concerning mental phenomena, Brentano argues that physical and mental phenomena differ in the sense that physical phenomena can be perceived externally whereas mental phenomena can only be perceived internally (Huemer, 2019). Brentano argues that intentionality is a key factor regarding the difference between psychological and physical phenomena in the sense that in terms of psychological phenomena intentionality or object-directedness is present (Jacquette, 2004). Brentano greatly influenced his student Edmund Husserl (Huemer, 2019). According to Husserl (1982) reflexivity is a necessary component to understanding phenomena as is the necessity to modify our perspective from external objects to an internal view. He believed that to achieve a phenomenological attitude it is necessary to attempt to understand the nature of subjective experience and that one way of doing this is to try to think of all of the possible aspects of the experience, what he referred to as free imaginative variation Husserl (1982). He was interested in the essence of consciousness and what makes consciousness possible, what he called transcendental reduction Husserl (1982). Similarly Heidegger (1962) saw our place in the world as being according to our own perception which is inevitably relative and temporal.

Concerning the relativity of perceptions, Merleau Ponty argues that our thoughts and our perceptions cannot be separated and that we view others from the perspective of our own embodiment and therefore we start from a position of difference (Toadvine, 2016).

Sartre was also a phenomenologist however he differed from Husserl with regard to his views on ethics, methodology and most interestingly, his views on the conception of self and sought to understand human existence and what it is to be human (Onof, 2021). Regarding what it is to be human, Sartre (1956) saw humans as continually in the process of becoming who we are and that our search for meaning is action-oriented and connected with the world in which we live. Kierkegaard (1974) shared this view believing that humans are continually involved in a process of evolving and becoming. Like Sartre, Kierkegaard (1974) was concerned with the concept self and was influenced by Socrates who believed that ethical self-knowledge is the most important knowledge that one can have (Stack, 1973).

In relation to this study, the views of Sartre and Kierkegaard are particularly relevant as when an individual experiences coaching there is generally a heightened level of self-awareness and a personal journey towards becoming (Schinner, 2019).

### **3.3.2 Hermeneutics**

Whereas phenomenology seeks to understand experience in terms of our internal perceptions and reflections, hermeneutics aims to understand human experience in terms of language as well as other creative aspects of communication (Stanghellini et al., 2021).

Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation and is an applied philosophical framework and methodology, concerned with various contexts – historical, cultural, social and linguistic – which enable us to appreciate and understand the experience of being human (Van Leeuwen et al., 2017). According to Smith et al. (2009) it was historically

used in an attempt to interpret and understand biblical texts and then later applied to both literary and historical manuscripts. Hermeneutic theorists are interested in the nature of interpretation in itself and whether or not it is possible to decipher what the author actually meant (Thiselton, 2009).

Ricoeur (1975) posited that phenomenology and hermeneutics are linked and asserted that phenomenology was in fact the foundation of hermeneutics while also arguing that a hermeneutical presupposition is necessary in order fully appreciate phenomenology.

The philosophy of hermeneutics and the concept of understanding have gone through many changes because they are embedded in prevailing worldviews (Calvert, 1998).

During the Modernist Era (Romanticist), Schleiermacher sought to understand the author, believing their intentions to be of major significance (Calvert, 1998).

Schleiermacher was concerned with the grammatical and psychological aspects of interpretation seeing it as an art which utilises the analyst's sense of intuition and saw the process as an attempt to understand the writer not just the manuscript

(Schleiermacher & Bowie, 1998). His contemporary, Ricoeur, however was more concerned with the actual text and posited that the reader develops a more profound understanding as the text appears to reveal itself (Calvert, 1998). According to Combrink (1984) this increase in understanding can be problematic when the reader and the text are coming from different contextual understandings resulting in possibly numerous interpretations.

Heidegger was actually an assistant of Husserl and took up his Chair at The University of Freiburg once it had been vacated; his book 'Being and Time' was dedicated to Husserl (Wheeler, 2020). Concerning hermeneutics, Heidegger warned of the dangers

of having preconceived ideas believing that our preconceptions must not influence our understanding and interpretation (Heidegger, 1962).

Fore-conceptions were also of concern to Gadamer (1960) who believed that both history and tradition influenced the process of interpretation and similar to Heidegger, believed that one often projects when one is attempting to understand a text and is quick to jump to conclusions. This is a view of IPA taken by some who believe that it is impossible to avoid projection and that the idea of bracketing the researcher's fore-conceptions during analysis is illusory (Gyollai, 2020).

In hermeneutics, the focus is upon the circularity of understanding and when interpreting a text, one needs to be open to new interpretations which may allow for a deeper understanding and other meanings (Student7, 2021). According to Grondin (2017), the hermeneutic circle, based upon ancient rhetoric and hermeneutics, is the idea that whilst we can understand details of a text as a result of having a general understanding of the whole work, we can also only understand the whole work, by having an understanding of the particular details. Both Heidegger and Gadamer acknowledged our preconceptions and prejudices but considered it vital to enter this hermeneutic circle, to gain a deeper understanding, rather than avoid the circle completely (Grondin, 2017). According to Smith et al. (2009) the majority of hermeneutic writers can recognise the hermeneutic circle and understand the interaction between the particular and the whole on a multitude of levels

When conducting IPA Analysis, a dual interpretation takes place. The experience is understood by the individual according to their own perspective and interpretation and then the researcher expounds upon this and offers their own interpretation of the

individual's account as part of the process of analysis (Cassidy et al., 2010). Smith and Osborn (2003) used the term double hermeneutic to emphasise the two interpretations involved in this process. The first is the participant's meaning-making (interpreting their own experience); the second is the researcher's sense-making (interpreting the participant's account) (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). The circularity of the process (questioning, uncovering meaning, and further questioning) involved in interpreting and understanding a phenomenon is called the hermeneutic circle (Moran, 2000; Smith, 2007; Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is an iterative process in the sense that instead of completing one step after the other, it is more effective to move backwards and forwards and to use a variety of perspectives when analysing data. One's relationship with the data is related to the hermeneutic circle (Smith et al., 2009).

### **3.3.3 Idiography**

The relevance of Idiography in IPA is that it deals with unique facts and provides detailed interpretations of events which are rich and allow for a deep understanding of the experience of the participant (Watt, 2021).

Idiography is concerned with the particular and looks at both the particular detail and also the depth of analysis (de Luca Picione, 2015). It looks at how the particular experience of an individual has been perceived and understood by particular individuals in a particular context and focuses upon both the detail and the depth of the analysis. To do this, it is necessary to use small and purposively selected samples (Smith et al., 2009). The concept that individuals experience life in their own particular ways and that

they are unique is central to the approach of idiography (Molenaar & Valsiner, 2008). Kelly (1995) referred to this an ability to have an internal perspective as opposed to an external perspective and termed this as an outward inlook. The main idea behind the idiographic approach is to explore each case, before any general statements are made which is in contract to the nomothetic principles which underlie most empirical work in psychology, whereby studies are undertake to determine the probability that particular phenomena will occur under specific conditions (Pietkiewitz, 2014).

### **3.4 Principles of interpretative phenomenological analysis**

Many academic disciplines currently see interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as an important qualitative research methodology which emphasises both the divergence and convergence of experience with all of the nuances and intricacies of these experiences; thus making it very enticing for many researchers (Tuffour, 2017). Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is concerned with the lived experience of individuals and provides an understanding of these experiences from the perspective of the individual along with the researcher's interpretation of their particular experience and is respecting of the ability of individuals to determine their own understanding and construct their own sense of meaning (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

This research pertains to coaching in the Middle East and seeks to explore the personal experiences of both Middle Eastern university students who participate in a coaching skills programme and Western coaches who practice in the Middle East. Qualitative research is imperative for research into cultural psychology because it can fully understand culture and how it is embedded into our psychological experiences (Ratner, 2012) and utilises knowledge that is culturally specific and research methods which are

in harmony both culturally and ecologically (Liamputtong, 2010). Qualitative research also accepts that there may be unanticipated findings (Barker, Pistrang & Elliot 2002). The qualitative research method of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) appears to be most suited to this particular research as the main goal of IPA is to explore how individuals make sense of their experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Individuals are personally engaged in making sense of people, objects and events in their lives and as such, are assumed to have the ability to interpret or understand themselves. (Taylor, 1985). Halling (2008) believes that we are all phenomenologists in the sense that we share our stories and experiences and we listen to the stories of others and subsequently reflect upon our own perspectives relating to these stories

Phenomenology is concerned with the personal experience of the individual and the aspects that make that particular experience unique from other experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). This is particularly relevant to research on the personal experience of individuals regarding coaching psychology within the specific culture of the Middle East. From an analytical point of view, it is also very relevant in the sense that IPA is a dual interpretation process. The participants make sense of their individual experience and then the researcher makes sense of the participants' interpretation of their experience (Smith & Osborne, 2008). Willig (2009) argues that our culture or sub-culture also influences our meaning making and that IPA seeks to understand this. The fact that this research focusses upon not only individual experience, but individual experience within the Middle Eastern culture has particular relevance as IPA can be likened to ethnographic studies of individuals and communities that are explored to understand their culture (Smith, Harré & Van Langenhove, 1995).

### **3.4.1 Limitations of IPA**

Although IPA can be successfully used to describe the personal lived experience of the individual, it does not in fact explain it (Willig, 2008) although in order to explain any experience, we must first acknowledge our own interpretation of this experience and the meaning it holds for us (Macran & Shapiro, 1998). With IPA, one can possibly view the function of language to have limitations whereby individuals give an account of their experience through language and therefore the words they choose, in a sense, construct the reality they experience rather than describes it (Willig, 2008). IPA does however appreciate this and emphasises the necessity for the researcher to make sense of the individual's experience (Larkin et al., 2006). Another interesting criticism of IPA is that it may be seen as elitist as both the researcher and the participant require the necessary skills to effectively describe their thoughts and feelings in relation to their experiences and as such, IPA is more suited to articulate participants (Willig, 2008).

IPA has been accused of being ambiguous and not having sufficient regulation (Giorgi, 2010) and of being descriptive rather than adequately interpretative (Larkin et al., 2006; Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011). However, with the increasing popularity of IPA as a methodology, authors are quick to point out that the philosophical, theoretical and methodological foundations of IPA are sound (Smith et al., 2009)

### **3.4.2 Why IPA instead of another method?**



Many qualitative methodologies are well suited to cultural research such as Narrative Analysis, Discourse Analysis and Grounded Theory (van de Vijver & van de Vijver, 2021).

The development of Narrative Analysis within the field of psychology can be related to both humanistic psychology and what Bruner called the cognitive revolution (Mattingly et al., 2009).

I considered using Narrative Analysis as it explores meaning making and like IPA, is a social constructionist approach. However, IPA can include the participant's narrative or personal story along with other factors, without being solely limited to Narrative Analysis. (Bruner 1990; Kelly 1955; Rogers 1961).

Discourse analysis was also a possibility. Researchers have somewhat different understandings of discourse and discourse analysis. Linguists perceive discourse as anything beyond the sentence however others view it as the study of language use (Fasold, 1990). However I still felt that IPA was more appropriate as discourse analysis is concerned more with the functionality of language and how this contributes to the construction of social reality (Tannen et al., 2018).

Discourse analysis and narrative analysis seek to understand how individuals use language to construct identity and reality however IPA seeks to describe the in-depth lived experience of the individual and the meaning they give this experience (Tuffour, 2017).

Grounded theory was another option however this approach is more sociological and generally uses larger samples resulting in broader interpretations (Willig, 2001). I

considered IPA to be more suited to this research as it is more psychological, uses a smaller sample, and provides deeper insights into personal experience and provides a perspective which is different to grounded theory (Smith et al., 2009; Barbour 2007).

Another reason for choosing IPA is that it allows greater freedom and creativity than other methodologies (Willig, 2001) and is particularly applicable when research is being conducted in unusual groups or situations (Biggerstaff and Thompson, 2008).

### **3.5 Reflexivity**

Acknowledging that the researcher has an influence on the research process and taking time to reflect upon this is important (Spencer et al. 2003). How data is collected and analysed is influenced by the assumptions and beliefs of the researcher, by the researcher's own perspective (Elliott et al., 1999).

Willig (2001) explains two types of reflexivity, once which is concerned with our epistemological understanding and the other which is personal to us, which involves reflecting upon the ways in which our own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have shaped the research and also involves thinking about how the research may have affected and possibly changed us, as people and as researchers.

#### **3.5.1 Reflexive Note**

Working and living in different cultures has been an important part of my life and I feel this has helped me to appreciate and understand people who have different cultural perspectives. When I moved to the Middle East, I wanted to understand viewpoints which were sometimes very different from those held in the west.

I have a vivid memory of the day of our arrival in Bahrain. We had just gone through passport control and were making our way to baggage collection, when Rebekah, my daughter, who was one and a half years old at the time, ran towards a young man who was dressed in a thobe. She stood in front of him and smiled at him and he bent down and put his hands on her head, smiled and spoke to her in Arabic. It was a beautiful moment and a very special beginning to our life in the Middle East.

Once I began work at the university, I was very interested to get to know our students and to understand their lives and their experiences. An interesting moment for me was when some of my female students explained the thinking behind arranged marriages. From a western perspective, the idea of arranged marriages is often disconcerting, but when these young women explained it from their perspective, I saw it quite differently. They explained that an arranged marriage is different to a forced marriage. When the marriage is arranged, the whole family on both sides get involved to make sure this will be a good match. Many factors are taken into consideration and a lot of research is done to ensure this will be so. These young women were appalled at the prospect of parents in the West allowing their children to marry a complete stranger of their own choosing without doing an intensive background check to ensure that their child will be safe and happy. Further conversations relating to cultural values made me think that these students would find coaching psychology interesting and I decided to develop an elective course in this area. The course I developed included topics such as values, identity, emotional intelligence, self-limiting beliefs, boundaries and future goals.

I kept a diary of my thoughts throughout the course and will share one particular diary entry which I have read many times :

Today was the final day of the coaching elective. Fifteen weeks have gone by so quickly and it is lovely to see how close the students have become. I know I will still see them on campus but I am going to miss them. When I arrived in the classroom this morning there was a slightly strange atmosphere and Student6 came up to me and said he needed to talk about something and asked me to go with him into one of the transparent meeting cubicles directly across from the classroom. He seemed distracted and kept glancing over towards the classroom. It was very strange and he was quite vague in terms of what he wanted to discuss. All of a sudden he said 'Okay it's fine now, we can go back to the classroom.' I was quite baffled but when we walked into the classroom I could see the students had a big cake and they all started clapping. It was so touching and then they voluntarily started sharing their feelings about how the course had affected them. All of a sudden Student3 stood up and everyone turned to look at her. She said with great emotion "I want to tell you all something. Before I did this course I was not happy. You would never have known, but I was not happy. I was not happy in myself. Now, I feel so different and I am always happy." I think this brought most of us to tears.

This research has been a journey for each individual student and a journey for me on a very personal level. I feel quite changed by it, in a very good way, and I have learned so much from these remarkable young people.

On numerous occasions throughout this research process, I found myself being brought right back to my teenage years. To my struggle to understand my emotions, my family, my peers, my purpose, the world around me and the meaning of it all.

When I was analysing the data I was quite surprised that my relationship with my mother presented itself on a few occasions and this gave me pause for thought. We have a very loving relationship but are quite different and have had to carefully navigate our relationship over the years.

Throughout my life, my core value has been freedom. Freedom to be who I am without conforming to the expectations of others; freedom from judgement; freedom from the oppressive behaviour of those who perceive themselves to have more power; freedom to choose my own beliefs even if those beliefs are contrary to the beliefs of some of the people I love; physical freedom to explore the world and experience the richness of humanity.

When I listened to the audio recordings of the students describing their experiences of participating in the coaching elective I was deeply moved. I could personally relate to so much to what they were saying.

To hear them talking about how they had become more self-reflective and self-aware and were better able to understand and regulate their emotional responses was very moving and powerful metaphors such as 'shining a torch in a dark cave' made me catch my breath.

One word many of the students used evoked the strongest emotional response in me. Freedom. If there was one thing I could have hoped for when developing this coaching course, it would have been that it would help people to experience a sense of freedom.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I considered the different philosophical approaches which have influenced my methodological and epistemological position and outlined my epistemological position, which is that of social constructivist. I also outlined the theoretical foundations of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and provided the rationale for my choice of methodology.

## **Chapter 4 : Study One : Research Method**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter I explored the various philosophical perspectives which have influenced my epistemological and methodological position and provided an outline of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), along with the rationale for my choice of methodology. I also outlined my epistemological position, which is that of social constructivist. In this chapter, I will present the research method for Study One. The aim of Study One is to explore the experiences of Middle Eastern students who participate in a coaching skills elective. I will also provide my rationale for using a focus group interview as the most suitable method of data collection for this particular study.

### **4.2 Procedure**

In the sections below, I describe my recruitment and data collection procedures, the process of analysis and ethical considerations.

#### **4.2.1 Participants and sampling**

IPA deals with a small number of participants who share a common experience. The sample is therefore selected purposively because these individuals can provide insight into a specific experience. (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Participants are selected on the basis that they can grant us access to a particular perspective on the phenomena under study. Because IPA is an idiographic approach, concerned with understanding particular phenomena in particular contexts, IPA studies are conducted on small sample sizes. (Smith et al., 2009).

With regard to IPA studies, there is no correct answer concerning ideal sample size, however as IPA has developed and matured and as more studies are being published, sample sizes are generally becoming smaller. This is due the nature of IPA and the focus upon detailed accounts and explorations into individual experience (Smith et al., 2009). IPA generally requires quite a homogeneous sample (Smith et al., 2009) and as this study aims to explore students' experience of participating in a coach training programme, I selected seven participants who had completed this programme.

Participants were third level Bahraini undergraduate students who had completed a 15 week course in 'Coaching Skills'. All of the students had been born and brought up in Bahrain. Seven students volunteered, five female and two male.

#### **4.2.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

In order to create a homogeneous sample I created inclusion and exclusion criteria.

##### **Inclusion Criteria**

- Students who had voluntarily enrolled in the coaching skills elective.
- Students who had attended all of the coaching workshops – 100% attendance was required.
- Students who had submitted all of the reflections required during the programme.
- Students who had been taught by my colleague, rather than myself
- Both female and male students.

##### **Exclusion Criteria**

- Students who had missed classes / workshops.



- Students who failed to submit all required reflections.
- Students who had been taught by me.

#### **4.2.3 Recruitment**

The recruitment was a simple and straightforward process. As I had developed and facilitated the coaching skills elective, it would not have been appropriate to select students whom I had taught. Therefore, to avoid bias, I asked one of my colleagues who also taught this course to look for volunteers from one of her cohorts. From a class of 25 students, 7 volunteered to participate in this study.

#### **4.2.4 Situating the sample**

Participants were female and male third level Bahraini undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 23. All had completed a 15 week coaching skills elective. All of the students had been born and brought up in Bahrain. 3 students were enrolled in Bachelor of Business, 2 were enrolled in International Logistics Management, 1 was enrolled in Bachelor of Engineering Technology and 1 was enrolled in Bachelor of Visual Design. To ensure anonymity of the participants, their names have been changed from Arabic names to Western names.

**Table 4.1 Study One : Participants' Demographic Data**

| <b>Name</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Country of Birth</b> | <b>Degree</b> |
|-------------|---------------|------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Student1    | Female        | 18         | Bahrain                 | Business      |

|          |        |    |         |               |
|----------|--------|----|---------|---------------|
| Student2 | Female | 19 | Bahrain | Logistics     |
| Student3 | Female | 18 | Bahrain | Business      |
| Student4 | Female | 18 | Bahrain | Business      |
| Student5 | Female | 19 | Bahrain | Visual Design |
| Student6 | Male   | 20 | Bahrain | Business      |
| Student7 | Male   | 23 | Bahrain | Logistics     |

### **4.3 Data collection**

#### **4.3.1 Procedure**

After my colleague had provided me with the contact details of the students who had volunteered to participate in this study, I Emailed the Consent & Information Form (Appendix B) to them, which provided an outline of the aims of the research and requested that, if they were happy, they sign it and return it to me via Email.

#### **4.3.2 Focus groups within IPA research**

IPA is malleable in its application and also in its intent and as a consequence, can utilise various methods of data collection (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). IPA is best suited to data collection methods that invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first person account of their experience (Smith et al., 2009). Interviews and diaries may be the best means, other approaches such as focus groups or participant observation may work (Smith et al., 2009). Focus groups encourage interaction between the participants. In

focus groups, the person conducting the focus group takes the role of a facilitator who encourages discussion within the group rather than the role of interviewer who asks questions. Focus groups differ from group interviews, in the sense that there is more communication between participants in a focus group than in a group interview (Interviews and Focus Groups, 2021). Focus groups have been successfully used in IPA research, see Flowers, Dunkin & Francis (2000) and Flowers et al. (2001). Langdridge (2007) and Smith (2004) both consider IPA to be suitable for use with focus group interviews as these provide an opportunity for rich and in-depth exploration. There is increasing interest in the use of focus group data with IPA and a number of articles which have combined the use of focus groups with IPA have been published (e.g., Flowers et al., 2003; Dunne & Quayle, 2001; Bustard et al., 2019, Crawford et al., 2022) however many authors are skeptical as to the suitability of focus groups for phenomenological research (Smith, 2004; Dowling, 2007).

When considering the use of focus groups with IPA, Tomkins & Eatough (2010) particularly look at the sense-making or hermeneutic process and the hermeneutic circle (negotiating part-whole relationships) and suggest that with the necessary modifications, focus groups may be suitable for use with IPA. Similarly Love et al., (2020) find focus groups to be suited to IPA on the condition that they are modified as necessary and that the idiographic accounts of individual participants are given voice. At the core of phenomenology is the relationship between experience and reflections upon the experience (Spinelli, 2005; Finlay & Evans, 2009) and this is relevant regarding the use of focus groups in IPA (Tomkins & Eatough, 2010). In some IPA studies involving focus groups, themes appear to have been identified based solely upon areas of group

consensus potentially at the expense of the individual and there is always a danger that the researcher may prioritise the group over the individual, which, given IPA's focus upon the ideographic, is potentially problematic (Tomkins & Eatough).

Focus groups are very effective in the sense that they allow for a multitude of viewpoints and opinions to be exchanged during one occasion which allows for a variety of participants and a lesser number of data collection occasions and assuming that the participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences in an in-depth manner, regardless of the other participants, then this method of data collection may fit with IPA (Smith, 2004). However, (Smith, 2004) was also concerned that the presence of a large group may deter some individuals from talking about sensitive topics. Interestingly Guest et al., (2017) found this not to be the case and in fact found that focus groups generated more personal, sensitive data than individual interviews. This may have something to do with the fact it is the interaction between the group members that actually generates the richness of the data and the insights that are uncovered (Morgan, 1997) and that the variety of different viewpoints relating to a particular experience create fertile ground for exploration (Halling et al., 2006; Halling, 2008). In fact, sometimes it is the very experience of discussing and sharing opinions and views on a particular experience that brings about a realisation for some of the participants, as they may have previously have been unaware of their thoughts or feelings (Tomkins & Eatough, 2010).

Focus groups are a method of research which is socially oriented and have the possibility of gathering more contextually relevant data as opposed to asocial data collection methods where participants do not have the opportunity to interact and when

considering culturally relevant research methods within the context of individualistic or collectivistic societies, this distinction may be pertinent (Krueger, 1994; Albrecht et al.1993). Focus group interviews are also a collectivistic research method and are particularly relevant where participants may be uncomfortable in a one to one interview setting (Madriz, 2002) as they can allow individuals to participate who might otherwise find a one to one interview uncomfortable and feel that they have little to say (Kitzinger, 1995).

According to Hennink (2013) it is the shared group conversation, which is quite a unique aspect of focus groups, that allows data to be generated which is different to the data that is gathered through individual interviews and during the group discussion participants have the opportunity to hear different viewpoints and in turn, share their own views whilst in some cases, adapting their own point of view as the conversation develops. Within the context of collectivist cultures [such as the Middle East], participants may feel more comfortable in focus groups rather than one to one interviews (Parameswaran, 2001).

In a study conducted by (Guest et al., 2017) between the relative effectiveness of focus groups and individual interviews, it was found they both generated similar data at the event level, however when compared on a per person basis, more personal and sensitive disclosures were likely in a focus group setting and interestingly, within a focus group setting it was found that some themes which could be considered sensitive, were explored whilst in individual interviews, this was not the case

Similarly (ÖVerlien et al., 2005) found that focus groups are appropriate for high-involvement topics and that they provide insights which are equally deep as other methods and in fact are potentially less intrusive than other methods.

The Middle East is a collectivist culture and in such cultures, individuals consider themselves to be part of a group identity with less emphasis on the idea of an autonomous self (Kawamura, 2012). Allied to this, this research was conducted in the aftermath of The Arab Spring when protests took place throughout the Middle East challenging what were perceived as authoritarian regimes (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2022). Both of these factors were taken into consideration when deciding upon the use of a Focus Group.

#### **4.3.3 Conducting the focus group interview**

The focus group was conducted at a round table in one of the meeting rooms of the university and was audio recorded. At the beginning of the focus group, I introduced myself and thanked the participants for volunteering to take part in this study. I thanked them for signing the Consent & Information Form and reminded them of the aims of the study. I informed that the Focus Group would take approximately one hour.

I felt very comfortable with the students and they also appeared to feel very comfortable with each other and with me. They knew that I also taught this course to other students, so it felt as if we had something in common. There was also a sense of excitement and the students seemed very pleased to be involved in this research project. There was a noticeable sense of trust between the students which I attributed partly to the fact that

they had been together for 15 weeks throughout the coach training programme, and had shared personal thoughts and feelings with one another.

#### **4.3.4 Reflection on the focus group interview**

I felt that my background as a coach allowed me to conduct the focus group interview in a sensitive and supportive manner which encouraged the participants to speak openly about their experiences. My approach was the same as that taken during the coaching process whereby the coach creates a therapeutic alliance with the coachee (Glass & Bickler 2021; Ryan et al., 2021; Lavi-Rotenberg et al., 2020; Safran & Muran, 2003).

Following the focus group interview I reflected upon what had transpired and made entries in my reflective journal. I was interested by the emotions that the conversation had evoked in me and how moved I was by certain topics, particularly when the students talked about feeling more free. I reflected upon whether the focus group interview had gathered all of the data possible or whether there were topics that were left unexplored. Research has been conducted on how the interviewer's perceived role - female, researcher, psychologist - along with their style of interviewing, can influence the data collected (William & Heikes, 1993; Richards & Emslie, 2000; Gencsoy, 2020). I also reflected upon the fact that this focus group interview was conducted in English and although the participants all spoke excellent English and are required IELTS score of 6.0 or above to be admitted to the university, I wondered if some details might have been lost. There were a few occasions when the group broke into laughter and spoke quickly in Arabic, and these may have been valuable comments.

#### **4.3.5 Transcription**

I audio recorded the focus group interview, with the consent of each participant. I transcribed the content and checked the accuracy numerous times, ensuring that pauses and laughter were included, as I needed to be as close as possible to the dialogue of the participants when conducting the analysis. For reasons of anonymity, I changed the names of each participant to Western names. The data is kept in accordance with University of East London's ethical guidelines.

#### **4.4 Data analysis**

Smith et al. (2009) posit that there is no single, correct approach for analyzing data and when it comes to IPA, a level of flexibility and innovation is encouraged. "The essence of IPA lies in its analytic focus ... which directs our analytic attention towards our participants' attempts to make sense of their experiences." (Smith et al. 2009, p. 79). As a result IPA can be characterised by a set of common processes e.g. moving from the particular to the shared and from the descriptive to the interpretative. It can also be characterised by a set of common principles e.g. a commitment to and understanding of the participant's point of view, and a psychological focus on personal meaning-making in particular contexts." IPA Analysis has been described as an iterative and inductive cycle (Smith, 2007).

Bracketing is a necessary process to demonstrate validity of the data analysis and as such, the researcher must make every effort to set aside their own experience, values and beliefs to enable them to describe the experience of the participants accurately (Ahern, 1999). However, when considering the hermeneutic phenomenological approach some authors posit that it is not possible to eliminate our prior knowledge and understanding (Koch, 1995) and that attempting to do so can be somewhat problematic



and lacking in consistency (LeVasseur, 2003) as there is no definitive guide or method for doing so (Giorgi, 2011). However, according to Smith et al. (2009, p.42) “you will have to try to suspend (or ‘bracket off’) your preconceptions in IPA.” Whilst some authors are proposing specific techniques for bracketing in phenomenological research (e.g. Chan et al., 2013) it still appears somewhat unclear. However, I made every attempt to bracket my preconceptions and kept this firmly in mind in all steps of the research process, including during data analysis.

Concerning the analysis of the data I followed the guidelines of Smith et al. (2009) which involved

- Reading and re-reading
- Initial noting
- Developing emergent themes
- Searching for connections across emerging themes

I also followed the advice relating specifically to focus groups and parsed transcripts many times to separately identify :

- Group patterns and dynamics
- Idiographic accounts

#### **4.4.1 Reading & re-reading**

I read the focus group transcript numerous times whilst also listening to the audio recording. This ensured that I stayed close to the data and became familiar with it. Listening to their voices whilst reading the words was very powerful and immersed me

in the world of the participants. I also made a point of bracketing my own thoughts about the transcript and I entered this into my reflective journal.

#### **4.4.2 Initial noting**

As I read and re-read the transcript, I noted anything which I felt was of interest in the margin. I analysed the transcript word by word and line by line and was seeking to identify whether comments were conceptual, linguistic or descriptive. This included reflecting upon significant phrases and capturing my responses and thoughts in relation to these in my reflective journal. Descriptive comments looked at the topic which was being discussed for example when Student5 said *'I didn't realise that we all have different personal values or like, some of us value different things more highly than others so that, kind of, well, that gave me a lot to think about. Especially (she laughs nervously) in terms of who I might marry.'* Linguistic coding looked at language cues for example when Student1 used the metaphor *'I can see things more clearly and how they, like, how they affected me even though I couldn't, you know, see it at the time. It's kind of like shining a torch into a dark cave, I didn't know before what was in the cave.'*

A number of metaphors were used throughout the focus group interview and these helped me to explore the meanings and understandings of the participants. I found that I had quite an emotional response to some of the metaphors. Conceptual coding focused on searching for a deeper meaning beneath what was actually said, for example when Student2 said *'I can see a woman coming out [from a coaching session] and people whispering 'what's her problem, what does she have, what did she do?' so I can see that. It's not, I'm not being negative, I'm just saying, I'm speaking the facts, they will say bad things about the woman.'* Something about this comment made me feel that she

was not talking about any woman, she was actually thinking about herself. This led me to review other comments Student2 had made and again I had the same sense.

Reflexivity is an important aspect of the analysis, and I kept a reflective journal of my thoughts and emotional responses throughout the process. I found that taking time away from the transcript and my reflections and allowing them to simply settle in my mind gave rise to further insights once I returned to the transcript and my reflective journal.

#### **4.4.3 Developing emergent themes**

From this point onwards, I worked predominantly with my notes / exploratory comments and referred occasionally to the transcript, the focus being to transform these exploratory comments into emergent themes. The themes continually evolved and I had numerous versions of themes. It was useful to re-read the transcripts to gain a deeper appreciation of nuances and allowing enough time between each reading to reflect upon the themes.

#### **4.4.4 Searching for connections across emerging themes**

I grouped the various comments and then clustered similar ones together using colour coding, which enabled me to find common themes. Once I had done so, I looked for relationships between the themes and was able to cluster them according to a main theme - Superordinate Theme - and then subthemes - Subordinate Themes.

### **4.5 The hermeneutic circle**

According to Smith et al. (2009, p.28) the hermeneutic circle “is concerned with the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole, at a series of levels” and “to understand any given part, you look to the whole; to understand the whole, you look to the parts.” This was something I kept in mind as I moved back and forth through the process. I also considered my role as a researcher in terms of the hermeneutic circle in relation to my experience as a coach and also to my assumptions. For example, my relationship with the data is a complex one in the sense that I designed the coaching course in which the coachees participated. I therefore had an in depth understanding of what they might experience and assumptions of how this might impact them. I am also positively disposed towards coaching and believe it to be beneficial to both personal and professional development. I have reflected upon the double hermeneutic and how I may have influenced and interpreted meaning however I also acknowledge that it is not possible to remain completely outside of the research experience. I have also reflected upon how my own beliefs, experiences and values may have influenced the research and used a reflective journal throughout the process to assist with reflexivity.

#### **4.6 Ethical practice**

This research received ethical approval from UEL Ethics Committee. Participation was voluntary and each participant received a Consent & Information Form which explained the nature of the study. Participants were assured that they were not obliged to participate and that they could withdraw at any stage. Participants were also assured of confidentiality and that no reference would be made to their names in the published research.

In the unlikely event that taking part in this research could conceivably be distressing to participants, participants were provided with an overview of the topics that would be explored during the focus group. They were reassured that they could withdraw at any time and that they did not have to give their opinions on any particular subject if they did not wish. The focus group interview was conducted in a supportive and sensitive manner.

Ethical practice is also concerned with researcher bias which may impact both moral and ethical duties to participants and the wider research community (Wadams & Park, 2018). To avoid the possibility of bias, I looked for volunteers from a cohort of students who had been taught by a colleague of mine, rather than by myself.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter I outlined the research method for Study One. In the next chapter I will present the results of this study along with an analysis of these results.

## **Chapter 5 : Study One : Results and Analysis of Results**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter I outlined the research method for Study One. The aim of Study One is to explore the experiences of Middle Eastern students who participate in a coaching skills elective. In this chapter I will present the results of Study One along with an analysis of these results. When initially analyzing the data, it was necessary to fully immerse myself in the experience of the participants. I therefore listened to the audio recording on a number of occasions and subsequently read and re-read the transcript multiple times. As I did so, I made exploratory comments, both on how the participants described their experience and also on my reaction to this. From this point onwards, I worked predominantly with my notes / exploratory comments and referred occasionally to the transcript, the focus being to transform these exploratory comments into emergent themes. I grouped the various comments and then clustered similar ones together, which enabled me to find common themes. Once I had done so, I looked for relationships between the themes and was able to cluster them according to a main theme - Superordinate Theme - and then subthemes - Subordinate Themes.

### **5.2 Overview of superordinate themes**

This chapter outlines the themes which emerged from the data analysis. The analysis of the data produced a total of three superordinate themes and six subordinate themes (see Table 5.1 below), which illustrated the participants' experiences of participating in a coach training programme.

The first superordinate theme, 'Coaching gets you thinking, captures the participants' experience of self-reflection. It also explores participants' experience of self-awareness and self-regulation.

The second superordinate theme, 'What if they find out?', captures the concern participants have about stigmatization and how they will be perceived and judged by others within their society and their fear that their privacy and confidentiality may be compromised.

The third superordinate theme, 'The Influence of Family, Culture and Religion', captures the effect that family has upon participants, particularly regarding the expectation of obedience to parents. It also explores the role of religion and the requirement of participants to adhere to Islamic values.

**Table 5.1 Study One : Superordinate & Subordinate Themes**

| <b>Superordinate Themes</b> | <b>Subordinate Themes</b>                               |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Coaching gets you thinking  | Self-reflection<br><br>Self-awareness & Self-regulation |
| What if they find out?      | Stigmatization<br><br>Privacy                           |

|                                               |                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The Influence of Family, Culture and Religion | Obedience to Parents<br><br>Religion & God in the Coaching Process |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|

### 5.3 Superordinate theme one: Coaching gets you thinking.

The first superordinate theme, 'Coaching gets you thinking, captures the participants' experience of self-reflection. It also explores participants' experience of self-awareness and self-regulation.

#### 5.3.1 Subordinate theme one: Self reflection

Before embarking upon this personal journey, none of the participants had spent any significant amount of time on self-reflection. The experience of taking the time to reflect upon themselves proved to be both rewarding and challenging for participants.

Student1 described how coaching gets you thinking and reflecting and how it gave her the opportunity to reflect upon her past.

*Coaching really gets you thinking, yani, being coached helped me to reflect back on some things that happened before, which I couldn't see at the time. You know, you just accept and get on with things and don't ask questions. But now, like, now I eh, I find I can think back about these things and instead of feeling, like, confused and uncomfortable, I, you know, I can see things more clearly and how they, like, how they affected me even though I couldn't, you know, see it at the time. It's kind of like shining a torch into a dark cave, I didn't know before what was in the cave (Student1, lines 2-8).*



Student1 did not specify what these *'things that happened before'* were, but her analogy of *'shining a torch into a dark cave'* is powerful and suggests that apart from being consciously more aware of events that had happened, that she had unconsciously processed them also.

The other participants all described becoming more self-reflective. Student7 and Student6 both commented on not usually have the *'time'* to reflect and how coaching gave them this time.

*Yeah, coaching was very useful ... we eh, we usually don't have the time to reflect upon ourselves, what is happening in our lives. You know, our weekend is Friday and Saturday. Friday is eh, our day of prayer and then we spend the whole day, I mean the whole day with our families. Parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers, sisters and you know, eh, you know, it is very nice, okay, but you, you just have to, and you have no time, just have to be there. The rest of the time we are studying, working, you know. But then you feel guilty if you are thinking well, I don't want to spend all that time there, I want to spend some time on my own* (Student7, lines 21-28).

This familial commitment is an expectation and offence and family friction may be caused by not fulfilling this obligation. Student7 emphasized the *'whole day'* and I got the sense that as much as he loved his family, this obligation felt like a burden, and he felt that he had no time for himself.

I noticed that Student7 repeated himself to emphasise what he was saying. His repetition of *'the whole day'* spent with extended family strongly emphasized his feeling of having no time for himself. His repetition of *'you just have to be there'* clearly

highlighted the sense of obligation and duty he felt towards his family. It felt like he really didn't have a choice.

I was interested that Student7 felt guilty due to what he was thinking, rather than what he was doing and I wondered if this was connected to his religion. It made me reflect on my own upbringing. My Mother was deeply religious and attended church every week. She believed that people had an obligation to do so and she would certainly have felt guilty if she had not. The fact that my Father was agnostic, finding his peace in nature, shielded me from the potentially damaging effects of guilt, however it gave me a lot to consider as I was growing up and for some reason, Student7's words brought this back to me.

Student6 echoed Student7's view.

*It [coaching] changes the way of thinking, yani, because it makes you rethink what you know and it's just this time and space that's been given to us just to reflect and it's just, eh, it's just we don't get this time in our daily lives because we're so busy with our university, family, friends, work and whatever so, like, when it comes to coaching, that space for us, well especially for me, what I experienced, is a place to reflect back on life and purpose. You know, what we are not used to doing, and what actually is a little scary at first, I mean, you kind of, kind of feel selfish if you are thinking about yourself* (Student6, lines 34-41).

Student6 agreed with Student7's view of not having time for reflection, but he goes a little further in the sense that he describes reflection as being 'a little scary'. I wondered what he was scared of finding? His statement '*it makes you rethink what you know*'

suggest to me that he might be somehow questioning cultural norms. Student6 also describes feeling '*selfish if you are thinking about yourself*'. Is this perhaps because the Middle East is a collectivist culture which emphasizes family and community over the individual?

During the coaching process, the coach does not provide solutions to the coachee. The coach asks questions that enable the coachee to come up with their own solutions (O'Connell 1998; De Haan et al. 2010; Cox et al. 2018). Student4 initially found this challenging but upon reflection realised that she could find her '*own solutions*'.

*Initially, I thought what's the point of me getting coaching if they're not going to give me the solutions. To be honest, and this is, this is a little embarrassing, but initially, I thought, what is this? What is this coaching? This is no good. How is it coaching? But then I began to understand, and I started to reflect upon myself. It was, eh, no, it was not easy at first eh, I did not really like it. You know, I think I liked the mist, you know eh, not having to understand. But eh, then, after a while, I thought about it and realised that I know myself better than anyone else, and you know that's true, and then I eh, I understood about finding our own understanding and our own solutions* (Student4, lines 52-59.).

Interesting metaphor of '*the mist*'. I found myself wondering how Student4 could possibly like the mist? I wondered what thoughts and feelings were being hidden in the mist?

Student5 and Student2 talked about how coaching helped them to reflect upon their values and to become more self-aware. This enabled them to see things from different perspectives. Student5 did not know what it meant to reflect.

*I didn't know what it meant to reflect ... I just lived my life and did what I had to do and, you know, eh, didn't think about things too much or question anything. But coaching, eh like, coaching helped me to reflect on myself, yeah, especially when we talked about our values. I became more clear about those, eh, what was important to me. I began to see things differently and to ask myself questions. This was a bit hard because you know, these questions were not always easy. And my values, well, our values come from Islam but I think I didn't realise that we all have different personal values or like, some of us value different things more highly than others so that, kind of, well, that gave me a lot to think about. Especially (she laughs nervously) in terms of who I might marry.* (Student5, lines 75-84).

Like Student4, Student5 found self-reflection initially challenging however it allowed her to become more clear about her values and also what was important to her. I found her self-correction interesting – when she said '*And my values, well our values come from Islam*' which shows the importance and influence of religion and also the collectivist culture of The Middle East. She laughed nervously when she spoke of who she might marry. I wondered why she was nervous. I wondered if she would she have much choice in this?

An important fundamental of coaching is the concept of being non-judgmental (Maini et al., 2020; Machin, 2010; Pennington, 2010). Interestingly, this is something that self-reflection allowed Student2 to understand.

... for me the biggest realisation was when I reflected on my views about things and then on different views and stopped judging other people who had different views. I, you know, I used to think that my view was eh the right view, and you know, I would, eh, I would sometimes get angry when people disagreed with me, but reflecting on my views and how I came to have these views has helped, yani, helped me to think about things in a different way and to be more accepting of different views. It's strange really cos you know, I always thought I was right and now, yani, now I don't care about being right (Student2, lines 85-91).

Student3 felt that self-reflection helped her to see things more clearly than before.

*I was like Student5, I didn't think about why I was the way I was, I just was and now I eh you know, I reflect back on my childhood, yeah, my childhood and my parents and eh the different influences that people have had on me and I feel like, yani, I feel like I can see so much more clearly now. It was eh, I didn't feel very comfortable at first, like, but then it began to make more sense and it's kind of like eh, coaching has given me glasses on the inside as well as the outside (she laughs) (Student3, lines 92-97).*

Student3 wears glasses, which presumably help her to see more clearly so her analogy of having glasses on the inside is an interesting metaphor (somewhat similar to Student1's metaphor of shining a torch in a dark cave) which indicates that, she is now able to reflect and to see things more clearly internally.

This opportunity to reflect appeared to come as quite a surprise to all of the participants and whilst in some cases it proved to be initially uncomfortable, ultimately all participants found self-reflection to be beneficial.

Qadar is referred to in the Qur'an and is known as the 'Decree of Allah.' It relates to the ideas of fate and predestination and is one of the six articles of faith of Islam (Qadar, 2021). As belief in fate and predestination is prevalent in the Middle East, so too is the idea that we accept rather than question our situation. However once participants engaged in self-reflection a powerful word emerged to describe the experience. This word was '*freedom*'.

Student3 appeared to be quite moved by this sense of freedom.

*I don't know why but once I started to reflect on my life and to ask questions, I felt a sort of, yani, a sort of freedom. I was nervous eh, yeah, I was nervous at the beginning, but now, yani, now I want to tell everyone in my village. I want them all to know about this coaching because it makes you feel free* (Student3, lines 98-101).

At that point all of the other participants started quickly chattering amongst themselves in agreement.

Student1 agreed with Student3.

*... yeah, I know, my parents are saying I have changed but yani, I think they kind of like it, and I'm not disrespectful but I definitely feel more free, you know, eh, more free to think about things the way I want to think about them, not how eh, how I should think about them and you know, it makes me feel so free, like I feel like smiling all the time.* (Student1, lines 102-105).

This sense of '*freedom*' had quite an impact on me; I was very moved by this discovery. When I reflected upon my own reaction, and how deeply affected I was by this, it was clearly because '*freedom*' is one of my most important core values. The need for

'freedom' is why I love to travel and what brought me to the Middle East in the first place. The fact that coaching had given these students a sense of freedom was a very joyful realisation for me. I was interested in Student1's comment that she is free *'think about things the way I want to think about them, not how eh, how I should think about them'* which was similar to Student6's comment *'it makes you rethink what you what you know'*. Is she now perhaps free to think differently about established norms?

### **5.3.2 Subordinate theme two : Self-awareness & self-regulation**

Subordinate Theme Two incorporates both self-awareness and self-regulation. They have not be divided into two separate themes as they are both components of Emotional Intelligence and they are interlinked. Once we become more aware of our thoughts and emotions and the reasons for these, we are then better able to regulate our responses (Goleman & Whitener, 2018).

For Student6, an increase in both self-awareness and self-regulation was evident in terms of his ability to control his anger. His emphasis *'I really mean it'* showed how challenging this previously was for him. He appeared to be quite proud of himself when he said *'I am the scientist.'*

*Before I took this course, I used to get angry so easily. To be honest I would punch first and ask questions later, I'm eh, I really mean it. My brother knew what to say to make me, you know, to make me flip and all of my friends thought this was funny and eh, would laugh when this happened and it happened a lot. And you know, they all like, they all thought it was funny but it made me feel so bad. When we covered the part on understanding emotions and self-regulation and I started to practice what we had*

*learned, everything changed. I don't get angry any more, I am the scientist, I get curious and yeah analytical and my brother is so confused* (Student6, lines 43-50).

During coach training, participants explored the cognitive model and the link between our thoughts (and where our thoughts come from), our emotions and our behaviour. Student6 took this theory and applied it very effectively to his own life.

Student7, who has two young children, found that his increased levels of self-awareness allowed him to be more in tune with how he was feeling and how this affected his behaviour.

*.. you know, eh, when I would get home, and you know I work as well as study, and then my two children would have made the house all messy and I would feel eh, well sometimes, quite angry with them, but now I can see that I am tired and eh, well trying to work and study is not easy, but I know now it is to do with what is going on inside of me and not to do with them so I am more patient with them* (Student7, lines 29-33).

Student7 expressed a heightened ability to understand his feelings and how these linked with his behaviour which like Student6, allowed him to make some helpful changes, particularly with regard to his relationship with his children.

All of the female participants remarked on how their personal relationships with friends and family had improved. Becoming more aware of themselves and how they react to certain situations, enabled the participants to alter their behaviour and in turn, improve their relationships with others.

*... my parents are always talking about how smart my brother is and since he was four, my mother has been saying 'Call him Doctor, he will be a Doctor' and this yani, this*



*really always made me so mad because they never said anything like that to me. They just think I will marry a Doctor. So I would get so mad and just go to my room. Last week, for the first time ever, instead of just getting mad and hiding in my room I, eh, I spoke with my Mother and I told her how it had always made me feel, you know, how hurt and angry I felt. I thought she would get angry but she cried instead and hugged me. I think that I can eh, you know understand my emotions better now than before and I can talk about them better (Student1, lines 11-19).*

Although Student1 is a university student and has been given this opportunity by her parents, Student1 has always felt that her brother's future was prioritized over hers. Instead of bottling up her feelings of hurt and anger, she was able to express herself to her Mother with a positive outcome.

I noticed my reaction to this description of an emotional exchange between Mother and Daughter. I found Student1's description of this display of emotion to be very touching. I reflected upon my own relationship with my Mother who is very reserved emotionally, and my experience of growing up with a Mother who certainly loved us however found it difficult to talk about feelings or emotions.

Student4 and Student5 have both had relationship issues which involved a lot of bickering and jealousy. They found that their heightened self-awareness helped them prioritise and put things in perspective.

*I was always arguing with my friend, you know if they went out with another friend and not invite me I wouldn't speak to her for a week or if she liked the same boy as me I would tell her she is a traitor. I don't know why, I was kind of crazy. But now, now, I ask*

*myself ‘what is more important, my temper or my friendship with her?’ and then I do what we did in coaching yani, I evaluate my thoughts and you know, most of the time (she laughs) they are not even true, they are just these random, yani, automatic thoughts and when I, when I see that, I calm down. I can see, yani, I can see that things are better and we are, my friends, all happier (Student4, lines 60-67).*

This ability to look at the situation clearly and evaluate her thoughts has helped Student4 to improve her relationship with her friends. Student5 clearly identified with what Student4 was saying and when Student4 had finished speaking, she quickly jumped in.

Me too, same, me too, but with my sisters, always fighting, always arguing but now it is different. Yes, it is so different. I still hate my brother (she laughs) but I get on so much better with my sisters yani. When they get upset about something or like, upset with me, I don’t, like, I don’t just react like, like I used to do, all the time, I would just react, but now no. Now like, I take the time in my own head, to, to understand why they are saying, what they are saying and you know, to understand. And then it makes it like, so much more calm (Student5, lines 68-73).

Without specifically mentioning it, both Student4 and Student5 are referring to the cognitive model in coaching and both are evaluating their own thoughts which allows them to perceive the situation in a more curious and analytical manner rather than in an emotionally heightened manner (Dobson, 2013).

### **5.3.3 Summary**

This superordinate theme explores how participating in a coach training programme 'gets you thinking'. Self-reflection was found to be both challenging and beneficial. Increased levels of self-awareness and self-regulation were found to improve relationships with others.

#### **5.4 Superordinate theme two: What if they find out?**

The second superordinate theme explores the participants' concerns about what people will think of them if they find out that they are receiving coaching or any other psychological intervention. The first subordinate theme captures the participants' fear of stigmatization that will result if people find out they are receiving coaching. The second subordinate theme explores the participants' concern for privacy; their own personal privacy but also the privacy of their families and how this may be compromised by their actions [engaging in coaching].

##### **5.4.1 Subordinate theme one: Stigmatization**

The exploration into this topic came about from an interesting non sequitur. Stigmatization has not even been mentioned when Student2 out of the blue made her statement. From the fervency in which she spoke, I sensed that this was very personal to her and that perhaps she had something she needed to talk about and that the concerns regarding people finding out and what they might think, related to her own fears. When Student2 made this statement, there was an animated reaction from the group with everyone agreeing and laughing.

*...especially the fact that we live in the Arab region ... going to a coach or psychologist or shrink or whatever, that is not yani, not so easy. They eh, the people don't have that*

*mentality. They don't want to say I have a problem or I need help, no, they don't want to and they don't eh, they don't trust people not to talk. And then yani, everyone will know and think you are sick.* (Student2, lines 106-110).

Student1 strongly agreed with Student2 and talked about what family, friends and work colleagues might think.

*She's right ...a lot of people, maybe they know they need coaching but they won't go and take it, because for example they think 'what will my friends think?', 'what will the boss think?' and you know, if your family finds out, then yani, then that is a disaster, I am not joking. There is like, eh, the shame for the family. No, it is a big risk and you know, people they love to talk about everyone else and especially, yani, especially if they can find something like this about this family or that family. It is big problem.*

(Student1, lines 111-116).

In Islamic culture, bringing shame or dishonour on the family is a serious matter and has in some cases, fatal consequences (Awwad, 2001; Helms, 2015); Mechammil et al., 2019).

While Student1 was talking, the group chattered in agreement. Student1's use of the word '*disaster*' was pertinent. Not a problem or an issue but a disaster. The general atmosphere of the group seemed to touch on ominous and the very real concern about people '*finding out*' was evident.

Student7 stressed the importance of family reputation. He was speaking slowly and deliberately and this was clearly a very important matter. The repetition of '*family reputation*' and '*a responsibility*' emphasized the seriousness of this.

*Family reputation, eh, family reputation in our society is very important. And there is a, a responsibility, yes, a responsibility on each of us, not, not to bring shame on the family. That is why, eh, eh, going to see the coach or psychologist, for some people, maybe like for many people, is not possible, because of what it might do to their families, not just, eh, not just to themselves. (sic) (Student7, lines 117-121).*

Student2 made the point that they live in a judgmental society and that they care about what other people think.

*We live in, you know, a judgmental society and we, like always care about what other people think. For example, if someone goes to a psychologist or coach ‘What’s her problem?’, ‘What’s going on with her family?’. And then, yani, your family find out and yeah, that is oh, I can, yani I can just hear my Mother saying about me, if I go to coach or psychologist and they find out, she will shake her head and say ‘who will marry her now? (Student2, lines 122-126).*

I found it interesting how Student2 used the feminine ‘*what’s her problem?*’ and related the situation to herself and to her own family. Student2 was the participant who started this conversation – where I felt that she was possibly talking about herself. Her statements here, particularly her Mother saying ‘*who will marry her now?*’ add to this possibility.

When Student2 made this statement the group all laughed with various interjections of ‘*it’s true*’ and ‘*she’s right.*’

This fear of being judged is clearly evident but it is allied to actual consequences, as it may impact a family's standing in society and even marital prospects (Werbner, 2007; Tapper & Tapper 1992).

Student1 was concerned about people fabricating things.

*They are curious also, like if they find out and eh, eh, you don't tell them why you are going to see a coach, they make up the answer.* (Student1, lines 128-129).

This is potentially quite a serious situation as what '*they*' make up could do irreparable damage to one's reputation. The fear of being judged or worse, condemned by others was palpable. The whole group agreed with Student1's assertion.

For the second time a gender perspective was introduced when Student2 talked about a female client.

*I can see a woman coming out [from a coaching session] and people whispering 'what's her problem, what does she have, what did she do?' so I can see that. It's not, I'm not being negative, I'm just saying, I'm speaking the facts, they will say bad things about the woman.* (Student2, lines 130-132).

Student2 echoes Student1's comments and interestingly specifically mentions this in relation to '*a woman*'. '*What did she do?*' This raises the issue of the reputation of a woman in a Middle Eastern culture and the fear and potentially consequences of tarnishing that reputation. As previously, the whole group agreed with Student2.

#### **5.4.2 Subordinate theme two: Privacy**

The second subordinate theme captures the participants' fear that their privacy will not be protected and people will find out not just that they have gone to see a coach, but what they have actually said to the coach.

Student5 believes that people have no faith that privacy will be respected. Again, a gender issue is introduced.

*They are afraid, they worry about the confidentiality, for example, like, if a woman would be a coach, they think that after the coaching session she will be with her family or friends yani and she would sit in like a gathering and she'll say, she'll tell them everything, all of the details of what, yani what she was told (everyone chatters and laughs) we know yani, that it's not true, but the people should be more aware that it is a confidential and professional work. (Student5, lines 134-139).*

Fear of people finding out is a great concern and again a woman has been used as the example. Student5 indicates that people would be afraid that a woman would not be capable of keeping confidentiality as she would be prone to gossiping. This raises questions of how women are perceived in Middle Eastern culture. The actuality reality and the perceived reality are often very different (Afshar, 1993).

Student1 gives another female example.

*It's like, we are raised what happens at home stays at home. Don't say to your cousins. Don't say especially to your uncles' wives, don't say to them (everyone laughs).*  
(Student1. Lines 140-141).

Whatever about the cousins keeping a secret, it appears that there is little chance that their uncles' wives will be able to do so. Family life in Arabic society is very private and

problems are kept within the immediate family group (Abed-Rabbo, 2020). Student1's comment '*Don't say especially to your uncles' wives, don't say to them*' again shows how women are perceived – as being prone to gossip. This comment drew great laughter from the group.

But apart from the gossip that may be generated from seeing a coach or a psychologist, it is the consequences of the gossip that are potentially far reaching. How a family's position in society might be affected. How an individual's marital prospects might be affected. With such possibly serious consequences, the perceived risk is great indeed.

Student7 agreed with the concerns regarding privacy and explained that people might feel more comfortable talking to the Imam. If anyone saw them talking with him, they would not assume the worst. Problems must be kept in the family.

*It is eh, it is difficult because when we have problems, they have to stay in the family. We don't eh, we don't talk about eh, outside the family. Some people talk to the Imam. That is the safe way. Because eh, because well you know, he is wise and understands, but also eh, also you know, if someone sees you speak with Imam, then they do eh, they do not think bad things about you. Probably they will think you are discussing the Qur'an* (Student7, lines 142-146).

Student6 agrees with Student7.

*It's true, what he says, I think that way is the safe way, and you know, the Imam understands about our faith and our culture more than the coach, so yani, even from that point of view it, yeah* (Student6, lines 147-149).



The word '*safe*' has been used by both Student7 and Student6. There is no risk involved in being seen talking to the Imam. Student6's statement also highlights the need for religious and cultural understanding.

### **5.4.3 Summary**

This superordinate theme explores participants' concerns about what people will think of them if they find out that they are receiving coaching or any other psychological intervention. It was agreed that anything relating to mental health is stigmatized and that individuals who engaged in coaching or any other type of psychological intervention would be considered sick. This would negatively affect peoples' perceptions of them, even potentially their suitability as a marital prospect. It would also be a source of shame for the family. Privacy was seen to be a huge concern with the view that the coach, particularly a female coach, could not be trusted to maintain privacy. There was also concern that if people knew that someone was seeing a coach or a psychologist, they would fabricate the reasons why and that these fabrications would potentially be detrimental to the individual and to their families.

## **5.5 Superordinate theme three: The influence of family, culture and religion**

The third superordinate theme explores the influence of family and religion over the individual. The first subordinate theme explores the requirement for individuals to obey their parents. The second subordinate theme explores the concept of putting God into the coaching process.

### **5.5.1. Subordinate theme one: Obedience to parents**

Obedying parents is a direct commandment of Allah. The Qur'an says the only time a child should say no to their parents and disobey them is when they are asked to something that is not allowed by Allah including committing sins, lying and so on. Otherwise, children must show love and gratitude to their parents (Khattab, 2021).

*Student4 spoke freely about the importance of obeying parents.*

*We are brought up yani, to obey our parents and eh to eh respect them. Here it is not like in the west. We never, eh, we never really leave our families. Like, here, even if we leave for a little bit, like to study abroad for a year, we always come back, yani, we always come back to our families. And I think that is one of the problems of eh, yeah, one of the problems of coaching here, yani, because if the coach says it's your life, do what you want, eh, nobody's business, that won't work because our parents, eh, they have to agree. (Student4, lines 150-155).*

This introduced a number of important factors. Firstly, that obedience and respect for parents is essential and that decisions should be made in consultation with parents. Secondly it draws a comparison between collectivist and individualistic societies. The Middle East is a collectivist society and as such, decisions should be made in line with family and cultural norms. Thirdly, it highlights the necessity for non-Arabic coaches who are practicing in the Middle East to be culturally aware (Terc, 2007; Serkal, 2021).

Student1 agrees that parents must be considered during the coaching process.

*Even about families, I think, I mean like the West, they can leave their parent's house and like here, they will eventually go back to the parents, so the coach can't tell the client to like okay, do whatever you want, don't take your parents into consideration.*

*You eh, you have to think yani, you have to think what do your parents want? And here, the only way you can leave your family is if you work abroad, or study abroad, that's it but you will always come back.* (Student1, lines 156-161).

Interestingly, when Student1 said that, there was murmured agreement from the group with a few voices saying '*or get married*'. Student1's statement had a sense of feeling trapped and I felt that the various responses '*or get married*' alluded to marriage being seen as a potential for escape. Those comments stayed with me and upon reflection, I found they linked in again with my value of '*freedom*'. Marriage may seem like an escape or a bid for freedom, but it is no guarantee of this.

Student3 also agreed that parents should be considered. Her statement '*you also have to ask what do your parents want?*' again highlights the importance of the coach being culturally aware (Serkal, 2021).

*But the family should be put in the picture as well. It's no good saying only, eh, what do you want? You have to ask also, yes, you also have to ask what do your parents want?* (Student3, lines 162-163).

Student2 was in agreement and directly emphasized the fact that "*you have to obey your parents.*" Prior to this, the language used relating to this subject was somewhat softer and more diplomatic – think what do your parents want, put them in the picture – the use of the word '*obey*' brought about a more somber atmosphere.

*That's true and sometimes you can't say no, because it's our parents, you have to obey your parents.* (Student2, lines 164-165).

Student7 spoke about a Hadith relating to this. The Hadith is the collected traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, based on his sayings and actions (The British Library, 2021).

*We must obey our parents as it is in our religion and our culture. There is eh, there is a Hadith eh to do with, specifically with this and if eh, if we obey our parents then two doors will open for us in paradise.* (Student7, lines 166-168).

This mention of the Hadith brought a sense of solemnity to the group and there was silence for a while. Student7 had made the link between obedience to parents and Islam.

Student1, presumably still thinking about her brother talked about how parents can be very strict and can get angry if their children do not accede to their wishes.

*Some parents are very strict yani, for example, for example, if you don't become a doctor, until the day of judgement, I'll be angry with you.* (Student1, lines 169-170).

This took the conversation off in a different direction which brings us to Subordinate Theme Two.

### **5.5.2 Subordinate theme two: Including God in the coaching process.**

The second subordinate theme explores the concept of including God in the coaching process.

When Student1 made her statement regarding parents being strict and '*until the day of judgement, I'll be angry with you*' other participants joined in with additional examples.

*Yeah, they use Islam like in a wrong way.* (Student3, line 171).

Whilst this appeared a little shocking, it is important to note that Student3 is not making any criticism of Islam. She believes that Islam is being misinterpreted by parents. This may be perceived as an attempt to use religion as a means of controlling their children; something which would not be particular only to Islam.

*Yes, they use it in a very wrong way.* (Student1, line 172).

Student1 agreed also agreed with Student3 but there was silence and a sense of discomfort within the group.

Student4 believed that parents mix up their traditions with their religion but that the two are distinct from one another. She also alludes to the idea of parents using religion as a means of controlling their children.

*But the sad part, yes, the sad part, just a small thing, the sad part is that Qur'an and Islam and religion says nothing, nothing of what they are saying. It's their traditions that they mix with religion. They come up, yani, they come up with things they want people to do and you know, they put it under the title of Islam, but when you go to Islam, there is nothing like that.* (Student4, lines 173-177).

I noticed Student4's repetition of the word 'sad' and wondered why she chose this word. She did not use 'annoying' or 'unfair' just 'sad' and there seemed to be a sense of resignation to this. It is an interesting point ... the difference between traditions and religion. When Student4 made this statement there was murmuring agreement from the group with various exclamations of 'it's true' and 'like my parents.'

Student2 talked about the difference between traditions and religion in the Middle East explaining that according to Islam, people are expected to do their best and then rely upon God.

The sixth article of faith in Islam commits a Muslim to a belief in fatalism, pre-destination and pre-determination. This concept is cause for some discussion and disagreement (Pipes, 2015).

Student2 introduced the concept of Tawakkul. Tawakkul is a Muslim's trust and acceptance of the divine will, which no one knows, understands or controls except Allah. The meaning of Tawaakul, on the other hand, comprises elements of laziness, inability, a resigned, careless attitude (Tanveer, 2020)

*It's not in our tradition, is more in our religion, as we have to work the hardest we can then we give it over to God. It's not we just sit back and just eat popcorn, and say 'Okay, God will help me pass this exam', no we have to, for example, we have to study and study really hard, then we give it up to God, and we'll see what happens. (Student2, lines 178-181).*

Student1 describes the interdependency that exists in the Middle East which is evidently related to both the collectivist culture of the Middle East and having the same religion . She also alludes to the Islamic principle of Qadar. Qadar is referred to in the Qur'an and is known as the 'Decree of Allah.' It relates to the ideas of fate and predestination and is one of the six articles of faith of Islam (Qadar, 2021).

*Yeah, we are dependent on others and it's like, whatever God has written for us, this is what will happen, so sometimes we don't give the extra effort with it, so it's an excuse,*

*as Arabs, it's known for us. You're leaving it all up to what God has written for you.*

(Student1, lines 182-184).

When Student1 said *'it's an excuse, as Arabs, it's known for us'* there was laughter in the group with various comments including *'like my cousin'* and *'like my brother'*.

Student3 makes the distinction between 'Tawakkul' and 'Tawaakul'.

*There's 'Tawakkul' and 'Tawaakul'. 'Tawakkul' is a good thing that I put in effort and then I say, 'Okay God, this is what I can do and for now, so help me. 'Tawaakul' is when you don't put in any effort.* (Student3, lines 185-187).

Student5 stresses the importance of 'Tawakkul' using the analogy of tying up a camel.

*You can't leave the camel untied and leave, and say 'Oh the camel is not gonna run away', no, you have to make sure and have the camel tied.* (Student5, lines 188-189).

Student5's analogy is based upon the Islamic Hadith on Reliance: Trust in Allah, but tie your camel. 'Anas ibn Malik reported: A man said, "O Messenger of Allah, should I tie my camel and trust in Allah, or should I leave her untied and trust in Allah?" The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, "Tie her and trust in Allah.'" (Sedek, 2019, p.21)

Student4 agrees that based upon 'Tawakkul' people are expected to put forth their best effort and then rely on faith.

*You're expected to do your best because if you don't get what the opportunity, you have to keep in mind that God gave you the opportunity for a reason, so try your best and rely on faith.* (Student4, lines 190-192).

Student5 reminds the group that, as Student1 said, Tawaakul is quite common in the Middle East.

*Yes do your best, but not eh, not everyone does that. No, they say Insh'alla it will be alright but then yani, then they do nothing to make it alright and that happens a lot.*  
(Student5, lines 193-194).

There was a lot of murmuring in the group and the consensus was that leaving things to fate and to what God has written, without putting in any effort, is common in the Middle East; as Student1 said 'so it's an excuse' and this is Tawaakul. However the concept of doing your best and then handing it over to God – Tawakkul – is a good thing – tie the camel and also trust in God.

Whether coaches should introduce God into the coaching process caused quite a reaction amongst the group and Student5 believed that by doing so, clients would consider the Coach to be understanding.

*... [Coaching] needs to be sensitive to this culture, especially to families and to our religion. It would be successful if you considered 'God'. They would say 'Oh, she [the coach] is understanding, she is putting God into it, Allah.* (Student5, lines 195-197).

Both Student2 and Student4 agreed that the coach would be seen as more competent by doing so.

*She knows what she is talking about.* (Student2, line 198).

*She knows what she is talking about, yeah.* (Student4, line 199).



The coach would be seen to be both understanding and knowledgeable if s/he were to bring God into the coaching process.

Student3 believed it to be important to consider the Qur'an way.

*And then maybe you can change their mentality, like God, it's the Qur'an way, not your way. 'Do you think that God will accept this action?' It's like one of the questions, it's an important question.* (Student3, lines 200-202).

Somewhat mirroring Student3's previous statement concerning *parents* 'you also have to ask what do your parents want', Student3 proposes that God's acceptance should also be considered when making decisions.

Student7 then made the link between personal identity, family and religion.

*You have to, eh, you have to include God in coaching, just like, eh, just like you have to include our parents. It is not a separate thing eh, no, it is all part of the same thing. You remember eh, when we talked about identity during the course. You remember. I am first a Muslim. Muslim first, then eh, son, father, manager whatever.* (Student7, lines 203-206).

There was universal acknowledgement of this within the group and various interjections of '*he's right*' and '*it's true*'. There was also a sense of respect for Student7 whose words appeared to be regarded as good and wise. The group consensus, that Muslims must consider what God would want, and include God in the coaching process is part of ongoing discussion in the literature on the relationship between religiosity and ethical decision-making (Sulaiman et al., 2021).

Student6, who had been very quiet for some time supported Student7's statement and confirmed the link between personal identity and religion.

*When you ask me who I am, I am, I am always first a Muslim, that is eh, that is like my core, after that yani, I might be a man or a student or a son yani, but I am a Muslim first.* Student6, lines 207-208).

Student4 also confirmed the link and reiterated the importance of putting God into the coaching process.

*It is true, I eh, I think it is true for all Muslims, it is true for me. I am first a Muslim and then eh, and then whatever and the coach, yani, the coach has to understand that we are not separated no, we are not separated it is all linked and the coach has to consider our parents eh our family and our religion.* (Student4, lines 209-212).

Both Student7 and Student4 commented that they are first a Muslim. Being a Muslim is the core element of their identity, so it stands to reason that God should be included in the coaching process and that the coach must be culturally sensitive and aware. The concept of Muslim identity is widely discussed in the literature (Manzoor, 2004; Azad, 2017; Tiflati, 2017).

### **5.5.3 Summary**

This superordinate theme explores the influence of Family and Religion

It was universally agreed that Parents and God should be considered during the coaching process and that decisions and actions should not be taken without considering what Parents and God would think about these.

The idea that parents sometimes use religion as a means of exerting control over their children was also explored.

The link between personal identity, family and religion was also highlighted.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter I presented the results and analysis of Study One which included three superordinate themes and six subordinate themes, namely

- Coaching gets you thinking : Self-reflection; Self-awareness and self-regulation
- What if they find out? : Stigmatization; Privacy
- The influence of family and religion : Obedience to parents; Including God in the coaching process

In the next chapter I will discuss the findings of Study One and contextualise these findings in the literature.

## **Chapter Six : Study One : Discussion**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, presented the results and an analysis of the results of Study One. This chapter begins with a summary of the main findings followed by a discussion of the findings in relation to the literature.

### **6.2 Summary of Main Findings**

Study One sought to explore the experience of Middle Eastern university students who participate in a coaching skills programme. Three superordinate themes were identified when analysing the data. The first superordinate theme explores the idea that coaching gets you thinking. This study found that one of the main outcomes of coaching is that it gets you thinking, in relation to becoming more self-reflective and also in terms of becoming more self-aware and have greater self-regulation.

The second superordinate theme explores participants' concerns about what people will think of them if they find out that they are receiving coaching or any other psychological intervention. It was agreed that anything relating to mental health is stigmatized and that individuals who engaged in coaching or any other type of psychological intervention would be considered sick. This would negatively affect peoples' perceptions of them, even potentially their suitability as a marital prospect. It would also be a source of shame for the family. Privacy was seen to be a huge concern with the view that the coach, particularly a female coach, could not be trusted to maintain privacy. There was also concern that if people knew that someone was seeing a coach or a psychologist,

they would fabricate the reasons why and that these fabrications would potentially be detrimental to the individual and to their families.

The third superordinate theme explores the influence of Family and Religion

It was universally agreed that Parents and God should be considered during the coaching process and that decisions and actions should not be taken without considering what Parents and God would think about these.

### **6.3 Contextualising main findings in the literature**

#### **6.3.1 Coaching gets you thinking.**

The first superordinate theme captured the participants' experiences of coaching which resulted in them becoming more self-reflective. This theme also explores participants increase in self-awareness and self-regulation.

Previous research has identified the importance of engaging in self-reflection for both the clients as well as the coaches (Grant & O'Connor, 2019) and Bozer & Jones (2018) found that coaching outcomes included self-insight.

Student5 found this to be the case, particularly when it came to awareness of her personal values. But coaching, eh like, coaching helped me to reflect on myself, yeah, especially when we talked about our values. I became more clear about those, eh, what was important to me.

Self-reflection and self-awareness are further evidenced in the literature (Spaten (2018), Rank & Gray (2017), Lawrence, Dunn & Weisfeld-Spolter, (2018), Lefdahl-Davis, Huffman, Stancil & Alayan (2018), Cameron et al., (2019), Fogg (2019)) where self-

reflection and self-awareness were found to significant coaching outcomes. In a very recent study on coaching in a higher education institution in the Middle East, Matthews (2022) found that participated highlighted clarity of thinking and self-reflection as a coaching outcome along with an increase in both professional and personal development. Likewise, in a study conducted by King, S., & van Nieuwerburgh (2020) on Emirate Muslims coaching experiences, many participants described both personal and professional growth due to heightened self-understanding.

In this study, all participants reported self-reflection and self-awareness as outcomes of coach training. Student3 used an interesting metaphor of glasses on the inside in terms of her increase in self-awareness. This is a powerful metaphor which really emphasises the increase in self-awareness she experienced.

Numerous studies have found that coaching increased self-awareness along with other outcomes. For example, Lane & de Wilde (2018) found that coaching increased self-awareness and goal attainment. Brinkley & Le Roux (2018) stated coaching benefits to be self-awareness and enhanced communication. Betrand (2019) found that coaching increased self-awareness and empathy. Erlich (2020) describes both self-awareness and an increase in resilience as outcomes of his study. Longenecker & McCartney (2020) found that coaching increases self-awareness and emotional intelligence whilst Nubold (2021) found coaching to increase self-awareness and self-efficacy.

Throughout the various coaching outcomes found in these studies, it would appear that an increase in self-awareness is a common thread.

It is unsurprising that self-awareness should be so ubiquitous in the literature on coaching outcomes, as all coach training includes a strong focus on exploring our personal values and aligning our personal values with our behaviour. Self-awareness is an essential aspect of this process (ICF, 2021).

Self-awareness is interlinked with self-regulation and numerous studies have found that coaching increases self-regulation. Pousa & Mathieu (2015) and Theeboom, Beersma & Annelies (2014) found that coaching has a significant positive effect on goal directed regulation. Grant & Ofer (2021) found that coaching psychology participants experienced increases in goal attainment, self-insight, psychological well-being, and solution-focused thinking. The authors posit that these benefits may enhance personal agency through goal-focused self-regulation.

In their study to examine the relationship between coaching and self-regulation, Baquero Barato & Rodríguez Moneo (2021) found that coaching supports self-regulation including a focus on goal-achievement and an interest in personal development.

Rose, McGuire-Snieckus & Gilbert (2015) found a positive correlation between emotion coaching and self-regulation. Silkenbeumer, Schiller & Kärtner (2018) similarly found that teachers use of emotion coaching and co-regulation contributes to the development of self-regulation of emotions in their students.

### **6.3.2. What if they find out?**

Coaching is different to counselling. The International Coach Federation describe coaching as focussing the present whilst constructively moving towards the whereas therapy seeks to understand past experiences and how these affect the present state (Patton, 2018). These obstacles and problematic behaviours can include self-limiting beliefs, personal doubts and fears so understandably the nature of the relationship between the coach and the client is built on trust, empathy and confidentiality (Schiemann et al., 2019).

Within the coaching relationship both the coach and the client “bring with them dreams, desires, histories, beliefs, cultures, abilities and fears” (English et al., 2018).

The participants in this study were unanimous in their agreement that going to see a coach would be considered the same as going to see any type of mental health professional and as such, would be subject to the same stigma surrounding mental health in the Middle East. When the participants initially began to explore this topic there was a sense of unease. Student2 was the first to speak and her statement “everyone will know and think you are sick” was met with concurrence with all of the students laughing and saying things like “you’re sick”, “you’re mentally ill”. This attitude is supported in the literature.

Numerous studies have found that there is widespread stigma facing individuals who are perceived to have mental health issues. Mental illness is considered to be one of the most stigmatizing conditions (Corrigan et al., 2000; Corrigan & Penn, 1999; Tringo, 1970; Weiner, Perry, & Magnusson, 1988).



According to Mohammadzadeh et al. (2021) four out of every five people in the Middle East who have mental health issues face stigma. This is exacerbated by the fact that in the Middle East, mental health has a low public profile as compared to physical health issues (Zolezzi et al., 2018). Maalouf et al. (2019) also found a low awareness regarding mental health issues in the Middle East.

Al-Adawi et al. (2002) found that participants in their study believed that those with mental illness should be segregated from society. In a subsequent study by Coker (2005) the author referred to statements by respondents to the effect that a person [who was seeing a mental health professional] “was ‘mad’ or ‘crazy’, harmful to others or had impaired reasoning.” In a more recent study, Zolezzi et al. (2017) found that the majority of participants believed that people who experience mental illness “are dangerous and unable to hold regular jobs and that they would not marry someone who suffered from a mental illness.”

When Student2 spoke about the fear of people finding out if she were to see a coach, she imagined her Mother to say ‘who will marry you now.’

This concern is also mentioned in the literature where studies have found that girls in the Middle East are more likely to experience negative consequences of stigma due to concerns regarding possible marriage partners (Dardas, Silva, Noonan, & Simmons, 2016; Doshmangir, Rashidian, Shakibazadeh, Rashedian, & Elahi, 2016; Jaber et al., 2015)

The stigma that surrounds mental health also extends to the family of the individual and brings with it a sense of shame. Student1 refers to this when she says “And you know, if

your family finds out, then yani, then that is a disaster, I am not joking. There is like, eh, the shame for the family.”

Student7 also refers to the concept of familial shame when he says “Family reputation, eh, family reputation in our society is very important. And there is a, a responsibility, yes, a responsibility on each of us, not, not to bring shame on the family.”

A family’s standing in their community is very important and numerous studies have found that disclosing there is a mental health issue in the family is considered “shameful” (Aloud & Rathur, 2009; Amer, 2006; Erickson & Al-Timimi, 2001; Youssef & Deane, 2006).

Rusch, Angermeyer, & Corrigan (2005) found mental illness to be a source of disgrace, shame and also weakness for the family.

As a result of the cultural prohibitions on “exposing any personal or family matters to outsiders” the shame and stigma associated with this actually prevents individuals from seeking help and accessing services (Youssef & Deane, 2006).

Student1 specifically mentions this when she says “It’s like, we are raised what happens at home stays at home.”

Youssef & Deane’s (2006) findings that the stigma associated with mental illness actually inhibits people from accessing services is consistent with other studies.

Eapen and Ghubash (2004) studied factors that influenced parents seeking help for mental health problems and found that only 38% of parents said they would seek to

access mental health services if their child were experiencing problems; stigma was identified as a key factor.

Student7 agreed with Student1's concerns regarding privacy and explained that people might feel more comfortable talking to the Imam. If anyone saw them talking with him, they would not assume the worst.

The literature widely supports this and numerous studies have found that individuals in the Middle East are more likely to talk to the Imam than to access mental health services. Imams (traditional spiritual leaders) are seen to aid the process of healing and are considered to be indirect agents of the will of Allah. (Abu-Ras et al., 2008; Padella, Killawi, Heisler, Demonner, & Fetters, 2010; Padella et al., 2012).

Youssef & Deane (2006) found that religious leaders were considered to be an important sources of help for mental-health problems.

Interestingly, after the September 11 bombings in New York, Imams played a significant role in aiding the Middle Eastern communities in the United States during this traumatic time by providing counselling and support (Abu Ras et al., 2008).

In an earlier study Ali, Milstein, and Marzuk (2005) found that 95% of Imams, reported spending significant time each week providing counselling to their congregants.

In a somewhat related study, Padella et al. (2012) found that Imams may also play roles in molding both community and family values in response to illness and difficulty.

The relationship between spiritual matters and mental health is an interesting one with some studies finding mental illness to be perceived as a punishment from God (Zolezzi

et al. 2017; Phillips & Stein, 2007) and others to show that jinns (spirits) are perceived to be the cause of mental illness (Al-Adawi et al., 2002; Rayan & Fawaz, 2018).

In an unusual twist, it appears that the very people who are charged with helping those suffering from mental health problems may also contribute to its stigmatism. Aside from stigma coming from the general community, some studies have found that mental healthcare professionals are also susceptible to developing stigmas about individuals who are experiencing mental health issues and that these stigmas are influenced by both the media and their communities (Alyousef & Alhamidi, 2019; Shahrour & Rehmani, 2009).

As stigma is such a significant factor when it comes to matters of mental health, it is unsurprising that those who do go to see a coach or a mental health professional are deeply concerned about confidentiality. In the current study, all participants agreed that individuals who saw a coach would have fears that the coach would not keep their disclosures private.

Student5's statement portrays the lack of confidence people have regarding confidentiality. The whole group were in agreement regarding this.

"They are afraid, they worry about the confidentiality, for example, like, if a woman would be a coach, they think that after the coaching session she will be with her family or friends yani and she would sit in like a gathering and she'll say, she'll tell them everything, all of the details of what, yani what she was told." Youssef & Deane (2006) and Scull et al. (2014) found that participants had concerns about confidentiality and lacked trust in mental health service providers.

Matthews (2022) found that participants considered trust issues to be a major obstacle when it came to coaching in the Middle East.

Although the majority of literature supports the idea of stigma regarding mental health in the Middle East, a small number of studies have somewhat contrary findings. Gearing et al. (2013), although stating that “stigma is a fundamental barrier to individuals seeking out mental health treatment in the Middle East”, found that in fact seeking treatment did not stigmatize individuals and their families. However the study was exploring attitudes specifically relating to adolescents receiving mental health treatment, which may potentially have influenced the outcome.

However in a subsequent study, Gearing et al. (2015) found that whilst seeking treatment was not found to increase perceived stigma, findings indicated females were more greatly affected by stigma than males.

Pocock (2017) found that in the Middle East, there remains both stigma surrounding mental health and also the problem of lack of medical education on this subject for medical professionals. He does however make the point that this has been the case in the past for many countries and that is also currently the situation in other parts of the world.

Interestingly, both Coker (2005) and Sewilam et al. (2015) found that there was greater stigma attached to mental illnesses relating to issues that were haram or culturally proscribed (such as alcohol abuse) than to disorders unrelated to substance abuse, such as depression, possession and psychosis.

### **6.3.3. The Influence of family, culture & religion**

The third superordinate theme explores the influence of family, culture and religion over the individual. The first subordinate theme explores the requirement for individuals to obey their parents. The second subordinate theme explores the concept of putting God into the coaching process.

Obedience to parents is an expectation both in Arabic culture and Islam. There was unanimous consensus amongst the group about this. Whilst there is not a large amount of literature available on this specific topic, it is referred to in various studies on parenting and also the elderly. Matthews (2002) described participants' views on the subject of cultural issues as being a barrier to coaching in the Middle East.

Elsman (2012) explains that in Islam, parents must be honoured, respected, loved and obeyed both in actions and in speech and there is a requirement to serve parents with both kindness and care.

Sharie'a (also written as Sharia) is Islamic law. The Qur'an is the principal source of Islamic law. It contains the rules by which the Muslim world is governed (or should govern itself) (Islamic Law - The Shariah, 2021).

The Hadith is the collected traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, based on his sayings and actions. The Hadiths relate to a broad range of subjects, from theological concerns such as revelation and the nature of God, to instructions on daily worship and rituals, to legal advice (The British Library, 2021).

Student7 refers to a Hadith when he says "We must obey our parents as it is in our religion and our culture. There is eh, there is a Hadith eh to do with, specifically with this and if eh, if we obey our parents then two doors will open for us in paradise."

l'anah, (2017) refers to another Hadith "The Lord's pleasure is in the parent's pleasure, and the Lord's anger is in the parent's anger" when he argues that children must obey every order that their parents gives them.

Sukami (2013) found that "obedience is one of the behaviours that a parent wants."

Oweis et al. (2012) found from a qualitative study on parenting that Islamic teachings, soicio-cultural values and traditions influence parenting behaviour and parental expectations.

Student4 complains about parents mixing traditions with religion "It's their traditions that they mix with religion" but it appears to be usual that beliefs and expectations, including the expectation for children to obey their parents, come from both Islam and traditions.

Syahrul (2008) states that children should be raised to obey and respect both parents by raising awareness about the great sacrifices of both parents for the children. This appears to bring with it a sense of obligation. It suggests that, I as a parent, have made great sacrifices for you, therefore you must do as I want. This somewhat links in with Student4's assertion that "*They [parents] come up with things they want people to do and you know, they put it under the title of Islam, but when you go to Islam, there is nothing like that.*"

Specific behaviours are expected of children including "listening to their parents, standing when they stand, obey the rule, fulfilling their call, be humble with full of love, and not force anything that can burden them, not get tired of doing good things, also do not look at them with suspicion and disobedience." (Al-Jawi, 2010)

Pertiwi & Muminin (2020) concluded that there is a link between Islamic morals and obedience.

Acevedo et al. (2015) described a dearth of research exploring values of parents and desired traits in children from an Islamic perspective. However one of their findings related to the difference in parenting styles and valued child traits in individualistic societies and collectivist societies. They found that many Muslim parents consider individualism and autonomy as a threat to collectivist societal values. They also state that obedience is at the heart of parental expectations of Muslims and quote a verse from the Qur'an :

And thy Lord has decreed that you serve none but Him, and do good to parents. If either or both of them reach old age with thee, say not "Fie" to them, nor chide them, and speak to them a generous word. And lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy and say: My Lord, have mercy on them, as they brought me up (when I was) little (Nufus et al., 2017).

The Middle East is a collectivist culture and although Aygün & Imamoğlu (2002) found increasing level of individualism in the constructions of the self in collectivist societies, this has not translated into a decrease in other collectivist notions, such as the emphasis on relationships and interdependency.

Al-Esia & Skok (2014), found that depending upon the social situation, individuals may fluctuate between individualistic and collectivist ideas.

In an interview on coaching and cultural contexts, Pasha-Zaidi (2017) talked about the importance of understanding the concept of wellbeing and coaching within a variety of



cultural contexts and referred to “the importance of culture and religion in imparting definitions of wellbeing” asserting not to do so would be irresponsible and possibly harmful.

When discussing the coaching process, there was also unanimous agreement that God should be included in this process. The Coach would be seen as understanding and more competent if this were the case.

Both Student2 and Student4 said “She knows what she is talking about” referring to a Coach who included God into the coaching process. Student3 specified a question that the Coach could ask the client “Do you think that God will accept this action?”

This attitude is widely supported in the literature. Sholahuddin et al. (2019) found that “A fundamental difference between Islamic and conventional business coaching is that the majority of Muslim coaches use Qur’anic and the Prophetic saying in their approach to supporting the clients in obtaining God-perceived goals.”

This is also supported by Ross et al (2018) who found that the most effective coaches are those who incorporate Islam into their practice and who are able to guide their clients to become closer to God.

Garcia-Aamor (2003) found that coaches who can also provide spiritual support are “highly valued by employers.”

In this current study, there was much discussion about the concept of Tawakkul and Tawaakul.

Tanveer (2020) states that “Tawakkul means putting trust in Allah while also implementing the means that have been permitted. Scholars have made an important distinction between tawakkul (تَوَكَّلْ) and tawaakul (تَوَكَّلْ). Tawakkul is a Muslim’s trust and acceptance of the divine will, which no one knows, understands or controls except Allah. The meaning of tawaakul, on the other hand, comprises elements of laziness, inability, a resigned, careless attitude. It indicates refusal to strive in accordance with the laws and ways which Allah has laid down for humankind. Those who misunderstand it wait for a miracle to ‘drop from the sky’ without striving towards it in any way.”

Fozia et al. (2016) discuss ‘Tawakkul’ and the importance of Muslims doing their best even though final outcomes may be beyond their control. Islam does not support the concept of depending upon God without putting in any effort. This mirrors Student4’s assertion that based upon ‘Tawakkul’ people are expected to put forth their best effort and then rely on faith

Allaho & van Nieuwerburgh (2017) developed a framework for Islamic coaching and posited that Islamic clients can consider their goals “within a framework of Muslim beliefs about God, self, others and the world.” They also identified features in Islamic teaching that “provide a purpose with its value base that also enable a coaching journey.”

Coaching requires self-exploration and Grine (2014) refers to the richness of The Qur’an. Sunnah and Islamic heritage as “rich sources for thinking, observing and exploring ourselves.”

Understanding culture was also found to be an important factor in the coaching process. King & van Nieuwerburg (2020) found that where coaches were culturally aware, this helped to build respect and trust with clients. This aligns with Student2 and Student4's statement regarding the Coach "She knows what she is talking about" referring to a Coach who included God into the coaching process.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter I discussed the findings of Study One and contextualized these findings in the literature. The following chapter moves on to Study Two where I have outlined the research method.

## **Chapter 7 : Study Two : Research Method**

### **7.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter I discussed the findings of Study One and contextualized them in the literature. In this chapter, I will present the research method for Study Two. The aim of Study Two is to explore the experience of Western coaches who practice in the Middle East.

### **7.2 Procedure**

In the sections below, I describe my recruitment and data collection procedures, the process of analysis, ethical considerations and assessment of the quality and validity of the study.

#### **7.2.1 Participants and Sampling**

IPA deals with a small number of participants who share a common experience. The sample is therefore selected purposively because these individuals can provide insight into a specific experience. (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Participants are selected on the basis that they can grant us access to a particular perspective on the phenomena under study. Because IPA is an idiographic approach, concerned with understanding particular phenomena in particular contexts, IPA studies are conducted on small sample sizes. (Smith et al., 2009).

With regard to IPA studies, there is no correct answer concerning ideal sample size, however as IPA has developed and matured and as more studies are being published, sample sizes are generally becoming smaller. This is due the nature of IPA and the

focus upon detailed accounts and explorations into individual experience (Smith et al., 2009). IPA generally requires quite a homogeneous sample (Smith et al., 2009) and as this study aims to explore students' experience of participating in a coach training programme, I selected seven participants who had completed this programme.

Participants were 5 coaches who had been trained in the west and who practiced in the Middle East. All were female and all were between the ages of 40 and 55. One was from New Zealand, one was from Canada, one was from the US and two were from the UK.

### 7.2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

In order to create a homogeneous sample I created inclusion and exclusion criteria.

### **7.2.3 Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

#### Inclusion Criteria

- Coaches who had been born and raised in the West and who had received their coach training in the West.
- Coaches who now practiced in the Middle East.

#### Exclusion Criteria

- Coaches who had been trained in the West but were of Middle Eastern origin.

### **7.2.3 Recruitment**

The recruitment of this purposive sample came from either coaches I knew personally in the Middle East or coaches whom one of my colleagues knew.

### **7.2.4 Situating the Sample**

Participants were 5 coaches who had been trained in the west and who practiced in the Middle East. All were female and all were between the ages of 40 and 60. One was from New Zealand, one was from Canada, one was from the US and two were from the UK. Two had previously worked as Lecturers in a Business School; two had worked as English Language Teachers and one had been a Nurse.

**Table 7.1 Study Two : Participants' Demographic Data**

| <b>Name</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Country of Birth</b> | <b>Profession prior to Coaching</b> |
|-------------|---------------|------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Coach1      | Female        | 46         | Canada                  | English Teacher                     |
| Coach2      | Female        | 50         | UK                      | Nurse                               |
| Coach3      | Female        | 49         | UK                      | Business Lecturer                   |
| Coach4      | Female        | 58         | New Zealand             | English Teacher                     |
| Coach5      | Female        | 42         | US                      | Marketing Lecturer                  |

### **7.3 Data Collection**

### **7.3.1 Procedure**

I initially made telephone contact with each of the participants to provide an overview of the research and to ascertain whether or not they were interested in participating. Once they confirmed their desire to participate, I Emailed the Information Sheet (Appendix C) to provide an outline of the aims of the research and invited them to read through the Consent Form (Appendix D) and if they were happy, to sign it and send it back to me via Email.

### **7.3.2 Semi-structured interviews within IPA research**

IPA is best suited to data collection methods that invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first person account of their experience. Interviews and diaries may be the best means, other approaches such as focus groups or participant observation may work. (Smith et al., 2009).

### **7.3.3 Conducting the interviews**

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in either my home or the home of the participant. As I already knew three of the participants and had been introduced to the other two participants by mutual friends, rapport was easy to establish. The fact that we were all coaches with the shared experience of working in the Middle East also ensured there were no barriers. It also made the process very easy, as we were all familiar with coaching terminology, coaching approaches and comfortable with sharing our own personal experiences of coaching with the understanding that confidentiality, professional respect and lack of judgment were assured.

At the beginning of each interview, I introduced and thanked the participants for volunteering to take part in this study. I also thanked them for signing the Consent Forms and reminded them of the aims of the study. I informed that the interviews would take approximately one hour.

### **7.3.4 Reflection on the Interviews**

I felt that my background as a coach allowed me to conduct the interviews in a sensitive and supportive manner which encouraged the participants to speak openly about their experiences. My approach was the same as that taken during the coaching process whereby the coach creates a therapeutic alliance with the coachee (Safran & Muran, 2003).

Following the first interview I reflected upon what had transpired and made entries in my reflective journal. I was interested by the emotions that the conversation had evoked in me and how moved I was by certain topics. I also noticed the 'flow' of the interview and how easy it was to interview participants where we had a shared knowledge, experience and understanding. After the first interview I reflected upon the questions I had asked and whether

or not I could have gleaned additional information but adapting any questions or asking different ones.

IPA is iterative and continued to follow this process after each new interview; however coaching is intuitive and I found that I intuitively asked the most pertinent questions based upon how the conversation was flowing and my intuitive reading of the



participant. In this regard, any pre-planned questions may or not have been appropriate to ask, depending upon the direction the coaching conversation / interview was taking.

### **7.3.5 Transcription**

I audio recorded the semi-structured interviews, with the consent of each participant. I transcribed the content and checked the accuracy numerous times, ensuring that everything was included including pauses and laughter as I needed to be as close as possible to the dialogue of the participants when conducting the analysis. For reasons of anonymity, I changed the name of each participant. The data is kept in accordance with University of East London's ethical guidelines.

### **7.4 Data analysis**

Smith et al. (2009) posit that there is no single, correct approach for analyzing data and when it comes to IPA, a level of flexibility and innovation is encouraged. "The essence of IPA lies in its analytic focus ... which directs our analytic attention towards our participants' attempts to make sense of their experiences." (Smith et al. 2009, p. 79). As a result IPA can be characterised by a set of common processes e.g. moving from the particular to the shared and from the descriptive to the interpretative. It can also be characterised by a set of common principles e.g. a commitment to and understanding of the participant's point of view, and a psychological focus on personal meaning-making in particular contexts." IPA Analysis has been described as an iterative and inductive cycle (Smith, 2007)

As in Study One, I also gave consideration to how I would bracket my preconceptions. Bracketing is a necessary process to demonstrate validity of the data analysis and as

such, the researcher must make every effort to set aside their own experience, values and beliefs to enable them to describe the experience of the participants accurately.

(Ahern, 1999). However, when considering the hermeneutic phenomenological approach some authors posit that it is not possible to eliminate our prior knowledge and understanding (Koch, 1995) and that attempting to do so can be somewhat problematic and lacking consistency (LeVasseur, 2003) as there is no definitive guide or method for doing so Giorgi (2011). However, according to Smith et al. (2009, P.42) “you will have to try to suspend (or ‘bracket off’) your preconceptions in IPA. Whilst some authors are proposing specific techniques for bracketing in phenomenological research (e.g. Chan et al., 2013) it still appears somewhat unclear. However, I made every attempt to bracket my preconceptions and kept this firmly in mind in all steps of the research process, including during data analysis.

Concerning the analysis of the data I followed the guidelines of Smith et al. (2009) which involved

- Reading and re-reading
- Initial noting
- Developing emergent themes
- Searching for connections across emerging themes

#### **7.4.1 Reading & re-reading**

I read each semi-structured interview transcript numerous times whilst also listening to the audio recording. This ensured that I stayed close to the data and became familiar with it. Listening to their voices whilst reading the words was very powerful and

immersed me in the world of the participants. I also made a point of bracketing my own thoughts about the transcript and I entered this into my reflective journal.

#### **7.4.2 Initial noting**

As I read and re-read each transcript I made exploratory comments, both on how the participants described their experience and also on my reaction to this and also noticed whether the commentary the commentary fell into the category of descriptive, linguistic, or conceptual and recorded these observations in my research journal.

#### **7.4.3 Developing emergent themes**

From this point onwards, I worked predominantly with my notes / exploratory comments and referred occasionally to the transcript, the focus being to transform these exploratory comments into emergent themes.

#### **7.4.4 Searching for connections across emerging themes**

I grouped the various comments and then clustered similar ones together, which enabled me to find common 'themes'.

#### **7.4.5 Moving to the next case**

Following the guidelines of Smith et al. (2009), I was aware that once I had read the first case that my 'fore-structures' would have changed (Smith et al. 2009, p. 100) and therefore I attempted to analyse each subsequent case on its own grounds rather than allowing myself to be influenced by the previous case. As mentioned in section 7.4, this attempt at bracketing fore-conceptions is not an easy feat and there are no definitive

guidelines for doing so, however I was aware of the importance of doing so and kept this firmly in mind when analyzing each case.

#### **7.4.6 Cross-case analysis**

Once I had completed the case analysis, I looked for relationships between the themes and was able to cluster them according to a main theme - Superordinate Theme - and then subthemes - Subordinate Themes.

#### **7.5 The hermeneutic circle**

According to Smith et al. (2009, p.28) the hermeneutic circle “is concerned with the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole, at a series of levels” and “to understand any given part, you look to the whole; to understand the whole, you look to the parts.” As in Study One, this was something I kept in mind as I moved back and forth through the process. I also considered my role as a researcher in terms of the hermeneutic circle in relation to my experience as a coach and also to my assumptions. I am a coach who is interviewing coaches. We all speak the same language and have an understanding of coaching which does not need to be explained in obvious terms. This was something I kept in mind during the interview and data analysis process. I was also aware that as a coach who also practiced in the Middle East but was trained in the West, I had preconceptions about what their experiences would be, the positive interactions they would have and the challenges they would face when coaching in the Middle East. I have reflected upon the double hermeneutic and how I may have influenced and interpreted meaning; however, I also acknowledge that it is not possible to remain completely outside of the research experience. I have also reflected upon how

my own beliefs, experiences and values may have influenced the research and used a research journal throughout the process to assist with reflexivity.

## **7.6 Ethical practice**

This research received ethical approval from UEL Ethics Committee (Appendix A).

Participation was voluntary and each participant received a Consent & Information Form which explained the nature of the study. Participants were assured that they were not obliged to participate and that they could withdraw at any stage. Participants were also assured of confidentiality and that no reference would be made to their names in the published research.

In the unlikely event that taking part in this research could conceivably be distressing to participants, participants were provided with an overview of the topics that would be explored during the focus group. They were reassured that they could withdraw at any time and that they did not have to give their opinions on any particular subject if they did not wish. The interview was conducted in a supportive and sensitive manner.

The semi-structured interviews was conducted in a supportive and sensitive manner.

## **7.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter I presented the research method for Study Two. In the following chapter, I will present the results and analysis of these results.

## **Chapter 8 : Study Two : Results and analysis of results**

### **8.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter I presented the research method for Study Two. Study Two seeks to explore the personal experiences of Western coaches who practice in the Middle East. In this chapter I present the results of Study Two and an analysis of these results. As with Study One, when initially analyzing the data, it was necessary to fully immerse myself in the experience of the participants. I therefore listened to the audio recording on a number of occasions and subsequently read and re-read the transcript multiple times. As I did so, I made exploratory comments, both on how the participants described their experience and also on my reaction to this. From this point onwards, I worked predominantly with my notes / exploratory comments and referred occasionally to the transcript, the focus being to transform these exploratory comments into emergent themes. I grouped the various comments and then clustered similar ones together, which enabled me to find common themes. Once I had done so, I looked for relationships between the themes and was able to cluster them according to a main theme - Superordinate Theme - and then subthemes - Subordinate Themes.

### **8.2 Overview of superordinate themes**

This chapter outlines the themes that have emerged from analysis of the data. Data analysis produced two superordinate themes and six subordinate themes (please see Table 8.1 below) which illustrated the participants' experiences of coaching in the Middle East.

The first superordinate theme, 'The Wounded Healer' explores the personal development and growth that the participants experienced as a result of coaching. It also explores their spiritual journey and their view of coaching as 'a privilege.'

The second superordinate theme, 'Insha'Allah' (the literal translation is 'If God Wills So') explores the participants feelings regarding 'dreams.' On the one hand, they are helping their clients to explore their dreams and possibilities whilst on the other hand, they are fearful that they may be giving their clients false hope ... that the dreams they dare to dream may in fact be impossible. This superordinate theme also explores the very powerful influence of family, culture and religion on the decisions that their clients consider. It also explores the fear that the coaches feel surrounding the confidentiality of the coaching process, the subject of stigmatisation regarding mental health in the Middle East and their concerns about how this might affect their clients and their clients' families.

**Table 8.1 Study Two : Superordinate & Subordinate Themes**

| <b>Superordinate Theme</b> | <b>Subordinate Themes</b>                                            |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The Wounded Healer         | My Personal Journey<br><br>My Spiritual Journey<br><br>My Privilege  |
| Insha'Allah                | Two Sides of the Same Coin<br><br>The Influence of Family, Culture & |

|  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
|  | Religion                      |
|  | Stigmatization & Consequences |

### **8.3 Superordinate theme one : The wounded healer**

The first superordinate theme explores the participants' individual coaching journeys and how their experience of coaching has contributed to their own personal and spiritual development. It also explores their experience of coaching as a 'privilege'. The first subordinate theme captures the participants' journey towards self-awareness and healing of past wounds; and how, through the process of healing their own wounds, they subsequently desired to help others. The second subordinate theme explores the participants' spiritual development and how their experience of coaching has contributed to this. The third subordinate theme explores how the participants view coaching as a 'privilege' particularly with regard to how much trust their clients place in them.

#### **8.3.1 Subordinate theme one : My personal journey**

Ultimately the journey has been about me (Coach3, line 324)

That statement surprised me, greatly. As a coach myself, I was taken aback and I reflected upon that. Why did I feel taken aback? What is wrong with the journey being about her? I wondered why that made me feel uncomfortable. This reflection brought up quite a lot for me. I followed my thoughts on this and found myself thinking about my



Father, his kindness, how he always puts others first and the huge influence he has had on my life.

When Coach3 went on to explain further, it became clearer. She had been broken hearted as a result of her divorce and this resulted in her doing a lot of soul searching and coming to some important realisations.

It was quite enlightening (laughs), when I looked back at my life over the years, I realised that I have put everyone else first. We both had good careers, but I held mine back and worked part time in a role I was over qualified for, so I could be there for our children and be there for him (Coach3, lines 340-342).

I noticed her use of the word '*enlightening*'. This is a word and a sense that has come up regularly in both studies. Coach3's divorce and her realisation that she had put everyone else first, seemed to be the dawning of a new way of thinking for her and the catalyst for some decisions. Coach3 is not alone in this regard and divorce, although a difficult experience can be the start of a journey of self-discovery that can make one stronger and happier and can be viewed as an opportunity for a new beginning (Krantzler, 2014).

*Decisions which were about me for a change and not about everyone else. And when it came to doing a coach training course I decided that this was going to be about me. My life. My journey.* (Coach3, lines 344-346).

There was a strong sense of resolve in how Coach3 said this and I felt it came with a stronger sense of self-appreciation and self-worth.

Coach3 spoke about how conventional therapy had not worked for her but that coaching empowered her and helped her to let go of the pain of the past.

*I had tried conventional therapy and it just wasn't working for me, it kept me stuck in the past and dwelling on my problems and pain. But with coaching, even though it didn't focus on my past, the whole process made me stronger, made me, you know, appreciate my strengths and have a more balanced perspective and this actually helped me to deal with the pain of past issues. (Coach3, lines 349-353).*

Having trained myself as a coach I found this interesting. All coach training programmes are clear that coaching is 'not counselling' and that it focuses upon the present and the future and not the past. This may be the case, but I also found that due to the subjects explored during coach training (for example values, boundaries, self-limiting beliefs) my self-awareness grew and this in itself allowed me to understand my past experiences more clearly. From what Coach3 described, I felt that her experience was similar.

Once Coach3 had healed herself she then felt that she wanted to help others to do the same.

*Once I had done that, I was ready to start on the next journey and give others the same gift. (Coach3, lines 353-354)*

Coach1 also spoke about her search for meaning in an attempt to let go of the past. She uses the word '*searching*' numerous times searching for meaning, searching to make sense, searching to find answers. It appears that her coaching journey has been a continuous '*search*'.

*I was always interested in psychology and therapy in searching for answers and searching for meaning, em, searching for meaning to my own kind of anguish and suffering. Searching to make sense of things that had happened in my past, in my childhood and trying to understand. I guess that's what drew me to coaching. As I began to sort myself out, I think I wanted to help other people who were also suffering or unhappy or confused. (Coach1, lines 6-8)*

I was interested in her choice of words '*anguish and suffering*' and it seemed to be quite a stark description of where she found herself and for some reason it conjured up images of Dante's Inferno for me. As she explained about her childhood it was clear that her experiences had left her feeling somewhat lost.

*Yeah well, looking back, well it's not an ideal picture and I think I felt quite lost as a child and quite confused and that was scary. I had quite a confusing childhood. My parents lived in two separate cities and from a young age I would fly back and forth to spend time with my Father, because I lived with my Mother, but it was confusing you know, it was like I was living in two different worlds and the relationship between my parents was really bad which of course, as a child, I blamed myself for and I felt so guilty when I was with each parent if they asked me anything about the other parent, which of course they did! (Coach1, lines 12-18).*

As an adult she became aware that these childhood experiences had an impact upon her adult relationships and came to the realization that she needed help dealing with this in attempt to let go of the past.

*... and that stuff stays with you so I got to the stage where I just wanted to make sense of things that had happened in my past, in my childhood and try to understand it a bit better and then you know, just let it go. (Coach1, lines 18-20).*

Coach1's experience of coach training helped her to do this by giving her a better insight into herself which allowed her to let go of the past.

*... really helped in a lot of ways because you know, when we eh train as coaches, well it's all about understanding ourselves, understanding others, seeing what is holding us back and stopping us from making progress and so a lot of that gave me a better insight into myself and helped me to put the past in the past. (Coach1, lines 33-35).*

There was a sense of finality when Coach1 uttered the words 'put the past in the past' and there was also a sense of resolve.

Coach1 also spoke how her experience of coaching resulted in her wanting to help others.

*As I began to sort myself out, I realised that so many other people must be in the same boat and I think I wanted to help other people who were also suffering or unhappy or confused. So yeah, what brought me to coaching was to help myself and in turn help others, I suppose. (Coach1, lines 39-41).*

This is very much in line with the concept of the wounded healer, in the sense that once we heal our own wounds, we wish to heal others (Kirmayer 2003).

Coach2 also talked about letting go of the past.

*I was still stuck in the past and the pain of the past, particularly my divorce. That was such, that was such a difficult experience for me and it affected me very badly and I think I just wanted to sort myself out and start making plans for my future. (Coach2, lines 179-182).*

After her divorce she began to doubt her ability to make good decisions and lost trust in herself.

*Well I really screwed up on some big life decisions (laughs) like my choice of marriage partner and my early career choices. (Coach2, lines 193-194). I really just didn't trust myself to make good choices when the ones I had made so far had ended up so badly and left me in this pit of despair. (Coach2, lines 197-198).*

Her description being in a 'pit of despair' was powerful and a bit distressing. A 'pit of despair' sounds like a really difficult place from which to escape. However as she regained trust in herself again, she found she was able to let go of the past.

*I think it was when we started talking about knowing ourselves better than anyone else does and you know that phrase 'being our own best expert', that eh, that made me think a lot. You know, that we could be guided ourselves and that helped me to begin to trust myself again and when that happened it was like 'puff' I could just let it all go. (Coach2, lines 202-205).*

When Coach2 said the word 'puff' it was as if something magical had happened, as if she had just waved a wand and 'puff' it disappeared. Coach2 also spoke about how her experience of healing herself, brought her to a place where she in turn wished to heal others.

*When I came to the Middle East, I decided to reinvent myself, and coaching has helped me to put away so many personal demons and just enjoy life and be grateful for my blessings. And now I have the chance to help others to do the same. I understand the pain of being stuck in the past and I think that now my own healing has been done, I can really help others to find happiness and more meaning in their lives. (Coach2, lines 212-216).*

This reflects Jung's idea that our own painful experiences can allow us to heal others (Hankir & Zaman, 2013).

Coach5 spoke of dancing dervishes and djinns to describe the emotional turmoil she felt in her teenage years.

*... how can I describe it, you know (laughs) you know the dancing dervishes, it was like that or like some wicked djinn had taken over and thrown everything inside of me into confusion (laugh) oh my poor parents! (Coach5, lines 541-542)*

Coach4 seemed to have a sense of humour when talking about her own demons and she sounded as if she was still quite delighted that she had managed to rid herself of them.

*That's what it felt like, being haunted by those damn demons and they never gave up, never let go, they were after me! But not anymore (laughs). (Coach4, lines 457-459).*

### **8.3.2 Subordinate theme two : My spiritual journey**

There is a branch of coaching called Existential Coaching which explores how we can face our existential dilemmas as we journey towards becoming our authentic selves

(Hanaway, 2020) and this sense of the existential and spiritual appeared with all participants.

Coach1 described how her experience of coaching had resulted in her considering her spirituality.

*Coaching, it eh, it really brought home, especially the spiritual aspect. That eh was something I thought a lot more about. The big questions (laughs). And the interconnectedness of everything.* (Coach1, lines 57-58).

She described coaching as a bridge that connected different aspects of her life, including her spiritual journey and how this brought her a sense of peace.

*Coaching was the bridge that connected my healthcare background and also you know my spiritual journey and my own development, all those things seemed to tie together, and it just feels, I just feel, such peace, such a sense of peace within myself, like a oneness.* (Coach1, lines 65-67).

Coach2's experience of coaching had allowed her to tap into her innate wisdom and connect with her spirituality to find answers.

*You know, within each of us, we have this innate intelligence, this innate wisdom, and sometimes we feel that we're disconnected from it, but we're not, but sometimes it is useful to have someone asking us questions which lead us to a space in which we can reconnect with our own wisdom, to connect consciously with our wisdom and, you know, our own spirituality and to find our own answers.* (Coach2, lines 222-226).

Coach2 spoke about how coaching had allowed her to explore herself and her reality in a spiritual sense.

I mean to me, there's something much deeper that needs to be addressed for somebody to be in touch with who they really are as a spiritual being and coaching has given that to me. It has allowed me to explore who I am at the deepest level and to understand myself and my reality in a spiritual sense. (Coach2, lines 231-234).

She also spoke about how coaches can help their clients to explore this aspect of themselves by asking questions in relation to spiritual matters.

*... sometimes it is useful to have someone asking us questions which lead us to a space in which we can reconnect with our own wisdom, to connect consciously with our wisdom and, you know, our own spirituality and to find our own answers.* (Coach2, lines 224-226).

Coach3 described her experience of coaching in terms of how it has helped her to ask existential questions.

*Okay, like what are we doing here? What is the purpose of our lives? What happens when we die? ... I mean coaching is all about understanding and moving forward with our lives but there is so much that we don't understand, so yeah, coaching helped me to think about these things.* (Coach3, lines 370-376).

Coach5 referred to her spiritual journey and where that was bringing her.



*I found that it [coaching] helped me to think about my sense of purpose, you know, eh, how to make my life meaningful and in that way, eh to think about my own spiritual journey and you know, where that was taking me. (Coach5, 571-573).*

Coach4 also mentioned her spiritual journey but from a slightly different perspective, in terms of how this has been influenced by the conversations she has had with her clients.

*The coaching conversations we have about life and meaning and purpose and spirituality have all influenced my own spiritual journey and I am so grateful for this. I think that you know, seeing, really exploring and seeing things from the worldview of the other person, is so helpful and eh, really allows us to questions our own beliefs and to expand as spiritual beings. (Coach4, lines 470-473).*

This was an important moment which brought me to a realisation. Coach4's words crystallised something for me. The coaching conversations in the Middle East must include spiritual matters because for Muslims, their religion is such an important aspect of their lives. I remembered in Study One how, when speaking about their identity, students unanimously agreed '*first I am a Muslim*'. I reflected upon how during these conversations, the clients will often raise religious and spiritual matters and coaches find themselves discussing this subject probably much more frequently than would be the case if they were practicing in the West. I wondered if this was possibly why all of the coaches had mentioned their own spiritual development. I was quite touched when I thought about the symbiotic nature of this and how the coaches were actually inadvertently being helped by their clients to explore their own spirituality.

More recently, research has been undertaken regarding coaching and spirituality and how coaches can support clients in terms of their personal spiritual development (Hall, 2019; Frunză, S., 2018) and this is an interesting area for future research (Foster et al., 2016).

### **8.3.3 Subordinate theme three : My privilege**

All of the participants spoke about the sense of privilege they felt in relation to the trust their clients placed in them and what they were prepared to share with them.

Coach5 spoke about this sense of privilege regarding the trust that her clients placed in her. There was a sense of wonder in her voice as she spoke about this.

*The trust! I was not expecting this level of trust. In fact, I have been stunned by the trust these amazing people place in me. Really, I eh, I thought that the fact we were from different cultures might, you know, make them more reticent to share but it has been the opposite and I continue to feel so privileged that they are prepared to trust me so much.* (Coach5, lines 579-582).

Coach4 also talked about trust and her surprise to find that her clients were very trusting of her and believed in her.

*I feel that Middle Eastern coachees are very trusting, like they believe in me, and how much I can help them and I have been eh, quite surprised by this.* (Coach4, lines 478-479).

Coach3 spoke about feeling both a sense of privilege and also feeling humble when she spoke about the issue of trust.

*My coachees are incredible, it is like a privilege, you are sharing some of the most intimate moments with them, and they trust you enough to share these moments, it is a real privilege and is very humbling.* (Coach3, lines 381-382).

I noticed Coach3's use of the word '*humbling*' and again I got a sense that she had in fact learned something from her clients. Humility is valued in Middle Eastern culture (Metcalf, 2006; Metcalf, 2007; Metcalf & Mutlaq, 2011) both in terms of how people treat one another and in relation to God and I was interested that Coach3 mentioned this.

Coach2 spoke of an 'open innocence' about her clients and also referred to the strong sense of trust within the coaching relationship.

*I think it's extraordinary how trusting they are and I think we're very lucky in the Middle East, because there is more of an open innocence about people, there are less barriers. When I look into the eyes of my coachees they just look so beautifully innocent, they are listening to every word I am saying as if it is something valuable and there is such a strong sense of trust.* (Coach2, lines 239-242).

There was a sense of surprise in Coach2's voice when she said '*they are listening to every word I am saying as if it is something valuable*' almost as if Coach2 somewhat doubted herself and the fact that her clients regarded what she had to say as valuable was a delight but also a surprise.

Coach1 spoke about feeling a sense of privilege by the trust that her clients place in her.

*I'm actually blown away by what they choose to share with me, it's a privilege. The fact that they place so much trust in me is truly a privilege. (Coach1, lines 73-75).*

As with other coaches, I felt that Coach1 had learned a lot from her clients and she referred to this more directly than other coaches and described it as a gift.

I have learned so much about myself, about the Middle Eastern culture, about humanity. It has been a gift. (Coach1, lines 72-73).

I was particularly interested in how Coach1 described learning about '*humanity*' and it made me think about my own experience of living in the Middle East and feeling a strong sense of humanity and a connection with the people which was deeper than anything I have experienced in other cultures.

### **8.3.4 Summary**

This Superordinate Theme explores the personal and spiritual development of the participants and their view of coaching as a 'privilege.'

## **8.4 Superordinate theme two : Insha'Allah**

This superordinate theme Insha'Allah (If God Wills So) explores the fears that the participants have regarding the exploration of their clients' dreams, the fact that some dreams may be impossible and their concern that they might be giving false hope to their clients. It also explores the influence of family, culture and religion on their clients' decisions and their fear of stigmatization and consequences.

### **8.4.1 Subordinate theme one : Two sides of the same coin**

Coach1 spoke about the dreams of her clients and the fact that they may sometimes only remain dreams due to the influence of their families and their society.

*You know, eh, part of what I love about coaching is the whole exploration of our dreams and possibilities and you know, just watching them [clients] light up when we do this. And you know, even if this is all that happens, well, I think it is something positive. I mean, yes, a lot of the time, their dreams are possible but sometimes, and this I know has eh, been a challenge for me (laughs) but the idea that you know, we explore all of these hopes and dreams and you know possibilities but in reality, yeah, in reality, (Coach1, lines 130-136) sometimes they are just not possible ... it all comes back to their culture and their religion, which I understand but it is difficult. I mean the compromises that young people have to make so that their lives are accepted by their families and their societies. (Coach1, lines 139-141).*

When Coach1 said that this has *'been a challenge for me'* and *'I understand but it is difficult'* there was a sense of frustration in her voice but it was tinged with reluctant resignation and I felt that at times, she found it more difficult than her clients did, for some of their dreams not to be realised.

Coach2 spoke about the *'real beauty'* of the process of dream exploration but also of her concerns about whether these dreams will be allowed to happen.

And when we really get down to that sense of individual choice, personal freedom, sense of possibility, sometime it seems like it's all there, you know, it's all there within their grasp and that, eh, yeah there's a real beauty in that moment and then it can evaporate like smoke. I suppose, eh, just that sense of reality, and yeah, realism, I

mean, what is realistically possible in terms of their families and their culture. I mean, and I do struggle with this, but sometimes, I am afraid that I am almost allowing them the freedom to explore their dreams, but ..... what if it's just not going to happen. It won't be allowed to happen.

As with Coach1, there was frustration in Coach2's voice when she said 'and I do struggle with this' and her metaphor of dreams evaporating 'like smoke' was powerful. There was a real sense of concern for her clients when she said 'I am afraid that I am almost allowing them the freedom to explore their dreams, but ..... what if it's just not going to happen. ' Her voice, like Coach1's, had a sense of reluctant resignation when she said ' It won't be allowed to happen' but there was also a sense of anger.

When Coach2 uttered the words 'I am afraid that I am almost allowing them the freedom to explore their dreams', there felt to me to be a touch of guilt and almost questioning whether or not she was doing the right thing.

Coach3 came right out and asked this question aloud.

You know, we eh, we talk about what is possible, we encourage them to dream big, but unless their families and their religion and their culture support this dream, the dream will stay a dream. So the influence of these factors is huge, enormous. I mean, are we guilty of giving them a false sense of hope?

I could sense the dilemma she was facing in terms of wanting to help her clients to explore their dreams and possibilities and then the awareness of her clients' potential disappointment if these dreams could never come to fruition.

Coach4 talked about how a young person's dream might not be possible without parental support.

And sometimes I worry that their dreams might not be possible anyway. You know, a kid who wants to be travel the world or be an actor ... there is so little chance that their parents would support something like this ... and if their parents don't support it they are not going to do it. And that, well, I understand it, but it doesn't sit well with me, I eh yeah, I really struggle with it.

Coach4 appeared frustrated as she talked about this but there was also a sense of resignation and it really emphasized to me the importance of having a deep understanding of this culture when working here as a coach, not just in terms of understanding the client but in terms how this effects our own responses.

Coach5 described her sense of conflict in terms of possibilities not actually being possible and her fear of giving her clients false hope. She did however still see the value in this process describing it as 'something precious'.

One thing I'm aware of and sometimes conflicted about is that we are opening up their minds to this sense of 'possibility' but sometimes, in their culture, some things just are not possible or if they are possible, there may be serious consequences (long pause). I know that the possibilities are limitless in terms of how they choose to perceive the world and what they choose to think and there is value in that, I do see that as something precious, but I am afraid that this does not always translate into being actually possible within the realms of their families, culture, religion. So, sometimes I worry that we are giving them false hope and that sort of frightens me.

After Coach5 talked about potential serious consequences she paused and I could sense the weight of the responsibility upon her. Pandora's Box came to mind as she was silent and the idea that with the best of intentions we can inadvertently cause harm. As with previous coaches, there seemed to be a slight sense of guilt when she said 'I worry that we are giving them false hope.'

#### **8.4.2 Subordinate theme two : The influence of family, culture & religion**

This theme explores the very strong influence of family, culture and religion have on the decisions that clients make regarding their lives. Coach5 was quite direct about this.

Here, there is such a strong sense of family and community. This can be a beautiful thing but it can have a down side. The down side is that people can't really do what they want to do, unless this is supported by their families and communities.

She went on to give an example.

One of my coachees has always wanted to take a European tour. She has dreamt of doing this for years but her parents forbid it. It is not acceptable for her to go alone, they cannot bring her and she has no husband to bring her. I understand that they want to protect her but I also think it is quite tragic that she cannot have this simple dream. We have discussed the possibility of doing it anyway, without her parent's permission but she said that she cannot go against her religion, that she is a Muslim and the being a Muslim means she must obey her parents. She seems to have reconciled it within herself, to be honest, I think I'm more upset.

Again, this brought up the question of what impact does the experience of coaching in the Middle East have on Western coaches? Can it potentially conflict with their own



values? Values such as freedom and independence. When Coach5 said 'She seems to have reconciled it within herself, to be honest, I think I'm more upset' there was again a sense of frustration. In the West, we often see independence, freedom and choice to be a natural right, almost something we take for granted. So how do we reconcile our own feelings about these important values in a coaching conversation with a client who can not claim these values as a natural right? How do we guide our client towards the best possible outcome for them, even if this outcome is in glaring contrast to what we would wish for them?

Coach4 felt that the influence of religion sometimes made clients give up on their goals too easily ... as if they were just not meant to happen.

Inshallah has a lot to do with it. God willing. If it's in God's plan, what God wants. I find that comes into the coaching process quite a bit. It's one thing having dreams of our own, but if they are not in God's plan, they will not happen. I suppose in a way this helps them to accept what they can not have, but I sometimes have to fight my urge to challenge that, because it can make them let go of their dream too easily.

I remembered that the students in Study One had also talked about people sometimes using Insha'Allah as an excuse for not trying as hard as they can.

Coach3 found that being a Muslim had a big influence on her clients' decisions and that it was important that their decisions would be viewed as acceptable within their religion.

I mean they are very clear about their values and what being a Muslim means and I feel that very much influences their decisions, you know, in terms of whether this would be

acceptable within their particular religion. Yes, and sometimes they will quote proverbs or lines from the Koran when considering things. It is really important to them.

Coach2 gave a different example of how family, culture and religion have an influence when talking about a client who could not leave an unhappy marriage.

She is trapped and she is trapped by her own family and culture and religion. And I can't do what I would do in the West, I can't bring the coachee there because for her it will not be possible.

Coach2 was clearly agitated when she gave this example and the sheer hopelessness of the situation appeared to make her feel very frustrated.

Coach1 presented a different slant on the role of families and religion when she said:

Well, from what I have experienced, families often use religion to make or prove a point or to influence someone's decision. I know eh, that their religion is very important to them, and of course it should be that is absolutely fine, but you know sometimes I feel that it, well can sometimes be used as a means of control, you know, almost to guilt them into doing or not doing something. But then again, this can probably be said of religions the world over.

This brought me back to what the students said in Study One that families sometimes use religion in a 'wrong way'. Coach1's comment that 'this can probably be said of religions the world over' seemed like a slightly throwaway comment and upon reflection, I felt I should have explored that a little more with her rather than let it go, as I think it is important to be very clear about this. Looking at the role that religion has played down

through the ages, we can see how it has been used for good and for bad and this would appear to apply to most religions.

#### **8.4.3 Subordinate theme three : Stigmatization and consequences**

This theme explores the very real fear that the participants have about people finding out about that their clients are engaging in coaching and also that the coaching conversations they are having with their clients might not be kept private. Apart from their fear of consequences for themselves, the participants spoke of their concern regarding possible stigmatization. They were of the belief that mental health is a sensitive topic in the Middle East and that individuals who seek help in the form of coaching or counselling may be stigmatized. They also feared the wider implications this might have for the reputation of their families.

Coach1 was very animated when she talked about her fears in this regard and her concerns about her clients and their families being stigmatized within their society.

Well, in my experience, eh, people don't differentiate too much between coaching and counselling eh, and initially might not really understand that there is a difference, but eh, well I don't think that Middle Eastern society is particularly open when it comes to people seeking help for their mental health or eh, talking to people about their problems. You know, family affairs are private and I do feel there is quite a stigma attached to mental health issues and people are very quick to condemn people who are struggling with their mental health as crazy (nervous laughter).

When Coach1 uttered the words "people are very quick to condemn people who are struggling with their mental health as crazy" she was laughing in quite a nervous manner

and it was clear that she could see the impact this would have – being labelled as crazy – on the lives of her clients.

Coach1 went on to further explain about how participating in coaching could bring stigmatization not only to the client but also to the client's family.

Well, for a start, they eh, they usually don't tell anyone they are coming for coaching and always, always they need reassurance on confidentiality. I do worry about that because you know it doesn't just stop with them, I mean you know this whole subject of family honour and don't bring shame to the family and they are a very private people. So, if people will start saying they are crazy because they are getting coaching or counselling or whatever, this affects the client and, and their families and you know, there are consequences.

That felt rather ominous to me and Coach1 was fearful of consequences for her client and her client's family. She was however also fearful for herself which was clear when she said:

Someone's gonna tell! Someone's gonna tell on us! (laughs) I am always afraid that em, someone is gonna tell on us and we will be in serious trouble. Really. We are opening up their minds but their society and culture may not necessarily approve of this and this causes me concern and is a challenge, a challenge for me to overcome my fear and my hesitancy.

There was a sense of urgency in her voice and she repeated 'someone's gonna tell' three times. This was clearly a real concern for her as well as what she described as 'a challenge'.

Coach2's comments on this subject were similar to Coach1's and she too was fearful of someone telling.

What if they tell someone about this, you know, about what we talk about and what we discuss, in their culture, can potentially be viewed as controversial and I am genuinely frightened sometimes by the conversations we have, within such a conservative society, but these conversations are necessary and I have to put my fear to one side and trust in my coachee, but yes, it's a real fear, it's a serious fear.

When Coach2 said 'it's a real fear, it's a serious fear' she genuinely appeared scared as if she were taking a big risk, but a necessary risk. I was interested in what Coach2 said about having to trust in her coachee. She had previously talked about the sense of privilege she felt regarding the trust that her clients have in her, and I was interested to see that there was also a requirement for trust on her side.

Coach2 also mentioned her concerns around the subject of stigmatization.

... and also for them, I mean just that eh that stigma around this topic, I mean I know, because I have friends who work in other parts of the world so yeah, it's not just here, but it is definitely here and you know, that eh, would be very difficult for any of my coachees and I can't even begin to imagine what their families would have to say about it, I mean I think all hell would break loose.

Coach2's final words on this were intense and it was not the first time in this study that a sense of impending doom was evident.

Coach3 referred briefly to stigmatization in a less direct manner saying

well, there is a strong concern in this society about peoples' standing in society and this is important so eh, I also have concern about that, and about what might affect that.

However she spoke more about her concerns for herself. She described having to take a leap of faith in terms of trusting her clients to keep the conversations confidential and her fears that they may be repeated out of context. As with Coach2, trust within this relationship was a two way street.

I'm always very aware that the confidentiality, because it's a huge leap of faith for me, but I'm also aware that the conversations that happen, and you know, where they go with those conversations, I'm very aware that they, that they might be repeated to someone else, and it's completely out of context, and I'm very aware of that and that makes me quite scared sometimes.

Coach2 appeared to be quite preoccupied with this fear that her clients might repeat their conversations to others and mentioned the word 'aware' on four occasions as if she was constantly on the lookout for danger.

Coach4 describes her sense of discomfort and fear and also her concerns for her client.

There have been many moments when I have been uncomfortable and some where I have been frightened. Recently a coachee wanted to record our conversations so that she could play them back to herself. She said that it would give her strength. But there is no way I could do that and that really made me realise how dangerous this can be. If her husband for example, heard what we discussed, I genuinely do not know what would happen to her. Her husband doesn't even know that she comes to see me.

Once again, a sense of taking a risk was evident and it occurred to me that this is perhaps an unanticipated aspect of coaching in the Middle East.

Coach5 talked about her sense of insecurity concerning this and possible consequences of people finding out.

The other way I feel scared is in terms of what we discuss and how this might be viewed if they tell someone. This is a very conservative culture and I do feel quite insecure in terms of what might happen if a coachee told someone what we discuss. I mean, the consequences could be far reaching for themselves but also for their families. This is not a society that is comfortable discussing mental health and I think we have to consider how this could also impact their families, not just themselves if it were to become common knowledge (Coach5 px, lines xxx)

## **8.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter I presented the results and an analysis of the results of Study Two. The superordinate themes that emerged explore participants' fears that there are possibly giving false hope to their clients as their dreams may be impossible and it also explores the influence of family, culture and religion has on the clients' decisions during the coaching process and the fears that the participants have regarding stigmatization and consequences. In the following chapter, I will discuss the main findings of Study Two and contextualize them in the literature.

## **Chapter Nine : Study Two : Discussion**

### **9.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented the results and an analysis of the results of Study Two. This chapter begins with a summary of the main findings followed by a discussion of the findings in relation to the literature.

### **9.2 Summary of main findings**

Study Two sought to explore the experience of Western coaches who practice in the Middle East. Two superordinate themes were identified when analysing the data.

The first superordinate theme explores the concept of The Wounded Healer and how this was applicable to the participants in this study. The understanding is that we are drawn towards healing others as a result of having had to heal ourselves and Carl Jung used this archetype in relation to himself to describe his own belief that it is our own experience of hurt that in turn, allows us to heal others (Hankir & Zaman, 2013). This theme explores the participants' personal and spiritual development through their own experience of coaching and also the sense of privilege they feel as a result of the trust that their clients place in them.

The second superordinate theme Insha'Allah (If God Wills So) explores the idea that although, through the coaching process, clients explore their dreams and possibilities, that in reality these may in fact not be possible and the participants' fear that they may be giving false hope to their clients. This theme also explores the influence of family, culture and religion in relation to the decisions that clients make during the coaching process. It also explores the fear that the participants feel regarding the possibility of the



confidentiality of their coaching conversations being compromised and the possible consequences in terms of personal consequences for themselves and possible stigmatization of both their clients and the families of their clients.

### **9.3 Contextualising main findings in the literature**

#### **9.3.1 The wounded healer**

The first superordinate theme captured the participants' experiences healing their own wounds through coaching and then in turn wishing to help others. This theme explores participants' personal development, their spiritual journey and their sense of privilege in the trust placed in them by their clients.

Previous research has focussed upon the concept of the wounded healer and the idea that we can better understand the pain of others if we ourselves have also experienced that pain. According to Kirmayer (2003) a healer's personal experience of illness is a fundamental source of knowledge both of the illness and the possible cure and the philosophy of the wounded healer suggests that a healer must be attuned to their own wounds as part of their progression towards healing others.

Coach1 described searching for meaning to my own kind of anguish and suffering. As I began to sort myself out, I think I wanted to help other people who were also suffering or unhappy or confused. Her experience of coaching allowed her to do this. Similarly, Coach2 spoke of her desire to help others as a result of healing herself through coaching. And now I have the chance to help others to do the same. I understand the pain of being stuck in the past and I think that now my own healing has been done, I can really help others to find happiness and more meaning in their lives.

In literature relating to addiction counselling it is interesting to find that recovering addicts can make the best counsellors because they have a deep understanding of what it is like to struggle with addiction and the impact it has on all aspects of people's lives (Brown, 2020).

When considering the question of why he had chosen to become a psychotherapist Albert Ellis (the founder of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy) wrote *"because I primarily wanted to help myself become a much less anxious and much happier individual. Oh, yes, I wanted to help other people, too, and I wanted to help the world be a better place, with healthier and happier people who fought like hell to create better conditions. But I really and primarily wanted to help me, me, me"* (Ellis, 2005, p.945).

When I read that particular extract, it brought me back to what Coach3 had said about her experience of coaching and that ultimately, the journey has been about me. However she went on to explain that *'Once I had done that, I was ready to start on the next journey and give others the same gift.'*

All of the participants spoke about their own personal development as a result of coaching. There is much in the literature to support the idea that coaching aids personal development (Pisklova & Bekoeva (2021); Barato & Rodríguez 2021; Brinkmann et al., 2021; Knowles, 2021). Eatough & Lancer (2021) found that coaching acted as a catalyst for personal development and following a university based study found that coaching helped students with regard to social relationships, confidence, stress and time management. Similarly David & Cobeau (2015) found an improvement in personal development specifically in relation to a reduction in participants' irrational beliefs and also an improvement in mood. In his book, Psychological Dimensions of Executive

Coaching, Bluckert (2006) emphasises the importance of personal development is the coaching process and Grant (2003) found coaching to be effective in terms of goal attainment and personal development.

The superordinate theme of The Wounded Healer also explored the role that coaching had played in the spiritual journey of the participants. All of the coaches spoke in one way or another about their spiritual journey.

Coach1 used the metaphor of a bridge to describe how coaching had been the conduit that connected her professional background, various aspects of her life and her spiritual journey. *'Coaching was the bridge that connected my healthcare background and also you know my spiritual journey and my own development, all those things seemed to tie together, and it just feels, I just feel, such peace, such a sense of peace within myself, like a oneness.'* (Coach1, lines 65-67).

Coach5 described her sense of inner peace that coaching helped her to find as she continued on her own spiritual journey.

*Apart from my values, I found that it helped me to think about my sense of purpose, you know, eh, how to make my life meaningful and in that way, eh to think about my own spiritual journey and you know, where that was taking me. And over the years I have found that I really do have a sense of spiritual connection, of inner peace, a sense that there is nothing unreconciled.* (Coach5, lines 571 – 575).

Existential Coaching has emerged from the fields of psychiatry, psychotherapy and existential philosophy (Fusco et al, 2015; Van Deurzen & Hanaway, 2012).

Existentialists have much to debate however a common thread relates to the idea that

as human beings, we are all in the process of 'becoming' (e.g. Heidegger, 1962, Husserl, 1925, Spinelli, 1989, Van Deurzen, 1997).

Van Deurzen & Kenward (2011) posit that existential practitioners help to expand clients' perspectives, possibilities and awareness through exploring their clients experience, values and beliefs in terms of spiritual, social, personal and physical dimensions and Spinelli (2002) shares this viewpoint, seeing existential coaching as an approach that supports meaningful coaching outcomes particularly when an individual's complete life and their particular lens is deeply explored, which includes exploring their personal values and their hopes.

Coach4 has also spoken about clients' worldviews during her interview and said I think that you know, seeing, really exploring and seeing things from the worldview of the other person, is so helpful and eh, really allows us to questions our own beliefs and to expand as spiritual beings.

I reflected upon the fact that although none of the coaches has specifically mentioned the term 'existential coaching' it seemed as if they were naturally integrating this approach into their practice as they engaged in coaching within the Middle Eastern culture.

Deurzen & Hanaway (2012) discuss the spiritual dimension of coaching, seeing it as an aspect of our lives where our beliefs, values, ideas and principles inform our experiences and result in our longing or despairing over our sense of meaning and purpose. In the field of psychotherapy, the relational spirituality model (RSM) helps

people to make sense of their suffering and to heal and grow through engaging with existential themes (Sandage et al., 2020).

Reading through the interview transcripts, it appears to me that many of the coaches who participated in the study were also yearning for a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives.

Coach4 commented that 'The coaching conversations we have about life and meaning and purpose and spirituality have all influenced my own spiritual journey and I am so grateful for this.'

Coach3 described how coaching had helped her to think about the bigger questions. 'Okay, like what are we doing here? What is the purpose of our lives? What happens when we die? ... I mean coaching is all about understanding and moving forward with our lives but there is so much that we don't understand, so yeah, coaching helped me to think about these things.'

Coach2 spoke about how coaches can help their clients to think about such questions. *'... sometimes it is useful to have someone asking us questions which lead us to a space in which we can reconnect with our own wisdom, to connect consciously with our wisdom and, you know, our own spirituality and to find our own answers.'* (Coach2, lines 224-226.)

This superordinate theme also highlights the privilege that the participants' feel in response to the trust their clients place in them. This perhaps says as much about the participants themselves as about their clients and there is much to be found in the literature regarding the nature of therapeutic relationships and therapeutic alliances.

There is substantial evidence that client outcomes are heavily influenced by the quality of the relationship between the therapist and client (Barley & Lambert, 2001; Frank, 1979; Hynan, 1981; Luborsky et al., 1975) and according to Grencavage & Norcross (1990) the importance of this relationship is recognised in all theoretical approaches. In the very early stages of therapy, the building of trust is a vital component and it is important that the client feels a sense of trust with their therapist (Bond, 1994; Torous & Hsin, 2018;

Brown & Peddler (1991) make specific reference to the boundaries of trust and how, in order to allow the client to feel safe, these boundaries may have to be augmented. This may be relevant in the sense that this study took place in the years following the Arab Spring. Additionally, Ashurst & Hall (1989) found that ethnicity and gender may influence a client's ability to trust. This was supported by research conducted by Littlewood & Lipsedge (1989). Given that this research took place in the Middle East, the ethnicity of the clients may have had a role to play in their ability to trust their coaches.

Coach4 commented on the ethnicity of her clients when she said *'I feel that Middle Eastern coachees are very trusting, like they believe in me, and how much I can help them and I have been eh, quite surprised by this.'* (Coach4, lines 478-479).

Coach2 likewise referred to her clients' ethnicity when she said *'I think it's extraordinary how trusting they are and I think we're very lucky in the Middle East, because there is more of an open innocence about people, there are less barriers.'* (Coach4, lines 239-241.)

### **9.3.2 Insha'Allah**

The second superordinate theme, Insha'Allah, which means If God Wills So, explores the dilemma in a sense that the participants feel as a result of encouraging their clients to explore their dreams and possibilities and then their fear of giving them false hope, if their dreams are simply not possible. It also explores the influence of family, culture and religion and how this affects the decision-making process of clients and the participants' fears regarding confidentiality, their concerns for their clients in terms of possible consequences of stigmatization and also their fear that what has been discussed during coaching sessions may be shared and taken out of context.

With regard to literature pertaining to dreams which might be impossible, a search provided limited specific information. More generally, literature relating to optimism when it comes to dreams and goals was available. Historically, having a realistic grip on reality has been regarded as a necessary component of mental health (Jahoda, 1958) however Taylor & Brown (1988) deviated from this perspective and claimed that individuals who had a positive bias had better mental health. Since then, there has been a growing body of literature to support the case for optimism (Buchanan & Seligman, Carver et al., 1993; 1995; Weisse, 1992; Martin, & Friedman, 1998; Student6son et al., 1998, Gillham et al., 2001) although this perspective still has critics, for example Colvin and Block (1994) who argued that there was often no logical basis for optimism and Weinstein & Klein (1996) who claimed that an optimistic bias can result in individuals being less likely to accurately perceive risk which can lead to numerous health hazards. All of the participants in this study spoke of their concerns that their clients' dreams may

sometimes not be possible whilst acknowledging that there was beauty and value in the process of dreaming itself.

Coach1 described the whole exploration of our dreams and possibilities and you know, just watching them [clients] light up when we do this. And you know, even if this is all that happens, well, I think it is something positive.

Coach2 spoke of 'a real beauty' in the process of exploring dreams.

And when we really get down to that sense of individual choice, personal freedom, sense of possibility, sometime it seems like it's all there, you know, it's all there within their grasp and that, eh, yeah there's a real beauty in that moment and then it can evaporate like smoke.

All participants in this study described the influence that family have upon the decisions their clients make. Family plays a significant role in the Middle East and is considered to be the foundation of a healthy and well-functioning society and obedience to parents is considered of vital importance within the Muslim faith (Wagay, 2019; Kumru et al., 2019; Yahanid et al., 2021; Tekke et al., 2020)

Rusli (2020) posits that the prevention of tension and social conflict within Muslim communities is largely determined by the values, rules and norms that families establish with their children and that teaching character values, moral values and observing a halal diet contributes to a well-functioning society. This was also found by Sokip et al., (2019) who additionally found that guiding children to develop their Islamic character is an important parental responsibility. When describing the parent/ child bond in families



who study the Qur'an, Hasanah (2021) focuses upon the importance of obedience to parents and the obligations that children have towards their parents.

Without exception, all participants spoke about their concerns for their clients should society at large discover that they are seeing a coaching psychologist. The implications for individuals who are considered to have mental health issues are significant in terms of the negative impact on them and on their families standing in society. This is widely supported in the literature surrounding stigmatization of mental health (Bharadwaj & Suziedelyte, 2017; Sickel et al., 2014; Kakuma et al., 2010) and according to Ciftci et al. (2013) individuals who suffer from mental illness continue to find the stigma surrounding this to be a major barrier. With regard to the stigmatization of mental health issues in the Middle East and/or within Islamic communities, many authors have found that shame concerning family social status is an important issue (Youssef & Deane, 2006; Erickson & Al-Timimi, 2001; Aloud & Rathur, 2009; Amer, 2006). In a study by Shibre et al. (2001) three quarters of participants experienced stigma as a result of a relative suffering from a mental illness and one third of participants expressed unwillingness to marry into a family where there was any mental illness.

#### **9.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter I discussed the findings of Study Two and contextualized them in the literature. In the following chapter I will integrate the findings of both studies and how they relate to the literature. I will also outline how these findings may contribute to the field of coaching psychology in the Middle East. I also discuss limitations of the studies and suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter 10 : Reflexivity**

### **Reflexivity**

“Social research requires us to account for our humanness” (Dean , 2017).

“Social research is too often the work of humans who have failed to account for their humanness while attempting to objectify other humans for study (Gouldner, 1970).”

I am going to begin this chapter by being reflective about my reflexivity as I found this to be an exceptionally difficult experience. I love writing. Since the age of fifteen, I have written poetry and prose, particularly to express my feelings and emotions, yet when it came to writing a chapter on reflexivity I stared at a blank page for a very long time. I began and erased the chapter multiple times and I was genuinely baffled as to why I was finding this so difficult. It began to make more sense when I read a description about reflexivity by Forber-Pratt (2015, p.821) :

“It is exposing one’s strengths, weaknesses, innermost thoughts, and opening it up for others to criticize. It’s voluntarily standing up naked in front of your peers, colleagues, family and the academy, which is a very bold decision!”

This caused me to reflect upon an aspect of my character which has been commented upon by my family and close friends over the years and which I know to be true. Whilst the nature of my work involves helping others, which brings me great joy, I am very reluctant to reach out and ask for help myself, even when I need it and I really do not like to be vulnerable.

So with a deeper understanding of what has been holding me back and with a mild sense of dread, I shall proceed.

There are many different types of reflexivity and according to (Dean, 2017, p.2) personal reflexivity is the most central factor and “we must consider how the researcher’s personal characteristics ... affects their research practice and their results.”

As a qualitative researcher, it is appropriate and necessary to consider the role that I have played in the process of conducting this research and the fact that I am actually a part of the research process. There are potentially aspects of my life and my experiences that may have had an impact on this research and indeed on how I have not only conducted the research, but also how I interpreted the data. There are many forms of reflexivity and for clarity, I think it will be helpful to divide this chapter into two parts, Prospective Reflexivity and Retrospective Reflexivity. Prospective Reflexivity is concerned with how the researcher has affected the study and Retrospective Reflexivity is concerned with how the study has affected the researcher (Attia & Edge, 2017). Throughout the course of this research I kept a Reflective Journal and have included some extracts throughout this chapter.

### **Prospective Reflexivity**

Prospective Reflexivity focuses upon how I have affected the research process.

Understanding and explaining the role of the researcher within the research is a continual process and must consider questioning and articulating the various influences, including cultural and social, that have an impact (Barrett et al., 2020).

When reflecting upon the role I have played throughout this research and how I may intentionally or inadvertently have influenced this, it is necessary to reflect on my own upbringing and the social and cultural influences that played a role.

## **My Background and Education**

I was born in Ireland in 1971 and grew up in the countryside in County Kildare. I was part of a loving family with an older brother and a younger sister and parents who were very much present. My childhood memories are filled with animals. Going for walks across the fields with our dogs, riding my horse, going out to find fresh eggs that the chickens had laid, playing with our cats and being chased by the turkeys. I think my initial interest in understanding behaviour came from the time I spent with our animals. Rusty, my horse, was very clever and she was an escape artist. She could open her own stable door and she also knew how to open the back door of the house which led into the kitchen. For some reason, the handle of the back door had been put on upside down, so in order to open the door, she had to put her nose under the handle and push it upwards. I remember coming home one day to find her stable door open and the kitchen door open. When I went into the kitchen there was a grapefruit on the floor with a large chunk taken out of it. I walked down the hall and found her standing in the drawing room. She was absolutely determined to stay there and it took a lot of coaxing to get her to finally come with me. Our dogs occupied a lot of my time. Daisy was my dog. She was half cocker spaniel and half collie with a silky black coat and beautiful brown eyes. She was the most loyal and kind dog I have ever known. We also had Scruffy. Scruffy was a stray that my brother had found and brought home. He was a small, handsome terrier type with a rough haired, light brown coat. He liked to eat raw

carrots. We never knew his age but he was a very happy dog and was quite a comedian and he instantly settled in to our household. One day my father arrived home with an Irish Water Spaniel puppy, Mal, who was about the same height as Scruffy, even though he was only 10 weeks old. They became friends but Scruffy was the sage who guided and sometimes chastised Mal. Mal was obedient and looked up to Scruffy. Scruffy was always quite domineering with Mal and Mal always tolerated it until the day it dawned on him that he was now about 5 times the size of Scruffy. I remember exactly when it happened. We were in the garden one afternoon and Scruffy gave his usual reprimanding bark at Mal for whatever reason. Mal initially became submissive but then I could see a sense of indignation in Mal, something I had never seen before and the next moment he grabbed Scruffy by the back of the neck and tossed him over onto his back. Scruffy was mortified and completely shocked and being a terrier, could not tolerate such an affront so before I knew it there was a full scale battle taking place which I could only stop by turning the garden hose on them. From that day onwards they were arch enemies and even when Mal was an old dog, if Scruffy walked anywhere near him, he would growl slowly until Scruffy disappeared from sight. When I started studying psychology, I became very interested in evolutionary psychology and I think I have our animals to thank for that.

I attended a boarding school in Dublin which gave me the opportunity to meet overseas students from vastly different cultures, faiths and beliefs. I would ask them to tell me about their countries, their customs, their travels and experiences and I had a great sense of impatience to experience all of this myself. I think this formed the basis for my interest in cross-cultural psychology.

It was really when I began to travel abroad that I started to think about my own Irish culture and to understand how Ireland was perceived internationally and this was quite a surprise. I saw that there was a real warmth towards Irish people and an empathy for the historical difficulties that our country had endured. I remember when I was sixteen I spent a summer in the Basque Country where I was welcomed wholeheartedly, especially by my friends' grandparents, as being from a small country with a similarly troubled history. They talked about Franco's regime and how he had been determined to erase the language and culture of the Basque people and asked me about the history of Ireland under British Rule. I remember thinking how passionate they were about their country and realising that I did not share this same sense of passion for Ireland. I loved growing up in Ireland but by the age of 16 all I wanted to do was leave it and explore the world. Which is what I did.

I completed my secondary school education in Ireland and my university education in England and since then, for the majority of my life, I have worked in different countries. This has been motivated by my desire to experience different cultures and different ways of looking at the world. These combined experiences which include Ireland, England, France, Spain, Moldova, Russia, US, Bahrain, Antigua, Switzerland, Singapore and St. Kitts, have allowed me to see the world from so many different perspectives and to understand that as human beings what we have in common is far greater than what sets us apart.

### **The Sectarian Divide**

Ireland is known internationally for the difficulties in Northern Ireland. I decided to see what I could find online regarding life in Ireland in 1971, the year of my birth, and I came

across an interesting article which I feel is pertinent. It relates to how Ireland was marketed from a tourism perspective at the time.

“Because this is part of a tourism campaign, selling Ireland as a happy destination, you won’t find a mention of The Troubles in Northern Ireland here, even though killing had become an almost daily occurrence there, bombing was commonplace and internment prisons were being set up. South of the border, we are told in these pages, all is calm and friendly and everywhere you go you will meet poets, wits and artists, ready to befriend you and pour you a pint” (Finola, 2021, p.1).

During my childhood ‘The Troubles’ as they were called, were rarely mentioned in my family. Although they seemed far away I was still aware of them and occasionally heard about the various atrocities if I happened to be present during the 6pm evening news. I do not feel that this had a profound impact upon me but it made me aware of divisions based upon sectarian grounds. Although I understood the nature of ‘The Troubles’ at that time, I found the Protestant / Catholic divide ridiculous and the resulting violence and loss of life to be pointless. My parents had friends from both sides and we had not been brought up with this prejudice. It appeared to me that most Protestants and Catholics were decent human beings but there was a small, extreme element on both sides who caused most of the problems.

Before arriving in Bahrain, I knew absolutely nothing about their sectarian divide, between Sunni and Shia Muslims. I quickly learned that the plumes of smoke which were visible from far away, came from the Shia villages as they burned tyres in protest against the Sunni government. Some students were very eager to share their faith with me and explain the difference between Sunni and Shia. Others were more interested in

sharing their political beliefs and explaining the political and social history of Bahrain. However, for the most part, things seemed peaceful and certainly in the university, Shia and Sunni students got along well and there were no obvious tensions. This unfortunately changed during the Arab Spring and in the aftermath, I watched as friendships between Sunni and Shia students disintegrated and there was a notable tension in the university. The sad part about all of this is that every single student I knew, Sunni and Shia, were beautiful humans being and yet they were turning on one another.

An extract from my Reflective Journal reads :

\*\*\*\*\* came to see me today. She looked quite shaken. She said that things had been difficult in her village during the night. Her eyes were still stinging from the tear gas. She told me how worried she was about her father and brother and started crying when she spoke about her childhood friend who will no longer have anything to do with her. It is heart breaking.

My experience of sectarianism in Ireland was from a distance, even though I lived in the same country. Here in Bahrain, I was right in the middle of it. Both Shia and Sunni students shared their experiences with me and I understood why they felt the way they did, on both sides. It made me re-examine my views on Irish sectarianism because looking at it from a distance made it possible for me to view it as absurd and pointless, but then I did not know their personal experiences.

## **My Religion**



As stated in the newspaper article, everything was indeed calm and friendly in the South and there certainly were poets, wits and artists and all sorts of interesting people.

However, these people were not the mainstream. The mainstream seemed to me to be concerned with being respectable, going to mass on Sundays and not doing anything to bring the family reputation into question. Indeed much like Bahrain where family honour and religion are embedded in the fabric of their society.

My mother was and still is a practicing Catholic and adheres to the principles of Catholicism. My father is agnostic and adheres to his own principles, although he is respectful of all faiths. My mother lives her values through her actions and has a very strong moral compass. I admire the fact that she is prepared to speak her mind and to counter injustice even when she is the lone voice in the group. My father has a philosophical and psychological turn of mind and is intrigued by human behaviour, particularly its quirks and eccentricities. Although he is agnostic, my mother and I refer to him as St. Francis, as animals universally adore him.

The population of Southern Ireland is predominantly Catholic and the Catholic church held great sway over the Irish psyche for a very long time. Divorce only became legal in Ireland in 1995 and abortion, only on the grounds of saving the life of the mother, became legal in 2013. There is a beauty and richness in the culture of Ireland, the land of saints and scholars and our Celtic history, but there is also a darkness to it, and the various atrocities of the Catholic church have come to light over recent years, particularly in relation to their treatment of orphans and unmarried mothers.

Concerning our religious history, I see 'guilt' as one of the most devastating consequences. Fortunately I was born towards the end of the reign of guilt and thanks

to my father, was never affected by it, but I know people my own age who still feel a huge sense of guilt with regard to their perceived transgressions including not attending mass on Sundays. This sense of guilt has permeated all aspects of their lives including their personal relationships. I think guilt can be a hugely damaging emotion and so much of my work involves helping my students to work through their feelings of guilt over failing, letting their parents down, not being good enough ... the list is long. Whilst living in Bahrain, although a different religion, I observed the same sense of guilt and the effects this had upon the psychological wellbeing of individuals and I think that my feelings about guilt certainly had the potential to influence the process of the research, particularly the focus group interview with the students and my interpretation of the data generated from that interview.

An extract from my Reflective Journal reads :

I was surprised to see \*\*\*\*\* walk through my office door this morning. I do not know her well and she has always seemed very distant. We talked for a long time. I really feel quite disturbed about what she told me possibly because our children are the same age. She keeps talking about how guilty she feels about failing in her marriage and how she can't get a divorce because of the shame it would bring to her family. They are insisting that she stay with him even though they are aware of how he is treating her. She is also terrified that her husband's mother will convince him to take her children away from her if she divorces him. The law is on his side.

Reading back over that still gives me a chill and during the years I lived in Bahrain, I came across many similar stories. Religion is a powerful influence in Bahrain.

Statements from Study Two emphasise this :

I mean they are very clear about their values and what being a Muslim means and I feel that very much influences their decisions, you know, in terms of whether this would be acceptable within their particular religion. Yes, and sometimes they will quote proverbs or lines from the Koran when considering things. It is really important to them. (Coach3)

Unless their families and their religion and their culture support this dream, the dream will stay a dream. (Coach3)

... [when someone has a mental illness] they are being punished by Allah for their sins, so imagine how that works out, you know, you are struggling with emotional problems and then eh, you're told it's punishment for what you have done wrong. (Coach2)

Well, from what I have experienced, families often use religion to make or prove a point or to influence someone's decision. I know eh, that their religion is very important to them, and of course it should be that is absolutely fine, but you know sometimes I feel that it, well can sometimes be used as a means of control, you know, almost to guilt them into doing or not doing something. (Coach1)

We have discussed the possibility of doing it anyway, without her parents' permission but she said that she can not go against her religion, that she is a

Muslim and the being a Muslim means she must obey her parents. She seems to have reconciled it within herself, to be honest, I think I'm more upset. (Coach5)

The students also spoke about the importance of bringing God into the coaching process and how religion influenced their choices and decisions.

It would be successful if you considered 'God'. They would say 'Oh, she [the coach] is understanding, she is putting God into it, Allah. (Student5).

And then maybe you can change their mentality, like God, it's the Qur'an way, not your way. 'Do you think that God will accept this action?' It's like one of the questions, it's an important question. (Student3)

You have to, eh, you have to include God in coaching, just like, eh, just like you have to include our parents. It is not a separate thing eh, no, it is all part of the same thing. You remember eh, when we talked about identity during the course. You remember. I am first a Muslim. Muslim first, then eh, son, father, manager whatever. (Student7)

When you ask me who I am, I am, I am always first a Muslim, that is eh, that is like my core, after that yani, I might be a man or a student or a son yani, but I am a Muslim first. (Student6)

It is true, I eh, I think it is true for all Muslims, it is true for me. I am first a Muslim and then eh, and then whatever and the coach, yani, the coach has to understand that we are not separated no, we are not separated it is all linked and the coach has to consider our parents eh our family and our religion. (Student 4).

## **My Values**

In 2008, about a year and a half before I moved to Bahrain, I completed a Diploma in Coaching. I was 37 at the time. My son Saul, was two and a half and my daughter, Rebekah, was just about to enter this world. Over the course of this six months of study, a lot of things fell into place for me and began to make sense. Although coaching is focused upon the present and the future - the topics covered such as personal values and living our lives in congruence with these values, self-limiting beliefs, boundaries and tolerations, future goals – required some reflection on the past, on what and who influenced our values, on where our self-limiting beliefs came from, on why we tolerate certain things that perhaps we should not, and these reflections had quite a profound impact upon me. When we explored our values it was very clear that ‘freedom’ was one of my core values and I realised that this value had driven much of what I had done over the years. Freedom to explore other cultures, freedom to look at things from different perspectives, freedom to think differently regardless of my environment. I had always considered myself self-aware. My father had given me my first psychology book when I was fifteen and I had read so much about the subject over the years. This coaching course had the effect of taking everything I believed and had experienced and putting a form to it, so that it all made sense.

This value of freedom, particularly freedom of thought, I believe was instrumental in my desire to develop a coach training elective for the students in Bahrain. I was very much aware of how coach training had benefitted me and I dearly wanted them to have this experience. Of course I had preconceptions about how they would benefit from this elective and the effect it would have upon them in terms of their own personal

development. I know that I wanted the students to feel free and this could certainly have had an influence on the research process and on my interpretation of the data.

## **My Gender**

One of the preconceptions I had before coming to Bahrain related to arranged marriages which I viewed as a complete violation of a woman's freedom to choose her own husband.

Shortly after starting work I had a fascinating conversation with a group of my female students. They were curious about my beliefs and eager to share theirs. Somehow the subject of arranged marriages came up and they were happy to educate me. They explained that their parents want to make sure that when they are married, that they are happy and that they are safe. They put a lot of time and effort into making sure the person their daughter wants to marry is suitable and is going to treat them kindly and is a good match for them in terms of interests, life plans and so on. The whole family gets involved, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, it is like a private investigation, to determine if this is a good man, does he attend the Mosque on Fridays, does he drink alcohol or take drugs, who are his family and friends, is he kind and responsible, does he have a career plan etc. They explained that their families do all of this to protect them. They were horrified that in the West, we can just go out randomly, meet a stranger who nobody knows anything about and decide to get married without any of this background knowledge.

I did however hear the other side of the coin. Some women were trapped in unhappy marriages out of fear of losing their children. Under Shari'a law a Muslim mother is

usually only granted custody of girls under the age of nine and boys under the age of seven, at which time custody is transferred to the father.

Prior to my time in Bahrain, when I thought of arranged marriages, I only thought it from the point of view of the woman, however, living there I realised that this also applied to men and I came across several situations where a man was strongly encouraged to marry a suitable woman, approved of by his family, even if his affections lay elsewhere and were he not to do so, the financial assistance that he was expecting in terms of buying a house would not be forthcoming. So we do not always see the full picture.

When I was analysing the data from the focus group interview I found I was quite surprised that there was very little relating to gender inequality. There was a small mention here and there, for example when Student1 spoke about her parents insisting that everyone call her little brother 'Doctor' or when the students spoke about a female coach being prone to gossip, but I was really expecting lots of personal stories about their experience of gender inequality, which clearly shows a preconception and most likely a misconception regarding this. This had the potential to influence the research process and my interpretation of the data.

### **My Search for Meaning**

When thinking about the most important influences of my life, particularly in relation to finding a sense of meaning, I have to mention Edward FitzGerald's translation of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. I came upon this book by accident decades ago and I must have read it hundreds of times at this stage. It is a book of philosophy as much as poetry and has become a personal companion to me. What I love about it is that it combines

our search for meaning with a recognition that life is fleeting and how important it is to live our lives as fully as possible while we can.

“Dreaming when Dawn’s Left Hand was in the Sky

I heard a voice within the Tavern cry

Awake, my Little ones, and fill the Cup

Before Life’s Liquor in its Cup be dry.”

I find it interesting that a Persian philosopher should have had such an influence upon me years before I ever went to the Middle East.

Any personal journey involves a search for meaning and understanding and coaching is often the spark that ignites this search. This was evident in statements from both studies.

It’s kind of like shining a torch into a dark cave, I didn’t know before what was in the cave.(Student1)

Coaching helped me to reflect on myself, yeah, especially when we talked about our values. I became more clear about those, eh, what was important to me. I began to see things differently and to ask myself questions. This was a bit hard because you know, these questions were not always easy. (Student5)

Coaching has given me glasses on the inside as well as the outside. (Student3)



It changes the way of thinking, yani, because it makes you rethink what you know and it's just this time and space that's been given to us just to reflect and it's just, eh, it's just we don't get this time in our daily lives ..... so, like, when it comes reflect back on life and purpose. You know, what we are not used to doing, and what actually is a little scary at first. (Student6)

Coaching, it eh, it really brought home, especially the spiritual aspect. That eh was something I thought a lot more about. The big questions (laughs). And the interconnectedness of everything. You know that eh, that sense of wholeness and healing and dreaming and possibilities. (Coach1)

A whole new world. A whole new appreciation. You know, within each of us, we have this innate intelligence, this innate wisdom, and sometimes we feel that we're disconnected from it, but we're not, but sometimes it is useful to have someone asking us questions which lead us to a space in which we can reconnect with our own wisdom, to connect consciously with our wisdom and, you know, our own spirituality and to find our own answers. (Coach2)

The coaching conversations we have about life and meaning and purpose and spirituality have all influenced my own spiritual journey and I am so grateful for this. (Coach4).

Again, I had a definite preconception that this would be the case. I expected and wanted this to be the case and this could have influenced both the research process and my interpretation of the data.

### **Retrospective Reflexivity**

Retrospective Reflexivity focuses upon how the research process has affected me.

My experience of living in Bahrain and of conducting this research has affected me profoundly in the best possible way. When I arrived in Bahrain I knew very little about Arabic culture, apart from the odd book I had read and I certainly had preconceptions about the role of women in society and arranged marriages as well as concerns about how well I would be received being a non-Muslim. Upon arrival these all disappeared. When we were out with our children in Bahrain, strangers would walk over to them, with beautiful smiles, place their hand on their heads and whisper a blessing. Wherever I went, even in the capital Manama, people would look into my eyes and there was an unspoken acknowledgement, as if recognising our common humanity. I have not experienced this in any other country I have visited and I was deeply moved by it. I loved how families and communities would look out for one another. Unlike in the West, nobody was lonely, because they belonged to a family and a community.

When considering how this research has affected me, I can clearly see how both Studies have affected me in different ways.

### **Study One**

When I was reading through the transcripts of the students in Study One, I was brought back to my younger self. I could relate to a lot of what the students were saying about parental expectations, religion, societal expectations and so on. I reflected upon my choice to discard all of that in favour of the freedom to live my life as I wished. The difference is that I was able to do that without any significant consequences. These students did not have that same choice and this bothered me.

However my experience with these students has highlighted to me the beautiful aspects of being human. We read so much about the dark side of humanity and I know we are a mix of both, but throughout my work with these students and throughout the course of my research, their openness, kindness and humanity have touched me deeply. This research process has reaffirmed to me the importance of introspection as I could clearly see how the students had benefitted from this. It has also reinforced my desire to work with students, to help them to navigate their own life journeys, share with them ways of dealing with their challenges, both present and future, and to help them see that they have the freedom to view life from whatever perspective they wish. It has also reinforced my sense of meaning and purpose and that has been a valuable gift to me.

Extract from my Reflective Journal :

As a fun exercise we did The Imagined House in coaching class today. \*\*\*\* made everyone laugh when she wrote that her house was filled with butterflies and unicorns, that is so like her, I saw her giggling as she was writing her description, which of course made me feel like doing the same. All of the students really enjoyed sharing what they had imagined to be in the secret room and had great fun trying to analyse one another's descriptions. They were really fascinating, \*\*\*\*\*'s secret room was filled with dusty books and a map of the ancient world, \*\*\*\*\*'s secret room had a door to another secret room which had a tunnel into the centre of the earth, which brought her to a prehistoric world. I found that one particularly interesting.

When \*\*\*\*\* read his description the atmosphere in the room shifted and I think it is the first time in my life that empathy seemed actually tangible in the air. His

mother, whom he cherished, died recently and when he spoke about what was in the secret room he said that it was filled with beautiful antique furniture and paintings but that they were all broken. I had to blink very quickly to keep my tears back. After class I watched how the students drew close around him and he could feel their love and their sorrow for what he was going through. They have such beautiful hearts.

This research process has also reinforced something which I knew already, but I know it even more forcefully now, the importance of my value of freedom. I believe that many students who participated in the coach training electives gained a sense of freedom as a result and that gives me huge joy. If there was one thing I wished for when developing this elective it is that. Two of my favourite student quotes are :

I was nervous eh, yeah, I was nervous at the beginning, but now, yani, now I want to tell everyone in my village. I want them all to know about this coaching because it makes you feel free. (Student3)

I definitely feel more free, you know, eh, more free to think about things the way I want to think about them, not how eh, how I should think about them and you know, it makes me feel so free, like I feel like smiling all the time. (Student1)

## **Study Two**

My experience with the coaches also affected me in a very positive way and gave me pause for thought. I reflected quite a lot upon my own life, the choices I had made, where I was now and my plans for the future.

I could see that I shared so much in common with the participants. We are all female, we had all completed a coach training course, we were all mature and we had all found our way to Bahrain.

So much of what they said resonated with my own experience of coach training and practicing as a coach in Bahrain. As so many philosophers have said, we are always in the process of becoming, and I completely related to what these coaches spoke about in terms of personal life journeys, self-awareness and spiritual development.

For all of these coaches, their experience of coach training appeared to be a turning point in their lives. This had also been the case for me.

Coaching was the bridge that connected my healthcare background and also you know my spiritual journey and my own development, all those things seemed to tie together, and it just feels, I just feel, such peace, such a sense of peace within myself, like a oneness. Coaching was the thing like that tied everything together for me, you know, made everything make sense and I truly feel blessed.

(Coach1)

And doing this course and actually training to become a coach, that's when I decided to make big changes in my life you know, that's when I started looking for opportunities abroad. Barbara

But my experience of coaching has aided this process, has helped me to ask some very important questions. (Coach3)

I came to coaching at a point where I needed to sort of bring it all together, and coaching helped me to do that, to understand myself better, to let things go, to

forgive others, to decide how I want to feel, what I want my life to be, and here in the Middle East, and experiencing this culture, it has been a real time of personal growth to me. (Coach4)

Extract from my Reflective Journal :

I am fascinated but not surprised by the similarity of all the coach's journeys, including my own. So much of what they have said could have come from my lips. It feels as if we have all come to Bahrain at the exact right time in terms of our own personal journeys and this feels very special.

I will end this chapter with an extract from my Reflective Journal which somehow for me, seems to capture this beautiful research experience :

We had a class on finding small daily joys in life recently and this afternoon \*\*\*\*\* came to my office to show me the beautiful photographs he had taken of the flowers on the campus. There was bougainvillea and frangipani and one other flower, I can't remember the name. He told me he has been doing this every day since our class and that he shows them to his grandmother every evening which also brings her joy. Then he told me about a dream he had last night, which I actually think was the main reason he came to see me. In his dream he was in the mosque. The mosque was not in Bahrain. He did not know where it was but it was a huge mosque and it was full of people. There was a large pillar with a falcon sitting on top of it. The falcon seemed to be observing everyone. He was then very surprised to see me inside the mosque. I was quite far away but I saw him and I smiled at him. Then he woke up. "I think this means you should convert

to Islam” he said. I smiled and we talked about dreams for a while and I told him about a dream I had when I was fifteen, about a young man with a purple robe and turban who was sitting at the end of my bed and it felt as if he was patiently waiting for me to notice he was there. “That was Al Mahdi” said \*\*\*\*\* with a beaming smile, “he is one of our prophets. Mashallah we may have different Gods but we are all brothers and sisters and our hearts are the same.”

## **Chapter 11 : Overall Findings and Conclusion**

### **11.1. Introduction**

In this final chapter, the findings of the two studies will be presented along with an account of how the findings are integrated, how they relate to the literature and key implications and recommendations for practice. The chapter concludes with a section highlighting the contribution to the field of coaching psychology, limitations and directions for future research.

### **11.2 Summary of the main findings**

Psychology originated in the west and theories have been developed following research undertaken using western participants. Likewise, in the field of Coaching, models have developed according to a western perspective. However coaching practice is growing steadily throughout the globe, including in the Middle East.

The research explored the following :

- The experience of Middle Eastern university students who participate in a coaching skills programme.
- The experience of Western coaches who practice in the Middle East.

The findings of this research provide evidence that cultural factors have a significant impact upon how coaching psychology is perceived in the Middle East, by both coaching clients and by Western coaches who practice in the Middle East. The findings indicate that numerous complex factors combine to influence these perceptions and that these factors are deeply culturally embedded within the realms of family, society and



religion. The findings also emphasise the need for coaches to be both culturally informed and culturally sensitive when practicing in the Middle East.

### **11.2.1 Summary of the studies**

**Study 1:** The experience of Middle Eastern university students who participate in a coaching skills programme.

The aim of this study was to explore the factors that influence perceptions of Middle Eastern university students who participated in a Coaching Skills Elective.

Method: Data was gathered from 7 university students through a focus group interview following completion of a 6 week Coaching Skills Elective. The focus group interview was semi-structured and the students were invited to share their thoughts on their experience of participating in the Coaching Skills Elective,

**Table 11.1 Study One : Key findings**

| <b>Superordinate Themes</b>                   | <b>Subordinate Themes</b>                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Coaching gets you thinking                    | Self-reflection<br>Self-awareness & Self-regulation            |
| What if they find out?                        | Stigmatization<br>Privacy                                      |
| The Influence of Family, culture and religion | Obedience to Parents<br>Religion & God in the Coaching Process |

The study found three superordinate themes. The first theme Coaching gets you thinking, showed that the experience of participating in this coaching skills elective resulted in the students experiencing greater levels of self-reflection, self-awareness and self-regulation. The second superordinate theme What if the find out? highlighted students fears of stigmatization for both the coaching client and their families, due to cultural perceptions surrounding mental health in the Middle East. It also showed the fear that coaching clients feel regarding the issue of privacy and their concerns that what they discussed during coaching sessions might not be kept confidential. The third superordinate theme The Influence of Family and Religion demonstrate the absolute respect for and importance of family, particularly in relation to being obedient to parents. It also portrays how religion and God must have a role in the coaching process.

**Study 2:** The experience of Western Coaches who practice in the Middle East.

The aim of this study was to explore the personal experience of coaches who had been born, raised and educated in the West and who now practiced coaching in the Middle East.

Method: Data was gathered from 5 western coaches through one-to-one interviews. The interviews were semi-structured and coaches were invited to consider the factors that influenced their decisions to become coaches, how coaching had benefitted them personally, their experience of coaching in the Middle East, the challenges they have faced when coaching in the Middle East and whether/how they had to adapt their coaching approach to this particular culture.

**Table 11.2 Study Two : Key Findings**

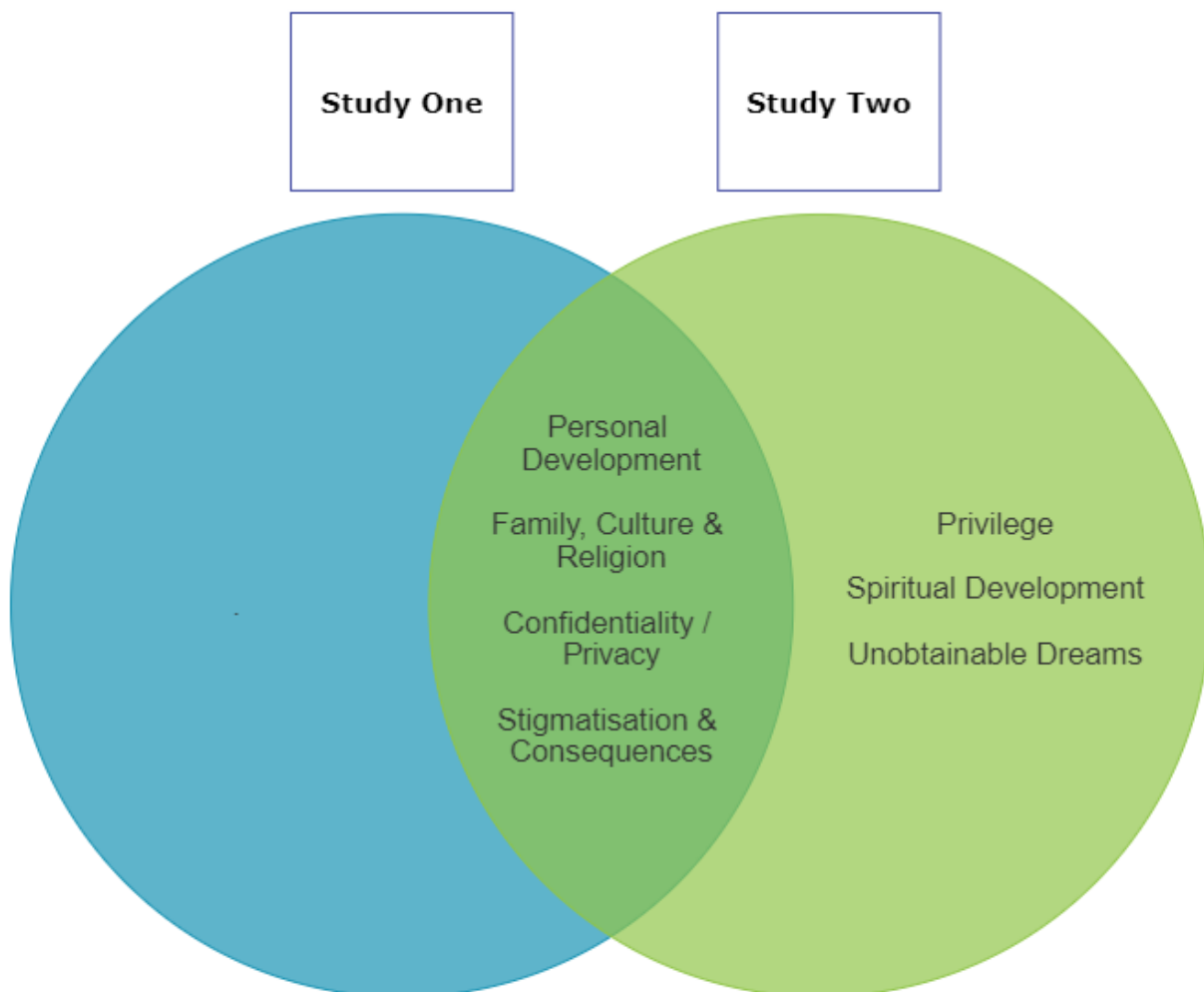
| <b>Superordinate Theme</b> | <b>Subordinate Themes</b>                                                                                  |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The Wounded Healer         | My Personal Journey<br>My Spiritual Journey<br>My Privilege                                                |
| Insha'Allah                | Two Sides of the Same Coin<br>Stigmatization & Consequences<br>The Influence of Family, Culture & Religion |

The study found two superordinate themes. The first theme The Wounded Healer portrayed their individual personal and spiritual journeys toward becoming a coach and subsequently practicing in the Middle East and also highlighted their sense of privilege regarding the trust that their Middle Eastern coaching clients place in them. The second superordinate theme shows a sense of conflict within the coaches in the sense that on the one hand they are encouraging their clients to dream but on the other hand, for reasons relating to family, culture and religion, these dreams may not in fact be possible. It highlights how family, culture and religion influence the various decisions that their clients make and also the concerns that their clients have surrounding the stigmatization relating to mental health in the Middle East. It also portrays the fear that the coaches feel regarding the confidentiality of their coaching conversations, the trust they need to place in their clients that this confidentiality will be observed and their fear of consequences for them and their clients should this not be the case.

### **11.2.2 Integration of the studies**

This research was purely qualitative and the chosen methodology was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). As highlighted in the discussion about methodology in Chapter 3, IPA is an approach which provides a rich account of the lived experience of individuals and one which is portrayed according to their own unique perspective without the preconceptions of the researcher (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Figure 10.1 demonstrates how the two studies interconnect – the findings they have in common and the differences.

**Figure 11.1 Integration of the Studies**



It can be seen from this figure that there were many numerous overlapping themes between both studies, namely :

**Personal Development :** In Study One, participants described how participating in the coaching skills elective resulted in personal development including heightened ability for self-reflection and greater self-awareness and self-regulation. In Study Two, participants described their own personal developed as a result of their coaching training programme and how this benefitted them.

**Family, Culture & Religion :** In Study One, participants described their decisions were greatly influenced by these factors and highlighted the requirement to consider what their parents/family would want and also what God would want. In Study Two, participants also described the role that these factors play in the coaching process, in relation to the decisions that their clients make and also in relation to how culturally aware and sensitive, they, as coaches, must be to these factors.

**Confidentiality / Privacy :** In both Studies, this was raised as a concern and it was interesting to see that trust was required on both sides. Trust that the coaches would not betray the confidentiality of the clients and trust that the clients would not talk about what was discussed during the coaching conversations, lest it might be taken out of context and seen as controversial or worse.

**Stigmatization and Consequences :** In Study One, participants expressed concerns regarding how they and their families might be stigmatized and the serious consequences that might result from this, due to the taboo surrounding mental illness in

this culture. In Study Two, participants were also concerned about how their clients and their clients' families might be stigmatized and the consequences of this.

The themes which did not overlap only came from Study Two and were in relation to :

Privilege : In Study Two the participants emphasized the sense of privilege and honour they felt as a result of the therapeutic alliance and the trust that their clients placed in them. This was not mentioned in Study One.

Spiritual Development : The participants in Study Two specifically mentioned their own spiritual journey and how this continued to unfold. The participants in Study Two talked about the importance of religion in terms of their personal lives and their identity (with regard to their sense of identity they perceived themselves be 'Muslim first') and the expectations that come with being a Muslim in terms of family relationships and how they live their lives. Whilst religion is clearly deeply important to them, they did not talk particularly about their own spiritual development and journey. It is perhaps useful to keep in mind that there was a significant age difference between the participants in both studies. Participants in Study One had an average age of 19 whereas participants in Study had an average age of 49.

Unobtainable dreams : In Study Two, the participants all felt a sense of conflict due to the fact that although the coaching process facilitates the identification of goals and dreams, that in reality, some of these dreams may not be obtainable for their clients within the Middle Eastern culture.

### **11.3 Discussion**

Considering this research project as a whole, the findings and results within this thesis may provide a contribution both to the practice of coaching psychology in the Middle East and our understanding of the cultural factors that influence perceptions of coaching psychology in the Middle East.

#### **11.4 Contributions to coaching practice in the Middle East**

In this section, some of the psychological approaches which underpin coaching practice will be discussed, particularly in relation to their suitability for integration into coaching practice in the Middle East. Firstly, an overview will be provided of how one particular approach, indigenous psychology, is already receiving consideration. Then two proposals will be made, firstly relating to the suitability of existential psychology as a psychological approach which could be successfully integrated into coaching practice in the Middle East, secondly relating to the suitability of transpersonal psychology as a psychological approach which could be successfully integrated into coaching practice in the Middle East.

##### **11.4.1 Training in cultural intelligence and cultural competence for coaches who wish to practice in the Middle East**

The findings of this research show that culture plays a fundamental role in how coaching is perceived in the Middle East and it is clear that both cultural understanding and cultural sensitivity are essential elements of coaching practice.

Cultural intelligence (CQ) refers to the ability of individuals to relate to and interact with individuals who have different cultural backgrounds; and their ability to interact with individuals in diverse cultural settings (Early & Ang, 2003). Cultural competence is the

positioning of both attitudes and behaviours to support a structure which allows for effective work across different cultures, going beyond the individual to include organisations, communities and countries (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000). As individuals become increasingly culturally competent, they gradually shift from a position of ethnocentrism, where they view their own particular culture as being the core of reality, to a position of ethnorelativism, where they understand their own cultural values, beliefs and behaviours to be simply one of many different cultural realities (Bennett, 2004). It is clear that coaches would greatly benefit from training relating to both cultural sensitivity and cultural competence (Plaister-Ten, 2019), however most of the models used in coaching competency do not overtly focus upon the cross-cultural suitability of their models and they embody Western cultural assumptions (Mosteo et al., 2021). As our world continues to become more international and cultural boundaries less defined, there is an increasing need for understanding, respect and sensitivity towards other cultures (Mosteo et al., 2021).

Western coaches who wish to practice in the Middle East may consider developing their cultural sensitivity and cultural competence to allow them to practice coaching in a way which is sensitive to the values of their clients, their families, their culture and their religion.

#### **11.4.2 Integration of cultural psychology and culturally sensitive psychological approaches into coaching practice in the Middle East.**

Cultural psychology is an interdisciplinary discipline that attracts philosophers, psychologists, linguists and anthropologists who share a common interest in understanding how culture influences and shapes human psychology and contrary to



psychologists who accept theories and findings to be universal, cultural psychologists accept that theories and findings vary depending upon culture (Snibb, 2003).

Within the culture of the Middle East, it may be advisable to explore psychological approaches which are more attuned to cultural psychology and to consider how these approaches may be integrated into coaching practice in the Middle East. In a challenge to mainstream psychology, Greenfield (2000) seeks to Student2gamate cultural understanding into both research and theory and recognises cultural psychology, cross-cultural psychology, and indigenous psychology as useful approaches to the psychology of culture. Regarding coaching in the Middle East, some work as already begun in terms of considering indigenous psychology as a suitable approach for integrating into coaching practice.

#### **11.4.2.1 Indigenous Psychology**

Indigenous psychology is the study of human minds and behaviours that is not transferred from other territories and is specifically intended for its own population (Kim & Berry, 1993). Psychology which has its roots in North America is embedded with Western values and indigenous psychologies need to be developed which are culturally aligned (Kim, 1995; Kim & Berry, 1993; Koch & Leary, 1985). Drawing upon their research in indigenous psychology, Kim & Berry (1993) stress the importance of contextualised understanding grounded in cultural, ecological, historical and/or political contexts, an understanding of the differences between cultural and national boundaries (various religious, ideological, ethnic and cultural groups may exist within once country) and an understanding that although individuals within a particular culture may have a better understanding of indigenous phenomena, outsiders may provide impartiality and

objectivity. The idea is to do so whilst building upon a scientific foundation of human understanding, experimental method and search for universals (Kim, 1999).

In a study regarding an indigenous psychology approach in Korea, Kim (1999, p.456) states that “Human consciousness, agency, meaning and goals are considered to be key constructs in explaining human mind and behaviour. The separation of the subjective and objective worlds that is important in the natural sciences is not possible in the human world, because we are both the subject and the object of investigation.” He goes on to explain that two types of knowledge are recognised in Korean indigenous psychology, one of which relates to a first person understanding and focusses upon phenomenological knowledge, the other which relates to a third person understand and focusses upon analytical knowledge. The findings of the study show that support and emotional attachment in relation to success are considered to be of more importance in Korean culture, as opposed to aspects such as reason and rationality which are considered important in the West (Kim, 1999). Previous studies found similar results (Kim, 1994; Kim & Choi, 1994; Stevenson, Azuma & Hakuta, 1986).

Concerning integrating indigenous psychology into coaching practice in the Middle East, some consideration of this has already recently begun (see King & van Nieuwerburgh, 2020; King et al., 2021) and this appears to be an approach which may be well suited to culturally sensitive coaching practice.

#### **11.4.2.2 Existential Psychology**

Another psychology which seems well suited to culturally sensitive coaching practice is that of existential psychology and this may be particularly suited to the culture of the Middle East.

Existential psychology can be defined as “a philosophy that confronts the human situation in its totality to ask what the basic conditions of human existence are and how man can establish his own meaning out of these conditions” (Barrett, 1958, p. 1 26).

Wong (2004) describes existential psychology as pertaining to the paradoxes and intricacies of human nature. It explores questions relating to our sense of self and our relation to others and to nature, whether we in fact have any control over our lives and what happens when we die; and although our human experiences and challenges are highly personal, they also cultural and social (Pyszezynski et al., 2004).

According to Fusco et al. (2015) existential coaching has drawn upon existential philosophy, existential psychiatry and existential psychotherapy and encourages individuals to give their lives meaning. According to Spinelli (2010) existential coaching does not require individuals to change or adapt their world view, but instead allows them to contextualise their issues in a way which is aligned with their worldview and allows them to preserve their way of being. Existential phenomenological psychology maintains that our lived experience necessitates incorporating our cultural contexts and that these aspects of ourselves are inseparable; and that the non-judgmental aspects of existential phenomenological psychology is suited towards working with culturally diverse clients (Felder & Robbins, 2016).

Existential coaching has been proposed as a useful approach to integrate with other coaching or therapeutic approaches for example with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

(Mirea, 2012), Solution Focussed approach (Langdridge, 2010) and Conflict Management (Van Deuzen & Hanaway, 2012). So too, integrating existential coaching within particular cultural contexts, in this particular case, the Middle East, may provide both the client and the coach with the opportunity of exploring matters from an internal reality rather than, as Bluckert (2006) suggests, seeing the clients' problems as situated externally and rushing towards solutions without truly understanding the complexity of these problems.

#### **11.4.2.3 Transpersonal Psychology**

Transpersonal psychology is another branch which may have relevance within in the culture of the Middle East as it pertains to spiritual matters and can integrate approaches that relate more deeply to the nature of human (Davis, 2003) The combination of spirituality with psychology can be found in the literature of James (1902, 1958), Jung (1965) and Maslow (1971).

The British Psychological Society recognises transpersonal psychology as a psychological approach which utilises psychological concepts and frameworks to explore and research spiritual experiences and practices (BPS, 2022).

Given the fact that the findings of this research found religion/spirituality to be themes within both studies, it may be worth considering as an approach suited for integration into coaching practice in the Middle East, particularly as it has culturally diverse origins and has been influenced as much by Eastern traditions and psychology as by European psychology (Davis, 2003).

Transpersonal psychology explores the usual spectrum but additionally explores transcendent experiences, higher functioning, mystical and religious experiences, consciousness and potential (Tartakovsky, 2011). Vaughan (1979, p. 101) views transpersonal psychology as “an open-ended endeavour to facilitate human growth and expand awareness beyond the limits implied by most traditional Western models of mental health” and states that “in the process of enlarging one's felt sense of identity to include transpersonal dimensions of being, the therapist may employ traditional therapeutic techniques as well as meditation and other awareness exercises derived from Eastern consciousness disciplines.” As with all teachings relating to enlightenment, whether psychological or religious, the journey is not outwards, but inwards (Metzner, 1979).

During the discussion of the findings of Study Two, it was evident that the participants had experienced personal and spiritual growth as a result of their experience of coaching Middle Eastern clients; it was in a sense a symbiotic relationship. In transpersonal psychology the nature of the therapeutic relationship allows for a sense of awakening in both the therapist and the client (Wittine, 1989).

## **11.5 Limitations of the studies and future directions**

### **11.5.1 Limitations**

Study One involved a focus group interview with seven Middle Eastern university students which was conducted through English. Although the participants all had excellent English (entry to this university required a minimum of IELTS 6.0), a more in-depth exploration of their experiences may have been possible had this focus group

interview been conducted in Arabic by a trained facilitator and then translated into English. I noticed on some occasions, particularly when there was a sense of excitement about a particular topic, that the group broke out into Arabic, speaking very quickly and sometimes laughing, and I may have missed some valuable information during these moments. Additionally, much research has been conducted with bilingual participants on the connection between first language and emotional arousal (Pavlenko, 1998; Altarriba & Santiago-Rivera, 1994; Santiago Rivera & Altarriba, 2003; Schrauf, 2000; Anooshian & Hertel, 1994; Aycicegi & Harris, 2004; Bond & Lai, 1986; Marian & Neisser, 2000; Schrauf & Rubin, 1998) and studies have found that individuals experience increased emotional arousal when speaking in their first language as opposed to when speaking their second language (Harris et al., 2006; Dylman & Bjärtå, 2019; Venturin, 2021). During the focus group interview, participants discussed subjects which were emotionally evocative, therefore their first language, Arabic, may have yielded richer data.

Out of the seven participants in Study One, five were female and two were male. It may have been useful to have had an equally balanced demographic as the Middle East is a patriarchal society (Soekarba, 2019) and this may have affect the experiences and perceptions of the participants.

In Study Two, all of the five participants were female. Again, being female in a patriarchal society (Soekarba, 2019) may have had an influence on their responses particularly to the problems of their female clients relating to freedom of choice.

### **11.5.2 Ideas for future research**

Study One sought to explore the experiences of Middle Eastern university students who participate in a coaching skills programme. It might be interesting to conduct a cross-cultural study to explore the experiences of students from different cultures e.g. Middle East, US, China and Europe.

In Study One, the focus group interview took place shortly after the participants had completed the coaching skills elective. It might be interesting to see if the positive impact of this experience, particularly relating to their personal development, was long term or if, in time, they reverted to their previous ways of thinking and behaving.

Therefore a longitudinal study may be interesting.

Study Two sought to examine the experiences of Western coaches who practice in the Middle East. An issue that emerged during this study was the fact that in some cases, the coaches seemed possibly more upset about their clients' lack of choice than the clients themselves were. This could be an area for future research in terms of the challenges to our own values and beliefs, when coaching is a different culture.

All of the coaches in Study Two were from the West. It might be interesting to conduct a similarly study using only Middle Eastern participants who have been raised in this culture to determine if they had similar or different challenges and experiences.

## **11.6 Conclusion**

The discipline of psychology is intricate, dynamic and ever evolving. As we continually seek to understand ourselves and others in a complex and rapidly changing world where boundaries are increasingly blurred and cultures evolve and integrate, we seek psychological approaches that best support our needs. Coaching psychology is one

such approach and as it continues to spread around the globe, it lends itself to what might be termed a cultural evolution. This study highlights the various cultural factors that influence perceptions of coaching in the Middle East and coaches who wish to practice in the Middle East require both an awareness and a sensitivity to the culture of the Middle East. Coaching psychology is a respectful and flexible approach which can readily integrate different psychological approaches. The integration of approaches such as indigenous psychology, existential psychology and transpersonal psychology may allow for coaching psychology to be sensitively and successfully practiced within diverse cultures and particularly within the Middle East.



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# Appendices


## Appendix A : Ethical Approval

Final Thesis Julia Yates 8MAY17: x Ethics Approval - UEL.pdf

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**29<sup>th</sup> November 2017**

Dear Dr Berdondini,

|                                |                                                                               |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Project Title:</b>          | <b>Coaching in a Middle Eastern Context : A Culturally Sensitive Approach</b> |
| <b>Principal Investigator:</b> | <b>Dr Lucia Berdondini</b>                                                    |
| <b>Researcher:</b>             | <b>Ruth FitzGerald</b>                                                        |
| <b>Reference Number:</b>       | <b>UREC 1718 19</b>                                                           |

I am writing to confirm the outcome of your application to the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), which was considered by UREC on **Wednesday 13 September 2017**.

The decision made by members of the Committee is **Approved**. The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation. Your study has received ethical approval from the date of this letter.

Should you wish to make any changes in connection with your research project, this must be reported immediately to UREC. A Notification of Amendment form should be submitted for approval, accompanied by any additional or amended documents: <http://www.uel.ac.uk/research/ethics/documents/Notification-of-Amendment-06>


Approved Ethics App-150116.doc

Any adverse events that occur in connection with this research project must be reported immediately to UREC.

**Approved Research Site**

I am pleased to confirm that the approval of the proposed research applies to the following research site:

|                                                                                    |                                                    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Research Site</b>                                                               | <b>Principal Investigator / Local Collaborator</b> |
| Participants will be located in Bahrain and interviews will be conducted via Skype | Dr Lucia Berdondini                                |



**Approved Documents**

The final list of documents reviewed and approved by the Committee is as follows:

| Document                      | Version | Date             |
|-------------------------------|---------|------------------|
| UREC application form         | 3.0     | 28 November 2017 |
| Participant information sheet | 3.0     | 28 November 2017 |
| Consent form                  | 3.0     | 28 November 2017 |
| Interview questions           | 3.0     | 28 November 2017 |

Approval is given on the understanding that the [UEL Code of Practice in Research](#) is adhered to. The University will periodically audit a random sample of applications for ethical approval, to ensure that the research study is conducted in compliance with the consent given by the ethics Committee and to the highest standards of rigour and integrity.

**Please note, it is your responsibility to retain this letter for your records.**

With the Committee's best wishes for the success of this project.

Yours sincerely,

Fernanda Silva  
Administrative Officer for Research Governance  
University Research Ethics Committee (UREC)  
Email: [researchethics@uel.ac.uk](mailto:researchethics@uel.ac.uk)

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## Appendix B : Consent & Information Form

Ruth Fitzgerald - Consent & Information Forms [Compatibility Mode] - Word (Product Activation Failed)

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**University of East London**  
Stratford Campus  
Water Lane, London E15 4LZ

**Participant Information Sheet**

**Research integrity**  
The University adheres to its responsibility to promote and support the highest standard of **open** and integrity in all aspects of research, observing the appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks.  
The University is committed to preserving your dignity, rights, safety and wellbeing and as such it is a mandatory requirement of the University that formal ethical approval, from the appropriate Research Ethics Committee, is granted before research with human participants or human data commences.

**The Principal Investigator/Director of Studies**  
Dr Lucia Boudoukas  
School of Psychology  
University of East London  
Stratford Campus  
Water Lane, London E15 4LZ  
Room A62.15  
L.Boudoukas@uel.ac.uk

**Student researcher**  
Ruth Fitzgerald  
Kilnoma House, Limerick, Co. Waterford, Ireland  
U1215587@uel.ac.uk

**Consent to Participate in a Research Study**  
The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information that you need to consider in deciding whether to participate in this study.

**Project Title**  
Coaching Psychology in the Middle East: A Culturally Sensitive Approach

**Project Description**  
The proposed programme of research is comprised of two studies:  
Study One: The experience of Middle Eastern university students who participate in a coaching skills programme.  
Study Two: The experience of Western Coaches who practice in the Middle East.  
February 2016

**Confidentiality of the Data**  
In the published research, no reference will be made to any names of individuals and your anonymity is assured. Where possible, participants' confidentiality will be maintained unless a disclosure is made that indicates that the participant or someone else is at serious risk of harm. Such disclosures may be reported to the relevant authority. Arrangements have been made to protect confidentiality of data. Confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations. All data generated in the course of the research will be retained in accordance with the University's Data Protection Policy.

**Location**  
This research is being carried out with participants who are located in The Middle East.

**Disclaimer**  
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time during the research. Should you choose to withdraw from the programme you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason. Please note that your data can be withdrawn up to the point of data analysis – after this point it may not be possible.

**University Research Ethics Committee**  
If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research in which you are being asked to participate, please contact:  
**Catherine Paudyal, Research Integrity and Ethics Manager, Graduate School, EB 1.43**  
University of East London, Docklands Campus, London E16 2RD  
(telephone: 020 8225 6485, Email: [researchethics@uel.ac.uk](mailto:researchethics@uel.ac.uk))

For general enquiries about the research please contact the Principal Investigator on the contact details at the top of this sheet.  
February 2016

## Appendix C.1 : Study One : Exploratory Comments and Emergent Themes

| Appendix 2 - Study 1 - Clustering Emergent Themes and Identifying Superordinate and Subor...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                              | TABLE TOOLS                                                                      |                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                              |  |  |  |
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|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <table><thead><tr><th>Exploratory Comments</th><th>Transcript</th><th>Emergent Themes</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>Thinking about what? What happened before? Why could you not see it at the time? Why do you accept it and not challenge it? Cultural influences / Patriarchal society? It sounds like something unpleasant happened. (It upsets me when young women are vulnerable. I don't show vulnerability.) Interesting metaphor of torch and powerful. A cave is completely dark. The cave would appear to be your unconscious. Coaching helped you to shine that torch and illuminate the cave. Even though coaching</td><td>Coaching really gets you thinking, <u>yan</u>, being coached helped me to reflect back on some things that happened before, which I couldn't see at the time. You know, you just accept and get on with things and don't ask questions. But now, like, now I eh, I find I can think back about these things and instead of feeling, like, confused and uncomfortable, I, you know, I can see things more clearly and how they, like, how they affected me even though I couldn't, you know, see it at the time. It's kind of like shining a torch into a dark cave, I didn't know before what was in the cave.</td><td><u>Self reflection</u> allowing her to see more clearly.<br/><u>Increased self awareness.</u></td></tr></tbody></table> | Exploratory Comments                                                                         | Transcript                                                                       | Emergent Themes | Thinking about what? What happened before? Why could you not see it at the time? Why do you accept it and not challenge it? Cultural influences / Patriarchal society? It sounds like something unpleasant happened. (It upsets me when young women are vulnerable. I don't show vulnerability.) Interesting metaphor of torch and powerful. A cave is completely dark. The cave would appear to be your unconscious. Coaching helped you to shine that torch and illuminate the cave. Even though coaching | Coaching really gets you thinking, <u>yan</u> , being coached helped me to reflect back on some things that happened before, which I couldn't see at the time. You know, you just accept and get on with things and don't ask questions. But now, like, now I eh, I find I can think back about these things and instead of feeling, like, confused and uncomfortable, I, you know, I can see things more clearly and how they, like, how they affected me even though I couldn't, you know, see it at the time. It's kind of like shining a torch into a dark cave, I didn't know before what was in the cave. | <u>Self reflection</u> allowing her to see more clearly.<br><u>Increased self awareness.</u> |  |  |  |
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| Table of Contents | <p>Arranged marriage? Family obligations?</p> <p>More accepting of different views – now is non-judgmental. Does not have the need to be 'right' anymore.</p> <p>Reflecting on past – childhood and different influences – she can see more clearly now.</p> <p>Initially uncomfortable.</p> <p>Powerful analogy of 'glasses on the inside' to enable you to see more clearly to understand yourself better.</p> <p>Similar to previous participant's analogy of shining a torch to a</p> | <p>For me the biggest realisation was when I reflected on my views about things and then on different views and stopped judging other people who had different views. I, you know, I used to think that my view was eh the right view, and you know, I would, eh, I would sometimes get angry when people disagreed with me, but reflecting on my views and how I came to have these views has helped, <u>yani</u>, helped me to think about things in a different way and to be more accepting of different views. It's strange really cos you know, I always thought I was right and now, <u>yani</u>, now I don't care about being right.</p> <p>I was like Maryam, I didn't think about why I was the way I was, I just was and now I eh you know, I reflect back on my childhood, yeah, my childhood and my parents and eh the different influences that people have had on me and I feel like, <u>yani</u>, I feel like I can see so much more clearly now. It was eh, I didn't feel very comfortable at first, like, but then it began to make more sense and it's kind of like eh, coaching has given me glasses on the inside as well as the outside (she laughs)</p> <p>I don't know why but once I started to reflect on my life and to ask questions, I felt a sort of, <u>yani</u>, a sort of freedom. I was nervous eh, yeah, I was nervous at the beginning, but now, <u>yani</u>, now I want to tell everyone in my village. I want them all to know about this coaching because it makes you feel free</p> | <p><u>Self reflection</u> on personal views and different views leading to becoming <u>non-judgmental</u>.</p> <p>Coaching allowed her to reflect upon her past and influences leading to greater <u>self awareness</u>.</p> <p><u>Self reflection</u> brought about a sense of freedom.</p> |
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| Table of Contents | <p>Interesting non sequitur ... it seems as if you were dying to make this point. From the fervency in which you state this, it feels as if this may be somehow related to you ... to you potentially needing to talk about a problem, but fearing people will find out and think you are sick (mentally). (When she made this statement, there was an animated reaction from the group with everyone agreeing and laughing).</p> <p>Concern about what everyone will think. The word 'disaster' is very strong and this is followed about a concern for 'shame for the family.' (Family honour and not</p> | <p>...especially the fact that we live in the Arab region ... going to a coach or psychologist or shrink or whatever, that is not <u>yani</u>, not so easy. They eh, the people don't have that mentality. They don't want to say I have a problem or I need help, no, they don't want to and they don't eh, they don't trust people not to talk. And then <u>yani</u>, everyone will know and think you are sick. (Everyone laughs and chatters saying 'she's right' and 'you're sick'.)</p> <p>She's right ...a lot of people, maybe they know they need coaching but they won't go and take it, because for example they think 'what will my friends think?', 'what will the boss think?' and you know, if your family finds out, then <u>yani</u>, then that is a disaster, I am not joking. There is like, eh, the shame for the family. No, it is a big risk and you know, people they love to talk about everyone else and especially, <u>yani</u>, especially if they can find something like this about this family or that family. It is big problem.</p> | <p>Fear of being stigmatised as being mentally sick.</p> <p>Fear of what people will think.</p> <p>Fear of bringing shame on the family.</p> |
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|  | <p>Interesting how you use the feminine 'what's her problem?' and relating it to her own family.</p> <p>(Elizabeth was the participant who started this conversation – In a previous comment I felt that she was possibly talking about herself. Her statements here, particularly her Mother saying 'who will marry her now?' tends to support this possibility.</p> <p>So even if people do not know why someone is seeing a coach, they will make up something. This is potentially very dangerous depending upon what they make up.</p> <p>Why a woman?</p> | <p>We live in, you know, a judgmental society and we, like always care about what other people think. For example, if someone goes to a psychologist or coach 'What's her problem?', 'What's going on with her family?'. And then, <u>yani</u>, your family find out and yeah, that is oh, I can, <u>yani</u> I can just hear my Mother saying about me, if I go to coach or psychologist and they find out, she will shake her head and say 'who will marry her now?.'</p> <p>They are curious also, like if they find out and eh, eh, you don't tell them why you are going to see a coach, they make up the answer.</p> <p>I can see a woman coming out [from a coaching session] and people whispering 'what's her problem, what does she have, what</p> | <p>Fear of being stigmatised by going to see a coach.</p> <p>Fear of people finding out and consequences of this.</p> <p>Consequences ... may be worse for</p> |
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|  | <p>Again, Elizabeth refers to a female and feels that people will say bad things about her.</p> <p>Why do they assume that 'a woman' would be inclined to breach professional confidentiality or gossip? Perception of women in the Middle East?</p> <p>Again the perception of women – your uncles' wives – being prone to gossip.</p> <p>Keep things in the family, private. The use of the word 'safe' is pertinent. Do you have fears for your safety – reputationally or physically? (The Arab Spring of 2011 had a</p> | <p>just saying, I'm speaking the facts, they will say bad things about the woman.</p> <p>They are afraid, they worry about the confidentiality, for example, like, if a woman would be a coach, they think that after the coaching session she will be with her family or friends <u>yani</u> and she would sit in like a gathering and she'll say, she'll tell them everything, all of the details of what, <u>yani</u> what she was told (everyone chatters and laughs) we know <u>yani</u>, that it's not true, but the people should be more aware that it is a confidential and professional work.</p> <p>It's like, we are raised what happens at home stays at home. Don't say to your cousins. Don't say especially to your uncles' wives, don't say to them (everyone laughs).</p> <p>It is eh, it is difficult because when we have problems, they have to stay in the family. We don't eh, we don't talk about eh, outside the family. Some people talk to the Imam. That is the safe way. Because eh, because well you know, he is wise and understands, but also eh, also you know, if someone sees you speak with Imam, then they do eh, they do not think bad things about you. Probably they will think you are discussing the Qur'an.</p> | <p>Stigmatisation as a result of seeing a coach.</p> <p>Fear that confidentiality will be betrayed, particularly if the coach is female.</p> <p>Fear that female relatives will not respect privacy and will gossip.</p> <p>Problems have to be kept private – stay in the family.</p> |
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| Again, the use of the word 'safe'. Indicates a real sense of fear of people finding out.                                                            | It's true, what he says, I think that way is the safe way, and you know, the Imam understands about our faith and our culture more than the coach, so <u>yani</u> , even from that point of view it, yeah.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | It is more safe to see the Imam than a Coach – no fear of stigmatisation if one is seen talking with the Imam. |
| Parents play a dominant role in the family and there seems to be a sense of dependency upon them 'we always come back to our families.'             | We are brought up <u>yani</u> , to obey our parents and eh to eh respect them. Here it is not like in the west. We never, eh, we never really leave our families. Like, here, even if we leave for a little bit, like to study abroad for a year, we always come back, <u>yani</u> , we always come back to our families. And I think that is one of the problems of eh, yeah, one of the problems of coaching here, <u>yani</u> , because if the coach says it's your life, do what you want, eh, nobody's business, that won't work because our parents, eh, they have to agree. | Must obey parents. Strong ties to family and parents have to agree with decisions.                             |
| Your parents 'have to agree.' Collectivist culture.                                                                                                 | Even about families, I think, I mean like the West, they can leave their parent's house and like here, they will eventually go back to the parents, so the coach can't tell the client to like okay, do whatever you want, don't take your parents into consideration. You eh, you have to think <u>yani</u> , you have to think what do your parents want? And here, the only way you can leave your family is if you work abroad, or study abroad, that's it but you will always come back.                                                                                      | Parents must be considered when making decisions. Strong ties to family.                                       |
| Again, you have to take your parents into consideration and you will always go back to your parents. Obligations to parents / collectivist culture. | What do your parents                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Parents must be considered in the                                                                              |

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| Interesting distinction between traditions and religion. Using religion as a source of control. | But the sad part, yes, the sad part, just a small thing, the sad part is that Qur'an and Islam and religion says nothing, nothing of what they are saying. It's their traditions that they mix with religion. They come up, <u>yani</u> , they come up with things they want people to do and you know, they put it under the title of Islam, but when you go to Islam, there is nothing like that. | The mistake of mixing up traditions with religion to get people to do what they want. |
| First allusion to 'inshallah' or pre-determination.                                             | It's not in our tradition, is more in our religion, as we have to work the hardest we can then we give it over to God. It's not we just sit back and just eat popcorn, and say 'Okay, God will help me pass this exam', no we have to, for example, we have to study and study really hard, then we give it up to God, and we'll see what happens.                                                  | Difference between tradition and religion in terms of effort.                         |
| Pre-determination as an excuse not to put in effort. It's all in God's hands.                   | Yeah, we are dependent on others and it's like, whatever God has written for us, this is what will happen, so sometimes we don't give the extra effort with it, so it's an excuse, as Arabs, it's known for us. You're leaving it all up to what God has written for you.                                                                                                                           | How religious beliefs in pre-determination affect behaviour.                          |
| A number of Hadiths speak about this.                                                           | There's 'Tawakkul' and 'Tawaakul'. 'Tawakkul' is a good thing that I put in effort and then I say, 'Okay God, this is what I can do and for now, so help me. 'Tawaakul' is when you don't put in any effort.                                                                                                                                                                                        | Difference between Tawakkul and Tawaakul.                                             |
|                                                                                                 | You can't leave the camel untied and leave, and say 'Oh the camel is not gonna run away', no, you have to make sure and have the camel tied.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Hadith to do with the Camel – pre-determination / effort.                             |
|                                                                                                 | You're expected to do your best because if you don't get what the opportunity, you have to keep in mind that God gave you the                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Pre-determination and trust in God.                                                   |

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| <p>Do your best and then hand it over to God. <u>Insh'alla</u> as an excuse for putting in no effort.</p> <p>The coach should include God in the coaching process.</p> <p>She will be more highly regarded.</p> <p>What would God want? The importance of Islam in the lives and decisions of Muslims.</p> <p>Muslim identity. I am first a Muslim.</p> <p>I am first a Muslim.</p> | <p>Yes do your best, but not eh, not everyone does that. No, they say <u>Insh'alla</u> it will be alright but then <u>yani</u>, then they do nothing to make it alright and that happens a lot.</p> <p>[Coaching] needs to be sensitive to this culture, especially to families and to our religion. It would be successful if you considered 'God'. They would say 'Oh, she [the coach] is understanding, she is putting God into it, Allah.</p> <p>She knows what she is talking about.</p> <p>She knows what she is talking about, yeah.</p> <p>And then maybe you can change their mentality, like God, it's the Qur'an way, not your way. 'Do you think that God will accept this action?' It's like one of the questions, it's an important question.</p> <p>You have to, eh, you have to include God in coaching, just like, eh, just like you have to include our parents. It is not a separate thing eh, no, it is all part of the same thing. You remember eh, when we talked about identity during the course. You remember. I am first a Muslim. Muslim first, then eh, son, father, manager whatever When you ask me who I am, I am, I am always first a Muslim, that is eh, that is like my core, after that <u>yani</u>, I might be a man or as <u>tudent</u> or a son <u>yani</u>, but <u>Iam</u> a Muslim first.</p> <p>It is true, I eh, I think it is true for all Muslims, it is true for me. I am first a Muslim and then eh, and then whatever and the coach, <u>yani</u>, the coach has to understand that we are not separated no, we are</p> | <p>Using religion as an excuse for lack of effort.</p> <p>God in the coaching process.</p> <p>Better impression of coach if she puts God in the coaching process.</p> <p>Take God's view into consideration when making decisions.</p> <p>Muslim Identity, parents and God in the Coaching process.</p> <p>Family and religion in the coaching process.</p> |
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## Appendix C.2 : Identifying Superordinate Themes and Subordinate Themes

Study 1 - Students Interview Transcript Coding - Word (Product Activation Failed)

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**Study One**

| Superordinate Themes                 | Subordinate Themes                                  |
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| Coaching gets you thinking           | Self-reflection<br>Self-awareness & Self-regulation |
| What if they find out?               | Stigmatisation<br>Privacy                           |
| The Influence of Family and Religion | Obedience to Parents<br>God in the Coaching Process |

... What was your experience of participating in this coaching programme?

Coaching really gets you thinking, yani, being coached helped me to reflect back on some things that happened before, which I couldn't see at the time. You know, you just accept and get on with things and don't ask questions. But now, like, now I eh, I find I can think back about these things and instead of feeling, like, confused and uncomfortable, I, you know, I can see things more clearly and how they, like, how

**Ruth Fitzgerald**  
Helped reflect back on events, now can see things with a different perspective – more clearly  
– interesting analogy of torch in cave – unconscious processing of emotions?

**Ruth Fitzgerald**  
(Use of metaphors in IPA)

PAGE 1 OF 10 3349 WORDS

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**Ruth Fitzgerald**  
Improved ability to understand and articulate emotions.

**Ruth Fitzgerald**  
Ability to become more reflective / having time to reflect.

**Ruth Fitzgerald**  
Family pressure, guilt relating to feelings.

and I told her how it had always made me feel, you know, how hurt and angry I felt thought she would get angry but she cried instead and hugged me I think that I can eh, you know understand my emotions better now than before and I can talk about them better.

... That's really interesting, what about the rest of you, any other thoughts on this?

Yeah, coaching was very useful ... we eh, we usually don't have the time to reflect upon ourselves what is happening in our lives. You know, our weekend is Friday and Saturday. Friday is eh, our day of prayer and then we spend the whole day, I mean the whole day with our families. Parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers, sisters and you know, eh, you know, it is very nice, okay, but you, you just have to, and you

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me, what I experienced, is a place to reflect back on life and purpose. You know, what we are not used to doing, and what actually is a little scary at first, I mean, you kind of, kind of feel selfish if you are thinking about yourself. I see, what else have you noticed? Before I took this course, I used to get angry so easily. To be honest I would punch first and ask questions later. I'm eh, I really mean it. My brother knew what to say to make me, you know, to make me flip and all of my friends thought this was funny and eh, would laugh when this happened and it happened a lot. And you know, they all like, they all thought it was funny but it made me feel so bad. When we covered the part on understanding emotions and self-regulation and I started to practice what we had learned, everything changed. I don't get angry any more, I am the scientist, I get curious and yeah analytical and my brother is so confused. I understand. Would anyone like to add anything else? Initially, I thought what's the point of me getting coaching if they're not going to give me the solutions. To be honest, and this is, this is a little embarrassing, but initially,

Ruth Fitzgerald  
This new feeling is scary. Why does Omar feel selfish for thinking about himself?

Ruth Fitzgerald  
Understanding own emotions better, understanding behaviour of others, ability to regulate emotional response, curiosity / ability to step back and analyse.

Ruth Fitzgerald  
Used to 'professionals' providing answers, not searching for own answers.

PAGE 3 OF 10 3349 WORDS

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comfortable at first, like, but then it began to make more sense and it's kind of like eh, coaching has given me glasses on the inside as well as the outside (she laughs) I don't know why but once I started to reflect on my life and to ask questions, I felt a sort of, yani, a sort of freedom. I was nervous eh, yeah, I was nervous at the beginning, but now, yani, now I want to tell everyone in my village. I want them all to know about this coaching because it makes you feel free (Zainab). Yeah, I know, my parents are saying I have changed but yani, I think they kind of like it, and I'm not disrespectful but I definitely feel more free, you know, eh, more free to think about things the way I want to think about them, not how eh, how I should think about them and you know, it makes me feel so free, like I feel like smiling all the time. ...especially the fact that we live in the Arab region ... going to a coach or psychologist or shrink or whatever, that is not yani, not so easy. They eh, the people don't have that mentality. They don't want to say I have a problem or I need help, no, they don't want to and they don't eh, they don't trust people not to talk. And then

Ruth Fitzgerald  
Sense of freedom. Spread the word.

Ruth Fitzgerald  
Sense of freedom. Happier.

Ruth Fitzgerald  
Mental health issues = sick. What will others think?

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and take it, because for example they think 'what will my friends think?', 'what will the boss think?' and you know, if your family finds out, then yani, then that is a disaster, I am not joking. There is like, eh, the shame for the family. No, it is a big risk and you know, people they love to talk about everyone else and especially, yani, especially if they can find something like this about this family or that family. It is big problem. Family reputation, eh, family reputation in our society is very important. And there is a responsibility, yes, a responsibility on each of us, not, not to bring shame on the family. That is why, eh, eh, going to see the coach or psychologist, for some people maybe like for many people, is not possible, because of what it might do to their families, not just, eh, not just to themself (sic). We live in, you know, a judgmental society and we, like always care about what other people think. For example, if someone goes to a psychologist or coach 'What's her problem?', 'What's going on with her family?' And then, yani, your family find out and yeah, that is oh, I can, yani I can just hear my Mother saying about me, if I go to coach or psychologist and they find out, she will shake her head and say 'who will

Ruth Fitzgerald  
Strong word - 'disaster'. Not a problem / issue but a disaster. Ominous sense. Serious concern about people finding out.

Ruth Fitzgerald  
Familial shame - personal responsibility.

Ruth Fitzgerald  
Judgmental society - what people think will affect future prospects.

PAGE 6 OF 10 3349 WORDS

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Study 1 - Students Interview Transcript Coding - Word (Product Activation Failed)

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and laughs) we know yani, that it's not true, but the people should be more aware that it is a confidential and professional work. It's like, we are raised what happens at home stays at home. Don't say to your cousins. Don't say especially to your uncles' wives, don't say to them (everyone laughs). It is eh, it is difficult because when we have problems, they have to stay in the family. We don't eh, we don't talk about eh, outside the family. Some people talk to the Imam. That is the safe way. Because eh, because well you know, he is wise and understands, but also eh, also you know, if someone sees you speak with Imam then they do eh, they do not think bad things about you. Probably they will think you are discussing the Qur'an. It's true, what he says, I think that way is the safe way, and you know, the Imam understands about our faith and our culture more than the coach, so yani, even from that point of view it, yeah. We are brought up yani, to obey our parents and eh to eh respect them. Here it is not like in the west. We never, eh, we never really leave our families. Like, here

Ruth Fitzgerald  
Especially Uncle's wives. Gender issue.

Ruth Fitzgerald  
Imam and counselling devotees.

Ruth Fitzgerald  
Coaching is a risk.

Ruth Fitzgerald  
Obedience, not just respect.

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Study 1 - Students Interview Transcript Coding - Word (Product Activation Failed)

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obey your parents.

We must obey our parents as it is in our religion and our culture. There is eh, there is a Hadith eh to do with, specifically with this and if eh, if we obey our parents then two doors will open for us in paradise.

Some parents are very strict yani, for example, for example, if you don't become a doctor, until the day of judgement, I'll be angry with you.

Yeah, they use Islam like in a wrong way.

Yes, they use it in a very wrong way.

But the sad part, yes, the sad part, just a small thing, the sad part is that Qur'an and Islam and religion says nothing, nothing of what they are saying. It's their traditions that they mix with religion. They come up, yani, they come up with things they want people to do and you know, they put it under the title of Islam, but when you go to Islam, there is nothing like that.

It's not in our tradition, is more in our religion, as we have to work the hardest we can then we give it over to God. It's not we just sit back and just eat popcorn, and say

Ruth Fitzgerald  
Influence of religion and culture on perception and behaviour.

Ruth Fitzgerald  
Traditions as opposed to religion.

Ruth Fitzgerald  
Tradition religion.

PAGE 8 OF 10 3349 WORDS

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## Appendix D.1 : Study Two : Exploratory Comments and Emergent Themes

Study 2 - Barbara - Emergent Themes - Word (Product Activation Failed)

Transcript, Exploratory Comments, Emergent Themes & Clustering Themes Study 2 BARBARA

Stage One: Multiple reading of transcripts and making exploratory comments.  
 Stage Two: Transforming notes into emergent themes.  
 Stage Three: Seeking relationships and clustering themes.

| Exploratory Comments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Transcript                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Emergent Themes                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>You did not want to be stuck in the past anymore and you wanted to deal with the pain of your divorce. Letting go of the past. Coaching would help to 'sort yourself out' and look towards the future.</p> <p>Coaching helped you to find your own answers and deal with personal issues. You used to hold yourself back. Why? Coaching helped you to make big changes, to look for opportunities. Strong words: 'put away personal demons.' Grateful for blessings. Chance to help</p> | <p>My own situation to start with. I was still stuck in the past and the pain of the past, particularly my divorce. That was such, that was such a difficult experience for me and it affected me very badly and I think I just wanted to sort myself out and start making plans for my future.</p> <p>What I liked about coaching was ... being guided yourself to find your own answers and deal with your own personal issues. You know, until I became involved in coaching, I realise now, yeah, that I really held myself back. And doing this course and actually training to become a coach, that's when I decided to make big</p> | <p>Letting go of the pain of the past and move towards the future.</p> <p>Deal with personal issues.<br/>Make changes and find opportunities<br/>Put away past demons</p> <p>Gratitude.<br/>Opportunity to help others.</p> |

PAGE 1 OF 6 1328 WORDS

Study 2 - Barbara - Emergent Themes - Word (Product Activation Failed)

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                   |
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| <p>You have to 'compose' yourself ... it is an emotional experience for you.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <p>And when we really get down to that sense of individual choice, personal freedom, sense of possibility, sometime it seems like it's all there, within their grasp</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <p>Emotionally invested in clients</p>                                            |
| <p>So many people to consider ... whom do they have to consider? Do they have to consider family? Society?</p> <p>Individual choice, personal freedom, sense of possibility ... all issues so close to my heart, so important to who I am as a person and as a woman. But all of that is not necessarily possible for your <u>coaches</u>. You say it seems to be "within their grasp and then it can evaporate like smoke". I find this personally upsetting. Why can't they have choice, freedom and possibility?</p> | <p>and then it can evaporate like smoke, and what we discuss, in their culture, can potentially be viewed as controversial and I am genuinely frightened sometimes by the conversations we have, within such a conservative society, but these conversations are necessary and I have to put my fear to one side and trust in my <u>coaches</u>, but yes, it's a real fear, it's a serious fear</p> | <p>Thinking of others</p> <p>Possibilities</p> <p>Are we making things worse?</p> |

PAGE 3 OF 6 1328 WORDS

Study 2 - Beth - Emergent Themes - Word (Product Activation Failed)

Transcript, Exploratory Comments, Emergent Themes & Clustering Themes Study 2 BETH

Stage One : Multiple reading of transcripts and making exploratory comments.  
 Stage Two : Transforming notes into emergent themes.  
 Stage Three : Seeking relationships and clustering themes.

| Exploratory Comments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Transcript                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Emergent Themes                                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Personal demons you needed to put to rest, trying to figure yourself out. You needed to 'bring it all together' which coaching helped you to do.</p> <p>Let things go and forgive others (pain of the past).</p> <p>To make decisions about what you want to feel / life to be. Personal growth. At peace with yourself. Want to give that to others.</p> <p>In a way it <u>seems</u> like an extreme thing, to leave your country to go to the Middle East and the other coaches have done the same. It makes me think that extreme feelings (pain, demons etc.) call for</p> | <p>I was trying to figure myself out for years, you know, put the personal demons to rest, and then I came to coaching at a point where I needed to sort of bring it all together, and coaching helped me to do that, to understand myself better, to let things go, to forgive others, to decide how I want to feel, what I want my life to be, and here in the Middle East, and experiencing this culture, it has been a real time of personal growth to me. I feel so much more at peace with myself and I want others to feel that same sense of peace.</p> | <p>Putting away personal demons of the past.</p> <p>Coaching brings it all together.</p> <p>Letting go of the past.</p> |

PAGE 1 OF 5 1119 WORDS

Study 2 - Beth - Emergent Themes - Word (Product Activation Failed)

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                      |
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| <p>What God wants comes into the coaching process (some students in Study 1 said that also). Helps them accept what they can not have. Can make them let go of a dream. Might not be possible anyway (previous coaches also mentioned this).</p> <p>If parents don't support a dream it will not happen. Strong family influence. Considerate but constraining.</p> | <p>Certainly. Inshallah has a lot to do with it. God willing. If it's in God's plan, what God wants. I find that comes into the coaching process quite a bit. It's one thing having dreams of our own, but if they are not in God's plan, they will not happen. I suppose in a way this helps them to accept what they <u>can not</u> have, but I sometimes have to fight my urge to challenge that, because it can make them let go of their dream too easily. And then sometimes I worry that their dreams might not be possible anyway. You know, a kid who wants to be an artist or an actor ... there is so little chance that their parents would support something like this ... and if their parents don't support it they are not going to do it. I think that they are greatly influenced by their families and consider what they would think before they make any decisions. On the one hand this is lovely and very considerate but on the other, it can be very constraining. So yes, I have had to</p> | <p>God in the coaching process</p> <p>Unfulfilled Dreams</p> <p>Family influence</p> |
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PAGE 4 OF 5 1106 WORDS

Study 2 - Carol - Emergent Themes - Word (Product Activation Failed)

Transcript, Exploratory Comments, Emergent Themes & Clustering Themes Study 2 CAROL

Stage One : Multiple reading of transcripts and making exploratory comments.  
 Stage Two : Transforming notes into emergent themes.  
 Stage Three : Seeking relationships and clustering themes.

| Exploratory Comments                                                                                                                   | Transcript                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Emergent Themes       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Use of the word 'searching' four times. Searching for meaning. Searching to make sense of things. I feel a sense of existential angst. | I was always interested in psychology and therapy, in relation to, in searching for answers and searching for meaning, <u>em</u> , searching for meaning to my own kind of anguish and suffering (laughs). Like everyone else I suppose. You know, searching to make sense of things that had happened in my past, in my childhood and trying to understand. | Searching for meaning |
| Desire to help others.                                                                                                                 | As I began to sort myself out, I realised that so many other people must be in the same boat and I think I wanted to help other people who were also suffering or unhappy or confused.                                                                                                                                                                       | Helping others        |
|                                                                                                                                        | It [coaching] really let me let go of the                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                       |

PAGE 1 OF 6 1338 WORDS

Study 2 - Carol - Emergent Themes - Word (Product Activation Failed)

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                  |
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| understand how personal experience shapes behaviour. It seems that as you were becoming more <u>self aware</u> you were then beginning to better understand others. Link between <u>self awareness</u> and understanding of others. | understand their experiences and how their own eh experiences shaped them and eh shaped their behaviour. That really helped me to let go of the past, and to focus on the present and plan for the future.                                                                                   | <u>Self awareness</u> and understanding others   |
| Again, link between <u>self awareness</u> and understanding others better.                                                                                                                                                          | Coaching is not about dwelling in the past but it does bring about a higher <u>self awareness</u> and also allows us to understand others better, so this naturally helps us to resolve our own past issues.                                                                                 | <u>Self awareness</u> and understanding others   |
| It feels as if there has been a rapid shift from the practical benefits of coaching previously mentioned to a more esoteric, spiritual view of coaching and the sense of possibility and dreams opened up by this.                  | Coaching, it eh, it really brought home, especially the spiritual aspect of wholeness and healing and wellbeing and dreaming and possibilities.                                                                                                                                              | Spirituality                                     |
| You mention twice about how coaching seemed to tie everything together for you and to make sense of everything. It feels that coaching was the bridge that helped you to connect different parts of yourself                        | Here is a natural affinity for me towards that world, and of course having studied healthcare and spirituality and all those things, it all seemed, it all seemed to tie in together. Coaching seemed to bring my healthcare background and also you know my spiritual background as well as | Coaching as the factor that ties things together |

PAGE 2 OF 6 1338 WORDS



Study 2 - Iris - Emergent Themes - Word (Product Activation Failed)

Transcript, Exploratory Comments, Emergent Themes & Clustering Themes Study 2 IRIS

Stage [One](#): Multiple reading of transcripts and making exploratory comments.  
 Stage [Two](#): Transforming notes into emergent themes.  
 Stage [Three](#): Seeking relationships and clustering themes.

| Exploratory Comments                                                                                                                                         | Transcript                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Emergent Themes                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Confused, emotionally volatile, angry. Unable to understand your emotions. Coaching helped you to understand yourself properly, to understand your emotions. | Nothing really bad happened to me growing up. My parents were supporting and loving, especially my father. They weren't strict, so I had nothing much to rebel against. But I just felt so confused all of the time, well from about age 15 until my early 20s. I was really emotionally volatile and felt very angry. And I didn't understand any of this emotion. I started off by reading <a href="#">self help</a> books and they actually did help, but it wasn't until I did a proper coaching course - it was a six month course so quite intensive - that I began to understand myself properly and then everything changed for me and has just continued to improve. I think going through that emotionally turbulent time, | <a href="#">Self awareness</a> |

PAGE 1 OF 8 1070 WORDS

Study 2 - Iris - Emergent Themes - Word (Product Activation Failed)

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                           |
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| Again Trust comes into it. 'Stunned by the trust'. Very strong statement (previous coach mentioned 'blown away'. Different cultures actually was a benefit because you <a href="#">won't</a> be shocked. You mention an honour and a privilege. | I was not expecting this level of trust. In fact, I have been stunned by the trust these amazing people place in me. I thought that the fact we were from different cultures might make them more reticent to share but it has been the opposite. I think that because we are from different cultures, they feel that I won't be shocked by anything they say, so I have found that they invite me into the most personal aspects of their lives and I genuinely find this to be both an honour and a privilege.                                                      | Trust from clients                        |
| Your very first sentence contains the word 'scared'. Again possibility (and possible lack thereof) comes up. Have to consider possible consequences.                                                                                            | I suppose I'm scared in two ways. One thing I'm aware of and sometimes conflicted about is that we are opening up their minds to this sense of 'possibility' but sometimes, in their culture, some things just are not possible or if they are possible, there may be serious consequences. I know that the possibilities are limitless in terms of how they choose to perceive the world and what they choose to think, but I am afraid that this does not always translate into being actually possible within the realms of their families, culture, religion. So, | Coaching is an honour and privilege       |
| Mention of family, culture and religion when it comes to what is possible. False Hope? (previous coach also mentioned                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Possibilities might not be possible       |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Consequences                              |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Influence of family, culture and religion |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Giving false hope                         |

PAGE 3 OF 8 1044 WORDS

Study 2 - Nancy - Emergent Themes - Word (Product Activation Failed)

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Transcript, Exploratory Comments, Emergent Themes & Clustering Themes Study 2 NANCY

Stage One : Multiple reading of transcripts and making exploratory comments.  
 Stage Two : Transforming notes into emergent themes.  
 Stage Three : Seeking relationships and clustering themes.

| Exploratory Comments                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Transcript                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Emergent Themes                                                                              |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>This has been a journey for you mainly about healing your wounds. You were stuck in the past, stuck with the pain. Coaching helped you to deal with that pain and to move forward and also help others. You describe coaching as a gift.</p> | <p>Hmmm...when I look at my life, yeah, I've had this background in education and health but really, ultimately, the journey has been about me, healing my wounds and that is what brought me to coaching. I had tried conventional therapy and it just wasn't working for me, it kept me stuck in the past and dwelling on my problems and pain. But with coaching, even though it didn't focus on my past, the whole process made me stronger, made me, you know, appreciate my strengths and have a more balanced perspective and this actually helped me to deal with the pain of past issues. Once I had done that, I was ready to start on the next journey and give others the</p> | <p>Healing past wounds</p> <p>Coaching helped you move forward</p> <p>Coaching is a gift</p> |

PAGE 1 OF 8 1091 WORDS

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Study 2 - Nancy - Emergent Themes - Word (Product Activation Failed)

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|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>'We have our own wisdom'. A previous coach also spoke about that. The continuous process of spiritual development. Spirituality was also mentioned by a previous coach. Coaching is not superficial, it can be deeply existential. Sense of hope. Answer to questions. 'I feel like my whole life has been preparing me for this'. Powerful statement. A previous coach talked about coaching 'tying' everything together. Some similarity.</p> <p>You mentioned privilege twice (also previous coach mentioned this) and how your clients trust you. You are deeply touched by the trust they give you. You mention trust three times.</p> | <p>We have our own wisdom and drawing from that, you know really embracing possibility, what is possible in terms of our own spiritual development and of course it is a continuous process, but my experience of coaching has aided this process, has helped me to ask and answer some very important questions and then there is just this sense of hopefulness and I feel like me whole life has been preparing me for this.</p> <p><u>1:</u> What has been your experience of coaching in the Middle East?</p> <p>My coachees are incredible, it is like a privilege, you are sharing some of the most intimate moments with them, and they trust you enough to share these moments, it is a real privilege and is very humbling. They have so much to deal with and they do so with such grace and acceptance and resilience but I think what touches me the most is the trust, the trust that they give me, I find that to be of huge significance.</p> | <p>Spirituality</p> <p>Coaching as a calling – whole life preparing you for this</p> <p>Coaching is a privilege</p> <p>Trust from clients</p> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

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## Appendix D.2 : Study Two : Identifying Superordinate Themes and Subordinate Themes

Study Two Interview Transcript Coding - Word (Product Activation Failed)

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**Study Two**

| Superordinate Theme | Subordinate Themes                                                                                         |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The Wounded Healer  | My Personal Journey<br>My Spiritual Journey<br>My Privilege                                                |
| Insha'Allah         | Two Sides of the Same Coin<br>The Influence of Family, Culture & Religion<br>Stigmatisation & Consequences |

I: When I speak with Coaches I am always interested in finding out what motivated you to become a coach ... what brought you to coaching?  
*Oh, well, em I was always interested in psychology and therapy, in relation to, in searching for answers and searching for meaning, em, searching for meaning to*

**Student**  
 Searching for meaning, healing the past, personal journey

PAGE 1 OF 33 7448 WORDS

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Study Two Interview Transcript Coding - Word (Product Activation Failed)

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Those are strong words ... anguish and suffering.

Yeah well, looking back, well it's not an ideal picture and I think I felt quite lost as a child and quite confused and that was scary. I had quite a confusing childhood. My parents lived in two separate cities and from a young age I would fly back and forth to spend time with my Father, because I lived with my Mother, but it was confusing you know, it was like I was living in two different worlds and the relationship

Student  
Pain from childhood, healing the past, personal journey

between my parents was really bad which of course, as a child, I blamed myself for and I felt so guilty when I was with each parent if they asked me anything about the other parent, which of course they did! And that stuff stays with you so I got to

Student  
Childhood guilt, personal development

Student  
Pain of the past, want to let go of it, personal development

PAGE 2 OF 33 7448 WORDS

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What has been your experience of coaching in the Middle East?

It has been a profoundly moving experience and I feel that I have learned so much about myself, about the Middle Eastern culture, about humanity. It has been a gift and my students, I'm actually blown away by what they choose to share with me, it's a privilege. The fact that they place so much trust in me is truly a privilege. I mean, these conversations, well, they can be controversial in any society, but in a society like the Middle East, to be honest, they are possibly quite shocking, not

Student  
Coaching in the Middle East has been a gift and a learning process

Student  
Privilege

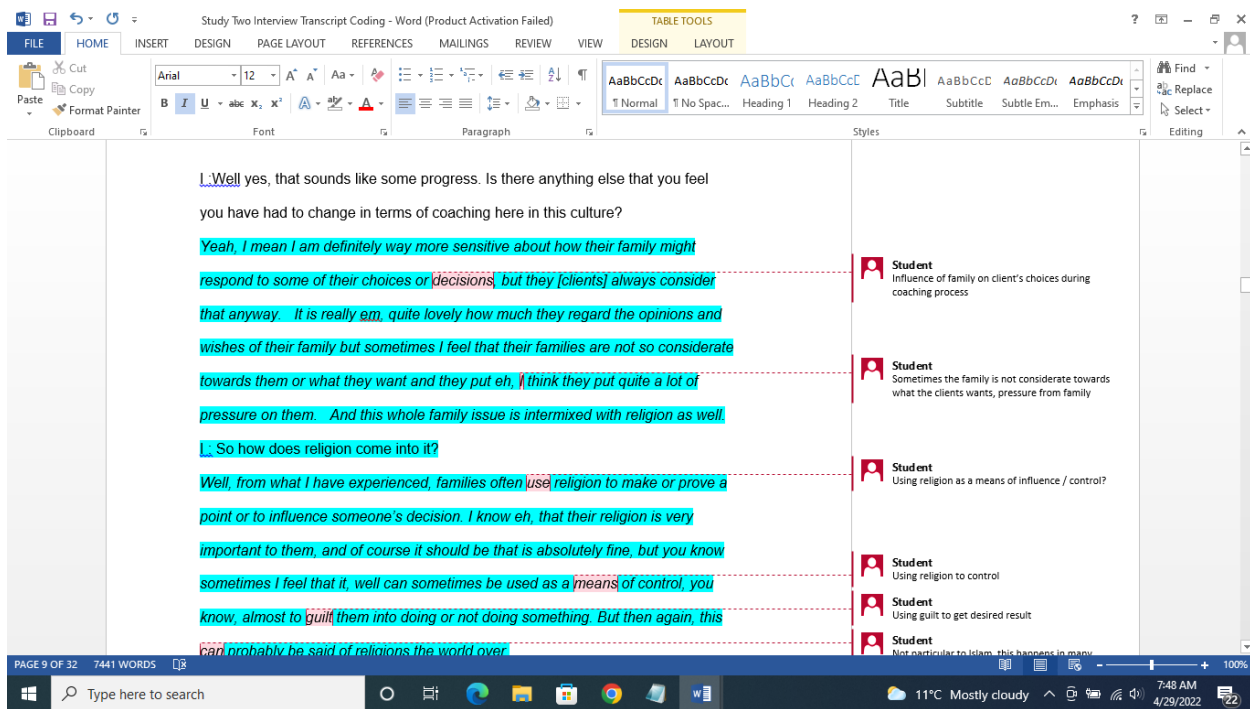
Student  
Coaching is a privilege

that there is anything wrong with them, but the exploration of possibility and the questioning, it is quite a stretch. But the responses I have had are incredible and

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And what do you think makes it evaporate?

I suppose, eh, just that sense of reality, and yeah, realism, I mean, what is realistically possible in terms of their families and their culture. I mean, and I do struggle with this, but sometimes, I am afraid that I am almost allowing them the freedom to explore their dreams, but (long pause)

Student  
Afraid that she is allowing them to dream

But what?

Yeah but what? But what if it's just not going to happen, it won't be allowed to happen

Student  
The dream might not happen, or might not be allowed to happen

Who won't allow it to happen?

Themselves, their families, their society. I mean, I know family is so important to them, it's huge, and they have such regard for their families and parents. And that means that eh, that they sometimes put their dreams away voluntarily, because they don't want to go against the wishes of their families. And yeah, I find that hard

Student  
Not just their family, but society also

Student  
They voluntarily put their dreams away ... almost like a choice between their dreams or their family.

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The other way I feel scared is in terms of what we discuss and how this might be viewed if they tell someone. This is a very conservative culture and I do feel quite insecure in terms of what might happen if a coachee told someone what we discuss. I mean, consequences could be far reaching for themselves but also for their families. This is not society that is comfortable discussing mental health, and I think we have to consider, yeah, really to consider how this could also impact their families, not just themselves if it were to become common knowledge

Student  
Consequences for client and also for the family of the client

Student  
Society is uncomfortable with the topic of mental health

And how do you think this stigma affects people who are struggling with mental health or emotional problems?

Well, firstly I think it stops them actually asking for help. I mean, you know, some of my coachees spent years trying to deal with their problems on their own and it took, yeah, it was a big step for them to eh, to actually reach out. And again eh, I think they're fearful of the impact on their families

Student  
Clients are concerned about effect on family

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## **Appendix E : Pilot Study**

### **Aims of study**

The aim of this study is to explore the impact of participating in a coaching skills elective on third level university students in a Middle Eastern culture.

### **The Study Context**

Undergraduate students at Bahrain Polytechnic University have a range of 'elective' courses to choose from. The Coaching Skills Elective is a six week course which comprises of two classes per week, each class being two hours long. In total, students have 24 contact hours. Students are introduced to a range of coaching topics including values, boundaries and tolerations, self-limiting beliefs, emotional intelligence, listening and questioning skills, goal clarification and motivation, accountability and progress. They learn coaching skills and also engage in peer coaching. Their assessment comprises of a coaching observation and a personal reflection.

### **Method**

#### **Design**

This mixed-method study had two assessments pre- and post – coaching with divided by six weeks.

#### **Participants**

98 third level Bahraini students participated in this study: the experimental group (N=75: 65 females and 10 males; mean age: 19) and the control group (N=23: 18 females and 5 males; mean age: 19).

## **Measures**

Personal and Social dimensions were assessed by a culturally contextualised version of two aspects of the Universal Integrative Framework Questionnaire (Law et al., 2007) which comprised of 39 questions that measured 'Personal Competence' and 27 questions that measured 'Social Competence'. Items were rated on a seven point likert scale.

## **Procedure**

This mixed-method study was conducted in two phases. At Time 1 (T1: pre-intervention), measures were taken of students' perceptions of their development from both the experimental group and the control group. The experimental group subsequently completed a 6 week coaching skills elective designed to improve their intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. At Time 2 (T2: post-intervention) the same measures were taken again. Their developmental scores ( $S = ST2 - ST1$ ) were computed for further statistical analyses.

Following the Coaching Skills Elective, students participated in a voluntary group interview to explore their perception of coaching.



2x2 quasi experimental design (experimental x control groups pre and post comparison) using the Universal Integrative Framework/UIF (Law, et al, 2007) - The UIF is a coaching psychology framework grounded in the psychology of learning. It consists of four dimensions: self, social, cultural and professional. It also integrates a questionnaire to assess individuals' competence for each dimension. This study only focuses on the personal and social dimensions (rephrased as 'Inner World' and 'Outer World' respectively). As this is a cross-cultural application, the UIF questionnaire was modified to fit the local context. To evaluate the impact of coaching from the UIF perspective, the improvement in the students' personal and social competence can be assessed by measuring their UIF scores before and after the coaching programme.

## **Ethics**

The research received full ethical clearance from Bahrain Polytechnic University Research Ethics Committee. Student participation was voluntary.

## **Results**

Analysis - Analyses show that the developmental scores for the experimental group at T2 were higher than the control group, indicating an improvement in their perceived intrapersonal and interpersonal competence.

Research limitations/implications – Future research might examine the impact of participating in a coaching elective on different cultural cohorts.

Practical implications – quantitative and qualitative analyses provided evidence that participating in a coaching skills elective can improve students' intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. Other universities in the region could benefit by introducing the same type of course in their own institutions.

Originality/value – Recent years have seen a growth in Coaching in educational settings. This study provides quantitative and qualitative evidence of the value of coach training, including statistically significant gains on intrapersonal and interpersonal skills.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study provide evidence that a six week Coaching Skills Elective has a positive effect upon students perceived personal and social competence. The quantitative data provided useful information however when analysing the qualitative data, it was clear that for future studies on this topic, a qualitative approach would yield richer data and allow for a more in-depth exploration of student experience of coaching. This led to my future decision to conduct a PhD study on this topic using the qualitative methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

## Appendix F : Ethical Approval Application for Amendment of Thesis Title

