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Who is a coach and who is a coaching psychologist? Professionalising coaching psychology in the United Kingdom

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Abstract

As the British Psychological Society establishes a new Division of Coaching Psychology and routes to chartered membership for coaching psychologists, we revisit the ongoing dialogue into the professionalisation of coaching psychology, with a specific focus on practice in the United Kingdom (U.K.). We attempt to make distinctions between the practice of a coaching psychologist and a professionally qualified coach. First, we offer an overview of the development of coaching psychology over recent years, contemplating the need to regulate it as a profession. Following that, we consider some of the main coaching and coaching psychology definitions in an attempt to delineate the practice of coaching psychologists from that of non-psychologist coaches. Next, we compare approaches to training and some of the differences between coaching and coaching psychology, as well as the need for an ethical framework and supervision for coaching psychologists. Finally, we conclude by offering a final thought about who is a coaching psychologist.

Keywords: coaching, coaching psychology, ethical practice, reflective practice, regulation, accreditation, BPS

Introduction

Coaching and coaching psychology (c-psychology) are relatively young fields. Coaching can be defined as “a Socratic-based, future-focused dialogue between a facilitator (coach) and a participant (coachee/client), where the facilitator uses open questions, summaries and reflections which are aimed at stimulating the self-awareness and personal responsibility of the participant” (Passmore et al., 2019, p. 1), while c-psychology has been defined as a practice of “enhancing well-being and performance in personal life and work domains underpinned by models of coaching grounded in established adult learning or psychological approaches” (Whybrow & Palmer, 2019, p. 8).

We can trace origins of the *psychology* of coaching back to Abraham Maslow’s and Carl Rogers’ contributions to humanistic psychology in the 1960s (Grant, 2006) and further still to the 1920s if we consider the field of sports coaching, with the work of Coleman Griffith and the publication of ‘The Psychology of Coaching: A Study of Coaching Methods from the Point of View of Psychology’ (Griffith, 1926). However, the formal emergence of c-psychology as a subdomain of psychology arguably started many years later with the creation of the Coaching Psychology Unit at the University of Sydney in 2000 (Palmer & Whybrow, 2006), and the first c-psychology interest groups in psychological societies in 2002 (the Interest Group in Coaching Psychology, IGCP - Australian Psychological Society, APS) and 2004 (Special Group in Coaching Psychology, SGCP - British Psychological Society, BPS).

Over recent years, c-psychology has rapidly developed and strengthened. The development and growing interest in c-psychology can be seen in the increase of c-

psychology interest groups around the globe to 21 in 2018 (Whybrow & Palmer, 2019) including Ireland, Sweden, Israel, Denmark, Hungary, New Zealand, South Africa, Ireland, Spain, Serbia, Italy and Switzerland. Notably, however, there is an absence of a c-psychology specific interest group with the American Psychological Association (APA), as one of the most influential psychological bodies in the world. Nevertheless, the Society of Consulting Psychology (Division 13 of the APA) found a home for c-psychology within this division and formed an alliance with the International Society for Coaching Psychology (Psychology International, 2012). In 2022, we also saw the emergence of a c-psychology interest group within a non-psychology focused professional coaching body - the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC).

The offer of c-psychology degrees in universities further reflects the growth of c-psychology. For example, in the United Kingdom (U.K.), courses start at the level of undergraduate and postgraduate courses are offered by some of the leading universities with some institutions offering doctoral level programmes. These developments mirror interest in the field and begin to address the growing call for the professionalisation of c-psychology as an academic and evidence-based profession (Palmer & Whybrow, 2006; Grant, 2006, 2011a; Gray, 2011; Fillery-Travis & Collins, 2016, Lane et al., 2018).

On 1st November, 2021, The British Psychological Society (BPS), the professional body for psychologists in the U.K. incorporated by [Royal Charter](#) – “a prestigious way of acquiring legal personality [reflecting] the high status of that body” (*Royal Charters*, n.d.) - established new routes to chartered membership (a status awarded to members who can demonstrate a required level of professional competency) through c-psychology. This marks an important phase of development for coaching as a “profession”, which we define further below. We believe this is an ideal moment to review the wide spectrum of practice and revisit conversations about the role of a coaching psychologist (c-psychologist) vis-a-vis other coaching practitioners. This article will therefore be of interest to anyone seeking to explore the difference between a coach and c-psychologist.

This paper focuses on implications for practice in the U.K, where standards for practising and regulating psychology vary from other regions. While the title of “psychologist” is protected by law against misuse by non-qualified persons (“protected title”) in most countries including the United States (U.S.), Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Greece, Finland and Norway, presently, anyone can claim to be a “coaching psychologist” in the U.K. Both the titles “psychologist” and “coaching psychologist” are not legally protected titles. Despite these differences, given the U.K’s influence on international policy and practice (Prime Minister, 2021), other countries will likely observe with keen interest what professionalisation of c-psychologists means for the coaching industry more broadly.

This paper addresses several different topics: first, we offer an overview of the development of c-psychology as a profession over the years. We consider some of the main coaching and c-psychology definitions to delineate the practice of c-psychologists from that of non-psychologist coaches. Next, we compare approaches to training and some of the differences between coaching and c-psychology in the U.K. Finally, we discuss and offer some suggestions to enhance the professionalisation of c-psychology and a final thought about who is a c-psychologist.

The development of Coaching Psychology

Sir John Whitmore (2007) expressed his belief that coaching methodologies are ideal for creating social change. This belief has been mirrored by respondents (coaches) of the International Coach Federation (ICF) Global Survey (2016) who identified that their shared underlying purpose was to improve lives. This aspiration is supported by meta-analyses into the efficacy of coaching for improving wellbeing, relationships and performance-related outcomes (e.g. Jones et al., 2016; Sonesh et al., 2015; Theeboom et al., 2014). Given the potential role that coaching can play in improving lives and society as a whole, it is arguably important to move the coaching industry towards a more formalised “profession”, defined below. Recent evidence suggests that there can also be detrimental outcomes to coaching, minimised by practices such as supervision (Schermuly & Graßmann, 2019). Establishing coaching as a profession therefore, should see clearly defined standards and frameworks to support evidence-based coaching practice (as is expected of chartered psychologists), thus minimising the potential for risk or harm from unregulated and unfounded practice.

A “profession” is characterised by having formal authorities that regulate and establish standards of education, training, professional and ethical practice - resulting in barriers to entry and sanctions for poor practice (Lane et al., 2018; Gray, 2011). Another key component of a profession is specialised knowledge, grounded in science (Hodson & Sullivan, 2012; Grant & Cavanagh, 2004). The work to establish a common body of knowledge grounded in evidence and empirically tested knowledge was initiated by coaching pioneer, the late Professor Anthony Grant in his landmark dissertation; “Towards a Psychology of Coaching” (2001). This formed the foundation of an argument to “host” coaching as a profession within the field of psychology, which already had the systems and framework in place to support standards of entry to a “profession” (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004).

It was correspondence between Professor Anthony Grant (based in Australia) and another coaching pioneer, Professor Stephen Palmer (based in the U.K.) at the start of the millennium that triggered the emergence of a movement to professionalise c-psychology as a specialist field within psychology (Palmer and Whybrow, 2006). The formation of c-psychology professional interest groups such as the SGCP (BPS) and the IGCP (APS), and associated publications and conferences supported discussions relating to both the aspirations and challenges of the coaching industry. When the SGCP was first formed, the purpose of c-psychology was defined as “enhancing performance in work and personal life domains” (Palmer and Whybrow, 2006, p.8). Grant (2006, p.16) saw it as a way to “make psychology more accessible and attractive to the public”, counteracting the prominence of unfounded, exaggerated claims and methods being promoted by “gurus” or unregulated life coaching organisations in the self-help industry at the time (Grant & O’Hara, 2006; Grant & Cavanagh, 2007). Since then, there have been many attempts to differentiate coaching and c-psychology, and the challenge of how to differentiate between non-psychologist coaches and c-psychologists noted (e.g. Grant, 2006, 2007, 2011a, 2011b).

The BPS acted as the statutory professional regulator (a professional regulatory body where professionals must register to practice by law) for psychologists in the U.K. until 2009, when this role was formally assumed by The Health and Care

Professions Council (HCPC). The HCPC only protects seven specific psychologist titles deemed to be “health and care” roles: clinical psychologist, forensic psychologist, health psychologist, counselling psychologist, sport and exercise psychologist, educational psychologist, and occupational psychologist. Two generic titles are also protected; practitioner psychologist and registered psychologist. It appears unlikely that U.K. legislation will be expanded to include coaching psychologist, or any new titles in the near future, therefore c-psychology finds itself alongside the field of neuropsychology, and academics, researchers and teachers in psychology who also have formal divisions (defined as a group focused on furthering training and practice within a specific field of psychology to help develop psychology as a profession and body of knowledge) within the BPS, but are not formally recognised as professions that need to be legally regulated by the HCPC. Psychology, as any field of science, is continually evolving although the regulating bodies often grounded in bureaucratic processes take time to catch up and acknowledge new domains as the science becomes more established. However, HCPC is not entirely independent of the BPS and does rely on BPS accredited qualifications as a U.K. standard for entry into the roles regulated. It could be expected, given the high status of the BPS and close partnership with the HCPC, that the use of the title “coaching psychologist” is less likely to be misused within the U.K. While the newly formed Division of Coaching Psychology (DoCP) under the BPS welcomes international members, full chartered membership attracts a larger portion of U.K. trained members due to qualifying entry requirements relying on BPS accredited academic courses that are largely U.K. based. Individuals who have qualifications that are not BPS accredited can apply to have their qualifications formally recognised by the BPS, should they wish to pursue full membership with the Society.

Beyond this, the role of “coach” is not formally state sanctioned or legally regulated in any regions across the globe, and the title does not overlap with any legally regulated professions, leaving members of the public with no confusion as to state-sanctioned standards of practice as there might be with use of the title “psychologist”, particularly within the U.K. Yet, there is broad recognition that the coaching industry benefits from regulation, demonstrated by the establishment of representative bodies in coaching such as the International Coaching Federation (ICF; established 1995), Worldwide Association of Business Coaches (WABC; established 1997), the Association for Coaching (AC; established 2002), European Coaching and Mentoring Council (EMCC; established 2002), International Association of Coaching (IAC; established 2003), Association for Professional Executive Coaching & Supervision (APECS; established 2004), and more recently, the establishment of a professional association dedicated to coach supervisors – Association of Coaching Supervisors (AoCS; established 2021). It is worth noting there are many other national associations representing coaching professionals worldwide. For qualified psychologists who coach, the International Society for Coaching Psychologists (ISCP; established 2011) is a professional body that has managed membership through affiliations (such as the aforementioned with the APA Consulting Psychology division) and registration with psychology professional bodies around the world. These professional bodies do set and promote global standards of professional and ethical coaching practice. The coaching industry, however, is largely self-regulated, and membership of these professional bodies is voluntary. Indeed, the top concern for the coaching industry highlighted by coach practitioners and managers who coach

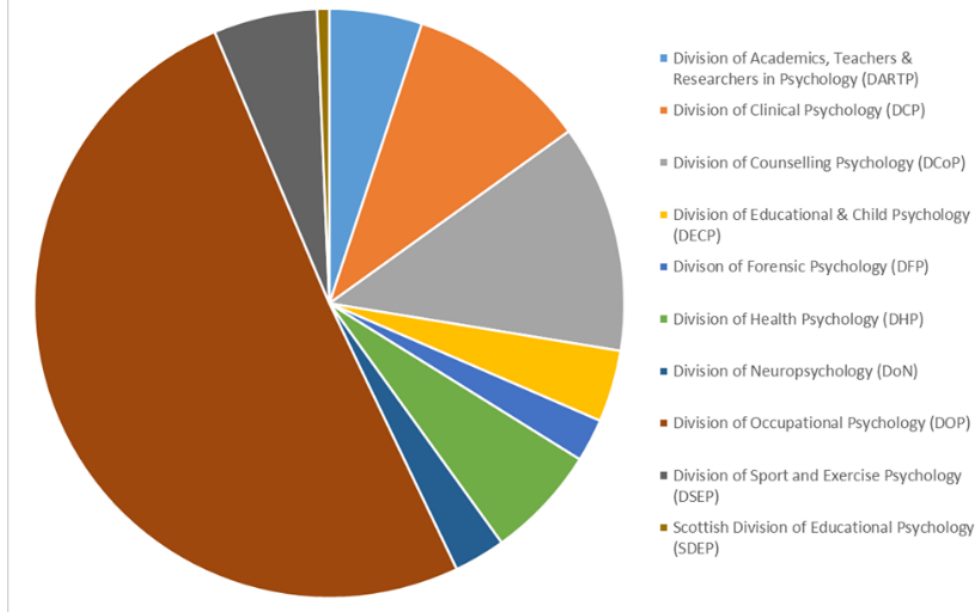
(44% and 45% respectively) in the ICF Global Survey (2016) is that of untrained individuals practising as coaches.

Mirroring this, there is also little guidance on managing legal risks as a professional coach. Grant (2006) highlighted the lack of legal cases presenting in the coaching field and suggests this could reflect that there aren't any issues, or that there is no official governing body for members of the public to complain to. As we enter into a new realm of professionalising c-psychology, there is arguably a need to discuss and define legal definitions which currently conflate coaching with training (Passmore and Lai, 2019), as well as explore the most common risks a c-psychologist might face. Montemarano (2020), a legal professional, emphasises the most common risks to life and work coaches centre around unclear client expectations of what coaching is and isn't, creating a situation that gives the coach potential to abuse the trust of the client, and operating outside the realms of one's own competence and knowledge (including psychology and law). Certainly, the risk of potential harm to clients arising from the boundary issues of coaching with therapy, combined with the "unconscious incompetence" of well-meaning coaches without psychology qualifications who may be unknowingly attempting to support their coachees with mental health issues, is a problem that should still be high on the agenda according to Bachkirova and Baker (2018). This challenge persists despite some effort by professional coaching bodies such as the ICF, to support coaches in managing this boundary (e.g. Hullinger & DiGirolamo, 2018).

In the early years, the proportion of the professional coaching population that was made up of people with a background in psychology was low at 20% (Grant and Zackon, 2004; Spence et al. 2006). Coaches came from a range of professional backgrounds including consultants, managers, executives, teachers and salespeople (Grant and Zackon, 2004). We are unaware of recent data that reveals the portion of psychologists that make up the professional coaching community. However, data from the BPS Division of Coaching Psychology (DoCP) can provide us with some insight. As of the 17th March 2021, the SGCP (now DoCP) had just under 2,500 members. Data from the DoCP reveals the diversity of psychology specialisms who incorporate coaching into their practice (see figure 1.). The majority of members come from the occupational psychology domain, followed by counselling psychology, clinical psychology, sports psychology, health psychology and academics, teachers and researchers in psychology (BPS, 2021). The large percentage of overlap with occupational psychology mirrors the increased number of professional coaches who work with leaders and businesses (65%; ICF, 2020) but there is an increasing representation of coaches across other psychological disciplines.

Figure 1. Membership of SGCP – BPS, March 2021

Figure 1: Membership of Special Group Coaching Psychology - British Psychological Society, March 2021



What is the distinction between Coaching and Coaching Psychology?

Discussions on how to define “coaching psychology” as distinct from “coaching” are ongoing (Passmore and Lai, 2019; Passmore, Stopforth & Lai 2018).

One of the most referenced coaching definitions is Whitmore’s (1992) “[coaching is] unlocking a person’s potential to maximise their performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them – a facilitation approach” (p. 3). As in many other coaching definitions, there is no reference to psychology.

In a recent definition, Moral (as cited in Passmore & Lai, 2019) describes c-psychology as “a way of doing coaching which uses and combines all the theoretical and technical resources of psychology in intrapersonal, interpersonal and systemic areas of knowledge” (p. 14).

On the surface, it appears that a majority of coaches, whether they have a psychology background or not, draw upon and apply psychological models and concepts in their practice (Bono et al., 2009; Jenkins, Passmore, Palmer & Short, 2012; Passmore, Brown & Csigas, 2017) in addition to their own professional domain experience and expertise (Grant, 2011b). This in large part, is attributed to coach training institutes embracing evidence-based approaches (Passmore et al., 2018). Nevertheless, it is argued in many cases that the introduction to these approaches remains formulaic, with a lack of a systematic and critical application and development of psychological knowledge (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007; Bachkirova & Lawton Smith, 2015; Bachkirova et al., 2017).

There is currently limited empirical evidence to delineate the psychology, practice and outcomes of coaches who are not psychologists from that of c-psychologists. In this paper, we define c-psychologists as coaches who have an academic degree and/or subsequent postgraduate qualifications in psychology (or who

can demonstrate the equivalent in the absence of formal qualifications), and are formally affiliated with a professional psychology body or association to maintain ongoing development and standards of practice. The limited research that has been completed in this area suggests that having an academic background in psychology relates positively to perceived credibility as a coach and coaching effectiveness (Bozer et al., 2014) and supports the development of essential psychological skills and core coach attributes including the ability to rigorously assess and evaluate their practice (Lai & McDowall, 2014).

It has been argued that differences in behaviour between psychologists and non-psychologist coaches cannot be directly observed in the coaching room, and that the difference may lie in psychologists simply being more capable of explaining underlying theories to their approach to coaching (Passmore, 2009a). Yet evidence suggests there are further differences here, for example, in how c-psychologists consider and process information about the client (Bono et al., 2009; Yanchus et al., 2020) and in their coaching focus (e.g. greater focus on goals that support behavioural change; Bono et al., 2009). We argue further that the difference may also lie in how coaches and c-psychologists inform their practice – whether or not they apply a methodological, critical analysis of appropriate psychological literature that forms an evidence base to guide an appropriate coaching approach that suits the context, as well as how this relates to the application of ethical standards. Coaching research to date has only focused on *whether* coaching works, rather than *how* coaching works (Theeboom, 2016). Further research into this might reveal the role played by the critical application of academic theories, concepts and/or methodological approaches in coaching; a practice that is expected of c-psychologists.

It is worth noting that studies exploring the application of psychology in coaching practice rely upon self-reports from coaches and do not go into depth on how psychology models or knowledge are being applied (e.g. Bono et al., 2009; Jenkins, Passmore, Palmer & Short, 2012). Studies did not explore or compare the psychological experiences of coaches and c-psychologists, nor the cognitive processes of a non-psychologist coach versus a c-psychologist during coaching. One qualitative study by Yanchus et al. (2020), explored the experiences of how clinical and counselling psychologists coach executive clients. The study supports the likely differences here, for example in the way that data is gathered, synthesised and interpreted:

Probably the place I feel the most like a clinical psychologist is that upfront point of gathering the behavioral history, the professional history, the personal history, looking at the assessments in front of me and really doing that synthesis in my mind—drawing those points of hypothesis or conclusion and dialoguing with the client around that to find out how on point those interpretations are and if, then, if they are and even if they are not, what do we with these points of guidance for us in terms of where the goal setting and the coaching goes from there. (p.5)

Another participant described being able to coach the “whole person” and not just the presenting issue:

I think this is where I have huge value for my clients because I see in the ICF coach training, coaches are being trained to solve the problem of the day, or whatever—but you have to coach the whole person and nobody knows how that works. The whole person is the anxious leader who gets a panic attack, or the

whole person who is struggling with self-confidence b/c always bullied as a kid.
How can I be successful as coach if I don't incorporate that?" (p.4)

Yanchus et al. (2020) suggest it is helpful to have training in organisational development and leadership structures in order to understand and appreciate the systemic factors that impact the coachee in the context of executive coaching, although it was concluded that experiential learning may be adequate as preparation here. We call for further research that explores the phenomenon of coaching from the perspective of c-psychologists and non-psychologist coaches to understand more, the similarities and differences so that this dialogue can continue.

More broadly, coaching also relies upon theories from disciplines other than psychology; for example, education and management (Passmore and Lai, 2019). In what cases then, should a coach be referred to as a c-psychologist rather than a coach? And how do we know if psychology is the appropriate "home" for coaching if other theories and disciplines are also relevant in the practice of coaching?

Results of an integrated review (Lai & Palmer, 2019) and meta-analysis (Wang et al., 2021) affirmed the importance of psychological approaches in coaching. Lai and Palmer (2019) determined that psychotherapeutic frameworks significantly contribute towards effective coaching outcomes such as the working alliance, organisational commitment, wellbeing & leadership behaviours; and that an understanding of psychological theories underpins several interpersonal skills deemed essential for coaching (for example, motivating and supporting the coachee emotionally). This supports the claim that the field of psychology could be an appropriate professional "home" for coaching.

Wang et al.'s (2021) meta-analytic review on the effectiveness of psychological approaches supported the positive impact on coaching outcomes consistent with Lai and Palmer's (2019) conclusion. Their view is that while coaches would benefit from a sound understanding of psychological theories and principles in cognitive-behavioural science (alongside an appreciation of context), that a degree in psychology is not essential for all coaches. In addition to more rigorous coaching research, it is suggested that further research comparing for example, psychological coaching approaches with those of other disciplines (e.g. management, education) might reveal more about the extent to which psychology is relevant to coaching over other theories or frameworks.

Whilst further research is clearly needed in this area, we emphasise that coaching involves the coach being in close psychological contact with the coachee. It could be argued that what distinguishes a c-psychologist from other coaching practitioners involves their practice being predicated on 'the scientific study and application of behaviour, cognition and emotion' to support a coaching alliance based on integrity, respect and trust in identifying and facilitating the coachee's goals (BPS, 2008). Training in psychology prepares coaches for this interaction, and provides legal, ethical and professional guidelines for practice. Being mindful of the coachee's mental health, and how that might impact the coaching process, but also understanding what it means to 'be human' can all help to facilitate coaching practice. The study of psychology at an appropriate level helps us to understand how human-beings think, feel and behave, how they process information, how their social and physical

environments impact on them, and how the brain works. Arguably, c-psychologists hold this information, build and test hypotheses and explore these with their clients during a coaching conversation. The extent to which this focus is mirrored by non-psychology coach training providers and regulators is an area worth investigating as we begin to consider further below.

Training

Training is perhaps one of the main differences between coaching and c-psychology. C-psychology is mainly taught in postgraduate courses at universities. Although being a psychologist is not a prerequisite, programmes are evidence-based and include a range of psychological theories underpinning coaching. However, the question remains whether there is enough psychological content compared to what a student would learn in a BSc Psychology or a psychology conversion course (a one year course that is BPS accredited, qualifying individuals for GBC; Graduate Basis for Chartered membership of the BPS).

Coaching pioneer, Professor Anthony Grant (2011a) questions whether the study of a postgraduate degree in c-psychology should be restricted to those who hold an undergraduate degree in psychology. He argued that such programmes “should be open to all who have the ability, attributes and intellect to complete such studies successfully” (p. 86). Although the discussion remains open, the newly formed DoCP within the BPS and the level 7 (up to Master’s level) standards to accredit postgraduate c-psychology programmes will set new directions. In fact, the selection and entry requirements specified in those standards (BPS, 2022) indicate that although the BPS normally expects entrants to accredited Master’s programmes to be eligible for GBC, the universities may have different entry criteria if there is a clear rationale for this, and guarantees that the students will be supported to meet the standards.

While this applies for c-psychology, as mentioned, coaching is a non-regulated area of practice in the U.K. and most coaches are trained in non-evidence-based short courses. According to the ICF Global Report (2016), among coaches who reported receiving coaching specific training (81% of the sample), only 42% had completed courses with more than 200 hours (to mirror the hours of university qualifications). 52% had completed courses comprising between 60 and 199 hours and 6% courses with less than 59 hours of training. Some of the main professional bodies accept hours within the lower bracket for accreditation at a foundation level, for example, ICF, EMCC and the Association for Coaching require between 20 and 60 hours of training to get an accreditation as a coach at a foundation level, and between 40 and 150 for the practitioner level (see Association for Coaching, ICF and EMCC, n.d.). The difference between professional bodies is notable; the master practitioner level at the Association for Coaching requires 80 hours of training, ICF 200 hours and EMCC 1800 hours.

In addition to hours of training, there is a focus on hours of practice in order to gain status as an accredited coach with a professional coaching body. It is argued by coaching scholars that coaching training and hours alone will not equate to coaching mastery, and that time spent reflecting on practice and receiving supervision is critical to coach maturity and development (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2011; Bachkirova & Lawton-Smith, 2015; Bachkirova et al., 2017). Indeed, the BPS Coaching Psychology

Standards (2022) places greater emphasis on hours spent across a wider breadth of activities (including time spent preparing and researching) than applied client work.

It is also worth mentioning that not all trainees will aim to become full-time professional coaches. Some will come to training only to add coaching skills to their portfolio of professional training or use those skills to underpin their professional practice. These and other coaches may not have the time or aspiration to complete a psychology degree. However, they will still benefit from learning the psychology of coaching, and it is probably time to increase the offer of courses that fill this gap as well as consider how this level of interest intersects with the professionalisation of c-psychology.

Enhancing professionalisation of coaching psychologists: Ethics

An ethical framework should underpin all aspects of a c-psychologist's practice (BPS, 2018; 2022). Ethics is defined broadly as 'a system of moral principles that affect the way in which people make decisions and lead their lives'. In professional contexts ethics focuses on 'conduct and moral decisions within the context of particular relationships in the workplace (Townsend, 2011, p. 141). Support provided by the BPS for ethical practice leverages the benefit of many years of experience in 'helping conversations' and psychological practice, in addition to a coaching specific focus offered by the DoCP. Arguably, professional coaching bodies mirror, to a degree, this ethical accountability with published Codes of Ethics. However, the key factor is an inability to apply formal (government-sanctioned) penalties for breach of practice. Equally, while the BPS "acts as the representative body for psychology and psychologists in the UK, and is responsible for the promotion of excellence and ethical practice in the science, education, and application of the discipline" holding credence with the U.K. government, until c-psychology is formally regulated by the HCPC in the U.K., it could be argued that this challenge also remains with the practice of c-psychologists.

Currently, it is expected that c-psychologists regulate their practice by adhering to the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (2018) and Practice Guidelines (2017). The Code of Ethics is based on four ethical principles, (i) respect; (ii) competence; (iii) responsibility; and (iv) integrity. When applied to a c-psychologist's practice, this framework necessitates support in monitoring and developing ethical decision-making through education, training and supervision. While the BPS Code of Ethics and Practice will appropriately guide a c-psychologist's practice, it may not be so helpful where boundaries become more 'blurred'. For example, knowing when to break client confidentiality is identified by Passmore (2009b) as one of four common ethical principles which pose unique ethical challenges for c-psychologists. The others concern, 'utility' or 'beneficence' (i.e. where the needs of the coachee are given primacy); 'autonomy' (i.e. where coachee's self-determination is supported); and 'avoiding harm' or non-maleficence (e.g. assessments and interventions by coaches working outside of their competency which may exacerbate coachee mental health issues).

Given the complex and unique ethical dilemmas facing c-psychologists, this section argues that an ethical framework for the development and fostering of 'ethical maturity' (Carroll & Shaw, 2013) in coach practitioners is required. The BPS and

DoCP has offered a range of support frameworks to foster ethical maturity; including access to peer practice groups, case studies presenting ethical challenges and guidelines for supervision. Additionally, Passmore and Turner (2018) have proposed the APPEAR model for ethical decision making based on six stages: (i) raising awareness and ethical sensitivity; (ii) enhancing reflection on practice; (iii) identifying possible solution options; (iv) extending the field through the lens of organisational and legal frameworks; (v) acting on reflections and taking ethical action; and (vi) reflecting on learning to enhance ethical competency. Recent research has indicated that more professional development is required for enhancing ethical maturity among coaches and c-psychologists, who routinely face highly complex ethical decision making in their practice (Turner & Passmore, 2018b).

Supervision

A key aspect of coaching practice that is believed to support the development of ethical maturity is the provision of coaching supervision. Various professional bodies for coaching attest to the importance of coaching supervision. For example, the ICF supports supervision as a professional development opportunity whereas other professional bodies specify supervision as a requirement to become accredited (e.g. BPS, AC, EMCC) to ensure quality of practice (Tkach & DiGirolamo, 2017).

Defining coaching supervision is still a work in progress, as a clear definition of coaching has not yet been established (Kauffman & Bachkirova; 2009; Bachkirova et al; 2020). Various definitions of coaching supervision exist in the literature and focus upon aspects such as its process, stakeholders, and purpose (e.g. Hodge, 2016; Hawkins & Smith, 2013; Hay, 2007; Cochrane & Newton, 2017).

As the professional body for Psychologists in the U.K., the BPS Practice Guidelines (2017) states that supervision is considered an essential part of good practice as a Psychologist, and thus it is no surprise that models of supervision applied in counselling and psychotherapy over the years have had a significant influence on supervision practice in c-psychology (Tkach & DiGirolamo, 2017). Yet, it is acknowledged that coaching and therapy practice differs (Bluckert, 2005), particularly with the presence of tertiary stakeholders (such as an organisation), making salient systematic models of supervision over psychological models (e.g. Hawkins & Shohet, 2012, p.85). Nevertheless, there is much to be learned from psychologists about the benefits of practising supervision; including critical time for reflection, protection of clients, learning from peers and keeping up-to-date with knowledge (Lane & Corrie, 2006b); as well as an opportunity for an objective voice and a focus on ethics and accountability (Carroll, 2007). It could also be considered a prime space for critical thinking and reflexivity about one's own practice, essential for coach maturity and development (Bachkirova et al., 2017) and an expected standard for c-psychologists (BPS, 2022).

It is important to recognise that whilst the need for coaching supervision is not in question, the academically rigorous, fully referenced and evidence-based approaches to this practice are currently being debated and are still forthcoming. This has not prevented the emergence of post-graduate coaching supervision qualifications (up to Level 7) offered by various educational establishments in very recent years. Yet the BPS informs that the form, purpose and amount of supervision varies depending upon

the sub-disciplines of psychology and no definitive amount of supervision for c-psychologists is specified at present. We expect the focus by c-psychologists on the critical application of evidence-based theories and methods for practice will lead to increased scrutiny and investigation into developing and establishing standards for coaching supervision into the future.

Professionalising Coaching Psychology

We acknowledge that psychology is one of several disciplines (including management and adult learning) that contributes to coaching as a practice. There is insufficient evidence to claim that psychology alone accounts for the effectiveness of coaching, however, evidence supports that psychological theories and models have a meaningful impact on coaching outcomes (Wang et al., 2021, Palmer and Lai, 2019), that effective coach attributes mirror those of psychologists (Lai & McDowall, 2014) and that having a psychology background and qualifications enhances the perceived credibility and effectiveness of coaches (Bozer et al., 2014).

Professionalising the role of “coaching psychologist” is thus a major step forward towards establishing a coaching practice underpinned by psychological knowledge, and to establish standards for a formal profession— particularly within the psychological domain. Although there is no doubt that a level of c-psychology training is important for effective coaching practice, we do not believe there is a need for all coaches to become chartered c-psychologists in order to practise or call themselves a coach. Indeed, ensuring diversity of coaches with differing expertise and backgrounds allows for opportunities to engage in richer dialogue and learn from each other. The question remains to be further examined empirically, what is the key difference between a c-psychologist and a non-psychologist coach and how much psychological knowledge and expertise is sufficient to practise as a professionally trained coach?

We posit that c-psychologists are uniquely placed to support coaches to enhance their knowledge and skill in understanding and applying psychological concepts and theories to their practice. One of the standards set by the BPS involves designing and implementing high-quality coaching research (completed to the standard of peer-reviewed, published research). Therefore, a coach, particularly one that meets this standard, has the capacity to critically evaluate and apply academic research to their practice as well as create new psychological insight (Fillery-Travis & Corrie, 2019; Lane & Corrie, 2006a). It is argued whether all coaching practitioners should be able to critically interpret and apply c-psychology (and psychology) research (Lane & Corrie, 2006a), however, how that skill can be attained and to what level this should be mastered by a coach is an appropriate question to explore, and we invite ongoing dialogue here in the context of the new c-psychology standards set by the BPS.

While we can't say what kinds of roles a c-psychologist might be better qualified for than a professionally accredited coach, we envisage there will be roles that involve design and scientific evaluation, and complex situations that demand an enhanced, critical understanding of the psychology of coaching. Arguably, there is a role for c-psychologists who complete research (in addition to, or even rather than practising coaching) to investigate and empirically define recommendations for practice in areas such as coaching supervision, ethical decision-making, and the critical evaluation and application of psychological and behavioural science to coaching practice.

Who can call themselves a coaching psychologist?

As noted earlier, the BPS cannot state-sanction or legally protect the use of titles. Currently, the HCPC formally regulates the use of titles related to practising as a psychologist. The BPS encourages all professionals and particularly its members, to consider ethical use of titles however, and reserves the right to terminate membership under breach of conduct. Under the BPS Code of Ethics, members of the BPS agree not to operate in areas of practice that they are not qualified in, nor to mislead others on their level of competence in an area (note these are principles that are legally enforceable outside of the BPS under [The Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008](#)). For example, a chartered psychologist cannot call themselves an occupational psychologist unless they demonstrate that they meet the standards set by the HCPC, aligned with the title. There is much work involved in this process due to the rigorous and high quality standards in place to protect consumers of the service. It is incumbent then upon every individual to educate themselves on what use of a title implies and to avoid misrepresentation, to comply with fair marketing practices.

The BPS assert it is their intention to be as inclusive as possible in recognising coaches who may not have completed a formal c-psychology qualification, but who have 3 years training and experience in c-psychology and can demonstrate that they meet the BPS' Standards in c-psychology (2022), through their professional recognition route. It is worth noting however, that the title of "chartered psychologist" brings with it clear expectations and signals a standard to members of the public in the U.K. which means that the process will require effort and commitment. There is an expectation that a c-psychologist will have completed formal studies (or demonstrate the equivalent knowledge and understanding), from level 6 in psychology (undergraduate level) through to level 7 and 8 in c-psychology (Master's and PhD level). Not all level 6, 7 or 8 qualifications meet BPS standards and hence there is a requirement to complete a BPS accredited course (or psychology conversion course that meets BPS standards), or demonstrate in another way that one meets the standards the BPS sets. Indeed, many management or education specialists have been able to do exactly that to attain Level 6 recognition (also known as Graduate Basis for Chartered membership or GBC) with the BPS. In addition to this, standards demand an ability to scientifically evaluate and apply psychology knowledge and not only to declare experience of coaching hours and meeting the competencies set by other coaching bodies whose criteria have not been developed with the standards of a psychologist in mind.

Ultimately, this means it won't be for every coach to pursue chartered membership with the BPS. For those who wish to focus on practising as a c-psychologist, with a specialised understanding of how to develop and apply psychology and c-psychology knowledge to coaching practice, then this would be an ideal and appropriate qualification to pursue.

Finally, it is important to state that there is no implication or assertion that a chartered c-psychologist is superior to, for example, a master certified coach with the ICF, rather these titles bear different standards of knowledge and experience, and each will merit specific (and most likely overlapping) roles within the coaching market – something that is yet to be determined and will most likely be a continued topic of conversation between the BPS and other accrediting bodies in the coaching industry.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have summarised past dialogues and discussed the current and ongoing professionalisation of c-psychology, explored through the lens of coaches and c-psychologists in the U.K. which comes at a time when the BPS has formally established a Division of Coaching Psychology and formalised pathways towards becoming a chartered c-psychologist. We have explored what it means to be a c-psychologist, and the required training, supervision and ethical frameworks that will be needed to support the profession. There is still much work to be completed, and many discussions to engage in to further define, develop and delineate the field of c-psychology as a formal area of practice within the broader field of coaching. We invite responses and thoughts from leaders, researchers and practitioners in the coaching field to continue the dialogue in the context of the newly established professional pathway for c-psychologists in the U.K.

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