

This is a pre-publication version of the following article:

Gourov, D., & Lomas, T. (2019). 'It's about wholeness. I love my awesomeness and I love my flawsomeness': An IPA analysis of coaching with the shadow in mind. *The Coaching Psychologist*, 15(2), xx-xx.

'It's about wholeness. I love my awesomeness and I love my flawsomeness': An IPA analysis of coaching with the shadow in mind.

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Difficult emotions and cognitive states are recognised in second wave positive psychology as being a gold mine for personal growth. The growing body of knowledge in positive psychology gives coaching psychologists a perimeter to work with, whilst archetypal shadow analysis, rooted in Jung's teachings, gives depth and insight. While definitions of coaching vary considerably, it can be argued to function as shining a light onto things that are hidden for the client, thereby bringing wholeness and clarity. Interpretive phenomenological analysis was used to analyse coaching with the shadow in mind, where this work became defined as looking at parts that are hidden, suppressed, unowned and unacknowledged by us and others. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four professional coaches. Three higher order themes were identified: the coach's personal journey through the shadow, what a shadow coach does and the client's journey into the shadow. These themes may generate insight into this paradigm of coaching for the first time and is an important step in the ongoing integration of second wave positive psychology and coaching psychology.

Keywords: *shadow coaching, second wave positive psychology, narrative coaching, wholeness, coaching psychology.*

The following maxim was inscribed at the entrance to the Temple of Apollo at Delphi: *"Man, know thyself, and you are going to know the gods"*. Knowledge of self remains an important pursuit. Jung (1954, p. 265) captured the quest for knowledge as one where *"One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious."* Kashdan and Biswas-Diener (2014) translate this stance for the modern reader as one of being comfortable with both positive and negative emotions. Lomas and Ivtzan (2016, p. 1754) argue that *"...ostensibly negative states could paradoxically be conducive to flourishing."* For this present study, the research question is: *how can coaches be comfortable working both with the good and with the bad that is within us?* This research sits at the intersection of three fields: positive psychology 2.0, Jungian shadow work and coaching psychology (Figure 1).

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

Jung (1964, p. 118) described the shadow as that which *"...contains the hidden, repressed and unfavorable aspects of the personality"*. Jung (1954) also described the presence of the 'positive' aspects of the shadow: that which could be talent, our potential or parts of us that could be suppressed for fear of responsibility. As part of working with the shadow, we must confront and come to terms with the unknown. Until we do this work, our deeper parts may sabotage our conscious intentions, manifesting as mechanism of self-defense where *"People often project their shadow issues onto others [...]* *That which a person does not own in him/herself yet, becomes difficult to tolerate in others."* (de Toit, 2016, p. 193). This process of detecting and integrating the shadow may feel chaotic and threatening (Johnson, 1993) but offers a way to tame dark aspects of the personality. What is also expected as part of this shadow process is the emergence of hidden talents and strengths. Acknowledging their presence takes courage and integrating them might demand a change in lifestyle.

The original focus of positive psychology was on what is going right with people (Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007). As the field of positive psychology is maturing, it has given rise to second wave positive psychology (2WPP) (Lomas & Ivtzan, 2016) and Positive Psychology 2.0 (Wong, 2011), also referred to as the “dark side”, which investigates benefits of negative emotions and experiences which trigger discomfort. Engaging with challenge and discomfort has a great potential for growth, healing, insight and transformation. In other words, *“...the ‘dark side’ contains the seed for a potential positive outcome, even when the path towards this outcome is testing”* (Ivtzan et al., 2015, p. 7).

Positive psychology has been referred to as the science at the heart of coaching (Kauffman et al., 2010), one that provides a delimited scope of practice (Seligman, 2007). Although definitions of coaching vary considerably (Palmer & Whybrow, 2005), the assumption is that people are basically healthy and *“...seek to be more emotionally, spiritually and psychologically fulfilled”* (Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007, p. 27). de Haan (2008) asserts that the role of the coach is to hold the space, challenge and support, suggest and explore. In the coaching partnership, goals are there to help organise the work, with the coach staying curious, open, non-judgemental and with a positive regard (Passmore, 2007). Cox, Bachkirova and Clutterbuck (2014, p. 22) refer to the coaching process as *“...making the unconscious conscious, to increase self-awareness [...] and so learn how to approach new challenges with more awareness and freedom”*.

Positive psychology is positioned to support the coaching profession and give additional tools of practice (Biswas-Diener, 2010), with archetypal shadow analysis giving depth and insight to coaching psychology (de Toit, 2016). It can be argued that powerful things start to happen when these two components – positive psychology and

shadow analysis - meet in a coaching space. The combination of the two has been scantily discussed in a coaching psychology context: literature has only briefly touched upon these areas, with Sims (2017) appealing to positive psychology coaches to embrace the 'bad' along with the 'good' - to coach with difficult emotions in mind. It is this gap that this present study sought to make smaller by exploring how shadow work guided by second wave positive psychology be used in a coaching environment.

Method

Hefferon et al. (2017, p. 211) argue that "*Qualitative approaches are ideal for exploring under-researched areas of investigation and allow for the development of novel, bottom-up theories*". This research topic has an unclear emerging theoretical underpinning and a limited pool of research; hence a qualitative research method being adopted. A social constructivist research philosophy was employed for this study, acknowledging multiple versions of reality and focusing on understanding the coaches' experience (Willig, 2013).

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to analyse semi-structured interviews. IPA allows for a deep interpretation of the participant's experience, where it is an open-ended, non-directive exploratory interview process, which also allows for the "*...articulation of both convergence and divergence within the study sample*" (Smith, 2017, p. 303). It allows for the analysis of what is being said as it is perceived by both the participant and the researcher.

Four English-speaking coaches took part in the study (three female and one male). Two participants were based in the United Kingdom and two in the United States. All were professional coaches with a minimum of four years of experience. A small sample of coaches is sufficient to yield a rich dataset using IPA (Smith, Flowers & Larkin,

2009). A purposeful sampling technique was used to select the most information rich-interviewees (Palinkas et al., 2015). The main criterion of selection was that coaches use shadow work in a coaching environment. The secondary criterion was the use of positive psychology and second wave positive psychology interventions and philosophy in the coach's work. Given that there was potential for sensitive and challenging information to surface during the interviews and the likely reluctance of coaches to speak openly and honestly about the probable overlap between therapy and coaching, full confidentiality and full data anonymity was applied with all participants. The broad list of questions used in the interviews is attached in Appendix A.

Each interview audio file was transcribed and coded, including pauses, mistakes, slips of speech and other dynamics at play (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). A wide margin was left on either side of the transcription for comments and coding. The first author listened, read and re-read the text, seeking to understand what the participants said. After coding and identifying broad themes in the first transcript, a similar process followed for the remaining three transcripts. As a result, four independent theme lists were compiled and common themes identified.

Results

Three overarching themes emerged from the data. These were labeled as: 1) the coach's personal journey, 2) what a shadow coach does and 3) the client's journey into the shadow. The first two topics focused on the understanding of the coach and what experiences, behaviour and qualities facilitated shadow coaching. The last theme was the coach's perception of what was happening for the clients as they underwent this paradigm of coaching. The main themes and their corresponding sub-themes are shown in Table 1.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

1. Coach's personal journey

1.1 Defining the shadow

Understanding and defining what the shadow is key for any further discussion. The themes and definitions from the participants were not identical yet shared a similar understanding. Where the words "hiding" and "suppressing" were frequently mentioned. Moreover, this hiding and suppressing happens not only from others, but importantly from ourselves.

The hidden part of us, those parts of us that we deny, suppress and hide from other people, but uhhmm...but sometimes we hide them from ourselves as well. [P4]

That we suppress, or that we hide from ourselves or from others, or anything really that we see in others that touches us, on a level that, you know, irritates us. [P3]

The other emerging insight is that the shadow is unacknowledged, and yet influencing life. One participant mentioned how there is a reluctance to go into the shadow, and everything that is contained in it. Yet, it was mentioned that by doing that work great learning occurred.

Unacknowledged and yet hanging over me...It's the suppressed part, it's the part that I don't want to look at, it's scary, I am not going to go there...but when we go there, there is great learning. [P1]

Another participant talked about parts and qualities that are not owned, and how these form underlying beliefs and commitments. It is also something that the clients no longer see in themselves.

Underlying beliefs, that they are not aware of, underlying commitments that they make...the part of themselves that they no longer see, the qualities in themselves that they don't own. [P2]

1.2 The importance of the personal journey

All participants reported how their personal exploration of the shadow was important for this kind of coaching. It was their own past experiences that helped to understand what this work is about. By working with the shadow, participants were able to refer to this as a personal journey, one of deep exploration, which took them to dark and light places, looking at the good and the bad. This process also helped the coaches to know themselves better. Having gone on this journey helped the coaches gain more meaning and reframe the dark side to something more conducive to their wellbeing, in the process pushing to make life-affirming choices which were also phrased as 'life and death' choices. It is as if, by making a definitive choice, a commitment and a new will to live was made.

There is always a personal journey. You are never going to find a coach that doesn't come from heartache. [P2]

And really get up close and personal with my dark side, and that absolutely transformed my wellbeing, and allowed me to stop dying and start living again...so I thought, are you going to sink or swim? This is the REAL question, and I am relieved the answer was swim. [P1]

For some participants it was working through their dark side, which is what came up first, whilst for others it was the gold that was hidden there. Finding and acknowledging the beauty and the light in themselves was at times just as challenging as going through darker material.

That's the thing that originally hooked me into this work, was to think, ok, I get this, the dark stuff, I don't want anybody to see that, but the light, you know, so, I worked very hard at finding, my light shadows. [P4]

1.3 Sharing stories:

Coaching is all about the client. As a result, sharing personal stories of one's own shadow journey is not something that immediately comes to mind. Yet sharing helps build trust with clients and encourages them to see life in a new way. The stories that do get shared ought to be relevant, and this sharing ought to be done carefully with clients that are sincerely interested and could benefit from what is being shared by the coach.

If you can give examples of your own life story, it does help the client to, maybe, it triggers something for them, or they remember something, or they understand it in a way, that they can get their own, can see themselves in that. [P4]

I don't share unless they ask...when I began coaching it was kind of like "oh, coaching is about them, not about you" ...In the beginning, I was a bit more careful with sharing, now days I do share, not with everyone, uhm. I see, in what I can share...[P4]

Those coaches who shared their own journey, through articles, interviews and social media, increased their visibility. As a result, the sharing of the coach's personal journeys allowed the clients to relate to the coach even before they got to know them.

Most of the people I work with, I don't go looking for them, they find me, the same way you looked up my profile, and, aaaa here is a guy what I am interested in, most of my clients have the opportunity to see something about them, in my blog posts, interviews. [P1]

2. What a shadow coach does?

2.1 Qualities

This theme explored the participant's perception of the qualities and traits they valued in a coach that does shadow work. One such quality is the ability to hold space; the allowing to happen whatever the client chooses to bring into that space. That means as a coach one needs to be totally present with the client, having an absolute focus on what is happening in the here and the now. Tuning into the moment and tuning out

everything that is outside of it. Being mindful and practicing mindfulness.

I think the essential quality that a coach needs to have, to be able to coach the client's shadow is the ability to hold space. I walk with my clients, metaphorically, I hold their hand metaphorically, and I introduce them to their shadow, in a way which gives them the trusting confidence to fall apart, knowing that I am there to give them courage to go through this. [P1]

In addition, more soft qualities like empathy emerged from the interview data. A coach can feel the emotions that are coming up for the client but does not seek to identify with them. Acting more like a mirror that reflects, so that the client can clearly see what it is that they are feeling and are able to articulate that.

I think to hold somebody else, like in your hand basically, you have to be really well trained, to have, be empathetic, you have to do your own work so that you can be like a clean vessel. [P2]

The qualities of holding space and being empathetic create an aura in coaching work, where the client feels safe to bring up any topic, even those they may never have brought up with anyone else.

2.2 Intention

An interesting topic appeared in the first interview, which was one of intention in the coaching space. The remaining participants were then probed on the importance of having an intention to help them in their coaching work.

What I do have is an intention, and it took me some time to figure my intention out...it's to help them develop their self-awareness so that in due course they can develop self-acceptance, self-approval, and ultimately self-love. And that is what I am always working, always my intention, and if I don't feel that's what I need, or want, I won't work with them. [P1]

Self-awareness emerged as important theme. One that influenced the way coaches entered the coaching relationship. One of the participants described this as being a multi-step process, where the ability to love oneself can be the end goal, but one starts with the notion of increasing self-awareness. The same phenomenon, but from another angle, was described by another participant, where their intention was focused on helping the client become emotionally whole, and in that way learn to love themselves.

My intention as a coach, in general, is that they learn to uncover their shadows so that they become more emotionally whole, they become less reactive, they become the observer and not the reactor in their lives. My intention for them is to learn to love themselves, and the way they learn to love themselves is to learn to trust themselves. [P2]

2.3 Therapeutic coaching

Given that shadow work originated in therapy work, it was interesting to see how these two areas were differentiated by the participants. The commonality of the two was confirmed, with a large 'grey area' present.

I think it's really grey area and it's very intertwined. [P3]

Despite the presence of the grey area and the connectedness of the work, it was made very clear that shadow coaching was not therapy, although the effect of the work was therapeutical. What made shadow coaching different was the coach's own experience of the shadow, which allowed to support the client on this path.

An overlap, where coaching can be therapy, therapeutic and healing, without being therapy per se, it's still coaching, it's that grey area in the middle...you can only do this work, if you have actually done the hard work on yourself, by going up close with the shadow...combination of qualities and experiences that a coach bring to it, which allows a therapeutic effect to, without being therapeutic per se. [P4]

It's really action-oriented, they come for a different feeling, they come for a goal and a vision. [P2]

What also made shadow coaching different from therapy was its goal oriented and time framed approach. Coaches noted how their clients found it particularly difficult to stay goal focused given the intensity of what emerged. The potential for the conversation to go in many directions was present. The latter made it very easy to evolve into a continuous discovery of the shadow. Staying goal focused and being very specific helped the coaches avoid the pitfall of making shadow coaching a long-winded investigation, without a clear end, which can happen in therapy.

It's more, I think, uhm, goal oriented, other than you want to feel better, or you want to understand more about, you know, your past, or why you do the things you do, but we always start out with a goal. What is it that you want to achieve? We ask them to be specific, and measurable, and you know, that is the hardest part for people. [P4]

3 The client's journey into the shadow

3.1 Action steps

A number of common action steps emerged on what helped clients achieve their goals. One such action step was 'acknowledging the shadow', although coaches noted this was something the clients were reluctant to do. As part of this process, coaches facilitated the clients to see their own shadow. The challenge was to help the clients see how the shadow was manifesting in their life, and then take ownership thereof.

Have to acknowledge the shadow, and that's a really big part of coaching with the shadow. [P1]

They don't want to acknowledge that there is on them, when we do the exercise, seeing in the others and reflecting on you, uhm, like "I am not like that, I am the opposite" there is some

indignation sometimes, I am not going to accept that part of me, I am going to keep that part in the dark. [P3]

The goal is, let me put that more positively, to take responsibility for 100% responsibility for our thoughts, feelings, and actions. [P4]

Coaches noted how taking responsibility for the shadow required a great deal of honesty. In their experience, this was not easy, but is the answer to whatever the underlying issue was hidden there. Once discovered, it became an issue of accountability, of holding the client accountable for the things discovered and helping them to move towards the goal.

Like in a third session, when we start to go deep, they completely disappear. Like out of the face of the earth, they don't pick up the calls, they don't answer the phone...[P3]

One coach noted how clients at times disappear when the shadow is brought out into the conversation. Noting that sometimes change is good as long as it is talked about, but implementing it can be difficult and unpleasant. The knowledge that this has the potential to happen can help a coach prepare and maybe warn a client in advance. In that way, the chance of it happening will be diminished.

3.2 Outcomes

All four participants expressed a feeling that coaching with the shadow in mind lead to positive results. An overarching observation was that clients started out feeling stuck, unsatisfied and not being able to understand the reason behind this. As clients took back both the light and the dark aspects of their personality, they felt more at ease in their own skin.

When they start, they are stuck in a rut, they are lost, even in despair, and afterwards, they are flourishing...And that can be a lot of it is moving forward, uhm, life, career, and their well-being. All those things. But they, they live more joyfully, but the keyword is LIVE. [P1]

One particular point strongly articulated by two participants was that clients developed the ability to make active choices about their life, rather than waiting for something to happen. Much more flourishing was observed to be taking place by the end of the shadow coaching work. The clients' focus on actions, particularly those aimed to improve their lives, that allowed them to dare to go after their goals and dreams or to go from a place of good to great, facilitated this transformation.

I see people stepping up, and actually doing things. You know that kind of thing when they are just doing that on their own. We are working with people who are going from a place of good to great! [P4]

A number of participants noted how important the moment of accepting both the light and the dark qualities was: something that led to the clients experiencing greater wholeness and self-love. It is at that moment that the coaches saw real changes and clients were able to 'become just themselves', without judgment or fear, accepting whatever it was that was burdening them.

So, they start to use their life instead of letting their life use them. It's about wholeness. I love my awesomeness and I love my flawsomeness. [P2]

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to investigate the coaches' experience of coaching the shadow - the good and the bad, the light and the dark - and to develop an understanding of the nuances of this work. The study is one of the first to explore and define the area of shadow coaching, with three component themes of shadow work

emerging from the data set. The three key themes are: the coach's personal journey through the shadow; what a shadow coach does; and the client's journey into the shadow. The key result of this work was that the combination of these three elements was argued by the participants to lead to transformation, integration and wholeness in the coaching space. As a result, the study sheds some light on how coaches can work with both light and dark aspects of the personality and do so more deliberately.

The emerging definition of the shadow coaching paradigm is one of enabling behavioural change and goal achievement by investigating personality traits that are hidden, suppressed, unowned and unacknowledged by us and others. This definition resonates with Jung (1954, 1964) and with de Toit (2016, p.189) where "*...the archetypal approach works on root causes, gaining greater awareness and shifts the way of thinking of the coachee.*" It is emerging as an avant-garde approach where irrational and limiting behaviours are brought to light. Shadow coaching differs from therapy, with the study participants noting how coaching was goal-oriented and time-framed. This finding mimics the goal-oriented coaching principles (Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007; de Haan et al., 2016; Grant, 2014) that distinguish coaching from therapy. Moreover, Jordan and Livingstone (2013) mention how the level of a client's therapeutic instability is a key differentiation point. Despite differences in coaching approaches among the interviewees, there was the admission that a large 'grey area' was present. Even though coaching with the shadow in mind was not therapy, its effect was termed therapeutic by the participants. Jackson and Parsons (2016, p.95) labelled this emerging approach as 'therapeutic coaching', where "*...clients can explore their vulnerabilities and fears and initiate new resilient and self-supporting behaviors.*" In this 'grey area', it may be the case that coaches do overstep borders and boundaries between coaching and therapy, and as Sime and Jacob (2018) show this is dependent on the coach's self-selected boundaries

and feelings of competency. The latter can be improved upon by coaches being trained in this paradigm of coaching, particularly practitioners that are already well versed in Jungian depth psychology and in the three key themes that have emerged from the current study.

One of these key themes was that of the 'personal journey', by means of which coaches are drawn to shadow work. A coach's personal experience and understanding heavily influences the way the shadow is understood and explained. In a coaching space, telling personal stories is one of the key ways for a coach to articulate his coaching philosophy, values and beliefs, and be aware of the 'why' behind the actions (Carless & Douglas, 2011). Sharing personal stories of one's own shadow journey is not something that immediately comes to mind. More so, given that, as a coach, we are trained to listen to ask powerful questions and to offer feedback (van Nieuwerburgh, 2017). Yet, the ability of the coach to tell personal shadow examples and stories - a form of narrative coaching - helps the client contemplate and see new possibilities (McMillan, 2015). Storytelling can serve as a link between abstract psychological concepts that may be difficult to grasp and real-life problems. As such, this may help the client to open up and tell their story and then see "*...the diverse and possibly conflicting narratives in their biography and to question the truth of narratives in which they may be stuck*" (Vogel, 2012, p. 7). However, as a coach, one needs to be careful not to cross a line from storytelling that is accompanied by reflection and learning, to storyselling, which is closer to providing guidance and advice, and trying to influence in a particular way (Lapp & Carr, 2008).

Another theme in the study, is the coach's ability to hold space while doing sensitive work. This is the cornerstone of shadow work and aligns with research by de Haan (2008) where the role of the coach is to hold space. Furthermore, being empathetic

was noted to be very important, something also shown by Passmore (2007) and van Nieuwerburgh (2017), as well as Rogers' (1992), where showing empathy helps clients accept their reality. de Haan, Culpin and Curd (2011) argue that it is the 'common factors' (such as the coaching relationship, empathic understanding and positive expectations), rather than a specific technique, that determine good coaching.

One notable finding is that of the intentions that a coach brought into the coaching space. This echoes one of the core conditions of therapeutical change, namely unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1992). A key intention that one of the participants set out with, was to allow their clients to have the ability to love oneself as the end goal. In the coaching process, the coach would be showing love and compassion towards the client. As a first step, Participant 1 recommended creating awareness, which could be achieved by means of a mindfulness practice. Passmore and Marianetti (2007) suggested how mindfulness can be used in a coaching context to support both the coach and the client.

Lastly, the theme of the client's journey through the shadow focused on the benefits of doing shadow work. All participants noted how their clients went from a place of languishing to a place of flourishing. This aligns with past research in SWPP (Lomas & Ivtzan, 2016) where opposing forces, such as positive and negative, are connected and dependent, with growth as a result of the interplay of these opposites. The interviews also suggested that engaging with discomfort, acknowledging it and taking responsibility – in essence taking the projection back (de Toit, 2016) - opened up potential for growth and transformation. Similar themes were explored by Kashdan and Biswas-Diener (2014), where embracing challenging experiences and learning from them led to greater happiness. As such, shadow coaching provides the space for all emotions and experiences to surface and use these for personal growth. Coaches

working with the shadow in mind are answering Sims' (2017) call to work with the whole range of human emotions, which is an important next step in the ongoing integration of 2WPP and coaching.

Limitations and recommendations for future research

The current study contains limitations that ought to be taken into account when considering the themes and conclusions. As with all IPA studies, the researchers are acknowledged as active agents in the generation of research, the personal biases and the understanding of shadow coaching may have made the topic narrower than it could be. The researchers are also aware that the diverse training in shadow work of the participating coaches was not duly explored.

Future studies may attempt to make the sample more globally diverse, with both Western and Eastern practitioners. An additional suggestion would be to focus on the client's perspective and gain potentially valuable insights into their lived experience of being coached with the shadow in mind.

Conclusion

Coaching is a relatively young profession with a growing body of research that is still building its credibility and research base. This qualitative study is the first to explore and define the shadow coaching paradigm from a coaches' perspective. Where three distinct components emerged from the data set. Coaching psychologists' can experiment with these findings and themes in their practice. This research indicates that there are significant benefits to be reaped from working with the shadow in a coaching context. And that by being trained in this paradigm of coaching, coaches can honour the boundaries between coaching and therapy in a more robust fashion.

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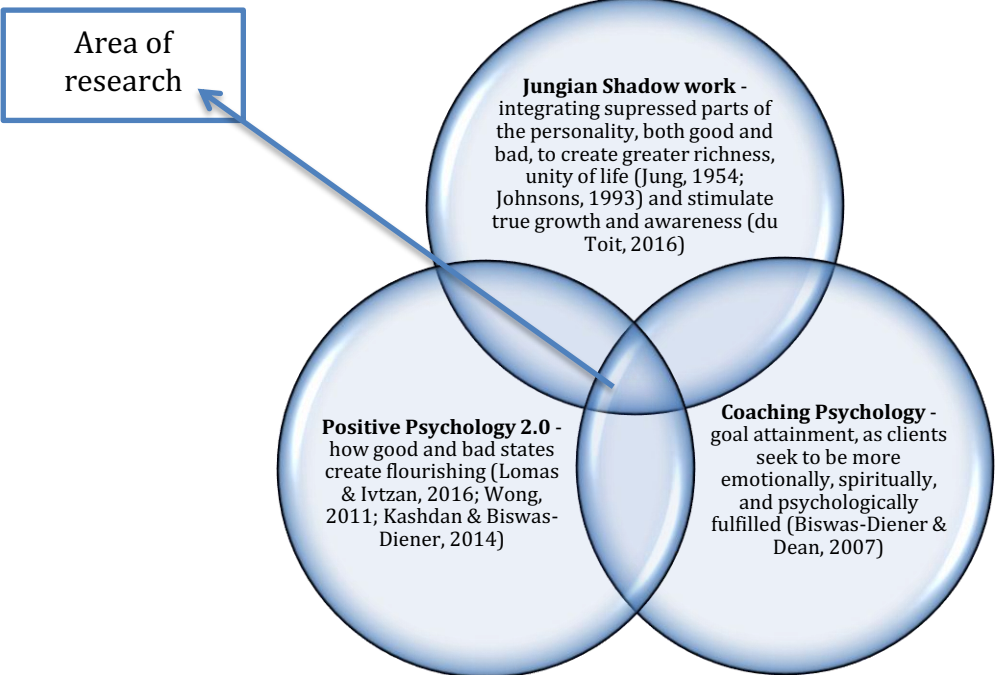
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Figure 1: Venn diagram which identifies the conceptual positioning of this research



Source: Author's own understanding and research

Table 1

KEY THEME	SUBORDINATE-THEME
1. THE COACH'S PERSONAL JOURNEY	1.1 DEFINING THE SHADOW
	1.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PERSONAL JOURNEY
	1.2 SHARING STORIES
2. WHAT A SHADOW COACH DOES	2.1 QUALITIES
	2.2 INTENTION
	2.3 THERAPEUTIC COACHING
3. THE CLIENT'S JOURNEY INTO THE SHADOW	3.1 ACTION STEPS
	3.2 RESULTS

Appendix A

A broad list of interview questions

1. If someone didn't know what the shadow side is, how would you define it?
2. Can you tell me more, of how you came to this definition?
3. What does one need as a practitioner to do shadow work?
4. What models help you put shadow work into a framework?
5. What has been your experience doing "shadow work" with clients?
6. Is this coaching? Is this therapy? How would you call this work?
7. What happens after shadow work is done?