

Examining how the Beliefs of Christian Coaches impact their Coaching Practice

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Abstract

Do the beliefs of Christian coaches influence their coaching practice? To explore this question, a qualitative research method based on an Interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) was used and data was collected from five coaches using semi-structured interviews. Four master themes were identified through the analysis of the data: the sense of personal identity of the coach, having a Christian worldview, additional resources brought to the coaching session and finally, the unique pressures that were experienced. An implication arising from this study is a required awareness in current coach-training practice of identification and possible integration of the beliefs, values and worldview of the coach.

Keywords Christianity, identity, beliefs, worldview, coaching practice

'To believe in something and not to live it is dishonest.'

Mohandas Gandhi

Introduction

Does it matter what a coach believes? Do practitioners' religious beliefs influence their coaching practice? During the MA course in Coaching and Mentoring Practice, I discovered that I was operating with a model in my coaching practice of which I was not aware. The key discovery I made was that my model was strongly influenced by my personal belief in Jesus and the implications of this relationship in every area of my life, including my working life as a coach.

I decided to make this insight the focus of my research project. More precisely, in my research I set out to explore to what extent my experience was unique to me or consistent with the experiences of other Christian coaches. And if my experience was not unique, I hoped to obtain insights into ways in which Christian coaches' coaching is influenced by their Christian beliefs. In addition, I envisaged my research would make a contribution to the existing gap in the coaching knowledge base regarding the ways in which religious beliefs influence individual coaching practitioners. Finally, I hoped to identify coaching issues for future training or supervision.

My research aims were achieved by examining the practices of five Christian coaches, and identifying emergent themes across this group. This article reports on my findings. The next few sections set the scene by briefly describing the literature and methodology. This is followed by the major themes that came out of the data analysis: identity, Christian worldview, resources brought to the coaching session, and pressures on Christian coaches. I end with a

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discussion of the findings and the conclusion, in which I offer further research recommendations.

Literature review

There is an increasing amount of research literature on spirituality (Wilber, 2006; Murray and Zentner, 1989; Carlson *et al.*, 2002). Adding to this, the expression of spirituality in the workplace is increasingly welcomed, explored and accepted by employers, (Hawley, 1993; Neck and Milliman, 1994; Worthington *et al.*, 1996; Cavanaugh, 1999; Dent *et al.*, 2005; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2004; Alexander, 2010).

However, on a deeper examination of this literature it was noted that the majority of the articles operated from a definition of spirituality that would not encompass the spirituality expressed by the participants in this study. This is because their spirituality was an expression of their Christian beliefs. Marques (2006, p.885) writes, “others [theorists] strongly reject the incorporation of the ‘R’ [religion] word when talking about spirituality.”

In light of this problem I looked at what might be called the caring professions, which have a long history of Christian participation. I was able to discover more extensive and developed literature in the area of the counselor or therapist (Worthington *et al.*, 1996; West, 1998; Veness, 1990; Sperry, 2001; King-Spooner & Newnes, 2001; Pargament, 2007). Perhaps it is in part due to the nature of the therapist’s role as a holistic “helper”, (which lends itself to a more open spiritual response than other professions) or perhaps because its professional identity is secure, thus enabling more contentiously viewed issues to be discussed more freely than in other newly established or establishing professions.

Bilgrave & Deluty’s (1998) research suggests a significant relationship between therapists’ spiritual or religious beliefs and their therapeutic approach and vice versa. Baker and Wang’s (2004) examined the connection between values and practice by fourteen Christian Clinical Psychologists using a range of qualitative procedures. Their analysis revealed three themes: faith providing an added dimension to their work (a sense of divine involvement that offered containment and strength), issues of disclosure with both colleagues and clients, and the challenge of integrating professional practice and Christian identity. This study clearly demonstrated the immense importance of faith to the participants’ sense of self, and how this related to their experiences at the interface of professional and spiritual worlds.

Carlson, Erickson and Seewald-Marquardt (2002) stress this link and write:

We believe more than ever before that our spiritual lives and our professional lives are inextricably connected. We feel we are called by our spirituality and by our work as family therapists to connect with others in a spirit of mutuality, compassion, love and community (p.219).

I believe that therapists are not unusual in this area and would venture that this would be true for all professions including coaching. However, I suggest that beliefs require awareness of how these might affect practice and therefore call for adequate training.

Methodology

As this study explored the issue of how the beliefs of Christian coaches influence their coaching practice, I needed to recognise and acknowledge my own strong beliefs in this area. It

was important for me as the researcher to be clear about my own perspective and any biases this may bring, while recognising that this is in and of itself an epistemological position.

The actual construction of the research question itself led me to choose a qualitative approach. I was interested not in the coaches' coaching practice per se but how they integrated their values, and the meaning that they gave to those values into their practice. Creswell defines qualitative research as "a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals... ascribe to a social or a human problem," (2009, p.3). I was not seeking to objectify or prove a theory in my research but enter into the way these five coaches integrate their beliefs into their practice. Their responses are idiosyncratic, human and not predictive but nonetheless illuminating and a valid contribution to knowledge. This aspect of understanding the meaning is at the very heart of the study. Qualitative research also focuses on obtaining data to explore, describe and gain an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons for that behaviour (Polit and Tatano Beck, 2006). The interviews I conducted and my reflexive responses to them for the data, which I co-construct, analyse, explore and describe.

As the aim of the study is concerned with the meaning making that the Christian coaches have made of their experiences "Interpretative phenomenological analysis" (IPA) was then considered as a research strategy. The aim of IPA is to get an insider perspective by exploring in detail how participants make sense of their world. IPA views the participants as "experts" on their own experiences, able to provide the researcher with an understanding of their thoughts, commitments and feelings through telling their own stories, in their own words, in as much detail as possible (Reid *et al.*, 2005, p.21).

Willig (2008) states that, "[IPA] recognizes that exploring the research participants' experiences must necessarily implicate the researcher's own views, as well as the nature of their interaction." (p.57). The results the analysis produced are "always an interpretation of the participant's experience." Smith (1997) writes, "[IPA] is an attempt to unravel the meanings contained in ... accounts through a process of interpretive engagement with texts and transcripts" (p.189). This interpretation takes place on two levels (Smith & Osborne, 2003), firstly, at the level of the participant who is giving his/her "interpretation" of the phenomenon with its meaning in his/her own words. Then, at a second level of interpretation, the researcher endeavours to understand the participant's words.

Study Participants

The following table provides relevant details of my chosen participants. Pseudonyms have been adopted to protect their anonymity.

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Age	No of years since becoming Christian	Years of Coaching experience	Occupation as coach	Coaching or relevant qualifications
Oli	Male	54	37 years	20+	Yes	Yes
Gary	Male	68	44 years	5 +	Yes	Yes
Tom	Male	55	14 years	7+	Yes	Yes
Brian	Male	55	36 years	25+	Yes	Yes
Will	Male	47	40 years	6	Yes	Yes

The participants were purposely sampled in line with Smith's *et al.* (2009) directions of obtaining a homogeneous sample. Thus, they would be representing a perspective (a Christian coach) rather than a population and also that the research question would be meaningful to that sample. Five male Christian coaches, their ages ranging from 47-68, were interviewed. They have all been Christians for a minimum of fourteen years. Furthermore they all have coaching qualifications or qualifications relevant to coaching, some are members of the ICF, and all had many years of formal and informal coaching experience. These criteria were important, as I wanted mature Christian participants who would have reflected deeply on their Christian beliefs and the out-working of their faith in their life and on their coaching practice. I believe that the criteria I used in my selection evidenced a level of reflexivity, which would enable the researcher to explore the phenomena to be looked at in this study.

Data collection

In IPA studies semi structured one-to-one interviews seem to be the most common and preferred means for gathering data (Reid *et al.*, 2005). Before the interview was conducted the aims of the study were outlined and consent was sought for the use of their experiences in the study and for the recording and transcription of the interview. The participants chose the time and place of their interview. The purpose of the interview was to collect a rich, textured, first person account of their experiences and the meaning they attached to those experiences.

Data Analysis

All the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The transcript was then placed in the middle column on a page divided into three columns. The transcript was read and re-read and the interview was re-listened to. My initial thoughts and observations were noted in the left hand column. Then more re-reading took place and any themes that were noticed were then written in the right hand column.

When all themes were identified they were clustered together in a separate document, via post-it notes, to enable the production of a master theme list, with supporting quotes (including page and line numbers). This process was then repeated for each transcript allowing for any new themes to emerge. A master table of themes for the whole group was then produced.

Findings

Four major themes emerged from the analysis of the data.

Theme One: Identity

All five of the coaches saw their identity grounded in their relationship with God, and over thirty sub-themes were obtained which contributed to the making of this master theme. Some significantly striking metaphors were used. These illustrated the influence their relationship with God had on how they viewed themselves, which in turn impacted their coaching practice.

Brian articulates this theme particularly clearly, "*my faith is an integral part of who I am.*" I found a most striking and beautiful metaphor used by Oli to describe himself and his coaching work, "*I like to think of myself as an agent of restoration that really helps to restore people and restore people in the sense that I help them to become what they fully can be.*"

"Agent of restoration" is a powerful metaphor; the "agent" in this case is acting on God's behalf. This naturally provides the coach, in this case Oli, with an added sense of significance and confidence in his coaching interventions. "Restoration" is a process of

restoring them to be the person the creator made them to be. Other metaphors used were ‘a follower of Jesus,’ ‘an imitator of God,’ and ‘as His [Jesus’] disciple.’

In summary, this theme illustrated the connection between the coaches’ relationship with God and the positive ways in which they viewed themselves. This very positive view of self naturally flows into their coaching practice. In my experience a coach’s negative self-perceptions would in contrast have an adverse influence on coaching sessions. When we consider the other themes identified through this study we observe that the coaches’ Christian beliefs influence everything not just their sense of identity. Collins (2009) aptly summarizes it this way, “If you are a Christian, coaching is also about who you are as a follower of Jesus Christ.”

Theme Two: Christian Worldview

Master Theme	Sub-themes
Having a Christian Worldview	God has a plan/purpose
	Their Christian view of the client
	Expectation of God’s working in coaching
	An influence on their values
	Other significant comments

This master theme had the most subordinate themes within it, with over ninety themes being identified. I was able to identify five key subordinate themes that scope out the parameters of this master theme. This was done by taking a participant’s individualized responses and placing them on a post-it note and then categorising them into groups. This was repeated for each interview then these categorised groups were considered together across all the participants’ data to see if some groups naturally belonged together. As is seen in the table below, these themes touch upon the coaches themselves, the clients and the context for their coaching interventions.

God has a plan/purpose

All of the coaches commented on the fact that they believed that God has a plan or purpose for everyone and that this meta-narrative in particular helps them to relax in the coaching environment. Illustrative of this were quotes such as “*Every human being was created in order or with a calling on their life or a destiny you could call it.*” And again “*...that God has planted in them, of a life vision they are meant to discover and to fulfil...*”

Their Christian view of their clients

All the coaches commented on this significant coaching theme that they view their clients not just as someone they have a business or contractual relationship with, but as significant individuals because they were created in God’s image and are therefore worthy of being treated with great respect.

Gary noted that: “*... God has set eternity in the heart of every person*”, and “*That ultimately I have a responsible to love my clients, not to just erm, practise techniques on them...*”

Expectation of God’s working in coaching

This theme covers aspects such as the timings of meetings with clients, the coaches’ increased expectation of positive coaching outcomes, and their sensing God’s presence in the

coaching meetings. Four of the five interviewees commented specifically on this theme and how this positively impacted their coaching.

Tom reacts quite strongly in his tone of voice and with his words to how others might attribute what happens in the coaching session just to coincidence or good scheduling.

[following Jesus] is not mumbo jumbo and this is really what it's all about and then actually seeing stuff happening, or believing that is not synchronicity, as people like to call it, it's actually the Lord working in your life.

An influence on their values

All bar one of the coaches commented directly on how their beliefs influenced their values, which has an influence on their coaching. Will observes that, *"I think it [my faith] influences my coaching because every coach, coaches through their own values and no matter what people say I don't believe it; there is no such thing as value free coaching."*

Oli describes his understanding in these ways:

I would say Christianity affects the underlying values behind my coaching, behind my attitudes towards the client. ... I do try to incorporate in my life and worldview, the values and the understanding of the world and of human beings that Jesus had.

Other significant comments

One of the differences that Will's Christian worldview brings is related to how he sees change take place in the client. The change is not just a result of the client and their own resourcefulness, which is the current perceived wisdom (McLeod, 2003; Rogers, 2008), but he instead sees God having an enabling role in the change process.

From my understanding of Christian faith and that affects my coaching very clearly because I have expectations and I see much hope for people that they can become something different than they are now...So I have a tremendous faith then in people's ability to change and grow but it's not because of anything necessarily innate in them, I see it as a divine enabling.

Theme Three: Resources brought into coaching

Master Theme	Sub-themes
Resources brought into coaching	The role of prayer
	Jesus as a model
	The Bible as a resource
	God at work in the coaching session
	Faith influencing the questions asked
	Personal faith journey as a resource

Once again all of the coaches contributed to this theme but not to every particular sub-theme. The process to produce this master theme with these sub themes was identical to the one used for the previous master theme. This major theme looks at the resources that the Christian coaches are able to bring to their preparation for coaching sessions as well as the coaching session itself. The coaches also commented that the use of some of these resources would not be apparent to the client. These resources are in addition to their coaching skills and experience.

The role of prayer

Brian talked about the importance of prayer as part of his preparation for a coaching appointment and about how he feels supported by other people praying for him and his work.

I'll often try to always pray for people that I am coaching before I coach them, so I am wanting them to be blessed..

He also commented on the two-way nature of prayer on how God communicates to him:

Often as I'm praying I'll get some ideas that will be quite helpful, so I find prayer quite a creative one."

Jesus as a model

It was interesting to find that two of the coaches commented on this subtheme. Oli commented on how practically his actions should be altered because he is modelling himself on Jesus. *"So if I am supposed to imitate Jesus and God in the way that he acts towards people I have to act the same way towards the people."* Tom sees Jesus as demonstrating a model that should be and can be followed in his (Jesus') personal interactions with people. Tom further sees Jesus as the complete coach and believes that Christian coaches have a particular unique access to him through their relationship with him, hence his comment, *"I don't think other people [coaches] actually have."* He felt encouraged by the example of how Jesus coached people.

The Bible as a resource

Four of the coaches commented on the Bible as a reference or as a coaching resource. We saw in the previous sub-theme how some of the coaches looked in particular at the biblical accounts of how Jesus related to and coached his followers and used his example as a coaching model. Brian comments on the Bible as a source of wisdom,

"We read the scriptures (a common alternative word for the bible for Christians) and it gives us the wisdom we can share with others."

God at work in the coaching session

In the Christian worldview theme it was noted that the coaches had an expectation of God working in the coaching sessions, which had an impact on them as coaches through raised levels of confidence and expectancy. Here in this sub-theme, three coaches, (Gary, Brian and Tom) comment on being aware of God actually working in the coaching sessions to bring about improved outcomes. Having God's aid in coaching sessions certainly would be a great resource to have available and this is what they say they experience. Brian paints this very vivid picture of how he sees God working in a coaching session:

... Every coaching session is a three-way session, of me, the person I am coaching and God's presence in the room.... That we are there to help people and see things progress and Gods interested in that agenda as well.

Faith influencing the questions asked

Three of the coaches described how their Christian faith influences the questions they ask and also the avenue of questioning they pursue “...*Some of the questions I ask, some of the areas I would pursue would be influenced by my [Christian faith based] values.*” And also, “*every coach coaches through their own values and no matter what people say I don’t believe it; there is no such thing as value free coaching.*”

Personal faith journey as a resource

Two of the coaches specifically commented on how they see their faith journey as a resource in their coaching, not only with clients who may be Christians, but also with other clients who have a faith-based worldview. Will comments as follows:

Having a Christian faith actually allows me to do that [to be sympathetic to failure to live up to one’s own belief system or values].

Theme Four: Pressures

Pressures	The workplace
	Other Christians’ expectations

Pressures was a somewhat surprising and unexpected theme, which emerged through the course of the analysis. The coaches who worked exclusively with commercial clients experienced this “pressure” more acutely.

The workplace

Firstly, there was pressure experienced due to the perception that the workplace environment is not (or has not been experienced as) sympathetic to Christian belief or practice. There was a strong perception that being a Christian was either not politically correct or might seem unprofessional in the workplace. Brian reported

The constraint that being a Christian can put on you as a coach as well [okay?] because there are elements of who I am, that I don’t disclose to the people who I am coaching...because it’s not politically correct to talk about being a Christian in the workplace, and some people may be offended by that.

The use of the word “constraint” is particularly vivid here - Brian feels bound by political correctness to hide part of who he is. The struggle that he experiences over this constraint is clearly something he is unhappy about .

Other Christians’ expectations

A second and somewhat unexpected source of pressure was for the coaches to use their coaching work as a platform for evangelism or to proselytize their clients. It was not clear if other Christians had told them to use their work as a platform, or whether it was their own internal convictions about the need to talk to people about Jesus, which was causing the pressure. In this extract Will was very definitive in his tone of voice. Notice that “I don’t” is repeated four times in such a short space of time. He wanted to make it very clear to me what he didn’t do and so strongly emphasised this.

What I don't do is I don't use my coaching as a platform for evangelising my coaching clients I don't do that... I don't use the opportunity or so I don't look for opportunities or make opportunities in my coaching to share my own personal anything, with people.

This theme highlighted how the coaches experienced the dynamic of being Christians who are coaches and the unique negative pressures and constraints they felt under as a result of their faith. This pressure resulted in them withholding either oneself or the advice they would give a client and in marketing their services because of the fear of a negative reaction to the Christian faith in secular situations.

Discussion

The findings in this study are consistent with the findings in Baker and Wang's (2004) study of fourteen Christian psychologists. They discovered three themes which are similar to the themes in this study which were: faith providing an added dimension to their work (a sense of "God is at work" helping them personally, and also their clients and colleagues), the issue of disclosure (whether to be overt in the expression of Christian faith and values or adopt the ethos of the profession and practise non disclosure) and thirdly the challenge of integrating professional practice and Christian identity.

Another striking observation from the themes discussed below was the similarities with Collins (2009, p.24/25). He proposes four particular areas which define Christian coaching: "bringing a Biblical world view to the relationship", "the coach's personal walk with Jesus", "the coach's knowledge that none of us can be completely neutral" and finally, "by praying for the client and being ready to discuss spiritual issues." It was a surprising discovery to see so many of the areas Collins articulated expressed so clearly across the interviews as none of the coaches works particularly in Christian settings or with a client base which is made up primarily of Christians. This led me to conclude that the themes I discovered were primarily connected to the person of the coach rather than being connected to a particular religious coaching context.

The first theme focused on the issue of the coaches' identities. All the coaches saw their identity profoundly tied into their personal relationship with God. This was apparent not only from the metaphors they used like being a disciple or follower of Jesus, but also from other comments made by the coaches.

Directly tied in to the coach's sense of identity was their perception of being "called" by God or their sense of vocation. That is to say that for these coaches they were responding to God's initiative to follow him and serve him through their work as coaches.

We see that for these coaches, God having given them a calling, and choosing to follow that calling, has added significance not only to their sense of identity but also on how they view their work.

Spinelli (2011, pers.comm., 15 August) wrote, "beliefs shape reality both at a personal and inter-personal level." It is this shaping of reality we are looking at in the second theme, which has its focus on the Christian coaches and their Christian worldview, since this had a number of implications for their coaching practice. This theme was consistent with Collins (2009, p.24) who writes that it is this "biblical world view" that is the most important aspect that the coach brings into the coaching relationship. In this study the coaches' Christian world view influenced a number of areas relevant to their coaching practice which were, God's purposes for the world, their view of the client, their expectation of God being at work in their client and finally in shaping their own values.

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The strongest sub-theme in the Christian worldview master theme, judging by the comments made by the coaches, was God having a plan/purpose for everyone. This is a very clear and significant theme that permeates the whole of the Bible (Romans 8: 28-31, Ephesians 1:11). One of the most well known verse is in Jeremiah 29: 11, 'For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'

A further significant observation was the role that their expectation of God working played in their own performance as coaches. This expectation filled them with great confidence and positivity as they entered the coaching sessions. It is certainly important for the coach to enter the coaching relationship in a confident manner. Bandura (1997) notes that "self-belief does not necessarily ensure success, but self-disbelief assuredly spawns failure."(p. 77).

These coaches seemed be able to relax regarding their performance as coaches, not thinking about their performance, relationship with the client, or finding solutions, instead they were able to focus on working at a higher coaching level.

A further issue related to the Christian worldview was that of values. Some of the coaches described coaching situations where their clients experienced ethical or moral dilemmas; in these situations the coaches found that their own Christian values were an asset, and they did not experience them as a hindrance to rapport or to the coaching session. They found that they were able to use their values to enable their clients to have a more rigorous examination of the issue than if they had no sense of values or were just happy to go with the clients' stated values. Zeus & Skiffington (2000,p.23) write that in a coaching relationship the coach's own values "are brought sharply into focus' and that coaches should not ignore or impose their own set of beliefs and values but to discuss them openly."

The third theme identified through the analysis was the number of resources that the coaches brought into the coaching sessions. Rogers (2008) writes that many experienced coaches use a number of tools or strategies for becoming centred before a coaching session including meditation, walking or yoga. So it should come as no surprise that prayer is a strategy used by Christian coaches to become centred, however what was surprising was the scope and variety of contexts prayer was used in. Not only did the coaches pray for their clients, and their coaching sessions but also some coaches had friends who supported them by praying for their coaching sessions. Praying for their clients' well being, growth or for them to be blessed illustrates the level of warmth, care and commitment that these coaches have for their clients. The coaches certainly believed that prayer works, and that they received ideas and inspiration through prayer. Collins (2009) writes that, "Christian coaches should never under estimate the power of prayer..." (p. 208).

It was noted the coaches did not comment on offering to pray for the client in the session unless the client asked for prayer, as this would have seemed to be crossing some undefined line of imposing ones beliefs on the client or of being unprofessional as a coach. Some of the coaches described themselves as being constrained (an idea which will be examined more extensively in the fourth theme) and perhaps not offering to pray with the client is a result of this constraint.

A further resource was the coaches experienced God at work in the coaching sessions. This finding is similar to the findings in Baker & Wang's (2004) who write "the interviews with participants focused specifically upon themselves at work, but they had concluded that God was also 'at work'." (p. 130).

Obviously other observers or researchers might not attribute these outcomes to “God being at work” and may see these as a result of serendipity, coincidence, or not even see the need to assign any one or thing as causing or being responsible for these outcomes.

The fourth and final theme was the issue of pressure the coaches felt in their work. There was a strong perception in the minds of the coaches that being a Christian was politically incorrect in the workplace. Over the last number of years there has been an increasing sense by many Christians from various professions and walks of life of feeling under attack because of their beliefs. The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Carey, in December 2010 claimed that Christians of "deep faith" faced discrimination, which resulted in either the fear of legal action, loss of jobs or the actual loss of jobs and legal action.

Regardless of where this pressure came from it was clear that there was a certain withholding of themselves by the coaches in the coaching relationship.

The second source of pressure was an expectation felt by the coaches that since Christianity is an evangelistic faith that all Christians should be overtly sharing their faith in their work. This pressure created a dilemma for some of the coaches between their desires to be obedient followers of Jesus yet also wanting to be professional in their approach to coaching. The coaches seemed to have worked out their own particular and individual responses to this pressure and the overwhelming consensus was that they would be led by the client in this area. If the client asked direct questions relating to the coach's beliefs or world-view they were more than happy to answer them, but ultimately clients came to them for coaching not Christianity. As the coaches wanted to work to high professional standards, they would take the opportunity of a curious client asking a faith related or a more personal question to give them a natural opening to explain their personal beliefs.

Limitations

I am aware of a number of limitations of this study. Researchers are aware (Denscombe, 1998, p.137) that interviews are not a ‘neutral’ means of data collection. It is possible that in selecting some people whom I knew personally that they wanted to somehow please me with giving answers that they thought I wanted.

A critique of phenomenological research is that it is focused on the perception of phenomena and does not make definitive statements about the nature of those phenomena. It focuses on the experience of the world; not on the “whys” behind such experiences and why there might be different experiences of the same phenomena. However the aim of the study is to obtain a rich detailed description not to delve into the explanatory reasons for the phenomena.

Further limitations would be the absence of a conceptualisation of what a Christian is and what was the understanding of the coaches who were interviewed in light of this. For this study, I used the definition as outlined in the appendix.

Conclusion

The analysis of the data gathered led me to conclude that each participant experienced that their beliefs have a significant impact on their coaching practice. These findings covered a number of key areas, which go to the heart of coaching practice. These are: the coaches' views of themselves, the coaches' worldviews and the resources the coach brings to coaching sessions. In addition to these three areas, an area of personal constraint or pressure was also identified.

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For all coaches in this study their faith was a defining part of who they are. They saw themselves in a very constructive and positive light, secure and confident in who they are because this is who God made them to be. They drew their sense of security and wellbeing not from their autonomous self or from their clients' reactions to them but from God who created them. This gave them a freedom to relax in the coaching session and an increased potential to operate at the higher end of the Smith & Hawkins' (2006) coaching levels model, enabling them to tend towards the process-in-context centred level.

All the coaches saw very clearly that God had plans and purposes for their clients, and that through good coaching the client is helped to discover what God had placed within them and then restored in line with God's intentions for them. In a similar vein Leider and Shapiro (2001, p.79) wrote about this special life calling:

In order to flourish, we need to discover and internalise an authentic reason for living that is bigger than we are... This energy, emanating from our very essence, tells us we are dialled into the right number, if we only listen. Our inner spirit, God within, provides us with the surest guidance for finding our true passions. Communicating with our inner spirit is the source and light into our special calling in life.

The third major finding was related to the additional resources they were able to bring into the coaching sessions. The coaches believed that they brought in a plethora of additional resources including prayer, the Bible and God working in various ways in the coaching sessions. It is interesting to note that none of these resources seem to feature in coaching manuals or even in wider searches of the coaching literature but are instrumental in the coaching practice of the coaches in this study.

Finally the coaches described the constraints they believed they were under because of their Christian beliefs. They described how this integral part of who they are needed to be managed; for fear of offending the client, getting their employer into trouble or seeming unprofessional in the work environment. This is not an isolated experience confined just to the coaching profession. This has been an increasing experience for many Christians, particularly those in the caring professions.

There are two particular issues to which this study draws attention Firstly, there is the issue of coach training. Every person has values as does every profession and organisation, and there will be underlying values in coach training programmes. However most of these values are not mentioned explicitly and examined to reveal their influence. It would be highly beneficial in coach training institutions if this area of the interplay between religious beliefs, values, worldviews and coaching practice was addressed. West (2010) highlights a very similar situation in the training, education and supervision of counsellors. A more holistic training would enable for example coaches who do have religious beliefs to begin to examine in detail the impact it is having on their practice. Though I also believe it would benefit all coaches to reflect on how their values impact their coaching practice.

Secondly, for a number of the coaches in this study, the interview process itself enabled them to process how their beliefs impacted their coaching practice at a deeper level. The interview discussions went beyond surface discussions that they might have with a fellow coach. One coach specifically commented on how he appreciated the chance to reflect on his practice that the interview process afforded him. I am only aware of one of the coaches I interviewed who has been involved in what he described as on-going coaching supervision. I believe that this anecdotal evidence reinforces the case for coaches to have on-going coaching supervision as this would enable the coach to continue to engage in exploring and reflecting on

how their beliefs are influencing their coaching practice and to process this in an on-going way. It does however raise an interesting question as to who would be qualified and willing to supervise someone in this area of the interplay between beliefs and coaching practice.

As the scope of this study was a small sample of Christian coaches, it would be interesting for further research to explore a number of related topics; such as examining if the findings in this study would be similar to those obtained from interviewing coaches from other faith groups or whether different themes would emerge. This then could be extended to a comparative study on how coaching practices differ between coaches with religious beliefs and coaches who are agnostics or atheists. The literature in this area of the religious (or none) beliefs of the coach is presently very thin. Braham (2006) looks at coaching from the worldview of Vipassana meditators; Silsbee (2008, 2010) books have a Buddhist influence. Collins (2009) cites O'Connor & Lages (2007, p.43) who write, "coaching has had many direct and indirect links to eastern thinking ... especially Zen Buddhism." Flaherty's (2005) book for example would fall into this category with its Zen Buddhist influences.

Rosinski (2010, p.161) writes, "Coaches can incorporate the spiritual perspective in many ways. The key is to be connected to "luminosity": letting brightness in and radiating it outward." Jesus said that he was the 'light' but I do not think that this is what Rosinski has in mind. Eastern thought has continued to be an attractive concept to those in the West who have discovered the bankruptcy of Western thought that neglects the soul and misses our deepest human longings. Sadly Christian belief has been tarnished with the same brush.

This however creates an opportunity for Christian coaches to redress this imbalance and to communicate the value and the contributions that their beliefs make to good coaching practice.

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Appendix A - Christian Faith

The Christian faith, in common with other forms of religion or spirituality has many different expressions, encompassing a wide range of denominations. What is common to all Christian churches and what distinguishes them from other religions is an official acknowledgement of a Christian creed (e.g., the Apostles Creed or the Nicene Creed). These Creeds were drawn up in times of conflict over doctrine and their purpose was to define accepted belief; that is affirming the belief in the triune God, the deity of Christ, creation, the virgin birth, the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of Christ. The central message of the Christian gospel is the invitation for a personal relationship with God. It is this relationship that is at the heart of Christian spirituality, making it a highly personal and relational endeavour, a way of life centred on a relationship with God, which naturally overflows to other people. The Archbishop of Canterbury (2011) writes that, 'Christian life is lived in relationship with God through Jesus Christ and... seeking to deepen that relationship and to follow the way that Jesus taught us.'

It is this personal relationship that is important to understand if one is to get to the heart of what is a Christian. The Bible uses many metaphors to illustrate this point but perhaps the most striking is becoming part of God's family (Galatians 6:10, New International Version); He has adopted us into His family, He is our father and we our His children (John 1:12) This intimate Father-child relationship is at the heart of the Christian faith. The Christian's status and position of being in God's family can't be earned by being good or religious, but is a free gift of God. A person chooses to accept this gift, which places love, peace and freedom at the heart of this relationship. Christians are not trying to earn God's favour by what they do. They are not trying to win Him over with their sacrifices or good deeds; Christians already have God's favour because of the security their status as children of God brings. It is my belief that this free gift of being adopted into God's family is one of the differences between Christianity and other

religions. I am using the Nicene Creed together with this personal relationship as the definition of a Christian in this study.

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