

Henley Business School
University of Reading

Coaching the inner critic: an exploratory study of coaching practice relating to
coachees inner critic

by
Lee Anthony Griffin

Student number: 28019737

Word Count: 11,957 words

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Science.

Abstract

This study investigates coaching practices related to the inner critic, a form of critical self-talk. The study explores the meaning of the inner critic in a coaching context, the challenges and barriers faced by coaches when addressing this issue, and the psychological mechanisms used by coaches to work with the inner critic as a coachee presenting issue.

Whilst there is research on the topic of the inner critic in a therapeutic context, there is very little research on the topic of the inner critic in coaching. This creates a clear gap that this research seeks to address.

Drawing on a constructivist perspective, fifteen coaches, with experience of working with the inner critic, were interviewed using a semi-structured approach, and the data was analyzed thematically.

The study yielded several noteworthy findings. Regarding the meaning of the inner critic, the research offers a novel definition of this concept in a coaching context, highlights that female coachees are more likely to discuss the inner critic, reveals that the inner critic is rarely the primary presenting issue, and identifies the various terms used by coaches to refer to the inner critic. Concerning challenges and barriers, the research uncovered more challenges than those reported in the literature and introduces the new issue of coaches' own inner critic. Lastly, the study describes the most prevalent tools and associated psychological mechanisms used in practice, including fostering a compassionate inner coach, defusing from critical thoughts, the use of metaphor and creating awareness of the critic. These findings culminate in a new coaching model for working with the inner critic, named the CRITIC model.

The study's findings provide valuable insights into coaching practices related to the inner critic, shedding light on its meaning, challenges, and potential solutions. The CRITIC model offers a practical framework for coaches to address the inner critic with their coachees.

Keywords: inner critic, inner voice, psychological mechanisms, cognitive restructuring, cognitive reframing, cognitive defusion.

Dedication/Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Krishnendu Saha for his valued support and guidance through the research process and to the interviewees who generously gave me some of their most valuable resource - time.

Secondly, this research is dedicated to my daughter Eva. May this small body of work inspire you to follow your own curiosities in your area of passion.

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Dedication/Acknowledgements	3
Table of Contents	4
List of Tables	6
List of Figures	7
Glossary	8
Chapter 1	9
Introduction	9
1.1 Rationale for the Research	9
1.2 Research Goals	9
1.3 Structure of the Dissertation	10
Chapter 2	11
Literature Review	11
2.1 Introduction	11
2.2 Understanding the Inner Critic	11
2.3 The Challenges of Working with the Inner Critic	13
2.4 Psychological Mechanisms	14
2.4.1 Cognitive Restructuring	14
2.4.2 Cognitive Reframing	15
2.4.3 Cognitive Defusion	15
2.4.4 Self-Compassion and Compassion-focused coaching	17
2.4.5 Other Psychological Mechanisms/Tools	18
2.4.6 Selecting Appropriate Psychological Mechanisms	19
2.4.7 Conceptual Framework	19
Chapter 3	21
Research Design	21
3.1 Philosophical Orientation	21
3.2 Research Approach and Methodology	21
3.3 Research Questions	22
3.4 Research Sample	22
3.5 Data Collection and Analysis	23
Chapter 4	26

Findings and Analysis	26
4.1 Introduction	26
4.2 The inner critic has various interpretations and meanings for coaches.....	26
4.3 Critical distinctions of the inner critic.	28
4.3.1 The inner critic does not differ by gender, but the response can.	28
4.3.2 Timescale and emphasis differ for coaching and therapy.....	28
4.3.3 The inner critic is rarely the initial presenting issue.	29
4.3.4 There are three key ‘meta impacts’ of the inner critic.	29
4.4 There are more challenges and barriers than suggested in the literature. ..	31
4.4.1 The inner critic is deeply rooted.....	32
4.4.2 Coachee readiness plays a key factor in the coaching process.	32
4.4.3 The coach-coachee relationship influences success.....	33
4.5 Psychological Mechanisms.	33
4.5.1 Creating awareness and understanding is an important first step.	34
4.5.2 Cognitive Restructuring	35
4.5.3 Cognitive Reframing	36
4.5.4 Cognitive Defusion	37
4.5.5 Self-Compassion	37
4.6 Tools and Techniques.....	38
Chapter 5	40
Discussion.....	40
5.1 Introduction	40
5.2 Meaning and Understanding	40
5.3 Challenges and Barriers.....	42
5.4 Psychological Mechanisms	42
5.5 Further Research	45
5.6 Conclusions.....	46
Reference List	47
Appendices	52
6.1 Appendix A - Semi-Structured interview questions	52
6.2 Appendix B - Message to find volunteers.....	54
6.3 Appendix C – Information and Consent Email.....	55
6.4 Appendix E - Ethics Approval.....	57

List of Tables

Table 3-1 Research Sample Overview	22
Table 4-1 Definitions of the inner critic	26
Table 4-2 Range of Impacts	30
Table 4-3 Summary of Challenges	31
Table 4-4 Questions to explore the inner critic.	34
Table 4-5 Summary of Tools and Techniques employing various psychological mechanisms.	38

List of Figures

Figure 2-1 Process features of the inner critic versus the voice of inner experiencing.	13
Figure 2-2 Functional Analysis of the Inner Critic.....	17
Figure 2-3 Conceptual model relating to the inner critic.	20
Figure 3-1 Coding ranked by number (NVIVO export).	24
Figure 3-2 Items clustered by coding similarity (NVIVO Export).....	25
Figure 4-1 Use of a spectrum for self-talk (authors elaboration from interview with Coach D)	37
Figure 5-1 A process model for inner critic coaching (CRITIC Model)	44

Glossary

ACC	Acceptance and Commitment Coaching
ACT	Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
ANTS	Automatic Negative Thoughts
CBC	Cognitive Behavioural Coaching
CBT	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
CMC	Compassionate Mind Coaching
CMT	Compassionate Mind Training

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Rationale for the Research

According to Palmer (2009), self-limiting beliefs and negative thoughts can act as barriers for coachees in achieving their goals. Despite having clear visions and strategies for their future, coachees may struggle to make progress due to their inner critic. The concept of the inner critic, as described by Neenan (2008), refers to negative and self-defeating thoughts that can harm an individual's confidence and well-being. Therefore, it is crucial for coaches to help their coachees recognise and challenge these negative thoughts in order to promote their personal growth and success.

Whilst it is a well-researched concept within the field of therapy (Stinckens et al. 2013a), research within the field of executive coaching is embryonic at best and thus there is a clear research gap. This gap relates to the lack of research concerning working with the inner critic in coaching. Within coaching literature, approaches for working with the inner critic have derived from cognitive behavioural approaches such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and more recently 'third wave' approaches (Passmore and Leach, 2022) such as acceptance and commitment coaching (ACC). However, the third wave coaching approaches are themselves developed from therapeutic approaches and thus are largely 'evidence supported' rather than 'evidence derived.' This means that we expect that they will be appropriate within coaching without the empirical evidence to prove the case. In addition, little research exists in translating these approaches for clients presenting issues in coaching (Passmore and Leach, 2022).

The above-cited approaches also vary in their use of distinct psychological mechanisms. For instance, 'cognitive restructuring' is used in CBC, while 'cognitive defusion' is employed in ACC. This highlights some intriguing questions for research, such as how coaches (rather than therapists) address their clients' inner critic in practice and the potential disconnect between coaching theory and practice.

1.2 Research Goals

The aim of this research is to enhance theory by examining the current coaching practices related to working with the inner critic and theories surrounding it. These directly relate to the following gaps. Firstly, it will aim to understand the meaning of the inner critic for coaches. Secondly, it will explore the challenges and obstacles faced

by coaches while working with the inner critic. Lastly, the research will shed light on the various psychological mechanisms utilised by coaches in their coaching practice.

The research goals informed the following research questions:

1. What do coaches understand as the concept of the inner critic and what is the meaning for them (exploration)?
2. What are the challenges and barriers of working with the inner critic and is there a difference in a coaching rather than therapeutic context (understanding the challenges)?
3. What psychological mechanisms are coaches using in practice to work with coachee's inner critic (understanding the solutions)?

For practice, this research provides a foundation for moving the field of coaching towards an evidence-based (rather than evidence derived) approach, by linking practice to research. This should provide the opportunity for the advancement of coach development by incorporating different approaches in psychological mechanism use and improved coach training by gaining insight into the most effective mechanisms used by coaches.

For coachees, the potential benefits include the enhancement of coaching practice for better outcomes and improved results for clients who struggle with their inner critic.

1.3 Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation is structured as follows. Firstly, the literature review chapter outlines the key theoretical concepts relating to the inner critic from concept, through to the challenges and barriers and finally the differing psychological mechanisms cited within the literature as appropriate for working with coachees inner critic. The research design chapter builds on the literature review by outlining the research design, the sample, and the data collection and analysis approaches. The findings are then presented thematically in relation to the research questions. This is followed by discussion and conclusions which summarise the key findings, as well as discuss areas for further research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Given the empirical purpose of this dissertation, the literature review is structured to reflect the key research goals. For example, providing an initial understanding of the inner critic as a concept, its meaning, the barriers from the literature and the psychological mechanisms used to work with the inner critic. Literature was identified using tools such as Scopus (www.scopus.com) using keywords such 'inner critic,' 'negative thoughts,' and 'psychological mechanisms' with a focus on peer reviewed journals, prioritised by most recent date.

2.2 Understanding the Inner Critic

The term 'inner critic' was first introduced by Gendlin (1981) and is a continually recurring negative voice that manifests as critical thoughts such as 'I am a failure' and 'I will make a mess of it [relating to whatever action a person is thinking of]' or thoughts linked to imposter syndrome such as 'I will get found out' (Harris, 2020) or perfectionism (Burns, 1980b). It is a basic feature of the mind (Kross, 2021), and negative thoughts (part of a negative inner voice) are experienced by 80%-99% of the non-clinical population (Larsson et al., 2016).

The concept of the inner critic is similar in nature to other commonly used terms such as the 'harsh superego' (Freud, 1961), 'performance inhibiting thoughts' (Skews, 2018), 'automatic negative thoughts/negative automatic thoughts' in CBT (Neenan, 2018), 'chatter' (Kross, 2021) and 'critical self-part' (Anstiss, 2022). The inner critic can also take many forms including a degrading/undermining critic, a punitive/accusatory critic, an overdemanding/controlling critic, a subservient/neglectful critic, a distant/avoidant critic, and a domineering/compensating critic (Stinckens et al., 2013a).

Stinckens et al. (2013a: 61) define the inner critic as:

...a well-integrated system of critical and negative thoughts and attitudes of the self that interferes with the individual's organismic experiencing process.

Examples of interference, given the definition above, can include limiting an individual's ability to move towards something important to them or to be undermining

even though their performance may be good (Neenan, 2008; Palmer, 2009). The critic can also both torment, paralyse and lead to self-sabotage (Kross, 2021). It can erode self-confidence and self-esteem (Stinckens et al., 2013a) and those who experience negative automatic thoughts are more likely to ruminate (Koseki et al., 2013) or have higher levels of depressive symptoms (Zec et al., 2022).

Additionally, automatic negative thoughts (ANTS), a similar concept to the inner critic from the field of CBT, can impair working memory, particularly in times of stress and can prevent quality thinking, problem-solving, decision-making and if prolonged, indecisiveness and freezing (Eichinger, 2018).

Whilst the term 'inner critic' has negative connotations (linked to the difficulty in getting rid of the inner critic), it is derived from a primitive protective function (Stinckens et al. 2013a). Historically, our minds developed to help us cope in a dangerous world; 'a don't get killed device' (Harris, 2020) and the primitive mind's focus was to look out for anything harmful and avoid it. Whilst useful in the past, in a modern context it manifests as worrying about things that might never happen, how we measure up or how well we fit into a social group. As Harris (2020: 5) puts it:

...evolution has shaped our brains so that we are hard-wired to suffer psychologically: to compare, evaluate, and criticise ourselves, to focus on what we're lacking, to rapidly become dissatisfied with what we have, and to imagine all sorts of frightening scenarios, most of which will never happen.

Embarking on a journey towards a valued direction in life is likely to trigger the inner critic as it involves venturing into unknown territories, which can activate the mind's protective response (Harris, 2020). As a result, the inner critic may start to make negative comments, such as 'you might make a mistake' or 'you might get rejected.'

The positive aspects can be likened to a 'voice of inner experiencing' which is a positive rather than negative form of self-talk (Stinckens et al., 2013a: 66). The key differences are outlined in figure 2-1 below:

Figure 2-1 Process features of the inner critic versus the voice of inner experiencing.

INNER CRITIC	VOICE OF INNER EXPERIENCING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Speaks against me ▪ Loud, harsh voice ▪ Repetitive droning (must, should) ▪ Unfriendly, mean ▪ Repeats old issues ▪ Pushes ▪ Discourages ▪ Destructive, denigrates ▪ Depressing ▪ Generalising (always, everybody) ▪ Impersonal ▪ Non-verbal: facial tension, crossed arms and legs, heavy breathing, tense body posture ▪ Produces tension, inhibition, anxiety, and dissatisfaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Speaks on my behalf. ▪ Quiet, calm voice ▪ Whispers ▪ Friendly, neutral ▪ Reveals something new ▪ Leads ▪ Encourages ▪ Creative, uplifting ▪ Brings hope ▪ Specific ▪ Personal ▪ Non-verbal: smile, loose muscles, deeper breathing, relaxed body posture ▪ Provides relief, energy and rest

2.3 The Challenges of Working with the Inner Critic

To this point, this review has examined the concept of the inner critic and its impact on individuals, highlighting both positive and negative effects. While the literature on challenges and barriers for coaches working with the inner critic is limited, research has primarily focused on implications within the field of therapy. Here, the first challenge relates to the ability for the coachee to recognise the inner critic in the first place. Coachees may not be aware of their inner critic (Stinckens et al., 2013b) and in addition, the therapist (or in the case of coaching, the coach) needs to be able to recognise an inner critic attack if a client does not recognise it themselves (Leijssen, 1998, cited in Stinckens et al., 2013b). As a potential remedy to this, clients can be taught to recognise intrusive negative thoughts which impair productive performance and utilise positive self-talk (Kaiser, 2019).

Other challenges include issues associated with the thoughts appearing plausible to the individual and being difficult to turn off (Neenan, 2018) as well as being particularly resilient to change (Stinckens et al., 2013a).

2.4 Psychological Mechanisms

The literature presents the inner critic as a persistent aspect of the mind, yet offers various treatment approaches based on psychological mechanisms. Psychological mechanisms refer to processes or events that bring about specific changes in psychological outcomes (Sripada et al., 2016).

2.4.1 Cognitive Restructuring

Cognitive restructuring (Beck, 1979) refers to the process of restructuring maladaptive thoughts through changing their content. In other words, changing the way clients think, will change emotion and behaviour (Clark and Beck, 2011; Levin et al., 2018). This is the primary psychological mechanism used in CBC where the focus is on restructuring negative thoughts that can appear as cognitive distortions. As Neenan (2008:13) states:

What CBC offers to coaches is an in depth understanding of how self-defeating beliefs are developed and then maintained in the face of contradictory evidence.

These might include distortions such as ‘emotional reasoning – I feel useless and therefore it must be true,’ ‘all or nothing thinking – my performance fell short of perfect and so I am a total failure,’ and ‘labelling – I’m a loser’ (Burns, 1980a). Restructuring techniques can vary in nature and can range from challenging the truthfulness of a thought by seeking evidence for and against it, identifying the cognitive distortions that the thought exemplifies, accentuating healthy opposites and creating an alternative thought that better reflects the experience – the latter being the primary form of restructuring (Stinckens et al. 2013b).

One popular model is the ABCDE model (Ellis and MacLaren, 1998) which is structured in the following stages:

A = activating event or adversity

B = beliefs about A (tools such as inference chaining can be used to aid this (Neenan, 2008)

C = emotional and behavioural consequences of holding these beliefs

D = distancing oneself from these beliefs

E = effective new outlook

In essence, this model aims to identify negative thoughts as cognitive distortions and replace them with new, more positive ones, using the mechanism of restructuring.

However, some have criticised this approach, arguing that simply replacing negative thoughts or arguing with them does not work over the long term (Harris, 2020). Hill and Oliver (2018) also advocate for an ACT approach that incorporates cognitive defusion, highlighting that any behaviour aimed at avoiding or eliminating unpleasant experiences such as distraction, procrastination, rationalising, or positive self-talk, effectively constitutes a control strategy. Additionally, they suggest that creating a positive self-story may lead to inflexibility, as creating a story that you are already good may limit growth. On the other hand, Deacon et al. (2011) found evidence for the effectiveness of both psychological mechanisms.

Other cognitive behavioural techniques for working with critical self-talk include replacement (substituting negative thoughts with positive ones) through to positive affirmation (focusing on what you do well) (Kaiser, 2019).

2.4.2 Cognitive Reframing

Reframing and restructuring are similar as they aim to alter perspectives on a situation. However, Robson and Troutman-Jordan (2014: 56) highlight differences between the two mechanisms:

...instead of the goal being invalidation of the client's cognitions, the goal of cognitive reframing today is to change, or reframe, the client's perspective from a negative to a positive.

Reframing involves changing the way we interpret or understand a situation (beliefs, unspoken assumptions, or values), by looking at it from a different perspective or considering the potential benefits of the situation (Fan et al., 2021). This can help us to overcome negative thoughts and emotions, and to see the positive aspects of a situation that we may have previously overlooked.

2.4.3 Cognitive Defusion

Cognitive restructuring and reframing have limitations, leading to alternative approaches for working with the inner critic (Larsson et al., 2016; Harris, 2020). In contrast to cognitive restructuring, which challenges negative thoughts and attempts to change their content or find evidence against them, cognitive defusion offers an alternative approach. The focus of cognitive defusion is on noticing thoughts, as just thoughts, and moving away from a position of fusion with them, where they are treated as true when they may not be (Hill and Oliver, 2018; Harris, 2020). Cognitive defusion does not aim to exert control over thoughts or change their form or frequency.

By decoupling thoughts and actions, cognitive defusion allows individuals to choose effective action more easily, rather than expending energy attempting to eliminate negative thoughts (Hill and Oliver, 2018). Techniques such as distancing oneself from thoughts, using first or third person in self-talk, and thanking the mind for the thought, can help to separate individuals from negative thoughts (Kaiser, 2019; Harris, 2020). Other defusion techniques include labelling negative thoughts as part of a story that one tells oneself.

ACC, based on the principles of ACT, employs this approach. The underlying philosophy is that uncomfortable, unwanted thoughts and feelings are an inevitable part of life and that willingly exposing oneself to them is necessary for a fully lived, fulfilling life (Hill and Oliver, 2019). The role of the coach is to help individuals understand that the presence of an inner critic is not problematic, but rather their response to it. Asking questions such as 'does this thought help me take effective action to improve my life?' or 'what would I get for buying into this thought?' can facilitate an effective response (Harris, 2020). Hill and Oliver (2018) highlight unhelpful fusions related to coaching sessions, such as being fused with judgments about oneself, reasons for not performing, and thoughts about the self not being good enough.

There is only one piece of research to date on the use of ACT as a basis for a coaching intervention and this study concluded that ACT-informed coaching represents an effective approach to performance and development coaching in work, career, and personal domains (Skews 2018). However, the research did not directly address the effectiveness of the approach for working with the inner critic.

There is limited direct research on the comparison of cognitive restructuring and cognitive defusion (with no research in a coaching context) however, Levin et al. (2018), in their study of both approaches for individuals with high self-criticism, found them equally effective, albeit working through distinct processes of change. In contrast, in a study also comparing cognitive restructuring and cognitive defusion, Larsson et al. (2016) found that defusion lowered believability, increased comfort and willingness to have the target thought significantly more than cognitive restructuring. Negative thought frequency was reduced in the defusion group and maintained in the restructuring group.

To date, there is no research comparing these psychological mechanisms for the treatment of the inner critic within coaching.

2.4.4 Self-Compassion and Compassion-focused coaching

Compassionate mind training (CMT) and more latterly compassionate mind coaching (CMC) was developed for those suffering self-criticism (Gilbert and Procter, 2006) and as a response to observations that whilst some high self-critics could relate to CBT approaches and generate alternative thoughts to self-criticism (cognitive restructuring), they would not be reassured by such efforts or were not helped at an emotional level (Lee, 2006 in Gilbert and Procter, 2006; Anstiss and Gilbert, 2014). Rather than identifying critical thoughts as distorted cognitions, CMT frames them in the language of safety behaviours such as automatic defences, which when understood as such, can form a basis for compassion. The goal is not to rid themselves of, or subdue self-critical thoughts, but to apply empathy and understanding to them: ‘...as we switch perspectives to a compassion focus/mentality, the hostility in the self-attacks may gradually recede’ (Gilbert and Procter, 2006: 362). Reframing self-criticism should help clients to engage in more constructive self-talk.

One tool used to explore the inner critic is functional analysis. An example is shown in Figure 2-2 below (Anstiss, 2021):

Figure 2-2 Functional Analysis of the Inner Critic

What is your greatest fear of letting go of your inner critic? Of not putting yourself down, or getting angry with yourself?			
So, the underlying fears are...?			
What does it look like? What is its inner form?	What does it actually say to you?	What does it feel about you?	What does it want to do to you?
How do you feel now?			

Research in the field of neuroscience suggests that our ability to empathise with ourselves is much less than our ability to empathise with others (Young et al., 2010). This is due to empathy’s role in social cohesion but not for our own behaviour. Riddell (2021: 252) suggests that:

Coaches can assist their clients in being empathetic with themselves by pointing out that this requires some effort and then by encouraging them to, for instance, consider what they might say to a good friend in their situation.

The compassion focused approach has been directly cited as a coaching approach that can help coachees manage their inner critic (Rowson, 2019) and reduce self-criticism in a therapeutic context (Rose et al., 2018).

Gilbert and Procter (2006) also point out that for some, self-criticism might be seen as something that makes them work hard and can be seen, in part, as a factor in what some might consider their success to date. However, Rowson (2019: 3) adds that:

...once this turns into self-attack and self-bullying, coloured by shame and guilt, it no longer offers any advantage. Instead, it leaves coachees trapped in the past and unable to take action.

2.4.5 Other Psychological Mechanisms/Tools

Mindfulness also appears in the literature as a useful mechanism in working with unhelpful thoughts. Ayhan and Kavak Budak (2021) found a strong negative correlation between mindfulness and negative automatic thoughts. One example cited for coaches is the use of writing meditation to observe the critic and bring compassion through this process (Johnson, 2020). ACT also emphasises mindfulness as a useful mechanism by focusing on the present moment (by accepting our thoughts and emotions without judgement) to help the individual develop a more flexible and open-minded attitude towards their inner critic.

Cognitive behavioural 'chairwork' is another coaching technique that can be beneficial in addressing problematic cognitions and is often used as a tool in compassion focussed coaching (Pugh, 2018). Pugh (2018: 101) suggests that chairwork can be useful in '...interviewing the inner critic in relation to its intentions and underlying motivations'. For Stinckens et al. (2013b), chair work can play a useful part in helping a client re-establish contact with their 'organismic experience' following identification of the inner critic. This essentially concerns how the client feels when experiencing the critic and is achieved through the experiential self, taking a different chair position to the inner critic.

An alternative approach to the two-chair cognitive restructuring is to use a third chair that can be used which a compassion focus to express compassion towards the attacked and attacking parts of the self (Gilbert and Irons, 2005).

2.4.6 Selecting Appropriate Psychological Mechanisms

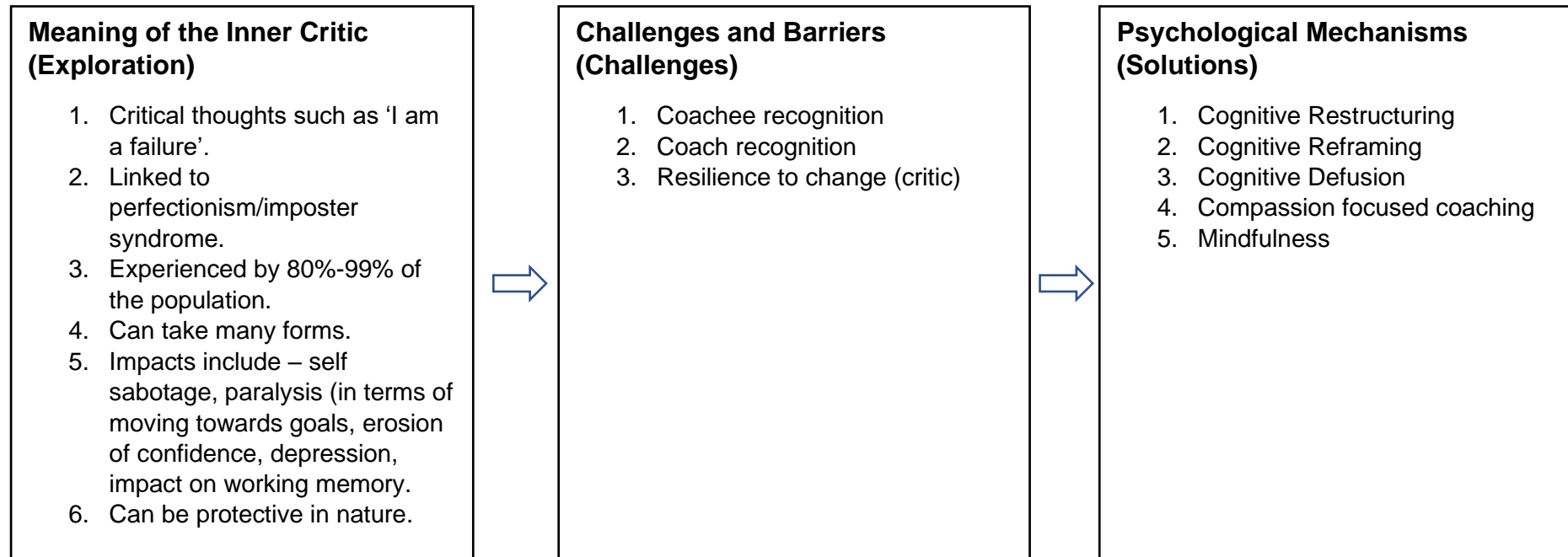
The use of therapeutic techniques in coaching the inner critic raises the question of when coaching is more appropriate than therapy. The severity of negative emotions should be considered in determining the appropriate approach (Rowson, 2019) and Stinckens et al. (2013a) suggest that different pathways may be more fitting based on the nature and intensity of the inner critic. They also note that the inner critic is complex, multidimensional, challenging, and time-consuming, which may not align with coaching's typical shorter-term approach compared to therapy. The proponents of cognitive defusion also emphasise that the inner critic cannot be completely eliminated as they are an inevitable part of life (Hill and Oliver, 2019).

Stinckens et al. (2013b) highlight the work of Carl Rogers (1942, 1959) in therapy, who although promoting recognition and acceptance of the client's inner critic (cognitive defusion), sometimes appeared to negate, or set aside the inner critic (more aligned with cognitive restructuring). This led them to conclude that Rogers adapted his approach to working with the inner critic based on the client's specific needs. A similar variability in approach is evident in Peters' (2012) work as well.

2.4.7 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual model developed from the literature review is presented in figure 2-3:

Figure 2-3 Conceptual model relating to the inner critic.



Source: Based on authors review of the literature.

Chapter 3

Research Design

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the overall research design used for this dissertation. This includes the philosophical orientation, the overall research approach, the specific research strategy, the research sample, and the data analysis strategy.

3.1 Philosophical Orientation

The research adopts a constructivist epistemological philosophy, which holds that the world does not exist objectively and independently from the observer (Oades et al., 2019). When compared to positivism, constructivism allows for multiple, equally valid social and constructed realities and allows the research to uncover embedded meaning through words and text (Ponterotto, 2002). A major theme in the literature review is that thoughts can be perceived as separate from the self (Stinckens et al., 2013b), and it is not the content of our thoughts but rather how we respond to them that shapes our reality. This perspective acknowledges that knowledge is not fixed or absolute. The purpose of this research is to examine the perceptions and interpretations that coaches have towards working with the inner critic, making a constructivist approach most fitting for this study.

3.2 Research Approach and Methodology

The study design used in this research is an exploratory approach. This approach is suitable as there is limited research on the topic of the inner critic in coaching. It allows for asking questions, gathering new insights, and generating ideas for future research. According to Hair et al. (2007: 154), exploratory research aims to 'discover new relationships, patterns, themes, ideas and so on'. It is particularly useful when previous research is lacking (Al-Ababneh, 2020). The study employs two key exploratory methods: literature review and expert interviews, as suggested by Saunders et al., (2009).

A qualitative research methodology was chosen for this study, as it aligns well with both the constructivist research philosophy and the exploratory nature of the research. Qualitative methods offer the opportunity to delve deeper into the subject, provide flexibility, and capture participants' thoughts and feelings more accurately (Creswell, 2013; Oades et al., 2019). The inductive approach was selected as it fits with the qualitative methodology and the aim of exploring the human experience and perspective of participants (Oades et al., 2019).

3.3 Research Questions

The literature review identified three core themes which were understanding the inner critic (for both the coach and the coachee), the challenges and barriers of working with the inner critic and lastly the approaches used by coaches to work with the inner critic. These were translated into semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix A), with further questions added aligning to content raised in the literature review.

3.4 Research Sample

The study utilised a purposive sampling strategy to gather a group of individuals who could provide valuable insights on the research topic (Creswell, 2013). The sample was selected for its relevance to the research problem and was kept small, in line with the qualitative research methodology. The interview participants were sourced through the authors' personal network and the International Coaching Federation website (<https://coachingfederation.org/>), and all had prior experience working with the inner critic in coaching. One of the interviewees (Coach G) is a known author in the field and thus constitutes an elite interviewee. To preserve anonymity, the names of the participants were omitted. The summary of the interviewee sample is presented in Table 3-1.

Table 0-1 Research Sample Overview

NO	NAME	GENDER	YEARS' EXPERIENCE AS A COACH*	EDUCATION IN COACHING	SPECIFIC EDUCATION ON INNER CRITIC?	ALIGN TO SPECIFIC COACHING STYLE?
1	Coach A	Female	14	ICF Accredited Constellations Various short coaching courses	No	No
2	Coach B	Female	2	Professional Certificate Master's degree	Yes (neuroscience programme)	No - eclectic approach
3	Coach C	Female	2 (8)	Professional Certificate	Yes (in CBT training)	No
4	Coach D	Male	25	Various short courses Behavioural psychology	No	No
5	Coach E	Male	2.5	Accreditation programme with EMCC	No	No
6	Coach F	Female	2	Professional Certificate Master's degree	Yes, but limited	No
7	Coach G	Male	32	Motivational Interviewing CBT ACT	Yes, in training on three therapeutic approaches	Default is motivational interviewing coach/Process

NO	NAME	GENDER	YEARS' EXPERIENCE AS A COACH*	EDUCATION IN COACHING	SPECIFIC EDUCATION ON INNER CRITIC?	ALIGN TO SPECIFIC COACHING STYLE?
8	Coach H	Male	10	Compassion focused therapy Professional Certificate Master's degree	No	based coaching No
9	Coach I	Female	25	Diploma Various short courses Parts of a master's degree	No	No
10	Coach J	Female	4	MSc Gestalt Psychotherapy	Yes	No but heavy influence of gestalt
11	Coach K	Female	2	Professional Certificate Master's degree	Yes, but limited	No
12	Coach L	Female	22	Various training courses. (250 hours)	Yes	No – eclectic approach
13	Coach M	Female	23	Meyler Campbell Programme	Yes (in sports psychology)	No – eclectic approach
14	Coach N	Female	2.5	Professional Certificate Master's degree	Yes (in psychosynthesis training)	No
15	Coach O	Female	23	Various coaching training courses	No	No
			Average: 12.8 years			

*Where they have been coaching, but not considered formally, in brackets.

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection method used for this research was semi-structured interviews, which are well-suited to this research due to their flexibility and ability to allow the interviews to flow in a natural manner (Oades et al., 2019). The research questions were carefully crafted ahead of time to allow for consistent comparison across interviewees. The semi-structured questionnaire questions used for the research are included in Appendix A.

Given the remote locations of the interviewees, interviews were conducted via video (using Microsoft Teams) and lasted approximately one hour. The recordings were fully transcribed, and thematic analysis was employed as the qualitative analysis method. The reason for selecting thematic analysis was its flexibility, the ability to gather rich and detailed information, and the fact that it is not tied to a specific theoretical or epistemological position (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This is important because the psychological mechanisms underlying this research may come from different

theoretical perspectives, so the flexibility of thematic analysis is advantageous. Furthermore, thematic analysis is compatible with constructivist paradigms in psychology and a well-conducted thematic analysis makes the theoretical stance of the research clear as well as being well suited to applied research areas such as counselling and psychotherapy (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Clarke and Braun, 2018). It has also been used to explore the experience of specific groups of therapists (Hunt, 2013).

The information gathered from each coachee was analysed individually using a thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The author utilised the software NVivo (QSR International) to code the results and ensure accuracy. Three initial themes were created (defining the inner critic, challenges and barriers, and tools and techniques used) based upon the literature review and then further codes were created from the interviews. The entire transcript of each interview was coded, and the codes were then compared and contrasted following the thematic analysis guidelines outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Figures 3.1 and 3.2 below outline the coding ranked by number and items clustered by coding similarity.

Figure 3-1 Coding ranked by number (NVIVO export).

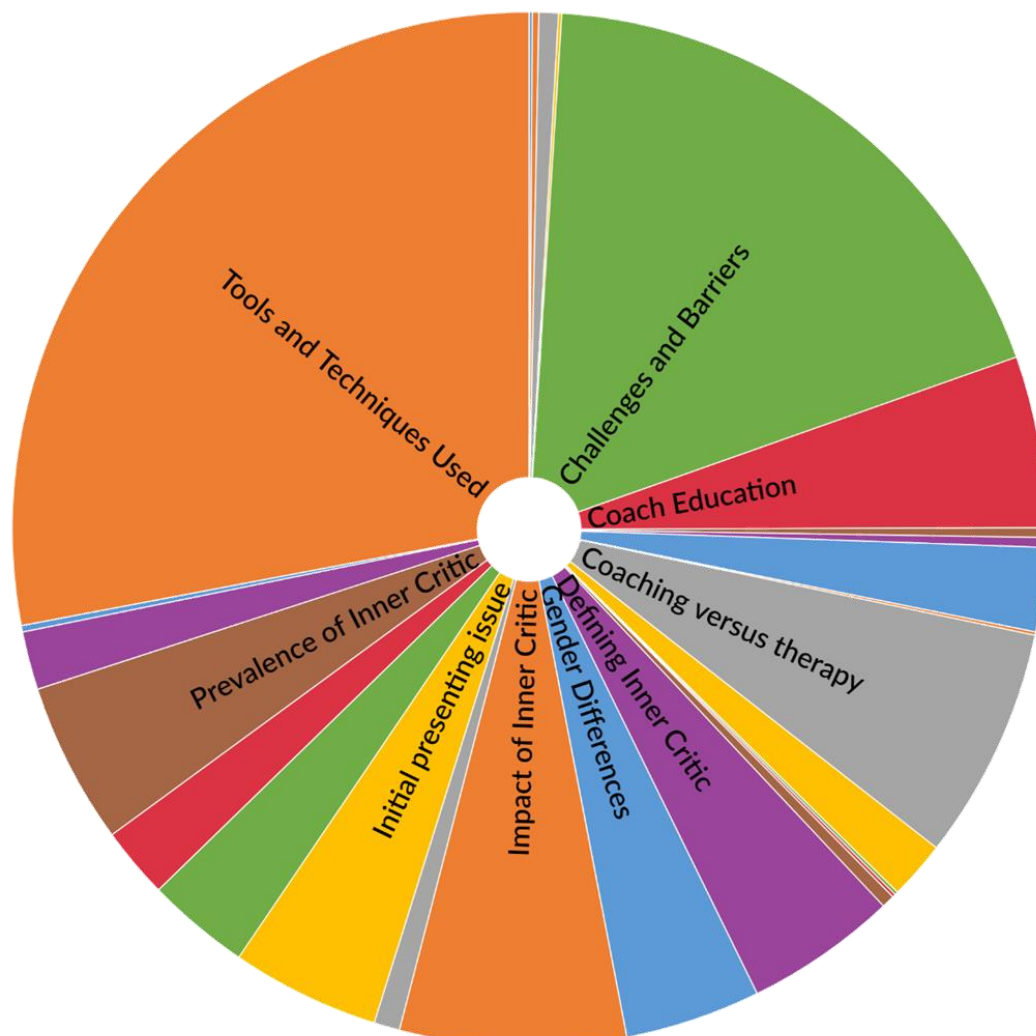
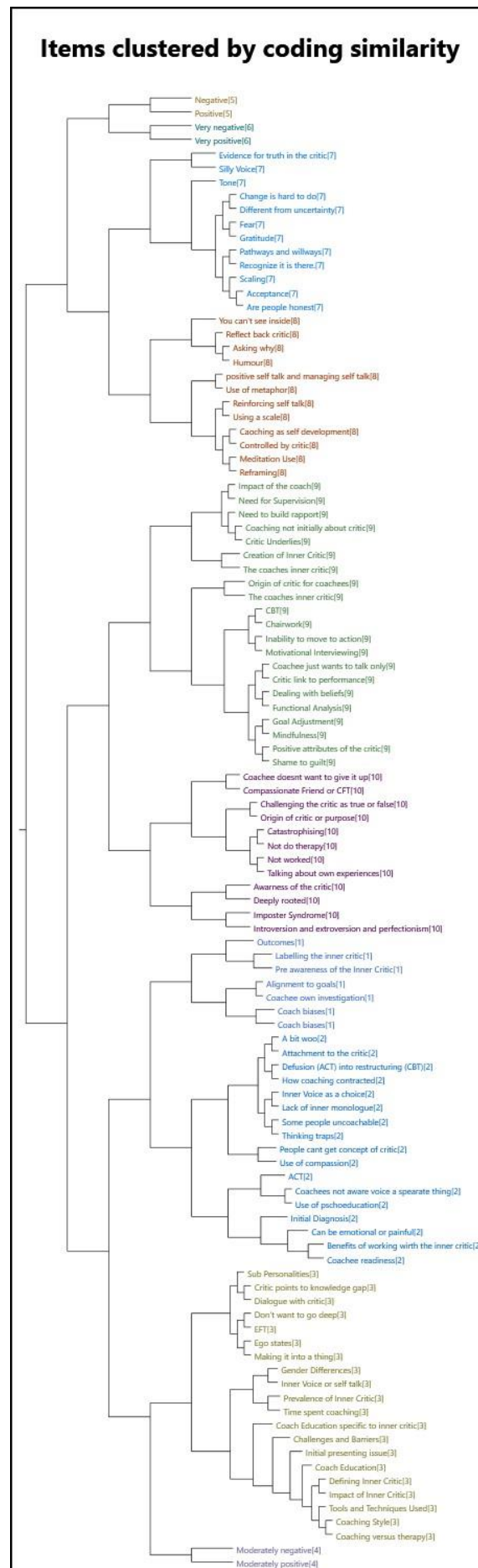


Figure 3-2 Items clustered by coding similarity (NVIVO Export).



Chapter 4

Findings and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

The findings section of this research presents the key themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews with 15 coaches. The themes were identified through a thorough analysis of the interview transcripts using thematic analysis. The findings are organised and presented in a way that highlights the most significant and relevant results.

4.2 The inner critic has various interpretations and meanings for coaches.

In this study, the concept of the inner critic was found to be viewed differently among coaches. While some coaches perceived it as having a negative impact, others recognised its potential as a motivator, although not necessarily the most effective one. One coach suggested that elements of the inner critic can aid in self-regulation and self-management, but it can become a problem when it becomes harsh, shaming, and condemning. Additionally, some coaches acknowledged its role in keeping people safe from past traumatic experiences, but Coach G also acknowledged that this protective function could prevent individuals from “living their best life.” Another coach emphasised that the inner critic does have something useful to say, even if it may be negative.

Examples of the inner critic as defined by coaches are shown in Table 4-1 below:

Table 0-1 Definitions of the inner critic

Definition	Coach
“...it’s somebody being critical of themselves internally.”	A
“...a voice talking to them in a critical way.”	F
“I think of it as a metaphor for certain psychological energy.’ It is a thought which is charged with a certain energy which is uncomfortable.”	I
“We wouldn’t necessarily use the term inner critic – we would talk about the phenomena in a way that makes sense to them. It has a pulling back energy.”	I
“...it is an unrealistic voice which is shouting negative thoughts at you, thoughts, and opinions, but it is unrealistic, so it is a false belief.”	M

Definition	Coach
"...as if you have two voices, you have your negative inner voice, you have your compassionate inner voice and, in most cases, the negative inner voice is the one that takes primacy for all of us."	B
"...it's a haranguing negative monologue. The kind that critiques you as you go through your life that says things like 'you're terrible at public speaking'."	B

The concept of the 'inner critic' was viewed differently among coaches, with some finding that the term did not resonate with their understanding of the concept. Instead, alternative labels such as 'negative inner voice', 'harsh inner voice', 'critical self', 'automatic negative thoughts', and 'the gremlin' were preferred. Notably, some coaches also associated the inner critic with imposter syndrome, although one coach noted that imposter syndrome is often mistaken for a fear of the unknown. Another common link identified in the research was the connection between the inner critic and perfectionism.

Coach D views the concept of the inner critic as being perspective dependent. According to this coach, psychotherapy seeks to explore the origins and function of the inner critic, while counselling aims to understand why the inner voice tends to be critical. In contrast, coaching takes the approach that individuals have the power to choose their inner voice.

Some coaches saw concept of 'inner voice' as positive, supportive, or encouraging and others suggest that the inner critic is simply a negative inner voice. For one coach, it is simply a form of self-talk and another suggested that the inner voice is neutral, and that the inner critic is the critical side of the inner voice. Other coaches suggested that differing energy and tone are important.

All coaches in the study reported that working with the inner critic is a common or significant part of their work, with one coach noting that they recently worked with two clients with the issue in the same week. It is a frequent topic in coaching because it involves transforming an individual's beliefs and mindset. The research also indicated that the critic could increase in prominence during significant new experiences for coachees.

4.3 Critical distinctions of the inner critic.

4.3.1 The inner critic does not differ by gender, but the response can.

Most of the coaches agreed that the existence of the inner critic does not differ by gender. However, several coaches noted that women may be more aware of, or willing to openly express their inner critic, potentially because men tend to hide it. One coach suggested that social conditioning could be an influence and another that people's emotional drivers, not gender, are a more significant factor.

Coach G suggested that differences in how the inner critic manifests may be due to evolutionary reasons, with men focusing more on failure and achievement and women on social rejection.

4.3.2 Timescale and emphasis differ for coaching and therapy.

The coaches in the study were generally confident in working with the inner critic within a coaching rather than a therapeutic context, and most felt comfortable distinguishing between the two. Some of the coaches had received training in therapy or practiced therapy, and they saw a fine line between coaching and therapy in their practice. However, one coach, who is not a trained therapist, noted that coaching can still effectively address deep and emotional issues. They saw the key distinction as the level of trauma associated with the inner critic and viewed the differences as simply being a matter of practice, not psychological mechanism. All coaches were aware of their boundaries and ready to refer clients if the issue becomes too intense, emotional, or linked to abuse or mental illness.

Coaches in the study recognised the challenge of managing time constraints when addressing the inner critic in a coaching setting. Coaching is often delivered over a shorter period and whilst coaching may occur monthly, therapy work may occur weekly, so coaches must be mindful of how their clients may be affected during these gaps. This was emphasised by one coach as an important consideration.

This also suggests that, as raised by several coaches, contracting is key. One of the main differences cited between coaching and therapy was the difference in how they contract with a client and also whether a company or the individual was paying for the coaching. This aligns with the view of one coach who argued that psychotherapy would look at the inner critic and understand where the inner critic comes from and the role of it (how you got there), Counselling would say that's an inner voice and help you understand why the inner voice is critical (feel better with where you are) and coaching

is concerned with taking ownership and move forward (getting to where you want to go) – so it depends on what the coachee wants to do. In short, making the past make sense versus focus on moving forwards. This was also supported by other coaches in that coaching has more of a ‘forward focus’ whereas in psychotherapy there is more of an ‘explore and see’ approach.

4.3.3 The inner critic is rarely the initial presenting issue.

The study found that the inner critic is not typically the primary concern of coachees in coaching. Rather, it can emerge as an issue while addressing other challenges such as job dissatisfaction, difficulty starting a business, emotional management, low confidence, unpreparedness for a new role, public speaking, or cognitive biases such as catastrophising. The inner critic is usually identified during the coaching process.

One coach had a client who specifically came with imposter syndrome as their concern, while another coach mentioned a woman who was aware of the inner critic concept and sought to work on it, however, these were very much in the minority.

4.3.4 There are three key ‘meta impacts’ of the inner critic.

The impact of the inner critic on coaches was primarily seen as its restrictive nature. According to the study, coaches described it as hindering progress and causing self-doubt by preventing people from pursuing what they want, keeping them hidden, and holding them back. These restrictions pose a challenge in the coaching context, where the goal is to help individuals reach their full potential (Whitmore, 2017). The study revealed three ‘meta impacts’ of the inner critic on coaches: its effect on mental health, its ability to hinder progress, and its reinforcement of self-doubt. Table 4-2 provides a comprehensive list of the impacts identified in the study.

Table 0-2 Range of Impacts

META THEME	IMPACTS (COACH IN BRACKETS)
MENTAL HEALTH/ WELLNESS IMPACTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Feeling broken (A) ▪ Not being able to cope, in tears, not feeling like themselves (A) ▪ Not happy, not functioning as they could be, not feeling good about themselves (C) ▪ People stressed out and depressed (E) ▪ Strong critic can drive people to depression, self-harm, suicide, addiction (G) ▪ A depress in their feeling of 'okayness' (I) ▪ Somatic pain e.g., tightness around shoulders (I) ▪ Lack of confidence (I) ▪ Feelings of shame (I) ▪ Difficulty sleeping (I) ▪ Displaying emotions at work (I) ▪ Significant cause of anxiety (H) ▪ It can affect relationships with people (A)
HALTING THE ABILITY TO PROGRESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Feeling stuck – "...feeling of being stuck and not being able to do this on your own, that makes people feel inadequate or incapable ...these are all words that strangely enough the inner critic uses." (B) ▪ Stops people going after what they want (A) ▪ It keeps them small and keeps them hidden. The purpose of it is about keeping people safe, but in keeping people safe it means that people then withhold (J) ▪ Choice of language has a big impact on performance – "...I'm hopeless at this". Self-talk creates a perception that there is no point. People lean back rather than engage (D) ▪ Limiting for people. On how they perform and how they behave as well, because for what I find is often it just stops people from acting (E) ▪ Stop going for a promotion or a new job (E) ▪ Reduces courage – holding people back (H) ▪ Prevent the person being who they want to be/stopping them realising their potential (F) (O) ▪ Inhibition in their action (I) ▪ It makes them hold back (M) ▪ Get in the way of living your best life (G) ▪ They play small (L) ▪ Answers do not come easily because the critic is in the way (L) ▪ It is negating us in some way (O) ▪ It is disabling and can make people tentative (O) ▪ The person can be quite disabled (O)
REINFORCING SELF DOUBT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ "...she is always seeking and needing very public recognition for what she does because she can't give herself that recognition" - needs lots of external recognition (A) ▪ Doubts capability (A) ▪ Reinforces limiting beliefs (F) ▪ They don't believe in themselves or think things are possible (L)

4.4 There are more challenges and barriers than suggested in the literature.

There were a range of challenges and barriers for coaches in working with the coachees inner critic cited by the interviewees. Many of these were also cited as reasons why they had struggled to work on the inner critic successfully with a coachee. These are summarised in Table 4-3 below:

Table 0-3 Summary of Challenges

META THEME		
1	Deeply Rooted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The work can be emotional or painful. ▪ Dealing with deeply rooted issues. ▪ Dealing with beliefs. ▪ Risk of making it into a 'thing.' ▪ You can't see inside people's heads. ▪ Do not want to go deep.
2	Coachee Readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The coachee does not want to give up their inner critic. ▪ The coachee is not yet ready to do the work/explore the inner critic. ▪ Coachees have an inability to move to action. ▪ Coachee just wants to talk only. ▪ Controlled by the critic. ▪ Lack of inner monologue (claimed by coachee). ▪ Coachees do not recognise it is there. ▪ The coachee is not that self-aware. ▪ Coachee looking for someone to take the problem away and not do any work
3	The Coaches Inner Critic/the relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The impact of the coaches own inner critic (including their own biases) ▪ How coaching is contracted ▪ A need to build rapport. ▪ Need for supervision.
4	Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coachees are unable to understand the concept of the inner critic. ▪ Some potential coachees are uncoachable. ▪ They lack awareness of the critic. ▪ Concept a bit 'woo.' ▪ Reinforcing self-talk. ▪ Not do therapy. ▪ Goal adjustment. ▪ Change is hard to do. ▪ Are people honest? ▪ The coach may not want to go there through a fear of straying into counselling territory. ▪ The environment is very strongly reinforcing the critic thus making it hard for a person to change the voice.

META THEME

Organisational culture might reinforce/re-create the critic. Command and control cultures. How much power is given to the line manager, the corporate systems, and the processes? What are the frameworks that keep people in a space.
--

4.4.1 The inner critic is deeply rooted.

The biggest challenge cited by coaches in the study was the connection between the inner critic and deeply ingrained issues for coachees. This work can be emotionally challenging for coachees, and as Coach A mentioned, "emotionally traumatic".

"Even if somebody wants to adjust. That inner critic, it can be really difficult to make a change to make that happen because it is so embedded." Coach A.

For a coach looking to do this work it can manifest as the coachee not being willing to open up as a result or even a level of unconscious resistance. In addition, as one coach added, these issues may also have been there for a very long time.

Coaches also cited that change is hard; in particular, change relating to the level of potential depth of the issues outlined above. The inner critic can be related to beliefs which are again deep in nature. Coachees can also see lifelong change as daunting and thus a coach should bear this in mind as part of the process.

Coach D noted the challenge posed by self-perpetuating inner critic self-talk, which can lead to a vicious cycle. This occurs when the inner critic creates a self-fulfilling prophecy that causes the coachee to seek out and validate the criticisms, leading to further reinforcement of the negative self-talk.

4.4.2 Coachee readiness plays a key factor in the coaching process.

The research also highlighted the challenge of coachee readiness as a key theme. This was expressed in various forms, including a lack of willingness to delve deep into emotional issues, lack of readiness to face the inner critic, or inadequate self-awareness and self-knowledge to undertake this type of work. Coach C mentioned a case where a coachee was more focused on disproving others' views of their issue rather than exploring their own inner critic. Several coaches noted that some coachees were reluctant to let go of their inner critic.

The research also noted several common obstacles in coaching engagements, including the time needed for the coachee to feel comfortable and willing to engage in the process (open up), as well as the coachee's level of coachability, openness, and honesty. In some cases, the coachee may struggle with taking action, blame others for their challenges, and remain addicted to crisis instead of finding solutions.

4.4.3 The coach-coachee relationship influences success.

The research highlights the crucial role of the coach-coachee relationship in overcoming challenges and barriers in coaching. One key and emergent theme is the influence of the coach's own inner critic and biases on the coaching process. Four coaches emphasised this issue, as working with a coachee's inner critic can be a challenging task. For instance, one coach sought supervision as the work with the coachee had triggered their own inner critic, while another experienced self-doubt and felt unable to relax while coaching. To address their own inner critic, one coach engaged in monthly written conversations, wrote a compassionate letter to themselves, and recognised the irony of criticising oneself while coaching a coachee on the inner critic.

Other crucial aspects of the coach-coachee relationship include establishing a strong connection, being cautious in the agreement process not to make promises to solve the coachee's problems, avoiding blurring the lines between coaching and therapy, and being mindful of how the work is presented to the coachee. For instance, mentioning that the work can be challenging may discourage them from even starting. Additionally, one coach pondered on how they may unconsciously attract coachees who struggle with their inner critic.

This research highlights a multitude of obstacles, indicating that existing literature may not fully address the challenges coaches should consider when working with the inner critic.

4.5 Psychological Mechanisms.

Most coaches in the research adopted a flexible approach to working with their clients and utilise a variety of psychological techniques. Examples included approaching each case individually and working with the coachee to co-create a solution that is tailored to their specific needs and situation. On the other hand, other coaches incorporate elements of both CBC and ACC in their practice, using restructuring and defusion respectively, to help the coachee manage their inner critic.

4.5.1 Creating awareness and understanding is an important first step.

The research findings indicate that many coachees are unaware of the role their inner critic plays in their initial presenting issues. For example, Coach C addresses this by raising awareness of the inner critic and exploring its impact on the coachees life. They encourage the coachee to reflect on the frequency of the critic's appearance and to note down any patterns they observe. This process of reflection may include mindfulness techniques.

Coach C believes that this examination of the presenting issue and the creation of awareness is crucial in reframing and finding actions to take, as well as potentially identifying patterns:

“...we are examining the presenting issue, were creating awareness, we’re reflecting, we’re thinking about actions that could be taken. We’re thinking about reframing. we’re doing all of that.” Coach C.

Coach B uses a function analysis to delve into the nature of the inner critic and increase understanding. This tool involves exploring the critic in more detail, asking questions such as what it feels like, what it sounds like, what it looks like, whose voice it is, and so on. They have found this tool to help coachees identify the source of their inner critic and remove the emotion from the process, allowing for a more detached analysis of the critic's practicalities. In one instance, a coachee discovered that their inner critic was their mother's voice.

The research identified a number of questions that can be used to explore the inner critic. These are outlined in Table 4-4 below:

Table 0-4 Questions to explore the inner critic.

Number	Question
1	What is the voice saying to you?
2	When does it show up – before you are about to do things? After you have done things?
3	Is it waking you in the night?
4	Does it sound like a child, a teenager, an adult? Does it sound like a parent?
5	What kind of language is being used?
6	When did this form?
7	When did this start?
8	How ingrained might this be?

Number	Question
9	What might be some work that we need to do?
10	When is there more of an energetic charge to it, when is it busier, shriller, louder, or nastier?

In addition to the questions above, Coach G uses inference chaining to examine the underlying assumptions that may contribute to the coachee's inner critic. This approach helps the coachee understand their thought patterns and offers the opportunity for them to challenge and change these limiting beliefs as well as reducing catastrophising and over generalisation.

4.5.2 Cognitive Restructuring

Several coaches use the ABCDE model from CBC in their practice. Coach G cited the use of the model to examine a coachee's beliefs, consequences, rational versus irrational thinking, and to challenge and change the content of their thoughts. For Coach F a limitation of this approach is when clients struggle to articulate their thoughts and feelings. They also point out that directly arguing with the inner critic can lead to defensiveness and escalation.

Coach I offered a similar approach to the ABCDE model and suggests using 'post-it notes' to write down limiting and empowering beliefs (each in turn) and examining each one's accuracy, origin, reliability, and impact with questions such as:

1. Is it true?
2. Is it helpful?
3. Was it true once?
4. Where did it come from?
5. How reliable is it?
6. If you knew the opposite were true – what impact would it have?

The client is then asked to reflect on what they want to do with each belief (rip it up, burn it, keep it) and change it into something more empowering, supportive, and helpful. Another coach took a similar approach by exploring the usefulness of the inner critic and finding more positive and supportive replacement thoughts. Coach L took a similar approach in working with the coachee to explore whether the critic is useful, shining a light on it and then work on what the replacement thoughts should be.

4.5.3 Cognitive Reframing

The research highlights numerous instances of reframing as a psychological mechanism. One coach helped the coachee reframe their past experiences by re-writing their story and setting new goals for the future, providing a new narrative for both the past 20 years and the next 20 years. Another coach, focused on creating awareness of the inner voice and reframing it as "it doesn't have to be like that." The emphasis was on managing the process towards the coachee's set goal with self-talk designed to support the goal, utilising intelligence rather than emotions.

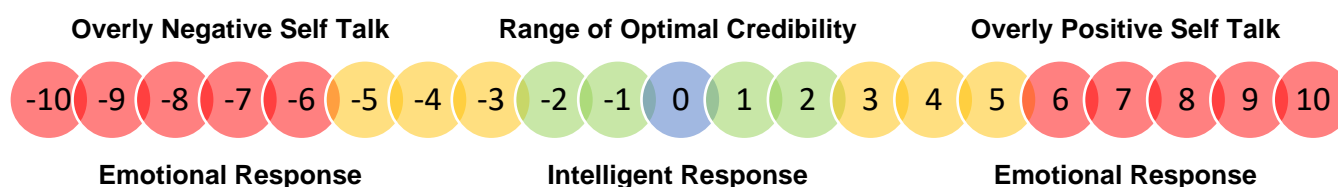
Other reframing approaches included introducing the concept of a "mental boardroom" and encouraging the coachee to choose its members or by prompting the coachee to visualise a positive future and question how they would feel in six months if nothing changed. In addition, having the coachee articulate the critic's voice and hearing it differently could be beneficial, as well as writing down or reflecting on what the critic is saying. As Coach E articulates:

"...everything kind of makes sense in your own head, but as soon as people say out loud, they'll be like, well, actually I don't agree with that."

Coach E also encouraged coachees to view any situation as an opportunity and choice to develop resilience, whereas Coach D focused on helping the coachee develop more generative language through reframing, such as replacing "I'm hopeless at this" with "it's just something I haven't mastered yet." In a similar approach, and continuing to emphasise a change of tone, another coach suggested moving from "I can't" to "I can't yet." Coach J uses polarity as a reframing technique. This involves looking for what is the opposite [to a critical thought] and getting someone to stand with the opposite, maybe not completely but as a challenge to see if it helps shift them between that polarity.

Coach D used a reframing approach based on a spectrum with zero in the middle and a range of minus ten to plus ten, with the goal of keeping the coachee's perspective within minus two and plus two (see figure 4-1 below). Beyond this range, the coachee's self-talk becomes overly emotional and negative or overly positive (thus losing its intelligence). Keeping the coachee's critic at minus two allows for an intelligent dialogue, while beyond minus two or plus two it becomes more like sensational newspaper headlines.

Figure 4-1 Use of a spectrum for self-talk (authors elaboration from interview with Coach D)



Other examples included the use of metaphor (such as an iceberg) to delve deeper into underlying values, beliefs, and assumptions or the coach explaining that the critic can sometimes be helpful and protective and suggests changing the relationship with it by understanding the positive intent behind it.

4.5.4 Cognitive Defusion

The interviews revealed the use of cognitive defusion as a psychological mechanism. Coach C discussed the ACT/ACC technique of "unhooking" work, which involves acknowledging a thought such as "nobody likes me", thanking the mind, and moving on with intended actions. Coach C also emphasised the importance of psychoeducation in facilitating defusion, explaining that habitual thoughts generate emotions and shape one's experiences. To help people understand this concept, Coach C suggests setting it as an experiment for a few weeks and introducing the idea of control over automatic thoughts, which can often be a revelatory experience.

Another coach suggested accepting what the critic says rather than allowing yourself to be bullied by it. One way is to believe what it says, and the other is to acquiesce with it. Coach I took a similar view: "...my aim would be to engage with it and have a dance with it, not to put up a fight and seek to crush it to bits." Coach M lends further support to this approach: "...so actually we need to embrace our inner critic, love our inner critic and go, you know what, you keep me on the right path."

4.5.5 Self-Compassion

The use of self-compassion as a psychological tool was frequently discussed in the study, often in relation to promoting a more compassionate and coaching-like approach to self-talk. Coach F emphasised the critical self's potential to lead to self-criticism, whereas a compassionate self leads to self-reassurance and recommended the cultivation of an "inner coach" to encourage this change. An example of such self-talk was provided by coach C where a coachee might remind themselves that they are

the ‘best of the best’ and have ‘got this’ before an important meeting or repeating pre-prepared mindset phrases. Compassion could also come in the form of celebrating that you were ‘out there’ even if things didn’t go to plan. Coach G also suggested that compassion focused therapy is better informed by neuroscience than say CBT.

Other approaches utilising the psychological mechanism of self-compassion included:

- Letting people know it is not your fault.
- Having a dialogue with the critic in a ‘Gestalt’ way.
- Asking ‘what would your best friend say to you about this situation’?
- Writing a compassionate letter to yourself or a compassionate memo saved on a mobile phone where it is you talking to you.
- Chair work where the compassionate self-talks to the critical self.
- Shifting from shame to guilt (guilt is functional – you can apologise and make amends. Shame is much more dysfunctional).

4.6 Tools and Techniques

Table 4-5 summarises the tools and techniques cited by the coaches for working with the inner critic and outlines the relevant psychological mechanism. These have been ranked in the frequency that they occurred from the interviews. It is clear from the ranking that a range of psychological mechanisms were in common usage. It can be inferred from the frequency of usage that these were seen as some of the most effective techniques and included the focus on creating new self-talk, unhooking from unhelpful thoughts, creating awareness of the critic, and verbalising the critic out loud.

Table 0-5 Summary of Tools and Techniques employing various psychological mechanisms.

	TOOL	PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISM/PURPOSE	COACH
1	Focus on created self-talk / cultivation of an inner coach (typically compassionate).	Restructuring – to create conscious self-talk	D, K, N, C, F, G
2	ACT technique - unhooking	Defusion	C, F, G
3	Use of metaphor e.g., choosing who is in your mental boardroom, sport analogies, iceberg	Reframing	D, C, O
4	Awareness/consciousness	Awareness	C, D, N
5	Verbalise the critic aloud (coachee or coach)	Reframing	E, I, H
6	Chairwork	Compassion	F, G, L
7	Goal setting	Reframing	A, D
8	Function Analysis	Understanding	B, G
9	Make the critic a comic character/changing the voice	Reframing	B, K

	TOOL	PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISM/PURPOSE	COACH
10	Visualising the future	Reframing	E, K
11	Write down what the critic is saying	Reframing	E, J
12	Use of personality profiles	Awareness/Understanding	F, M
13	CBT Models - ABCDE	Cognitive Restructuring	F, G
14	Dialogue with it in a gestalt way	Compassion	I, L
15	Psychoeducation	Defusion	C, G
16	Challenging evidence	Restructuring	K, M
17	Meditation and mindfulness	Mindfulness	D, G
18	Writing life story – to rewrite story	Reframing	A
19	Constellations	Understanding	A
20	Introducing concept of inner critic	Awareness	C
21	CBT models – inference chaining	Restructuring	G
22	Rogarian approach	Understanding	G
23	Focus on general health and physical fitness	Understanding	I
24	The use of polarity	Reframing	J
25	Pathways and Willways	Other	M
26	ACT - Values work	Understanding	K
27	ACT – use of ACT matrix	Defusion	F
28	Motivational Interviewing	Other	G
29	Use of a spectrum	Reframing	D
30	Use of fear to motivate a coachee to change	Reframing	M
31	Use of gratitude	Compassion	M
32	Stress the positive attributes	Reframing	G
33	Exploring sub-personalities	Understanding	I
34	Emotional Freedom Therapy (EFT)	Other	I
35	Ego states – why still believing something now that may have been a belief in childhood.	Understanding	I
36	Drawing the Inner Critic	Understanding	L
37	Transactional Analysis	Understanding	O
38	Ladder of inference	Understanding	O
39	Looking for the gift in what the critic is saying	Reframing	L

Chapter 5

Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This research sought to investigate the following research questions:

1. What do coaches understand as the concept of the Inner Critic and what is the meaning for them (exploration)?
2. What are the challenges and barriers of working with the Inner Critic and is there a difference in a coaching rather than therapeutic context (understanding the challenges)?
3. What psychological mechanisms are coaches using in practice to work with coachee's inner critic (understanding the solutions).

The questions in the research aimed to enhance coaches' abilities to work with the inner critic by exploring their understanding of its meaning, challenges, and available psychological mechanisms. Based on the research questions, literature review, and findings, the discussion is organised into the following sections:

- Meaning and Understanding
- Challenges and Barriers
- Psychological Mechanisms
- Further Research

5.2 Meaning and Understanding

The literature on the inner critic, as presented by Gendlin (1981), portrays it as a negative entity. The research in this study supports this view but also sheds light on the potential benefits of having an inner critic. For example, some coaches advocated looking for the gift that the critic brings to enable coachees to explore positive intent of the critic. It was found that when the inner critic becomes harsh, it can cause problems. The research also supports Harris's (2020) idea that imposter syndrome is a form of the inner critic, as it was one of the most reported manifestations of the inner critic among participants.

Larsson et al. (2016) previously stated that a significant proportion of the non-clinical population experience negative thoughts, which was supported by the results of this study as well. Most of the coaches in the research believed that the inner critic is something that to some degree, everyone experiences, and it was clear from this research that working with coachees inner critic was extremely common in practice.

Based on the literature review and the research, the author has been able to develop a new definition of the inner critic in a coaching context which is as follows:

The inner critic is an extremely common, automatic, critical form of self-talk, that whilst typically restrictive and problematic in nature can originate as a protective function and thus also have positive intent.

The literature documented various negative effects of the inner critic, including hindering personal growth and progression (Palmer, 2009), causing self-sabotage (Kross, 2021), and undermining self-confidence (Stinckens et al., 2013). The findings of this study reinforce these impacts and highlight the additional mental health implications of the inner critic, as coaches reported that it can lead to feelings of being "broken," "shameful," and can even drive individuals towards depression, self-harm, suicide, and addiction. The three core meta themes identified in the research align with the literature, but the research findings place a greater emphasis on the mental health effects of the inner critic.

The literature suggests that there are several concepts similar to the inner critic, each with different terminology. Coaches cited terms such as "negative inner voice", "critical self", and "automatic negative thoughts". Some coaches understood the concept of the inner critic but did not use the term in their daily practice as it was not part of their language. This presents a challenge in the field, as the use of diverse terms for a similar concept may result in a diverse literature on the topic.

In the literature, Stinckens et al. (2013a) categorised the inner critic as one of two forms of self-talk, with the inner critic being negative and the "voice of inner experiencing" being a positive form. The latter term was not mentioned in the research, but terms such as "inner supporter" and "inner coach" were.

Given the limited coaching-specific research in the literature, several key themes emerged in this study. Firstly, the research showed that working with a coachee's inner critic is a common issue for the coaches involved in the study, emphasising the importance of further research in this area. The study also found that there was no significant difference in the existence of the inner critic between genders, but some coaches suggested that women may be more aware of or willing to express their inner critic, while men may not. These findings highlight the need for further exploration of the inner critic in coaching, particularly as there is no current research on this topic in coaching.

Another key theme that emerged from the research is that the inner critic is rarely the primary issue in coaching sessions. In most cases, coaches discovered the inner critic while addressing other presenting issues such as job dissatisfaction or fear of public speaking.

5.3 Challenges and Barriers

While the literature has identified some challenges in recognizing and managing the inner critic, such as the ability to recognise it (Stinckens et al., 2013b) and the coach's ability to identify an inner critic attack (Leijssen, 1998), this study has revealed a much broader range of obstacles that coaches must consider when working with the inner critic. These barriers can be categorised into three main themes: coachee readiness, the coach's own inner critic and their relationship with the coachee, and the deeply ingrained nature of the inner critic.

The research identified coachee readiness, specifically the reluctance to let go of the inner critic, as a common barrier. Additionally, the coach's own inner critic and its impact on the coaching relationship were identified as significant factors, adding complexity to the process. This is an important research finding that was not evident in the literature. For coaches working with the inner critic, managing their own inner critic at the same time is an important area of consideration. Finally, the deeply ingrained nature of the inner critic, which often makes it emotionally charged and challenging for coachees, was another obstacle highlighted in the study.

The results emphasise the importance of coaches having a comprehensive understanding of the various challenges they may encounter when working with the inner critic and knowing how to navigate them effectively. This need may be attributed to the limited literature and research focused on this specific area, which lacks resources to support coaches in this type of work. Thus, this represents an important finding from this research.

5.4 Psychological Mechanisms

The literature on psychological mechanisms tends to be divided into distinct theoretical frameworks, such as cognitive restructuring used in CBT (Neenan, 2018) versus cognitive defusion in ACT (Hill and Oliver, 2018). However, the findings of this research suggest that in practice, coaches adopt a more eclectic approach and do not adhere to one theory. This is in line with the work of Carl Rogers, cited by Stinckens et al. (2013b), who while advocating the use of cognitive defusion, also utilised other techniques such as cognitive restructuring. The research found that coaches use a

variety of techniques, including defusion, reframing, and restructuring, and explain several potential approaches to the coachee, choosing the one that resonates the most.

One notable aspect is that coaches often begin with one approach and switch to another if it is not effective. The research also highlights the significance of creating awareness as an important part of the coaching process, since the inner critic is rarely the primary issue presented.

The study revealed that coaches employ a significantly broader range of approaches than previously suggested in the literature review, with a total of 39 distinct methods identified. These approaches include functional analysis of the inner critic and other diverse techniques. The most frequent approaches from the research, and thus deemed most effective were creating positive self-talk/cultivating an inner coach, unhooking/defusing from the critic, creating awareness, use of metaphor and verbalisation of the critic. Equipping coaches with a comprehensive understanding of these tools and techniques, aligned with specific psychological mechanisms can benefit their practice. Consequently, this research has resulted in the creation of a model for working with the inner critic in coaching, named the CRITIC model, which is illustrated in Figure 5-1.

Figure 5-2 A process model for inner critic coaching (CRITIC Model)

<u>Create Awareness</u>	<u>Raise Understanding</u>	<u>Investigate and explore</u>	<u>Tools and techniques</u>	<u>Implement and iterate</u>	<u>Check on progress</u>
Creating the awareness of an inner critic.	Helping the coachee to understand the concept of the inner critic. (psychoeducation) This stage may be naturally integrated with creating awareness.	Working with the coachee to explore their inner critic (using key questions or tools such as functional analysis). Identify what the barriers might be.	Select the most appropriate treatment approach via psychological mechanism or a mix of mechanisms. Consider the relevant barriers based on the investigate stage.	Implement the approach and work with the coachee. Potential management of coaches own inner critic in the process.	Evaluate the effectiveness of the work on an ongoing basis to ensure progress.
Note: The research suggests that in most cases the inner critic is not the initial presenting issue. Therefore, raising awareness of its existence can be useful.	Note: Following awareness, the research suggests that helping the coachee to understand the concept better can be useful to them. This might include concepts like how common an inner critic is.	Note: The research outlined a range of useful questioning and exploration techniques which can be used to explore the inner critic. At this stage there could be a decision point relating to whether coaching or therapy is the most appropriate approach.	Note: This stage would include the selection of psychological mechanism use which may include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Restructuring 2. Reframing 3. Cognitive defusion 4. Compassion 5. Other approaches Coachee's may have a preference about what feels right for them.	Note: This stage would include doing the coaching work with the coachee where a particular psychological mechanism or model is used e.g., the ABCDE model in CBC.	Note: This stage is concerned with the ongoing work and an assessment of how effective the process has been in addressing the limiting factors of the inner critic as outlined in this research.

The study suggests that each stage of the CRITIC model can potentially aid coachees. For some, simply being aware of the concept of the inner critic may be helpful. For others, gaining an understanding of its nature and related factors may be beneficial, and further work may be unnecessary. However, for some coachees, continued utilisation of psychological mechanisms may be necessary. It is important to note that the approach is likely to be iterative as progress is made. In line with the findings of this study, the CRITIC model allows for multiple psychological mechanism use to provide coach flexibility.

5.5 Further Research

Qualitative research is not good for testing cause and effect relationships although qualitative descriptions can suggest possible relationships, causes as effects (Oades et al. 2019). Further work is required to test the cause-and-effect relationships of varying psychological mechanisms for working with the inner critic. Further studies should also explore areas such as gender – is there really a difference between men and women in terms of readiness to discuss the inner critic. In addition, further research could include studying effective approaches for overcoming the range of barriers and the fine line between coaching and therapeutic practice in relation to the inner critic.

Current literature is focused largely on therapeutic approaches that have crossed the boundary from therapy to coaching such as ACC. However, there are other processes used in therapy based on differing psychological mechanisms including self-psychological, integrative relational and modern psychoanalytic approaches (Lowinger et al., 2022) that could be investigated further. In addition, the emergent issue in this research of the role of the coaches own inner critic. Shapiro et al. (2016) suggest that therapists who are most critical of themselves can also be the most critical of their clients. Is this true in coaching?

Finally, research into the effective deployment of the CRITIC model in coaching (and relative to other approaches) would provide empirical evidence to support its use. Furthermore, the sample was selected through a combination of personal networks and the International Coaching Federation website, which has limitations in terms of availability and response rate. There is also potential for the self-selection bias of the sample, as only coaches with experience in working with the inner critic participated in the study. This could have influenced the results related to the prevalence of the inner critic in coaching practice.

Finally, there is a potential limitation in the validity of the psychological mechanisms investigated in the study. The mechanisms might not be exhaustive and the concepts such as cognitive restructuring and cognitive reframing may not be mutually exclusive.

5.6 Conclusions

To conclude, this research sought to investigate the concept of the inner critic in coaching to explore its meaning for coaches, the challenges and barriers relating the coaching work and the various psychological mechanisms deployed by coaches in their practice.

The research identified several important findings. In relation to the meaning of the critic, the research enabled a new definition of the inner critic in a coaching context, the identification of females as more likely to discuss the critic, and that the inner critic is rarely the initial presenting issue. In terms of challenges and barriers, the research outlined more challenges for coaches than identified in the literature and importantly introduced the new issue of coaches own inner critic. Finally, the research outlines the most prevalent tools (and associated psychological mechanisms) used in practice. The combination of the findings enabled a new model for working with the inner critic in coaching named the CRITIC model.

Reference List

Al-Ababneh, M. M., (2020). Linking Ontology, Epistemology and Research Methodology, *Science and Philosophy*, 8(1): 75-91.

Anstiss, T. and Gilbert, P. (2014). *Compassionate Mind Coaching*, In: Passmore, J., (ed.) *Mastery in Coaching: A complete psychological Toolkit for advanced coaching*. London: Kogan Page.

Anstiss, T., (2021). *Compassionate Mind Coaching*. Lecture notes, Neuroscience and Psychology for Behavioural Change, Henley Business School, Henley-on-Thames MSc on 25th March 2021.

Anstiss, T., (2022). *Compassionate Mind Coaching*. In: Passmore, J., and Leach, S. (eds.) *Third wave cognitive behavioural coaching: contextual, behavioural and neuroscience approaches for evidence-based coaches*. Pavilion Publishing and Media Ltd.

Ayhan, M. O. and Kavak Budak, F. (2021). The correlation between mindfulness and negative automatic thoughts in depression patients. *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care*, 57(4): 1944-1949.

Beck, A. T., (1979). *Cognitive Therapy for Depression*. New York: Guildford Press.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2): 77-101.

Burns, D. (1980a). *Feeling Good: the new mood therapy*. New York: Harper Collins.

Burns, D. (1980b). The perfectionist's script for self-defeat. *Psychology Today*, 14(6): 34-52.

Clark, D. A. and Beck, A. T. (2011). *Cognitive Therapy of Anxiety Disorders*. New York: Guildford Press.

Clarke, V. and Braun, V. (2018). Using thematic analysis in counselling and psychotherapy research: A critical reflection. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 18: 107-110.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design; choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Deacon, B. J., Fawzy, T. I., Lickel, J. J., and Wolitzky-Taylor, K. B. (2011). Cognitive defusion versus cognitive restructuring in the treatment of negative self-referential thoughts: An investigation of process and outcome. *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 25(3): 218-232.

Eichinger, R. W. (2018). Should we get aboard the brain train? *Consulting Psychology Journal*: 70(1).

Ellis, A., and MacLaren, C. (1998). *Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy: A Therapist's Guide*. Atascadero, CA: Impact.

Fan, S. C., Shih, H., Tseng, H., Chang, K., Li, W. (2021). Self-Efficacy Triggers Psychological Appraisal Mechanism for Mindset Shift. *International Journal of Mental Health Promotion*, 23(1): 57–73.

Freud, S. (1961). The Ego and the Id. In: Strachey, J. (Ed. and Trans.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, 19: 3–66. London: Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1923).

Gendlin, E.T. (1981). *Focusing*. (rev. ed.). New York: Bantam Books.

Gilbert, P., and Irons, C. (2005). Focused therapies and compassionate mind training for shame and self-attacking. In: Gilbert, P. (Ed.), *Compassion: Conceptualisations, research and use in psychotherapy*, pp. 263–325. Hove: Routledge.

Gilbert, P., and Procter, S. (2006). Compassionate mind training for people with high shame and self-criticism: Overview and pilot study of a group therapy approach. *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy*, 13(6): 353-379.

Hair, J. F. Jr, Mooney, A.H., Samouel, P., and Page, M. (2007). *Research Methods for Business*. Oxford: Wiley and Sons.

Harris, R. (2020), *The Happiness Trap*, London: Robinson.

Hill, J., and Oliver, J. (2018). *Acceptance and commitment coaching: Distinctive features*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Hunt, J. (2013). An initial study of transgender people's experiences of seeking and receiving counselling or psychotherapy in the UK. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 14: 288–296.

Johnson, J. (2020). Making Peace with Your Inner Critic. In: Maisel, E. (Ed.) *The Creativity Workbook for Coaches and Creatives*, pp. 7-10. Routledge.

Kaiser, R (2019). Stargazing: everyday lessons from coaching elite performers, *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 71(2): 130–139.

Koseki, S. Noda T., Yokoyama S., Kunisato, Y., Ito, D., Suyama, H., Matsuda, T., Sugimura, Y., Ishihara N., Shimizu, Y., Nakazawa, K., Yoshida, S., Arima K., and Suzuki, S. (2013). The relationship between positive and negative automatic thought and activity in the prefrontal and temporal cortices: A multi-channel near-infrared spectroscopy (NIRS) study, *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 151(1): 352-359.

Kross, E. (2021). *Chatter: The Voice in Our Head (and How to Harness It)*. London: Random House.

Larsson, A., Hooper, N., Osborne, L., Bennett, P., and McHugh, L. (2016). Using Brief Cognitive Restructuring and Cognitive Defusion Techniques to Cope with Negative Thoughts, *Behavior Modification*, 40(3): 452-482.

Levin, M.E., Haeger, J., An, W., and Twohig, M.P. (2018). Comparing Cognitive Defusion and Cognitive Restructuring Delivered Through a Mobile App for Individuals High in Self-Criticism, *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 42: 844–855.

Lowinger, R. J., Cher, D., Matusow, N., and Young, K. A. (2022). The Treatment of Adult Patients with an Inner Critic-Self-Psychological, Integrative Relational, and Modern Psychoanalytic Approaches. *Psychoanalytic Social Work*, 1-22.

Neenan, M. (2008). From cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) to cognitive behaviour coaching (CBC). *Journal of Rational-Emotive and Cognitive-Behavior Therapy*, 26(1): 3-15.

Neenan, M. (2018), *Cognitive Behavioural Coaching: Distinctive Features*. New York: Routledge.

Oades, L., Siokou, C. L., and Slemp, G. (2019). *Coaching and mentoring research: A practical guide*. Sage.

Palmer, S. (2009). Compassion-focused imagery for use within compassion-focused coaching. *Coaching Psychology International*. 2(2): 13.

Passmore, J., and Leach, S. (2022). *Third wave cognitive behavioural coaching: contextual, behavioural and neuroscience approaches for evidence-based coaches*. Pavilion Publishing and Media Ltd.

Peters, S. (2012). *The Chimp Paradox: The Mind Management Program to Help You Achieve Success, Confidence, and Happiness*. London: Vermilion.

Ponterotto, J. G. (2002). Qualitative research methods: The fifth force in psychology. *The Counselling Psychologist*, 30(3): 394-406.

Pugh, M. (2018). Cognitive Behavioural Chairwork. *International Journal of Cognitive Therapy*, 11: 100–116.

Rachael. W. S. (2018). *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) Informed Coaching: Examining Outcomes and Mechanisms of Change*. Doctoral thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London [Thesis].

Riddell, P. (2021). In: Passmore, J. (Ed.), *The Coaches Handbook. The Complete Practitioner Guide for Professional Coaches*, Routledge.

Robson, J. P., and Troutman-Jordan, M. (2014). A Concept Analysis of Cognitive Reframing. *Journal of Theory Construction and Testing*, 18(2): 55-59.

Rose, A., McIntyre, R., and Rimes, K. A. (2018). Compassion-focused intervention for highly self-critical individuals: Pilot study. *Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 46(5): 583-600.

Rowson, T. (2019). Compassion-focused perceptual positions. *The Coaching Psychologist*, 15 (1).

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2009). *Research Methods for Business Students*, 5th Edition, Harlow: Pearson education Limited.

Shapiro, S., de Sousa, S., and Hauck, C. (2016). Mindfulness in positive clinical psychology. *The Wiley handbook of positive clinical psychology*, 381-393.

Sripada, R. K., Rauch, S. A., and Liberzon, I. (2016). Psychological mechanisms of PTSD and its treatment. *Current Psychiatry Reports*, 18(11): 1-7.

Stinckens, N., Lietaer, G., and Leijssen, M. (2013a). Working with the inner critic: Process features and pathways to change. *Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapies*, 12 (1): 59-78.

Stinckens, N., Lietaer, G., and Leijssen, M. (2013b). Working with the inner critic: Therapeutic approach. *Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapies*, 12 (2), 141-156.

Whitmore, J. (2017). *Coaching for Performance*, 5th Edition, London: Nicholas Brealey.

Young, L., Dodell-Feder, D., and Saxe, R. (2010). What gets the attention of the temporo-parietal junction? An fMRI investigation of attention and theory of mind. *Neuropsychologia*, 48(9): 2658-2664.

Zec, M., Antičević, V., Lušić Kalcina, L., Valić, Z., and Božić, J. (2022). Psychophysiological stress response in SCUBA divers: The contribution of negative automatic thoughts and negative emotions. *Current Psychology*, 1-15.

Appendices

6.1 Appendix A - Semi-Structured interview questions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research. As you know I am exploring the different approaches that coaches are using to work with coachees' inner critic, where coachees' see it as an issue for them.

I have some questions for you in this regard - please feel free to say if you would prefer not to answer any questions if you do not feel comfortable doing so.

About you as a coach

1. How long have you been a coach?
2. What training, if any, have you undertaken as a coach?
3. Do you align/identify to any particular coaching styles/approaches?

Understanding the Inner Critic

4. What is your understanding of the term inner critic/what does the term mean for you?
5. How does the inner critic impact on your coachees?
6. How does it differ from a coachees inner voice?

The Challenges and barriers

7. What challenges/barriers do you see in working with coachees' inner critic?

Coaching the Inner Critic

8. Does the inner critic as a presenting issue come up regularly in your coaching practice?
9. Could you tell me about your experience(s) of working with the inner critic as a presenting issue and the approach/s that you took?
 - a. Where did the approach work well?
 - b. Why did the approach work well?
 - c. Where didn't the approach work well?
 - d. Why didn't the approach work well?
10. What else would you like to tell me about your experiences?

Questions that could be added to the above as relevant:

11. Do you have particular coaching tools that you use for working with the inner critic (potentially included as part of question 8)
12. Do coachees typically identify the inner critic as an issue themselves/do they understand the concept? (Potentially included as part of question 7)

13. Are there any differences for you in working with the Inner Critic in coaching as opposed to in a therapeutic context? (Potentially included as part of question 7)

Thank you very much for your time and contribution. If needed, can I come back to you and explore some of your reflections further?

Please let me know if you would like sight of my final document when it is available.

6.2 Appendix B - Message to find volunteers.

Coaching the Inner Critic: An exploratory study of the psychological mechanisms used by coaches to work with the Inner Critic as a presenting issue.

In my own coaching practice, I have often come across coachee's inner critic as a presenting issue i.e., something that is a factor in restricting their ability to achieve their goals. In fact, I have also found my own inner critic to be challenging at times.

My dissertation, as part of the final stage of an MSc in Coaching and Behavioural Change with Henley Business School, explores the different approaches that coaches are using to work with coachees' inner critic. There is relevant research in therapeutic contexts but not within the field of coaching and so research in this area is intended to inform both theory and practice.

I am looking for some willing volunteers who, as coaches, have experience of working with the inner critic/coachees negative thoughts as a presenting issue and are willing to share their experiences and have those reflected anonymously in my dissertation report. If you would like a copy of the report once completed, I will be very happy to share.

The interview will last approximately sixty minutes and there may be a need to follow up to seek further clarification.

Please message me directly if you would be willing to be part of my research and we can talk about the next steps.

Or if through a personal contact

Please email me on lee.griffin@aecom.com if you would be willing to be part of my research and I can talk to you further about the next steps.

6.3 Appendix C – Information and Consent Email

Information and consent email

Email subject heading: Coaching the Inner Critic: An exploratory study of the psychological mechanisms used by coaches to work with the Inner Critic as a presenting issue.

Dear (name of recipient)

I am carrying out a research project on coaching the inner critic, in order to better understand the various approaches used by coaches to work with the inner critic.

The research forms part of my MSc in Coaching and Behavioural Change qualification at Henley Business School, part of the University of Reading.

Part of the research involves interviewing coaches who have experience of working with coachees where the inner critic/negative thoughts is a presenting issue; and, for this reason, I would like to invite you to take part.

If you agree, you will be asked to participate in a video interview of about 60 minutes. During the interview I will ask you questions on your understanding of the concept of the inner critic, what you see as the barriers/challenges in working with the inner critic as a presenting issue and what coaching approaches you have used in working with the inner critic.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can choose not to answer any particular questions and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

With your permission, I would like to record the interview and/or take notes for later analysis. The data will be kept securely and destroyed after the completion of the project.

At every stage, your identity will remain confidential. Your name and identifying information will not be included in the final report. The identity of your organisation will not be included in the final report. A copy of the completed project will be available on request.

The project has been subject to ethical review in accordance with the procedures specified by the University of Reading Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct.

If you have any further questions about the project, please feel free to contact me by email.

If you agree to take part, I would be grateful for an email to confirm that you are age 18 years or over and willing to participate on the basis of the arrangements described in this email as they relate to the nature of the project and your participation.

Best regards

Lee Griffin

Email: lee.griffin@aecom.com

6.4 Appendix E - Ethics Approval

From: Lee Griffin <l.a.griffin@student.henley.ac.uk>

Sent: Wednesday, April 5, 2023 1:44:52 PM

To: Lee Griffin <l.a.griffin@student.henley.ac.uk>

Subject: Ethics Application SREC-HBS-20221024-LEGR6479 - Completed

Dear Lee Griffin,

The approval process for your Ethics Application SREC-HBS-20221024-LEGR6479 has now been completed.

Regards,
The Ethics Team