



An exploration of the role of coach training in developing self-awareness: a mixed methods study

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Accepted: 26 May 2021
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Abstract

It is proposed that it is critical that coaches are highly self-aware to be effective at facilitating the development of self-awareness in their clients. Accordingly, self-awareness is included in the competency frameworks of the coaching professional bodies, yet there is a lack of evidence supporting how coaches develop self-awareness. This is problematic as it brings into question the design and development of coach training programmes, which is likely to hinder the professionalization of coaching. Therefore, we set out to provide evidence as to whether coach training develops self-awareness, and if so, what aspects of the training facilitate this development. A mixed-methods design was utilized with two separate studies. Firstly, a pre-post-test quantitative study to test whether coach education increases participant self-awareness. Followed by a qualitative study to provide an in-depth understanding of how the coach training supported the participants in developing self-awareness. The research found that coach training partially develops self-awareness and that key enablers to this development include experiential learning supported by reflection in a psychologically safe environment. The contribution of this research and paper is to contribute to the theory of coach development by illuminating how coach training can develop self-awareness. In addition, it is our hope that our findings will contribute to practice by informing the future design of coach training programmes and providing a means to evaluate coach development as a result of coach training.

Keywords Self-awareness · Executive coach training · Coach training · Coach development · Self-reflection

Coach training is a rapidly growing industry (Forbes, 2017; Passmore & McGoldrick, 2009), and yet very few coach training programmes are underpinned by scientific evidence (Jordan et al., 2017; Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011). To date the majority of research on coach training has focused on the acquisition of hard coaching skills (e.g. goal focussed coaching), rather than how the coach develops themselves (Jordan et al., 2017). Leggett and James (2016) claim that

there is now a need to explore how coach training benefits the coach. Recent research by Atad and Grant (2020) that has responded to these calls, explores how coach training develops coaches and compared novice coaches to those coming to coaching from a therapeutic or counselling background. Despite this recent development, there is an absence of in-depth research exploring how coaches develop during coach training.

One of the core competencies perceived to be important for coaches is self-awareness (Bluckert, 2005), and as such it is included in the professional bodies (i.e. the International Coaching Federation (ICF) and European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC)) core competency frameworks. This focus on self-awareness is underpinned by the work of Laske (1999) and Bachkirova (2016) who suggest that it is essential coaches develop the 'self', as they argue that the coach (i.e. the individual) is the main tool used in coaching. Supporting this perspective is the proposition that a core purpose of coaching is to elicit behavioural change through raising the self-awareness of the client (Bozer et al., 2014), and therefore it could be argued that in order for the coach to develop self-awareness within their clients, they first need to

Julia Carden led the research and work for this paper and was supported by Jonathan Passmore and Rebecca Jones.

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develop their own self-awareness. Rayner (2019) identified that one of the most effective means of developing self-awareness was training to be a coach, however, there is a lack of conclusive evidence on the role of coach training. In particular, it is not yet known which aspects of coach training might facilitate the development of coach self-awareness.

Currently anyone can set up a coach training school or programme (Seligman, 2007) and while some coach training programmes are accredited with the professional coaching bodies many are not. Therefore, as the coach training market is an area of growth (Passmore & McGoldrick, 2009) combined with the fact that coaching is an unregulated profession (Smither, 2011) and there is a move towards the professionalisation of coaching (Gray, 2011; Moore & Koning, 2016), it is proposed that there is an increasing need to develop evidence to understand how best to educate coaches. A lack of evidence supporting how coaches develop (Jordan et al., 2017) and whether coach training facilitates the development of self-awareness is problematic as it brings into question the robustness of the design and development of training programmes (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004; Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011). Consequently, there is a lack of evidence on which we can base future studies to evaluate the effectiveness of coach training. In sum, we propose that it is essential that we better understand how to educate coaches effectively, and as self-awareness is perceived to be of significant importance to coaches (Bachkirova, 2016; Laske, 1999) it is important that we gain an understanding of the role coach training plays in developing this aspect of the coach. Previous research (Sutton et al., 2015) identified that self-awareness can be developed in the work-place when it is taught as a training programme, however, there has been no research identifying if self-awareness is developed as a result of coach training. Consequently, this research aims to provide evidence as to whether coach training can develop self-awareness, and if so, what aspects of the coach training facilitate this development. The contribution of this research and paper is to contribute to the theory of coach development by illuminating how coach training can develop self-awareness. In addition, it is our hope that our findings will contribute to practice by informing the future design of coach training programmes and providing a means to evaluate coach development as a result of coach training.

There are multiple definitions of coaching and a myriad of types of coaching, resulting in a lack of consensus on how coaching should be defined (Bono et al., 2009; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Gray & Goregaokar, 2010). This study will focus on what is often labelled as ‘workplace’ coaching, as this can be described as a rapidly growing industry (Forbes, 2017) and one that is increasingly used to develop leaders and managers in businesses (Baron & Morin, 2009; Joo et al., 2012). Therefore we adopt the following definition of coaching: ‘coaching is a one-to-one intervention between a professional

coach and a client (the client). The purpose of this intervention is to enhance the client’s behavioural change through self-awareness and learning, and ultimately contribute to individual and organizational success’ (Bozer et al., 2014: p.883). This definition importantly highlights the coaches’ role in raising the client’s self-awareness which aligns with other conceptualisations of the purpose of coaching (Laske, 1999).

Coach Training Programmes

While there has been some research exploring the effectiveness of coach education programmes for sports’ coaches (Maclean & Lorimer, 2016) and an examination of the characteristics of the Australian coach training industry (Grant & O’Hara, 2008), there appears to be no research exploring the content and effectiveness of workplace coach education training. Where coach training is accredited with a professional coaching body (for example the ICF, EMCC and AC) there will be requirements (set by the professional body) on the content of the training in order to meet the accreditation standards set. This content tends to be focussed on the development of the coaching competencies which have been set by the particular body (e.g. ‘cultivating trust and intimacy’ (ICF)). However, a review of a sample of accredited courses by the same professional body (via an internet search) demonstrated that there appears to be little consistency on content, with variations in coaching tools and models taught. From a review of the courses aimed at educating coaches in the UK (using the published curriculums online), it appears that course content typically centres on teaching different tools (e.g. GROW model or transformational coaching techniques, such as questioning and listening (Jones, 2020)), rather than exploring aspects of the coach themselves, in terms of their own motivations, values and behaviours. While self-reflection was mentioned by a couple of providers, it was not evident that this was common across coach training providers. This is interesting given that a large number of coach education programmes in the UK are focused on training coaches to achieve accreditation with one of the professional coaching bodies, and the new ICF competency framework (ICF, 2019) includes a new competency, ‘coaching mindset’, which incorporates the requirement that coaches ‘use the awareness of self’ and ‘remains aware of and open to the influence of context and culture on self and others’. Furthermore, the EMCC has a core competence ‘understanding self’ (EMCC, 2010), yet the coach education training programmes are still largely focused on coaching tools, techniques and skills (Jones, 2020).

Therefore, as self-awareness is deemed to be important to coaches and the work they do (Gatling et al., 2013; Shaw & Glowacki-Dudka, 2019) we propose that research is needed to explore if self-awareness is developed during coach training.

Defining Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is a construct for which there seems to be a multiplicity of perspectives (Sutton, 2016; Williams, 2008), and it is a term which is frequently confused with other similar constructs (e.g. self-consciousness and self-knowledge (Morin, 2017; Sutton, 2016)). Alongside this, it appears that self-awareness is largely defined depending on the focus of the research and the context within which it is referred (Sutton, 2016). Early, seminal work on self-awareness (Duval & Wicklund, 1972) took the stance that the construct was an aversive state as it leads to rumination and reflection on the negative aspects of one's self. However, more recent work by Trapnell and Campbell (1999) indicate that in fact self-awareness is far more positive as it leads to reflection, which is often positioned as a route to learning (Kolb, 1984; Silvia & Duval, 2001). This stance, that self-awareness is a route to learning, is one which we have adopted for this research, as we are exploring self-awareness within the context of coach training. There are a plethora of definitions, however, these can be summarised as defining self-awareness from either an intra-personal, or an inter-personal perspective or a combination of both intra and inter-personal perspectives (Fenigstein et al., 1975; Taylor, 2010; Trapnell & Campbell, 1999). As this research is examining coaches and their work involves working with others in a confidential relationship (Bozer et al., 2014) we propose that it is necessary that conceptualizations of self-awareness include both the inter and intra-personal perspectives. With this in mind, the present study adopts the following definition: "Self-awareness consists of a range of components, which can be developed through focus, evaluation and feedback, and provides an individual with an awareness of their internal state (emotions, cognitions, physiological responses), that drives their behaviours (beliefs, values and motivations) and an awareness of how this impacts and influences others." (Carden et al., 2021).

Why Is Self-Awareness Important for Coaches?

One of the key aims of coaching is to enhance the client's behavioural change through raising their self-awareness (Bozer et al., 2014). In addition, the nature of coaching has developed over the years, with coaching now increasingly working in the area of personal values, identity and self-esteem (Stelter, 2014), and with many clients coming to coaching to change an aspect of 'self' (Bluckert, 2005). Consequently, a key role for the coach is to facilitate an increase in the self-awareness of their clients and to work with clients at this deeper level of identity (Bozer et al., 2014).

If coaches are required to facilitate an increase in the self-awareness in others, it is proposed that they themselves must

be highly self-aware. Laske (1999) proposes that coaches can only facilitate the development of others to the level they have developed themselves, and therefore this suggests that a coaches' level of self-awareness will dictate the amount of self-awareness they can facilitate in their clients. Taking this a step further and bearing in mind the definition of coaching outlined above, we suggest that a coaches' personal level of self-awareness could therefore hinder or promote the behavioural change in the client (Lee, 2003).

Self-awareness is perceived as important for coaches, as it is suggested that all of a coach's client interventions are expressions of the 'self', and also are likely to reflect his or her own personal learning journey (Bachkirova, 2016). This viewpoint is supported by Pinkavova (2010), who highlights that how coaches think about the world, how they construct meaning and how they feel about themselves is important in their coaching practice so that coaches can understand how and why they develop their thinking, and then know how and why they make the interventions they do with their clients. This, therefore, suggests that without self-awareness coaches will be making interventions without fully appreciating why they are doing so. Alongside this, Fogel (2009) highlights the need for coaches to develop an awareness of physical sensations and reactions to give them access to other parts of their perceptual abilities when working with clients, so that coaches can understand why they are reacting and behaving in a certain way with a client, and to understand themselves as the instrument for coaching (Bachkirova, 2016). Often a coaches' reactions and responses are unconscious, and part of building self-awareness is about understanding these automatic, unconscious reactions (Turner, 2010). Without this awareness coaches are likely to be 'triggered' (Aquilina, 2016), which could potentially disrupt the session as the coach will become distracted by their 'own stuff' rather than being focussed on the coachee and the topic for the coaching session. This indicates that self-awareness is necessary for the coach to manage their responses, reactions and interventions in the coaching. Therefore, it is proposed that self-awareness enables the coach to focus on the coachee, which supports Gatling et al.'s (2013) argument that self-awareness underpins the ability of the coach to establish a relationship of unconditional trust with the client, which is seen as a core component of effective coaching (De Haan et al., 2013; De Haan et al., 2011). In sum, based on the literature to date, it is proposed that self-awareness is indeed an essential competency for coaches to develop.

How Is Self-Awareness Developed?

The underlying assumption to this study is that self-awareness can be developed. This assumption is based on the theories of adult development (Kegan, 1982) which adopt the

philosophical stance that adults continue to develop over the course of their lifetime, and this includes the development of self (Laske, 1999). Therefore, if self can be developed then one might argue that so too can self-awareness.

Exploring the literature, it is suggested that self-awareness can be developed through self-evaluation (Showry & Manasa, 2014; Taylor, 2010), introspection and reflection (Eckroth-Bucher, 2010). A re-occurring theme in the literature is the use of self-reflection as a route to developing self-awareness (Hullinger et al., 2019; Shaw & Glowacki-Dudka, 2019). This is also the position adopted by Bachkirova (2016) who highlights the requirement to look inwards (introspection) and also outwards to develop the self. This combination of internal and external reflection is endorsed by Wilson and Dunn (2004) who outlined three routes to awareness by structured introspection, seeing oneself through other's eyes and self-observation. Sutton et al. (2015) provide greater granularity as to the nature of self-reflection required to develop self-awareness and propose four distinct levels. Level one is self-reflection, level two relates to insight and being able to name thoughts, feelings and understanding motives and actions. Level three is rumination, where there is some reflection on past negative events and reflecting on what can be learnt from those experiences. Finally, level four involves mindfulness and paying attention to what is happening moment to moment. Sutton et al.'s (2015) perspective is aligned with research exploring how counsellors develop self-awareness (Pompeo & Levitt, 2014) which concludes that at the heart of the development is self-reflection, consisting of observation, interpretation and evaluation. Therefore, we suggest that a major route to developing self-awareness is via self-reflection.

However, self-reflection alone may not be sufficient to develop self-awareness as individuals also need to have the willingness to learn and develop (Chen et al., 2011). Ardel and Grunwald (2018) echo this and argue that self-reflection is not enough, and that deeper awareness will also need self-insight and self-compassion. However, Laske (2006) highlights that we cannot develop without initiating a state of emotionally based self-questioning. This suggests that individuals must be motivated to develop self-awareness.

Wilson and Dunn (2004) highlight the limitations of introspection and self-reflection, in particular that there is often no easy access to the unconscious aspects of self. Therefore, Wilson and Dunn (2004) feel that another route to self-awareness is to access how others view us. Incorporating data from others may help coaches gain access to unconscious traits and motives, that is of course if they are prepared to reflect on these. The challenge with using data from others is that individuals may disagree with those providing feedback about one's personality traits (Wilson & Dunn, 2004). Recent research (Rayner, 2019) concluded that the most effective means of developing self-awareness are training to be a coach, receiving coaching, feedback from peers and completing

personality questionnaires. What was not clear from Rayner's (2019) study was what elements of coach training led to a development of self-awareness. The literature also highlights that the development of self-awareness is not a one-off event but is instead dynamic and ongoing in nature (Hullinger et al., 2019; Rasheed et al., 2019).

Therefore, it is proposed that it is essential for coaches to develop high levels of self-awareness (Bluckert, 2005; Leggett & James, 2016), to be effective as coaches and to facilitate an increase in self-awareness and behaviour change for their clients. Informed by the literature, we propose that the self develops over the course of one's lifetime (Kegan, 1982; Laske, 1999) and that self-awareness can be trained and developed (Hullinger et al., 2019; Pompeo & Levitt, 2014; Shaw & Glowacki-Dudka, 2019; Sutton et al., 2015). As many coach education training programmes focus on coaching tools (Jones, 2020) we are interested to see if coach education does develop coach self-awareness and in doing so address the lack of evidence underpinning coach training programmes. We propose that developing a body of evidence on how coach training develops the coach, will provide the means for evaluating the effectiveness and impact of coach training programmes (Atad & Grant, 2020; Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011) on the student coaches, and underpin coach training accredited by the professional bodies, whom incorporate self-awareness as core competencies. Therefore, the aims of this study are to explore: Does coach training develop self-awareness? And if so, what aspects of the training supported this development? With this in mind, a mixed-method design (Hanson et al., 2005; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Carter, 2016; Van Nieuwerbergh & Tong, 2012) was chosen, which includes two studies. Firstly a quantitative study is presented to explore the hypothesis:

H1: Coach education will significantly increase participant self-awareness, self-reflection and self-insight.

This is followed by a qualitative study which will provide an in-depth understanding (Bryman, 2012; Jick, 1979) of how coach training supported the participants in developing self-awareness.

Study One

Method

Study Design

To examine whether coach training resulted in an increase in self-awareness, a pre-post-test research design (Tschannen-Moran & Carter, 2016) was utilized where self-awareness was measured prior to the start of coach training and three to

four months after training was completed. Data was collected between October 2018 and December 2019.

The Coach Training Intervention The coach training programme used in the study was a UK Business School professional qualification in coaching, with three classroom-based modules made up of seven days, spread over three months, supported by inter-module coaching practice, reading and self-reflection. Throughout the programme, the participants are encouraged to reflect and keep a learning journal of their developmental journey. The programme is accredited with the three main coaching professional coaching bodies in the UK (ICF, EMCC and AC).

Participants The participants all started the coaching qualification between October 2018 and October 2019. Of the 264 potential sample, across 11 cohorts, 111 completed the questionnaire at both time points (i.e. at commencement of the programme and on completion of module three), providing a 42% response rate. While this is a little lower than the average response rate from individuals in organizational research (Baruch & Holton), where 52% is the average, it is higher than the response rate from data collected in organizations, and as the data was collected over two time-points with a three month gap, a lower response rate is not unusual (Freedman et al., 1980). Among the 111 participants, 48% were male. In relation to prior coaching experience, 47% had no prior experience as a coach or no coach training, 29% had between one and five years' experience, 13% had between five and ten years' experience, and 11% had 15 or more years' experience.

Measures. Self-Awareness Outcomes Questionnaire (SAOQ) Sutton's (2016) SAOQ measures the effects of self-awareness interventions (Sutton, 2016) and as the coach training intervention being studied includes a module focussed on self-awareness, this measure was deemed appropriate for using in this study. The SAOQ consists of 38 items measuring four sub-scales of reflective self-development (RSD), acceptance (ACC), proactive at work (ProWork) and emotional costs (Em Costs). The reflective self-development subscale (11 items, $\alpha = .83$) represents the development of focus on self in terms of conscious reflection. The acceptance sub-scale (11 items, $\alpha = .80$) represents personal confidence and also an understanding of others. The proactive at work sub-scale (9 items, $\alpha = .66$) focusses on having a proactive approach and contentment in the workplace. The fourth subscale, emotional costs (7 items, $\alpha = .71$) refers to the potential negative aspects of being more aware of oneself in terms of vulnerability and fear. Responses are measured on a five-point Likert scale with responses ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (almost always), with a not-applicable option. Example items from the scale are: 'I learn about myself and how I see the world' (reflective self-development); 'I have fun' (acceptance); 'I see my work life

as something I have power to affect' (proactive at work); 'I feel vulnerable' (emotional costs).

Self-Reflection and Insight Scale (SRIS) (Grant et al., 2002) As self-reflection and self-evaluation is perceived to be a route to developing self-awareness (Showry & Manasa, 2014; Taylor, 2010) we also included the SRIS scale in our study. The SRIS consists of 20 items, of which nine are reverse scored, measuring the two sub-scales of self-reflection and insight. The self-reflection sub-scale (12 items, $\alpha = .91$) measures an individual's engagement with and desire for self-reflection. The insight scale (8 items, $\alpha = .82$) is related to internal self-awareness. Responses are measured on a six-point Likert scale with responses ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 6 (agree strongly). Example items from the scale are: 'I frequently examine my feelings' (engagement in self-reflection); 'I am very interested in examining what I think' (need for self-reflection); 'I am usually aware of my thoughts' (insight).

The Practitioner Self-Awareness and Support Questionnaire (PSAS) (Van Wagoner et al., 1991; Winstone & Gervis, 2006) The PSAS has been used to explore the level of importance sports psychologists attach to self-awareness (Winstone & Gervis, 2006) and as it measures self-insight, which is seen as a route to developing self-awareness (Showry & Manasa, 2014; Taylor, 2010), it was felt it was an appropriate measure for this study. The PSAS consists of 14 items, and measures two sub-scales of self-insight and self-integration. The self-insight scale (7 items, $\alpha = .86$) looked at how the participant is aware of his/her own feelings and understands where these feelings are arising from (Van Wagoner et al., 1991). The self-integration scale (7 items, $\alpha = .64$) focusses on the participants sense of self and confidence in self. Responses are measured on a five-point Likert scale with responses ranging from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). Example items are: 'have the capability to reflect on your feelings' (self-insight); 'have awareness of your personal areas of unresolved conflict' (self-insight); 'distinguish between client's needs and your needs' (self-integration); 'manage your need for approval' (self-integration).

An additional question was added at time point two to ask if participants felt their self-awareness had developed over the course of the training, this was included as it was felt that it might inform study two. All 111 responded 'yes' believing that their self-awareness had increased as a result of the training.

Results

Full descriptive statistics for all variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for dependent, independent and control variables

| | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 |
|------------------------------|------|------|--------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------|--------|--------|--------|----|
| 1. SAOQ RSD T1 | 3.86 | 4.82 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. SAOQ RSD T2 | 3.89 | 3.71 | .742** | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. SAOQ ACC T1 | 3.86 | 4.40 | .569** | .504** | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. SAOQ ACC T2 | 4.10 | 3.86 | .527** | .682** | .551** | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. SAOQ ProWork T1 | 3.91 | 3.32 | .681** | .729** | .451** | .451** | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6. SAOQ ProWork T2 | 3.99 | 3.27 | .458** | .532** | .685** | .680** | .579** | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7. SAOQ Em Costs T1 | 3.08 | 3.39 | .019 | .052 | -.346** | -.086 | -.216* | -.184 | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| 8. SAOQ Em Costs T2 | 3.19 | 2.72 | -.023 | .024 | -.319** | -.037 | -.260** | -.155 | .775** | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| 9. SRIS Self Reflection T1 | 4.71 | 8.99 | .636** | .517** | .108 | .331** | .274** | .092 | .297** | .173 | 1 | | | | | | | |
| 10. SRIS Self Reflection T2 | 4.99 | 7.35 | .452** | .504** | .081 | .447** | .133 | .105 | .209* | .190* | .727** | 1 | | | | | | |
| 11. SRIS Self-Insight T1 | 4.33 | 5.19 | .424** | .359** | .632** | .361** | .378** | .364** | -.274** | -.223* | .158 | .157 | 1 | | | | | |
| 12. SRIS Self-Insight T2 | 4.45 | 5.11 | .426** | .472** | .494** | .608** | .308** | .398** | -.128 | -.131 | .131 | .241* | .504** | 1 | | | | |
| 13. PSAS Self-Insight T1 | 3.97 | 4.44 | .429** | .355** | .099 | .141 | .188* | -.001 | .141 | .074 | .468** | .304** | .085 | .038 | 1 | | | |
| 14. PSAS Self-Insight T2 | 4.30 | 3.70 | .360** | .432** | .115 | .401** | .123 | .174 | .170 | .189* | .472** | .500** | .120 | .182 | .574** | 1 | | |
| 15. PSAS Self-Integration T1 | 4.07 | 3.10 | .325** | .230* | .105 | .184 | .174 | .058 | -.001 | -.041 | .341** | .240* | .029 | .146 | .567** | .384** | 1 | |
| 16. PSAS Self-Integration T2 | 4.38 | 3.06 | .201* | .349** | .107 | .419** | .167 | .207* | .002 | .009 | .333** | .388** | .031 | .159 | .328** | .602** | .442** | 1 |

** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

SAOQ RSD = Self-Awareness Outcomes Questionnaire Reflective Self-Development; SAOQ ACC = Self-Awareness Outcomes Questionnaire Acceptance; SAOQ ProWork = Self-Awareness Outcomes Questionnaire Proactive at Work; SAOQ Em Costs = Self-Awareness Outcomes Questionnaire Emotional Costs; SRIS Self-Reflection = Self Reflection and Insight Scale Self-Reflection; SRIS Self-Insight = Self-Reflection and Insight Self-Insight; PSAS Self-Insight = Practitioner Self-Awareness and Support Self-Insight; PSAS Self-Integration = Practitioner Self-Awareness and Support Self-Integration

To explore hypothesis one, the mean score for all measures at time point one was compared with the mean score for all measures at time point two. To evaluate if the difference was statistically significant, paired t-tests were carried out (Atad & Grant, 2020). A summary of these results is provided in Table 2.

The paired t-tests revealed that there was a statistically significant change for six of the eight sub-scales, therefore hypothesis one is partially supported. Although there was not a statistically significant change across all the measures, there were increases for all the sub-scales apart from the emotional costs sub scale, which decreased. This is potentially due to the fact that the training had increased the positive aspects of self-awareness (e.g. self-acceptance), while reducing the negative aspects (i.e. self-absorption and rumination). The results reveal an increase in self-reflection (Grant et al., 2002), but not an increase in reflective self-development (Sutton, 2016) which looks at the ongoing nature of reflective learning. Self-insight, in terms of its relevance to coaching (Van Wagoner et al., 1991) did increase, however self-insight in relation to self (Grant et al., 2002) did not. In sum, the significant results seem to relate to the proximal measures of self-awareness in terms of the outcomes from developing it i.e. acceptance, self-insight, and proactive at work.

Study Two

Building on the results of study one, study two was undertaken to provide an in-depth understanding (Bryman, 2012; Jick, 1979) of the aspects of coach training that initiate the development of self-awareness.

Method

Research Design and Participants

Semi-structured interviews were utilized with participants for this study randomly selected from those who had completed the questionnaire at both time-points for study one and who had provided their contact details to volunteer for this interview study. There is much debate in terms of how many interviews should be conducted when following a mixed-mode research design, with suggestions ranging from nine participants (Tschannen-Moran & Carter, 2016) through to 15 (Van Nieuwerburgh & Tong, 2012). Therefore, it was decided that interviews were conducted until theoretical saturation was reached (Stern & Porr, 2011) (i.e. when no new data was emerging (Corbin & Strauss, 2008)), and that enough breadth and depth of data had been gathered (Saunders & Townsend, 2016). This was achieved after 12 interviews. The participants comprised of seven males and five females, with nine operating or planning on operating as external coaches and three operating as internal coaches.

Procedure

The interviews followed a semi-structured format (Saunders et al., 2016; Tschannen-Moran & Carter, 2016) to provide consistency in the top-level questions asked, while allowing the opportunity to explore responses further (Hullinger & DiGirolamo, 2020). As all participants completing the questionnaire in study one answered 'yes' to the question "do you perceive your self-awareness has increased as a result of the training", the interview questions were based on the assumption that the

Table 2 Comparison of sub-scales at time one and time two

| | <i>n</i> | Time one mean | Time one SD | Time two mean | Time two SD | <i>t</i> | Sig |
|---|----------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|----------|-------|
| Self-Awareness Outcomes | | | | | | | |
| Reflective Self-Development | 111 | 3.86 | 4.82 | 3.89 | 3.71 | −.973 | .333 |
| Acceptance | 111 | 3.86 | 4.40 | 4.10 | 3.86 | −6.96 | .000* |
| Proactive at Work | 111 | 3.91 | 3.32 | 3.99 | 3.27 | −2.79 | .006* |
| Emotional Costs | 111 | 3.08 | 3.39 | 3.19 | 2.72 | −4.11 | .000* |
| Self-Reflection and Insight Scale | | | | | | | |
| Self-Reflection | 111 | 4.71 | 8.98 | 4.99 | 7.35 | −5.57 | .000* |
| Self-Insight | 111 | 4.33 | 5.19 | 4.45 | 5.11 | −1.91 | .059 |
| Practitioner Self-Awareness and Support | | | | | | | |
| Self-Insight | 111 | 3.97 | 4.44 | 4.30 | 3.70 | −6.34 | .000* |
| Self-Integration | 111 | 4.07 | 3.10 | 4.38 | 3.06 | −7.09 | .000* |

*statistically significant changes <0.05

participant believed their self-awareness had developed. The interview questions were open ended and included: “How would you describe self-awareness?”; “How do you perceive your self-awareness has changed over the course of the training?”; “What initiated those changes?”; “How has that impacted your coaching work?” The interviews took place on completion of the final coach training workshop and were conducted online using Zoom. The interviews were recorded for later data analysis.

Analysis

The analysis was undertaken using NVIVO. In order to stay as close to the data as possible, initial analysis was completed using an open coding approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Larsson et al., 2005; Oldridge, 2019), whereby the transcripts were studied line-by-line and codes were derived which resembled the words of the participants (Jones & Noble, 2007). As the analysis progressed, themes and categories were identified (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Passmore & McGoldrick, 2009), and these were refined throughout the analysis phase (Oldridge, 2019) through constant comparison (Stern & Porr, 2011). This iterative process was ongoing throughout the analysis phase (Passmore & McGoldrick, 2009). The process of coding is driven by the interpretations of the researcher and other researchers could potentially interpret the data in alternative ways, however, interpretative thoughts are another source of data (Stern & Porr, 2011) and these thoughts were captured throughout the coding process. Mindful that there can be multiple interpretations of the data during the coding process, the lead researcher engaged in re-analysing the data throughout the analysis and continued this throughout the writing up phase (Oldridge, 2019). As all the coding and the resulting interpretation is supported by and grounded in the raw data, the analysis can be perceived as trustworthy (Jones et al., 2019; Kirrane et al., 2018; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Walsh & Downe, 2006).

Results

Study two was used to explore in greater depth, what led to the participants developing their self-awareness. Table three provides a summary of the themes and the open codes that related to each of the themes. The themes derived from the data centred on the development journey, how self-awareness was perceived to be defined, the enablers to development (with sub-themes of environment, experiential learning and reflection) and the impact the development had on practice. In presenting the findings, each of the themes will be taken in turn and discussed, the words of the participants are included in italics, as the evidence from the interviews that has been used to develop these themes (Stern & Porr, 2011) .

The Journey

An enlightening finding was that participants were ‘surprised’ and not expecting that developing self-awareness would be an aspect of coach training: *“If you’d said to me before I started, what am I expecting – beginning to understand my self-awareness and how this impacts how I behave generally, let alone in the coaching context, would not have been in my top 10 answers.”* It was also highlighted that while the first module covered self-awareness, the development of self-awareness happened throughout the programme and therefore it is *“a journey”*, with many aspects of the programme contributing towards the development of self-awareness: *“it’s like putting a jigsaw together, pieces on their own are generally not that interesting or significant.”* Many participants pointed out that as a result of the training they now realise that there is a requirement for on-going development and that the training was only the starting point: *“the self-awareness piece is still quite embryonic for me and I’d like to see it develop further”*. Overall, the data revealed that developing self-awareness through a training programme is a ‘jigsaw’ with many pieces making up the overall picture; this is represented in Fig. 1. Each of the larger ‘jigsaw’ (shaded in light grey) pieces link to the themes summarised in Table 3.

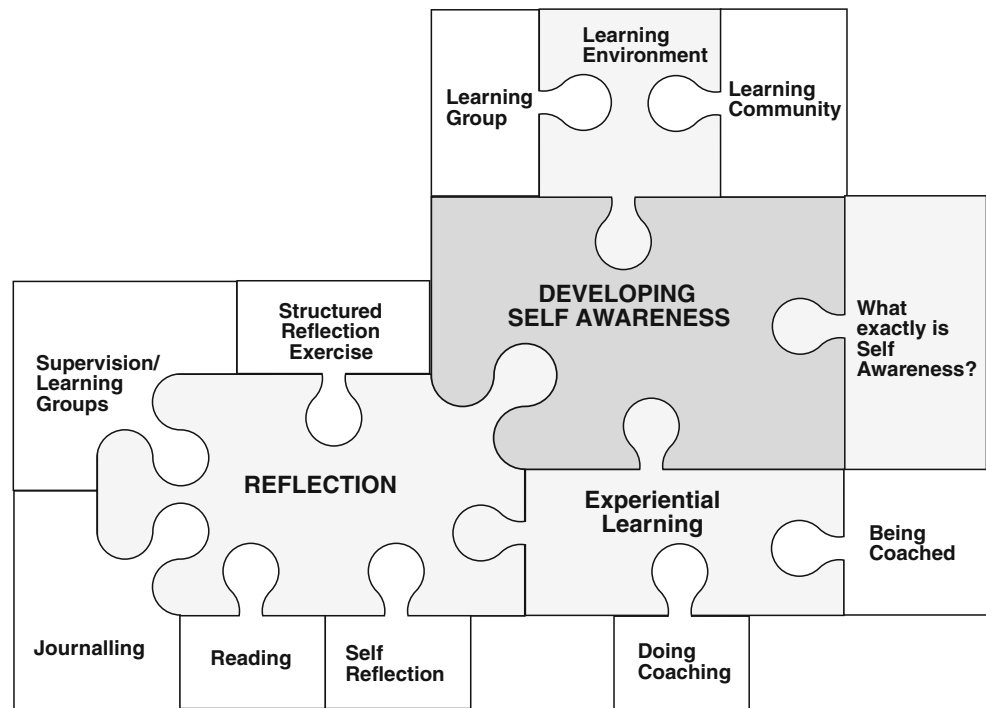
What Exactly Is Self-Awareness? (Definition)

The initial question in the interviews centred on exploring how the participants describe and define self-awareness. There was not a consistent definition of the construct across participants, with definitions ranging from very short statements such as: *“clear understanding of your personal values”*, to others that incorporated multiple elements, for example: *“being aware of how I project myself onto other people and also thinking of when I’m trying to achieve things, being aware of strengths and internal obstacles and also capabilities.”* In some cases, responses included ‘elements’ or ‘components’ of what might be included in self-awareness, such as values, thoughts, feelings, emotions and drivers. There was also evidence that self-awareness can be considered in relation to behaviours with other people. For example: *“how other people also might perceive you.”* Interestingly, while module one of the training centres on ‘self’ and ‘self-awareness’ there was no consistent appreciation, amongst the participants, of what self-awareness actually is and therefore what they were actually developing.

Enablers to Developing Self-Awareness

Environment The data revealed that the learning environment acted as an enabler to developing self-awareness, particularly in terms of the learning group and community: *“a real sense of trust and safety amongst us that allowed us permission to*

Fig. 1 The Jigsaw of Developing Self Awareness



go really quite deep.” There was a sense that the smaller learning groups (groups of eight or nine students) also provided a vehicle whereby self-awareness might be developed, with some of the participants identifying the learning groups, (when asked “what aspect of the course enabled you to develop self-awareness?”) as the route to developing self-awareness.

Experiential Learning The importance of having the opportunity to put learning and reflection into practice was highlighted, along with the opportunity to increase self-awareness through practice: “the theory and the practice collided and that confirmed the importance of being aware in the moment”. This element was linked to the theme of reflection and other participants suggested that “doing the coaching, then reflecting back on what you’ve

felt, what reaction it provoked in yourself” was key. Therefore, this theme emerged as being inter-connected to ‘reflection’, as, for the experiential practice to enable the development of self-awareness, reflection was also required: “the experience of working with people and seeing how people behave is the trigger, and then reflecting on it and then coming back and actually doing something different, so I suppose there are a few steps to it.”

Reflection Reflection came through the data as a major influencer to developing self-awareness, when asked what “had the biggest impact on developing your self-awareness?” For example, “I would go the reflection, the self-reflection.” There were a number of methods to the reflection. Journaling and reflective writing were perceived to be a particularly successful and effective method to developing self-awareness as

Table 3 Summary of themes and open codes from qualitative data

| Themes | Open Codes |
|-------------|---|
| The Journey | A jigsaw; a loop; made me think; a journey; not expecting; whole person |
| Definition | Definition; ability; reflect; behaviours; impact on others; response to others; values; strengths & weaknesses; emotions/feelings; thoughts; triggers; drivers |
| Enablers | Environment: Learning community; learning group Experiential learning: Being a coach; being coached; enabled development; group working; observing others; parallel process; theory & practice collide; time to think Reflection: Action & reflection; group sessions; initiated; reading; reflection; journaling |
| Impact | How know; changed; identifying drivers; impact; level; more than tools; self-enquiry; what’s developed; importance |

it “*uncovered thoughts and gave different insights*”, and it enabled the participants to perhaps develop “*insights that are a lot more personal and for me*”. There was also a sense that the reflective writing was a means to “*be self-reflective because I am not sure that I really understood that before writing it down.*” This was seen as a tool that would be continued after the course to develop further new insights: “*I now journal on all my interactions with individuals and reflect on ‘what that tells me about myself’*”. This discipline of journaling and reflective writing was seen as a means of self-reflection: “*I think the precedence was the key that pushed me into how to reflect upon myself more*”. Participants highlighted an exercise from workshop one, where students were asked to observe a piece of coaching and record what was coming up for them in terms of thoughts, feelings, physiological reaction and then reflect on what that might be telling them about themselves: “*it was the exercise where we observed coaching and noted down what was happening for us*”. One participant felt that this exercise added another dimension because it was “*where you felt you got glimpses into the unconscious*”. One participant talked about how the reading of the core texts “*had left quite an impression*” and that using the reading as a prompt to take notes, journal and thereby self-reflect. In sum these elements of reflection were seen as pivotal in developing self-awareness during the training: “*I would go to the reflection, the self-reflection which is a key pillar in the way that the course is taught, and important in how we will move forward as coaches.*”

Impact

Participants were asked what they believed the impact of developing self-awareness was in terms of their coaching and for themselves, individually. They believed that it had given them “*more confidence*” and had supported the development of “*more active listening, truly listening as opposed to hearing.*” It had also helped develop new aspects of awareness: “*understanding what my body is telling me and how I am thinking about things in relation to that. I was definitely not as aware of my own body’s reactions to things as I am now*”; and “*having greater visibility of what had previously been subconscious*”. It was felt that this development supported their effectiveness as a coach: “*I learnt that I can add value through not sharing myself and actually I think I learnt a discipline*”, and “*when I started it became painfully clear that my questions were driven by my judgements and I am absolutely a better coach now for the improved self-awareness.*” It was also perceived that the development of self-awareness had supported the students both as an individual and as a coach, as it “*increased my ability to be aware of my own actions across the piece and to think about the consequences of those actions on myself and other people.*”

Although, there was initial surprise that development of self-awareness was part of the course structure, at the end it was viewed as “*critical*” because “*otherwise you can steer and put your perspective over the top of the client without even realising it.*”

General Discussion

The findings from study two and earlier qualitative work (i.e. Atad & Grant, 2020; Rayner, 2019) suggest that coach training enhances personal development and self-awareness, however the results from the quantitative study only partially substantiate this. This may be partially explained by the findings from study two which indicated that the students were not expecting the development of self-awareness or personal development as an aspect of the programme. Therefore, because they had not identified the development of self-awareness as a learning outcome from the training perhaps they were not focussed on developing it. This was perhaps exacerbated by the fact that there was no clarity of understanding of what self-awareness actually is.

It is interesting that the ‘emotional costs’ sub-scale of the SAOQ decreased between time points one and two. This aspect of the scale represents the negative aspects of self-awareness in terms of self-absorption (Sutton, 2016) and the ruminative elements (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999). Therefore, it is likely that participants, as a result of the coach training, have improved in self-confidence and feel less vulnerable over time. Thereby, it is suggested that coach training developed participants’ positive self-awareness outcomes while also reducing the emotional costs (self-absorption) associated with self-awareness, as measured by the SAOQ. While it is encouraging that the participants developed the positive aspects of self-awareness, it must be highlighted that there is no evidence if the ruminative aspects (emotional costs) of self-awareness were perceived as beneficial to the development of self-awareness by the participants. This is relevant as the literature suggests that reflecting on past negative events and then learning from these is an important aspect of developing self-awareness (Sutton et al., 2015).

Study two indicated that learning about self-reflection and doing it was one of the most impactful means of developing self-awareness, and this supports earlier qualitative work which indicates that coach training courses tend to develop self-reflection (Leggett & James, 2016). However, when looking at the sub-scales used in study one, while the self-reflection sub-scale did increase significantly, the reflective self-development sub-scale did not. This perhaps suggests that the training did lead to the development of self-reflection however the ongoing nature of self-reflective learning was not embedded, which this sub-scale represents (Sutton, 2016). This is perhaps because for some self-reflection requires

conscious, purposeful effort and application (Grant et al., 2002) and this implies that one might need to develop a new habit to fully embed reflective self-development.

In terms of whether the coach training led to an increase in self-insight, it might be argued that for the purpose of coaching it did increase, as the self-insight sub-scale from the PSAS questionnaire (Winstone & Gervis, 2006) is based on the work of Van Wagoner et al. (1991) who defined self-insight as “to the extent to which a therapist is aware of one’s own feelings and understands their basis” (p.412). However, what did not increase significantly was personal self-insight as defined by Grant et al. (2002). Insight in this scale has been defined as “an awareness of one’s own performance, awareness of the performance of others, and a capacity to reflect on both of these in order to make appropriate judgements” (Roberts & Stark, 2008, p.1055), and perhaps what the programme revealed to the participants was that there was more work to do on self-insight.

It is possible that for many of the students the training was the first time they were being asked to regularly track and reflect on their thoughts, feelings, behaviours and responses to others, which is what leads to higher levels of self-reflection and self-insight (Roberts & Stark, 2008). Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that there were not significant increases across the all the measures, and this might have been compounded due the short amount of time between time point one and time point two (three to four months).

The findings from study two also highlight the importance of other enablers to raising self-awareness. The learning environment was deemed to be important, in terms of creating a “safe” space and somewhere to practice where “*people would not offer judgements*”. This possibly suggests that to develop self-awareness it is important to create the space and environment where the participants could “*go deep*” and explore their own filters and reactions. This of course is unsurprising when the literature on psychological safety is considered, as psychological safety will help the learners overcome their anxiety and defensiveness when they are faced with challenging information or reflections about themselves (Edmonson & Lei, 2014). A psychologically safe environment will also create a space where learners can take greater inter-personal risks, test out thinking and seek feedback (Carmeli et al., 2009; Edmonson & Lei, 2014). Our findings also imply that smaller groups can be a vehicle for developing self-awareness, and while the overall class size was a maximum of 24, there were several smaller group activities with learning groups of eight and work in triads. The data indicated that it was this smaller group work that had the greatest influence on developing self-awareness. Therefore, it is proposed that creating a learning environment with strong psychological safety and including small group work are key enablers to developing self-awareness in a training environment.

Experiential learning and reflection were highlighted as core components of the programme which led to the increase

in self-awareness. This aligns with Kolb’s (1984) theory of learning, where he highlights that experiential learning needs to be supported by reflection for new behaviours and actions to be developed, and that this is a continuous process (Hedberg, 2009). Several of the participants highlighted how impactful the reflection and reflective activities were on them in developing self-awareness, and for many of them this was a new experience. Therefore, if developing self-awareness is a key learning outcome, our data suggests that it is advisable to design course programmes to take into account Kolb’s learning cycle and ensure this is reinforced in the training approach.

While the data indicated that the learning environment and experiential learning contributed to raising self-awareness, it was also clear that there was not one ‘stand-out’ element of the coach training which led to an individual developing self-awareness. Instead, several aspects appeared to contribute, which participants described as “*a jigsaw of many pieces*”. The participants also referred to the development of self-awareness as being “*a journey*” and this is line with the proposition that its development is dynamic and ongoing in nature (Hullinger et al., 2019; Rasheed et al., 2019).

In summary, it is proposed that coach training goes some way to developing self-awareness, self-reflection and self-insight. However, for coach training to be more impactful in raising self-awareness, self-reflection and self-insight it is proposed that there needs to be a greater amount of time dedicated to self-awareness, self-reflection and self-development in coach training sessions. This learning must be supported by the creation of a psychologically safe learning environment, where participants are required to participate in experiential learning in small groups. While earlier qualitative research indicated that developing self-awareness and self-development was an outcome from coach training (Atad & Grant, 2020; Rayner, 2019) our quantitative findings suggest that perhaps much more focus on self-awareness, self-reflection and self-insight is required for this to actually occur. The findings have provided preliminary evidence into the enablers that are required to initiate and support this development.

Implications for Practice

Our findings highlight that for self-awareness to be developed through a coach training programme, students should be made aware that it is a core learning outcome, in order to kick-start the process of self-questioning and self-reflection required for its development. This involves teaching about self-awareness, including modules on self-reflection and then experiential activities to initiate its development. It is also important that courses are delivered in a psychologically safe environment, so that delegates can be vulnerable. The required psychological safety can be achieved by setting clear ground rules,

which needs to include contracting around confidentiality and clear guidance on how to provide feedback in a non-judgemental yet constructive way. The data highlighted that feedback needs to be developmental, based on observation and evidence, rather than evaluative. In addition, there needs to be plenty of small group work (the participants in this study had small groups of eight people and work in triads), where participants are encouraged to experiment without the fear of judgement. This small group and triad work should ideally involve coaching, which will enable the delegates to get to know one another and therefore increase and deepen the psychological safety being experienced. Once psychological safety is established, it is recommended that the design of coach training programmes should be based on Kolb's (1984) learning cycle including experiential learning and reflection. Experiential learning should incorporate exercises where students engage in coaching practice, being coached and observing practice in action in small groups and triads. This practice and observation must be supported by reflection, although we recommend that first, students are introduced to self-reflection as a means of development. Our study highlighted that exercises where one is observing and recording one's responses to the observations is a good starting point, before then being encouraged to 'journal' what this might mean for their own learning. This process could then be supported by reflective writing exercises and reflective action-learning groups, where students are encouraged to share their own responses and insights. Our research also highlights the importance of including specific course modules on self and self-awareness, alongside the training of coaching tools and techniques which are the typical content (Jones, 2020), in order for student coaches to develop all the core competencies required by the professional coaching bodies. Finally, by identifying the components of coach training which led to the development of self-awareness, our research can provide a basis to develop evaluation criteria for coach training, and thereby assess the effectiveness of coach training programmes in developing self-awareness.

Implications for Research

Our research goes some way to filling the gaps identified in earlier research (Jordan et al., 2017) as it has explored the development of the 'softer' aspects of coach development and also how coach training develops the individual coach (Leggett & James, 2016). It has also provided much needed quantitative data which highlights that the perceptions gained from qualitative research are not completely endorsed. We recommend that future research should now seek to evaluate the themes derived from study two to ascertain whether these enablers to self-awareness each make a significant difference to self-awareness. This research might utilize a controlled

experiment (Grant, 2008) where students are specifically taught about self-awareness and self-reflection and the measures used in this study could be utilized to assess impact. In addition, a research design incorporating a control group could be utilized to evaluate the impact of the enablers, where the control group is taught using the existing programme content and compared against a group which are taught with the enablers in focus and as part of the content. We recommend that research utilising the same measures is carried out to examine to what extent self-awareness is raised on coach training programmes provided by other organisations, and then a comparison in course content could be completed to identify which modules had most impact on developing self-awareness. There is also the opportunity to conduct a longitudinal study examining how the measures used in this study change over a longer period of time (e.g. over a year or three years). In addition, further research could be carried out to explore how the ruminative (emotional costs) aspects of self-awareness benefit development, whereby coaches are encouraged to reflect and engage with past negative experiences to identify how these shape their coaching practice and what they can learn about themselves to inform their self-awareness.

Limitations

As this was a pre-post-test study we were not able to utilize a control group, which means that we cannot be sure that everyone in the sample would not have developed their self-awareness over a four-month period without coach training. However, as Rayner (2019) highlights, coach training is perceived to be a route to developing self-awareness, so without this training it is questionable if self-awareness would be developed in the same way. Our research only examined one coach development programme in the UK, therefore, in order to gain conclusive evidence, it is recommended that a study incorporating samples from other coach training providers in the UK and elsewhere be undertaken in order to see whether our findings are replicated. It would also be interesting to understand the cultural implications of developing self-awareness, if indeed there are any. In addition, this research only focussed on the coaches' perspective and the next step would be to understand how self-awareness supports the success of the coaching process overall, incorporating the coachee's perspective on the impact of the coaching they received.

Conclusion

While earlier work indicated that coach training was a route to developing self-awareness (Rayner, 2019), there was scarce empirical data to confirm this. Our research has partially reinforced the assumption that self-awareness can be developed

and trained (Kegan, 1982; Laske, 1999). However, our research also identified that to develop self-awareness, self-reflection is the key route, and therefore an essential element of any coach training programme. With an increasing focus on self-awareness for coaches (Bachkirova, 2016; ICF, 2019; EMCC, 2010), our research provides evidence to underpin the design and evaluation of coach training programmes. Our paper provides a contribution to the body of evidence supporting and underpinning coach training and development, demonstrating that self-awareness can be an outcome from coach training. In addition, it highlights the aspects of coach training which facilitates an increase in self-awareness.

Data Availability The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declarations

Ethical Approval This research was ethically approved by Henley Business School.

Informed Consent All authors agree with the content of this article and all gave their consent to submit.

Conflict of Interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

Disclosure Statement No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors. This paper has not been submitted to any other journals.

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