

COACHING PSYCHOLOGY

ROUTLEDGE

Coaching in the Grey Space

Exploring Boundaries, Ethics and Complexity when Coaching and Therapy Intersect

Dr Laretta Greer

THE GREY SPACE™



SERIES EDITOR:
Stephen Palmer

‘This research-based book fills a gap by exploring the ambiguous space between coaching and therapy in a thoughtful but well applied way. It is critical but accessible and is a must read for those interested in examining the boundaries and overlaps between the two professions.’

Paul Stokes, *PhD, Associate Professor of Coaching and Mentoring, Sheffield Hallam University, UK*

‘*Coaching in the Grey Space* aims to enhance the work of helping professionals across different settings, from the beginner to the experienced practitioner. This book offers a timely contribution for those encountering and navigating the Grey Space in their coaching practice, to explore their ways of working and the boundaries of where coaching and therapy intersect. This evidence-based perspective highlights the preparatory and preventative aspects of the Grey Space. A key resource for anyone interested in enhancing their understanding of this complex landscape.’

Siobhain O’Riordan, *PhD, Chartered Coaching Psychologist*

‘As we learn more about the nature of “everyday trauma” we can see how it contributes to stress overload, dysfunctional behaviours, anxiety and depression – all widespread today. To make a clear separation between therapy and coaching is no longer feasible, so coaches need to be well supported to work in this “grey area”. This important book will do just that – it is a welcome contribution to the coaching profession.’

Hetty Einzig, *Founder-Director, Transpersonal Leadership Coaching, AC Publications Strategy Director, and author of The Future of Coaching: Vision, Leadership and Responsibility in a Transforming World*



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Coaching in the Grey Space

Coaching in the Grey Space is set to enhance the practice of coaching psychology, by defining the previously unidentified grey space – where boundaries between the coaching and therapeutic terrain intersect.

This book navigates how we as coaches can negotiate this complex terrain, to improve the management of boundaries and ethics for coaches within the practice and safeguard clients. It also describes how coaching within the grey space can have both preparatory and preventative effects with the potential for far-reaching positive outcomes. With extensive research, enquiries and experiments and wide-reaching case studies, the book will equip a reader with a thorough understanding of an often complex and fast-moving industry.

Promoting a much-needed evidence-based debate on the ethical boundaries of coaching and therapy, this book will be an original and practical resource of interest for coaching practitioners, both established and those undergoing training in the field.

Dr Laretta Greer is a trauma-informed Coaching Psychologist specialising in personal development, transitions and stress management, with a particular interest in stress management and prevention. She holds a BSc in Counselling and Psychology, an MSc in Occupational Psychology and a DProf in Coaching and is a qualified bereavement counsellor and an accredited psychometric and personality practitioner. Her mission is to support people through enhancing and developing their skills, so that they can improve their mental and physical health and take charge of their lives for the better.

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Dedicated to Max Gunn

Space, time and distance is insignificant, I love you
always and forever!



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Preface

For years, there has been controversy surrounding the role of coaching: the role it plays, the territory it occupies and the ethics and safety regarding its practice. With a rapidly growing and developing coaching industry, research in understanding the navigation of the boundaries where coaching and therapy intersect has struggled to keep up. This book brings together years of thought-provoking research and examples of practice for those professionals who want to deepen and develop their practice and keeping up -to-date through real-world practitioner examples and applied research. This will equip practitioners to navigate the space where coaching and therapy intersect, with confidence.

Coaching in the Grey Space offers a clear definition to a previously undefined area of coaching/coaching psychology: the grey space, where the boundaries between coaching and therapeutic terrain intersect. This book offers direction as to how we, as coaches, can negotiate this complex terrain, to improve the management of boundaries and ethics for coaches within the practice and safeguard clients, drawing on research findings which explore these moments of intersection. Furthermore, it outlines that the client brings the whole of themselves into the coaching room and, therefore, it is not always possible to know if a client is “coachable” right away and offers insight into how to manage these complexities sensitively and collaboratively with our clients. In addition, it brings to light how coaching within the grey space can have both preparatory and preventative effects with the potential for far-reaching positive outcomes. With extensive research, enquiries and case studies, the book will give a reader a thorough understanding of an often confusing and fast- moving industry.



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Introduction

I am a coaching psychologist offering personal consulting focused on health, well-being, transformation, resilience, stress management and prevention. My mission is to support people through enhancing and developing their skills, so that they can improve their mental and physical health and take charge of their lives for the better – to thrive.

My motivation and rationale for conducting this research was because of questions and experiences I was having within my own practice. I was working with several clients, who I would have been advised to ‘refer’ to therapy by coaching training, coaching bodies/boards or textbooks. However, in my experience, to do so was not necessarily the best thing for the client.

The research outlined in this book gave me the opportunity to explore and understand how others experienced and worked in the space where therapy and coaching intersect: the grey space. What emerged from my initial motivations and curiosity began to shape a study based on an action research enquiry with others and also a first-person enquiry/autoethnographic enquiry around my own practice.

Through this research, many themes were presented. They highlight the complexities of the terrain of the grey space, the concerns coaches bring and the need to ensure that their clients are not left without support. In doing so, the coaches act as a bridge – stepping into the role of ‘helper’ to facilitate finding support, through to their disillusion with systemic issues and inherited terms such as ‘referral’. I go on to suggest that the term ‘referral’ is outdated within the future profession of coaching. As we ‘grow up’ as a profession, we have the opportunity to choose which narratives, discourses and rhetoric we keep – and those which no longer serve – and, finally, to call for training such as foundational mental health, basic psychology and trauma-informed training. Additionally, this book aims to emphasise the need for robust supervision, such as dual-trained supervisors who can illuminate the path that coaches traverse.

Coaches of all kinds working in the grey space should be actively engaging in reflective and reflexive practice, bringing to light “everyday taken-for granted” (Schön, 1983), as will be demonstrated through this research. In addition, in Chapters 4 and 5 a map is offered through the lived experience of all the co-enquirers to assist coaches in navigating this space. Lessons can be taken, utilising

ways in which co-enquirers navigated this terrain and sought to improve their own practices.

What this research aims to highlight is that we as coaches can and do work in productive ways with our clients within this complex intersection where the boundaries between therapy and coaching intersect: the grey space.

Navigation of chapters

Chapter 1, ‘Am I the pioneering grey space client?’ undertakes a narrative enquiry informed by autoethnography to place myself and my own story within the context of my research. The personal nature of the enquiry as you will see from the autoethnography is informed by my lived experience and, as such, it took time to find the words, the narrative and to make the decision about how I would tell and craft this piece and what I would wish to share in the public domain.

Chapter 2, ‘Mapping the terrain of the grey space’, considers the terrain of the grey space, the tensions and concerns within the psychological/therapeutic and wider community with the emergence of coaching, with many of these concerns questioning good practice. It argues that creating a distinguishing line between the therapeutic and coaching terrain is not possible, and not necessarily in the client’s best interest.

Chapter 3, ‘How and when we may encounter the grey space’, provides a brief overview of the literature currently surrounding the grey space, giving important context to my research. This review of current guidance highlights the importance of my work. A case is presented for stress being a ‘wicked problem’, viewing coaching psychology and coaching as being well positioned as practice. It is here that the need to consider how and when we may encounter and then navigate this ‘grey space’ terrain is discussed.

In Chapter 4, ‘Navigating the grey space: Part I The grey space compass: the process of how coaches explore and plot this territory’, I plot the terrain, offering a recalibration of our compass as coaches, charting and mapping how coaches explore and navigate this grey space, including exploring when and how coaching continues, or when to signpost to other professional interventions, such as therapy. It can be surmised that this is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Questions are contemplated such as: What are the similarities and differences between various coaches when managing and approaching the grey space with their clients? How and when do coaches signpost? Extracts presented are representative of the collaborative enquiry of group workshops and cross-boundary experts’ one-to-one conversations, exploring the lived experiences of coaches navigating this terrain.

Chapter 5, ‘Navigating the grey space: Part II Surveying the grey space’, and Chapter 6, ‘Navigating the grey space: Part III Further surveying, and charting what emerges’, charts the grey space, explores the findings and what emerged within it, facilitating the voices of various coaches from a range of positions. I bring to the fore and illuminate hidden experiences and an understanding of their practice, and how these coaches work in the grey space. The conversations are wide-ranging, with a variety of views given across different areas of coaching and

therapy. Coaches felt strongly about normalising mental ill health and the need for more mental health education; ‘giving voice’ to normalising mental health within the ethical considerations, limits and boundaries as a coach. Coaches indicated that the grey space is a dynamic and complex space, with questions arising regarding ‘signposting’ and holding juxtapositions regarding therapy, traditional psychology and systemic issues, coaches’ stance of facilitating, ‘giving voice on behalf of their client’ and what is required to traverse the complexities of the grey space.

Chapter 7, ‘Viewing beyond trauma’, seeks to describe real-world examples of trauma and how we may encounter this within our practices, through an illustrative case study. This is vital when considering the presence of trauma and the management of boundaries between the coach and coachee. Once again, the navigation of the grey space and the role of the coach comes into play. Through this illustrative example a case is presented of how coaching can be ‘preparatory’. Furthermore, I suggest due to the acquisition of tools learnt within this coaching space the client may be better positioned and resourced, creating greater ‘willingness’ (Hayes, et al., 2004) to engage in further therapeutic work surrounding their trauma, even if this is at a later date. I also suggest that trauma is inherent to the grey space, with a greater likelihood of trauma being present, therefore it is vital that coaches be trauma informed. This is recommended in order to practice safely and ethically.

Chapter 8, ‘Regular navigational updates and conclusion’ accepts that navigation outdates very quickly, so any map is only a guide. I argue that it is essential across the helping professions that our skills navigating the grey space complexities are developed. The idea that mental health *should* not show up in the coaching space and that coaches *should* only be working with clients who have no mental health problems is redundant and unrealistic. The map of the terrain that coaches are presented with due to the contextual issues is outdated. We need to remember that “the map is not the territory” (Bateson, 1972). Bateson and Bateson further suggest that there is a tendency to mistake the map for the territory: “The name is not the thing named” (Bateson & Bateson, 1987, p.21), and that we must at times confront the map-like boundaries, as the landscapes and terrain shift, so our maps need to be updated. Lastly, I provide suggestion as to how we as coaches and the profession may need to revise our maps. As the world we live in becomes more complex, we too as coaches need to ensure that we have the relevant tools necessary to map our terrain so that we can navigate this ethically.

In Chapter 8, I conclude that the grey space can be both preparatory and preventative when journeyed in an ethical way. Preparatory in terms of instances where clients whose coaching journey touches on trauma – ‘coaching the client towards’ therapy – also in terms of the ameliorative/preventative aspects presented, such as the mental health issues linked to long-term stress. I demonstrate that there are treasures to be found for clients in being able to plot, map and navigate this space with clients. Finally acknowledging the ever-changing nature of the world around us, and the impact this has on coaching psychology as a whole, creates a greater sense of importance surrounding the theory of the grey space in coaching psychology.

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Am I the pioneering grey space client?

Overview

The following narrative offers a glimpse into my lived experience on multiple layers as a person, as a coach and as a researcher; exploring how my personal stories, and those of my clients, are intrinsically linked to my research of the grey space and my own development. This self-study enquiry is informed by using an autoethnographic approach. “Autoethnographic approaches are flexible, reflexive and reflective of life as lived; they do not follow a rigid list of rule-based procedures; frequently they are multivocal” (Ellis & Bochner, 2020, p.6).

When conducting a self-study, drawing on a first-person action enquiry, it is particularly important as a researcher to step back and consider what our motivations are for conducting any piece of research. Why this topic? Why this enquiry? Reason and Marshall (1987) suggest that, as researchers, we select topics consciously or unconsciously resulting from the ‘baggage’ we carry around, with an underlying drive: “a bid for personal development” (p.115). Through this autoethnography, my wish is to offer the wider coaching community a view into how and why I navigate this terrain as I do, so that they too may take something from this lived experience and add value to their coaching practices and clients. Through this approach, I, as a researcher, can consider my experience as a practitioner within the grey space, with the view that the reader can construct lessons within their own sphere of practice (McIlveen, 2008). Ellis and Bochner (2000) propose that we can learn about our own lives through reading about the lives of others: “autoethnography offers the potential to expand scholarship about human experience” (p.7). This further suggests that through tales of how individuals manoeuvre and navigate losses, disappointments and traumas, we are assisted in living fuller lives. With narratives offering companionship and ways of coping, we gain understanding, insight and the opportunity to reframe and live more fully through the challenges of life.

Chapters 1 and 7 explore elements of my story and how they sit within my research. I will also be giving accounts from my first-person perspective on interaction with co-enquirers from this research and from clients. The elements of my story include the following: exploring when trauma shows up in the coaching room and how this impacts and relates to my experience; the stance I adopt, and why; the

importance of awareness of self as a coach, and the moments when I am still grappling with it in terms of my own story; the significance of preparing for disclosure; the responses these disclosures may bring; and the parallel reaction I faced through my lived experience.

Bochner and Ellis (2016) speak of the connection to others that an author can create using vulnerability in autoethnography. Through writing in the first person rather than the third person, which one traditionally sees in academic writing, the reader is offered the opportunity to “enter into dialogue with the writer’s existence, as well as their own” (p.82). Furthermore, by claiming that this third-person prose strives for objectivity, thereby creating a distance and an asymmetrical position, a gap is created between self and other. Rather, “autoethnographic writing resists this kind of emotional distancing” (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p.82). Through this process, the writer requests that the reader joins them for a journey that includes the twists, turns, emotional highs and lows of life; evoking feelings and engendering the reader to make a personal connection to the stories told. “Our writing is not simply academic; it’s personal and artistic too” (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p.80). From this viewpoint, the “authors use their own experience in the culture of reflexivity to bend back on self and look more deeply at self-other interactions” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p.740). Through this narrative, both wide-angle (cultural context) and intimate (self) positions will be considered (Winkler, 2018).

Ethical considerations regarding others and self within this narrative have been deliberated on. As a result, I have taken great care in how I represent those people who form part of my story, and who are not able to offer their perspective. Therefore, the source of this narrative and how it is constructed is exclusively from my first-person account, narrated through my voice and experience. Furthermore, when selecting which aspects to share and how best to convey them, a level of challenge and emotional discomfort was experienced, which is not uncommon (Dashper, 2015); resulting in reflecting on how best to take care of myself and others represented in this narrative (Chatham-Carpenter, 2010). Therefore, to protect myself and others, censoring aspects of the story became essential. I have drawn inspiration from the stylistic approach in Ellis’ (2020) piece “‘I hate my voice’: coming to terms with minor bodily stigmas” when writing elements of this chapter.

As Bochner (2012) proposes,

autoethnographies are not intended to be received but, rather, to be encountered, conversed with and appreciated. My concern is not with better science but with better living and therefore I am not so much aiming for some goal called ‘truth’ as for an enlarged capacity to deal with life’s challenges and contingencies.

(p.161)

And so, I invite you to receive the following chapters in the spirit in which they are intended.