

# An integrative literature review on the impact of life coaching on courage, fear and anxiety

Joanna Jarosz, Suite Coaching, Barcelona, Spain

Contact Email: [jjarosz1612@gmail.com](mailto:jjarosz1612@gmail.com)

## Abstract

The demand on techniques, approaches and processes that have a positive impact on courage, fear and anxiety is very high in general population. The evidence-based and theoretical literature supporting life coaching as a successful approach building individual courage and helping with fear and anxiety is scarce. This integrative literature review synthesises data from previous research studies about the impact of life coaching as an intervention to enhance courage and decrease fear and anxiety. Findings obtained in this study suggest that life coaching is a reliable approach that may enhance individual courage and decrease fear and anxiety.

**Key words:** anxiety; courage; fear; life coaching; self-determination theory

## Introduction

The concept of courage is important for understanding the nature of fear and anxiety and human behaviour in general (Norton & Weiss, 2009). There are various theories of courage (Norton & Weiss, 2009). Rate et al (2007), for example, define courage with the following three components: fear, risk, and nobility of purpose. Rachman (2004) defines courage as behavioural approach, which allows people to 'persevere despite the presence of fear' (p. 170). 'Courageous' people are able to carry out actions even though they face fear - the same actions as people who do not experience fear, while in the same circumstances. According to Rachman (2004), courage is therefore different than fearlessness. Available definitions of courage vary. Most of them, however, contain a common element - the presence of perceived threat (Cox et al, 1983; Norton & Weiss, 2009; McMillan & Rachman, 1988; Rachman, 1984). It has proven challenging to find a better (or significantly different) conceptualisation of the terms: courage, fear, and anxiety elsewhere in the literature. Studies of anxiety disorders as a behaviour approach suggest that fear is a necessary component for someone to show courage (Norton & Weiss, 2009). Reports focused on mental health also accentuate the correlation of courage with fear and anxiety (Office of the Surgeon General, 1999).

Rachman's (1984, 2004) definition of courage as a behavioural approach, presented in conjunction with fear, seems to be also relevant in a life coaching setting - as clients face fear and anxiety, and need courage to make changes they desire. A potential explanation of the improvement in individual's courage, fear and anxiety has been provided by behaviour theory (Mowrer, 1960). As some elements of behaviour theory have been incorporated in life coaching (Newnham-Kanas et al, 2008; Spence & Oades, 2011), coaching may be suggested as an effective intervention for people experiencing fear and anxiety (Barlow 2002). According to Marks (1987), exposure to feared circumstances is a crucial element in this approach. People who are more courageous tend to benefit more from such interventions, as they expose themselves to fear with less limitation (Rachman, 2004). Exposure to feared situations has been demonstrated to be an integral part of various approaches aiming at decreasing fear and anxiety (Norton & Price, 2007).

The evidence-based and theoretical literature supporting life coaching as a successful approach, strengthening individual courage and helping with fear and anxiety, is scarce (Frisch et al., 2005; Grant, 2003; Green et al., 2007; Hanssmann, 2014). A number of studies, however, present the evidence that life coaching may be a successful approach to building courage, hope, well-being and resilience, and reducing fear, anxiety, stress or depression (Curtis & Kelly, 2013; Grant, 2003; Green et al, 2006; Green et al, 2007; Spence & Grant, 2007). Overall, it has been suggested that coaching can be an effective methodology in inspiring change (Grant, 2009). According to Curtis and Kelly (2013), people need to develop courage in order to be able to make a transformational change in their lives.

Fear and anxiety have been linked with decreased quality of life (Koestner & Loiser, 2002). The literature also associates increased well-being of individuals with the ability to show courage when facing challenges (Joseph & Linley, 2005). Life coaches take the ability to heal and well-being of their clients as given; enhancement of their clients' quality of life is the primary objective of a life coaching process (Hamlin et al., 2009). Green et al (2007) describes life coaching as an integrative process that helps people experience a better quality of life. It seems therefore that concepts like fear, anxiety and courage are vital for life coaching as their presence or absence directly affects individual well-being and the ability to thrive.

This integrative review recognises the gap in research about the impact of life coaching on courage, fear and anxiety, and aims to make a unique contribution by integrating the studies specifically with this focus. This study intends to investigate the potential of life coaching as an intervention facilitating the development of individual courage and improvement in experienced fear and anxiety. The results found in the literature indicate that life coaching may have a positive impact on courage, and reduce fear and anxiety and therefore be a successful intervention for people, whose professional or personal growth and development have been limited. A better understanding of courage, fear and anxiety in the context of life coaching will allow coaches to target their clients' needs, help their clients strengthen their courage, reduce their fear and

anxiety, and face challenges in their professional and personal life, and ultimately lead to more efficient growth and development.

The objective of this study is to analyse the available scientific literature to evaluate the evidence on the influence that life coaching has on an individual's courage, fear and anxiety using the integrative review methodology. Four questions have been addressed in this review: (1) How are *courage*, *fear* and *anxiety* characterised in the theoretical and empirical literature on life coaching? (2) What is the role of life coaching in enhancing *courage*, and helping with *fear* and *anxiety*? (3) What is the mechanism explaining potential improvement (or lack thereof) in individual's *courage*, *fear* and *anxiety*? (4) What results have been documented or suggested in the literature?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Integrative literature review has been chosen as a form of research to evaluate, critique and synthesise available literature in order to generate new knowledge on the impact of life coaching on courage, fear and anxiety, and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the proposed research topic.

#### ***Integrative review methodology***

An integrative literature review is a form of research that analyses and synthesises available literature on a topic in an integrated way, which allows the generation of new frameworks, perspectives and knowledge about the topic reviewed (Torraco, 2005). It provides many benefits: evaluates the strength of the scientific evidence, identifies the gap in current research and the need for future research, bridges related areas of work, generates research questions, identifies frameworks, and explores successful research methods (Russell, 2005). Russell (2005) suggested that the methodology of integrative review should include 5 stages: (1) problem formulation, (2) data collection or literature search, (3) evaluation of data, (4) data analysis, and (5) interpretation and presentation of results.

The integrative review summarises both empirical and theoretical literature on a given topic and can 'incorporate diverse methodologies in order to capture the context, processes and subjective elements of the topic' (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005, p. 552). The presented integrative review attempts to address an emerging topic, which has not yet undergone a comprehensive review of the literature. Torraco (2005, p. 357) suggested that an integrative review addressing an emerging topic is more likely to 'lead to an initial or preliminary conceptualisation of the topic (i.e., a new model or framework)' and come to specific conclusions about it.

An integrative literature review may have substantial contributions and implications for theory, practice and further research as various methods, experimental and non-experimental

studies designs and both theoretical and empirical literature is included in the synthesis (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). An integrative literature review identifies, analyses and synthesises ‘results of independent studies on the same subject’ in order to reach conclusions on that subject (Tavares de Souza, Dias da Silva & de Carvalho, 2010, p. 103). In this study, the integrative review methodology allowed the formation of useful implications for theory, practice, and future research in relation to the impact of life coaching as an intervention enhancing individual courage, and helping individuals with fear and anxiety.

### ***Literature Search***

The integrative literature review allows for the inclusion of diverse methodologies, experimental and non-experimental research, peer-reviewed and non peer-reviewed studies, theoretical and empirical literature in order to assure the most thorough understanding of a given topic (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005).

### ***Sampling frame***

Search of the literature included: multiple health- and behaviour-related, psychological, educational and medical databases. The databases included: ScienceDirect, EBSCO, PubMed, Galileo, PsychINFO and CINAHL. A Boolean strategy for full and abbreviated keywords was utilised. Search terms for articles included: *life coaching, coaching, life coach, courage, fear, and anxiety*. The following phrases were used to conduct search within all databases: *life coaching AND courage, life coaching AND fear, life coaching AND anxiety, coaching AND courage, coaching AND fear, coaching AND anxiety, life coach AND courage, life coach AND fear, life coach AND anxiety*. Ancestry search (search of references in relevant articles) and cross-reference was additionally used in order to retrieve more articles through examination of the reference lists of the articles already found.

### ***Inclusion and exclusion criteria***

The following inclusion criteria were used for search parameters: the studies had to be published in English, and pertain to life coaching and its impact on courage, fear, or anxiety. Peer-reviewed as well as non peer-reviewed articles were included. Empirical as well as theoretical studies were included. Studies displaying opposite views or results were included. Articles that did not contain any elements relevant to life coaching and its impact on any aspect related to courage, fear, anxiety, or their dimensions were excluded. Although a timeframe was not set as one of the parameters of conducted search, the sources utilised in this review were published or updated between 1960 and 2014. One hundred and seven sources have been used for the purpose of current integrative review: academic textbooks, articles from the journals and periodicals as well as various educational pieces. Four of them were used to describe the theoretical framework of the integrative review.

### **Data evaluation**

Due to the use of various databases, extensive search methods, inclusion and exclusion criteria, the primary evidence reviewed in the integrative review is methodologically sound. The final sample obtained in the literature search included diverse studies and study designs. All studies represented different quality of evidence, which ranged from low to high. A higher level of evidence can be assigned to peer-reviewed case series, randomised control trials or literature reviews. A lower level of evidence can be assigned to non peer-reviewed literature, commentaries, or expert opinions. The quality of the literature was not a criterion relevant to this literature review. Following integrative review research guidelines, all evidence was analyzed with equal significance and no study was excluded based on its low quality (see Table 1 for further breakdown).

<b>Type of Source/ Study design</b>	<b>Number of studies</b>	<b>Key terms explored</b>
academic textbooks/chapters	27	anxiety, coaching psychology, courage, fear, hope, intrinsic motivation, life satisfaction, panic, phobia, purpose, self-determination, resilience, self-esteem, strength
randomised control trials	4	anxiety, courage, depression, fearlessness, hardiness, hope, life satisfaction
peer-reviewed case series	22	anxiety, courage, depression, fear, fearlessness, hope, intrinsic motivation, life satisfaction, mental health, leadership, panic, phobia, psychological safety, regret, self-determination, resilience, self-efficacy, self-esteem, strength, transformational change, well-being
peer-reviewed case studies	5	courage, life coaching, positive psychology, quality of life
literature reviews	8	anxiety, coaching culture, co-active life coaching, behaviour change, cognitive-behavioural treatment, motivation
other peer-reviewed studies	31	anxiety, confidence, courage, fear, fearlessness, hardiness, hope, life satisfaction, positive psychology, resilience, self-doubt, self-esteem, strength, stress, time perspective, transformative learning, trust, well-being
non peer-reviewed studies	6	coaching, cognitive behavioural technique, decision-making, fear, inner courage, well-being

**Table 1: Categorisation of sources used with respect to study design and key terms explored.**

The process of data evaluation and synthesis of literature in an integrative review aims to identify core issues and integrate available research rather than reporting previous findings (Torraco, 2005). The objective is to obtain a unique interpretation and set of conclusions for the literature pertaining to variables under study providing new implications for theory, practice and future research.

The objective of the integrative review goes beyond reporting on the previous literature. It synthesises various sources of literature while staying focused on the analyzed topic (Torraco, 2005). Although an integrative review is based on previous research and findings, it results in a new model, new knowledge, or a new conceptual framework. Broader dataset adds value to in-depth analysis of the topic. In this integrative review, opinion pieces contribute to the overall discussion on the topic. Literature with lower levels of evidence included in this study reinforced and broadened the findings of the literature review with those of a higher level of evidence.

### ***Data Analysis***

According to Russell (2005), the variables under study and the relationships between them should be described during the initial stages when conducting an integrative review. In this integrative review, courage, fear, and anxiety in the context of life coaching intervention were the variables under study. Data obtained in the search stage was diverse, complex and incorporated potentially numerous categories. The data was analyzed according to *inductive content analysis*. Emerging themes and obtained research categories were a derivative of the researcher's experience in analyzing the literature (Creswell, 2007). The following elements of data analysis were used in order to extract categories for the review: noting patterns and themes, clustering, noting dependence/co-dependence between variables, finding intervening factors and building a logical chain of evidence. As advised by Whittemore and Knafl (2005, p. 551), critical analysis of data was utilised to identify 'important and accurate patterns and themes' for the review.

### **Findings**

The data analysis allowed four categories to be identified, which became research questions for this review: (1) How are *courage*, *fear* and *anxiety* characterised in the theoretical and empirical literature on life coaching? (2) What is the role of life coaching in enhancing *courage*, and helping with *fear* and *anxiety*? (3) What is the mechanism for explaining potential improvement (or lack thereof) in individual's *courage*, *fear* and *anxiety*? (4) What results have been documented or suggested in the literature? To find answers to each of these questions, the literature has been rigorously analyzed according to integrative review techniques, as well as deductive and inductive reasoning (Russell, 2005). Selective coding was performed as the final stage of data analysis to further describe and analyses the nature of the categories, and relationships of the concepts and variables identified in the data.

***(1) How are courage, fear and anxiety characterised in the theoretical and empirical literature on life coaching?***

*Courage*

Various descriptions of courage have been found. Curtis and Kelly (2013, p. 20) refer to courage as ‘extreme expression of motivation and commitment’. Peterson and Seligman (2004, p. 29) define courage as ‘emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal’. In their classification of positive strengths, Seligman *et al.* (2005) placed courage as one of the six core virtues, which allow an individual optimal development. The other core virtues are: wisdom, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Courage has also been described as ‘honesty about one’s values and needs and willingness to confront incongruent attitudes and behaviours’ (Curtis & Kelly, 2013, p. 28). Apart from will, courageous actions also need a certain level of emotional and cognitive skills to be carried out (Hannah *et al.*, 2007). Pury *et al.* (2007) suggest that courageous actions require a strong sense of autonomy. A courageous action originating from a strong sense of autonomy shows that an individual is able and willing to: begin the process, be vulnerable, confront her fears, prioritise her goals, recognise her values and bear the consequences of her actions (Pury *et al.*, 2007).

Peterson and Seligman (2004) identified the following character strengths with courage: bravery (valour), persistence (perseverance, industriousness), integrity (authenticity, honesty) and vitality (zest, enthusiasm, vigour, energy). Bravery is defined as ‘not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain’, integrity refers to ‘taking responsibility for one’s feelings and actions’, vitality means ‘approaching life with excitement and energy’, and persistence is described as ‘persisting in a course of action in spite of obstacles’ (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 29). It has been suggested that persistence helps individuals modulate negative emotions as they attempt to align their actions with their identified values (Burton *et al.*, 2006).

Courage has also been associated with love, faith, hopefulness, forgiveness, self-regulation, self-determination, and resilience (Bernard, 2004; Curtis & Kelly, 2013; Jablin, 2006; Noble & McGrath, 2008). According to Sheldon (2002), self-regulation skills help individuals stay committed to their long-term priorities, even when negative emotions, distractions and challenges get in the way. Sheldon (2002) also suggests that self-regulation builds self-determination and is positively correlated with perseverance. Courage has also been linked to resilience, along with other skills like: optimistic thinking, coping skills, humour, helpful thinking or problem solving (Benard, 2004; Noble & McGrath, 2008).

### *Fear*

The literature on life coaching lacks a clear, unified definition of fear. Fear has been described as a painful emotion along with boredom, loneliness, or discontent, which may result in a need for a lifestyle change (Curtis & Kelly, 2013). Certain variables have also been linked to the notion of fear. In a study by Drum (2007), fear has been negatively associated with exploration and independence. Curtis and Kelly (2013) suggest that there is a positive correlation between fear and lifestyle transition. Fear has also been linked to low self-esteem (Brady, 2011). While high self-esteem allows an individual to enjoy high self-acceptance, confidence, and ability to cope with stress - low self-esteem leads to fear and negativity (Brady, 2011; Mruk, 1999).

### *Anxiety*

The literature pertaining to life coaching and anxiety is very scarce, and a description of this notion is hard to be found. According to May (1981) healthy psychological development of an individual requires the ability to dynamically adjust to natural anxiety. This natural anxiety occurs when individuals act according to their 'sense of values, purpose, and meaning in life versus submitting to the social expectations of the world and familiar routines' (Curtis & Kelly, 2013, p. 21). Anxiety may therefore appear if individuals choose actions based on the opinions of others rather than on who they truly are.

Numerous variables, notions and environments have been linked to increased anxiety in the literature. Anxiety and other negative emotions have been associated with controlled extrinsic motivation (Baard, 2002). The controlled motivation causes individuals to be defensive and approach new situations with a feeling of pressure and discomfort (Rogers, 1961). Empirical studies have shown that controlling environments may lead to anxiety, stress, learned helplessness, and low quality of life (Koestner & Loiser, 2002). It happens when basic needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are not met, in which case the individuals value the judgments of others higher than their own (Curtis & Kelly, 2013).

Anxiety has been described as a hindering factor to learning (Wang & Millward, 2014). Anxiety has also been negatively associated with motivation to learn and self-efficacy (Colquitt *et al.*, 2000). Boniwell and Sircova (2014) suggest that forgiveness reduces negative emotions, including anxiety. Regret, on the other hand, has been linked to increases in anxiety and depression (Roese *et al.*, 2009). Regret can refer to past situations like: making a mistake or not taking advantage of an opportunity (Boniwell & Sircova, 2014). Anxiety can also be associated with the future, when an individual tries to stay committed to future plans, but has to face unexpected challenges and uncertainty (Zaleski, 1996). Life satisfaction has also been listed among reasons why individuals face anxiety (Baruffol *et al.*, 1995; Lewinsohn *et al.*, 1991).

## ***(2) What is the role of life coaching in enhancing courage, and helping with fear and anxiety?***

### *Courage*

One of the key features of life coaching is its emphasis on the coach-client relationship (Gabriel *et al.*, 2014; Stober, 2006; Whitmore, 2009). There are a few critical elements that help build an efficient coaching relationship, such as trust, empathy (Gregory & Levy, 2011; Stober, 2006), and unconditional positive regard (Stober, 2006; Whitmore, 2009). A strong coaching relationship requires a safe environment, in which clients are inspired by coaches to be courageous and take risks while making decisions and designing actions (Pearson, 2011). Unconditional positive regard implies that the coach accepts and respects who the client is without any judgement (Gregory & Levy, 2012). Coaches should encourage their clients to be their true selves in the coaching relationship by being fully open, genuine and honest (Gabriel *et al.*, 2014).

Building core character strengths, such as courage, is considered one of the objectives of a life coaching process, along with strengthening a sense of autonomy and finding life purpose (Creed & Blume, 2013; Zarecky, 2014). The establishment of a safe, encouraging, non-judgmental and supportive relationship is vital to the achievement of outcomes desired by the coachee. In such a coaching relationship, the clients build hope, courage and attain resilience in order to stay committed to their long-term goals and support their behaviour change in order to achieve their goals (Spence & Oades, 2011).

A coaching relationship also gives clients the courage to learn - about themselves and their environment (Drake, 2011). Life coaching involves developing the client's insight into her inspirations, motivations and life purpose (Lyon, 2005). The role of the coach is to help the client identify ways to continuously grow, develop and maximise his/her potential assuming that every coachee has an innate desire to grow (Gabriel *et al.*, 2014). Life coaching takes as given that coachees have intrinsic motivation helping them achieve their best selves (Joseph & Bryant-Jeffries, 2007). By addressing that motivation, coaches facilitate the coachee's growth, development and maximisation of his/her potential (Gregory & Levy, 2012; Stober, 2006).

Life coaching is a client-centred process, in which individuals are encouraged to face their challenges. Those challenges require clients to demonstrate courage while facing them. According to Geber (2010), clients can be courageous because they have their coach's support. That support is crucial for the clients when they need courage to examine themselves, confront others and decide what it is that they would like to do next (Geber, 2010). Coaches give their clients courage to change by helping them learn how to let go of obstacles that are holding them back and how to move on (Brady, 2011). Krum (2012, p. 68) emphasises the importance of coaching in finding the courage to let go of 'seeing value in the eyes of others'. Courage is

needed to make a change, in particular when the value a client attaches to a certain outcome is not as important as the value others attach to the same outcome (Krum, 2012).

### *Fear*

Every coaching relationship begins with exploration of the client's dreams, hopes, aspirations, goals, and also fears (Sharol, 2008). According to Kets de Vries (2013), fear is one of the six major concerns that clients bring to the coaching sessions (other concerns are: physiological, sexual/sensual, attachment, anger, and exploration). A life coach may take on a role of a liberator, who supports a client in times of a difficult transition (Brady, 2011). Hanssmann (2014) states that coaches create a transformational space for their clients and help them overcome their fears. According to Rogers (1967), unconditional positive regard and creating a non-judgmental environment is fundamental for the clients to be able to face their fears, worries and concerns. Empathy is very important in establishing that safe and non-judgmental environment (Newnham-Kanas *et al.*, 2011). The clients see that the coach accepts them for who they are and therefore find it easier to accept themselves and face their fears assisting in a difficult transition (Brady, 2011).

Popular fear-related themes appearing in coaching conversations are: fear of change, fear of the unknown, fear of failure, vulnerability, and pressure from loved ones (Sammut, 2014). Kets de Vries (2013) lists the following common fears showing up in coaching sessions: fear of loneliness, abandonment, emotional closeness, being hurt, fear as a basic emotional experience. Other examples are fear of being rejected and fear of chaos from not being in control (Krum, 2012). Clients may come to the coaching session with the need for change convinced that they have made bad choices, feeling 'angry, procrastinating, fearful' (Linder-Pelz & Hall, 2008, p. 51). Clients can fear various aspects of transformational change - the unknown of who they become when they decide for a change (Berger, 2004; Hanssmann, 2014; Markus & Nurius, 1986), loss of who they are in the present, loss of sense of self (Cranton & Wright, 2008; Hanssmann, 2014), or even loss of sense of belonging (Markus & Kitayama, 2003). The role of coaching has been recognised as very important in identifying the emotional state of the client and later supporting and guiding the client through the shift in thinking and perspective, in order to be able to act differently (Reynolds, 2011).

### *Anxiety*

Anxiety related to stressful situations in both personal and professional life is common for coaching clients (Frisch, 2013). Clients struggle with different kinds of anxieties, which very often are related to limited thinking and behavioural patterns (Grant & Hartley, 2013). Other sources of anxiety may be related to time passing by - so called 'time anxiety'. Time anxiety is present when clients are highly aware of time running out, slipping through their fingers, or with them having no control over it (Boniwell, 2005). Overcoming anxiety may be a very important part of a life coaching process. Coaches support their clients while they recognise and name

sources of their anxieties. Helping clients understand their anxieties may ultimately help them carry out necessary changes in their perspective and actions (Reynolds, 2011). Some level of anxiety is an inherent part of the coaching process as clients attempt to change and perform actions that are not in their comfort zone to facilitate change (Wang & Millward, 2014).

***(3) What is the mechanism explaining potential improvement (or lack thereof) in individual's courage, fear and anxiety?***

A potential explanation of the improvement in individual's courage, fear and anxiety has been provided by behaviour theory. According to Mowrer (1960) the existence of courage may hinder development of fear and anxiety. As suggested by Rachman (1984, 2004), courageous people facing threat demonstrate courageous behaviour expose themselves to feared circumstances, which makes them less prone to developing fear or anxiety. Those, on the other hand, who try to avoid fearful circumstances, will at some point develop fear (Mowrer, 1960). Muris (2009) therefore suggests that courage may play a vital role for clients who deal with fear and anxiety, and for client-centred behavioural approaches, which include life coaching.

*Courage*

There are many approaches in the literature explaining the potential mechanism of how life coaching may impact an individual's courage. According to Maslow (1970) and May (1975) individuals make beneficial choices leading to growth when they are provided with supportive conditions. Since a life coaching process creates supportive environment for the clients, coaching could be considered as one of the channels through which we can positively impact a client's growth and ultimately their courage. Spinelli and Horner (2008) suggest that an existential approach to coaching may provide a potential explanation of that link. The clients must show a lot of courage throughout the coaching process to be able to face their main challenges and make a change (Spinelli & Horner, 2008). The coaching process - while providing support for the clients - helps them build their courage as well.

Trust and truth are two of the most important foundations of a strong coaching relationship. The coach makes the client feel safe, understood, and cared about, which allows the coach to challenge the client's beliefs (Krum, 2012). The commitment to truth, as described by Deurzen (2010), is necessary to create a coaching process that would maximise the client's potential. The language used by the coach is consciously selected to increase a client's awareness of the available choices and the responsibility associated with those choices. With increased awareness created through the coaching relationship, the clients learn how to find the courage to face the challenges in their lives (Krum, 2012).

According to self-determination theory, basic psychological needs (autonomy, relatedness, and competence) must be satisfied for the individual to be able to strengthen her courage, face the challenges, cope with stress and make the necessary transitions (Curtis & Kelly, 2013; Hannah *et al.*, 2007). When a coaching process is supportive of those needs, the client

tends to approach her life with greater excitement, energy, and readiness to take actions leading to self-development (Ryan & Deci, 2008). By showing unconditional positive regard, coaches facilitate the development of the autonomy-supportive behaviours of their clients (Gabriel *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, a belief that the client has the autonomy to grow and face challenges on his/her own promotes self-determination (Gabriel *et al.*, 2014). Maslow (1970) and May (1975) state that supportive conditions, such as those offered by life coaching, help clients make growth choices which result in more courage, creativity, love, and responsibility experienced by those clients.

As proposed by Curtis and Kelly (2013), courage is formed as a product of the internalisation process experienced by the coachee during the coaching process. Coaching helps internalise the client's psychological resources (values and character strengths) by supporting basic psychological needs. The internalisation process has been presented as a cycle in which increased self-awareness and emotional regulation builds self-responsibility and commitment, which subsequently strengthens courage and results in higher self-determination (Curtis & Kelly, 2013). During that process, clients internalise their character strengths to face the challenges and take courageous actions. Coaches have the ability to shape performance, enhance motivation and the well-being of their coachees. Self-determination theory applied in life coaching is also consistent with the fundamental principle of life coaching that the coachee is approached as a whole person and no area of his/her life is treated in isolation (Gabriel *et al.*, 2014).

Strengthened courage resulting from a coaching process may also be explained by looking at life coaching as applied positive psychology (Green *et al.*, 2007). The focal points of applied positive psychology (and life coaching) are the individual's strengths, positive experiences, building skills, and looking for what is right (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Although the study by Green *et al.* (2007) is focused on cognitive hardiness, it can also be related to courage through resilience, as hardiness is an important component of resilience (Bonanno, 2004). The life coaching program applied in the study by Green *et al.* (2007) encouraged participants to enhance their positive experiences by setting desired goals, using available resources and creating actions leading to achieving those goals. Focusing on one's strengths rather than shortcomings allowed the participants to build hardiness. Because of the strong relationship between hardiness and courage, the same mechanism may be applied to strengthen courage as a result of a life coaching process.

### *Fear*

There are many approaches in the literature explaining the potential mechanism of how life coaching may impact individuals' feelings of fear. Self-determination theory suggests that when clients reach greater autonomy, they become more open-minded, and embrace new learning and experiences. Clients also learn to accept and modulate their feelings of fear instead of denying them (Hodgins & Knee, 2002). In an internalisation process described by Curtis and

Kelly (2013), overcoming fear involves hope, self-regulation, and focusing on the positive outcome. This result relates also to the theory of positivity (Fredrickson, 2009). When clients envision a positive outcome, and attach hopeful expectations to that outcome, they are able to better contain their feelings of fear and shift their focus with a more positive mindset (Fredrickson, 2009). Overcoming fears and concerns can also be achieved by changing the client's perspective (Hanssmann, 2014).

The literature also emphasises learning as an important strategy to overcome fear and self-doubt (Downey, 2003; Hindmarch, 2008). According to Downey (2003) when a client is open to new learning and stays fully focused, the feelings of fear and self-doubt fade and are eventually forgotten. The learning is also found in simply facing fear as confronting challenges is a choice between growth and fear (Watkins, 2004). The coach's presence and the fact that the client is not alone in the coaching relationship are also important factors helping clients confront their fears throughout their learning process (Hanssmann, 2014). Clients recognise the importance of having someone there when they go through a deep change process. The coaching relationship, the coach's engagement and unconditional support helps coachees overcome their fears (Groen & Hyland-Russel's; 2010).

Coaches acknowledge that clients are vulnerable when going through a process of change: 'coaching is about change and to change you do make yourself vulnerable' (Rogers, 2004, p. 6). Clients' fears associated with change are therefore addressed by the coach in a safe environment of trust and understanding (Drum, 2007). The sense of safety allows the clients to fully express themselves without fear of being laughed at, judged or criticised (Woodhead, 2011). According to Kets de Vries (2013), it is a space where clients can play with new options, possibilities and creative ways of doing things, which increases cognitive flexibility, boosts creative thinking, and helps with fear and existing concerns in return. When created in a group setting, a safe environment may have additional beneficial effects on individuals experiencing fear (Kets de Vries, 2005).

### *Anxiety*

The analyzed literature provides only a few potential explanations for improvements in anxiety obtained as a result of a life coaching process. Boniwell and Sircova (2014) suggest that balanced time perspective may positively influence clients who struggle with anxiety. Time perspective coaching helps clients 'to be active in everything that is happening around them', which increases their influence on future events and therefore allows them to have a greater appreciation and satisfaction from all life experiences, regardless of whether they are good or bad (Boniwell & Sircova, 2014, p. 35). According to Sircova and Mitina (2008) such a mindset helps reduce the anxiety coming from future choices.

It has been shown that life coaching increases an individual's level of hope (Green *et al.*, 2006; Green *et al.*, 2007). Hope theory (Snyder *et al.*, 2002) may also help explain how life coaching influences individuals who experience anxiety (Leach *et al.*, 2011; Worgan, 2013). It has been demonstrated that people with higher levels of hope have lower levels of anxiety, depression, and generally have better health, are more successful, and have a better sense of their life purpose (Cheavens *et al.*, 2006). High-hope individuals are considerably more resilient, which is one of the reasons why their level of anxiety is lower (Lopez *et al.*, 2004; Worgan, 2013).

Self-determination theory also suggests how life coaching may help clients with their anxiety. Since one of the sources of anxiety is controlled motivation, an environment, which supports individual's autonomy may positively influence feelings of anxiety (Curtis & Kelly, 2013; Koestner & Losier, 2002). The coaching relationship supports the clients while they align their actions with their core values, congruent goals and purpose, which increases their level of autonomy (Hodgins & Knee, 2002), and consequently helps decrease anxiety. It has been suggested that supportive relationships (such as a coaching relationship) can relieve stress and decrease anxiety (Grant, 2009; Myers, 1999). According to Stewart *et al.* (2008) coaching clients are able to reach greater emotional stability. Since emotional stability refers to the ability to face even stressful situations with calm, it also affects individual susceptibility to experiencing anxiety. Grant and Hartley (2013) note that unhelpful thinking patterns and anxiety may be related and give the example of procrastination to describe the potential mechanism. As a solution-focused approach in a cognitive-behavioural framework life coaching emphasises the development of personal strengths and goal attainment rather than problem analysis (Grant & Hartley, 2013) and helps shift unhelpful thinking patterns by focusing on new opportunities, meaningful development and performance goals (Gabriel *et al.*, 2014).

#### ***(4) What results have been documented or suggested in the literature?***

The evidence suggesting that life coaching can strengthen an individual's courage is scarce (Frisch *et al.*, 2005). The results of the study by Curtis and Kelly (2013) suggest that psychological courage can be strengthened in a life coaching process, as well as the character strengths associated with courage - open-mindedness, love of learning, bravery, integrity, vitality, hope, and self-regulation. In the study by Green *et al.* (2007), life coaching resulted in significant increase in cognitive hardiness. The study was a randomised controlled experimental design, which was conducted among 56 senior female high school students. Increases in hardiness were noted among participants in the coaching group, while no changes were registered among participants in the control group.

Numerous studies report significant reductions in levels of anxiety over the course of coaching programs. There is growing evidence that life coaching may reduce anxiety and stress in both young people and adults (Leach *et al.*, 2011). Grant (2001) conducted a study among a

sample of students, where the effects of cognitive, behavioural, and cognitive-behavioural coaching approaches were compared. Cognitive coaching was found successful in reducing non-study-related anxiety. Grant (2003) also investigated the results of a life coaching program among a sample of twenty adult postgraduate students and found that as a result of the program, the level of anxiety was significantly reduced. In the study by Grant (2014), there were 49 participants who were coached according to solution-focused cognitive behavioural therapy coaching over a period of 10-12 weeks. Coaching was successful in reducing anxiety levels of participants in this study.

However, not all studies support the claim that life coaching has positive impact on individuals struggling with anxiety. No significant decrease in anxiety was noted in the study conducted by Green (2004). Newnham-Kanas *et al.* (2011) in their annotated bibliography of life coaching and health research cite six articles examining the role of life coaching in lowering anxiety levels in participants. The authors reported conflicting results - some studies concluded that life coaching had no effect on anxiety, other studies, however, suggested that life coaching can be a successful approach in reducing anxiety.

### **Limitations of this review**

Integrative reviews share some common limitations like: combining diverse methodologies in reviewed studies and subjectively formulated methods of analysis. This lack of scientific rigour in the analysis of past empirical and theoretical literature may have significantly impacted the obtained results. There might be a potential systematic bias at any of the stages of this integrative review - literature search, data analysis and extraction of findings. For example, the literature search may have not yielded all of the critical primary sources. Data synthesis was also challenging due to many methodologies included. Although studies analyzed in this integrative review addressed the concepts of courage, fear and anxiety, the extent to which those concepts were defined and discussed varied greatly depending on the study. This could possibly limit the robustness of interpretation of the obtained results. Various approaches were used to assist coachees with their improvement, which also limits the ability of researchers to compare results. Additionally, the restricted amount of information available in life coaching research makes it challenging to draw conclusions that would apply to a large population of coachees. Another limitation is related to the quality of analyzed studies. Many empirical studies included in this review included biased samples; some were lacking a randomisation mechanism, which guarantees higher levels of objectivity; and numerous studies lacked thorough descriptions of their methodology and evaluation of the sustainability of the results.

### **Conclusions**

This study aims to evaluate the available evidence on the influence of life coaching on individual courage, fear and anxiety. There is a considerable amount of literature that addresses

the concepts of courage, fear and anxiety in the context of life coaching. Undertaking this integrative review of the literature allow the claim to be made that coaching may yield positive results with people who need to strengthen their courage, reduce their fear and anxiety. The literature pertaining to life coaching and courage and anxiety is scarce, and presents various - not necessary consistent - theories and descriptions of those notions. The established literature, however, lacks a clear, unified definition of fear. It has been suggested that life coaching may play a very influential role in enhancing courage, and helping with fear and anxiety. Building core character strengths, such as courage, is considered one of the objectives of a life coaching process. Fear and anxiety related to stressful situations in both personal and professional life are very common for coaching clients. Various potential explanations of the improvement in individual's courage, fear and anxiety have been provided in the literature. Theories like: behavior theory, existential approach, self-determination theory, applied positive psychology or learning theory have been employed to explain the mechanism behind the increase in individual courage and decrease in fear and anxiety because of a life coaching process.

The gaps in research about the impact of life coaching on courage, fear and anxiety, means this integrative review offers a unique contribution, as it integrates the studies specifically with this focus. Life coaching may be a worthwhile intervention enhancing individual courage and helping with experienced fear and anxiety. The results obtained in this review revealed the need to develop an innovative theory about life coaching as a potentially successful intervention for people, whose professional or personal growth and development have been limited by lack of courage and feelings of fear and anxiety. This study may prove useful to life coaching practitioners, who coach clients lacking courage to make a change in their lives or struggling with fear and anxiety of various origins. The results extend beyond life coaching practitioners and may also be beneficial in a wide variety of contexts, as coachees expressing fear and anxiety are not limited to the coaching setting.

Life coaching as a future-oriented and goal-oriented approach may be successful in helping clients strengthen their courage, reduce their fear and anxiety, and face challenges in their professional and personal lives. Coaching practices may be strengthened by research and knowledge of techniques that have been demonstrated as effective. Life coaching can ultimately be more tailored to the needs of the coachees working towards strengthening their courage, or reducing fear and anxiety. Better understanding of those concepts in the context of life coaching will also allow coaches to better target their clients' needs leading to more efficient growth and development of coachees.

Future research can develop ideas introduced in this study by further exploring some of the links that have been presented between courage, fear, anxiety and life coaching. Further conceptualisation of those terms, particularly fear and anxiety, is warranted before research can effectively evaluate the impact of coaching strategies. Gathering data to support the claim

regarding the coach's role in strengthening the client's courage and reducing fear and anxiety could be one of many directions for future research. More research is needed to further analyses the impact of life coaching on courage, fear and anxiety, and the sustainability of the results in the long run. Qualitative research studies summarising empirical results from coaching practices would be a beneficial contribution that could help determine the impact of the life coaching experiences. High quality studies should be conducted to clarify the mechanism of improvement and to establish the most efficient elements of life coaching. Research should also be directed at unifying existing definitions of courage, fear, and anxiety, especially in the empirical life coaching setting.

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Joanna Jarosz has an MA degree in economics from the University of Minnesota and is working toward completing her PhD. Joanna's primary research focuses on the theoretically grounded models of life coaching and their application in behavioral change.