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Abstract

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Keywords

Microaggressions, Foucault, Intercollegiate Athletics, Racial Subjectivities, Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

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Despite growing research on racial microaggressions as a subtle but prevalent form of racial discrimination, research on microaggressions in sport and their effects on the psychosocial wellbeing of athletes is scarce. Moreover, some researchers question the legitimacy of microaggressions due to their subtle nature and inconsistency in how they are experienced (Lilienfeld, 2017). The purpose of this study was to examine U.S. collegiate student-athletes-of-color experiences with racial microaggressions in sport through a new theoretical lens, Foucauldian poststructuralist theory. We theorized microaggressions as an example of the daily panoptic gaze that leads to self-surveillance and the production of normalized individuals (Foucault, 1995). Eight student-athletes-of-color participated in two interviews: a two-person focus group interview followed by an individual interview. The interviews were analyzed deductively using Sue's (2010) microaggression typology followed by a Foucauldian discourse analysis (Willig, 2013). The results illustrated how student-athletes-of-color experiences and subjectivities were racialized. Within sport, the sport as transcending race discourse was widely circulated and legitimized through various sporting practices, which limited athletes' ability to perceive and acknowledge race and microaggressions. This study sheds light on how racial microaggressions manifest in the lives of student-athletes and how the discourses and practices we take for granted constitute racial subjectivities. Keywords: Microaggressions, Foucault, Intercollegiate Athletics, Racial Subjectivities, Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

Researchers suggest that racism in the United States has not disappeared, but has become more subtle and insidious (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000; Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015). One form of subtle discrimination that contributes to contemporary America's "racism without racists" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 13) is racial microaggressions. Racial microaggressions are "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their [racial] group membership" (Sue, 2010, p. 24).

Microaggressions can be expressed verbally or nonverbally, for example, in the form of verbal slights or through dismissals of marginalized groups' experiences (Sue et al., 2007b). Researchers have found that various marginalized groups experience microaggressions and encounter them in diverse contexts such as in school, at the work place, and even in counseling settings (Wong, Derthick, David, Saw, & Okazaki, 2014). Researchers explained that the effects of microaggressions were comparable to a "death by a thousand cuts" (Sue, 2010, p. 66). Although a single comment or incident can be ignored or overlooked, the constant, cumulative, and omnipresent nature of microaggressions can result in negative physical and

mental health outcomes (Sue et al., 2007b) and lead individuals to perceive their surrounding environments as unwelcoming and hostile (Melendez, 2008; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

Despite the growing research on microaggressions, especially racial microaggressions, the concept still remains controversial (Harris, 2008; Thomas, 2008). Critics argued that microaggressions promote a culture of victimhood (Campbell & Manning, 2014), which produces psychologically weak individuals (Friedersdorf, 2015b) who cannot take a joke. Calling it “macro-nonsense” (Thomas, 2008, p. 274), researchers have also argued that the concept is priming people to become overly sensitive to the behavior of others and to adopt a victimhood mentality. Researchers have also pointed to the fact that microaggressions are contextual (Sue, 2010) so there is a lack of consistency among people-of-color experiences with microaggressions, which has led some researchers to question the legitimacy of microaggressions as to whether they really are a manifestation of racial discrimination or simply a misunderstanding (Harris, 2009; Lilienfeld, 2017). Previous research has been limited in being able to clearly theorize why perspectives differ so widely, leading to a critical question: Why are microaggressions so contextual? Why might individuals, even those from the same racial minority group, have mixed or contradictory experiences with microaggressions? Moreover, additional theorizing seems warranted to explain why something as subtle as racial microaggressions can bring such significant negative consequences to the victims. Thus, both theoretical and conceptual refinement of microaggression research is warranted.

The purpose of this study was to examine the range of ways a sample of U.S. collegiate student-athletes experienced racial microaggressions through a new theoretical approach, Foucauldian poststructuralist theory. Foucauldian poststructuralist theory provides a way for researchers to understand why people interpret and experience microaggressions differently and why microaggressions, however subtle and seemingly innocuous, can be problematic. In this paper, we theorized that racial microaggressions are a manifestation of the panoptic gaze that leads to self-surveillance and normalized racial bodies. Our three specific research questions were (a) How do student-athletes experience racial microaggressions in sport? (b) What are the discourses student-athletes draw upon to make sense of racial microaggressions? and (c) How do student-athletes negotiate their racial identities and realities in sport in relation to this discursive content? In the following sections, we will provide a brief review of literature on racial microaggressions followed by an overview of Foucault’s theoretical framework as it relates to better understanding racial microaggressions.

Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life

First introduced in 1970 by Chester Pierce, researchers called racial microaggressions a modern-day form of racism (Sue et al., 2007b). Also referred to as “microinequities” (Sue, 2010, p. xvi), microaggressions are characterized by their subtlety, which causes the victim as well as the perpetrator to be unaware of its occurrence at times. Although this subtlety makes racial microaggressions particularly complex for researchers to understand, Sue et al. (2007b) outlined three types of microaggressions that can affect interpersonal relationships: (a) microassaults, (b) microinsults, and (c) microinvalidations. All three types of racial microaggressions communicate the message that racial minorities are somehow less worthy and inferior to their White counterparts. The types and themes of racial microaggressions proposed by Sue (2010) are shown below on Figure 1.

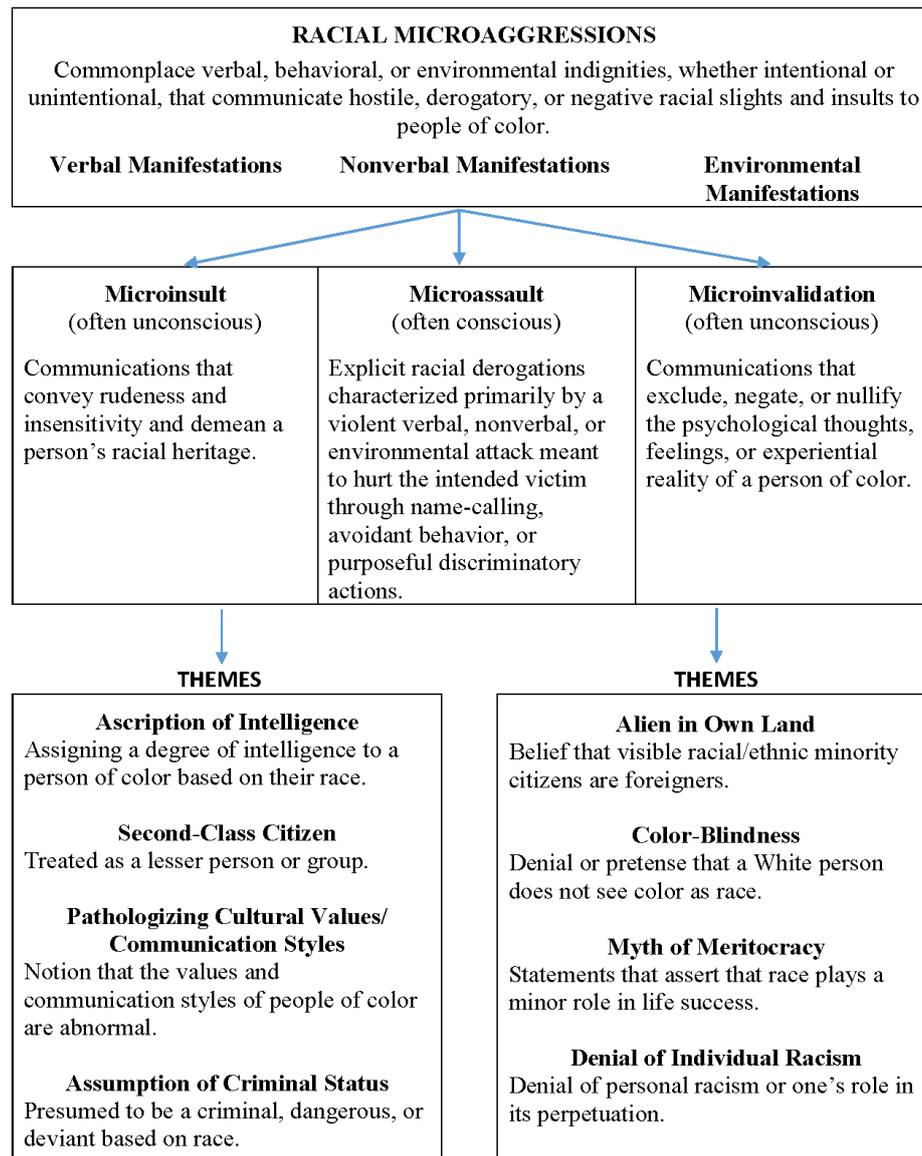


Figure 1. Categories of and Relationships among Racial Microaggressions (Sue, 2010, p. 29)

Despite their subtle manifestation, researchers found that the stress resulting from chronic racial microaggression experiences can lead to negative biological, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral consequences (Sue, 2010). Microaggressions, as a chronic stressor, can lead to lower functioning of the immune system (Sue, 2010), negatively impact physical health outcomes (Wong et al., 2014), and increase mood disorders such as depression and anxiety (Donovan, Galban, Grace, Bennett, & Felicie, 2013; Gomez, Khurshid, Freitag, & Lachuk, 2011). Additionally, Salvatore and Shelton (2007) found that racial minorities showed a greater decrease in cognitive functioning when exposed to subtle microaggressions compared to overt forms of racial discrimination. Researchers have explained that this is because subtle forms of racism potentially require more “guesswork” (Sue, 2010, p. 101) on the part of the victim compared to overt discrimination, and that “guesswork” makes it more cognitively burdensome. Furthermore, microaggressions lead racial minorities to perceive their surrounding climate as hostile and unsafe (Grier-Reed, 2010; Melendez, 2008), which can lead to “hypervigilance and skepticism” (Sue, 2010, p. 103) or internalized racism as a way for racial minorities to cope with the status quo of White supremacy (Sue, 2010).

Since Sue et al.'s (2007b) seminal article on racial microaggressions, microaggression research has become a useful concept to understand other interconnected social inequalities such as gender and sexual orientation-based microaggressions (e.g., Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011; Sue, 2010). Although we acknowledge that microaggressions are a useful concept to explain various social inequalities, as racism is ever-present and continues to persist as a major source of social inequality, in this paper, we focus on examining racial microaggressions experienced by people-of-color.

Racial Microaggressions in Sport

Despite the amount of research conducted on microaggressions, examining microaggressions in sports has been scarce. Given the various negative consequences that can adversely impact individuals, it is a timely task for sport and exercise psychology (SEP) researchers to examine how racial microaggressions manifest and impact those in sporting contexts. Additionally, research on North American sport suggests that the culture of sport involves a bracketed morality, "a legitimated, temporary suspension of the usual moral obligation to equally consider the needs and desires of all persons" (Bredemeier & Shields, 1986, pp. 257-258). In other words, actions that would be perceived as transgressions in society are not only often accepted but also expected, and at times, and celebrated in the sporting context. For example, student-athletes normalized the use of trash talk as simply being part of the game, even though the content of trash talk ranged from belittling one's athletic ability to one's sexuality and masculinity (Rainey & Granito, 2010). If sport operates under a unique set of norms, how does this influence the manifestation of one's understanding of racial microaggressions in sport? Could microaggressions also be normalized as a part of sport to the point of being invisible to those involved? If so, what are the consequences of such behaviors being normalized, accepted, and even celebrated? Carrington (2004) stated that "sport has a particular corporeal resonance in making visible those aspects of social life that often remain submerged in other domains" (p. 2). Sport may provide a unique setting to examine subtle manifestations of racism as the invisible may be more likely to become visible in sport.

Three studies have been conducted on the microaggression experiences of athletes. Jordan (2010) examined the racial microaggression experiences of Black college student-athletes and found that a unique microaggression that Black athletes experienced was having their athleticism attributed to their race (Jordan, 2010). Burdsey (2011) also found that British Asian male cricket players experienced racial microaggressions from a wide variety of sources such as teammates, fans, and even referees. Interestingly, the players expressed a tendency to minimize and trivialize their experiences despite recalling specific microaggression examples. Burdsey explained the athletes' (non)responses to the fact that the athletes were entrenched in a color-blind ideology, but further explanations are warranted as to why athletes would adhere to an oppressive ideology that does not directly benefit them. Comeaux (2012) also examined the microaggressions college student-athletes experienced due to their status of being a student-athlete such as verbal slights related to their intelligence or academic motivation. However, Comeaux did not look at racial differences and many of the participants surveyed reported no experiences with microaggressions.

Although these results suggest that athletes, especially athletes-of-color, may not be immune from subtle and overt forms of discrimination, some questions remain concerning understanding microaggressions. Researchers have not clearly articulated why there is such a wide range in the way racial microaggressions are understood. Not only did participants minimize the effects of microaggressions (Burdsey, 2011), but some did not even perceive microaggressions (Comeaux, 2012). Even more, Allen (2010) found that racial microaggressions were perpetrated, not only by White people, but also by racial minorities.

Why are there such inconsistencies in experiences with microaggressions? Why do some people perceive them while others do not? Moreover, why do even people-of-color perpetrate microaggressions and violence against each other (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015)? It is timely that researchers consider a larger body of theory to understand the ambiguous, subconscious, and contradictory experiences related to microaggressions.

In this paper, we theorize racial microaggression through a new theoretical lens of Foucauldian poststructuralist theory; Foucault's theorizing of discursive power can offer an explanation for why microaggressions can be problematic despite their subtle and inconsistent manifestation. There are two studies to date that applied Foucauldian poststructuralist theory to microaggressions. Murray (2013) theorized microaggressions as Foucauldian subjectivism to explain how students, especially students-of-color, are surveyed and corrected to fit the education system that centers on "white, middle-class value system[s]" (p. 62). Gearity and Metzger (2017) also applied a Foucauldian poststructuralist perspective to theorize how intersectional microaggressions manifest as a form of disciplinary power in sport coaching to produce normalized athletes. Although these studies offer initial theoretical insights and conceptual tools for analyzing disciplinary power that is fluid and omnipresent, additional studies examining how individuals negotiate their subjectivities in response to microaggressions are warranted. In the following section, we will outline the main principles of a Foucauldian poststructuralist approach and how it can be applied to theorizing racial microaggressions.

Foucauldian Poststructuralist Theorizing of Racial Microaggressions

Some researchers have criticized microaggressions as an empirical construct due to the inconsistent nature of peoples' experiences with them (Lilienfeld, 2017). Researchers found that not only are the effects of microaggressions dependent on the situation and context (Sue et al., 2007b; Wong et al., 2014), but some racial minorities also reported a tendency to minimize their effects (Burdsey, 2011). Due to the variability in how individuals make sense of them, it has been difficult for researchers to understand what is and is not a microaggression (Lilienfeld, 2017; Wong et al., 2014). When applying the lens of Foucauldian poststructuralist theory to microaggressions, however, the multiple, often contradictory, experiences related to microaggressions can be explained.

Poststructuralist theorists adhere to a relativist ontological assumption that there are multiple realities and that these realities are all partial, fragmented, incomplete, incoherent, and often even contradictory (Markula & Silk, 2011). Moreover, although poststructuralists acknowledge a material reality outside of language, they posit that it is through language that physical reality acquires meaning (Weedon, 1997). Poststructuralists explain that we enter a world that is already interpreted and learn to make sense of the world, our experiences, and ourselves in particular ways through discourse (Crotty, 1998). Thus, rather than reflecting our reality, Foucauldian poststructuralist theorists posit that language and discourse, "ways of knowing" (Markula & Silk, 2011, p. 49), constitute our reality. In other words, we see the world and ourselves based on socially constructed ways of knowing (i.e., through discourse). We see what we see not because it is *the* universal truth, but because it is what we know to see and look for.

From Foucauldian poststructuralist theory, then, the fact that there are multiple and often contradictory ways of understanding microaggressions does not delegitimize the concept; there will always be multiple interpretations. Rather, by focusing on examining the discourse used to construct particular ways of knowing and being, Foucauldian poststructuralist theory can help researchers examine the variability and how individuals come to their different interpretations of microaggressions.

Examining the discursive resources available to make sense of microaggressions is important because discourses not only constitute one's reality but also one's sense of self (Kavoura, Ryba, & Chroni, 2015; McGannon & Busanich, 2010). Although we often think of one's identity as inherent and fixed, Foucault considered identities, or what he called subjectivities, as something that is constantly changing and being (re)negotiated based on the discourses we have available to us. Subjectivity is "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (Weedon, 1997, p. 32). Foucault made a conscious and intentional terminology shift from using identity to subjectivity to reflect his theorizing of identity as socially and discursively constructed (Markula & Silk, 2011) rather than inherent and fixed. These assumptions decenter humans as rational and conscious beings and, instead, theorize humans as "the product of the society and culture within which we live" (Weedon, 1997, p. 32).

Although Foucault's theorizing of subjectivity sounds deterministic, as he saw discourse as constituting our subjectivities, Foucault also discussed how we, as subjects, have agency to negotiate between multiple discourses (Gutting, 2005). This is because, within discourse, subjects are offered subject positions, which is "a location for people in relation to dominant discourses, associated with specific rights, limitations and ways of feeling, thinking and behaving" (Weedon, 1997, p. 3). Because there are always multiple, often competing, discourses, individuals constantly negotiate to take up or resist the subject positions offered within discourses to negotiate their subjectivities.

As discourse constitutes the way one sees and understands the world as well as one's self (i.e., subjectivity), it has implications for power (Willig, 2013). Despite adhering to a relativist ontological assumption that truths are multiple, this does not mean all are considered equal and legitimate (Weedon, 1997). Some discourses become more dominant and widely used than others as discourse(s) "legitimate and reinforce existing social and institutional structures, [while] these structures in turn also support and validate the discourses" (Willig, 2013, p. 130). Eventually, some discourses become so dominant that they become taken-for-granted notions of truth; they appear to be common sense ways of understanding so they appear to be difficult to challenge or change (Weedon, 1997). These socially legitimized discourses "determine what is considered 'normal' in a setting, who belongs, who is allowed to participate and who is not" (Dortants & Knoppers, 2013, p. 537).

Foucault (1995) theorized that this is how power worked in modern society. Rather than a powerful other (e.g., monarchy) punishing and torturing people for their socially determined deviance, Foucault theorized that some socially determined ways of being and knowing become more dominant than others and, in turn, these dominant discourses produce legitimate ways of being and knowing in the world. Foucault (1995) called this discursive power. This means that, from the lens of Foucauldian poststructuralist theory, systems of inequality such as racism are not only upheld by the conscious and intentional harm caused by powerful others, but through our everyday language and normalized ideas (Foucault, 1995).

Discursive power is an efficient way of exercising power because it is subtle and omnipresent, but productive (Foucault, 1995). Foucault theorized that Jeremy Bentham's architectural design of a prison system, the "Panopticon" (Foucault, 1995, p. 200), represents such a disciplinary society that produces, within individuals, the effect of being exposed to a subtle, but pervasive and omnipresent gaze. The panoptic gaze leads individuals to (sub)consciously internalize societal norms and disciplinary practices. Subsequently, society can produce "*normalized citizens*" (Wilchins, 2004, p. 960, emphasis in original), who work to achieve normality out of fear of appearing abnormal. Through the presence of the panoptic gaze, discursive power is exercised with a "problematic efficiency" (Markula & Pringle, 2006, p. 43), as it leads to the automatic functioning of disciplinary power in which individuals self-survey and correct their own deviance, even in the absence of powerful others. Because

disciplinary power is productive, difference can be prevented, rather than punished, “not by authorities, but by individuals themselves, and not just intermittently when in public, but continuously, in private as well” (Wilchins, 2004, p. 994).

Consistent with Foucauldian poststructuralist theory, examining everyday language such as microaggressions becomes essential because language is neither innocent nor neutral. Normalized language such as microaggressions not only reflect dominant racial discourses, but also (re)produce them, which constitutes who and what we consider *normal* in society. In this study, we theorize that microaggressions are an example of the panoptic gaze that reminds individuals of their deviance from societal norms. By subtly penetrating to the minutest avenues in society and reminding individuals of their racialized deviance even in their most private or random spaces, microaggressions can contribute to producing, what Foucault (1995) called, obedient and useful “docile bodies” (p. 135). Such theorizing of microaggressions provides an alternative explanation for why people-of-color may subconsciously participate in their own subjugation as to avoid “the range of micro-penalties associated to deviations from the ‘norm’” (Markula & Pringle, 2006, p. 44).

As discursive power is everywhere and nowhere and (re)produced through everyday speech, microaggressions cannot or rather should not be brushed off (Weedon, 1997). Rather, we theorize that microaggressions are an instructive way to examine and problematize our normalized ways of talking and thinking about race. “For Foucault, it was the processes of ongoing critical thought–problematizing–that would enable researchers to find more instructive ways of seeing the ‘things’ that society often assumes to be self-evident” (Mills, 2014, p. 39). The goal of a Foucauldian poststructuralist theorizing of microaggressions, then, is not to make clear categorical distinctions between what constitutes an overt discrimination versus a microaggression versus an innocent joke (e.g., asking what is and is not a microaggression). Rather, researchers can move beyond the question of what is and is not a microaggression to examining “whom does discourse serve” (Markula & Pringle, 2006, p. 48) when everyday language surrounding race such as racial microaggressions is normalized.

In summary, racial microaggressions have emerged as a way of understanding how racism manifests in everyday life (Sue et al., 2007b), but have scarcely been examined in sport settings. Moreover, despite growing research on microaggressions, they remain misunderstood due to their subtle manifestation and the inconsistent experiences people have with them. Theoretical refinements to the construct of microaggressions could help us explain and understand the contradictions surrounding what microaggressions are and why they are worthy of study. In this study, we apply Foucauldian poststructuralist theory to theorize racial microaggressions. Although there are multiple Foucauldian concepts that help explain how discursive power is exercised and resisted such as technologies of discipline (Gearity & Mills, 2012; Jones & Toner, 2016) or technologies of self (Crocket, 2017; Markula, 2003), the focus of this paper was to examine the panoptic effects of dominant discourses to student-athletes’ subjectivities. Thus, we examined the discourses student-athletes drew upon to make sense of racial microaggressions and examined how student-athletes negotiated their subjectivities within the discursive context of U.S. collegiate sport.

Situating Ourselves

This study was initially conceived by the first author, Sae-Mi, and refined through the collaboration with the other authors. I, Sae-Mi, developed a strong interest in issues of social justice during my graduate training where I learned how difference and inequities are often inexorably tied. Living as a foreigner and woman-of-color in the U.S. for the past few years had also led to an acute personal awareness of my “otherness” (Connolly, 1985, p. 365). However, it was often difficult to pinpoint why and how I came to feel this sense of otherness;

overt acts of discrimination were rare and most people seemed open to difference. It was when I encountered the academic concept of microaggressions when I came to understand how, despite the circus of niceness, I was subtly and (sub)consciously put down in everyday settings. Learning that microaggressions are a shared experience for many people from marginalized groups was extremely validating. Being introduced to Foucault's theorization of discursive power further illuminated my understanding of power and its connections to microaggressions. Thus, I aimed to explore microaggressions in my discipline of SEP to examine and demonstrate how discrimination is prevalent and permeates our daily lives, whether we are aware of it or not.

My co-authors were faculty from various disciplines with whom I collaborated throughout the research process. As White Americans, they did not have personal experiences of being targeted by race-related microaggressions, but they were eager to explore the phenomenon due to their disciplinary training as well as from learning about, and witnessing, racial microaggressions being perpetrated in various contexts. Malayna, Brian, and Clayton come from different academic disciplines, but they have a shared background and interest in critical theory and Foucault. They helped theorize and design the study, think of issues of praxis, while also providing editorial assistance. As a long-time veteran in the field of SEP, Edward became involved to help contextualize the study and integrate the work into SEP practices. Although we collaboratively designed the study under Sae-Mi's leadership, Sae-Mi led the data collection and analysis. Henceforth in the manuscript, when I is used, I is referring to Sae-Mi.

Methods

Methodology

The methodological approach for this study, informed by a social constructionist paradigm and Foucauldian poststructuralist theory, is Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA). Adhering to a constructionist epistemology, we theorized that we see what we know and how we see the world is produced as well as limited by the cultural meanings and interpretations available to us. Thus, knowledge construction has power implications because those cultural meanings and interpretations are constructed and circulated through language and discourse produce particular realities and subjectivities. Thus, we focused on discourse as a way to access meaning(s) and truth(s) that inform participants' experiences with microaggressions. Using a Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis, we examined how power operates within and via language and how power and language constitute participants' reality and sense of self relative to racial microaggressions in intercollegiate athletics.

Participants and Recruitment

I recruited eight student-athletes for this study. The number of participants offered variability in the range of ways student-athletes negotiate and make sense of their microaggression experiences, but also made the data feasible for an in-depth analysis (Markula & Silk, 2011). I selected participants for this study using purposeful criterion sampling. The minimum criteria for participation were to be a student-athlete representing a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I sports team, and to have trained for at least one semester with their team. These criteria were established so the student-athletes would be familiar with their sport/team cultures and have experience navigating both school and intercollegiate sport. Moreover, student-athletes who self-identified as belonging to a racial minority group were recruited to examine the range of ways student-athletes can experience

racial microaggressions. After approval from the Institutional Review Board from my university, I identified 129 student-athletes who could potentially identify as a racial minority from the picture roster of a NCAA Division I mid-Atlantic land grant institution's website. Student-athletes were invited to participate in this study via email and various members of the athletic team staff were also contacted asking for their cooperation in participant recruitment.

Two participants identified as bi-racial (e.g., Black, Asian, Hispanic), four athletes identified as Black/African American, and two athletes identified as Asian/Asian American. Three participants were international students representing each of the following three continents: Asia, Europe, and North America. The other five participants were from the U.S.A. Seven participants were female athletes and one participant was a male athlete. Each participant played one of the following sports: soccer, golf, gymnastics, or volleyball. The age range of the participants was 18 to 20 years old.

Interviews

Participants participated in two separate interviews: (a) a focus group interview and (b) an individual interview. Because we were focused on accessing the discourses participants drew upon to make sense of their racial microaggression experiences, we had to elicit participants' talk surrounding race and racial microaggressions. Thus, we used semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions about their experiences in sport and their thoughts about, experiences with, and responses to microaggressions. Markula and Pringle (2006) suggested that those who apply poststructuralist analysis remain flexible in their questioning to accommodate new or unexpected information or situations.

The purpose of starting with a focus group interview was to introduce participants to the concept of microaggressions and provide space for participants to reflect on their understanding and experiences with them. This was because participants may not have had the language to either make sense of or describe microaggression experiences due to the newness as well as subtlety of the concept. Moreover, some researchers have suggested that focus groups are ideal for critical research because focus groups disrupt the power between the researcher and the researched (Liamputtong, 2006; Madriz, 2000; Wilkinson, 1999). Although the researcher inevitably has the power to focus the content of the interview, the researcher has less control of the conversation in focus group settings compared to individual interviews (Madriz, 2000). Although the goal was to have four participants per focus group, I conducted two-person focus groups due to scheduling conflicts of the participants. The focus group interviews were organized into three phases: (a) an introduction phase, (b) an example phase, and (c) a discussion phase.

Focus group introduction phase. The purpose of phase one was to introduce the participants to each other and create a comfortable environment. I purposely used broad and open-ended questions about the participants' identity and experiences as a student-athlete so that each participant could choose what to discuss and emphasize. I sequentially asked the participants to describe who they were, what it was like to be a student-athlete, and what it was like to be a student-athlete-of-color.

Focus group example phase. The purpose of phase two of this investigation was to focus the interview on racial microaggressions. Because microaggressions are still a novel concept, I first provided brief examples of microaggressions that have been documented in real life. Participants viewed a collection of photos from the *I, too, am Harvard/Princeton/Oxford* campaigns, which is a collection of photos from racial minority students expressing their personal experiences of being different/treated differently due to their race (e.g., <https://itooamharvard.tumblr.com>). I purposely chose a collection of photos that included various genders and races. Although I selected photos that I believed exemplified the construct

of microaggressions, I did not label them as microaggressions during the interview. Rather, I referred to them as examples of experiences of students-of-color. Participants had the opportunity to ask clarifying questions about the examples.

Focus group discussion phase. The purpose of phase three was to elicit participants' talk surrounding microaggressions by reflecting on the photo examples of microaggressions. Participants were asked to discuss their thoughts and reactions related to the photo examples described above. Participants were also asked to share their own experiences that appeared similar or related to the photo examples. Participants were asked how these experiences may have affected them in the past and in the present.

Although I provided photo examples of racial microaggressions, the participants were exposed to additional examples and ideas by listening to fellow participants, in addition to the researcher (Madriz, 2000). Discussing microaggression experiences in a group setting helped participants gain exposure to various ways of talking and thinking about microaggressions. Previous research supports the use of focus groups to discuss subtle discrimination experiences; researchers found that hearing others' experiences helped participants recall their own experiences with subtle forms of discrimination (Cooper, 2015; Melendez, 2008; Solórzano et al., 2000). The variety of examples also allowed me to inquire about the complexities regarding microaggressions; I could note and probe further on each participant's experiences. For this phase, however, I also informed participants that, since there are limits to confidentiality in focus groups, they could choose to be silent if they preferred.

Individual interviews. The purpose of the follow-up interview was to allow participants to speak in more depth about their microaggression experiences. Open-ended semi-structured interviews were conducted one week after the focus group interview. The week between was intentionally designed to offer participants enough time to further reflect on their experiences, but not too much time that they forgot what was discussed in the focus group interview. At the beginning of each individual interview, the participant received a one-page summary of the focus group discussion. The participant was invited to read through it and comment on, correct, change, or add to my summary of the focus group. This form of member checking lessened the burden on the participants to read through an entire transcript, but still allowed them to see how I, as the researcher, was organizing the focus group interview and documenting their input. The summary also prompted participants to remember the focus group and allowed me to follow up on participants' focus group experiences, inviting them to share thoughts that they were unable or unwilling to share, or to discuss additional insights they have had since participating in the focus group. Participants were subsequently asked about their experiences in sport and microaggressions in more depth, by asking them about how microaggressions affected them.

Interview data. All interviews were audio recorded using a digital recorder. Participants chose pseudonyms to help ensure confidentiality in the tape recordings. Both types of interviews were conducted in a private classroom at the university to ensure easy access for participants. The focus groups took approximately 60 minutes. The individual interviews ranged from approximately 60 to 120 minutes. The interviews were transcribed verbatim to capture, at times, the incoherent and choppy nature of discourse and speech (Markula & Silk, 2011). I also took analytic memos throughout data collection, transcription, and analysis to facilitate researcher reflexivity, which is an important step for ensuring quality in poststructuralist studies (Avner, 2014; Mills, 2014). Once all the interviews had been completed, I transcribed half of the interviews and a transcription agency transcribed the other of the interviews to be efficient with time.

Data Analysis

First, I identified all the ways participants explicitly and implicitly referenced racial microaggressions. Because “the fact that a text does not contain a direct reference to the discursive object can tell us a lot about the way in which the object is constructed” (Willig, 2013, p. 131), I went beyond a keyword search of the term *microaggressions* to identifying all texts referencing race in the widest sense. For example, when a participant referred to “little things that like a Black person might notice more than a White person,” I identified this as talk related to racial microaggressions and included it in the analysis even though the term microaggression was not explicitly used.

Then, I used Sue et al.’s (2007b) typology of microaggressions (i.e., microassaults, microinsults, microinvalidations) as codes to deductively analyze the talk related to microaggressions. When some race-related talk did not fit into Sue’s typology, I analyzed the data inductively to identify commonalities between these microaggressions to create a new microaggression theme. For example, participants talked about several instances in which they were reminded of their racial identity. Although participants expressed that people reminding them of their race bothered them at times, it did not seem to fit into Sue’s existing typology *per se*. Thus, I created a new theme for this microaggression, which I will discuss further in the results and discussion section.

I also applied Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) to examine the effects of discourse and power on participants’ understanding of racial microaggressions and themselves; Willig’s six-step approach to FDA was instructive for the purposes of this study because it offered theoretical constructs that helped identify the relationship between discourse and their implications to one’s subjectivities. This analytic approach was consistent with the theoretical lens of this study because we theorized that “power is actually produced by discourse... [because] the way in which we talk about things has implications for the ways in which we experience the world, both physically and psychologically” (Willig, 2013, p. 138).

Willig’s approach to FDA focuses researchers’ attention to the following six theoretical constructs: (a) discursive constructions, (b) discourses, (c) action orientation, (d) positionings, (e) practice, and (f) subjectivity. Although I looked for each of these constructs within my data, I modified the order of Willig’s approach because I had considerable data about participants’ positioning and subjectivity within my data, due to the purposeful questioning during data collection. Moreover, I looked at the constructs of positions, practice, and subjectivity concurrently rather than sequentially because these constructs were interconnected rather than mutually exclusive. For example, I identified that one way of constructing microaggressions (the discursive construction) was to think of them as unintentional, innocent mistakes or jokes. In response, the participants reported that they did not, and should not, feel offended. They positioned themselves as rescuers or the understanding victim because some offenders “can’t help themselves.” If they did feel offended, the subject positions available to them were to consider themselves as overly sensitive and someone who overthinks things.

Once I identified participants’ discursive constructions of both microaggressions and their subjectivities, I identified the wider societal discourses and the institutional context they were situated in. In other words, I reflected on wider social discourses that legitimized the participants’ construction of microaggressions and themselves. For example, I asked, What discourse(s) would help participants make sense of their microaggression experiences and themselves in this way? For the example mentioned above, I identified the discourse as a post-racial society discourse, which would explain participants’ construction of microaggressions as innocent mistakes that should not offend anyone.

Ensuring Quality in Poststructuralist Research

As a poststructuralist researcher, I adhered to a constructionist epistemological and relativist ontological view of knowledge and reality. Poststructuralists follow a different process of research validation from traditional validation procedures of positivism/postpositivism, such as bracketing or triangulation to verify representative truths (Markula & Silk, 2011). Rather, Markula and Silk (2011) suggest poststructuralist researchers “place less significance on detailed, ‘procedural’ judgment criteria and call for a more in-depth, theoretically driven, yet practically applicable, socially situated knowledge production process” (p. 220).

To socially situate knowledge production, poststructuralist researchers engage in self-reflexivity of how they are co-constructing knowledge, as poststructuralists assume that knowledge is co-constructed by the researcher’s consciousness (McGannon & Busanich, 2010; Mills, 2014). Researcher reflexivity means “carefully writing oneself into one’s research” (Avner, 2014, p. 79) and acknowledging and reflecting on the ways one’s own knowledge and experiences shape their research questions, processes, analyses, and presentation. In poststructuralist research, researcher co-construction is not seen as a limitation, but an inevitable part of knowledge construction. The goal of researcher reflexivity, then, is not to try to legitimize the researcher’s analysis as more truthful or objective. Rather, the goal is to document and contextualize the research process by informing the reader of the researcher’s lens which, in the case of this study, was designed to align with a Foucauldian poststructuralist theoretical approach. Viewing the phenomenon and data from multiple angles and perspectives offers a crystallized (Ellingson, 2008; Mills, 2014; Richardson, 2000) understanding of microaggressions, which is more consistent with the philosophical assumptions of poststructuralism.

I regularly kept analytic memos (Saldaña, 2016) during data collection and analysis, which served as a tool to facilitate research reflexivity. I engaged in a cycle of “going back to the data, Foucault’s theories and my emerging analysis” (Mills, 2014, p. 84) in order to understand my analysis in various ways. I attempted to make sense of how I was collecting and interpreting the data by asking, “how do I know what I know/see?” by going back and forth from Foucault’s theoretical concepts to the data and going back and forth from my analytic memos to be critically reflective of why I did what I did and how. Ellingson (2008) argued that self-reflexivity of the researchers’ role within the research process provides “far more rigor than *pretending* my subjectivity does not exist or has been somehow eliminated from the process of my research” (pp. 183-184, emphasis in original). In addition to ongoing self-reflexive work during analysis, I periodically consulted Malayna and Brian during analysis by sharing examples of how I was interpreting Foucault’s theory in relation to the data. These consultations were not in the service of achieving consensus among the group, but rather to help me consider a range of interpretations of the data and the theory before settling on any one analytical path.

Ann Oakley famously said, “a way of seeing is also a way of not seeing” (Crotty, 1998, p. 55). There will always be additional and alternative ways of seeing and knowing, but the following results and discussion provide one particular theoretical understanding of student-athletes’ experiences with racial microaggressions in sport. Given the novelty of the topic and theoretical approach of this study, the purpose of this study was to be exploratory.

In the following section, we will first discuss the types of microaggressions student-athletes-of-color experienced in sport-related contexts. Then, we will discuss the dominant discourses that informed the participants’ understanding of their microaggression experiences. Additionally, we will discuss what the implications of these dominant discourses are to the student-athletes’ subjectivity.

Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the range of ways U.S. collegiate student-athletes experienced racial microaggressions. In the following section, we first discuss the racial microaggressions student-athletes-of-color experienced. Although I tried to focus the interviews, especially the follow-up individual interview, on how race entered sporting contexts, the participants reported experiencing various forms of microaggression in all the contexts they navigated including in school, the community, online, as well as in their sport. In this paper, we only described the data related to the racial microaggressions student-athletes experienced in sport-related contexts.

Student-Athletes' Experiences with Racial Microaggressions in Sport

Even before I shared examples of microaggressions during the focus group, some participants described experiences that could be characterized as microaggressions as defined by Sue et al. (2007b). For example, Jade described her experiences as "It's little things that like a Black person might notice more than a White person because they wouldn't realize or think about that." This suggests that Jade experiences subtle communications related to race, which are how microaggressions are characterized (Sue, 2010). Although none of the participants had heard of the term racial microaggression before, all the participants in this study reported various verbal and nonverbal communications that could be characterized as racial microaggressions. Once exposed to different microaggression examples, all the participants reported that they were relatable experiences that were present throughout their lives.

Racial differences in microaggressions. Consistent with previous microaggression research, there were differences in the types of microaggressions experienced based on the participant's race (Constantine & Sue, 2007; Johnston & Nadal, 2010; Nadal, Wong, Sriken, Griffin, & Fujii-Doe, 2015). For the Asian/Asian-American student-athletes, the microaggression theme of ascribing their intelligence to their race persisted in sport-related contexts as well. For example, Lucy, an Asian American athlete, noted how teammates frequently requested her help during study hour and assumed, since her freshmen year, that she would help the team meet their team GPA. When it came to sport, however, Asian/Asian American student-athletes were seen as less athletic due to their race. Henry, an Asian male athlete, recalled how his strength and conditioning coach would motivate him during lift sessions by yelling, "My 2-year-old daughter could lift more than you, you little Asian!" These comments show how Henry was perceived as physically weaker than his non-Asian counterparts. The Asian/Asian-American participants were stereotyped based on their race.

Relatedly, Black/African-American athletes also navigated expectations related to their athletic abilities. All the Black/African-American athletes in this study reported hearing variations of comments such as "Of course you're fast. You're Black!" which was consistent with previous research on Black/African-American athletes (Jordan, 2010; Melendez, 2008). Assumptions that race is biologically determined also led to different expectations of how a Black body should perform. For example, Katy recalled how a trainer expected her to recover more quickly from an injury due to his belief about Black peoples' biology. These comments were so common that some participants even wondered if these were good stereotypes for athletes because people think they will be more athletic.

Although it can appear innocuous and harmless to attribute people-of-color's abilities, whether academic or athletic, to their race, these are troubling assumptions that can lead to severe negative consequences. These assumptions minimize the accomplishments of people-of-color by attributing it to race rather than individual talent and effort. Moreover, research shows that biological assumptions of race can lead to disparities in the pain assessment and

treatment of Black/African Americans (Hoffman, Trawalter, Axt, & Oliver, 2016); for example, Barbara Dawson, an African American woman, died in police's custody because the hospital and police believed she was faking her pain and chose to forcibly discharge and arrest her rather than to treat her (Tan, 2016). As illustrated in Katy's example, racial bias and stereotypes could potentially lead to inequitable treatment and care in sport medicine as well. These examples illustrate how racial microaggressions are not innocuous, but they can point to existing racial biases of the perpetrator and hinder racial progress.

Another distinctive racial microaggression for Asian/Asian American and Latinx student-athletes was the theme of "alien in own land" (Sue et al., 2007b, p. 278). The Asian/Asian-American athletes, consistent with previous research on Asian Americans (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007a), frequently had to respond to variations of the question, "Where are you *really* from?" Henry was even asked whether he was in the country legally by sport staff and opponents. Moreover, when people learned that Sarah, who was biracial (Asian and Latinx), was an international student, they often assumed or joked that she was from Mexico and had "hopped the fence" even though she was from Canada. These microaggressions reflect the racial stereotypes that Asians or Latinx are not *real* Americans. Although some participants in this study were international students, as illustrated from Sarah's example, society has assumptions about who does and does not belong in certain countries and contexts; Asians and Latinx in this study were also continuously assumed as perpetual foreigners in their own land.

Microaggressions as reminders of racial identities. Although racial microaggressions have been described as (in)directly communicating a message that people-of-color are inferior to White people (Sue, 2010), participants in this study constructed a type of microaggressions that was more subtle and nuanced and could not neatly be characterized within Sue's typology, as they were not (in)directly insulting or invalidating.

Some athletes constructed microaggressions as events that served as a reminder of their racial identity. Although race was not at the forefront of her awareness in sport, occasionally, Sally expressed how hearing certain race-based comments could "bring me back to reality or something." For example, Jade observed that people would frequently comment that they knew of Gabby Douglas when Jade told them she was a gymnast. She expressed her annoyance because she not only hears it frequently, but because she also felt that "they are just trying to group people together." Referencing Gabby Douglas was a reminder to Jade that, when others saw her, they saw not just a gymnast, but a Black gymnast. Henry also noted that he was often referred to as "hey Asian" by his strength and condition coach and peers. He reported that while he did not feel that it was offensive because he was Asian, he wanted to be called by his name rather than his race like all his other teammates. The participants reported perceiving incidents as these as microaggressions because people "made it about race" when it did not have anything to do with race.

These findings demonstrate how, despite popular beliefs, we do not live in a post-racial society. Color-blind ideology is problematic because, as these results illustrate, race matters, even in sport. Thus, suggesting that minorities are being overly sensitive and always playing the "race card" is troubling as it invalidates and silences the realities of people-of-color. In fact, in this study, it was often White people who "made it about race" and reminded the participants that they are racial beings. White people could bring up race by making racial "jokes" or to discredit achievements of people-of-color, while simultaneously being able to claim they do not see color.

In summary, participants from this study reported experiencing a variety of racial microaggressions. The types of microaggressions were often race-specific and attributed various interests and abilities to race. These results were consistent with previous research findings that students-of-color had to learn to navigate the multiple spaces they encountered

(Solórzano et al., 2000; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzando, 2009), but added additional dimensions of sporting contexts. Although these examples clearly demonstrate how student-athletes' experiences, in and out of sport are racialized, the participants did not always perceive the above examples as microaggressions, especially in sport. The following section will discuss how student-athletes-of-color drew from different discourses to make sense of their microaggression experiences.

Discourses and Subjectivity Negotiations in Sport

Through a Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis, I identified three discourses that student-athletes drew upon to make sense of their racial microaggression experiences: sport transcends race discourse, post-racial society discourse, and discourse of racism. The multiple, competing, and contradictory discourses offered various subject positions that participants took up or resisted to negotiate their subjectivities.

Sport as transcending race discourse. Within *sport as transcending race* discourse, the idea that sport is a meritocratic space where athletes can participate, experience, and succeed irrespective of their race was circulated. Although the participants in this study acknowledged various ways their experiences were racialized both in society and in sport, they heavily drew upon the *sport as transcending race discourse* to make sense of their race-based experiences in sport. MJ pointed to the presence of various races in sport as evidence that identities do not matter in sport:

I feel like sports is the great equalizer with that [race].... even now, we have boys on the team that are mixed and African-American, and they fit in well, and people support them. So, I feel it's no longer about what I look like, what I, it's all about what jersey I'm wearing, what team I'm on, and like where you're going.

MJ also described how being on a team leads you to embrace your teammates regardless of their identities.

The love we have for each other as a team, as a support, and I think the love, the connection you feel for your teammates outweighs any racial, LGBT, any of that. Like, because at the end of the day, I know you have my back on the court, and I have yours, and that's all that really matters.

Sally, despite explaining earlier in her interview that she would never “act like a Black person in front of White people” or approach a White person she did not know, also explained how sport was an exceptional space where race did not matter.

It was different because like, they [teammates] all like me because we're a team now, and they know I'm going to be here for four years and you have to like me or like, you know, we're going to be playing with each other. We got to have a connection. So, you have to be my friend. You know? ... You want to like jump in and like love your teammates, or just have a connection with them, so you guys then have that same connection on the field or on the court or something.

The *sport as transcending race discourse* was emphasized by the coaching staff as well as the university athletic department as necessary to perform well. The participants observed their coaches describe that they “don't see color” and expected the athletes to unite as a team

regardless of race, nationality, and personality. Sally described how this message was communicated:

Yeah. And our coach like stresses the fact that this team is a family, so like we have like everyone else is back home, wherever you live, so these are the people you need to talk to if you need help, and you need to talk to our coach because she's like our mom. You know? ... And she [coach] like stresses like family and stuff because this is the, your home away from it. You need to like, like it and accept all these people on your team, because they're not going anywhere.

Not only did the coaches and administration reiterate this message, but they also reinforced this discourse of transcending race through various techniques of discipline (Foucault, 1995). For example, the coach/athletic staff determined the athletes' living spaces and schedules, engaged in various team building activities to build cohesion, and used team punishments for individual mistakes. Kiya noted how the team was encouraged to see beyond race to identify as a team first by the coaches and administration:

Especially because they [coaches] kind of make it that way.... like when you see them all the time, like have fall with them, spring with them, [laughs] summer with them. So, it's kind of like you can't not, get away from them, type of thing. And so, um, and then you pretty much you have like schedule, like pretty much all your scheduling is done by the coaches, and then you have mandatory like team time where you have like a team dinner, and then you have like team activities, where you like do stuff outside of [sport name removed] to kind of help with the chemistry and stuff.

As a result, all of the participants discussed how this set up of intercollegiate sport led them to perceive their athletic and personal lives as indistinguishable. MJ explained:

You live with them and everything. So your life changes. I feel like college is such a life changing thing, and you change with the same people. So you, like we room together and stuff like that. And you so come in with the people, and you leave with the same people. So it's just kind of like, it's, it's one because then you have, you really don't have a choice, but to like, they become your family. And that's like kind of how college sports is. And then so, there really is no separation, well, at least in that aspect, pertaining like your personal life and your athletic life. They [coaches] put, it's required because they make, they make it. So, um, like they talk to whoever runs the dorms and stuff, and like they set you with a roommate that's on the team.

The participants also explained how the goal of sport, winning, superseded everything else including race. They explained, "Fans will cheer for you regardless of your race" and that "Coaches will recruit the best players regardless of race as long as they help them win," which they perceived as evidence that racial microaggressions or other forms of racial discrimination did not occur in sport. In other words, harboring negative attitudes or beliefs based on race was seen by the participants as incompatible with the goals of winning. These findings were consistent with Brown, Jackson, Brown, Sellers, Keiper, and Manuel's (2003) explanation for how the emphasis of winning in sport contributes to creating a true homogenous in-group in sport where the goal of winning was perceived as transcending all other matters. Kiya explained how the goal of sport, winning, supersedes race:

So, like I've never really experienced that [racial discrimination] either because I mean everyone, when you start playing sports, the color doesn't matter. Because I mean, if you think about it, football, all football teams, all basketball teams, a majority are Black. [Laughs] And so, I mean, at that point, I feel like that's the only time that race doesn't matter because they want their team to win, and they don't really care who, who, who is doing whatever, as long as they're winning games... It's how good are you at your sport? Are you a good athlete? How are you going to win games?

The *sport as transcending race discourse* had several implications to student-athletes' understanding of microaggressions and themselves. Within this discourse, participants were offered the subject position of an athlete who transcends race. From this subject position, participants did not have access to language to make sense of their microaggression experiences or racial subjectivities because they had to transcend race in order to take up the subject position. Within this discourse, race, let alone racial microaggressions, were considered absent in sporting contexts. Participants in this study generally were most able and willing to recall microaggression examples from the distant past or from non-sport settings compared to sport settings.

Moreover, despite researchers' findings that people-of-color rarely minimize the effects of racial discrimination (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Sue, 2010), even when the participants acknowledged various race-based incidents in sport, the participants largely minimized their racial microaggression experiences. From a Foucauldian poststructuralist perspective, the participants' adherence to dominant discourse and minimizing racial microaggressions are explained, not because victims felt powerless to resist or challenge the dominant ideology, but because discursive power is productive. Participants in this study negotiated their subjectivities to what is normative within the discursive context of sport, which was to identify as an athlete first and transcend other subject positions such as race.

Drawing from the *sport as transcending race discourse*, seeing the influences of race in sport was seen as a personal problem of being a bad athlete who did not put the success of the team and sport first. This led participants to self-surveil themselves to transcend race in sporting contexts. For example, Kiya and MJ described how the White teammates had noticed that the athletes were often sitting in their own racial groups during team meal times. Because their team's racial demographic was almost split in half between White athletes and athletes-of-color, Kiya and MJ explained it was more noticeable. In response, the participants described how the athletes-of-color apologized and committed to "fixing the issue" of the Black athletes sitting together. This was somewhat contradictory with what Kiya and MJ were saying earlier in the interview about how they enjoyed socializing with other athletes-of-color because they felt a sense of connection and community. Although the participants did not perceive the White teammates comments of, "Do you guys realize you are all sitting together?" as a microaggression, it acted as a panoptic gaze to remind the athletes-of-color of their deviance from the sport norm, which was to transcend race and be an athlete first. Within the *sport as transcending race discourse*, Kiya and MJ took on the subject position of a race-less athlete, which subsequently shaped as well as limited their ability to see race including issues of racial discrimination and microaggressions.

Jade and Kiya constantly negotiated between taking up or resisting the subject position of a race-less athlete. By drawing on a competing *discourse of racism*, which will be discussed later in this paper, Jade explained how she learned to embrace her natural Black hair and feel proud of her race. She, however, contradicted herself later in the interview by noting how some of her teammates who were "pro-Black" sometimes took it too far. She perceived that verbal and nonverbal expressions from her White teammates were communicating, "Ok. That's

enough” when they were being “too Black.” Although Jade could draw upon competing discourses to negotiate her subjectivity as racialized, she had to negotiate her “Blackness” in sport.

Kiya also negotiated the boundaries of her racial subjectivity. Throughout her interview, drawing on the *discourse of racism*, she spoke passionately and extensively about her subjectivity as an African American woman. She was also very knowledgeable about the current and historical racial inequalities faced by African Americans and suggested that “not talking about race makes racism worse.” When discussing her experiences in sport, however, she struggled to negotiate the contradicting discourses of *sport as transcending race* and the *discourse of racism*. Within the discursive context of sport, she had to negotiate her subjectivity between being Black or an athlete; she could not be both at the same time. In the following quote, Kiya describes the consequences of going against the norm of transcending race:

Um, I don't, typically, unless. Um, for me, they don't necessarily really, I try not to combine them [race and sport]. Because there's really no need [laughs]. There's really no need. To do that. I mean, unless like someone else comes and brings some outside stuff then I don't worry about it. Because the fact that, it's, it's just, a nasty situation and people get really emotional about it [race] and I know I will get emotional about it and be all up in someone's face and I don't have time for that...

And so really like, as a team, in order to function with, because we have like half of our team almost is Black. And other half is White that they, you can't have that type of animosity or, any of that because that's the type of stuff that ruins teams. And that people want to quit and you get into fights and like it just wouldn't work. And so that's why you can't have it like that.

If Kiya were to reject the subject position of a race-less athlete and talk about race, she would be positioned as the athlete who ruins the teams’ chemistry and subsequent performance by bringing race into “the family.” The *sport as transcending race discourse* was legitimized by, and consequently served, the institution of sport.

Although these findings are consistent with Burdsey’s (2011) findings that the entrenched color-blind ideology in sport influences participants’ (non)responses to microaggressions, this is a contrasting view to critical humanist theorists who assumed power as binary, hierarchical, and oppressive (Markula & Silk, 2011). From a Foucauldian perspective, athletes adhered to the *sport as transcending race discourse* because that was what was legitimized as normal. Moreover, they received micropunishments in the form of microaggressions when they deviated from the norm of being a race-less athlete. If a participant was to recognize something as a racial microaggression, then they would be positioned as the ones unable to transcend issues of race and to be a “team player.”

Although this discourse can contribute to athletes actually overcoming racial barriers and stereotypes to work together as a team, as can be seen from the results of this study, the discourse also ignores and invalidates the racialized realities of student-athletes-of-color. The myriad of racial microaggressions listed in the first section of our results and discussion demonstrate that student-athletes-of-color subjectivities and lives are already racialized, whether they are conscious of it or not. Moreover, MJ explained that the *sport as transcending race discourse* had limits:

But the second [sport name removed] is done, it [race] still becomes an issue. Like the second I walk out of the gym, it’s still an issue. The jersey comes off,

it's still an issue. So, I think sports is almost a release from the issue, but it doesn't, like it doesn't make it go away, but it's a release for a little bit of time.

MJ's quote illustrates Fisher, Butryn, and Roper's (2003) argument that athletes are more than athletes; they possess intersecting subjectivities. Even if sport were truly a unique space where participants could transcend their race, as MJ points out, "the jersey comes off" and athletes are re-positioned as racial subjects in different discursive contexts.

Even though the previous section of this study demonstrated how racial microaggressions acted as examples of other people, often White people, bringing race into the conversation, the *sport transcends race discourse* limited participants' ability to perceive and describe them as racial issues. Foucault (1995) described how dominant discourses not only become internalized by individuals, but that individuals engage in self-surveillance to prevent their deviance from the norm out of a fear of being deemed abnormal. Student-athletes' self-surveillance to fit the discursively constructed subject position of an athlete was also evident in this study. This, according to Foucault (1995), is a more subtle, subconscious, and effective way of exercising power.

Post-racial society discourse. Another discourse that the participants heavily drew upon to make sense of their microaggression experiences was the *post-racial society discourse*, which is the belief that racism is limited to overt acts of racism by overt racists. Participants explained how their experiences were different from their parents' experiences or "back in the day" when people-of-color faced "*real* racial discrimination." This implied that racism is only upheld by overt acts of discrimination and that we live in a society where overt racists are scarce.

Within the *post-racial society discourse*, racial microaggressions were constructed as unintentional bias, innocent mistakes, or jokes rather than as acts that are discriminatory. Unlike their parents' generations, within this discourse, the subject position of a victim or perpetrator was no longer offered. Rather, perpetrators of microaggressions were positioned as clueless or curious people who had no intent to harm. Because microaggressions were constructed as harmless due to the lack of an overt intent to harm, in response, the participants were positioned as subjects who could not be harmed. In other words, if there was no intent to harm, they could not experience harm. Lucy explained that, "I guess, um, unless it's like, really, really bad then you should just let it go. Like, most things are really minor, like, you shouldn't let it bother you that much. Unless it's like something really, really, really bad."

Although some of the participants recognized that some perpetrators may have harbored racial bias or prejudicial attitudes, drawing upon this discourse, the perpetrators were positioned as being clueless rather than being racially biased. Sarah explained, "some people can't help themselves. They are just really sheltered." Henry often explained away his microaggressions as, "They [offenders] just don't know. They've never met someone like me. Some people never even left [state name removed]" implying that it was normal and almost inevitable that he would encounter racial microaggressions.

In response to the clueless perpetrator, participants were offered the subject position of the understanding victim, which had consequences to how participants could think, feel, and act. For example, even when some participants described that they were frustrated when they heard comments such as "Whew, your [Black] hair is a lot" or "Run faster little Asian!" they explained that they cannot be upset for long because the perpetrators did not intend to insult them. At times, Jade shared that she could not brush off comments as easily, but, by taking up the position of the understanding victim, Jade blamed herself for her negative responses by explaining that, "sometimes I just overthink things."

Participants were engaging in what Sue (2010) called, "rescuing offenders" (p. 76) by acknowledging offenders of microaggressions as products of their environment. Participants

explained that, “I know they didn’t mean it that way” or say “People sometimes just don’t know what they are saying” and minimized the negative responses they had with microaggression. This is because, within the *post-racial society discourse*, perceiving microaggressions as harmful was not a compatible or privileged position. Although participants do have the agency to resist the subject position of the unharmed subject, there are social consequences to resisting dominant discourses such as being considered overly sensitive and petty (Thomas, 2008).

Discourse of racism. *Discourse of racism* is the acknowledgement that people have historically been and continue to be socially stratified based on one’s skin color. Within this discourse, more subject positions were available to the participants such as being a racial subject, as well as a victim of racism. Microaggressions were constructed as problematic in that they reflected racial bias or perpetrated harmful racial stereotypes. This is because, within the *discourse of racism*, subject positions of a racial subject such as being the victim and perpetrator were available. Within the subject position of a racial subject, participants could perceive and acknowledge microaggressions as racial stereotypes. Their feelings of annoyance or frustration by the microaggressions were also legitimized as microaggressions were constructed as reflecting racial bias. For example, Lucy felt angry when her peers attributed her athletic abilities to her being half-Black (she was not). Even though the perpetrator responded that they “didn’t mean it that way,” drawing from the *discourse of racism*, Lucy could legitimize her position to feel offended and confront them by saying, “I’m not Black. I’m fully Asian.”

Even when microaggressions were delivered in the form of a joke or a sincere question, when drawing from the discourse understanding that racism still exists in our society, participants were positioned to recognize microaggressions as rude and harmful. For example, when Sarah’s guy friends joked about her hopping the fence as a Mexican or when people asked Lucy if she was Chinese, they felt that these comments were inappropriate. Lucy explained, “It’s just mean, like rude, like you’re just making fun of someone just because of who they are.” Many of the participants even recognized that they themselves also held racial biases towards races different from their own. When acknowledging that racism was still a societal problem, they perceived that these microaggressions were problematic regardless of the perpetrators’ intent.

Drawing from the *discourse of racism*, participants could justify their sensitivity towards subtle slights such as microaggressions. In fact, an action did not have to actually occur for some participants to recognize themselves as racial subjects. For example, Jade explained that she would think, “I hope the judges like me” during meets because she perceived that “judges really can just look at me and be like, oh she’s Black. Like maybe we’ll just judge her harder like, just stuff like that that no one could know.” When we acknowledge that racism still exists, especially in forms that are not directly observable such as institutional racism (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015), aversive racism (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000), or color-blind racism (Bimper, 2015), Jade’s thoughts can be understood as “healthy paranoia or cultural mistrust” (Sue, 2010, p. 73) to survive in the dominant culture. Similarly, Kiya and MJ’s concerns for their safety when traveling to rural areas, even when they are traveling as a team, could be justified when drawing from the discourse that racism exists. Outside of this discursive understanding, however, the participants’ proactive concerns, thoughts, and feelings would most likely be understood as being overly sensitive, crazy, or paranoid (Friedersdorf, 2015a, 2015b; Thomas, 2008).

Drawing from the *discourse of racism*, all the participants in this study explained how connecting with other people-of-color helped them validate their racial realities. Jade explained how she was able to learn to love her hair by watching YouTube videos or Pinterest posts about natural Black hair. All the participants in this study also reported that they spoke with their parents or their friends who are also people-of-color, which helped them recognize that their

responses to microaggressions were valid. Moreover, all the participants in this study described how they felt it was easier to connect with other people-of-color at times because they shared similar experiences, including racial injustices. Kiya described:

So it's just like trying to find other people who look like you to have at least like one person you can relate to, who like, if like stuff happens on the news, I can feel comfortable talking to you about it. Because, like, even though like, even though like if you're Caucasian and you're my friend, like you don't necessarily understand like what I'm saying, personally.

This is an example of how sport was perceived as a positive space for the student-athletes-of-color in this study. All the female participants in this study, for example, participated in teams that had an exceptionally high proportion of athletes-of-color on their teams. Many participants described how it was comforting and validating to have other athletes-of-color on the team they could share their experiences; this was different from other contexts that participants had to navigate such as the classroom in which they were often the numerical minority.

Drawing upon the *discourse of racism*, participants were better positioned to brush off microaggressions because they perceived the perpetrators' ignorance to be the problem, not themselves. As racial microaggressions were an everyday experience for them, the participants often did not respond to the microaggressions by saying, "Some people are ignorant and there is nothing you can do about it" or "Those things don't bother me anymore because I know who I am and what I bring to the table." Lucy explained:

Um, you don't have to be what people say you are. You can be whatever you want to be. So, just don't let what people say affect you. So, you know who you are, so nothing anyone says can change who you are unless you let it.... You just, like, find out you're happier when you don't, like, you aren't living for other people, just live for yourself.

Although this was an empowering discourse that allowed participants to cope with racial microaggressions, the participants were not necessarily positioned to challenge racism, but use "situation-specific strategies and tactics to cope with inequality" (Kavoura et al., 2015, p. 8). The onus of dealing with and overcoming racism was still placed on people-of-color. For example, all the American participants described how they were bothered by such comments when they were younger, but that they learned to become more confident and secure of themselves overtime. Jade and Kiya shared that, because they were taught by their parents from an early age that they had to be 10 times better than their White peers to be considered equal, they worked harder to be and perform better than their White counterparts.

However, if you continued to be bothered by microaggressions, does that mean you are not a confident and secure person? Within this discourse, the ways in which participants could construct their subjectivities were still limited.

Conclusion

While cultural sport psychology scholars have called researchers to centralize the influences of culture in sport psychology research (McGannon & Smith, 2015; Ryba, Stambulova, Si, & Schinke, 2013; Schinke, Stambulova, Lidor, Papaioannou, & Ryba, 2015), few studies have examined the marginalized experiences related to race in sport (Kamphoff, Gill, Araki, & Hammond, 2010; Ram, Starek, & Johnson, 2004). The purpose of this study was

to examine racial microaggressions in a new context of sport and through a new theoretical approach, Foucauldian poststructuralist theory.

The racial microaggression examples shared in this study clearly demonstrated that, for the participants in this study, whether they were conscious of it or not, their experiences were racialized. Moreover, using Foucauldian poststructuralist theory, we were able to explain the contradictory experiences of student-athletes by examining how they negotiated multiple discourses to make sense of their experiences. Within sport, *the sport as transcending race discourse* was widely circulated and legitimized through various sporting practices. Within this discourse, an athlete was constructed as one who transcends race to contribute to the team and win, which led participants to be blind to or minimize their experiences with race. Moreover, the microaggressions acted as a panoptic gaze that reminded participants of their deviance from the norm of being a race-less athlete, which led them to self-surveil and correct such deviance of being conscious of race. In other words, there was little room within the *sport as transcending race discourse* for student-athletes-of-color to recognize and acknowledge the influences of race to their subjectivities and their sporting realities. This demonstrates how discursive power is omnipresent and held by everyone. Everyone, even people-of-color, can adopt and circulate dominant discourses that can contribute to their own marginalization and oppression.

These findings have several implications for sport psychology professionals (SPP). First, we illustrate the importance for SPPs to better understand the influences of race and racism. As demonstrated in this study, it is important to problematize everyday talk such as microaggressions as language not only reflects, but further produces our realities. Learning about racial microaggressions could be a way SPPs reflect on how racial inequities are (sub)consciously (re)produced through our taken-for-granted language and practices.

Additionally, given that the presence of microaggressions can lead to negative mental health consequences and lead one to perceive the climate as hostile (Melendez, 2008; Solórzano et al., 2000), it is imperative SPPs educate coaches, clients, and teams about racial microaggressions. By using Foucauldian poststructuralist theory, SPPs can not only discuss what microaggressions are, but also facilitate critical reflections on *why* certain language can be problematic. This is meaningful because omnipresent discursive power also means that resistance is everywhere. Educating SPPs, coaches, and athletes to problematize daily language such as microaggressions and disrupt taken-for-granted assumptions can help create a safe and cohesive environment for everyone. A practical suggestion for carrying out these discussions could be to adopt the design of this study in using communities and photo examples to facilitate awareness of microaggressions. Facilitators could formulate communities, athletic or otherwise, to facilitate discussion and bring awareness to microaggressions in sport.

In the context of sport, coaches act as pivotal point people in facilitating cultural change within teams and sports (Gearity & Metzger, 2017). Involving the understandings of cultural competence, sociological aspects of sports, and discursive power through applications in coach education programs could not only bring awareness to coaches in regards to microaggressions, but afford the opportunity for coaches to create far-reaching changes in their teams that extend beyond the reach of a SPP. Future research is needed to explore how to better facilitate understandings of microaggressions and discursive power through other interventions and strategies.

Despite a rigorous study design, there were limitations to this study. Poststructuralist researchers posit that researchers co-construct knowledge and alternative interpretations will always be available regardless of the validation procedure that was followed in conducting this study. Recently, Crocket (2017) also critiqued sport sociology researchers' overreliance on interviews as a methodological tool when applying Foucauldian theory. He suggested

researchers employ alternative methodological tools (e.g., fieldwork) to consider the effects of “affect, emotions, and embodiment” (p. 22) to participants’ subjective experiences.

Although the purposes of this study were unrelated to generalizability, given that the findings from this study are exploratory, additional studies are needed to gain a crystallized (Ellingson, 2008; Richardson, 2000) understanding of microaggressions. Future studies could employ various Foucauldian concepts such as technologies of discipline (Foucault, 1995) or technologies of self (Foucault, 1990; Markula, 2003) to further examine how discursive power is exercised, negotiated, and resisted in sport. This would help researchers better understand how racial inequities are (re)produced even when we do not have personal intentions to be discriminatory. Moreover, researchers should examine the intersections to racial subjectivities. Theorizing microaggressions through Foucauldian poststructuralist theory opens up possibilities for researchers to look beyond identity-based microaggressions as subjectivities are considered to be multiple and constantly negotiated (i.e., subjectivities) rather than fixed and inherent.

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