

COACH DISCUSSION OF SPORT-RELATED CONCUSSIONS IN STUDENT-
ATHLETES: AN ANALYSIS OF SILENCES

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Context: Sport-related concussions affect millions of athletes every year and represent a significant risk for college athletes. This particular injury is difficult to treat because the presentation of the symptoms is mostly internal, and self-report is the primary method of determining whether an individual has a concussion. Coaches are charged with creating a team environment that does not put players at greater risk of injury, and coaches express a desire to keep players safe; however, many athletes who sustain a concussion still return to play while symptomatic. There is a discrepancy between the stated values of coaches, and the behaviors that occur with regard to sport-related concussions in a team environment. The present study elicited coaches' perspectives on what challenges exist when it comes to managing sport-related concussions.

Methods: An analytic question was used in the study, which was "*How does a deconstructive analysis create an awareness of silences and illuminate the silent articulations of concussion sequelae.*" Data were analyzed using a deconstructive methodology focused on inferences that were gleaned through the analysis of different types of silence as well as the analysis of the conditions that produced those silences.

Analysis involved a three-phase process, which was analysis of the transcripts individually, concurrently with the audio of the interviews, and the analysis of the audio interviews individually with no written material.

Results: Four types of silence were identified: *Digressive*, *Discordant*, *Desiring*, and *Disciplinary*. Examples were provided of each type of silence in the context of the interviews. *Digressive* and *Discordant* silences were found primarily in the first phase of the analysis followed by the *Desiring* and *Disciplinary* silences in the second and third phases respectively.

Conclusions: Concussion sequelae extend beyond the traditional physiological sequelae and include the effects concussions can have on coaches and even interviewers discussing the phenomenon. Alternative methods of inquiry provide unique understandings of this complex issue. *Digressive* and *Discordant* silences were counterproductive in that they encouraged increased focus on the silences pertaining to the discussion of concussions rather than avoidance of the issue. *Desiring* silences have the potential to produce greater awareness of *Disciplinary* silences.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Sport-related concussions have received significant attention through recent media and scientific study alike. This form of mild traumatic brain injury is typically sustained due to a blow to the head or body and acquired through contact with another athlete, equipment, or the playing surface, while in the context of playing a sport (Daneshvar et al., 2011). The Center for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that there are over 3 million sport-related traumatic brain injuries per year in the US, the majority of which present in the form of concussions (CDC, 2005). This prevalent injury affects athletes of all ages, but it has proven inherently difficult to study for several reasons.

Symptoms of concussions such as dizziness, nausea, fatigue and blurred vision are complex and have mostly internal presentations (Register-Mihalik & Kay, 2017). When an individual is symptomatic, the best, and in some cases only, way to determine whether those symptoms are occurring is through self-report (Kerr et al., 2016). Unfortunately, there are multiple reasons why an athlete might be silent rather than reporting this injury including a lack of understanding of the long-term consequences of competing with a concussion, and external and internal pressures to play while symptomatic (Kerr et al., 2016). Though athletes may perceive such pressures as emanating from a variety of different sources, one of the most influential people in the lives of athletes are their coaches (Kroshus et al., 2015c). The goal of this paper is to focus on the notion that pressures and silences are not only internally produced by athletes, but are also externally produced by the coaches who have athletes in their

charge, and that all of these pressures and silences are affected by the current discourse pertaining to sport-related concussion. Though recent studies analyze the pressures exuded from coaches and hypothesize some of the reasons for these pressures, none have done so with a deconstructive methodology, which allows an analysis of the silences produced and allows those “silences to speak” (Mazzei, 2004, 32).

The literature review begins by presenting an ecological model to frame the literature on sports concussions, athletes, and coaches. Next, I review current work pertaining to sports concussions in order to explain the effects and outcomes associated with this injury. I then address literature on coaches in order to position them as influential individuals with athletes. These elements of the literature review are followed by recent analyses that have focused on pressures experienced by athletes from coaches, and some of the relationships that exist between coaches and concussions. Finally, I address the different methods with which these topics have been investigated in the past, and explain the importance of an analysis using deconstructive methodology, which simultaneously adds to current literature and opens up a different avenue of study regarding this complex topic.

Ecological Considerations

Bronfenbrenner’s (1989) ecological model allows for a window into some of the complicated ecology of the relationship between coaches and concussions. The ecological model was developed as a way to conceptualize how individual development is influenced by multiple systems. Importantly, the individual is embedded in, and interactive with, each of the systems of the ecological model simultaneously. I set the individual student athlete who has sustained a concussion as the center of this model, and

give examples of the different systems that impact that individual's interactions with coaches.

The broadest level of the ecological model, the macrosystem, refers to the sociocultural values and beliefs that shape our lives. The macrosystem affects coaches and concussions through widely held values such as the pain principle or meritocratic pain, which posits that enduring pain actually improves one's character and increases one's inherent value (Sabo, 2009). This idea can be characterized in phrases such as "No pain, no gain."

The exosystem refers to social settings in which individuals do not directly engage, or policies associated with those settings that affect an individual. An example of how an exosystemic policy-level concern affects this relationship would be the policies that exist regarding concussion testing, such as those within National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) sports (Baugh et al., 2015). The mesosystem refers to how the social systems that an individual is engaged in (e.g., team, school/academics) interact with each other, separate from the individual. In our example, important elements of the mesosystem for college athletes include interactions between coaches and college-level athletic administrations, or coaches and medical professionals (Esquivel et al., 2013; Kroshus et al., 2015a). Lastly, the microsystem refers to the social settings in which an individual is directly engaged. Microsystems include the athlete's team, coaches, school administration, friends, family, and medical professionals (Kroshus et al., 2015c). The focus of this study is the coach/player microsystem, with specific attention to what has been left out of conversations about concussions and why such omissions could be happening. These conversations were elicited in the mesosystem through the interaction

between myself as interviewer, and coaches to discuss how coaches and student-athletes communicate. Additionally, in order to better understand how silences might be produced, as well as to posit how silences produce larger-scale outcomes, I will also address some of the exosystemic and macrosystemic pressures that affect this complex relationship between coaches, players, and concussion.

Effects of Sport-Related Concussion

Sport-related concussions affect individuals' cognitive, emotional, and physical wellbeing (Eisenberg, 2014). More specific symptoms include dizziness, fatigue, drowsiness, insomnia, nausea, loss of consciousness, amnesia, sensitivity to light or sound, and/or difficulty concentrating (Register-Mihalik & Kay, 2017). Though the effects of concussions typically last between ten and fourteen days, in some cases, negative symptoms such as those that affect concentration, sleep, dizziness, and emotionality may persist longer than fourteen days (Eisenberg, 2014; Makkissi et al., 2017). Due to the fact that many of these symptoms are not easily observable, it is especially important that athletes who have sustained this type of injury report on how they are feeling and their levels of discomfort (Moreau et al., 2014). Additionally, athletes experiencing post-concussive symptoms are actually in a more vulnerable state and at greater risk of sustaining more permanent negative outcomes if reinjured while they are still symptomatic (Prins, 2013). Other factors that can increase risk of concussions are dependent on the sport. In collegiate athletics the two highest incidences of concussion are women's soccer and men's football, followed closely by men and women's lacrosse, men's soccer, women's basketball, and wrestling (Register-Mihalik & Kay, 2017). Unfortunately, even with the high incidence of this injury, due to shifting

definitions of concussion (how many symptoms must be present, is loss of consciousness included in the definition etc.), along with concerns about external and internal pressures on athletes, concussions remain underreported (Kerr et al., 2016; Register-Mihalik & Kay, 2017). With the knowledge of the seriousness of this injury, more information is needed about how certain factors or influences may exacerbate a lack of symptom reporting by athletes, which may in turn contribute to efforts to prevent negative outcomes associated with sport-related concussion.

Influence of Coaches

In the world of college sports, there is no shortage of individuals who influence student athletes. Their families, caregivers, and peers clearly have strong influence over the decisions that athletes make daily (Kroshus et al., 2015c). Administrators, such as athletic directors, influence athletes in that they can determine what academic or behavioral criteria makes an athlete fit to compete, decide what events athletes will attend, and they can even dictate the relationships athletes have with the media (Burton, 2002). Athletic trainers also have a degree of influence through helping athletes decide whether they are physically capable of playing in games and helping them understand the risks inherent in athletics. Though each of the previously mentioned parties influences athletes in different ways, arguably the most influential person in the life of an athlete is their coach (Mastroleo et al., 2012).

Coaches have a variety of roles that affect and influence the lives of college student athletes. They are charged with determining the athlete's weekly practice schedule, setting up the structure of those practices, planning team meetings or weightlifting sessions, providing feedback and direction on athlete's performance,

deciding which athletes will play in a given competition, and generally managing the day to day activities associated with being a member of a college team (Poskanzer, 1989).

These different roles filled by coaches provide a platform that allows them to influence aspects of an athlete's life. Coaches can affect sport-related constructs like perceptions of competence, perceptions of athletic skill, and perceptions of the dimensions of physical self such as physiological competence and overall sport performance (Amorose, 2003; Gearity & Murray, 2011; Jowett & Cramer, 2010). Coaches can also influence athlete's general mood (positively and negatively), their ability to cope with stress, and, in some cases, coaches have been shown to influence social behaviors such as athletes' drinking behaviors (Gearity & Murray, 2011; Lafrenier et al., 2011; Mastroleo et al., 2012). With the amount of influence coaches have, some argue that coaches have a quasi-fiduciary obligation to their players (Russel, 2014). Regardless of the level of responsibility or obligation coaches have to their players, coaches clearly have influential roles in the lives of student athletes, and the importance of this role is magnified when they are tasked with helping manage one of the more unfortunate outcomes of college sports – concussions.

Relationship Between Coaches and Concussion

Over the last decade, there have been several investigations of coaches' influence on athletes who have experienced a sport-related concussion. Athletes who perceived less support from their coach, with regard to reporting concussion symptoms, were more likely to continue to play their sport despite experiencing symptoms of concussion (Baugh et al., 2014). Some athletes experience a fear of potential negative outcomes as a result of reporting concussion symptoms such as loss of playing time, loss of starting position on the team, and giving off an appearance of seeming "weak" (Chrisman et al.,

2013). Coaches can even influence players' reporting of concussion symptoms in a more indirect fashion through their effect on sports medicine clinicians (Kroshus et al., 2015a). Kroshus and colleagues (2015a) found that over half of the sports medicine clinicians interviewed for their study reported experiencing pressure from coaches for players that had sustained a concussion to return to play prematurely. However, not all of the current evidence implicates coaches as a strictly problematic entity in the lives of athletes who have experienced sport-related concussion. Coaches also have displayed a willingness to learn about concussion in order to benefit their players, with one study reporting that 90%, of the 1009 coaches they surveyed, requested and used concussion education materials to benefit their teams (Sarmiento et al., 2010). This is critical because although coaches are not medical professionals, their proximity and influence on athletes means they are one of the first individuals to whom an athlete could report symptoms (Kroshus et al., 2016). Overall, there is a growing body of research related to how coaches can be conduits of increased risk *or* improved safety for players that have suffered from sport-related concussions. Though coaches may express a desire or intent to benefit their players, there is still plenty of room for improvement (Kroshus et al., 2015c).

Research on coaches' influence on athletes who have sustained a sport-related concussion has approached the topic from multiple realist or positivist angles, and there is a considerable discrepancy between coaches' expressed intent and the outcomes. Athletes are becoming more educated about the negative outcomes of concussions (Kroshus et al., 2015b; Mrazik et al., 2015) and yet still experience pressure to return to play while symptomatic, from both internal (Sabo, 2009) and external (Kroshus et al., 2015a; Kroshus et al., 2015c) sources. Coaches, specifically, have been shown to have the

potential to pressure athletes to return to play, in both direct and indirect ways, while simultaneously expressing an interest in finding ways to benefit their players who have sustained a concussion (Kroshus et al., 2015c; Kroshus et al., 2017). Some coaches have even maintained the stance of reportedly caring about the health outcomes of their athletes while endorsing the idea that they would be more likely to play their players with symptoms of concussion in more important competitions (Kroshus et al., 2017). These discrepancies, along with the nature of the injury itself, display some of the complex relationship between coaches and concussions. One facet of this relationship, that is easily overlooked and could provide greater depth of understanding on this issue, is actually not what we are *hearing* through expressed intentions of coaches, but rather what can be found in the silences: What coaches are not saying.

Multiple researchers from various fields including psychology, sociology, education, and public health (Bengtsson & Fynbo, 2017; Lehmann, 2014; Mazzei, 2004; Mazzei, 2007; Morison & Macleod, 2013; Poland & Peterson, 1998) have positioned silence as data. Within psychology specifically, in many cases silence is viewed as intentional, and as resistance (MacLure et al., 2011). Others within psychology have shown how, in psychotherapy, silence can be generative and meaningful, contemplative, and a part of typical turn taking that is necessary in speech (Lehmann, 2014). Across these perspectives on silence, the assumption is that silence is worth studying. My contention is that a deconstructive analysis of silences can shed new light on the complex topic of coaches and student athlete concussions.

Deconstructive Methodology

A deconstructive methodology addresses the tensions between what is given or has been previously understood (traditions) and irruptions, or instances, of newness and difference (Derrida, 1997). Contrary to some conceptualizations of deconstruction, the goal is not to replace the dominant knowledge within a hierarchy for the subjugated knowledges, or even to rebuild a completely different hierarchy, but instead one of the goals of deconstruction is to displace hierarchies (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) and produce new and different understandings. In order to do so, Jacques Derrida (1967/1976) charges researchers to acknowledge what he terms the “trace” (in French it elicits the idea of a track, footprint, or imprint) or the absent-presence left behind in words and signs. Silences and humor have been posited as examples of this trace (MacLure et al., 2011; Mazzei, 2007a). Thus, one valuable aspect of deconstruction is that it allows for the acknowledgement of silences. Notably, others have described silence as presence, or what they term, a presence of the absence (Bang & Winther-Lindqvist, 2016). In the context of this study, the current literature has shown that within data, the voices and experiences of coaches have been privileged over the silences. Rather than claim that silences are more valuable, or more “real”, than the experiences and statements of coaches, a deconstructive analysis can instead help to destabilize the assumed hierarchy/binary between that which has been stated explicitly, and that which might be inferred or interpreted through an analysis of silences. As a result, I will be searching for the presence of the absences, as well as the trace or absent-presence in the data.

Study Purpose

Concussions are a dangerous injury with serious short and long-term consequences. Despite some of the more recent awareness that exists about the dangers of

concussions, athletes continue to underreport symptoms and experience pressure from coaches to return to play (Kerr et al., 2016; Kroshus et al., 2015c). As was previously mentioned, coaches have been shown to have attitudes consistent with safe concussion reporting behaviors, but some of those attitudes are less dependent on player safety, and more dependent on the potential magnitude of a given sporting event, with some coaches believing in the acceptability of players playing with concussion symptoms in more important competitions (Kroshus et al., 2017). Also, as players increase their time spent with coaches in the collegiate environment, players perceive less support from coaches about reporting a concussion (Baugh et al., 2014), so although coaches report safer attitudes regarding reporting behaviors, there is a discrepancy between what has been reported and what is occurring. Given these discrepancies between what is stated by coaches and players versus what behaviors actually occur, many of the insights into this phenomenon are lost when collecting traditional qualitative data and analyzing it in a fashion that assumes that the words of participants are the road to the most direct and uncontaminated forms of knowledge (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). In order to circumvent this problem with data analysis, this study will involve a deconstructive analysis of data that allows for attention to the spaces between words and the inferences that can be gleaned through the analysis of silences.

Analytic Question

The data collected for this study was part of a larger study that aims to analyze coaches' perceptions and understandings of sport-related concussions. Researchers at multiple sites interviewed coaches, and their responses were recorded to become the data for the study. The larger study involved both a traditional qualitative analysis of the data

provided by coaches, a quantitative analysis of survey data collected later on in the process, and the creation of an educative website with various modules that allowed coaches to learn more about sport-related concussions.

The original traditional qualitative study interview protocol was created in order to answer specific research questions. These were: (1) What are coaches' current practices/roles with respect to concussions? (2) What should coaches' practices/roles be with respect to concussions? and (3) What are coaches' strengths and learning needs with respect to concussions? The proposed study will focus on a different type of question, an analytic question that was derived through the combination of theory with data. Analytic questions help to explicate how a specific theory or analysis (in this case deconstruction) allows for unique questions or understandings of data (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012).

Analytic questions emerge in the midst of a process of reading theory and applying it to data. Analytic questions also have been described as created within the threshold between theory and data, and that in this threshold "...the divisions among, and definitions of, theory and data collapse." (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, 6). The research questions for the original traditional qualitative study privileged the voices and words of our participants; alternatively, the proposed analysis is unique because of the involvement of the theory of deconstruction and in how deconstruction allows unique analysis of the data. The analytic question, which will be the focus of this study, is: *How does a deconstructive analysis create an awareness of silences and illuminate the silent articulations of concussion sequelae.* It is fitting, appropriate, and perhaps even poetic that concussions, an injury characterized and exacerbated by silences, could be better understood through an analysis of silences.

CHAPTER II

METHODS

This chapter begins with an introduction to the deconstructive methodology, followed by a description of the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of this methodology. Deconstruction was pioneered by Jacques Derrida (1967/1976; 1968/1978; Derrida & Caputo, 1997). This methodology, though it defies definition, can be described as a specific type of critique centered on the polysemic nature of text, and simultaneous respect for, and dismantling of, historical and traditional notions or ideas (Derrida & Caputo, 1997). *Polysemic* refers to multiple meanings and the deferral of any unified or underlying meaning of the text at all. Though deconstruction has a rich history in the pantheon of poststructuralist methodologies, it is inherently difficult to describe and much attention in definitions of deconstruction is focused on what deconstruction is *not*, relative to what it *is*. The language used to describe this methodology is also very intentional, and sometimes obscure, for example, in some cases deconstruction is even talked about as an event or occurrence rather than a formula or a tool that can be utilized (Derrida, 1968/1978). The idea is that researchers, critics, or philosophers do not deconstruct data, but data are always already undergoing deconstruction, and our job is to search the margins of knowledge and prop up ideas that are not currently, or have not historically, been privileged. This is a methodology that requires one be "...informed by the tradition, but not bound by it" (Mazzei, 2004, p.26). Importantly, the goal of attention to the margins and interstices is not at the expense of knowledge of tradition. An awareness of what has been prioritized and privileged, and the reasons for that privilege, is what allows for different ideas to irrupt and disrupt hierarchies, which has been posited

as one of the goals of deconstruction. “Deconstruction seems to offer a way out of the closure of knowledge” (Spivak, 1976, p. lxxvii). Though deconstruction can evade description, many researchers have taken up deconstruction with varied purposes, and their work can help to shed light on some of its characteristics as well as its uses.

Jacques Derrida himself discussed myriad topics including writing, signs and symbols, language, justice, hospitality, and democracy from a deconstructive perspective (Derrida, 1967/1976; 1968/1978; as cited in Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Some researchers took up the work of Derrida in order to show how his arguments changed the course of educational research or definitions of what is methodology versus “quasi-methodology” (Childers, 2012; Trifonas, 2009). Another example of the use of deconstruction is an article focusing on the juxtaposition between how silence and humor both confound interpretation and require it (MacLure et al., 2011). MacLure and colleagues (2011) argue that though the very nature of silence causes difficulty of interpretation, silence incites a search for meaning, which is productive and positive.

Though many researchers who took up deconstruction, such as those mentioned, focus on theory and its implications, many of those implications manifest into praxis. Childers’ (2012) discussion of methodology versus quasi-methodology was also important for its concurrent troubling of the idea of “urban students” and narratives of emancipation. The work that is most consistent with the goals of my study is Mazzei’s problematic of silence and arguments for silence as data. Her work is steeped in theory about the importance and uses of silence, and it also showcases a deconstructive methodology as a way to better understand conceptions (or the lack thereof) of racial identity amongst White teachers (Mazzei 2004; 2007a; 2007b). In sum, deconstruction

has been employed to benefit understandings of theory, praxis, or both, and these are just a few of many possible examples of deconstruction put to work.

Though more examples of this important poststructural methodology could be described, I would like to move instead to focus on the intended outcome of this study. In other words, I will focus on what the use of a deconstructive methodology allowed me to do, specifically through the work of Mazzei (2004; 2007a; 2007b). An accurate description of the goal of this study was to “attend to silence, not as an omission or absence of empirical materials, but rather as that to be engaged as meaning full and purpose full” (Mazzei, 2007a, p. 9). Through her taking up of a deconstructive methodology, Mazzei was able to produce not only a theory, but also a practice and a leveraging of deconstruction as methodology in order to bring silences to bear on the difficult concept of White racial identity. During the process of interviewing coaches for this study, it became clear that there were valuable insights to be gained from the silences present in the data. Thus far, the relationship between coaches and concussions has been shown to have some clear discrepancies between intent and outcomes, which has produced a complex relationship between the things that are said, and the things that are left unsaid. In order to analyze those discrepancies and conflicts, I used a deconstructive methodology that pays respect to traditions (traditional qualitative methodologies and interviewing), but also values heterogeneity and the creation of something new (Derrida & Caputo, 1997). My hope was that a focus on a new and different aspect of this data would generate new understandings. This methodology allowed me to ask different questions than I would have been able to ask with a realist traditional qualitative methodology using coding, and required an analysis that focused on ways of paying

attention to silence as data as opposed to treating the words provided by the coach participants as “brute” data, “uncontaminated by theoretical interpretation” (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014, p. 715). Before I discuss the more specific research design and data analysis, I will explain the epistemological and ontological assumptions that accompany a poststructural methodology such as deconstruction.

Epistemological and Ontological Assumptions

Deconstruction has a poststructuralist ontology and epistemology. Rather than searching for central or overarching structures from which to build out (structuralism), deconstruction is instead about a search at the margins of knowledge in order to disrupt the center (MacLure, 2010). The poststructuralist ontology was a response to the foundationalist assumptions inherent in structuralism, and rejects those foundations entirely. In fact, Jacques Derrida would assert that there is no absolute center (truth, essence) and that though we may have “dreams of deciphering” a truth, his view is that we can/should turn away from our search for a “full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of the game” (Derrida, 1968/1978, p. 294). The center then, which requires disrupting, is one that has been positioned there by context, experience, or history. In the case of voice/presence vs. silence, voice/presence would represent a center, prioritized and hierarchically placed above silence by modern and realist research, and the awareness of a deconstructive methodology allows us to decenter and destabilize those constructs that were placed at the center of attention. Jackson and Mazzei (2009) do just that, critiquing the centrality of voice as authentic, raw, and untouched. The ontology of deconstruction then is a contingent reality where signs and symbols must be

addressed in context, there is no unvarnished Truth, and meaning is constantly deferred (Derrida, 1968/1978).

Epistemology then, the “how we know what we know”, becomes important to identify (and thus explains some of the difficulty of assigning specific methods to deconstruction). We must be aware of the retirement of the “value-free actor <who> can know something by adopting a position of exteriority and therefore objectifying ‘bits’ of reality” (Dillet, 2017, p. 518). Importantly, deconstruction is not a nihilistic enclosure of knowledge and reality where no ideas have meaning, but instead, a deconstructive epistemology allows us to search for knowledge in different places and to open up or create irruptions of knowledge that would not otherwise exist. Deconstructive epistemology is more of a warning and an awareness to tread lightly, search the margins, while keeping a “watchful eye/ear for that which might otherwise be missed” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011, p. 17). The nature of deconstruction has been described as an epistemological and methodological quandary, yet one in which I am able to seek meanings (albeit incomplete) in the absent presence of speech (Mazzei, 2007a).

Research Design

The research design began as a traditional coding and interviewing style of qualitative study. The initial plan was to analyze data from semi-structured interviews by performing a thematic analysis looking for themes and categories to help organize our raw data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While engaging in the interview process, researchers began to notice some themes already, but the themes pertained less to the data collected, and more to the unspoken and unacknowledged aspects of the interviews – the silences. With the awareness of potentially important and powerful silences, the focus on analysis

of these interviews began to include finding a way to analyze the silences inherent in our data.

As opposed to the traditional qualitative study with a realist/foundationalist conception of data, this study was rooted in a poststructuralist theoretical framework. Rather than viewing data as having one uniform meaning explicated by our participants and “taken for what it is”, a poststructuralist framework is not concerned with essentializing, categorizing, and codifying data or searching for inherent meanings, but rather recognizes that meaning must be deferred (Derrida, 1967/1976). This framework opened the door to an analysis of the multiple meanings extant in a given interview, and provided an opportunity to analyze what the participants did *not* say. In order to analyze the data then, a thematic analysis would not suffice, and therefore the deconstructive methodology was a more fitting approach. Importantly, a thematic analysis would involve the direct statements of participants and discussions gleaned through interviews as the unit of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), but the poststructuralist unit of analysis is discourse. Discourse is described as “habits of interpretation distributed through communities that frame experiences, objects, and events in particular ways” (Rosiek & Heffernan, 2014, p. 730). Therefore, the analysis for this study did not focus on only the words being said, but included the discourse that makes certain conversations possible in the first place, and the ways those discourses made particular statements and ideas legible and meaningful (Rosiek & Heffernan, 2014). Lastly, this analysis was represented in the form of 1st person prose and presented as this doctoral dissertation.

Participants

Participants were Division I college coaches who were currently coaching in a regional athletic conference. There were 14 total coaches interviewed, of whom ten were head coaches and four were assistant coaches. There were nine male coaches interviewed, and five female coaches interviewed. Coaches completed semi-structured interviews with either one or two interviewers from two public research universities. Study inclusion criteria were: (a) recognized as a Division I coach by their respective institutions, (b) coaching a sport that involves contact between athletes (intentional or inadvertent) (c) completed informed consent, (d) completed semi-structured interview questions, and (e) agreed to respond to follow-up clarifying questions after the completion of the interviews.

Data Collection and Management

Sampling and Recruitment

Coaches were invited to participate using the following methods: (1) Contact was made with the head team physicians at the two respective universities to initiate communication with coaches and discuss the study; (2) Individual coaches that fit inclusion criteria were emailed by researchers to discuss study aims and coaches' interest in participating. When coaches expressed interest in participating in the study, they were contacted by researchers from their respective universities and presented with details about when and where to meet in order to participate in the study. Consent was obtained on the day of the interview, before the start of each interview. Participation in the study was voluntary and coaches had an opportunity to ask questions before completing consent forms. The study and interview materials were funded through a PAC-12 Student-Athlete Health and Wellbeing grant.

Procedure

Interviewers were selected based on the availability and location of the coaches who participated in the study, and consisted of four researchers. I conducted seven of the interviews personally. Interviewers met with coaches in the coaches' offices on campuses. Interviewers described the aims, goals, and procedure of the study to the coaches and provided an opportunity for coaches to ask questions. Interviewers then explained informed consent, limits of the study and any risk involved in participating in the study. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted by either an individual researcher or pair of researchers. Interviews were audio recorded and consisted of questions such as (1) What do you think your role as a coach is in athlete health and safety?; (2) What are your biggest concerns/challenges with the health and safety of your players?; (3) Speaking of concussions in particular, what do you see as the biggest challenge when it comes to concussion safety?; and (4) What are your expectations when it comes to your athletes reporting illness or injury? Interviews were then concluded. Interviewers kept individual field notes/commentary throughout the course of the interviews, and at the conclusion of the interviews, each interviewer wrote down impressions of the interview in the form of field notes. If researchers had clarifying questions about content within interviews, or if coaches wanted to clarify interview statements, then researchers and coaches communicated via email and new data were added to the coaches' transcripts to reflect their statements via email.

Data Management

Data were collected using either a portable recording device or recording on a researcher's computer. If two researchers were present for the interview, both researchers

recorded the information separately to assure successful recording. Recorded data were then transcribed and those transcription files were stored using the qualitative data analysis software Dedoose. The same files were also stored alongside the corresponding recordings using an encrypted and password protected file storage program. Field notes/researcher commentary notes were also stored along with any extra information gathered by researchers post-interview.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was a multiple step process that was both iterative and steeped in a constant attention to theory, in this case deconstruction. I will describe this process step by step. It began with a traditional treatment of interview data through participation in the interviews, transcription of the data, and a thorough reading of the transcriptions. The initial reading required approximately one hour per transcript, served to help me familiarize myself with the data, and was the beginning of the process of identifying silences within the data. Importantly, and concurrent with each step, I spent time reading about deconstruction (theory), as well as engaging with new research pertaining to sport-related concussions, and relationships between athletes and coaches with regard to injury.

The next step of the analysis involved listening to the interviews along with reading the transcription simultaneously. This was for the purpose of being able to force reading to slow, and caused me to have to pay attention to the pauses, the silences, and whether or not individuals were responding to the questions they were being asked (Mazzei, 2007a). A strict reading of the transcripts without the benefit of listening to the interview recordings does not allow for paying attention to pauses, tone, emphasis, or inflection of the statements and perpetuates the decontextualization process that occurs

during traditional coding (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). During this step of the analysis, I paused the recordings periodically to make notes about what silences may exist in the statements of the participants, how those silences were not addressed by interviewers, and questions that could/should have been asked at a given moment. I also spent time noting some of the ways that disciplines I have participated in as an interviewer produced those silences through analysis of the statements of the participants.

The final step involved listening to the interviews without the transcription in front of me. This stage of the analysis was a mindful/meditative listening that was focused more on process than on product. Mazzei (2007a) found that this stage in the process allowed her to better attend to the multiple layers of meaning that existed in her data. She described how during this phase of the process silence “revealed its incipient importance as both purposeful and meaningful in discourse-based research” (Mazzei, 2007a, p. 81). The discrepancies between coaches’ statements and the behaviors that occurred in the context of dealing with concussions on their teams was difficult to entangle, and an analysis focused on seeking out multiple meanings provided a perspective on this topic that had not previously been realized. Throughout this analysis process I continued to read my own field notes to remember what ideas were being considered during and after each of the interviews. Again, I was also reading about deconstructive methodology by Derrida and other experts as well as delving into the current research on sport-related concussions, and coaches’ responses to concussions as a phenomenon. In order to attempt to respond to my analytic question, I maintained awareness of current research and continued to “think *with* theory” and made sure that I

was steeped in the theory in such a way as it almost felt as though Derrida was “reading over <my> shoulder and asking a series of questions” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011, p. 7).

Role of the Researcher

The initial role of the researcher in this project was to engage in interviewing participants and to analyze realist data in order to produce specific categorizations and produce meaning. As a researcher engaging in a deconstructive process, I viewed data differently and no longer reported on realist data, but rather created an analytic question to help interrupt that process. Typical qualitative research involving coding, such as consensual qualitative research, focuses on the process of bracketing out the researcher expectations and a constant attention to the bias of researchers with the hope of preventing bias from unduly influencing data (Hill et al., 2005). For the purposes of this project, the role of the researcher was instead to recognize that bias is inevitable, and in fact varying discursive fields affected the way the interviews and conversations proceeded and affected the way this topic was written about. Rather than fight against the idea that my bias would affect the way data is influenced, the role of the researcher was to show how a variety of conditions produced both words and silences, and to make clear that these analyses, and any conclusions or meanings as a result, are not the only conclusions that could be drawn from a given group of data. Another important role for myself as researcher was to notice the times during the course of interviews where myself or other interviewers could have asked for more specificity or elicited some of the silences inherent in these interviews (Mazzei, 2007b). As interviewers we can be complicit in the silences (Morison & MacLeod, 2014) and that complicity need not

necessarily be interrupted during the interview, but was considered in the “silent safety of analysis” (Mazzei, 2007b, p. 637).

Assumptions of the Study

The original assumption of the larger study was that there were themes that existed within the data that could be organized and categorized to represent the totality of what was described by the coaches in the interviews. However, my experience during the interviews led me to believe that a realist approach would eliminate an important source of data for me (silences) and would fail to illuminate important dimensions of the problem of discrepancies between intention and outcomes related to coaches and concussions. My assumption was that meaning is fleeting, temporal, and context-dependent, but that the understandings that one could gain through an analysis of silences would be valuable in understanding the complex relationship between athletes with sport-related concussions and coaches. Along with that idea, another important assumption was that though the silences occurred as a result of discourses that are difficult to work against, discourses are not “closed systems” and can be contested (St. Pierre, 2000). I believed that an awareness of these silences, and perhaps even shining a metaphorical spotlight on the issues that exist in the relationship between sport-related concussions and coaches, had the potential to elicit positive change.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

“Those who fail to reread are obliged to read the same story everywhere.” – Roland Barthes

The analysis of these data involved specific forms of “rereading” in three steps. Each step yielded different examples of silences, which both illuminated and complicated the results of the study (Mazzei, 2007a). Step one was the participation in the interviews, followed by a reading of the transcripts to become familiar with the content. Step two was a reading of the transcript that was focused on the content and structure of the sentences in the transcripts while simultaneously considering the actual utterances of the participants through listening to the recordings. Step three was a focus on “rereading” the data by abandoning reading completely, and paying strict attention to the inflection and tone of the participants through further analysis of only the recordings.

While performing the analysis that involved interviewing participants and reading the transcripts, I noticed silences that I describe as *Digressive* and *Discordant*. Digressive silences altered or bent the narrative to allow for responses that did not directly attend to the questions posed by interviewers. Alternatively, discordant silences represented examples of concepts that appear mutually exclusive and lack clarity regarding what the speaker intended to communicate. Often the discordance would manifest when a statement was made about a coach’s priorities with regard to student athletes, and then that statement would appear to be contradicted soon after the original statement was made. The second analysis, that involved the simultaneous reading of transcripts and listening to the recordings, yielded an entirely different sort of silence that I refer to as

Desiring silence. This production of silence notably served to further the status-quo and relied on a nuanced definition of desire, which will be discussed later on in this study. Lastly, the analysis that centered around listening to the interviews without the transcripts had a completely different outcome. I found that the silences that ultimately were most apparent were not silences from the participants, but rather the silences from the interviewer. These silences will be referred to as *Disciplinary* silences due to the fact that, as an interviewer, I had specific perceived expectations of how to act, which were derived from a variety of disciplines (e.g. psychology, research, college athletics) and those expectations in turn prevented certain questions from being asked. Examples will be provided of each type of silence, followed by an explanation of how those silences have been defined.

Findings

Step One

Digressive Silences.

The first type of silences that became apparent were the *Digressive* silences. *Digressive* silences were characterized by the interviewer asking a specific question and then the interviewee responded to an entirely different, and unasked, question. These silences were interesting in that, in some cases, interviewers would even repeat the question and the coaches would continue to digress by discussing questions and topics that did not pertain to the original question. One example of this is a coach who was asked specifically to talk about his role regarding athlete health and wellness:

Coach: Well, I think as a coach nowadays it's a little bit different. I think you wear a lot more hats. I think first and foremost I would think that most

coaches still see themselves as an educator of some sort...I'm a psychologist part of the time, you're a father part of the time, you're obviously the coach or a mentor...I have players who don't have fathers, or don't have any parents who are involved in their lives.

He was then asked to clarify specifically what role he has pertaining to the overall health and wellness of his athletes, and he responded by saying:

Coach: Well, I personally, you know, I'm maybe different than some coaches, I want our players to have a great experience...you can ask my coaches this too, I truly want each and every one of them to have a great experience. I want them to get a lot of personal growth and gain from playing this sport. Therefore, almost everything we do is family-oriented...I think I take it the hardest when they get physically injured, when they tear their knee and they're lost for the season...

In this case, a second interviewer asked the question a third time, and it was not until this third attempt that the coach provided some specific examples of his role pertaining to health and wellness.

Another way this type of silence manifested in interviews was when a coach was focused on one specific topic, to the exclusion of other ideas, and diverted their responses to the different questions in order to return to that topic. One example of this was a coach who was asked "<referring to head injuries>...What do you think about health and safety?" The coach then responded by describing at length one very specific technique that he teaches on his team, that he believes leads to fewer head injuries. After listening

for approximately 5 minutes to the description of the technique, the interviewer then asked:

Interviewer: So, what do you think needs to change?

Coach: The education.

Interviewer: Do you think there's any role for policy or rule change, or is it more just get the coaches –?

Coach: Yeah. I mean, yeah, I think that all helps. But it's all about education, and it's all about – the thing that I tell those guys – always at the end – if we don't change how we coach the game, there's not going to be a game to coach. I mean, it's that simple. So, you can be as stubborn as you want. But the other thing that's really been awesome with what we're doing is...

The coach went on to describe in greater detail about the same, previously mentioned, specific technique that they teach their players. The entirety of the exchange totaled almost one-third of the full interview, and the coach even attempted to lead the conversation back to discuss the same specific technique later on, which required redirection from the interviewers in order to change the topic. *Digressive silences* were characterized by the avoidance of a topic leaving the interviewers with a sense of confusion as to what question is being answered. The next type of silence was not characterized by avoidance at all, but it also resulted in feelings of confusion for the interviewers for an entirely different reason.

Discordant Silences.

Discordant silences were difficult to notice in the moment. While participating in these interviews, there were times when I felt like something about the responses

provided by coaches felt “wrong” or “off”. It was like listening to a song that started out as jazz and finished as an opera. The tricky part was that both the jazz and the opera music were pleasant to listen to, and the transition between the two styles was somehow seamless. In some cases, the only thing that tipped me off that there was some sort of silence being produced was this feeling of wrongness afterward. It was actually those feelings that spurred me to take on these analyses as my dissertation. Ultimately, after step one of these analyses, I determined that those feelings of wrongness were the result of a specific type of silence. I describe this type of silence as *Discordant*, and found that it manifested in statements that appeared to lack a sense of congruency or harmoniousness with previous statements made in the same interview.

Some of the examples were sentences which contained within them contradictions that were easy to spot. A simple example was the coach who was asked if there are penalties for players who are not attending some form of rehabilitation after a head injury, who responded by saying, “No we don’t have penalties for that. It’s just discussion and then if they don’t make adjustments, then there will be penalties.” Though these quick incongruencies were deemed examples of *Discordant* silences, the more pervasive examples spanned the length of the interview. A prime example of a *Discordant* silence, is within the interview with a coach who spends a significant portion of the interview talking about how important it is that programs are all working under the same ethics model when it comes to concussion protocols. He made comments such as, “I like the testing, I like all the things that we do, but then you hear it not being consistent across the board. You know, I talk to somebody else in another school and they’re like, oh they’d let her play.” The interviewer then explained the differences between

concussion protocol assessments and assessments for someone who may have a bone fracture. The coach then responded by saying, “No, and I get all that, and I’m going to err on the side of caution when it comes to that. And as long as we’re all playing under the same rules, I think that’s where, I think, we’re all coming from with this. Let’s be educated in it, and let’s all play under the same guidelines.” The interaction concludes with the coach making this important comment, “And what I’m saying, obviously *taking care of the student athlete is first and foremost*, but I do think it should be some protocol across the board.” The discord in the interview was clear in the difference between “taking care of the student athlete is first and foremost” and the coach’s insistence that the rules be the same for everyone. Based on his statements, and particularly the fact that each of his comments concludes with the same line about playing under the same rules, guidelines, and protocols, it is **not** obvious that taking care of the student athlete is first and foremost. Rather, his statements indicated that he is most concerned with equality and fairness of the rules, moreso than he is concerned about the safety and wellbeing of the student athletes.

The previous example was indicative of the typical way that *Discordant* silences showed up in the data. These silences often were discovered as discrepancies between two concepts that do not appear to fit together. That said, I would be remiss if I did not mention in this deconstructive analysis that the existence of a discrepancy or a feeling of wrongness in a statement implies that there is also the existence of a “rightness” to certain statements as well. My position is not that the coaches “truly” believe one idea at the expense of the discrepant one, and my position is certainly not that any of these ideas are dichotomies in the first place. For me, the purpose of pointing out the *Discordant*

silences is to trouble or question the notion that any value or ethic is **obvious** and that each topic is much more complicated than it appears.

Step Two

Desiring Silences.

Desire is a concept that is predominately understood as characterized by a lack of something. The typical understanding would be that a person lacks, and therefore desires that which they lack. Deleuze and Guattari (1983) define desire not by what an individual may lack, but rather by what their desire produces and who it functions for. This is an important distinction for Mazzei's (2011) work on how desire functions to produce silences, and how those silences in turn function to re-inscribe power and privilege. Her work focuses on how *Desiring* silence about race and specifically "whiteness" serves to perpetuate and preserve the status-quo benefitting those who already hold a significant amount of privilege. Though these data could certainly be analyzed with an eye toward the ways in which silence about race preserves the positions of coaches in power, I would like to highlight the *Desiring* silences pertaining to discussions of coaches and concussions, and later analyze what these silences produce.

Initially, my thought was to consider these silences as a lack of awareness, or perhaps to talk about them as oversights, but after discussing these examples with colleagues, it became apparent that these silences were functioning in specific ways and benefitted those individuals in power. The upcoming examples will show how this type of silence actually functions to allow coaches to maintain the status-quo and ultimately maintain illusions of safety and ethicality. One example of these *desiring* silences came while discussing what might be some possible answers to the very real problems brought

on by concussions in sport. Interviewers were asking about the importance of information dissemination related to long term effects of concussion. The coach then explained his perspective on information dissemination and what ideas he considers when it comes to concussion and his sport:

Coach: Yeah, but you know a concussion is not good. We all get that. So that's really as far as we need to go, to say, "Okay, it's not good." We don't know exactly what these long-term effects are, but we know getting a bunch of concussions is not nearly as good as not getting them, so how do we play this game and minimize it? You know, try to minimize those as much as possible. I think that's the big issue...And not only concussions, but just everything else that comes with this violent game...

This example was representative of the types of statements made by the coach throughout the interview, which evidenced this concept of *Desiring* silence. As mentioned above, the way to determine the existence of a *Desiring* silence is to notice how this silence functions and what it produces to maintain the status quo. In this case, despite the fact that this coach consistently and repeatedly recognizes that the sport that he coaches is "violent" and that concussions are a direct result of engaging in the sport, there is not a discussion at any point about *whether* the sport should be played at all. In fact, in this quote he believes that the question is not whether the sport should be played, but rather how to minimize sport-related concussions with the continuance of this sport's existence as a foregone conclusion. By not considering the ethicality of the sport's existence, and whether people should be participating in this sport at all, the status-quo is not subject to any criticism and thus is perpetuated and maintained.

Another example of how *Desiring* silence functions in these interviews came from an interview with a coach who refers to the athletes he recruits as “competitors”:

Coach: ...If they have something going on with their head, whether it's a concussion, and they pass the concussion protocol and it is safe to play, that the trainer is not going to send them out there unless it's safe. So they are not afraid to go to him with the trust that if it isn't something that should keep them off the field, it's not going to keep them off the field. That's critical. Because otherwise the system of they should go see a trainer or a doctor, they're going to avoid that because they're competitors, and we recruit competitors, and they want to be on the field. And then it's a three-way trust. I trust the medical staff when they tell me the kid shouldn't be on the field. It isn't something drummed up, it's the truth.

In this example, the coach is talking about the athletes on his team and describing how in some cases they could be afraid to go and see the trainer. The implication is that his players would be afraid that the trainer could “drum up” the severity of an injury, which would necessitate the player being unable to play their sport. Specifically, he states that his staff recruits competitors and that because the individuals are competitors, they want to be on the field. This reasoning, supplied by the coach, explaining why a player might fear going to the trainer is leaving out a very important consideration. It is entirely possible, and arguably more likely, that rather than the coaches recruiting this very specific type of player who always wants to be on the field and is afraid to see the trainer, perhaps it is the environment and culture of the team that creates and perpetuates those behaviors. In this case, the idea that it might be the environment on the team that causes

these types of attitudes and behaviors is never brought up or considered, and thus I characterized this example as a *Desiring* silence. This particular silence functions to prevent introspection about what systemic behaviors and actions might be causing the phenomenon of avoiding the training room, and allows the coach to ascribe responsibility for this phenomenon to the individuals with significantly less power and privilege – the players with this “competitor” trait. Additionally, by referring to players as “competitors” rather than young people, or individuals in his care as coach, the coach is able to further distance himself from the responsibility for the potential of fostering an environment that encourages players to avoid proper safety precautions. Though each of the examples provided pertains to slightly different topics within the interviews, the ways in which the silences function are very similar. In each case, one narrative maintains a silent or absent presence in order to preserve the status-quo and maintain the current system or understanding. Each of the three examples of silence that were discussed previously could be attributed to the coaches or interviewees, but the final type of silence that I noticed was instead a silence on the part of the interviewers.

Step Three

Disciplinary Silences.

As a researcher, it is easy to get caught up in the importance of asking all of the questions on the interview guide or to focus on being the unbiased interviewer or blank slate. In some cases, the interviewer is perceived as the receptacle meant only to collect the unvarnished opinions of the interviewee, and not to add to or affect those opinions in any tangible way. Similarly, there are aspects within the disciplines of being a psychologist or an athlete that dictate the way a psychologist or an athlete would act in a

given situation. Each of these examples of disciplines that we are involved in have the potential to affect the behaviors of an interviewer throughout the course of engaging in an interview. As I was analyzing these data by strictly listening to the interviews without any of the transcripts in front of me, I was surprised by the fact that rather than focusing on the responses of the interviewees, I was instead focusing on questions posed by myself as interviewer. Specifically, I was noticing what questions were not being asked and what ideas did not receive any follow up. Though one could attribute these silences strictly to my understanding of what it means to be an unbiased researcher, I suggest that truly those silences are tied to multiple disciplines that I engage in, both within and outside of academia, and that those disciplines produced silences that I am calling *disciplinary* silences.

One example of a *disciplinary* silence came when a coach was asked about his specific role after players sustain injury on his team. This scenario was referenced earlier when a coach needed to be asked the same question in three different ways in order to respond to the question, but in this case, I would like to draw attention to my own response after the question was answered:

Interviewer: Speaking specifically about like injury, and like physical injury, what do you think your role as a coach is when it comes to that?

Coach: Yeah, to pass them along. I don't get involved at all.

Interviewer: Who do you pass them off to?

Coach: Our trainer and the doctors. I would be lying if I didn't say from time to time I roll my eyes and say, are you sure they can't get out and play today. But the reality is I've never really messed with trainers and doctors. You just open

yourself up to criticism and a lawsuit perhaps, or whatever the case may be, when you step out of your realm, and that's not my realm. I Leave that to them.

In this case, we have an example of the same coach who talked about how his role is as a father, educator, psychologist, coach, and mentor to his players, but when it comes to his players sustaining a physical injury he believes his role is only to pass along his players to medical staff. In fact, he stated that he does not “get involved at all” and commented that when you “step out of your realm” you risk criticism or a lawsuit. After this interview, I wrote in my field notes, “Kept thinking about the contrast between his claim of treating players like family versus the actions he believes are important when his players sustain injuries/concussions.” So in that moment, it was clear that as an interviewer I recognized some inconsistency, and at the very least a place in the interview where some clarification or queries would be beneficial, but this discrepancy (this particular interaction was also noted as a *discordant* silence) was never brought to the forefront. In this case, one possible example of this *Disciplinary* silence would be the disciplining that occurred while I was participating in the discipline of athletics. As a former college athlete, who happened to play the sport that this coach was coaching, I am aware of the importance of not questioning the head coach and maintaining a unified front as a team. Similarly, questioning discrepancy and eliciting conflict are not standard procedures in the disciplines of research and psychology (both of which are disciplines I am heavily involved in). Broaching the topic of conflict is an intervention that can be used sparingly, but the overwhelming instinct of researchers and clinicians is to continue to maintain rapport thus maintaining the potential for further conversation. These examples evidenced how some of the beliefs I had acquired as a function of the

disciplines I have been involved in did not allow for the types of queries that would be necessary to better understand how that coach views that discrepancy.

A second example of *disciplinary* silence was clear in the example provided earlier about how a coach recruits competitors who avoid the training room for fear of being diagnosed with an injury that would prevent them from playing. The quote concludes with:

Coach: ...And then it's a three-way trust. I trust the medical staff when they tell me the kid shouldn't be on the field. It isn't something drummed up, it's the truth.

Interviewer: I get what you're saying. The idea is that you do have to trust each other, and you appreciate that, and you have the same goals inherently.

Coach: That's right. Yep.

Interviewer: What about families? Do they come into the discussion at all when you're talking about like trust in that relationship?

This example was described as a *desiring* silence, but the interviewer response here is also a perfect example of *disciplinary* silence. To challenge the coach's perspective as to why this phenomenon of "avoiding the training room" occurs has the potential to be beneficial to our research about how coaches view concussions, and what roles coaches have after a player sustains a concussion. My training within the discipline of psychology also allows me to recognize that reframing this phenomenon as having been caused by the culture or environment of the team, rather than some "competitor" characteristic inherent in his players, could provide some much-needed insight for this coach. Despite that awareness on my part, and instead of introducing that idea to the coach, I validated

the coach's response, tacitly condoned his belief about why the particular phenomenon was occurring, and then changed the subject. In this moment, the desire to maintain rapport fostered by my experience in the disciplines of psychology and performing research were again weighing heavily on myself as interviewer, thus exemplifying another *disciplinary* silence.

Summary

These results give name to, and provide examples of, the types of silences present in the interviews with coaches. The *Digressive* silences were some of the more noticeable silences in the moment and were easy to identify in the first step of the analyses. As a reminder, *Digressive* silences were characterized by an avoidance of the asked question. *Discordant* silences, which were statements or ideas that presented as discrepancies throughout the span of an interview, were present in the data as well. These silences were also identified during step one of the analysis, and were more difficult to notice during the course of interviewing coaches. The third type of silence, *Desiring* silence, was arguably the most difficult to recognize without a very specific type of analysis. In step two of the analysis, I was able to recognize these silences through a careful listening to the interviews while simultaneously reading the transcripts. *Desiring* silences were identified through analyzing cases in which a coach's silence functions to perpetuate the status-quo and maintain a system or belief that benefits those in power. The final type of silence, *Disciplinary silence*, was identified during the third stage of the analysis, which involved strictly listening to the interviews without reading the transcript. *Disciplinary* silences were silences on the part of the interviewer and were described as silences

produced by a variety of disciplines that affected the way interviews were conducted, and specifically what types of questions were asked.

Each of these types of silence has important implications for theory, practice, and policy. The discussion will include some of the more detailed ways these silences functioned in the context of the interviews, followed by the implications of that functioning in the greater contexts of methods of research and of college sports.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

Coaches have a significant influence on the reporting behaviors of their players who may have sustained a concussion (Baugh et al., 2014; Kroshus et al., 2015c). I used a deconstructive methodology in order to analyze the silences inherent in Division I coaches' discussions pertaining to concussions and concussion management on their respective teams. When asked to describe their role as a coach when their players sustain a concussion, an interesting phenomenon occurred; the interviewers felt as though there were aspects of the interview that remained unspoken or unexplained. Derrida's deconstructive methodology (1967/1976; 1968/1978; Derrida & Caputo, 1997) allowed me to address that phenomenon and uniquely analyze the interviews by attending to the silences, both spoken and unspoken. As a result of the analysis, I was able to identify four types of silences (*Digressive, Discordant, Desiring, and Disciplinary*) throughout the course of the interviews. In this chapter, I discuss how each of these silences has implications for theory, practice, and policy. Other questions that arose throughout the course of analysis included, how did the *Desiring* silences function to perpetuate the status-quo, and what disciplines were impacting the interviewer to produce *Disciplinary* silences. These questions also are addressed in the discussion of significant findings. First, I revisit the analytic question to delve into how a deconstructive method allowed for this unique type of analysis. The revisiting of the analytic question represents the first significant finding of this study, and shows how a deconstructive method redefines the understanding about what can be classified as concussion sequelae.

Significant Findings

Analytic Question Revisited

Typical sequelae of sport-related concussions include impaired consciousness, neurologic deficits, confusion, and dysfunction of memory (Pavlovic et al., 2019). Long term physiological and psychological outcomes of sustaining this type of injury can include cognitive and emotional deficits, which could have a significant impact on overall quality of life (Pavlovic et al., 2019). However, in light of these interviews, it is clear that there are also sequelae that are less centered on the individual who sustained the injury and more focused on the responses of external sources such as coaches and those that come in contact with coaches, such as interviewers. I attempted to answer the analytic question of *how does a deconstructive analysis create an awareness of silences and illuminate the silent articulations of concussion sequelae?* This analytic question, similar to many other questions in this study, was not *whether* a deconstructive analysis allowed for an awareness of silences, but rather *how* the analysis did so. The most obvious way this occurred was by opening up other forms of data for analysis. The deconstructive analysis, pioneered by Jacques Derrida (1967/1976; 1968/1978; Derrida & Caputo, 1997), allowed silences, identified in this case as *Digressive, Discordant, Desiring, and Disciplinary*, to be data and to produce alternative meanings for, and understandings of, the interview data. Importantly, the goal of this deconstructive analysis was not destruction of previous meanings or understandings, but rather was more akin to the original meaning of the word analysis, which etymologically means “to undo or unloose” (Johnson, 1978). “If anything is destroyed in a deconstructive reading, it is not the text, but the claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another.” (Johnson, 1978, p.3). Once the potential for different understandings and forms

of data was established, the silent articulations of concussion sequelae could be understood with regard to how they function.

At times, the concussion sequelae manifested as coaches, able to maintain a keen ability to respond to nuanced questions about their roles as a coach, seeming unable (unwilling?) to entertain questions about their responses and roles when a player has sustained a concussion. These silent articulations manifested as multiple coaches becoming focused on one topic to the exclusion of others to essentially “run out the clock” on the interview. In other cases, these articulations were displayed as inconsistency and discrepancy about the way a coach talked about the concussion response on their team. More subtly, there were silent articulations that rendered conversations that might threaten the status-quo difficult or even impossible. These articulations of concussion sequelae even had a profound effect on me as an interviewer through the types of follow-up questions that were posed to the coaches. Each of these responses and outcomes represented sequelae of concussions that I would not have been able to consider without a deconstructive lens of analysis, and they functioned in different ways throughout the course of the interviews, which led to some additional significant findings.

Additional Significant Findings

There were two other overarching significant findings. The first is that the methodology used in this study introduced a unique way to analyze this topic and an alternative to a traditional survey-based or thematic analysis methods when it comes to learning about coaches’ perceptions of how they manage when a concussion occurs on

their team. The second finding is how silences functioned in these interviews, and how in some cases silences produced a greater awareness of other types of silence.

The methodology used in this study was closest to the work discussed by Mazzei (2007a) in her work using deconstructive practices. I emphasize that it was *closest* to the practices she used due to the fact that, as she describes in her book, deconstructive methodologies defy definition and adherence to set rules about how they can and should be used (Mazzei, 2007a). This study successfully employed a deconstructive methodology to identify and ascribe multiple meanings and understandings of silences, both spoken and unspoken. Previously the topic of coaches and concussion had been studied using positivist epistemologies and using, for example, quantitative survey-based methods or coding-style methods (Baugh et al., 2014; Chrisman et al., 2013; Kroshus et al., 2017). These methods are able to analyze a subset of data that is observable, but neglects to consider silences as a viable mode of data production. My position is that, using deconstructive methodology to study this topic, enriched the pool of data that we were able to draw from as researchers and allowed for new and irruptive understandings. My hope is that the understandings gleaned from this type of study will only further reinforce the importance of studying topics in unique ways and with unique purposes. In this case, there were some key findings, about how silence functions and functioned in this study, that I believe were not possible to identify or consider using positivist methods or epistemologies.

One of the most fascinating findings is the way that silences manifested. Mazzei (2003) wrote about the concept of veiled silences and how in order to avoid a discussion of racial identity, particularly of whiteness, teachers in her study actually did not answer

the question that was initially asked of them, but rather avoided the topic of whiteness in order to answer a different question of their own creation. In this study, rather than discuss coaches' roles with regard to health and safety after an athlete sustained a concussion, some coaches used the very same type of technique (in this study termed digression due to the manner in which it was used), and they would digress multiple times throughout the span of an interview. They would do this by either avoiding a response to one specific question despite numerous attempts to ask that question by the interviewers, or by returning to the same topic repeatedly despite interviewers posing a variety of different questions. These types of spoken silences, or present absences, were accompanied by the discordant silences, which were the significant discrepancies in the ways in which coaches talked about concussions throughout the span of the interviews. These silences were specific to when coaches were asked about their management of concussions and were marked not by a lack of speech, but rather by speech that was not consistent with either the question being asked or the statements they had made previously. Alternatively, desiring and discursive silences characterized by an avoidance of speech about a given topic, both on the part of the interviewee and the interviewer, also were identified through the analyses performed in this study. Ultimately this study introduced a variety of different conceptualizations of silence, all of which centered on the relationship between coaches and concussions. The study also provided some understanding of *how* some of these silences functioned and what those silences produced.

Digressive and discordant silences were understood as counterproductive in that the intent (or at least function) of these silences appeared to be avoidance of a topic.

Before the idea for this study was formed, I recognized that there was something in the coach interviews that was being avoided or hidden. When I realized that there was some avoidance on the part of the interviewees, rather than directing my attention away from certain topics, the avoidance served to instead evoke curiosity in order to better understand what was producing that avoidance. Ultimately, the coaches' avoidance of certain topics pertaining to concussion actually shaped the analytic question that anchored this entire study, which I would argue is a counterproductive outcome of avoidance. Conversely, desiring silences were productive, and in two different ways. In contrast with the counterproductivity of the first two types of silences, desiring silences were productive in that they appeared to serve their purpose by functioning to obscure a topic, but they were also productive due to the fact that they produced an awareness and greater understanding about the final type of silence, the *Disciplinary* silences.

Notably, desiring silences obviously occurred as a result of desire. In the analysis of desiring silence and whiteness completed by Mazzei (2011), the desire to perpetuate the status-quo, and continue to treat whiteness as the accepted norm, produced silence around the concept of whiteness. In the case of the first example provided in this study, desire to maintain the status-quo produced silence on the topic of whether a "violent" sport should even exist. In the second example provided in the results, desire to maintain the status-quo precluded discussion about how perhaps it is a coach who creates a culture of avoiding trainers or the training room rather than an undefined "competitor" trait found in the players who are recruited by that coach. In each of these cases, the output or production of these desires was silence, but in turn those silences were productive as

well. Again, productive in that they served their original purpose, but also productive in that they produced a greater awareness of *Disciplinary* silences.

Initially, I considered the silence on the part of the interviewer as another element of desiring silence; I considered that it was essentially a shared desire to maintain the status-quo by both interviewer and interviewee. Upon further reflection, I recognized that there were additional factors influencing interviewers, which were not subsumed by the category of desiring silence. The first two disciplines that affected me as interviewer was that of being a researcher and psychologist. These disciplines helped to answer questions about what I perceived as “good” or “bad” research or a “good” or “bad” clinician. There were many moments in the interview when I considered follow up questions that could have brought some clarity to the different types of silences in the interviews. But a question that could elicit confrontation did not seem consistent with the discipline surrounding what makes a “good” researcher or psychologist: one who builds rapport, maintains limited biases, and has the express goal of facilitating a smooth and comfortable interview or therapeutic session. I believe that these disciplines inhibited me from asking questions that would disrupt those “good researcher or psychologist” ideals. Similarly, I also recognized that it was my experiences in the discipline of being an athlete, which defines what makes a “good” team player, but was also affecting my ability as interviewer to ask questions about what was being left out of the interviews. I was a college athlete for five years, and one of the key characteristics of a team player is someone who follows the instructions of the coach and does not cause dissension on the team. Those are examples of the types of disciplines that produced silence on the part of myself as interviewer; there may be others. Each subjectivity or identity such as “good

researcher”, “good psychologist” and “good team player” was shaped by these disciplines, and my recognition of how those disciplines affected my ability to interview could all be traced back to the existence of desiring silences. Without the desiring silences drawing attention to my complicity in those silences, I would not have been as likely to consider other explanations for my complicit nature in perpetuating the status-quo and maintaining many of the illusions held by these coaches.

Implications

One of the most significant practical implications is the recognition and consideration of the different types of silences that occur in an interview setting. For example, psychologists as interviewers recognize that it is valuable to recognize the different types of silences that inevitably come up throughout the course of an interview in order to have greater collaboration and rapport (Cutler et al., 2019). Additionally, an interviewer should consider what their potential responses are going to be when they notice the use of different types of silences in the moment. For instance, just because an interviewer might notice that silence or avoidance is occurring in an interview context does not mean that the silence or avoidance needs to be confronted (Strong & Zeman, 2010). The decision about whether to question more deeply on a topic, or whether to move on to other questions should stem from the goals of the interview, and the theory or methodology behind the interview (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). This idea leads to an important implication based on the analytic question in this study, which is that concussion sequelae extend beyond the physical symptoms of the individual who sustained the concussion. Concussion sequelae should also be thought to include the effects on coaches and even interviewers attempting to study the topic of concussions.

When studying concussion sequelae in the future, it will be valuable to consider those sequelae that extend beyond the bounds of the person who sustained the injury.

A final significant practical implication is related to the practice of educating coaches about concussions. This study exemplified the notion that coaches responding to concussions that occur on their teams is a complicated issue. That knowledge and awareness of the nuance of this phenomenon should inform the practice of educating coaches about best practices and the importance of their role in the healing process. Rather than assuming that all coaches' first priority is the safety of their players or that once coaches receive the information about the danger of concussions that they will act appropriately, it will be important to include education about the complex, and in some cases competing, values associated with what happens after a player who you are coaching sustains a concussion. Current education typically consists of a fact sheet providing greater awareness of the signs and symptoms associated with concussion, and then some education about the importance of removing student-athletes from a game (Kroshus et al., 2019). Coaches should be made aware of the potential for varying types and presentations of silence that exist in the context of discussing concussions so that they can better attend to the silences they have the potential to produce. Though practical implications are important, there are also some significant policy implications as a result of this study.

Due to the importance of providing nuanced concussion education, these changes to concussion education need to begin through changing administrative policy. There should be a significant change in the way that administrations at universities or governing bodies require concussion education as a result of studies like this one that attend to

specific silences that occur around the topic of concussion. Along with online modules or fact sheets that teach about the signs and symptoms of concussions (Kroshus et al., 2019; Glang et al., 2010), administrations and governing bodies could require greater amounts of education that allows for a discussion of the topic by requiring coaches to process the implications of what occurs when a player sustains a concussion. One possibility would be to require a meeting with a member of the administration to discuss these more complex ethical and situational considerations of how concussions affect the coaches' behaviors. Another implication with regard to policy is to make changes that address some of the financial reinforcers that could contribute to these instances of silence. By making a concerted effort to reinforce coaches less often with financial benefits based on metrics of winning or losing games, but rather on facilitating a safe and growth-promoting environment for athletes, university administrations can address another of the factors that could contribute to the silences addressed in this study. This potentiality is made decidedly more difficult due to the fact that winning, rather than safety, produces endorsements and other financial benefits for universities, but ideally as research on concussions evolves and public awareness grows, legal and financial repercussions for silences from coaches will have the potential to stimulate change in the larger ecology of college sports.

Finally, given all of the factors that may operate to obscure coaches' concussion related behaviors, and given how devastating the outcomes of concussions can be for student athletes, it seems critical that journal editors and concussion scholars should create policy that calls for more diverse and creative methods to study the phenomenon.

Specifically, editors and scholars can incentivize study of the aspects of concussions that extend beyond the observable and self-report aspects of the phenomenon.

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of the study pertained to the silences that were analyzed. Due to the discussion of how meaning is constantly deferred in a poststructural analysis, the meanings and understandings of the study are only some of the potential meanings that could be put forth. I could not know what all of the silences might mean, and I also could not attend to all of the different silences that occurred. Rosiek & Heffernan (2014) explain that there are constantly multiple silences occurring in data and that participants could have discussed any manner of topics from “money, disease, the weather in another part of the country, pink elephants, and so on” (p. 731). As the author and researcher on this project, it was important that I drew attention to the salient silences while simultaneously recognizing that out of all of the different silences and types of silences, there were some that I was unable to attend to, and these may have had relevance to the study. Another limitation to the study is that I was unable to participate in each of the interviews, since half of the interviews occurred in another state and were conducted by other researchers. Ideally, I would have participated in all of the interviews, which would have given me a richer perspective on how the data was gathered and some more familiarity with every aspect of this process. Lastly, another limitation is that the data for the present dissertation study was gathered through interview alone. Though there are survey data collected in the context of the quantitative analysis, this dissertation analysis would benefit from some form of participant observation and perhaps an analysis of past documented behaviors that occurred within each sports program pertaining to the

treatment of sport-related concussions. Observational and historical data collection could have provided an even fuller perspective on the silences produced.

It is also important to note, in the context of limitations, my positionality as a researcher. I identify as White, Latino, and male, and each of those identities influence the way that the data was interpreted in this study. I also have extensive experience interviewing in a variety of clinical and research capacities, and each of those experiences also informs the way that I interpreted this data as a researcher. My identity as a former college athlete clearly affected my interpretation of this data as well. Each of these different positions or subjectivities clearly provided scaffolding for the way data in this study were interpreted, and though I do not view an individuals' positionality as a limitation to research, it is important to be aware of how my positionality influences and limits the type of meanings I am capable of identifying throughout the research process.

Future Research

The majority of the analysis in this study was drawn from data that were collected in interviews. In order to bolster the data collected in interview research, researchers can also participate in more naturalistic research about the culture of a team and the way decisions are made on a day to day basis. Studying coaches and their decision-making processes about concussions in the future through observation and naturalistic research methods could be beneficial to better understand the complicated dynamics that are involved (Chacón-Moscoso et al., 2018). Importantly, this type of study could and should extend to coaches who work with high school and younger age individuals in their respective sports as well. The sooner in the process that the silences related to the phenomenon of concussions can be addressed by coaches and players, the greater

potential for changes in the management of this phenomenon in a college or university setting. It would also be helpful to the field to analyze concussions by doing more interview and naturalistic observation research with medical professionals as well (Kroshus et al., 2015). Many of the coaches who were interviewed for this study talked about their relationships with the medical professionals they work with at their respective universities, and it would be valuable to know more about the experiences of those medical professionals in communication with coaches along with players who have sustained a concussion.

Similarly, this methodology would be a valuable tool in better understanding athletes' experiences after sustaining a concussion. It could be particularly valuable to compare the silences produced by athletes with the silences produced by coaches in order to explore whether there are some situations or types of silences where silence can be intentionally or unintentionally collusive and serve both coach and athlete identities in specific ways. Additionally, another potentially valuable area of future research would be to examine how coaches' gender or other aspects of identity might function within hierarchies of sport to affect the silences that manifest in the context of the discussion of concussions. Of note, though the analysis of the multiple intersecting identities that coaches hold simultaneously would be valuable, this deconstructive methodology would be better served by an analysis more focused on structural/systemic power dynamics (. For example, a fitting study would be an examination of head coaches discussing concussions with particular attention to the intersections of heterosexism, societal gender expectations, and privilege.

Lastly, it is important to again highlight the importance of using varied methodologies and methods of analysis to study concussions. So much of this data would have been lost to traditional positivist theories of how research should be conducted and positivist understandings of the role and positionality of the researcher. Unique methods of study yield unique results (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014), and concussions should be studied from a variety of angles to best understand this complicated phenomenon.

Conclusion

Overall, this study provided a valuable opportunity to learn more about the ways that coaches manage concussions on their athletic teams, but also the ways in which different types of silences are produced, and how those silences function. When masked by silence, typical physiological conceptualizations of concussion sequelae can have dangerous consequences, but the consequences of ignoring sequelae that extend beyond the individual who was injured can be equally dire. This type of analysis was made possible by a deconstructive methodology that allowed the spaces between, the absent presences, to be conceptualized as data. Poststructuralist deconstructive methodology provided a structure for looking deeper into the silences and treat the depths of those silences as a new source of information. This methodology also allowed me to eschew fixed conceptualizations of meaning, and instead introduce "...new, different, and contingent meanings that are not fixed but open to resistance and change." (Jackson, 2001). The silences identified in this study represented only a portion of the possible silences in interviews, and the meanings discussed as a result of those specific silences represented only a portion of the potential meanings or understandings that could be gleaned from this particular data set. My hope as a researcher is that others will use the

information and methodology from this study to continue to better understand the silences that occur in discussions about concussion as well as the many silent articulations of concussion sequelae.

APPENDIX A

Interviewer _____

Participant (Name, sport, school)

Date _____ Location

Description of participant, environment, context or other pertinent information:

How did you get started in coaching?

What are your biggest concerns/challenges with the health and safety of your players?

How prepared do you feel to address and or manage those issue? What type of information would be useful in helping you address/manage those issues?

What do you think your role as a coach is in athlete health and safety? What's within the scope of your job and what's outside of the scope of your job?

What are your expectations when it comes to your athletes reporting illness or injury?

Speaking of concussions in particular, what do you see as the biggest challenge when it comes to concussion safety?

All things considered, what do you think the most important thing that coaches can do when it comes to concussion safety? Do most coaches do these things? If not, what do you think gets in the way?

***Support for following medical guidelines*

- Tell us about the medical staff that work with your team
- How often do you talk with them? What are those interactions like?
- What do you think about their approach to dealing with concussions?
- Does your school have concussion guidelines?
 - o How did you learn about these guidelines?
 - o What do you think about these guidelines?
 - o How useful do you think they are?
 - o Do they apply in all cases?

Have you ever had to complete a mandatory training related to coaching? Can you tell us things you disliked? Things you liked?

***If you were in charge of designing health and safety education for coaches, what would it look like? Whose opinions do you most trust?

Learning preferences

- From whom do you want to get information about concussions?

- Is there anything you want to learn about concussion?

APPENDIX B



APPROVAL OF SUBMISSION

June 17, 2016

[Emily Kroshus](#)

Emily.Kroshus@seattlechildrens.org

Dear Dr. [Emily Kroshus](#)

On 6/1/2016, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	PAC-12 Student-Athlete Project on Developing Coach Education
Investigator:	Emily Kroshus
Activity ID:	STUDY00000145
IRB ID:	STUDY00000145
Funding:	Name: PAC-12 Conference, Funding Source ID: eGC1A12289
Grant ID:	
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus group question guide- Aim 1, Category: Other; • Recruitment aim 1, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Recruitment aim 3, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Protocol clean, Category: IRB Protocol; • Coach Fact Sheet, Category: Other; • Coach survey (pre and post)- Aim 3, Category: Other; • Info sheet aim 1, Category: Consent Form; • Open ended written prompts- Aim 1, Category: Other; • Info sheet aim 3, Category: Consent Form;

The IRB approved the Initial Study from 6/1/2016 to 5/31/2017 inclusive. At least 45 calendar days prior to approval expiration, you are to submit a continuing review with required explanations. You can submit a continuing review by navigating to the active study and clicking Create Modification / CR.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 5/31/2017, approval of this study expires on that date.

To document consent, use the consent documents that were approved and stamped by the IRB. Go to the Documents tab to download them.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system.

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