

What Voice and Whose Story?

Applying Inoue's Habits of White Language to Mainstream Media Coverage of Police Violence in Ontario

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Abstract:

The persistence of police violence despite decades of criticism from impacted communities points to the systemic nature of discriminatory policing which is rooted in historic and ongoing colonialism, racism, and settler White supremacy. As settler conservatism constitutes the dominant political ideology in Canada, society and state institutions are influenced by this mode of thought, including policing and media institutions. While mainstream media coverage of police violence that does not scrutinize police actions is often explained through efforts to uphold media objectivity, as an institution that is steeped in settler conservatism it is important to understand how standards in media reporting may ultimately reproduce White supremacy. Asao B. Inoue speaks to the Habits of White Language whereby he identifies six patterns which, when present in a text and regardless of author intentionality, suggest that the text may contain and produce White supremacy (2021). Through secondary data analysis, this article maps the Habits of White Language onto the qualitative themes identified in a 2020 thematic discourse analysis of initial mainstream media reports on police use of lethal force in Ontario, Canada. Thus, the previously identified trends in mainstream reporting styles are explicitly framed within understandings of White supremacy.

Keywords: ***Keywords:*** policing; use of force; white supremacy; discourse; media; representation; framing.
