Over the last three decades, our research has largely focused on the social systems that contribute to and reinforce racism in Canadian society. The media are among the most powerful of these many institutions, as they help transmit its central cultural images, ideas, and symbols as well as a nation’s narratives and myths. Media discourse plays a large role in reproducing the collective belief system of the dominant White society and the core values of this society. Using discourse analysis as a central tool, we have analyzed how social power, dominance, and inequality are produced and resisted through text and talk. The coverage of issues affecting racialized minorities is filtered through the stereotypes, misconceptions, and erroneous assumptions of a largely White-dominated group of media institutions. The media’s images reinforce cultural racism and White hegemony.

Our approach identifies a constant and fundamental tension between the everyday experiences of racialized and indigenous people and the perceptions of publishers, editors, journalists, producers, broadcasters, and other media personnel, who have the power to redefine that reality. Over the years, we have continued to document the ways in which racism as ideology, policy, and praxis functions in media organizations. In all of our research and writing, we note how so-called liberal ideologies carry very different meanings, connotations, and consequences. We believe that notions of tolerance, accommodation, equality, fairness, and freedom of expression—central concepts in liberal media discourse—have immensely flexible meanings. Our work has been influenced by many scholars of discourse analysis, such as Teun van Dijk, Michel Foucault, and Stuart Hall. The framework we share is the belief that racialized discourse advances the interests of White hegemony and has an identifiable repertoire of ideas, words, images, and practices through which racism is advanced.

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One of the first media studies that we were involved in was a content analysis of *The Toronto Sun* called *Power without Responsibility*, published in 1985 (Ginzberg, 1985). The study was precipitated by the concern and frustration of a number of racial minority groups in Toronto that believed the *Sun* was consistently portraying people of colour and indigenous peoples in a highly prejudicial manner. Despite efforts by representatives of these communities to articulate their concerns over a number of years, the *Sun* refused to address the problem of racial bias in the newspaper. Working with researcher Effie Ginzberg and the Urban Alliance on Race Relations, we undertook a discourse analysis of 200 editorials and columns covering the period 1978 to 1985. The analysis revealed constant repetition of denigrating stereotypes of racialized communities, including Blacks, Muslims, South Asians, Southeast Asians, and indigenous people. *Sun* writers repeatedly used words and images that demonstrated their belief in biological racism.

Another important case study conducted by Henry was sponsored by Ryerson University’s Faculty of Journalism and initiated by Professor John Miller. In April 1994 in mid-town Toronto, three young Black men entered the Just Desserts Café demanding money and jewellery from the patrons. Around 20 people were held at gunpoint, and when several of them resisted, one of the assailants pulled out a sawed-off shotgun and shot a patron, who died shortly afterward. The robbers fled in a waiting car. The trial of the three men concluded in December 1999, with two found guilty and one not guilty. The media discourse around this event was framed as a moral panic about the need for law and order. Gun control was presented as the key issue, with little context. The “truth” being promoted was that young Black (Jamaican) men were responsible for the escalating violence in society and should be deported in great numbers. Race became a central focus in the controversies over the incident.

In 2002, we published a book entitled *Discourses of Domination: Racial Bias in the Canadian English-Language Press* (Henry & Tator, 2002), in which we continued to use discourse analysis to examine several other case studies that demonstrated racial bias in the mass media. In another research study, *Deconstructing the “Rightness of Whiteness” in Television Commercials, News and Programming* (Henry & Tator, 2003), we turned again to a discursive analysis of racial bias. News stories were found to have a number of common racialized themes, including immigration, crime, cultural differences, poverty, unemployment, tensions between groups, and discrimination against racialized minority communities. We found that local newscasts were dominated by stories about White people who saw the world through a prism of whiteness. A pilot study of six Canadian television programs also found that the prism of whiteness provided a powerful filter. The dominant discourses and representations in these programs reinforced the construct of whiteness as the normative universe, a society in which essentially “all others,” including people of colour—and especially Blacks and indigenous peoples—are constructed as “problem” people.

Among the significant challenges that we believe still need to be addressed by scholars is the failure of anti-racism scholars to grapple with the interlocking web of racism that intersects with the various institutions in our society. The production and reproduction of racism does not happen within the hermetically
sealed walls of the media, nor is it confined to the specific organizational norms and decision-making processes of particular structures. Media culture and its structures are a composite of ideologies, values, norms, and practices that are deeply connected with and embedded in diverse societal systems such as governance, policing, justice, education, and cultural production. We believe that White elites in all of our public spheres heavily influence and strongly control many ideological beliefs, which in turn affect public discourse and public responses to the critical issue of race and racism in democratic liberal societies. It is important to stress that the discourses of democratic racism flow across sectors. For example, the racialized discourses of policing authorities related to so-called “Black crime” reverberate in the rhetoric that flows from the newsroom and from the talk-show host. In the same way, the discourse of racialization is simultaneously used by the media and politicians to establish the danger of “Muslim radicalism,” “illegal immigration,” and “Asian and Black gangs,” for example.

A second challenge that confronts anti-racism scholars is that while many of us are documenting and deconstructing racialized discourses and ideologies of the elites, it is equally important to pay closer attention to the non-dominant/oppositional voices of racialized and indigenous communities, who are challenging the dominant narratives, myths, and racialized images that have done so much to shape everyday dominant discourse in the media as well as in other social domains. There is a need to identify and analyze oppositional discourses that can seriously challenge the hegemonic order and disrupt the status quo. We hold to the notion that social change is dialectical and discursive in nature. Diverse ethno-racial communities and networks of individuals are beginning to cross cultural, racial, and other social boundaries in a search for common ground from which to resist the dominant practices of cultural producers and other social, cultural, and political leaders. Despite the significant increase in research on media practices and policies since our pioneering work 25 years ago, there is still the need to challenge the inadequate numbers of racialized owners and senior managers of media organizations, as well as the still stereotypic representation of racialized people and communities.

References