

“Covid-19 Anti-Vaxxers, White Supremacist Suicidality and Racialized ‘Risk’”

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Much of the discourse around vaccination hesitancy or refusal focuses on Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities, pointing to historical injustices as underwriting their understandable reluctance. In this talk, I link certain anti-Covid-19 vaccination sentiments with a particular form of supremacist whiteness, organized around a narrative of white masculine victimhood for the sake people of color, and other marginalized groups. Drawing on a variety of empirical and philosophical sources, I outline – and situate vaccination refusal within – the investments, contours, and webs-of-belief characteristic of this cissexist, heterocapitalist, and xenophobic form of whiteness. The apparent suicidality of these antivaxxers is, I argue, the logical outcome of a politics of purity organized around racial resentment and can be counted among other self-defeating biopolitical choices (such as Medicaid expansion refusal) that have led to a recent drop in white life expectancy in the US – a phenomena Jonathan Metzl terms “dying for whiteness”. This form of supremacist whiteness, and the individual and collective biopolitics it espouses, poses a far greater risk to the health and well-being of members of BIPOC communities than historical biomedical injustices.

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