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Published online: 18 Aug 2023.

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The White gaze: epistemological imposition and paradoxical logic in educational research

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ABSTRACT

This article critically examines the constraints associated with mainstream ethnographic research, including methodologies, analyses, epistemologies, and logic, herein referred to as the White gaze, a reinforcement of White supremacy. The focus is on how the White gaze infringes upon Black epistemologies and BIPOC epistemologies more broadly. The study highlights the pioneering work of Du Bois' "The Philadelphia Negro" a notable ethnographic study that transcends the limitations of the White gaze. It emphasizes the importance of incorporating concepts, perspectives, and language that stem from intimacy and rapport, allowing for a comprehensive representation of the diversity and nuances within Black communities. Furthermore, the article addresses the detrimental impact of mainstream research on Black communities resulting from the White gaze. It exposes the historical absence, denial, and discrediting of decades worth of BIPOC-centric research and resources to advance their communities' well-being. Drawing on various scholarly sources (Fenwick, 2022; Foster, 1994; Horsford, 2021; Morris, 2015; Smith, 1999; Stanfield & Dennis, 1993; Walker, 2013; Wright, 2019; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008), it highlights the systemic barriers hindering the dissemination and recognition of BIPOC knowledge. This article highlights the omnipresence of the White gaze in academic research—specifically, its effect on educational research and practices shaping school culture—that prevents, for example, Black epistemologies from informing research on Black students. And lastly, offers implications for educational research and practice.

My goal with this paper is to highlight the *White gaze* inherent to mainstream ethnographic research, methods, analysis, and logic; and its contribution to pervasive stereotypes regarding Black community life and culture. The White gaze is indicative of academic research conducted by White men and others in service of White supremacy. It is a ubiquitous and omnipotent academic tool that shapes popular discourses and perceptions of Black and other racially minoritized people (BIPOC) in society (Bainazarov et al., 2022; Bonilla-Silva & Zuberi, 2008; Dei & Adhami, 2022; Morrison, 1998; Wright, 2019; Young, 2008; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008).

The concept of the White gaze, as observed in academic research, significantly impacts the epistemologies of various BIPOC communities (Stanfield & Dennis, 1993; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). *Epistemological imposition* (de Sousa Santos, 2014) occurs when the analysis and logic of White perspectives are prioritized over the perspectives and knowledge of Black individuals (Fenwick, 2022; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). These pervasive norms are most detrimental, particularly when Black communities and children are the central focus of research. Scholars across

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disciplines have expressed concerns regarding the racial and epistemological implications of mainstream research tools influenced by the White gaze and their broader societal consequences (de Sousa Santos, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Gordon, 1990; Khalifa, 2018; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Stanfield & Dennis, 1993; Tillman, 2002, 2006; Wright, 2022; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). Regardless of intention, the outcomes of the White gaze and subsequent epistemological imposition lead to the dissemination of inappropriate and ineffective strategies for educating Black children, thereby adversely affecting the overall well-being of Black and other racially minoritized communities (e.g., Du Bois, 1899).

This article aims to highlight the omnipresence of the White gaze in academic research and its impact on how academics conduct research. I argue that the White gaze functions as an epistemological barrier that prevents other ways of believing, knowing, and experiencing educational research and education (e.g., Bainazarov et al., 2022; Dei & Adhami, 2022; Du Bois, 1899; Smith, 1999; Wright, 2019). Furthermore, I aim to complicate omnipotent discourses of objectivity in mainstream academic research influenced by the White gaze. I want to emphasize the contribution of these academic research norms to the current disparate state of US education for Black and other racialized communities. And lastly, highlight BIPOC research from beyond the White gaze.

White supremacy and the logic of the White gaze

In this article, I conceptualize that the White gaze is inherently oppositional to Black and other minoritized groups' epistemologies. The White gaze and its inherent epistemological imposition are exemplified by what Bonilla-Silva and Zuberi (2008) referred to as *White logic*. White logic is the context of White supremacy that has defined mainstream research techniques and processes. *White logic* anchors White supremacy's imagination and premise—that elite White men's culture, knowledge, science, and history are omnipotent and universal. Thus, White logic marginalizes all *other* cultures, knowledge, science, and history.

Consequently, BIPOC communities are deemed to be deficient and lacking in the attributes associated with and determined appropriate by White logic. White logic historicizes itself and "grants eternal objectivity to the views of elite Whites and condemns the views of non-whites to perpetual subjectivity" (Bonilla-Silva & Zuberi, 2008, p. 17). Despite this, as Du Bois (1899) argued, the best available research methods are inherently inaccurate. And that the most careful researchers are fundamentally doubtful regarding the errors associated with the statistical method, general observations, and, most of all, the personal biases, moral convictions, unconscious learnings, and prejudices of the researcher. Furthermore, Stanfield (2008) examined "numerous examples in history of sociological research of mystical, magical, and theocratic reasoning masquerading as scientific theory testing and theory building" (p. 276). The life and work of Ellwood Cubberley (1868-1941), a former professor and the head of Stanford University's College of Education from 1898 to 1933, embodies White logic. Cubberley is widely regarded as the architect of the modern school model, encompassing various elements such as the scientific, corporate, and factory school models. His beliefs and works significantly contributed to the development of educational administration and its principles. Cubberley's perspectives were influenced by Greek and Roman mythology, philosophy, and Westernized and Eurocentric interpretations of Christianity, which guided his approach toward the "advancement" of "backward" people (Marsh et al., 2022). It is, therefore, incumbent on BIPOC members to locate and resist the epistemological imposition of the White gaze, its claims of uninfluenced objectivity, and infallible science.

The arguments highlighted in this paper are not novel; rather, they are situated in over a century of critical work by Black and marginalized scholars, intellectuals, and a few White sociologists and researchers critical of the White gaze's epistemological imposition (de Sousa Santos, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Du Bois, 1899; Morris, 2015; Smith, 1999; Stanfield & Dennis, 1993;

Willinsky, 2000; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). Murray (1973) suggested that given basic US history, Blacks in the US should look at academic research and the social science field that it came from with "unrelenting suspicion" (p. 112). Furthermore, he urged that Blacks should "never forget that the group in power is always likely to use every means at its disposal to create the impression that it deserves to be where it is" (p. 112). Despite often thinly veiled efforts to cloak academic research in social justice, diversity, equity and inclusion discourses, and rhetoric, the White gaze's impact on academic and educational research continues its deleterious patterns against Black and minoritized communities and the educational experiences of their children (Patel, 2015; Wright, 2022). These deleterious patterns and detriments reverberate throughout Black communities with devastating long-term sociopolitical and socioeconomic consequences.

Social science researchers argue that academic research is conducted almost exclusively from the White gaze, but resistant efforts, albeit marginal, have occurred from the very beginning (Bainazarov et al., 2022; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Du Bois, 1899; Murray, 1973; Stanfield & Dennis, 1993; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). Attempts to conduct educational research beyond the White gaze—from alternative epistemological standpoints—began to emerge two decades ago (Gordon, 1990; Stanfield & Dennis, 1993). In the following section, I elaborate on the three main conceptual ideas in this paper: (a) the White gaze, (b) epistemological imposition, and (c) BIPOC-informed research. The discussion of these concepts is followed by a literature review, highlighting the White gaze's stronghold on research, followed by some alternative epistemological standpoints beyond the White gaze. The literature review follows a discussion section, implications, future studies, and a conclusion.

The White gaze: epistemological imposition and BIPOC-informed research

In this article, I critically examine and highlight the presence of the White gaze in academic research and its detrimental impact. I emphasize how the White gaze limits alternative approaches to research, enforces Eurocentric epistemologies onto Black and other communities of color, and perpetuates White supremacy. I present concrete examples illustrating the harm inflicted by the White gaze upon BIPOC communities, their epistemologies, and overall well-being. Additionally, research is explored that demonstrates resistance to and divergence from the White gaze, and alternative perspectives and frameworks are offered (see Figure 1).
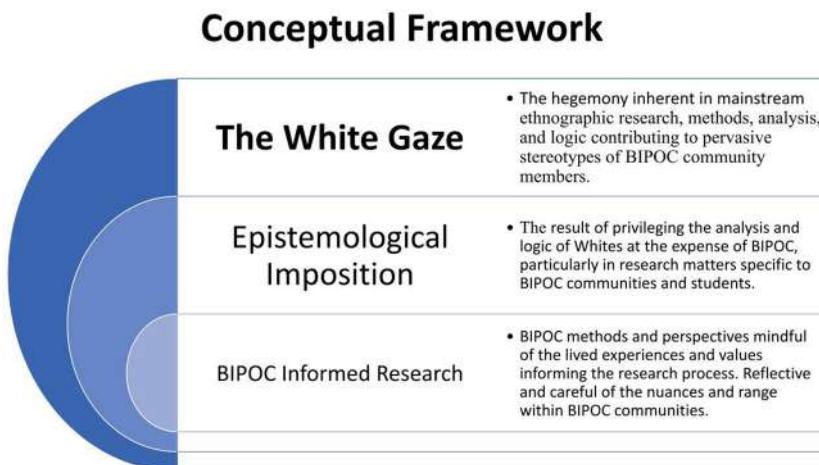

Conceptual Framework

The White Gaze	• The hegemony inherent in mainstream ethnographic research, methods, analysis, and logic contributing to pervasive stereotypes of BIPOC community members.
Epistemological Imposition	• The result of privileging the analysis and logic of Whites at the expense of BIPOC, particularly in research matters specific to BIPOC communities and students.
BIPOC Informed Research	• BIPOC methods and perspectives mindful of the lived experiences and values informing the research process. Reflective and careful of the nuances and range within BIPOC communities.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework: the White gazes' epistemological imposition.

The White gaze

Young (2008) described the logic of the White ethnographic gaze in the 1960s as "intense and elaborate research, analysis, and argument" regarding the culture and lives of Blackamericans (p. 180). Essentially, research conducted by White men from the White gaze about Black people shaped and continues to influence the trajectory of academic learning, what is considered knowledge, and who are considered the *knowers*. Additionally, popular discourses depicted Blackamericans as a "needy population … who lived lifestyles in severe contrast with middle-class America" (Young, 2008, p. 180). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) described qualitative research as working in the service of coloniality by representing BIPOC to the White world as *Other*: "Sadly, qualitative research, in many if not all of its forms (observation, participation, interviewing, ethnography), serve as a metaphor for colonial knowledge, for power, and for truth" (p. 1). Otherwise, these White gaze approaches to research contrast Du Bois's methodology, as Morris (2015) highlighted:

> Du Bois's sociological analyses, based on surveys, ethnographic research, massive interviews, and participant observation, took him behind cultural stereotypes of the black masses, enabling him to realistically describe the conditions with which they struggled, conditions that were unknown to the public, and most social scientists. (p. 42)

In a 1998 interview on the "Charlie Rose Show," Toni Morrison was asked about incessantly writing about race, specifically the lives and experiences of Black people to the exclusion of Whites. Accordingly, Morrison (1998) stressed that the question itself was insulting. She stated, "as if our lives have no meaning, and no depth without the White gaze." Morrison worked to embrace and preserve her identity as a Black woman and fought to evade the influence of the White gaze in her writings. Her perceptions were shaped by recognizing some literature from other racialized persons; she "could feel the address of the narrator over my shoulder talking to… somebody White. I could tell because they are explaining things that they did not have to explain if they were talking to me." The ramifications of research conducted from the White gaze have potently influenced public policy and educational and cultural norms that continue reverberating throughout society. Thus, being, living, thinking, and writing beyond the White gaze is a source of freedom for Black and racialized people. Those predisposed to do so must anticipate and be diligent against multiple attacks from White supremacy's defenses and defenders.

Epistemological imposition

Morrison (1992) declared that "the readers of virtually all of American fiction have been positioned as white" (xii). Further expanding on Morris, Willinsky (2000) contended, "This positioning acts as a form of deracination that encourages white readers to see their situation as 'universal'" (p. 218). Sociologists and social science ethnographers, and researchers from various races, ethnicities, and backgrounds from across disciplines, including education, have, for over a century, warned about the implications of racialization and epistemological imposition in research (Collins, 2007; de Sousa Santos, 2014; Dei & Adhami, 2022; Du Bois, 1899; Gordon, 1990; Khalifa, 2018; Murray, 1973; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Stanfield & Dennis, 1993; Tillman, 2002, 2006; Wright, 2019, 2022; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008).

Du Bois (1899) innovated the community survey as a research instrument, and many BIPOC scholars consider him the founder of modern sociology in the US. However, his research and contributions to the discipline are primarily denied and ignored by mainstream sociologists (Morris, 2015; Patel, 2015; Stanfield, 2008). Du Bois was finally recognized by the President of the American Sociological Association (ASA) as one of the founders of American sociology. Stanfield (2008) argued, though, "such recognition does not even begin to scrape the surface of understanding the profound influences Du Bois had in crafting of professional sociology in both Europe

and in the United States" (p. 280). Further, Morris (2015) declared that there was an intriguing secret regarding sociology's US origins: "The first school of scientific sociology in the United States was founded by a black professor located in a historically black university in the South. This reality flatly contradicts the accepted wisdom" (p. 1).

Stanfield (1993) suggested that mainstream social scientists are predisposed to essentialize race and ethnicity-based research due to the ubiquitous nature of highly racialized content in mainstream US history, society, and culture. And additionally, social science research was epistemologically universal, and social scientists are informed by precolonial and enlightenment era tropes of superiority and inferiority. Further, he noted social scientists are part of a race-centered society and that we should not expect them "to be any different from other citizens in having been socialized to accept race-laden assumptions" about people and society (Stanfield, 1993, p. 17).

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) presciently reminded us, "Colonizing nations relied on the human disciplines, especially, sociology and anthropology, to produce knowledge about strange and foreign worlds" (p. 1). In her critique of mainstream research, Smith (1999) cited one of its most prolific categories, positivism and positivist attitudes toward research, arguing that positivists take for granted the notion that research is "an objective, value-free and scientific process for observing and making sense of human realities" (p. 164). Various BIPOC ethnographers and researchers have pushed back heavily against these mainstream and positivist suggestions. In contrast, they argued that these notions are not objective or neutral; they resemble the societies and histories of those from whom they derived—biased and offensive (Battiste, 2013; Murray, 1973; Patel, 2015; Zuberi, 2008).

Additionally, Zuberi (2008) highlighted the role of eugenics in the early constructs of mainstream empirical social science. He argued, "many quantitative studies of racial difference fail to place race within a social context, thus allowing the faulty assumption that the existence of race relations could be benign" (p. 127). This section offered insight into the various descriptions of the White gaze and epistemological imposition in social science and research on BIPOC communities.

Educational impacts

The damage caused by the research logic and practices informed by the White gaze in education is staggering (Bainazarov et al., 2022; Fenwick, 2022; Wright, 2022). Mainstream educational research is foundational to every aspect of educational culture and practice (Battiste, 2013; Dei & Adhami, 2022; Fenwick, 2022; Foster, 1994; Irby, 2021; Lopez, 2021; Patel, 2015; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Smith, 1999; Tillman, 2002, 2002, 2006). Its policies, leadership strategies, curriculum, various preparation programs, and all of its reforms and reform efforts are products of mainstream research tools informed by the White gaze. Consequently, contemporary educational systems and norms are products of the White gaze. Furthermore, these practices foster the epistemological impositions underscored by Black educational researchers, frequently discussed in terms of disconnects and *gaps*—some of which I highlight in this section (Wright & Kim, 2023).

Fenwick (2022) argued that contemporary disconnects between Black educators and students are rooted in the implementation of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. She argued that the new, post-Brown unitary system was to be controlled by Whites. As a result, "Black principals were not to be heads of schools with Black teachers and Black children. The number of White principals was to be increased" (Fenwick, 2022, p. 10). In other words, Whites were to lead predominantly White and integrated schools and would also replace Black principals in the dwindling number of predominantly Black schools.

Khalifa (2018) explored longstanding disconnects between schools, Black and other minoritized students, and the communities they claim to serve. He acknowledged historical differences between how Black *community-based* epistemologies differentiated from *school-based* or

school-centric epistemologies. These school-based or school-centric epistemologies, I contend, are products of the White gaze. Bonilla-Silva and Zuberi (2008) argued for "epistemic liberation from the White logic" (p. 23) by resisting research methods from the White gaze shaping and producing racial knowledge in the academe and society. Tillman's (2002) culturally sensitive research thesis found that although Black epistemologies should inform qualitative research designs about Black people and their children in education, in fact, these scholars are largely missing from mainstream discourses and publications. As White educational researchers themselves, Scheurich and Young (1997) warned that the lack of response and engagement with epistemological racism and imposition is due to a "lack of understanding among researchers as to how race is a critically significant epistemological problem in educational research" (p. 4). Foster (1994) addressed how Black communities are socialized by their local epistemologies and later through the White gaze, school, or, as she describes, "the mainstream culture" (p. 131). Stanfield (1993) argued that "the acts of imposing the experiences of the dominant on the subordinate" (p. 34) tend to promote ideologies and do not advance scientific knowledge production. The outcomes of the White gaze and the subsequent epistemological imposition are many. One of the most significant ones is exemplified by political strategies to isolate Black political power from educating Black children, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

BIPOC-informed research

> Until lions tell the tale, the story of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.
>
> —African Proverb

Some social scientists have argued that mainstream academic research is fundamentally hegemonic, racially, and ethnically discriminatory (Bainazarov et al., 2022; Stanfield, 2008; Williams, 1993). Patel (2015) contended that "education research … has played a deleterious role in perpetuating and refreshing colonial relationships …" (p. 12). These hegemonic and discriminatory arguments are amplified by examining Du Bois (1899) seminal research study, *The Philadelphia Negro*, and its place in history as a ground-breaking empirical qualitative and quantitative social study. Before *The Philadelphia Negro*, no research on any group of people in the United States was as methodologically comprehensive as Du Bois' (Morris, 2015). Despite this fact, Du Bois was long denied entry into the canons of the social science discipline (Morris, 2015). For decades, mainstream sociology and social scientists have attributed the foundations of scientific methodology as a product of the Chicago School. Nonetheless, Morris (2015) illustrated that two decades before the Chicago School movement, "Du Bois had already made the most distinctive contribution to American sociology [*The Philadelphia Negro*, 1899] … rooted in the idea that sociology was an empirical science consisted of producing community studies and theoretical formulations based on empirical methodology" (p. 4).

Up to this point, I have highlighted critiques of the White gaze from BIPOC and critical White sociology and social science ethnographers and researchers spanning more than a century. These critiques focus on qualitative and quantitative methods that produce racial knowledge, resulting in epistemological imposition. The idea of resisting epistemological imposition is further clarified by Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva (2008) call for an *epistemology of racial emancipation*—a relentless critique of research and research methods producing racial knowledge informed by the White gaze: "The epistemology of racial emancipation has as its goal the elevation of the human by the elimination of White supremacy" (p. 335).

BIPOC social scientists have gone to great lengths to deconstruct White gaze-informed research discourses that have made us a *problem*. For example, deconstructing social science discourses such as educational achievement gaps and life chances, determined and erected by the White gaze (Collins, 2007; Smith, 1999; Stanfield & Dennis, 1993; Wright & Kim, 2023; Zuberi &

Bonilla-Silva, 2008). Black anthropologist Williams (1993) called for research approaches that cease to treat responses and reactions to "oppression and discrimination as abnormal behavior" (p. 135). Williams (1993) further critiqued, "Social scientists examining the cities of the world and the racial relations therein have failed to discover the common denominators that underlie the oppression and discrimination they have found" (p. 136).

Additionally, mainstream ethnographers and social science researchers' solutions to US racial *problems* called for assimilation and slow and evolutionary processes of racial change. On the other hand, a long tradition of dissidents and critiques from BIPOC scholars to the White gaze in social science research have strongly opposed mainstream processes. Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva (2008) contended that the "critique of what has been known as 'the sociology of race relations' has thus been intrinsically connected to the politics of resistance and decolonization projects" (p. 331).

How mainstream research informed by the White gaze framed BIPOC members is directly correlated to the range in hostility and critique by members of BIPOC communities. Smith's (1999) discussion on Maori research and their perspectives on research is exemplary:

> Maori is marked by a history that has shaped the attitudes and feelings Maori people have held towards research. Research is implicated in the production of Western knowledge, in the nature of academic work, in the production of theories which have dehumanized Maori and in practices which have contributed to privilege Western ways of knowing, while denying the validity for Maori knowledge, language, and culture. (p. 183)

Thus, BIPOC community members must amplify their contributions to meaningful research and other alternatives that improve their living conditions according to their lived realities, best interests, and well-being.

Utilizing qualitative research tools beyond the White gaze

Throughout this paper, I have illustrated that Du Bois (1899) *The Philadelphia Negro* is the gold standard of social science research—quantitative and qualitative—beyond the White gaze. However, this section highlights two contemporary examples of qualitative research cognizant of and operating beyond the White gaze.

Paris (2019) used the concept of the White gaze to identify and analyze the violence and erasure caused by educational research discourses and rhetoric. He posited that "educational research often calls us out our names, meaning that educational researchers often name people and communities not as they are but as the academy needs them to be along damaging logic of erasure and deficiency" (p. 217). The White gaze normalizes violent and oppressive educational research terms. For example, terms such as urban, minority, underserved, and at-risk in naming Black and other minoritized students are erasure terms meant to avoid "the prominence of race, racialization, and racism" (p. 218). In addition, terms like non-White, minority, and diverse "are always filtered through the White gaze in that they are explicitly and implicitly set against Whiteness as the norm" (p. 218). These *erasure terms* and *calling us out our names,* as mentioned by Paris (2019), mirror what Walcott (2018) referred to as *obscuring language.* The logic of obscuring language circumvent the specific histories and experiences of BIPOC, which leaves structures of White supremacy and antiblackness unaltered. White supremacy and antiblackness are cornerstones of Western institutions and organizations such as schools (Walcott, 2018). These obscuring language and erasure terms exemplify the epistemological imposition caused by the White gaze, as I have argued throughout this paper.

From beyond "the gaze of the White mainstream," Marc Lamont Hill (2018) analyzed the formation of critical, racial, and sociopolitical discourses at the start of the Black Lives Matter Movement post-Ferguson (p. 288). Hill examined the role of Black Twitter in enabling critical pedagogy and political organizing to help shape and amplify acts of resistance to anti-Black state

violence in the United States. Hill named these pedagogical tools *digital counterpublics* that reveal violent surveillance designed to monitor, control, and discipline Black bodies—part of a long history "from flesh branding and slave catcher patrols to McCarthyism and COINTELPRO" (p. 290).

Paris (2019) and Hill (2018) illustrate the liberatory potential of common research tools when utilized beyond the White gaze. Historically, academic research in general and educational research specifically proceeds from the White gaze, which in turn silences and devalues alternate epistemological standpoints (Stanfield & Dennis, 1993; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). This epistemological imposition in research has been called out on multiple fronts. In these two examples, Paris and Hill each utilize conventional qualitative research tools from unconventional epistemological standpoints and a distinctly Black perspective, which brings me to Audre Lorde's (2018) conviction that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." However, Lorde's declaration needs to be unpacked. Are these tools really the master's, or are they products of colonization, pillage, and ill-gotten wealth from kidnapping and enslavement? Furthermore, other than because he commissioned himself such, why would BIPOC members continue referring to White men as master?

The master's tools are not his and never were: the White gaze and academic research

Audre Lorde is recognized as a brilliant poet, activist, and literary scholar who has helped generations of women and men grapple with issues of racism, Black feminism, identity, and dominance. She is rightfully recognized as a giant amongst her peers. However, her assertion that the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house raises some issues that scholars have challenged conceptually and practically. Words matter, and problematic and violent words, ideas, and concepts, born of colonization and enslavement, should be rejected and resisted, no matter how ubiquitous and palatable they have become. Thus, the terms *master*, *his tools,* and *his house* must be re-classified.

For example, the master of who/what? BIPOC should remain diligently mindful that the master is a colonizer and enslaver whose actions brought centuries of death and destruction to an innumerable collective of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. The *master*—enslaver/colonizer's—*tools* are the product of pillage and plunder, and *his house is* built upon colonized and stolen lands and by the hands of the enslaved. It is beyond the scope of this paper to expound further, except to show how BIPOC epistemologies, beyond the White gaze, shift how research is conducted, analyzed, and concluded, as exemplified by Paris (2019) and Hill (2018). The master's tools, relative to research, originate from violence and are therefore not neutral and, in many instances, looted from colonized and oppressed people. As such, we can re-imagine and re-use these tools differently (Stanfield & Dennis, 1993; Willinsky, 2000; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008).

Problematizing the White gaze in research

Researchers and scholars have criticized the idea of neutrality in research, its claim to know and classify everything, and its problematic origins—anthropology, geography, and ethnography—pivotal to colonization and imperialism (Battiste, 2013; Dei & Adhami, 2022; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Du Bois, 1899; Foster, 1994; Patel, 2015; Smith, 1999; Stanfield & Dennis, 1993; Willinsky, 2000; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). In ethnography, for example, intimacy, rapport, and trust must be established between researchers and those they research. However, Young (2008) noted the irony in that the "classic and most highly regarded studies of African Americans have been produced by White American sociologists" (p. 179), influential in shaping negative discourses regarding Black community members. This irony is rooted in the thought of intimacy and rapport between White American sociologists and Black people. On the contrary, this relationship reflects

four decades of hostile research from the gaze of White men, beginning in the 1960s regarding the social organization and culture of Black communities.

Additionally, Willinsky (2000) pointed out how White sociologists' social and organizational research of Blacks in the 1960s reflects the early colonial order of classifying and naming *new* places and people. The colonizer's practices of classifying and "naming was to think about the world, one might say on one's own terms" (Willinsky, 2000, p. 36). Smith (1999) identified how researchers and academics may perceive their research as service to a greater good for humanity or emancipatory goals for oppressed communities, but that such a belief, "although a primary outcome of scientific research is as much a reflection of ideology as it is of academic training" (p. 2). Foster (1994) argued the colonial origins of modern educational research and its dichotomous foundations—haves/have nots, powerful/powerless, self/other, and more—are exacerbated by researchers' sociopolitical perspectives and experiences.

Proponents of research-based education argue that a cumulative body of relevant knowledge is the criteria for a profession to be considered evidence-based (Biesta, 2007; Hargreaves & Agency, 1996). Thus, what do we say about the profession of education and its efforts to educate Black students, especially when nearly 100 years of cumulative knowledge from Black epistemologies informing the profession is missing—particularly from competent Black educators regarding the school experiences of Black children (Fenwick, 2022; Foster, 1994; Tillman, 2004; Walker, 2013)?

Black freedom and equality: a radical threat to the White gaze

Education has a long history of enactment through and from the White gaze. Consequently, educating Black children from the purview of the Black experience, and informed by Black epistemologies, has an equally long history of resistance and opposition from educators and actors seeing and living through the White gaze. Black communities emerged from enslavement in the mid-1860s with a strong desire to learn and formed self-reliant, self-controlled, and nurturing educational institutions for their children for a century, despite enormous obstacles (Anderson, 1988; Fenwick, 2022; Tillman, 2004; Walker, 1996). These educational institutions were met with astonishment and contempt by White onlookers, missionaries, and various others from Northern states (Anderson, 1988; Watkins, 2001). Anderson's (1988) research on the education of Black students in the South between 1860 and 1935 highlighted how the formerly enslaved departed from their enslavers' ideology of education. Southern Blacks' educational aims and efforts were fundamentally political, radical, and threatening to the plantation owners' conceptions of education for Blacks. Thus, the political struggle for Black control of education and its opposition and resistance is deeply rooted (Wright, 2022).

Black educational experiences are fundamental to the educational sanctity of Black education and excellence, even though mainstream education has denied and overlooked both this history and over a century of empirical evidence regarding Black education. Yet, focusing on strides in Black educational research does not align with the logic of the White gaze and is counterproductive to White supremacy. In turn, the excellent aspects inherent in the 100 years of segregated pre-*Brown* schooling are denied, much like the erasure or marginalization of over four centuries of Black excellence and achievements in the United States, including Du Bois's scholarship and ground-breaking work in the social sciences and ethnography. Thus is White supremacy and its logic informing the White gaze.

Discussion

In this article, I bring together three separate concepts—the White gaze, epistemological imposition, and BIPOC-informed research. This article and its concepts contribute to over a century of

analysis and critique of the White gaze's dominance in academic research and epistemological imposition against BIPOC communities. I contribute to a relatively thin literature review of the epistemological imposition occurring throughout the social sciences and educational research, which is resulting in the White gaze adversely shaping the lives of BIPOC communities and their children in school (Gordon, 1990; Khalifa, 2018; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Stanfield & Dennis, 1993; Tillman, 2002; Young, 2008). In addition, this conceptualization of the White gaze and its epistemological imposition contributes to understanding the root of BIPOC social science scholars' and researchers' critiques of mainstream social science research and ethnography, as well as examples of alternative approaches. The literature review highlights a long history of opposition to mainstream research logic—BIPOC-informed research and approaches first cited at the turn of the nineteenth century (Bainazarov et al., 2022; Collins, 2007; Dei & Adhami, 2022; Du Bois, 1899; Hill, 2018; Marsh et al., 2022; Paris, 2019; Smith, 1999; Stanfield & Dennis, 1993; Wright, 2022; Wright & Kim, 2023; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008).

One strength of this article is the damning evidence about the harm of the White gaze and the epistemological imposition that are canonical in academic research and practice. One of the limitations of this paper is that I offer minimal, if any, effort to show positive outputs from mainstream social science and ethnographic research. Examples of positive outcomes may be cited and recognized. However, that is not the aim of this paper and is beyond its scope.

Implications: emerging questions and new insights

Academic research—methods, protocols, quality, relevance, and its origins—have been called into question across various fields, from the social sciences to education (Bainazarov et al., 2022; Battiste, 2013; Biesta, 2007; Dei & Adhami, 2022; Foster, 1994; Gage, 1989; Gordon, 1990; Khalifa, 2018; Paris, 2019; Patel, 2015; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Smith, 1999; Tillman, 2002). Moreover, given the substantial critiques regarding the political and subjective nature of academic research, one important question calls the profession into question: How are *we* to be taken seriously about the *problem* of Black education when over a century of cumulative knowledge from Black epistemologies informing the education of Black children is denied (Anderson, 1988; Fenwick, 2022; Foster, 1994; Foster & Tillman, 2009; Lomotey, 1989; Tillman, 2004; Walker, 1996, 2013)? This question pertains to the years between 1865 and 1964, the Jim Crow years of segregation in which Black educators educated Black children in Black norms with Black epistemologies. Since *Brown v. Board of Education*, we have—from the lens of the White gaze—experimented with the hope of integration and equality promised by *Brown* nearly 70 years ago. Fenwick (2022) argued that White resistance to *Brown* in the early 1970s "decimated the Black principal and teacher pipeline and intentionally resulted in massive demotions and dismissals of exceptionally credentialled Black educators" (p. 2).

As a result, modern, post-*Brown* schools have contributed to the miseducation and underdevelopment of some of the most powerful Black minds. Black children are not provided safe schools with loving and caring educators. Black children rank among the bottom in nearly all significant academic and learning measures and, conversely, rank at the top in the most punitive measures, such as suspension, expulsion, and school arrests (Wright & Kim, 2023). In addition to the anti-Black violence, racism, and other inequities being hurled at historically minoritized communities in the United States, social media platforms and other outlets have begun exposing its historical depth and omnipresence (Hill, 2018).

The minds of present and future generations of Black students need nurturing environments and preparation, which can no longer be compromised, as the literal future of Black America, and dare I say America, is at stake. History has prepared us to expect strong opposition from the usual suspects, defenders, and supporters of White supremacy and its various tools, such as the White gaze in research. History has also shown us that the best interests of Black people, on the

terms of Black people, have always been deemed threatening and subsequently attacked, and we should expect nothing less. These implications I am proposing are not new, just long over-due. The Civil Rights Era offers (a) a roadmap of what Black political empowerment beyond the White gaze can accomplish and (b) the force by which educating Black students on the terms of Black educators and communities will be undermined and resisted.

Applications future studies and conclusion

As a long-term strategy for the sake of a Black future, we must be unapologetic about the vio-lence that research from the White gaze toward Black communities has inflicted upon Black stu-dents in schools. Researchers in Black communities and on Black students should not only identify, reflect, and reject violent White gaze approaches to research but also embrace values like respect and rapport and avoid essentialist tropes. Mainstream research conducted from the White gaze should be avoided at all costs. Such costs will include criticism from resourceful aca-demics in positions of power who have established their careers using research methods informed by the White gaze. But, if striving for caring and nurturing environments for BIPOC children is the goal, such obstacles must be anticipated, navigated, and overcome. Appropriate role model-ing and representation of Black women and men researchers and educators who accommodate the nuance and range of the Black experience and culture must be the driving force behind educational decisions. Consequently, environments where Black children love school and learning will ensue. These efforts can transform the current educational trajectory and future of Black America and the United States as a whole.

Indeed, the literature review emphatically outlined the damage caused by White researchers studying Black and other minoritized communities from the White gaze. Notwithstanding, in 1899, Du Bois called attention to the depth, scale, and intricacy of the *problems* of Blacks in a way never done before. Du Bois's critique of mainstream research included notions of objectivity, the social distance from and lack of contact with Blacks, championed by White and mainstream researchers. This method of distance (i.e., objectivity), he suggests, is useful in preserving White researchers' preconceived conclusions about Blacks that could be disturbed by facts (Du Bois, 1899, 1903; Morris, 2015).

Perhaps Du Bois, with the care, precision, and innovation of his Philadelphia study, unwittingly placed a bullseye on the back of Blacks by suggesting researchers focus on the *problems* faced by Blacks and the rich data and sources that he was instrumental in excavating. Researchers, he suggested, should "seek to extract from a complicated mass of facts the tangible evidence of a social atmosphere surrounding Negroes, which differs from that surrounding most whites" (Du Bois, 1899, p. 8). White researchers and others conducting research through the violence of the White gaze have built lofty careers collecting data and analyzing the *problems* with Black and other minoritized communities and their children (Wright & Kim, 2023). As a result, not all, but far too many White researchers—including, to a lesser degree, people of color and members from minoritized communities—have contributed to much of the wreckage regarding the condi-tion of Black education, and consequently, Black communities overall. Du Bois's well-meaning suggestion may have caused a *scramble for Africa*[1] type of response and effect. We need to reverse these mainstream research norms. Researchers must look at the pathology of White supremacy and those who openly and silently uphold it and those who deem their neutrality as harmless.

I imagine, therefore, that White researchers and other allies—more so accomplices against anti-Blackness, White supremacy, and racism—spend time and effort in heavily understudied White, middle/upper-class schools, studying the presence and the force of White supremacy that exists there. White researchers studying White, middle/upper-class schools can seek to uncover the roots of the White gaze and epistemological imposition as an inherently ideological and

political norm occurring in White schools. As a result, a critical *insider* understanding of K12 schools' role in replenishing White supremacist ideologies and leaders can further develop. Yet there remains a significant gap in educational research from White "insiders" investigating the phenomena of White supremacy in K12 schools concerning its prevalence in US institutions and leadership circles. And studying the White gaze and how it is cultivated in schools that educate high-SES White students offers critical insight into the role that mainstream research and schools play in recycling society's past and future leaders of White supremacy and its traditions.

Notes

1. The *Scramble for Africa* is a euphemism for European colonization and the partitioning of Africa. This scramble resulted in a forcefully integrated global economy wherein African nations supplied colonizers with cheap labor, including enslavement and raw materials. Subsequently, Africa's resources were drained for European and Western nations' consumption, which has fundamentally contributed to the underdevelopment of Africa. *Modern* Western nations were built and continue to benefit from these agreements, while African nations, as a consequence, continue their struggle to overcome these structures and systems (Nwoke, 2007).

Disclosure statement

Notes on contributor

James Wright is a researcher and faculty affiliate in the School of Education at the University of California Berkeley's 21st Century California School Leadership Academy. James' teaching and research are grounded in social justice leadership. He employs critical policy analysis and coloniality perspectives to expose long-standing historical inequities in US schools that hinder historically marginalized students' potential.

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