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Dear Mr. Kozol. . . . Four African American Women Scholars and the Re-Authoring of Savage Inequalities

RAQUEL L. FARMER-HINTON

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

JOI D. LEWIS

Mills College

LORI D. PATTON

Indiana University

ISHWANZYA D. RIVERS

Millikin University

Background: *In 1991,* Savage Inequalities *quickly became the most riveting assessment of the inequalities in U.S. public schools. When Kozol visited East St. Louis for his book, the authors of this paper lived and attended schools there. As Kozol's readers in their respective graduate and undergraduate classes, the authors found it difficult to merge his outsider views with their insider experiences because their backgrounds included many unnamed human and structural resources, valuable beyond a dominant and patriarchal framework.*
Objective: *The objective of this paper is to resituate Jonathan Kozol's* Savage Inequalities *by critiquing Kozol's caricaturization of East St. Louis and its schools as places where students and community members lack communal agency and resources. Through the lens of each form of capital from Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth Model, the authors show how their stories reflected access to various forms of capital as K-12 students in East St. Louis.*
Research Design: *The methodological framework for this study is narrative inquiry. The authors storied their East St. Louis experiences by generating a narrative protocol and using*

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the protocol to share their backgrounds, historical and contemporary understandings of East St. Louis, and each author's educational and professional trajectories. Once the narratives were completed, the authors shared and analyzed the narrative texts to identify patterns and emergent themes.
Findings: *The narratives revealed how families, teachers, community centers, churches, and extracurricular programs were sources of familial, aspirational, resistant, navigational, and social capital. The narratives also provided clarity on the power and dignity of "unnamed" family and community structures, even though these forms of capital are rarely explored in the dominant literature.*
Conclusion: *The narratives complicate Kozol's interpretation and prompt readers to look at East St. Louis (and other urban communities) with a more paradoxical frame. This study is important for future educators who read* Savage Inequalities *and misunderstand urban students and families as subjects who need to be saved. Educators and potential educators require a much more complicated view of urban school districts and school children since scholarship can often provide a one-sided picture of inadequacy and despair. The authors contend that although East St. Louis indeed faces critical challenges fueled by racism and classism, the authors re-storied Kozol's narrative to expose the very rich source of community cultural capital that exists in East St. Louis and other urban centers very much like it.*

> We are from a city that never sleeps, from basketball games, track meets, high school rivalries and Lincoln Tiger pride.
>
> We are from study hard, go to college and give back to your community.
>
> We are from a place that people marginalize, but we think is the center of the universe.
>
> We are from resistance, beauty, brilliance, intelligence, and humility . . . our family, community and all of humanity.
>
> We are from grandmothers with a 4th grade education and a Ph.D. in wisdom.
>
> We are from East Saint, East Boogie, East St. Louis.
>
> – Joi D. Lewis, Ed.D.

In 1991, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* quickly became the most riveting assessment of the inequalities in U.S. public schools. *Savage Inequalities* reminded readers that despite *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and subsequent civil rights legislation and remedies, the education system remained segregated and inherently unequal. In meeting with school administrators, teachers, students, and families in several

U.S. cities and suburbs, Kozol (1991) documented how educational opportunities varied by the wealth of the local community. One of the many cities that Kozol visited was East St. Louis, Illinois, located just across the Mississippi River from St. Louis, Missouri. His characterization of East St. Louis included extremely vivid images about poverty and pollution that likely engendered discomfort among readers, who were unaware that people lived and were educated in such conditions. "East St. Louis will likely be left just as it is for a good many years to come: a scar of sorts, an ugly metaphor of filth and overspill and chemical effusions, a place for blacks to live and die within, a place for other people to avoid when they are heading to St. Louis" (Kozol, 1991, p. 39).

Interestingly, when Kozol visited East St. Louis, the authors of this paper lived and attended schools there. As undergraduate and graduate students, we were assigned *Savage Inequalities* as our first introduction to urban education scholarship. As Kozol's readers, we found it difficult to merge his outsider views with our insider experiences, particularly with a text as influential as *Savage Inequalities*. Individually, we knew that our backgrounds included many unnamed human and structural resources, valuable beyond a dominant and patriarchal framework. And, when confronted by other *Savage Inequalities* readers who expressed confusion about how we "made it out," we utilized our cultural wealth and capital to address those responses. Yet, it took the vision of an elder scholar who happened to interact with each of us at different times and in different spaces to notice a distinguishable pattern among us as scholars who happened to be from East St. Louis, Illinois. We were then encouraged to meet and/or reacquaint in order to collaborate on a research study about our experiences in East St. Louis and to understand how those experiences challenge Kozol's interpretation of East St. Louis in *Savage Inequalities*.

In this paper, we offer an alternative interpretation of life and education in East St. Louis. The objective of this paper is to resituate Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* by critiquing Kozol's conceptualization of East St. Louis and its school system within the framework of Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth Model. Utilizing Yosso's (2005) model, we have storied our East St. Louis experiences by generating a narrative protocol and sharing our backgrounds, historical and contemporary understandings of East St. Louis, and our educational and professional trajectories. To explain the full impact that East St. Louis has on all who grew up there is beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, we sought to understand and interpret our lived experiences in the context of our family and community while growing up in East St. Louis.

The narratives provide clarity on the power and dignity of "unnamed"

family and community structures, identified by Yosso (2005) as forms of capital (i.e., aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital), even though these forms of capital are rarely regarded as significant in the dominant literature. Moreover, the narratives resist a wholesale application that East St. Louis is a bastion of hopelessness. Instead, the narratives complicate Kozol's interpretation and prompt readers to look at East St. Louis (and cities like East St. Louis) with a more paradoxical frame. This study is important for future educators who read *Savage Inequalities* and either misunderstand urban students and families as subjects who need to be saved or strategically avoid urban teaching placements.

LITERATURE REVIEW

EAST ST. LOUIS, DEINDUSTRIALIZATION, & DEFICIT DISCOURSES

In the late 1870s, East St. Louis was a booming city with new railroad lines, stockyards, packinghouses, and steel mills, and, by the 1890s, the city had one of the fastest-growing populations of any U. S. city (East St. Louis Action Research Project, n.d.-a; Nunes, 1998). Similar to occurrences in other U.S. industrial cities, factory and railroad owners used African American southern migrants as strikebreakers and deliberately courted them with newspaper appeals and direct advertisements, spurring The Great Black Migration (Drake & Cayton, 1945; Farmer-Hinton, 2002; Frazier, 1951; Goodwin, 1990; Lemann, 1991). By 1914, The Great Black Migration led to the tripling of the number of African American residents living in East St. Louis (East St. Louis Action Research Project, n.d.-a; Lumpkins, 2008). This rapid migration of African Americans caused tremendous fear among White East St. Louisans, leading African American residents to be segregated and contained in neighborhoods on the south end section of the city (Nunes, 1998). In 1917, existing racial tensions from The Great Black Migration mounted and East St. Louis' community members suffered the worst race riot in U.S. history (Lumpkins, 2008; McLaughlin, 2002). The race riot occurred because the disgruntled, mostly-White industrial workforce acted upon their fears over the "invasion" of African Americans into the East St. Louis community and its jobs (East St. Louis Action Research Project, n.d.-b; Lumpkins, 2008; Nunes, 1998). Numerous African American residents were threatened; African American communities were burned; and 40 African Americans were killed by the mostly-White city population (East St. Louis Action Research Project, n.d.-b; Lumpkins, 2008; McLaughlin, 2002; Nunes, 1998).

By the 1920s, East St. Louis was known as the "Pittsburgh of the West" because of its economic prosperity (Nunes, 1998). While East St. Louis had a booming industrial base, many industries were not located within East St. Louis' city limits forcing the city's tax base to be overly reliant upon residential property instead of the wealth generated from railroad, stockyard, packinghouse, and steel mill industries (Theising, 2003). Local policies allowed industrialists to create shell cities as tax shelters just outside of the city's boundary lines. As a result, 1920 census data revealed that East St. Louis' city government was ranked the second poorest of all American cities that had over 50,000 residents (East St. Louis Action Research Project, n.d.-a). However, East St. Louis' economic realities were not aligned with local perceptions because East St. Louis was still associated with its booming industrial base, stimulated by the wartime economy of World War II, and the city was viewed as a city where anyone who wanted a job could have a job (East St. Louis Action Research Project, n.d.-a; Nunes, 1998).

The National Civic League named East St. Louis an "All-American City" in 1959, although the city was in the midst of its industrial decline (National Civic League, n.d.; Nunes, 1998). East St. Louis experienced debilitating deindustrialization as the local railroad industries lost market competition to the airline and trucking industries, and as local factories moved to outlying areas for more space and cheap land on which to build new factories (Reardon, 1998). As these larger businesses closed, smaller businesses such as local retail businesses and hotels also closed (Nunes, 1998). While deindustrialization marked East St. Louis' economic decline, East St. Louis' African American community gained power through the continued migration of African American Southerners, political and social gains from the Civil Rights Era, the desegregation of East St. Louis' schools and neighborhoods, and the election of its first African American mayor in 1971 (East St. Louis Action Research Project, n.d.-a; Nunes, 1998). Unfortunately, African Americans' rise to power in East St. Louis was accompanied by declining property values from rampant White flight, Black middle-class flight, and burgeoning unemployment rates from losing over 13,000 jobs to deindustrialization by 1980 (Theising, 2003).

In the 1980s, East St. Louis was characterized as an underclass and hypersegregated community because its residents were disproportionately poor and African American. The deficit discourse about urban residents has its roots in genetic inferiority theories and cultural deficit theories, which blame social inequalities on individual people and families instead of the socio-structural processes that select and sort people into *predestined* roles (Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Tozer,

Senese, & Violas, 2009). This deficit discourse about East St. Louis occurred in local and national media (i.e., *60 Minutes, Time Magazine, The Phil Donahue Show*) and *blamed the victim* by focusing on East St. Louis' corrupt city government, bankrupt and indebted city agencies and schools, and a population of residents disproportionately receiving welfare (Reardon, 1998). Descriptions of such "underclass" behavior resonated in the American public such that the source of urban blight and dilapidating schools were often attributed to urban residents themselves versus the declining tax bases and crumbling infrastructures that those residents inherited when they migrated to urban communities on the cusp of deindustrialization (Anyon, 1997; Farmer-Hinton, 2002; Halpern, 1995; Katz, 1989; Noguera, 2003). Thus, this deficit discourse about East St. Louis did not include any contextual analysis of the socio-structural history of the community (which had an ineffective tax base and weak labor market prior to African American power and leadership) nor any analysis of why East St. Louis' economic and social challenges existed in tandem with other former industrial cities such as Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, Newark, Philadelphia, and New York City (Anyon, 1997; Bonds, Farmer-Hinton, & Epps, 2009; Massey & Denton, 1993; Mirel, 1993; W. J. Wilson, 1987, 1996).

SAVAGE INEQUALITIES AND THE CARICATURIZATION OF EAST ST. LOUIS

In contrast to deficit discourses about urban communities, Kozol wrote *Savage Inequalities* from a social justice perspective in order to address the hypocrisy of equal schooling opportunities in the United States. Kozol taught in segregated schools in the Boston area, but left teaching to help disenfranchised adult farm workers and the homeless. Upon his return to public schools after a 25-year absence, he noted racial re-segregation as well as a lack of public commitment to equality and social justice for and in urban communities and schools. In *Savage Inequalities*, Kozol provided a structural analysis of several communities, including East St. Louis, in order to illustrate the impact of deindustrialization, corporate neglect, and political and moral disinterest on urban communities and urban schools.

Kozol focuses on several main structural problems in East St. Louis such as the impact of corporate neglect on toxic pollution (see also Austin & Schill, 1994; Fisher, 1995; Krieg, 1998). Kozol discusses the ability of corporations to create shell cities on the outskirts of East St. Louis in order to avoid environmental and pollution laws as well as local taxation policies. He discusses the manner in which these corporations'

hazardous wastes impact families' health and home environments, and how, to prevent liability, these corporations engage in unscrupulous means of offering families below-market payments as a form of restitution and protection from future liabilities. Kozol also focuses on the polarization of race in the local area. He uses articles from the local news media to illustrate how the residents of East St. Louis are considered the *others* who are to be feared, contained and avoided with references such as East St. Louis is "America's Soweto" (p. 8), an "inner city without an outer city" (p. 20) that is "full of bars and liquor stores" (p. 16). Lastly, Kozol focuses on the impact of past and current funding differentials on East St. Louis' schools. He couches these funding differentials with the irony that East St. Louis has the "highest property-tax rate in the state" while acknowledging the impact of deindustrialization on joblessness, population decline, and home values. He further critiques outside legislators who do not recognize that East St. Louis' high property tax rate is, in fact, a measure of residents trying to *help themselves*. He further critiques state legislators' reluctance to solve East St. Louis' "long term problems" (p. 24) and to envision the interconnectedness of all the local communities (versus their boundary lines). Ultimately, Kozol wants readers to understand the negative impact of past and current funding differentials on school building quality, instructional resources, and extra-curricular activities.

Despite Kozol's structural analysis (and his overall good intentions), his journalistic and sensational narrative about East St. Louis is actually only one side of a much more diverse story, leading his narrative to engender an ecological fallacy about the identity and meaning of East St. Louis and its schools. As a result, while Kozol had good intentions with the *Savage Inequalities* chapter on East St. Louis, his work can also be characterized as a stock story that contributes to the caricaturization of East St. Louis (Aguirre, 1999; Delgado, 1989). Delgado (1989) defines a stock story as one story that illustrates the privileged position of the storyteller to dictate the hows and whys of a particular person, context or event. Authors of stock stories are able to "pick and choose from among the available facts to present a picture of what happened" (Delgado, 1989, p. 2421). While stock stories are generally characterized as such by those critiquing the power that the dominant group holds over subordinate groups, we do not consider *Savage Inequalities* to be a stock story in that manner, particularly considering Kozol's social justice background and his overarching interest in resolving educational inequities. We consider the *Savage Inequalities* chapter on East St. Louis to be a stock story because (1) Kozol did not privilege East St. Louis' residents' cultural knowledge and experiences; (2) Kozol did not privilege East St. Louis' residents' resiliency and

sense of agency; and (3) Kozol's seminal work about East St. Louis serves as the sole voice in urban education scholarship about East St. Louis.

First, in his structural analysis of East St. Louis, Kozol did not privilege residents' localized ways of knowing and doing, which would have provided more diverse experiences and perspectives to shape his descriptions of what East St. Louis is and is not (see Milner, 2007; Tillman, 2002). For example, Kozol utilizes the narrative voices of outside journalists and community workers to paint the readers a picture of East St. Louis. While the intent was to show compassion toward East St. Louis' plight, these journalists and community workers generalized about East St. Louis by making associations between what East St. Louis looks like (e.g., "full of bars and liquor stores" [p. 16]) and who the residents are. For example, there is a deficit-based assumption that, in East St. Louis' "tiny shack-like houses" (p. 15) located near "sewage marshes" (p. 12), families cannot thrive and schools cannot teach. Further, based on the voices of these journalists and community workers, it would seem implausible that East St. Louis could produce students who are academically successful, or for there to be a strong sense of pride and communal spirit in East St. Louis, or even for people in East St. Louis to experience joy (see also Love, 2004).

Second, while Kozol is trying to engender an awareness of social justice issues in racially isolated communities, his narrative implies that East St. Louis' residents need to be saved and they do not have the wherewithal to reform the community on their own accord (see also Katz, 1989; Love, 2004; Siddle Walker, 1996). Despite showing how a resilient football coach wins championships in a poorly equipped training facility and football field, there is not much mention of East St. Louis' residents' sense of resiliency and agency in *Savage Inequalities*. For instance, Kozol references the tactics of local corporations who use unethical financial incentives to buy homes from East St. Louis residents in order to avoid being held liable and/or to acquire land for cheap in preparation for future lucrative land deals as residents are displaced. Kozol does not acknowledge that there are just as many residents who organize and act in the interest of their neighborhood's development and protection (Harwood, 2002; Reardon, 1998). Kozol also shares students' voices in order to express their concerns and frustrations over inequitable schooling opportunities. However, beyond portraying students' victimization and frustration through *stock stories* about teenage pregnancies, unengaged students and high school dropouts, he fails to illustrate how students' sense of resiliency and agency operates as a coping strategy to achieve despite inequitable contexts (see O'Connor, 2000; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999; Storz, 2008). As a result, his work may prompt teachers to take a missionary approach to teaching in urban centers like East St. Louis in an effort to

save students from their communities (Michie, 2005).

Lastly, since Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* is a foundational piece in urban education scholarship, his voice has a privileged position (see Milner, 2007; Tillman, 2002). Because East St. Louis is one of the smallest and least researched cases in his text, Kozol has ultimately become the sole authorized and dominant voice of what East St. Louis and its schools are and are not (Milner, 2007; Tillman, 2002). Also, since East St. Louis is the smallest and least-researched case presented in the book, this case is least likely to have had many counter-stories to Kozol's voice and description about the city. The implications are great. For instance, Kozol concludes the chapter on East St. Louis in a decidedly bleak and hopeless tone by saying:

> East St. Louis will likely be left just as it is for a good many years to come: a scar of sorts, an ugly metaphor of filth and overspill and chemical effusions, a place for Blacks to live and die within, a place for other people to avoid when they are heading for St. Louis. (p. 39)

The only conclusion to be drawn from Kozol's narrative is that East St. Louis is a place to fear and avoid at all costs. The challenge is that if one only knew Kozol's perspective (which is often the case because his work is viewed as a foundational piece in urban education scholarship), *Savage Inequalities* may be the only picture that future teachers in East St. Louis schools will receive about what their work lives will resemble. As a result, future teachers in East St. Louis will have the additional responsibilities to teach through the caricaturization of East St. Louis, particularly since *Savage Inequalities* is widely used, cited, and referenced in the U.S.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY, COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH & COUNTER-STORYTELLING

In order to re-story Kozol's Savage Inequalities, we relied on Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT is an appropriate framework because not only does it acknowledge the historical, social, and political contexts in which education exists, it also illuminates the role of race, racism, and White supremacy that cyclically foster inequities in schooling for people of color. CRT, while interdisciplinary in nature, has significant roots stemming from critical legal studies (CLS) (see Lawrence, Matsuda, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993; Lynn & Adams, 2002). Legal scholars of color, raised issue with CLS' failure to acknowledge race and racism as central and influential aspects of oppressive legalized structures as well as the voices

of those at the margins who were (and remain) disproportionately affected by racial oppression. As a result, these scholars of color formed the CRT movement, committed to unveiling racism and working actively to eliminate it and its counterpart, White supremacy.

Several core tenets of CRT emerged from this movement. The first tenet acknowledges the endemic nature of racism in its overt and insidious forms. CRT scholars assert that not only is racism normal, it is so deeply rooted in the societal fabric of this country that it makes racism more difficult to recognize and challenge (see Bell, 2005; Delgado & Stefancic, 1995; Lynn & Adams, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002b). CRT is also concerned with revealing all claims of color blindness, neutrality, and meritocracy, especially with regard to how such claims are enacted to maintain White supremacy and power (see Bell 1995, 2004). For instance, Bell's interest convergence theory argues that the maintenance of White supremacy is heavily ingrained in White interests, and White people will only make changes toward civil rights or the advancement for people of color when Whites benefit from these advancements (Bell 1995, 2004). Another tenet of CRT involves the lived experiences of people of color. CRT scholars are committed to placing a central focus on the voices and experiences of people of color. Placing people of color at the center of racial discourse is an act of validation and provides a space where racism is re-contextualized in a manner that more accurately reflects their histories, voices, and experiences. Given the centrality placed on the experiential knowledge of people of color, their voices are often reflected in the form of counter-narratives, counter-stories, and other chronicles that breathe life into experience and provoke both thought and action.

While CRT was initially situated in the legal field, it has grown substantially over the last 20 years, where its presence can be found in fields such as political science, history, ethnic studies, women's studies, and most notably education. Ladson-Billings (1998) asked, "What is Critical Race Theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education?" Her question alludes to the under-theorization of race and racism in education and calls attention to the need for educators to examine the persistent inequities in schooling through a critical race lens. Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) are credited with writing the foundational piece that ushered CRT into the realm of educational discourse. They stated, "While Kozol's graphic descriptions may prompt some to question how it is possible that we allow these 'savage inequalities,' . . . these inequalities are a logical and predictable result of a racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized" (p. 47).

In keeping with the tradition of CRT, we acknowledge the role of race

and racism in our collective educational experiences as Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) suggest. We also draw upon two particular tenets posited by CRT, counter-storytelling and acknowledging the lived experiences of communities of color. Solorzano & Yosso (2002a, 2002b) identified five purposes that counter-stories serve in terms of theory, methodology, and pedagogy:

> (1) They can build community among those at the margins of society by putting a human and familiar face to educational theory and practice.
>
> (2) They can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society's center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems.
>
> (3) They can open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing possibilities beyond the ones they live and demonstrating that they are not alone in their position.
>
> (4) They can teach others that by combining elements from both the story and the current reality, one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone.
>
> (5) They can provide a context to understand and transform established belief systems (p. 36; 156).

These tenets are important because they reveal the power of counter-narratives in centering our lived experiences as African American women who were educated in East St. Louis and who represent an alternative perspective to Kozol's *Savage Inequalities*. Several scholars have demonstrated how these particular tenets are mutually shaping and, when used as units of analyses, reveal the ways in which people of color can re/proclaim their voices and unveil alternate realities.

For example, Love (2004) engaged in counter-storytelling to disrupt the majoritarian or stock story of the achievement gap. She stated that counter-stories "enable the discourse to move beyond the broad label of racism, which can cover a wide range of behaviors at the individual, system, institutional, and societal levels to reveal specific experiences and circumstances that limit and subordinate" (p. 232). In her analysis, she argued that the maintenance of the achievement gap hinged upon deficit discourses that depicted the academic failures of students of color rather than their educational attainment. Moreover, her counter-story-

telling revealed the maintenance of White supremacy through the misrepresentation and misinterpretation of data, ultimately creating a gap between students of color and their White counterparts. Love's analysis reminds educators that majoritarian stories must be disrupted and challenged through counter-stories. When the voices of minoritized populations are illuminated, deficit discourses are shattered and White supremacy is uncovered (Gilborn, 2005).

In this study, our personal perspectives were best framed through Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth Model (CCWM). Yosso's model, grounded in CRT,

> shifts the research lens away from a deficit view of communities of color as places full of cultural poverty disadvantages and instead focuses on and learns from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged. (p. 69)

The CCWM is comprised of six forms of capital, which Yosso purposefully distances from dominant and economic barometers of "capital," merit, and value in order to give the often-missed intrinsic and communal merits of communities of color precedence and privilege (Yosso & Garciá, 2007). The first form is "aspirational capital" or "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (p. 77). The second form is "linguistic capital," which refers to "the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style" (p. 78). "Familial capital" relates to the knowledge that is produced and nurtured through kinship that extends beyond traditional notions of what 'family' means, accounting for historical and communal bonds with others. The fourth form is "social capital." Social capital refers to "networks of people and community resources" that exist to help communities of color navigate social systems (p. 79). "Navigational capital" is a cultural form that represents the possession of skills and knowledge to strategically move through systems and structures neither originally designed nor intended for people of color. The last form is "resistant capital," which relates to the increasing competence and skills that are accessed and enacted through persistent stances against the systemic inequality that people of color experience (Yosso, 2005).

The CCWM, situated within a critical race lens, is appropriate because of its capacity to provide space for us to name racism as a key determining factor that has and continues to influence the policies and processes

that negatively affect schooling in East St. Louis and subsequently our own educational experiences. Conversely, the model is useful in addressing inequitable schooling in East St. Louis as part of a larger dominant script that promotes an ideology of cultural racism that blames people of color for the educational inequities they face rather than acknowledging White supremacy and racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). This model is also valuable for allowing us to engage in acts of agency and self-empowerment, to bring our stories to the center, to resist this dominant and deficit ideologies, to insert perspectives to defend ourselves and East St. Louis, and to tap into the cultural wealth we have attained through our educational upbringing and schooling in East St. Louis (Yosso, 2005).

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

ABOUT THE STUDY

This study began in 2009 when Dr. William Trent, a professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, contacted his former student, Raquel, suggesting that she consider writing about her schooling experiences in East. St. Louis. Just prior, Dr. Trent happened to meet and/or teach the other authors and noted a pattern among all of the scholars from East St. Louis. Raquel then contacted Joi, Ishwanzya, and Lori to brainstorm ways in which our stories could be shared. What we learned through our initial conversations was that Kozol's work was a major influence on how others interacted with us and reacted to us when they learned we were from East St. Louis. In our conversations, we acknowledged that East St. Louis had been (and continues to be) storied in particular ways that contribute to dominant and deficit discourses about the city itself and its educational system. We also learned that we all attended the same high school, Lincoln Senior High School. Through reminiscing about our own experiences, we collaboratively designed a narrative study that we believed would offer an alternative perspective to Kozol's depiction of East St. Louis, while simultaneously revealing the communal resources that even the poorest of communities possess.

NARRATIVE INQUIRY

The methodological framework for this study is narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is mainly concerned with storied texts. Narratives may be presented in a number of formats including life histories, biographies, personal memoirs, and nonfiction literature and interview transcripts. In narrative inquiry, each of the aforementioned artifacts is validated as a

potential source of data that reveals stories and experiences. This methodological approach is influenced by other qualitative approaches such as phenomenology and autoethnography. Narrative inquiry intersects with phenomenology in that both illuminate the lived experiences of participants in the research process. Autoethnography shapes narrative inquiry in that "the researcher's story becomes part of the inquiry into a cultural phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002, p. 116). Patton (2002) identified two foundational questions that narrative inquiry attempts to address: (1) what does the narrative or story reveal about the person and world from which it came? and (2) how can this narrative be interpreted so that it provides an understanding of and illuminates the life and culture that created it? (p. 115). The answers to these questions can have profound, far-reaching implications for how social and cultural meanings are (de) and (re)constructed through the researcher's lens and within larger social contexts.

Narrative inquiry is not simply about identifying texts; it also calls attention to narrative analysis. Patton (2002) stated, "how to interpret stories and, more specifically, the texts that tell the stories, is at the heart of narrative analysis" (p. 118). In order to engage in narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Connelly (2000, 2006) identified five defining features: (1) experience; (2) time; (3) intensity; (4) collaboration; and (5) following leads. As noted, experience is at the very heart of narrative inquiry. In other words, our everyday experiences are transmitted in the stories that we tell and retell, as well as the stories that we are told. As such, narratives serve as phenomena for interpretation and as a method for conducting the interpretation. Ample time is required to gather, interpret, analyze, and construct stories in a way that uncovers the complexity embedded within people's lived experiences. In concert with time, intensity is required to engage in an exploration of the past, present, and future, and these dimensions of time are situated in historical, social, and cultural contexts. It involves a back-and-forth, dialogical relationship among researchers, participants, and texts. Approaching narrative inquiry with a collaborative disposition provides space to establish rapport and engage in co-constructions of time with necessary intensity. Following leads involves allowing the necessary flexibility to engage in narrative inquiry without limiting the possibilities of other texts and forms of data that may be relevant to the study.

PARTICIPANTS

Each of us works in higher education either as administrators or faculty members. Joi, for instance, is the Dean of Student Life at Mills College in

Oakland, California. She graduated from East St. Louis Lincoln Senior High School in 1987 and then forged a pathway for herself in higher education, including receiving a bachelor's degree from Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville (SIUE) and a doctoral degree from the University of Pennsylvania. She is a scholar of resistance movements and her research and teaching interests include a comparative analysis of higher education systems in South Africa and the U.S., the roles of Black women in institutional transformation, narrative research as liberatory praxis, and hip hop and neighborhoods. Raquel also attended East St. Louis Lincoln Senior High School and was a sophomore when Joi was a senior. She graduated in 1989 and then pursued undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. At the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, her research, teaching, and service agenda focuses on educational inequities, the urban context in which many of these inequities exist, and the school communities who educate within these inequitable contexts. She currently conducts research on the college preparation of students of color in urban communities. Lori is also an alumna of East St. Louis Lincoln Senior High School who graduated in 1991. She later pursued an undergraduate degree from SIUE in 1995. Lori also completed her doctoral studies at Indiana University-Bloomington and first worked as an administrator, then faculty member in Higher Education at Iowa State University and the University of Denver. Currently, at Indiana University, Lori's research agenda broadly examines racial injustice in the academy and the experiences of minoritized populations in higher education. Her recent studies have placed a particular focus on African American students with regard to gender and sexual identities; experiences at historically Black colleges; and involvement in racial/ethnic culture centers. Ishwanzya graduated from East St. Louis Lincoln Senior High School in 1997, 10 years after Joi's graduation. She completed her undergraduate degree at Millikin University and her graduate degrees at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She currently serves as the Assistant Director for the Center for Multicultural Student Affairs and the Director of the Long-Vanderburg Caterpillar Scholar's Program at Millikin University. Her research and teaching interests include social foundations of education, higher education access for underrepresented groups, the use of community colleges by underrepresented students, and urban education.

METHODS

Phase One of this study involved constructing a narrative protocol that would be used as a guide to write our respective narratives. We each

contributed questions and prompts that responded to the central questions, "Why are you interested in this project and what do you want Kozol to know?" In our narratives we responded to prompts regarding our family background, school and community background, historical and contemporary knowledge of East St. Louis, professional and educational trajectories, and ways we address perceptions and reactions to being from East St. Louis.

Once we completed our narratives, we shared them with each another. We completed an iterative process of reading and re-reading each of the narratives to garner a greater understanding of the data, keeping focused on the stories we could share in this counter-narrative to deficit views about East St. Louis and its residents. Each of our lived experiences in East St. Louis occurred in different contexts, spaces, and times. We are different ages, we grew up in different families and neighborhoods, and we each experienced the elementary-middle-high school transition at different ages, places, and times. In our analysis, we were cognizant of how our differences affected each of our stories. Considering our differences, we read for both an understanding of each individual story by analyzing responses to the narrative prompts. Yet, we also read for an understanding of the collective or shared stories among us. As we coded the stories, we indicated commonalities in our experiences across contexts and time. This process of analyzing stories individually and collectively generated behaviors, interactions, and incidents that were then organized into coherent categories. Given our desire to reveal these resources, we chose Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth Model (CCWM) to serve as a frame to report findings from our narratives. As a result, we re-read our stories one last time, thinking about our overall observations from the analyses and situating them within the six forms of capital of the CCWM. Five of the six forms of capital in the CCWM served as themes to report the findings.

Throughout this process, we practiced trustworthiness by remaining in contact with each another through email and conference calls. We shared our observations with one another as a form of member-checking and to gauge our own understandings in the process of re-storying our experiences. We also practiced reflexivity in this process by remaining aware of our own biases and their influences on our interpretations. We practiced the use of both emic and etic perspectives in the analysis of our stories. On one hand, we positioned ourselves as insiders who were knowledgeable about East St. Louis—the community and the schooling system; on the other hand we did not assume that we knew each other's stories as a result of growing up in the same community. Instead, we approached the analysis and interpretation of each narrative as standing

on its own having particular meanings for the author of each narrative.

Peer review and triangulation were also used. Over the course of this project, we have used several conference presentations as a means of peer review and critique. These fellow scholars challenged our findings and offered helpful insights to strengthen the project and the analyses. Also, over the course of this project, we began a follow-up project where we collected narratives from teachers in East St. Louis. These teachers were retired teachers who taught in East St. Louis during Kozol's visit and current teachers who matriculated through the East St. Louis school system along with us as youth. These additional data have helped us to improve our analyses by understanding teaching, learning and living in East St. Louis from the perspective of retired educators and our peers who are now educators.

We also agreed that as researchers and participants, our goal was not to fashion an unrealistic or nostalgic story that would suggest an essentialist experience of growing up and being educated in East St. Louis. Instead we focused on both differences and similarities in our stories, paying close attention to the nuanced ways in which we accessed community cultural wealth. Finally, we remained cognizant of the privileges we each have as highly educated African American women, considering that some East St. Louis residents have not shared a similar educational pathway.

FINDINGS

FAMILIAL CAPITAL

"There is no right or wrong side of the tracks in East St. Louis" (Kozol, 1991, p. 17). In Kozol's text, East St. Louis is described as a virtual wasteland full of pollutants, raw sewage, liquor stores, crumbling infrastructures, and impoverished neighborhoods and residents. Through these descriptions in Kozol's text, the reader can only assume that these images are generalizable to the entire community. Most importantly, the reader can also assume that the familial relationships inside of those homes were inferior merely by the vivid images of our neighborhoods. Yosso (2005) considers family capital as capital that carries "a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition" (p. 79). The following paragraphs discuss how we spent our formative years in a range of homes from brick bungalow homes to wooden shotgun houses to colonial-style homes to townhouse-style apartments in housing project complexes, and, instead of a deficit view, we share how our homes were merely structures and did not dictate whether or not we received familial capital.

A common thread among our narratives is the importance of family.

Regardless of the external features of the homes we grew up in, we all shared stories of the kinds of interactions in those homes that led to our familial capital. One of us, for example, shared how she grew up in two homes, one was a colonial-style home and the other was a "shotgun" home (i.e., a small wooden house without corridors separating the rooms). Those two homes were places of familial love and support despite the differences in the quality of the home surrounding the familial interactions within them.

> I initially grew up in an area of the city called "The Hills." Loisel Hills is a middle-class community where the homes sit on rolling hills. Our neighbors were teachers, school administrators, police officers, and city government officials. . . . With my parents' divorce, my house in "The Hills" became a weekend house and my mom and I moved in with my grandparents to Centreville [adjacent to East St. Louis]. My grandparents' house was my mom's house growing up. My grandparents have a "shotgun" house, which used to be surrounded by other small wood-frame houses when my mother was younger. However, those homes were removed to build housing project complexes and senior living facilities. Although my grandparents' house is small in comparison to my parents' house, it was actually the best place for me to grow up due to the constant attention and guidance from living in a multigenerational family house where all of my aunts, uncles, and cousins would gather throughout the week and the weekend.

In Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model, extended families are central to familial capital. Instead of traditional understandings that value nuclear families over other family types, Yosso (2005) argues that the kinship networks of "immediate family (living or long passed on) as well as aunts, uncles, grandparents, and friends" are central to the capital available in communities of color (p. 79). In two of our narratives, our multigenerational families provided familial capital due to the kinship networks they produced. Each narrator experienced how the density of such family networks reinforced norms and expectations.

> Although our house was in Parkside, we spent only limited time there. I would really say I "grew up" in the South End on Gay Avenue. My older sister, brother, and I spent most of our time at our grandmother's house at [—] Gay Avenue, my Aunt [—] lived next door at [—] Gay Avenue and my Aunt [—] lived

> across the street at [——] Gay Avenue. For a while, my Aunt [——] lived on the next block on Central Avenue. The proximity of my family's houses was critical to the way we were raised.

In each of our narratives, we tie family love and support to our upbringing. Yosso (2005) notes that families "model lessons of caring, coping and providing (*educación*), which inform our emotional, moral, educational and occupational consciousness" (p. 79). Instead of financial capital or financial wealth, familial capital was a resource that was valued within our families and our community.

> I did not grow up rich, but I had it better than many of my friends. I remember one girl told me when I was young that she liked me because I was rich. I argued her up and down about being wrong, because financially we were not rich, but we were rich in other ways. I have the honor of knowing both of my parents, which is not the case for some of my childhood friends. I never worried about food, clothing, or shelter. I certainly had access to things that my friends did not. . . . We were rich because of who our parents were.

In terms of educational training and occupational aspirations, we all told stories in our narratives of how our families had high expectations. Three of us were raised in families where our parents graduated from college and one of us is a first-generation college graduate. Despite our parents' educational backgrounds, it was important for them to direct our paths.

> I grew up mainly in a single-parent home, although my mother married when I was much older. My upbringing was pretty strict. My mother set boundaries and rules that she expected to be obeyed. She was adamant that I would not fall prey to the element of our neighborhood.

As described by Yosso (2005), another aspect of familial capital is how families use school and extracurricular activities to foster educational consciousness. In our narratives, we discuss how our families made sure we were involved in schools or extracurricular programs and we discuss the ways in which our schools and programs supplemented our familial capital. Each narrator remembers a particular teacher, mentor, or school-based program that informed our educational and career aspirations.

> I would have to say it was the structure of Upward Bound. There was no doubt being a student in Upward Bound that you were going to college. It was only a matter of which one. So they [program staff] instilled in us early that we would be going [to college] and they were there to help with the process.

Schools also served as an extension of familial capital. Kozol's text focuses on the dearth of resources and the poor quality of the buildings in which we were educated. Our narratives also discussed these issues, yet, proportionately our remembered stories were about the school staff members who shaped us. Although, the mentoring we experienced was obtained in substandard educational facilities, we were able to accrue additional capital.

> During my first year at Lincoln, we had the infamous flood, which destroyed our library, gym, and band room to the extent that we did not attend school for a few weeks until the school was sanitized (although, for some reason, the lines from the flood water were there for a while). . . . . The teachers were very old-school. Teachers and administrators stood in the hallway when classes passed. If boys were hanging all over you, they gave you "the eye." If you looked at a teacher the wrong way, they'd "check you" after class—or tell your mother (their colleague). . . I am not sure if all of this attention was because I was a teacher's child or not. But, I will say that this accountability system kept me on my toes.

Community organizations and churches also served as an extension of familial capital. These churches and community-based organizations taught leadership and social skills as well as offered religious, artistic, and athletic training. Kozol (1991) describes one building in particular as a former university building that no longer offers classes, but serves as a "social welfare complex" (p. 16). It is in these kinds of buildings that we took dance classes, swim classes, and Bible study classes.

> I was very involved with my church St. Paul Baptist Church. I sang in the youth choir, participated in Vacation Bible School, recited speeches, performed in plays. Church was a big part of my life and it is where I learned a lot about leadership, public speaking, and just received a great deal of affirmation from elders.

In Kozol's text, East St. Louis' residents are poor, and the city did not appear to have a stratification system within it. Kozol does visit what was

considered "the top school in the city" and he alludes to within-city stratification as minor considering his view that "[E]ven here, however, there is a disturbing sense that one has entered a backwater of America" (p. 34). Yet, East St. Louis has internal class struggles where family stature, social organizations, and political connections control the limited resources available in the community and within its schools. Each narrator told stories about the role of familial capital in securing our access to better schools and/or better teachers in poorer schools. East St. Louis also has a selecting and sorting system where the talented are separated from the perceived un-talented through school tracking, athletics, and the arts. We also told stories about how being "smart" led to a multitude of opportunities.

> I remember the attitude or the perception that the smartest and wealthiest kids went to either Dunbar or Alta Sita like those were the schools to go to. The best teachers were at Dunbar and Alta Sita, which ensured that the smartest kids were at those schools. But also those schools had more money or so it seemed than the other schools. Dunbar had different events that my elementary school, Washington, did not have and they also had more after-school programs. But I remember the teachers at my elementary school being very committed to education and teaching us the things we needed to learn. . . . I had demanding teachers who did not hesitate to let me know that I could do better and it was expected that I would do better.

In sum, our remembered childhood stories echoed the value of our East St. Louis community. While East St. Louis is not generally perceived as a place of value through descriptions in Kozol's text (or other news and popular media), we express how familial capital served as a form of community cultural wealth. Ultimately, we all explored how the familial capital we experienced led to our educational achievements and career paths, which has ultimately been recycled into our families as familial capital.

ASPIRATIONAL CAPITAL

In *Savage Inequalities*, Kozol visited a housing project complex to look at the impact of pollution and limited city services on local residents. Kozol relayed a conversation he had with two children during this visit. He quoted one child as saying, "It's a lot a hate" (Kozol, 1991, p. 14). This statement is meant to resonate with the reader as a means of highlighting the structural inequalities of East St. Louis and showcasing how some

children feel that *hate* is their everyday reality. This quote makes the reader wonder how East St. Louis could provide anything in the way of love, support, and care when children are able to recognize the hatred that seemingly lurks underneath the fabric and structure of the city. While hatred, lack of opportunity, and what seems like apathy are antithetical to aspiration, inspiration, and hope, these qualities do in fact exist and are often persistent forces in the lives of many East St. Louisans. According to Yosso (2005), aspirational capital is the ability to hold onto hope in the face of structured inequality and often without the means to make such dreams a reality. Aspirational capital refers to the "ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). The multiple narratives of this study highlight how deeply residents are committed to their children achieving and aspiring despite the seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

There is a long historical connection by African Americans to the power of education (Anderson, 1988; Billingsley, 1992; Hochschild, 1995; Siddle Waker, 1996; K. R. Wilson & Allen, 1987). Traditionally African American teachers and African American educational institutions played major roles in setting the foundation for aspirations, achievement and success (Span, 2009). While speaking of her teachers, one narrator summarized the role of aspirational capital in her teachers' overall commitment and educational standards.

> Teachers definitely encouraged me to realize my potential. They saw something that needed developing. I also think that being challenged was key for me and what I would do later. But just believing in me when I said I wanted to be a doctor was really important. Mrs. [—] definitely pushed me to give my all instead of coasting by.

Aspirational capital was also exuded through parenting. Adults of East St. Louis struggle to give their children a better life without concrete knowledge that it will pay off. Still, in our narratives, we shared stories of our parents working toward goals of a better life. It is this strong sense of faith and determination that set the foundation for their children to achieve. For example, we all shared how our families established aspirations that we would attend college even though our parents could not always articulate the steps of the college choice process (see Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

> I knew I was going to college, yet I did not know how I was going to get there and really what it took to get there beyond good

> grades. I had no clue about the money needed to go. . . . I was minimally aware of the odds stacked against me—girl child, resident of East St. Louis, poor, a single-parent female-headed household. And, to top it off, we lived in a public housing complex. . . . It was going to happen because as far back as I could remember college was not an option, but a fact. Going to college was a way of life, a way to a better life, a way to a better position in life. Not only would it provide me with a way out of East St. Louis, but with the intellect to better understand the conditions of East St. Louis.

In these narratives, we also shared how the inspirational and aspirational capital gained and experienced in East St. Louis benefits others. Because students from East St. Louis were supported, inspired, and challenged to achieve their goals, they are in turn able to support, inspire, and challenge others with whom they come in contact.

> I am the first in my immediate family to get a Ph.D. and that has made my parents extremely proud. . . . Because of everything that I have experienced, particularly all the support I've received, I am able to foster strong relationships with [my] students. As is the case with many faculty of color, I spend an extant amount of time mentoring and being supportive of students of color, many of whom are women. I believe they see something in me to which they aspire and I really enjoy working with students to help them realize their dreams and aspirations.

All told, these narratives show that cities like East St. Louis are not bastions of neglect and ill will, but instead house individuals committed to the dreams and goals of their children and future generations. The narratives highlight the role of parents and teachers in communicating the power of dreaming and aspiring, particularly in a social context where inequalities could dictate low aspirations. Although our family members were not always well versed in the mechanics of preparing for college, their aspirations dictated our behaviors and outcomes. As recipients of these school-based and familial expectations, we can share the power of dreaming and aspiring with others.

RESISTANT CAPITAL

Kozol (1991) described inferior cities and school conditions, but not how residents resist media images and structural realities. He also shared

inferiority thinking by the local media and state government officials, but not how residents rally against deficit thinking. Resistant capital refers to those "knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Some key examples of resistant capital espoused by the narrators include refusing to attend schools that were not providing a quality education, protesting educational inequities, constructing alternate situations and solutions to inequitable conditions, and resisting others' images of what it means to be from East St. Louis.

The narrators shared how they resisted educational inequities through protests and alternative solutions. One narrator, for example, had a math teacher leave mid-year. She and her class peers took a leadership role to force school and district leaders to address the teacher shortage.

> As ninth-grade students, our homeroom teacher [and] math teacher retired, leaving us without a teacher at the beginning of the school year [and] without any prospects of a replacement teacher. As students, we realized the need for a teacher, especially a math teacher and the role that the teacher played in the achievement of our future goals. As students we wrote letters to the school board, asked for meetings with principals, interjected parental involvement, and even asked our former teacher to come back. While it may have been fun in the beginning not to have a teacher, we knew that we were falling way behind other schools and other students and that this would seriously jeopardize our chances at getting into college and succeeding.

While this quote offers one example of recognizing the limitations of not having a math teacher, other narrators pointed out how their teachers also resisted inequalities by refusing to be limited by scarce resources. While Kozol (1991) discussed outdated textbooks and inadequate materials, the narrators discussed the many teachers who supplemented with their time and talents. The narrators also reported how students and teachers alike pushed and resisted against the label of scarcity in an effort to have a more positive learning environment.

> Lincoln [High School] did not offer Spanish 3 because usually students only took Spanish 1 and 2 by the time they were seniors. I took Spanish 1 as a sophomore. So, as a senior, Mrs. [——] must have used her free period to teach me and someone else Spanish 3.

Each narrator explained how East St. Louis' infamous reputation precedes its residents and clouds their personal interactions with others. As residents of East St. Louis, each narrator has encountered meeting a new person and answering the question, "Where are you from?" to which the narrators respond and then receive a look of shock and awe. For the narrators, growing up in East St. Louis also meant resisting stereotypical images of East St. Louisans.

> My vision of the city, or rather others' vision of the city, has pushed me to excel both personally and professionally. I am always trying to prove that yes, I can do something, and that I have an adequate educational foundation that was gained in East St. Louis. But also recognizing that there are not too many opportunities in East St. Louis has [also] pushed me to make sure that I do not end up back in the city. That has pushed me harder to succeed.

Ultimately, the narrators experienced how residing in East St. Louis provided skills and competencies to disrupt the impact of structured inequality on belief systems and morale. From these experiences, each narrator learned to speak in opposition of what others think they know about East St. Louis and its residents. Each narrator also learned to resist inferior conditions and limitations placed upon them.

NAVIGATIONAL CAPITAL

In Yosso's (2005) discussion of community cultural wealth, she describes navigational capital as the "skills of maneuvering through social institutions" (p. 80). Such skills become particularly important for navigating spaces that were established in ways that excluded or devalued the experiences of people of color. In examining our narratives individually and collectively, we identified emergent themes of navigational capital in our experiences. We were all navigating schools that had our best interests in mind. However, these schools were situated within an educational system rooted in the notion of educational inferiority. In other words, our schools, specifically the high school we all attended, were full of teachers and administrators committed to our success, but the overall resources were lacking. As a result, our narratives show that our experiences of growing up in the East St. Louis educational system provided us with experiences that prompted the development of three specific navigational skills: (1) navigating space or making the best of limited resources; (2) navigating college and career pathways; and (3) navigating contradictions. In this

section, we examine particular instances that have helped us to understand navigational capital in extremely rich ways.

Navigating Space

In each of our narratives, we explore how our experiences in East St. Louis have exposed us to ways of viewing the spaces we occupy in unique ways. As students in East St. Louis, this meant making the best of limited resources, space being one of them. Navigating the high school space was at first difficult for one narrator, who transferring from a Catholic school had never faced limited space.

> My homeroom was located in the gym, as were several others. It seems Lincoln was very overcrowded. There simply was no place to put all of the students they had, plus those coming from Assumption [a Catholic high school]. Overcrowding had been a prominent issue for some time and now I was experiencing the repercussions of that. I remember thinking, 'Why can't they just build another high school?'

Each narrator also discussed how the restroom facilities were unclean and lacked toilet paper. One narrator shared, "You never used the bathroom during the day as the toilets were not reliable." Other narrators shared space limitations regarding sports and extra-curricular activities. Despite these instances, we were also able to establish pride in our high school.

> Lincoln was a very old building. I often remember going in classrooms and the classroom would be dirty. I remember having to sit in the assembly room for lunch and looking at the dirt in the carpet and the broken chairs, but there was also a sense of pride in the building in that the custodial staff tried to keep it together.

One narrator likened this sense of pride to a feeling of hope. She stated, "The schools were overflowing with hope that turned hallways into an indoor track after school, prolific speeches in classrooms from the speech team, the concert chorale, to the jazz band." Another narrator noted how space constraints did not affect school pride and team spirit. For instance, while the high school had a gym for basketball games, the football games were held in Parson's Field, which for one narrator was, "the ultimate metaphor for East St. Louis because it was structurally

inferior, but there was so much love and passion in being a Lincoln Tiger."

Navigating College & Careers. Growing up, each narrator knew that she would go to college. One narrator mentioned, "In my family, college was just expected." Our institutions also exposed us to college opportunities. Though we felt prepared, each narrator realized the inequities in her schooling upon reaching college and realizing that we lacked preparedness in some areas. One narrator indicated:

> I really did not have a sense of schools being unequal until I went to college. I graduated number 12 in my class, was on the honor roll, Beta Club, and took all of the college prep classes: chemistry, trigonometry, Latin, et cetera. When I took my placement exam first year in college, I was placed in all remedial classes. I did not get any credit except for music in my first semester. All of the students in my classes were Black people. This is when I really made the connection between the differences in schools.

Our navigational capital is also prevalent in how we negotiate our career and research endeavors. Each narrator shared how her experiences of growing up and being educated in East St. Louis had a profound effect on the careers chosen and research agendas pursued. The following excerpt represents how one narrator not only navigates contradictions, but also translates these contradictions into her work as a scholar-practitioner:

> I have spent the past 15 years as a senior administrator at state universities and elite colleges, in environments described by Bowen and Bok (1998) in *The Shape of the River* as bastions of privilege. Although my life's work has been constrained within a context that privileges knowledge created by scholars who work in places I was never supposed to be and who influence policies about places where I grew up but they have only visited, I have persistently transgressed. My lived experiences have gifted me with the ability to move back and forth between (or should I say to integrate) two worlds divided by institutional racism, sexism, and classism. My leadership philosophy is fueled by my connection to both worlds, one privileged by financial, human, and scholarly resources and the other privileged by the phenomenal legacies of my ancestors and communities of color. Leadership for me is about using my sphere of influence to create policies

> and conduct research where I can inquire about, participate in, and systematically hold space for communities that represent these worlds.

Navigating Contradictions

In our narratives, we discussed how Kozol did not focus on the fact that there are disparities even within our own racially and economically oppressed community, leading to perhaps the most important form of navigational capital: navigating contradictions. One narrator, who grew up in one of several housing project complexes in East St. Louis stated:

> I lived in the projects, a housing complex surrounded by great people and not-so-great people. I saw what it was like to live in dire misery and filth and what it was like to live in great comfort and what seemed like wealth to me. . . . I saw men and women get up everyday and go to work, come home and spend time with their families. I remember playing in the street with grown-ups as we played large-scale activity games. I also remember gunshots and police kicking down our back door looking for our next-door neighbors. I remember drug wars and seeing the effects of drugs on families and children. . . . I remember lots of trees and green grass, lawns that neighbors took care of. I remember being able to run up and down the street playing or jumping rope. I can see the existence of both good things and bad things in my neighborhood.

Our narratives also depict our ability to navigate between dichotomies such as spaces of privilege and oppression. For example, one narrator discussed navigational capital in the form of reconciliation. In other words, she was able to reconcile the negative stereotypes of East St. Louis with the positive experiences and memories she has of the city. Using navigational capital also involves managing experiences and interactions that on the one hand construct East St. Louis negatively, but on the other hand, prompt us to have community pride. This particular dichotomy was prominently described in our interactions with people who had read *Savage Inequalities* or pictured East St. Louis as a "bad" or "rough" place.

> In general folks are usually taken aback by my pride in East St. Louis and they do not know what to do with my sort of calling them on their racism and classism in the moment. They often

> want to frame me as an exception and I quickly refute this assumption and share that there are so many wonderful people from East St. Louis and many who still remain there. I count it an extreme privilege to have been raised there.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Our narratives also demonstrate Yosso's (2005) explanation of social capital, which is grounded in the notion of formal and informal connections in communities of color for the purpose of increasing life chances and choices for those who have been historically left out, largely because of racist, sexist, and classist constructs. The lived experiences that inform the multiple narratives in this study highlight how social capital garnered in East St. Louis provided us with the ability to move back and forth between worlds divided by racism, sexism, and classism.

Each narrator discussed that East St. Louis' social network includes the many teachers, neighbors, store owners, medical professionals, church members, sorority and fraternity members, and barber and beauty shop owners who connect the unnamed social infrastructure in East St. Louis. Narrators also discussed community businesses and institutions that have been around for over 50 years. It is in these places and spaces that opportunities are explored, scholarships are given, and dreams are validated. One narrator shared:

> As a young person I was involved in lots of things: the Science Awareness Program through the Mary Brown Center and Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, the 3 R's program at the library sponsored by Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, the Delteens [a teen group] sponsored by Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., [and] Upward Bound at the SIU [Southern Illinois University] campus in East St. Louis.

Narrators also shared the interconnectedness of the East St. Louis community. Three narrators were born into families who have reared multiple generations of children in East St. Louis. As a result, the narrators noted how the community has closure (see Coleman, 1988), meaning that many adults share a common vision on child rearing and respect for adults. For example, one narrator shared that "in East St. Louis, like most Black communities, it is extremely important to refer to elders and professionals with formal titles, but with a familial undertone, such as 'Dr.,' 'Mrs.,' 'Rev.,' as a form of respect." This "naming" of elders was a method

of capacity building in communities like East St. Louis. Adults also used titles to resist ways that, historically, Black people were treated as less than human (Morris, 1999).

Narrators also shared the impact of intergenerational closure (see Coleman, 1988) on school-family relationships in the East St. Louis community. In a community where multiple generations exist, many teachers have taught parents and children, allowing families and school staff members to understand and trust each other's norms and expectations. Further, in a community with intergenerational closure, many East St. Louis teachers and families interact frequently by visiting the same stores, attending the same churches, and going to the same sporting events. As a result, schools and families have a sense of collective efficacy surrounding children, and children are held accountable for grades and behavior (Sampson, Morenoff, & Earls, 1999).

> I had many of the same teachers my dad had, Mrs. [——] and Mrs. [—].Our teachers and administrators were awesome, they held us to high standards and pushed us to achieve. We would see them everywhere—at church, in the grocery store, at football, basketball and track meets. They knew my family and I knew that I had to stay in check at school or there would be a heavy price to pay.

In addition to norms and values as forms of social capital, each narrator also told stories about a particular East St. Louis teacher who exposed them to specific resources and opportunities as additional forms of social capital.

> I had a lot of cool teachers . . . Mrs. [—] was probably the most instrumental. She was the one who challenged me and those in my English class to critically think about our work . . . Interestingly enough, Mrs. [—] took us on field trips to two colleges, University of Illinois (UIUC) and Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville (SIUE). SIUE is where I decided to go pursue my undergraduate work. She likely does not know her impact on my education, but Mrs. [—] was an instrumental teacher and the best one I had at Lincoln.

Narrators also told of specific events that developed social capital in young East St. Louisans such as debutante balls, choral competitions, speech and debate teams, and science fair competitions that students participate in throughout the state and around the country.

When Kozol visited East St. Louis, he saw abandoned buildings, boarded-up houses, closed businesses, and vacant lots. But for the narrators who grew up there, there was social capital. Narrators talked about neighbors and teachers, who shared their resources, elders who demanded respect, and parents who relayed school expectations. Narrators also discussed key institutions, landmarks, and special places where their plans for social mobility were validated, nurtured, and affirmed.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this paper, our objective was to resituate Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* by critiquing Kozol's caricaturization of East St. Louis and its school system by utilizing Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth Model. This paper considers the ecological complexities inherent in urban school systems and surrounding communities by connecting those ecological complexities to our personal stories and by extending the discourse to revise the meaning of cultural wealth. As noted earlier in the paper, our goal was not to fashion an unrealistic or nostalgic story that would suggest an essentialist experience of growing up and being educated in East St. Louis. In fact, we acknowledged the barriers we faced due to deindustrialization, concentrated poverty, a weakened tax base, and political infighting. Therefore, we are not suggesting that structural inequalities are vital in order to promote the kind of community cultural wealth that Yosso suggests and we experienced. Instead, we are suggesting that despite these structural inequalities and barriers, communities of color offer wealth to its members, which is contrary to the deficit models promulgated in the literature. Therefore, this paper focuses on the ecological complexities inherent in urban school systems and surrounding communities by connecting those ecological complexities to our personal stories and by extending the discourse to revise the meaning of cultural wealth. We discovered many parallels and some divergent themes between and among our stories. Overall, our four narratives revealed how the important relationships we had (have) with our families, teachers, and mentors and how our participation in community centers, churches, and extracurricular programs were (are) critical sources of familial, aspirational, resistant, navigational, and social capital.

Although we grew up at different times and in different neighborhoods, it is useful to note that there were only subtle differences in the trajectory of our educational journeys post-East St. Louis. Each of our families, teachers, and mentors had high expectations of us, regardless of our family status or backgrounds. Although our family structures were

different, the messages we received about becoming whatever we wanted to be and our responsibility to others, particularly our community, were consistent. Regardless of the variety of support systems we engaged with outside of our homes, each pointed to the same outcome. We were constantly given messages that emphasized that we were not limited by our circumstances. Our stories also reveal that we are not limited by the effects of the structural deficits that characterize East St Louis. The various forms of capital we do have interrupt not only the effects of the social injustices that we lived with in East St Louis, but also help us counter the low expectations that others have of us when we tell them where we grew up.

Yosso's (2005) model of capital provided an excellent framework with which to analyze the benefits we received growing up in East St. Louis. We note, however, that these various forms of capital identified by Yosso are not mutually exclusive and are not achieved in isolation from one another. Our narratives show how these forms of capital are mutually shaping and overlapping. For example, each narrator was reared to disassociate scarcity with her inner belief system (resistant capital) and then learned to create alternate pathways around systems of scarcity (navigational capital) or were provided alternative pathways around systems of scarcity (familial and social capital).

Additionally, by utilizing Yosso's model, we found that we were not able to include what we experienced as "spiritual capital." In our analyses, we noted how social capital existed among various networks (e.g., schools, beauty salons), but we also experienced that the networks inherent in spiritually based social networks were not simply about the sharing of norms and resources among network members. Instead, in our lived experiences in East St. Louis, religious institutions were central to how norms and resources were shared, leading to leadership experiences and educational programs. Moreover, unlike other social networks, the social ties among network members were religious ties. Since East St. Louis is a community where religious ties serve as an asset, religious institutions and their members influence local schools, politics, and civic participation.

Lastly, Yosso (2005) discussed resistance capital as oppositional behaviors related to structural oppression, particularly faced by raced, gendered, and classed groups. Yet, even within these strata, resistance capital is also used, for example, in the oppositional behaviors we were taught and exemplified to counter the label and stereotype of being a resident of East St. Louis. Often, besides being Black, poor, and female, we had to challenge the status quo as youth as it related to location, namely the questioning of our value and worth simply due to the community in

which we were reared. As college students, we had to use the resistance capital to defend our intelligence among same-raced, classed, and gendered peers. Further, even as current faculty members and administrators, this resistance capital is still used due to our colleagues' and students' acceptances of stock stories about East St. Louis. Therefore, in addition to race, gender, and class classifications, there is also structural oppression through location generally (e.g., inner cities) and specific (e.g., East St. Louis) and this article helps to extend the understanding of how resistance capital is operationalized.

There are many other important themes that emerged from our narratives, analyses of which are beyond the scope of this paper, but some of which are worth mentioning here. One critical theme concerns the gendered nature of our relationships—as girls growing up—with important teachers and mentors, many of whom were women. Our work also raises important questions to be pursued in future work: how did growing up in East St. Louis inform and influence the lives of people who did not end up in the field of education? What about boys and men? What about fellow residents from generations before and after ours? It is certainly important to recognize that none of us currently reside in East St. Louis. What distinguishes us from those who stay? What is it like to live there now?

While scholarship such as Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* is meant to raise concern and ire at the conditions in which low-income and minority residents are allowed to live, these literatures miss the collective experiences of communities like East St. Louis. In highlighting the societal problems of East St. Louis, Kozol neglected to see how the wealth of the community actually aided in combating these problems. We believe ours is a critical counter-narrative to Kozol's representation of East St. Louis and similar cities. Educators and potential educators require a much more complicated view of urban school districts and school children since scholarship can often provide a one-sided picture of inadequacy and despair. His book had the positive effect of washing away the protective wall that shielded us from our country's sins; however, it ultimately characterized the city and all those who live there as a place and people for whom to feel sorry and pity. It is our contention that although East St. Louis indeed faces critical challenges fueled by racism and classism, we also have some of the greatest human capital as a function of growing up, living and striving in places like East St. Louis. It was our intention in this paper to re-story Kozol's narrative to expose, among other things, the very rich source of community cultural capital that exists in East St. Louis and other urban centers very much like it.

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RAQUEL L. FARMER-HINTON is an associate professor in the Educational Policy and Community Studies department at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Her research, teaching, and service agenda focuses on educational inequities, the urban context in which many of these inequities exist, and the school communities who educate within these inequitable contexts. She currently conducts research on the college preparation of students of color in urban communities. Toward that end, her publications (in journals such as *Teachers College Record; Education and Urban Society; The Urban Review; The High School Journal*; and *The Journal of Negro Education*) examine the resources of school communities that help students of color to prepare for and transition to college.

JOI D. LEWIS is currently the Dean of Student Life at Mills College in Oakland, California. She was recently named Vice President of Student Affairs and Chief Diversity Officer at Minneapolis Community and Technical College, effective July 2012. She is an accomplished and experienced practitioner-scholar and leader regarding institutional transformation and redressing historical inequities in higher education. Her scholarship is similarly focused. As a scholar of resistance movements, her research includes models of retention and belonging, a comparative analysis of systems of higher education in the United States and South Africa, the roles that Black women play in institutional transformation, and narrative research as liberatory praxis. Her life's work and vocation have been profoundly shaped by two critical lived experiences: growing up in East St. Louis, IL and working and leading for upwards of 20 years at several urban colleges and universities.

LORI D. PATTON is an associate professor in the Higher Education Program at Indiana University. Her research agenda broadly examines racial injustice in the academy and the experiences of minoritized populations in higher education. Recent studies have placed a particular focus on African American students with regard to gender and sexual identities; experiences at historically Black colleges, and involvement in racial/ethnic culture centers. She is co-author of the 2nd edition of *Student Development in College* (Jossey-Bass), co-editor of *Responding to the Realities of Race* (Jossey-Bass), and editor of *Culture Centers in Higher Education* (Stylus Publishing). She is nationally known and has been recognized by the Association for the Study of Higher Education for exemplary scholarship.

ISHWANZYA D. RIVERS is the assistant director for the Center for Multicultural Student Affairs and the director of the Long-Vanderburg

Caterpillar Scholar's Program at Millikin University. Her research and teaching interests focus on college access, choice, recruitment, and retention for underrepresented students. Particularly, she examines the relationships between higher education, legislative policy, institutional policy, and social and economic outcomes for historically underrepresented and underserved students. She is the co-author of "Reassessing the Achievement Gap: An Intergenerational Comparison of African American Student Achievement before and after Compensatory Education and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)", which was published in a special issue of *Teacher's College Record* in 2012. She is also the author of "If They Don't Make a Place for Us, We Should Make a Place for Ourselves": African American Women and Nursing at State Community College" in *Black Women in Leadership: Their Historical and Contemporary Contributions* edited by Dannielle Joy Davis and Cassandra Chaney (forthcoming).