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From One Tired Black Student to Another: The Understanding of Blackness in Non-Formal

Spaces

Kenique Brown

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Master of Education

College of Education

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to Black students, especially Black girls, who were sexualized, demonized, and oppressed by those who couldn't touch the greatness they will embark on. Above all else, I did this for you! On the days, I had no hope for Blackness in education, I did it for you. You are so worthy of love in education. You are so worthy of praise in all aspects of who you are as a Black human. Blackness is powerful, relevant, happy, loving, nappy, and beautiful. You are worth knowing and learning. And, for that, my work never stops.

I also dedicate this thesis to my mom, granny, and cousin who encouraged me to always go to school and showed me the value of education.

Lastly, I dedicate this thesis to my daddy. I hope you rest peacefully and continue to live through me.

I love yall

## Acknowledgement

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"I'm for truth, no matter who tells it. I'm for justice, no matter who it is for or against. I'm a human being first and foremost, and as such

I'm for whoever and whatever benefits humanity as a whole." (Malcom X)

"I have a masters in white's, all I ask is that whites get a GED in Blacks" (unknown)

## *Table of Contents*

<b>Dedication .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgement.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction .....</b>	<b>2</b>
Problem Statement .....	2
Purpose.....	3
Significance.....	4
Researcher Positionality.....	5
Definition of Terms.....	7
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review.....</b>	<b>10</b>
Introduction.....	10
Educational Spaces .....	11
Zambia .....	15
African Education Program (AEP).....	19
Identity Through An “Intersectional Approach” .....	22
Black Racial Identity.....	26
Conclusion .....	30
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology.....</b>	<b>31</b>
Introduction.....	31
Research Question and Sub-Question.....	31
Research Design.....	31
Site .....	32
Sample.....	32
Data Collection .....	33
Analysis.....	38
Quality Control and Ethics.....	39
Ethics.....	41
Conclusion .....	41
<b>Chapter 4: Findings .....</b>	<b>43</b>
Profiles .....	43
Research Questions .....	45
Blackness is Humanness .....	46
Your Skin is Dark Like Charcoal.....	50
Blackness Inside the Centre .....	56
Black Women.....	59
The Role of Nonformal Spaces.....	61
Community Safe Space.....	62
The Centre is Home .....	67
Conclusion .....	74
<b>Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions.....</b>	<b>76</b>
Introduction.....	76
Educational Spaces .....	76
Zambia .....	77

African Education Program (AEP) .....	77
Identity Through An “Intersectional Approach” .....	78
Black Racial Identity.....	79
Significance.....	79
Limitations .....	80
Future Research Considerations .....	81
Implications for Classrooms .....	82
Personal Reflection .....	82
Summary .....	82
<b>Appendix.....</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>87</b>

## Abstract

Black students all over the world are at a disadvantage. They are misunderstood and oppressed. Black students do not receive an adequate intentional education in traditional educational spaces. Non-formal educational spaces have been supportive to Black students since slavery. Non-formal spaces have provided a space for Black people to feel seen and learn in a safe space. In this phenomenological qualitative study, four female Black Zambian gap-year students within a non-formal educational space were interviewed individually to describe the impact of a non-formal space on their understanding of Blackness. Through individual, semi-structured interviews, and additional data from the researcher's journal that documented information from those interviews, participants described how their identities were shaped by the non-formal space. Key findings included the non-formal space being a safe space and home-like for participants, a recognition of the impact of their dark skin on their Black identity, and how Blackness is described in the non-formal space. This study contributes to the much needed research and investigation on Black African women in non-formal spaces, but most importantly Black women.

*Key Words:* Blackness, qualitative research, non-formal educational spaces, non-formal spaces, Zambia, identity, Black identity, women, college-students, non-profit

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Problem Statement

While on a journey to help those of African descent understand their Blackness, I realized that Black students are not awarded the opportunity in traditional educational spaces to explore and learn more about their identity. However, they are finding non-traditional educational spaces to explore and learn more about their Blackness. Researchers define "... nonformal education as any organized, systematic, education activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children" (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974, as cited in Kpetay & Lozenski, 2021, p. 477). These spaces have held Black students and children on their backs to create an environment that praises and teaches Black identity and culture since students cannot gain this type of education because of fundamental white supremacy in traditional educational spaces (Kpetay & Lozenski, 2021).

Kpetay and Lozenski (2021) describe a nonformal space as existing outside the presence of "state hegemony" (p. 477) and "...State laws, curricular standards and processes" (p. 477). Since nonformal educational spaces do not have to follow the traditional educational guidelines that were founded in white supremacy there is an opportunity for Black students within this environment to excel in learning more about their African descent. Throughout this research, Blackness is described through students' non-formal educational experiences to understand how these out of school spaces influence their description of Blackness. Schools dedicated to informal Black education like The Nu Skool, "a monthly community forum that focuses on African and African American history, culture, and politics" (Kpetay & Lozenski, 2021, p. 482) can use



Black history to connect Black students to an education they are not allowed in traditional educational spaces.

Non-formal educational spaces, like The Nu Skool, are a key component to Black education. Without these nonformal Black spaces, Black people may not have access to learn more about their history, identity, and culture. From this research, I explored Black nonformal spaces and the implications and outcomes of these spaces.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to understand how Black Zambian students who have been in a nonformal educational space describe their Blackness. There is a gap in research about how nonformal spaces have impacted Black youth internationally. However, the research that was found highlights the benefits that Black students have gained from being within these nonformal spaces within the United States (US). Most spaces researched in the past have represented all spaces outside of the classroom, so this focus was not limited to school environments. Any space that Black students can learn outside of the classroom are considered informal or nonformal educational spaces (Kpetay & Lozenski, 2021).

To begin showcasing the importance of nonformal education spaces, I would like to introduce a student, Winston, a Black middle schooler who loves reading, and has been deemed misunderstood by educators within his middle school (Johnson, 2014). Latrise Johnson, an educator for the school that Winston attended, described her encounter with Winston as an “edge-of-school” space. This space is deemed as a person or places that Winston was able to practice literacy engagement, in which he was able to thrive. He enjoyed this space because he did not like reading at his desk. Winston searched for spaces that he could learn through his own

lived experiences. Winston helped me understand the perspective of a Black misunderstood middle schooler. He needed these outside resources to explore his identity, Blackness, and academic success. Winston inspired me to look deeper in these out of school or classroom places that impact Black identity and development. Winston's story began the investigation of understanding how Black students experience Blackness within non-formal educational settings.

My experiences in working with a nonformal education space in Zambia have prompted me to want to explore research similar to that of Winston, but instead with Black Zambian university gap year students. Therefore, my research question for my study is: How do Black female Zambian gap year students within a non-formal educational space describe what Blackness means to them? And the sub-question for my study is: How do participants describe the role of the nonformal space in their lives?

### **Significance**

Educators and students deserve to tell stories of how non-formal educational environments have influenced the development of Black identity for students. Non-formal spaces have not only impacted Black children's interactions with that space but have also contributed to Black adults. McLane-Davidson et al. (2018) report the power of intentional Black spaces for adults. These researchers describe the space as An Accountability Sistah Circle (Sistah Circle). The weekly meetings within the Sistah Circle allow members to feel recognized by each other's strengths, power, and the ability to learn new skills not always available to Black female teachers. In addition to those highlights of the Sistah Circle, women are also given a space of validation for their voice unlike in other academic spaces. McLane-Davidson et al. (2018) encourage others within academia to make room for these communities.

I wanted to explore students' and educators' experiences within non-formal spaces and try to provide educators outside of these spaces some understanding of how to potentially better connect with Black students. National Center for Educational Statistics (n.d.) noted that during 2017-2018 almost 80% of teachers were white and nearly 7% of teachers were Black. If Black students do not have a likely chance to have a Black educator, non-Black educators need to step up and expand their knowledge to connect with Black students to enhance the racial development of Black students.

### **Researcher Positionality**

Those of African descent are recognized to, “cosmologically and spiritually see our world through an ethos that centralizes sharing. In other words, we are a people who order our ways of being and seeing with understanding that our existence is one mutuality and reciprocity” (Dillard, 2020, p. 699). Through this mutuality, I feel a deep connection and obligation to those of African descent. I am the students in this study, and they are me. Through my journey in being an educator, I will continuously be learning from my students, parents, and professionals around me. There is nothing that my students cannot teach me. Because of this notion, I am dedicated to exhibiting the ideal that I am because you are. In other words, “I exist because you do and thus, must trust you as my brother, sister, as a human being regardless of race, color, nation or social identities” (Dillard, 2020, p. 699).

I am Black, Queer, nonbinary woman. I was raised by an ambitious Black single mother. My mother and family taught me to use every resource that was provided to me and seek those that were not provided to me. This included informal and non-formal educational spaces. Without those spaces, I would not be where I am today. Before being in non-formal spaces, no

one asked me about what framed my Blackness or how that impacted my education. However, being Black impacted me the most during my educational journey. From the beginning of my education in elementary school, my Blackness was pinned against me. I was not treated equally by teachers and had to sit in silence for the greater good of a better education. My mother found numerous out-of-school and classroom spaces that shaped the lives of low-income students (most of which were students of color). In these spaces, I learned more about being Black indirectly. Only after getting older and reflecting on those experiences at those programs did I realize how they impacted my race. I had to go to college readiness programs to gain more information about programs and scholarships because I couldn't learn those things in school. Those spaces that I entered were directed and facilitated by people and women of color. They made me into the person I am today.

During my final year of undergraduate studies, I had to complete an internship course for my degree completion. I chose to work for a non-profit organization in Zambia that focuses on empowering youth through leadership and education to break the cycle of poverty. According to the African Education Program (AEP) website (n.d.), this organization has provided 3,000 college scholarships, access to their youth center, daily meals, and encouragement and resources for students to complete high school and continue to higher education. I was originally added to the non-profit's team as an intern to produce a program that connected Black Zambian students with Black US students through a mutual engagement to discuss their connection through African descent. Eventually, I was hired to work for AEP and became the founder of this cultural exchange program, Connecting Communities Youth Initiative (Connecting Communities). In efforts to create a program that supported US and African Black students, I wanted to first understand how Blackness and non-formal spaces potentially share a correlation. In doing this

research, I hope to always be an aspiring safe space for Black students to learn about their culture and identity.

### **Definition of Terms**

**African:** For the sake of this research, African is defined as those born in Africa who still reside within the continent or those born in Africa who migrated to other countries (Researcher's definition).

**Black or African American:** The United States Census Bureau (n.d.) notes that Black is a person who has origins in any Black racial group of Africa. However, those born in Africa who have migrated to the United States have started using this term to define their duality (Researcher's definition). Coleman (2020) supports the introduction of capitalizing Black after acknowledging W.E.B Du Bois' call to action of periodicals, including the *New York Times*, to use the capital N in Negro to represent over 12 million people at the time. Du Bois notes that the lower case "n" was "a personal insult" to Black people.

**Blackness:** Merriam-Webster (n.d.) note that Blackness is described as "the fact or state of belonging to any human group having dark-colored skin". However, for the sake of this research, I have defined Blackness as the fact or state of belonging to any person with African descent to not limit those within the Black community who do not have "dark-colored skin".

**Colorism:** Knight (2015) discusses colorism: "Any response to this question is complicated due to the deep legacy and influence of skin-color preference in the United States and in other parts of the world. Within-group and between-group prejudice in favor of lighter skin color—what feminist author Alice Walker calls 'colorism'—is a global cultural practice. Emerging throughout

European colonial and imperial history... Its legacy is evident in forums as public as the television and movie industries, which prefer to cast light-skinned people of color, and as private as the internalized thoughts of some Latino, South-Asian or black parents who hope their babies grow up light-skinned so their lives will be ‘just a little bit easier’” (para. 2).

**Edge-of-school spaces:** Johnson (2014) notes that edge-of school spaces are “non-classroom spaces located in school, occupied by school personnel and ‘discovered’ by students” (p. 209).

**Female:** Merriam-Webster (2022) defines female as “...an individual of the sex that is typically capable of bearing young or producing eggs” (p. 2). However, for the sake of this research, female refers to cisgendered women. The emphasis on “cis” is to reflect that not all females are capable to produce eggs. And, to honor trans women (Researcher’s definition).

**Gap year students:** For the sake of this research, gap year students are defined as students within AEP who have graduated high school and are awaiting college acceptance and funding from African Education Program. Gap year students typically work at The Amos Youth Centre to gain funding for college (Researcher’s definition).

**Identity:** Jones (2013) notes the following definition for identity: “...the stories of one’s life; as an individual constructs a sense of self, tempered by the external world, a story unfolds and gets written” (p. 6).

**Nonformal education and spaces:** Kpetay and Lozenski (2021) note that “any organized, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children” (p. 477).

**Texturism:** Burnett (2021) defines texturism as, "...the idea that looser curl patterns are more desirable and favored, while discrimination, dislike, and even hatred lingers towards those with kinkier curl patterns" (para. 3).

**White or Caucasian:** "Caucasian has two distinct meanings, and the difference between them occasionally leads people to aver that one of them is incorrect. The earliest sense of the word is a literal one: of or relating to the Caucasus (a region in southeastern Europe between the Black and Caspian seas) or its inhabitants. The second refers to the racial group commonly referred to as white. The objection to using Caucasian to refer to a white person is that many whites do not actually come from the Caucasus region. Be this as it may, there is no rule in language stipulating that the formation of a word must be based on logic; were this the case we would not call members of this racial group either Caucasian or white, since there are very few whose skin color is in fact that exact shade" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Coleman (2020) uses the lower case "w" in white to represent this group of people because white does not share culture or history. In addition, white will be lower cased to represent the lack of white superiority within this research (Researcher's definition).

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

Education has never been safe for Black people. The U.S. Department of Education (2020) notes that from the beginning, those of African descent have received the short comings of education at the hands of white people. Based on the laws documented by the U.S. Department of Education (2020), laws have been passed to allow Black students to receive equal education, but those seem to just be a formality. In addition, National Center for Educational Statistics (n.d.) notes that most educators are white women. This experience results in a lack of representative role models for Black students. Rapper J. Cole, in his song *Brackets*, notes the challenges of Black students in education through his lens of having to pay taxes. Cole (2018) raps:

Yeah, I pay taxes, so much taxes, sh\*t don't make sense

Where do my dollars go? You see lately, I ain't been convinced

I guess they say my dollars supposed to build roads and schools

But my n\*ggas barely graduate, they ain't got the tools

Maybe 'cause the tax dollars that I make sure I send

Get spent hirin' some teachers that don't look like them

And the curriculum be tricking them, them dollars I spend

Got us learning about the heroes with the whitest of skin

One thing about the men that's controlling the pen

That write history, they always seem to white-out they sins (Verse 2).

As a reaction to the lack of representation J. Cole raps about in schools, Black students do not have the privilege of inclusion within traditional educational spaces. This lack of inclusion has prompted non-formal educational spaces to support Black students in efforts to provide an



adequate historical and cultural education for Black students. Within this literature review, I explored how non-formal educational spaces affect Blackness identity development in Black students.

The following themes helped me explore the possible description of Blackness for young Zambians in a non-formal space: educational spaces, Zambian history, African Education Program (AEP), identity, and Blackness. The mentioned themes emerged within the literature to reflect why students are seeking non-formal educational spaces and how their Blackness is developing. AEP has impacted hundreds of young Zambians by providing an inclusive non-formal education space for Zambians to explore their identity and academics in a way that is unique to them. Johnson (2014) acknowledges that non-formal educational spaces have found a way to connect Black students to their Blackness while allowing them to learn in a personal, unique, and safe environment. Blackness is the center of this research and the literature. Black students need to explore their racial identity to fully develop within their cultural identity.

### **Educational Spaces**

Non-formal spaces have been used throughout history to help Black students find outlets for identity development, access to inclusive history, and safety. Kpetay and Lozenski (2021) note that Black non-formal educational spaces have been a part of Black history since slavery. They described the following examples of nonformal Black educational spaces throughout history:

...enslaved Black folks teaching each other to read in the woods outside the slave master's surveillance..., ...to political study in church basements during the Civil Rights era..., to the creation of community schools situated in the philosophies of groups like the Nation of Islam and Black Panthers (Kpetay & Lozenski, 2021, p. 478).

Black students are still facing numerous disadvantages within traditional educational spaces currently. Dolet and Spencer (2021) reviewed studies that showed many educators believe Black girls are more assertive, disruptive, more likely to challenge authority, less attentive to classwork, louder, and more unladylike than their non-Black female peers. Due to these perceptions, Black girls face high levels of teacher discrimination, which leads to the likelihood of higher school disciplinary action and suspensions. This dehumanization is only the beginning of the neglected identity development that Black students face. Like Black female students, Black male students also face bias and discrimination in traditional educational spaces. Johnson (2014) notes that before Black male students enter the classroom, they are faced with the expectation of not being competent in reading, writing, answering questions, and behaving. With these dehumanizing expectations, Black students do not sense belonging within traditional educational spaces. This leads Black students to non-formal educational spaces that may or may not explicitly aid in their Black identity development.

### *Edge-of-School Spaces*

Johnson (2014) described edge-of-school spaces through the understanding of heterotopias. Johnson (2014) used the following five principles to describe heterotopias:

First, heterotopias respond to physical, psychological, or social crises in the lives of individuals – people visit them in response to a change in their lives. Second, they are historically adaptive and change function over time as cultural conditions change. Third, they are capable of juxtaposing aspects of the real world in them in such a way that they create a microcosm in which all the aspects relate to each other in ways that seem more agreeable than they really are. The fourth principle suggests that heterotopias freeze time and allow people to ‘forget the clock’. They are neither completely public neither are

they completely private. The final principle is that heterotopias have a sense of opening and closing so they are both isolated and penetrable. (p. 207)

In response to heterotopias, edge-of-school spaces are described as “non-classroom spaces located in school, occupied by school personnel and ‘discovered’ by students” (Johnson, 2014, p. 209). Johnson (2014) focused on a case study of a student named Winston. Winston was a Language Arts enthusiast; however, he struggled in traditional classrooms due to his Language Arts teacher creating false anti-Black narratives of how Black male students should interact within the classroom. For example, Winston’s teacher described him as uncontrollable within the classroom setting. Winston created these spaces in reaction to the lack of belonging within the classrooms. Examples of edge-of-school spaces for Winston included: Johnson (the researcher), Mrs. Hall’s office (the literacy coach), a recording studio in the basement of the school, and the school talent show practices. Due to these spaces, Winston was able to have space and time for him to create a personal and unique literacy practice that connected to his lived experiences. These spaces are vital for the development of not only Black men, but all Black people. During Winston’s time within the school talent show, though he was not able to perform, he was able to illustrate how he felt about the school uniforms through poetry. The research supported the need for safe edge-of-school spaces for Black racial identity development.

### *Formal and Non-formal Spaces*

**Introduction to Formal and Non-Formal Spaces Through Pan-Africanism.** Kpetay and Lozenski (2021) describe the definition of formal and non-formal spaces through the understanding of (Pp)an-Africanism as:

P’an-Africanism and “p’an-Africanism share two separate definitions. However, when both “P” and “p” are used, it is a representation of both movements. “P’an-Africanism is

described as “an aspirational theory of self-governance and self-determination for the descendants of Africa, both on the continent and in the Diaspora....” Pan-Africanism is described as “...a group of movements, many very ephemeral. The cultural element often predominates....” Briefly, pan-Africanism with a small letter may be used for all those all-African movements and trends which have no organic relationship with the capital "P" variety. (pp. 480-481)

Using both “P” and “p” ((Pp)an-Africanism) are a representation of both historic and symbolic African diaspora. This brief expression of (Pp)an-Africanism is only a small portion of the complexities of the movement and historical context and legacy. In efforts to answer the research question, I embraced the idea of the emergence of Black diaspora in efforts to support Black students everywhere.

**Formal Spaces.** Kpetay and Lozenski (2021) note that formal educational spaces are “...largely what happens in schools based on sociolegal paradigms of credentialization, standardization, and govern- mental oversight” (p. 478). These spaces can be referred to as classrooms, schools, or public institutions. Kpetay and Lozenski (2021) describe these spaces as places that have been weaponized against the Black community and support white supremacy and patriarchy. These spaces do not give Black students a sense of belonging or allow them to explore their cultural differences from other races, especially white students.

**Non-formal Spaces.** Non-formal spaces are more of what this research will focus on and how they potentially affect the Black community. Kpetay and Lozenski (2021) define nonformal educational spaces as “...a semi-structured form of education that communities create outside of formal education” (p. 478). These nonformal spaces are created organically and reactively to community needs. Non-formal spaces lack “...State bureaucracies, narrow Eurocentric curricular

standards, or white dominated technologies of surveillance and sanction. Nonformal Pan-African educational space encourages a rethinking of the very notion of public in ways that work against structural white supremacy” (Kpetay & Lozenski, 2021, p. 477). An example of a nonformal space is Nu Skool. Nu Skool is a diverse Afrocentric monthly forum used to discuss “...African and African American history, culture, and politics” (Kpetay & Lozenski, 2021, p. 482). This space is used to celebrate and affirm Black people while keeping them safe. At Nu Skool there is “space outside of the white gaze, where Black self-expression and self-determination are valued” (Kpetay & Lozenski, 2021, p. 484). Black students thrive within this environment of self-expression. This sense of self-expression within their Blackness is vital to the education of Black students. Students within this Black non-formal space use language like: “Black history, Afrocentric, racial pride and pan-Africanism” (Kpetay & Lozenski, 2021, p. 486). This language is important for Black students to use to understand their Blackness. These results highlight the importance of nonformal spaces for Black students.

### **Zambia**

Students within this research are from Zambia, Africa. This section provides a brief overview of some aspects of Zambian life to provide insight and context to this study. In the following sections, I discuss Zambian country information, population, and education.

#### ***Zambia Country Overview***

Zambia is located in the southern region of Africa. The capital of Zambia is Lusaka. The U.S. Department of State (2020) recognizes that Zambia gained its independence in 1964 from Britain. Embassy of the Republic of Zambia Washington, D.C. (n.d.) acknowledges that there are over 70 different ethnic groups in Zambia that all share different cultural norms. In addition to the diverse ethnic groups in Zambia, Embassy of the Republic of Zambia Washington, D.C.

(n.d.) also notes that within the seven main tribes there are about 70 different dialects. After reviewing multiple inconsistent resources, I found that the World Health Organization (n.d.) reports that in 2015 the population of Zambia was 16,212,000 people. In addition, the World Health Organization (n.d.) notes the life expectancy at birth is 59 and 65 years old for men and women respectively.

According to the U.S. Department of State (2020), Zambia holds financial value in the copper industry. However, “The country’s primary challenges are to improve governance issues; restore debt sustainability, promote broad-based, inclusive economic growth; maintain adherence to democratic and constitutional principles; create employment; and develop its human capital” (U.S. Department of State, 2020, para. 1). Although the U.S. Department of State (2020) acknowledges that Zambia is working towards debt sustainability, The World Bank (n.d.) notes that 60% of the population is living under the poverty line. Based on the information provided by Habitat for Humanity Great Britain (n.d.), this means that Zambians are only living with the financial accessibility of under \$2.00 a day and others living with even worse conditions of only \$1.25 a day. The U.S. Department of State (2020) also expressed that there are challenges with creating employment. This need for employment would help the nearly 15% of the population that is unemployed as reported by The World Bank (n.d.). Students within AEP are all victims of the challenges being faced in Zambia. Employment challenges also impact the educational environment for students in Zambia.

### ***Zambia Education Overview***

UNICEF (n.d.) reports that education in Zambia is controlled by the Ministry of Education led by the federal government. The government provides free schooling for primary

and secondary students starting at age seven (Education Policy and Data Center, n.d.). Education Policy and Data Center report that Zambia has a 7-2-3 education system in place.

The 7-2-3 education system is described below:

Primary school has an official entry age of seven and a duration of seven grades.

Secondary school is divided into two cycles: lower secondary consists of grades 8 - 9,

and upper secondary consists of grades 10 - 12. Students sit for the Primary School

Leaving Certificate Examination at the end of grade 7, an exam to enter upper secondary

at the end of grade 9, and School Certificate Examination at the end of grade 12.

(UNESCO IBE, World Data on Education. Revised 8/2010). Primary school is free in

Zambia, but school attendance is not compulsory. (United States Department of Labor,

2011, as cited in Education Policy and Data Center, n.d., para. 1)

The Education Policy and Data Center (n.d.) report that within Zambia the rural areas are 2.4 times more likely to consist of children who are out of school than urban areas.

Unfortunately, school attendance is also directly affected by family income. The lower the

family income the less likely students are to be in school (Education Policy and Data Center,

n.d.). UNICEF (n.d.) reports that challenges with access to school directly affect low income and

vulnerable children. Due to these economic challenges, there has been an increase in

“community schools” like AEP that focus on helping underrepresented students. “Community

schools” are reported by UNICEF (n.d.) to help over 220,000 students in Zambia. Advocates of

community schools, Anna C. Murru, Harriet Miyato and Tom E. Vandenbosch, report findings

of community schools in Zambia. Murru et al. (2018) explain that community schools were

created to enhance academic success for the most vulnerable populations in Zambia, girls, and

orphans.

El-Bashir and Nkossa (2014) refer to Zambia as known as a “low-density population”. Since homes are usually placed within half a mile of each other, this causes a disadvantage for students trying to access education. Students are reported to have to walk at least a mile to go to school, and ten percent of them walk over a mile. In addition to distance challenges that students face, they also struggle during the rainy season to get to educational facilities due to poor conditions of roads and schools being destroyed by the weather.

### ***Girls in Education***

As mentioned above, there is a challenge with poverty within Zambia. This challenge directly affects girls in Zambia trying to go through the education system. Girls are often put with the burden of becoming caregivers for their family or wives through forced child marriages (J. Savarit-Cosenza, personal communication, May 30, 2022). Savarit-Cosenza also acknowledges that girls are often placed into child marriages to support the family financially. Child marriages are often correlated with financial gain for the family of the wife. Since girls are becoming caregivers and/or wives they are taken out of the school system to uphold their duties. Once girls become wives, they are expected to begin having children. El-Bashir and Nkossa (2014) estimate that in 2010 there were over 13,000 girls who were pregnant in school; however, only about 5,000 of them re-enrolled into school. Savarit-Cosenza notes that there has been a decrease in child pregnancies among girls in Zambia, but this is still a pressing matter being addressed by the organization and country.

For girls in Zambia, their education is seen as extremely unvaluable to society (El-Bashir & Nkossa, 2014). Because of these perceptions, girls are not encouraged to go to school, but instead to prepare to become wives, mothers, or caregivers. Eloundou-Enyegue and Calves (2006) report that families are often faced with the decision of financial investments in the



present or future. This ultimatum often forces parents to make quick decisions to find wealth in marriage rather than wealth in education. In addition, educators and students report that Zambian women would be supported by their husbands, so there is no need for an education, but boys would need to support their family, so they are in more need of education (El-Bashir & Nkosha, 2014).

Based on the information from El-Bashir and Nkosha (2014), they found that within the education system, educators witnessed first-hand the lack of support girls received within the educational system. Female educators who have gone through similar experiences acknowledge the cycle of oppression that girls in education face; however, there is not sufficient evidence to determine how they react to this challenge. In addition to these disadvantages, when girls are attending schools, El-Bashir and Nkosha (2014) reported that the toilet facilities are not equipped to manage the needs of girls (including toilet paper and sanitation). Consequently, girls miss about four days a month due to the lack of appropriate facilities. Missing this many days of school equates to girls missing nearly 300 lessons during the year. These are only a few of the challenges that girls in Zambia face. AEP works diligently to fight against these gender disparities to advance Zambian women and girls within society.

### **African Education Program (AEP)**

This section provides context related to the students' experiences within the AEP program. Within this section, I give an overview of how the AEP organization was founded and emphasize the importance of the Amos Youth Centre.

#### ***AEP Founding***

The African Education Program website (n.d.) noted that it was founded in 2002 by four US high school sophomores who wanted to help students in Zambia impacted by poverty and

AIDS. The founders of AEP included Hillary Bridges, Sarah Hayes, Christian Mark, and Julie-Anne Savarit-Cosenza. African Education Program is located in Kafue, Zambia less than an hour from the capital of Zambia, Lusaka. Savarit-Cosenza is the only active founder still working with the organization, and she serves as the Co-Founder and Executive Director. Savarit-Cosenza is European American and currently lives in multiple locations between Zambia and the United States to conduct and lead international and domestic affairs for AEP.

After finding the potential needs within the community through their own research, the founders collected school supplies, computers, and clothes to ship to Zambia (African Education Program, n.d.). However, upon arrival in Zambia, they found that there was not a place for these materials. Materials such as school supplies, computers and clothes were treated as valuable objects within society and could not be placed anywhere other than a library with adequate observation and security. As mentioned above, Zambia has struggled greatly with educational resources. In finding this saddening news, the founders decided to begin listening to the community and understanding what they needed. In doing so, they created a space for people in the community to communicate what they needed. Creating a space for the community began their non-profit legitimacy process. AEP acknowledged that within two years they were registered in the US as an official 501c3 charitable organization. Since this work could not be done alone, the AEP team at the time had an influential connection to Amos, a local member of the community they found through their high school Zambian soccer coach. Amos went on to support the non-profit's physical location in Zambia in 2005 (African Education Program, n.d.). Since Amos became such a vital part of the origination of AEP, they named the current youth Centre in his honor.

### ***The Amos Youth Centre***

After working with the Zambian community, AEP realized that there was a need for a space that could provide an educational, creative, and safe environment for students in the community (African Education Program, n.d.). This space is now known as Amos Youth Centre (The Centre) and originated in 2006 (African Education Program, n.d.). AEP reports that they support over 200 youth a year and are recognized by the Zambian Ministry of Home Affairs.

Students at The Centre range between primary school age to awaiting college level. Founder, Savarit-Cosenza, acknowledges that students in the lower age range are active learners and creators in this space. AEP provides a space for students to have a non-formal educational experience, so students can debrief the school day and ask questions they are limited to during formal schooling. Savarit-Cosenza notes that students in AEP do not have the ability to ask questions during their traditional school day, so AEP creates an environment where questions are encouraged. In addition, Savarit-Cosenza informed me that the education system in Zambia struggles to find educators who are trained to accommodate every student in the classroom (J. Savarit-Cosenza, personal communication, May 30, 2022).

Savarit-Cosenza also acknowledges that students awaiting college are considered “gap year students”. Gap year students are students within the program who have graduated from The Centre at AEP and are awaiting to go to university within the next year (J. Savarit-Cosenza, personal communication, May 30, 2022). Lumuno Chongo, Director of Programs (African Education Program, n.d.), works directly with gap year students. Chongo is Black Zambian and currently lives in Zambia. Christine Mulenga, Resource Development Coordinator, works with gap year students to provide a space for them to create unique programs at the Centre. Mulenga is Black Zambian and lives in Zambia, as well. Chongo, Mulenga, and other staff members provide an opportunity for students to gain experience as educators, tutors, mentors,

administrative support, and more at The Centre. This work experience funds Zambian college-based scholarships that gap year students receive (J. Savarit-Cosenza, personal communication, May 30, 2022). These scholarships have helped students in AEP to transition into college and begin supporting their own communities to enhance the lives of others.

### **Identity Through An “Intersectional Approach”**

This research explores how students look within themselves and unpack their identities as influenced by their experiences in a nonformal education space. To do so, students must explore their identity at the front. Students within this study were encouraged to reflect on their identities and consider how non-formal educational spaces at the Centre have affected their perceptions of their identity. Students within this research share two of the same identity aspects: Black and female. Through looking at multiple modes of their identity, students will be faced with also looking into their intersectionality. Jones and Abes (2013) note the importance of this concept:

Intersectionality has become popular in educational contexts and among student development scholars because, on the face of it, intersectionality appears to capture more fully the complexity of who we are as individuals, acknowledges that each of us possesses multiple identities, and addresses the argument that "there are multiple dimensions of social life operating in every micromoment" (as cited in Luft, 2009). (p. 135)

### ***Intersectionality***

This research recognizes how Black women have been excluded in educational settings and how that leads them to non-formal educational spaces. It is important to note that students in AEP come with a variety of identity factors such as being first generation college students, cis-

gendered, and low income. I discuss how intersectionality is used to understand the research focus and students' identity.

Intersectionality was originated by Kimberlé Crenshaw. In an interview with Columbia University, Crenshaw describes intersectionality this way:

Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things. (Columbia University Law School, 2017, para. 4)

Crenshaw highlighted the importance of first acknowledging that there is not one singular issue that influences identity, but all of them. Jones and Abes (2013) implemented this approach when they explored intersectionality to understand the multidimensions of students' identity and experiences in higher education to uncover social injustices. Jones and Abes (2013) also noted that intersectionality originated with the understanding of oppression within people who identify as women and of color. Originally, researchers were not looking at the intersection of identities to understand injustices and oppressions. Jones and Abes (2013) highlighted Crenshaw's analysis on black women being affected by violence in society and lacking the explanation of being both women and Black. Crenshaw's interest in investigating Black women came from the lack of awareness from society as to why Black women as an intersection were oppressed. Crenshaw's analysis created an ability to look at how oppressive patterns affect multiple identities.

Intersectionality is known to connect the individual and systems of structure and oppression by

- (1) Placing the lived experiences and struggles of people of color and other marginalized groups as a starting point for the development of theory;
- (2) Exploring the complexities

not only of individual identities but also group identity, recognizing that variations within groups are often ignored and essentialized; (3) Unveiling the ways interconnected domains of power organize and structure inequality and oppression; and (4) Promoting social justice and social change by linking research and practice to create a holistic approach to the eradication of disparities and to changing social and higher education institutions. (Dill & Zambrana, 2009a; Shields, 2008, as cited in Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 143)

This research hopes to mimic Crenshaw's method of acknowledging all aspects of students' identity while using the intersectional approach as well. Using this approach will allow others to learn of the experiences of people of color. The intersectional approach provides a thorough analysis of understanding the lived experience of students' identity and then deconstructs the complexities to promote social justice. The intersectional approach in this research study enabled students and me to focus on potential systemic issues to promote social justice and eliminate inequalities within education in Zambia that have caused such an increase in students utilizing "community schools" that have pushed Black students into nonformal educational spaces.

### ***The Intersection of the Educational Experience for Black Girls in Zambia***

Black girls in Zambia have been targeted for gender-based crime at a much higher rate than boys. Rae Hamoonga, the Zambia police spokesperson, (2021) reported that 22.9% of victims that experience Gender Based Violence were children. Girls represent 74% of this violence. In addition, girls represent 60.5% of abused victims in the country. Based on this information, law officials are aware of the abuse and gender-based violence among children. However, researchers Freya Johnson Ross and Jenny Parkes, discuss within their research the

impact of gender-based violence in Zambia (and other South African countries) and how law officials and policymakers are not holding up their end of ending violence and abuse among youth. Johnson Ross and Park (2021) report that there are gaps in the understanding of the relationship between policy and evidence, and its enactment for gender-based violence. Black girls have been targeted and abused within Zambia. In addition, as mentioned before, AEP is located outside of the capitol, Lusaka, where there are reported to have the highest number of child defilement cases at 26.2%. Unfortunately, Black girls in AEP suffer from these chances of being abused or assaulted. These data do not include the violence and dehumanization happening within school settings.

Women and Law in Southern Africa Trust-Zambia, Cornell Law School (2012) reported that most of the sexual violence happening to Zambian girls was perpetrated by the male educators. In addition, nearly 60% of girls reported that they knew a teacher who had harassed or abused a female student. Based on this violence, girls in Zambia need a safe space to learn. Although AEP provides girls a safe space to learn, they cannot commit to protecting them from these crimes within schools. In addition, Women and Law in Southern Africa Trust-Zambia, Cornell Law School (2012) also reported that teachers would use money, food, school fee coverage among other things to convince girls to have sexual relations with them. As mentioned before, more than half the population in Zambia live below the poverty line. One could see why girls would agree to this arrangement. Therefore, programs like Threads of Hope, are important for Black girls to gain their own financial freedom for themselves and their family. Threads of Hope has provided the space for girls in AEP to learn how to tailor clothing in exchange for financial independence. This type of program also encourages conversations about many of the goals that Women and Law in Southern Africa Trust-Zambia, Cornell Law School (2012)

advocate for. Women and Law in Southern Africa Trust-Zambia, Cornell Law School (2012) recommend the Ministry of Education in Zambia to work with civil society organizations that offer safe spaces for brave discussions about sexual harassment and violence experienced in schools. Safe spaces, like non-formal educational spaces, can play a significant role in creating these environments for girls. Dolet and Salas (2021), in their research of creating safe spaces for Black girls in middle schools, recommend collaborating with nonprofits organizations to support students who have been assaulted. These collaborations could potentially change the lives of girls who have been assaulted and create an awareness and knowledge for those who have not been assaulted.

### **Black Racial Identity**

This section provides context related to the students' Black racial identity in non-formal spaces. Within this section, I give an overview of how non-formal educational spaces have created a safe space for Black students to develop their racial identity.

### ***Blackness and Africanness***

Blackness is the overall theme for this research. While investigating Blackness, I found that Blackness is fluid and forever evolving. There is no correct or incorrect answer for what Blackness is or is not Zeleza (2016) acknowledges that:

African and Blackness have been synonymous with struggles, resistance, and liberation. These histories have joined groups over the course of human history such that Africa today is not confined solely to a physical or geographical location. Africa is more than a continent. Africa and African identities are also about “states of being and of becoming.” (as cited in Sefa Dei, 2018, p. 124)



Students within AEP all share the commonality of being Zambian but may experience Blackness very differently. While understanding the description of Blackness held by Zambian students, there is no separation of their African identity. Sefa Dei (2018) recognizes the misrepresentation of Blackness and Africanness through the European colonial representation of Black/African. The European colonial representation highlights Blackness and Africanness as “deviant, criminal, abnormal, and degenerate...” (Sefa Dei, 2018, p. 126). However, the African cultural expression of Blackness can be found symbolizing “holiness, purity, beauty, happiness, and anger” (Sefa Dei, 2018, p. 126). To promote a more comprehensive understanding of Blackness, Sefa Dei (2018) recommends: moving away from a singular homogeneous understanding of what Blackness means to recognizing who is being excluded from this understanding of Blackness and widening the understanding of the African diaspora to create inclusion within the diaspora. Based on this expansion of the diaspora in uncovering the description of Blackness for AEP students, Sefa Dei (2018) acknowledges that researchers will undoubtedly learn more about Blackness for other students and people within the African diaspora. Understanding different representations of Blackness only enlightens the understanding of Blackness/Africanness. Sefa Dei (2018) suggests that “Blackness should not just be a study about us; it must be a study for us!” (p. 136). Through students in AEP sharing their own description of Blackness, students are taking an active part in the research and understanding of Blackness.

### ***Racial Identity Development***

“Racial identity refers to how one’s conception of themselves relates to race as well as a focuses on the social and political impact of visible group membership on psychological functioning” (Johnson & Arbona, 2006, as cited in Hypolite, 2020, p. 495). People not only look at themselves for racial identity confirmation, but how those within privileged societies look at

them to understand their racial identity. There is a positive impact on Black students' academic success when there are positive outlets for racial identity development; however, if Black students do not receive a safe, positive environment for this racial development and endure negative racialized experiences, students can start to feel race-related stress. Yet, Hypolite (2020) acknowledged through her research that safe spaces like Black cultural centers (BCCs), which are considered non-formal educational spaces, provide safe racial developmental spaces for Black students. Hypolite (2020) recounted the following experience of a college junior, Elle, who utilized the BCC:

I think I've just been able to grow as, like, a Black woman through that [BCC] space. So definitely my Black identity I've been able to learn more about what that is and I think before I came here I saw it as there was this one image of Blackness and through the different events they have had, like [Black Talk Back], and just . . . like meeting people there because of the space they created, just learning that there is no one image of Blackness, it's anything and everything. (Hypolite, 2020, p. 241)

Elle's story is just one example of how influential Black non-formal spaces can be for Black students. Elle helps educators recognize that non-formal spaces like BCC support first year Black students in their adjustment to campus through better understanding of their history and personal identities. Understanding student experiences, like Elle's, helped provide guidance to better understand AEP students and how they describe their Blackness within their non-formal spaces.

### ***Racial Developmental Intentionality***

In a space where Black racial identity is encouraged there should be a sense of intentionality to promote the growth of their Black racial identity. This intentional process works

in the understanding of who Black people are and what they have endured in the past and present to better understand and equip them for their future. Dillard (2020) acknowledges that:

Black children deserve school contexts that are homeplace (hooks, 1991), places where every- thing about them is affirmed, beautiful, comfortable, ‘normal,’ brilliant and special, even within a world and in material conditions that may speak otherwise. And everything we do as teachers must create the cultural, social, curricular and pedagogical space that (re)members and (re)covers their humanity and thus, our own... That means that to create spaces that honor the spirit of Black children... (p. 703)

Dillard (2020) provides information to highlight what traditional educational settings should contain for Black students; however, as mentioned before, this is not always available for Black students. Nonetheless, non-formal educational spaces may provide this type of affirming and normalizing of Blackness for students.

AEP honors Black students by aiming to provide a space for them to learn and grow as individuals. The African Education Program website (n.d.) notes that girls in AEP are allowed to be a part of the Threads of Hope program. Threads of Hope is the first income generating program within AEP. As mentioned before, there is a great financial struggle for students in AEP. Within Threads of Hope, girls learn how to tailor and alter clothing to earn money for themselves and their family. This program began with an AEP alumnus, Alice, who obtained her tailoring certification through the sponsorship of AEP. Alice created this program to help girls in AEP to not only “gain skills, knowledge and an opportunity for economic independence, but to foster leadership skills, empowerment, and gender equality” (African Education Program, n.d., para. 6). Savarit-Cosenza acknowledged that often girls within AEP have to pick between receiving an education and financially providing for their family (J. Savarit-Cosenza, personal

communication, May 30, 2022). Threads of Hope was created with intentionality for girls to not have to pick between financial security and education. Through this intentionality of Threads of Hope, girls in the program are allowed to gain skills while feeling empowered through their independence.

### **Conclusion**

This literature review chapter highlighted educational spaces, Zambian history, African Education Program (AEP), identity, and Blackness. Through these topics, this chapter has shown a gap in research about how students perceive Blackness, especially those in non-formal educational spaces. The literature reviewed in this chapter indicates the complexity of Blackness and the need for continuous research. In addition, Zambia plays a key role in uncovering Blackness in Black students due to the lack of research on Black identity of those from African nations. Although sources reviewed in this chapter recommend non-formal educational spaces for Black students, there is limited research on how community organizations in Zambia affect the development of these students' understandings of Blackness. Within the next chapter, Methodology, I discuss my research design to help uncover how Black Zambian students in non-formal educational spaces describe their Blackness.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I will discuss the methodology used for my research to understand how Black female Zambian gap year students describe their Blackness in a non-formal educational space. This research aimed to provide educators, especially non-Black educators, a chance to understand how non-formal spaces affect Black student development and to perhaps help educators gain insight on how to help Black students enhance and develop their Blackness in their educational space. This section will disclose the qualitative approach for research, the sample size and location, data collection strategies, analysis processes, and ethical considerations.

#### **Research Question and Sub-Question**

How do Black female Zambian gap year students within a nonformal educational space describe what Blackness means to them?

How do participants describe the role of the nonformal space in their lives?

#### **Research Design**

For this research, I used a qualitative research approach. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that qualitative researchers "...are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 6). Hearing the stories of Zambian students in AEP allowed me to understand their experiences first-hand. Since I am not of Zambian ancestry, hearing their experiences was the best way to unpack my research question. Their world was a new understanding for me, and I wanted to explore and articulate it in a way that only Zambian culture could know.

The qualitative approaches I chose for this research include a case-study and a phenomenological approach. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) define a case-study as “...an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 37). The in-depth description for this case study allowed students within AEP to describe their Blackness from their firsthand experiences. And the bounded system for this case study was found within the specific sample of students from AEP. This close analysis of a bounded system, AEP gap year students, helped me to gain an in-depth understanding of students’ Blackness. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) define phenomenological research as “a study of people’s conscious experience of their own life-world; that is, their everyday life and social action” (p. 26). I believed that learning about Zambian students’ lived experiences would heighten my ability to connect with them about what Blackness means to them. As mentioned in Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a phenomenological approach is appropriate for understanding emotion and intense human experiences. Through this study, students unpacked their emotions and human experience of being Black within a non-formal space.

### **Site**

This study took place online via Zoom. Selected AEP students were at the Amos Youth Centre, commonly known as The Centre, in Zambia. The AEP website (n.d.) recognizes The Amos Youth Centre as being dedicated to students in Zambia to provide a safe space for them to feel welcomed and express creativity. During the interviews, selected students were in a closed classroom for privacy. I was within my home to provide privacy and confidentiality for students being interviewed.

### **Sample**

This study included four Black female students from AEP between the ages of 20-22 within the gap year program. Students had an intermediate level of English. Zambian students are required to learn in English during their K-12 education. Students were selected due to their completion of high school and awaiting to go to university within the next year to year and a half. Every student within AEP does not go to university. Choosing university-bound students enabled me to explore their future academic pathway and learn how their Blackness affected their past and their future. This study was conducted five to eight weeks during the fall and winter 2022-2023 semesters.

### **Data Collection**

This study used the following data collection methods: semi-structured interviews, online synchronous interviews, and a researcher's journal.

#### ***Semi-Structured Interviews***

This study used semi-structured interviews. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) highlighted that semi structured interviews are:

...in the middle, between structured and unstructured. In this type of interview either all of the questions are more flexibly worded or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions... most of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time. This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic. (p. 111)

I employed this interview format by allowing students to guide the interview and provided room for follow-up questions. The structured aspect of this interview technique allowed me to have a guideline of questions to ask students. But the semi structure aspect of this interview technique

ensured students to have the flexibility to answer questions with follow-ups. This practice also allowed students to bring up new themes that could emerge within the interview.

### ***Online Synchronous Interviews***

Additionally, I conducted these interviews in an online synchronous format. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) define synchronous interviews as interviews through online video mediums that are happening in real time. This method of interviews allowed me to not be restricted by being in Zambia, but in the US. Also, online interviews were recorded to allow for playbacks to analyze interviews afterwards.

### ***Interview Model***

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe the purpose of interviewing as a way to enter into another's perspective. I have separated the interview questions into two categories: The Centre and Blackness and Identity. The Centre questions unpacked how students described their experience at the Centre. The Blackness and Identity questions allowed students to begin describing their identity and Blackness in general and within the Center. Using the following interview questions allowed me to understand students' perspective of Blackness.

#### **Interview Questions.**

The Centre Interview Questions:

1. Describe a typical day at the Centre.
2. How do you typically interact with students at the Centre?
3. Describe the Centre before completing secondary school.
4. Describe your relationship with staff at the Centre now that you have graduated.
5. Describe your feelings toward the Centre.
6. How do you feel about working at the Centre after graduating?



7. Do you feel that other students look up to you from your participation in AEP? If so, how does this make you feel?

Blackness and Identity Interview Questions:

1. When you hear the word "identity" what comes to mind?
2. What are important things within your identity?
3. Are there things that have influenced your identity?
4. What does being a Black woman mean to you?
5. What does "Black identity" mean to you?
6. What does "Blackness" mean to you?
7. What does Blackness feel like in the Centre?
8. What does Blackness smell like in the Centre?
9. What does Blackness look like in the Centre?

Interviews were conducted over five to eight weeks for about an hour to an hour and a half total with each participant. This time period allowed me to set up two interviews to first discuss The Centre and then to discuss Blackness and identity. First, I asked students about The Centre to begin with a neutral conversation and eventually built up to personal questions for students. The final set of questions started with the students creating their own definition of identity, Blackness, and being a woman/Black woman. Students were given the opportunity to follow-up at any point to ask additional question, provide additional information, or clarify any information.

***Researcher's Journal***

Lastly, I used a researcher's journal. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) note that, "What is written down or mechanically recorded from a period of observation becomes the raw data from

which a study's findings eventually emerge. This written account of the observation constitutes field notes, which are analogous to the interview transcript" (p. 149). The notes taken during and after the interview provided a description of the interviewees' actions and comments. Using a researcher's journal to relay the observations within this study allowed me to keep record of things happening in real time. In addition, I documented emerging themes within the data. Notetaking was done virtually through my iPad within the Goodnotes app. I took limited notes during the interviews and documented potential themes after the interview.

**Two Column Method.** Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommend using a two-column method where the researcher uses one side of the page for notetaking during the interview and the other side for later analysis. The first column highlighted participants' reactions to questions. Also, the first column was used to describe students' appearances. This practice aided in later analyzing their body expressions and characteristics, pauses, or emphasis on certain experiences. The second column contained more subjective researcher ideas. Here I noted questions that I had or my reactions to participants' answers. I also noted some key themes that seemed to be emerging from the data.

### ***Semi-Structured Interview Strengths and Limitations***

A strength with using semi-structured interviews was the flexibility for students and myself to have follow up questions. We weren't constricted to the questions that I developed like if I were to use structured interviews. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that semi-structured interviews allow students to gain a new self-awareness to matters that they may have never been able to before interviewing. In contrast, there were also challenges with using semi-structured interviews. For example, students felt vulnerable about sharing information with me. Due to the

personal nature of the research, students disclosed confidential information and certain scenarios needed discretion within Chapter 4.

### ***Online Synchronous Interview Strengths and Limitations***

A strength while using online synchronous interviews allowed me to not be restricted by being in a different country than students. In addition, I had access to the audio recordings after the interview had been conducted. This aided in developing an adequate analysis and memory recognition of interviews. However, challenges including technology issues caused an interruption in the interviews with all of the participants. And, because we were not in fully secure location confidentiality could have been broken.

### ***Researcher's Journal Strengths and Limitations***

A strength while using a researcher's journal was the ability to have written events or occurrences down for later memory recollection. Also, this process allowed me to be reflective in practices that I exhibited for students and their practices for me. Lastly, the research journal allowed me to include descriptive information during the interview experience for later analysis. In addition to the strengths mentioned, there were challenges. A limitation I found while using a researcher's journal during an interview is the loss of information while writing down notes. Also, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) acknowledged that if too much time passes between taking notes and the interview, there could be a loss of memory recollection.

### ***Data Collection Strengths and Limitations Summary Remarks***

The various approaches mentioned within the methodology allowed me to have a diverse group of data collection. Online semi-structured interviews allowed for open-ended and fluid interview questions and answers while providing structure for specific questions. To support the

interviews, using a researcher's journal allowed me to highlight real time events that happened during the interview.

### **Analysis**

While finding the description of how female Black Zambian gap year students explained their blackness in non-formal educational spaces and the meaning of the Centre to students required an in-depth analysis of the data collected through interviews and the researcher's journal. Mertler (2020) explains that when conducting qualitative data analysis, researchers utilize inductive thinking. He notes that thinking inductively means examining specific data to look for patterns that lead to general conclusions and theories. In order to think inductively, I used coding and evaluation of the data collected to answer my research questions. Coding within the researcher's journal and interviews allowed me to create themes and compare similarities.

### ***Coding***

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that, "Coding is nothing more than assigning some sort of short- hand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data" (p. 199). I found myself using coding to analyze data from recorded interviews and the researcher's journal. Using a researcher's journal, I was able to color code student remarks to support the research questions. This enabled me to also create a new document to better organize students' remarks and potential themes. The new document was a chart that included the following columns: the emerging themes and sub-themes, research question, my interview question, the participant's quote with their initials, and analysis. Each cell represented one participant's remarks and included the above listed information. Each theme was color-coded in the chart and aligned to the appropriate research question it addressed. For example, the theme of the Centre as home was color-coded in red and the theme of self-

confidence was color-coded in blue. This document allowed me to re-create and organize themes with participant responses as further analysis developed throughout the coding process.

Using shorthand during the interviews, I was able to identify categories that helped me separate different themes that emerged within interviews and in turn find key descriptors for Blackness and the meaning of the Centre to participants. Using color coding allowed for an easy retrieval of data. Lastly, as students made influential comments or actions, I created a numeric system to easily identify within recordings when students mentioned said comments or actions.

### **Quality Control and Ethics**

To ensure that I conducted my research in an appropriate manner, I used quality control and ethical practices in my study. In this section, I discuss triangulation, member checking, researcher's position, rich, thick description, and ethics.

#### ***Triangulation***

Triangulation is described in four types: “the use of multiple methods, multiple sources of data, multiple investigators, or multiple theories to confirm emerging findings” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 244). I used multiple methods of data to confirm all findings. For example, I used the interview recordings to compare the data within my research journal to cross-check data collected. Consequently, triangulation served as a way to support validity and reliability in my study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) define validity as “whether the data are, in fact, what they are believed or purported to be - in other words, did we actually measure what we intended to measure, based on the focus of our research?” (p. 155). In addition, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) define reliability in qualitative research as dependability or consistency. In other words, the results should be consistent with the data collected. Using triangulation supported validity by

providing multiple forms of data to ensure credibility and reliability by creating consistency between data and their results.

### ***Member Checking***

Member checking is, "...that you solicit feedback on your preliminary or emerging findings from some of the people that you interviewed" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 246). For students to describe their Blackness accurately, students were given the opportunity to contact myself at any point for follow-up questions, comments, and concerns. I also used What's App for all follow up questions, comments, and/or concerns through text. This form of member checking allowed students to feel secure in their responses and ensure accuracy of information. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) note that member checking is one of the most important ways of ruling out possible misunderstandings or interpretations of observations to ensure validity and trustworthiness.

### ***Researcher's Position***

To ensure validity and reliability, I utilized critical self-reflection to uncover biases from my own researcher positionality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) provide the following definition of researcher's position as, "... how the researcher affects and is affected by the research process" (p. 249). As mentioned before, I am a part of the Black and non-formal educational space community. I could have been affected by this research. Although, I did not note any biases within my researcher's journal, this was a constant notion in my mind through the interview process with students. By acknowledging my biases mentally, I was able to commit to validity and reliability by uncovering if what was measured was intended, without the effect of my bias.

### ***Rich, thick description***

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe rich, thick description as a detailed description of findings within research to create adequate evidence. Rich, thick description can be validated with “participant interviews, field notes, and documents” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 257). Within this research, I used participant interviews and field notes documented in the researcher’s journal to create adequate evidence of the emerging themes and findings within the research. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) report that rich, thick description will provide transferability. Transferability helps others make connections to another study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By conveying a thorough description of Blackness for students in non-formal educational spaces and their meaning on the Centre, I was able to support transferability and hold meaning for others. Students were also able to provide sufficient descriptive data within the interviews and follow up sessions to support transferability.

### **Ethics**

The African Education Program gave consent to not use pseudonyms for this research; however, student participants’ identities were kept confidential with pseudonyms. In addition, I kept all research data in an encrypted folder on my password protected laptop and iPad. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommend that working within an online medium there must be signed consent for participants to be willing to participate within the study. To ensure this study was conducted ethically, students were required to sign a consent form to participate. In addition, I followed all IRB guidelines to ensure this study was conducted ethically.

### **Conclusion**

In this methods section, I detailed the qualitative approach for research, the sample size and location, data collection strategies, analysis processes, and ethical considerations. All of the information included in this chapter led to the findings reported in chapter 4.





## Chapter 4: Findings

To begin this chapter, profiles of the four participants are provided to give a brief description of their background information and their place within the Centre. The participant summaries attempt to provide a more holistic overview of them as individuals. After these profiles, I will address the primary and secondary research questions and discuss the themes that emerged from the research interviews with participants.

### Profiles

Participants Mercy Kataba, Chama Kasma, Victory Mongo, and Yvonne Rox will be introduced in more detail within this section. Each participant is a female native Zambian and active Gap Year student at the Centre. They have all graduated from high school and are awaiting to attend university in the next year to year and a half.

#### *Mercy Kataba*

Mercy is currently 21 years old and is the second born within a family of eight. Her father passed away when she was only a baby. Mercy was raised by her grandparents and mother. However, she currently lives with her stepfather and older sister. Mercy has been a student with AEP since she was in grade eight. She will be going to university next year, in the year 2024, to study hospitality management. Mercy described this field as working within hotels, meal planning, and being a waitress. She mentioned that more specifically her focus will be within the culinary arts field. Mercy will be going to school online so that she can stay close to home and the Centre. Currently, Mercy works as a facilitator in the Centre for Students. She facilitates conversations like Girl's Talk, drama, and art. Students who participate in Girl's Talk are between grades 11 and 12. She has led conversations about menstrual hygiene, hygiene of a woman, drug and alcohol abuse, peer pressure, and other topics that help the students develop

during their prime puberty years. Within the drama club, she used real-world events for students to act out. This method is used to help students learn real-world experiences that they may have discussed in Girl's Talk. Mercy described this approach as a way for students to be active in their life learning process (M. Kataba, personal communication, December 12, 2022).

### ***Chama Kasama***

Chama is currently 21 years old. She was raised by her mother, whom she credits to her ability to love being a Black woman. Chama graduated from secondary school in 2020 and will be going to university soon. Chama facilitates Girl's Talk and Leadership Club. Within her facilitation of Girl's Talk, she discussed the importance of mental health and hygiene. Chama mentioned that she likes to give the "younger ones" the ability to learn more about these issues. Chama discussed how important it is for students to be comfortable talking about various topics and sharing their views. Chama, being a part of the AEP community for a long duration, was able to disclose how different the Centre was in comparison to when she was a student. She noticed how when she was a student there were not as many options for clubs, but students now can join a diverse array of clubs (C. Kasama, personal communication, January 13, 2023).

### ***Victory Mongo***

Victory is currently 20 years old. She is the second born within a family of five. Victory graduated high school in 2021. She struggled for a while with school but eventually received an honorary distinction for her exams and this distinction encouraged her to continue to thrive for success. Aside from school, she has a passion for music. Victory sings gospel music, especially, but loves all music. Although Victory is Zambian, she also loves Nigerian music. She hopes in the future that she can meet artists and people who have inspired her music journey. Due to her passion for music, Victory is one of the music teachers in the Centre. Victory inspires students in

the space to embrace their musical creativity while they inspire her to do the same. Victory feels called to help those around her because of all the support she was given by AEP (V. Mongo, personal communication, January 18, 2022).

### ***Yvonne Rox***

Yvonne is the third born of seven. She completed secondary school in 2019 and will be attending university within a year. Yvonne is from a small village in Kafue. She shared that her favorite colors are blue, white, and pink. Yvonne excitingly expressed her love for food but, especially, okra. As a Gap Year student, she teaches the high school students. Yvonne teaches spelling, art, music, and dance. She enjoys her time teaching at the Centre and will be going to university for a degree in teaching (Y. Rox, personal communication, December 16, 2022).

### **Research Questions**

The primary research question for this study is: How do Black female Zambian gap year students within a nonformal educational space describe what Blackness means to them? By collecting data from interviewing participants and analyzing that data, three themes and subthemes emerged from the first research question: Blackness is Humanness, “Your skin is dark like charcoal”, and Blackness in the Centre. Several of these themes also have subthemes. Each theme is supported by participants’ remarks and experiences at the Centre and in Zambian community and culture.

The sub-research question for this study is: How do participants describe the role of the nonformal space in their lives? Within the interviews, two themes and subthemes emerged from the second research question: Community Safe Space and The Centre is Home. These themes also have subthemes that are included in their section. These themes were created based on the participants' reaction to the Centre after attending the Centre from a younger age to becoming a

Gap Year student where they can give back to the AEP community. While analyzing the interview data, subthemes were created to help support the claims of participants and provide a rich, thick description and triangulation within the data.

### **Blackness is Humanness**

Throughout this study, the emerging theme of Blackness is Humanness refers to the impact of Blackness on the participants' humanness. Participants describe how their identity and themselves are impacted by being Black. Due to Blackness being humanness, students are able to describe their identity and Blackness. Many of the participants suggest that Blackness plays a positive role in their identity. However, the participants within this section show the fluidity of pride and oppression within the ability to describe and display Black pride. In moments shared within this section, students compare their Blackness to the impact of how whiteness has impacted the beauty of dark skin and Black people. Although this imprisonment of oppression plays a vital role in their identity, participants grow from the attempt to limit their Blackness to lighter skin or whiteness. Participants do express that all people within the Zambian community do not have this experience and fall victim to methods of decreasing their Black appearance. This phrase helps us to understand the research question of how students describe their Blackness within a non-formal space. In efforts to understand Blackness being humanness, I have provided an understanding of Blackness as a part of humanness, two participants' description of identity, their description of how their Blackness is a part of them, and three participants' description of the impact of whiteness on Blackness.

### ***Understanding Blackness as a Part of Humanness***

Participants were asked a series of questions to describe their Blackness and what Blackness was in the Centre. Through those series of questions, the theme of humanness and

Blackness arose from two participants: Chama and Mercy. Participants could describe Blackness in any way that they chose, but humanness quickly became a common theme throughout their responses. Blackness was a part of their total existence as a human. They could not be human without being Black and Black without being human. This phrase helped to explain one way participants described their Blackness during their interviews.

**Identity.** Participants were first asked to describe their identity. This question puzzled students. Based on the confused and smirking reactions from students, it suggests that the question was something simple to explain but hard to find the words for (K. Brown, researcher's journal, January 13-16, 2023). After an ongoing conversation with students about answering the question without giving them a definition, they were able to come up with their definition for their identity and Black identity. Many of them expressed that identity and Black identity were a part of who they were and played an important role in their lives.

Although participants had unique responses to how they described identity, they all had similar definitions. Mercy explained identity as, "...it means, a part of a human being like, who are you? What are you capable of doing, something which describes a person" (M. Kataba, personal communication, January 13, 2023). Her reaction to the interview question about describing identity suggested that she viewed identity as a part of who someone is as a person. She followed up by stating descriptive factors that contribute to one's identity, "...some important things my like, my skin color, sex, about my culture. Such, yeah" (M. Kataba, personal communication, January 13, 2023). Here she described her characteristics of identity. For Mercy, her remarks suggested that she uses physical characteristics and humanness to describe her identity.

Chama had a similar description of identity. She explained identity as:

...my culture, my beliefs, and my environment, the things I like and there's values as well... Okay, we have like, let's say in Zambia, different cultures. So, my culture or description is like, you can tell okay, I don't know maybe you won't be able to pronounce the words. But I'm (tribe), my tribe, like that is my trade-in or disclose my culture. (C. Kasama, personal communication, January 13, 2023)

Chama used culture to define identity. Chama began to get specific about her own experience with her identity and culture. While expressing her identity, she warned me that I may not know how to pronounce words within her Zambian culture. These comments suggest that Chama is a part of an identity group that I am not a part of, which makes her response all the more unique in her description of identity.

**Blackness as a Part of Me.** Chama and Mercy's interviews about Blackness and identity suggested that participants felt a sense of pride and oppression from their Black identity. These aspects existing at the same time caused an intense number of emotions for students towards their identity. To begin, Mercy described her Black identity as "Black identity means belonging somewhere. Yeah, belonging somewhere like the race, color, says the culture (M. Kataba, personal communication, January 13, 2023). Mercy signified that Black identity is the art of belonging somewhere. This could include culture, color, or race. The sense of belonging suggested that being Black is a part of the whole being experienced by Black people. Mercy followed up this description by noting her own Blackness as, "Oh, the Blackness feels like just the feeling in me (M. Kataba, personal communication, January 13, 2023). Mercy's description of Blackness as a feeling inside of her indicated that Blackness is a part of her. This depiction of Blackness conveyed the idea that she could not separate her Blackness from herself. Mercy and Chama continued to show Black pride in their description of Blackness. Chama described her

Black identity as, "...it means, I can say, greatness. I can say beauty, strength, courageous" (C. Kasama, personal communication, January 13, 2023). These descriptors revealed a positive connotation to Blackness from Chama.

**Imprisonment of whiteness in Black Humanness.** Throughout the interviews, three of the participants described Blackness in comparison to whiteness.

*Victory.* Victory implied a disheartening opinion of whiteness in comparison to Blackness. She explained the impact of fighting against white superiority in Black community as:

So yeah, Black is beautiful. You look nice. Yes, you might have it all. But at the end of the day, it's always that thing inside me. If you're white, if you're light, you'd be better person. You'd have some advantages. You wouldn't be who you are now, you'd have other things as in, you'd be a better person. You'd be better if you were white. (V. Mongo, personal communication, January 26, 2023)

Victory expressed that whiteness creates a betterment within society. And Victory explained during her interview that even if you believe in your beauty as a Black person, there is always something lingering inside of you that makes you hesitate whether your Blackness is enough. This imprisonment of whiteness being a superiority has implied a potential hatred for Blackness and created an oppressive, self-hating othering.

*Mercy.* Mercy, first, described Blackness in comparison to whiteness:

I shouldn't like intimidate myself, like, because I'm black. I can do anything. Despite being white, or black. We are all the same. So, I shouldn't neglect myself. No, because I'm dark I can't do what a white person can do? So, I just have to figure out myself like, I just have to put myself like, No, I'm black! Being Black is a blessing to me. I'm also

capable of doing what a white person can do. And the white person can also do what a black person can do. Yes! (M. Kataba, personal communication, January 13, 2023)

Mercy's comments represent the dichotomy between pride and oppression in her understanding of Black identity. She displays pride in her Blackness but in response to the oppression of Black people by the white community for being Black and, also, having dark skin. In reaction to that oppression, Mercy showed determination in her pride for Blackness, being a blessing to her after many years of opposing thoughts.

*Chama.* As mentioned before, Blackness seems to be a reaction to whiteness in the participants' spaces in Zambia. Chama describes the response to the colorism that lives inside the Zambian community. According to Mercy, people who have dark skin are targeted within the community. Chama supported these claims and added that people within the community will resort to bleaching their skin in reaction to the insecurity created by whiteness or lighter skin being the standard of beauty within the Zambian community (C. Kasama, personal communication, January 13, 2023).

### *Summary*

Chama and Mercy provided examples of the fluidity of Blackness within the Zambian and AEP communities. Chama, Victory, and Mercy expressed pride in Blackness but in reaction to whiteness and how they or others were perceived because of their Blackness. However, this perception of black fluidity and whiteness did not change the ability of Blackness to be a strong, beautiful blessing within themselves.

### **Your Skin is Dark Like Charcoal**

During an interview with Mercy, she mentioned that while she was younger and growing up in Zambia someone referred to her skin as “dark like charcoal”. This notion stayed with her



throughout her exploration of her Black identity. Although the two other participants mentioned in this section did not have someone compare their skin to charcoal, they felt the negative implications of having dark skin in a world where lighter skin is deemed as more beautiful, as described by all the participants. Students directly related their Black identity to the shade of their Black skin. Three participants: Mercy, Chama, and Victory described their Blackness through their dark skin. A lot of what students learned about their Blackness and skin tone came from what they were told in comparison to lighter or white skin. This theme helps to understand how participants described their Blackness by uncovering the process of self-love students gained by coming into the space and learning more about their Black beauty through mentorship and self-development.

### *The Realization*

All of the participants are a part of the dark skin Black community (K. Brown, researcher's journal, January 13-16, 2023). Most of them share similar stories in their interviews about understanding their dark skin in a suggested world where white is the beauty standard. Their Blackness starts with the realization of either being Black or having dark skin.

**Mercy's Realization.** Mercy describes her experience growing up as a dark Black woman and her realization moment:

...it was the time when I reached my puberty but yeah, because back then I never, like, kind of, accepted myself the way I was. So, I just felt like being Black was just too much for me. I could admire those who are white. Oh, I wish I was white but never knew. Like, being Black was just something which was not a precious thing in me. Not until I reached

puberty. But that's when I had to understand everything. (M. Kataba, personal communication, January 13, 2023)

Mercy expressed the timeline of her realization of being a dark skin woman starting before puberty. Mercy began this timeline by discussing how she was influenced by white beauty standards. This influence suggested that she had a lack of ability to conceptualize her beauty of being a Black woman (M. Kataba, personal communication, January 13, 2023). Mercy described her lack of ability to accept her Blackness so much that she wanted to be white during this time, and her Blackness became too much for her to accept. As mentioned before, Mercy was referred to as charcoal during this time, so her realization suggested the impact of racial trauma during her childhood years before puberty.

**Chama's Realization.** Chama had a similar realization of her Blackness growing up in Zambia. She describes her realization:

When I was very young. I used to be in maybe watching cartoons, or see pictures or anything of, like, white ladies. Yeah. And I wished I was like that cartoon. I wish I was like that girl in the movies. She's light skin and blonde hair. (C. Kasama, personal communication, January 13, 2023)

Like Mercy, Chama had a realization of Blackness in reaction to the perpetuation of white beauty in the media. This realization suggests the power of whiteness and the impact of colorism within the media. Participants witnessed whiteness and lighter skin being glamorized while their skin color could potentially be compared to something with a negative connotation, like charcoal. Chama also mentioned the desire to have blonde hair during this time. This desire to have blonde

hair seemed to indicate the impact of texturism within the Black community based on white beauty standards being portrayed on television. Chama and Mercy were both impacted by this haunting reality.

**Victory's Realization.** Victory shares a different perspective on her realization of Blackness within Black Zambian culture:

Well, see being black, usually...you're brought up in a way whereby you feel like white people are better than you. So even as you're growing up, it's really hard for you to convince yourself to say no, yes, black is nice, black is beautiful and everything is we see people saying. It's like beautiful. But at the end of the day, you're like, okay, maybe these guys are just trying to comfort themselves. Because at the end of the day, some people are still bleaching...So they see that as being beautiful and so even when they say no, Black is beautiful, people still regard those that are lighter, as beautiful. And so, as much as I try to feel like yes, I'm beautiful. Yes, black is nice. Society you is saying no, you're not because those that are lighter...so I think being Black has a lot of negativities with it. Not really that bad but how people painted it, especially to black people. (V. Mongo, personal communication, January 26, 2023)

Unlike Victory's co-workers, she ended her reflections on Blackness by blaming the Black community for aiding in a colorist society. She expressed an extreme amount of frustration during our interview. Before Victory mentioned how the Black community played a vital role in whiteness and lighter skin being portrayed in the Black community as better, she acknowledged that growing up she was taught that the white community is seen as better in society than Black people. This comparison led her to believe that those who express joy for Blackness could just be

trying to make themselves feel better and are telling themselves lies. Again, lighter and white skin tones were seen as the beauty standard as was described in Chama and Mercy's experience with their realization as well.

### *Despite It All*

After Mercy and Chama came to the realization that they are Black, the data from the interviews suggested that at some point in their lives their attitudes shifted from Black self-hate to Black self-love. The participants were able to experience this self-love at some point in their lives.

**Despite It All: Chama.** Chama eventually learns to accept help from those around her, and she can connect with her Blackness. Through the process of beginning with the community, she describes Blackness as, "Beautiful everything Yeah, I can say Blackness is beautiful" (C. Kasama, personal communication, January 13, 2023). Despite having gone through racial trauma and wanting to become a white woman, she was able to connect with her Blackness and find Blackness in the experience.

**Despite It All: Mercy.** Although Mercy would like to not have Black people pinned against each other about the color of their skin, she finds comfort in recognizing that the Black Zambian community needs to work together to disrupt colorism. Her despite it all moment is:

Yeah, it hurts at times in such comments from a fellow Blacks but you just have to tell yourself like blackness is whatever you feel inside yourself... that does have to be you the inner you. How you feel about yourself! Don't let other people tell you how you look...despite people telling you, like, you're dark like charcoal but that's not the way you

are. You are just you. You are black. That black is just in you. (M. Kataba, personal communication, January 13, 2023)

After Mercy was compared to charcoal, she was still able to find Black beauty within herself while supporting Black empowerment. Mercy's remarks seem to imply that she found a silver lining.

### ***Summary of Blackness and Identity***

Participants have gone through a fluidity of emotions while experiencing their Blackness in their lifetime, from when they were children to young adults. The process is not linear, but as seen in the data, multiple Black women were going through the same insecurity with their race due to the portrayal of whiteness within society and the media. Mercy suggested looking at Blackness as:

I just love the way we are despite having the kinky hair. The dark skin it's just in us just the structure of our body. So, you don't have to feel bad about how the skin looks...That is said loving the way we are the structure and everything about us being Black. That makes us unique from other people even them (white people), they may feel the same way. So, we just have to feel the same way other people feel. So just have to accept it as an inherited from our forefathers, were just born black just like before. We don't have to discriminate ourselves from the way we look. No, just have to love the way we look. (M. Kataba, personal communication, January 13, 2023)

Mercy provided an important factor to consider in understanding Blackness that helps to summarize other participants' ideas. She suggested that those who came before her were also

Black, and it is just who they are. Her ideas seemed to mean that this acceptance is all Black people need. The participants acknowledged that they first went through a process of realizing they were Black, then overcame the initial shock and challenge of being Black, and all the negativity from both the Black and white community. This process seemed to have impacted the participants in ways that shaped their interpretation of their Blackness.

### **Blackness Inside the Centre**

Students were given the opportunity throughout the interviews to describe in their own words what Blackness in the Centre feels, looks, and smells like. Within their responses, four words came up for students: love, peace, flowers, and belonging. This section is dedicated to showcasing how students compare the Centre to some of the most calming and pure attributes within Zambia and their community. Blackness Inside the Centre helps to answer the first research question of how participants describe their Blackness within the non-formal space of the Centre. This section ends by illustrating the power of Black women in the Centre and how they positively impacted the Black women in this study to see the beauty in their Blackness.

#### ***Love, Peace, Flowers, and Belonging***

In this section, I focus on three participants' remarks pertaining to how the Centre supports their understanding of Blackness. Although each of their experiences are unique, they shared a common language to describe their Blackness inside the Centre. In their interviews, Mercy, Chama, and Victory focused on love, peace, flowers and belonging.

**Mercy's Blackness Inside the Centre.** Mercy describes her experience as a dark-skinned woman with darker gums. She explains this physical issue as an insecurity she faces by accepting this as a part of her Blackness. She recalls a story with Lulu as she started to express why the Centre feels like love:

Yeah, I remember there was someone who had to comment on the way I look (about her dark gums) ...we're having a girl's talk then Madame Lulu just said like, turn to your neighbor and say something nice about your neighbor. Then, my neighbor was Madame Lulu. Then, she said like I love the way you are dressed, I love the black gums that you have. I wish I had them. So that made me feel loved. Because I never thought those gums were nice...But reminding me of that in front of my fellow students. It made me feel loved. (M. Kataba, personal communication, January 13, 2023)

This comment is the first example of love being showcased in the Centre by staff members to students. This display of love allows Mercy to acquire appreciation for her Blackness. Her dark skin and dark gums were something that she struggled with accepting in the past but Lulu's warm embrace of these physical characteristics helped Mercy to eventually overcome that insecurity.

Mercy used flowers as a similar description of what the Centre smells like. She provided a specific flower, but she carries the common theme of flowers being the smell of the Centre. She describes the smell of the Centre as:

That [the smell] could just be unique. It can feel like the same from a rose flower... Because it smells nice because it makes you feel at peace. Yes, just the nature of that scent of the rose flower makes you feel at peace...the peace like you just feels at home, like you're just in your own world where there's nothing bothering you. (M. Kataba, personal communication, January 13, 2023)

Not only does Mercy describe Blackness in the Centre as a rose, but the rose smell is peaceful. In addition to the love she feels as a Black woman in the Centre, she expresses a sense of peace

from the rose-like smell of the Centre. This smell description suggests that there is a peaceful presence that helps her escape the world outside of the Centre.

**Chama's Blackness Inside the Centre.** Chama explains that the Centre smells like flowers and a breath of fresh air. "If you ever been in an environment where they just maybe like my main flower with like fresh air..." (C. Kasama, personal communication, January 13, 2023). Flowers seem to suggest that she envisions beauty and fresh air when she smells the Centre. The fresh air description implies an escape from things outside the Centre, and the Centre is refreshing to her.

When asked about what Blackness looks like in the Centre, Chama used a flower description again. She described the image of the Centre as an orchard, to be more specific in her description. Chama explained that the Centre is like an orchard because of the diverse nature of orchards. For example, orchards can come in different sizes and shapes, as do students in the Centre (C. Kasma, personal communication, January 13, 2023).

**Victory's Blackness Inside the Centre.** Victory struggled to understand how to describe how Blackness smells and looks in the Centre, but after I explained the question more fully, she was able to make her own meaning of the question. She responded that the smell and look of Blackness was a sense of belonging in the Centre (V. Mongo, personal communication, January 26, 2023). Victory described this sense of belonging in the Centre as:

So, the center is one place where it encourages you to, to be who you are. And that you can do anything with who you are being black. It's not a disadvantage, but actually, it's an advantage. Because you can prove to the outside Centre. (V. Mongo, personal communication, January 26, 2023)



Victory's expression of a sense of belonging in the Centre suggests that this experience can also be seen as peace and as peace and love because it enabled students to accept their Black identity. Although Victory shared a different experience, her ideas related to the other participants. All three of these participants felt welcomed in the space. Their focus on a floral-like smell and a sense of peace and love in the Centre all conveyed a similar idea that they felt like they belonged there.

### ***Black Women***

Black women play a vital role in the experience of Blackness for participants in the Centre. As mentioned previously, all participants are female and have access to Black women in the Centre. All of the participants noted that Lulu and Christine were the most influential women in the Centre.

**Chama.** Once she matured, Chama was able to realize her Blackness was enough. She was able to come to this realization through the support of her female mentors in the Centre. She describes this realization as:

I started like having like a mature mentality and having people like mentors (Lulu and Christine) at the Centre made me realize that I didn't have to be like someone else. Just me being of a Black woman means so much. I am beautiful the way I am despite not having the long hair. I started loving my natural hair is a loving thing about me. And that's what a lot of young girls at the Centre are doing right now [learning to love their Blackness]. (C. Kasama, personal communication, January 13, 2023)

Lulu and Christine played a vital role in Chama's ability to accept her Blackness. Her Blackness in this scenario is determined by her beauty. Her beauty includes her hair. She stated that having longer hair is a symptom of beauty, and she mentioned that she does not have long hair. Her

mentors, Black women, whom she looks up to have changed her way of thinking about beauty. They made her realize that her beauty is unique and means much more than having long hair. This realization enabled her to embrace her natural hair.

**Victory.** She shared a similar experience at the Centre. Victory used powerful language such as the Centre is “breaking the chains” of Blackness not being accepted and appreciated. She described how Black women in the Centre are teaching her about her Blackness:

So, the Centre [Black women in the Centre] is helping us be proud of who we are. Accept the color that we have, where we're born from, and just be unlimited. Not having limitations. The Centre is helping us in trying to break those chains that are limiting us because of how we feel we are. (V. Mongo, personal communication, January 26, 2023)

Victory suggested that the Centre is creating the change needed for students at the Centre to feel empowered instead of limited by their Blackness. This change could help students to feel proud of who they are in their Black bodies. Victory shared a unique experience of Blackness. She mentioned that the staff helped her accept where she is from. Appreciation for being a Black Zambian has not been acknowledged within other interviews, but Victory was able to connect her Blackness back to being Zambian, and staff members helped her embrace that aspect of her Blackness.

**Mercy.** As mentioned previously, Mercy shared a recollection of Lulu helping her appreciate her darker gums. This moment played an impactful role in her Black identity development. Mercy had the opportunity to answer freely about her learning experience at the Centre, and she described what was taught to her over the years by Black women (mainly Lulu) in the Centre:

I just love the way we are despite having the kinky hair. The dark skin it's just in us. Just the structure of our body. So, you don't have to feel bad about how the skin looks. No, it just has to be in us despite even thinking of bleaching it. We don't have to have those thoughts. Loving the way we are the structure and everything about us being Black that makes says unique. We were just born black just like before, we don't have to discriminate ourselves from the way we look. No, just have to love the way we look. (V. Mongo, personal communication, January 26, 2023)

Previously stated, Mercy felt a lack of beauty within herself as a child, and embracing her Blackness was hard. In the past, Marcy correlated beauty to whiteness. After being at the Centre, she was able to meet staff members, like Lulu, to help her embrace her Blackness.

### ***Summary***

As shown by this research, the appreciation for Blackness within Black women in this study was not linear, but fluid and ever-changing by their environment, maturity, and role models in their lives. Participants shared how Blackness in the Centre is floral-like in smell, is loving in nature, creates a sense of belonging, and provides peace for them. This perception of Blackness expressed by students seemed to be enhanced by influential Black women at the Centre, like Lulu and Christine. Participants' self-growth in their appreciation of Black beauty was a result of the mentorship they received from the Black women in the Centre.

### **The Role of Nonformal Spaces**

The sub-question for this research study is: How do participants describe the role of the nonformal space in their lives? Within this section, two themes emerged from the interviews with participants: Community Safe Space and the Centre is Home. Both themes were curated by the responses and language used by participants. The Community Safe Space describes the sense

of community and safety participants feel within the Centre. Subthemes emerged within the Community Safe Space: the student worker background to help understand the job of students, the impact of staff relationships, and how participants were able to learn through teaching. The Centre is Home was created directly from student language. Within the Centre is Home section, students confessed that the Centre had been a home for them due to their lack of having a traditional home. Subthemes also emerged within this section: background for the language of “home” for the Centre and the cyclical process that takes place in the Centre. The themes of Community Safe Space and the Centre is Home help to capture the essence of the sub-question of this research as described by participants in their interviews.

### *Community Safe Space*

Throughout this study, the emerging theme from the data found that Community Safe Space refers to the intentional space built for AEP students to feel a sense of community. Within this sense of community, three students are able to feel safe and seen as expressed within their interviews. For those three students: Mercy, Yvonne, and Chama, they suggested that the Centre feels safe to them in different ways. This phrase helps us to understand the research question of how students describe what a non-formal space means to them. In efforts to understand Community Safe Space, I have provided a background for student workers in the Centre, their experience with the staff at the Centre, and how they were able to learn through teaching at the Centre.

**Student Worker Background.** The Gap Year Students work as teachers in the Centre to help students learn about a diverse group of topics. The participants have been with the program since they were in secondary school. They have been a part of the AEP community serving in different roles. They started as students and now have become a part of the Gap Year program as

student workers. After next year, most of the participants will be alumni of the organization. As mentioned in earlier sections, they work as a teacher/facilitator (the participants used these terms interchangeably, but for the purpose of this research, I will use teacher) with students in Girl's Talk, art, drama, and music club. Although the participants do an array of leadership activities within the Centre, all of them share a common appreciation for the Centre and their experiences there. They were able to feel a sense of community while they were a student and now have the ability to create that safe space for their own students.

**Staff Relationships.** Staff relationships emerged as an important factor related to Community Safe Space. Two participants: Mercy and Yvonne described their relationship with staff members at the Centre. Mercy and Yvonne implied that their ability to connect with staff members created a community safe space for them.

*Mercy.* When asked about Mercy's experience at the Centre before secondary school, she said, "Before I completed secondary school, I thought The Centre was like my everything because by then I wasn't living with my parents and life was hard. All I could do was spend my all day at the Centre (M. Kataba, personal communication, December 12, 2022). Mercy was able to escape her harsh realities at home through the community she built at the Centre. The staff at the Centre also gave students a sense of community through mentorship. Mercy shared aspect of her close relationship with the staff at the Centre. Her ability to connect with staff members in the Centre provides her with a sense of community. Since she went through the program, she was able to build a relationship with staff members, like Madam Lulu and Christine. She describes her relationship with the staff as the following:

Yes, Madam Lulu used to teach us, even Madame Christine and some other, I mean college students are in school, they used to come and teach...Yeah, I had that chance to

see those things so I just couldn't keep it to myself. I thought of sharing with my younger ones...' (M. Kataba, personal communication, December 12, 2022)

Mercy's ability to give back suggests that she is invested in the AEP community. This ability to give back also implied that she was able to learn a lot from staff members at AEP, and she wants to give the knowledge she gained back into the AEP community.

*Yvonne.* When asked about the intimate relationship between staff and Yvonne, she said: I've been with her [Lumuno Chongo, Lulu, or Madam Lulu, as referred to by students] since 2015. When I was just in grade eight. So, I know her that much. And I'm free with her. Like, we could chat. A lot of things she advised me. When I'm going in the wrong direction or, maybe, I'm not doing something right. She's, my mentor. (Y. Rox, personal communication, December 16, 2022)

This intimate relationship described by Yvonne with Lulu displayed a sense of community. The sense of community created a safe relationship with staff members and students, like Yvonne. Based on Yvonne's sentiments about Lulu, Lulu was able to guide and direct Yvonne through her development at the Centre.

**Learning through Teaching.** In this section I explain how participants Mercy and Chama described their ability to learn through teaching at the Centre. Based on their remarks, they enhanced their self-confidence, coped with their life experiences, and created a safe space for students.

*Mercy's Lesson.* In Girl's Talk, Mercy took on the role of a teacher. Her reaction, shared in her interview, to being a teacher suggested that she works hard to create a space where students feel comfortable discussing hard topics like menstrual health, substance abuse, past trauma, and real-world experiences. For example, she shared that in the drama club she created

“sketches” or acts with the students about tough topics they discussed in Girl’s Talk, so that students were able to put what they learned in Girl’s Talk into action. Mercy described some of the influential information students get from Girl’s Talk:

...For example, menstrual hygiene, how to take care of their bodies when they undergo puberty because a lot of them face challenges. They don't know how to take care of themselves. Thereby they smell... So, we try our best to teach them on how they can take good care of their bodies without anyone noticing that they're on their P's (menstrual cycle). Even though we also teach them about drug abuse and peer pressure, we talk about a lot of things that you as teenagers face during puberty. (M. Kataba, personal communication, December 12, 2022)

These remarks seemed to suggest that the Centre serves as a safe space for students to learn and explore the topics they discuss with Mercy. Mercy described her ability to help students take care of themselves in Girl’s Talk sessions.

Mercy also mentioned that students often face traumatic events at home. Since students are often faced with trauma at home, this safe and creative environment begins to create a sense of community for students. Mercy, like many others in AEP, have lost a parent. This created an impactful disruption for the students’ lives. Mercy suggested that it is important for students to know how to deal with the traumatic event of losing a parent because their parents won’t be around forever (M. Kataba, personal communication, December 12, 2022). When Mercy described how she related traumatic events to students in drama she said:

So our parents becomes worried for us, like our future being when, for example, when they die, how are we going to live after they have passed away if we continue that same behavior [she is describing substance abuse]? So, we try our best and put it into an act

whereby they see the impact that our parents go through. And how we can help them to overcome those things. (M. Kataba, personal communication, December 12, 2022)

The Centre students have the opportunity to learn from those around them when they cannot learn this information at home. While the student workers are teaching students, they are also learning how to cope with their own life experiences.

*Chama's Lesson.* Chama mentioned her growth in self-confidence due to her student experiences in AEP. She described herself before teaching as less confident and not being able to speak out in front of other students (C. Kasama, personal communication, December 12, 2022). She elaborated further by saying that she feared public speaking but overcame this in the Centre, becoming a teacher. She dedicated getting over this fear to the “younger ones”. When asked about her experience at the Centre after secondary school she said:

Being a mentor to the younger ones, which is at some point, I felt I wasn't ready but when I completed (secondary school) and then started doing the talks with the girl yeah, a got used to it and discovered it was way more fun and very educated for me. So, I got to learn a lot of things like to have courage and to stand in front of students and speak and be that I can really stand in front of anyone else and because they really helped me a lot even though I was scared before I completed school. (C. Kasama, personal communication, December 12, 2022)

Chama's ability to grow in her public speaking suggested that the Centre served as a safe space to create internal change for students.

Chama also described her experience as a teacher in the Centre as a way for her to get to know students (C. Kasama, personal communication, December 12, 2022). She embraced her ability to get to know students and accommodate them when they were acting in distress from



disagreements with their friends or if they were having problems at home. When I asked her about her interaction with students she said:

For example, if by teaching them, like, you get to see them every day. You get to know them better. When you interact with them when you're in class, yeah, you get to know them in person. Like maybe their names, what they like, which kid is not concentrating class. Maybe they have problems at home? Yeah. (C. Kasama, personal communication, December 12, 2022)

These actions suggest that she is able to connect with students to better accommodate them when they are facing challenges.

**Summary.** Throughout these interviews, students were able to connect their own experiences with AEP to better prepare them for becoming a student worker in the Centre. As mentioned, students were able to build community by connecting with the staff at the Centre and learn through teaching their students. These attributes created a safe space for students to build community with themselves, staff, and students in the program.

### ***The Centre is Home***

While interviewing students, the Centre displayed a place of home for them. The sense of home that the Centre provided for students gave them the ability to grow safely from those around them. Often lessons like menstrual health, advice about becoming an adult, and more are missed in their traditional home environments; however, students created a home in the Centre to learn more about themselves and their future as individuals. This phrase helps to understand the research question of how students describe what a non-formal space means to them. When students were asked about the Centre and what it means to them, many of them responded directly by saying it felt like “home”. “I- that center is my home. That's what I can say. I feel safe

when I'm there, I feel free. Yeah, it's my home.” (C. Kasama, personal communication, December 12, 2022). Unlike many other themes presented in this research, this theme emerged directly from students’ exact words and not from my interpretation. Subthemes that support the home-feel in the Centre include a section to understand the term “home” and the cyclical process that takes place within the Centre.

**Understanding Home.** To begin to understand why the Centre feels like home to the Gap Year Students, I collected two expressions of gratitude from students to display their understanding of why the Centre feels like home to them. Victory responded to what the Centre means to her by saying, “...we're (students) blessed to have AYC (Amos Youth Centre) in every way... I'm really thankful, and I'm grateful” (V. Mongo, personal communication, January 18, 2023). And Mercy responded, “Before I completed secondary school, I thought the Centre was like my everything...” (M. Kataba, personal communication, December 12, 2022). These gracious responses from students about the Centre displayed their admiration and gratitude for the Centre. Their admiration and gratitude mark the beginning of their home-like feelings for the Centre.

**The Cyclical Process.** The subtheme Cyclical Process describes how students at the Centre began by learning from staff members. After graduating from high school, they began the Gap Year program. As mentioned, in the Gap Year program, students work as teachers in the Centre. During this time, participants explained how they use the information that was taught to them while they were students in the Centre to help the students they now work with. This section will explain the Cyclical Process, how the Cyclical Process looks in action, and the peak of gratitude.

*Understanding The Cyclical Process.* Within the Centre, students can have a sense of home because of the cyclical learning process they have experienced while being a student and becoming a student worker/Gap Year student. They first learn from the staff and use the knowledge gained from staff members to teach their students when they become student workers. As mentioned before, the student workers are in the Gap Year program to obtain their university scholarships. To obtain this scholarship, students must work at the Centre during their waiting duration to get into university.

Chama. The cyclical process for Chama started with her coming into the Centre at middle school age. During this time, she was a student at the Centre. Chama was taught by the previous Gap Year students and staff. Chama shared her cyclical process as:

It's a way of giving back, like after you're done with your high school, you have to go to the Centre, and help other kids. Like, by teaching them some, they're involved in different clubs, like art, music and dance, and a spelling bee. So, I chose to teach because it's one of my hobbies. (C. Kasama, personal communication, December 12, 2022)

Chama is one of many participants who described her experience as first being a student and then becoming a teacher at the Centre. She teaches as one of her hobbies. Her ability to create a cyclical process displays that the Centre provided a home for her to express her hobbies and create a home-like communal change within the Centre.

Yvonne. She shared a similar experience at the Centre. Yvonne described her experience as:

I was once in their shoe. When I was still at school, I looked up to someone, like, when they were giving us tuition, like I trusted my teachers that they're giving me the right

information. So I feel that's the way they [her current students] feel about me. (Y. Rox, personal communication, December 16, 2022)

Yvonne expressed that she trusted her teachers at the Centre to guide her in the right direction, and she suggested that her students feel the same way towards her. Yvonne's cyclical process provided her with the ability to teach and guide in the way that she was taught and mentored by those in the Centre. Her ability to create this environment provides evidence that the cyclical process in the Centre requires trust. Having mentor-like figures in the Centre enabled students to learn the importance of having influential figures in their lives. They had someone to look up to and eventually became that change in the community as well.

*The Cyclical Process in Action (Relationship, Learning, and Acting).* In efforts to create this cyclical process, participants expressed the ability to be "free". Based on three participants' responses, the Centre seemed to provide opportunities for them to feel free to have open relationships with the staff. Based on the responses from students, I created the cyclical process that outlines how students created the relationship with staff members, their ability to learn from them in this trusting relationship, and how they use what they learned with their own students.

Chama. In efforts to create a relationship with staff members, Chama described the next steps as having the ability to chat with staff members about life and advice for navigating it. Since she has created a relationship with staff members, she is able to learn from them. She ends her comments about the Centre by highlighting Lulu by saying, "She's my mentor" (C. Kasama, personal communication, December 12, 2022). This relationship with Lulu, and other staff members, helps Chama to support her students. Chama described her process for asking for help from staff members in the Centre:

Yeah, if maybe there's something that I need to talk to the younger ones about and I don't have, maybe, a lot of information about I can talk to the other staff that can help though it's not every staff member, but most of them. (C. Kasama, personal communication, December 12, 2022)

Chama seemed to use what she has learned from staff members to help her students when she does not have enough information. Her ability to learn from staff members, even as a Gap Year student, suggested that the cyclical process continued through her career as a teacher at the Centre. She did not stop learning from staff members when she became a teacher, and she seems to rely on that relationship to continue learning.

Mercy. She described an incident where students in the Centre were having a hard time getting along for a reason she chose not to disclose. One of the students in the incident did not want to communicate with Mercy about the incident. Mercy pleaded to the student that she can trust and be free with her. The student realized that Mercy and she had built a trusting relationship, so she then began to open up about the incident in the Centre with another student (M. Kataba, personal communication, December 12, 2022).

The process of students creating a relationship with staff members, learning from staff members, and acting on what they learned takes time, but participants seemed to recognize that it was well worth it through their appreciation and gratitude for the Centre and its staff.

***Gratitude of the Cyclical Process.*** After going through the process of being a student and becoming a Gap Year student worker, participants expressed extreme gratitude to the Centre and Staff. Students acknowledged that it is now their time to impact the community in their way.

Victory. She described the impact of the Centre:

I feel like the Centre has played a bigger role in our community. Because firstly...it has not just raised kids who are in school or graduate only, but also people that are responsible leaders, people that know how to give, they taught us to not always want to receive. (V. Mongo, personal communication, January 18, 2023)

Victory highlighted the impact of the Centre as being taught how to give back to the community and be a leader. This impact allowed her to be a giver in the community and not just a receiver.

She followed up with:

You also have to give, and have a heart of gratitude as well, exactly. I think “Thank you”. Yes, it's a way of saying thank you for the years that you've helped us. And now, we're ready to help you people help other people that are behind us, people that are coming, so that the betterment of this of the Centre... (V. Mongo, personal communication, January 18, 2023)

Victory suggested that her gratitude is expressed in her ability to connect with the younger students and the betterment of the Centre. She finalized her thoughts of the Centre as:

And they've played a bigger role than some of our parents' house. Because none of our parents are able to do certain things for us, but they help us know we are. They talk about things that our parents can talk about, because being African and everything, there are certain things that our parents are limited to tell us. (V. Mongo, personal communication, January 18, 2023)

Victory had the opportunity to gain parental guidance from the Centre due to her lack of ability to gain those resources in her traditional home from her parent. The parental guidance in the Centre seemed to suggest the “home-feel” that Victory acknowledged at the beginning of this

section. Usually within a traditional home, students could connect with their parents on this level, but she was unable to and found this feeling at the Centre.

Chama. She also expressed gratitude for the Centre. She shared a more personal experience of her ability to learn more about menstrual and mental health and hygiene. She described her ability to learn these important life lessons and the Centre as:

Personally, I've learned a lot of things. Usually when it comes to the Girl's Talk that we used to have I have learned so much more than I didn't even learn from home. My menstrual cycle, hygiene, how to take care of my mental health, and all. And, that the Centre is a good place. It's been very helpful. (C. Kasama personal communication, December 12, 2022)

Chama expressed that the Centre was very helpful in her developmental process with her menstrual and mental health and hygiene. These lessons are usually taught in a traditional home, but she suggested that she was unable to receive these important life lessons from home; however, she was able to receive them at the Centre, and she is grateful for the experience of being able to learn at the Centre and from the staff.

Mercy. She also shared her experience of gratitude from the Centre. Mercy is grateful for the experience of being able to learn at the Centre and from the staff. She described her gratitude as:

How I feel about Amos Youth Centre? It fills a hole for me, feels like home for me. Because this because like, they listen, they listen to me from like. I can say like, from my village, districts are there a lot of girls, when their parents don't have school fees or money to pay for their school fees, they just get married. At the tender age, a lot of girls in our community that my age, they're all married. So, when you when you don't have

money, that's the only option then. So, the moment I was given this sponsorship when I was just when I just passed my grade seven. At some points, I felt like I just gave up. Like, there's nothing for me, there is no future for me. So that's when they helped me through until now. I'm really grateful for this organization and feels like they have created a strong bond with me. Despite like, even if I may, I may go far away. I can't forget about Amos Youth Centre and how far I have come. (M. Kataba, personal communication, December 12, 2022)

Mercy followed up by saying she thought the Centre was her everything because she wasn't living with her parents, and her life was hard. She spent most of her time escaping her reality at the Centre where she could learn and have food provided to her daily. This escape at the Centre indicated that at an early age the Centre became a home away from home for Mercy. Her gratitude expression is shown by naming the Centre as a home for her and acknowledging that no matter where she goes, she will never forget the Centre and the bond they have created.

**Summary.** The Centre created a home environment for students and the Gap Year student workers by giving them a place to feel free to discuss topics that they were unable to in their traditional homes. Many participants suggested their ability to escape their harsh reality at the Centre. The Centre created this environment by fostering a trusting relationship with students, cultivating a sense of freedom for them to feel safe to learn, and providing them opportunities to become teachers for their students as Gap Year student workers. After this cyclical process, students expressed a strong sense of gratitude towards the Centre and the staff for creating this process and space for them.

## **Conclusion**



In this chapter, each of the four participants aided in uncovering the primary and secondary research question. The primary and secondary research question sought to understand how Black Zambian gap year students in a non-formal educational space described their Blackness and the meaning of the non-formal educational space, the Centre, to them. Through two rounds of interviews, coding, and analyzing Blackness, identity, and the Centre, I found that participants described their Blackness as humanness based on their Black identity being a part of them and their whole being, the impact of whiteness on their Black identity, and colorism and texturism preventing them from embracing their Black identity. I also found that the meaning of the Centre is a community safe space and a home-like place for participants. In chapter five, I will provide the discussion and conclusion to this study.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine how Black Zambian students who have participated in a non-formal educational space describe their Blackness. In the discussion section the findings from this study are supported by past research that unpacks educational spaces, Zambian history, African Education Program (AEP), identity, and Blackness. The themes provided in this study support the literature review section that sought to understand why students are searching for non-formal educational spaces and how their Blackness is developing. However, much more research about Blackness and non-formal education spaces is encouraged. In addition, this chapter will include the significance of the study, limitations within this study, future research considerations, implications for classrooms, personal reflection, and a summary of the study.

### **Educational Spaces**

Findings supported the research of Kpetay and Lozenski (2021), who described non-formal spaces like Nu Skool, as spaces outside of whiteness that value Black self-expression and determination. Kpetay and Lozenski (2021) argued the importance of these spaces for Black students. Non-formal spaces, like the Centre, allowed Black students to become validated and valued in their Blackness. The results of Kpetay and Lozenski (2021) recommended that students should be allowed to have non-formal spaces to continue their Black expression to enhance their education. As mentioned, participants were able to go to university, with a scholarship provided by AEP. This is an example of the enhancement of education as recommended by Kpetay and Lozenski.

My study related to Kpetay and Lozenski's report on the Nu Skool, as a non-formal space. Both, the Centre and the Nu Skool shared similarities in providing Black students the

ability to have a community space outside of their traditional educational settings and traditional home settings. My research found that two participants, Victory and Chama, found a home setting in their non-formal space, the Centre. Victory was able to talk to staff members at the Centre about topics she could not discuss at home because of African cultural norms (V. Mongo, personal communication, January 18, 2023). Chama was able to learn about menstrual and mental health, hygiene at the Centre because she was unable to learn about this in her traditional home environment. Victory and Chama's ability to find home-like support shows a supportive connection to Kpetay and Lozenski's report.

### **Zambia**

UNICEF (n.d.) reported the increase in "community schools" for underrepresented students in Zambia and those "community schools" help underrepresented students because of the financial challenges of most families living in Zambia. The encouragement of community schools is also supported by the data collected in the Educational Policy and Data Center (n.d.) that reported family income is directly related to students' attendance in school. Within my study, Yvonne described the trust she gained with individuals in the Centre because her educational tuition was paid and staff mentored her during her time there (Y. Rox, personal communication, December 16, 2022).

### **African Education Program (AEP)**

AEP (n.d.) reported that students in the space can come into the Centre between primary school age awaiting college level. Students within my study reflected the reported age as described by AEP. AEP (n.d.) emphasized the importance of the gap year students awaiting to go to college within the next year. During their gap year, all of the participants recognized the opportunity they were presented during this time to give back to the AEP community to help the

younger students. For example, Victory expressed that the Centre played an influential role in the Zambian community, not only for the betterment of education opportunities, but for creating impactful leaders in the Zambian community (V. Mongo, personal communication, January 18, 2023).

### **Identity Through An “Intersectional Approach”**

Intersectionality was originated by Kimberlé Crenshaw, who sought to uncover where power and identity interlock and intersect. She emphasized that there is not one singular issue that sparks oppression, but all things (Columbia University Law School, 2017, para. 4). Students within my research reflected the oppressions of being Black and a woman. One could argue other aspects of their identity, like poverty, family and educational status also affected the intersections of their identity, but this research mostly examined the intersections of being Black and a woman. However, other aspects of their identity were uncovered. For example, Mercy described not having one of her parents and the negative and traumatic effects it had on her life as a young woman (M. Kataba, personal communication, January 13, 2023).

Women and Law in Southern Africa Trust-Zambia, Cornell Law School (2012) reported that girls in education are often coerced by teachers by providing money, food, school fees, and other things to convince girls in school to exchange sexual favors. However, as presented in my research, students in AEP are supported financially for school to avoid situations that could potentially harm them with teachers. Dolet and Salas (2021) recommended in their research for educational and student centered organizations to connect with non-profit organizations to support girls who have been assaulted. Although students in my research study did not explicitly state that they were assaulted in any way, they did disclose that they have personal, intimate conversations with staff members like Lulu and Christine, and trust them for mentorship in and

outside of the space. For example, Yvonne described in her interview that with Lulu and Christine, she can be “free” with them (Y. Rox, personal communication, January 13, 2022). This comment implied that safe spaces within non-profits are essential for girls in education and correlated with Dolet and Salas (2021).

### **Black Racial Identity**

Zezeza (2016) reported that Blackness is also about “states of being and of becoming”. Mercy described her Black identity similarly. She told of her Blackness as something inside of her, the ability to belong somewhere, and the ability to be a part of a whole experience of being Black (M. Kataba, personal communication, January 13, 2023). My research corresponded to Zezeza’s (2016) and suggested that Blackness is something bigger than the color of one’s skin; it’s the ability to be and become something more.

Dillard (2020) recognized work from bell hooks (1991) that encourages Black children to have a home-like place where they are affirmed, and part of themselves is normalized and beautiful. Mercy disclosed a conversation with Lulu during a session of Girl’s Talk where Lulu complimented Mercy’s dark gums. Having dark gums is an insecurity that Mercy shared. That normalization of dark gums that Lulu provided for Mercy gave her the courage to start to believe that darker gums are beautiful and normal (M. Kataba, personal communication, January 13, 2023). Chama had a similar experience, and she was able to document through her Black identity journey. Over time, especially with the support of staff members at AEP, her Blackness was beautiful (C. Kasama, personal communication, January 13, 2023). The staff encouragement that Mercy and Chama shared during my research is compatible with hooks (1991) and her suggestion of Black children having a place to normalize their beauty.

### **Significance**

Based on the findings and data collected from my research study and previous research, this research adds to the importance of Black identity being present in educational spaces and the impact of non-formal spaces on the Black community. Within this research study, participants were able to connect to their Blackness by reflecting on their identity and experience within a non-formal educational space through an open conversational interview. Although this study was limited in sample size, it adds to the much needed research of Black students being eliminated and dehumanized within traditional educational spaces and the need for non-formal spaces to cater to the unmet needs of Black students in traditional education spaces that rarely provide opportunities for them to explore Blackness and their identities. Although participants within this study have unique experiences of their Black identity development, the overarching results show that they have met at a common place that provides them with the tools to continue their identity development to be better community members and to celebrate their Black identity.

My study provided a much needed in-depth understanding of the impact of non-formal spaces for Black women. There was very limited research on the impact of these spaces for Black women, especially African and Zambian women. This study allowed Black women to speak freely about their experiences in non-formal spaces. These stories will aid in understanding Black people and Black women as humans and as academics.

### **Limitations**

A limitation of this study was the time difference between the United States and Zambia. This limitation added to the challenges of mutual availability for the researcher and participants due to the six-hour time difference (Zambia being ahead). In addition to the limited time to interview students, this study was conducted over an academic semester, and this limited the preparation for working with AEP and its students.

Another limitation of this study was two participants, Yvonne and Victory, shared a commonality of shorter responses. While one interview was strong for each participant, there was a lack of adequate data in another interview. This challenge relates back to the limitation of time to conduct the study.

Lastly, there was the lack of knowledge that I held about Zambian culture. Although I am Black and a part of the African diaspora, I do not hold the same African Zambian culture as the participants. For example, I was not familiar with the different villages mentioned by students. This knowledge could have added to my understanding of their identity in this study. In addition, when participants talked about food (although, they were helpful with explaining), I am not familiar with traditional Zambian dishes. Some of the participants like to cook, but I was not able to connect with them in this way to understand more of their identity. Lastly, I was limited in my understandings of Zambian educational experiences outside of the information provided in the literature review and interviews with students and staff. This lack of knowledge fueled a disconnect in understanding their educational transitional periods and what daily life is like for students in Zambia.

### **Future Research Considerations**

If any other researcher were to do this study, I would recommend taking at least a year to visit the Centre, build a relationship with the students, and interview the staff about their opinions on how they may have influenced the students whether intentionally or unintentionally. During my interviews with students, there were many moments where I wanted to know the staff members' perspectives on their influence within non-formal spaces. I especially wanted to know Lulu's perspective because she came through the program as a student and has worked her way up to become a part of leadership in the Centre.

In addition, I would recommend researchers explore the impact of male staff at the Centre. One participant discussed one male staff member and it left me pondering on the impact of female student relationships with male staff members.

### **Implications for Classrooms**

The findings encourage educators to learn from researchers, especially hooks (1991), regarding the value of Blackness in all educational spaces. hooks (1991) emphasized, “...everything we do as teachers must create the cultural, social, curricular and pedagogical space that (re)members and (re)covers their humanity and thus, our own... That means that to create spaces that honor the spirit of Black children” (p. 703). Teachers should consider inviting Blackness into educational spaces after rethinking and relearning their biases and perspectives on Black identity as recommended by Sefa Dei (2018).

### **Personal Reflection**

I learned that as a Black educator, I still have much more work to do to understand Black students because my experience is not their experience, but we do share a commonality in our Black experience. I also learned that I want to bring my full self into my classroom and further research. Throughout this research, I pushed my non-binary identity to the back to create better safety for students to feel comfortable expressing themselves. In the future, I would like to always be a representation of Black, queer, non-binary women.

### **Summary**

This phenomenological qualitative study examined how non-formal educational spaces influenced participants' perceptions of Blackness and how out-of-school spaces impacted their lives. The sample consisted of four female Black Zambian Gap Year students. Data collection included two semi-structured interviews with each participant and a researcher's journal to



document additional information from the interviews. Findings revealed that Blackness is a part of humanness for participants, their dark skin has influenced their Black identity, Blackness is prevalent in the Centre, the Centre feels like home for students, and there is a unique cyclical process in the Centre for students and staff.

## Appendix

### Appendix A: Identity Consent Form

#### Consent to Participate in Research

##### Identification of Investigators & Purpose of Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Kenique Brown from James Madison University. The purpose of this study is to understand how Black Zambian students who have been in a nonformal educational space describe their Blackness. This study will contribute to the researcher's completion of her master's research project.

##### Research Procedures

Should you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form once all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. This study consists of two to three individual interviews. The third interview is optional and only used for further understanding of the participant and researcher. You will be asked to provide answers to a series of questions related to your understandings of the Amos Youth Centre, African Education Program, Blackness, identity, and womanhood. If you choose to consent, your interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. If you decline to be audio recorded, interviews can be recorded via handwritten electronic notes.

##### Time Required

The time involved in the study will span over multiple sessions throughout the fall 2022 semester. You will be interviewed two to three times. Each interview will take approximately thirty minutes to an hour. If necessary, the researcher will also email or ask follow-up questions in interviews for clarification purposes within responses. Participation in this study will require approximately three to four hours of your time.

##### Risks

The investigator does not perceive more than minimal risks from your involvement in this study (that is, no risks beyond the risks associated with everyday life).

##### Benefits

Potential benefits from participation in this study include having an opportunity to process your ever-developing identity in relation to your womanhood, Blackness, and understanding of non-formal spaces. By participating in this study, you may enable educators and other professionals to gain a better understanding of how nonformal spaces affect individuals' understanding of Blackness.

##### Confidentiality

The results of this research will be shared at the researcher's thesis defense and possibly other academic venues, such as conferences. The results of this project will be coded in such a way that the respondent's identity will not be attached to the final form of this study. The researcher retains the right to use and publish non-identifiable data. While individual responses are confidential, aggregate data will be presented representing averages or generalizations about the responses as a whole. All data will be stored in a secure location accessible only to the

researcher. Upon completion of the study and thesis defense, all information that matches up individual respondents with their answers, including audio recording with their answers, will be destroyed.

### **Participation & Withdrawal**

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate. Should you choose to participate, you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind.

### **Questions about the Study**

If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study, or after its completion or you would like to receive a copy of the final aggregate results of this study, please contact:

Researcher's Name: Kenique Brown  
Equity and Cultural Diversity Educational Foundations & Exceptionalities  
James Madison University  
Email Address: [brown3kr@dukes.jmu.edu](mailto:brown3kr@dukes.jmu.edu)

Dr. Stephanie Wasta  
James Madison University  
Telephone: (540) 568-5210  
Email Address: [wastasa@jmu.edu](mailto:wastasa@jmu.edu)

### **Questions about Your Rights as a Research Subject**

Dr. Lindsey Harvell-Bowman  
Chair, Institutional Review Board  
James Madison University  
(540) 568-2611  
[harve2la@jmu.edu](mailto:harve2la@jmu.edu)

### **Giving of Consent**

I have read this consent form and I understand what is being requested of me as a participant in this study. I freely consent to participate. I have been given satisfactory answers to my questions. The investigator provided me with a copy of this form. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.

I give consent to be interviewed. \_\_\_\_\_ (initials)

I give consent to be audio recorded during my interview(s). \_\_\_\_\_ (initials)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (Printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (Signed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher (Signed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

This study has been approved by the IRB, protocol # 23-3620

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