Research Statement

As an emerging scholar, my program of research focuses on examining how youth mentoring interventions are culturally responsive to the unique strengths and needs of Black youth. My professional experience as a mental health clinician and navigating life as a Black man are imperative to the scope of my research. Particularly, my commitment to serving diverse youth, families, and communities is reflective in my research focus of utilizing youth mentoring as an intervention to prevent detrimental outcomes and promote positive outcomes among Black youth. Specifically, I focus on how youth mentoring can promote social-emotional well-being and mental health outcomes, while identifying and cultivating protective factors that reduce health-risk behaviors (i.e. ethnic/racial identity) among Black youth. Furthermore, I am invested in identifying systemic factors (i.e. poverty, lack of access to quality education) and how these factors influence the access and utilization of protective factors that then influence the effectiveness of youth mentoring programs. My research agenda is centered on conducting innovative and rigorous research that promotes social and racial justice among marginalized populations, specifically Black youth and families.

My research addresses the lack of empirical evidence on youth mentoring interventions adapted to be culturally responsive for Black youth from diverse communities. My dissertation focuses on exploring the potential precursors of change that promote positive outcomes for Black youth participating in community-based youth mentoring programs. Dr. Jean Rhodes (2005) provides a youth mentoring model that lays the groundwork for how mentoring promotes outcomes among youth; however, within this framework, race, ethnicity, culture, gender, and systemic barriers (i.e. racial marginalization) are not considered in the mechanisms that promote positive outcomes. These considerations are especially important for Black youth considering the potential hurdles facing them in the US and the fact they make up the largest racial demographic of youth participating in mentoring programs (Garringer et al., 2017). This study is foundational to my research as a scholar, research that focuses on assessing and implementing culturally responsive interventions reflective of the needs and experiences of Black youth.

I am fully committed to conducting community-based research that makes tangible differences in the lives of youth and their families. I intentionally sought out collaborations with several professors and research institutes during my time as a doctoral student. One of my most significant collaborations was with Dr. Shantel Crosby, an assistant professor at the University of Louisville, as a research assistant on a grant that looked at the experiences of trauma-exposed students utilizing a trauma informed school intervention. We utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods during the duration of the grant. Our findings resulted in presentations at conferences such as the Society for Social Work and Research and the Council on Social Work Education. Additionally, we were able to submit several articles based on part of the grant that are currently under consideration for publication. One entitled “They don’t care about you”: Exploring socioemotional barriers in school settings for Black, trauma-exposed boys, received positive feedback at the Society for Social Work conference.

In addition to collaborating with Dr. Crosby, I connected with the Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing at The University of Texas at Austin. Furthermore, I collaborated with Dr. Rowena Fong, the Ruby Lee Piester Centennial Professor in Services to Children and Families,
and Dr. Amanda Barczyk, an affiliate faculty member in The University of Texas at Austin Dell Medical School’s Department of Population Health. Moreover, I conducted several focus groups and quantitative data analysis that led to a presentation at the Society for Social Work conference titled “Associations between adverse childhood experiences and neighborhood safety among parents receiving child maltreatment prevention services” as well as collaborations with local stakeholders to improve the permanency outcomes of youth in foster care. Additionally, I conducted empirical literature reviews and big data management and analysis with Dr. Fong and Dr. Barczyk that led to published manuscripts in the *Children and Youth Services Review* and *Journal of Trauma Nursing* journals respectively.

During my time at The University of Texas at Austin, I established myself a social science researcher focused on implementing culturally responsive interventions that make long-term positive impacts on Black youth and their families. I am dedicated to ensuring my work addresses significant gaps in the research literature, in addition to making practical implications that benefit society as a whole. I am looking for opportunities to further develop and strengthen my research skills. I plan to apply for a K series award from the National Institutes of Health to pursue my program of research to develop culturally responsive youth mentoring interventions. My passion, leadership, and professional experience serving communities provide the tools to make a significant contribution to both Academia and my community. All of my research is designed to (a) enhance the lives of Black people, (b) provide advocacy to and empowerment of marginalized communities, (c) illustrate stories of populations who often do not have their story told, and (d) provide youth and their families with the skills to live productive and fulfilling lives.