

## Research Statement

As an emerging scholar, my program of research focuses on adapting interventions to be culturally relevant to promote positive youth development and prevent detrimental risk factors among 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. Specifically, my commitment to serving diverse youth, families, and communities is reflective in my research focus of youth development and culturally responsive interventions and prevention. Despite the recognized importance of ethnic/racial identity as a critical developmental factor for youth of color (Neblett et al. 2012), a minimal amount of research has focused on how interventions can enhance ethnic/racial development, thus promote positive youth developmental outcomes.

Specifically, I am interested in using interventions to promote social-emotional well-being and mental health, while identifying protective factors that reduce health-risk behaviors 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. I plan to further explore how interventions can be adapted to cultivate ethnic/racial identity development among youth. My dissertation will focus on the process through which Black youth achieve positive outcomes in youth mentoring programs with consideration to racial, ethnic, cultural, and systemic factors.

My research addresses the lack of empirical evidence on interventions adapted to be culturally responsive for youth from diverse communities. My dissertation focuses on the process of change Black youth undergo when 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 process of change. These considerations are especially important for Black youth considering the potential hurdles facing them in the U.S. 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 the scholar I am developing into; a scholar that focuses on assessing and implementing culturally responsive interventions reflective of the needs and experiences 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. 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.

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In addition to collaborating with Dr. Crosby, I connected with the Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing at The University of Texas at Austin. I also 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. 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. Furthermore, 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 the spring semester of 2020, I was selected to be a graduate research assistant for the Team Kenya research project, part of The University of Texas President's Award for Global Learning. In this leadership role, I mentor and supervise undergraduate students, while also managing a qualitative research project. Due to the cancellation of our study abroad research trip, we are currently exploring the impact of COVID-19 on the self-management strategies of individuals living with HIV/AIDS and diabetes in Austin, Texas. Despite the rearrangement of the research project, I have been able to provide one on one mentoring to all of the undergraduate students and even presented a guest lecture on the basics of coding and analysis for a qualitative thematic analysis. This opportunity is one of the many projects I am a part of which allows me to use my research to impact my local community and the greater society. Using the skills I developed, my plan is to explore funding opportunities that will enable me to continue examining the impact of culturally responsive interventions as a means of promoting positive youth development and preventing long-term detrimental outcomes.

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 Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) to pursue my program of research to develop culturally responsive 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.

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## References

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