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## Parenting Skills of African American Young Mothers Who Transitioned from Foster Care

Tamesha Yvonne Townsend-Simmons  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Tamesha Yvonne Townsend-Simmons

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## Review Committee

Dr. Barbara Benoliel, Committee Chairperson,  
Human and Social Services Faculty

Dr. Dorothy Seabrook, Committee Member,  
Human and Social Services Faculty

Dr. Veronica Carey, University Reviewer,  
Human and Social Services Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost  
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2023

Abstract

Parenting Skills of African American Young Mothers Who Transitioned from Foster

Care

by

Tamesha Yvonne Townsend-Simmons

MA, Strayer University, 2011

BA, Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In Human and Social Services

Walden University

July 2023

## Abstract

Prior research indicated there is an ongoing social issue in the United States for young single mothers with foster care experiences and their children. This group of women face poor economic and parenting outcomes without assistance from government resources in the form of effective parenting programs. Yet programming lags and there are ongoing assumptions about young mothers' in foster care parenting skills and abilities. The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to better understand the development of parenting skills among a selected group of African American adult young mothers who transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood between the ages of 15 and 20. The theoretical frameworks for this study were Schlossberg's transition theory and Mowder's parent development theory, which explain that the parenting role is developed through parents' exposure to social roles over time. Purposive snowball sampling methods were used to select four participants. Data were collected in online phone and Zoom audio-recorded interviews. A cross-case analysis of the data resulted in the uncovering of three themes: a) the missing preparation for the parent role, b) challenges of self-efficacy and self-esteem in the parent role, and, c) the value of family of origin and foster family resources and support during the new parenting process. The study may contribute to positive social change by increasing human services providers' awareness of young mothers' parenting experiences and challenges while in and when leaving foster care, and their adjusting to independence and motherhood.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation and journey to God, my family, and my friends in the present and afterlife. I want to thank Juanita Townsend and the late Timothy Townsend for always instilling in me that anything is possible if you are willing to fail and try again, and the late Patricia Simmons for encouraging me to move forward even when life appeared unbearable. I also dedicate this research study to Uriah Shelton, my daughter, who changed my life in 2008. Uriah, you are a one-of-a-kind, intelligent, talented, and joyful young woman. I love you. I want to thank Tyrone Simmons, my loving husband, who encourages me to improve myself. Shawnya, Darius, and Eric, I thank you for the daily inspiration and love. Stephany, Maxine, Supreme, and Betty, I love you all so much. I thank you for your prayers and encouraging words.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### Introduction

As of September 30, 2019, the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) reported that approximately 423,997 children are in foster care based on data from state fiscal yearly reports. Data trends from the report showed that 52% of individuals in foster care were male and 48% were female in 2019 (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, *Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data for FY 2019, 2020*). Female youth involved with Child Protective Services (CPS) or in foster care are twice as likely to become teen mothers than their peers in the general population. In addition, 72% of teen births occur between the ages of 18 and 19 during the transition of aging out of the foster care system (Kim et al., 2017; Kost et al., 2017; Shpiegel, 2017; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017, as cited in Font et al., 2019).

Approximately 55% of female youths in foster care between the ages of 13 and 19 experience teen pregnancy, and 21% of those who have given birth during adolescence before age 20 are more likely to have mental health issues and have less successful parenting outcomes than their peers who are not in foster care (Combs et al., 2018; King et al., 2022; Shpiegel et al., 2021). Dworsky and Courtney (2010, as cited in Ohene & Garcia, 2020) assessed the outcomes of youth transitioning from foster care in Utah. They found that 31% of pregnant and parenting young women ages 18 and 24 became pregnant within 3 years of leaving the foster care system.

Young mothers in foster care employ negative parenting skills and behaviors more than adolescent mothers who have not been in foster care due to experiencing more adverse events (Font et al., 2019). Young mothers in foster care are more likely to become single teenage parents living in poverty, have less social support, experience higher levels of depression, and have lower parental efficacy (Hickey et al., 2019; Martin et al., 2021). Multiple adverse occurrences increase a parent's propensity to engage in corporal punishment, neglect, and generational emotional and physical abuse (Brassard et al., 2020). Over time, these negative parenting behaviors increase a child's behavioral challenges and risk of involvement with CPS (Heilmann et al., 2021). Because young women in foster care frequently suffer from abuse or neglect, do not have a close relationship with their primary caregiver, and have lived with multiple caregivers, the transition to independence, motherhood, and developing parenting skills may be more challenging (Font & Gershoff, 2020; Smith et al., 2019).

Zarate-Alva and Sala-Roca (2019) explored the impact of gender on the experiences of young people in foster care. According to Cox et al. (2021) and Lewin et al. (2019), Further research remains essential to revise ideas and assumptions about young mothers in foster care and their parenting skills and abilities. In this study, I explored the development of parenting skills among African American young mothers who transition from foster care to independence and motherhood. The findings in this study may be used to increase awareness in community programs about the challenges young mothers might experience in developing parenting skills during the transition to independence and motherhood. This study includes new perspectives on African

American young mothers' parenting skills, parenting experiences in foster care, attitudes about sex, adulthood, health service providers, support services, sexual risk, and parenting responsibilities. In Chapter 1, I will discuss the study background, problem, purpose, and research question, justify the theoretical framework, the nature of the study, limitations, and how the study contributes to social change.

### **Background**

Over 400,000 children and youth reside in foster care systems in the United States, with nearly one-third of youth leaving foster care between 13 and 19 years old (Children's Bureau, 2018, as cited in Rolock et al., 2021). Verulava et al. (2020) found that youth aged out of foster care felt unprepared while transitioning into adulthood. The participants in the qualitative study described the aging out process as unfavorable and identified financial, social, and psychological life problems as challenging. The youth specified low involvement with social workers while preparing to age out of foster care. Verulava et al. (2020) recommended expanding foster care services to youth 21 years and older to increase housing, educational stability, support, and employment resources as foster youth transition to adulthood.

Among the demands of parenthood, young mothers transitioning out of foster care deal with the constant fear of system involvement and the lack of available resources for support (Schelbe & Geiger, 2017; Taussig & Roberts, 2022). Young mothers in foster care are more likely to have their children investigated by CPS and have more parenting oversight than mothers not in foster care (Dworsky, 2015, as cited in Villagrana et al., 2022). In addition to immeasurable influences like CPS involvement, social isolation

from these matters negatively affects young mothers' parenting skills and styles and their mental health (Kenny, 2018).

Young mothers frequently exiting or entering foster care experience depression, conflicted relationships, repeated pregnancies, and inadequate parenting skills. Parental figures and the baby's father are critical sources of support for young mothers in fostering healthy parenting skills and lowering parental stress (Ward & Lee, 2020). Young mothers who are depressed are more likely to have poor parenting habits and may find it challenging to access parental support systems (Lee et al., 2020). Ohene and Garcia (2020) found that pregnant and parenting teens (PPTs) in the child welfare system who entered foster care in late adolescence and experienced approximately 12 placements before aging out of foster care had birthed one child while in foster care. The young mothers experienced stigmatization for becoming parents early and judgment from adults about their parenting skills and abilities because of adolescence.

Young mothers with young children are frequently unprepared for the demands of parenting and experience social isolation, abuse, or other life-threatening stressors that make parenting challenging during the transition from adolescence to motherhood, adulthood, and independence (Cox et al., 2019). These elements are significant for young mothers with poor parenting abilities and skills, who face various emotional difficulties and decline to apply their parenting techniques in their children's day-to-day lives (Dunn et al., 2018). The findings from this study may be used to implement social change by indicating that young mothers in foster care require supportive parental resources and that previous and existing private, public, and government systems may need to reorganize



their services provided for young mothers based on the reflective change in the sociodemographics of young mothers' development of parenting skills and abilities.

### **Problem Statement**

The specific research problem that I addressed in this study was to better understand the experiences and perspectives on the development of parenting skills among African American young mothers who transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood. Most people start families without specialized training by learning parenting skills and behaviors by observing their parents and the examples of others who teach or demonstrate patience, affection, love, safety, healthy living, and parental responsibility (Newland et al., 2018). Research has shown that some adolescent parents in foster care do not have access to the same positive parental experiences to observe and learn effective parenting skills because of frequent placements and other significant adverse challenges in foster care (Chambers et al., 2018).

I was prompted to explore this issue because, according to Cox et al. (2021), adolescent childbearing and parenting among foster care youth exist as significant social problems. Previous researchers indicated that young mothers age and their children remain at risk for poor economic, academic, and parenting outcomes without assistance from effective parenting programs, federal and state resources, and social support (Combs et al., 2018; Dumas et al., 2018; Font et al., 2019).

Researchers who have investigated young parents in foster care have highlighted their resilience and the need for extensive support services formed explicitly their needs to overcome and address their parenting challenges (Eastman et al., 2019; Holtrop et al.,

2018; Schelbe et al., 2018; Nunez et al., 2022). In addition to reducing the risk of adverse educational and relational outcomes and improving adolescent parents' foster care responsiveness to their children and knowledge of positive parenting behaviors and child development (Jaffee et al., 2018; Prince et al., 2019; Rebbe et al., 2018). Although researchers have investigated this issue, I have not found research regarding the development of parenting skills among African American young mothers who transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood between the ages of 15 and 20. Further research remains essential to revise preconceived notions that researchers and human and social service practitioners may have about young mothers in foster care and how they parent their children while implementing services within this population (Rea & Cox, 2021; Lewin et al., 2019).

### **Purpose of the Study**

I conducted this qualitative multiple-case study to explore the development of parenting skills among African American young mothers who transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood between the ages of 15 and 20 and who are now adults. Initially, I planned to collect and examine oral data by using a generic qualitative research design with a sample size of 10 to 20 African American women ages 18 or older who had previously been in the foster care system as young mothers between the ages of 15 and 20 who transitioned out of the foster care system into independence and motherhood while pregnant, giving birth, and parenting. However, I had difficulty recruiting participants. I changed the design to a qualitative multiple-case study and recruited four African American women ages 18 or older. Researchers who examined

early motherhood found connections to adverse developmental outcomes for mothers and children (Hibbs et al., 2018). Researchers have found that young mothers experience depression because of growing and developing through the adolescent development stages, which possibly causes young mothers to experience difficulties in raising a child (Agnafors et al., 2019; Finigan-Carr et al., 2015; Winter et al., 2016).

Previous research has shown that African American adolescent mothers are at high risk for emotional stressors and report them more frequently. Without social support from their partners, social workers, healthcare network providers, caregivers, family members, and friends (Berma et al., 2019; Brown et al., 2018; Steele et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020). According to Schelbe and Geiger (2017), foster care youth may face difficulties as they age out of parenting. In the research study, the researchers found that some parenting foster youth found happiness in their children and tried to become effective parents despite having little training in parenting, minimal access to resources, and limited social support. The parents were motivated to improve their lives for their children to provide a better life for them and out of a worry that they would end up in the cycle of foster care. My goal for this study was to explore, examine, and fill the gap in the existing literature to identify associated factors in the development of parenting skills among African American young mothers between the ages of 15 and 20 who transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood.

### **Research Question**

The research question for this study was: What are the perspectives and experiences of African American young women on developing parenting skills who

became mothers between the ages of 15 and 20 and transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood?

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The theories that I used in this study were Schlossberg's transition theory and Mowder's parent development theory (PDT). Historically named the parent role development theory ([PRDT]; Mowder, 1991a, 1991b, 2005), this theory has been used to explain parenting through parents' social role over a historical period. PDT provides a view of parenting in which individuals develop unique personal perspectives of what being a parent means (Gardner et al., 2017; Yin Yu & Hsiu, 2018). In addition, factors that affect parenting cognitions include individual experiences over time, unique personalities, education, and distinctive characteristics (Harder et al., 2020; Narciso et al., 2018). Changes, influences, and backgrounds also affect parents' developmental experiences and perceptions of their role (Gale et al., 2022; Kiang et al., 2017). The demands of taking on work, school, and having a child or children could overwhelm and hinder the healthy development of youth as they transition from foster care into independence (Haggman-Laitila et al., 2019; Schelbe & Geiger, 2017).

Transition theory defines a transition as a form of anticipated transitions (expected or scheduled events), unanticipated transitions (unexpected events), and nonevents (events expected to occur but do not occur; Bjornsen & Dinkel, 2017; Jones & Dean, 2020). Transitions generate significant changes in the individual's self-perception and create new behavioral patterns (Harder et al., 2020; Schlossberg, 1981). As a result, Gbogbo (2020) and Mintz et al. (2017) have used PDT in their studies to explore the

lived experiences of pregnant adolescents and adolescent mothers. PDT is a practical, theoretical framework for exploring African American young mothers' parenting perspectives and experiences while transitioning to independence and motherhood. Youth transitioning out of care often experience unwarranted positions, adverse life challenges as sole providers, and the risks of retaining secured housing as young adults (McLachlan et al., 2020; Reynolds et al., 2018). Youths balancing multiple responsibilities while parenting and transitioning out of care may negatively or positively cope with the transition and parenting roles in caring for their children (Kamath & Nawar, 2019; Rosenberg, 2019).

The logical connections between the framework presented and the nature of the study include Schlossberg's (1981) "4 S's" system. The "4 S's" system represents four factors that affect an individual's ability to cope with a life-impacting transition: a situation, self, support, and strategies (Schlossberg, 1981, p.10). Mowder's PDT can be used to address parenting issues by assessing parents' perceptions of roles, responsibilities, and activities, consequent parenting shifts, and changes the parents experience over time (Mowder, 1991a, 1991b, 2005). Mowder's PDT is used to examine how parents respond to their own experiences, children, parent-child relationships, family dynamics, and the parents' behaviors or roles in their social-cultural milieu (Gardner et al., 2017). According to Gbogbo (2020), The "4 S's" system has been used by researchers to guide their research study questions about the explored population's lived experiences. In this study, the young mothers' perceptions of their experiences, strategies, and coping skills they used while transitioning through independence and early motherhood will be

explored by using the “4 S’s” system. I used these theoretical frameworks to capture the participants’ perceptions of their experiences and parenting skills as African American young mothers and how they coped with transitioning from foster care to independence and motherhood.

### **Nature of the Study**

Initially, I sought to use a generic qualitative inquiry to address the research question in the current study. Kahlke’s (2014) research study showed that generic qualitative studies seek to understand how people interpret, construct, or make meaning from their world and experiences. As a result of encountering recruitment issues, I decided that a qualitative multiple-case study design was the best fit to address the research question. I used the semistructured interview method online to collect oral data and cross-case comparison to analyze the data from the African American young mothers. These details are explained in the Chapter about their experiences and perspectives on being a mother in foster care during the transition and the development of their parenting skills as they transitioned into independence and motherhood-moreover, the potential connections between the two factors. I used a qualitative multiple-case design to examine the differences and similarities in young mothers' stories, subjective opinions, attitudes, beliefs, or reflections on their parenting experiences and the development of parenting skills while transitioning to independence and motherhood.

Researchers Creswell (2013) and Yin (2009), as cited in Vasil (2019), have examined and explained sample sizes in qualitative multiple-case studies. The sample size for the qualitative multiple-case study design was four participants who identified as

African American and female-experienced foster care as a parent who had given birth, was pregnant, and became a mother between the ages of 15 and 20. They parented while transitioning out of the foster care system into independence and motherhood without the child's biological father's involvement. The required age for the participants in the study ranged from 18 or older.

I used a purposive snowball sampling method by sending out an electronic flyer on the study's Facebook page to solicit responses from prospective participants. I used the Walden University Participate Pool website to recruit students and alums. I used an interview protocol based on literature to guide the 40 to 60-minute online, in-depth, semistructured, audio-recorded interviews with open-ended questions by telephone or Zoom at the participants' discretion. I used the default Zoom voice recorder to record the interviews with the participants and transcribe the recordings verbatim before data analysis.

### **Definitions**

I used the following terms in this study:

*African American:* As a people, African Americans are known to come from or originate from the native land of Africa (Baharian et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2019). The term "African American" has been defined by other names such as "black people," "negros," "colored," and "Afro-Americans throughout ancient times (Logan et al., 2018, p. 11).

*African American young mothers:* A group of young and new mothers aged 15–21 (black) African American. A high-risk group reported being more financially and

emotionally stressed by inadequate social support from their partners and the greater community (Brown et al., 2018).

*Aged out:* Emancipated, or previously aging-out, is a singular event and refers to the act of achieving legal independence from state supervision; In instances of children under the age of 18, in some states, emancipation is still a legal status that can undergo appeals for the best interests of the child (Häggman-Laitila et al., 2018; Ryan et al., 2016).

*Foster care:* Foster care is a type of care in which a child resides within a family other than their biological family for a variety of reasons (Bell & Romano, 2017; Rock et al., 2015; Strijker & Van Oijen, 2008, as cited in Konijn et al., 2019).

*Foster care youth:* Young adults ages 13–18 are placed in child welfare services and not in the care of their biological families due to inadequate parenting, delinquency, neglectful behavior, or substance abuse (Johnson, 2021; Rosenberg & Kim, 2018).

*Independence:* Youth currently in or formerly in foster care (previously transitioned out) live independently (Thompson et al., 2018).

*Motherhood:* Female experiences that are distinct due to dramatic changes in physiology, endocrinology, immune function, and behavior that begin during pregnancy and continue into the postpartum period, as well as long-term changes in brain function (Duarte-Guterman et al., 2019).

*Parenting skills:* Steps and tools a person uses to effectively care for a child or children by providing a safe physical and emotional environment for the child or children to develop as life changes over time (Heymann et al., 2022; Jenkins & Handa, 2019).



*Transition:* The transition process from one situation, circumstance, or state to another (Leipold et al., 2019).

*Transition out:* Former foster care youth who previously transitioned out (formerly, beforehand) of the foster care system and aged out due to turning 18 years of age, one year or more beyond those youth who aged out at a specific age (Font et al., 2018).

*Young mothers:* are generally defined as a biological age for women younger than 19 and 21 or those younger during the time of giving birth, progressing through adolescence, and adapting to motherhood (Hendrick & Maslowsky, 2019; Sjöberg & Bertilsdotter-Rosqvist, 2017).

### **Assumptions**

In this study, I made several assumptions. I assumed the participants would have relevant experience and remain truthful about meeting the study's criteria. I assumed that the interview answers would develop as accurately and honestly as possible and that the participants would answer the questions truthfully and accurately, in accordance with their work-related experiences and perceptions. I also assumed that if I took accurate notes and kept my role as the researcher in mind, I would avoid bias in the data analysis.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of this research study and delimitations followed the study criteria for participants who met the following criteria: (a) identified as African American and female; (b) 18 years of age or older; (c) who were pregnant, had given birth, or had parented children as young mothers between the ages of 15 and 20 while in a foster care

setting, and (d) without the involvement of the biological father of the child and are now 18 years of age or older. The scope of this research study was limited to four participants who met the study criteria. The delimitations of the study impacted the recruitment process in terms of the change in sample size and alignment with the design, how the participants used the Facebook study page, resided in the United States of America, and had access to an electronic device and internet to participate in the study via Zoom video or phone audio recordings of in-depth semistructured interviews.

### **Limitations**

The study's limitations included a low response rate to the electronic recruitment flyer on the study's Facebook page and the Walden University Participate Pool website. A generic qualitative method had a methodology limitation concerning the original sample size of recruiting 10 to 20 participants. Another limitation of this study was the data collection process, which became time-consuming, rigorous, and costly. Another limitation was that interference from participants' Wi-Fi connections, internet services, and incoming phone calls caused minor interview interruptions while collecting oral data.

### **Significance**

This study is significant to the human and social services field in applying new knowledge to social change because of the growing body of research I have reviewed and explored by Ethier (2022) and Lingetun et al. (2017) on adolescent motherhood in foster care, the dangers involved for young mothers, their children, and teenage parenting abilities. The study's findings were applied to support the new literature found in this study. The results of this study include new perspectives on African American young

mothers' parenting skills, foster care experiences, and parenting responsibilities. The study may benefit parents, case managers, social workers, mentors, instructors, and counselors offering community programs and institutional resources. The research could spread awareness among human and social services community programs about the challenges young mothers might experience in developing parenting skills during the transition to independence and motherhood.

### **Summary**

Previous researchers have indicated the need for further research on the development of parenting skills among African American young mothers who transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood (Aparicio et al., 2019; Cox et al., 2021; Damashek et al., 2020; Shpiegel et al., 2020; Verulava et al., 2020; Williams-Butler et al., 2018). In this study, I explored the experiences of African American young mothers who transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood between the ages of 15 and 20. This study may affect community social change by promoting new or redeveloped services and resources for parents, case managers, social workers, mentors, instructors, and counselors offering services to aged-out or transitioned young mothers. In Chapter 1, I addressed the study background, problem, purpose, and research question justified by the theoretical framework. This chapter also included the nature of the study, a brief introduction of the methodological process, limitations, and the significance of the study. Chapter 2 includes a review of the related and existing literature and a discussion of this study's research problem, search

strategy, a full review of the theoretical foundation, key concepts of the study, a summary, and a conclusion.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

In this qualitative multiple-case study, I explored the development of parenting skills among African American young mothers who transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood between the ages of 15 and 20. Adolescent childbearing and parenting are significant social problems in America. Prior research indicates that young mothers and their children remain at risk of poor economic and academic outcomes (Combs et al., 2018; Dumas et al., 2018; Font et al., 2019). Pregnancy rates among young women in the foster care population are nearly double national averages, with one-third becoming pregnant by 17 and nearly half having repeated pregnancies by 19 years old (Eastman et al., 2019). Researchers have examined gender as a factor relating to the challenging experiences young people in foster care have or may encounter. They have found that young women transitioning out of foster care with a child or children must negotiate parental responsibilities in an environment of adversity, high stress, and economic and employment difficulties (Dworksy & Gitlow, 2017; Radey et al., 2016; Zarate-Alva & Sala-Roca, 2019).

However, further research on the challenges young mothers in foster care experience in parenting their children remains needed (Cox et al., 2021; Lewin et al., 2019). Researchers have previously found that African American teen mothers and their children face unique risks, lower educational attainment, less economic self-sufficiency, and increased health problems relative to their peers who have one birth during adolescence (Lane, 2020; Lewin et al., 2019; Oman et al., 2018). Specifically, there is a

need for a greater understanding of how African American young mothers who transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood experienced and perceived the development of their parenting skills.

In this chapter, I will explain the study's purpose and further describe the problem in the literature and context of the past significant and present research. In the first section of the literature review, I will review the search strategy, including the databases and key terms used to collect information and research from peer-reviewed journals. In the second section, I provided the theoretical framework, and in the third section, I explored the key concepts of the study. The key concepts include foster care within the United States, young motherhood, transition for foster youth and young mothers, parenting skills and development, and independence from foster care.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The literature review includes several sources of information from the extant literature that I obtained using the Walden University Library. The primary databases included APA PsycInfo, ProQuest, and SAGE, which provided access to current peer-reviewed journal articles. I also used the search engine Google Scholar. Key search terms that I used included: *teen pregnancy, foster care, parenting skills, motherhood, previous foster care experiences, adolescent motherhood, transitional process, aging out, youth in care, emerging adulthood, African American, and independence*. I used additional databases and phrases to explore related past and current literature, including CINAHL Plus, Directory of Open Access Journals, CORE, ScienceOpen, Sociology Source Ultimate, Psychology, and Behavioral Sciences Collection, and PLOS. The additional

terms included *school engagement, child protective services, early parenthood, poverty amongst adolescents, resiliency, residential foster care, pregnancy, parenting youth, policy implications, child welfare, teenage birth, young mothers, and transition age.*

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The theories I used to ground this study included Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory and Mowder's (1991a, 1991b, 2005) PDT. Schlossberg's transition theory defines a transition as expected or unexpected events that result in changes in routines and roles. Expected events are anticipatory transitions, and unexpected events are unanticipated transitions (Bjornsen & Dinkel, 2017; Jones & Dean, 2020). Transitions can change the individual's self-perception and create new behavioral patterns (Harder et al., 2020; Schlossberg, 1981).

Mowder's PDT is a practical, theoretical framework for exploring the parenting perspectives and experiences of African American young mothers who experience foster care while transitioning to independence and motherhood (Gbogbo, 2020; Mintz et al., 2017). Youth transitioning out of care often experience unwarranted positions, adverse life challenges as sole providers, and the challenges of retaining secured housing at an early age (McLachlan et al., 2020; Reynolds et al., 2018). Youths balancing multiple responsibilities while parenting and transitioning out of care may find it challenging to cope with the transition and parental roles they need to assume in caring for their children (Kamath & Nawar, 2019; Rosenberg, 2019).

### **Schlossberg Transition Theory**

Schlossberg (1981) presented the transition model process to provide a framework for practitioners, psychologists, counselors, and researchers to better understand the life changes that individuals experience. Unpredictable life transitions occur, and people react and adapt to transitions in multiple ways and forms. For example, a positive transition in a person's life could occur financially through a pay raise at work, or a negative life transition could occur through job loss. A spouse or loved one could die from a tragic accident, possibly causing an individual to become depressed and lose their job. In the model, Schlossberg described and defined the complex reality of human characteristics and coping mechanisms amid life changes.

Schlossberg (1981) explained that most people are inspired to take charge of their lives. People act in motivating ways to bring about or stop change and devote time and energy to pursuing long-term objectives and continuing our growth. Several theorists, including Brim and Kagan (1980), Erikson (1950), Levinson and Mckee (1977), Lowenthal and Chirboga (1972), and Neugarten (1977), have focused on adaptive behavior. These theorists describe adult development in various ways, including psychological, psychosocial, and physical development and behavior through predictable and unpredictable life transitions. The theorists emphasize the significance of a person's relationship with significant others, family members, and friends in understanding development through a transition in life events. Marriages, job promotions, graduating from high school or college, and subtle changes following anticipated events are all examples of transitions. Erikson (1950) found that personality develops sequentially



through eight stages of psychosocial development, from infancy to adulthood. As an individual completes each stage, they develop a healthy personality and acquire essential virtues. Basic virtues are distinguishing characteristics that the ego can employ to resolve subsequent crises. Failure to complete a stage can result in a reduced ability to complete the following stages and develop an unhealthier personality and sense of self (Kivnick & Wells, 2014). Human behavior is adaptive, regardless of whether it has the expected environmental consequences.

Transitions in life can be stressful for emerging adults. A transition or movement from one state, condition, or location to another has universal properties and conditions that help explain the person's environment in terms of development, situation, health, life balance, and outcomes. Changes can occur in a person's life, but if the person does not value the event, such changes cannot be considered a transition. Levinson and Mckee's (1977) mid-life transition theory concentrated on the adult development of the individual life in the broadest sense of early and middle adulthood. The theorist used the mid-life transition theory to explain men's lives in the study and how men develop and experience the transition in diverse ways depending on their ethnicity, personality, class, level of education, and other factors. Lowenthal and Chirboga's (1972) theory was used to explain the midlife crisis in lower and middle-class men and women whose youngest child was preparing to transition out of the home. The theorist found that some parents confronted the experience of an empty nest compared to retrospections of past low points and expectations for their child's future. Indeed, parents anticipated the departure of the

youngest child with a sense of relief and concern without justifying the transition as a life crisis or event.

Schlossberg developed the transition model as part of continuing research on adult development. A study by Schlossberg and Leibowitz (1980) for The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) involved men being removed from their employment positions at NASA because of a required reduction in the workforce. A week after the reduction announcement, the participants engaged in an interview; a follow-up interview occurred 6 months later. The study's follow-up findings showed that they viewed the job termination as a forced, abrupt loss and had high-stress levels and uncertainty regarding obtaining new jobs. The transition model provided a valuable method for collecting and organizing interview data from the men's perceptions of the transition (role change, affect source, timing, onset, duration, and degree of stress involved). Based on the data provided using the model during the initial and follow-up interviews, NASA provided institutional support in counseling, placement services, and new jobs for the men to reclaim control over their own lives.

In Schlossberg's model, adaptation to transition occurs as a complex process. Many variables appear to influence an individual's transition outcome (Schlossberg, 1981). The primary role of Schlossberg's transition model is its insights into how transition fits with an individual's stage, situation, and style at the time of the transition. Schlossberg (1981) stated that the salience of different variables depended on the group and the transition under observation. The transition process model characterizes adulthood as a period of change, developmental transitions, psychosocial development,

crisis, adaptation, coping, and stress. Schlossberg's transition model has three major factors: approaching transitions (transition identification and process), identifying with coping resources (Schlossberg's "4 S's" system), and taking charge and strengthening resources (Nabieh El-Adawy et al., 2020, p. 8).

The "4 S's" system categorizes individuals' resources as self-resources (psychological and spiritual resources), social support (family and support groups), strategies (coping resources for life problems), and situation (environmental resources) (Schlossberg, 1981; see also Gbogbo, 2020). Schlossberg (1984) expressed that refining the model and using the "4 S's" system could assist counselors and psychologists in providing coping skills and developing preventive interventions for individuals experiencing transitions. According to Schlossberg, the "4 S's" system factors (self, social support, situation, and strategies) influence an individual's coping with the transition. Schlossberg's transition process model with the "4 S's" system offers a theoretical framework for exploring the transitions experienced among the study population of young mothers, even though the development of the original model focuses on adults.

### **Mowder's Parent Development Theory**

Historically named ([PRDT]; Mowder, 1991a, 1991b, 2005), Mowder's (1991a, 1991b, 2005) PDT focuses on parenting from the perspective of the critical social role played by parents. PDT provides a view of parenting in which individuals develop unique personal attitudes about what being a parent means (Gardner et al., 2017; Yin Yu & Hsiu, 2018). Factors that may affect parenting cognitions include individual experiences,

unique personalities, education, and distinctive parenting styles (Harder et al., 2020; Narciso et al., 2018). Developmental changes, social influences, and cultural background also affect parents' developmental experiences, perceptions of their role, and skills (Gale et al., 2022; Kiang et al., 2017). The demands of taking on work, school, and having a child or children could overwhelm and hinder the healthy development of youth as they transition from foster care (Haggman-Laitila et al., 2019; Schelbe & Geiger, 2017).

PDT is a technique used by experts and professionals to organize their thoughts, practices, and research around parenting (Mowder, 1991a, 1993, 1997, 2005). Individuals' perceptions of parental responsibilities and roles vary. Individuals play other social roles throughout the day, for example, friends, teachers, learners, employers, or employees. However, when people interact with their children, the interaction is defined by their role as parents. PDT is used to observe individual parent roles, explain how parents and parenting develop and change over time, and describe how parenting roles correlate with parenting activities (Mowder, 2005, as cited in Gale et al., 2022). People form their ideas about parenting based on their previous interactions with their children and their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of their respective parenting responsibilities and roles. Some components of the parent role remain created, honed, and retained in the individual's belief and may become imposed externally, for example, the legal requirements to care for a child in socially developed nations for the protection and welfare of children (Mowder, 2005, as cited in Guo & Chiu, 2022).

PDT is used to focus on how parents' perceptions of their roles and subsequent parenting change because of how well-informed and responsive parents are to their own

experiences, children's needs, parent-child connections, family dynamics, and societal and cultural context. PDT is an essential tool for professionals or practitioners working with children and families who want to learn and understand children's growth and development, parents' roles, and skills, particularly the children's growth and development process.

PDT provides a theoretical framework for thinking about the parent role and proposes a development model in which individual conceptions of the parent role shift and change over time (Mowder et al., 1995, as cited in Mowder, 2005). Mowder (1997) asserted that young children begin to appreciate social roles early in life centered primarily on a cognitive-behavioral perspective. Young children recognize that their parents have a special relationship with them and behave in a specific manner. PDT also is used to identify how parents relate to and behave toward their children. Individuals' cognitions or schemata about the parent role become progressively refined over time as an individual, family, and other social and cultural experiences develop (Donnelly, 1992, as cited in Mowder, 2005).

PDT is an appropriate theoretical framework for the current study. Emergent parenting behaviors arise from individuals' life experiences as a child in a parent-child relationship and, specifically, individuals' developing parenting cognitions (Mowder, 1991a; 2005). Mowder (2005) contributed valuable information about the PDT, literature about parent roles, and parents' development over time. PDT is used to offer further information for practitioners, program developers, and researchers focusing on parenting

and children's development roles (Jabeen et al., 2021; Mowder, 2005). Child-oriented practitioners could use the information from PDT to advocate and offer services.

Furthermore, it is possible to see parenting from a unique and personal perspective that differs from that of a professional and a parent (Mowder, 2005). Parenting, for instance, can enhance and focus parents' lives, cause stress or tension, and elicit a wide range of emotions of happiness, fulfillment, and grief. PDT will provide me with essential information and organizational strategies to explore the foster care experiences of African American young mothers' who transitioned to independence and motherhood. I will use the PDT to assess the mothers' thought processes, interpretations, and performance regarding meeting their child's or children's needs before, during, and after the transitional process as young mothers.

The logical connection between the framework presented and this current study is that both theories touch on the significant life changes experienced by fostered young women transitioning from foster care while parenting their children. Schlossberg's (1981) "4 S's" system represents four factors that may affect an individual's ability to cope with a life-impacting transition: the situation, self, support, and strategies (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 10). A situation describes multiple factors similar to changes in roles, triggers, and concurrent stressors caused by the situation. The term "self" identifies demographic, personal, and psychological characteristics concerning self-efficacy, ethnicity, and the individual's socioeconomic status (Wall-Wieler et al., 2018, p. 3). Social support includes individuals, family members, friends, networks, and strategies that refer to how individuals decide to cope with the transition and the outcome of finding strategies to

change, modify, or control the situation. Mowder's PDT will address parenting issues by assessing parents' perceptions of their roles, responsibilities, and activities, consequent parenting shifts, and changes the parents experience over time. Mowder's PDT evaluates how parents respond to their own experiences, children, parent-child relationships, family dynamics, and the parents' behaviors or roles in their social-cultural milieu.

### **Literature Review Related to Key Concepts**

#### **An Overview of Foster Care**

Throughout foster care history, societies have had experiences with orphaned children or children whose parents could not care for and provide for them. In the United States, at the first White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children in 1909, participants recommended carefully selecting local foster families to house and care for orphaned children rather than orphanages (Connolly & Golden, 2018; Richardson, 2011). The conference participants also agreed that poverty was not a sufficient reason to remove a child from their parents. Federal legislation established social policies that assisted families in keeping their children during the Great Depression. In 1935, the Social Security Act aided indigent children and other federal programs that provided financial assistance and Work Progress Administration (WPA) jobs to low-income families to avoid having children placed into foster care or an orphanage (Erkulwater, 2019). With or without a job, some parents could not properly care for their children and had to place them in an orphanage, either voluntarily or forcefully, by the state.

With programs and other assistance resources in place, reports of child abuse increased after the publication of "Battered Child Syndrome" in 1962. Numerous abused

and neglected children entered foster care homes against their parents' will; this transition promoted foster care from a voluntary or recommended system to a frequently used involuntary system (Kempe, 1962; Patrick et al., 2019; Tournel et al., 2006). The foster care population continued to increase, and some argue that placement might not benefit children and prefer temporary placement; average stays lasted around 5 years (Fanshel, 1981, as cited in Sutcliffe & Bhatti-Sinclair, 2019). Konijin et al. (2019) found that separating children from their parents could cause emotional problems for foster children who moved from one foster home to the next without permanent placement. In addition to other difficulties, children and youth who encounter trauma, including abuse or neglect, are more likely to have long-term emotional, behavioral, and physical health issues. The child welfare system aims to safeguard children from abuse, assist families in need, and keep children safe at home when that is possible (Bekaert et al., 2021). When necessary, provide children with temporary out-of-home care and ensure they have secure, long-term, positive homes with their families, loved ones, adoptive parents, or legal guardians.

Early adverse experiences may influence children's and youth's development and behavioral and emotional problems. Children and youth in foster care or adoptive families often experience undesirable placement issues, abuse, neglect, or homelessness before and aftercare (Schoemaker et al., 2020). Aged-out youth experience dropping out of school, homelessness, poverty, adolescent pregnancy, substance abuse, unemployment, health problems, mental health problems, and victimization. Researchers have indicated that foster care has improved some children's and youth's lives after removing



unfavorable caregiving circumstances (Duke et al., 2017; Haggman-Laitila et al., 2018). Children and youth involved in the CPS system, some of whom experience foster care placement, remain a significant and policy-relevant subpopulation of those at risk for early parenthood.

Teen pregnancy remains risky for girls aged out of foster care. Doyle (2007, as cited in Taylor et al., 2021) reported that 35% of Illinois teenage girls involved with CPS or foster care had teen births. According to King et al. (2017, as cited in Nathans & Chaffers, 2022), 18% to 20% of CPS or foster care girls had teen births in California. Additional researchers found that approximately 55% of female youth who age out of foster care who reach the age of majority while still in care have a teen pregnancy, and 21% have a teen birth (Combs et al., 2018; Oshima et al., 2013; Purtell et al., 2020). In the United States, 37% of all children and more than half of African American children have experienced CPS investigations before the age of 18 (Fong, 2019; Kim et al., 2017). This group is more susceptible to teen pregnancy than other teens because of the circumstances that led to their placement in foster care, the experience, and the lack of healthy relationships with family or non-family members.

The CPS system affects numerous children in the United States, particularly those from low-income African American families. In the United States, by age 18, 6% of all children and 12% of African American children have had one or more foster care placements (Oman et al., 2018; Wildeman & Emanuel, 2014). In 2018, roughly 7.5% (n = 18, 759) of all children and youth exited foster care without legal permanency (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018). Researchers discovered that “aged-out” female

adolescents and young women between the ages of 15 and 24 endure a disproportionate burden of the adverse outcomes of unintended pregnancy (Casola et al., 2017, p. 643) in consideration of the vulnerabilities of adolescent mothers and the significantly increased rates of adolescent pregnancy. Moreover, I will examine the challenges faced by those in foster care, collect data, and attempt to fill in the existing literature gaps about the development of parenting skills among African American young mothers who transition from foster care to independence and motherhood at the ages of 15 and 20. Additional information remains needed about African American young mothers experiencing pregnancy, birth, parenting skills, and unpreparedness for motherhood and independence while transitioning out of foster care.

### **Young Mothers and Motherhood**

Young mothers remain commonly viewed as lacking maturity, parental skills, and unpreparedness. Young mothers are generally defined as a term for the biological age of women younger than 25 or those younger during giving birth (Sjoberg & Bertilsdotter-Rosqvist, 2018). Research has shown that early motherhood is associated with adverse developmental outcomes for young mothers and their children (Hibbs et al., 2018). Previous researchers have found that young mothers experience depression at an increasing rate during the developmental stages of raising a child as a teen or adolescent (Agnafors et al., 2019; Dinwiddie et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2017; Walker & Holtfreter, 2021). The growing body of research on adolescent motherhood in foster care has concentrated on the dangers involved for mother and child, sexual health, and teenage parenting (Aparicio et al., 2019). Several studies have not demonstrated an examination

of young African American mothers' parenting skills development between ages 15 and 20 who transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood. The prevalence of parenting among young mothers aging out of foster care makes them an essential group needing help adjusting to motherhood.

*Young motherhood* is a significant life transition that introduces new challenges during an intense mental and physical developmental stage, challenging or forcing the intense transition from childhood to adulthood (van Vugt & Versteegh, 2020). Young mothers in foster care who often experience motherhood face rejection and abandonment due to their trauma and unstable histories; African American young mothers primarily endure additional challenges in and out of foster care than other races (Aparicio et al., 2019; Burke et al., 2018; Merritt, 2020). Young mothers transitioning out of foster care often encounter poverty, a lack of education, affordable housing, and quality childcare (Gill et al., 2020; Mezey et al., 2017). According to Aparicio's (2017) study, young mothers in foster care could attempt to work harder to raise their children differently because becoming mothers might trigger their own unfavorable childhood experiences. The young mothers may fear their children entering the foster care system at or around the same age as they previously did. *Young motherhood* is a major life shift that brings new difficulties during an intense physical and mental growth period that compels or challenges the transition from childhood to maturity. While transitioning into motherhood, these young moms and their kids are susceptible to abuse, neglect, and social and economic impacts.

## **The Transition for Young Mothers to Motherhood**

Life trajectories, experiences of change, and transformations challenge the life cycles of stability and instability that people experience and seek to understand life through transitions. People usually define *transition* as a critical or challenging moment when planned or unplanned events occur in relationships, work environments, life, or society (Fenwick, 2013; Hicks, 2022; McKenzie & Wilson, 2019). Previous researchers have found that people need security and validation when moving through life while connecting with a group of other people, families, and couples (Roy et al., 2020; Ryon & Gleason, 2018). A transition in life during every event mainly involves interactions with others. For example, couples' transition to parenthood is a significant life stressor, with most couples experiencing failed relationships during the process and transition through parenthood (Holmes et al., 2013; Kuersten-Hogan & McHale, 2021). Figueiredo et al. (2018) found that couples remain in stable relationships during the transition to parenthood. New parents having a child for the first time are introduced to a plethora of unanticipated problems that have the potential to strain the quality of their relationships. New parents must learn to care for an infant despite increased sleep deprivation, fatigue, and financial burdens. Change and transformation experiences challenge people's life cycles of stability and instability as they seek to understand life through transitions.

The transition from childhood to motherhood is a significant milestone in a woman's life and starts throughout pregnancy and lasts until after the baby's birth. The mothers began to feel competent and confident and settled in with their infants. The average time for a baby to settle in or develop a schedule occurs during the fourth or fifth

month (Baddock et al., 2019). The transition for adolescent and young mothers to motherhood compared to adult new moms has correlated with additional obstacles (Erfina et al., 2019; Kagawa et al., 2017). Young and adolescent mothers in the foster care population deal with several significant life events, the transition to maturity, pregnancy, parenthood, motherhood, and other life challenges. Adolescent females become young mothers before developing or requiring knowledge, abilities, or resources to deal with early motherhood (Anglely et al., 2015; Baudry et al., 2017; Kumar & Huang, 2021). The lack of skills and motherly practices adds additional stress to a stressful developmental stage. The transition to motherhood for young mothers could become challenging as they progress through adolescence and adapt to motherhood.

### ***African American Young Mothers***

Young and new mothers who identify as Black or African American remain a high-risk group, especially young African American mothers who have transitioned out of foster care. Brown et al. (2018) noted that African American young mothers endure more financial and emotional stress than Caucasian young mothers. African American young mothers experience inadequate assistance from social and community support systems, spouses or partners, and family members. African American young mothers have a higher rate of pregnancies and repeat births while transitioning out of foster care (Agnafors et al., 2019; Courtney et al., 2016; Kucheva, 2018; Shah et al., 2017). Researchers have recently explored young mothers' parenting roles, fathers' involvement, and health care experiences, in addition to studies focusing on future research on learning more about the development of parenting skills throughout youths' transition from foster

care to motherhood and independence (Agnafors et al., 2019; Bi et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2017). Scholarly researchers previously examined young mothers' daily or day-to-day experiences, social, financial, and emotional needs, and strengths while transitioning out of foster care (Haight et al., 2009; van Vught & Versteegh, 2020). In this study, I will explore the development of parenting skills among African American young mothers who transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood. There is a need, as indicated by previous studies.

### ***Transitioning Foster Care Youth***

Youth transitioning out of foster care at 18 or older frequently rely on non-parental adults, peers, and mentors for financial and emotional support (Best & Blakeslee, 2020). The youth seek assistance while navigating life-changing events, for example, applying for school, a job, housing, health care, daycare, and other extended resources. Researchers who have previously conducted research focused on youth transitioning out of foster care or aged-out youth have frequently concentrated on the obstacles foster youth have encountered as a direct result of the traumatic events that led to their placement in foster care (Jones, 2019; Rebbe et al., 2017; Yoon, 2018). The traumatic events mentioned in previous studies may have included child neglect, abuse, or abandonment. On the contrary, Hokanson et al. (2020) found that transitioned-out youth who did not experience life adversities after foster care raised their children, completed secondary educational programs, obtained adequate housing, and created positive relationships. A collective group of youth was more successful than others due to

fewer foster care placements, living with an adult, consistent support, reliable transportation, and government assistance.

The development of meaningful, consistent, and reliable relationships with caring adults for transition-aged youth remains an essential component of the transition to maturation into adulthood. The transition from foster care to independence for aging out youth becomes challenging because youth develop uncertain behaviors on how to properly navigate the welfare system to receive professional assistance, social support, and resources for the following stages in their lives as they enter adulthood. Verulava et al. (2020) suggested that the child welfare system did not assist youth in developing healthy relationships with dependable adults and mentors before exiting the foster care system to provide sufficient programming and support systems for their future transitions. Fowler et al. (2017) found that preparing foster youth to live independently was challenging and intimidating. Youth not in foster care were ill-prepared and unable to achieve independence by their 18th birthday.

Despite facing adverse events and obstacles, the youth demonstrated resilience and optimism during the transition. Hernandez and Lee (2020) recommended increasing government agencies' programs focused on the welfare of children and specialized services specifically targeting youth's future stability as they exit or emancipate from the foster care system. Transition youth relationships with foster and biological family members remain vital for critical development and positive connections in the form of social support in transition and aged-out youth lives. On the contrary, some youth may experience grief about not having family connections or feeling overwhelmed by multiple

caregiving obligations. Hernandez and Lee (2020) also noted that a primary relationship is a significant concern for youth because it focuses on protecting and supporting other young people at risk for adverse outcomes. The researchers' study data points to potential interventions that can engage emancipated youths' desire to make valuable connections and build meaningful relationships with others to promote their positive development through a transition.

### **Parenting Skills & Development**

Parenting practice predicts effective and ineffective outcomes of children's development and behaviors based on the child's environment, parents' knowledge of the development of their child or children, and the practice of skillful parenting by utilizing basic mechanisms to ensure optimal outcomes for the child and families. Recent research has shown that some parents may lack the skills and understanding of their children's developmental stages. Researchers found that programs focused on effective parenting skills and supportive practices for parents and their children (Barlow & Coren, 2018; Goodman & Garber, 2017). The programs provided the parents with tools to adjust their awareness of personal views, behaviors, home and work balance, and environmental and emotional affection: attachment, appropriate expectations, knowledge, and long-term parenting effectiveness. Bradshaw et al. (2019) recommended that more research is needed to assess parenting programs' effectiveness for specific subgroups of parents. Youth aging out of foster care as parents or entering parenthood remain a highly vulnerable group at risk. Roles, parenting practices, and behaviors are among people's most important decisions to impact their children's lives effectively or ineffectively.



Youth exiting or previously aged out of foster care experience a higher rate of adolescent parenting and have different parenting experiences. Then peers who do not experience child welfare or foster care systems have a history of experiencing multiple foster care home transitions, abuse, poverty, non-consistent adult support, and a lack of child and parent resources. Day et al. (2022) and Gill et al. (2020) found that young mothers transitioning out of foster care need comprehensive support from healthcare providers. Healthcare providers must move forward with educational parenting services for young mothers on attachment, breastfeeding, proper diaper changing, neglect, care, health care, nutrition, prevention, intervention, and safety practices. Ineffectiveness in the maternal role of young mothers often occurs within the aged-out foster care youth population.

### ***Development of Parenting Skills***

Young mothers entering or exiting foster care have no adequate knowledge or competence to care for a child independently. Brewsaugh et al. (2018) suggested that various fathers participated in the young mothers' and children's lives. The young fathers could only provide limited assistance because of school and work balance, part-time jobs, poverty, probation, and other adversities. Dinwiddie et al. (2018) found that young mothers experienced complicated postpartum pregnancies because of a lack of knowledge about prenatal care, diet, healthy behaviors, and physical activity. Most young mothers express frustration, depression, overwhelm, confusion, loneliness, unpreparedness, severe fatigue, and a lack of energy. These components play a huge role

in ineffective parenting skills in young mothers who experience various emotional challenges and a decrease in practical parenting skills in their children's day-to-day lives.

After giving birth, young mothers found time management, motherhood, and spending time on self-interest and responsibilities difficult. The transition to early motherhood becomes cumbersome for adolescent or young mothers because of the lack of physical, psychological, and cognitive preparedness needed for mothers' maternal and developmental roles in adulthood (Eastman et al., 2019). With all the adversities young mothers transitioning out of foster care have previously encountered, the mental ability to care for a child is vital in parenting and cognitively understanding the developmental stages of their children's lives. In this study, I would like to explore the development of parenting skills among African American young mothers transitioning out of foster care to motherhood and independence and the response and perspective of the young mothers' love and affection towards their children and life skills during the transition.

### ***Love and Affection***

Warmth, comfort, care, affection, nurturing, support, acceptance, or love from a child's parents can be defined as parental love. Love and affection are shown in diverse ways when parents hug, bond, praise with financial rewards or gift purchases, demonstrate positive body language or provide adequate social support to their children (Sabey et al., 2018). Children require specific positive reactions from their parents or caregivers to develop physically and mentally. This reaction occurs frequently and creates an interpretation as an act of parental love. Children feel neglected by their parents when they lack parental love. Parental rejection characterization exists as cold,

unaffectionate, aggressive, and negligent of care (Mikolajczak & Raskam, 2018). A child's healthy brain development requires love and affection. Children who feel loved and encouraged tend to be happy, confident, and capable of handling conflicts and anger. How parents respond to their children affects their feelings about themselves, how secure they are, and how well they cope with stress, a sense of security, and affection.

Love and affection help children feel secure, despite their achievements. Occasionally, parents overlook providing love, which is a fundamental emotion for their children. According to previous research, a lack of parental comfort and love can cause children to become much more stressed because parents place too much pressure on them to succeed without balancing it with affection (Hesse et al., 2018; Rohner, 2004; Shaffer & Obradović, 2017). Love is a feeling that motivates and encourages people to be better and is accepted or given to others in their lives. Love remains intimately tied to joy, family, satisfaction, and caring, which people strive for in their relationships with others. For many people, love is a source of anguish and suffering, and seeking love from others leads to more significant pain and fear. Unfortunately, this appears to be an unbreakable cycle in which people and many others may find themselves. Love transforms affection into a form of happiness that begins with how parents and caregivers model the concepts and how the child learns to associate love and pain.

Children and youth entering foster care experience abuse, neglect, or abandonment by biological parents, family members, caregivers, adoptive parents, foster homes, and parents who are expected to care for and keep them safe. Positive relationships between foster youth and their caregivers are associated with their self-

reported sense of security and well-being, and bonding with caring and trusted adults is critical for appropriate adolescent development. Steenbakkers et al. (2021) found that despite the difficulties some children in their foster families faced, most described positive experiences. Leathers et al. (2019) study noted that adolescents in traditional foster families did not express a sense of belonging in the foster family and had vague or ambiguous attitudes toward their foster caregivers. The foster youth experienced unclear loss in the event of multiple foster placement changes and found themselves constantly seeking a sense of belonging. Previous and current foster youth portrayed foster homes as lacking love, affection, warmth, emotional connections, and unsupportive environments (Bernedo et al., 2016; Haggman-Laitila et al., 2019; Rayburn et al., 2018). Youth expressed wanting the treatment or fulfillment of feeling like a family member or a regular kid in their foster homes. Foster youth do not consider their foster parents part of their inner support circle when foster parents or caregivers do not provide love or affection.

### ***Life Skills***

The role of a support system or circle for parenting and foster care youth is imperative to the youth's health and transition to adulthood and independence. Children born to adolescent or young mothers in the foster care system remain at increased rates of repeating the foster care cycle and challenges (Aparicio et al., 2019). Young mothers in foster care or transitioning out of the foster care system struggle emotionally, mentally, and physically when caring for themselves and their children. Many young mothers who transition or age out of foster care become focused, motivated, and committed to

developing independent lives with the optimism and hope of caring for their children. When the added responsibilities of motherhood, parenthood, adulthood, and independence arise, emotional barriers develop during the path of achievement in these areas. Young mothers require adequate support, resources, guidance, love, and affection to provide their children with a healthy emotional, mental, and physical life (Lieberman et al., 2020). Suppose the supportive circle or system is not offered or given by the protection of the foster care system, biological or adoptive families, residential facilities, programs, and state agencies. The lack of access to supportive systems could make some young mothers in and exiting foster care unable to deliver and provide their children with good lives. The young mothers will not have the opportunity to develop, practice, and receive life skills training, as well as care, love, affection, and stability to live independently with their children.

### **Independence**

Independence is an individual's ability to live independently without other people's interference or assistance. Emancipation, known as "aging out," defines a singular event that refers to the act of achieving legal independence from the supervision of the state (Lemus et al., 2017, p. 48). In the case of foster children under the age of 18 in some states, emancipation remains a legal and changeable status for the foster child's best interests (Jones, 2019; Ryan et al., 2016). Foster youth aging out repeatedly experience daunting challenges when preparing for a life of independence (Kucheva, 2018). Recent research found that children and adolescents not in foster care are unprepared and unable to achieve independence at 18 (Scannapieco et al., 2016; Verulava

et al., 2020). Former youth in foster care who have already transitioned out of the system fall into two subgroups (Fox, 2016; Watt et al., 2019). The first subgroup consists of former foster youth who have reached adulthood and exited the state's care at 18. The second subgroup of former foster youth consists of those in the foster care system for at least one year after age 18 when they were supposed to exit or age out of the foster care system. The increased attention on youth in foster care and the missions of the policies to help transition young adults come about as limited in their scope. Improvements and adjustments may need to go through an extensive review and require new approaches in developing new policies for youths who do not receive supportive services in preparation for the transition to independence, either while in foster care or after becoming independent.

Once youth reach an age of maturity that allows them to benefit from independent living programs, the goal of the programs is to assist the emancipated youths in becoming self-sufficient. The independent living services aim to help adolescents and young adults at risk of various challenges while transitioning into adulthood and independence. The term "independent living services" refers to several coordinated programs to assist young people in achieving self-sufficiency (Doucet et al., 2022, p.2). These programs include housing, jobs, educational opportunities, and personal care needs. Barnow et al. (2015) and Fowler et al. (2017) analyzed programs most helpful to adolescents transitioning out of care. The studies found that independent living services for adolescents who transitioned out and lived independently received minor support services, resources, and preparation for independent living. Both researchers suggested that future studies explore

emancipated youth aftercare programs' unpreparedness and unfocused processes. The programs need modifications to their policies and programs when preparing youth for independent living and skills.

### **Summary**

The role of a mother is something; the youth must provide what has never been done before without experience, knowledge, preparation, support, and guidance while transitioning through adulthood and independence. Studies have shown that young foster care mothers face complex challenges (Shaffer & Obradovic, 2017; Shpiegal et al., 2021). More human and social service programs may be needed to create supportive networks through the foster care system and families to enhance the emotional connections between young mothers and their children and assist them in building their independent lives. Support systems significantly impact the emotional and mental development of parenting foster youth in foster care systems as they prepare for independence and motherhood. This research study will fill the gaps previously discussed by implementing the African American young mothers' perspectives and experiences during their transition to independence and motherhood. In Chapter 2, I provided information on present and past research studies and the application of the theoretical approach. Chapter 3 includes the research design and the justification for selecting a qualitative multiple-case study approach.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to better understand the development of parenting skills among African American young mothers who transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood. Participants in this study were 18 or older and were previously in the foster care system while pregnant, giving birth, and parenting at ages 15 and 20. According to the authors of previous studies, African American foster care youth have different experiences in the child welfare system than other races or ethnic groups (Hendrick & Maslowsky, 2019; Watt & Kim, 2019). Although researchers have investigated this issue, I have yet to find previous or relevant research studies exploring the development of parenting skills among African American young mothers who transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood. In Chapter 3, I will discuss the research design, the role of the researcher, the justification for selecting a qualitative multiple-case study approach, the recruitment and data analysis procedures, the method used to address trustworthiness and ethical procedures.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

Both Stake (1995) and Yin (2003) explained that relatively single or multiple case studies allow close collaboration between the researcher and participant to describe their views or reality through their stories. A qualitative multiple-case study design was a better approach for the study. In 2013, Yin noted that researchers used a multiple-case study design to carefully examine a sample size of four to five participants' cases. In the



study, I used the multiple-case study approach to examine and gain an in-depth understanding of the participant's actions and decisions and predict similar and different results across each case. The qualitative multiple-case study approach is used as an appropriate design to learn and understand the "how" and "why" or "what" of the research question, which is the goal when a qualitative multiple-case study design is used (Guo & Zheng, 2019, pp. 3948): What are the perspectives and experiences of African American young women on developing parenting skills who became mothers between the ages of 15 and 20 and transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood?

A generic qualitative approach is a design used in qualitative studies for researchers to learn and understand people's interpretations of their experiences in a phenomenon (Caelli et al., 2003; Kahlke, 2014). In this study, I wanted to gain an in-depth understanding of how African American young mothers previously in foster care would interpret, construct, or make sense of their experiences, which is the goal when a generic qualitative design is used. A generic qualitative data collection process is used to collect information from representative samples of people about real-world events or their experiences and processes. A generic qualitative collection is used to obtain multiple opinions, ideas, or reflections. It typically has larger samples than other qualitative approaches (Percy et al., 2015, as cited in Shepard et al., 2022). External generalization (reliability) is unnecessary. However, if the sample is transparent and relatively representative of the target population, readers may be persuaded to apply the findings to similar people or situations outside the sample (Kahlke, 2018).

Phenomenological research is a unique qualitative method for identifying the shared essences of a social phenomenon (Neubauer et al., 2019). I considered using a phenomenological methodological approach for the study in addition to the generic qualitative design. The phenomenology approach is used in research studies to focus on individuals' elements of human experiences and understand a phenomenon as seen by those who have experienced it. Researchers used a phenomenology approach to understand and interpret the participants' innermost thoughts as they assimilated a shared lived experience (van Manen & van Manen, 2021). A description of the phenomenon's essence is the result of a phenomenological investigation. Flynn and Korcuska (2018) found that researchers who used phenomenology-led research studies used unstructured interviews. Participants led the interviews by explaining the significance of their interactions with a phenomenon. Therefore, because of the participant-led interviews, the phenomenological methodological approach did not meet the precise goals of the research study.

In this study, I did not use the phenomenological method. The phenomenological method would have limited my focus on exploring the participating African American young mothers, who are now adults with previous foster care experiences, and their perceptions about their experiences. Researchers used generic qualitative methods to identify and comprehend a phenomenon, a process, or the viewpoints and worldviews of the participants (Lester et al., 2020). I used a qualitative multiple-case study approach to explore the similarities and differences between each case study by asking the "how," "why," and "what" questions suggested by Ebneyamini and Sadeghi Moghadam (2018, p.

11) during the semistructured online interviews. I used open-ended questions to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' perspectives and experiences within their stories of transitioning from foster care to independence and motherhood and developing their parenting skills.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In this study, I served as an instrument in interviewing the participants, collecting, and analyzing oral data directly from African American young mothers. Clark and Veale (2018) suggested that the researcher's role in qualitative research is participatory, and the researcher gains access to the participants' natural environment and becomes the leading research instrument for collecting and analyzing the data. Qualitative researchers must understand the importance of not allowing biases to influence their study's outcomes (Prosek & Gibson, 2021).

When conducting the recruitment process, screenings, and interviews, I had direct access to this population as adults 18 or older. Personal or professional relationships did not occur or exist with participants to avoid ethical issues. Throughout the study, I used the novice researcher protocol found in Roberts' (2020) research study on rookie researchers and the quality of interview questions to collect valuable data during a qualitative interview to prevent bias. The interview questions I asked and how I responded to or interpreted the participants' answers could contribute to a form of bias. Bias, thoughts, and actions could develop during the discussion of how the participants perceived their experiences as young mothers in foster care, considering my previous role as an adoptive mother to my younger cousins who had previously experienced the foster

care system. In this study, I used Rolls and Relf's (2006, as cited in Minikel-Lacocque, 2019) bracketing interview strategy by leaving my personal opinions, emotions, assumptions, and judgments outside the study.

Throughout the study, I used bracketing strategies to sustain personal beliefs, prior knowledge, and experiences without influencing the development of the research question, data collection, or analysis. When subjective opinions arise, bracketing should immediately occur at the beginning of the study to promote rigor throughout the study (Wadams & Parks, 2018). In this study, I continued to use bracketing strategies by hand-writing notes in my journal to document my assumptions about the study, population, and member checking to ensure trustworthiness. I assumed that during the interviews, participants would share their previous stories and experiences, dispute such claims, and request the removal of their information or data from the study. In addition, I used the interview guide (see Appendix B) during the in-depth semistructured interviews, which led me to ask open-ended and "follow-up" questions, potentially preventing participants from voluntarily removing themselves from the study (Yin, 2018, p. 118). I used note-taking strategies that both Stake (1995) and Yin (2018) suggested for researchers to take notes between the questions during the interview. Participants received a monetary incentive (an electronic \$25 Amazon gift card) for participating in the research study during the completion of the interview. An incentive in qualitative research is a motivational, encouraging, and compensatory tool for the participant's involvement in the research study (Gong et al., 2020). As the primary research instrument using Rolls and

Relf's (2006) bracketing interview strategy, I avoided personal and misleading questions during the interviews to avoid triggering or violating the participants' privacy.

### **Methodology**

As discussed briefly in Chapter 1, I found that a generic qualitative design was not appropriate for the study because of recruitment issues that occurred during the recruitment process. Saunders et al. (2017) suggested that a sample size of 10 to 20 participants is appropriate in a generic qualitative study. I changed the study sample size to align with the updated qualitative case study design. With Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I changed the study methodology design to a qualitative multiple-case study. I used a qualitative multiple-case study design to explore each participant's case and the perspectives and experiences of the four young African American mothers who were participants. The participants, now 18 or older, had previously experienced foster care between the ages of 15 and 20, were pregnant, had given birth, or had parented a child during their transition out of the foster care system to independence and motherhood. In the semistructured interviews, I used both Kahlke's (2014) and Percy et al.'s (2015) recommendations that qualitative research is a form of scientific inquiry that allows researchers to explore human experiences from their own personal and social perspectives to develop a sufficient understanding of the participant context influencing these experiences. A case study is an empirical investigation that probes a current occurrence (the case) in-depth. A variety of sources of data (triangulation), as well as the "context" in which it occurs, are used in case studies, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and setting may not be

immediately apparent (Yin, 2018, p. 18). This study included a qualitative multiple-case study research design, a purposive and snowballing sampling method, and semistructured interviews as the instrument to gather the data.

### **Participant Selection Logic**

In this study, I used a purposive and snowball sampling method by uploading an electronic flyer on the study's Facebook page to solicit responses from prospective participants and the Walden University Participant Pool website to recruit students and alums approved by the Walden University IRB. I used the electronic flyer and caption area of the Facebook page and website to provide prospective participants with information about the population the study seeks to explore, age, duration of the interview, how to contact the researcher by email, and how participants' information and responses would remain private and confidential (see Appendix A for the electronic research study interest flyer).

The 5-minute or less screening procedure occurred after prospective participants expressed interest in the study by email. I then responded to the email by thanking the prospective participants for their interest. I asked them five screening questions to determine whether they were eligible to participate in the study. The questions follow: Do you identify as an African American? Do you identify as a female? Did you parent a child, or were you pregnant between the ages of 15 and 20 in a foster care setting without the involvement of the child's biological father? Were you pregnant or parenting when you transitioned from the foster care system into independence? Are you 18 years of age

or older? If a prospective participant did not meet the requirements, I would thank them for their time and seek out a new participant.

The recruitment of 12 potential participants occurred during the selection process after I experienced recruitment, scheduling, and poor communication issues with participants who met the criteria and provided consent to participate. The study's sample size decreased to four participants who identified as African American and a female, age 18 or older. The participants had previously experienced foster care as parents, were pregnant, or had given birth as young mothers between the ages of 15 and 20. In addition, the participants had parented a child or children in a foster care setting during the transitional period and when they transitioned out of the foster care system to independence and motherhood without the involvement of the biological father. Participants received the informed consent form by email and replied with "I consent," indicating they consented to participate in the study voluntarily. At their discretion, participants discussed dates and times to schedule the 40 to 60-minute audio-recorded interviews (via Zoom or phone). Chaney and Spell (2015), Haight et al. (2009), and Ross et al. (2021) have all explored this population and selected 10 to 20 African American female participants for their studies. The researchers reached saturation of new data from semistructured, in-depth interviews with approximately three to 15 participants with a history of foster care placement. In this qualitative multiple-case research study, I selected the participants who would best fit the current study to answer the in-depth "how" and "why" or "what" questions suggested by Yin (2018, p. 10) used in a qualitative multiple-case study interview. I used these questions during the interviews to

develop supportive oral data collected from the four participants to answer the research question and enhance the readers' understanding of the phenomenon under exploration.

### **Instrumentation**

The most frequently used qualitative data source in health care and human services studies is the oral data collected from semistructured, in-depth interviews. I used semistructured interviews in the study as one of the instruments to gather the unstructured data by conversing with each participant. I also used a flexible interview methodology recommended by DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) for researchers to explore their participant's thoughts, feelings, and beliefs regarding a specific subject during interviews. I used the Walden University IRB-approved interview protocol guide (see Appendix B), which contained open-ended questions I used during the semistructured interviews. I used the interview protocol guide to explore the four African American young women's experiences and perspectives on developing parenting skills when they became young mothers between the ages of 15 and 20 and transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood. After reviewing peer-reviewed articles on the development of interview questions associated with qualitative inquiry explored by previous researchers Castillo-Montoya (2016), Gani et al. (2020), and Jacob and Furgerson (2012). I created the study interview protocol guide to generate empirical trustworthiness evidence (data) to achieve valid and reliable knowledge that I used in the study to answer the research question and fill in the gap in the literature.

Interview protocols in a qualitative research study should have theoretical, practical, comprehensive, and open-ended questions so that participants can understand



and respond to further questions and thoughts freely (Staller, 2022; Yeong et al., 2018). The interview questions in this study were related to both theoretical frameworks. The interview questions related to the theoretical framework of Schlossberg's transition theory of exploring the four adult African American female participants' experiences of expected or unexpected events as young mothers' while transitioning out of foster care to independence and motherhood. I used Mowder's PDT to explore the participants' parenting perspectives, parental roles, and experiences as African American young mothers transitioning to independence and motherhood while in foster care.

In the study, I used multiple data collection instruments. I used the interview questions to capture new information from the 40 to 60 minutes Zoom video and phone audio-recorded in-depth semistructured interviews. I used the default Zoom voice recorder to playback the telephone and video audio-recorded conference interviews, not the Apple Voice Recorder app I initially planned to use for the phone interviews. Zoom had a built-in voice recorder that recorded participants when they connected to Zoom via telephone. I also collected, organized, analyzed, and transcribed the study data using the NVivo 14 qualitative research methodologies software. I initially planned to use MAXQDA qualitative research methodologies software. However, I encountered complex issues with uploading the study data to MAXQDA software. I used multiple data collection instruments to fill the gap in this study.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

The steps for preparation for data collection before the data analysis included the following:

I submitted the required documents to Walden University IRB to collect data following the alignment of the methodology. I received approval from Walden University's IRB on February 8, 2023 (IRB approval #02-08-23-1047381) to collect the data for this study. I uploaded the approved electronic study flyer (see Appendix A) on the study Facebook page and Walden University Participant Pool website to solicit responses from prospective participants and recruit students and alums. Prospective participants expressed interest in the study by email. I responded to the email by thanking the prospective participants for their interest in the study. I asked them five screening questions to determine whether they were eligible to participate in the study. I used the Facebook study page and recruited 12 potential participants; only four met the study criteria. The four participants' received the informed consent form by email and replied with the words "I consent." I encouraged participants to email me if they had any questions or concerns about the study, their Zoom video or phone semistructured audio-recorded interviews, or the consent form. I collected oral data from the four participants during the semistructured interviews that addressed the research question. The participants identified as African American women and females 18 or older. The participants described their experiences and perspectives on developing parenting skills as young mothers between the ages of 15 and 20 when they transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood.

I conducted the online semistructured interviews on Zoom for 40 to 60 minutes. I used the interview protocol guide (see Appendix B). I started with casual, open-ended questions to create a sense of comfort for the participants before they answered the

study's in-depth, semistructured questions during the interviews. In the study, two participants' interviews occurred via telephone through the default Zoom voice recorder, and the other two used the Zoom video conference feature. I took handwritten notes during each interview in case something occurred, with the digital voice recorder losing the data. At the end of each participant's interview, I thanked them for their participation and asked if they had any recommendations or further questions. I asked them for their email addresses and emailed a \$25 electronic Amazon gift card. The participants received electronic gift cards as an incentive for participating in the study. In addition to the received incentive, I asked the four participants if they would like to receive a one to two-page summary of the study findings. All four participants requested a summary of the study findings. I noted their request in their consent emails, and all participants received a one to two-page summary by email after the study was finalized.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Data analysis in qualitative research case study begins with data gathering. Data collection and analysis become inextricably linked as assumptions and themes emerge during the study (Erlandson et al., 1993; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2018). There are no procedures or guidelines for analyzing qualitative data; each study is unique. Thus, each analysis will be unique and left to the researcher (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2018). Cross-case analysis facilitates the comparison of commonalities and differences in the process, activities, and events that are the units of analysis in case studies (Yazan, 2015). In this study, I used a cross-case analysis using Nvivo 14 qualitative research comprehensive analysis software program. I chose the data analysis for this study based on the purpose,

problem, research question, sample size, and qualitative multiple-case study design. As the novice researcher in this study, I first immersed, read, and familiarized myself with the data collected from each participant (interviews, recordings, field notes, and documents).

I reviewed the transcripts, highlighted phrases or paragraphs that appeared meaningful and informative, and used the research question to determine if the highlighted data related to the research question. I eliminated all highlighted data unrelated to the research question. I stored all unrelated electronic data, all field notes, and recordings on a digitally secured Microsoft Word cloud with a digitally protected password only accessible by me to reevaluate in the future. All printed and handwritten data and notes I recorded are locked in a fireproof safe with a combination of numerical codes only accessible to me. After I collected the oral data, each part of the data was transcribed into codes first using the alphabetical letters A, B, C, and D as the participant's pseudonyms to replace and protect the actual names of the participants. I used numerical numbers 1, 2, and 3 from coding the oral data in text form. I initially uploaded the telephone voice and video audio Zoom recordings to MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software. I faced multiple challenges in developing accurate and trustworthy codes and themes within the software. I received assistance from Walden University's qualitative methodology team members, who showed me how to use the NVivo 14 software program online. I used the NVivo 14 software to develop codes, themes, and patterns by grouping related data items described by a phrase or statement as the patterns developed into identifiable data items parallel to a precise pattern.

I organized the previously assembled categories to extract apparent patterns and direct quotes from the data (transcribed interviews, field notes, and documents) in search of the emergence of overreaching themes. Three themes emerged from comparing these categories across the four cases, and I checked to ensure the themes could be supported with data from each case. After I analyzed the oral data, the arrangement of themes in the matrix corresponded with the supportive patterns. I explained the themes and word data with the patterns and supported the illustrated pattern descriptions further explained and displayed in Chapter 4. The matrix included the letter and numerical codes for each data category. In a qualitative case study, repeated data patterns are synthesized after the data preparation, collection, transcription of the data, storage, software, and analysis processes (Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2018). The repeating data patterns in this study were synthesized into a composite synthesis to address the study's research question. Member checking typically occurs after the researcher has collected and analyzed data (Candela, 2019; Doyle, 2007). All four participants requested a one to two-page summary of the study findings. I noted their request in their consent emails, and a copy of the summary was emailed after the study was finalized to each participant.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

In this study, I took several steps to ensure and increase trustworthiness. Korstjens and Mooser (2018) found that qualitative researchers planned and incorporated methodological strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of the study findings. I received approval from Walden University IRB before the data collection. I provided potential participants with the study consent form, which listed the purpose of the study and the

interview guide protocol. I obtained consent from potential participants before interviewing them online using Zoom, where all interviews were audio and video recorded. I also took notes during the data collection and analysis process. Typically, four trustworthiness criteria are employed to assess the soundness of qualitative research and the authenticity and quality of findings. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are among them (Campbell et al., 2020).

### **Credibility**

Credibility is an attribute intended for judging and increasing the accuracy and accountability of findings and conclusions, which require adequate documentation, reporting, and evaluation (Liao & Hitchcock, 2018). Most qualitative multiple-case studies rely on the triangulation of several data collection methods and sources to assist with the study's credibility, for example, member checking, recordings, reflection, and organization of notes (Krefting, 1991; Morrow, 2005; Rose & Johnson, 2020). In this study, I used several strategies to establish this criterion of trustworthiness. One of them was triangulation, which entailed me using different sources of information or procedures from the field to establish identifiable patterns found in the data to answer the research question.

### **Transferability**

Transferability in a qualitative research study refers to researchers comparing their findings to previous research studies in the field of their specialization and theoretical frameworks that describe the study setting and participants' attitudes or characteristics. Transferability is the second significant aspect of trustworthiness. It is

understood as the generalizability of inquiry. This only concerns case-to-case transfer in qualitative research (Amin et al., 2020). I used these trustworthiness criteria established through the thick description for this study.

### **Dependability**

Dependability covers the attributes of the related system of reliability, availability, consistency, and security. Dependability is used to demonstrate or measure the reliability and consistency of a study's results. Unreliable systems may cause information loss, data misinterpretation, and high consequent recovery costs (Boucerredj & Debbache, 2018). The criterion of trustworthiness mainly focuses on whether the same results would be attained if the same study were conducted twice (Morrow, 2005, as cited in Yadav, 2021). I used triangulation and an audit trail to represent dependability in this study. If someone else wanted to replicate it, they would have adequate information from the research report to do so and obtain similar findings as I did in this study.

### **Confirmability**

The final component of trustworthiness is confirmability. It refers to the degree of neutrality in the findings of a given research study (Amin et al., 2020). In this study, I wrote in a journal and took field notes to document assumptions about the study privately without influencing the reader to ensure confirmability. When readers or people agree with the researchers' interpretations and findings of the data collected from their study, the term is known as "confirmability" (Nassaji, 2020, p. 428). I maintained confirmability throughout the research study by using the collected oral data from each participant and member checking. I used these steps to ensure the current study findings derived from the

perspectives and perceptions of the participants and not my personal views as the researcher. I also conducted an "audit trail" in this study. An "audit trail" is used when a researcher records and rationalizes all the steps and decisions regarding a study's data coding and analysis (Nassaji, 2020, pp. 429-430; Nowell et al., 2017).

### **Ethical Procedures**

In this research study, I protected the well-being of all participants by following and submitting all required documents to Walden University's IRB for approval of the study. I used a purposive and snowball sampling method by uploading an electronic flyer (see Appendix A) on the study's Facebook page to solicit responses from prospective participants and the Walden University Participant Pool website to recruit students and alums. I used the electronic flyer and caption area of the Facebook page, and the participant pool website provided prospective participants with information about the population the study sought to explore. In addition, the age group, interview duration, how to contact me by email, and how all participants' information and responses would remain private and confidential. The prospective participants privately shared their interest in the study by emailing my Walden University student email address to protect their identity from other participants.

Throughout this study, I thoroughly explained to the participants, as many times as necessary, any information or questions they needed to be answered or asked. I explained the inclusion criteria screening process, the informed consent form, the interview guide protocol (see Appendix B), and the participant's right to withdraw from the research study at any time. After I conducted the screening criteria questions, I



collected all data from the participants who met the study requirements. I emailed the informed consent form to the prospective participants to review and reply with the words "I consent." This phrase indicated they consented to participate in the study voluntarily. All participants' information, name, age, email address, or other personal information they provided is only known to me as the researcher of this study to keep their identities protected. I used the letters A, B, C, and D to represent the participants in this study and numbers 1, 2, and 3 to code the participants' oral data in text form to protect their identities. I have secured all confidential collected data, recordings, and informed consent forms listing the participant's identification. I stored all personal and confidential information about the participants in a Microsoft Word cloud with a digital protection password only accessible to and by me for five years. Throughout the study, I followed all ethical research considerations, procedures, and guidelines under the Walden University IRB to protect each participant in this study. I confirm that all participants' identities remained confidential within the law's limits. As a mandated reporter in Pennsylvania and the researcher of this study, if I learned about abuse from someone other than a child who was allegedly abused, I must report it to legal authorities.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to better understand the development of parenting skills among African American young mothers who transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood between the ages of 15 and 20 years old. In this chapter, I presented and addressed the qualitative multiple-case study research design, the role of the researcher, the recruitment process, data collection,

data analysis, the trustworthiness of the study, and ethical procedures and considerations of the participants. Chapter 4 includes a detailed discussion about the study setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, results, and summary.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to better understand the experiences and perspectives on the development of parenting skills among African American young mothers who transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood. Most people start families without specialized training by learning parenting skills and behaviors by observing their parents and the example of others who teach or demonstrate patience, affection, love, safety, healthy living, and parental responsibility (Newland, 2018). Researchers have reported that some adolescent parents in foster care lack access to the same positive parental experiences to observe and learn effective parenting skills due to frequent placements and other significant adverse challenges in foster care (Chambers et al., 2018). In this study, I sought to answer one research question.

What are the perspectives and experiences of African American young women on developing parenting skills who became mothers between the ages of 15 and 20 and transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood?

In this chapter, I present (a) the setting of the data collection, (b) demographics, (c) data collection, (d) data analysis, (e) trustworthiness of data, (f) results, and lastly, (g) summary.

### **Setting**

The setting for each interview was online using Zoom. Participants chose their interview environments to respect their privacy and confidentiality. All participants' interviews occurred online in the privacy of my home office. Two participants

participated by video; the other two used the Zoom meeting telephone number for their interviews. All interviews were audio recorded using the default Zoom recorder. I started each interview by greeting and thanking the participants for voluntarily participating in the study. I gave a self-introduction and a brief review of the consent form. I asked the participants if they had any questions or concerns, followed by two icebreaker questions that provided a possible form of comfort before moving forward into the in-depth interview questions.

### **Demographics**

Each of the four participants in this study met the inclusion criteria of being self-identified as African American, female, and had previously been pregnant, given birth to, or parented children as young mothers between the ages of 15 and 20 while in a foster care setting without the involvement of the biological father of the child and are now 18 or older. The participants were either pregnant or parenting when they transitioned from the foster care system to independence and motherhood.

### **Data Collection**

#### **Recruitment**

I received approval from Walden University's IRB on February 8, 2023, to collect the data. I uploaded the approved electronic study flyer (see Appendix A) on the study recruitment Facebook page and Walden University Participant Pool website to solicit responses from prospective participants. Twelve potential participants showed an interest in the study by email. I emailed each potential participant, thanked them for their interest in the study, and asked them five screening questions to determine whether they were

eligible to participate. Four participants met the criteria and were emailed the consent form before agreeing to participate in the study to review and ask questions. They responded with an email stating, "I consent." I conducted the interviews online from February 20, 2023, to May 1, 2023. They lasted for 40 to 60 minutes at the participant's discretion. In the interviews, I used semistructured and open-ended questions using the study interview guide protocol (see Appendix B) and probed by asking follow-up questions. This practice was particularly appropriate when I needed help understanding a participant's response or when their answers to the questions were ambiguous or vague to obtain more detailed and specific information. I took notes during each interview. Note-taking was necessary in case something occurred to the digital voice recorder and the loss of the collected digital data and for self-reflection.

There was a variation in the data collection from the original plan presented in Chapter 3. I initially sought to recruit 10 to 20 participants following the generic qualitative design sample size outlined in Chapter 3. I changed the study design from a generic qualitative to a qualitative multiple-case study due to recruitment issues. I received over 15 inappropriate racial comments and slurs posted by strangers on the study's Facebook page, which I had to report to Facebook customer service and my chair committee member. In addition, an unusual circumstance was encountered when collecting data. The Apple Voice recorder app was terminated from the data collection process because the default Zoom video and audio recorder recorded the oral data from the four participants to answer the research question. I received approval from Walden University's IRB on April 11, 2023, to change the qualitative case study design and

update the informed consent procedures section previously approved by the IRB on February 8, 2023.

### **Data Analysis**

I used a cross-case analysis to collect the data using NVivo 14 qualitative research comprehensive analysis software. Cross-case analysis facilitates the comparison of commonalities and differences in the process, activities, and events that are the units of analysis in case studies (Yazan, 2015). I initially used MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software and experienced multiple issues uploading the telephone voice and video audio Zoom recordings to MAXQDA. I followed the cross-case analysis described by Robert Yin, which differed from the cross-case analysis approach described by Robert Stake (1995), which follows the constructivist or interpretive approach that knowledge is not discovered. However, instead, it is constructed (Yazan, 2015).

The cross-case analysis included the data from the four cases. There were clusters of quotes that emerged as categories in each case study and then were compared to the other cases to determine whether the categories were supported in all four cases. Three themes emerged from comparing these categories across the cases, and I checked to ensure the themes could be supported with data from each case. The cross-case analysis found no discrepant cases within the four individual cases.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

In this study, I took several steps to ensure and increase trustworthiness, as outlined in Chapter 3. I received approval from Walden University IRB before the data collection. I provided potential participants with the study consent form, which informed

them about the purpose of the study and the interview guide protocol. I obtained consent from potential participants before interviewing them online using Zoom, where all semistructured interviews were audio and video recorded. I also took notes during the data collection and analysis process. I also used an audit trail describing all the steps to complete the research from the beginning and reporting the findings to ensure trustworthiness. In qualitative research studies, researchers planned and incorporated methodological strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of the study findings (Korstjens & Mooser, 2018). Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are among them (Campbell et al., 2020).

### **Credibility**

Credibility is an attribute intended for judging and increasing the accuracy and accountability of findings and conclusions, which requires adequate documentation, reporting, and evaluation (Liao & Hitchcock, 2018). Most qualitative multiple-case studies rely on the triangulation of several data collection methods and sources to assist with the study's credibility, such as member checking, recordings, reflection, and organization of notes (Krefting, 1991; Morrow, 2005; Rose & Johnson, 2020). I used several strategies to establish this criterion of trustworthiness. I consistently used the semistructured interview protocol I had developed and reviewed with the committee throughout the study to ensure I was collecting credible oral data from each participant's perspective of their experiences.

I followed a similar protocol in analyzing the data. I reviewed the reports and intuitively highlighted any sentences, phrases, or paragraphs that appeared meaningful

and related to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and in each participant's data to determine the credibility of the data being relevant to the topic of the study. A negative case analysis was another procedure I used to increase the study's credibility. I identified data elements that disconfirmed emergent findings by conducting a negative case analysis. A negative case analysis is a technique used to ensure the validity of the interpretation of qualitative data by analyzing outlier data (Johnson et al., 2020). I refined the data analysis whenever a new negative case emerged. I repeated revisions until I could explain and present most of the data captured in this research study.

### **Transferability**

Transferability in a qualitative research study refers to researchers comparing their findings to previous research studies in the field. This only concerns case-to-case transfer in qualitative research (Amin et al., 2020). As suggested by Daniel (2019) and Hadi and Closs (2016), these trustworthiness criteria were established through the consistency in the data sources provided by the participants. The participants in this study met the criteria. They identified as African American women and females who experienced foster care as a parent who had given birth or was pregnant, were a mother between the ages of 15 and 20, and were now adults. I gained an in-depth understanding of the development of their parenting skills as I collected oral data from these participants through the one-on-one, online semistructured interviews using questions gleaned from past literature.



## **Dependability**

Dependability covers the attributes of the related systems of reliability, availability, consistency, and security. Dependability is used to demonstrate or measure the reliability and consistency of a study's results. Unreliable systems may cause information loss, data misinterpretation, and high recovery costs (Boucerredj & Debbache, 2018). The criterion of trustworthiness mainly focuses on whether the same results would be attained if the same study were conducted twice (Morrow, 2005, as cited in Yadav, 2021). I used triangulation and an audit trail for this study to establish dependability. If someone else wanted to replicate it, they would have adequate information from the research report to do so and obtain similar findings as I did in this study.

According to Nowell et al. (2017), an audit trail is a transparent description of the steps taken in a research study from the beginning of the project until the findings are reported. In this study, I followed and applied eight steps. The first step entailed determining what to research. I identified and sought peer review through the committee on the topic, research question, and study design. The second step is identifying how to research the identified problem. This step involved reading through secondary data and research literature, including peer-reviewed journal articles and previous studies related to the current study topic. The methodology used was also determined, which was the qualitative multiple-case study approach. I used this approach for this study to effectively explore the participants' stories.

After determining the research topic and the structure of the study, the third step was to write up a research proposal, which included more information regarding the research goals, purpose, and participant scope. In the fourth step, the research was prepared by selecting the participants, scheduling interviews, and preparing Zoom meetings and the necessary technical equipment. The fifth step was executing the research data from February 20, 2023, to May 1, 2023. In-depth, semistructured interviews with open-ended questions were used to collect data. Interviews were conducted with four participants via Zoom and phone, using the default Zoom voice recorder. I took handwritten notes using pen and paper for backup for the four interviews and follow-up questions.

The sixth step was about coding and synthesizing the data to find insights. I used a cross-case analysis with the NVivo 14 software to code the data. I found three themes that generated insight that answered the research question and achieved the study's goal. In the seventh step, I created a report outlining the significant findings and results from the study in document format. It incorporated an executive summary, comprehensive themes, and supporting evidence. The final step is sharing the findings with key stakeholders. Essential records remain secured and password-protected, concerning what I did while exploring the study. These include information on how the data collection instrument was developed; all raw data and notes I took during each semistructured interview; the trustworthiness of notes about confirmability, dependability, credibility, and transferability; and a codebook listing all the codes used in the data analysis process. I kept a journal throughout the study and continuously engaged with the Chair and

committee for their advice and input. The audit trail described all the steps I completed in this research study from the beginning to the end of the reported findings. By following this audit trail, other researchers could obtain the same results. Therefore, I established dependability in this study.

### **Confirmability**

The final component of trustworthiness is confirmability. Confirmability refers to the degree of neutrality in the findings of a given research study (Amin et al., 2020). In this study, I wrote in a journal and took field notes to document assumptions about the study privately without influencing the reader to ensure confirmability.

In this study, I maintained confirmability. I used the oral data collected from each participant and member checking to ensure the study findings reflect the perspectives and perceptions of the participants and not my personal views. I also conducted an audit trail, in which I recorded and rationalized all the steps and decisions regarding the data coding and analysis (Nassaji, 2020, pp. 429–430; Nowell et al., 2017). I invited my chair to review the data and analysis to determine if the findings and interpretation were objective. The audit trail highlights each step I took during data analysis to justify my decisions.

### **Results**

In this study, I explored the development of parenting skills among African American young mothers who transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood at 15 to 20 years old. Themes organize the results of the data analysis. The research question in this study was: What are the perspectives and experiences of African

American young women on developing parenting skills who became mothers between the ages of 15 and 20 and transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood? I used three themes to address this question: Missing preparation for the parent role, challenges to self-efficacy and self-esteem, and value of resources and support.

### **Key Findings**

From the analysis of the case study data, I was able to analyze and find an answer to the research question. What is learned from the perspectives and experiences of African American young women on developing parenting skills who became mothers between the ages of 15 and 20 and transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood? Three themes emerged from six categories from the four cases that help answer this question. These are: (a) Theme 1: Missing preparation for the parent role (Felt scared of taking care of the child; Not mature enough and was not aware of responsibilities that come with motherhood) (b) Theme 2: Challenges to self-efficacy and self-esteem (Feel that a mother should be responsible, provide for the child, and be loving; Adapting to a new schedule was challenging and was depressing to take care of the baby) (c) Theme 3: Value of resources and support (Wanted to be a better mother than what her mother was to her; and had resources and support during the new parenting process). Table 1 below illustrates the number of participants who mentioned each category within the emergent three themes.

**Table 1***Themes Related to the Research Question*

Theme	Categories	Participants contributing to this category	References to this category in the data
Theme 1: Missing preparation for the parent role	Felt scared of taking care of the child	4	14
	Not mature enough and was not aware of responsibilities that come with motherhood	4	13
Theme 2: Challenges to Self-efficacy and self-esteem	Feel that a mother should be responsible, provide for the child, and be loving	4	8
	Adapting to a new schedule was challenging, and was depressing to take care of the baby	3	10
Theme 3: Value of resources and support	Wanted to be a better mother than what her mother was to her	3	10
	Had resources and support during the new parenting process	4	57

**Theme 1: Missing Preparation for the Parent Role*****Felt Scared of Taking Care of the Child:***

The participants felt scared of taking care of the child when they were pregnant, gave birth, and became mothers between the ages of 15 and 20. All four participants who took part in the interviews mentioned this, and they mentioned it 14 times. Participant A stated that “I was trying to run away from the frustration. After some time, I realized I was pregnant, and I was so scared.” Participant B talked about feeling “Scary just thinking about how now I gotta take care of somebody for the rest of their life and for my life.” She added:

It was scary because it’s like a permanent thing where you have a kid. It’s like you can’t give up. You gotta take care of this person; now you’re responsible because somebody’s responsible for me. Yeah, I’m responsible for someone, so that was like the scary part. Like, how do I take care of this person?

Participant C spoke about how she was scared when it comes to taking care of her child, including sending them to school. She stated, “I was scared when I, like, just sent one off to college. I was scared. “Moreover, Participant D stated, “So once I got the news (of her pregnancy), I called my sister. I’m scared. I’m not ready. I do not want to have this baby. That’s how I felt scared.” She added:

I never thought about being a mother because I really wasn’t like, you know, my brothers, my sisters, they had kids. I was just like, ready to live my dream like I know I’m traveling the world and being this and being that. It just happened, and I just became pregnant, and it was very scary. The whole pregnancy to me was

scary to me. Pregnancy is scary because all you worried about is, is your baby going to be healthy? Am I going to be healthy? I was very, very terrified.

***Not Mature Enough and Was Not Aware of Responsibilities That Come with***

***Motherhood:***

This category suggested that the participants believed they were not mature enough when they were pregnant, gave birth, and became mothers between the ages of 15 and 20. At the time, they were also unaware of the responsibilities of motherhood. This category was mentioned by all four participants 13 times. Participant A indicated that:

I don't know what It is to be a mother. I'm very young. I'm not yet mature enough. And I don't know even the responsibilities that come with this. I am only now trying to survive. For the sake of myself, not even for the sake of me being pregnant.

Participant B noted that:

To be honest, I guess because I'm young, kind of like clueless, not knowing what's going on, but don't really have a clue about taking care of a child once I have her. Pretty much, yeah. I mean, I really can't explain it like I just was a kid myself.

Participant C mentioned that:

It was challenging seeing what the world was really like. So, I remember in the beginning I was, you know, explaining we didn't know we, you know, we didn't experience the world, we didn't have too much, you know, craziness going on around us. Once I was, you know, feeling myself and grown, and I had this kid,

now I'm getting to see what the world was really like, paying bills, having to get up like that grind that, you know, that hard work. And do all of this stuff to make sure like coming to the realization like you're really out here and you really have to, You know, be an adult, in order for you not to lose your kid the way your parents did. That was pretty challenging.

Participant D indicated that she watched certain television programs seeking help from others to learn about parenting skills as she was immature and did not have the responsibilities that come with being a mother. Specifically, she stated that, "Well, I always watched TLC the whole time I was pregnant. I watched TLC, and then with my older sister, she helped me."

## **Theme 2: Challenges to Self-efficacy and Self-esteem**

### ***Feel that a Mother Should be Responsible, Provide for the Child, and be Loving:***

The participants feel that mothers need to be responsible, provide for their children, protect them, and be loving. This was mentioned by all four participants who took part in the interviews, and they mentioned it eight times. Participant A noted that "a mother should be like responsible. She should be like providing for the child. You should be able to protect the child. You should be able to provide medical care." Participant B mentioned that as a mother, she wants to be "More loving and more attentive to my child and not abusing substances and all that type of stuff like that. Yeah, pretty much, just not following in the same footsteps as my mom."

Participant C indicated that:



You know they are very mannered role models, and you know they have respect and they're hard-working, you know I'm happy. It's everything that I thought to be a mom was. Just trying to raise them right and do what I can to make sure I'm raising them to be young, respectable men.

Talking about how a mother should be responsible, Participant D noted that:

Whatever situation you in, you should just you know, do better for the child, like that should be your first priority. And like I said, I used to love drinking and smoking and stuff like that. I did like that was my thing, but once I had him, I just had to fall back and be in my house.

***Adapting to a New Schedule was Challenging and was Depressing to take care of the Baby:***

This category demonstrated that it was challenging for the participants to adapt to the new schedule once they gave birth between the ages of 15 and 20, and taking care of the child was depressing. This category was mentioned by three participants 10 times.

According to Participant A:

The day-to-day thing changed a great deal in that time. I think it's when the baby would get sick or maybe during the first few days, she had colic. So, trying to manage that and also getting your sleep, and making this aby getting used to being on a sleep routine, that was a bit challenging for me, and adapting to all of it (a new schedule).

Speaking about her changes, Participant B mentioned that:

Um, pretty much besides getting myself up and ready for school, I now have to get another person up and ready for school and, in the middle of the night, feeding this person. So, for the most part, I was pretty tired, but I would still get up, get her ready for daycare, get me ready for school, and that was just how the routine had changed versus getting myself ready. Now I'm responsible for getting me and this other person ready.

Moreover, Participant D stated that:

Every time he cried, I cried like I would feed him, change him, hold him.

Everything I did, he just couldn't stop crying. So yes, that was really, really depressing for me or whatever, and I just really couldn't not like, couldn't take it.

But like I was just all over the place I didn't have anything to do. Like I didn't work, all I did was sit around looking funky or rough around the edges, didn't have myself together. Hair never comb just being a bum changing, feeding, and putting him to sleep, basically. That was my life for a couple of months, yeah. I Didn't like to go outside. I didn't want people around me either, like I was just really, really depressed.

### **Theme 3: Value of Resources and Support**

#### ***Wanted to be a Better Mother Than What Her Mother was to Her***

The participants felt that when they were pregnant, gave birth, and became a mother between the ages of 15 and 20, they wanted to be a better mother to their child than what their biological mother was to them. This category was mentioned by three out of the four participants who took part in the interviews, and they mentioned it 10 times.

Participant B mentioned that:

I wanted to be a better parent than my mom was to me and my siblings. That was more of my thought. I really didn't look up to anybody. Just not following in the same footsteps as my mom. Just like I said, just being better, more loving and that's pretty much it.

Participant C indicated that:

I'm going to give this kid more than what I had, you know. So that was my thoughts on, you know, having a kid, its just like I just got to do what I got to do because I don't want my kid to ever go through anything that we went through.

She added that:

Becoming a mom to me was, and not to sound repetitive, but just handling my business it was giving my kid whatever he wanted when he provided me with good grades. It was spending time with them all the time. It was like hey talk to me, and if you can't talk to me because you feel like I'm mom, then go talk to somebody else. It was just, you know, raising them with the morals and stuff like that.

Moreover, Participant D stated that, "and the simple fact of what I went through I just wouldn't want him to go through that." This participant also noted that she just wanted to make sure that she didn't want to do things to jeopardize her son's home life or stability because she didn't want him to experience foster care like she did.

### *Had Resources and Support during the New Parenting Process*

Furthermore, the participants indicated that they had resources and support during the parenting process. This was mentioned by all four participants who took part in the interviews, and they mentioned it 57 times.

Participant A said that:

Fortunate enough I had during this time in the street there was this lady who came by one day. And she, and I think she realized that I was in a very desperate situation. So she fortunately for her, she told me that she had an apartment and in this apartment, she wanted someone to help with the washing around. Cleaning and taking care of the house and looking after it and next to where her apartment was, she had another one, like an Airbnb. So, she needed someone to, like, take care of them. She chose to house me in one of those apartments. Her being there, which I think was just by good luck.

She added that:

This lady has really helped me. Because I had done a lot of shopping for the baby. She guided me on some clothes and also, she guided me on where to buy them and how to make sure that I am saving, so at least by this time I cannot say I had a lot of struggles. I had a place to stay, had a place to put the stuff

When asked if she had any adult present with her when she was giving birth because she was underage, Participant A noted that, “This lady happened to have a young daughter. I think she was around 20, so she was there. Yeah, she was very like family.” With this kind of support, she indicated that, “I think I felt kind

of relieved. Like, at least I have someone there. I have somewhere to go to after giving birth. I have someone to ask questions regarding what I may not know.”

Speaking about the resources that she had after delivery.

Participant A stated that:

There were black nurses there. So, this nurse was very friendly. Even after delivery, she will make sure that I have fed the baby. She would make sure that the baby is already latching on, make sure that I'm positioning the baby quite well, and also I remember blood pressure being monitored, something like that after the delivery. And some medicines were given to me, the antibiotics. Yeah, that is what I can remember.

Additionally, also talking about support, Participant A indicated that:

The good thing about this time is that the lady wasn't allowing me to work. She was like you need to, like, take care of the baby for three months. You can start over from there. Ah, this is quite relieving because you know, I thought that once I got from the hospital, I'll be walking and working with the baby already. Which would have been really difficult because at the same time, you are really healing, you are really trying to heal. You are young and you also want the baby to adjust to the environment. So, I felt like that was a support system by itself, being given three months, having food, and having someone like check on you. And then there was this person who was employed to like take care of the house, she also helped me a lot.

Speaking about her support system, Participant B mentioned that “They were supportive.” (referring to her siblings, biological mother, grandmother, and foster mother) When asked if they were able to provide her with resources or help her set up the baby clinic appointments, her response was affirmative, stating, “Yeah, all of them.” “They have good hearts.” “They pretty much helped with everything, doctor’s appointments and all.” Moreover, Participant B noted that her foster mother supported her after giving birth to her child, stating, “In foster care, I didn’t really have a bad experience other than my mom being on drugs and not being there.” “But she was still supportive when I had my child; she was there to help me.” When asked if she had any resources available to her, for example, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) social services and food stamps known as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), she responded by saying, “UM yeah, both.” Moreover, Participant B reported that:

Once I had her, I took her to daycare and continued to go to school. Then I was working for a job, but for the most part, my family would watch her for me. But for the most part, I had support in making sure I could continue my education. So, she went to regular daycare. I just signed her up for daycare through CCIS. I got support from some of her teachers, but for the most part, my family was very supportive in watching her too. When she didn’t go or she couldn’t go to daycare, they would watch her.

When asked how she was able to juggle homework in between those late nights and assignments and projects, she stated, “I still had support. So, while I’m doing homework,

someone will watch her for me.” Participant C indicated that she received a lot of support from social workers.

She mentioned that:

And they would just come out to see me. They would ask me if I needed anything. Take me shopping, you know, get me stuff for the baby and in the whole duration of the pregnancy give me parenting classes like the whole thing, and but then after that, and you dad was around like he was around, but you know, anyway I went and had my baby. They gave me, you know, some more parenting classes, more clothes and but then after that, you know I had started to work and just started to gain my own independence after that.

Moreover, she received support from her biological mother after she was released from prison. She reported that, “my biological mom, you know, was doing very well. She was out of jail and off of drugs and all of these other things. She would come and, you know, babysit for me.”

Participant D also talked about the support system that she had. , she mentioned that:

She (her aunt) lived in Atlanta Georgia, So, my aunt did take him for a couple of months until I got myself, like in a routine. I did have a good support system cause my older sister would come and get him or whatever, like, come and take him off my hands for a couple of hours.

Participant D added that:

I did have a good support system and people who loved us, helped us. But yeah, my sister, which is his aunt or whatever, she would help me by showing me different things, like changing his diaper saying. Listen, you got to take this out. You put the side on first, that side on first, then wipe him here, you know. So yes, I was taught a lot.

### **Summary**

In this qualitative multiple-case study, I explored the development of parenting skills among selected cases of African American young mothers who transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood between the ages of 15 and 20 years old. In this chapter, I have reviewed the way the study was carried out, including the recruitment of participants, the data collection and analysis, the findings, and the trustworthiness of those findings. In the findings, I found that the African American women who participated in this study were missing the preparation of the parent role, felt scared of taking care of the child, believed that they were not mature enough, and were unaware of the responsibilities of motherhood. Participants experienced challenges with self-efficacy and self-esteem and felt that a mother should be responsible, provide for the child, and be loving. According to the study, participants found adapting to a new schedule challenging and depressing to take care of the baby; they wanted to be a better mother than what their mother was to them, and they had and valued the resources and support during the new parenting process. Chapter 5 includes the research summary, interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications of professional practice and social change, and conclusion of the whole study.



## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### Introduction

Research has consistently shown that female youth involved with CPS or placed in foster care face significantly higher risks of becoming teenage mothers than their peers in the general population. Studies indicated that vulnerable young women are twice as likely to experience teenage pregnancy. Studies have highlighted that 72% of all teenage births occur during the critical transition period between 18 and 19, particularly when young individuals are aging out of the foster care system. These findings, supported by studies conducted by Kim et al. (2017), Kost et al. (2017), Shipiegel (2017), and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2017), as cited in Font et al. (2019), highlighted the urgent need for targeted interventions and support for these at-risk youths. The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study using cross-case analysis was to better understand and explore the development of parenting skills among African American young mothers who transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood between the ages of 15 and 20 years old and who are now adults.

I used a qualitative multiple-case study research design and a cross-case analysis to address the research question in this study. I conducted in-depth, semistructured interviews and open-ended questions to collect the data. I collected oral data from the African American young mothers' during the interviews. They discussed their experiences and perspectives on being a mother in foster care during the transition of developing their parenting skills as they transitioned to independence and motherhood, as well as the potential connections between the two factors explored. I used the case study

design and cross-case analysis to examine the young mother's stories, subjective opinions, attitudes, beliefs, or reflections on their parenting experiences and the development of parenting skills while transitioning to independence and motherhood. Jahja et al. (2021) suggested that in a qualitative multiple-case study, a researcher may use a cross-case analysis to develop added information for human scholarly social service professionals, practitioners, and independent researchers to better understand the population of subjects in the study's experiences under exploration.

I used one research question to guide the inquiry of the study: What are the perspectives and experiences of African American young women on developing parenting skills who became mothers between the ages of 15 and 20 and transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood?

The findings suggested that the African American women who participated in this study were missing preparation for their parent role, felt scared of taking care of the child, believed that they were not mature enough, and were unaware of the responsibilities of motherhood. Participants experienced challenges with self-efficacy and self-esteem and felt that a mother should be responsible, provide for the child, and be loving. According to the study findings, participants found adapting to a new schedule challenging and depressing to take care of the baby; they also valued the resources and support and wanted to be a better mother than what their mother was to them and they had resources and support during the new parenting process.

This study's findings can benefit various stakeholders supporting young mothers, including parents, case managers, social workers, mentors, instructors, and counselors

who are part of community programs and institutional resources. The research can inform and enhance the effectiveness of existing support systems within the human and social services sector by shedding light on the unique experiences and needs of African American young mothers in foster care. Additionally, the study could raise awareness among community programs about young mothers' challenges when developing parenting skills during the challenging transition to independence and motherhood. This awareness can prompt the development of targeted interventions, resources, and guidance tailored to the needs of this specific population. This research can make a difference in the lives of young mothers in foster care by equipping human and social service professionals and support networks in the field with the knowledge and understanding to provide adequate assistance. By addressing African American young mothers' unique experiences and needs, this study contributed to their broader goal of fostering nurturing and supportive environments for all young parents in similar circumstances.

### **Interpretations of the Findings**

In this section, I will present an interpretation of the findings and how the literature confirms or refutes the study's findings. The data collected revealed three themes that emerged from six categories that addressed the research question. I will discuss each category in detail and relate it to the literature and the theoretical frameworks guiding this study.

## **Missing the Preparation of the Parent Role**

### ***Felt Scared of Taking Care of the Child***

The first category revealed from the data analysis was that participants felt scared of taking care of their children when they were pregnant, gave birth, and became mothers between the ages of 15 and 20. Participant C in the study discussed how she was scared when caring for her child, including sending them off to college. Participant C's and other participants' experiences in this study are reflected in several studies about young mothers. Cox et al. (2019) discussed how young mothers with young children are frequently unprepared for the demands of parenting. The participants in this study did receive support; moreover, they did not have adequate or consistent adult support and professional systems to guide them before, through pregnancy, and the subsequent birth of the child. The unknown about the future may have caused fear in them.

Mowder's parent development theory can be applied to participants who feel scared of caring for their child. PDT provides a view of parenting in which individuals develop unique personal attitudes about what being a parent means (Gardner et al., 2017; Yin Yu & Hsiu, 2018). According to PDT, factors affecting parenting cognitions include individual experiences, unique personalities, education, and distinctive parenting styles (Harder et al., 2020; Narciso et al., 2018). Young mothers transitioning out of foster care and into motherhood may only know what parenting they have witnessed or experienced during foster care. These experiences may not always be positive, which may elicit fear in young mothers. The four African American women who previously were young mothers and participated in the study underwent a significant transition from being

individuals in foster care to becoming parents. According to the transition theory, individuals experience a period of adjustment and adaptation when taking on new roles (Schlossberg, 1981). The fear and apprehension expressed by the participants may be a normal response to the challenges and uncertainties associated with this transition.

### ***Not Mature Enough and Were Unaware of the Responsibilities of Motherhood***

The second category revealed in the study suggested the participants believed they were not mature enough when they were pregnant, gave birth, and became mothers between the ages of 15 and 20 years, and at the time, they were also unaware of the responsibilities that come with motherhood. Participant A in the study indicated she did not know what it was to be a mother and did not know the responsibilities that came with it. Participant A also noted that they are just trying to survive. Several studies have supported the fact that young adolescents are not ready to become mothers, and adolescent females become young mothers before they have developed or required the knowledge, abilities, or resources to deal with early motherhood (Angley et al., 2015; Baudry et al., 2017; Kumar & Huang, 2021). Eastman et al. (2019) also supported this by concluding that the transition to early motherhood becomes cumbersome for adolescent or young mothers because of the lack of physical, psychological, and cognitive preparedness needed for mothers' maternal and developmental roles in adulthood.

### **Challenges to Self-efficacy and Self-esteem**

#### ***Felt that a Mother Should be Responsible***

The second theme and third category suggested that the participants experienced challenges to self-efficacy and self-esteem. They felt that mothers must be responsible,

provide for their children, protect them, and be loving. Participant A noted that a mother should be responsible, provide for the child, protect the child, and provide medical care. Participant D noted that “whatever situation you are in, you should just, you know, do better for the child; like that should be your first priority.” Previous research has confirmed that young mothers transitioning out of care often encounter poverty, a lack of education, affordable housing, and quality childcare (Gill et al., 2020; Mezey et al., 2017). The worries the participants in this study had regarding how to care for their children have been confirmed in the literature as difficult for young mothers.

***Adapting to a New Schedule was Challenging and was Depressing to Take Care of the Baby***

The fourth category revealed in the study was that it was challenging for the participants to adapt to the new schedule once they gave birth between the ages of 15 and 20, and taking care of the child was depressing. Participant A in this study noted that day-to-day things changed a great deal. Participant B stated that besides getting herself up and ready for school, she had to get another person ready for school and was pretty tired from feeding the baby in the middle of the night. Participant D noted that every time her son cried, she cried. She would feed him, change him, and hold him. With everything she did, he could not stop crying. The uncontrollable crying and her inability to comfort her baby were depressing for her. The experiences the participants in this study had can relate to their lack of knowledge regarding motherhood and the required responsibilities. Dinwiddie et al. (2018) found that most young mothers express frustration, depression, overwhelm, confusion, loneliness, unpreparedness, severe fatigue, and a lack of energy.

These components play a huge role in ineffective parenting skills in young mothers who experience various emotional challenges and a decrease in practical parenting skills in their children's day-to-day lives. Research by Erfina et al. (2019) and Kagawa et al. (2017) showed that the transition to motherhood for adolescents and young mothers, particularly those in the foster care population, is accompanied by numerous obstacles. These obstacles include navigating the transitions to maturity, pregnancy, parenthood, motherhood, and other life challenges. Compared to adult new moms, adolescent females who become young mothers often lack the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources to cope with the demands of early motherhood (Anglely et al., 2015; Baudry et al., 2017; Kumar & Huang, 2021). This lack of preparation and maternal competence adds to the stress experienced during this critical developmental stage. Consequently, the transition to motherhood becomes particularly challenging for young mothers as they simultaneously navigate the complexities of adolescence and adapt to their new roles as mothers.

### **Value of Resources and Support**

#### ***Wanted to be a Better Mother***

The fifth category revealed from the data was that participants felt that when they were pregnant, gave birth, and became young mothers between the ages of 15 and 20, they wanted to be better mothers to their children than their biological mothers. Participant B in the study stated they wanted to be a better parent than their mom was to them and their siblings. Participant C indicated they would give their child more than they had. The statements by participants B and C are confirmed in the literature.

According to Aparicio's (2017) study, young mothers in foster care could attempt to work harder to parent their children differently because their own undesirable childhood experiences could be triggered by becoming mothers. The young mothers may fear their children entering the foster care system at or around the same age as they previously did.

### ***Had Resources and Support***

The sixth and final category of the study was that the participants had resources and support during the parenting process. Participant A in this study had the support of a lady who was not part of any foster care system. The participant noted how the lady helped her with housing and a way to provide financial support for her and her child. Participant B in this study stated she had support from her foster mother, who helped her during her pregnancy and after the child was born. The support systems the participants in this study received were crucial in helping them transition from foster care into adulthood and motherhood. According to Lieberman et al. (2020), young mothers require adequate support, resources, guidance, love, and affection to provide their children with a healthy emotional, mental, and physical life. From the experiences gathered in this study by the participants, three out of the four did not cite any healthcare support they received before or after their pregnancy. Only Participant A cited healthcare support after giving birth while in the hospital. Participant A noted that a black nurse was very friendly. She would ensure that the participant fed the baby, the baby was latching on, and had adequate positioning. Healthcare providers are an essential part of a young mother's life. Day et al. (2022) and Gill et al. (2020) found that young mothers transitioning out of foster care need comprehensive support from healthcare providers. Healthcare providers



provide educational parenting services for young mothers on attachment, breastfeeding, proper diaper changing, neglect, care, healthcare, nutrition, prevention, intervention, and safety practices.

### **Study Findings Concerning Theoretical Frameworks**

The transition theory is used to understand and explain individuals' processes when experiencing significant life changes or transitions (Schlossberg, 1981). I used the transition theory to provide insights into the experiences of the African American young mothers as they transitioned from foster care. The transition theory is used to emphasize that significant life changes involve a process of role transition and identity development (Schlossberg, 1981). The participants in the study experienced a shift in roles from being young individuals in foster care to becoming mothers. The feelings of fear, perceived immaturity, and the belief that a mother should be responsible can be understood as part of their identity negotiation and the adjustment to their new parental roles. Transition theory also acknowledges that transitions often generate stress due to the demands and changes involved (Schlossberg, 1981).

The young mothers facing challenges transitioning to a new schedule, feeling scared, and wanting to be better mothers can be seen as stressors associated with the transition. These stressors may include adapting to parenting responsibilities, managing their own emotions and insecurities, and navigating the uncertainties of motherhood. The transition theory also emphasizes the significance of support systems during transition periods (Schlossberg, 1981). The findings suggested that the participants had the resources and support they needed, suggesting the presence of a support network to some

extent. The availability of resources and support, for example, access to parenting programs, social services, mentors, or family members, can assist these young mothers in their transition and alleviate some of their fears and challenges. The transition theory states that transitions involve a process of adjustment and adaptation. The participants' desired to be better mothers by indicating their willingness to grow and improve their parenting skills. The statements by the participants also suggested an active engagement in the adjustment process and a desire to align their behavior with their perception of a responsible mother.

I used Mowder's PDT to address parenting issues experienced by the participants by assessing their perceptions of their roles, responsibilities, and activities, consequent parenting shifts, and changes they experienced over time. Mowder's PDT is used to evaluate how parents respond to their own experiences, children, parent-child relationships, family dynamics, and the parents' behaviors or roles in their social-cultural milieu (Gardner et al., 2017). When applied to the findings of this study, I used PDT to explain the different emotions the participants had regarding becoming a mother. Because the participants did not have their biological mothers in their lives consistently and were raised in foster care, their view of parenting was based on what they experienced in foster care. Developmental changes, social influences, and cultural background also affect parents' developmental experiences, perceptions of their role, and skills (Gale et al., 2022; Kiang et al., 2017). The four participants in this study may have developed their perceptions of their roles and skills from their foster care experiences.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Throughout this study, I encountered several limitations that should be acknowledged. The primary limitation was the low response rate to the electronic recruitment flyer on the study's Facebook page and the Walden University Participant Pool website. I aimed to include an initial sample of 10–20 participants. Recruitment issues were raised during and after the recruitment and consent processes. The limited sample size of four participants may have implications for the generalizability of the findings and the ability to draw more comprehensive conclusions. I described the participants' experiences and perspectives. I compared the cases using cross-case analysis to mitigate this limitation and enhance the study's trustworthiness using the oral data collected from the participant's online Zoom phone and video audio-recorded semistructured interviews, allowing readers to assess the relevance and applicability of the findings to other contexts or populations. The specific characteristics and experiences of the four participants may only partially represent the diversity and complexity of the target population.

### **Recommendations**

As a result of conducting this study and the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made for future research. Because of the small sample size obtained in this study, future research would benefit from increased efforts to recruit a more extensive and diverse sample, allowing for greater generalizability and a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of interest. By expanding the sample size, researchers can enhance the generalizability of their findings. A more extensive and

diverse sample allows for a broader population representation, enabling researchers to draw more reliable conclusions and make valid inferences about young motherhood. Moreover, a larger sample size facilitates the identification of potential subgroup differences or nuances within the population, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of young mothers.

In addition to increasing the sample size, future research should strive to achieve greater diversity within the sample. The diversity within the sample would include considering various demographic factors like ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and geographic location. By incorporating a more comprehensive range of participants, researchers can capture a broader perspective on the experiences of young mothers and ensure that findings are applicable across different contexts and populations. Future studies can also benefit from using mixed-methods approaches. By combining qualitative and quantitative methods, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of young mothers transitioning out of foster care. Quantitative data can provide statistical generalizability and identify patterns and trends, while qualitative data can offer rich insights into participants' lived experiences and subjective perspectives. Integrating both approaches would allow for a more holistic understanding of the research topic.

Because this study focused on African American mothers, future research should explore the influence of cultural factors and identity on the parenting experiences of African American young mothers transitioning from foster care. Researchers could investigate how cultural beliefs, values, and norms impact their perceptions of

motherhood, sense of responsibility, and access to support. Understanding the cultural context can provide valuable insights into this population's specific challenges and strengths and guide the development of culturally sensitive interventions and support systems. Future research could also compare the experiences and challenges of African American young mothers transitioning from foster care with those of other relevant groups, for example, young mothers from different racial or ethnic backgrounds, adult mothers, or young mothers who did not experience foster care. This cross-case comparative approach can help identify unique factors contributing to the challenges faced by African American young mothers and highlight potential areas for targeted support and intervention.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study have several positive social implications. Based on the participant's reported challenges and needs, there is a need for improved support services tailored to the unique circumstances of African American young mothers transitioning from foster care. The improvements could involve developing comprehensive programs that address parenting skills, emotional well-being, educational opportunities, career development, and access to healthcare. Support services should be accessible, culturally sensitive, and provide ongoing assistance in preparation and throughout the transition. The study also highlighted the participants' desire to be better mothers and their perceived lack of knowledge and skills. As a social change, there could be an emphasis on providing comprehensive parenting education and training programs specifically designed for young mothers transitioning from foster care. These programs could focus

on child development, effective parenting techniques, healthy relationships, and life skills, empowering them with the knowledge and tools necessary for successful parenting.

The development of establishing mentoring programs and connecting young mothers with positive role models from similar backgrounds can significantly impact their self-confidence and personal development. Mentors and role models who have successfully navigated similar challenges can provide guidance, support, and encouragement as examples of resilience and success. By promoting positive role models, society can inspire and empower young mothers transitioning from foster care to believe in their potential and capabilities. A significant social change can involve challenging and reducing the stigma and negative stereotypes of young mothers transitioning from foster care through public awareness campaigns, media representation highlighting their strength and resilience, and promoting a more empathetic and supportive societal attitude. By reducing stigma, society can create an environment that encourages young mothers to seek help, access support services, and fully participate in society without fear of judgment or discrimination.

### **Conclusion**

Pregnancy rates among young women in the foster care population are nearly double national averages, with one-third becoming pregnant by 17 and nearly half having repeated pregnancies by 19 (Eastman et al., 2019). Adolescent childbearing and parenting are significant social problems in America. In this study, I examined the challenging experiences and the development of parenting skills among African American young

mothers in foster care. I used the data analysis to address the research question: What are the perspectives and experiences of African American young women on developing parenting skills who became mothers between the ages of 15 and 20 and transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood? The findings suggested that the African American women who participated in this study were missing the preparation of the parent role, felt scared of taking care of the child, believed that they were not mature enough, and were unaware of the responsibilities of motherhood. Participants experienced challenges with self-efficacy and self-esteem and felt that a mother should be responsible, provide for the child, and be loving. According to the study, participants found adapting to a new schedule challenging and depressing to take care of the baby; they also valued the resources and support and wanted to be a better mother than what their mother was to them, and they had resources and support during the new parenting process. The study was significant because it provided valuable information about the experiences of African American young mothers who transitioned from foster care and their perceptions of how a mother is responsible, provides for, and loves their child within that role as a mother. These perceptions assisted them with the development of their parenting skills through their life transitions. The study findings can be used to provide human services practitioners and professionals with new information about understanding young mothers in foster care experiences. Human services professionals can promote awareness of the support and educational services needed for women transitioning from foster care to independence and motherhood. Furthermore, human services practitioners and professionals can gain insight from this study, which suggests

the need for targeted interventions, enhanced support services, and policy changes for young mothers to have the opportunity to raise their children in a productive environment and become a positive part of society. By implementing the recommendations from this study, human services professionals and society can foster social changes that promote the well-being, resilience, and success of young mothers and their children in foster care.



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## Appendix A: Social Media Research Study of Interest Flyer

**WERE YOU A YOUNG MOTHER IN FOSTER CARE?**

**STUDY PARTICIPANTS WANTED**

**ARE YOU AFRICAN AMERICAN AND 18 YEARS OLD OR OVER?**

**DID YOU :**

- Became a mother between 15-20 years of age while in foster care
- Transitioned to independence

**EMAIL**  
Tamesha Townsend-Simmons PhD. Student,  
Walden University  
Tamesha.Townsend-Simmons@waldenu.edu

**PARTICIPATE IN A DOCTORAL STUDY ABOUT MOTHERS WHO TRANSITIONED FROM FOSTER CARE TO INDEPENDENCE**

**TO PARTICIPATE IN A 40-60 MINUTE INTERVIEW**

**RECEIVE A SMALL TOKEN OF APPRECIATION FOR PARTICIPATING**

**(PERSONAL INFORMATION AND RESPONSES ARE CONFIDENTIAL)**

*Note:* A young woman holding a child. Image from Felman, A. (2020). Fg Trade/Getty Images. Medical News Today. Healthline Media UK Ltd, Brighton, UK, a Red Ventures Company. Retrieved August 19, 2022, from [https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/237109?utm\\_source=ReadNext#symptoms](https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/237109?utm_source=ReadNext#symptoms)

## Appendix B: Interview Guide Protocol

I want to thank you once again for being willing to participate in the interview aspect of my doctoral research study. As I mentioned, my study seeks to understand the perspectives and experiences of African American young women developing parenting skills who became mothers between the ages of 15-20 and transitioned from foster care to independence and motherhood. Our interview today will last approximately 40–60 minutes. I will ask you about your upbringing, experience in foster care, parenting journey as a young mother in the foster care system, and experience transitioning out of foster care. [review aspects of consent form] you completed the informed consent form that was emailed to you indicating that you consent to participate in the research study and that I have your permission to audio record our conversation. I will take notes of our conversation during the recorded interviews. Before we begin the interview, do you have any questions? [Discuss questions] If any questions arise during the interview, please feel free to ask them anytime. It will be my pleasure to answer your questions.

### **Interview Questions**

- How do you like the weather during this time of the year?
- What actor or entertainer would you say was your childhood crush?
- Can you tell me a little about your foster care experience when you entered?
- Can you describe what it was like to be pregnant?
- How did you feel about becoming a mother?
- What was your idea of being a mother?
- What resources did you have available during your pregnancy?

- What was it like to give birth or have your child in a foster care setting?
- Can you describe your day-to-day routine as a young mother in a foster care setting?
- What was parenting like for you during the transition out of foster care?
- How comfortable were you with your child transitioning to independent living?
- What programs or resources did you receive or have access to during the transition to independence?
- What did you find most challenging about being a young mother in foster care?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share with me before we conclude the interview?