

2018

# Silent Voices - Attachment Formation in Twelve Foster-Reared Mothers and Their Children

Pauline Lepierrot  
*Walden University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>

 Part of the [Psychology Commons](#)

---

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu](mailto:ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu).

# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Pauline Henri-Le Pierrot

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

## Review Committee

Dr. Yoly Zentella, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty  
Dr. Benita Stiles-Smith, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty  
Dr. Christopher Bass, University Reviewer, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer  
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2018

Abstract

Silent Voices -Attachment Formation in Twelve Foster-Reared Mothers and Their  
Children

by

Geneva Pauline Henri Le Pierrot

MA, National University, 1990

BA, California Sacramento State University, 1986

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Clinical Psychology

Walden University

February 2018

## Abstract

Adults who were reared in foster care are at greater risk for attachment disturbances than those not raised in foster care, due in part to the negative impact of parental separation. It is important to study the attachment behaviors of foster-reared mothers because large numbers of their children enter foster care. This study was conducted to understand the childhood attachment experiences of foster-reared adults. The research questions addressed the ways in which mothers raised in a foster-care environment perceived and described their experiences of forming relationships as children with their foster mothers, as well as of forming relationships with their own children. This study used a qualitative methodological approach guided by phenomenological inquiry. In-depth, semistructured interviews were conducted with 12 participants. Phenomenological analysis was used to code, analyze, and interpret the interview data. Results were organized into 2 major themes: mother-like attributes and intense fear of loss. Additionally, 4 subthemes emerged: unconditional love of the foster mother for her foster child, continued contact with the foster mother, fear of losing the ability to protect a firstborn child, and fear of the permanent loss of custody of a firstborn child. Further, the research findings revealed 3 important lived experiences that were less related to the research questions: affectionless psychopathy, maternal deprivation, and preoccupied or dismissive parenting styles. The social implications of the study include increased awareness of intergenerational patterns related to foster care and of the need for positive change to assist at-risk foster reared parents.

Silent Voices - Attachment Formation in Twelve Foster-Reared Mothers and Their  
Children

by

Geneva Pauline Henri Le Pierrot

MA, University, year

BA, University, year

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Clinical Psychology

Walden University

February 2018

## Dedication

Over the past 10years, I have received support and encouragement from a great number of individuals. I dedicate my dissertation to my family and dearest friends. A special feeling of gratitude to my angels who began this journey with me but were given their heavenly wings to soar to heaven before the completion of this project my parents, Pauline Pierro and Lesley Henry II; my son, Deven J. LePierro; and my dear friend, Mr. Leanell Jones.

All of these individuals spent many hours assisting me through this experience. I'd also like to give much thanks to my Aunt Gloria Dyer, Aunt Josephine Pierro, Johanna Dyer, and Tasha Renee Murphy for their words of encouragement and countless hours of proofreading. I also dedicate this dissertation to my granddaughters, Deveona Le Pierro and Ashanti Le Pierro, and my great granddaughter, Lanessa Le Pierro, who have supported me throughout the process. I also dedicate this work and give special thanks to my wonderful daughters, Geneva Henri Le Pierrot, Josephine Henri Le Pierrot, and Cleopatra Henri Le Pierrot, for being there for me throughout the entire doctoral program.

## Acknowledgments

I wish to express the deepest appreciation to my committee members, who were more than generous with their expertise and precious time. A special thanks to Professor Dr. Yoly Zentella, my committee chair, for her countless hours of reflecting, reading, encouraging, and most of all, patience throughout the entire process. Without her guidance and persistent help, this dissertation would not have been possible. I would like to thank my committee members, Professor Dr. Benita Stiles-Smith and Professor Dr. Linda Whinghter, whose insight and knowledge into the subject matter steered me through this research. Furthermore, I appreciate all the support and encouragement from my family and friends. I give a special thanks to the panel of experts—Dr. Leona Tompkin, Dr. Tanga Franklin, Dr. Bryan Hickman, Dr. Holly Mattingly, and Dr. Lynde Paule—for helping me develop the interview questions and inspiring me to keep writing.

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background.....	2
Problem Statement.....	8
What Is Known About the Topic .....	10
What Is Not Known About the Topic.....	11
Purpose of the Study.....	12
Research Questions.....	13
Theoretical Framework for the Study.....	13
Nature of the Study.....	18
Definitions.....	19
Assumptions.....	20
Scope and Delimitations .....	20
Limitations .....	22
Significance.....	22
Summary.....	23
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	25
Introduction.....	25
Literature Search Strategy.....	27
Theoretical Foundation .....	28
Early Childhood Attachment .....	28
Foster-Care Attachment.....	29



Major Theoretical Propositions.....	30
Previous Applications of Attachment Theory.....	31
Rationale for Chosen Attachment Theory .....	32
Relationship of Attachment Theory to the Research Questions .....	34
Literature Review Related to Concepts .....	35
Construct of Attachment.....	35
Construct of Foster-Care Rearing.....	36
Methodology.....	38
Attachment Research Strengths and Weakness .....	40
Rationale for the Selection of Concepts.....	43
What Is Controversial, What Remains to Be Studied, and the Chosen	
Methodological Approach .....	45
What Is Known .....	46
Controversial Research.....	46
What Remains to Be Studied.....	47
Why the Phenomenological Methodology Is Meaningful .....	48
Summary and Conclusions .....	49
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	51
Introduction.....	51
Research Design and Rationale .....	51
Role of the Researcher .....	52
Methodology.....	53
Participant Selection Logic.....	54

Instrumentation .....	54
Interview Questions .....	56
Data Analysis Plan .....	59
Data Interpretation .....	62
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	63
Establishing Credibility: .....	63
Member Checking.....	63
Establishing Confirmability .....	64
Bracketing.....	64
Triangulation.....	65
Audit Trail.....	66
Establishing Dependability: .....	67
Inquiry Audit.....	67
Establishing Transferability:.....	68
Thick Description.....	68
Ethical Procedures .....	69
Summary .....	70
Chapter 4: Results .....	72
Introduction.....	72
Setting .....	72
Demographics .....	73
Data Collection .....	73
Data Analysis .....	74

Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	77
Credibility .....	78
Transferability.....	79
Dependability .....	80
Confirmability.....	81
Results.....	82
Mother-Like Attributes .....	84
Intense Fear of Loss .....	89
Maternal Deprivation .....	93
Affectionless Psychopathy.....	93
Preoccupied or Dismissing Parenting Styles .....	93
Discrepant Cases.....	95
Summary.....	95
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	97
Introduction.....	97
Key Findings.....	98
Interpretation of the Findings.....	99
Findings Extend Knowledge.....	99
Analysis and Interpretation of the Findings.....	101
Limitations of the Study.....	104
Limitations to Trustworthiness .....	104
Recommendations.....	105
Implications.....	108

Positive Social Change Implications .....	108
Methodological, Theoretical, and Empirical Implications .....	111
Recommendations for Practice .....	113
Conclusion .....	115
References.....	118
Appendix A: Interview Protocol.....	138
Appendix B: Flyer for Participation .....	142
Appendix C: NIH Training Certificate .....	145
Appendix D: Participant Criterion Interview Questions.....	146

## List of Tables

Table 1. Research Questions and Interview Questions.....	57
Table 2. Demographics Index Chart .....	83

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In working over a period of years with parents actively involved in the process of reunification with their children, I became aware of a pattern. Many parents seeking to retrieve their children from the foster care system had themselves formerly been foster children or had been reared by someone other than their biological parents. As I observed this phenomenon, it became apparent that a common denominator among many of these parents was a series of unsatisfactory early childhood attachment experiences. These experiences may have occurred before they were removed from their parents' care, while in a foster care placement, and/or after emancipation from the foster care system.

The importance of human attachment has long been of great interest to many research communities. Attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1973; Bowlby, 1969) highlights the importance of mother-to-child attachment relationships in human development. Various studies have shown a strong correlation between maternal responsiveness (Barth et al., 2005) and an infant's development of a distinct pattern of secure or insecure attachments (Dozier, Bick, & Bernard, 2011). These patterns appear to be determined by the quality of the child's attachment experiences (Dearden, 2004). The quality of the mother's responsiveness in the attachment process, in turn, seems to be determined largely by the quality of her own early childhood attachment experiences (Hughes, 2006). When mother-child attachment issues are studied, one subgroup that frequently comes into focus consists of those family units that become involved with the foster care system.

The phenomenological themes of studies in this area have involved relationship formation between foster children and foster mothers (Barber & Delfabbro, 2003) and

mother-to-child attachment behaviors of foster-reared mothers (Durousseau, 2008, Martin, 2005). Using a phenomenological research design, this current study explored and examined the experiences of 12 women who had been separated from their families of origin during childhood and then separated from their own child or children later in adulthood. I interviewed 12 women who met the following criteria: They had been in the foster care system after age 5 for a minimum of 5 years and had a child in foster care later in life. I tape recorded the women's accounts related to specific attachment experiences and to being foster-care-reared mothers who were dependents of the court as children and who, at the time of the study, had at least one child who was a dependent of the court.

Potential social implications of the study include increased awareness of the generational component of this phenomenon through exploration of the life experiences of the participating mothers. Further, it is my hope that the study will motivate social change through the development of specialized parenting-education programs to assist individuals who were reared in foster care so that members of this at-risk population of parents will be more prepared to parent and attach to their children.

Chapter 1 includes the study's background, problem statement, nature, research questions, theoretical framework, definitions of terms, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and significance, concluding with a summary.

### **Background**

Professionals working with foster children have observed that a large percentage of them come from family backgrounds in which one or both parents have themselves

formerly been, as children, dependents of the court. Later, after becoming parents themselves, such individuals frequently find themselves involved with child protective services by having their own child or children removed from their care.

The importance of human attachment has long been of great interest to many research communities. Attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1973; Bowlby, 1969) highlights the importance of mother-to-child attachment relationships in human development. Various studies have shown strong correlations between maternal responsiveness (Barth et al., 2005) and an infant's development of a distinct pattern of secure or insecure attachments (Dozier et al., 2011). These patterns appear to be determined by the type of attachment experiences had by the child (Dearden, 2004), and the quality of these experiences seems to be determined by the quality of the parents' own early childhood experiences (Hughes, 2006).

It is understood that an individual is able to form healthy adult relationships primarily because of his or her own healthy childhood attachment experiences (Chaffin et al., 2006). Such experiences probably have helped to create a relatively firm foundation for the individual, owing largely to his or her attachment needs having been met. If the attachment process of a young developing child is disrupted or severed through harmful modalities such as abuse, neglect, separation, or abandonment, the attachment development chain may be broken or damaged (Dozier, Zeanah, Wallin, & Shauffer, 2009), and the child may form unhealthy or insecure attachment as he or she matures toward adulthood. This fact was highlighted by Bernstein (2009), who explained that severed attachment in early childhood can substantially impair the emotional and



cognitive development of a child. Consequently, parent-child attachment processes become damaged by inadequate or grossly distorted childhood attachment experiences, which can have adverse consequences (Wearden, Peters, Berry, Barrowclough, & Liversidge, 2008) not only in childhood but later in adulthood.

Research has shown that childhood attachment patterns remain stable over time and aid in the prediction of other measures of healthy or unhealthy attachment development (Barth et al., 2005) as well as in the development of adult internal working models of attachment (Coleman-Cowger, Green, & Clark, 2011). More than 70 years of attachment research, from the early 1940s (Barth et al., 2005) to the present (Dozier, Bick, & Bernard, 2011; Dregan, Brown, & Armstrong, 2011), demonstrate the continued importance of this subject matter. Bowlby's (1969, 1973) foundational research in this area indicated that early childhood attachment experiences aid in the formation of adult attachment patterns. However, due to the lack of diversity in the populations Bowlby investigated, his results are only generalizable to non-foster-care populations. As Cain (2006) noted, minimal research has been conducted on adult attachment patterns in relation to foster-care-reared adult mothers (Hanson & Spratt, 2009).

The research of Chapman et al. (2004) involving young females emancipated from foster care revealed that 67 of 100 participants suffered from attachment issues that prevented them from experiencing healthy adult relationships. Courtney, Cusick, Keller, Havlicek, and Perez (2007) also conducted research on teenage females reared in foster care; however, their study did not include foster-reared mothers. Consequently, the

findings Courtney et al, (2007) cannot be generalized to the study considering that mothers who had a child after they emancipated from foster care were the participants.

A study by Dregan et al.(2011) indicated that disorganized or insecure attachment is the beginning of a “developmental trajectory that will take the individual ever farther from the normal range, culminating into disordered thought patterns, behavior or mood” (p. 94). Indeed, the literature suggests that many adults reared in foster care suffer from attachment issues. Schofield and Beek (2005) explained that in the context of prolonged separation or loss, many foster children experience symptoms of despair and depression. Burns et al. (2004) reported that foster-reared adults suffered from mental health disorders at a rate 46% higher than adults reared by their biological parents. In such findings, it is evident that the traumatizing early childhood experience of being removed from a birth parent and being placed with strangers in foster care contributes to or creates a predisposition to forming an unhealthy model of attachment, which may manifest in dysfunctional parental attachment patterns later in life (Collins, Guichard, Ford, & Feeney, 2004).

Cohen, Mannarino, and Knudsen (2005) conducted a study with 30 males 14-16 years of age who had graduated from a residential treatment facility before entering foster care. Cohen et al. found that of the 200 participants who reported negative childhood attachment experiences, 24% also reported an increase in attachment disorders in adulthood. These findings highlight a correlation between negative attachment experiences and increased attachment disorders in male foster-care populations. The

Cohen et al. study is important to the current research, but its limitations are noteworthy, given that females were not included in the study population.

Green et al. (2010) explored the theory of adult attachment in relation to female adults who had experienced maltreatment while being reared in foster care as children. Green et al. highlighted that the women had difficulties with adult-to-adult healthy relationships; they often chose men who were physically abusive to them. Additionally, Green et al. noted that the women in their study tended to be unsuccessful in choosing emotionally healthy significant others. Similarly, the research of DiLillo, Lewis, and Di Loreto-Colgan (2010) showed that children reared in foster care often suffered from attachment issues that followed them into adulthood and interfered with their ability to sustain healthy adult relationships due to their insecure attachment patterns (DiLillo et al., 2011). Both Green et al. (2010) and DiLillo et al. (2011) found a relationship between being reared in foster care and the development of insecure adult attachment patterns that derive from early childhood attachment experiences.

Numerous studies have focused on foster children (Dozier et al., 2009; Naumova et al., 2011; Zeanah, Dozier, & Shauffer, 2011), early childhood attachment experiences, and attachment disturbances (DiLillo et al., 2010; Dozier et al., 2011; Lindhiem, Bernard, & Dozier, 2011), but few studies have explored how foster care rearing affect smother-to-child attachment behaviors (Call, 2009; DiLillo et al., 2010; DiLillo et al., 2011). More specifically, there is a gap in the existing literature on foster-care-emancipated females who have children in foster care. I conducted this study to address this psychological and

social phenomenon and fill the literature gap relating to mother-to-child attachment behaviors in this population.

Both clinical and empirical studies suggest that attachment disturbances are common in foster-care populations (Hanson & Spratt, 2009; Smyke, Dumitrescu, & Zeanah, 2002). Many clinical studies have addressed infant-to-mother attachment interactions (Apple, 2006; Dozier et al., 2011), and indeed, the academic community appears well aware of the body of work in this area. However, minimal empirical research has been conducted regarding how being in foster care may contribute to less than optimal early childhood attachment experiences for females who later become mothers (DiLillo et al., 2010). Likewise, there is a paucity of research regarding family separation experiences for this population (Franzén & Vinnerljung, 2006) or this population's adult attachment patterns and internal working models of attachment (Green et al., 2010). This problem has primarily been studied in relation to Caucasian mothers and their infants (DiLillo et al., 2010; DiLillo et al., 2011; Lindhiem et al., 2011). The issue of mother-to-child attachment has not been given much attention; the few studies that I found in this area did not involve at-risk populations. No studies were found that involved parents reared in foster care who subsequently had a child or children in foster care. This study thus represents an effort to fill a gap in the literature regarding childhood attachment experiences of mothers who were reared in foster care and their mother-to-child attachment behavior patterns.

### **Problem Statement**

Adults reared in foster care as children are at a 42% greater risk for attachment disturbances (Lee & Hankins, 2009) than individuals reared by their biological parents. The research of Jones (2011) expanded the work of Green et al. (2010), who studied female adults who had experienced maltreatment in foster care as children. Green et al. found that these women showed decreased ability to enter into healthy adult relationships, due in part to their less than optimal early childhood attachment experiences while being reared in foster care. Ganem (2008) explained that there is a direct correlation between the adult-to-adult attachment behaviors of a mother and her mother-to-child attachment behavior patterns. If a child struggles with attachment to adults or children, his or her chances of healthy adult-to-adult attachment and parent-to-child attachment are decreased. This gives credence to the work of MacMillan et al. (2001), who stated that individuals' childhood attachment experiences while in foster care placement influence their adult attachment patterns, specifically their ability to attach to their own children.

Over 500,000 foster children in the United States emancipate from foster care when they turn 18 (Pecora, White, Jackson, & Wiggins, 2009); many of them will suffer from attachment disturbances, and many will become parents (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999, 2008). Zeanah et al. (2011) and Edwards, Shipman, and Brown (2005) explained that additional research is needed on adult parental attachment behaviors in this at-risk population of foster-care-reared individuals, and Chapman et al. (2004) highlighted a generational aspect of this phenomenon. It is apparent that mother-to-child attachment

behavior is an issue of concern because foster children who go on to become parents represent a growing segment of Americans who lose their children to the same foster-care system. This is a societal issue, given that these individuals have increased rates of criminal behavior, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, mental health issues, poverty, homelessness, and lack of education (Durousseau, 2008).

Many of these individuals need the resources of community social services to assist them in meeting basic survival needs such as food, shelter, and medical care. High levels of social service assistance for this population translate into higher taxes because many of these mothers lack the skills needed to gain lawful employment (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). The literature review in this study indicates that although much is known about infant-to-mother attachment behaviors, very little is understood about mother-to-child attachment or how it impacts parenting behavior. Furthermore, what is not known is how childhood attachment experiences of foster-reared females relate to their mother-to-child attachment behavior patterns (Landreth & Bratton, 2006). This study explored how women reared in foster care between the ages of 5 and 18 years experienced attachment in childhood to their foster mothers and how they later experienced attachment to their own children. I conducted this study in an effort to fill the gap in the literature regarding this at-risk population. Infant-to-mother attachment has been studied for many decades, but minimal attention has been given to mother-to-infant attachment research. This study, by focusing specifically on mothers who were reared in foster care, makes a meaningful contribution to the literature.

### **What Is Known About the Topic**

It is understood that the process of human attachment is important to the development of the species, but the process is very complicated, as seen in the research of Bifulco et al. (2006) and Bick and Dozier (2010), who noted that humans have neural processes for incorporating and using early childhood emotional and social experiences relevant to attachment relationships. This is important in the case of foster-care-reared individuals, in that the natural order of this process is disrupted and possibly stunted in this population. Furthermore, Dregan et al. (2011) explained that children who have experienced a disruption in their attachment process due to being separated from their parents are very likely to experience various adverse emotional and psychological issues because they have not effectively learned how to regulate their emotions, lack self-control, or lack self-reliance.

The research of Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998), Cassidy and Shaver (2008), and Collins et al. (2004) give validity to the notion that attachment patterns formed in childhood continue to develop through adulthood. Consequently, it is understood that the unhealthy traumatizing early childhood experience of being removed from a birth parent and being placed with strangers in foster care contributes to or creates a predisposition for forming an unhealthy working model of attachment that manifests in insecure adult attachment patterns (Franzén & Vinnerljung, 2006; Qin, Mortensen, & Pedersen, 2009). The literature is clear in indicating that early childhood attachment experiences impact the working model of attachment for these individuals as they reach adulthood. It is also

clear that children in foster care are at risk for attachment disorders and that many of these individuals become parents who have an insecure working model of attachment.

### **What Is Not Known About the Topic**

Farruggia and Sorkin (2009) explained that with growing concern regarding foster-care-reared and attachment-disordered populations, further research is necessary because little empirical data exist with regard to these at-risk subsets of adults (Pecora, 2010). According to Poorhussein (2008), a better understanding of how attachment patterns and internal working models are formulated in the at-risk population of teen female mothers reared in foster care is important to raise social awareness so that changes in the foster care system can begin to take place. Chaffin et al. (2006) explained that even less is understood about how this process may lead to the increased probability that foster-care-reared individuals' own children will also become part of the foster care system and suffer from similar early childhood attachment experiences. Martin (2005), Mikuliner and Shaver (2003, 2007), and Chaffin et al. (2006) indicated a large gap in the research, highlighting the need for additional study in the area of early childhood attachment experiences with at-risk foster youth. It is apparent that existing studies have not addressed the gap with regard to mothers reared in foster care and their mother-to-child attachment behavior patterns.

Through this research, I sought to gain understanding of the experiences of foster-reared mothers by giving participants the opportunity to share their lived experiences of the phenomenon of being foster care reared and expressing their mother-to-child attachment behavior patterns. This study has practical significance, in that it brings to



light this social phenomenon and its far-reaching implications for these at-risk mothers. Those in the social services, such as therapists, social workers, psychologists, and others, could benefit from a better understanding of the significance of mother-to-child attachment behavioral patterns, specifically those involving a foster-reared mother and her child. This increased understanding should aid in the facilitation of improved psychoeducational and social services for foster-care-reared mothers and their children.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Using a phenomenological method of inquiry, I explored participants' lived experiences of foster care rearing and the meaning they placed on their experiences of mother-to-child attachment behavior patterns. I focused on the lived experiences of childhood attachment of mothers reared in foster care placement and the essence of their mother-to-child attachment behavior patterns later in adulthood. The purpose of this study was to fill a gap in the literature regarding this phenomenon.

The scope of the study involved foster-care-reared mothers who also had children in foster care. In this phenomenological study, I used Moustakas's (1994, 2000) interviewing technique to gain insight into the lived past experiences of the chosen participants. Data were gathered through interviews with 12 mothers who were formerly reared in foster care. The participants were interviewed regarding their lived experiences in foster care (specifically with regard to their childhood attachment experiences with their foster mothers) and about their more recent mother-child attachment behaviors with their own children currently or formerly in foster care.

## Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do mothers raised in a foster care environment perceive and describe their experiences in forming relationships with their foster mothers while they were in foster care?
2. What are the experiences of mothers raised in foster care in forming relationships with their own children?

The research questions guiding this study focused on participants' lived past experiences of being reared in foster care and their more recent mother-to-child attachment behavior patterns. The study's significance is discussed in a later segment of this chapter.

## Theoretical Framework for the Study

The theoretical framework for this study included Bowlby's (1980) theory of adult attachment and Zeanah's (2000) theory of foster-care-related attachment, both of which are discussed in more depth in Chapter 2. Bowlby (1982) found a direct correlation between the attachment patterns of young men and their childhood attachment experiences of maternal deprivation and separation due to being in foster care. Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory exploring the *emotional dance* between mother and infant eventually extended to understanding adolescent attachment patterns of male delinquent criminals who were institutionalized in a juvenile correction facility while being rehabilitated. His research with 200 male criminals revealed that 62% of the population

studied suffered from attachment issues well into adulthood, which prevented them from re-entering society in a productive manner (Bowlby, 1979).

The current study also relied on theory developed by Zeanah et al. (2011), who conducted research with populations of male subjects who were in foster care as children and who suffered from attachment issues as adults. Zeanah et al. addressed early childhood attachment experiences and parental attachment patterns, which were the primary themes of this study.

Zeanah and O'Conner (2003) reported that multiple foster placements can predispose emancipated foster youth to suffer with attachment issues later in life; which explains the phenomena of cross-age continuum. This finding is significant to the current research study; however, whereas I explored the experiences of female participants exclusively, Zeanah and O'Conner focused on male foster-care-reared individuals who were in treatment for cognitive and psychological impairment due to early childhood attachment trauma. Zeanah and O'Conner found that many of these research subjects suffered from cross-age continuum attachment issues later in life, due in part to less than optimal early childhood attachment experiences. When one takes into consideration the issue of cross-age continuum which refers to the phenomena of trauma in childhood continuing through adulthood, it is apparent that this phenomenon affects females as well as males. Many of these children become adults who suffer from attachment issues, which may hinder their ability to attach to their own children in healthy way.

It is critical to acknowledge and understand the importance of gender differences in studies such as this one because gender-related biases persist as a social problem that

needs to be addressed. As explained by Kaschak (1992), “Despite claims to the contrary, masculinist epistemologies are built upon values that promote masculinist needs and desires, making all others invisible” (p. 11). It is evident from Kaschak’s quote that women are often rendered invisible and voiceless in many facets of society, including research studies. Furthermore, historically, women have been used less often than men as research participants. As highlighted through the research of Anderson, Schonfeld, Kelso, and Prentice (2003), men are used in research studies at a rate 27% higher than women. Consequently, for this research study, I chose to use only female participants, focusing on foster-reared mothers because women lose their children to foster care at a significantly higher rate than men do. As explained by Mumola (2000), 2% of single fathers have one or more children in foster care, compared to 10% of single mothers (Mumola, 2000). It is apparent that there is a need for women to be used in research studies such as this one so that the results can be generalized to other wise voiceless and invisible populations.

No previous research projects have been conducted on female foster-reared parents. Consequently, it can be assumed there is a gap in knowledge with regard to female foster-reared individuals. Using the theories and research of Bowlby (1980, 1982) and Zeanah et al. (2011) as lenses, I explored the lived childhood experiences of participants reared in foster care and their experiences of specific mother-to-child attachment behavior patterns. A more detailed analysis of related literature follows in Chapter 2.

Bowlby (1979) theorized that infants use innate behaviors to keep caregivers close to them. Through early childhood attachment experiences, an infant's emotional and cognitive abilities develop, partly due to the caregiver's consistent responsiveness. This system aids in the formation of a secure attachment base the infant's secure bond with the caregiver enables him or her to use the caregiver as an attachment base (Bowlby, 1980, 1982). Attachment patterns are strongly related to early childhood attachment experiences, which then aid in the development of internal working models of adult attachment and parental attachment. Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1982) numerous empirical studies lend credence to the notion that the so-called working model of attachment is very important to the development of the psyche and that such models can set the stage for individuals' attachment paths.

In the context of foster care, the importance of attachment processes is underscored by the consistent increase in the numbers of emancipated foster youth who become parents within 5 years of leaving foster care and who are at high risk of ultimately losing their children to that same system (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). The research of Boris and Zeanah (2005), who studied foster children diagnosed with reactive attachment disorder (RAD), and Chapman et al. (2004), who studied the effects of maltreatment on foster children, used Bowlby's attachment theory as a foundation.

The work of Besser and Priel (2005) indicated that attachment issues can arise following early adverse caregiving experiences, and that attachment dysfunction can be indicated by the absence of proximity-seeking efforts by a child in relation to an identified attachment figure. He further explained that children who are reared in

institutions, as in the case of foster care, and have repeated changes of caregivers, or who have experienced extreme neglect after the age of 6 months can be faced with attachment issues. His work gives credence to the hypothesis that severed attachment in childhood may contribute to later problematic attachment issues in adulthood (Besse r & Priel, 2005). DiLillo et al. (2011), who researched romantic relationships of foster-care-reared adults, and Chapman et al. (2004), who studied attachment patterns of foster-care adolescents, both applied Zeanah's theory of adult attachment.

By using Bowlby's theory of attachment (1979, 1980) and the Zeanah et al. (2011) theory of foster care institutionalization to frame this study, it may be possible to begin understanding the lived experiences of women experiencing the phenomenon of being raised in foster care as children and later developing mother-to-child attachment issues with their own children who end up in foster care. A better understanding of these experiences may inform the development of strategies to maximize this parental population's ability to attach to their children in a healthy and nurturing manner. In light of the high rate at which children are entering foster care, it seems important to understand why so many Americans whose lives are impacted by the foster care system suffer from distorted attachment issues. The conclusion that attachment patterns and internal working models of attachment may be transmitted from parent to child is a plausible (Chapman et al., 2004), as illustrated by the proportion of formerly foster-care-reared parents who are eventually incarcerated and whose children later become part of the foster care or juvenile justice system.

This phenomenological study explored the lived foster care past of the participants. I applied the attachment theory of Bowlby (1980) and the foster-care theory of Zeanah, Smyke, and Dumistrscus (2002) to explore the early childhood attachment experiences of foster-care-reared females and their mother-to-child attachment behavior patterns. In Chapter 2, I describe the work of Bowlby and Zeanah in greater depth.

### **Nature of the Study**

The method of inquiry was a phenomenological study with 12 foster-care-reared mothers. The goal of the study was to explore the lived experiences of foster-care-reared mothers and their mother-to-child attachment behavior patterns. The units of analysis consisted of the categories of common themes that emerged from the meaning each woman attached to her early childhood experiences of foster care and to her mother-to-child attachment behaviors. Data were collected through interviews and analyzed for themes. The use of phenomenology aided in this process, in that I sought to explore the mothers' experiences of the phenomenon of being reared in foster care (Tyler & Melander, 2010).

Twelve participants were recruited from a population of 200 mothers who were former clients of a mental health service agency. Guest, Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) explained that in a phenomenological study data saturation and thematic saturation occur at approximately 12 participants. Each of these women had a nonviolent criminal history, was not actively in recovery from a drug addiction, was placed in foster care after age 5 for a minimum of 5 years, had a child who was in foster care, had been involved in the court process to regain custody of her child, and was not currently in the

reunification process to regain custody of her child. The participants were selected purposively from among candidates recruited through a flyer detailing the criteria for the research study. The flyer was posted at the mental health agency and directed interested participants to contact me through an email address listed on the flyer (Patton, 1990). I used the participant screening questions listed in Appendix F to verify that the sample consisted of participants who had been identified for the study and met the established criteria for participation. The first 12 people who met the criteria were included in the study. As Patton (1990) explained, a criterion sample consists of cases that meet a chosen criterion. The strategy of criterion sampling was chosen to recruit and select participants for this study because it made it possible to focus on cases that specifically met the criteria of foster care rearing, which resulted in an information-rich sample.

### **Definitions**

*Adolescent mothers:* Girls and young women who have given birth between the ages of 12 and 18 years (Hanson & Spratt, 2009).

*Attachment:* The ability to form meaningful relationships with others (Bowlby, 1979).

*Attachment figure:* A person, usually the biological parent, whom a child sees as his or her primary caregiver (Bowlby, 1979).

*Attachment patterns:* An attachment style developed by a child's or adult's quality of social experiences (Bowlby, 1979).

*Bonding:* The connection between an individual and an attachment figure (usually a biological parent; Bowlby, 1979).



*Foster care:* A single-family home with one or two parents contracted by a child and family services agency to provide children and youth with residential care (Hanson & Spratt, 2009).

*Generational foster care:* A pattern in which family members of successive generations have been placed in foster care on a long-term basis (Hanson & Spratt, 2009)

*Internal working model of attachment:* Attachment experiences in early childhood that form the foundation for a system of life expectations and a way of being (Bowlby, 1979, 1982).

### **Assumptions**

For the purposes of this study, I assumed that the individuals included in the sample met all of the criteria for participation.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This study encompassed 12 mothers who had been reared in the foster-care system for at least 5 years. Each of the participants had been emancipated from the foster-care system and, later in adulthood, had her own child or children removed from her care and placed in foster care. With regard to the study's limitations and transferability, only women who had been reared in foster care and who had a child in foster care were used; the research may not be generalizable to men or women who were not reared in foster care. The participants were all women under the age of 50 who were born and reared in the United States. The study was announced in a specific mental health agency, and participants were recruited from this setting.

In criterion sampling, as in this study, the researcher seeks to study the rich example of the phenomenon of interest. As, described by Patton (1990), a criterion sample consists of information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest (p. 40). Criterion sampling was chosen for this study because the approach focuses on cases rich in information that meet inclusion criteria. Their richness derives from being unusual and special in some way, as in the case of experiences of attachment behavior patterns of mothers reared in foster care.

The rationale for the use of female participants in the current project was that historically, researchers used females less frequently or excluded females entirely from studies (Bartlett, Doyal, & Ebrahim, 2005). Women are represented in clinical research less than men. Women are used only 24% of the time in research studies compared to men who are represented in research trials by 64% (Anderson, Schonfeld, Kelso, & Prentice, 2003). More importantly, there is a gap in the literature in that few studies have involved mothers reared in foster care who have a child in foster care (Pecora, White, Jackson, & Wiggins, 2009).

Generalizability is defined as the degree to which findings can be generalized from a study sample to the entire population (Polit & Hungler, 1991, p. 645). Although the data from qualitative studies are not generalizable, the results from the current study are anticipated to be useful in understanding the lived experiences of foster-reared mothers. Additionally, the study gives voice to 12 at-risk mothers who otherwise might not be afforded the opportunity to share their life experiences of foster care.

### **Limitations**

A limitation in the study was the exclusive use of mothers who were reared in foster-care homes in the United States. Another limitation was the use of one agency to recruit the 12 participants.

### **Significance**

With respect to professional application, it is hoped that this study's findings will help to elucidate issues related to early attachment disruption as well as ways in which childhood trauma, such as early parental separation, may lead to stunted or unhealthy attachment formation. The social-change issue addressed by this study is of critical practical importance because many adults who suffer from attachment difficulties are the very people who populate prisons, drug treatment facilities, and mental health agencies (Franzén & Vinnerljung, 2006). This study contributes to the literature on foster-care-reared mothers and mother-to-child attachment behavior pattern issues, filling a gap in that literature.

Studies have shown that an individual can achieve emotional and psychological gains by sharing personal secrets or truths with at least one other person (Farruggia & Sorkin, 2009). The experiences of the women in this study are of vital importance because formerly foster-care-reared women give human faces to the statistics prevalent in the field of psychology. It is my hope that the findings will refine and extend the literature on early childhood attachment disruptions among members of foster-care populations. The study's results may also aid in bringing about positive change to foster care system and the way in which parents with attachment difficulties are treated with

respect to separation from their children, treatment planning, family reunification efforts, and permanency planning. In an effort to promote social change, the study's results will be appropriately disseminated to raise public awareness of this social issue and to provide professionals in various fields with access to the information needed to create an effective holistic support system for the growing population of individuals whose lives are touched by foster care. It is my hope this work will serve as a catalyst for collaboration across disciplines to conduct research on adult attachment patterns in relation to foster-care populations throughout the United States. This study may prove important to future research, in that its findings extend the work of Bowlby and Zeanah by addressing the at-risk-population of foster-reared mothers and their parental attachment patterns. Additionally, given that few foster care attachment research studies have applied a phenomenological lens, this study makes a unique contribution by shedding light on the issue in the phenomenological tradition.

### **Summary**

Chapter 1 presented the background of the problem of adult attachment patterns of foster-care-reared females and their mother-to-child attachment behavior patterns. The purpose of the study was to develop a better understanding of mothers' experiences of being foster care reared and their attachment with their own children. The research questions were presented, and the theoretical framework consisting of Bowlby's (1969, 1980, 1982) attachment theory and the Zeanah et al. (2002) foster-care theory related to attachment was discussed. I described the nature of the study, which I expand upon in Chapter 3, and I briefly addressed the participants, themes, and significant terms.

Chapter 1 concluded with a discussion of assumptions, scope and delimitations affecting the generalizability of the study, limitations, and the significance of the study.

In Chapter 2, I present an in-depth discussion of the literature on the themes of foster care rearing and mother-to-child attachment behaviors, as well as literature relevant to the study's theoretical framework. Information on the history of attachment theory, background on foster-care-related attachment theory, what is known and not known about the topic, information on the gap in the literature, and a summary are included.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

We are moulded and remoulded by those who loved us; and though the love pass, we are nevertheless their work and though the love pass, we are nevertheless their work, for good or ill. (Mauriac, 1952, p. 31)

### **Introduction**

The major objective of attachment research is to identify the factors that contribute to the regulation of attachment behaviors (Bowlby, 1979, 1982). A central tenet of attachment theory is that attachment patterns in adulthood are directly correlated to early childhood attachment history and the ability to regulate attachment behaviors (Zeanah et al., 2011; Zeanah & Smyke, 2009). However, the precise way in which early attachment representations might shape adult attachment patterns is ambiguous. Current research reveals that adults who were reared in foster care as children are at a greater risk for attachment disturbances (Franzén & Vinnerljung, 2006; Ganem, 2008) and their children are 5 times more likely to enter the foster care system than the general population (Fraleigh, 2002, 2004). Reporting on an Illinois study, Hoffman and Maynard (2010) elaborated on this reality by explaining that children of adolescent mothers with less than optimal attachment experiences make up more than 60% of children entering foster care in that state.

The purpose of the present qualitative phenomenological study was to explore mothers' lived experiences of being reared in foster care and their childhood attachment experiences with their children who entered the foster care system. A synopsis of the current literature highlights that research has focused on attachment patterns of human

beings for the last four decades (Bowlby, 1979, 1980, 1982). In this literature, no scientific or psychological models have been presented to account specifically for parental attachment patterns of foster-care-reared adult females. The existing research on adult attachment dynamics has focused almost exclusively on working models as regulators of attachment-related behavior (Chaffin, Hanson, & Saunders, 2007).

A synopsis of the current literature is presented. Numerous key theorists set the foundation for attachment theory, including Bowlby (1969, 1982); Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978); Ainsworth (1989); and Zeanah (2000); and Martin, Snow, and Sullivan (2005). Zeanah et al. (2011) posited that social competence is perceived as the central focus of the psychological development of children, and Zeanah and Smyke (2009) explained that a secure attachment base is of paramount importance to the development of a healthy attachment foundation psychological development. Current literature points to the importance of parenting and early childhood attachment experiences in the development of a healthy attachment psyche or internal working model of attachment (Bernard & Dozier, 2011; Boris & Zeanah, 1999, 2005). Early childhood attachment experiences serve as building blocks of an internal working model of attachment for infants, children, adolescents, and adults (Bowlby, 1969).

The theories of Bowlby (1982), Ainsworth (1973, 1989), Zeanah (2000), and many other therapists have contributed to knowledge of attachment and bonding. In this literature, a child's first year is afforded great importance. A secure attachment base, as explained by Bowlby (1979), is a significant building block that serves as the foundation of a growing child, and it should be established through optimal early childhood

experiences. Childhood attachment experiences contribute to the development of resilience and trust, as well as the ability to regulate one's emotions and develop self-reflective capacities, which may be crucial when encountering adverse life events (Call, 2009; Jones, 2011).

This literature review reveals that there is minimal research on adult attachment patterns in the population of foster-care-reared adults (Collins et al., 2004; DiLillo et al., 2011; Sable, 2000) and even less in the area of attachment patterns of mothers who were reared in foster care and who have a child in foster care (Lee, 2003; Lee & Hankin, 2009; Martin et al., 2006). Due to this gap in the literature, Bowlby's (1973, 1982) attachment theory and Zeanah et al.'s (2002) theory of foster care-related attachment were chosen as organizing frameworks of this study. This chapter contains the following sections: Introduction, Literature Search Strategy, Theoretical Foundation, Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts, Summary, and Conclusion.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

To begin this literature review, I present a review of research strategies to assist in locating articles in the future. I used the Walden University library database and search engines to gain access to the most current peer-reviewed scholarly journals. I identified and accessed relevant literature using ERIC, Education Research Complete, SAGE Publishing, Academic Search Premier, and Google Scholar. Search terms included various combinations of the following keywords: *adult attachment patterns, attachment, case study, challenges, Charles Zeanah, child attachment, cognitive development, experiential learning, foster care, institution, John Bowlby, Mary Ainsworth, parenting,*



*phenomenology, social cognition, and working model of attachment*. In particular, use of the terms *adult attachment* and *working model of attachment* successfully identified germane scholarship in the Walden University library and Psych Pro Quest database.

I did not find any research literature directly related to the early childhood attachment experiences of foster-care-reared mothers and how these attachment experiences influenced their mother-to-child attachment behavior patterns. Therefore, this review includes literature pertaining to the significance of early childhood attachment and the attachment patterns of adults.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

In this study, the theory of childhood attachment is represented by the work of Bowlby (1969, 1980, 1982), which supports the theme of early childhood attachment experiences. The theory of foster care attachment is represented by the work of Zeanah et al. (2011); additionally, Besser and Priel's (2005) research supports the theme of parent-to-child attachment.

### **Early Childhood Attachment**

The theory of child attachment was originally developed by Bowlby (1979), a British psychoanalyst who observed that separated infants would go to extraordinary lengths (e.g., crying, clinging, frantically searching) to prevent separation from their parents or to reestablish proximity to a missing parent. Bowlby (1979) felt that these expressions were manifestations of the immature defense mechanisms of the child and the attempt to repress emotional pain.

Attachment researchers explain that early childhood attachment experiences are significant to infant development (Ainsworth, 1989). Researchers adopting this approach have claimed that attachment-disordered adults express that their caregivers were not responsive to their attachment needs (Brennan et al., 1998; Fraley, 2002). These perspectives point to the controversial phenomenon of the cross-age continuum and how it affects attachment patterns in adulthood (Fraley, 2004; Pecora, 2010; Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005).

It can be concluded that early childhood attachment experiences are retained over time and continue to play an influential role in attachment behavior throughout the life course of the adult. According to Bowlby (1982), a motivational system, which he called the *attachment behavioral system*, was gradually “designed” by natural selection to regulate proximity to an attachment figure. Bowlby’s research revealed that the attachment behavior system provides the conceptual linkage between ethological models of human development and modern theories on emotion regulation and personality development (Bowlby, 1979). These systems are important to the theme of early childhood attachment experiences and how they serve as building blocks for the development of adult attachment regulation. It appears that the ability of adults to regulate their emotions is essential to optimizing their parent-to-child attachment behavior patterns.

### **Foster-Care Attachment**

The theory of foster-care-rearing attachment is represented by the work of Zeanah and Smyke (2009), who investigated whether signs of disordered attachment were

greater in children who were reared in socially depriving caregiving environments. Ninety-three children were studied by means of structured interviews with caregivers who were foster parents or biological parents. Results revealed that children who had less than optimal attachment experiences due to being reared by foster caregivers exhibited significantly more signs of disordered attachment than children who were reared by a biological parent (Zeanah & Smyke, 2009).

These findings are consistent with those of Wilson, Sinclair, and Gibbs (2000), who interviewed 150 foster children in an attempt to understand how attachment experiences while in foster care affected the stability of foster care placements. The findings of Wilson et al. suggest that foster children need to feel as though they have more control with regard to their next placement experience. Subjects in the study who had the opportunity to meet their new foster parents before placement seemed to have fewer attachment issues than participants who were not afforded that opportunity. It was concluded in this research that the continuum of foster care casualty is reflected by increasing signs of disordered attachment in toddlers living in socially depriving environments.

### **Major Theoretical Propositions**

Bowlby's (1982) attachment perspective is a major theoretical proposition that contributes to the understanding of childhood and adolescent attachment. Bowlby(1982) suggested that parenting is a central and proximal socialization process that influences a child's development, contending that through these experiences, both child and parental characteristics are shaped (p. 82). His major hypothesis was that this primal phenomenon

of attachment contributes considerably to the development of the internal working model of the child (Schofield & Beek, 2005; Wearden et al., 2008). Rholes and Simpson (2004) explained that internal working models of attachment organize behavior, cognition, and affect in close relationships, thus providing guidance about how to behave, what should be expected or anticipated, and how to interpret the meaning of ambiguous interpersonal events (p. 7).

Cassidy and Shaver (1999) made major contributions to attachment research by exploring the early childhood experiences of foster-care-reared children in Romania. Their longitudinal case study of foster care rearing as an alternative to institutional care provided beneficial data that the current study uses. Their research involved a population of at-risk severely deprived and abandoned young children in Romania (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999). Cassidy and Shaver hypothesized that attachment experiences serve as building blocks for adult attachment patterns and that these established patterns continue through the phenomenon of the cross-age continuum.

### **Previous Applications of Attachment Theory**

The research-based analysis of attachment theory explored the key theorists, philosophers, and seminal researchers related to the phenomenon of child and adult attachment. Consequently, concepts involving the adult attachment patterns of at-risk individuals have been applied in research studies to better understand how these less than optimal mother-to-child attachment patterns may be expressed through a mother's depression (Pecora, 2010; Pecora et al., 2009; Takeuchi et al., 2003), dysfunctional attitudes toward an unborn child (Tyler & Melander, 2010; Wearden et al., 2008),

unresolved trauma or loss (Dinero, Conger, Shaver, Widaman, & Larsen-Rife, 2008; Lee & Hankin, 2009), or substance abuse (Dumaret, Coppel-Batsch, & Couraud, 1997).

Women who experience childhood traumas such as those involved in parental separation and foster care may experience problems in their subsequent parent-to-child attachment behavioral patterns. Through this literature review it became apparent that the focus of earlier research centered on issues that phenomenological researchers addressed in their studies, such as the process of childhood attachment, the internal working model of attachment, the cross-age continuum of attachment, and parent-to-child attachment behavior patterns (Dumaret, Duyme, & Tomkiewicz, 1998; Franzén & Vinnerljung, 2006).

Attachment theory pertaining to children and attachment theory pertaining to adults have been applied previously in research similar to the current study. Attachment theory is relevant to this study. The theory encompasses two themes: child attachment experiences and mother-to-child attachment behavior styles. These topics were of paramount importance in the development of the research question for this study, which involved the idea that individuals who have experienced disrupted or severed attachment in early childhood due to being separated from their families of origin and being reared in foster care may later develop insecure attachment patterns that predispose them to less than optimal mother-to-child attachment behavior patterns in adulthood.

### **Rationale for Chosen Attachment Theory**

The adolescent attachment theory of Bowlby (1980) and foster care attachment theory of Zeanah and Smyke (2009) were chosen for the foundation of this research study

because of their relevance to early childhood attachment experiences, the development of internal working models of attachment, and the cross-age continuum (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999). As explained by Bowlby (1982), attachment to a parental figure is of paramount importance to a child's development of an internal working model of attachment, which will later be solidified into adult attachment patterns.

The foster care attachment theory of Zeanah (2000) highlights the phenomenon of a "cross-age continuum of adult attachment by explaining the process as primarily being driven by two major factors: (a) the persistence of parenting attachment patterns through the years and (b) the self-perpetuating nature of attachment behavioral patterns (self-fulfilling prophecies)" (p. 163). This concept was important to the current research because it was useful in exploring how these processes work together to form the internal working model of attachment that is used by a child who does not have the grounding of parental attachment.

My rationale for the selection of these theories of child attachment (Bowlby, 1982) and adult attachment (Zeanah, 2000) for the foundation of the present phenomenological research study was that I sought to explore participants' lived past experiences of being reared in foster care and how their childhood attachment experiences influenced their mother-to-child attachment behavior patterns. Specifically, the attachment research of Bowlby (1982) and Zeanah (2000) provided insight into the building blocks of attachment that set the foundation for attachment patterns later in life.

### **Relationship of Attachment Theory to the Research Questions**

The attachment theories of Bowlby (1979) and Zeanah (2000) established a strong foundation in adult attachment theory that I found useful in pursuing answers to the research questions in the current study. The research questions were the following:

1. How do mothers raised in a foster care environment perceive and describe their experiences in forming relationships as children?
2. What are the experiences of mothers raised in foster care in forming relationships with their own children?

Empirical research with regard to childhood parental separation, foster care rearing, and adult attachment theory was analyzed and applied in the present phenomenological study. The present study explored participants' past lived experiences of being reared in foster care and how childhood attachment experiences influenced mother-to-child attachment behavior patterns. My examination of early childhood attachment experiences and their contribution to a parent's ability to attach to a child was informed by the attachment theories I selected for the study.

The research questions related to and built upon the existing attachment theory of Bowlby (1979) and the foster care theory of Zeanah (2000), due in part to the common thread of cross-age continuum (Zeanah & Smyke, 2009). It has been explained that early childhood attachment experiences help to form the individual working model of attachment and these models serve as the building blocks for adult attachment. Additionally, both theories provide a foundation for a better understanding of the experiences of formerly foster-care-reared mothers, their development of adult internal

working models of attachment, and the influence this process has on their mother-to-child attachment behavior patterns. I sought to establish such an understanding by examining the life stories and early childhood attachment experiences of a sample of mothers who were reared in foster care and later had a child or children being reared in a foster home.

The above assumptions of Bowlby (1969, 1980, 1982) and Zeanah (2000) are appropriate to the application of attachment theory for the current research because Bowlby's theory explains the foundation for attachment patterns that solidify into those that will be carried into adulthood through the phenomena of cross-age continuum (Zeanah, 2000). The above assumptions of both theorists are appropriate to the application for the following present phenomenological study, because the research captures the importance of early childhood attachment experiences and their relationship as building blocks for the development of internal working models of attachment.

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

The following literature review describes studies related to the construct and methodology that have been chosen to aid in providing insight into attachment experiences of foster care reared mothers and how these experiences affect their mother-to-child attachment behavior patterns.

#### **Construct of Attachment**

The construct of attachment, according to the research of Bowlby (1969) begins within the first year of life infants organize a partnership with their mothers. This partnership incorporates an attachment system that regulates strategies, employed for managing the infant's attachment-related needs. Bowlby's (1982) qualitative study



sampled teenage male criminals in the effort to understand how their early childhood attachment experiences influenced their ability for healthy attachment. The attachment research results of Chapman et al. (2008) are similar to the chosen phenomenological study because the work aids in showing that early attachment experiences set a foundation for a particular attachment style.

It is evident from the infant-caregiver attachment research of Bowlby (1969), Ainsworth (1989), and Chaffin et al. (2007) that even at a very young age, the building blocks of attachment formation have been set. These blocks are important to the development of the construct working model of attachment. The chosen study will build from Bowlby's (1982) and Dozier et al.'s (2011) research in an effort to understand how these attachment building blocks serve to form the working model of attachment which directly influences the parent-to-child attachment relationships of these adults (Dozier, Bernard, & Bick, 2009). Furthermore, the two related studies of Bowlby, (1969) and Dregan et al. (2011) are monumental to the construct of attachment when considering the current study's effort to better understand the plight of the foster care reared individual because their attachment ability has been compromised even before they have had the opportunity to enter school.

### **Construct of Foster-Care Rearing**

The construct of foster care rearing embodies the dynamics of disrupted and/ or dysfunction in attachment relationship. Children in foster care appear to be at increased risk for attachment disorders due to early pathological care such as abuse and neglect (Beckman-Weidman, 2006; Dregan et al., 2011; Schofield & Beek, 2005). The foster

care case study of Goerge and Wulczyn (1998) revealed that the incidence of placement in foster care for children under age five was double that of children aged 5-17. This is important when considering that the age of one to five is a significant time of attachment formation (Bernard & Dozier, 2010; Bernard, Dozier, Bick, & Carlson, 2008; Schofield & Beek, 2005).

It is apparent that many foster children who develop attachment problems may experience multiple moves which may result in a continuous cycle of loss of attachment figures (Cain, 2006; Qin et al., 2009). When children experience multiple separations they expect rejection and separation with each new home that they are placed in. Consequently, these individuals may resist forming attachments in order to avoid pain and this is done either actively by detaching or alienating themselves from their caregiver. Dumaret et al.'s (1997) research study highlights that the intergenerational transmission of foster care rearing behaviors can be transmitted through generations. The study utilized populations of grandparents and parents. The findings suggest that foster care placement was not by chance in these families. Many of the grandparents who were study participants had a personal history of foster care with their own children. The transmission rate for these individuals was 51% for the 35 families studied and in 18 families at least one parent was a former foster child. The tendency of both parents to pass on foster care rearing behaviors occurred in 23% of cases; in eight families, both the mother and the father had themselves been separated from their families in childhood or adolescence. This research is important to the chosen study because it highlights that there is a generational component to foster care rearing.

## **Methodology**

Qualitative studies of infants who had been separated from their mothers were used to study the problem of infant-paternal attachment (Ainsworth, 1973, 1989; Bernardet al., 2008). Similarly, Rholes and Simpson (2004) studied the phenomena of parent-child interactions using a qualitative research method and revealed that “working models organize attachment behavior, cognition, and affect in close relationships, providing guidance about how to behave, what should be expected or anticipated, and how to interpret the meaning of ambiguous interpersonal events (p. 7).

Earlier research studies of adult attachment behaviors used a quantitative or mixed research method which was insignificant due to psychometric limitations (Brennan, 1995; Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994) because adult attachment instruments classified individuals into categories (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Main & Goldwyn, 1994), which were marginally useful with regard to conceptual analyses because they are not always accurate depending on gender and nationality (Rholes & Simpson, 2004).

The work of Zeanah et al. (2011) who focused on attachment disorders of foster-reared children used a qualitative case study methodology. The significances of Zeanah’s (2000) research to that of the chosen study are the similarities in chosen population and qualitative methodology. The results of Cassidy and Shaver’s (1999) research revealed that those children had no opportunity to form an attachment, were labeled with disorder of attachment, children who had experienced a distorted relationship were labeled as

having a secure base distortion and where an existing attachment had been abruptly disrupted; these individuals were labeled as having a disrupted attachment.

The research of Cassidy and Shaver (1999) highlighted that when the attachment system is balanced optimally in childhood both the intimacy and autonomy needs of the individual are effectively met. Furthermore, the research data from Haight, Ostler, Black, Sheridan, and Kingery (2007) who utilized 18 children in their study, detailed how the attachment process aids in the development of the internal working model of attachment. Both of these studies lacked the utilization of at risk or minorities populations. Additionally, both studies used small population sample size; fewer than 50 children were used in each of their studies.

The qualitative method used in Zeanah et al.'s (2011) study revealed the origins of attachment are dyadic in nature, arising from early childhood experiences in a parenting relationship and sensitivity in parenting predicts attachment security, whereas unresponsiveness or rejection of a child's attachment-related needs is linked to insecure attachment patterns. The similar work of Dregan et al. (2011) also utilized a qualitative method approach with attachment avoidant individuals. The results revealed that these individuals learned to defend against intimacy and develop relationship strategies that make them less vulnerable. The study showed that this coping skill extended into adulthood.

These studies are important to the chosen study because of the benefit that a qualitative research method provides. The use of qualitative methods can enhance the research method by understanding that the lived experience of an individual separated

from his/her parents of origin is important. When considering that early childhood attachment experiences affect the development of working models of attachment it would stand to reason that the individuals who suffered from less than optimal experiences would develop insecure attachment patterns (Coleman-Cowger et al., 2011; Dregan et al., 2011). These findings are consistent with the qualitative research of Pecora (2010), Pecora et al. (2009), and Tyler and Melander (2010) whose results revealed that negative patterns of childhood attachment experiences can erode the child-to-parent attachment bonds and consequently, the child may develop a pattern of insecure attachment.

### **Attachment Research Strengths and Weakness**

In this section, the strengths and weakness inherent in the research approaches of attachment theorist and research studies will be explored. The research of Bowlby (1982), Ainsworth (1989), and Zeanah and O'Connor (2003) explored attachment patterns of children and their mothers in the attempt to understand how infants and children attach to their caregiver. The qualitative study of Tyler and Melander (2010) highlighted the problem of attachment by using a population of 176 children who had experienced a disruption in their attachment process due to being separated from their parents while in foster care for less than three years. The results revealed that the participants experienced various adverse issues in adulthood because of their inability to effectively regulate their emotions, self-control, and self-reliance.

The qualitative study of Tyler and Melander (2010) provided insight into the interpersonal dynamics of early childhood attachment experiences with children who were separated from their parent's for a short amount of time. This is significant to the

chosen study because it uses a similar qualitative method of inquiry. One evident weakness in all the above-mentioned studies is their chosen populations; none of the above studies utilized at-risk populations such as people of color, homeless individuals or foster care reared individuals. An additional weakness is that these researchers failed to study mother-to-child attachment behavior patterns (Santrock, 2007).

A qualitative case study of 13 Australia foster care youth was conducted by Barber and Delfabbro (2003). The youth were 10 to 15 years old and all had experienced multiple moves while in foster care due to problematic behavior. The findings of this study suggest that the foster care experience of all the participants was difficult due to less than optimal attachment experiences. The strength of this study was that the researchers chose an at-risk population but its weakness is the small sample size and all participants were from Australia. Consequently, these findings cannot be generalized to other at-risk populations, or people who were not native to Australia. Furthermore, the problem of attachment was addressed through Bowlby's (1979) research with juvenile delinquents, Zeanah's (2000) research with foster children and Schofield and Beek's (2005) research with teenagers explained that in the context of a prolonged separation or loss the individual experienced negative behaviors such as, depression and anxiety which interfered with the development of healthy adult relationships.

The strength of data in all above studies, along with those of Bartell (2005), Bowlby (1979), and Cassidy and Shaver (1999) is that the findings are similar to the work of Dourousseau (2008), which explains that early attachment to a primary caregiver may set into motion the foundation for learning how to attach, respect and love another

human being and the absence of this process through premature disruption could have negative repercussions later in adult life. The weakness in the research for all theorists is that they did not use any minority participants, therefore; the outcome cannot be generalized to a minority population.

The qualitative research study of Wearden et al. (2008) highlighted the link between a parent's childhood attachment experiences and the manner in which they relate or attach to their children. The strength of the study is the direct connection to the generational transmission of attachment patterns and the significance that these patterns play with regard to the "internal working model" of the child or adult. Nevertheless, the weakness in the study is that it used a small population size and all participants were white therefore the results cannot be generalized to minority populations. Wearden et al. (2008) could have expanded their research by including at-risk populations and a larger sample size.

It is apparent from the review of literature that this disruption may interfere with the attachment process (Durosseau, 2008) and put at-risk the future ability of these young human beings to learn how to attachment properly to another person (Pecora, 2010). This may give understanding to the complexities of attachment patterns and how these patterns continue through adolescence and through adulthood (Pecora et al., 2009). As explained by Dregan et al. (2011) it is important to the understanding of this process to investigate the internal working models of these at-risk mothers and inquire as to their early childhood experiences as they relate to their parent-to-child attachment patterns.

### **Rationale for the Selection of Concepts**

The carefully selected concepts for the qualitative phenomenological study include early childhood attachment experiences and parent-to-child attachment patterns of foster care reared mothers. Both themes are justified by the literature and were chosen because of their significance to understanding the essence of the lived experience of foster care reared mothers.

**Early childhood attachment.** Tyler and Melander (2010) explained that early childhood attachment experiences set the base for preconceived expectations about an individual's value of self and others. This phenomenon is dictated by how accessible and responsive the primary caregiver; their ability to provide support and protection to the child (Wearden et al., 2008). Furthermore, early childhood attachment experiences with the primary caregiver who is usually the mother helps to form the internal working model of attachment which aids in the shaping and defining of adult relationship expectations and behavior (Poorhusein, 2008).

Current research (Snow, Sullivan, Martin, & Helm, 2009; Zeanah & Smyke, 2009; Zeanah et al., 2011) explained that children can learn how not to attach to human beings due to their less than optimal childhood attachment experiences; when these children grow up their adult attachment patterns can be skewed which is a significant building block to forming of insecure attachment patterns. The disruption of this process in childhood due to traumatic events such as parental separation can have lasting adverse consequences (Jones, 2011; Qin et al., 2009).



The ability for these adults to form the reflective capacity to attach significantly in a healthy manner to other human beings (Pecora, 2010; Tyler & Melander, 2010) can be diminished. Thus, it can be concluded that the building blocks of the internal working model of attachment that stem from trauma, separation and foster care rearing can help to lay a foundation that is rooted in painful childhood attachment experiences of foster care reared individuals (Dregan et al., 2011; Qin et al., 2009) and will ultimately lead to insecure parent-to-child attachment patterns.

Additionally, it is understood that the unhealthy experience of being removed from a birth parent and being placed with strangers contributes or creates the predisposition to forming insecure attachment patterns (Hanson & Spratt, 2009; Lewis, Dozier, Knights, & Maier, 2008). What is not understood is how these insecure adult attachment patterns predispose the former foster reared female to less than optimal parent-to-child attachment patterns. The significance of adult attachment patterns to the current qualitative phenomenological study is the propensity for the attachment phenomenon of cross age continuum this process is established in infancy and solidified in adulthood (Chapman et al., 2008; DiLillo et al., 2011).

**Parent-to-child attachment of foster-care-reared mothers.** The accompanying behavioral manifestations of the phenomena of being reared in foster care and its contribution to adult attachment patterns is conceptualized by Zeanah and Smyke (2009) who explained this process as being a central component to the development of adult personality formation and parent-to-child attachment foundation. Additionally, Zeanah (2000) expanded the internal working model and its behavioral manifestations will be

used later in adult life (Fraley et al., 2000; Martin, 2005) through the cross-age continuum (Zeanah, 2000). The research of Santrock (2007) explained that severe trauma can substantially impair the emotional and cognitive development of a child, which contributes to adult insecure attachment patterns due in part to the cross-age continuum' phenomenon. The phenomenon of cross-age continuum is controversial but supported by a number of longitudinal studies (Dube et al., 2001; Dumaret et al., 1997; Ferguson & Dacey, 1997; Zeanah, 2000). Even when taking into consideration that all the studies are over 14 years old they are significant to the current qualitative phenomenological study because they establish a foundation for adult attachment theory.

### **What Is Controversial, What Remains to Be Studied, and the Chosen**

#### **Methodological Approach**

In this section, I review, synthesize, and describe what is known and controversial, as well as what remains to be studied about attachment. While reviewing and synthesizing the key concepts in the literature, it is apparent that Bowlby (1969, 1979, 1982) brings understanding and clarity to the fundamental process of attachment behavioral patterns in infants and adolescences. The research of Shi (2003) highlights that attachment processes are very important and are formed through childhood attachment interaction experiences.

It is important to understand that the parent's attitude toward the child during this process is crucial to the development of a healthy attachment experience (Bowlby, 1973), which will be used as their attachment building blocks in adulthood. Additionally, the research of Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, and Dornbusch (2009) supports the

above work and brings further understanding of this process by explaining that parenting characteristics help to moderate the relationship between specific parental behaviors and the development of the child's internal working model of attachment.

### **What Is Known**

In an effort to provide a description of what is known about attachment, it is evident from the above literature much is understood about the attachment processes of an infant to its mother (Bowlby, 1979). In the area of adult attachment patterns, current research primarily deals with, "adult-to-adult attachment patterns or marital satisfaction between adult partners (DiLillo et al., 2010; Ganem, 2008). The research of Bartholomew and Horowitz, (1991) classified adult attachment patterns based upon retrospective reports about childhood relationship experiences with parents. The similar work of Edwards et al. (2005) and Koenig, Cicchetti, and Rogosch (2009) noted that secure patterned adults reported positive early childhood attachment experiences and warmer relationships with their own parents than insecure patterned adults.

### **Controversial Research**

The controversial research findings of Brennan (1995) and Fraley (2004) suggest that there are two fundamental dimensions with respect to adult attachment patterns; attachment-related anxiety and attachment-related avoidance. Adults who score high on the attachment-related anxiety scale are more prone to worry about the availability of their chosen attachment figure (wife, husband, friend, and partner) in comparison to adults who score at the lower end of this variable tend to be more secure in their perceived responsiveness to their chosen attachment figure.

Furthermore, in other controversial studies, secure patterned adults reported more positive relationships with parents, higher quality of home environment, and higher expectations for satisfactory marriage and family life, compared with insecure patterned adults (Collins & Feeney, 2000). The research of these scientists aids to understanding the importance of positive childhood attachment experiences which aid in the development of a secure pattern of attachment. Therefore, it must be understood that unhealthy experiences such as the separation from one's family of origin (Ganem, 2008) could negatively impact the attachment growth of a child and continue through adulthood.

### **What Remains to Be Studied**

A key concept that remains to be studied is attachment patterns in foster care reared female mothers. The most current empirical studies on early childhood attachment experiences and subsequent parent-to-child attachment patterns were over 35 years old; this should be addressed considering the generational component of attachment patterns (Bowlby, 1979). With this in mind, it is evident that each spectrum of adult attachment patterns should be investigated (Dozier et al., 2009) and research on childhood attachment experiences and their relation to parent-to-child attachment behavior patterns should be conducted. It is apparent the interactions experienced in childhood with parental figures are related to perceptions of parenting (Wearden et al., 2008). Ultimately, these perceptions aid in the formation of adult attachment patterns and the transmission of these patterns to their offspring (Bowlby, 1973; Duroseau, 2008).

### **Why the Phenomenological Methodology Is Meaningful**

This section reviews and synthesizes studies related to the research questions:

“How do mothers raised in a foster care environment perceive and describe their experiences in forming relationships as children? and What are the experiences of mothers raised in foster care in forming relationships with their own children?”

Attachment and family systems theorists suggest parents bring to caregiving the relationship strategies developed through their own experience of being parented. These experiences contributed to their parent-to-child attachment behavior patterns (Dregan et al., 2011) and internal model of attachment (Bowlby, 1980; Pecora, 2010; Sroufe et al., 2005).

Bowlby (1969) proposed that human beings internalize attachment experiences with their significant caregivers in the form of working models of attachment. These models of attachment are unconscious, highly resistant to change and form a foundation that is used through adulthood (Briere, Woo, McRae, Foltz, & Sitzman, 1997; Tyler & Melander, 2010). This process is well documented but how it contributes to the attachment phenomena with regards to foster care reared adults lacks clarity. To gain clarity of this phenomenon, it is important to the chosen study and research question to examine what mechanisms influence parental attachment patterns.

It appears from the literature that parent-to-child attachment patterns have a family connection that facilitates this life altering cycle from generation to generation (Bernard & Dozier, 2011; Green et al., 2010; Martin, 2005). The current phenomenological research design was chosen because it was the most appropriate

approach to exploring the lived experience of being reared in foster care and how childhood attachment experiences influence mother-to-child attachment behavior patterns. Additionally, the above-mentioned studies set the foundation for the chosen phenomenological study and bring to the forefront that attachment has not been studied with mothers who were reared in foster care consequently; the chosen phenomenological research is meaningful and is important to study.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

In summary, two major themes are consistent in the literature: early childhood attachment experiences of foster-reared individuals and parent-to-child attachment patterns. It is evident that the complicated process of attachment is important to the development of the species and contributes to the working model of attachment. It is understood that less than optimal early childhood attachment experiences may alter the predicted ability for an individual to form the reflective capacity to attach significantly in a healthy manner to other human beings (Lau, Valeri, McCarty, & Weisz, 2006; Zeanah et al., 2011) even their own child. What is not understood is how these early childhood attachment patterns predispose the former foster-reared mother to less than optimal parent-to-child attachment behavior patterns (Fraley, 2004; Zeanah & Smyke, 2009).

This qualitative phenomenological study will serve to fill the gap in the literature and extend the knowledge in the area of adult attachment patterns of at-risk individuals who were not reared by their biological parents by studying early childhood attachment experiences of foster care reared individuals and the development of parent-to-child attachment patterns. This chapter provided an introduction, literature search strategy,

theoretical foundation, literature review related to key variables and/or concepts, summary, and conclusion. Chapter 3 includes an introduction, a detailed discussion of the research design and rationale, the researcher's role, methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and summary.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to provide a greater understanding of the significance of early childhood attachment experiences for formerly foster-care-reared females, including the relevance of these experiences to later maternal attachment behavioral patterns. This study applied both attachment theory and foster-rearing theory to an effort to understand how attachment to a foster maternal figure sets the foundation for attachment for a foster-reared mother. This chapter includes an introduction, a detailed discussion of the research design and rationale, and descriptions of the role of the researcher, the study methodology, and issues of trustworthiness, concluding with a summary.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

Mother-to-child attachment behaviors may be related to a mother's experiences in foster care. Qualitative research methodology was chosen to explore the experiences of foster-reared mothers whose children also experienced foster care. Additionally, qualitative methodology was chosen to develop a rich, thick description of the participants' lived experiences. Moustakas (1994) suggested that qualitative research provides the ability to assess the wholeness of an experience while searching for essences of the experience, rather than measurements and explanations (p. 21). Qualitative research allows the researcher to delve into reasons and explanations for a studied concept, such as mother-to-child attachment and experiences in foster care.



The phenomenon researched in this study was the childhood attachment experiences of foster-reared mothers. A phenomenological research design was chosen for this inquiry because it was the most appropriate qualitative method to explore the shared lived experiences of formerly foster-care-reared mothers (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). As explained by Schuhmann, Leijenhorst, and Steenbakkens (2004), “the essence of the lived experience is hidden but can be uncovered through the use of phenomenology research” (p. 12).

Various other research paradigms were considered, such as grounded theory, ethnography, case study, and narrative research. Grounded theory involves the development of a theory grounded in data from the field. Ethnography entails description and interpretation of a cultural or social group. A case study involves the development of an in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases, and narrative methodology is applied to the life stories of individuals (Lincoln, 2009). None of the aforementioned approaches seemed appropriate because I wanted to explore the lived experiences of the individual participants.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role was to design the entire study, develop the interview protocol, conduct an in-depth interview with each participant and analyze the data. I did not have any personal or professional relationships with the participants; thus, there were no power issues involving participants to consider. I worked in the foster care field for over 15 years and had personal beliefs and biases about foster-reared mothers that could potentially have

influenced the design of the interview protocol, as well as data collection and analysis. Consequently, bracketing was used to control bias.

The criteria for inclusion for the study included being over 21 years of age, having entered foster care after age 5, exiting foster care between the ages of 15 and 18, having lived in more than one foster home, having multiple foster mothers, and being a mother of at least one child who had experienced foster care. The criteria were publicized through a flyer (Appendix B) posted in the client waiting room of a mental health agency with the permission of the agency's director. The flyer included an invitation for potential participants to contact me. Additionally, I made every effort to be sensitive to the needs of the participants. If a participant was unable to continue with the interview, she was excused from the interview because participation in the study was voluntary (Moustakas, 1994). Participants could withdraw from the interviews for any reason and at any stage. The participants were recruited very carefully with the use of the inclusion screening questions mentioned above and listed in (Appendix D). The participants were provided an opportunity to have any questions or concerns addressed through email on an individual basis during the screening process to prevent respondent withdrawal concerns. Additionally, the participants had an opportunity to ask any other questions they had during their formal interview.

### **Methodology**

As explained by Husserl (1913), phenomenology is the reflective study of the essence of consciousness as experienced from a first-person point of view (p. 7).

Schuhmann et al. (2004) explained that phenomenology seeks to describe the basic lived experience of individuals; as a research method, it is the study of essences.

### **Participant Selection Logic**

The participants were recruited through a mental health agency in Northern California that provides therapeutic services to parents involved in reunification services. With permission obtained from the director, I posted a flyer (Appendix B) in the mental health agency to announce the study, identify the criteria for participation, and invite interested participants to contact me.

In phenomenological studies, the sample size is often justified by interviewing participants until data saturation is reached, which refers to the point at which no new information or themes are emerging from the data (Moustakas, 2000). Guest et al. (2006) explained that 12 participants are sufficient to reach both data and thematic saturation in a phenomenological study. Consequently, I chose to use 12 participants. The recruitment and selection process for participation involved each interested foster-reared mother contacting me by email. Interested individuals were screened to determine if they met the criteria for participating in the study. The first 12 mothers who met the criteria were selected and scheduled for an interview. The selected participants had the opportunity to have their questions answered while being scheduled for their interview.

### **Instrumentation**

Moustakas (1994, 2000) explained that in phenomenological methodology, the primary data collection instruments used include reflective journals, interview protocols, and audio recordings of participants' interviews. He further explained that the use of

these instruments establishes sufficiency of data collection to answer the research questions. Data were collected through two researcher-produced sources: a researcher journal and audiotaped interviews from the chosen 12 participants. Moustakas (1994, 2000) explained that in phenomenological methodology, the written reflections of the researcher are very important to the study because the researcher is an instrumental part of the research. Therefore, I kept a reflective journal, which I used to record my reflections on the participants' taped interviews. My reflections were written directly following the interviews.

The participant interview questions were developed to answer the two research questions, which addressed the details of the participants' childhood attachment experiences while in foster care and their experiences with regard to being a mother with a child reared in foster care. A recording device was used to record the participant interviews, and notes were recorded in my journal during the interview stage. Some of the notes included codes denoting prompts or probing questions during the interviews, which aided in the data analysis.

In this phenomenological study, credibility was established through the use of member checks of the participant interviews. Moustakas (2000) defined *member checking* as a process of soliciting informants' views of the credibility of findings and interpretations (p. 202). In qualitative research, a member check is a technique used to improve the accuracy, credibility, validity, and transferability of a study. In the process of member checking, the respondent was asked to verify my interpretation of the data for accuracy of concepts and clarity of understanding. Member checks served to decrease the

incidence of incorrect data and the incorrect interpretation of data (Bygstad & Munkvold, 2007).

The process of member checking was initially established as I restated or summarized information the participant shared during the interview; this aided in ensuring accuracy. During the interview, clarifying questions were asked of the participants to ensure that I was documenting their responses accurately. Member checking also was used after the study was complete. I summarized each interview and emailed a 1-page to 2-page summary of key findings to each individual respondent (Moustakas, 2000). This allowed each participant to critically analyze my key findings concerning their personal interview statements and comment on them. The specific data collection instrument (interview protocol) was chosen in an effort to answer the research question.

### **Interview Questions**

The interview questions, also presented in Appendix A, are listed in Table 1 according to the research question they were designed to answer. The attachment theory of Bowlby (1979) and the foster-care theory of Zeanah (2000) that were incorporated into this study aided in forming the research questions. Each theory was used independently to weave a foundation for inquiry concerning the attachment issues of foster-reared mothers. The two theories were incorporated into the research, and interview questions served as a road map during the interview process. The gap in research that I addressed in this study involves how mothers reared in foster care experience relationship formation with their foster mothers and their own children.

Table 1

*Research Questions and Interview Questions*

Research question	Interview questions
Theory: Zeanah (2000)  RQ1: How do mothers raised in a foster care environment perceive and describe their experiences in forming relationships with their foster mother as children?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Thinking back to your foster care experiences, how many foster mothers do you remember, and if you had to choose one, why is she the most important?  <i>Probe:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me more about why she is the most important.</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. When you met your foster mother for the first time, what were some of the things she did to help you form a relationship with her?  <i>Probes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me more about the first time.</li> <li>• Tell me more about the things you did together.</li> </ul> <i>Prompt:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did you feel about forming a relationship with her?</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. For this question, I'd like you to think back to your experiences in foster care with your most important foster mother. How was your relationship with your foster mother affected by the other children in the home?  <i>Prompt:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did you feel when you spent time alone with her?</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. For this question, I'd like you to think back to experiences with your most important foster mother and how she comforted you as a child. What were some of the ways she comforted you?  <i>Probe:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me more about how she comforted you.</li> </ul> <i>Prompt:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did you feel when she comforted you?</li> <li>•</li> </ul> </li> <li>5. This question relates to how your experiences with your most important foster mother affected your relationship with her. As you think back to your foster care experiences, describe your relationship with your most important foster mother after you left your foster home, including the relationship you have with her now.  <i>Probe:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me more about your relationship with her.</li> </ul> <i>Prompt:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you feel when you think of her?</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

*(table continues)*

---

Research question	Interview questions
<p>Theory: Bowlby (1979)</p> <p>RQ2: What are the experiences of mothers raised in foster care in forming relationships with their own children?</p>	<p>6. As a mother who was raised in the foster care system, how did your age affect your relationship with your firstborn child?  <i>Probe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me more about how your relationship was affected.</li> </ul> <p><i>Prompt:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At what age did you have your first child?</li> </ul> <p>7. I would like to talk with you about what it has been like to parent your child or children. What was your experience in forming a relationship with your firstborn child?  <i>Probe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me more about forming the relationship.</li> </ul> <p>8. Thinking about your experiences with your firstborn child while he or she was in foster care, please describe in as much detail as possible what you remember about your relationship with your firstborn child.  <i>Probe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me more about the relationship.</li> </ul> <p>9. If your firstborn child was returned to your care, please describe in as much detail as possible what you remember about your relationship and how you felt when he or she was returned to your care.  <i>Probe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me more about how you felt.</li> <li>• Tell me more about the relationship.</li> </ul> <p>10. If you could make any changes to improve your relationship with your firstborn child, what would they be?  <i>Probe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me more about the changes.</li> </ul>

---

The 10 primary interview questions and prompts (Appendix A) were developed to understand the lived experiences of mothers being reared in foster care and their development of mother-to-child behavior patterns. The interview questions were developed to guide the participants in sharing not only their lived foster-care-rearing experiences, but also their experiences with their own children. An expert panel of six PhD-level individuals reviewed the interview questions.

In terms of their focus, the interview questions were arranged from general experiences to specific knowledge. Each participant exited the study by means of debriefing after the completion of the interview. At the end of each interview I explained the phenomenon being studied and asked the participant one question: “How do you feel after sharing thoughts about your former foster care experiences?” A *debriefing* is a careful review of the participant’s experience after the completion of a study. As Tesch (2007) explained, there are two major functions of debriefing: educational and ethical. The educational goals are served by informing subjects about the nature of the phenomenon being studied, and the ethical goals are served by minimizing any negative feelings that may have resulted from participation. In the chosen research study, no form of deception was used.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Phenomenology (Moustakas, 2000) was influenced by Husserl (1913) and Heidegger (1938). Phenomenological theory was used as the research methodology for this study. As stated in Chapter 2, the attachment theory of Bowlby (1980) and the foster-care attachment theory of Zeanah (2009) were used as the theoretical framework for the



study. The phenomenological analysis technique of Moustakas (2000), which is explained below, was used to analyze the interview data. As applied in this study, the technique consisted of the following steps:

1. I transcribed each individual interview into written form.
2. I analyzed each individual interview as a text.
3. Horizontalization was conducted by listing every respondent's quote relevant to the foster-care-rearing experience of forming a relationship with her foster mother. Specific patterns of thought and significant statements from each individual interview related to the experience were highlighted.

4. The fourth step involved "determining the invariant constituents"

(Moustakas,

1994, pp. 120-121). This was part of the reduction and elimination process.

The invariant constituents were determined by testing each expression for two requirements:

- Does the respondent's statement contain a verbal expression of the foster-care-rearing experience that answers the research questions(i.e., RQ1: How do mothers raised in a foster-care environment perceive and describe their experiences in forming relationships with their foster mothers as children? RQ2: What are the experiences of mothers raised in foster care in forming relationships with their own children)?
- Is it possible to abstract and label the expression?

If the expression met both of the requirements, it was considered a horizon of experience (Moustakas, 1994). Invariant constituents were then clustered and put into themes that were seen as being at the core of the foster-care-rearing experience. The invariant constituents were developed by the frequency percentages of the foster-care-rearing categories that were generated.

5. The essence of the participant's meaning was summarized in a short paraphrase.
6. I clustered statements by themes, and these themes were open coded in preparation for synthesis.
7. During data analysis, each meaningful segment of text in the transcript was assigned a code or label.
8. The invariant constituent and its theme were checked against each entire participant record to ensure that the constituents were present.
9. A transcript of each participant's experience was texturally described using the validated invariant constituents and themes (Hicks, 1975).
10. I created a textural-structural description for each participant interview.
11. A composite description of the meanings of the experience of being a foster-care-reared mother was created using all of the participant interview data. The group was represented as a whole by this description.
12. An overall synthesis of the study was developed and presented in written form.
13. Tables were used to organize the data.

14. The data were organized, coded, and labeled so that I could determine meanings for the analysis.

### **Data Interpretation**

According to Moustakas (2000), the qualitative inquiry process is evolutionary. As the interpretations evolve, the investigator should return to the summary tables and raw data to verify her interpretations. Examples of each conclusion should be identified to support these conclusions in the final written presentation. The use of specific examples in participants' words is one of the most compelling attributes of qualitative research.

Upon completion of the data interpretation as explained by Bygstad and Munkvold (2007), a final validation by member checking, defined above in the data collection section, was accomplished by email. Each individual participant received a one- to two-page emailed summary of their interview interpretations created by the researcher. The participant was asked to validate the data interpretation for accuracy. If there were any discrepancies in the summary descriptions of the participant's individual interview data, the original data was not altered but additional information was added as "new data" in an effort to establish the credibility of the findings. This was done after I discussed the discrepancy with the participant. I made every effort to explain the data description as the participant intended it to be conveyed so the accurate essence of the lived experience of each interviewee was concise. The management of discrepant cases included reviewing the discrepancy, investigating the cause, and resolving it or declaring it irresolvable. Moustakas (2000) explains, this process is important so the reflection data

is complete and accurately documented for analysis (p. 127). When the participants were satisfied their reflections had been accurately documented, I completed the process and finalized the draft. After the draft had been reviewed, the results were reviewed for issues of trustworthiness.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

The hope of this phenomenological study is that it can go beyond the facts of the experience in the attempt to understand the depth and breadth of the meaning of the shared experiences as it relates to the participants individually and as a whole. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that trustworthiness of a research study is important to evaluating its worth and is established by the utilization of techniques that increase credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability. Trustworthiness may be established and maintained throughout a study by close adherence to a structured methodological model (Tesch, 2007). Credibility (internal validity) is achieved in a phenomenological study when the participants recognize the results of the study as their own experiences (Hicks, 1975). It is the researcher's responsibility to ensure the participants' experiences are described accurately (Streubert-Speziale, Streubert, & Carpenter, 2011). This was achieved by utilizing the following strategies: member checks, bracketing, audit trails, triangulation, inquiry audit, purposeful sampling and thick description.

#### **Establishing Credibility: Member Checking**

Member checking, described above, was involved in validating the interpretations of the researcher with regard to the participant interviews. Member checking was

accomplished during each participant's interviews. Moustakas (2000) explains that member checking aids accuracy of the findings. Member checking was also accomplished after the interviews were completed and the participants received an emailed summary of their interview answers. This step allowed the participants to read their interview summary to assure accuracy. Each participant was asked by the researcher during a phone interview if the interpretations of their experiences were correct and if not, what changes should be made or if they have any additional information to add. This form of member check aided in ensuring the researchers interpretation of the participants experiences were accurate and clear (Heidegger, 1990).

### **Establishing Confirmability**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that confirmability is achieved by the researcher's ability to establish a neutral position with regards to the study so the biases or interest of the researcher does not influence the study. Hicks (1975) explains that in a phenomenological study, the researcher is part of the phenomenon being studied; therefore, their feelings, experiences, and understanding of the subject matter must be explored to promote objectivity of the topic being researched. In this study, three techniques were used to increase confirmability; bracketing, triangulation and audit trail.

### **Bracketing**

Moustakas (2000) highlights that the presence of the researcher can be an issue due to personal biases and influence with the participants; consequently, bracketing allows for self-reflection and researcher perceptions to become part of the research.

To achieve reflexivity within the research, bracketing was used throughout each phase of the study to reduce researcher biases and preconceived ideas. Moustakas (1994) suggests that when assessing the internal validity of research findings in a phenomenological study the process of bracketing should be used. Bracketing is a method that involves setting aside or “bracketing” the researcher’s preconceptions while collecting and working with the data to be used. This process provides the reader an understanding of how the researcher arrived at the final structural description of the experience. I have worked with adults who were reared in foster care so bracketing was used to bracket foster care rearing and attachment biases, preconceptions, and opinions. Examples of these biases include: foster-reared adults suffer from attachment disorders and are not capable of parenting their children properly. Additionally, this bracketing process aided in identifying and reducing the elements of my biases so they did not intrude or influence the study. If my biases go unchecked valuable data could be omitted or distorted during the interview and analysis process.

### **Triangulation**

Patton (2002) defines triangulation as a method used by researchers to establish validity in their studies by analyzing a research question from multiple perspectives. Triangulation is the use of two or more data sources that will be compared and contrasted in an effort to increase the trustworthiness of the study (Kenny, 2012). The data sources will be compared to determine areas of agreement as well as areas of divergence. A triangulation approach of the data will further aid in pinpointing both the verification of the critical issues and reduction in the possibility of researcher bias. Kenny (2012)

advocates the use of triangulation by stating, triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods (p. 167). In this study, triangulation was achieved by comparing the interviews of all 12 participants considering that the sample is homogeneous. During the analysis stage, each participant's interview answers were compared to determine areas of agreement as well as areas of divergence. Patton (2002) cautions that it is a common misconception that the goal of triangulation is to arrive at consistency across data sources or approaches; in fact, such inconsistencies may be likely given the relative strengths of different approaches. In Patton's view, these inconsistencies should not be seen as weakening the evidence, but should be viewed as an opportunity to uncover deeper meaning in the data. As discussed previously, data was collected via interviews with participants. This form of triangulation strengthened the study and gave context to the participant's experiences and interpretations of the lived experience of foster care rearing.

### **Audit Trail**

An audit trail involves the transparent detailed explanation of the steps taken in the research study so if the study was replicated similar results would be obtained (Hicks, 1975). Moustakas (2000) wrote an adequate trail should be left to enable the auditor to determine if the conclusions, interpretations, and recommendations can be traced to their sources and if they are supported by the inquiry (p. 156). I began the audit trail by using a reflective journal to write relevant research thoughts in such as the sampling methods, recruitment, notes about communication with the participants and other relevant research steps. As per Moustakas (2000), charts and tables in a word processing document were used to contain the researcher's notes taken from the interview data. Codes were

formulated from the recurring responses from all the participants that make up the invariant constituents. The codes were analyzed and put into themes, which were in separate documents from the responses. Descriptions of the participants lived experiences were formulated for each participant in a Word document. The synthesis of the findings were developed, typed, and presented in a written format, but no participant identifying information was included. Hence, any person may read through the documents and assure the findings were reached logically from the interview data and the participant experiences.

### **Establishing Dependability: Inquiry Audit**

Dependability in a phenomenology study is grounded in the understanding that an individual's awareness of her experience is perceptual and contextual (Bygstad & Munkvold, 2007). Hicks (1975) explained, although there may be several interpretative viewpoints on the same phenomenon, sameness (reliability) can arise out of inconsistency, variability and relativity of human discernment (p. 92). An inquiry audit will be used to increase dependability by utilizing the data acquired from the audit trail that is described above. An inquiry audit aids future researchers in replicating the study or assists the auditor in evaluating the original findings (Hicks, 1975). The inquiry audit process utilizes all the components of the audit trail. The inquiry audit procedure consists of several basic steps such as examining the data, findings, interpretations and recommendations of the research findings. The inquiry audit will be performed by a Ph.D. level researcher. It is explained by Lincoln and Guba, (1985) that a single audit, if executed properly can simultaneously determine dependability and confirmability. This



process will aid in assuring that the research findings are internally coherent and supported by the data.

### **Establishing Transferability: Thick Description**

Transferability in a naturalistic study depends on similarities between sending and receiving contexts, the researcher collects sufficiently detailed descriptions of data in context and reports them with sufficient detail and precision to allow judgments about transferability to be made by the reader. Transferability was accomplished through the use of thick description. It was my goal to provide a dense and sufficient description of the participants' interpretations and feelings of the phenomenon so that the data results could be compared, thus allowing for transferability.

### **Purposeful Sampling**

Kenny (2012) explained that a purposeful sampling of the participants is paramount to the study to optimize that the participants share the same type of experience base of the phenomenon, which increases trustworthiness. Lastly, it is of great importance to present a convincing argument that the findings are indeed trustworthy. Validity, as explained by Moustakas (2000) with regard to a phenomenological study, is dependent on the trustworthiness and persuasiveness of the results found. Additionally, Hicks's (1975) research highlights that the most critical method of validating the accuracy of the interpretations of the phenomenological study data is the juridical process of presenting a cogent argument (p. 88). My interpretations of the data are supported by direct evidence from the interviews, audio tapes, and psychosocial history.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Ethical considerations are always of great importance when research is done with human beings, as explained by Moustakas (2000). When dealing with fragile or traumatized populations, additional consideration should be taken due to the private, confidential nature of the information that may be shared by the participants (Pereira, 2012). The safety of the participants is foremost important so a number of specific issues were addressed with regard to ethical considerations. A copy of the Institutional Review Board approval #06-22-16-0093395 is listed in Appendix D. Additionally, the researcher has taken the training, Protecting Human Research Participants. The course is approved by the National Institutes of Health and the certificate of completion is listed in Appendix C.

The audio-taped interviews that were conducted with each participant were identified by a number to ensure the data was kept confidential and there were no concerns related to the confidential nature of the data. Any identifying personal information such as the name of participant and age were removed from the protocols to ensure confidentiality. The transcripts were coded with a number to ensure the researcher knows which transcript belongs to which participant. Due to the potential personal nature of the information and life experiences that may be shared by the participants, it was clarified that none of the personal information will be shared in a way that can identify the participants individually. There is no known risk of harm associated with participating in this study. If a participant became unable or unwilling to complete the interviewing stage due to her anxiety, emotional state, or any other reason, she was

encouraged to discontinue participation. The participants were provided with three phone numbers of free or low-cost mental health agencies (National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, The National Hopeline Network, and National Alliance on Mental Illness) which are also listed on the consent form (Appendix C). Files, audiotapes, and transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet in my home office for a minimum of five years and destroyed after that time by shredding and proper disposal. Only the researcher will have access to the transcripts.

The results of this research will be disseminated in an effort to raise public awareness of the social issues associated with early childhood attachment experiences of foster care reared female mothers and mother-to-child attachment behaviors. It is essential to empower professionals in varying fields with the information needed to create a holistic support system for this at-risk population of mothers and children. Additionally, these findings will be disseminated through a poster presentation at Walden University and possibly public presentations at other colleges. My findings will be disseminated to the study participants through their personal emails that were collected when they sign up for the study.

### **Summary**

It has been highlighted that the role of the phenomenological researcher is to adopt the “phenomenological” attitude by being open to whatever reveals itself (Moustakas, 2000). The phenomenological method of inquiry was chosen for this study because it provides an avenue to give the mothers in this study a voice and provides the

needed information to highlight the lived experiences of foster reared mothers and their mother-to-child attachment behavior patterns.

Chapter 3 discussed the use of a phenomenological methodology (Moustakas, 2000), which drives this study of 12 women and the uncovering of their lived childhood experience of being reared in foster care and its influence on mother-to-child attachment behavior. The women's experiences were captured utilizing an interview with ten open-ended questions and some short information gathering questions. The data was analyzed by following Moustakas's (1994) eight-step modification of van Kaam's (1959) data analysis method. To verify the data, I will clarify researcher bias; conduct member checking; leave an audit trail; and have a rich, thick description of the phenomena. Trustworthiness of the study was discussed as was the ethical procedures followed. Chapter 4 will provide an introduction, discussion of the research setting, demographics, data collected, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness and results, findings, and a summary.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to understand both early childhood attachment experiences and mother-to-child attachment behavior patterns, which represented the study's primary themes. I sought to explore lived experiences of foster care rearing and the meaning that participants placed on their experiences of mother-to-child attachment behavior patterns. The following research questions served as guide posts for the study:

1. How do mothers raised in a foster care environment perceive and describe their experiences in forming relationships with their foster mothers while they were in foster care?
2. What are the experiences of mothers raised in foster care in forming relationships with their own children?

Chapter 4 contains an introduction, followed by sections addressing the setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and results of the study, concluding with a summary.

### **Setting**

The setting where the research interviews took place was a private room in a public library in Sacramento, California. There appeared to be no personal or organizational conditions that influenced participants or their experience at the time of the study that might have influenced the interpretation of the study results.

### **Demographics**

Twelve participants were recruited randomly through a flyer that was posted in a mental health service agency. Guest, Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) explained that saturation in a phenomenological study occurs at approximately 12 participants. The participants lived in Sacramento, California, and their children lived in the same state. All 12 participants were between the ages of 21 and 42. The average age of the participants was 32, and the average number of children per participant was three. Six participants were African American, four were Caucasian, and two were Hispanic. Seven women had no criminal background, and five had a nonviolent criminal history. Four participants reported having no drug history. All participants reported being placed in foster care after age 5 for a minimum of 5 years and experiencing multiple placement moves. The participants had an average of four different foster home experiences while in foster care. All participants emancipated from foster care between the ages of 16 and 18. Ten participants regained custody of their firstborn child. Two participants lost parental rights to their firstborn child, after which the child was adopted.

### **Data Collection**

The data were collected from the transcribed interviews of the 12 participants. Foster-reared women who emancipated from foster care were selected to participate in this study based on their firsthand experience with the phenomena of interest: foster care rearing and parent-to-child attachment behaviors. All participants lived in Sacramento, California, and were interviewed at a public library in that city. Each participant responded to a clinic flyer by contacting me by email. I subsequently contacted each

participant by email or telephone, introduced myself, and explained the nature and intent of the study. During the initial introduction, each woman was informed that the interviews would focus on two topics of discussion: (a) their foster-care-rearing experiences with their most important foster mother, and (b) their parent-to-child attachment experiences with their firstborn child.

The frequency of data collection was one interview per participant. The duration of each participant's interview was from 1 to 2 hours. A 10-question semistructured interview was used to ask each woman about her most important foster mother and firstborn child. Each completed audiotaped interview was checked for accuracy and transcribed verbatim by me. The data were transcribed and checked for accuracy, and all transcripts were read during each phase of the study. There were no variations in the data collected from the plan that was presented in Chapter 3, which included surveying the participants. There were no unusual circumstances encountered in data collection.

### **Data Analysis**

This section contains a description of the process that I used to code the interview data for each participant to determine the themes for the study. The interview data for each participant were grouped based upon key themes regarding the experience of foster care rearing and parent-to-child attachment as they emerged. I then performed line-by-line coding and labeled phrases with code names. These small pieces of information, which related to participants' perceptions of foster-care-rearing and parent-to-child attachment experiences, were very important to the study.

Following open coding, code names representing the key aspects of the phenomenon (i.e., foster rearing and parent-to-child) were placed side by side for further analysis and then into categories based on their importance. Categories were then placed together for further analysis to discover the complex interrelations of the content drawn from each element of the paradigm. During the analysis of the data, two major themes emerged: (a) “mother-like” attributes of the most important foster mother and (b) “intense fear” with regard to the loss of the firstborn child. During analysis, the data were divided into two parts. The first part represented Interview Questions 1 through 6. These interview questions addressed the foster care attachment experiences of the participants with their most important foster mother. The second part represented data from Interview Questions 7 through 12, which focused on the significant parent-to-child attachment experiences of the participants with their firstborn child.

The participants talked about their childhood experiences with their most important foster mother and which sorts of attachment experiences contributed to their choice of their most important foster mother. One participant explained, “She was the most important foster mother because she loved me and spent time with me.” Another participant expressed that her most important foster mother was chosen because “Big Mama was the best, because she never hit me or called me stupid.”

Furthermore, the participants talked about their attachment experiences with their firstborn children after they were removed from their care and their attachment behaviors after their children were returned to their care. One participant explained that when her child was removed from their care, she became very fearful: “I cried every day after my



child was taken. I thought my child would never come home.” Another participant explained that she feared her daughter would be raped while in foster care: “That was a hard time; I felt that I would not be able to protect her while she was with those people. I was raped when I was in foster care.”

The single cases are presented in this way to lay the groundwork to determine the relation, if any, to participants’ past foster care attachment experiences with their most important foster mother and their past or current parent-to-child attachment behaviors with their firstborn child. Two major themes emerged: mother-like attributes and intense fear of loss, each with two subthemes. The first main theme expressed by the participants was that their most important foster mother had “mother-like” attributes. The subthemes relating to this theme were (a) unconditional love and (b) continued contact with the most important foster mother. The second major theme that was expressed by the participants with regard to their firstborn child and parent-to-child attachment was intense fear. The subthemes relating to this were (a) fear of not being able to protect the child and (b) fear of permanent loss of custody of the child.

A third theme that emerged from the research that was important but less related to the research questions involved (a) maternal deprivation, (b) affectionless psychopathy, and (c) a dismissing or preoccupied parenting type. This theme is significant to the research because all 12 mothers had their children removed because of neglect or abuse. In the attempt to hear the lived experiences of each participant, I became aware of the components of this theme and felt that they brought understanding of the intergenerational aspect of foster care. It can be concluded from the research that these

mothers' ability to optimally parent their children was impaired due in part to the combination of the above factors. Consequently, it is apparently plausible that these additional factors work in conjunction to stunt and impair the attachment development of these foster-reared mothers. There were no discrepant perspectives in this participant pool that were factored into this analysis.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

It was explained by Sheton (2004) that qualitative inquiry may lack methodological rigor, which suggests that descriptive outcomes may be less reliable and valid than quantitative results. In order to counter the assumption that narrative data have questionable value, issues of trustworthiness related to the study must be addressed (White, Oelke, & Friesen, 2012). Consistency involves the repeatability of a study's results, and accuracy relates to the extent to which those results actually constitute the construct (Creswell, 2009). A researcher conducting a phenomenological study seeks to explore a phenomenon through descriptive measures. The value of any study lies in the consistency and accuracy of the narrative data in relation to the object of interest (Adcock, 2001).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that the trustworthiness of a research study is important in evaluating its worth and is established by the use of techniques that increase credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability. Trustworthiness was established and maintained throughout this study by close adherence to a structured methodological model (Tesch, 2007). Additionally, the study's trustworthiness was ensured by the verbatim transcription of each participant's individual interview data. In

an effort to increase the accuracy of the data, I transcribed each interview recording on the same day that the interview occurred.

### **Credibility**

Credibility (internal validity) is achieved in a phenomenological study when the participants recognize the results of the study as their own experiences (Hicks, 1975). It has been my responsibility to ensure that each participant's experiences are described accurately (Streubert-Speziale, Streubert, & Carpenter, 2011). This task was achieved by using the following strategies: member checks, bracketing, audit trails, triangulation, inquiry audit, purposeful sampling and thick description. Additionally, credibility was achieved by interacting with each of the chosen participants in an effort to develop rapport with each individual foster-reared mother.

I contacted each participant to clarify what she meant when the data from the tape recording were not clear. In an effort to ensure the accuracy of the transcription, I went over the field notes with each participant at the end of the interview to clarify any unclear statements. Additionally, the field notes were used to assist in the triangulation of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking occurred during and at the end of each individual interview to ensure accuracy in capturing the participant's meaning in statements about attachment in foster care rearing and her personal parent-to-child attachment experiences.

Credibility represents the extent to which the concepts drawn from original narrative descriptions embody the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994). Establishing credibility involved several methodological considerations that strengthened

the internal validity of the research process. The interviews occurred in the same setting for each participant: a private room in a public library. The semistructured interview facilitated rapport building by allowing each participant to guide the direction of the interaction. The sample size of 12 foster-reared mothers directly related to the point of saturation, which was defined as the point at which participants provided no new information (Sheton, 2004). No adjustments to the credibility strategies that were planned were necessary during the study.

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the generalizability of the data to the larger population that the participants in the sample represent. Transferability involves whether the research is transferable over the boundaries of the project (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The participants were able to provide rich and thick descriptions of their foster care attachment experiences because they lived them. Additionally, a dense and detailed explanation of the study results and literature search supports the research findings. The participants were of varied ages from 21 to 46 and offered different types of data based on their experiences. Purposive sampling of the chosen participants allowed for transferability of the study to other female foster care settings.

Improving the extent to which this research may inform therapeutic work with foster-reared mothers beyond those in the study requires attention to factors that affect external validity. The process of informed consent and the detailed criteria outlining participant characteristics, undertaken to protect the integrity of the 12 foster-reared mothers, may have created selection bias. I specifically identified clients who met

inclusion criteria for participation. Participant selection biases were reduced by following the informed consent protocol after gaining permission to post the flyer in the chosen agency (White et al., 2012). The semistructured interviews encouraged the foster-reared mothers to provide detailed narratives in order to offer the clearest conceptualization of their experiences, which, when analyzed for universal themes, offered a shared global experience of the phenomenon of foster care rearing and parent-to-child attachment that represented the population as a whole. There were no adjustments to the transferability strategies that were stated in Chapter 3.

### **Dependability**

The dependability of qualitative research reflects the reliability of the research process, such that in future studies using the same methodology under similar conditions and with demographically equivalent participants, the results would parallel the outcomes found at the conclusion of the original research (White et al., 2012). To account for dependability within the findings of the study, an audit trail was kept in my journal, which shows the systematic process of data collection and analysis (Janesick, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Triangulation was also used to increase dependability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To strengthen the repeatability of the study, an audit trail was performed, which included detailed documentation of the data collection process in a journal and maintenance of the interview transcripts in which the data were analyzed (Smith et al., 2009). To strengthen the integrity of the final themes and codes, the information included in the data analysis involved triangulation of the data through obtaining details from multiple informants,

completion of research interviews, the demographic questionnaire completed by the research participants, and detailed field notes documenting the observations that were made by me (Shenton, 2004; Tebes, 2005). There were no adjustments to the consistency strategies that were stated in Chapter 3.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability is a measure of how accurately the collected data support and reinforce the findings (Patton, 2002). I ensured that the study's findings represented the data accurately. As the research study was conducted I used strategies to ensure that the results emerged as trustworthy and of high quality (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Furthermore, my methodologist, who was versed in qualitative coding and analysis, provided expert assistance in reviewing the codes and agreeing on the adopted themes and categories to support confirmability, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Confirmability indicates the extent to which the outcome data, such as themes and concepts, reflect the ideas conveyed in the raw data, such as individual narratives and demographic questionnaire answers (Lynch, 1983, 1999). Strengthening confirmability of qualitative results improves the objectivity of outcomes (Sheton, 2004). I engaged in member checking, a process in which the evaluator reflects the statements made by the participant to ensure the accuracy of the evaluator's understanding of the informant's intrinsic meaning of the ideas conveyed (Smith, 2009; Turner & Coen, 2008).

Additionally, the process of triangulating the data involved cross-referencing information and confirming it with multiple sources, reducing the impact of research bias (Sheton,

2004). There were no adjustments made to the consistency strategies that were stated in Chapter 3.

### **Results**

All 12 participants expressed which characteristics that they viewed as mother-like and which attributes that their most important foster mother had. However the depth of their individual foster care rearing experiences with their most important foster mother varied according to each woman. All participants had multiple placements; each woman had placement experience that involved living in two to eight different foster homes. Each participant expressed fear when first meeting their first most important foster mother because they had foster care experiences that were less than optimal. All the participants had to be prompted multiple times when asked about their foster care experiences because they explained it was painful to think about their foster care history. All the participants eluded that there were more painful memories than pleasant ones. All participants were in homes where there were other children; other unrelated foster children and or biological children of their foster mother. The demographic index chart is provided in Table 2.

Table 2

*Demographics Index Chart*

Domain	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
Race of participant	A	A	AA	AA	AA	AA	AA	W	W	W	W	H	H
Number of children	2	1	4	1	2	5	11	3	3	4	4	4	
Number of placements	3	10	7	5	2	3	6	4	3	4	3	3	
Age at pregnancy	17	14	13	19	21	16	14	15	14	16	15	18	
Physical or sexual abuse	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Age at placement	13	9	10	8	11	15	11	7	9	13	13	14	
Age at interview	40	38	26	21	32	37	43	33	36	34	41	46	

Although the essential components or themes of foster care rearing and parent-to-child attachment experiences can be differentiated, they cannot be completely separated from one another. These two themes and their delineative four sub-themes are interwoven to create the invariant structure of how foster care experiences and mother-to-child attachment was experienced for the 12 women in this study (Moustakas, 1994).

The two distinctive themes emerged and were selected to illustrate the essential aspects of how attachment in foster care rearing and parent-to-child attachment patterns was experienced by the participants. The results are organized into two major themes, mother-like attributes and intense fear of loss. The four subthemes that emerged from the two major themes include; unconditional love, continued contact with the foster mother, fear of losing control of their ability to protect their first born child, and fearing the permanent loss of custody of their first born child. The two research questions that



follow are used to connect each major theme to the participant's answers from the 12 interview questions.

### **Mother-Like Attributes**

RQ1 was as follows: How do mothers raised in a foster care environment perceive and describe their experiences in forming relationships with their foster mother as children?

The essence of how foster rearing was experienced for the 12 foster reared mothers is presented in this Study. The women in this study reported feeling a deep connection with their most important foster mother because of her mother like qualities. This relationship was of paramount importance to each participant and assisted in their ability to attach to their most important foster mother. All the participants had experienced multiple foster care experiences before they came to reside with their most important foster mother; many left their most important foster mother's home to live with other foster parents. Most foster reared individuals had experienced between 2 and 8 placements throughout their child welfare careers (Casey Family Programs, 2007). All 12 participants expressed that their most important foster mother was not abusive or mean to them; she treated them with respect and unconditional love. It is highlighted that an individual is able to form healthy adult relationships because of healthy childhood attachment experiences (Chaffin et al., 2006). All of the participants expressed thoughts that their foster care rearing experiences led them to understand that most foster mothers were in it for a check and if they did not receive a financial stipend they would not have

been foster mothers. All twelve participants in the research study explained that they'd experienced some type of abuse (maternal deprivation) while in foster care.

**Unconditional love.** All of the participants expressed that many of their foster mothers did not express motherly traits and did not care about the foster children as individuals who had been entrusted to their care. For most of the women who experienced a mother-like foster mother the expression of motherly qualities is grounded in their desire to be loved unconditionally.

Another participant, Sarah who felt that her most important foster mother showed her unconditional love expressed that it was very difficult to move from foster home to foster home. She explained that when she met her sixth foster mother she acted out so her foster mother would call her social worker and remove her from the home. Her foster mother did not give up and she stayed in her home for two years. Sarah is a biracial participant who was removed from her mother because her brother sexually abused her. She averaged two new foster families every year until she emancipated at age 18; she entered into foster care at age 13. She shared that many of her placements were physically and sexually abusive. The participant expressed her thoughts about the unconditional love her most important foster mother showed her:

Ms. Briana saved my life. After I told her about the sexual abuse; she made a report to child protective services and I started living with her. She went to a lot of trouble so I could live with her. I knew she must have loved me because of that.

Sarah's most important foster mother was an African American teacher at her middle school; she rescued her from the abusive home. She lived with her most important foster mother until she died a year later. Unfortunately, after the death of Sarah's most important foster mother she had to move to another home, another school, and another community.

Another participant, Gloria, is grateful for her foster mother who treated her like her own child. This profound sense of unconditional love is expressed in the following excerpt: "Mama J would help me with my homework and would buy me mangos because it's my favorite fruit. She was very kind to me and I felt loved by her."

June who lived in four other foster homes until she met her most important foster mother at age 16 expressed a fondness for the women who made a difference in her life. Ms. Mary, her foster mother was an African American women in her late sixty's, who was a homemaker who was not employed. June recognized that her foster mother had motherly characteristics and appreciated that she showed her unconditional love. She explains:

My foster mother, Mary was very loving and spent time with me. She cooked dinner every night and we all ate together. It was on my 17th birthday that she gave me a big party with balloons and a cake. Everyone was there; foster family and friends. This was the only birthday party I can remember having as a child. All I could do was just sit and watch everyone enjoying the party. This was the best time of my life.

Another participant, Rose is a biracial 40 year woman who is grateful for her most important foster mother and the qualities she instilled in her while she resided with her as a child. She credits those experiences as helping her be the woman she is now and appreciates that her most important foster mother treated her like her own child. She explains:

I am very grateful for my Auntie Jean because she treated me special; she never hit me or made feel like I was no good because my mom could not keep me. I had my own room and she bought me new clothes. Other foster mother's would take me to thrift stores to buy my clothing. That was always a sad experience because I felt like I only deserved used clothes. When I went to school kids would tease me because my clothes were old.

**Continued contact with the foster mother.** Furthermore, these women were all extremely grateful for their most important foster mother. Some of the participants continue to have regular contact with their most important foster mother. Half of the participants viewed their most important foster mother as their mother figure and continue to refer to them as mom. Compared to the early attachment experiences Tasha who expresses her lived experiences of maternal deprivation: "My relationship with my biological mother was always real hard. She was not very loving or hugged us kids or anything like that."

This expression of familial attachment is essentially significant to the experience of foster care rearing for the women in this study. This type of endearment is expressed through the words of Tasha who was removed from her mother due to her maternal

deprivation, neglect and substance abuse. Tasha is an African American, 29 year old woman who has 2 children:

When I moved to the last foster home; I remember thinking it was nice to have a foster mother tell me she loved me. I know her words were real because I put her through a year of hell; but she did not give up on me. It felt like she really loved me. I send her a card sometimes at holidays and I sign it your, “loving daughter” Tasha.

Jane is a 43 year old Caucasian woman who has 11 children, she was removed from her mother at age 8 due to maternal deprivation and neglect. Jane was also appreciative of how her foster mother treated her with unconditional love and respect. She continues contact with her most important foster mother. She never regained contact with her biological mother. So it was very important to have someone who knew her as a child and still loved her. The respect that she has for her foster mother is explained through her words:

Mama was a great mother. She took good care of me and made me feel like her own. I still see her on holidays. She was very supportive and caring when my children went into foster care. She helped me a lot through those hard times. My kids love her and call her Big Mama.

Brenda was a 32 year old, African American participant who had her first born child at age 21. She explained that she was fearful about having children because she did not think she could be a good mom due in part to the maternal deprivation that she had experienced while with her maternal mother. She had two foster mothers while she was

in foster care from age 11 to age 18. Of the 12 participants who were interviewed she is the only participant who only moved twice while in foster care. Most of the participants moved between four and eleven times. Multiple moves are a contributing factor to the lack of attachment due to learning how not to attach to another person because the child will move soon. Brenda expressed a warm fondness for her most important foster mother by explaining:

She allowed me time to speak with her one on one instead of in front of the other children. She told me that she had an open door policy with all her kids and that if we ever needed her that we could just ask.

### **Intense Fear of Loss**

RQ2 was as follows: What are the experiences of mothers raised in foster care in forming relationships with their own children?

The second major theme that was expressed by the participants was intense fear of loss of control with regards to their first born child. All the participants felt that the age at which they had their first child was significant to their ability to rear him or her optimally

Nine of the participants had their first child before turning 18 years of age. Three participants had their first child after age 18; even these women felt ill prepared for motherhood because of what they had experienced before, during and after foster care. All the participants felt that having a child early in life may have contributed to their less than optimal attachment patterns and to their fear of loss when their child was removed from their care and put in foster care. Each participant felt that being older could have

prepared them for the challenges of motherhood. All the participants expressed the need to be better mothers once their children were returned to them. The subthemes relating to this theme included: 2a) fear of losing the ability to protect their first born child, and 2b) fear of permanent loss of custody of their first born child.

**Fear of losing control of their ability to protect their firstborn child.** Closely linked to the ideas of attachment is the primal need for a mother to protect her child. The participants described the fear that their child could be harmed while they were in foster care with strangers. Many of the participants had recalled the experiences of physical, psychological and sexual abuse by a foster parent or the foster children whom they lived with. These past traumatic experiences appeared to be significant when the participants lost custody of their children.

Mary, who was physically and sexually abused before and during foster care, explained,

It was hard being in foster care, I did not feel safe. When my son was placed in foster care I cried every day because I knew I could not protect him in there. I was hurt while I was there and I felt that he would be hurt too.

All twelve participants endured circumstances that were uncomfortable and unpleasant in their childhoods as well as their adulthoods. The lack of positive connection with a maternal figure is so crucial that many of the psychological, social and emotional problems of the participants can be traced to disconnections or violations within their childhood relationships. They learn how to accept what was beyond their control to change. This may be the driving force of their fear when their first born child

was placed in foster care. Jill who had her first child at thirteen years old was like many of the participants who were interviewed. She expressed a fatalistic attitude about her ability to have a maternal relationship with her first born child as she explained:

I did the best I could with what I had. I wanted my son to have a better life but I did not know how to give it to him. When he was taken from me my greatest fear was that he would be harmed while he was in that lady's home. I felt so sick, I was suicidal. I tried to be a better mother when I got him back. I still have nightmares of losing him.

**Fearing the permanent loss of custody of their firstborn child.** Unlike the grief felt from a death, the loss felt from having a child removed and placed into foster care interferes with the working model of attachment that developed in each of the participants. The temporary or permanent loss of their child was devastating for most of the individuals in the study. Two of the participants never had their children returned; these children were adopted and the participants never saw them again. The loss of attachment is an experience that is expressed through grief and is highlighted through the words of Mary:

I cried every day after my baby girl was taken from me. I thought I would get her back but the social worker said I did not complete the reunification plan. I did not know what to do. I took a bunch of pills and drank a lot of alcohol. I wanted to die.

It is significant that both of these participants became suicidal after losing their children. They were ill prepared to deal with the trauma of such a life altering



experience. Additionally, both participants became pregnant and had other children. An insecurely attached adult may lack the ability to form a strong attachment to their offspring which may aid in their ability to move past the pain of losing their child to the foster care system (Lyons-Ruth, 1988).

As expressed by Julie, who had her firstborn child removed from her care and adopted,

I became very depressed after my son was removed and adopted. I don't think I ever attached to him, really. I tried therapy after he was adopted but soon found that drugs made the pain go away. I met a guy and was pregnant again in a couple of months. That child was removed as well and placed in foster care. My life was very hard.

The voices of each participant reverberates the difficulties of being reared in foster care and later having their own child removed from their care. The various difficulties that each participant suffered through as they grew up including having their own children being placed in foster care contributed to a working model of attachment that was less than optimal.

It must be highlighted that the researcher felt it was important to share three additional lived experience themes that was revealed from the participants research results :maternal deprivation, affectionless psychopathy, and preoccupied or dismissing parenting styles. These lived experiences are very significant to the research but less related to the research questions; the additional themes were produced from the prompts

as the participants became comfortable with the researcher and began to talk about their attachment traumas before, during and after foster care.

### **Maternal Deprivation**

Julie explained that she experienced maternal deprivation while in foster care by her third foster mother who refused to take her to the doctor when she was experiencing agonizing pain in her stomach.

I told her I was in pain as I screamed that my stomach hurt. She told me to shout up and she would give me something to cry about. The next day she took me to the emergency room. The doctor explained that my appendix had burst. I had to have emergency surgery; I could have died!

### **Affectionless Psychopathy**

Renee, another participant explained that her biological mother exhibited affectionless psychopathy when she decided it was better for her to be removed from the home and placed in foster care so her older brother who molested her could stay in the home. She explained:

My brother had molested me for years but when my mother found out she did not care. My mother told me I was the strong one in the family. Much stronger than my brother and I would be okay in foster care.

### **Preoccupied or Dismissing Parenting Styles**

A preoccupied parent tends to be intermittently available or rewarding, then inexplicably unavailable which may result in their child feeling clingy or anxious around the parent who isn't meeting their emotional needs. This form of parental attachment

was expressed by a participant who felt because she made dinner for her children she did not need to spend time with them when her boyfriend was visiting. She explained,

Ya, when my man came over to see me I sent my kids to their room. I always fed them before he came so we could be alone. He would leave when they started crying because they wanted out of the room. It was hard being a mom.

A dismissive parent may meet the child's basic needs, but will have trouble responding to the child on an emotional level. The child may adapt by becoming removed from their own emotions and developing a pseudo-independent stance. This form of parenting style is expressed by Jill who explained that she thought it was appropriate to leave her three toddlers by themselves at home while she went dancing at a local night club. She explained, "I take good care of my kids; yes I left my children by their selves. They were sleep when I left. I did not know that the nosey neighbor lady was going to call child protective services on me."

The multiple foster care experiences during each participants formative child rearing years created an internal working model of attachment that lacked parental consistency and boundaries which would have kept them safe and optimized their internal working models of attachment. Additionally, the reality of maternal deprivation and affectionless psychopathy that many of the participants experienced in their formative years established a working model of attachment and a preoccupied or dismissing parenting style that may have contributed to the neglect of their first born child that led to his or her ultimate removal and foster care placement.

## **Discrepant Cases**

There were no discrepant cases in this research study.

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 includes a summation of the research data and the findings in relation to the research questions, themes and subthemes. The attachment experiences of the 12 foster reared adults is consistent with Bowlby's (1988) description of the internal working model of attachment which is a cognitive framework comprising the mental representation for understanding the world, self and others (Bretherton, & Munholland, 1999). The results of the current research study highlight that Bowlby's work did not take into account the positive social factors (Lyons-Ruth, 1988) that can influence the outcome of at risk populations, such as the quality of substitute care from a foster mother. The data from the current research brings credence to the fact that when a foster reared child was shown mother like attributes by their most important foster mother, this process aided in strengthening their working model of attachment.

It appears that the negative effects of maternal deprivation can be lessened if there is appropriate emotional care after separation, such as the support from a foster mother. The results of the current research data explain that many of the participants benefited from the unconditional love that was extended to them from their most important foster mother. The findings were clear that unconditional love and secure parenting was a strong factor in the choosing of the most important foster mother for all the participants. It is evident from the research that each participant's interactions with their first born

child were influenced by their early memories and expectations which contributed to the formation of their internal working model of attachment.

The internal working model of attachment is a major influence on how the fostered adult parent their first born child and contributes to their ability to attach to that child in an optimum way. Despite the reality of maternal deprivation, dismissing or preoccupied parenting types, and being reared in foster care most of the participants appeared to move past their less than optimum childhood experiences. Most of the mothers formed a successful relationship with their first born child if he or she was not adopted. This may have been achieved in part through the support of social workers, parenting classes and clinical therapy which are components of the reunification plan that all 12 participants had to participate in an effort to regain custody of their child. Chapter 5 will include an introduction, interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, implications, recommendations, implications, and summary.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research was to provide a greater understanding of the significance of early childhood attachment experiences of formerly foster-care-reared females and the relevance of this relationship to their maternal attachment to their own children. The phenomenon that was defined and identified in the present research study involved the complex development of an internal working model of adult attachment patterns, specifically in foster-reared populations, and how these patterns can compromise parent-to-child attachment style. As I sought to synthesize the writings of key theorists, philosophers, and researchers related to the phenomenon, it became apparent that much of the literature in this area addressed the process of early childhood attachment experiences and how these experiences can contribute to an internal working model of attachment. Additionally, the literature addressed the cross-age continuum (Call, 2009) and parent-to-attachment patterns (Schoore, 2002). Very few studies on this topic had involved at-risk populations, and even fewer had studied women who had been reared in foster care. I could find no studies that used mothers who had been reared in foster care and who had children removed from their care and placed in foster care.

I conducted this study to fill the gap in the literature with regard to mothers who were reared in foster care who later lost their children to the same foster care system that reared them. It is clear that individuals who were reared in foster care are at greater risk for attachment disturbances (Lee & Hankins, 2009), due in part to the negative impact of

maternal deprivation, dismissing or preoccupied parenting types, and parental separation on attachment formation. The current study involved 12 foster-reared mothers who also experienced the removal of their children for placement in foster care. This study aided in understanding that through the phenomena of the cross-age continuum, many foster-reared individuals will also lose their children to be reared by strangers while in foster care.

### **Key Findings**

The key findings expressing the essence of the participants' experience were driven by the 10 questions that I asked of each participant. The participants' candid answers to the first five difficult questions highlighted what was important to them with regard to the qualities of their most important foster mother. The key findings that were gathered from the first five questions included (a) maternal deprivation, (b) kindness and predictability of the chosen foster mother, (c) ability to stay connected to the foster mother after emancipation, (d) number of foster placements, and (e) self-harming behaviors.

The last five questions that were answered by the participants touched upon the importance of attachment behaviors of foster-reared mothers with their firstborn children after they are removed from their care. The key findings that were derived from the last five questions included (a) specific memories of childhood abuse, (b) participant's age at birth of the first child, (c) dismissing or preoccupied parenting type, (d) fear of losing the ability to protect the firstborn child while he or she was in foster care, and (e) desire to be better mothers if they regained custody of their firstborn child.

## **Interpretation of the Findings**

### **Findings Extend Knowledge**

The findings of the current research study extend knowledge on childhood traumas (Coleman-Cowger, Green, & Clark, 2011), affectionless psychopathy (Bowlby, 1990), maternal deprivation (Besser & Priel, 2005), and preoccupied or dismissing parenting styles in foster-reared mothers (Rubino et al., 2009) by broadening what has been found in the peer-reviewed literature described in Chapter 2. Several of the participants had specific memories of childhood traumas that occurred before and during foster care. Many of the participants talked about the affectionless psychopathy and maternal deprivation that they endured before and during foster care. Others recalled multiple experiences of rejection by their maternal figures.

It has been highlighted that children who experience child abuse and neglect are 59% more likely to be arrested as a juvenile, 28% more likely to be arrested as an adult, and 30% more likely to commit a violent crime (Casey Family Programs, 2007). The above statistics may explain how their internal working model of attachment was less than optimally formed. Other participants struggled to remember their most important foster mothers and had to be prompted by me multiple times to recall their most important foster mothers. It became apparent to me that many of these mothers had suppressed their childhood traumas, which had impacted their recall ability. All of the participants expressed the experience of fear and pain when their firstborn child was removed from their care. Furthermore, the interview data revealed that the mother-like qualities of their most important foster mothers changed the course of their lives forever.



Many of the participants expressed that they were better mothers because of the nurturing and unconditional love that had been shown to them by their most important foster mother. These young women, who had experienced affectionless psychopathy due to maternal deprivation by their biological mothers and other maternal figures for many years of their lives, eventually met a maternal figure who showed them unconditional love. It is evident that positive childhood attachment experiences can influence and alter the internal working model of attachment of a foster-reared mother (Tyler & Melander, 2010).

The research of MacMillan et al. (2001) and Ganem (2008) highlighted that childhood attachment experiences of foster-reared individuals influence their adult attachment patterns. Furthermore, the work of George et al. (1984) and Lee and Hankin (2009) indicated the existence of three distinct attachment styles: autonomous-secure, preoccupied, and dismissing, autonomous-secure parents gave a clear and coherent account of early attachments experiences; preoccupied parents spoke of many conflicted childhood memories about attachment; and dismissing parents were characterized by an inability to remember much about their childhood attachment relations. This work is significant to the current study because many of the participants showed a propensity to displaying a dismissing or preoccupied parenting type (Coleman-Cowger, Green, & Clark, 2011). This was evident by the researcher's prompting attempts. Each participant had to be prompted two or more times to remember the information that was asked about their foster care attachment experiences. Less verbal prompting was needed when the participants were asked about their children being removed from their care and being

placed into foster care. Seven participants explained that they'd tried to forget their past because it was so painful. The findings of this present study revealed that each participant's internal working model of attachment was influenced by their maternal deprivation and foster care experiences. These childhood experiences had a direct impact on the development of their relationship with their first born child. The generational component of this phenomenon is clear because each of the research participant's children was a second generation foster reared individual. Generational parenting similarities were highlighted through the research data and many of the participants became aware that their parenting and attachment practices were similar to that those of their own biological mothers. The significance and particular concern of this finding is related to the current study's finding that children repeat the lessons that they learn from their parental figures (Blunt, 2009; Bowlby, 1988; Heer, 2008). The realization of the similarities appeared to be the prelude to transformation and change in the lives of many of the participants once they had their children returned.

### **Analysis and Interpretation of the Findings**

The importance of studying attachment behaviors of foster-reared-mothers derives from the generational component of these behaviors, in that many of their children enter foster care and suffer from affectionless psychopathy due to maternal deprivation (Duroseau, 2008). This is significant because many of the women in this study had not had many positive or significant attachment experiences before meeting their most important foster mother. Three significant shared experiences emerged from the results: affectionless psychopathy due to maternal deprivation before and during their fostering

years, physical and sexual abuse before and while in foster care, and self-harming behaviors. Bowlby (1988) concluded that maternal deprivation in a child's early years can cause permanent emotional damage. He referred to this phenomenon as *affectionless psychopathy*. According to Bowlby, this condition involves a lack of emotional development, characterized by a lack of concern for others, lack of guilt, and the inability to form meaningful or lasting relationships. In analyzing and interpreting the findings from the research study in the theoretical context of adult attachment, it is helpful to consider the statement by Bowlby et al. (1987) that "the bio-behavioral processes which lead from distress to solace or from danger to safety are very primal and necessary" (p. 208). An additional theme that emerged from the research was that all of the participants had experienced multiple foster placements before they emancipated; all of the foster reared mothers had at least two placement homes, and one participant had been placed in 10 homes before emancipating between 16 and 18 years of age. Clarity springs forth with regard to the results of the present study when one considers that many of the participants did not feel safe while in foster care because they could not predict how they would be treated by their new foster parents or how long they would live in the home. Many of the participants chose their most important foster mother because she was kind to them and the kindness became predictable: It is understood that this bio-behavioral process (Bowlby et al., 1987) may be weakened or absent in many foster-reared populations, and their childhood experiences of predictability may be unbalanced or absent (Coleman-Cowger, Green, & Clark, 2011). Consequently, many of these foster-reared mothers struggle to maintain predictability while rearing their own offspring, due in part to their

underdeveloped internal working model of parent-to-child attachment patterns (Zeanah et al., 2011).

The current study adds to the peer-reviewed research on this topic by increasing the understanding of the processes that facilitate an internal working model of attachment in foster-reared mothers. Bowlby (1988) explained that the phenomenon of cross-age continuity is a process primarily driven by two major factors: (a) the persistence of parenting attachment patterns through the years and (b) the self-perpetuating nature of attachment behavioral patterns (Colonnesi et al., 2013). This work was very significant to the results of the study because all of the participants and their children had been affected adversely by cross-age continuity phenomena, which were evident in the generational reality of foster care. Most of the participants expressed that parenting their children had been difficult because they had minimal positive parenting attachment experiences. They were ill prepared to rear their children and had no one to guide them through the process.

The complex concept of attachment patterns have been applied in research studies to better understand how these less than optimal mother-to-child attachment patterns may be expressed through a mother's depression (Milgrom & McCloud, 1996; Murray et al., 1996), dysfunctional attitudes toward an unborn child (Lieberman et al., 1997), and unresolved trauma or loss (Liotti, 1995). This is significant to the present study because four of the participants expressed having feelings of depression and engaging in self-harming behaviors while in foster care. One participant attempted suicide while in foster care.

In comparing specific peer-reviewed literature to the results of the current research study, it is evident that individuals who experience the unpredictability that childhood traumas such as parental separation and foster-care rearing bring are at risk of developing an internal working model of attachment that may lead to less than optimal parent-to-child attachment patterns. These variables may help in understanding why foster-reared mothers lose custody of their children, who are then reared in foster care. Furthermore, the grandchildren of these mothers are at a greater risk of being removed from their parents and placed in foster care; hence, the cycle of generational foster care persists through cross-age continuity (Jonson-Reid, Kohl, & Drake, 2012).

### **Limitations of the Study**

#### **Limitations to Trustworthiness**

Although this research was carefully prepared and reached its goal of interviewing the participants, I am aware of its limitations, which were similar to those anticipated, as stated in Chapter 1. The size of the research group in this study was small, at only 12 participants. Consequently, the majority of foster-reared mothers in the United States could not be represented in this study, which decreased its transferability. A larger sample of foster-reared mothers from various states could improve the transferability of the research results. Secondly, understanding how ethnicity and culture in foster-reared populations contribute to their parenting skills. Thirdly, only women were used in this study, therefore the utilization of men in the study could enhance the outcomes of the research. Foster-reared men have also had their children removed from their care and placed in the foster care system (Tyler & Melander, 2010).

## **Recommendations**

As explained in the literature review in Chapter 2, the internal working model theory (Coh et al., 2008) and cross-age continuity processes (Gavrilov & Gavrilova, 2006) are very important in the area of adult attachment. These two concepts appear to be keys to understanding the generational aspect of parent-to-child attachment challenges in the at-risk population of foster-reared mothers (Jonson-Reid, Kohl, & Drake, 2012). Due in part to the results of the current research, it is recommended that further research be conducted on internal working models of adult attachment in at-risk populations that have been reared in foster care to better understand this process and how it affects the cross-age continuity process. Researchers could approach this by using a larger population of at risk individuals in a longitudinal study. Researchers use adult assessments such as the Adult Attachment Interview (Main & Goldwyn, 1994) and personality assessments such as the MMPI or NEO-2 to broaden the scope of the research to encompass personality types as well as attachment styles of foster-reared individuals who lose their children to foster care.

The results of the current research highlight that all of the participants were predisposed to numerous negative attachment experiences, which consequently served as building blocks to their distorted attachment patterns, which negatively impacted their parent-to-child attachment style. These results are important to the strength of the current research, which highlights that many foster-reared mothers lose their children to foster care because they are insecurely attached, due in part to their experiences of maternal deprivation. These women developed insecure attachment patterns due in part to their

own traumatic childhood experiences, which contributed to their preoccupied or dismissing parenting styles.

A major limitation of the current research was the use of only women. Consequently, it is recommended that male populations be used to further explore these concepts in future studies, in order to better understand how less than optimal internal working models of attachment are expressed in father-to-child attachment patterns that result in behaviors that lead to the removal of children from formerly foster-reared fathers.

Additionally, Forness et al. (2000) suggested that adults who experience the phenomenon of being reared in foster care can develop insecure attachment patterns, which may ultimately and unconsciously be transmitted to their offspring. Clark-Stewart et al. (2000) highlighted that these precipitating factors increase the likelihood that the offspring of an individual who was traumatized by early childhood separation (Jonson-Reid, Kohl, & Drake, 2012) will perpetuate the cycle of generational insecure attachment patterns. This brings credence to the notion that adults who experienced childhood trauma such as separation and foster care rearing will experience parent-to-child attachment pattern issues. There is a need for further research to understand these precipitating factors that increase the likelihood that offspring of a formerly foster-reared individual will perpetuate the cycle of less than optimal parent-to-child attachment patterns. Valuable insights could be gained by using a large sample of foster-reared women and men to study the attachment patterns of these at-risk individuals and how their behaviors may contribute to the removal of their children.

The current research study was grounded in the framework of childhood separation, foster-care rearing, and adult attachment theory. These three theories provided a sound foundation for analyzing the empirical research which was significant to the internal working model and parent-to child attachment patterns in this population. This process allowed me to achieve insight and clarity with regards to this phenomenon (Bernier & Dozier, 2003, p.355). The weakness of the current research is that at-risk male foster parents and male foster children were not used. The strength of Bowlby's (1973) and Cohen, Mannarino, and Knudsen's (2005) research, as explained in Chapter 2, was that they all used male juvenile offenders, but the limitation of his work was that he did not use females. The strength of the current research is that a female population was used, in contrast to Bowlby's work. In the current study, only foster mothers and foster-reared females were studied. The use of foster fathers and foster-reared males would broaden the study.

The results of the current research highlighted the work of Zeanah et al. (2011) and furthered the understanding that these processes may be weakened or absent in the foster care reared population, therefore their need for predictability may be unbalanced or absent. It is recommended that further research be performed in this area so insight, clarity and a greater understanding into the process of foster rearing as a whole and its relationship to parent-to-child attachment patterns can be obtained.



## **Implications**

### **Positive Social Change Implications**

Positive social implication in the area of foster care reform at the organizational and policy making levels is very important for a researcher because there is a need to improve the United State foster care system. This researcher found it imperative that changes to this system be achieved to stop the suffering of at risk populations. Foster-reared parents, foster parents, child protection organizations, government policy makers, and etc. must be educated about parental attachment issues in an effort to begin these needed changes. Positive social reform will be evident when there is no longer a need to remove children from their families of origin and place them in the homes of strangers. This researcher took positive social implication into consideration when developing the current research study. At an individual and family level much consideration was given to understanding the generational components of our foster care system as a whole and its relationship to foster reared mothers and their parent-to-child attachment patterns.

Allen et al. (2001) expressed that, “attachment is a biologically based process which requires enriched and structured experiences for its continued healthy development” (p. 151). His work was extended through the current research by highlighting that many foster reared individuals learn how not to attach to others due in part to their less than optimal foster rearing experiences. All of the participants expressed feeling unloved and unwanted while in foster care. Social change may be affected positively through mandating advanced training opportunities in child development,

attachment and bonding for foster parents so they can understand the importance of their responsibility to care for and nurture their foster children.

A phenomenological analysis was used to code, analyze, and interpret the interview data. The main purpose of this phenomenological research is to describe the lived experiences of the participants by hearing their life experiences. The results from this study will aid in positive social changes that can help reform the practices for social workers and caregivers involved in the placement of foster children. The social implications of the study include increased awareness of generational foster care and the need for positive change with at-risk foster reared parents.

Many foster reared individuals experience multiple fostering experiences which often means many foster parents, multiple educational experiences, and living in various neighborhoods. Many foster reared individuals experience higher rates of emotional, physical and sexual abuse. Additionally these individuals experience less educational attainment, experience substance use at an earlier age, higher rates of homelessness, joblessness and teen pregnancy. The stigma that is attached to being a foster child is significant to the building blocks of the internal working model of attachment of these individuals. Social change is significant to this issue; reducing the stigma and shame that is experienced by this at risk population is important in reducing the generational issues of foster care rearing. What happens when this young person has a child? The basic human instincts of the mother-to-child attachment processes which were underdeveloped by their foster rearing experiences become magnified. Consequently, these young mothers may not be able to attach optimally to their children.

The results of the current research study highlights that the development of the attachment process can be compromised if it is not provided with healthy attachment experiences. Many foster reared individuals lack healthy attachment experiences due in part to neglect or abuse while living with their biological parents or foster parents. Obegi et al. (2004), explains that the attachment phenomenon facilitates the internal working model of attachment of many individuals who have experienced the impact of the continuum of foster care rearing. His work gives credence and understanding to the process that affects foster reared individuals. Many of these individuals have been predisposed to numerous negative attachment experiences which consequently served as building blocks to their distorted attachment patterns which negatively impacted their parent-to-child attachment patterns.

Consequently, at an individual level and family level this work filled a gap in literature and extended the knowledge in the discipline of adult attachment with people who were reared in foster care by studying their childhood attachment history and maternal deprivation experiences. Additionally, the progression of their adult internal working model of attachment and the development of attachment with their own children must be researched. Social change should include the use of innovative models of child development theory that includes attachment and bonding. Foster reared individuals should benefit from the relational nature and community context of foster care which may aid in reinventing our foster care system. Furthermore, there is a need for innovative parenting education that includes instruction in attachment and bonding theory these programs could be delivered by trained professional. These changes hold promise for

creating hope for mothers who were reared in foster care and their children. The findings of this study have given an individual as well as a collective voice to twelve mothers who have shared similar life experiences of foster care rearing and the loss of a child to foster care.

Their experiences can impact other individuals and families by demystifying the importance that foster mothers play with regards to foster care rearing and mother-to-child attachment. Foster reared mothers can use the tools that have been given to them by the foster mothers who parented them. These tools include healthy parenting skills, self-respect and determination. Generations of children can be affected by what their foster reared mothers experienced while in foster care (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 2015). Research is needed to form changes to our United States foster care system. These changes could reduce the numbers of children who experience attachment disorders because they were removed from their biological mothers. This may aid in altering the trajectory of the generational aspect of parent-to-child attachment disorders (Call, 2009).

### **Methodological, Theoretical, and Empirical Implications**

Phenomenology methodology was chosen because the researcher wished to explore the lived experiences of foster reared mothers who had a child in foster care. Furthermore, mother-to-child attachment behaviors of foster reared mothers (Duroseau, 2008, Martin, 2005) coincide with their ability to attach in an optimal way with their own offspring. By using phenomenology a deeper understanding of the relationship between mothers and children occurred. This process assisted in understanding attachment

formation of foster reared adults (Bowlby, 1980; Zeanah, 2000). The phenomenon of complex adult internal working models of attachment specifically in foster care reared populations was found to be significant to all 12 of the foster reared mothers. The foster care rearing experiences of all 12 mothers negatively compromised their parent-to-child attachment patterns. Three of the participants felt that their most important foster mother's predictability and unconditional love contributed to the improvement of their parenting skills. These three participants continued contact with their most important foster mother after the emancipated from their care and had children.

The theoretical understanding of the human "behavior system" is a very important concept in attachment theory (Colonnesi et al., 2013). The theory of attachment (Bowlby et al., 1987) provides the conceptual linkage between ethological models of personality development and parent-to-child attachment (Marvin & Whelan, 2003). The theoretical framework served to extend the understanding of relationship formation of foster children to their foster mothers (Barber & Delfabbro, 2003). The relationship of this phenomenon was embedded in the theoretical framework. The current research extends the understanding that the personality development of foster reared mothers is shaped by their experiences while in foster care. Consequently as these young women develop into mothers they pull from their past attachment experiences with their foster mothers. It is apparent from the conclusion of the current study that the two theories coincide, relationship formation of foster children to their foster mothers (Barber & Delfabbro, 2003) and mother-to-child attachment behaviors of foster reared mothers (Duroseau, 2008, Martin, 2005). The findings deviate from the theories that were used

by highlighting that the attachment to a nurturing foster mother could alter the parenting style of the fostered adult. Furthermore, these findings extended the current study by going into depth as to how this process affects at risks foster reared mothers and their children.

The participants all expressed that their foster mothers were instrumental to their development as young women. These foster mothers taught them how to be mothers and aided in the development of their attachment and parenting styles. This is important to the current research because it aids to understanding how these processes work together to form the internal working model of attachment that is utilized by a mother who grew up without the benefit healthy parental attachment. The empirical implications of the current research highlight the need for further research that uses a more in depth longitude study in the area of parent-to-child attachment in the area of foster reared mothers or a mixed method qualitative study.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

When considering recommendations for practice the complex issues of foster reared mothers must be taken into consideration. Foster reared individuals could benefit from child development education and supportive services provided by mentors who have graduated from a parental training program. This program could assist these mothers in becoming optimally prepared parents in an effort to curtail the cycle of abuse and neglect. The current knowledge in the area of attachment among at risk populations appears to still be limited and further research into the causes for the documented overrepresentation of parents who have children in foster care is needed. This knowledge

could better prepare professionals so they could educate foster reared parents through the use of specially designed parenting plus attachment programs that were developed to teach child development theory that includes attachment and bonding. At risk parents who are taught the correlation between parenting attachment behaviors and their early childhood attachment experiences may be able to move past the trauma of their past so they can live their best future as they move through the journey of life. This could begin the path to healing for themselves as well as their children which in turn will end the phenomenon of generational foster care.

The independent living programs which are currently offered to foster reared individuals are often poorly executed and have limited coverage (Courtney, Cusick, & Keller et al., 2007). It is important that foster reared individuals be given the skills necessary to move past their difficult beginnings so that they could parent their children in an optimal way. As mentioned earlier, the use of parenting programs that include attachment theory is a way to pave the path of improvement (Colonnesi, Wissink & Noom et al., 2013). An improvement in that area may not only help the foster reared mothers and their children, but will also provide an important social investment in terms of reducing the cost that is associated with providing foster care services to children thus saving tax payers dollars (Hoffman & Maynard, 2010).

Overall, the explanatory importance of adult attachment patterns in reference to foster reared populations has been overlooked by most researchers. The current research highlights this importance with regards to the growing numbers of foster reared individuals who become parents and lose their children to foster care. The findings of the

research may assist practitioners in understanding the importance to accommodate for various attachment types and psychological disorders that foster reared individuals experience, such as posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, Bipolar disorder, self-mutilation, and suicide (Bifulco et al, 2006). This new found understanding should encourage professions who work with at risk population such as foster reared individuals to construct interventions that utilize therapeutic techniques such as cognitive behavioral therapy and dilate behavioral therapy; clinical treatment plans accordingly.

### **Conclusion**

At any given day in the United States there are over 500,000 foster children who will emancipate from foster care when they turn 18 (Pecora, White, Jackson, & Wiggins, 2009); many of them will suffer from attachment disturbances and almost all of them will become parents (Cassidy & Shaver, 2008). Due to the consequences over generations (Call, 2009) that will perpetuate the cycle of foster care rearing there is a need to prioritize the needs of these at risk mothers, fathers and their children. The analysis of the literature review explains that early childhood experiences contribute to less than optimal attachment patterns. The underlying causes that led to the participant's foster care rearing experiences with their most important foster mother were explored through this current research study. It is apparent that the qualitative phenomenological study was chosen because many of the above mentioned research studies used a phenomenological method as a way to gain entrance into the lives of their chosen population. It is also apparent that none of these studies used at risk populations of foster reared mothers in an attempt to better understand their lived experience.



Furthermore, the gap in attachment literature which was significant to the chosen method of phenomenology which was described in chapter 3 aided the study by bringing understanding to the connection of early childhood attachment experiences to parent-to-child attachment patterns. The current study benefited from this framework considering that attachment theory provided a sound foundation for analyzing the empirical research with regards to childhood separation, foster care rearing, adult attachment theory, its significance to the development of adult insecure internal working models and parent-to-child attachment patterns (Bernier & Dozier, 2003, p.355). Additionally, the participants' lived experience of having a child who had been removed from their care and placed in foster care was explored by asking open-ended questions during the taped interview sessions. Zeanah et al. (2011) and Edwards, Shipman, and Brown (2005) explain that additional research is needed in the area of adult parental attachment behaviors in this at-risk population of foster care reared individuals, and Chapman et al. (2004) highlights a generational aspect to this phenomenon.

In conclusion it is apparent that the research of Bowlby (1989, 2000) is correct in explaining that adults who experience the phenomenon of being reared in foster care can develop insecure attachment patterns. These attachment patterns make attaching to their child less than optimal which may ultimately and unconsciously be transmitted to their offspring (2000) by the lack of the parent's inability to attach to their child. These patterns are important to understand because they are precipitating factors which predispose (Garland et al. 2000) and increase the likelihood that the offspring of a foster reared individual will perpetuate the cycle of less than optimal mother-to-child

attachment patterns. The results from the current study highlights that these precipitating factors increase the likelihood that the offspring of an individual who was traumatized by early childhood separation could possibly perpetuate the cycle of generational insecure attachment patterns (Clark-Stewart et al, 2000). The implications for social change include the interpretations of innovative practices that could be implemented to assist at risk populations, and connect their stores globally so mothers who were in foster care, practitioners, and policy makers can collaborate to improve the current therapeutic interventions for this at risk population of individuals.

## References

- Ainsworth, M. D. S. (1973). The development of infant-mother attachment. In B. M. Caldwell & H. N. Ricciutti (Eds.), *Review of child development research* (Vol. 3, pp. 1-94). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Ainsworth, M. D. S. (1989). Attachment beyond infancy. *American Psychologist*, *44*, 709-716.
- Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1978). *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the strange situation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Anderson, J. R., Schonfeld, T. L., Kelso, T. K., & Prentice, E. D. (2003). Women in early phase trials: An IRB's deliberations. *IRB*, *25*(4), 7-11.
- Apple, R. (2006). *Perfect motherhood: Science and childrearing in America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Barber, J. G., & Delfabbro, P. H. (2003). Placement stability and the psychological well-being of children in foster care. *Research on Social Work Practice*, *13*, 415-431.
- Bartell, T. M. C. (2005). *Factors associated with attachment in international adoption* (Unpublished doctoral thesis). Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS.
- Barth, R. P., Landsverk, J., Chamberlain, P., Reid, J., Rolls, J., Hurlburt, M., ...Kohl, P. L. (2005). Parent training in child welfare services: Planning for a more evidence based approach to serving biological parents. *Research on Social Work Practice*, *15*, 353-371.

- Bartholomew, K., & Horowitz, L. M. (1991). Attachment styles among young adults: A test of a four-category model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 61*, 226-244.
- Bartlett, C., Doyal, I., Ebrahim, S. (2005). The causes and effects of socio-demographic exclusions from clinical trials. *Health Technology Assessment, 9*(38), iii-iv, ix-x, 1-152.
- Becker-Weidman, A. (2006). Treatment for children with trauma-attachment disorders: Dyadic developmental psychotherapy. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 23*(2), 147-171.
- Berlin, L. J., & Dodge, K. A. (2004). Relations among relationships. Invited commentary on child abuse and neglect and adult intimate relationships: A prospective study. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 28*, 1127-1132.
- Bernard, K., & Dozier, M. (2010). Examining infants' cortisol responses to laboratory tasks among children varying in attachment disorganization: Stress reactivity or return to baseline? *Developmental Psychology, 46*, 1771-1778.
- Bernard, K., & Dozier, M. (2011). This is my baby: Foster parents' feelings of commitment and displays of delight. *Infant Mental Health Journal, 32*, 251-262.
- Bernard, K., Dozier, M., Bick, J., & Carlson, E. (2008). Enhancing attachment organization among maltreated infants: Results of a randomized clinical trial. *Child Development, 83*, 623-636.

- Besser, A., & Priel, B. (2005). The apple does not fall far from the tree: Attachment styles and personality vulnerabilities to depression in three generations of women. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 31*, 1052-1073.  
doi:10.1177/0146167204274082
- Bick, J., & Dozier, M. (2010). Mothers' and children's concentrations of oxytocin and vasopressin following physical interaction. *Developmental Psychobiology, 52*, 100-107.
- Bifulco, A., Kwon, J., Jacobs, C., Moran, P. M., Bunn, A., & Beer, N. (2006). Adult attachment style as mediator between childhood neglect/abuse and adult depression and anxiety. *Social Psychiatry & Psychiatric Epidemiology, 41*, 796-805.
- Boris, N. W., & Zeanah, C. H. (1999). Disturbance and disorders of attachment in infancy: An overview. *Infant Mental Health Journal, 20*, 1-9.
- Boris, N. W., & Zeanah, C. H. (2005). Practice parameter for the assessment and treatment of children and adolescents with reactive attachment disorder of infancy and early childhood. *Journal of American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 44*, 1206-1219.
- Bowlby, J. (1944). Forty-four juvenile thieves: Their characters and home life. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 25*, 107-127.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss, Vol. 1: Attachment*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

- Bowlby, J. (1973). *Attachment and loss, Vol. 2: Separation, anxiety and anger*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1979). *The making and breaking of affectional bonds*. New York: Tavistock Publications.
- Bowlby, J. (1980). *Attachment and loss, Vol. 3: Loss, sadness, and depression*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1982). Attachment and loss: Retrospect and prospect. *The American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 52, 664-678.
- Brennan, K. (1995). Dimensions of adult attachment, affect regulation, and romantic relationship functioning. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 21, 267-283.
- Brennan, K. A., Clark, C. L., & Shaver, P. R. (1998). Self-report measurement of adult romantic attachment: An integrative overview. In J. A. Simpson & W. S. Rholes (Eds.), *Attachment theory and close relationships* (pp. 46-76). New York: Guilford Press.
- Briere, J., Woo, R., McRae, B., Foltz, J., & Sitzman, R. (1997). Lifetime victimization history, demographics, and clinical status in female psychiatric emergency room patients. *Journal of Nervous Mental Disorders*, 185, 95-101.
- Burns, B. J., Phillips, S. D., Wagner, H. R., Barth, R. P., Kolko, D. J., Campbell, Y., & Landsverk, J. (2004). Mental health need and access to mental health services by youths involved with child welfare: A national survey. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 43, 960-970.

- Bygstad, B., & Munkvold B. (2007, January 3-6). *The significance of qualitative analysis: Experiences from a longitudinal case study*. Proceedings of the 40<sup>th</sup> Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, Waikoloa, Big Island, HI.
- Cain, C. (2006). *Attachment disorders: Treatment strategies for traumatized children*. Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson.
- Call, J. (2009). Transgenerational attachment, life stress, and the development of disruptive behavior in preschool children. *Attachment and Human Development*, 11(1), 1-28.
- Cassidy, J., & Shaver, P. (eds.) (1999). *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Cassidy, J., & Shaver, P. R. (Eds.) (2008). *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research and clinical applications* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford Publications.
- Chaffin, M., Hanson, R., & Saunders, B. E. (2007). Report of the APSAC task force on attachment therapy, reactive attachment disorder, and attachment problems. *Child Maltreat*, 11(1), 76-89.
- Chaffin, M., Hanson, R., Saunders, B. E., Nichols, T., Barnett, D., & Miller-Perrin, C. (2006). Report of the APSAC task force on attachment therapy, reactive attachment disorder, and attachment. *Child Maltreatment*, 11, 76-89.
- Chapman, D. P., Whitfield, C. L., Felitti, V. J., Dube, S. R., Edwards, V. J., & Anda, R. F. (2004). Adverse childhood experiences and the risk of depressive disorders in adulthood. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 82, 217-225.
- Doi:10.1016/j.jad.2003.12.013

- Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2013). *Foster care statistics 2011*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.
- Coh, D.A., P.A. Cowan, C.P. Cowan and J. Pearson, 2008. Mother's and father's working models of childhood attachment relationships parenting style and child behavior. *Development and Psychology*, 4(3): 417-431
- Cohen, J. A., Mannarino, A. P., & Knudsen, K. (2005). Treating sexually abused children: 1-year follow-up of a randomized controlled trial. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 29(2), 135-145.
- Colaizzi, P. F. (1978). Psychological research as the phenomenologist views it. In R. S. Valle & M. King (Eds.), *Existential phenomenological alternatives for psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Coleman-Cowger, V. H., Green, B. A., & Clark, T. T. (2011). The impact of mental health issues, substance use, and exposure to victimization on pregnancy rates among a sample of youth with past-year foster care placement. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33, 2207-2212.
- Collins, N. L., & Feeney, B. C. (2000). A safe haven: An attachment theory perspective on support seeking and caregiving in intimate relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78, 1053-1073.



- Collins, N. L., Guichard, A. C., Ford, M. B., & Feeney, B. C. (2004). Working models of attachment: New developments and emerging themes. In W. S. Rholes & J. A. Simpson (Eds.), *Adult attachment: Theory, research, and clinical implications* (pp. 196-239). New York: Guilford Press.
- Colonna, C., Wissink, I. B., Noom, M. J., Asscher, J. J., Hoeve, M., Stams, G. M., & Kellaert-Knol, (2013). Basic Trust: An Attachment-Oriented Intervention Based on Mind-Mindedness in Adoptive Families. *Research On Social Work Practice* (23)2, 179-188.
- Cotton, P. (1990), "Examples Abound of Gaps in Medical Knowledge Because of Groups Excluded from Scientific Study," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, vol. 263, no. 8, Feb. 23, 1990
- Courtney, M. E., Cusick, G. R., Keller, T., Havlicek, J., & Perez, A. (2007). *Midwest evaluation of adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at age 21*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, Chapin Hall Center for Children.
- Creswell, J. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Creswell, J. W. (2011). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4<sup>th</sup>ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.
- Creswell, J. W., Clark, V. L., Plano P., Kelly, S., & Creswell, J. D. (2007). Mixed methods research designs in counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*, 224-235. Special issue: Knowledge in Context: Qualitative Methods in Counseling Psychology Research.
- Dearden, J. (2004). Resilience: A study of risk and protective factors from the perspective of young people with experience of local authority care. *Support for Learning, 19*, 187-193. Doi: 10.1111/j.0268-2141.2004.00346.x
- Delmar, C. (2010). Generalizability as recognition: Reflections on a foundational problems in qualitative research. *Qualitative Studies, 1*(2), 115-128.
- DiLillo, D., Lewis, T., & Di Loreto-Colgan, A. (2010). Child maltreatment history and subsequent romantic relationships: Exploring a psychological route to dyadic difficulties. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma, 15*(1), 19-36.
- DiLillo, D., Peugh, J., Evans, S. E., Kras, A., Campbell, C., Gale, E., & Perry, A. R. (2011). When your past becomes our problem: Child sexual abuse history and marital functioning among newlyweds. *Developmental Psychology, 46*, 51-77.
- Dinero, R. E., Conger, R. D., Shaver, P. R., Widaman, K. F., & Larsen-Rife, D. (2008). The influence of family of origin and adult romantic partners on romantic attachment security. *Journal of Family Psychology, 22*, 622-632.

- Dozier, M., Bernard, K., & Bick, J. (2009). Attachment-based intervention for substance using mothers of infants. In N. E. Suchman, M. Pajulo, & L. C. Mayes (Eds.), *Parenting and substance addiction: Developmental approaches to intervention*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dozier, M., Bick, J., & Bernard, K. (2011). Attachment-based treatment for young, vulnerable children. In J. Osofsky (Ed.), *Young children and trauma: Intervention and treatment*. New York: Guilford.
- Dozier, M., Zeanah, C. H., Wallin, A. R., & Shauffer, C. (2009). Institutional care for young children: Review of literature and policy implications. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, 6(1), 1-25.
- Dregan, A., Brown, J., & Armstrong, D. (2011). Do adult emotional and behavioural outcomes vary as a function of diverse childhood experiences of the public care system? *Psychological Medicine*, 41, 2213-2220.
- Dube, S. R., Anda, R. F., Felitti, V. J., Chapman, D. P., Williamson, D. F., & Giles, W. H. (2001). Childhood abuse, household dysfunction, and the risk of attempted suicide throughout the life span: Findings from the adverse childhood experiences study. *JAMA*, 286, 3089-3096.
- Dumaret, A. C., Coppel-Batsch, M., & Couraud, S. (1997). Adult outcome of children reared for long term period in foster families. *Child Neglect and Abuse*, 21, 911-927.

- Dumaret, A., Duyme, M., & Tomkiewicz, S. (1998). Foster children: Risk factors and development at a preschool age. *Early Child Development and Care, 134*, 23-42.  
Doi:10.1080/0300443971340102
- Durousseau, R. (2008). *Termination of parental rights: Recall of attachment experiences among adults who were legally separated from their parents*. San Francisco: Alliant International University.
- Edwards, A., Shipman, K., & Brown, A. (2005). The socialization of emotional understanding: A comparison of neglected and non-neglectful mothers and their children. *Child Maltreatment, 10*, 293-304.
- Farruggia, S. P., & Sorkin, D. H. (2009). Health risks for older US adolescents in foster care: The significance of important others' health behaviours on youths' health and health behaviours. *Child Care Health and Development, 35*, 340-348.
- Ferguson, K. S., & Dacey, C. M. (1997). Anxiety, depression and dissociation in women health care providers reporting a history of childhood psychological abuse. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 21*, 941-952.
- Ferruggia, S. P., & Sorkin, D. H. (2009). Health risks for older US adolescents in foster care: The significance of important others' health behaviours on youths' health and health behaviors. *Child Care Health and Development, 35*, 340-348.
- Fraley, C. (2004). *A brief overview of adult attachment theory and research*.(Online journal). Champaign: University of Illinois.

- Fraley, R. C. (2002). Attachment stability from infancy to adulthood: Meta-analysis and dynamic modeling of developmental mechanisms. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 6*, 123-151.
- Fraley, R. C., Waller, N. G., & Brennan, K. A. (2000). An item response theory analysis of self-report measures of adult attachment. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 78*, 350-365.
- Franzén, E., & Vinnerljung, B. (2006). Foster children as young adults: Many motherless, fatherless or orphaned: A Swedish national cohort study. *Child and Family Social Work, 11*, 254-263.
- Gall, M., Gall, J., & Borg, W. (2003). *Educational research*. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Ganem, L. D. (2008). *An examination of the attachment process from childhood to romantic relationships among young adults raised in long-term and adoptive foster care*. Proquest Information and Learning Company.
- Gavrilov, L. A.; Gavrilova, N. S. (2006), "Reliability Theory of Aging and Longevity", pp. 3–42 in *Handbook of the Biology of Aging*, ed. Masoro E. J. and Austad S. N, Academic Press, San Diego, CA.
- Goerge, R., & Wulczyn, F. (1998). Placement experiences of the youngest foster care population: Findings from the multistate foster care data archive. *Zero to Three, 19*(3), 8-13.

- Green, B., Kaltman, B. L., Chung, J. Y., Glennie, M., Jackson, S., & Dozier, M. (2010). Attachment and health care experiences among low-income women with trauma histories: A qualitative study. *Journal of Trauma and Dissociation, 13*, 190-208.
- Griffin, D., & Bartholomew, K. (1994). Metaphysics of measurement: The case of adult attachment. In K. Bartholomew & D. Perlman (Eds.), *Advances in personal relationships, Vol. 5: Attachment processes in adulthood* (pp. 17-52). London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods, 18*(1), 59-82.
- Haight, W., Ostler, T., Black, J., Sheridan, K., & Kingery, L. (2007). A child's-eye view of parent methamphetamine abuse: Implications for helping foster families to succeed. *Children and Youth Services Review, 29*(1), 1-15.
- Hanson, R. F., & Spratt, E. G. (2009). Reactive attachment disorder: What we know about the disorder and implications for treatment. *Child Maltreatment: Journal of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, 5*, 137-145.
- Heidegger, M. (1938). The age of the world picture. In M. Heidegger, *The question concerning technology and other essays*. William Lovitt (trans. & editor). New York: Harper and Row.
- Heidegger, M. (1990). Der Spiegel interview. In G. Neske & E. Kettering (Eds.), *Martin Heidegger and national socialism: Questions and answers*. New York: Paragon House.

- Hicks, S. (1975). Introduction. In M. Heidegger, *The basic problems of phenomenology (Studies in phenomenology and existential philosophy)*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Retrieved from <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/heidegge.htm>
- Hobbs, G. F., Hobbs, C. J., & Wynne, J. M. (1999). Abuse of children in foster and residential care. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 23*, 1239-1252.
- Hoffman, S. D., & Maynard, R. A. (2010). *Kids having kids: Economic costs and Social Consequences of Teen Pregnancy* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press.
- Hopkins, B. C. (2011). *The philosophy of Husserl*. Durham, UK: Acumen Publishing.
- Hughes, C. (2006). Finding your marbles: Does preschoolers' strategic behavior predict later understanding of mind? *Developmental Psychology, 34*, 1326-1339.
- Husserl, E. (1913). *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy*. Jean Bassendean (trans. & editor). Western Australia: The Hague Publisher.
- Husserl, E. (2010). "The idea of phenomenology, *Husserliana series vol. 8 of Husserliana: Edmund Husserl – Collected works*. New York: Springer.
- Jones, L. (2011). The first three years after foster care: A longitudinal look at the adaptation of 16 youth to emerging adulthood. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*, 1919-1929.
- Kaschak, E. (1992). *Engendered lives: A new psychology of women's experience*. New York: Basic Books.

- Kenny, G. (2012). An introduction to Moustakas's Heuristic method. *Nurse Researcher*, *19*, 6-11.
- Koenig, A. L., Cicchetti D., & Rogosch F. A. (2009). Child compliance/noncompliance and maternal contributors to internalization in maltreating and non-maltreating dyads. *Child Development*, *71*, 1018-1032.
- Kotz, D. (2014). Medical research still lags on women. *Globe*, *11*, 8-22.
- Landreth, G. L., & Bratton, S. C. (2006). *Child parent relationship therapy (CPRT): A 10-session filial therapy model*. New York: Routledge.
- Lau, A. S., Valeri, S. M., McCarty, C. A., & Weisz, J. R. (2006). Abusive parents' reports of child behavior problems: Relationship to observed parent-child interactions. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *30*, 639-655.
- Lee, A., & Hankin, B. L. (2009). Insecure attachment, dysfunctional attitudes, and low self-esteem predicting prospective symptoms of depression and anxiety during adolescence. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, *38*, 219-231.
- Lee, E. (2003). *Abortion, motherhood, and mental health: The medicalization of reproduction in the US and Britain*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Lewis, E., Dozier, M., Knights, M., & Maier, M. (2008). Intervening with foster infants' foster parents: Attachment and bio-behavioral catch-up. In R. E. Lee & J. Whiting (Eds.), *Handbook of relational therapy for foster children and their families* (pp. 269-292). Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America.



- Lincoln, Y. S. (2009). Ethical practices in qualitative research. In D. M. Mertens & P. E. Ginsberg (Eds.), *The handbook of social research ethics* (pp. 150-169). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. (1985), *Naturalistic inquiry*, Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Lindhiem, O., Bernard, K., & Dozier, M. (2011). Maternal sensitivity: Within-person variability and the utility of multiple assessments. *Child Maltreatment*, 16, 41-50.
- MacMillan, H. L., Fleming, J. E., Striener, D. L., Lin, E., Boyle, M. H., Jamieson, E., Duku, E. K., Beardslee, W. R. (2001). Childhood abuse and lifetime psychopathology in a community sample. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 158, 1878-1883.
- Main, M., & Goldwyn, R. (1994). *Adult attachment scoring and classification systems* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (Unpublished manuscript). Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2010). *Designing qualitative research* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Martin, E. (2005). *Intergenerational patterns of attachment: A prediction of attachment styles across three generations using the adult scale of parental attachment and the Marschak interaction method rating system* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Mississippi). Dissertation Abstracts International.
- Martin, E., Snow, M. S., & Sullivan, K. (2006). Patterns of relating between mothers and preschool-aged children using Marschak interaction method rating system. *Early Child Development and Care*, 178, 305-314.
- Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative researching* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

- Mauriac, F. (1952). *Desert of love*. London: Methuen publishing.
- Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2003). The attachment behavioral system in adulthood: Activation, psychodynamics, and interpersonal processes. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 35, pp. 53-152). New York: Academic Press.
- Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2007). *Attachment in adulthood: Structure, dynamics, and change*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Moustakas, C. (2000). Heuristic research revisited. In K. J. Schneider, J. F. T. Bugental, & J. F. Pierson (Eds.), *The handbook of humanistic psychology: Leading edges in theory, research, and practice* (pp. 263-274). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mumola, C. J. (2000). *Incarcerated parents and their children* (NCJ-182335). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Naumova, O. Y., Lee, M., Kuposov, R., Szyf, M., Dozier, M., & Grigorenko, E. (2011). Differential patterns of whole-genome DNA methylation in institutionalized children and children raised by their biological parents. *Development and Psychopathology*, 24(1), 143-155.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

- Pecora, P. J. (2010). Why current and former recipients of foster care need high quality mental health services. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 37(1-2, Special Issue), 185-190.
- Pecora, P. J., White, C. R., Jackson, L. J., & Wiggins, T. (2009). Mental health of current and former recipients of foster care: A review of recent studies in the USA. *Child & Family Social Work*, 14(2, Special Issue), 132-146.
- Pereira, H. (2012). Rigor in phenomenological research: Reflections of a novice nurse researcher. *Nurse Researcher*, 19, 16-19.
- Polit, D., & Hungler, B. (1991). *Nursing research: Principles and methods*. New York: JB Lippincott.
- Poorhussein, R. (2008). The effect of parenting styles on child's attachment style. *Journal of Daneshmand*, 455.
- Qin, P., Mortensen, B. P., & Pedersen, C. B. (2009). Frequent change of residence and risk of attempted and completed suicide among children and adolescents. *Article of General Psychiatry*, 66, 628-632.
- Rholes, S., & Simpson, J. (2004). Attachment theory: Basic concepts and contemporary questions. In S. Rholes & J. Simpson (Eds.), *Adult attachment: Theory, research and clinical implications* (pp. 3-14). New York: Guilford Press.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sable, P. (2000). *Attachment and adult psychotherapy*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.

- Santrock, J. W. (2007). *A topical approach to life-span development* (3<sup>rd</sup>ed.) New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Schofield, G., & Beek, M. (2005). Providing a secure base: Parenting children in long-term foster family care. *Attachment & Human Development*, 7(1), 3-25.
- Schuhmann, K., Leijenhorst, C., & Steenbakkers, P. (Eds.). (2004). *Selected papers on phenomenology*. New York: Springer.
- Seidman, I. (1998). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (2<sup>nd</sup>ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Shi, L. (2003). The association between adult attachment styles and conflict resolution in romantic relationships. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 31(3), 143-157.
- Smyke, A. T., Dumitrescu, A., & Zeanah, C. H. (2002). Attachment disturbances in young children. I: The continuum of caretaking casualty. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 41, 972-982.
- Snow, M., Sullivan, K., Martin, E., & Helm, H. (2009). The adult scale of attachment: Psychometric properties, factor analysis and multidimensional scaling. *Journal of Attachment & Human Development*.
- Sroufe, L. A., Egeland, B., Carlson, E. A., & Collins, W. A. (2005). *The development of the person: The Minnesota study of risk and adaptation from birth to adulthood*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Steinberg, L., Lamborn, S., Darling, N., Mounts, N., & Dornbusch, S. (2009). Over-time changes in adjustment and competence among adolescents from authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and neglectful families. *Child Development*, 65, 754-770.

- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Streubert-Speziale, H., Streubert, H. J., & Carpenter, R. D. (2011). *Qualitative: Research in nursing advancing the humanistic imperative*. Fort Lee, NJ: Williams & Williams Publication.
- Takeuchi, T., Hiroe, T., Kanai, T., Morinobu, S., Kitamura, T., Takahashi, K., & Furukawa, T. A. (2003). Childhood parental separation experiences and depressive symptomatology in acute major depression. *Psychiatry and Clinical Neurological sciences, 57*, 215-219.
- Tesch, R. (2007). *Qualitative research: Analysis types and software tools*. Basingstoke, England: The Falmer Press.
- Tyler, K. A., & Melander, L. A. (2010). Foster care placement, poor parenting, and negative outcomes among homeless young adults. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 19*, 787-794.
- Van Kaam, A. L. (1959). Phenomenal analysis: Exemplified by a study of the experience of "really feeling understood." *Journal of Individual Psychology, 15*, 66-72.
- Wearden, A., Peters, I., Berry, K., Barrowclough, C., & Liversidge, T. (2008). Adult attachment, parenting experience, and core beliefs about self and others. *Personality and individual difference, 44*, 1246-1257.

- Wilson, K., Sinclair, I., & Gibbs, I. (2000). The trouble with foster care: The impact of stressful events on foster careers. *British Journal of Social Work, 30*, 193-209.
- Zeanah, C. H. (2000). Disturbances and disorders of attachment in early childhood. In C. H. Zeanah (Ed.), *Handbook of infant mental health* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 358-362). New York: Guilford Press.
- Zeanah, C. H., Dozier, M., & Shauffer, C. (2011). Foster care of young children: Why it must be developmentally informed. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 50*, 1199-1201.
- Zeanah, C. H., & O'Connor, T. G. (2003). Attachment disorders: assessment strategies and treatment approaches. *Attachment and Human Development, 5*, 223-244. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Zeanah, C. H., & Smyke A. T. (2009). Building attachment relationships following maltreatment and severe deprivation (Chapter 9). In J. Berlin, Y. Ziv, L. Amaya-Jackson, & M. T. Greenberg (Eds.), *Enhancing early attachments: Theory, research, intervention, and policy*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Zeanah, C. H., Smyke, A. T., & Dumitrescu, A. (2002). Attachment disturbances in young children. II: Indiscriminate behavior and institutional care. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 41*, 983-989.

## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Interviewer: Pauline Le Pierrot

Name of Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview Number:

1. 1. Thinking back to your foster care experiences; how many foster mothers do you remember and if you had to choose one; why is she the most important?

Probe

1. Tell me more about why she is the most important

2. When you met your foster mother for the first time what were some of the things she did to help you form a relationship with her?

Probe

1. Tell me more about the first time

2. Tell me more about the things you did together

Prompt

3. How did you feel about forming a relationship with her

3. For this question, I'd like you to think back to your experiences in foster care with your most important foster mother. How was your relationship with your foster mother affected by the other children in the home?

Prompt

1. How did you feel when you spent time alone with her

4. For this question, I'd like you to think back to experiences with your most important foster mother and how she comforted you as a child. What were some of the ways she comforted you?

Probe

1. Tell me more about how she comforted you

Prompt

2. How did you feel when she comforted you

5. This question relates to how your experiences with your most important foster mother affected your relationship with her. As you think back to your foster care experiences, describe your relationship with your most important foster mother after you left your foster home including the relationship you have with her now

Probe



1. Tell me more about your relationship with her

Prompt

2. How do you feel when you think of her

6. As a mother who was raised in the foster care system, how did your age affect your relationship with your firstborn child?

Probe

1. Tell me more about how your relationship was affected

Prompt

2. At what age did you have your first child

7. I would like to talk with you about what it has been like to parent your child or children. What was your experience in forming a relationship with your firstborn child?

Probe

1. Tell me more about forming the relationship

8. Thinking about your experiences with your firstborn child while he or she was in foster care, please describe in as much detail as possible what you remember about your relationship with your firstborn child?

Probe

1. Tell me more about the relationship

9. If your firstborn child was returned to your care, please describe in as much detail as possible what you remember about your relationship and how you felt when he or she was returned to your care.

Probe

1. Tell me more about how you felt
2. Tell me more about the relationship

10. If you could make any changes to improve your relationship with your firstborn child, what would they be?

Probe

1. Tell me more about the changes

Appendix B: Flyer for Participation

**Volunteers Needed for Research Study**

**You are invited to participate in a study about your experiences in foster care as a child and as a mother who had a child placed in foster care.**

**The study will take approximately 1 and 1/2 hours of your time.**

**Description of Project:** As a participant in this research, you would be asked to share some memories from your own life as a foster child and about being a mother of a child or children in foster care. The face to face interview will take place with me and your participation will take about 1 and ½ hours. Additionally, within two weeks there will be a follow up email to confirm your research answers and a follow-up phone call to address any questions you may have about the study.

**To participate:** You must be over 21, having entered foster care after age 5, exiting foster care between the ages of 15 and 18, lived in more than one foster home, having multiple foster mothers and being a mother of at least one child who has experienced foster care. Interested individuals will be screened to determine if they meet the criteria for participating in the study. The first 12 mothers who meet the criteria will be selected and

scheduled for an interview. The selected participants will have the opportunity to have their questions answered while being schedule for their interview.

**Risk:** There are no known risks associated with participation of this research study.

**BENEFITS:** There is no direct benefit to you from being in this study. This study may benefit children or adults who are in foster care in the future. The results of the study may be read by people who work in the foster care system.

**Compensation:** Participants will receive no compensation for participating in the study.

**Contact:** To learn more, please contact the researcher of the study, Pauline Le Pierrot, at [phenr002@waldenu.edu](mailto:phenr002@waldenu.edu).

This research is conducted under the direction of Dr. Yoly Zentella, Psychology Department at Walden University.

---

Signature of Researcher

---

Date

## Appendix C: NIH Training Certificate

**Certificate of Completion**

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Geneva Le Pierrot** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course “Protecting Human Research Participants”.

Date of completion: 07/14/2013

Certification Number: 11754

## Appendix D: Participant Criterion Interview Questions

Are you over 21 years of age?

Did you enter foster care after age 5?

Did you exit foster care between the ages of 15 and 18?

Did you live in more than one foster home?

Did you have more than one foster mother?

Did one or more of your children experience living in foster care?