

THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE  
DIRECTORS IN NORTH CAROLINA GOVERNMENT

by

Larrisha McGill

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Management in Organizational Leadership

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Committee:

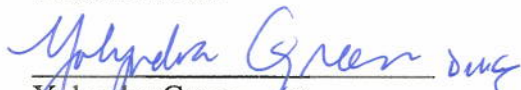
Kyatonia Reaves, PhD, Chair


Pamela Brown, PhD, Committee Member

Yolyntra Green, PhD, Committee Member

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Kyatonia Reaves

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Pamela Brown

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Yolyntra Green

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jeremy Moreland, PhD  
Dean, School of Advanced Studies  
University of Phoenix

Date Approved: July 28, 2014

## ABSTRACT

Limited research exists regarding the lived experiences of African American women in North Carolina government. This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of 10 African American Female Directors in North Carolina government. This research study revealed the challenges African American women face to break through barriers created by the glass ceiling and strategies the participants perceived necessary to obtain a leadership position. Participants were asked nine open-ended, semi-structured interview questions and their responses were audio recorded for data analysis. The analysis of data revealed eight themes among African American female directors as barriers and contributors in their ascension into a leadership position. (1) African American women need to think positively, (2) African American women lack confidence and the culture of North Carolina government organizations, (3) Female African American leaders are not recognized and respected as leaders, (5) Networking is important for African American women who want to obtain a leadership position in North Carolina government, (5) Extra preparation is needed for African American women, (7) African American women need to cultivate people skills, and (8) African American women must overcome stereotypes to obtain a leadership position. Findings from this study may be valuable to African American women who aspire to be in a leadership position in North Carolina government. Leaders may benefit from the study's findings to promote gender and race diversity within the organization.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my dissertation study to my family. A special feeling of gratitude to my supportive and loving parents, Larry and Cynthia McGill whose words of encouragement and continued prayers gave me the push I needed to complete this journey. A special thanks to my mom who always provided a listening ear so I could cry, cuss, fuss, yell, and scream without judgment. I would like to thank my father for his prayers and confessions of faith that encouraged my spirit so that I could continue to press forward.

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Lastly, I dedicate this work to my loving grandparents who have gone on to glory in the heavens above but I know are looking down with great joy and pride in their hearts. Grandfathers Richard McGill and Willie McKoy; Grandmothers LeeAnna McGill and Julia Mae McKoy, I love you!

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Women compose 47% percent of the U.S. workforce and projections show that women will occupy 51% percent of the workforce by 2018 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010). Women entering the workforce continue to increase as does the number of African Americans in the workforce, increasing the ethnic balance (Pitts & Jarry, 2009). Though these findings indicate that more female African Americans are in the workforce, research is lacking on female African Americans' attainment of leadership positions and their lived experiences in obtaining a position of leadership. McCall (2005) indicates that the focus of past studies has been on Black men and Caucasian women.

The current research study attempted to fill the gap in existing literature by exploring the lived experiences of African American female leaders in North Carolina government organizations. This research study used Moustakas' (1994) modified van Kaam method to understand the lived experiences and perspectives of 10 African American women in a directorial position in North Carolina government organizations. In addition to understanding the lived experiences of participants, this study also included the exploration of attitudes, beliefs, characteristics, and competencies that these women perceived are important to acquire a leadership position. Information gathered from participants and findings from the study uncovered information that is valuable for African American women to compete for and obtain leadership roles in North Carolina government organizations.

## **Background of the Problem**

Leadership is a term that is defined with distinctions that reflect the personal and professional position of the definers. Definitions of leadership have focused on describing the leader's use of authority and power to encourage individuals to take action and accomplish goals (Yukl, 2009). Men in leadership positions have been the focus of research in large detail, but women, particularly African American women, have received less attention, both in research on the topic and the development of theories (Chemers, 1997). Parker (2004) indicates that leadership models need to include the experiences of women, particularly black women, for the development of leadership theories. Textbooks about leadership cite research that examines women in leadership positions such as Yukl (2009), subsequently, the influence of ethnicity and race in relation to leadership roles has been ignored (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Practitioners and researchers continue to be interested in topics related to leadership and diversity, however the meaning of these topics has changed over time. One issue that has remained regarding leadership and diversity is the topic of the glass ceiling (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). The glass ceiling is a term developed in the 1980s that represents obstacles and barriers that confront women in their attempt to advance in their careers into leadership roles, such as president, chief executive officer, and CEO (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Henry-Brown & Campbell-Lewis, 2005). These barriers often result from gender bias (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Though women have had various leadership roles throughout history, tradition considers men to be ideal leaders because of their assertive traits; as a result, women are not perceived as appropriate leaders (Eagly &

Carli, 2007). Women, however, possess many leadership qualities related to mothering and nurturing skills (Kandalec & Robertson, 2010).

Despite evidence that females are effective leaders, the hurdles to obtain a leadership position are increased for women, especially women of color (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Holvino & Blake-Beard, 2004). Research describes the glass ceiling in terms of what prevents women from acquiring high-level positions in organizations (Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1992). Hillary Clinton referenced the glass ceiling while running for U.S. president in 2008, stating “the glass ceiling that had previously prevented women from running for president had been cracked” (Lockhead, 2008, p.1). Though Clinton did overcome the barrier to run for president and other women have acquired positions of management, the glass ceiling still exists (Joy, 2008). Women can obtain positions of leadership but only by carefully completing complex steps while facing issues associated with discrimination (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Kim (2004) indicates ethnic minorities and women have acquired blue-collar government jobs to include clerical, low-level or midlevel positions but few women and ethnic minorities have obtained administrative and professional positions due to the glass ceiling. Murrell and James (2001) argue that the workplace continues to display discrimination against women and minorities. The concept of the glass ceiling continues to prevent women from advancing into leadership positions. Consequently, African American women are faced with more barriers than Caucasian women are (Bell & Nkomo, 2001). The experiences for women of color are significantly different from the experiences of Asian and Latino women, perhaps partly because of African Americans’ unique history in the United States (Catalyst, 2004). Women in general often refer to the

glass ceiling as an obstacle and hindrance that keeps them from advancing within organizations; however, black women reference the glass ceiling as a dense concrete barrier that is hard to break (Catalyst, 2004).

Black women are more inclined to experience discrimination not openly acknowledged or displayed and subtle prejudices that relegate these women to out-group status that create occupational segregation (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). The representation of black women as leaders in organizations is lacking because of the limited availability that black women have to the information networks that are vital for career advancement (Catalyst, 2004; Mehra, Kilduff, & Bass, 1998).

A U.S. labor force report published in 2010 indicates that women make up 46.7% of the overall workforce and 51.5% of management, professional, and other related positions. However, African American women make up 5.3% of all individuals in management positions (Catalyst, 2011b). Similarly, of the 23% of chief executives in the United States who are female, only 4% are African American (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010). This trend is consistent in North Carolina with respect to black women in a leadership position. A similar disparity exists between black and white women in professional leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations.

There is a need for research to examine the lived experiences of African American women that have been successful in breaking barriers created by the glass ceiling to obtain a position of leadership. Given the current phenomenon of the low representation of black women in a leadership position, research necessitated a phenomenological method to explore the lived experiences, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and strategies of African American women in North Carolina government. This

research uncovered common themes among African American women regarding the challenges they faced and motivating factors that contributed to their success.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Diversity in the workforce continues to increase; however, that diversity does not proportionately reflect the diversity in leadership positions (Henry-Brown & Campell-Lewis, 2005). The specific problem for the current research study is the underrepresentation of African American women in leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations. North Carolina government has 59,726 professional leadership positions both black and white women fill 38,207 of these positions. However, black women only account for 9451 of these positions compared to 26,782 professional leadership positions filled by white women (EEOC, 2011).

Research is lacking on the experiences of African American women in leadership positions in North Carolina's government organizations. In particular, limited research exists on the lived experiences of African American women and understanding the barriers, competencies, and strategies as contributors to the success of these women to advance and progress through the ranks of North Carolina government to obtain a position of leadership. This research study used a phenomenological method to understand the lived experiences of women, specifically, African American women in North Carolina government that have been successful in acquiring a leadership position as a director in North Carolina government organizations.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American women in director positions in North Carolina government organizations. This

research study uncovered the challenges faced by African American women to break through barriers created by the glass ceiling. This qualitative, phenomenological study revealed common themes among African American women they perceived to be barriers and contributors to their success to obtain a leadership role. Participants of the research study identified their shared experiences about progressing through the ranks of North Carolina government through their lived experiences. The study also revealed strategies that African American women deemed successful in their ascension into a leadership position.

Data collection occurred by conducting interviews with participants asking open-ended questions. A semi-structured interview method allowed flexibility in the interview process and created an environment for individuals to speak openly about their experiences. Using this interview method provided the opportunity to ask follow-up questions during the interview process. Participants shared their experiences that led to a better understanding of the phenomenon (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010) of the underrepresentation of African American women in North Carolina government organizations. Triangulation of data for this research study was achieved by using open-ended questions, review of existing literature, and member checking of transcripts. Triangulation in qualitative research is the ability to use three ways to corroborate and confirm a specific description, event, or facts reported in a study. Triangulation strengthens the validity of the research study (Yin, 2010).

The qualitative method was the proper method to use for this study to understand the meanings that individuals attributed to a social problem (Creswell, 2005). Using the modified van Kaam method by Moustakas (1994) to analyze the data gave an



understanding of perceptions from the lived experiences of African American women serving in a leadership position in North Carolina government organizations and facilitated the exploration and identification of themes that contributed to the promotion of participants.

### **Significance of the Study**

The results from this research may provide information for program directors to guide African American women in obtaining leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations. Bringing awareness to the experiences of African American women's attainment of leadership roles could result in the development of training programs for women to develop skills needed to mitigate barriers created by the glass ceiling. Results from the study may also lead to the development mentoring programs for women to equip them with strategies needed to obtain a leadership role.

### **Nature of the Study**

The present study applied a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of African American women to understand the "how" and "what" views African American women have regarding their lived experiences in obtaining a leadership position in a North Carolina government organization (Williams, 2008). This design allowed each person to express themselves from their perspective based on their own personal experiences. Phenomenology focuses on the experiences of individuals from their perspective and this research study attempted to gain insight into the barriers, motivating factors, and actions of African American women in obtaining a leadership position in a North Carolina government organization (Yin, 2010).

There are four attributes to a phenomenological design. First, the design focuses on the lived experiences of individuals, second, phenomenological attitude or how a situation or event is perceived, third, the ability to obtain rich textural descriptions of the experience, and fourth, a transformative relational process that can uncover unexpected findings and outcomes (Finlay, 2009). Participants of the research study were able to translate their experiences from their perspective with no boundaries as to what was discovered (Moran, 2000).

Implementing a qualitative phenomenological design also allowed the researcher to gather information from individuals that described their lived experiences of how they obtained a position of leadership in North Carolina government given the present phenomenon of the underrepresentation of African American women in a leadership role. Data analysis consisted of transcribing the responses from participants using seven steps of van Kaam's modified method to analyze the qualitative data (Moustakas, 1994):

- List and group statements that have meaning as it relates to the research topic being explored;
- Eliminating and reducing textural data that does not give meaning to the lived experiences of participants;
- Grouping data into themes by clustering;
- Confirming the themes by validating and review of transcripts;
- Using relevant data to describe the experiences of participants;
- Constructing each participants experience individually;
- Grouping the textural-structural data together and combining each experience as a whole (Moustakas, 1994).

Gathering data from participants about their lived experiences relevant to the existing phenomenon allowed for the analysis of each individual experience without putting into question the participants' objective reality, appearances, and their causes (Wilkerson, 2008). Participants articulated and told their stories from their perspective in their words on their terms.

**Overview of the research method and appropriateness.** Collecting qualitative phenomenological data for the current study was an appropriate method to implement to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of the participants. Cooper and Schindler (2006) indicate that qualitative research involves using techniques designed to discover, explain, and interpret the meanings of a persons' experience in the social world. A qualitative method allowed for exploration of the experiences of female African Americans obtaining leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations. The small sample size was used and textual data were collected to understand the participants' individual experiences.

Using a qualitative phenomenological method uncovered common themes among African American women that have attributed to the success and promotion of these women into a leadership position. Participants described their experiences by telling stories in their words as they lived them. German philosopher Edmund Husserl is one of the thought leaders of phenomenology who emphasized that individuals structure their lives by describing their experiences as they lived them (Moustakas, 1994). The descriptive nature of phenomenology is to understand an individual's experience as they lived them and give meaning to the accounts described by participants in relationship to the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of black women in leadership.

In qualitative studies, data is typically gathered through observation and conducting interviews (Creswell, 2008). For this study, data were gathered by asking open-ended interview questions that pertained to the experiences of participants' in obtaining their leadership positions. Implementing a semi-structured interview format also allowed participants to talk about their experiences in an unrestricted manner (Creswell, 2008). Rich, textural data were collected by conducting the interviews which led to understanding the attributes about the participants' experiences and provided answers to the research questions (Hein & Austin, 2006). Data collected from participants helped answer the central research question and sub-questions for the present study. Data saturation was achieved when the same information was expressed from participants about the specific topic and phenomenon being explored (Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011).

The quantitative method was not an appropriate method for this study since quantitative research involves the collection of numerical data that is statistically analyzed to test hypotheses and establish a relationship between variables (Creswell, 2008). The quantitative method also involves obtaining a large number of participants, often through random selection (Creswell, 2008).

**Overview of the design and appropriateness.** Phenomenological research is intended to gain an understanding of experiences that surrounds individuals in their world and extract what the experiences of individuals' means to them as they have lived them (Cervone & Pervin, 2010). Implementing a phenomenological design for this study assisted in understanding the different experiences and perceptions of each participant as they lived them to obtain a position of leadership given the phenomena of the

underrepresentation of African American females in a leadership position. Moustakas (1994) identified four steps of the phenomenology process used for the current research study: epoche involves setting aside and bracketing preconceived biases, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesizing the data into meanings.

Collins (2004) notes that African American women are faced with common challenges. For example, African American women encounter circumstances that confine them to neighborhoods, schools, jobs, and housing that is mediocre. However, the challenges are not the same, African American women's experiences regarding these challenges, vary based on the individual woman and are hidden by general beliefs about African American women's sexuality, work habits, and intelligence (Collins, 2004). For the current qualitative study, 10 participants had the opportunity to articulate their unique lived experiences on how they overcame challenges to obtain a leadership position in North Carolina government organizations.

There are different qualitative designs to choose from to conduct qualitative research to include a case study, heuristic, holistic, Delphi, and ethnographic qualitative designs. Of the various qualitative designs, a phenomenological design was best suited for this study to understand the lived experiences of participants. A case study was not an appropriate design for this study since the findings from a case study are linked to a specific case that has been identified (Simon & Francis, 2004). A heuristic qualitative design seeks to conduct research based in the future that explores a problem to make a change for the future (Simon & Francis, 2004).

Holistic research designs are a non-traditional approach that attempts to analyze data using relationships, people, and social views (Simon & Francis, 2004). Delphi research designs are used when experts are identified in a specific field and resolution to a problem from subjective conclusions is developed. This design requires the collection of data from experts by asking open-ended questions; Based on the agreement of responses, interviews are conducted with the same experts to collect more opinions (Simon & Francis, 2004). An ethnographic design is implemented to examine a culture from the view of a problem at the time it is being studied. A grounded theory design is implemented when the researcher wants to create a theory of process found in the data (Creswell, 2008).

### **Research Questions**

Creswell (2008) asserts that research questions define and outline a research study and guide how data is collected and analyzed. For a qualitative phenomenological study, research questions do not give reference to information that already exists (Creswell, 2008). Moustakas (1994) posits that human research questions should include the following features:

- To discover the meanings of an individual's experience;
- To uncover the qualitative factors of the experience and behavior of humans;
- The requirement of participants to fully be engaged in the research study;
- Avoid generalizing relationships that are underlying;
- Clarify findings through detailed, insightful, and accurate translation of an individual's experience (p. 105).

This study explored the lived experiences of 10 African American women serving in a directorial leadership position in North Carolina government organizations. Individuals were familiar with working in a North Carolina government organization and were able to give insight on the existing phenomenon of the underrepresentation of African American women in a leadership position.

There are two types of research questions for qualitative studies. A central question explores the concept of a central phenomenon in a research study followed by related sub-questions (Creswell, 2008). Research questions should be general and not place limits on the inquiry. Developing research questions for qualitative research is important for a qualitative research design. Asking the right research questions assists in guiding the research study. For qualitative research with a phenomenological design, the research question should ask “what” (Patton, Cochran, 2002, p. 7). For this research study, one central question guided the study followed by three related sub-questions. The sub-questions assisted in narrowing the focus of the study and allowed questioning to be open (Creswell, 2008). The central research question for the current study was to discover:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of African American women who have obtained a leadership position as a director in a North Carolina government organization?

The sub-questions for the study are as follows:

- What obstacles, if any, do African American women perceive they overcame to obtain a position of leadership?

- What are the factors that African American women perceive contributed to their advancement to a leadership position in a North Carolina government organization?
- What changes, if any, do African American women perceive are necessary for the advancement of more African American women into leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations?

Appendix C includes the interview questions asked of participants during the interview process.

### **Theoretical Framework**

There are theories that critically address the social constructs of the phenomenon addressed in this study that give meaning to the participants experiencing the phenomena. The theory that established the framework for this qualitative, phenomenological study is Critical Race Theory (CRT). This theory established a foundation to assist in understanding the experiences of black women's ascension into leadership (Stanley, 2009).

Social science has researched the glass ceiling and its results in the past two decades. Additionally, research has noted the hindrances that African American women encounter in pursuit of senior-level leadership (Jackson & O'Kallaghan, 2009). To understand the experiences of black women in leadership, understanding the framework of leadership on how women operate is necessary. Leadership connects a person in authority to a measurement of influence and power in organizations. Consequently, social class, race, and gender in the leadership process (Byrd, 2009b) limit African American women in predominantly white organizations. Theories provide understanding



and answers to difficult problems. Lynham (2002) indicates that applying a theory to the issue, problem, or phenomenon connects theory to practice.

**Critical race theory.** Leaders in organizations apply different views and frameworks to assist with understanding problems, situations, and the day-to-day activities in the work environment. Unfortunately, the ability to solve problems when they arise using established frameworks are not universal and generalized to situations, people, or circumstances (Byrd, 2009a).

Historically, Caucasian men are the ideal representation of leadership, demonstrating the behaviors and values expected in corporate America (Gathers, 2003). The relative absence of black females in a leadership position is not an indicator that they are ineffective as leaders, as individuals who are in leadership positions may not be effective (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). Early theories of leadership placed emphasis on being an effective leader versus how to lead effectively (Armandi, Oppedisano, & Sherman, 2003). Historically, males who demonstrated leadership styles that were action oriented, hierarchical, and quasi-militaristic dominated the business management structure. The prevailing belief was that ideal leaders are tough, independent, and individualistic. John Wayne's various characters and Lee Iacocca are examples of what was considered the ideal leader (Nelton, 1991).

Traditional theories of leadership created by Raven's and French (1959) known as legitimate power theory and leader-member relationship theory developed by Graen's (1976) were recognized in an era where the image of a person that leads within the organization was that of a white male, creating the idea that leadership is race neutral (Parker, 2005). Histories image of African American women is submissive and in

positions of service. Accepting black women as leaders in organizations is skewed because of this constructed social image.

When black women come into an organization as a leader or manager, they are challenged with breaking down the typical image of a leader and reinventing themselves to reflect the image of a person that leads an organization, which is a white man or white women (Parker, 2005). The significance of theories is necessary to explain and understand the experiences of African American women as leaders and provide opportunities for the leadership development of black women as rising leaders in organizations. CRT creates a framework to bring social issues to the forefront that counteracts traditional theories of leadership (Byrd, 2009a).

CRT is a framework for this research study for the exploration of factors that surround the experiences of black women in leadership roles (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). CRT emerged resulting from the civil rights movement in the 1960s when attention was on equal rights and the relationships of black and white people. Most of what is known about Critical Race Theory is founded on the experiences of African Americans (Closson, 2010).

Critical Race Theory provided a theoretical framework to reveal the inequalities that exist in organizations and promote social change. This theory established a foundation for the researcher to embrace the narrative stories of individuals and uncover the lived experiences of African American women in leadership positions (Bernal, 2002). Narratives from participants challenged existing dominate ideologies and re-interpreted traditional knowledge. Using the Critical Race Theory created an opportunity for black women to talk about their experiences through storytelling and examine critical racial

issues that exist in the workplace (Stanley, 2009). CRT also acknowledges the struggles that confront minorities and black women as leaders in society (Bernier & Rocco, 2003). CRT examines the assumptions, perceptions, and biases that advocate the inequalities of black women in organizations (Stanley, 2009).

Theoretical constructs about women in leadership and the generalizations related to gender is missing the voices of African American women. According to Collins (2000), history has excluded the experiences of Black people in America. Collins (2000) asserts the behaviors of males and females are described from an Anglo-centric point of view as the truth. There is an assumption that this information includes the behaviors of African American women. Since the topic of black women as leaders is not included in the foundation of leadership theories, the current research study challenged the assumptions of traditional models of leadership that do not include the experiences of black women in leadership roles (Williams, 2008).

Most of what is understood about leadership is founded on research from the 20<sup>th</sup> century and does not include African American women. Thoughts of leadership have opened the acknowledgement of women as leaders, although theories on leadership still connect to male roots (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Nahavandi, 2003; Parker, 2005; Rosener, 2000; Wren, 1995). It is evident that the existing literature is founded on models and leadership theories traditionally based on the stereotypical behaviors of males.

Critical Race Theory gives insight on the social class, gender, and race that prevent the influence and power of black women as leaders in organizations. CRT brings attention to the discourse and social issues prevalent in organizations today and counteracted traditional leadership theories (Byrd, 2009a). More qualitative research on

leadership is necessary to expand current theories and understand the experiences of minority women (Byrd, 2009a). By conducting qualitative research, researchers can gather descriptive, rich data from women in the organizations that will assist to build upon existing theories.

### **Definitions of Terms**

A word can have more than one meaning, based on the context in which the word is used. The following words are defined to understand the use of meanings in the current study:

*African American.* This term refers to a large racial minority group in the United States (Shaw-Taylor, 2007). African American is defined as Black Americans from African ancestry (African American, 2005).

*Black.* This term refers to a large and diverse population in the United States. Blacks are also referred to as African Americans (Pierce, Singleton, & Hudson, 2011). The United States Census Bureau (2010) defines this term as an individual that has origins from racial black groups in Africa. This includes individuals who denote their race to be African American, Black, or Negro or individuals who note their race to be Kenyan, Haitian, or Nigerian (“United States”, 2010).

*Glass ceiling.* This term refers to the symbolic invisible barrier that has limited the advancement opportunities that women and ethnic minorities have in organizations (Hester, 2011).

*Leadership.* This term has several definitions that include different personal and professional characteristics of leaders. The majority definitions indicate that leadership

involves interpersonal influence and the use of authority and power to encourage others to act in certain ways and achieve goals (Yukl, 2009).

*North Carolina government organizations.* The dominant forms of government in North Carolina are county and city governments. These county and city governments are general-purpose governments in that governing boards consist of board members elected by registered voters. County and city jurisdictions overlap in North Carolina, with 100 counties in the state (Bell, 2007).

*Stereotypes.* This term refers to strong barriers to women advancing to leadership positions (Koeing, Mitchell, Eagly, & Ristikari, 2011). Wellington, Kropf, and Gerkovich (2003) noted that significant stereotypes contributing to the glass ceiling regard beliefs about women's abilities and roles.

*Phenomenology.* Examines the experiential meaning, embodiment, and discover clear descriptions of human experience or phenomenon as the experience is lived (Finlay, 2009).

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions associated with this research study is that women who hold the position as director in a North Carolina government organization will want to participate in the study and be available to conduct an interview. Another assumption is that individuals will provide honest answers to interview questions, sharing their experiences as leaders in North Carolina government organizations and providing insight regarding their perceptions and experiences as they lived them. Additionally, the third assumption is that analyzing the participants' experiences and perspectives will result in the identification of themes that relate to the meanings and experiences of participants about

the phenomenon. Lastly, as the researcher, I did not have control of the trustworthiness and credibility of responses given by participants. I assumed that each participant would know that responses to interview questions would be kept confidential, in turn, making them comfortable enough to respond to each question openly and freely.

### **Scope, Delimitations, and Limitations**

The scope for this study was limited to using a qualitative phenomenological design to obtain rich, textual data. The study sample consisted of 10 women and involved researching the lived experiences and perspectives of black women in a position as a director in North Carolina government organizations.

### **Delimitations**

A delimitation for the study is that participants must meet the study sample criteria. The sample criteria establishes the ability to obtain individuals that have experience regarding the phenomenon under study, which will provide insight on the experiences and perceptions of African American women that have obtained a leadership role in North Carolina government organizations. Additionally, a delimitation was study participants will hold leadership roles, they will likely be busy; thus, to ensure that enough participants are recruited, it was important to schedule a time to interview participants that were convenient for them (Creswell, 2005). Another delimitation is that due to the nature of the study, and the corresponding small sample size, the findings will have limited generalizability (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). In qualitative studies, the goal is not to generalize the study's findings but to gather data that is thick and rich in description to understand the phenomenon under investigation.

## **Limitations**

Neuman (2006) indicates that the limitations of a study can threaten the internal validity of a study that in turn reflects the weaknesses of a study. A limitation for the study is the accuracy and openness of the participants' responses (Creswell, 2008). Research bias is another limitation for the present study since the researcher is a black female employed in a North Carolina governmental agency. Additionally, limitations for this research study are that the different experiences of each participant will not represent other methods that are available to women in leadership roles to break through the barriers posed by the glass ceiling. In addition, the geographic location for this study is limited to the State of North Carolina government agencies.

## **Summary**

Though the relationship of leadership and men has been researched extensively, research and theory is lacking on the development of leadership in relation to women, especially African American women (Chemers, 1997). Yukl (2009) conducted research on women but did not explore the factors of ethnicity and race. There is a need for research to look at the experiences of all women in leadership positions. This study examined the lived experiences and perceptions of African American female leaders in North Carolina government organizations who have obtained a position of leadership. By gaining an understanding on the perspectives and experiences of women, particularly African American women, women may be able to increase their success in advancing in their careers (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Chapter 1 provided an introduction for the current research study, to include the background of the problem, purpose and problem statements. Additionally, chapter 1

discussed the significance, nature, and the theoretical framework for the research study. Chapter 1 also included definitions of key terms, scope, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations for the present study. Chapter 2 contains a literature review relevant to the study under investigation.



## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature

This qualitative, phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of 10 African American women that have progressed into a leadership position in North Carolina government. This study will give insight and understanding about the current phenomenon that exists in North Carolina government organizations, which is the low representation of black women in a leadership position.

Chapter 2 includes a review of literature related to the subject under investigation, including but not limited to the historical perspectives of women as leaders, the evolution of women in the workplace, experiences for women of color, and the stereotypes of African American women. Other topics discussed in the chapter include the history of the glass ceiling, perspectives and theories regarding the glass ceiling, and organizations established to address issues on the glass ceiling. Chapter 2 also includes gaps in the literature, justifying the need for this study.

#### **Title Searches and Research Documents**

Literature for the review was obtained through various sources, including the EBSCOhost and ProQuest search databases, as well as professional and government sources, such as Catalyst, the North Carolina Employment Security Commission, and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Keywords that were used to locate material include *women, women in leadership, women in government, women in management, African American women in leadership, African American women, glass ceiling, gender and leadership, diversity, North Carolina government, qualitative, and qualitative phenomenological.*

Through these searches, the researcher obtained a significant number of documents related to the subject under investigation. These documents include peer-reviewed articles, government reports, books, and dissertations. The documents contain various aspects and perspectives of the debate on the glass ceiling. The synthesis of the documents presents a comprehensive view of the topic, both historically and currently.

### **Historical Perspectives of Women as Leaders**

A report developed by Catalyst in 1977 was the first organization to note the lack of women in leadership roles. Catalyst is a nonprofit organization that works to increase opportunities for women in the workplace. The report indicated that only 147 women were on the boards of directors at 1,300 U.S. companies (Schwartz, 1980; Wolman, 2007). Prior to this report, there was limited data available regarding the role of women in the workplace. Following publication of the report, interest on the topic increased that led to additional research (Kochanowski, 2010).

Women have had leadership roles for a number of years. Examples of women in leadership positions go back as far back as the 11th century. In the 1800s, Elizabeth Stanton was a leader of women's rights in the United States. Emmeline Pankhurst was another leader, advocating for the promotion and rights of women in the early 1900s in Manchester, England. Pankhurst, who had a charismatic style of leadership, directed the National Women's Political Union. In an era in which women gave up their property and identities when they married, Pankhurst argued that women should keep their property and identities (Kandalec & Robertson, 2010). Another female leader is Eleanor Roosevelt, a native of the United States. She stated the following:

Women should not shy away from using mothering as a metaphor of leadership, that what you learn as a mother is transferable to the workplace and will serve you well as a leader, and mothering is an opportunity to teach and refine leadership values. (Gerber, 2002, p. 64)

Unfortunately, women have only moved halfway in organizations and in corporations since the beginning of the women's movement. In Western industrialized societies, the majority of women are still in middle management with no chance of moving upward (Cheung & Halpern, 2010). Women from different areas of the world are even further away from the halfway mark than women who are located in the Western part of the world. For example, women in China only account for 16.8% as heads of Communist Party's and government departments (Cheung & Halpern, 2010).

The 1990s showed some improvement for women to advance to management and leadership positions, however, these advancements were deemed as "token gestures" in response to the blatant behavior of men in organizations during this time. The majority of men have not accepted or understands the communication and leadership styles of women. Women who have the chance to be empowered in a leadership position create negative challenges and pose a threat to male executives (Berry & Franks, 2010, p. 3).

### **Evolution of Women in the Workplace**

During the 1940s in the United States, women began working in secretarial jobs in factories, replacing the men drafted to fight in World War II. When the war ended, many men returned to their jobs, displacing the women, with the exception of some women who were educated (Kandalec & Robertson, 2010). In the following decades, the trend of male dominance continued in the workplace. Women made up less than a

quarter of the workforce by the early twentieth century. Traditional roles of women as nurturers, homemakers, and primary caregivers were prevalent for decades. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, two-thirds of women age sixteen and older had already entered the workforce (Lanier, N.D.). According to Parker (2009), women account for fifty percent of the workforce and produce a large portion of revenue in American society.

The term glass ceiling became widely used in the 1990s to denote the barrier preventing women and ethnic minorities from moving to high-level positions within an organization (Kandalec & Robertson, 2010). *Labyrinth* is another term that describes the challenges that women face when seeking to advance in their careers (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Though women can obtain positions of leadership, women must often travel complex paths and deal with issues concerning sexism and racism (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Women are working in occupations and industries that once dominated by men. Over the past one hundred years, women have gained access to educational, professional, executive, and managerial jobs that men once occupied (Eisenberg, 2010). For instance, fifty percent of individuals enrolled in medical school in 2007-2008 were women. Women earned sixty-three percent of college degrees in 2006 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Women earned fifty percent of doctorate degrees and sixty-one percent of masters' degrees in 2006 and 2007. For all degree levels within the different ethnic/racial groups, women earned the majority of degrees for years 2008 and 2009 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Black females earned sixty-two percent of professional degrees; seventy-two percent of master's degrees; sixty-six

percent of bachelor's degrees; and sixty-eight percent of associate's degrees respectively (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

The presence of women has increased in the workplace; however, there is still a low representation of women in the top organizational tiers. Men continue to be considered the dominant leaders in American society (Eagly & Chin, 2010). Whereas women compose almost 47% of the United States workforce, they hold 40% of all management positions (Catalyst, 2011b).

An even greater difference exists for women that serve in executive positions and serve on the board of directors in corporate America (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Wolman, 2007). In United States, only 23% of women in both public and private organizations are chief executives. Of these women, only 5% are Latino and 4% are African American (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010). Though women, particularly minorities are not represented in leadership positions, women are obtaining more leadership roles than in previous decades (Zweigenhaft & Domhoff, 2006). The perception of women who have moved up the corporate ladder are viewed as gaining their success by performing sexual favors or meeting the quota of an organization rather than having the knowledge and abilities needed to make effective contributions in leadership positions (Carnes & Radojevich-Kelley, 2011).

Research needs to use a qualitative method to investigate the lived experiences of black women in leadership. The focus on black women is important because barriers to the advancement of careers affect African American women more often and more severely than Caucasian women; thicker barriers exist for black women because of race and gender (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Better-Reed & Moore, 1995; Hoyt, 2007).

## **Experiences for Women of Color**

Black women are treated unfairly with regard to advancement and training, discrimination, disconnection, lack of instrumental and psychosocial support, and prejudice (Bova, 2000). These types of experiences for black women limit their access to professional networks (Sanchez-Hucles & Hucles, 2010). The implications, importance, and consequences of African American women in organizations was first reflected in Kanter's theory of proportions. This theory describes the effects of social interactions, marginality, and mobility for women in organizations (Turner, Wong, & Gonzalez, 2011).

Turner, Wong, and Gonzalez (2011) explain the numerical distributions in Kanter's theory of proportions, specifically, in regards to men and women in high-level positions within an organization. They assert that individuals in the majority experience different interactions than individuals in the minority. For example, women of color experience circumstances that are characterized by feeling extra pressure to perform, being on display and more visible, pressure to make fewer mistakes, isolation, gaining credibility, stereotypes, coping with misperceptions about their roles and identity in organizations, and experiencing more stress (Turner, Wong, & Gonzalez, 2011). These experiences suggest that individuals in the minority face a cycle of disadvantages while individuals who "fit the norm" experience advantages. Kanter's theory states that women of color do not "fit the norm" (p. 200).

Turner, Wong, and Gonzalez (2011) conducted a qualitative research study that examined the experiences of African American women in faculty positions at universities where the student population was predominantly white. A theme that became apparent is that black women attributed their experiences and frustrations to racial assumptions

regarding their competence and intelligence as a professional (Turner, Wong, & Gonzalez, 2011). They also suggested that superiority is automatically given to White women and men. The data also revealed that there was an apparent awareness that women of color have to live with the circumstances of promoting the social phenomenon created by the organizations culture and the myths that exist for the superior White male (Turner, Wong, & Gonzalez, 2011).

Black women employed at these universities described their experiences as frustrating because of the “invisible” gendered and racial assumptions about their professional competence and intelligence and the advantages that are automatically given to White women and men (Turner, Wong, & Gonzalez, 2011, p. 203). The researchers of this study described the experiences of these women as subtle discrimination, marginalization, gender bias, and institutionalized sexism and racism. The researchers concluded that the culture of an organization can create road blocks to the professional development and growth for women of color (Turner, Wong, & Gonzalez, 2011).

In many organizations, African American women occupy positions within the lower ranks of an organization that segregates them and limits their ability to have access to individuals that have influence to advance their careers (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Both racism and sexism also limit opportunities for black female leaders. Two disadvantages for African American women is that they are different from White women to reap the same benefits from their gender status, and differentiate from black men from the same race (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

In an increased effort for organizations to become the employer of choice, organizations have begun to create core values that assist in creating a participative

culture for the organization (Steele, 2011). The intention for organizations is to create an environment that is inclusive of the shared norms and values and the “unwritten rules” that determine how the norms are enforced and practiced (Steele, 2011, p.1).

Many organizations place high importance on an employee’s ability to be assertive. This characteristic has become important for leaders who want employees to be more productive with fewer resources (Steele, 2011). An assertive employee for instance, has influence on how an individual handles workplace politics, responds to power, and their participation as a team player within the organization. This is a challenge for women of color to practice without it triggering biases that are hostile and reactions from others that are based on preconceptions and stereotypes (Steele, 2011). African American women may find it difficult to be assertive in organizations without being viewed as overly aggressive or arrogant. The disadvantage of not displaying assertiveness in the workplace leads to being labeled as passive and viewed as lacking the ability to provide significant contributions to the organization (Steele, 2011). This misconception can cause black women to be perceived as “unqualified” and lacking “potential” to become leaders who are effective (Steele, 2011).

In addition to everyday interactions in the workplace with managers and colleagues, outside socializing plays an important role in determining with whom the “unwritten rules” are shared. Participating in workgroup activities such as bowling, golf, softball, fishing, or “Happy Hour,” are important to an employee’s career advancement (Steele, 2011). These activities provide opportunities for employees to learn about the organization, network, build relationships, and improve personal visibility with co-workers. Unfortunately, women of color are not included in the “word of mouth”



invitation lists circulated around the organization. Even if they receive an invite to attend social gatherings, women of color choose not to participate because they feel uncomfortable with the activity and do not feel welcomed even if they decide to attend (Steele, 2011).

Steele (2011) further asserts that black women feel uncomfortable sharing times with co-workers in social settings for fear of becoming too intimate and familiar in ways that create discomfort in the organization. Steele (2011) notes that managers in an organization should play an active role in encouraging employees to participate in social functions sponsored by the organization. Managers also have the responsibility to create an environment that makes everyone feel comfortable and included in both social and work settings (Steele, 2011).

### **Stereotypes of African American Women**

Stereotypes have affected how people view female African Americans; which has tainted the self-perceptions that black women have of themselves. The media and pop culture often support stereotypes of black women that make it harder for black women to be perceived as effective leaders (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Another cause of stereotypes and biases is the lack of black women in senior management; people may assume that the small number indicates that members of this group do not have the skills needed for high-level positions (Catalyst, 1994).

African American women have a decreased chance of being promoted, and more likely to experience job segregation, and face negative career expectations because of sexism and racism (Combs, 2003). These women are also located at the bottom of many organizational structures, which limits access to the personnel in the organization who

can help African American women advance in their careers. These multiple barriers prevent access to informal and formal avenues to promotion (Cohen, 2002; Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzerk, & King, 2002).

The first lady of the United States, Michelle Obama, is not exempt to the stereotypes that have characterized Black women for so long. The “angry Black women” and inquisitiveness regarding different appearances of black women are stereotypes that still exist even at the White House. As women of color continue to achieve in education, accomplishments, contributions, and successes, these characteristics are overshadowed by incorrect perceptions and “stigmas” that taint their image (Hayes, 2012, p.18). “Sometimes, Black women can conquer negative myths, sometimes they are defeated and sometimes they choose not to fight” (Dodson, 2011, p.14). No matter what the outcome is, society can better understand African American women as citizens when they understand the jagged places that are a struggle for women of color to stand tall (Dodson, 2012).

The characteristics that individuals often attribute to men, women, and leaders adds to the challenges women are faced with in obtaining leadership positions and being effective (Koenig, Mitchell, Eagly, & Risitari, 2011). Stereotypes are strong barriers that prevent the ability for women to advance into leadership positions. This fact is agreed upon by organizational and social psychologists but by women who have considerable experience as leaders. Despite some improvements toward male and female beliefs regarding leadership, stereotypes continue to add to the challenges that women face in obtaining portions of authority and power (Koenig et al., 2012).

People usually associate the concept of leadership with an individual in authority that is able to use influence and power in an organization; black women are restricted from the role of leadership in organizations due to social class, gender, and race (Byrd, 2009a). Scholars and feminists have explored African American women from the perspective of sociology; however, more research needs to further explore African American women leaders in various organizations (Collins, 1990; Hooks, 1990; Sternweis & Wells, 1992). Byrd (2009a) suggests that additional research be conducted to understand the challenges that face female African American leaders.

### **Gender Differences**

The structure of American society has changed over the last 40 due to the advancements in education, technology, and science. These changes have created opportunities in the workforce for women and men, however, studies indicate that one gender has benefited over the other. It is evident that women have progressed in today's society but the struggle still exists for women to obtain equality in the workplace (Maniam, Russell, & Subramaniam, 2010).

Discriminatory actions and stereotypes create barriers for women to advance in the workforce. It is apparent that physical and biological differences exist between women and men and the differences are used to excuse the unequal manner of how women are treated in the workplace and in society. Women are perceived as the "weaker sex" throughout history, which has created the notion that women should only act as caretakers for their family and households. These perceptions continue to determine the difference in social roles for women and men today (Maniam, Russell, & Subramaniam, 2010, p.161).

There has been a large amount of research conducted regarding discrimination and the underrepresentation of women in the workplace. The vast majority gives attention to documenting gender bias and wage gaps that exist between men and women. Research has concluded that one explanation for this inequality is that many women work in occupations dominated by women (Maniam, Russell, & Subramaniam, 2010). Wright and Baxter (2000) indicated that the problem is created from bias due to the actions of male employers that continue to give credence to past stereotypes and the idea that women are incompetent. Keen and Quadagno (2004) asserted that because of existing prejudices, women have a decreased chance of obtaining upper-management positions even if they have the experience and education that is equal to their male counterparts.

This disregard has begun to receive more attention regarding racial differences in leadership and the influence of gender (Chin, Lott, Rice, & Sanchez-Hucles; Eagly, 2007; Rhode & Kellerman, 2007) in the workplace. Mueller, Mulinge, and Glass (2002) appealed for organizations to take action in the workplace to change conventions, practices, and workplace norms. They further assert that employers need to understand that differences in the physical appearance between men and women should not have any bearing on a woman's ability to perform in the workplace.

Existing gender bias associates men with being leaders since they commonly display masculine and assertive traits that signify leadership. In contrast, women are not perceived as leaders because they display qualities such as compassion. The leadership style of men is "command and control", and a women's leadership style is "facilitative and collaborative", whereas both leadership styles are important (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p.173).

A survey conducted amongst women identified four main complaints and challenges that women are faced with that indicate the difference in perceptions regarding the role of women is a “real phenomenon” (Maniam, Russell, & Subramaniam, 2010, p. 165). Women often expressed the fact that they feel dismissed and their opinions are ignored in the workplace. Women are interrupted in general discussions that include both men and women including board meetings (Maniam, Russell, & Subramaniam, 2010). Secondly, women have expressed that when they attend a meeting with a male employee, it is automatically assumed that the male is her boss and when it is made clear that the woman is the boss the woman is placed in a position to prove her knowledge and experience to do the job (Maniam, Russell, & Subramaniam, 2010).

Thirdly, the efforts for equity in employment is a sound concept, however, this creates a larger gap between genders than ever before. Women have reported hearing statements like “she got the job because she’s a woman” and “we men are losing opportunities” (Manianan, Russell, & Subramaniam, 2010, p. 165). Lastly, in corporate America, the meetings that occur after the scheduled meetings are most significant. These meetings build relationships and often take place during social events. Women are excluded from these types of events that decrease their ability to network and be introduced to different opportunities (Manianan et al., 2010).

The exploration of women in the workplace should be examined to understand how women have been successful to advanced in the workplace and the obstacles that still exist (Manianan et al., 2010).

## **Glass Ceiling**

Glass ceiling is a Western term first used by Schellhardt and Hymowitz. The term has gained widespread attention in various organizational environments, such as in corporate America, government, education, and nonprofit organizations (Lockwood, 2004). The term refers to unofficial barriers that prevent a protected class of individuals, such as women, from obtaining promotion opportunities in an organization (Mathur & Chadha, 2010). Bendl and Schmidt (2010) refer to the glass ceiling as a barrier that prevents ethnic minorities from obtaining executive and senior management positions in an organization.

For over a century, stereotypes of females have affected women's desires to apply for leadership positions and their success in obtaining such positions when they do apply. Wellington, Kropf, and Gerkovich (2003) surveyed women in the role vice president and higher at Fortune 1000 companies and found that 72% of the women agreed or strongly agreed that stereotypes regarding women's abilities and roles are barriers to advancing in an organization. Stereotypes that are barriers to career advancement include the beliefs that women are not aggressive enough and that they are emotional and fragile (Taylor, Morin, Cohn, Clark, & Wang, 2008). Even though women have progressed in achieving educational accomplishments, increasingly entering the workforce, and are progressively obtaining management positions, few women have obtained political and corporate leadership positions (Carnes & Radojevich-Kelley, 2011) within organizations. Research conducted by the Pew Research Center indicates that women do not progress to the highest leadership positions because of widespread resistance to change and gender

discrimination, as well as females' family obligations and inadequate experience (Taylor et al., 2008).

Eagly and Chin (2010) noted that many members of society believe discrimination is a factor that explains why women are not in leadership roles. Eagly and Chin (2010) note that women experience discrimination even when applying for positions that are gender neutral. "Psychology prejudice" has been the factor identified as causing this occurrence. Cultural stereotypes also work against women as leaders. Despite these prejudices and stereotypes, research shows that women have the skills needed to be executive-level leaders (Eagly & Chin, 2010).

Another possible factor perpetuating the glass ceiling is highlighted in the expectation-states theory. According to this theory, gender stereotypes exist in society and these stereotypes are related to beliefs about status (Ridgeway, 2001). Such beliefs can cause perceptions of inequality between individuals with different levels of status (Bolat et al., 2011). Inaccurate perceptions of inequality have led to the belief that women, particularly ethnic minority women, are not appropriate for leadership positions (Eagly & Chin, 2010).

Carnes and Radojevich-Kelley (2011) suggested that women believe the glass ceiling will stop them from accomplishing their goals, so they stop trying. This type of attitude is referred to as the Pygmalion effect and relates to the concept of self-efficacy. Beliefs that women are unable to obtain leadership positions are formed during childhood and result from what girls are taught—ideas such as that women are unable to obtain top organizational positions because of the glass ceiling and because men prevent women from being successful (Carnes & Radojevich-Kelley, 2011). When women believe they

cannot break the glass ceiling, they are unlikely to do so (Bola et al., 2011). Carnes and Radojevich-Kelley (2011) asserted that if women would change their attitudes about their abilities to advance in their careers, women would recognize their potential and strive to obtain top positions.

The glass ceiling affects the advancement of careers for women and minorities to obtain executive level and middle management positions (Henry-Brown & Campbell-Lewis, 2004). Qualitative research was conducted on the glass ceiling phenomenon and black women in the banking industry in 2009. Findings from the study concluded that black women are stereotyped as being aggressive and confrontational if they raised their voice to describe a situation (Simmons, 2009). These negative stereotypes and perceptions create challenges for a woman of color that cause their professionalism and leadership skills to be doubted by others and puts into question their ability to be successful leaders (Simmons, 2009).

A similar qualitative study was conducted in 2010 that explored the glass ceiling and the experiences of women in management in the banking industry of Kenya. This study revealed that the glass ceiling creates barriers that prevent women from being promoted in the Kenya banking industry to CEO positions (Mangatu, 2010). The researcher conducted interviews with participants and identified themes that confirm the phenomenon of the glass ceiling still exists (Mangatu, 2010). Participants of the study described the advancement of their male colleagues was “smooth and fast” (Mangatu, 2010, p. 110). The glass ceiling is an international phenomenon that affects women in various industries. It is a concept that needs to be examined across every industry to help



leaders understand the affects it has on women and create organizations that are diverse and equitable for men and women to obtain positions of leadership.

Many benefits result from diversity in leadership positions. Organizations can obtain competitive advantage through maintaining diversity in the workplace (Salomon & Schork, 2003). The findings from a 1998 study by the American Management Association indicate that organizations with diversity in senior management have favorable financial performance. Organizations with women in senior-level positions outperformed organizations with all male managers (Salomon & Schork, 2003). Coleman (2010) noted that as a method of strengthening the economy, government leaders may need to implement measures to encourage the appointment of women to leadership positions. Dawley, Hoffman, and Smith (2004) found that promoting African Americans in an organization results in organizational growth and the implementation of policies that promote a diverse and qualified workforce. Eagly (2007) suggested that diversity increases problem solving and creativity. Studies also indicate that when women are in positions of authority in an organization, the number of women in other positions in the organization increases (Eagly, 2007).

### **Perspectives and Theories on the Glass Ceiling**

Organizations and business recognize that it is a struggle for them to retain their brightest and best women, however, the presence of the glass ceiling makes this notion irrelevant to women “who walk the halls of power” (Berry & Franks, 2010, p.1). In looking at the statistics and the lives of women who have attempted to obtain leadership positions, breaking the glass ceiling requires women to understand the subtle and apparent obstacles they may face in attempting to move forward in their careers. It is

also important for women to learn the strategies needed to break through these barriers (Berry & Franks, 2010).

Researchers have linked gender, race, and ethnicity to the glass ceiling (Bartol, Martin, & Kromkowski, 2003; Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990; Powell & Butterfield, 1994). Theories have been developed to explain the glass ceiling in an organizational context (Jackson & O'Kallaghan, 2009). The first theory is the institutional theory, which has an emphasis on rules that allow organizations to become stable over time (Di'Maggio & Powell, 1991; Frankforter, 1996). Organizational stability affects management hierarchies and policies, which can keep members of the cultural majority in positions of dominance and power, thereby creating a barrier to upward mobility for women and racial minorities (Jackson & O'Kallaghan, 2009). The second theory is social theory, which indicates that women and minorities who do not imitate the traditional leadership behaviors of Caucasian men are not effective in the workplace and will not be recognized or successful (Frankforter, 1996).

The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission identified three categories that prevent minorities and women from obtaining top-level management positions: social barriers, internal-structural barriers, and government barriers. Social barriers regard the number of individuals who are educated and prepared for specific positions, as well as differences associated with different groups of people and their relationships to leadership characteristics (Jackson & O'Kallaghan, 2009). Internal structural barriers are barriers that prevent outreach activities for individuals with low representation in the organization. Such barriers may include corporate climates in which diversity is viewed

negatively, there is a lack of mentoring opportunities, and training is resisted (Jackson & O'Kallaghan, 2009).

Government barriers include the failure to enforce laws, inattention to data collection or the prohibition of descriptive analysis, and inadequate reporting and discussion on the glass ceiling and its existence (Jackson & O'Kallaghan, 2009). Additional barriers contributing to the glass ceiling include inadequate career development opportunities, inexperience in line management experience, gender differences in linguistic and socialization styles, the “old boys” networks that are persistent at the top of many organizations, and tokenism (Oakley, 2000). Despite reports on successful efforts to remove the glass ceiling in some organizations (Maume, 2004; Ohlott, Ruderman, & McCauley, 1994) the glass ceiling is still a reality in many organizations, thereby preventing women and ethnic minorities from obtaining senior management positions (Jackson & O'Kallaghan, 2009). Dawley et al. (2004) reported that when women are given assignments with high visibility, have mentoring opportunities, and receive cross-functional training, women have more opportunities to advance in their careers.

The apparent barriers created because of the glass ceiling are prevalent and limit opportunities for women to enter and progress in the workforce. “Feminine socialization shapes women in ways that make them dependent, not in control of significant parts of their lives” (Isaacs, 2002, p.134) which creates reluctance among women to pursue higher-level positions that are dominated by men (Carnes & Radojevich-Kelley, 2011).

## **Organizations Developed to Address the Glass Ceiling**

**Glass Ceiling Commission.** It is widely recognized that ethnic minorities and women have opportunities to climb the corporate ladder to a certain point; after they reach that point, they are faced with an invisible barrier that prevents them from obtaining management positions. U.S. government officials have been sensitive to the barriers that have contributed to the phenomenon of the glass ceiling and have raised awareness of this phenomenon in America. President Bush approved the Civil Rights Act of 1991 to create the Glass Ceiling Commission (Hester, 2011).

The Glass Ceiling Commission consists of 21 people appointed by congressional leaders and the president and chaired by the secretary of labor (Glass Ceiling Commission, 2003; Russell, 1995). The commission was formed to review the procedures and policies that result in barriers to career advancement (Kalish, 1992). The members of the Glass Ceiling Commission have verified and defined the presence of the glass ceiling that hinders minorities and women from obtaining leadership positions. The commission members have reported that the glass ceiling results from organizational and individual attitudes that are biased against marginalized groups (Wooten, 2008).

**EEOC.** The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was established under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 under Title VII (EEOC, 2009b). The EEOC's mission includes enforcing Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, sections of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Age and Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, sections of the Civil Rights Act of 1991, and the Equal Pay Act of 1963 (EEOC, 2009b). The EEOC is responsible for enforcing regulatory, statutory, program responsibilities,

and policy through the Office of Field Programs and the Office of General Counsel (EEOC, 2009b).

Members of the EEOC also create procedures for job applicants and federal employees to file complaints regarding employment discrimination and retaliation. The commission members also conduct in-depth training for employees at the state, local, and federal government levels. Another function of the EEOC is to educate managers on the laws that are enforced by the EEOC to stop discrimination in organizations. The commission also provides information on the employment status of minorities and women, including local and state governments. Data from the commission is available to the public for review (EEOC, 2009b).

**Catalyst.** Catalyst was founded in 1962 to raise awareness regarding the equality of women in the workplace. In the early 1990s, Shelia Wellington, Catalysts' president at the time, brought awareness to the fact that while all women faced various barriers to career advancement; African American women experienced two layers of discrimination: being female and being African American. Awareness of these issues led to increased organizational efforts to promote women to executive-level positions (Catalyst, 2011a).

In 1994, Catalyst published a report titled *Cracking the Glass Ceiling: Strategies for Success* (Catalyst, 2011a). The report contained an in-depth overview of the barriers faced by women regarding career advancement and best practices that should be implemented by companies to assist in breaking down the barriers to advancement. In 1999, Catalyst published another report, titled *Women of Color in Corporate Management: Opportunities and Barriers* (Catalyst, 2011a). The report indicated that

one-half of the respondents surveyed had witnessed pervasive stereotypes regarding women and their racial and ethnic backgrounds (Catalyst, 2011a).

By 2000, improvements on the promotion of women to executive positions slowly progressed, and Catalyst continued its efforts to address the issue, both in the United States and globally. In 2002, Catalyst published a report titled *Women of Color in Corporate Management: Three Years Later* that indicated African American women believed they were in a worse position than they were in 1998 (Catalyst, 2011b).

**U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau.** The U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau was established in 1920 through Public Law No. 259. Under the law, the bureau was assigned the duty to “formulate standards and policies which shall promote the welfare of wage-earning women, improve their working conditions, increase their efficiency, and advance their opportunities for profitable employment” (U.S. Department of Labor, 2011, p. 1). The bureau was also given the right to investigate and report concerns that pertained to women's welfare.

Early investigations conducted by the Women's Bureau focused on the work conditions of the “Negro” women. Members of the Women's Bureau responded to the needs of women and changing demands by leading efforts to assess existing laws regarding female workers and to promote more training opportunities for women so that women have opportunities to pursue their interests and meet their needs. Members of the bureau also assess new legislation protecting women, helping to ensure women have access to the same range of occupations and jobs as men (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010).

## **Cultural Effects on Leadership**

Examining leadership without considering cultural factors limits understanding of the topic and related issues. Connerley and Pedersen (2005) provided an inclusive, multidimensional definition of *culture*, explaining that culture consists of invisible and visible attributes that influence leadership. These attributes include characteristics such as education, social group, place of residence, gender, ethnicity, language, nationality, and affiliations (Connerley & Pedersen, 2005).

Chemer (1997) created a leadership model that includes the roles of gender and culture. The model indicates that culture influences leadership in several ways, regarding social norms and leaders' and subordinates' interpretations of situations. Chemer (1997) asserted that culture and gender are contingencies of leadership that are present in a society that is diverse and should be addressed when leadership is examined. Schein (2004) asserted that leadership and culture are "two sides of the same coin" (p.1). Chin and Sanchez-Hucles (2007) posited that examining leadership without considering culture decreases the amount that can be learned about leadership. Ignoring cultural factors and dynamics can create problems in developing leaders for the future (Chin & Sanchez-Hucles, 2007). The reshaping of culture and management are the essence of leadership (Schein, 2004).

A diverse workgroup consists of people from various social and cultural backgrounds who must interact with one another. In the workplace, an individual's self-assumptions and cultural identity, along with perceptions and assumptions about other individuals of various ethnicities, can affect the leadership experience. Leadership experiences, in turn, can have an effect on a leader's chances of being successful (Ayman

& Korabik, 2010). Ayman (1993) claimed that leaders' and subordinates' cultures affect how leaders' are evaluated and behave. If women want to be effective in a society that is diverse and in their careers, women must understand their cultural influences and their preferred behaviors. If women in leadership roles do not understand these factors, they may not achieve effective interactions with subordinates, which may cause misunderstandings and incorrect assumptions (Ayman & Korabik, 2010).

In society, gender norms impose the behaviors and roles that create different experiences for men and women. Restrictions exist regarding the roles of women that create challenges for them to obtain higher-level positions in careers that are demanding (Cheung & Halpern, 2010).

### **Leadership Styles of Women**

As more women have obtained leadership positions in society, more attention focused on the leadership styles of women. The behavior of women in leadership positions has been examined closely since few women occupy leadership positions (Miller, Taylor, & Buck, 1991). Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and van Eagen (2003) reported that it is imperative to examine the leadership behaviors of women to obtain a better understanding of women's effectiveness as leaders and how women's leadership skills affect their chances of advancement.

Eagly and Carli (2007) noted that the roles of leadership are similar in different organizations, even if the leader in that organization is a man or woman. However, women display leadership styles that are participative, democratic, and collaborative rather than autocratic. Women who use a democratic approach to leadership include subordinates in the decision-making process. Leaders who use an autocratic approach



discourage subordinates from their involvement in the process of making decisions in an organization (Eagly et al., 2003).

Studies show women in high-level leadership positions often apply a relationship style of leadership by empowering others and creating a consensus among subordinates. These qualities may have been learned through women's roles as mothers and nurturers (Kandalec & Robertson, 2010). Women in leadership positions also have high levels of conviction and self-worth (Stern, 2008). Studies also indicate that women do not acknowledge their power when discussing their leadership styles; rather, women emphasize their abilities to create consensus within the organization and empower individuals (Cheung & Halpern, 2010).

Other researchers have found that women often display two types of leadership styles: task-oriented leadership and interpersonal leadership. In the task-oriented style, the leader prioritizes the completion of assigned tasks by organizing activities according to relevance. Leaders who use the interpersonal style focus on developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships by giving attention to individuals' welfare and morale (Cheung & Halpern, 2010).

Researchers have also discovered that women in leadership roles display reward-contingency behaviors more than do men in leadership roles (Eagly et al., 2003). Women often connect employee rewards to employee behaviors, which helps employees understand how different levels of effort and performance result in different rewards (Cheung & Halpern, 2010). Women are also more likely to emphasize team building and communication (Cheung & Halpern, 2010). Salomon and Schork (2003) noted that

women are strong integrators and are experts in the areas of multitasking and parallel processing.

Chin (2007) explained that women apply a collaborative process in leadership roles and that many women describe how they created organizations in which information is shared throughout the organization. This type of leadership style is called transformational leadership. Burns (1978) defined *transformational leadership* as a leadership style that engages individuals in a way that creates an environment in which followers and leaders inspire each other to create high levels of morale and motivation.

Researchers who have investigated the leadership styles of women have emphasized that a transformational leadership style allows women to inspire and nurture their subordinates, helping the followers to make important contributions to the organization (Bass, 1985, 1998). Transformational leaders are individuals that can gain the confidence and trust of the individuals they lead. Transformational leaders also set goals for their followers and the organization and create plans to accomplish the goals. Through modeling expected behaviors and nurturing and mentoring followers, transformational leaders empower and encourage their followers to achieve their full potential and make significant contributions to the organization (Eagly et al., 2003). The idea of transformational leadership has changed to include individuals who are optimistic, inspirational, equitable, and ethical.

The argument that women use transformational leadership more often than men was validated in a meta-analysis of 45 studies. Women in leadership tend to demonstrate the interpersonal characteristics associated with transformational leadership, whereas men tended to demonstrate aggressive and hierarchical characteristics (Cheung &

Halpern, 2010). Lowe, Kroebk, and Sivasubramaniam (1996) discovered that transformational leader' greatly influence followers in an organization than leaders who have a transactional leadership style. Because women implement a transformational style of leadership more often than men, who are more likely than women to use transactional leadership, women may be especially beneficial as leaders (Lowe et al., 1996). Eagly and Carli (2007) concluded that the women who do obtain leadership positions are effective.

Grant (1988) referred to women as a force that can effect change in an organization. Women possess talents that contribute to effective leadership, and these talents should not be ignored (Salomon & Schork, 2003). Women's leadership qualities, which may have been acquired through experiences with family and the community, include cooperation, communication, interest in developing relationships, and attitudes regarding power. These qualities are liberating and transforming forces that can be used to empower all individuals rather than to gain power over individuals.

### **Phenomenology**

Phenomenology was introduced by Edmund Husserl in 1900-1901 as a new, bold, and radical way to philosophy in order to take philosophy from an intellectual theoretical speculation embodied with would-be problems in an effort to make contact with matters as they are through lived experience. Husserl continued to push his thoughts of phenomenology in different directions and with each new development, a different generation of students worked with Husserl over the years (Moran, 2000). Since the central idea of phenomenology is to describe things as they are and how they appear it allows for phenomenologists to freely engage in every aspect of an experience as long as the individual faithfully translates the experience of events themselves, there are no

boundaries as to what can be explored (Moran, 2000). Phenomenology never blossomed into a movement as Husserl intended, nevertheless, it is still a clear alternative to philosophy in the process of accepting consciousness (Moran, 2000).

Phenomenology is qualitative research that examines the experiential meaning, embodiment, and discovers clear descriptions of a human experience or phenomenon as the experience is actually lived (Finlay, 2009). The objective of phenomenological research is to identify “subjective insider meanings” as to what a lived experience is like for an individual (Finlay, 2009, p. 475). Authors such as Moran (2005), Psathas (1989), and Schutz (1967, 1971) give credit to Husserl as the creator of phenomenology. Husserl was concerned with understanding the meaning of an individual’s life through “real-world conditions” (Yin, 2010, p.8).

Yin (2010) describes five characteristics of qualitative, phenomenological research with the first being able to understand the meaning of a person’s life. Secondly, a representation regarding the views and perspectives of individuals with the ability to gather information from individuals can be the major objective of qualitative research. As a result, the ideas and events that emerge from qualitative, phenomenological studies represent the individuals who lived them, not the preconceptions, meanings, or values of the researcher (Yin, 2010). Thirdly, qualitative, phenomenological research investigates the conditions of the institutional, social, and environmental conditions in which a person’s life takes place and these conditions strongly influence “human events” (p. 8). Fourth, qualitative research seeks to provide an explanation to events through existing or concepts that emerge. Additionally, qualitative research is used to create new concepts

and ideas. Fifth, qualitative studies seek to gather, present, and integrate current data from different sources that provide evidence for a study (Yin, 2010).

Phenomenology is understanding the lived experiences that are contingent on historical, social, and cultural views (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). Husserl as the founder of phenomenology exclaimed that researchers of phenomenology have to have a special and different type of attitude.

Phenomenologically reducing or epoche forms the attitude of the researcher by suspending interpretations of the natural world for the purpose of recognizing the true meaning of a phenomenon (Finlay, 2009). Husserl indicated that researchers of phenomenology should set aside or bracket preconceived assumptions and theories so that is led by participants in an exploratory manner (Cassidy, Reynolds, Naylor, and De Souza, 2011).

Phenomenological research is a rigorous, systematic research design that allows researchers to describe and dig deep into the phenomenon being explored. The main concern of phenomenological research is to embody the experimental meanings of an experience through detailed descriptions (Cassidy, et., al., 2011).

### **Gaps in the Literature**

Despite the national attention given to the glass ceiling, research on the topic is limited and not concentrated in one field. Research has focused on women in corporate America (Castilla, 2008; Jordan, Clark, & Waldron, 2007) and the discoveries made are not comprehensive or consistent enough to understand how to break the barriers created by the glass ceiling (Jackson & O'Kallaghan, 2009). Women who believe the glass ceiling exists are likely to quickly give up their efforts to achieve high-level positions

(Carnes & Radojevich-Kelley, 2011). It is therefore imperative for research to explore the lived experiences of women and the barriers that prevent career advancement, and strategies to overcome these barriers. Brown (2007) suggests that more research needs to explore why certain barriers persist. According to Jackson and O’Kallghan (2009), there is small amount empirical research that exists on the lived experiences of female African American leaders, the challenges they faced because of the glass ceiling, and how they overcame challenges to obtain leadership positions.

There is limited research available that explores the experiences of African American women within the context of government in leadership roles, more specifically in North Carolina government. Exploring the lived experiences and views of female African American leaders in government organizations will result in a more comprehensive understanding of the glass ceiling and barriers that may be contributing to the present phenomenon of the low representation of black women in leadership positions (Jackson & O’Kallaghan, 2009) filling the gap in the research.

## **Conclusions**

Women are a representation of the changing global economy. Women represent a large portion of consumers (Wolfman, 2007) and the amount of women in the workforce continues to increase, but the number of women in executive-level positions has not increased proportionally (Catalyst, 2006). Men continue to hold more top leadership positions (Kochanowski, 2010). African American women experience even more challenges and less represented in leadership positions than Caucasian women (Catalyst, 1994).

In the early 1990s, attention was given to the glass ceiling and individuals became more aware of the phenomenon. Federal funds were allocated to examine the glass ceiling in U.S. organizations (Martin, 1991, 1992). The initial focus was on examining the inequities in positions of management in the corporate sector (Jackson & O'Kallaghan, 2009). Many employers made an effort to make their organizations preferred places to work. The employers were proud of establishing core values to help define the organizational culture. The intent was to create an environment fostering inclusive norms and shared values regarding the unwritten rules in the organization. These rules regard the desired level of assertiveness, dress, communication, socializing, professionalism, and teamwork. As explained in the literature review, black women find it hard to embrace these rules (Steele, 2011).

Despite efforts to address the glass ceiling, the problem has yet to be resolved (Elaqua et al., 2009). Recent studies show that women are not in top leadership positions (Catalyst, 2006; "Department of Labor Statistics", 2006). The glass ceiling may be a result of several factors, including interpersonal relationships, organizational beliefs, and the actions of organizational leaders (Elaqua et al., 2009). Women who experience the glass ceiling are likely to stop their efforts to climb the corporate scale and may also protest and file lawsuits against the organization (Stroh, Brett, & Reilly, 1996).

Research shows that women possess many important leadership skills (Kochanowski, 2010). Women who are able to obtain leadership positions are presented with an opportunity to tap into their inner strengths. The success of women in leadership role is partly dependent on the direct responses to their values and cultures (Kandalec & Robertson, 2010). Thus, examining culture in relation to leadership is important when

examining women's leadership styles and behaviors. Exploring leadership without considering culture decreases what can be learned about leadership.

### **Summary**

The number of leaders who are female and ethnic minorities has increased (Dreher, 2003; Ryan & Haslam, 2005; VanVianen & Fischer, 2002), but the progress has been slow and these groups are still underrepresented in leadership positions (Sanchez-Hucles & Sanchez, 2007). Black women experience more stereotyping than white women and must deal with misperceptions regarding their race and identity. Stereotypes affect the perceptions that individuals have regarding African American women in leadership roles; it also affects the self-perception that black women have of themselves, which also contributes to the glass ceiling.

African American leaders have noted that though they are more visible in leadership positions, they feel socially invisible. Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) also note that many female African American leaders believe a great amount of pressure is placed on them to make fewer mistakes than other leaders and to conform to the organization's culture. Haslam and Ryan (2008) support these findings, indicating that the performance of African American women leaders is scrutinized and that these leaders are blamed if the organization begins to decline. Whereas male leaders often have many sources of support during challenging situations, women—especially African American women—are isolated, lack mentors, and less likely to find the help they need when faced with challenges (Haslam & Ryan, 2008). Women are working in positions that are not secure or have the potential of advancing upward in the workforce. Women who



experience race discrimination refer to the glass ceiling as Plexiglas that is unbreakable (Berry & Franks, 2010).

Chapter 2 contained a literary discussion on the glass ceiling and women in leadership positions. The chapter included discussion of historical perspectives on women in the workplace and the glass ceiling. Discussion also focused on why women have been unable to advance to leadership positions. These reasons include structural, societal, internal structural barriers, and government barriers. Barriers also include various biases, organizational norms, and stereotypes. The chapter also contained an explanation of why African American women face even more barriers to advancing in their careers than Caucasian women. The literature review also contained discussion of organizations established to address the glass ceiling. Gaps in the literature highlighted the need for the current study, which may assist in understanding the views and experiences of black women in obtaining a leadership role.

Chapter 3 explains the methodology to conduct this research study. The chapter contains the rationale for choosing a qualitative method and phenomenological design. Chapter 3 also includes a discussion of the study population, sample, and sampling method, as well as informed consent and confidentiality. Also discussed are the data collection procedures, considerations regarding reliability and validity, and the data analysis procedures.

## Chapter 3

### Method

This qualitative, phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of 10 African American female leaders who hold the position as director in a North Carolina government organization. Data was collected through in-depth open ended interviews with participants. The study used the van Kaam modified method (Moustakas, 1994) to analyze the data. The results from the study provided insight regarding the phenomenon being explored (Neuman, 2006) of the lack of black women in a leadership role in North Carolina government organizations.

Chapter 3 explains the method used to conduct the research study and includes the rationale for selecting a qualitative, phenomenological research design. Chapter 3 also contains a discussion of the sample, population, and sampling method, as well as informed consent and confidentiality. Also discussed are the data collection method, concerns regarding validity and reliability, and the data analysis method.

#### **Research Method and Design Appropriateness**

This qualitative research study explored the lived experiences of 10 African American female leaders in North Carolina government organizations. The participants' experiences were captured through individually scheduled interviews and asking open-ended questions. Open-ended questions encouraged participants to give meaningful answers regarding their feelings and lived experiences. Implementing a qualitative phenomenological approach was appropriate for this study to understand the lived experiences of African American women that have advanced into a leadership role in North Carolina government organizations and uncover shared themes, beliefs, and

perceptions that they attribute to their success. Implementing a qualitative method assisted with understanding the participants' experiences and connecting their experiences to the conscious process of black women in obtaining a leadership role in North Carolina government.

**Research method.** The goal of phenomenology is to understand what appears or manifests to individuals who have experienced a specific phenomenon (Moran, 2000). Shank (2006) indicates that phenomenological research attempts to understand the meanings and worlds of individuals as they live them every day. Another goal of phenomenological research is to reestablish contact with a previous experience, which can lead to a deeper understanding about individuals' lived experiences (Neuman, 2003). This form of inquiry was developed by psychologists Edmund Husserl as a method of focusing on the process of experiencing, and what an experience is like (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Shank, 2006). Phenomenology is an anti-traditional, radical style of philosophizing in which the emphasis is on obtaining the truth about phenomena (Moran, 2000). Moran (2000) also noted that phenomenologists seek to energize philosophy by examining the lives of human subjects. This philosophical approach works together with an appeal to examine concrete, human experiences in all its richness (Moran, 2000).

The chosen research method aligned with the objective of the study to examine the lived experiences of 10 African American women in a leadership position as a director in North Carolina government organizations. By researching their lived experiences and connecting their experiences to the existing phenomena of the low representation of black females in leadership positions, participants had the opportunity

to provide narrative accounts regarding their shared lived experiences in obtaining a leadership role.

The increasing use of qualitative research resulted in part from increased concern regarding the needs of and inequities experienced by various groups, such as women, individuals in low social classes, and ethnic minorities. Using qualitative inquiry for this research study was a practical and valuable way to study human phenomena (Hein & Austin, 2006).

This qualitative, phenomenological method brought attention to the experiences of participants and characterized these experiences. Edmund Husserl indicated that a persons' experience gives meaning and combines the perceptions, ideas, thoughts, emotions, memories, and the need to act (Thevenaz, 1962) with the understanding that these characteristics give insight to the meaning that individuals attribute to life events. Husserl believed that phenomenology allows people to describe their experiences, while excluding the prejudices, ideas, and beliefs of the researcher that could hinder understanding a persons' experience (Thevenaz, 1962; van Manen, 1990).

Moustakas (1994) posits that a phenomenological method assists in the development of essences or the most important element of a phenomenon with structural and textural descriptors of how people understand their experiences in everyday life. The structural descriptors explain the "how" (*noesis*) of an experience and the textural descriptors explain the "what" (*noema*) about an experience. In phenomenology, the (*noesis*) and (*noema*) are combined to understand the meaning of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

**Research design.** Qualitative research designs with a phenomenological component provided an opportunity to examine the views and perspectives from the point of view of participants and assist in explaining the participants experiences (Willig, 2007). Ostergard, Dahlin, and Hugo (2008) note that phenomenology is a form of inquiry that involves approaching a phenomena as it presents itself to participants versus imposing preconceived ideas on participants. Researchers use qualitative research when a problem focuses on what was or is occurring, views, detailed information, and inquiry about a process (Yin, 2004). A phenomenological design provided access to the “collective memories and experience” of participants to provide direct insight about the phenomenon being explored (Cooper & Schindler, 2003, p.154) and allow individuals to describe what they experienced in their own words (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Qualitative phenomenological research designs focus on the perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of each individual experience, and textual descriptions are developed to reflect the meaning of each collective experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Data were gathered using open-ended interview questions regarding the participants lived experiences in obtaining a position of leadership (Salkind, 2003). This data collection method allowed the researcher to ask participants follow-up questions, if necessary, to get a better understanding of each individual experience (Salkind, 2003). Responses gathered from the interview questions provided answers to the research question and sub-questions developed for the study.

As previously stated in chapter one, Moustakas (1994) identified four steps of phenomenology that the researcher applied for the current study. *Epoche* was the first step in the process that allowed the researcher to put aside prejudgments, biases, and

preconceived thoughts. Epoche decreased influences and allowed the researcher to self-reflect and create dialogue guided by a frame of reference and attitude (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological reduction is the second step of the process where the researcher listened to participants and focused on the dominant and recurring central themes of each individual experience while suspending personal viewpoints (Moustakas, 1994). The third step in the process as described by Moustakas (1994) is imaginative variation. This step required the researcher to view the experiences from a different perspective. The final step of the phenomenological process integrated the structural and textural descriptions into statements that captured the important elements of the phenomenon experience (Moustakas, 1994).

A quantitative design was not selected for this research study since it requires the collection of quantifiable data from participants by asking specific and narrowed questions where the data is analyzed using statistics based on inquiry that is unbiased (Creswell, 2005). Quantitative designs require the measurement of variables, whereas, qualitative designs focus on meanings and processes not measured in frequency, amount, or quantity (Labuschagne, 2003). Data collection for quantitative research is reliant on mathematical information, which is different from collecting data in qualitative research. Qualitative research is dependent on collecting data to include sentences and phrases from the participants' verbatim responses to describe a lived experience (Ponterotto, 2005). A quantitative method is not appropriate when the researcher intends to explore a phenomenon (Blum & Muirhead, 2005).

There are various designs used to conduct qualitative research to include historical, case studies, heuristic, holistic, Delphi, ethnographic, and grounded theory,

however, none of these designs were appropriate to conduct this research study.

Historical qualitative designs are useful when the researcher intends to interpret archived facts or events. This design is appropriate when the researcher can solve the problem using historical data. This design does not require the researcher to observe or conduct interviews with participants (Simon & Francis, 2004).

Case studies are best suited when findings from the research validates a specific case being studied. The researcher has access to a case or sample in order to gain and acquire information about an individual's deepest and private feelings. A comparison of theories is necessary to understand the context and develop a theoretical foundation (Simon & Francis, 2004). Heuristic qualitative research is conducted when the researcher is interested in the future and studies a problem to make a change for the future. In this case, the research design is based in the future (Creswell, 2004). Personal communication and open-ended questions are asked that are relative to the universe to establish meaning in the participants personal experiences. Patterns are identified in participants' responses, which become the outcome of heuristic research (Simon & Francis, 2004).

A holistic qualitative design is a method that attempts to uncover data using relationships, people, and the social views of individuals. This is a non-traditional approach in qualitative research where the triangulation of data is critical to uncover patterns in the data and yield results. Delphi qualitative designs require the researcher to pinpoint experts in a specific field and solve a problem using biased conclusions. The researcher interviews selected experts by asking open-ended questions, collecting data, and depending on the agreement of responses, interviews the same experts to gather more

opinions. Theories and exploratory information are developed using this research design (Simon & Francis, 2004).

Ethnographic qualitative research is conducted when the researcher intends to analyze a culture from the view of a problem during the time it is studied (Creswell, 2004; Simon & Francis, 2004). Researchers who use this qualitative design can examine time periods that range between months or years to understand the development of samples viewed at the time of existence (Creswell, 2004; Simon & Francis, 2004). A grounded theory qualitative design allows the researcher to produce a broader theory regarding the qualitative central phenomenon found in the data. The theory is an educational process that explains activities, events, actions, and interactions that take place over time (Creswell, 2005).

### **Research Questions**

Research questions specify what the researcher is attempting to understand and align the focus of a research study (Maxwell, 2008). Research questions also guide the study and fully explore the selected topic. The central research question for the present study asks:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of African American women who have obtained a leadership position as a director in a North Carolina government organization?

The sub-questions for the study are as follows:

- What obstacles, if any, do African American women perceive they overcame to obtain a position of leadership?



- What are the factors that African American women perceive contributed to their advancement to a leadership position in a North Carolina government organization?
- What changes, if any, do African American women perceive are necessary for the advancement of more African American women into leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations?

### **Study Population, Sample, and Sampling Method**

**study population.** Salkind (2003) defines a *population* as individuals to whom the study results are generalized because these individuals have characteristics similar to the characteristics of the study population. When findings from a study are generalized to a population, the results have a deeper meaning (Burns & Grove, 2003). The population for this study consists of 9451 black females in leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations. This number is significantly lower compared to the 26,782 white women that fill leadership positions available in North Carolina government organizations (EEOC, 2011).

The study sample consisted of 10 members of the targeted population. In addition to being female, African American, and working in a North Carolina government organizations, additional criteria for participants required members of the study sample to be working as a director. Sample sizes for qualitative studies are smaller in comparison to the sample sizes used in quantitative studies (Mason, 2010). Though qualitative sample sizes are smaller, they must be large enough to discover emerging themes. Various factors affect the sample size needed in qualitative research (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam 2003). Accordingly, collecting more data in qualitative research will not reveal

additional information. One code or occurrence of data is enough to confirm and include as part of the framework analysis (Mason, 2010). Data frequency is not important in qualitative research since the occurrence of data collected can be important enough to understand the research topic. Qualitative research focuses on meaning and not creating generalized statements of hypotheses (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). Furthermore, conducting qualitative research takes more time to analyze and code data for emerging themes that can be time consuming with a large sample size (Mason, 2010).

**sample.** Sample sizes used in qualitative research have to be large enough to ensure that the perceptions of participants are revealed in the data. If sample sizes are too large it can produce repetitive data that is not needed to answer the research questions (Mason, 2010). The sample sizes for qualitative research should include 5 to 25 participants (Creswell, 1998). Schreiber and Asner-Self (2011) indicate that at least six participants are needed to conduct qualitative, phenomenological research. For this study, 10 individuals made up the sample size for this study or until data saturation occurred. Data saturation occurred when responses from participants were repetitive regarding the specific topic under investigation.

The main goal of sampling is to collect information regarding an action or event to deepen and clarify understanding of the topic being explored (Neuman, 2003). Purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research (Glendill, Abbey, & Schweitzer, 2008) and was used to obtain individuals for this study. A purposive sampling method was appropriate given the small sample size (Curtis, Gester, Smith, & Washburn, 2000).

**sampling method.** Purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to solicit the participation of 10 individuals from a population of 9,451 black women currently serving in a leadership position as a director in a North Carolina government organization. Purposeful sampling was chosen for this study based on the purpose of this research study, the researchers' knowledge of the targeted population, and the characteristics of potential participants.

As is typical in qualitative research, purposeful sampling identified individuals with significant knowledge about the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2008). Purposeful sampling also allowed the researcher to select participants that could give in-depth, rich information related to the topic under study, thereby contributing to the meaningfulness of the study findings (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Neuman, 2003). Purposeful sampling is the deliberate recruitment of individuals who meet specific criteria for a study (Whitley & Crawford, 2005). The criteria for individuals for the current study include African American women who hold a leadership position as a director in a North Carolina government organization.

Participants were contacted via e-mail using personal contacts, inviting the individuals to participate in the study. Appendix B includes the e-mail communication individuals received. Email addresses for participants were obtained using the North Carolina Government directory obtained at <http://www.NC.gov>. Permission to access the directory was granted by the Senior Public Information Officer and a signed Data Access Form is included in Appendix F. Individuals were instructed to respond by e-mail to notify the researcher of their participation in the study. The first 10 individuals who

indicated their willingness to participate were contacted via telephone to establish dates, times, and locations to conduct interviews.

### **Informed Consent**

Research that involves members of a marginalized group, specific attention must be given to the principles of ethics to include respect, integrity, justice, and freedom (Glendill et al., 2008). Researchers are obligated to put parameters in place to protect participants. The current phenomenological research study asked questions that solicited sensitive information to the interview questions to extract meaning from participant responses. As a method of ensuring compliance with these principles, participants received an informed consent form (see Appendix A), which the participants were required to sign before beginning the interview.

The consent form outlined the purpose of the study, potential benefits and risks associated with their involvement, and the voluntary nature of participants with the option for individuals to discontinue their participation in the study, without penalty, at any time. Once interviews were conducted with participants, the role of participants was complete. If participants decided to withdraw their participation from the study after data collection, their files would be removed and data collected would not be included or analyzed with the results. The informed consent form also described the methods used to protect participants' confidentiality.

### **Confidentiality**

Glendill et al. (2008) explained that confidentiality is important in research and participants are assured that their anonymity is maintained during and after the study. To ensure confidentiality, research results did not include personal identifiable information

about participants. Individuals were assigned an alphanumeric code unrelated to the participants' demographic information. Alphanumeric codes ranged from AAW1-AAW10, to mean *African American Woman participant 1*. Participants were assured that their names and personal information would be kept confidential. Reference to participant interviews used codes rather than their names. No information was accessed or shared with third parties. Outside of the dissertation chair and committee members the editor hired to edit the dissertation had access to findings from the study. A signed non-disclosure form is included in Appendix E. All study materials (e.g., informed consent forms, interview transcripts) were stored at the researchers' place of residence in a secure file cabinet accessible only by the researcher. Destruction of all study materials will occur 3 years upon completing the study.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection for a study depends upon the nature of the study, the community, and participant sensitivities (Gibbs, Kealy, Willis, Green, & Welch, 2007). In qualitative research, Moustakas (1994) notes that the researcher is an instrument used to collect data and interviews should be approached from the perspective that the participants are the experts since the goal is to learn everything the participants can share about the phenomenon being studied (Milena, Dainora, & Alin, 2008).

Collection of data for the present study occurred using an interview format that was semi-structured, asking questions that were open-ended to allow individuals to give a detailed explanation of responses. A semi-structured interview format provided flexibility in the interview process for the researcher to explore ideas that emerged (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). In-depth interviewing is a frequently used method of

collecting data in qualitative studies because talking is a natural way of communicating (Griffiee, 2005). Interviews create an informal atmosphere in which the researcher can engage the participants in casual conversation regarding their opinions and experiences. Other qualitative studies using a phenomenological research design were reviewed to create the interview protocol for this study. The list of questions asked during the interview process is included in Appendix C: Interview Questions.

Interviews took place at a neutral location that was comfortable and convenient for the participants. A signed Premises, Recruitment, and Name form is included in Appendix D. Creswell (2007) suggests that interviews with participants should take place in an environment that is comfortable for participants, in a location where they do not feel restricted to share information. Participants had the option to schedule the interviews in a setting comfortable for them. Participants were required to provide a signed consent form (Appendix B) before interviews were scheduled. Interviews took approximately 30-60 minutes. Responses gathered from participants to the interview questions yielded the necessary data to answer to the central research question and sub-questions for the study. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

### **Instrumentation**

The interview questions (see Appendix C) are open-ended with a semi-structured format to ask additional questions for clarity if necessary (Polkinghorne, 2005). This interview format is typically used in qualitative research (Leedy & Ormond, 2010). This method led to a clearer picture of the participants' lived experiences in becoming a leader in a North Carolina government organization. Using open-ended questions also

encouraged participants to provide unexpected information, leading to recommendations for future research.

The interview protocol allowed the researcher to gather information from a small purposive sample of the population. Interview questions were informed by the researcher and developed based on the literature review. Similar studies using the same research design were also reviewed to assist with the development of the interview protocol. Additionally, the researcher is an instrument collecting data from participants. The researcher took notes during the interview process and recorded observations about the participants' responses and nonverbal cues (Cobbs & Forbes, 2002) this also assisted in the triangulation of data.

### **Pilot Study**

A pilot study of at least one participant that met the specified criteria was conducted to validate the interview protocol. Few participants are needed for a qualitative research pilot study. Lee (2012) notes that it is possible to conduct a pilot study with one participant. A pilot study was needed to test the interview protocol and strengthen the validity of the research study. Responses gathered in the pilot study were not included or analyzed with the final research results. The individual that participated in the pilot study had similar characteristics as the target population.

Conducting a pilot study provided an opportunity to receive and improve the interview protocol and make necessary modifications to interview questions (Creswell, 2005). Conducting a pilot study also allowed for the triangulation of data to establish the truthfulness of each individual experience regarding the phenomenon being explored (Yin, 2010). Triangulation of data in qualitative studies occurs when the researcher can

support the data collected in the study (Berg, 2009). Data collected from the individual in the pilot study was collected after receiving approval from the University of Phoenix Institutional Review Board. The pilot study participant was required to sign an informed consent form before participating in the study (Appendix B).

### **Validity and Reliability**

The validity of a study validates the rigor of the research process and the integrity of the study's findings (Roberts & Traynor, 2006). Establishing validity is important to demonstrate the truthfulness of the research results (Neuman, 2003). Researchers of qualitative methods dismiss the validity of framework accepted in quantitative studies. Researchers of qualitative methods advocate for different avenues to assess the quality of qualitative research and assert that there are criteria that is better suited to reflect the assumptions in qualitative research studies (Trochim, 2012).

The comparable quantitative criteria indicate that the internal validity for quantitative studies is equal to the credibility in qualitative studies. The credibility in qualitative studies is established when the results of a study are credible from the perspective of participants (Trochim, 2012). The external validity in quantitative research is equal to the ability to transfer findings to different situations. Researchers of qualitative studies can increase transferability by describing the context of the study and assumptions associated with the study. Individuals who want to transfer findings from a study to a different environment are responsible for making the decision to transfer findings from a study (Trochim, 2012).

Whereas reliability is a consideration in quantitative research, reliability is not applicable in qualitative research. Rather, dependability is a consideration. The



dependability in qualitative studies is emphasized by the researchers' ability to describe the different environment where the research takes place. More importantly, the researcher is responsible for explaining what changes are different in the environment and how these differences affect the approach of the research study (Trochim, 2012).

Finally, the objectivity in quantitative research is comparable to the confirmability in qualitative studies. Confirmability refers to the confirmation of findings from the study validated by someone else (Trochim, 2012). Researchers of qualitative studies can record the steps for verifying the data collected during a study. The alternate criteria for describing the criteria for quantitative studies are acceptable amongst quantitative researchers and viewed as being successful alternatives to the legitimacy of qualitative studies (Trochim, 2012).

**Reliability.** Reliability regards “the extent to which findings can be replicated” (Ali & Yusot, 2011, p. 30). The reliability of qualitative research is based on the extent to which the results are reputable or measured in various situations (Bryman, 2001). Reliability for the current study was enhanced through manual coding and analyzing the data to identify themes about the phenomenon being investigated. Nvivo 10 software was used as an instrument to verify and analyze the manual coding of data.

**Validity.** Validity in qualitative research is dependent on the research tool and the ability for the research instrument to measure what it was designed to measure (Punch, 1998). In terms of qualitative research, the validity is determined by the ability to establish truthfulness of the results that are believable or credible from the views of participants. Validity for the present study occurred through member checking of transcripts to confirm findings and allow participants to review transcribed interviews for

accuracy. The validity of the present study was enhanced by outlining the study methodology in this chapter. The chapter outlines the steps to conduct the study, as well as the rationales for the decision (Roberts & Traynor, 2006).

Qualitative research describes and explains a phenomenon and its meanings from the participants' perspective (Trochim, 2012). The validity of qualitative research is compromised if the researcher is familiar with the participants, the setting, and the processes of the participants (Roberts & Traynor, 2006).

Yin (2010) notes when recruiting participants for a research study the researcher should deliberately select participants with whom they are not familiar with or with whom the researcher suspects has similar views related to the research study. Researcher bias was minimized by purposively selecting participants with no previous or present personal or professional interactions with the researcher. Bracketing preconceived assumptions minimized researcher bias. Husserl (1982) refers to the method of bracketing as "phenomenological epoche" as cited by Freistadt (2011, p.4). Phenomenological epoche allows the researcher to suspend their natural attitude in order to bring individual consciousness to a point of reflection. This process allowed all doubts and preconceptions about an experience to be brought to the forefront (Freistadt, 2011). Implementing this step prevented the researcher from making errors and remain neutral when collecting and analyzing responses from participants (Moustakas, 1994). Implementing this process was important for the present study since the researcher is a black female employed in a North Carolina government organization.

Creswell (2003) indicates that the internal validity of qualitative studies is established through review and the accurate responses from participants' to the interview

questions. Creswell (2003) also asserts that there is no specific way to confirm the validity in qualitative research. Internal validity was enhanced in the current study by ensuring participants that their confidentiality would be maintained, which encouraged participants to answer openly and accurately. Internal validity was also enhanced by using an analysis process to examine and discover the meanings of each individual's perceptions and experiences.

External validity is established if findings can be applied to different circumstances (Merriam, 2009). The external validity is established by the degree in which the findings from the study can be transferred to different settings or contexts (Trochim, 2012). Small sample sizes in qualitative research can be a factor that limits the transferability of findings to other settings (Flyvbjerg, 2004; Gobo, 2004; Sharp, 1998) as in the current study. Although, having a small sample size allowed the researcher to gain deeper insight about a social phenomenon that would not be accomplished using a different research design (Rhodes, 2000). The rigor of qualitative research can establish a strong foundation that will allow the transfer of findings to be applied to different settings (Mason, 2002).

### **Data Analysis**

Husserl, one of the founders of phenomenology suggests that phenomenology is the ability to make sense of personal experiences (Smith, 2004). The data analysis process was significant because it identified themes regarding the experiences of each individual and their perspectives resulting in a clearer understanding on their ability to obtain a leadership position. The data analysis process involved manually coding, reviewing, and evaluating the responses given by participants (Griffie, 2005) using the

van Kaam Moustakas modified method. The views of participants were interpreted into complete and clear analysis of the research study. Statements were separated into single thoughts and then grouped into categories (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The researcher reviewed statements in the interview transcripts to answer the research question and sub-questions for the present study. Using this process added structure analyzing the data for the study.

The process of analyzing the data was a systematic approach for collecting the data and developing the data into coherent meanings. The modified van Kaam method of analyzing and coding the data consisted of the following steps (Moustakas, 1994). The first step involved creating a list of phrases and expressions relevant to the research topic. The second step involved eliminating textual data that is irrelevant to the meaning of experiences or duplicated. Thirdly, data were grouped into themes or clusters followed by the fourth step involving the process of validating the themes by reviewing transcripts from the interviews. The fifth step involved developing textual descriptions of the participants' experiences, based on the relevant themes and quotes from the transcripts. The sixth step consisted of using the textual descriptions and imaginative variation to describe the participants' experiences. The last step involved gathering all of the meanings together into a combined experience as a whole (Moustakas, 1994). This process helps to make sense of the data collected, to interpret and identify themes that emerged from the data collected (Cooper & Schindler, 2006) and transform the data into meaningful findings (Patton, 2002). Using this data analysis method confirmed the accuracy of the study and themes that emerged uncovered the meanings of the participants' experiences and perceptions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).

## **Summary**

Chapter 3 explained the methodology for the present study. The chapter also included the reason for choosing a qualitative method with a phenomenological design. The study population, sample and sampling method was also discussed. The chapter likewise included discussion of informed consent, confidentiality, and the data collection process. Chapter 3 also included a discussion on how the data were analyzed and the reliability and validity for the present study.

It is assumed that findings from the research study will fill the gap in existing literature and research about the experiences of black females advancing into and obtaining leadership positions that women of color face in the context of government, specifically in North Carolina. Chapter 4 will contain a review of data and analysis methods, with descriptions of the data collected in the study. The chapter will also explain and discuss the results of the study.

## Chapter 4

### Analysis and Results

Chapter 4 includes findings from this qualitative, phenomenological study, which involved interviewing 10 African American women working in director positions in North Carolina government organizations. The participants' interview responses were analyzed to uncover the essence of their lived experiences and perceptions in obtaining leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations. This phenomenon is noteworthy because a disproportionately small number of African American women obtain and serve in leadership positions in these organizations.

#### **Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted to test the data collection instrument. Conducting a pilot study strengthened the validity of the interview protocol. The pilot study included one participant, representing 10% of the sample size in the main study. The participant in the pilot study was a member of the study population but did not participate in the main study. Lee (2012) notes that it is possible to conduct a pilot study with one participant. Ten participants was the sample size for the main research study. A pilot test of one participant represented ten percent of the sample size, who met the criteria for participants including African American, female, and working as a director in a North Carolina government organization was completed.

The pilot study consisted of the interview protocol designed for the main study. After completing the interview, the participant was asked to provide feedback on the interview questions and protocol, indicating whether any changes were needed. The pilot study participant confirmed that the interview questions were relevant, clear, and

appropriate for the study. The pilot study participant also indicated the time required for the interview was appropriate. The pilot study participants' responses to the interview questions were not included in the final data analysis.

### **Study Sample**

Upon receiving approval from the University of Phoenix's Internal Review Board, purposive sampling was used to recruit participants who met the sample criteria. The criteria comprised being African American, being female, and working as a director in a North Carolina government organization. Potential participants were identified through using the North Carolina state employee directory. (The senior public affairs specialist for the state granted permission to access this information; see Appendix F.)

Participants from the target population received an invitation via e-mail containing a description and purpose of the study and the nature of participation (see Appendix B). Individuals who agreed to participate responded to the e-mail and provided their contact information. These individuals were contacted by phone to schedule interviews. Before the start of each interview, the participant was provided a copy of the informed consent form (see Appendix A) and was given time to review the form and ask any questions. Participants were required to sign and date the form before beginning the interview process.

Each participant was assigned an alphanumeric code to protect the participant's confidentiality. The code began with *AAW* (signifying African American woman) and ended with a number. The numbers were assigned based on the order in which the interviews were scheduled and conducted. For example, the first participant was assigned the code *AAW1*.

## **Data Collection**

Data was collected in this qualitative, phenomenological study through one-on-one, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews that were audio recorded. Each participant answered four close-ended demographic questions and nine open-ended questions on her lived experiences obtaining a leadership position in a North Carolina government organization (see Appendix C). During the interview process, follow-up questions were asked of participants to clarify and obtain additional information if participants did not answer the interview question being asked. Creswell (2008) asserts that researchers should be prepared to ask follow-up questions to ensure that accurate responses are received from research participants.

The data collection phase spanned approximately 2 months; the interviews were scheduled based on the participants' availability. Interviewing 10 participants was sufficient to achieve data saturation.

Table 1 shows the connection between the interview questions and the research questions. Interview questions 1, 2, and 5 were linked to the central research question. Interview questions 4 and 5 were related to S1, while interview question 3 was linked to S2. Interview questions 3 and 6–8 were connected to S3. Interview question 9 was related to each of the research questions because it provided participants with the opportunity to share additional information about their experiences that the participants believed were relevant to the study.



Table 1

*Connections Between Interview Questions and Research Questions*

Interview questions	Research question
1, 2, 5	RQ1
4, 5	S1
3	S2
3, 6–8	S3

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Following the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim using Microsoft word. Transcribing the interviews verbatim was necessary to confirm the horizontalization of data and responses from each participant was treated equally relevant. Each participant received a copy of her interview transcript to review and check for accuracy. This process enhanced the validity of the study by establishing the credibility of the data. After the transcripts were member checked, the data were imported into NVivo 10 software to assist in analyzing the data using Moustakas’s modified van Kaam method.

Step 1 involved listing words and phrases relevant to the research topic. Each statement was valued equally. Step 2 consisted of eliminating duplicate data and data that did not provide answers to the central research question and the sub-questions for the study. The words and phrases that were not eliminated were identified as meaning units or invariant constituents that described the lived experiences of the participants in obtaining and working in leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations.

Step 3 involved grouping the invariant constituents or units of meaning into categories and themes. In Step 4, the invariant constituents and themes were validated by

checking them against the transcripts. Themes were discarded if they were not explicitly or implicitly stated in the transcripts. This step helped ensure the themes accurately represented the participants' experiences and perceptions. Step 5 involved constructing individual textual descriptions. The experiences of the participants were described using excerpts from the transcripts. This step assisted with understanding the experiences of the participants as they lived the experiences.

Step 6 consisted of constructing structural descriptions. This step involved reflecting on the textual descriptions and using imaginative variation to understand the events that precipitated what the participants experienced. Completing this process led to an understanding of how the experienced happened and the core of the experience. During Step 7, the textual and structural descriptions were combined to uncover the essence of the phenomenon for the participants.

### **Participant Demographics**

Each participant answered four demographic questions related to the participant's length of time employed in a North Carolina government organization, length of time as a director at the organization, education level, and age range (see Table 2). The participants had worked between 1–43 years at their organizations, which included state, county, and city levels of North Carolina government. The participants had served as directors between 1–32 years. Twenty percent of the sample had earned a bachelor's degree only, 60% had earned a master's degree, 10% had earned a doctorate, and 10% had earned a law degree. The majority (70%) of the participants were at least 50 years old.

Table 2

*Demographic Data*

Characteristic	Number	Percent
Length of years employed in NC government		
1–10 years	1	10%
11–21 years	5	50%
22–32 years	2	20%
23–43 years	2	20%
Length in position		
1–10 years	5	50%
11–21 years	1	10%
22–32 years	4	40%
33–43 years	0	0%
Educational level		
Bachelor degree	2	20%
Master degree	6	60%
Doctorate degree	1	10%
Law degree	1	10%
Age range		
40–49	3	30%
50–59	4	40%
60+	3	30%

**Sampling of Responses to Interview Questions**

**Interview Question 1: As an African American woman, what is your experience related to advancing into a leadership position?** The purpose of this question was to prompt discussion about the participant’s lived experiences in advancing into a leadership role in North Carolina government. The expectation was that each participant would freely discuss her experiences. A summary of responses is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

*Selected Responses to Interview Question 1*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Response</b>
<b>AAW2</b>	I have experienced both sexism and racism in terms of advancing. I started out as a graduate student, started working in government as an intern, and was promoted after 5 months of working as an intern. When I started in government, I was making a third of what other graduate students were making.
<b>AAW3</b>	I would say that my experience has been challenging because I have sacrificed a lot with my children and my family.
<b>AAW9</b>	Well, it has been challenging on some fronts but rewarding in most of them.

**Interview Question 2: What are the motivating factors that influenced your decision to pursue a leadership position?** The purpose of the second interview question was for the participant to describe the factors that motivated her to obtain a leadership position in a North Carolina government organization given the disproportionately low number of African American women in leadership positions in these government organizations. A sampling of responses to this interview question is presented in Table 4.

Table 4

*Selected Responses to Interview Question 2*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Response</b>
<b>AAW2</b>	I would say because I saw a lack in the organization overall and because I am a proud African American woman and I believe that we are excellent leaders and that we need to be in those positions.
<b>AAW9</b>	For me it goes back over history because I have always been a “first of” in my family . . . then being the first one to be the first black female director in my previous position and in my current position.

**Interview Question 3: What do you perceive are the skills needed to obtain a leadership position in North Carolina government?** The intent of the third interview question was to identify skills the participants believed were necessary for African American women to obtain a leadership role in North Carolina’s government. A sampling of the responses is presented in Table 5.

Table 5

*Selected Responses to Interview Question 3*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Response</b>
<b>AAW1</b>	You have to have really good people skills, you have to be motivated, and you have to have initiative. But more than anything you have to know to finesse the desires of politicians and the public . . . from an administrative point of view it can be a challenge.
<b>AAW2</b>	A whole lot of determination; you cannot be thin-skinned at all because black women are going to encounter gender discrimination as well as race discrimination.
<b>AAW9</b>	Number one, education; number two, at any position you have to carry yourself as a leader, you have to talk like a leader, when you walk in a room and start talking, people should see you as a leader, and you have to dress like a leader.
<b>AAW6</b>	For African Americans, I still believe that you have to have twice the preparation as other ethnicities because the struggle is going to be a little bit different.

**Interview Question 4: What do you perceive to be the barriers that prevent African American women from advancing into leadership positions?** The intent of

interview question 4 was for participants to discuss the barriers they believed were required to break through to advance to a leadership role. Table 6 contains a summary of the responses to this question.

Table 6

*Selected Responses to Interview Question 4*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Response</b>
<b>AAW5</b>	Barriers are proving yourself and people having confidence that you can do the job. I had that barrier to work against where I came from, and it was mostly male-dominated, with the majority being white males.
<b>AAW6</b>	I don't live in a dream world, and I am certainly more than aware that there is still a glass ceiling in a whole lot of localities in government.
<b>AAW9</b>	I think one barrier is the lack of having someone as a mentor to kind of mold you and tell you things that you really need to be doing and what you need to be focused on.

**Interview Question 5: What experiences do you perceive may hinder an African American woman's advancement in North Carolina government organizations?** The purpose of interview question 5 was to facilitate discussion of the challenges the participant faced when working toward a leadership position in a North Carolina government organization. Selected responses are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

*Selected Responses to Interview Question 5*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Response</b>
<b>AAW2</b>	We as African American women have to “temper our temper” even if we get very angry about something. We have to learn to say what needs to be said in a calm and direct manner while still getting your point across and doing what needs to be done in a given situation.
<b>AAW6</b>	I think that my experiences have been the same as many and that is the traditional view that women aren’t as smart and can’t really handle the pressure. Also, we are supposedly temperamental and emotional and not really built for the pressure that one would experience in a leadership role.
<b>AAW9</b>	I also think there are stereotypes that you have to work through, and some of them you really have to work harder through because they force you to be someone that you are not always necessarily.

**Interview Question 6: Based on your experience, what preparations do you believe black women need to possess to advance into a leadership position in North Carolina government as opposed to a non-African American woman?** The intent of the sixth interview question was for the participant to identify how and what African American women need to do to obtain a leadership role, particularly in comparison to what women of other ethnicities need to do. Table 8 contains a sampling of the responses to this question.

Table 8

*Selected Responses to Interview Question 6*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Response</b>
<b>AAW1</b>	I think that women in government need to learn how to be strategic when dealing with people and be able to read people. Know where you want to be, how to read people, and use that skill to get where you want to be and make the best out of a situation to achieve what you want to achieve from a situation.
<b>AAW4</b>	Being extremely well prepared a lot of times means for us to have multiple degrees even if your white counterparts do not, and a lot of times that is the case and has been the case in my career. Because you have more and you feel like you always have to be better prepared.
<b>AAW8</b>	Earning the respect as a woman, earning the respect as an African American woman is important because I do think that my non–African American cohorts, those females, sometimes it’s just given to them in terms of that respect.
<b>AAW10</b>	I just believe that African American women have to be more professional, know more, be willing to do a little more, work a little harder, work a little longer in order to show and prove that yes, we can do that.

**Interview Question 7: What are your thoughts on how the culture of North Carolina government organizations affects the advancement of black women?** The goal of the seventh interview question was for the participant to identify how, according to her perceptions, the culture of North Carolina’s government organizations affect the opportunities for African American women to advance to higher levels in government organizations. Summarized responses to this question are presented in Table 9.



Table 9

*Selected Responses to Interview Question 7*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Response</b>
<b>AAW2</b>	I generally think that it impedes us, and I don't think that things are different in 2013 as opposed to the 1960s. I believe that there is a lot of institutional racism, and I think there would be more racism that is overt if it was politically correct. It is almost like there is a resurgence of white male dominance in government. There is still a predominance of white males in government.
<b>AAW3</b>	I mean the culture is the "good ole' boy" system, and that is the culture as a whole and you have to figure out where you can be the most successful.
<b>AAW6</b>	The culture is still the same since the times of slavery. There has been progression, but some of the attitudes persist—that we're not necessarily willing to uplift the entire group on the basis that men are in control of all large decision making.

**Interview Question 8: Based on your experiences, what specific training materials, tools, and programs do you feel could be developed to increase the number of black women in leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations?** The purpose of interview question 8 was to prompt participants to think about what resources would help more African American women to advance successfully through the ranks of government. A sampling of the responses to this question is presented in Table 10.

Table 10

*Selected Responses to Interview Question 8*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Response</b>
<b>AAW1</b>	I don't know if it's so much tools but networking and learning about other black women's experiences and how to deal with issues that may arise. Additionally, learning how other black women have handled similar situations.
<b>AAW9</b>	If there are mentoring programs, because I am a fan of them, so if there are mentoring programs in place there would be more knowledge gained.

**Interview Question 9: Do you have other thoughts, feelings, or experiences to share that you feel may benefit this research study?** The purpose of interview question 9 was to provide the participant an opportunity to share additional information about her experiences that she thought were pertinent to the study. A sampling of responses is presented in Table 11.

Table 11

*Selected Responses to Interview Question 9*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Response</b>
<b>AAW1</b>	In government there is an extra hurdle of dealing with politics and understanding the politics of a situation because, in the end, politicians are politicians, and once you understand that the better off you will be. . . . You have to build trust, and it is harder for black women to establish trust versus a white woman.
<b>AAW2</b>	We as black women may not have the “Rockefeller connection” with someone who may be able to put you in a position that we want, so as black women we have to get an education and all the credentials necessary to get where you want to be so that education cannot be an excuse used to prevent black women from advancing.
<b>AAW3</b>	I would just say that African American women have to realize that the opportunities are broad and as you move up and there is still going to be some push back and some level of noise that you have to get through. The experiences will be different for each woman but it is still not easy.
<b>AAW8</b>	Women in 2013 are still breaking glass ceilings and I think that I am clearly an example of that, but the reality is that we still have many ceilings to break. But it’s important as women and leaders that we really just simply begin to embrace the value of women, what we bring to the table from a leadership perspective, and giving us that opportunity to display our abilities I think is important.

**Findings**

Analyzing the interview responses resulted in the identification of eight themes regarding the participants’ lived experiences as female leaders in North Carolina government organizations. The eight themes are discussed in detail below.

**Theme 1: African American women need to think positively.** Theme 1 emerged from participants describing the type of attitude that African American women need to obtain a leadership role in North Carolina’s government. Eighty percent of participants believed that having a positive attitude is linked to African American women advancing to leadership positions. The invariant constituents or meaning units that contributed to this theme include the ideas of African American women needing to have a

positive attitude, look at situations from a broad perspective, be self-confident and determined. Twenty percent of the participants believed that African American women must be strong, confident, and determined to advance into leadership roles within North Carolina's government.

AAW1 stressed the importance of "the ability for black women to step back and look at situations for what they really are, look at the personal cost benefit, and how the situation is being handled." AAW2 advised that African American women need "a whole lot of determination; you cannot be thin-skinned at all because black women are going to encounter gender discrimination as well as race discrimination." Additionally, AAW5 stated, "I try to come with a positive attitude because I realized early on that whatever mood I was in or how I was reacting to things that I was affecting the people around me."

**Theme 2: African American women lack self-confidence and the culture of North Carolina government organizations.** Seventy percent of the participants believed that a major barrier to African American women advancing in North Carolina's government organizations is a lack of self-confidence in the ability to obtain a leadership role. AAW2 reported, "sometimes we as black women can be a barrier to ourselves, which is sad." AAW1 added, "I think we as black women can be our own worst enemy." AAW7 commented, "I think sometimes seeing ourselves in leadership roles can be a challenge—preparing ourselves, building the kind of confidence that you need, and seeing yourself on a playing field with men".

Forty percent of the participants believed that the culture of North Carolina government organizations is a barrier to advancement. In discussing this topic, AAW8

asserted, “in North Carolina I do think that we could be more progressive than we are for women in general but even more so for women of color.” AAW6 added, “I don’t live in a dream world, and I am certainly more than aware that there is still a glass ceiling in a whole lot of localities in government.”

**Theme 3: Female African American leaders are not recognized and respected as leaders.** Fifty percent of the participants shared the perception of not being recognized and respected as leaders within North Carolina government organizations because of race and gender. AAW1 stated the following:

There is some prejudice. As an example, I can go places with my staff member who is a White woman and people know we are from public affairs; however, nine times out of ten they are talking to her more than they are talking to me. Even though they may know her position but especially when they don’t know her position, they just assume that I work for her. When she explains that I am the boss and they should be directing those comments to me, it’s those types of challenges that I am faced with.

AAW2 made the following comment:

It is my experience that even though people will try to ignore a black female, I am not going to put up with that because I have worked too hard, obtained two degrees, and several certifications that say I know what I am doing. So I will not put up with that, and I will not be quiet because I think if you don’t say anything and call people out then they will continue that behavior.

AAW6 noted, “a lack of respect I think still exists in government and is a tremendous hindrance to our mobility. As much as we’ve seen women grow in this area, it is still a

male-dominated governmental environment, and it's going to take a minute to turn that around.”

**Theme 4: African American women need mentoring to obtain leadership positions.** Eighty percent of the participants believed that having mentors and mentoring programs is important in order for African American women to advance in North Carolina government organizations. AAW9 stated the following:

If there are mentoring programs in place there would be more knowledge gained than in any training you may have or any conference that you attend. I think that if mentoring programs at all levels were put in place, that would certainly help—whether that was at the department level, someone in your agency who has moved up the ladder, or someone outside of the organization who may be able to teach you the tricks of the trade.

AAW4 commented, “I think you have to have a strong mentor because you need a support system.” AAW5 added, “It's important to mentor each other and have someone to talk to.”

**Theme 5: Networking is important for African American women who want to obtain leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations.** Ninety percent of the participants shared the belief that networking is important for female African Americans who desire to advance to leadership roles in North Carolina government organizations. AAW3 commented, “you need to be out there to meet people, because I don't think that is something we as a people do enough.” AAW4 added, “you can't ever think that what you know is enough; you have to continue to try to improve

yourself and network.” AAW6 shared, “I would say cultivating relationships within the arena that you want to enter is a good thing.”

**Theme 6: African American women must prepare to advance into leadership positions.** All of the participants discussed the importance of African American women preparing themselves to advance to leadership positions. The participants noted that preparation includes completing higher education, learning the politics of government, and working harder than male and white counterparts. Participants also asserted that African American women must prepare more than other individuals in order to compete for leadership roles in North Carolina government organizations. Eagly and Chin (2010) note that women experience discrimination even when applying for positions that are gender neutral. “Psychology prejudice” has been the factor identified as causing this occurrence.

AAW2 commented that:

The men in this position prior to me did not have a master’s degree or certifications, but I had to get all of that in order to get and maintain my position. And sometimes you have to get extra and do extra to prove to other black people—men and women—that you know what you are doing.

The experiences of these African American women were a motivating factor for the participants to earn degrees and certifications to enhance their skills and allow them to compete for positions of leadership.

**Theme 7: African American women should cultivate people skills.** The participants believed that African American women need good people skills to advance in North Carolina government organizations. AAW9 shared the following:

Being personable is definitely a skill set. . . . I think at the end of the day what makes you successful is that you have to have those people skills, and you have to be able to respond to the audience that you are in front of and be able to play different roles at different times.

AAW5 similarly commented, “I think it is critical to have good people skills.” AAW1 added, “You have to have really good people skills, you have to be motivated, and you have to have initiative.”

**Theme 8: African American women must overcome stereotypes to obtain leadership positions.** Seventy percent of the participants shared the belief that stereotypes affect the advancement of African American women. AAW2 expressed the following view:

Men expect us to be passive, so we as black women have to figure out how to get a good balance of who we are without coming across passive but to be assertive enough to get things done without coming off as aggressive.

Further, AAW6 shared the following perception:

There have been progressions, but some of the attitudes persist—that we’re still less valuable and we’re willing to allow maybe one or two through, but we’re not necessarily willing to uplift the entire group . . . These attitudes are still here.”

## **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American women in obtaining and working in director positions in North Carolina government organizations. Chapter 4 contained a review of the research protocol and presentation of the data analysis findings. Data were collected through interviewing 10



African American women who were directors in North Carolina government organizations. Analyzing the data resulted in the identification the following eight themes, which regard the factors that contribute to and prevent obstacles to African American women:

- Theme 1: African American women need to think positively.
- Theme 2: African American women lack self-confidence and the culture of North Carolina government organizations.
- Theme 3: Female African American leaders are not recognized and respected as leaders.
- Theme 4: African American women need mentoring to obtain leadership positions.
- Theme 5: Networking is important for African American women who want to obtain leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations.
- Theme 6: African American women must prepare to advance into leadership positions.
- Theme 7: African American women should cultivate people skills.
- Theme 8: African American women must overcome stereotypes to obtain leadership positions.

The participants indicated that self-confidence, resiliency, and social skills contributed to their success in obtaining leadership roles. African American women who desire to become leaders in North Carolina government organizations must be willing to

take risks, step outside of their own comfort zones, and create networks of individuals who can provide support, mentorship, and opportunities for advancement.

The findings of this study provide insight on how to improve the opportunities for African American women to obtain leadership roles in North Carolina government organizations. Leaders may use the findings to remove the barriers to career advancement for African American women. African American women who have achieved career success might consider establishing leadership and mentoring programs to assist other African American women in achieving their career aspirations. The findings may help women who desire leadership positions to understand what factors will help them achieve their goals, what barriers they need to overcome, and how to overcome those barriers.

In Chapter 5, the results of the study are interpreted, and the implications are presented in relationship to existing literature. The chapter also includes discussion of recommendations for leaders, based on the findings from the study. Additionally, Chapter 5 contains recommendations for future research to expand upon the current study. Also discussed are limitations of the study, followed by a summary of the study and conclusion.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American women in obtaining and working in director positions in North Carolina government organizations. The study resulted in a greater understanding of the lived experiences that African American women experience when endeavoring to obtain leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations. The study findings also provide insight on the factors that can help African American women obtain leadership positions in such organizations and give insight on potential barriers African American may face in obtaining a leadership role. Chapter 5 contains an in-depth discussion of the study's findings, including the relationship of themes to research questions, and the relationship of themes to existing literature. The chapter also includes recommendations for leaders and future research, followed by discussion of the limitations in the study. The chapter concludes with a summary and conclusions.

#### **Relationship of Themes to Research Questions**

The central research question and three sub-questions for the study are as follows:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of African American women who have obtained a leadership position as a director in a North Carolina government organization?

1. What obstacles, if any, do African American women perceive they overcame to obtain a position of leadership?
2. What are the factors that African American women perceive contributed to their advancement to a leadership position in a North Carolina government organization?

3. What changes, if any, do African American women perceive are necessary for the advancement of more African American women into leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations?

Table 12 displays the connection of themes to the central research question and three sub-questions developed for this research study. Themes emerged from the responses of 10 participant's interviews. Themes one through eight answered the central research question for the study. Themes 2 and 3 answered sub-question one of the study; Themes 4-7 answered sub-question question two of the study. Lastly, themes 1 and 8 addressed the third sub-question of the study.

Table 12

*Relationship of themes to research questions*

<b>Research questions</b>	<b>Themes</b>
<b>RQ1: What are the lived experiences of African American women who have obtained a leadership position as a director in a North Carolina government organization?</b>	Themes 1-8
<b>Sub-question 1: What obstacles, if any, do African American women perceive they overcame to obtain a position of leadership?</b>	Theme 2: African American women lack self-confidence and the culture of North Carolina government organizations Theme 3: Female African American leaders are not recognized and respected as leaders
<b>Sub-question 2: What are the factors that African American women perceive contributed to their advancement to a leadership position in a North Carolina government organization?</b>	Theme 4: African American women need mentoring to obtain leadership positions Theme 5: Networking is important for African American women who want to obtain leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations Theme 6: African American women must prepare to advance into leadership positions Theme 7: African American women should cultivate people skills
<b>Sub-question 3: What changes, if any, do African American women perceive are necessary for the advancement of more African American women into leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations?</b>	Theme 1: African American women need to think positively Theme 8: African American women must overcome stereotypes to obtain leadership positions

## **Relationship of Themes to the Literature**

Women have only moved halfway in organizations and corporations since the beginning of the women's movement. As previously noted in Chapter 2, the majority of women in Western industrialized societies are still in middle management with no chance of moving upward (Cheung & Halpern, 2010). This fact is confirmed by the disproportionately low number of African American women that have leadership positions in business and academia. In 2012, only 3.2% of African American women were in senior executive leadership positions at Fortune 500 companies ("Boosting Black Women in Corporate America," 2012). Additionally, only 8% of college presidents are African American women (American Council on Education, 2012). Similarly, African American women are underrepresented in leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations.

The emergence of themes from this research study support and are consistent with findings from the literature presented in chapter 2. Specifically in relation to the experiences of African American women, stereotypes of African American women, gender differences, glass ceiling, and the cultural effects on leadership. The results from this study add to the existing body of knowledge and broaden the knowledge of scholars and researchers that want to obtain a better understanding of African American women's lived experiences in obtaining leadership positions in North Carolina government. A discussion of each theme is provided in relationship to existing literature.

**Theme 1: African American women need to think positively.** The majority of participants emphasized that positive thinking helped them to advance in their careers and believe this characteristic could help other African American women advance within the

organization. Participants expressed that maintaining a positive attitude can be challenging at times because of the barriers they face from day-to-day including being stereotyped as incompetent, aggressive, and emotional. Despite these barriers, participants remained focused on their goal of obtaining a leadership position by thinking positively and demonstrating a good attitude to help them overcome these stereotypes. It was important for these women to remain self-confident and to maintain control of how they related to and presented themselves to the public. This discipline was critical in helping the participants advance in their careers. This finding aligns with the assertion of Obiomon, Tickles, Wowo, and Holland-Hunt (2007) that positive thinking builds confidence. When women are confident they can promote themselves by serving on committees, serving in professional organizations, and participating in organizational functions.

Many of the participants shared that their desire to be successful started early in their careers. The majority of participants expressed how they received support from family members and friends, who encouraged the participants to achieve their career goals. The participants learned from their families at an early age the importance of taking pride in themselves. The participants were also taught to believe they could achieve their goals if they maintained the right mindset and kept a positive attitude despite difficult circumstances.

**Theme 2: African American women lack self-confidence and the culture of North Carolina government organizations.** All of the participants expressed the confidence they have in themselves, including their abilities to fulfill their responsibilities as directors in North Carolina government organizations. Based on their experiences the

participants believed that an African American woman's level of self-confidence can affect whether or not a woman will be successful in their career. According to these women, several factors contribute to a female African American's level of self-confidence, including receiving support from family and friends, learning values at an early age, and completing higher education. The lack of these factors can contribute to African American women feeling a low sense of worth and doubting they can accomplish their aspirations. The participants expressed that many African American women lack the confidence needed to advance into leadership roles.

Carnes and Radojevich-Kelley (2011) refer to this attitude as the Pygmalion effect in relationship to the concept of self-efficacy. The belief that women cannot obtain a leadership position is a result of what girls are taught in childhood if they are presented with ideas that women cannot achieve higher-level positions in organizations because of the glass ceiling. If women have this belief, it is less likely they will strive to do so (Bola et. al., 2011). Once women begin to change their attitudes and the perception they have of themselves it is likely that women will begin to recognize their potential and work towards moving up in organizations (Carnes & Radojevich-Kelley, 2011).

The culture of an organization can affect the ability for women to move up within an organization. Several of the participants believed that the culture of North Carolina government directly prevents the ability for black women to obtain leadership positions, which contributes to the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of African American women in leadership roles. A few of the participants expressed that the "good ole-boy" mentality still exists which favors white men. This aligns with literature presented by Connerley and Pedersen (2005) assertion that looking at leadership without considering

cultural factors limits understanding of the topic and related issues. Connerley and Pedersen (2005) provided an inclusive, multidimensional definition of *culture*, explaining that culture consists of invisible and visible attributes that influence leadership. These attributes include characteristics such as education, social group, place of residence, gender, ethnicity, language, nationality, and affiliations (Connerley & Pedersen, 2005).

**Theme 3: Female African American leaders are not recognized and respected as leaders.** Many of the participants experienced and continue to experience a lack of recognition and respect they receive from subordinates and colleagues. The participants repeatedly noted that they must explain their decisions to other organizational leaders, who question the participants' competence as women. The experiences described by participants is consistent with a survey conducted amongst women in the workplace that revealed that women feel dismissed, they are interrupted in general discussions that include both men and women in meetings, and their opinions are often ignored in the workplace (Maniam, Russell, & Subramaniam, 2010). Despite the lack of respect and recognition the participants received, the participants believed it was important to treat others with respect, even when the respect is not reciprocated.

These findings are consistent with a qualitative research study conducted by Turner, Wong, and Gonzalez (2011) that explored the experiences of African American women in faculty positions at universities where the student population is predominately white. A common theme that emerged among these women was the frustration and experiences to the racial assumptions regarding their intelligence and competence as a professional. Additional findings from the study suggested that superiority is freely



given to white women and men (Turner, Wong, & Gonzalez, 2011). The participants attributed the lack of respect to their gender as well as their race.

Racism and sexism continue to limit opportunities for African American female leaders and the participants expressed how they have experienced both in their career paths. The disadvantages for African American women are that they are different from White women to reap the same benefits from their gender status, and differentiate from black men from the same race (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Physical and biological differences still exist between women and men that continue to be used to excuse the unequal manner of how women are treated in the workplace and in society overall (Maniam, Russell, & Subramaniam, 2010)

**Theme 4: African American women need mentoring to obtain leadership positions.** The majority of participants had mentors to direct and guide them through their careers and believe that having mentors contributed to their advancement. According to these women, mentoring helps African American women develop the necessary skills and self-confidence to succeed. Mentoring also guides and supports African American women in their pursuit of leadership roles. Crawford (2009) defines mentoring to be a significant element to the personal and professional development for African American women. Black women have a difficult time establishing relationships that provide mentoring due to suitability, availability, and individuals within their social and professional network to provide guidance (Johnson-Drake, 2010).

The ability for African American women to have a mentor could be significant to black women as they face obstacles and challenges in achieving their career goals (Spencer, 2007). Based on the experiences of participants, the women believe that

African American women that have mentors are more likely to obtain leadership positions.

**Theme 5: Networking is important for African American women who want to obtain leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations.** All of the women interviewed expressed how important it is for African American women to network, especially if they do not have mentors. The women participants believed that networking opens up opportunities that would otherwise not be available to African American women. A few of the participants discussed their experiences on how networking with other African American females helped to provide them the opportunity to advance into leadership positions.

The participants experiences are supported by Steele (2011) who asserts that participating in workgroup activities are important to the advancement of employees within an organization. These types of activities create opportunities for individuals to network, learn more about the organization, cultivate work relationships amongst colleagues, and improve personal visibility with other employees. As noted in the literature review, African American women fill positions in organizations but most are within the lower ranks of the organization. This separates African American women and limits their ability to network with individuals that could be influential in advancing their careers (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

**Theme 6: African American women must prepare to advance into leadership positions.** Based on the experiences of participants, preparation is crucial and more extensive for African American women than for other groups of employees because of racial and gender biases. All of the women expressed the importance of African

American women to prepare themselves to advance into leadership positions. In particular, the participants believed African American women have to do more to prepare themselves to include completing advanced education by earning a degree and developing strong skill sets. This finding is consistent with statistics presented in the literature review that indicate black females earned sixty-two percent of professional degrees; seventy-two percent of master's degrees, sixty-six percent of bachelor's degrees and sixty-eight percent of associate's degrees (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

The experiences of these women were a motivating factor for them to earn extra certifications or degrees to compete for leadership positions even if having an education was not required for the job. Despite the preparation of participants in their own professional development and growth, Hayes (2012) assert that as women of color achieve in education, accomplishments, contributions, and successes, these characteristics continue to be overshadowed by incorrect perceptions and “stigmas” that taint their image.

**Theme 7: African American women should cultivate people skills.** The participants emphasized the importance of African American women possessing good people skills. These skills are necessary to overcome the stereotype that African American women are not personable and cannot communicate effectively with others. One of the people skills the participants shared was the ability to interpret people's actions in order to identify what the people are thinking and feeling. According to the participants, this skill assisted them in anticipating the needs of others and communicating effectively.

These findings are in alignment with Parker (2001) who understood that the communication of African American women is devalued and negatively perceived and conducted a research study that examined the communication of 14 African American women in leadership positions in organizations dominated by White males. Findings from the study revealed five attributes regarding effective communication and leadership among African American women to create success include (a) empowering employees to produce results, (b) interactive communication, (c) participative decision-making, (d) openness in communication, and (e) leading through boundary-spanning communication (p.57). Based on the experiences of participants, cultivating people skills is particularly important for African American women who want to obtain a leadership position in North Carolina government.

**Theme 8: African American women must overcome stereotypes to obtain leadership positions.** The participants discussed their experiences of being negatively stereotyped as African American women. The women shared their perceptions on how they had to work hard in their leadership positions to overcome the stereotypes that characterize African American women. These stereotypes include being aggressive, uneducated, and angry sometimes referred to as “angry black woman’s syndrome”.

This is in alignment with literature presented by Steele (2011) that asserts an employee’s ability to be assertive is of high importance within organizations. Employees that are assertive in the workplace have influence on individuals to effectively deal with workplace politics, response to power, and their participation as a team player within the organization. Being assertive can be a challenge for African American women because it triggers biases that are hostile and reactions from others that are based on preconceptions

and stereotypes (Steele, 2011). African American women have to find an equal balance of being assertive without being perceived as overly aggressive or arrogant. Stereotypes have ultimately skewed the perceptions that people have about African American women. The media and pop culture continue to enforce stereotypes of black women that make it difficult for them to be seen as effective leaders (Catalyst, 1994). Koenig, Mitchell, Eagly, and Risitari (2012) argue that stereotypes are strong barriers that prevent the advancement of women into leadership positions.

This is relevant to the literature review and the study's findings because it is evident that stereotypes continue create barriers for women to advance in the workforce. Although there has been some progress regarding the perceptions of men and women in leadership, stereotypes still contribute to the challenges faced by African American women to obtain a position of power and authority.

### **Significance to and Recommendations for Leadership**

**Significance to Leadership.** The findings of this study are significant because they provide insight on female African American's experiences obtaining leadership positions in North Carolina government. The eight themes may be valuable for African American women who aspire to achieve leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations. More African American women may obtain leadership roles by incorporating the factors identified in this study as contributing to career advancement and by being aware of and responding to the barriers to career advancement.

This study adds to the limited body of knowledge on the leadership experiences of African American women, specifically in North Carolina government organizations. Davis (2012), who examined the experiences of African American women in leadership

in business and academia, asserted that future research on “African American women in government and non-profit organizations would be beneficial for other women who aspire to leadership positions in these sectors” (p. 170).

The phenomenological approach allowed participants to share their experiences obtaining and working in leadership roles in North Carolina government organizations. The experiences these women shared provided rich and compelling data regarding the factors inhibiting and contributing to achieving leadership roles. Findings from this research study may add to the literature regarding African American women in leadership positions in government. Studies that explored the lived experiences of African American women in leadership positions did not exist specific to North Carolina government. This study is relevant to the area of organizational leadership as leaders within government organizations become aware of the increased need for more diversity in leadership.

**Recommendations to Leadership.** The results of this study support the fact that African American women are underrepresented in leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations. According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2011), of the 59,726 leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations, African American women account for only 9,451 (15%) of the positions, compared to Caucasian women, who hold 26,782 (44%) of the positions. Additionally, the number of African American women who hold director positions decreased from 11.4% in 2012 to 10.9% in 2013 (Catalyst, 2012, 2013).

The findings of the study substantiate the need for leaders of North Carolina government organizations to promote qualified African American women to leadership

positions. The study results also indicate the need for government leaders to address the barriers African American females face in their efforts to obtain leadership roles.

The participants noted that African American women need support in order to secure leadership positions. African American women who have become leaders in government organizations could help other African American women by establishing leadership and mentoring programs. The programs could address the eight themes discovered in this study to not only develop the leadership skills in other African American women, but to help African American women build confidence in themselves, provide them guidance in their career paths, assists with preparing them for leadership by cultivating their people skills, and provide more networking opportunities for African American women. Researchers, practitioners, scholars, and organizational leaders may benefit from viewing the findings of this study from the framework of the critical race theory (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). Using the critical race theory may help leaders to “see things from the worldview of [African American women] and not simply from our own unique standpoints” (Walker, 2003, p. 991).

Leaders of North Carolina’s government organizations can also create an organizational culture that facilitates advancement opportunities for African American women. This could be achieved through the creation of training programs that teach the necessary skills for the advancement of women, more specifically, the advancement of African American women in North Carolina government organizations. Additionally, leaders in North Carolina government organizations can create a network of women leaders to collaborate with each other, share ideas, and experiences. Networking can be a

recruitment tool for leaders within North Carolina government to identify African American women who have the potential and talent to be leaders within the organization.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The participants indicated that their experiences were in some ways similar to those of women of other ethnicities. Future research could involve comparing the lived experiences of women of different ethnicities to understand how their leadership experiences compare using a case study qualitative design. A case study could determine if leadership experiences differ based on the type of organization, such as government, nonprofit, or private sector. Again, the experiences of women of different ethnicities could be compared. Future research could also be conducted in other sectors of the government, such as at the federal level.

Participants expressed the importance of having mentors as a contributor to their success in obtaining leadership roles. An additional recommendation for future research could involve comparing the lived experiences of African American women who had mentors for guidance into advancing into leadership positions versus African American women who did not have a mentor using a qualitative, phenomenological design. This could uncover additional barriers that prevent the promotion of African American women into leadership roles and confirm findings from this study regarding importance of mentors being a vital part to the career success of African American women.

A recommendation for future research could include a qualitative phenomenological study exploring the lived experiences of African American males in North Carolina government in a leadership position. It would be interesting to see if



black men have similar experiences and perceptions as black females in their ascension into a leadership role.

A final recommendation for future research could include a quantitative study among African American women not in a leadership position, but desire to be in a leadership position in North Carolina government. Findings from this type of research study could potentially pinpoint the number of black women interested in seeking advancement within the organization and identify women who have the talent and potential to be leaders. Lastly, results from a quantitative study could reveal information to develop training programs that may be helpful for the advancement of more African American women into leadership roles.

### **Limitations and Generalizability**

**Limitations.** As previously noted in Chapter 1, limitations can affect the internal validity a research study that can in turn reflect the weaknesses of a study (Neuman, 2006). One limitation that could have affected the study's findings was the accuracy and openness of participant's responses (Creswell, 2008). The trustworthiness of participants' responses was also a limitation to this study. Participant's responses to interview questions may reflect what they thought needed to be expressed to create positive outcomes of their experiences that were negative. To prevent this limitation, follow-up questions were asked of participants if responses to interview questions were not clear and relevant to the interview question being asked. Member checking of transcripts by the participants helped to confirm the accuracy of data collected to ensure that responses from participants represented the perceptions and experiences of each individual.

Another limitation to the study could have been researcher bias. Implementing the epoche process prevented researcher bias and eliminated prejudgments to make certain the focus remained on the views from participants and the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of African American women in leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations. The experiences of each participant were examined with an open mind without assumptions or prejudgments.

The data collection instrument could have been a potential limitation to the study. To test the validity of the interview protocol and strengthen findings from the study, a pilot study was conducted with an individual from the target population. Feedback from the pilot study participant indicated that the interview questions were clear, appropriate, and relevant to the research questions. The pilot study participant also noted that the time taken to conduct the interview was a reasonable.

**Generalizability.** Generalizability is not the intent or goal of qualitative research. However, findings may be generalizable to other state governments across the United States because the women leaders of this study may have similar experiences from black female leaders in other government organizations. The findings may not be generalizable to African American female leaders in higher-level positions such as City Council members, City manager, Assistant City Manager, County Manager, Assistant County Manager or a State Administrator because women leaders in these positions may have different experiences and challenges based on the higher position of leadership.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American women in obtaining and working in leadership positions in North Carolina

government. As noted in chapter 1, there are theories that acknowledge the social constructs of a phenomenon that provide meaning and understanding to individuals who experience the phenomenon. The Critical Race Theory provided a framework for this research study to understand the experiences of the participants' advancement into a leadership position (Stanley, 2009). As originally termed by Raven and French (1959) the legitimate-power theory and the leader-member relationship theory developed by Graen (1976) were recognized during a time when the typical leader of an organization was a white male. This in turn skewed the image of black women in leadership positions and their ability to lead because of this constructed social image. When women obtain a leadership position within an organization they face the challenge of breaking down the typical image of a leader of being a white male and proving themselves as a leader within the organization (Parker, 2005).

The framework of the Critical Race Theory assisted with understanding and exploring factors that encompass the experiences of African American women in leadership positions (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). Many of the participants in this research study discussed the negative experiences of gender and race discrimination during their careers. Kanter's theory of proportions describes the effects of social interactions, marginality, and the mobility of women in organizations (Turner, Wong, & Gonzalez, 2011). The participants of this research study revealed that African American women experience situations that are shaped by feeling extra pressure to perform, pressure to make less mistakes, more visibility, gaining credibility, stereotypes, experiencing more stress, and coping with misperceptions about their roles and identity in an organization. It is evident based on the results of this study that the experiences of the

participants reflect Kanter's theory of proportions with regard to women in high-level positions, specifically, African American women. The experiences of the African American women interviewed for this study reveal that individuals in the minority continue to face a cycle of disadvantages while persons who "fit the norm" experience advantages. Kanter's theory notes that African American women do not "fit the norm" (p. 200).

Results of this study provided answers to the central research question and sub-questions for the study. The women participants were able to describe their lived experiences and share stories of how they obtained a leadership position as a director in North Carolina government. Even though the experiences of each participant were different, common themes emerged as a result of their experiences and the women acknowledged the challenges and barriers they had to face and overcome in their ascension into a leadership position as directors.

## **Conclusion**

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the current problem of the underrepresentation of African American women in a leadership position in North Carolina government. Regardless of the barriers the women in this study overcame and the preparation it took for them to obtain a leadership position, the fact remains that there is an underrepresentation of African American females in leadership positions within North Carolina government and research is lacking about their experiences. This could potentially have an effect on identifying women that have the talent and skills necessary to advance into leadership positions.

Chapter 2 provided a review of literature that was logical for the study. The literature review provided information to help understand the experiences and evolution of women since entering the workforce at the end of World War II. Chapter 2 included a review of literature that revealed reasons why there is still few African American women represented in leadership roles.

Chapter 3 included an explanation about the appropriateness of implementing a qualitative, phenomenological design. Chapter 3 also included an explanation on how a phenomenological design would assist in understanding the lived experiences and perceptions of these women to give meaning to their lives and experiences working in North Carolina government.

Chapter 4 provided information on how participants were selected for the research study, research questions, and a review of demographic information gathered from each participant. Chapter 4 also described the process of implementing the modified van Kaam method to assist with analyzing and understanding the data collected and an explanation of using NVivo 10 to further analysis the data collected for themes. Eight themes emerged from 10 African American females interviewed to include but not limited to the skills and knowledge needed to be a successful leader in North Carolina government, barriers to advancement, the importance of mentoring and networking programs, and the preparation needed to advance into a leadership position in North Carolina government. Chapter 4 also included a presentation of the data and analysis of themes that emerged during the interview process.

Chapter 5 included an in-depth discussion and analysis on themes that emerged from the data presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 also included an overview of the

connection of themes to the literature and the research questions for the study. Chapter 5 also included recommendations for future research.

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## Appendix A

### Informed Consent

Hello,

My name is Larrisha McGill and I am a student at the University of Phoenix working on a Doctorate of Management in Organizational Leadership degree. I am doing a research study entitled: *The Lived Experiences of African American Female Directors in North Carolina Government*. The purpose of the research study is to explore the lived experiences of 10 African American women who hold the position of director in a North Carolina government organization.

Your participation will involve a recorded interview that will last approximately 30-60 minutes. You can decide to be a part of this study or not. Once you start, you can withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits. Participants who withdraw must contact the researcher via e-mail to withdraw from participation in the study. The researcher will acknowledge via e-mail your desire to withdraw from the study and advise that your data will be destroyed and not used for the study. The results of the research study may be published but your identity will remain confidential and your name will not be made known to any outside parties. Your participation in this study is voluntary. There are no known risks of participating.

If you have any questions about the research study, I can be reached at 919-247-2800 or by e-mail at 19lala77@e-mail.phoenix.edu. For questions about your rights as a study participant, or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Phoenix Institutional Review Board via e-mail at IRB@phoenix.edu.

As a participant in this study, you should understand the following:

- You may decide not to be part of this study or you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you want to withdraw, you can do so without any problems.
- Your identity will be kept confidential.
- Larrisha McGill, the researcher, has fully explained the nature of the research study and has answered all of your questions and concerns.
- Interviews will be recorded; you must give permission for the researcher, Larrisha McGill, to record the interview. You understand that the information from the recorded interview will be transcribed. The researcher will assign an alphanumeric code unrelated to your demographic information to assure confidentiality.
- Data will be kept in a secure and locked area for three years and then destroyed.
- The results of this study may be published.

By signing this form, you agree that you understand the nature of the study, the possible risks to you as a participant, and how your identity will be kept confidential.

When you sign this form, this means that you are 18 years old or older and that you give your permission to volunteer as a participant in the study that is described here.”

**I accept the above terms.**  **I do not accept the above terms.** **(CHECK ONE)**

Signature of the interviewee \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Participant Invitation Letter (E-mail Notification)

Dear Ms. /Mrs.,

My name is Larrisha McGill, and I am a student at the University of Phoenix working on a Doctor of Management in Organizational Leadership. I am conducting a study entitled: *The Lived Experiences of African American Female Directors in North Carolina Government*. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of 10 African American women who hold a leadership position as Director within a North Carolina government agency. The findings from this study could be used to explain how African American women obtained, sustained, and maintained leadership positions in North Carolina government and how African American women handled obstacles or barriers created by the glass ceiling to advance in their careers. The results from the study could also provide a framework by which women, especially African American women, can obtain positions of leadership in North Carolina's government.

If you agree to participate in the study, you will participate in a recorded interview that will last approximately 30-60 minutes. Your participation in this study is voluntary. There are no known risks of participating. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, you can do so without penalty or loss of benefit to yourself. The results of the study may be published, but your participation will remain confidential. A brief explanation of the interview process will be provided to you prior to participating in the interview. If you have any questions, please contact me at 919-247-2800 or by e-mail at [19lala77@e-mail.phoenix.edu](mailto:19lala77@e-mail.phoenix.edu).

Should you decide to participate in this study, prior to the interview you will be asked to complete an informed consent form consisting of the verbiage found in this e-mail. For your records, a copy of the form will be provided to you. Please respond to this e-mail within 1 week of receiving it, indicating your interest in participating in the study and your contact information including a telephone number. Thank you in advance for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Larrisha McGill

University of Phoenix Doctoral Student

919-247-2800

## Appendix C

### Interview Questions

1. As an African American woman, what is your experience related to advancing into a leadership position?
2. What are the motivating factors that influenced your decision to pursue a leadership position?
3. What do you perceive are the skills needed to obtain a leadership position in North Carolina government?
4. What do you perceive to be the barriers that prevent women from advancing into leadership positions?
5. What experiences do you perceive may hinder an African American woman's advancement in North Carolina government organizations?
6. Based on your experience, what preparations do you believe black women need to possess to advance into a leadership position in North Carolina government as opposed to a non-African-American woman?
7. What are your thoughts on how the culture of North Carolina government organizations affects the advancement of black women?
8. Based on your experiences, what specific training materials, tools, and programs do you feel could be developed to increase the number of black women in leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations?
9. Do you have other thoughts, feelings, or experiences to share that you feel may benefit this research study?

The interview will conclude with the following demographic questions:

1. How long have you been employed in North Carolina government?
2. How long have you been in a leadership position?
3. What is your educational level?
4. What is your age? Under 30, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60+

Appendix D

Premises, Recruitment, and Name Permission Form



**PREMISES, RECRUITMENT AND NAME (PRN) USE PERMISSION**

Solid Waste Management Facility

Name of Facility, Organization, University, Institution, or Association

Please complete the following by check marking any permissions listed here that you approve, and please provide your signature, title, date, and organizational information below. If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, please contact the University of Phoenix Institutional Review Board via email at [IRB@phoenix.edu](mailto:IRB@phoenix.edu).

I hereby authorize Larrisha McGill, a student of University of Phoenix, to use the premises (facility identified below) to conduct a study entitled **The Lived Experiences of African American Female Leaders in North Carolina Government and the Glass Ceiling.**

I hereby authorize Larrisha McGill, a student of University of Phoenix, to recruit subjects for participation to conduct a study entitled **The Lived Experiences of African American Female Leaders in North Carolina Government and the Glass Ceiling.**

I hereby authorize Larrisha McGill, a student of University of Phoenix, to use the name of the facility, organization, university, institution, or association identified above when publishing results from the study entitled **The Lived Experiences of African American Female Leaders in North Carolina Government and the Glass Ceiling.**

10/3/2013  
11

Signature

Date

Andrew Martin

Name

Operation Manager

Title

Address of Facility

1833 Candor Ave  
Durham NC 27704

## Appendix E

### Non-Disclosure Agreement



### Non-Disclosure Agreement

Suzy Bills, of Editing by Suzy, acknowledges that in order to provide the services to Larrisha McGill (hereinafter "Researcher") who is a researcher in a confidential study with the University of Phoenix, Inc., Suzy Bills/Editing by Suzy must agree to keep the information obtained as part of its services (as more fully described below) confidential. Therefore the parties agree as follows:

1. The information to be disclosed under this Non-disclosure Agreement ("Agreement") is described as follows and shall be considered "Confidential Information": data collected from participants by the researcher for research topic entitled: The Lived Experiences of African American Female Leaders in North Carolina Governmental Organizations and The Glass Ceiling will be kept confidential by Suzy Bills/Editing by Suzy. Suzy Bills/Editing by Suzy understands that all information shall remain the property of Researcher.
2. Suzy Bills/Editing by Suzy agrees to keep in confidence and to use the Confidential Information for editing purposes only and for no other purposes.
3. Suzy Bills/Editing by Suzy further agrees to keep in confidence and not disclose any Confidential Information to a third party or parties for a period of five (5) years from the date of such disclosure. All oral disclosures of Confidential Information as well as written disclosures of the Confidential Information are covered by this Agreement.
4. Suzy Bills/Editing by Suzy shall upon Researcher's request either destroy or return the Confidential Information upon termination of this Agreement.
5. Any obligation of Suzy Bills/Editing by Suzy under this Agreement shall not apply to Confidential Information that:
  - a) Is or becomes a part of the public knowledge through no fault of Suzy Bills/ Editing by Suzy;
  - b) Suzy Bills/Editing by Suzy can demonstrate was rightfully in its possession before disclosure by Researcher/ research subjects; or
  - c) Suzy Bills/Editing by Suzy can demonstrate was rightfully received from a third party who was not Researcher/research subjects and was not under confidentiality restriction on disclosure and without breach of any nondisclosure obligation.
6. Suzy Bills/Editing by Suzy agrees to obligate its employees or agents, if any, who have access to any portion of Confidential Information to protect the confidential nature of the Confidential Information as set forth herein.

Current version 032012



7. Suzy Bills/Editing by Suzy shall defend, indemnify and hold the Researcher and the University of Phoenix harmless against any third party claims of damage or injury of any kind resulting from Suzy Bills/Editing by Suzy use of the Confidential Information, or any violation of by Suzy Bills/Editing by Suzy of the terms of this Agreement.
8. In the event Suzy Bills/Editing by Suzy receives a subpoena and believes it has a legal obligation to disclose Confidential Information, then Suzy Bills/Editing by Suzy will notify Researcher as soon as possible, and in any event at least five (5) business days prior to the proposed release. If Researcher objects to the release of such Confidential Information, Suzy Bills/Editing by Suzy will allow Researcher to exercise any legal rights or remedies regarding the release and protection of the Confidential Information.
9. Suzy Bills/Editing by Suzy expressly acknowledges and agrees that the breach, or threatened breach, by it through a disclosure of Confidential Information may cause irreparable harm and that Researcher may not have an adequate remedy at law. Therefore, Suzy Bills/Editing by Suzy agrees that upon such breach, or threatened breach, Researcher will be entitled to seek injunctive relief to prevent Suzy Bills/Editing by Suzy from commencing or continuing any action constituting such breach without showing or providing evidence of actual damage.
10. The interpretation and validity of this Agreement and the rights of the parties shall be governed by the laws of the State of Utah where the parties reside.
11. The parties to this Agreement agree that a copy of the original signature (including an electronic copy) may be used for any and all purposes for which the original signature may have been used. The parties further waive any right to challenge the admissibility or authenticity of this document in a court of law based solely on the absence of an original signature.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, each of the undersigned has caused this Agreement to be duly executed in its name and on its behalf:

Printed Name of Third Party/Vendor: Suzy Bills

Signature: Suzy Bills  
 Address: 496 N. 600 W., Orem, UT 84057  
 Date: 10/3/13

Printed Name of Researcher: Larrisha McGill

Signature: Larrisha McGill  
 Address: 7110 Obsidian Way, Durham NC, 27703  
 Date: 10/3/13

# Appendix F

## Data Access Use Form



### DATA ACCESS AND USE PERMISSION

#### North Carolina Government Employee Email Directory

Name of Facility, Organization, University, Institution, or Association

Please check mark any of the following statements that you approve regarding the study and data described below:

- I hereby authorize Larrisha McGill, a student of University of Phoenix who is conducting a research study titled or described as follows *The Lived Experiences of African American Female Leaders in North Carolina Government and the Glass Ceiling* access to, and use of, the non-identifiable archival data described as follows: North Carolina Government Email directory for use in the aforementioned research study. In granting this permission, I understand the following (please check mark each of the following as applicable):
  - The data will be maintained in a secure and confidential manner.
  - The data may be used in the publication of results from this study.
  - This research study must have IRB approval at the University of Phoenix before access to the data identified here is provided to Larrisha McGill.
  - Access to, and use of, this data will not be transferred to any other person without my/our express written consent.
  - The source of the data may be identified in the publication of the results of this study.
  - Relevant information associated with this data will be available to the dissertation chair, dissertation committee, school as may be needed for educational purposes.

Margaret Jordan  
Print Name

10/2/13  
Date

Margaret Jordan  
Signature

Larrisha McGill  
Researcher Signature/Acknowledgement

Public Information Officer  
Title  
106 W Jones St Raleigh, NC  
Address

10/2/13  
Date

## Appendix G

### Interview Transcripts

#### Participant AAW1

1. As an African American woman, what is your experience related to advancing into a leadership position?

**AAW1 Response:** I can't really say that it has been overly challenging. I have been really fortunate after I graduated in 82'. That was the hardest part just getting my foot in the door somewhere. After I did that it wasn't that hard to move and I made very strategic choices to get me where I thought I wanted to be. I am different because I transitioned from the private sector into government because it is a totally different world between the two. I mostly went from specialist positions to manager in the healthcare realm. when I was working for a company called Carolina Physicians Health Plan which is an HMO and they were bought by Signa, then I went to Kaiser and stayed there for two years. I was then recruited by someone who knew the City Manager and I met with him and we hit it off and I had the skill set that he was looking for, so he offered me a position working in government, so I think my timing in this area has been fortunate. I was driving by City Hall back in the late 80's and I wondered what it was like to work in government because I think I may like that one day. I did not pursue a Masters degree, I had wanted to go to law school but changed my mind because I wanted to do PR in this area.

2. What are the motivating factors that influenced your decision to pursue a leadership position?

**AAW1 Response:** When I was in healthcare I was a manager and I had a staff and coming into government was a natural transition for me to be hired into a leadership position. I had two other people working for me and my staff has grown. I love working with people and I knew I had the talent to do this job. Plus I had a good working relationship with the former City Manager and I knew exactly what he expected which made it easy. The other challenge was getting to know the Council and getting to know the City Manager to meet both of their needs.

3. What do you perceive are the skills needed to obtain a leadership position in North Carolina government?

**AAW1 Response:** You have to have really good people skills, you have to be motivated, and you have to have initiative but more than anything you have to know how to finesse the desires of politicians and the public while doing what you need to get done from an administrative point of view it can be a challenge. There is some prejudice, as an example I can go places with my staff member who is a White woman and they know we are from public affairs and nine times out of ten they are talking to her more than they are talking to me, even though they may know her position but especially when they don't know her position, they just assume that I work for her. When she explains that I am the boss and you should be directing those comments to her, it's those types of challenges that I am faced with. Even with eye contact, I had her to schedule a meeting with someone who I instructed her to invite so that we could meet and talk further and they knew who I was since I was sitting behind the desk and seventy percent of the

time they are talking to her instead of me and I am just as nice and friendly towards them as she is and sometimes even more but they direct their conversation to the White person, but that is just the way it is. I am not sure if they have certain leadership expectations or they feel like they have more in common with her, or that she may try to influence me in some way or what, I am not sure exactly what it is and it happens all of the time.

4. What do you perceive to be the barriers that prevent women from advancing into leadership positions?

**AAW1 Response:** Here I do not think it is education it is more about understanding what the needs and desires are of other leadership and how to engage them and figure out what it is they really want. The City Manager is very good and open and fair but I have to tell you that there are times I wonder what he is really thinking with all these black women surrounding him. You sit in leadership meetings and there was a time there were only White people in there and sometimes I go to other places like conferences and it is “Lily White” and I wonder where all of the black people are. I try not to be too overly sensitive but it has been thirteen years.

5. What experiences do you perceive may hinder an African American woman’s advancement in North Carolina government organizations?

**AAW1 Response:** I think mainly the expectations other people have of us. We look at things from a broader view of situations and people and we are more real about things than other people are and people do not know how to take that or work with that. I think even the City Manager expects us to respond in a certain way because of what he is familiar with and we may be more in your face, more specific and we will call something really what it is without trying to be so politically correct about it all of the time, for better or for worse and it is not because we don't know because we are just as smart as anybody in the room or smarter we just don't get into talking a whole bunch of junk to get to the point.

6. Based on your experience, what preparations do you believe black women need to possess to advance into a leadership position in North Carolina government as opposed to a non-African-American woman?

**AAW1 Response:** Well I don't know if there is anything really specific but education is important and being able to network is important. I have dealt with people from the "outside" who have certain expectations of certain people in government about what they can and cannot do. For example, I have to work with a reporter who will contact the City Manager directly instead of contacting me and I have thought about addressing this issue a couple of times but I thought about it and asked myself does it really hurt anything by this reporter going straight to the City Manager. The ability for black women to just step back and look at situations for what they really are, look at the personal cost benefit, and how the situation is being handled, being able to "choose your battles". I think that women in government need to learn how to be strategic when dealing with

people and be able to read people. Know where you want to be, how to read people, and use that skill to get where you want to be and make the best out a situation to achieve what you want to achieve from a situation. I always put leadership on a pedestal and we as black people have to understand that we are just as smart and just as engaging and a lot of times have a lot more to offer than we think we do. We as black women have to be comfortable to follow-up and get information that we need without coming off as being the “angry black woman” but authoritative so that a person knows that we expect an answer. We as black women when we walk into a room and we see White men sitting at the table we tend to automatically think that they are the authority figure and that is who we need to listen to and follow, and we answer them and it is not that way anymore. As we mature in the work world and in government as well, we will realize that we do not always have to fall in line all of the time and we have a lot to offer. I use be that way and it use to make me mad, when I walked into a room with White men I would feel intimidated because I thought that they were judging me and they didn’t think I knew as much. Black women also have to be strong enough to overcome negative comments that people may have said to us and not let that affect our psyche and remember that we are confident and capable. We as black women have to know who we are dealing with and work with it but not accept it, but work with it.

7. What are your thoughts on how the culture of North Carolina government organizations affects the advancement of black women?

**AAW1 Response:** The culture here in the City is pretty accepting of black females advancing but I can't say that it is the case overall. It's probably more of a hindrance because of the expectation that we do not have that much to offer and we are not as competent. When I have attended conferences people will ask the White woman that holds the same position that I do a question before they will ask me and when I speak up and explain the accomplishments the City has made under my leadership then people are surprised. Black women have to be cognizant about how we are perceived in government and be strategic about how we operate, communicate, and who we trust.

8. Based on your experiences, what specific training materials, tools, and programs do you feel could be developed to increase the number of black women in leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations?

**AAW1 Response:** I don't know if it is some much tools but networking and learning about other black women's experiences and learn how to deal with issues that may arise and how other black women have handled similar situations. Sometimes as black women once we have reached a certain level we feel like "we have arrived" and they do not make themselves available to other black women. I think that we as black women can be our own worst enemy.

9. Do you have other thoughts, feelings, or experiences to share that you feel may benefit this research study?

**AAW1 Response:** Not really, I just think that we as a group or as a people are overcoming this and it has taken time and I think that education and getting out in the work world has helped us build our confidence and learn how to work



together better. In government, however, there is an extra hurdle of dealing with politics and understanding the politics of a situation because in the end politicians are politicians and once you understand that the better off you will be. You have to have Teflon on so that you can “flow” right in. You have to build trust and it is harder for black women to establish trust versus a White women.

The interview will conclude with the following demographic questions:

1. How long have you been employed in North Carolina government?

**13 years**

2. How long have you been in a leadership position?

**13 years**

3. What is your educational level?

**Bachelor degree**

4. What is your age? Under 30, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60+

**50–59**

### **Participant AAW2**

1. As an African American woman, what is your experience related to advancing into a leadership position?

**AAW2 Response:** I have experienced both sexism and racism in terms of advancing. I started out as a graduate student and started working in government as an intern and was promoted after 5 months of working as an intern. When I started in government, I was making a third of what other graduate students were making and by the time I was promoted into another position I was making two-thirds of what other graduate students were making that held the same type

position and came out of graduate school with me. I was glad to be in both of those positions because I learned a lot and moved around in several different areas within the department. It took me 5 months to get my first promotion and then two years to be promoted into another position which I stayed in for seven years and then I was an assistant director for ten years and was promoted to director. Before I became an assistant director an acting white man was in the director's position and after he left a black male was hired in the director's position and a black male assistant director. When those individuals left I was then promoted into an assistant director's position. I was the first minority to work in my department and the first black female to be hired as a director in my department.

2. What are the motivating factors that influenced your decision to pursue a leadership position?

**AAW2 Response:** I would say because I saw a lack in the organization overall and because I am a proud African American woman and I believe that we are excellent leaders and that we need to be in those positions. When I started working in government in this organization all of the directors were white men and over time the organization began to hire white females and then a department was created where a black female served in the director's position and then I was promoted to my current position. I believe over time we have taken a step back because we only have three black females including myself out of 23 departments serving in a director's position in this organization.

**Follow-up question:** Describe your experience being the only black female director at the time you were promoted and working with all white men serving in directors position?

**AAW2 Response:** By the time I was promoted into the a directors position they knew me well enough to know that I was not going to play “crazy” for them but I had interesting experiences with them as I moved up in the organization and I believe over time word spread about me. I remember serving on this committee before I was promoted to director and I would provide my comments about what was being discussed and it was clear the white men really were not interested in what I had to say but someone else would make the same comments and it was a “great idea” coming from them. I decided that after a couple of rounds of that I had to say something. I remember one person who was particularly bad about it and I remember telling him that “I will not play invisible to your arrogant white male” and then other people in the room were trying to tell me not to be angry, however, it was important for me to call this person out and after that my reputation preceded me and people began to think that I was “crazy”( as in not going to let them slide by) and they knew not to play with me. Fast forward to present day and I had the same experience recently where I was in a meeting and made a suggestion in a meeting and it was overlooked but a white man made that same suggestion and he was heard. Myself and another black women sitting beside me spoke up and said “she just said that” so it is my experience that even though people will try to ignore a black female I am not going to put up with that because I have worked too hard, obtained two degrees, and several certifications

that say I know what I am doing so I will not put up with that and I will not be quiet because I think if you don't say anything and call people out then they will continue that behavior.

3. What do you perceive are the skills needed to obtain a leadership position in North Carolina government?

**AAW2 Response:** A whole lot of determination; you cannot be thin skinned at all because black women are going to encounter gender discrimination as well as race discrimination. You will also deal with people who have what I call the "clandestine racist attitude" where people want to be who they are which is a racist but they do not want to be called out about it. I tell my son and daughter that they have to be better than good if you want to be a leader in an organization. The men in this position prior to me did not have a Masters degree or certifications but I had to get all of that in order to get and maintain my position and sometimes you have to get extra and do extra to prove to other black people men and women that you know what you are doing.

4. What do you perceive to be the barriers that prevent women from advancing into leadership positions?

**AAW2 Response:** They are barriers created by people's perception of how women are and how black women are; there are still people in the organization that believe that women are emotional and who have old-fashioned beliefs. Sometimes we as black women can be a barrier to ourselves which is sad. For example, when I was promoted into this position the individuals who gave me problems were black women who are no longer with the organization. They did

not last two years because I expected them to do their jobs. Additionally, it is important for black women not to allow people to form a negative reputation about them because they show their emotions. I tell people don't cry in a meeting or in front of your boss never let them see you sweat and if you need to cry or get angry go to the bathroom and scream and do what is necessary to get your emotions in check but act in a "professional manner" in front of them because it will become a barrier for you in the organization and it is hard to overcome that reputation once it has been established.

5. What experiences do you perceive may hinder an African American woman's advancement in North Carolina government organizations?

**AAW2 Response:** We as African American women have to "temper our temper" even if we get very angry about something. We have to learn to say what needs to be said in a calm and direct manner while still getting your point across and doing what needs to be done in a given situation. That is something that we as women have to learn how to master. I also think that it is good to have people, specifically other women, to be able to call and rely on each other to get advice from or just talk to about different situations and experiences. Men also expect us to be passive so we as black women have to figure out how to get a good balance of who we are without coming across passive but to be assertive enough to get things done without coming off as aggressive. Listening is also a good skill to have as well as "people watching" in order to read people and observe people's gestures and facial expressions so you know how to respond and communicate to people.

6. Based on your experience, what preparations do you believe black women need to possess to advance into a leadership position in North Carolina government as opposed to a non-African-American woman?

**AAW2 Response:** I am going to say for any woman that it is important to have the appropriate education because people will look for reasons not to promote you because you are women. Do some extra-curricular work so that you get to know people and get your name out there and network so that people become familiar with who you are because a lot of times that will get you an interview. It is also important to have good people skills, be charismatic, energetic, and professional. Often times people will hire you because they like you and feel you would be a good fit for the organization even if you still have to learn additional skills to perform the job duties.

7. What are your thoughts on how the culture of North Carolina government organizations affects the advancement of black women?

**AAW2 Response:** I generally think that it impedes us and I don't think that things are different in 2013 as opposed to the 1960s. I believe that there is a lot of institutional racism and I think there would be more overt racism if it was politically correct. It is almost like there is a resurgence of white male dominance in government. There is still a predominance of white males in government.

8. Based on your experiences, what specific training materials, tools, and programs do you feel could be developed to increase the number of black women in leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations?

**AAW2 Response:** I believe that the training and education that is available in North Carolina is good given all of the universities in the area. I also think that it is important for women to become a part of professional organizations in their fields. The cultural barriers are the ones that are the most detrimental because people in your family tell you how important education is and even after you have obtained a good education it is just a matter of someone perceiving us as individuals that will add value to an organization so we often times have to go the extra mile to develop the necessary contacts and market ourselves so that people can put us in positions and we can grow.

9. Do you have other thoughts, feelings, or experiences to share that you feel may benefit this research study?

**AAW2 Response:** My major thought is that we get the education and not listen to people who think that education is a waste of time. We as black women may not have the “rockerfeller connection” with someone who may be able to put you in a position that we want so as black women we have to get an education and all the credentials necessary to get where you want to be so that education cannot be an excuse used to prevent black women from advancing. Black women also have to be determined and we have to look at the “big picture” and not let sexism and racisms discourage us.

The interview will conclude with the following demographic questions:

1. How long have you been employed in North Carolina government?  
**38 ½ years**
2. How long have you been in a leadership position?

**22 years**

3. What is your educational level?

**Masters and two certifications**

4. What is your age? Under 30, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60+

**60+**

### **Participant AAW3**

1. As an African American woman, what is your experience related to advancing into a leadership position?

**AAW3 Response:** I would say that my experience has been challenging because I have sacrificed a lot with my children and my family. Sometimes when I look back on it it's hard for me to believe that I sacrificed as much as I did because when you are living it and you are reaching for your goal knowing that it is going to make it better for your family, you don't always think about how to value what you are sacrificing and you always look at others and compare yourself to others in terms of their sacrifices like men, women, and children. It is so different in our society how people look at the things and what we sacrifice versus men so it has been challenging and I am where I want to be it's just now when I look back on it, I ask myself did I work too hard? Did I sacrifice too much?

2. What are the motivating factors that influenced your decision to pursue a leadership position?

**AAW3 Response:** Primarily my mother, my mother worked in a factory and she never had any input into her work schedule as to when she could be off. I remember being young and she had to work third shift and leave us at home alone



when we were little kids and I remember that even before I started school. So in my mind then I said I wanted to be in a role so that I could always be with my kids and I could make decisions about when I work or at least have input when I work and even though sometimes you have that you don't always exercise it because you want to make sure that you are competitive with your male colleagues, but I wanted to feel empowered in that way that my mom never felt.

3. What do you perceive are the skills needed to obtain a leadership position in North Carolina government?

**AAW3 Response:** Number one education, number two at any position you really have to carry yourself as a leader, you have to talk like a leader, when you walk in a room and you start talking people should see you as a leader, and you have to dress like a leader. The other part of that is you have to make sure that you spend as much time possible understanding your role and how your role fits and aligns with the other departments or business units. Get inside the head of your boss and your peers and really try to figure out and understand where people are and take away from them what you can get in terms of doing your job and being successful and leave the other stuff alone and leave the people behind who are not there yet or not ready yet. You can't pull everybody along but you find the people who really are looking forward and their trying to do better but there are some people you have to leave alone because you can't align yourself with everyone and you can't take everyone with you. Sometimes in our culture we feel like we don't want to give up on people but there are people at all levels and it doesn't matter what their position is and you see promise and opportunity and you say "I can

mentor this person” or “I can coach them”, but then there are other people who don’t get it, they’re not going to get it and I am not going to waste my energy trying to bring that person along. You have to have good judgment about people and surround yourself with people who are smart and that is something that people do not always do. A person could look at me as a director and look at the people I hire and question why I hired a certain person, or why did she not hire this person. I am not going to hire anyone or bring anyone in my department who is not the “best of the best”, who have not proven themselves, or if I don’t think that person can continue to help me maintain success in my department. My department is constantly moving the bar and we get good comments about the good job we are doing and I am not going to sacrifice that just because I want to have “this look”. To me, it’s about knowing if I am going to work hard I want to find people that will work hard and I am not going to have weak links on my team. This does not mean that I will not hire young people. The last couple of people I have hired have come to me through internships, with no real work experiences but when they completed their internship with me I saw leaders in them and I saw the potential and I said ok I can take this person and mold them because they already have the education and I can develop this person. I have also had interns that when it was time for them to leave I wished them “good luck” because I knew that the person wasn’t there yet and they were not ready to move into this fast paced demanding environment. It’s unfortunate because I had a black female intern and I had never had a black female intern and both times it was a really bad experience. I think they had an expectation that it was going to

be easy just because they had their education. I remember one person sitting in my office and I asked her to do something and she came and said to me “I have my MPA, I really don’t think this is what I need to be working on” and I told her that she did not have any work experience and I couldn’t believe that she would say that to me because she needed a job but couldn’t do what I asked her to do.

However, I have had people come in like I have now who came to me as an intern and now that person is an assistant director. It is important for people when they enter a program to take whatever they are given as a learning opportunity and have self-awareness of what you know and what you don’t know.

4. What do you perceive to be the barriers that prevent African American women from advancing into leadership positions?

**AAW3 Response:** I think number one ourselves, I was just having a conversation with a colleague of mine and I was talking about this African American female in the organization and I stated that she is so smart but her attire, her mannerisms, and her approach when you are not there yet really is a turnoff to other directors. I said that you can have and be the most fashionable person in the world but it doesn’t mean that you can wear everything to work. So having that self-awareness is important but I think we are the number one barrier because there is already this stigma attached to us in terms of being overbearing, negative, and mad and having this kind of stigma hurts when a black woman comes into an organization or a certain area because people are expecting to see something negative out of you. For example, when I came to this organization working in another position not as a director I absolutely hated my job when I first came here and when I tell people

that they say “I would have never known” and I would go home and tell my husband how much I hated the job and I wanted to find me another job because I hated it so much. I also did not like my director but she never knew that and as a matter a fact she still calls me and invites me to lunch sometimes but I hated to come and work with her everyday but I came in and I would come into her office and she would explain to me the things that she wanted me to do whether it was attending a meeting or completing a project and I would go home and tell my husband how much I hated this job but she was the person that recommended me for my current position as the director and when she left I got the job. So you never know what blessing or opportunity you will get out of a relationship with another person so you should never burn your bridges. I think we are our number one barrier because it’s like when I remind my children of the opportunities they have versus the opportunities I had to get to this point I remind them that the only person who can keep you from achieving your dreams is you. Another barrier is not getting our education, our lifestyles and knowing what we want to do first, second, or third in life to make sure that I can be the best that I can be for my children or when you have a husband. You can’t have it all and not do the extra work that it takes to maintain everything especially if you have a family while you are getting additional education. So setting goals and reaching your goals and not letting what I call “noise” to distract you whether it is family noise, the people you work with, friends, the naysayers and negative people influence you. I think that it is important for women to explore and experience different opportunities like traveling or maybe working in another country and experience other cultures

because it is important and women have so many more opportunities to do these types of things now and that is something that I wish I would have done.

5. What experiences do you perceive may hinder an African American woman's advancement in North Carolina government organizations?

**AAW3 Response:** Number one, when you talk about government it's not like there is one hundred people doing a particular job at the same level so the number of opportunities available in North Carolina is limited. Also understanding the politics and I don't mean the party kind of politics but the kind of politics when you understand the managers relationship with Council, understanding the Council's expectations and how he relates to you and what he asks you do to. You have to have that "organizational sensitivity" knowing that it's not just about your department or the people you manage because it's bigger than that and everybody has a boss somewhere. It takes a while to really understand the politics and the number of opportunities available so you have to be willing to be patient if you want to be in North Carolina government at a certain level or be willing to broaden your interest.

6. Based on your experience, what preparations do you believe black women need to possess to advance into a leadership position in North Carolina government as opposed to a non-African-American woman?

**AAW3 Response:** I think that it definitely requires more in terms of education and I don't think that has changed. I think that there are certain assumptions and stereotypes that still exist and that hasn't changed so I work really, really hard to make sure that I don't fall into those stereotypes but I am also who I am because

if I need to get in your face I will get in your face and that's not going to change but there is a way that I do that. I can close my door and say that I need to talk to someone without shouting it out or being dramatic. I think that you have to be really strong because men will challenge you everyday and people will challenge you everyday. People challenge me all the time in my role and the decisions that I make. I just had a very "crucial conversation" with another director the other day and informed him that I did not understand why he was questioning my work because I have given him the answer to his question over and over again and he continues to ask the same question as if he is going to get a different answer and this is a White male asking me that question. So I had to sit down and have a conversation with this person and I told him that I didn't understand why he communicates to people that I get frustrated and I explained to him that frustration is not a behavior it is a reaction so let me tell you since why I get frustrated. Number one he asked me the same question and I give him the same answer; it's not like I am inconsistent, two, he gives me the same advice and I say ok thank you very much but here is what I am going to do and he doesn't like that, and three he continuously says the same things to other people as if other people can make me make another decision when I am the director and that frustrates me. I don't try to run anybody else's business if you ask me for advice I will give it to you and I came here to be in the position I am in as the director and that's all I want to do and whatever I can do to support another person I will do that but don't talk to me as though you know more about my business than I do.

**Follow-up question:** Do you think you would have been put in that position to have to explain yourself further if you were a White woman?

**AAW3 Response:** I think maybe to some degree as a White woman but I think less as a White man. I think that it is sometimes hard for people to wrap their heads around the fact that I don't use a lot of big words and I'm just a down to earth person. People ask "how does she do that?" "How does she do that kind of job and when she opens her mouth she doesn't sound like she graduated from Harvard or Yale?" because I didn't graduate from Harvard or Yale but I worked really, really hard and I have lots of years of experience and so it's hard sometimes for people to control themselves in that manner. So that has always been a challenge because my position has always been filled by a White man within the organization. When I came to work in my department the assistant director told me after she hired me and we became close because she was retiring and I was brought in to groom for this position and I remember her telling me that she couldn't believe that I was doing as well as I was because she said that typically in this department it has been White men who do the best in this role. The position that I am in requires a lot of hard work and time and I don't think people realize how much time needs to be devoted in carrying out the duties on my position. It's not easy when you have children or a partner who is understands the role that you are in and what your colleagues are doing and I have got to keep up and do even better. One disappointment that I had in this organization was when there was an opportunity open to fill the Deputy City Manager position and I was asked about the position. Although I do not have a desire to be in that role,

I was surprised when a White male was asked about his interest in that role and had only been in North Carolina government for about two years. I questioned how I would be looked at to be on the same level with this person when I have 20 years of experience in government, eight years of experience in my current position, serve on the Executive Team, chaired several committees, but I am put on the same level as a White man with less experience than me.

7. What are your thoughts on how the culture of North Carolina government organizations affects the advancement of black women?

**AAW3 Response:** I mean the culture is the “good ole boy” system and that is the culture as a whole and you have to figure out where you can be the most successful. I say that because if you look at some of these Deputy City Managers in these organizations in North Carolina government you wonder how they got the position that they are in and that’s because it is a “good ole boy” system. You have to find the place that will be a best fit for you and because of that “good ole boy” system there are certain places within North Carolina government that I would not go to work. If I look at other opportunities I will do research on the City Council members and the Mayors and read their bios to find out more about who they are and what they do because ultimately it will be a top down approach and those are the people who are going to say we expect to have a diverse environment so if I do not see that then I am apprehensive about seeking other opportunities in different areas within North Carolina government.



8. Based on your experiences, what specific training materials, tools, and programs do you feel could be developed to increase the number of black women in leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations?

**AAW3 Response:** I think more networking opportunities for women to share experiences and more of a culture change is going to have to occur in some organizations. I work with cities that when you look at the makeup of the staff such as the directors and the people under them you wonder how do things get the way they are and so flip-flopped because you may have these really, really smart people who are not being elevated or promoted and then organizations bring in different people to fill the directors positions. I also think that we have to make sure that we stay on top of what is going on in North Carolina government so when I am in a room with people from different organizations within North Carolina government I am able to engage in conversation because I know what is going on and I don't fit into the stereotype that other people may have thinking that I am not able to have a discussion about different topics. So it is important that we network and stay on top of what is going on in our organization but other organizations as well. There are people that I keep in contact with in my same line of work and I keep them engaged in conversation so when I need something I can go to them as ask and I know I will get the information that I need because we have those relationships. It is important that you keep strong relationships with people in your profession and read to stay current about information in your profession.

9. Do you have other thoughts, feelings, or experiences to share that you feel may benefit this research study?

**AAW3 Response:** I would just say that African American women have to realize that the opportunities are broad and as you move up and there is still going to be some push back and some level of “noise” that you have to get through, the experiences will be different for each woman but it is still not easy. However, there are still opportunities available to take advantage of that can benefit each person. For example, I was having a conversation with a young lady who went to Thailand and she used that as an opportunity to learn more information about that country since her organization does a lot of work with people in Thailand so she made it her vacation. This young lady was recently promoted to another position in another state but she used her travel as an opportunity to learn more about different governments and how they work. So it is important for women to expose themselves to as many things as possible because you never know where you are going to be or what opportunities may become available and you are able to talk about your experiences and what you know having encountered different situations.

The interview will conclude with the following demographic questions:

1. How long have you been employed in North Carolina government?  
**23 years**
2. How long have you been in a leadership position?  
**22 years**
3. What is your educational level?

### **Master's degree**

4. What is your age? Under 30, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60+

### **40–49**

### **Participant AAW4**

1. As an African American woman, what is your experience related to advancing into a leadership position?

**AAW4 Response:** Just to give you a little background I started my career in public accounting in 1976 and I went to work for an accounting firm. I was one of five women who came into that firm that year and the only African American female working in the firm at that time. It was an interesting but somewhat difficult transition and I stayed in that position for two years primarily just to get my work experience because it was so difficult. It was difficult for the firm and I recognize that now even thirty years or so later they weren't really ready to have an African American. They knew that it was something that they needed to do but they really didn't know how to make that transition. Often times I received comments from my fellow colleagues that would tell me that they had to figure out what clients to send me to because there were clients who did not want a black person on their team. I finally said to them that "I'm not just a number", I came to this profession because I want to be in this profession but I need to be out in the field so that I could learn. So I ended up getting assigned to jobs but they were smaller jobs and not jobs with the bigger well-known firms. I was assigned to small non-profit organizations which was good in retrospective because government and non-profits are similar but eventually I left that firm just because

I did not feel like they were ready and I went back to grad school. I had some very good mentors during my internships during the two years that I was in grad school both male and female black and white and I discovered that the private sector was more able to accommodate me as a young black female and I got a lot of leadership responsibilities. My first big responsibility as a leader was in 1983 when I was about 23 and I was working for a company and the men that I worked with had forty years of experience and the manager of that department put me in charge of one particular engagement which I thought was wonderful because he realized that the only way that I was going to learn was to give me more responsibilities. He was a great mentor and a great person and so I realized that I really enjoyed management and having the responsibility of being in charge and getting things done. I left that company and began working for another company in the yarn spinning business. I had just finished grad school and I had my MBA and my CPA and I knew nothing about the yard spinning business and I was a manager with this company. Learning from my experience with the previous company I went in with the attitude of knowing that I know what I know and the people that I supervised knew what they knew. We were all about the same age but they assured me that they would help me and take care of me as long as I helped them in whatever capacity they needed my assistance. It was the best job and one of the best experiences that I had as a manager. What I tried to do over the years was emulate the people that supervised me and take away the good that I learned through those experiences and I excluded the things that were not good. While I was working at the yarn spinning company I had a female manager who

was absolutely horrible and so what I have tried to do over the years as I mentor young people is encourage them to develop their own style. So I have tried to put myself in positions where I could have increasingly more responsibility and I started my own CPA firm in 1987 and I did that for ten years. I was able to run my firm successfully for a decade because I had learned from my previous experiences working for the two companies that I worked for prior to opening my business. Being a woman in the accounting profession when I came through there were not very many black women working in the accounting field. However, now the profession has turned around and there are many more women than men. So I have tried to maintain my skill set and I like learning. So over the course of my career I have tried to put myself in positions where there was a little risk because I recognize where my strengths and weaknesses are and I also recognize that I have room for improvement. When I spoke with the City manager about this job I informed him that I really did not like government but since being in this position I realized how much I really enjoy doing what I do and the City manager saw something in me that I didn't see in myself and I really appreciate that but took that risk to take this position and while I don't do everything right this has been a great learning opportunity. So as an African American woman you have to be willing to take risks and you have to stay on top of what your skills are. You can't ever think that what you know is enough you have to continue to try to improve yourself and network. I have some great mentors and I don't know what I would do without those women and they are primarily other black females. I don't think that we do a good enough job with that I have just learned to do that in the last

five years. I did not do that early on in my career because I thought I knew everything. I think one of the things that I would do differently and I try to tell my kids is use the network that you have because people want to help you and by doing that it will help make the path easier.

2. What are the motivating factors that influenced your decision to pursue a leadership position?

**AAW4 Response:** I am not a good follower. I like being in charge and I have not really learned how to be a great follower because I have an entrepreneurial spirit and I like thinking of new ways to do things and then bring people together to carry out the ideas. I like being the director and I realized that as I got older I felt that the technical part of my profession I had mastered by the time I was thirty and I felt that I could also make a contribution if I have some say with the direction of a department or a business because I want to give back and know that I have made a difference and the way that I can do that is by being in charge.

3. What do you perceive are the skills needed to obtain a leadership position in North Carolina government?

**AAW4 Response:** You have to be intellectually adept and learn your business. One thing that I think is important that I have learned about in the last couple of weeks is that you have to understand your emotional intelligence (EI). I think I can be a good leader just because I am an intelligent individual and I can decipher large volumes of information and carry them out, however, I don't think that makes me a good leader. Leaders that have a strong EI become superior leaders not just good leaders but great leaders and that comes by having a self-awareness,

having good interpersonal skills, having a passion for learning, willing to make decisions that are not popular as well as have a vision and being able to influence people to carry out that vision. What I have realized in the last couple of weeks is that I need to help people by using some type of metaphor to help them understand why what I need them to do is important and how I can tie their values into completing a project. In order to do that I have to understand what values are important to individuals by understanding what drives and motivates them and be able to communicate what I need from them to get something done because you can't get people to follow you if you can't get people to buy in or if their values are not congruent with what the project entails.

4. What do you perceive to be the barriers that prevent African American women from advancing into leadership positions?

**AAW4 Response:** I think sometimes we are really bossy and I think that stems from the fact that a lot of women are heads of households and we always have to figure out how to get things done without putting up with a whole bunch of crap. While I think we bring a lot to the table because I think we are persistent and we can get things done in the workplace that can be perceived differently. So I think we have to get a balance between being driven, being passionate, and being persistent and also be able to take constructive criticism and feedback and also change our behavior. So again, it boils down to your EI and knowing if you are emotionally able to accept criticism, give feedback, and communicate with people if you need to because if you can't do those things well you may be a midlevel manager but you will never be the head of an organization because it requires

that. So having that EI and understanding what yours is and what that requires of you and honestly unless you go to a class or you are willing to read a book on what it is how do you get that? So I believe that we are at a disadvantage because unless you hear about it or somebody tells you that you need to understand this about yourself, and if you don't understand you need to go to a class or get some training because the real component of what is going to make you successful you will not get. So I think that is a barrier because we don't know that EI is critical to our success. Research has shown that knowing your EI is critical to being a good leader.

5. What experiences do you perceive may hinder an African American woman's advancement in North Carolina government organizations?

**AAW4 Response:** A positive experience that I have had is that I have a great boss. I report directly to the City manager and I also report to an independent agency. Those individuals are very knowledgeable about what we do, the value of it, and they support me. I also had a job with the State before I accepted this position and that supervisor was horrible so much so that I really thought that he was borderline unethical. I wrote a report on him, turned it in, and I resigned from that position. The values that he had conflicted with the values that I believe in which are honesty and integrity, two of my values and I could not work for that person. So I think that the person you directly report to can hinder advancement and I think you have to have a strong mentor because you need a support system. So it important to have a network of peers that you can go to and can be honest with you about your strengths and weakness and support you.



6. Based on your experience, what preparations do you believe black women need to possess to advance into a leadership position in North Carolina government as opposed to a non-African-American woman?

**AAW4 Response:** Just being extremely well prepared and a lot of times that means for us is that you have multiple degrees even if your white counterparts do not and a lot of times that is the case and has been the case in my career because you have more and you feel like you always have to be better prepared and again knowing your EI. I had a professor say to me one time that if you feel like you are getting emotional you need to be able to get up and leave the situation. It is important to know what your hot buttons are and what triggers you because even if I am mad with a person I need to be able to communicate effectively with that person as opposed to being angry or having an attitude. So we as women need to develop networks and understand what real communication is and knowing what our hot buttons are. You need to be out there to meet people because I don't think that is something we as a people do enough of and you need to seek out training that is going to help you to get in tune with that.

7. What are your thoughts on how the culture of North Carolina government organizations affects the advancement of black women?

**AAW4 Response:** I think that it's specific, I think each government is different. I think that the culture here is better than most governments because I think the City Manager is aware that we have a large black population. I think that it is important for upper management within government to understand the culture of their organization. Looking at other government organizations it looks like their

older white males so I think for them bringing in younger people is difficult for some organizations to deal with. So as an African American female the culture where I work is good because I have worked in other cities and government organizations where the women were not valued as much. The people that head organizations have to bring in more young people, more women, and more black people.

8. Based on your experiences, what specific training materials, tools, and programs do you feel could be developed to increase the number of black women in leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations?

**AAW4 Response:** I think the one that I would really like to share coming from my training I have learned over the last couple of weeks is EI because it is primary to your success. I would like to develop a survey and send it to all of the black and brown women or at least bring us together and share the information about EI and think about how we can be better especially if we are looking to advance or even if you are already in a leadership position. I think we could all benefit from someone addressing us and taking us through training on EI because we all think we act a certain way but I think our perception is skewed about how we act. You may have a lot of education but you need to make sure that you are emotionally adept and I think that is important to share with women of color.

9. Do you have other thoughts, feelings, or experiences to share that you feel may benefit this research study?

**AAW4:** There are not that many women PhD's and they are not that many women and I think it is great that young African Americans can be role models. I

think we should strive for higher levels of education whether a Masters or PhD because it tells people you are an expert at something and it also tells people that we are willing to preserve and also try to be mentors for people who are coming behind you because it opens doors. Having women of color that are experts in their fields it would be more difficult to exclude them from leadership positions. Also you can't wait for the position to become available and you have to bring everything to the table that you know because organizations may put a white male or female into a position that may not have a lot of experience or knowledge but they are willing to give them a chance but a black female has to bring everything to the table and prove themselves. So being ready to fill leadership positions means that you have to get your education and you need to think two levels ahead depending on where you are in your career and that way the decisions you make will be the decisions that a leader would make.

The interview will conclude with the following demographic questions:

1. How long have you been employed in North Carolina government?

**12 years**

2. How long have you been in a leadership position?

**30 years**

3. What is your educational level?

**PhD**

4. What is your age? Under 30, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60+

**50–59**

## **Participant AAW5**

1. As an African American woman, what is your experience related to advancing into a leadership position?

**AAW5 Response:** My experience in advancing into a leadership position in this area has been very progressive and I have received a lot of support for female advancement. When I came to the area there was a female city manager and a female assistant city manager and quite a few female directors. So I had a lot of support coming in more so than where I came from in Virginia where there were more male leaders in Virginia government.

2. What are the motivating factors that influenced your decision to pursue a leadership position?

**AAW5 Response:** I have always considered myself to be a people person and I like to get things done so it has just taken me in that direction. I love managing, managing people, and managing projects and I have never been afraid of that. An opportunity became available for me to become a director stepping up from being an assistant director because the current director decided to leave. I was recommended to be the acting director and I am not going to lie it was scary but I realized that I care about this department and I care about the City and I needed to step up and keep this department together moving forward because there had been quite a few leaders coming and going during the previous five years and there was a lot of nervousness about continuity. The department had also been through a lot of changes dealing with cuts and management changes and so it was “survival of the organization” and this is where I was going to be. I love this area and this

department so I had to step up but everyone was very supportive and I realized once I was in the position as the director all of the experiences that I had been through “the good, the bad, and the ugly”, had prepared me for the politics, managing people, and managing projects so it was very comfortable, surprisingly.

3. What do you perceive are the skills needed to obtain a leadership position in North Carolina government?

**AAW5 Response:** Well one thing is that it is ok to be afraid because as long as you have that fear I think that you are able to accomplish anything and everything that you set your mind too, at least that is how I feel about it. I like challenges and thrive on those and I am not going to say that I am not nervous or afraid because you still have to work to overcome that but it lets you know, and lets people know that you are human and that you care. The other thing is utilize your assets because you don't have to know how to do everything. There is probably no one walking around that knows everything about their department but what you are able to do is manage people to get the job done looking at each person's weaknesses and strengths including your own. I know what my strengths and weaknesses are and I am not ashamed of it, I can work on it but some things like being “directionally challenged” that's just me and I want to overcome that. What I do is if someone is better with maps and directions or whatever that's when I try to look at the strengths and weaknesses of my coworkers and myself and work it to the departments' advantage to make sure that nothing gets dropped in the department and that we are working together as a team. I feel like the department has a good team that complements each other.

4. What do you perceive to be the barriers that prevent African American women from advancing into leadership positions?

**AAW5 Response:** Barriers are proving yourself and people having confidence that you can do the job. I had that barrier to work against where I came from and it was mostly male dominated with the majority being White males but then they started bringing in black males and not giving females a chance. Also finding ways to get the skills that you need and always keeping an open mind to learn new things from anyone that you are exposed to, and not getting negative or caught up in that because you are not exactly where you want to be. I was promoted because when I came out of the organization I was a superintendent and I got involved in my statewide organization and people knew my reputation that if I said I am going to do something I am going to be committed and do the best job that I can. One thing that was not an option for me was not doing what I said I was going to do because my word is my bond. Failure is an option because I have learned from my experiences through failure but I was never afraid to try something new and you have to do that. You have to be self-motivated and not wait for someone to always pat you on the back to tell you that you are doing a great job. I am self-motivated and I have been thrown in every situation that I have ever been in so I am a survivor, I ask for help, I give credit to others, and I don't take the credit because it's the organization that is accomplishing things and I try to make sure that I do that. I try to listen to what people are saying because I generally care about people in the organization whether or not they are in my department or in other departments.

5. What experiences do you perceive may hinder an African American woman's advancement in North Carolina government organizations?

**AAW5 Response:** Some of the things that I just said which are you have to keep an open mind to learning new things. Don't be afraid of failure because if you are afraid of failure you are not taking risks and I have taken risks. I have accepted employees, facilities, equipment, vehicles, and programs that no one else wanted. When I worked in Virginia I was the go to person and people were quite upset that I was leaving. I love for people to tell me no because I am going to figure out a way to get it done. One thing that I learned early on is that you have control over yourself and how you react to things and once I learned that then I didn't get upset about things that I had no control over. You can still focus on what you want to do and if training is not provided you can go out and find training. If mentoring is not provided you can go out and find mentoring. I have found that when you try to assist and help other people you grow from that too. You can't look at everything as an obstacle but as an opportunity, you have to have that mindset. If you look at things as a challenge then it's going to be a challenge but look at things as an opportunity for growth. When I first got here I gave the managers under me projects to work on and they thought that I was giving them projects that was not in their field of expertise so they felt that I was setting them up to fail. I came from the mindset where I was always thrown into different situations so I was just trying to see how they were going to organize getting the projects done. Not necessarily looking for them to do the projects themselves but seeing how they were going to build a team to address the project. People want to

move up but they don't want the challenge but the challenge is what makes you grow and develop and that's what I realized when I stepped into this role as acting director, all of the experiences and challenges that I had prepared me for this directors position.

6. Based on your experience, what preparations do you believe black women need to possess to advance into a leadership position in North Carolina government as opposed to a non-African-American woman?

**AAW5 Response:** I think for women period is what I just said about knowing yourself, know what your strengths and weaknesses are and know what makes you tick. I use to tell people that I was a recovering workaholic and when I came to this area I fell right back into all of my bad habits but I am so use to giving one hundred and ten plus percent when I say that I am going to do a job, now I realize that I have to reward myself too. I will do the work, work hard, and push myself harder than anyone else but I am thinking about the job all the time. I look at my job as a career not just saying "I have to come to work". I try to come with a positive attitude because I realized early on that whatever mood I was in or how I was reacting to things that I was affecting the people around me. So I said I have to calm myself down because I was kind of hype. Once you know yourself and what makes you tick then you can be there for other people because you are not focused on what your needs are but you are focused on what the organizations needs are and the people that are a part of it. I think it is critical to have good people skills and if you are in a leadership position you have to know the policies and some policies are basic policies no matter where you go in government. This



is a bureaucracy, and I have watched other people come into the organization from the private sector that are frustrated by it. I worked in City government for thirty plus years so I am use to that but I don't see that as a negative. I look at it as protecting all of us, protecting the organization, and protecting the tax payers. I have also learned to be creative within it while still falling into those parameters and fulfilling my need for creativity, so it is all in how you look at things. I think that North Carolina is a very progressive State than Virginia in recognizing talent whether you a minority or a woman and this area is great in utilizing all resources. So this is a great place for all people to come and progress.

7. What are your thoughts on how the culture of North Carolina government organizations affects the advancement of black women?

**AAW5 Response:** In Parks and Recreation and nationally accreditation, there are only about one hundred Parks & Receptions departments that are nationally accredited. The first departments in the state of North Carolina were headed up by women except for Asheville which is headed up by a male while other cities within the State of North Carolina are headed up by females. I am the only black female director of a nationally accredited department. It was interesting to see that females were the individuals leading and taking charge in trying to educate and inform other departments as they were working towards national accreditation.

8. Based on your experiences, what specific training materials, tools, and programs do you feel could be developed to increase the number of black women in leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations?

**AAW5 Response:** Our state has a national conference that is held in Virginia where all of the directors working in this industry in North Carolina come together. There were several of us that were new directors and several of us that were female minority directors. What we started doing was having lunch to meet and talk about some of the issues that we were dealing with in our departments and help one another. We did that for a year and met every two months at different locations in different cities. This allowed us to share our experiences and support one another. There are a lot more minority female directors in this industry that have become directors since I became a director and I think it's important to mentor each other and have someone to talk to.

9. Do you have other thoughts, feelings, or experiences to share that you feel may benefit this research study?

**AAW5 Response:** I think that North Carolina is a very progressive state. I look at the directors here and the diversity in this area and I was not use to seeing this diversity when I was in Virginia. I also look at the diversity amongst other directors in this industry at our state conference and the directors' conference and you see more females which is very unusual whatever your nationality is, it is very unusual. North Carolina is very progressive and I think it's important for the organizations to recognize us and provide support that's why I have not missed a directors conference because you get the training and networking opportunities to get to know other people and be able to discuss any issues that you may be having as well as receive and offer resolutions to other directors. So it is a great opportunity to build a network of people that you can call.

The interview will conclude with the following demographic questions:

1. How long have you been employed in North Carolina government?

**9 years and 3 months**

2. How long have you been in a leadership position?

**9 years and 3 months**

3. What is your educational level?

**Master of Science and Management**

4. What is your age? Under 30, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60+

**60+**

#### **Participant AAW6**

1. As an African American woman, what is your experience related to advancing into a leadership position?

**AAW6 Response:** I have to say that it has been a situation of being somewhat at the right place at the right time and having persons willing to use the skills that I have to advance. If I think about my career in its entirety I would say that my first opportunities were interesting because I am a nurse by profession and my husband was in the military when I got married. I went to be with him in the Republic of Panama and the women on the military post where we were stationed did not work. So, I was somewhat unique in that I had just finished a four year college degree and wanted to work. I did not have kids or anything to hold me at home so I wanted to pursue my career which after a year I did. I worked in a hospital and it was a feeling of apprehension as this was my first nursing job. But having persons within that hospital setting to embrace me, helped me learn things. One of my first

experiences was learning how to read EKGs there. Because someone saw my interest, they were willing to support that. I went into mental health and it was very interesting. I happened to just show up for work and they said that the guy who was doing substance abuse treatment had just resigned. I was told “here’s your new job!” But at the same point , I got to know some people that were working in the field already and willing to share their information and that helped me to progress. Ultimately, when I was serving as substance abuse counselor at a state facility, the unit director promoted me and so I became the first African American to take over counseling services in a state agency. It was at a time where there was a lot more interest in promoting African Americans coming out of the civil right movement. I have always been somewhat self-assured and I have not had too many problems with self-esteem. I attribute that to my father who felt that there was nothing better than being who we were. There was never a question about going to college because it was ingrained in us very early that education is important. So, I have always tried to capitalize on that and to that extent, being prepared and being at the right place at the right time has helped to propel my career.

2. What are the motivating factors that influenced your decision to pursue a leadership position?

**AAW6 Response:** I think one aspect is personality; I am a Leo if you believe in birth signs. If you believe, there is sort of innate leadership in persons born under that sign. I am a believer in proper preparation or as I refer to it “the five P’s- proper preparation prevents poor performance.” That is my credo, so I am very

meticulous about detail, trying to understand things, and always giving my best. I can't say that I was always the best student but I can say that I have always been willing to get out there and seek interest and opportunities. I think that just preparing for things has been beneficial along with getting me into position. So that if opportunities open up, I am there to seek it. But I have to say that education is extremely important and having an education, willingness, and desire to pursue things that are of interest and not being afraid to pursue those things have really helped me. I would also say that the support of family and friends and receiving encouragement and support from them has been very important. I don't think that I would have done many things through the years if it had not been for the support of my family in making things happen. They have been invaluable in terms of my career pursuits and just having an environment that really never has tried to hold me back. I have never been put in a box and told that this is where you need to be, even though I am acutely aware of having come through during the sixties and all of the upheaval around civil rights. I think it's really interesting that even in that segregated environment, I don't know that in terms of my career pursuits, that I felt any particular restraint. I think it has a lot to do with having been brought up in this area. This is an environment where African Americans have achieved a lot-had their own banking institutions, had their own educational institutions, and all of that. So to that extent even though it was segregated, we did not necessarily feel that separation because we had pretty much everything. That's not to say that I can't remember going to the five and dime stores downtown and seeing the white water fountain and the black water fountain and wondering what

that was about and drank out of whichever one I could get to. I even got put in the County jail during the Civil Rights movement just before I went off to college because that is what we were doing, fighting for our right to be in a movie theater and other public accommodations. But even so, you still felt that, at least in your own community; you were respected and that you were still expected to achieve something despite the segregated environment. So, of course, my friends and all attended HBCU's (Historically Black Colleges & Universities). That is where we got a lot of nurturing that we would not experience at any other place and networking also becomes your next big value. You realize that you can go in a certain environment and say the name of your African American school amongst African Americans and you will find somebody that attended the same school and know of someone who went to the same school. I just think that there are a lot of different influences in life. I am different than most African Americans in terms of my religion because most African Americans are Baptist and I am Presbyterian. The thing that I say about being reared in that church environment is that the Presbyterian church does value education. There is a structure and support there and a love that I think we all experience in a church in which we have grown up. That sets the tone and propels you, and boosts your self-esteem. I would say that having a fairly firm foundation in the church has also been a big support for me. You never know from where your help is going to come, so I don't want to leave out the church and the experiences I have had because it continues to be a heavy influence.

3. What do you perceive are the skills needed to obtain a leadership position in North Carolina government?

**AAW6 Response:** For sure you definitely have to be very well prepared and I don't think that will ever change. For African Americans, I still believe that you have to have twice the preparation as other ethnicities because the struggle is going to be a little bit different. You definitely have to be extremely knowledgeable and well prepared. Not necessarily in the government per se but just in whatever it is that you are trying to do within that governmental entity. You have to have some level of assertiveness and be prepared to take a stand-taking positions knowing that sometimes you may be out there all by yourself. But because you are very well prepared for the position that you are taking and you can back up the position that you are taking, you don't have to fear being willing to stand alone. It's just going to be the way it's going to be until people get to see something different. I would say cultivating relationships within the arena that you want to enter is a good thing. Seeking people who might be able to mentor you is a good thing. I think you also need to be a person who demonstrates fairness and honesty because integrity still means a lot in government and it's how you carry yourself that often makes or breaks a situation for you. I just think these things are very important to any leadership role that you will take.

4. What do you perceive to be the barriers that prevent African American women from advancing into leadership positions?

**AAW6 Response:** I don't live in a dream world and I am certainly more than aware that there is still a glass ceiling in a whole lot of localities in government.

But I think it's simply because as the years progress, there was always men being prepared for those roles. I don't think I believe that is as true now and as the higher educational environments have opened up and more women are going into higher education, and women are gradually rising to top level leadership roles in all types of environments now. I think at least the hill may be steep but we're climbing up all of the time and in my mind, there's going to be a day where we won't know the difference and there won't be a difference. Women are very smart and I think that cultivating relationships and knowing how to relate in certain environments will diminish some of the kickback you get as a woman leader in an environment. The traditional women's roles are still perceived by most men to be still intact in their head-that women should have a more subservient role, that women shouldn't assert themselves, should not speak up or challenge a position in an environment. But I think over time, there has been some change and we can always hope that change will continue to occur and that we will see more women in leadership. When I think about the government in this area compared to what it was when I was coming up, I can't imagine that I saw any women at all in any leadership roles. But now, it's quite prominent. When I ran for the Board of County Commissioners in the 90s, during that time, four women and one man served on that board. This was the first time in the history of the county that we had a female majority and an African American majority on the Board of Commissioners. It says that things can change because during that time, schools in Durham were still segregated. So, if you get out there, you can potentially



make a difference if you are willing to stand up for something and have other people believe in what you are standing for.

5. What experiences do you perceive may hinder an African American woman's advancement in North Carolina government organizations?

**AAW6 Response:** I think that my experiences have been the same as many and that is the traditional view that women aren't as smart and can't really handle the pressure. Also we are supposedly temperamental and emotional and not really built for the pressure that one would experience in a leadership role. It is certainly not true. I don't think we are given credit for the roles women have played and the strength that women have always had in terms of how they hold the family together and how women can make something almost out of nothing. We've just never been given the credit that we're due for the leadership roles that we've always had, even as they fit in a traditional household or even more so in a single parent household where you are responsible for literally carrying out everything. So, that sort of lack of respect I think still exists in government and is a tremendous hindrance to our mobility. As much as we've seen women grow in this area, it is still a male-dominated governmental environment and it's going to take a minute to turn that around. I am still waiting for the first female manager that lasts. For the most part in this area, being a City or County manager is a position that we don't hold. From the broader environment, that attitude is changing. If it's the women who are voting and the women who are really getting out there, eventually we can make it happen.

6. Based on your experience, what preparations do you believe black women need to possess to advance into a leadership position in North Carolina government as opposed to a non-African-American woman?

**AAW6 Response:** I think that race is going to always play a role but I think that a good educational background is very important. I have always felt that one thing that has helped me was when I entered a HBCU. We were required to take public speaking as a requirement and our final exam was in front of the English department at the school. We had to prepare a speech, make a presentation, and be graded accordingly. I say that to say that I believe public speaking becomes very important. How one articulates and presents themselves at any point is something that someone will see almost before they have read your resume. They may not have read your resume but they hear how you speak and so it's very important that we articulate well. Also, we should always be mindful of how we react in certain situations. Not to say that you don't show emotions, but yes, you do if you are in an environment where you are helping people and you have to have some emotional connection. You can't let disappointments or people not doing exactly what you want or not being receptive to things hold you back or it flip a wrong switch, because you then become viewed as someone who is too temperamental. I think that you should try to get your career out there before you have the constraints of family and small children. If you have other things that other people think won't allow you to perform, they will use that against you. They won't necessarily do that in a way that is very obvious to you but, nonetheless, they will hold that against you. I have to say, all in all, I've been very lucky in my career all

the way around. It's been a rare situation in which I didn't really ultimately achieve what I was trying to do. That's unusual maybe, but maybe not as unusual as people think. When black women put their minds to a thing, they can make it happen. It may take longer to happen but, nonetheless, we can do it.

7. What are your thoughts on how the culture of North Carolina government organizations affects the advancement of black women?

**AAW6 Response:** Let's face it, we are seeing the epitome of it going on right now. It does tell you about male dominance and the power of money- neither of which are we often in control. We can't control the fact that we are women and women are still being paid less than men. The culture is still the same since the times of slavery. There have been progressions but some of the attitudes persist- that we're still less valuable and we're willing to allow maybe one or two through, but we're not necessarily willing to uplift the entire group on the basis that men are in control of all of the large decision making and they want to control all the money. These attitudes are still here. So it's part of a cultural experience in which we have to learn how maneuver in order to get where we want. I don't know if that is going to change readily. We finally got a female governor and they tried to mistreat her, but she was a strong woman that took a lot but she made it. I also think that the strength that we have as women- ultimately our strength and faith as black women in particular, will ultimately sustain us no matter what.

8. Based on your experiences, what specific training materials, tools, and programs do you feel could be developed to increase the number of black women in leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations?

**AAW6 Response:** I think that there are any numbers of programs that exist.

There use to be a national program that worked with young women as children and taught them proper assertiveness and made sure that they focused on education, that they don't have to narrow their focus in any way. If they are good in math or science, it would push them to excel into wherever their gifts may seem to be and build that sense of confidence early and just give them that "can do spirit"-that yes you can be what you want and you have to hang in there and push, push. Any program that starts young and takes young women all the way through and provides them with mentoring that they will need will ultimately create more and more African American leaders. So we see those types of programs now and I just think we don't have to wait because the one thing that the African American community has always been churches. To me, those are the best environments provided that they have the level of flexibility in their doctrines to support the encouragement of women. Even in the churches, women are not allowed to lead because it is just looked down upon, but it is a place where resources are available.

9. Do you have other thoughts, feelings, or experiences to share that you feel may benefit this research study?

**AAW6 Response:** No not really, I would just say that women need to know how gifted they already are and everything that you need is already there. You just have to bring it out because it's already in you.

The interview will conclude with the following demographic questions:

1. How long have you been employed in North Carolina government?

**18 years**

2. How long have you been in a leadership position?

**10 years**

3. What is your educational level?

**BS degree**

4. What is your age? Under 30, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60+

**60+**

#### **Participant AAW7**

1. As an African American woman, what is your experience related to advancing into a leadership position?

**AAW7 Response:** I have been in this department for 41 years right out of college as a public health nurse with zero experience; I graduated from Duke University School of Nursing. Back in the day and even now people make the assumption that you went to Duke and that parted the waters for me. I was hired even before I got a nursing license even though I had taken all of the tests the license had not come. So I have had a very fortunate career and I think that I am truly blessed. I believe that God has directed my path or the path for me because I have moved through the organization doing all kinds of jobs. One of my peers tells the story of

when we came to work in 1975 I had already said that I was going to have the nursing director's job. So I applied for my current position as director when the other director who had been in the position for twenty years left and he made the assumption that I would be the next director because he would come to my office and ask me about which magazine subscriptions I wanted to keep and I would tell him that I have not been interviewed or anything and it didn't work out that way. In retrospect, well it wasn't in retrospect, I just came out and told the person that informed me that I was not selected. First they conducted telephone interviews and they gave me a courtesy interview. Everybody who understands business and recruitment knows that you call the person, set up a time, tell them what you want to do, and call them back during that designated hour. The chairman of the board called me in the middle of the day said "hey girl, got a minute?" I replied yes, and he proceeded to tell me that he had few questions that he wanted to ask me and informed me that he was going to interview me for the director's position; and it took less than ten or fifteen minutes. So when the chairman of the search committee came to me he informed me that I was not selected for the job and I informed him that I did not think I would be for one since my interview was so short and two because I do not look like what you want your director to look like. I told him that this department has had white male physicians so to go from a white male physician to a black female nurse was too many deviations. I really was angry because the person that was in the position retired after five years before he left. New people would come in and he would welcome them aboard and he would remind them of how many days he had until he retired. Over time he became

bitter with the politics and at that point the only thing that he wanted to do was get his twenty years in retire and not look back and he hasn't been back since. I was really angry for a couple of weeks after being informed that I was not selected for the position and some of the staff thought that I would get the job because of the work that I had done. So the person that was selected was a white male but he was not a physician and he was the leader of the organization and I learned a lot from him. The person that was hired before him lasted only four months before he was fired and he was also a white male. This person that was hired after him had standards and was engaged in what the organization was doing. I had to realize that I was working for someone who wanted to be involved in the organization so I had to get my act together and not be angry, fall in line, and make his schedule my schedule. I was willing to do anything he wanted me to do; he was in the position for ten years. From the time the first director left until the last director left I had time to grow and development and do all kinds of things and I decided to let him be the shield because I realized that I did not have to deal with the politics. So in October of 2008 he called me into his office and informed me that he was going home and I was it. I never had a formal interview for the job but I completed an application. The same person that informed me that I did not get the job fourteen years prior was the chair of the board who decided that they did not need to interview or advertise for the position because we know who we want to do the job. So I have been very fortunate but you still run into people that have those racists attitudes and they don't even know they are racist but I just say it is what it is; it's been good but I have had my challenges. I was recognized in this

magazine for my push for people to consider social determinacies of health and for people to recognize that you just can't count on what is done in the clinical area or passing out pills but you have to look at the context of which they live. The person that nominated me had to submit a list of people that could be interviewed to validate what they were saying and one person said that I was very good and said "she is really articulate". How many white people do you have telling people, head of departments, using that phrase and further stated that "she is an articulate person in the community" and this was published. People don't even realize what they say when they are saying it so stuff like that comes out and your constantly feeling like you have to do more. I am a detailed oriented person and I spend a lot of time and energy on what I do to make sure it is right because you are always going to be second guessed.

2. What are the motivating factors that influenced your decision to pursue a leadership position?

**AAW7 Response:** You can lead from anywhere but to have an opportunity to lead where there is recognized authority is an exception opportunity. I was born and raised in North Carolina and attended college here as well. I was very friendly with the people who were the grounds workers and cafeteria workers, "the help", they were very proud of those who got to attend the colleges like Duke back then. Even the kids who were not part of the community, the people who were the grounds workers and cafeteria workers invited them to their homes and churches on the weekend and they took care of us so to be able to have just a little part in making life better for people who still recognize me from back then is really



important for me to make sure that this department respects our customers and the we work to improve the quality of life and make a difference and that is what motivates me.

3. What do you perceive are the skills needed to obtain a leadership position in North Carolina government?

**AAW7 Response:** Two or three years ago might have been a different answer but there are some things going on down there now. I was actually offered a position to be Deputy Director for another department about two years ago and it was not something that I went looking for an individual asked if I had talked to someone because this person wanted to speak with me about this position. so I spoke to this person and he informed me that they were looking for a deputy and wanted me to complete an application and we could negotiate salary. I told him that I believed that I had something that I was suppose to accomplish here and I always tell people that I think that this is where God wants me to be. Before we were at this conference and the guy just kept hounding me telling me that I have to come. I saw a person who worked there that had lost weight but he looked good and I said to him that he had lost so much weight and looks good. He told me that they were trying to kill us down here and this is the same person who was trying to get me to call the person to talk to him about the deputy director position so he just began talking to me about how awful it was and I asked him “you want me to come down there?” She told him that I can sit in my office and look out the window and be happy where I am and I told him no. The dynamics of the environment now are almost toxic to what people who are the vulnerable populations need. It’s almost

like everything that could possibly help someone who is poor is being targeted and dismantled. So to work in North Carolina government you have to be fortified with something more than just your daily constitution because laws are constantly being turned over that have been put into place, they don't have money, put in positions where you are required to do more with less. I have talked to people who have worked for state government for over twenty five years who have told me that they have never felt like this before. People are afraid of saying anything because they don't know it will be taken and it can be used against them. The general assembly created more positions to serve at the pleasure of the governor two years ago and it went into affect with this administration. The current governor did not have anything to do with it but they use to have something like three hundred and seventy eight people across state government that had to submit their resignations and be re-appointment but now it is one thousand people and a lot of those people still have not been told if they will be in their current positions or be reappointed. So to be in North Carolina government you have to have thick skin and you have to have somewhere where you can go to nurture yourself and refortify because people are not made to feel of value.

4. What do you perceive to be the barriers that prevent African American women from advancing into leadership positions?

**AAW7 Response:** Sometimes we want to move quickly, go from zero to sixty and I think nurturing the idea or creating a culture that one you can lead from anywhere and two where you start you do have to end. We sold our home health agency about two years ago and I had to really take a look at what I was

communicating to staff because I came in as a Public Nurse I with no experience at all but I have been able to move through the organization. We have people who are community health assistants and there is nothing wrong with being in those positions but have those people been asked or coached to do something different so I try to tell people that they can be anything they want to be. We spend a lot of time talking about career goals and helping people see themselves going someplace else because sometimes it never crosses a person's mind that they can do something different. So I think sometimes seeing ourselves in leadership roles can be a challenge and preparing ourselves and building the kind of confidence that you need and seeing yourself on a playing field with men. In this area there are a lot of African American women in leadership positions but making sure that people can see themselves and helping them to figure out how to create the opportunity to move forward.

5. What experiences do you perceive may hinder an African American woman's advancement in North Carolina government organizations?

**AAW7 Response:** People need to read you just can't go on the preparation that you walked out with when you get a degree. You have to stay current and you have to go places other than this state for seminars you have to go to the national scene and figure out what other people are doing and you have to be willing to take risk and you have to be willing to admit when you mess up. So I think that when you think about things because I have folks that can't move unless they have all the answers. You have to do something and know when it is not working and bold enough to say that wasn't the best decision. You don't have to know all

the answers and you have to be willing to hear from others. You have to be willing to ask for feedback, accept that feedback, and make a decision based on that feedback. Sometimes we as women don't want women to tell us no if we thought of something that is pretty good and we still might want to push forward and sometimes that's not always the right thing to do it may be an excellent idea but the timing may not be right.

6. Based on your experience, what preparations do you believe black women need to possess to advance into a leadership position in North Carolina government as opposed to a non-African-American woman?

**AAW7 Response:** I have a peer who is a health director in another county who moved here from Michigan and she went to one of the counties that border (?), then she left there and went to another county which was a larger county but there are very few African Americans in government in her department and she is so frustrated because she grew up in Michigan and when she goes to meetings and she takes one of her staff members who is white the leader of the meeting talks to the staff member as the director and she has to remind them that she is the director and she is so tired of being in that role and having to push against her staff to get things done. I think that this area is a little bit different in that we value diversity but there are still people who question whether or not you know what you are talking about whereas if you give another person who is not African American say the same truth then people are more easier to agree and understand what they are talking about. You always feel like you spend a lot of time making sure that all the "I's" are dotted and "T's" are crossed but it's still anybody's guess. Some

people just see color sometimes and the stereotyping of what they expect, the message gets overshadowed or drowned out by color.

7. What are your thoughts on how the culture of North Carolina government organizations affects the advancement of black women?

**AAW7 Response:** Being in a leadership role somebody sees you and they see you as a model so I think that it is important that you connect with the people who may see you as a model. I think that in any of the departments across the state you become the voice for the organization so it is very important that you model behavior. My hairdresser killed my hair and I started wearing wigs to work because there are times when I have to address the media. One day I took the wig off and cut off all the long hair and thought I can wear my hair natural and I want little girls to see that you can wear your hair this way and still be in a leadership position. So it's important that you try to represent and try to make your appearance that people can relate to you and you can put your best foot forward so that you can speak confidently.

8. Based on your experiences, what specific training materials, tools, and programs do you feel could be developed to increase the number of black women in leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations?

**AAW7 Response:** Certainly mentorships and putting materials in people's hands that may resonate with them. My staff and I moved into this new building with a new director that had different expectations so we started having staff development days where we brought in a speaker. So I think to create leaders you have to cultivate the knowledge and put things in people's hands and for them to

have the opportunity for them to talk about it and then have them to lead from wherever they are talk to people about their goals and create opportunities for people to realize those goals and putting people in situations where they get to talk to different people and be willing to share ideas.

9. Do you have other thoughts, feelings, or experiences to share that you feel may benefit this research study?

**AAW7 Response:** Never give up! And know that it's not about you all of the time. I wasn't having any thoughts about doing this job and sometimes when you least expect things it will come to you but you have to be willing to help somebody else and stay positive. You can't dwell on the past and look at everything as an opportunity. I try to look for what the lessons are and not dwell on things that I cannot change.

The interview will conclude with the following demographic questions:

1. How long have you been employed in North Carolina government?

**41 years**

2. How long have you been in a leadership position?

**30 years**

3. What is your educational level?

**Master's in Public Health**

4. What is your age? Under 30, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60+

**60+**

## **Participant AAW8**

1. As an African American woman, what is your experience related to advancing into a leadership position?

**AAW8 Response:** I would say that as an African American woman that experience overall has been a very positive experience. I have been in my profession for twenty six years directly out of college and have literally gone through various ranks throughout the course of my career in this same profession with the same organization. The experience overall has been positive but what I also recognize is that nothing has been given. You find yourself raising the bar with positions because then they know that you are qualified. When I say “they” I am referring to the institution.

**Follow-up question:** Do you feel that you have had to raise the bar because you are an African American woman or is that just part of your work ethic?

**AAW8 Response:** I think that it is a combination of both I have worked since I was a part of the seeder program as a child and I come from a family that has a very strong work ethic. One of my mottos throughout my career is to lead people in a better state than you find them and I have tried to do that as a role model in the positions that I have had. I have had people say “I’ve gotta go step in those shoes” and they are big shoes to fill as small as my foot is but with that mindset I think sometimes I have had fewer challenges even though they have been there and people have said “oh she got this because” . . . I have heard because of race, I have heard because of people that I know but at the end of the day I believe that they also knew that there was a strong work ethic too and to hold a number of

“first” I think is exemplary of that because you don’t get to hold those roles particularly in a male-dominated assignment without showing that you are capable and qualified regardless of what race you are. I have to come through those doors and perform, lead, direct, guide, and at the end of the day I would never believe that I was a token promotion in any way and I don’t believe that those who promoted me believed that as well. Most of my supervisors have been of other ethnicities.

2. What are the motivating factors that influenced your decision to pursue a leadership position?

**AAW8 Response:** I think some of those are simply innate. I think that you are born with the desire. I think you have to have the desire, opportunity, and a set of core values that drive you to do just that. In college, I had leadership assignments I graduated as the president of the professional organization in my major. I think that you are born with that and a support system makes a whole lot of difference in that regard and I have had a lot of support both internally in the agency and externally family wise so I think that makes a huge difference, also, seeing that need to advance. Have I taken on assignments that I didn’t like? Yes, but somewhere in this mind I would literally say I’ll do it but I am not going to be here long because I have a plan regardless of what somebody else’s plan is, I have a plan and I am not going to spend but so much of my time in this role and I have just done that throughout the course of my career. Yes, I have had assignments that I didn’t particularly like but I also knew that I am going to be able to take something from that assignment and build on my next assignment, my next role,



so I had to “suck it up” and we all pay our dues. In this environment some things come with the territory, suck it up, pay your dues, and go forward.

3. What do you perceive are the skills needed to obtain a leadership position in North Carolina government?

**AAW8 Response:** I think there is a host of skills but I think to that depending on what that profession is the skill sets are going to be different. One that is more of a character trait than a skill is that you got to want it. In North Carolina I do think that we could be more progressive than we are for women in general but even more so for women of color. To develop that skill set some of it is the resume, it's where you've been, how you got there, and what you have done but then there is another piece I think is obtained or acquired over time and it comes from not just experience, education, or having worked in a job but it's having someone that you can reach out to, that mentor who provides you that guidance, direction, and that little piece of wisdom on things that you are not sure about and it may not come from that person who matches your profession. It comes from people who are very capable at times to see the forest from the trees because they are on the outside looking in and just thinking outside out that box that you are so entrenched within.

4. What do you perceive to be the barriers that prevent African American women from advancing into leadership positions?

**AAW8 Response:** I think that there is a couple; one is our own confidence levels. In my own organization I have women period of different races and ethnicities

that don't have that confidence level that they can do it at the next step. They don't have the confidence level to lead or believe that they can lead but then there is that other piece that they don't have the confidence level to believe that they can balance personal life and career and that is a challenge and I see that with some of the women here in this organization. The women feel as though if they take on an assignment they won't be able to do other things but you can find that happy medium; it might take a little more effort but you can find it. I think they are institutional barriers, have some of those walls come down, have we broken the glass ceiling, absolutely, but I think in 2013 there are still too many institutional barriers. North Carolina like several other states, women across the board are paid less than men, women of color are paid less than their white counterparts. Those to me are institutional, societal barriers, and socially speaking we as a nation, as a state, and as a city have to get beyond that. That's bigger than the woman in the role because she can come to work and work just as hard as her male counterpart and earn the respect of those peers but at some point the institution has to recognize the greater value of that woman in that position period.

5. What experiences do you perceive may hinder an African American woman's advancement in North Carolina government organizations?

**AAW8 Response:** The mindset of those around you can hinder your advancement. I say this because a couple of things came to mind. As a young person in this department in my fifth or sixth year I competed for a promotion and went through a process. We took a test to assess our skills and scores were

revealed anonymously based on your identifying number but no one would have known that except for the facilitator. I can remember veteran white males finding me once that list was posted and asking me where did I rank on the list and I asked why and they said we need to know where you ranked on that list and I would not share the information but that went on for several weeks. I continued to be asked where I ranked on the list and I asked why do you need to know that information have you asked anyone else? But there response was no, but it's important that we know where you are and that told me that they see me as competition and I left that alone. It was not until I entered graduate school and I happened to be in a class with a person who was several ranks over me and in the middle of this graduate class one day the person said in the presence of everyone in the class "I have to get my degree before she gets hers" and it was a white male and that statement stunned me and the research professor who asked this person why did they say that? and his response was "because she is a threat" and the professor asked him why did he believe that? and he said "just because she is and I don't mean this in a negative way but look at her, she's an educated, smart, African American woman she is my threat and if I don't get my degree before she gets hers she will surpass me in the organization." When he retired we were both at the same rank. He works part-time now and I am his boss. So to have heard that, these were some moments that were very real to me and this is a person who spoke candidly in a classroom but is this the mindset of others? Now, he and I are friends and he has been very honest and open about things but that was a mindset. So when you have those things in place he was one of those people who spoke it

who saw in his mind a threat and felt that he had to get his degree and I was in no rush because I had too much going on and I will get mine when I get it but to him there was a timeline as to when he had to have his degree and his timeline was before mine. I think as long as you have those, and if they are not overt conversations like that, what hindrances take place under the table, what efforts take place under the table covertly that prevent women from rising to that next level. So knowing what threats exist is a wide eyed approach to accomplishing your goals. I don't always know what threats I have but when you are able to perceive what some of those threats are knowing what some of those threats are allows you to avoid those pitfalls or the potential setups and earning the respect of those around you. To be in this assignment now there were four interviews that I had to go through two were closed and two were very public and at the end of the day people have to in essence vote for who they thought the right candidate was. One was a public forum for anyone who wanted to come from the community and one was internal in terms of City government so my peers and my co-workers voted and I have been on the side of casting a vote. To know that you have the support of the people matters because I have seen that same vote go for somebody that was not a member of the organization.

6. Based on your experience, what preparations do you believe black women need to possess to advance into a leadership position in North Carolina government as opposed to a non-African-American woman?

**AAW8 Response:** One the preparation is to set goals know what it is you what to achieve you may not have all the answers, you may not have that path clearly

defined but have some idea on where you see yourself in two years, five years, ten years, twenty years, or thirty years, where are you going to retire. Identify what steps are required to get from this point to the two year goal and what steps are going to be required to get from this step to the five year goal and so forth. In identifying what those steps are who are those people that are able to assist you in getting there; that is not to say that you need to be unethical in your efforts; that is not to say that you have to step on the backs of others to get there but identify those people who allow you to lean in, identify those people that allow you to manage up. Those people that you can have a conversation with and ask “how did you get there?” and find out what skills they have that you need to possess. See those people as strengths and it’s ok to identify those threats, know who they are and know what you need to avoid. Also, do people know who you are; are you knowledgeable in the field, assignment, or role that you’re seeking? You don’t have to be the expert but you need to have a general knowledge talking the talk is one thing the ability to walk the walk is another. When you are in a male dominated profession, from day one in my training I had people refer to me as “Ms.” So earn that respect and some of it sometimes comes from your presence. This is not an arrogant statement at all but as a young person in my career I had people saying “Ms.” or “yes ma’am” that told me early on that they respect me for who I am, not that everybody did and I get that but the further you go in your career the more likely you will continue to earn that respect. Earning the respect as a woman, earning the respect as an African American woman is important because I do think that my non-African American cohorts, those females,

sometimes it's just given to them in terms of that respect. Particularly in a male field I am a woman, I am lady, I dress up, I am all girl and in no aspect of this job I have never felt the need to show myself or appear to be more manly than my male counterparts. I see that with women in this organization, they feel as though in order to prove themselves they have to show a masculine side of who they are and this has nothing to do with sexual orientation but some females feel that they just need to be tougher than the guys. Being weaker than the guys is not what earns the respect either but it's being yourself and being comfortable in that element regardless of what your role is. I want women on every aspect and in every role that this department has to offer. I want them to be apart of the greater organization. I want the face of this organization to look like the male, to look like the female, to look like all of us who wear this uniform. But I don't think that I have to go out here and spit tobacco, curse, and a be a man to prove that I am capable of carrying forth the tasks and duties of this assignment. Also, I think that women have to read, it's important to read, knowledge is power. Fiction is good, but have those other books in the back of your mind, know the importance of being good to great. Know the importance of outliers and tipping points. Know the importance of the experiences that other women had by breaking those glass ceilings. There are books out there on leadership and they are not going to necessarily teach you how to lead and direct but it gives you some insight and some basics for goal setting and goal attainment and reaching that next step and recognizing that you are not in it by yourself and sometimes we feel like that. There are some days where I feel like I am by myself. In my profession, this city

is the 42<sup>nd</sup> largest city in the nation by population that puts me in the midst of colleagues who are also at the top in their organization so when I attend my conferences I am sitting beside other leaders who have larger organizations than mine in terms of employees but when I go to that table of fifty I am one of five women. There are only five women that oversee the top fifty organizations in this profession and I am the only African American female. There is one Latino woman and there are three white women. So I have to step up to the plate and at some point we just have to step up. Can it be intimidating? Absolutely, because I go to some of these conferences and if the women can't make it because of other things I am the only female at the conference but I have got to hold my own. I have got to be able to show my subordinates, this organization, my peers, and my supervisors that I am capable. The preparation is huge but it's tapping into all of those things that build a great leader and it's everything from a book to walking the walk.

7. What are your thoughts on how the culture of North Carolina government organizations affects the advancement of black women?

**AAW8 Response:** The culture in North Carolina is sort of an ebon flow it just depends on, to some degree, the politics of the day. When we look at where we are as a state we've made some significant strides over time but we peak in valleys. Sometimes we move four steps forward and other times we are taking two steps back and I think that those of us who are in leadership roles as women of color, African American women, have to realize that in spite of the culture we have to cultivate too and regardless of whatever the culture dictates we have to

recognize how we got where we are and why it is so important that there is a legacy to advance where I am and what I have accomplished and that comes from me mentoring and reaching down to make sure that other women have the same opportunity. My goal as the leader in this organization is to empower everyone regardless of gender, regardless of race and in doing that it is important that I empower everyone so that woman of color get it and realize that she has that opportunity because I have to also make sure that the white male sees his opportunity and create that balance but empowering those that need it the most is critically important but I have to have that balance to ensure that I don't hear comments from other people stating that I gave an opportunity to a black female because that person looks like me and somebody's crying reverse discrimination. So having that balance is important regardless of what the culture dictates. I have been in the south all of my life and I have heard my dad talk about how the colored and the whites had separate water fountains so we have come a long way but I know that we still have a ways to go. If I allow culture dictate my destiny in its entirety I would not be where I am. In recognizing the culture, I have a role and a responsibility as an African American female leader to ensure that others have a lighter path to travel than I did. Somebody paved the way to make it a little lighter and a little easier for me so when I give presentations I often say that "I have stood on the shoulders of" . . . those women who came here as meter maids fifty years ago who were able to move up in their careers during a treacherous time some were white and some were black so I have stood on their shoulders to be where I am today. I have also stood on black male shoulders and



white male shoulders but recognizing that whatever that culture is here in the south I have a responsibility to ensure that somebody else has a lighter and easier path to travel.

8. Based on your experiences, what specific training materials, tools, and programs do you feel could be developed to increase the number of black women in leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations?

**AAW8 Response:** I think it starts with the most basic aspects of education, mentoring that level of confidence begins in school. There should be a leadership course that kids take. There should be mentoring opportunities afforded to every kid because sometimes they don't get it unless they are members of the YMCA or some other organization but the reality is a mentor comes from all walks of life. You don't have to pay if you can identify that person that reflects something that you strive to achieve. Giving kids the sense and need to be productive is where it starts. Offering leadership training courses in school, in college, and building that core leadership and value within oneself comes from church or other civic organizations like girl scouts. It's giving them that push that they need to continue to go forward and strive. Once you get into the professional arena some of it has to come from self-initiative, you have to want it because in this "dog eat dog world" people are not going to hand it to you. They will if you seek it if you go to them and say that I want some of that they may be willing to share but at times particularly with women of color you are not going to get that hand out. You have to be willing to show somebody that this is what you want and you have to have a plan to get it and be willing to ask if someone can help you achieve your

goals. A lot of times people are going to say yes because when people come to you for help it's kind of hard to say that they are not going to help you and they may even want to help you but unless you come to them and say "can you share with me?", "can you mentor me?" they are not going to do it but it's hard when you put a person on notice and say "I want to be like you" and sometimes that's the ego boost that person needs to be willing to mentor, coach, and guide you because they see you as their next protégé. I also think that we have to be careful because mentoring can be positive as it is negative and you can pick up the worst skill set and character traits from some of the worst leaders and mentors out there too. So you have to know what that positive core leadership value is and build on it. A person can pull a lot from Colin Powell, Martin Luther King, Oprah Winfrey and the list goes on and probably in some of the most horrific way someone could say that Hitler was a leader but look at how horrible he was as a leader but look at how he trained so many people to take the lives of some many Jews. The ugliness of mentoring and leadership has to be made aware of as well and when you seek that goal and seek that desire to lead you have to know what core values you want to pull from each of those people you identify as mentors because none of them are perfect and every great leader has some negative traits but you have to know which ones to take that build who you are and where you want to go.

9. Do you have other thoughts, feelings, or experiences to share that you feel may benefit this research study?

**AAW8 Response:** Women in 2013 are still breaking glass ceilings and I think that I am clearly an example of that but the reality is that we still have a lot of

ceilings to break but it's important as women and leaders that we really just simply began to embrace the value of women what we can bring to the table from a leadership perspective and giving us that opportunity to showcase our abilities I think is important. We see some progression in North Carolina and we are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century but there are still so many companies and organizations that could still be led by women and I think it's important that we are not so comfortable as women that we cannot reach outside of our comfort zones and in reaching outside of those comfort zones know who your peers are, they don't have to be in your profession but also know when there could be that exchange of goal setting and discussion, coaching, and mentoring and just having the simplest conversations. You know we have heard that some of the greatest decisions are made on the golf course and we say that as a cliché but that is the reality particularly in corporate America. They make agreements, problems are solved, and millions of dollars are made because of a gentlemen's agreement. We never hear terms like a "woman's agreement" or "the girls pact" and it's important I think that we recognize that we have women in leadership roles who are very capable of moving a mission forward or pushing an ideology forward or a goal but sometimes we are more protective of our own thoughts and ideas and its important to know when to reach out to that other girl and ask for help or offer to assist them and you realize the bond and the relationships that are forged but the impact it has is not just those decisions that are made among those groups of women but the decisions made that can impact that next group of women that come up, giving them that opportunity. In closing, I think women in leadership roles have to be strategic

about a lot of things one being the SWOT analysis. Know what strengths are before you, know what yours are but know what the organizations are as well. Also know what weaknesses exist because if you know that and you have forward thinking and enough foresight you know how to turn a weakness into strength. Know what opportunities are there sometimes they are not immediate sometimes they are long-term opportunities so if you know that there is a position that is going to be coming open in three years because somebody's retiring what are you doing to position yourself, you may not get it, but what are you doing to position yourself to plan to get to that next assignment or that next role. Always know what those threats are and threats are very different from weaknesses. Threats can become opportunities but you have to know how to strategically look at that threat and how to deal with it and sometimes we can see them with enough foresight and forward thinking and sometimes they are in your face and you didn't see it coming but they are the ones that will blindside you and most of the times they are personally motivated. So I think that if we are wide-eyed in our roles as leaders we can accomplish a lot.

The interview will conclude with the following demographic questions:

1. How long have you been employed in North Carolina government?  
**26 years**
2. How long have you been in a leadership position?  
**8 months**
3. What is your educational level?  
**Masters**
4. What is your age? Under 30, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60+  
**50–59**



## **Participant AAW9**

1. As an African American woman, what is your experience related to advancing into a leadership position?

**AAW9 Response:** Well it been challenging on some fronts but rewarding in most of them. I will give you just my background in terms of how I came to where I am now. I attended UNC Chapel-Hill for my undergrad and majored in Parks & Recreation. I started working part-time while I was a student at UNC for the Town of Chapel Hill Parks & Recreation department. I was actually working a part-time job during the summer and the recreation superintendent who was an African American male was also working a part-time job at the same place I was employed during the summer of my sophomore year. So we began talking and he found out that I was a Parks & Recreation major and he asked me if I would be interested in coming and working part-time and there were various types of positions open at that time. I went in and spoke with him and it just so happened when I went to speak with him there was a part-time program assistant who was heading out. He asked me how my typing skills were and I reminded him that I was a college student and I do papers so clearly I can type. He told me that he needed some help administratively because he did not have strong typing skills and needed assistance with completing reports and administrative tasks. I went in and started working for about 15-20 hours per week and that ended up increasing to twenty five sometimes thirty hours per week and I was still in school part-time. He thought I was doing good work and informed me that he wanted to keep me around for a little while. So I worked part-time up until it was time for me to do

my internship and I stayed on did my internship there and upon graduation was offered a full-time position. I started out in athletics for about five years and I got bored with that so I started building my resume and began volunteering for different things in the department. They did a reorganization and created a marketing/supervisor position so that put me in charge of marketing special events. It worked out because I was able to get a little bit of experience when I started out even though I was not getting paid for doing everything that I was doing. That is what I always tell students is that you have to do the work before you actually get paid for it. So I worked in marketing/special events for another few years and during that time there were some staff shortages help was needed some help and the community centers and I did some interim work there just taking the time to build up my resume. During that time he encouraged me to go back to school to get a Master's degree before I got a family started. At that time, I was thinking "I just graduated" and I wanted to take a couple of years off and he told me no and that I needed to go back to school within a year of finishing because you will accrue bills, start looking at the guys, decide you want to get married, and then have kids and I said ok fine. I ended up attending graduate school after graduation and earned a Masters in Public Administration and NCCU because I knew at some point I would be moving up the ladder so I wanted to get my Masters degree done. Completed that degree, promotions continued to come and things were shifting in the department and eventually after about fifteen years in the department we had an opening because the director left and at that point that was the only position that I could move up into. So I thought well, I have

worked here for fifteen years and it's probably time for me to go ahead and get a director role because originally I probably should have done it earlier but I wasn't willing to relocate but sometimes the easiest way to move up is to move out. So the director position came open after being there for fifteen years but I was overlooked for the position. I thought that was very interesting and I thought that if this organization did not recognize my talent then somebody else will. So I filled out two applications for two other director jobs and the second one called for an interview and the position was in another city within the state of North Carolina. At that time I did not want to move but I thought if they gave me an opportunity I was going. A lot of times people will tell you that the easiest way to move up the ladder is to sometimes leave your organization because some people can't see you transitioning from mid-level management to director of a department. I went to the interview and was offered the position and I relocated to that city for about a year and a half and when a position became available closer to where I was I applied and ended up coming back to this area. So that was my path in terms of becoming a director and just recognizing that I was going to have to make some moves to move up the ladder, otherwise, I probably would still be at my old job and may have been an assistant director but that wasn't enough for me so that's how I became a director.

2. What are the motivating factors that influenced your decision to pursue a leadership position?

**AAW9 Response:** For me it goes back over history because I have always been “a first of” in my family. The “first of” this “the first” of that for example at my



old high school I was the first African American drum major so from that it was being the first to attend a traditionally white institution, and then being the first one to be the first black female director in my previous position and in my current position. Motivating for me then was that I always wanted to put myself in a position to be a role model and to make my parents proud, that's always going to be in the back of my membrane and now that I have a son I want to make sure that he does not have an excuse when he gets older to say "mom I can't do x,y,z". I have a track to tell him that he can because if I can do it being "the first" black female to do things then there is no excuse as to why as a black male he can't get the same thing done. Motivating for me has pretty much been family, wanting to exceed and do well, faith of course has certainly been because to whom much is given much is required and that's my mantra I believe in it as well as understanding that I am not in it just for me but I am here to help some people along the way.

3. What do you perceive are the skills needed to obtain a leadership position in North Carolina government?

**AAW9 Response:** In North Carolina government you have to recognize that politics are at play and recognize the overlying issues in the community. You have to recognize who the stakeholders are in your community and you have to have the negotiation skills and personality that people feel comfortable talking to you, people feel comfortable approaching you, and they feel like you are open to some new ideas and not just what has happened in the last twenty or thirty years in the community. When I came in, it was a time where people wanted things to

happen and I think the leadership had been stagnant at some point along the way. Being personable is definitely a skill set and a lot of times now people want to know if you have any technical skills, budget and finance experience, human resources, and all the skills that go with having a job but I think at the end of the day what makes you successful is that you have to have those people skills and you have to be able to respond to the audience that you are in front of and be able to play different roles at different times. You will be in front of a number of audiences and you have to be able to match where they are, what information they are looking for, and what information they are trying to get from you. So yes, the technical skills and educational background is all good but at the end of the day it all comes down to your people skills because that's the difference in people who do a job well and those who are going to excel and really be that person that communities look to recruit down the road when communities look to hire.

4. What do you perceive to be the barriers that prevent African American women from advancing into leadership positions?

**AAW9 Response:** Well I think one is the lack of mentors. When I came into this field there were about two African American females that had director's positions in this industry, now there are probably four females and eight African American males. So I think one barrier is the lack of having someone as a mentor to kind of mold you and tell you things that you really need to be doing and what you need to be focused on. I was fortunate enough to have a black male telling me the things that I needed to be doing to prepare myself for leadership. He would tell me that I needed to go to school and I needed to build my resume and get active in

my local associations. African Americans need someone to tell you what you need to do along the way. I think the lack of mentors for African American women is one barrier. Another barrier is exposure to different opportunities. Family can be a barrier because when you are playing the role of wife, mom, director, leader, and the one that people always go to it can be a lot and a lot of women just lack the confidence that they can do it but that's typically because we don't have opportunities to figure it out.

5. What experiences do you perceive may hinder an African American woman's advancement in North Carolina government organizations?

**AAW9 Response:** I think the community that they serve in can be a plus or a minus. In this area it is very "clickish" and there are old school people who are still surprised after speaking to me over the phone and they come in and see that I am a black female. So I think the community certainly plays a role in how you are perceived and I also think there are stereotypes that you have to work through and some of them you really have to work harder through them because they force you to be someone that you are not always necessarily. I am a totally different person at home then I might be at work. I am really cool, calm, and collected at home and for the most part, I am that way at my job. However, when there certain issues pop up there is a different restraint that has to happen here versus at home.

**Follow-up question:** What specific stereotypes have you had to work harder not to show in the workplace?

**AAW9 Response:** The "angry black woman" when something jumps off so I have just had to temper it down because I can be that in certain situations but at

the end of the day it's not worth getting yourself all lost in things that are going on. I think one thing that helps is that you have to learn how to pick and choose your battles. Everything is not a battle, everything is not that important but there are also things that you want to make sure that people understand about you in terms of who you are but I think that the "angry black woman" is definitely one you have to work past and so people can find out that you are really educated and you understand what you are doing. You always have to go above and beyond of what is expected and what others have done in the past. I like to say that I want someone that looks like me to be able to have the same role when I leave and they don't have to deal with the stereotypes or work through the barriers that I had to work through coming through the door. Initially coming in as the director in this area was challenging but as you get out and start talking to different groups your reputation is going to precede you. You want people to say that you are easy to talk to and easy to get along with because it helps break down those barriers because people will then tell other people about you.

6. Based on your experience, what preparations do you believe black women need to possess to advance into a leadership position in North Carolina government as opposed to a non-African-American woman?

**AAW9 Response:** Well definitely the education has got to be there because there is no way we are going to get the opportunities that other people would get if we don't have the education plus some. If a job calls for a bachelor's degree then we need a Masters because that's just the nature of the game. I think we have got to work harder in building relationship in the community, I think we have got to

work harder in establishing community partners that don't look like us so if there is an issue then it is not your face that's always the face of that issue, it's actually someone who looks like the audience that you need to speak to. Figuring that out early has certainly been helpful because you figure out who those stakeholders are and the people who are for certain causes and you let them carry the message. That is not something that you can learn in a training but something that you have to figure out along the way but that's certainly something that has helped me along the way. Other preparation would be being exposed to local government politics and being exposed to those issues that you really don't know what is going on behind the scenes and having someone that can explain that type of stuff to you. It's almost like you have to team up with someone that doesn't look like you to get that information and befriend them in such a way that they feel comfortable telling you what's coming down the pipe. On the job training is a lot of the preparation that you need to move up the ladder but you really don't get it until you get that opportunity. But definitely the education and having a support system in place is helpful particularly for single African American mothers who are still moving up the ranks. That support system has to be in place whether or not it is the husband or your family. That is very key for us because a lot of people are fine moving kids everywhere but that is not our culture. It is also to have to support of your colleagues that are doing the same things that you are.

7. What are your thoughts on how the culture of North Carolina government organizations affects the advancement of black women?

**AAW9 Response:** I think that it is changing because we have had some strong African American women in leadership at different levels. I have been a director for seven years and when I attended conferences there were few to none as far as seeing African American female directors in this industry and now there are ten to twelve African American females directors in this industry. So I think that the culture is changing and that people are recognizing that we are obtaining the jobs and doing them well. I think it's definitely changing even at the city manager level. I know a couple of African American females who are assistant city managers in North Carolina and there are a few outside of North Carolina but I think people are open to it and having managers that will give you an opportunity and they understand that you are going to do a good job based on your track record. If you have a good track record and they know some people that you have on your references then they know that you are ok. I think that conferences and African American women doing presentations at conferences helps to change the persona of people when they see you are doing well in another community they may think that you will do well in their community. I think that it is changing and there are things that are driving it because it has definitely changed from where it was five, ten, and twenty years ago. I spoke with the former African American female who use to be the director of planning twenty years ago and she is tickled by the fact that this area has an African American female director working in my field because twenty years ago she was the only female and the only African American department head and after she left that department has not had any African American directors and that has been a really long time.

8. Based on your experiences, what specific training materials, tools, and programs do you feel could be developed to increase the number of black women in leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations?

**AAW9 Response:** I think if there are mentoring programs because I am a fan of them so if there are mentoring programs in place there would be more knowledge gained than in any training you may have or any conference that you attend, any on the job training that you will ever get, and I think that if mentoring programs at all levels were put in place that would certainly help whether that was at the department level, someone in your agency who has moved up the ladder, or someone outside of the organization who may be able to teach you the tricks of the trade. Getting involved with programs will help open up the door for us.

9. Do you have other thoughts, feelings, or experiences to share that you feel may benefit this research study?

**AAW9 Response:** I would be curious to see how spirituality plays apart in advancing into a leadership role.

The interview will conclude with the following demographic questions:

1. How long have you been employed in North Carolina government?  
**20 years**
2. How long have you been in a leadership position?  
**7 years**
3. What is your educational level?

### **Master's degree**

4. What is your age? Under 30, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60+

### **40–49**

### **Participant AAW10**

1. As an African American woman, what is your experience related to advancing into a leadership position?

**AAW10 Response:** My experience in advancing has been difficult to find position where you feel that you can continue to grow and add value and be an innovator in the position. With my previous experience, people stayed in positions for a long time which eliminates opportunities for others. I think that you get frustrated and you feel like you will never have an opportunity to advance so you look where you can find opportunity and you take it when you can. If your family situation allows you to do that then that is a good thing.

2. What are the motivating factors that influenced your decision to pursue a leadership position?

**AAW10 Response:** That's just my nature, I have always been a person that wants to go to the next level and challenge myself. I like to learn so I am always looking for opportunities to learn. I don't think I know everything but I think I know enough to add value. In a leadership position I can learn, grow, and learn from the people around me. I am very inquisitive and I am always asking "why" and looking for ways to do things differently. Even as a child being the oldest of eight children made me a leader because I am still the one that everyone turns to; I am



the friend that everyone turns to. People expectant a lot from me and I always seem to rise to the challenge.

3. What do you perceive are the skills needed to obtain a leadership position in North Carolina government?

**AAW10 Response:** I believe that in North Carolina government you have to be well versed in not just your specific area of government but you have to know a lot about government and how all of government operates. You also have to know enough to be a good partner to all the people in government. For me, taking the municipal government class at the school of government was excellent because it helps you to network and it helps you to make friends with people who will help you continuously. So if you have a weak area you have other people that you can reach out to. I think in North Carolina government you have to be willing to learn and sometimes you feel defeated because it doesn't seem to be opportunities. Even if opportunities become available they are in remote areas where you don't really want to go, especially if you have a family. For a person who is willing to move around there are some outlying areas but we tend to want to be in metropolitan areas because there are more opportunities. Small areas provide a lot of opportunities as well that I don't think we consider because the demographics may not be there, the population is small, and there is not a lot of growth. So in terms of demographics in the state of North Carolina I believe that is a limiting factor to having more African American involvement in government. I have been in some small areas and the populations don't really lend themselves to have

African Americans want to move there because it's not developed to the extent that we feel we need when we are trying to grow.

4. What do you perceive to be the barriers that prevent African American women from advancing into leadership positions?

**AAW10 Response:** I don't really feel that there are barrier in government I think that there are opportunities that come and go and I think that we have to be at the right place at the right time with the right opportunity. I don't think there are barriers, I think that African American women at least I have found have a lot of opportunity more so than in other states. I use to live in Wisconsin, so I see North Carolina as having a lot more opportunity in terms of race. I think in North Carolina people don't consider race as much as where I have lived in the past. So my own experience compared to where I have lived I think that North Carolina is one of the more welcoming states for African American women in government.

5. What experiences do you perceive may hinder an African American woman's advancement in North Carolina government organizations?

**AAW10 Response:** In terms of experiences that can hinder opportunities would be your background, where you went to school, your family, and your friends may keep you from pursuing opportunities that you might not otherwise pursue. I think that when you develop yourself you can put yourself in a position where you can compete. If you are the most qualified and put yourself in a position to get it then it can happen. I do think that people in leadership position put in their heads that they want a certain type of person in a position based on race, gender, or they may think that if they promote from within that it could be more of the same. When

people believe that without giving a person an opportunity to show what they can do, that can hinder opportunities for people to grow. So if a person feels like that is going to happen why you would want stick around in a place like that.

6. Based on your experience, what preparations do you believe black women need to possess to advance into a leadership position in North Carolina government as opposed to a non-African-American woman?

**AAW10 Response:** I have always felt in my career that I just have to work harder. This is something that I heard over and over growing up, and that we always have to do better and stand out. In elementary school, high school, and even in college I was always the first in my family to ever go to college so it was always you have to work harder and you have to work smarter. I think that is even true in North Carolina government because you will see people get promoted and you think to yourself, “how in the world did this happen” and whether if it’s true or not, who you know does still make a difference. I just believe that African American women have to be more professional, know more, be willing to do a little more, work a little harder, work a little longer in order to show and prove that yes we can do that. We have to always prepare and be on top of the game you can never slack up in order to advance.

7. What are your thoughts on how the culture of North Carolina government organizations affects the advancement of black women?

**AAW10 Response:** I can only talk about the two places that I have worked. Where I am now the culture is welcoming and the culture creates an environment that wants you to the job you were hired to do and wants to get better as an

organization. Where I was before, the culture was looking at where we can go private and we are public and let's try to bring private thoughts into a public organization, not having enough faith that the people you have hired to do the job know what they are doing. I think that at any job you have to have a culture where people know that if you are hired to do a job to let you do the job because you are the expert and I think that's necessary in any environment. I don't think that the culture affects the advancement of black women but I think the culture of particular organizations can prevent the advancement of black women. I think that it's the people more than the culture and the mindset of the leadership and what direction they want to go. I think that if you have leadership that is open and believes when they say they want to develop their own people and advance their own people then do that don't say one thing and then do something else.

8. Based on your experiences, what specific training materials, tools, and programs do you feel could be developed to increase the number of black women in leadership positions in North Carolina government organizations?

**AAW10 Response:** I think it would be nice to have organizations that mentor African American women to help them develop leadership skills. There are a lot of books and webinars out there about leadership but I think that having a mentor that watches you develop, teach you, and just having someone you can lean on and talk to when you have some rough times or celebrate the good times. I think that organizations like that would be nice. I belong to a lot of organizations but I don't get that mentoring, I only got that when I went through organizational leadership training in the previous organization where I was employed. Even then

my mentor was not African American because there weren't or didn't appear to be available. I am sure that there are some mentors for African American women but you have to make the time and be willing to put the time into it. People are so busy people don't really feel like they have the time so you wind up getting the same people over and over and the people who have really shared experiences with you are not there to help you grow. So I think that having some type of organization for mentors and maybe have some weekend development workshops, I think that people would go.

9. Do you have other thoughts, feelings, or experiences to share that you feel may benefit this research study?

**AAW10 Response:** I personally think that the state of North Carolina has good opportunities for people who are willing to put in the work. It can be rough and with the new leadership that we have in Raleigh I have heard a lot of people complaining that they are losing their jobs and they feel like they are being targeted. I think that on a State level they need to find ways to address whatever they are doing. They need to develop a message that explains what it is they are doing especially for African American women based on those who I have talked to. These women need to know that they are not targeting them because of their race, but that the State is making changes and change is hard for most people. However, what people really see is that you are coming after me because I'm an African American woman, you don't think I can do my job, and your getting rid of my job, or trying to find a way to get rid of my job. I think that whenever you make changes you have to share with people what the purpose and goals are

before change takes place. I think that got lost in the changes the State has been making and it has made people feel devalued and that's not good.

The interview will conclude with the following demographic questions:

1. How long have you been employed in North Carolina government?

**15 years**

2. How long have you been in a leadership position?

**9 years**

3. What is your educational level?

**Law School**

4. What is your age? Under 30, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60+

**50–59**