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Southeastern University - Lakeland

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The Southern Baptist Convention's Perception of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
Compared to African American Pastors' and Leaders' Lived Experiences

Submitted to Southeastern University

Jannetides College of Business, Communication, and Leadership

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Organizational Leadership

Jeffrey J. Wallace

March 2023

Jannetides College of Business, Communication, and Leadership
Southeastern University

This is to certify that the dissertation prepared by:

Jeffrey J. Wallace

titled

**THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION'S PERCEPTION OF
DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION COMPARED TO AFRICAN
AMERICAN PASTORS' AND LEADERS' LIVED EXPERINCES**

Has been approved by his committee as satisfactory completion of the dissertation
requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Approved By:

Joshua Henson, Ph.D., Chair

Jannetides College of Business, Communication, and Leadership

Bethany Peters, Ph.D., Committee Member

Jannetides College of Business, Communication, and Leadership

Carlo Serrano, Ph.D., Committee Member

Jannetides College of Business, Communication, and Leadership

Southeastern University Institutional Review Board Approval:

September 21, 2022

March 2023

Abstract

The study of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is complex and multilayered. Similarly, the study of DEI within an ecclesiastical and ecumenical Christian movement like the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) has its challenges. Challenges and tensions surrounding the SBC, relating to women's leadership issues, the infiltration of partisanship and politics in the pulpits, racial injustice flashpoint moments, and the lack of ethnic diversity in a crucial leadership position have impacted the overall lived experience of African American pastors and leaders. This phenomenological study explored the Southern Baptist Convention's perception of diversity, equity, and inclusion compared to African American pastors' and leaders' actual lived experiences. The purpose of this research was to study DEI from three perspectives: women in leadership from a faith-based perspective, racial injustice within ecclesiastical and denominational settings, and the SBC's inner workings and its perceptions of women in leadership and perception of racial injustice on the national, state, and local level. The findings confirmed that African American pastors and leaders not only have concerns about the current direction of the SBC but acknowledge some differences in the lived experiences based on the level within the convention that one serves. The research findings also revealed growth opportunities and some positive perspectives.

Keywords: diversity, equity, inclusion, Southern Baptist Convention, African American, pastors, women, racial injustice

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to first and foremost to my beautiful wife, best friend, and part-time proofreader, Quovadis. Thank you for your relentless love and support, late-night coffee deliveries to the office, and consistent encouragement to keep pushing, no matter what. I love you so much! You are the real VIP. To my three young kings, Jaye, CJ, and Cameron. Thank you for all of the texts, videos, and phone calls of encouragement! I hope that I have made you proud. Always remember striving for excellence and greatness is nonnegotiable, and settling for mediocrity is not an option! I love you guys!

To my incredible older sibs, Greg Jr., Solita, and Yvette, thank you for letting me stay in our group text during this journey. I totally needed all of the laughter and jokes. You guys are the best siblings on the planet! I love you guys so much! Thank you for always letting me be just “baby brother!” To my late father, Greg Wallace, thank you for always teaching me at an early age to never run from hard things. You both instilled in my siblings and me the importance of loving Jesus and the value of having an honest work ethic. To my fantastic mom, Vivian Wallace, thank you for the early morning calls of encouragement. But, also, thank you for teaching me to never make excuses and for never letting me settle for making C's growing up! I didn't understand it then, but I do know! Thank you for everything you've done for me! I am who I am because of the two of you!

Acknowledgements

To all my friends, ministry partners, and colleagues worldwide that have prayed for me, encouraged me, and cheered me on, THANK YOU!! Every form of encouragement was felt, needed, and greatly appreciated!

- To the doctoral faculty at Southeastern University, specifically Dr. Jenny Carter and Dr. Emile Hawkins, thank you for saying “yes” and for your commitment to my success.
- To my phenomenal dissertation committee, I cannot thank you enough! Dr. Joshua Henson, Dissertation Chair, you are the REAL DEAL! I would not have made it through this without you! You taught me how to effectively bridge the gap between being a pastor and a scholar! Dr. Bethany Peters, Methodologist, thank you for thoroughly walking me through how efficiently navigate my methodology. Your leadership provided so much depth to this research. Dr. Carlo Serrano, Third Reader, thank you for always stretching me to think beyond what I see on the surface. You helped me see this topic from multiple lenses.
- To all of the SBC African American pastors and leaders who participated in this research, thank you for your honesty, transparency, and heart. I learned so much from you all.
- To my SLU Team and Board of Directors, thank you for giving me the margin to slip away when we were on the road or come in late to meet a writing deadline. This accomplishment would not have happened without you.
- Dr. Jay Strack, Dr. Brent Crowe, and Nikki Hoffpauir, I know you all do not want me to print the enormous sacrifice you guys made for me to ensure my success, so I will say...thank you! However, for the record, thank you is not adequate enough to express my appreciation and gratitude for you guys. Brent, thank you for being my brother, mentor, and friend! None of this would have happened without you!

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

The study of organizational diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is complex and multilayered. Approaching this topic requires organizations to have a holistic strategy and plan for creating, cultivating, and managing a healthy work environment (Cox & Lancefield, 2021). If organizations seek to cultivate a healthy culture in an ever-evolving globalized world, addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion is necessary. One of the significant challenges for organizations is learning to reimagine their views and biases on being a leader (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Traditional views of high-level leadership within the United States often reflect a dominant majority population consisting of White (i.e., Euro-American), heterosexual, Protestant males (Chin & Trimble, 2015). A healthy leadership perspective of DEI influences one's understanding of leadership, shapes personal and institutional biases, and impacts how organizations approach the topic (Dover et al., 2019).

The topic of DEI must be approached intentionally and strategically. Organizations and institutions struggle to cultivate culturally neutral environments because institutions are often designed exclusively with ideas, practices, and products that correlate with dominant or majority groups (Brannon et al., 2018). Most diversity efforts include key decision-makers attempting to simply check a box by just hiring one or two minorities instead of creating a culture of changing the status quo (Thomas & Gabarro, 1999). When key decision-makers have a passion and conviction to empower minorities, DEI policies and practices will be administrated.

Inclusivity requires an individual or an organization to be supportive in public and private, avoid assumptions, avoid gender bias, be respectful in the midst of not fully understanding, and be intentional in using inclusive language (Capras, 2021). Fostering inclusion within institutional settings through diversity policies and practices, like negotiations, is an interdependent endeavor that requires some buy-in and support across all social group lines within the organization (DeMartine et al., 2016). Dennissen et al. (2019) suggested a three-level framework for organizational diversity, equity, and inclusion: (a) the individual level (career

development), (b) the group level (community building), and (c) the organizational level (inclusion). Each of these three levels poses its own unique set of challenges; however, if organizations desire to approach the topic of diversity, equity, and inclusion holistically, having an intentional strategy that incorporates all three levels is vital.

As the U.S. population grows more eclectic and diverse, there is a need for organizations in the public and private sectors to develop healthy strategies for addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion (Bernstein et al., 2020). Yet, despite this rapidly growing diverse population, organizations, corporations, and higher education institutions still have significant disparities related to women and ethnic minorities in leadership ranks (Chin & Trimble, 2015). With an emerging eclectic population, both locally and globally, relevant leadership models need to be less ethnocentric and more diverse if organizations want to respond to the rapid changes in leadership need successfully (Chin & Trimble, 2015).

The rapid change in the growing eclectic population calls for a more expensive and robust leadership model than traditional models (Kotter, 2014). A consistent lack of effort, awareness, or adjustment towards diversity, equity, and inclusion can negatively impact minority groups' experience with secular organizations (Brannon et al., 2018). Likewise, minority groups also experience a lack of diversity, equity, and inclusion within faith movements.

There is existing research on diversity, equity, and inclusion in secular and public organizational structures; however, there have been limited studies on this topic in private faith movements. Therefore, I aimed to explore minorities', specifically African Americans, lived experiences of diversity, equity, and inclusion within the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), in contrast to how majority groups and the convention perceive diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Background of the Problem

Over the past several years, the United States has experienced a lot of controversial issues related to political power, social injustice, sexual harassment, and the demeaning of women (Burge, 2021; Holcomb, 2014). Topics of social injustice have taken the forefront, and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement

has gained momentum due to high-profile murder cases like George Floyd, Ahmad Aubrey, Breonna Taylor, and the Kenosha, Wisconsin shooting (Kendi, 2019; Tisby, 2021). Likewise, high profile sexual harassment and sexual assault against women have occupied our culture and society with cases like Harvey Weinstein, Bill Cosby, Brett Kavanaugh, and Jeffrey Epstein, leading to the #MeToo Movement (Bhattacharyya, 2018; Hillstrom, 2019). Politically, the transfer from the Barack Obama administration to the Donald Trump administration to the Joe Biden administration has caused more divisiveness within the country than in previous years (Giboney et al., 2020).

Issues of sexual harassment have also made their way within the Southern Baptist Convention. The recent findings in a third-party investigation into the handling of sexual abuse by the SBC's Executive Committee found that from 2000- to 2021, there were at least 409 women sexually abused by someone affiliated with the SBC at some point (Bharath et al., 2022; Kilgore, 2022). The common theme with the issues of political power, social injustice, and sexual harassment is that White men in power dominate these headlines and the lack of diversity in high-profile positions (Hill, 2017).

Within the evangelical movement, there have also been many challenges and issues within the SBC related to race, gender equality, and questions of leadership transparency, authenticity, and ethical morality (Roxburgh, 2019). Many influential minority pastors and leaders are concerned with the ongoing lack of diversity and the rise of racial tension within the SBC (Eckholm, 2011). Charlie Dates, the pastor of the Progressive Baptist Church on the south side of Chicago, was interviewed by *Christianity Today* Magazine (Roach, 2020). Pastor Dates stated, "I am troubled that there is no SBC entity led by a non-Anglo. Every time there is a selection, and they say, 'God's man is'...it is a White man" (Roach, 2020, p 4). The challenge for Pastor Dates and many other minority pastors and leaders is the fact that the SBC has experienced a steady growth of minority churches over the past 10 years; however, this growth has not been reflected in the promotion of minority leadership in SBC entities (SBC, 2020).

Issues surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion challenges within the Southern Baptist Convention have been magnified by the recent departure of one of the most influential female leaders, Beth Moore (Smietana, 2021). In a recent interview, Beth Moore apologized to all the women affiliated with the SBC for supporting a theology that restricts women (Shimron & Smietana, 2021). Moore's departure from the SBC also significantly impacted curriculum sales for the convention's primary resource provider LifeWay Christian Resources (Barkley, 2021). Moore leaving the SBC speaks to just one of the many issues and struggles minority leaders face.

Another tension the convention faces is the conversation regarding the validity of critical race theory. The convention has six seminaries affiliated with the SBC: Southern (1859), Southwestern (1908), New Orleans (1917), Golden Gate (1944), Southeastern (1951), and Midwestern (1957). On November 30, 2020, the six SBC seminary presidents, all White men, took a stance condemning critical race theory (Huckabee, 2020). The presidents believed that it was dangerous to view humans and conflict primarily through race, gender, or sexuality instead of through scriptural concepts such as sin (Bailey & Boorstein, 2020). In the November 2020 edition of the Baptist Press, the presidents agreed that affirming critical race theory, intersectionality, and any version of critical race theory is incompatible with the Baptist Faith and Message (SBC, 2000).

Scholars like Delgado and Stefancic (2017) have agreed that critical race theory is less about being divisive and non-unifying, yet more about recognizing that racism and marginalization still exist and is not a bygone artifact of the past. From a theological perspective, the SBC Seminary Presidents and the SBC entity believe in Article 1 of the Baptist Faith and Message, 2000 that states all scripture is totally true and trustworthy; including, "We are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). They also believe in Article 3 of the Baptist Faith & Message that states we are all image bearers of Christ based on Genesis 1:27 (Barkley, 2021). A belief in both Articles 1 and 3 would be a direct conflict of the convention's stated beliefs on critical race theory. Therefore, if not addressed, this position and perspective by the SBC Seminary Presidents and the lack of overall minority

leadership in SBC entities could hurt how minorities experience diversity, equity, and inclusion within the convention.

Statement of the Problem

The comprehensive study of DEI is complex and multilayered. Likewise, the study of DEI within an evangelical movement like the SBC equally has its challenges. The current problems surrounding the SBC relate to women in leadership, CRT, race, and social injustice (Page, 2021). Therefore, within the current research, the two focus issues were women in leadership and perceptions of racial injustice as it relates to women in leadership. At the same time, DEI tends to focus on matters of gender, including matters of the LGBTQ+ community (William et al., 2021). In the SBC, however, because of its theological and doctrinal framework, the argument is not related to inclusivity as it relates to the LGBTQ plus community. It is specifically related to the role of women in leadership in ecclesiastical settings.

The current research project addressed three specific problems. First, there was a need to study DEI in various contexts because it is loosely defined based on the context (Chin & Trimble, 2015). Specific groups perceive DEI differently. For example, in U.S. science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) professions, women and other marginalized groups are perceived as incapable of effectively working in the field compared to their White male counterparts (Amato, 2019; Ing, 2014). Another example is how the study of DEI at a historically Black college and university differs from that of a predominately White institution (Killough et al., 2018; Lake, 2021). Likewise, there is a need to understand how theology and doctrine contribute to understanding DEI in a faith-based context.

Second, there are many faith traditions, but there is a need to focus on the SBC because the movement faces many current issues and challenges (Moore, 2022; Radnofsky & Ciechalski, 2021). There is much practical research done on the SBC, but no academic research. The most current academic research focuses on theology and doctrine only, but not the perceptions of African American pastors and leaders. While most of the research looks at theological and doctrinal issues

related to DEI, there is a need to explore perceptions of racial injustice concerns, specifically from African American pastors and leaders.

Third, there is a need to understand better how DEI is perceived differently among the three levels of the SBC: executive, state, and local. Lifeway Christian Resources conducts annual studies on behaviors of the SBC, pastors' perceptions of compensation packets, current cultural trends, and views on local church diversity. No studies to date have explored perceptions of DEI at all levels of the SBC. Therefore, there is a need for more research to understand more factors that relate to DEI, women in leadership, and perceptions of racial injustice.

One of the major contributing factors of DEI is to understand the role of doctrine, theology, and faith as it relates to matters of women in leadership and racial injustice. While a significant number of articles have been done on women in leadership, from a theological perspective (Barkley, 2021; Burge, 2021; Shimron & Smietana, 2021), further investigations can be conducted to understand the actual perceptions of African American pastors and leaders within the SBC movement (Bailey & Boorstein, 2020; Page, 2021). While the matters of racial injustice have become a matter of great concern within the SBC (Roach, 2020), research must be done to understand better the perceptions of African American pastors and leaders within the SBC on executive, state, and local levels. There is a need to understand specifically with the SBC because, to date, no research has been conducted from a qualitative perspective on the SBC.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of the current research study was to study DEI from three perspectives. First, there was a need to study women in leadership from a faith-based perspective. Second, there was a need to study perceptions of racial injustice within ecclesiastical and denominational settings. Third, there was also a need to better explore the SBC's inner workings and its perceptions of women in leadership and perception of racial injustice on all three levels of the SBC.

Therefore, I aimed to explore perceptions of DEI, women in leadership, and perceptions of racial injustice among the three levels of the SBC: executive, state, and local. The research was conducted through a phenomenological study of

African American pastors and leaders in the SBC. The executive level of the SBC is the executive committees and the domestic executive agency known as the North American Missions Board. The state level of the SBC is one of the 42 individual conventions that represents the entire SBC (SBC, 2022). The local level of the SBC refers to each individual local church that is organized and recognized as Southern Baptist (SBC, 2022).

Research Questions

Through this study, I explored the perceptions of DEI, women in leadership, and racial injustice among the three levels of the SBC: executive, state convention, and local church. This study was conducted through a phenomenological study of African American pastors and leaders in the SBC. Further, the experiences of each level of the convention were compared to examine the similarities and differences among the three levels of the convention. The study leaders and participants were selected from all three levels of the SBC, specifically from the North American Mission's Board, the California Baptist Convention, the Florida Baptist State Convention, and the Georgia Baptist Convention. The four research questions for this study were as follows:

RQ1: What are perceptions of African American leaders and pastors on DEI in the SBC?

RQ2: What are perceptions of African American leaders and pastors on women in leadership in the SBC?

RQ3: What are perceptions of African American leaders and pastors on racial injustice in the SBC?

RQ4: What are the similarities and differences of the perceptions of the three levels of the SBC related to DEI, women in leadership, and racial injustice?

Significant of the Research

The study of diversity, equity, and inclusion can be vital to an organization's health, productivity, and longevity. The significance of this research study is the possibility of helping the SBC identify potential blind spots in areas of weakness as

an opportunity. The findings may also help the SBC assess its proper organizational health related to DEI. The SBC may leverage the research findings to create a sustainable strategy for the future. This study is also significant because current research has shown that the SBC is intensely fractured, and there is much division between minority pastors and women versus the majority leadership and their ideology (Radnofsky & Ciechalski, 2021).

Much of the division is centered around issues of race, racial reconciliation, and gender equality, specifically related to women in leadership (Koon, 2021). If not addressed, the possible implications of this division could result in long-term health and longevity of the SBC, as leaders like Beth Moore and Josh Buice, President of G3 Ministers, are currently leaving the ministry/SBC (Jackson, 2022). There are also specific concerns about minorities and young leaders leaving the SBC. Most young leaders (i.e., Millennials) will not tolerate an intolerant movement. Therefore, if not addressed, the SBC will not just lose African Americans and women, but also young Whites, Latinos, Hispanics, and other minority groups (Burge, 2021; Jackson, 2022).

Conceptual Framework

In this study, I explored the perceptions of DEI, women in leadership, and racial injustice among the three levels of the SBC: executive, state, and local. The context of this dissertation is the SBC; however, the focal concepts of this research exclusively consisted of DEI, women in leadership, and racial injustice. Therefore, these three concepts served as the conceptual foundation of the identified problem.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The first concept in this framework is the perception of diversity, equity, and inclusion. From a theoretical perspective, DEI has three distinct definitions. Harrison and Klein (2007) referred to diversity as simply variety. It is “the reputation, in one social system of people with distinctly different group affiliation cultural significance” (Cox, 1993, p. 5). Equity is a term that refers to an approach that ensures that everyone has access to the same opportunities (Tan, 2019).

Inclusion is the degree to which individuals feel a part of a critical organizational process, “including access to information and resources,

involvement in workgroups, and ability to influence the decision-making process” (Mor-Barak & Cherin, 1998, p. 48). In relation to the current study, the concept of DEI aims to explore the perceptions of DEI among the three levels of the SBC: executive, state, and local. The primary purpose of this particular framework is to research the perception of DEI and identify whether there are any differences from each of the three levels. This research on the perceptions of DEI focused on the experiences of African American pastors and leaders within the SBC.

Women in Leadership

The second concept is the role of women in leadership. This concept focuses on the stereotypes of a woman’s leadership role. The marginalization of women in leadership happens in corporate settings and evangelical movements like the SBC. In corporate settings, women are often undermined in their leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Some scholars have defined this process as a stereotype threat.

Concepts like the stereotype threat and implicit bias are significant factors in a woman's leadership role being marginalized. Steele et al. (2002) defined the stereotype threat as “the concrete, real-time threat of being judged and treated poorly in settings where a negative stereotype about one's group applies” (p. 385). Implicit bias is an “unconscious or automatic mental associations made between the members of a social group 'or individuals who share a particular characteristic' and one or more attributes 'implicit stereotype' or a negative evaluation 'implicit prejudice” (FitzGerald et al., 2019, p.1).

Within the SBC, the movement adheres to a document called the Baptist Faith and Message, 2000. The Baptist Faith and Message, 2000 serve as the SBC's doctrinal and theological statements. It is the document set forth as the teachings and beliefs of every member affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC, 2022). Article VI of the Baptist Faith and Message states, “While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture” (SBC, 2000). Article VI in the Baptist faith and message directly impacts how a woman within the SBC movement is viewed as a leader.

Racial Injustice

The third concept is the perception of racial injustice among the three levels of the SBC: executive, state, and local. *The overall concept of racial injustice* speaks to the lack of human rights and unequal treatment of a group of people, which results in one group being at a disadvantage over another group (Wisdom et al., 2019). Likewise, within the context of the SBC, the concept of racial injustice focuses on how African American pastors and leaders perceive their experiences as members of the faith movement. In this study, I compared the SBC perception of racial injustice issues to African American pastors' and leaders' views and perspectives.

Methodology

The methodology used for this research project was qualitative, and the design was phenomenological. Phenomenology is used to better understand the essence of a particular group of people's lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A phenomenological study is an approach to qualitative research that focuses on the essence of a lived experience that can be perceived or sensed by people who have different viewpoints (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). A phenomenological study aims to capture the way an occurrence was lived by people who participated in that occurrence (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). This type of study consists of both “what” an individual experienced and “how” they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994).

Participants

The participants for this research project consisted of women and African American pastors and leaders who have been a part of the Southern Baptist Convention for at least 5 years. These participants provided a clear and comprehensive perspective on how minority leaders view their experiences within the convention. During annual convention meetings, the reports given only outlined the number of churches planted and missionaries sent abroad (SBC, 2022). To date, there has been no comprehensive research conducted on minority pastors and leaders within the convention. There have been conversations; however, there has not been any research.

This research project consisted of a total of 10 participants (male and female). Participants were recruited from each level of the convention: executive, state convention, and the local church. The participants were selected from all three levels of the SBC, specifically from SBC churches, conventions, and entities from California and the Southeast regions.

Data Collection

To ensure participants feel comfortable being open, honest, and transparent about their experiences, the data collection process for this research project consisted of 45- to 60-minute recorded individual interviews. The preferred method of conducting each interview was via Zoom. I created a controlled environment to make the participants comfortable. I served as the moderator and was responsible for facilitating the discussion using predetermined questions. Each interview was casual and informal. This process established a permissive and nonthreatening environment (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Upon completing the individual interviews, I systematically analyzed the data and provided appropriate reporting (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Analysis

Analyzing the data began with the information gathered from the recorded Zoom interviews. The participants' responses to the interview questions were transcribed and coded. The three coding methods used were *in vivo*, process, and value. *In vivo* coding allows for the interviewee's exact words. *In vivo* coding is known for utilizing the participant's language as the primary symbol for qualitative data analysis (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Second, process coding is an action coding system that uses gerunds, also known as "ing" words, as codes (Charmaz, 2008). The purpose of process coding was to help me identify forms of the participants' actions, reactions, and interactions, as suggested by the data (Charmaz, 2008).

Third, value coding is used to analyze an individual's value system, based on three concepts: attitudes, values, and beliefs (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Values coding is often used to explore "cultural values, identity, intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions in case studies, oral history,

critical ethnography, psychology, and sociology” (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018, p. 129). By using the three identified forms of coding, I identified key phrases, actions, and emotions that the participants expressed. I highlighted their thoughts and perspectives by handwriting codes on the side of the transcript. After these data were gathered and codes were handwritten, I systematically collapsed each code into overarching themes that further illustrated their lived experiences within the Southern Baptist Convention.

Ethical Considerations

As I approached this study, several ethical considerations were made to protect the participants. The first consideration was informed consent. Participants in this research study were made aware of the entire purpose of the study and their rights as participants, to which they provided written acknowledgment and agreement (Terrell, 2016). I thoroughly examined the nature and scope of threats and advantages fundamental to the study (Terrell, 2016). I created and monitored unbiased procedures for identifying and selecting participants in this study (Terrell, 2016).

Scope and Limitations

The purpose of identifying the scope and limitations is to establish the unique parameters of the current research. This research project's primary scope and limitation were exclusively on the perceptions of DEI in the SBC. No other denomination or fellowship was considered. As it relates to “minority identification,” this research project focused on women (natural-born), and African American pastors and leaders lived experiences within the SBC alone because current concerns in the SBC revolve around matters of women in leadership, CRT, racial injustice. There is a need for future study to better understand how other minority groups in the SBC perceive matters of DEI and women. Any concerns on the study of the sexual identity or the LGBTQ+ community was outside of the scope of this research.

There are some generalizations within this research. This research project was not a theological research project. It was a leadership research project based on social science and academic literature. Because the research participants are a part

of a Christian organization, there were doctrinal and theological references. As the researcher, I was not trying to take a position outside of the SBC doctrinal statement known as the Baptist Faith and Message. I was exclusively operating within the doctrinal and theological framework of the SBC. The topic of racial injustice is a concern within multiple communities. For the purposes of this study, racial injustice was specifically defined as it relates to matters within the African American community.

Inclusion differs from diversity in focusing not only on the compositional mix of people, but also on every employee's incorporation into organizational processes and culture (Bernstein et al., 2020). Equity differentiates from inclusion, in that it places the outcome at the system or organizational rather than a group or individual level (Bernstein et al., 2020). Researchers have found that management efforts promoting equity and inclusion work consistently have positive outcomes, whereas diversity alone was associated with both positive and negative outcomes (Barak et al., 2016). Implementing diversity alone is limited to producing a simulation to dominate culture, while inclusion and equity will create a healthy and holistic view of a multicultural organization (Nishii, 2013).

Definition of Terms

Several theoretical and scientific perspectives around gender, diversity, equity, and inclusion inform an understanding of each term. For this study, the following definitions offer guidance into a clear understanding of how the research's meaning on specific terms. For example, the term gender is used to describe a natural born male and female for this study. Furthermore, the definitions of terms will also provide insight into my specific point of view and some depth into how these terms can be operationalized within the Southern Baptist Convention.

The Baptist Faith and Message, 2000. The Baptist Faith and Message serves as the Southern Baptist Convention's doctrinal and theological statements. The Baptist Faith and Message is the document set forth as the teachings and beliefs of every member affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC, 2000).

Diversity. The characteristics of a group of two or more people refer to demographically differences among group members in race, ethnic city, gender, social class, religion, nationality, sexual identity, or other damages to social identity that amount to the history of any groups' prejudice, statement discrimination, or oppression (Ramarajan & Thomas, 2010). Harrison and Klein (2007) referred to diversity as simply variety. It is “the reputation, in one social system of people with distinctly different group affiliation cultural significance” (Cox, 1993, p. 5). Researchers have often used ethical diversity to describe the same groups and identified groups using classifications from the U.S. Census Bureau (Barbatis, 2010). Some researchers referred to racially or ethnically diverse groups as “minorities” (Strayhorn, 2009) or persons of color (Closson, 2010).

Equity. This term refers to an approach that ensures that everyone has access to the same opportunities. It recognizes that everyone does not start from the same place because cultural and societal advantages and barriers exist (Tan, 2019). It is a term that calls for the righting of systemic, institutional, organizational, and structural injustices (Bernstein et al., 2020). Inequity is often experienced when there is the presence of institutional and systematic discrepancies between different ethnic groups (Chin & Chien, 2006, p. 79).

Inclusion. Inclusion is a continuous and intentional effort to ensure that diverse groups of people are valued members and considered fully participate in all aspects of leadership and decision-making (Tan, 2019). The degree to which individuals feel a part of a critical organizational process includes access to information and resources, involvement in workgroups, and ability to influence the decision-making process” (Mor-Barak & Cherin, 1998, p. 48).

Local church. The local church is the individual congregation that represents a Southern Baptist Church. Within the SBC, no particular congregation has any authority over any other individual congregation, except that a church may oversee another congregation voluntarily as mission work. Still, that other congregation has the right to become an independent congregation at any time. There are more than 50,000 local SBC churches (SBC, 2022). For this research, the state conventions serve as the third level of the SBC.

The North American Mission Board. The NAMB is one of the many domestic mission agencies of the Southern SBC. The North American Mission serves as one of the executive level agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention. It is involved in Southern Baptist church planting and revitalization, state Baptist relief agencies, creating evangelism resources, pastoral training, and other programs that support all Southern Baptist state conventions and local churches (NAMB, 2021).

Race. The traditional definition of race can be defined as a category of humankind that shares certain distinctive physical traits; however, the term ethnicities is more broadly defined as sizeable clusters of people classed according to common racial, national, ethnic, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background (Blakemore, 2019). For this research, “race” refers to men and women of an African American ethnicity.

Social injustice. This term describes the lack of human rights and unequal treatment of a group of people, which results in one group being at a disadvantage over another group (Wisdom et al., 2019). This term is used in connection with the term *racial injustice*.

The Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee. The Executive Committee ministers to the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention by acting for the Convention ad interim in all matters not otherwise provided for in a manner that encourages the cooperation and confidence of the churches, associations, and state conventions and facilitates maximum support for worldwide missions and ministries (SBC, 2022).

State conventions. There are 42 state conventions within the Southern Baptist denomination. A Southern Baptist State Convention is a cooperative association by which local SBC churches receive various forms of support and resources, as well as support for missionary and other work undertaken by the convention (SBC, 2022). Because of the basic Baptist principle of the local church's autonomy, state conventions do not have any administrative or ecclesiastical control over a local church. For this research, the state conventions serve as the second level of the SBC.

Women in leadership. For the purposes of this research, this phrase referred to any natural-born woman who is a member of the Southern Baptist Convention, ability to equally serve in any of the three identified levels: executive, state convention, and the local church.

Summary

A healthy approach to organizational DEI requires an intentional strategy and an overall commitment to change (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). The effective implementation of DEI requires key decision-makers to be willing to abandon certain cultural comforts and perspectives to become more diverse and welcoming to different people groups. Historically, organizations and institutions like the Southern Baptist Convention have struggled with their ability to become more diverse and inclusive. One of the significant challenges for organizations like the SBC is learning how to reimagine their views, ideology, and biases on who can be a high-level leader (Kotter & Cohen, 2002).

The traditional view of high-level leadership within the United States often reflects a dominant majority population consisting of White (Euro-American), heterosexual, Protestant males (Chin & Trimble, 2015). Therefore, in the current study, I focused on African American pastors and leaders within the SBC's lived experiences as it relates to matters of race and gender at the executive, state, and local. The value of this study is that the findings provide a deeper understanding of how the SBC perceives its approach to managing DEI compared to how minority pastors and leaders within the convention experience and view DEI.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to review the theoretical and empirical literature on diversity, equity, and inclusion in an ecclesiastical and denominational setting. In conducting this study, I aimed to explore how the Southern Baptist Convention perceives DEI, as it relates to matters of women in leadership and racial injustice, in contrast to the lived experiences of minority pastors and leaders. This literature review is divided into four sections. The first section presents literature related to the overall concept of DEI. The second section focuses on DEI as it relates to the SBC. The third section centers on women in leadership. The fourth section provides a review of literature related to racial injustice. This is not a theological research project. It is a leadership research project based on social science and academic literature. Because the research participants are a part of a Christian organization, there are both theoretical and theological references within this literature.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

There is much literature on DEI, as this concept is complex and multilayered. Thus, several authors and scholars informed the theoretical perspectives around the concept of DEI for this section of the literature review. Following this overview of diversity, equity, and inclusion, I will provide individual definitions for each one of the concepts. Together, each definition offers guidance in better understanding the complexities of the overall concept of DEI and how DEI applies to the research topic of the current study. Furthermore, each definition provides insight into how DEI can be operationalized within specific environments.

Before defining diversity, equity, and inclusion, this literature review identifies a critical overarching theoretical position known as generative interactions. Generative interactions refer to the different connections across diversity that generate social interactions and a deeper understanding of the need to facilitate equity at the organizational level (Bernstein et al., 2020). This concept of generative interactions, as it relates to diversity interactions, is not new to

scholarship. Diversity interactions can be considered generative if organizational interactions can challenge the guiding assumptions of a particular culture, to raise essential questions regarding contemporary social life, to foster reconsideration of that which is taken for granted and thereby furnish new alternatives for social actions (Gergen, 1978).

The theory of generative interactions can serve as a guide towards helping an organization move toward healthy DEI practices. The purpose for identifying the theory of generative interactions is because of the connection to specific organizational practices that produce and maintain generative diversity interactions, which leads to implementations of equity and inclusions (Sutton & Staw, 1995). The theory provides an ethical and alternative approach to DEI in organizations and the ethical management of different perspectives from various stakeholders within the organization. When all stakeholders are treated with fairness, honesty, and even generosity, the possibilities of equitable outcomes significantly increase (Harrison et al., 2015).

DEI and Organizational Change

Much diversity, equity, and inclusion literature apply to its impact and organizational structures and environments. Although some of the literature in this review is an older resource, many principles, practices, and insights are still relevant today. In their book, *Breaking Through*, Thomas and Gabarro (1999) provided clear insight into the issues confronting minorities in their pursuit of executive positions and the need for intentional DEI strategies in many organizational structures. These authors discussed several implementations of DEI strategies used in many corporations to “assimilate and integrate into majority culture” (Thomas & Gabarro, 1999, p. 156).

The literature on this topic tends to address DEI primarily from the perspective of how to assimilate minority leaders and workers into a majority organizational culture. The focal point of most DEI strategies found in literature leans towards how to help organizations systematically approach change. For example, Kotter and Cohen (2002) provided a strategy to aid organizations in making necessary changes. Although Kotter and Cohen are not only referring to

organizational change as it relates exclusively to diversity, equity, and inclusion, many of the principles also found in their eight stages of successful change apply to multiple contexts. These authors reported, “Evidence overwhelmingly suggests that the most fundamental problem in all of the stages of the change process is changing the behavior of people” (Kotter & Cohen, 2002, p. 7). Thus, when it comes to implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion within organizational structures and culture, literature would suggest that it starts with buy-in from the people.

Kotter and Cohen's (2002) eight steps for organizational change approach is more about rallying the team around a shared vision and strategy. More specifically, to organizational change practices that focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion, Kalev et al. (2006) proposed that change efforts through cross-functional job restructuring, and collaboration can counter job segregation. Kalev et al. conducted a sociological study examining the increase in diversity impact by creating a cross-functional work team that was not implemented to improve the visible view of diversity but to enhance organizational effectiveness, which led to a more diverse organizational culture. Likewise, Kalev's study points to the potential diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts to be implemented when the intentional organization efforts are not labeled as a forced “diversity initiative.” Consequently, these scholars suggested that when diversity is not forced upon an organization, it tends to be more receptive and sustainable.

For organizations to effectively approach diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies, there must be a visible change in the leadership structure. Diversity, equity, and inclusion will never be implemented as long as traditional leadership structures are present. Scholars Chin and Trimble (2015) provided a thought-provoking resource that identifies various dimensions of studying diversity, equity, and inclusion, specifically regarding leadership. These scholars stressed the importance of leveraging DEI and leadership because of the ethnocentric bias in current leadership theories. When studying current leadership trends in the United States, research has shown that most high-level leaders are often represented by White euro-Americans, heterosexual, Protestant males. This demographic is seen as

the dominate power elite who shapes the identities and leadership behaviors to conform to that majority culture (Chin & Trimble, 2015).

Upon reviewing the literature on organizations assimilating to more diverse and inclusive cultures, the consistent theme is the need for corporate buy-in from all organization members. Cox and Lancefield (2021) discussed five strategies to infuse diversity and inclusion into an organization. They outlined the importance of practical strategies like lowering the expected hiring rate and being open to adjusting background and educational expectations. One of the critical strategies the scholars mentioned was the need to ensure that the CEO is championing the campaign of diversity and inclusion and organizational change (Cox & Lancefield, 2021).

DEI and Theoretical Perspectives

From a theoretical perspective, DEI has three distinct definitions. Each definition is further discussed in the following three sections. As it relates to organizations having the ability to move towards being more diverse, equitable, and inclusive, there must be an understanding of the theoretical perspectives of DEI. For many scholars, diversity is principally referred to as having a mixture, range, or variation (Harrison & Klein, 2007). In an organizational setting, diversity is viewed as having one workplace system that is populated with distinctly different groups of people from a variety of cultural or ethnic backgrounds (Cox, 1993). Equity is a term that refers to an approach that ensures that everyone has access to the same opportunities (Tan, 2019). Inclusion brings diversity and equity together, as it fundamentally ensures that every individual feels included in critical aspects of the organizational environment and decision-making process (Mor-Barak & Cherin, 1998).

Definition of Diversity

There are numerous definitions found in the literature on diversity. Most of the literature is consistent and acknowledges that diversity is the characteristics of a group of two or more people. Diversity refers to demographic differences among group members in race, ethnic city, gender, social class, religion, nationality, sexual identity, or other damages to social identity that amount to the history of any

group's prejudice, statement discrimination, or oppression (Ramarajan & Thomas, 2010). Harrison and Klein (2007) referred to diversity as simply a variety. It is “the reputation in one social system of people with distinctly different group affiliation cultural significance” (Cox, 1993, p. 5).

Most conceptual and empirical definitions of diversity focus on the social and psychological perspective and the need for cross-cultural adaptation (Crisp & Turner, 2011); however, there is also the organizational perspective. From an organizational perspective, diversity focuses on an intentional strategy and approach towards avoiding unequal treatment and negatively stereotyping individuals of a minority group (Baum, 2021). Stereotyping typically happens in organizations when assumptions are made based on such conceptions that do not factually represent all members of a group (Baum, 2021). Organizations that desire to approach diversity positively must recognize that a diverse community or organization is one in which an eclectic group of social and cultural characteristics resides within the group (Baum, 2021).

Definition of Equity

Equity is a term that calls for the righting of systemic, institutional, organizational, and structural injustices (Bernstein et al., 2020). Equity refers to an approach ensuring everyone has access to the same opportunities, recognizing that everyone does not start from the same place because of cultural and societal advantages and barriers (Tan, 2019). In the existing body of literature, many scholars have expressed that inequity is often experienced when there is the presence of institutional and systematic discrepancies between different ethnic groups.

Equity is all about equal treatment of individuals and groups. The concept of equity considers the needs and characteristics of minorities or marginalized individuals and attempts to incorporate those needs into the organizational culture (SHRM, 2023). The principle of equity concedes that there are traditionally underserved and underrepresented people and that fairness regarding their unbalanced conditions is needed to assist equality in providing valuable opportunities to those marginalized groups (Bopaiah & Cole, 2021). The goal for

equity is that the same treatment, access, and opportunities afforded to one are afforded to all.

Definition of Inclusion

Inclusion is a term that addresses the continuous and intentional effort to ensure that diverse groups of people are valued members and considered fully participating in all aspects of leadership and decision-making (Tan, 2019). Inclusion is the degree to which individuals feel a part of a critical organizational process “includes access to information and resources, involvement in workgroups, and ability to influence the decision-making process” (Mor-Barak & Cherin, 1998, p. 48). Much of the literature is consistent in its definition of inclusion. The literature refers to inclusion as a commitment toward equality and diversity, for all people are systematically valued with the same opportunity.

From an organizational perspective, inclusion is an intentional act of creating an environment where any individual or group feels welcomed, respected, and valued (Baum, 2021). An inclusive environment not only embraces the differences of others, but also allows others to influence the decision-making process within the organization (Baum, 2021). The benefit of an inclusive culture in an organizational environment is that it allows people with multiple backgrounds, mindsets, and ways of thinking to work essentially together to perform the highest potential to achieve the organization’s desired goals and objectives (Bopaiah & Cole, 2021). Organizations that practice inclusivity could cultivate a more creative and collaborative environment.

DEI Differences and Values

When reviewing the literature, DEI has several implications, as it relates to differences only using one compared to all three. For instance, inclusion differs from diversity in focusing on the compositional mix of people and every employee's incorporation into organizational processes and culture. In contrast, equity differentiates from inclusion in that it places the outcome at the system or organization, rather than a group or individual level (Bernstein et al., 2020). If organizations consider using all three, researchers have found that management efforts promoting equity and inclusion consistently correlate to positive outcomes.

In contrast, diversity alone was associated with positive and negative outcomes (Barak et al., 2016). Implementing diversity alone is limited to producing a simulation to dominate culture, while inclusion and equity create a healthy and holistic view of a multicultural organization (Nishii, 2013).

Women in Leadership

The marginalization of women in leadership is a topic that has been discussed from multiple perspectives. Over the years, many scholars have researched and reported on the vast differences between views of women and men in leadership. Much of the early research on women in leadership focused on perceptions that women are inferior to men due to a lack of skill and leadership traits necessary for managerial success (Hennig & Jardin, 1977). In more modern research, studies showed that more women were both educated and occupied positions of leadership, yet there were still questions of women's leadership effectiveness compared to men's (Northouse, 2013). Modern research has also shown that women lead in a more democratic and collaborative manner than men, which some organizational settings did not view that leadership style as favorable (van Engen & Willemsen, 2004).

The various perspectives on woman in leadership and their overall effectiveness is a matter of preference in style and organizational environment. In a meta-analysis comparing the effectiveness of female and male leaders suggested that although men and women were equally effective leaders, an organization's preference in who occupied upper-level leadership roles were often associated with men (Eagly et al., 1995). Regardless of a woman's education, experience, and intellectual aptitude, much of the literature that discusses the marginalization of women in leadership have similar perspectives. For example, Ing (2014) and Amato (2019) discussed the inequality of gender representation in STEM careers, despite the narrowing of the gender achievement gaps.

Even though women are successful in matriculation and a simulation through higher education, those achievements are not translating into being hired in high-level positions that men traditionally dominate. In earlier academia, some scholars identified an invisible barrier that prevents women from ascending into

elite leadership positions called the *glass ceiling* (Hymowitz & Schelhardt, 1986). This term was introduced into the American vernacular in 1986, suggesting that even in female-dominated occupations, women face an invisible barrier to ascension, whereas White men appeared to ride a *glass escalator* to the top of leadership positions (Williams, 1992). The overall leadership gap is seen in both the public and private sectors, whereby women are disproportionately concentrated in lower-level and lower-authority leadership positions compared to men (Powell & Graves, 2003).

SBC on Women in Leadership

The topic of women in leadership, as it relates to the Southern Baptist Convention, has been an issue for many years. Throughout the years, the church has celebrated the growing number of women receiving theological degrees; however, this celebration has not translated into an intentional surge in efforts to lower barriers (Levens, 2022). Much of the literature addresses how prominent leader Beth Moore left the movement in March 2021, citing that she can no longer support a theology that restricts women in leadership (Radnofsky & Ciechalski, 2021; Shimron & Smietana, 2021; Smietana, 2021). To date, Beth Moore has been one of the most influential women leaders in the SBC, which causes her departure to have a significant impact on how members view the convention's position on women in leadership (Barkley, 2021).

Consequently, much of the literature suggests there are still stereotypes of a woman's ability to lead in high-level roles. For example, the theory, feminist leadership addresses the bias towards women and any quality and social status and roles, making the role of leading a challenge (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Other concepts like the "stereotype threat" and implicit bias are significant factors in a woman's leadership role being marginalized. Steele et al. (2002) defined the stereotype threat as "the concrete, real-time threat of being judged and treated poorly in settings where a negative stereotype about one's group applies" (p. 385). Implicit bias is an "unconscious or automatic mental associations made between the members of a social group 'or individuals who share a particular characteristic' and one or more

attributes 'implicit stereotype' or a negative evaluation 'implicit prejudice'' (FitzGerald et al., 2019, p.1).

The Southern Baptist Convention's primary argument, as it relates to women in leadership, centers around the positions of complementarianism in contrast to egalitarianism (Shaw, 2021). These positions are discussed further in the next section. In 2000, the Southern Baptist Convention officially made complementarianism a part of its foundation for cooperation by including a doctrine document called the Baptist Faith and Message (SBC, 2000).

The Baptist Faith and Message, 2000 serves as the SBC's theological statements. It is the document set forth as the teachings and beliefs of every member affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC, 2022). Article VI of the Baptist Faith and Message states, "While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture" (SBC, 2000). Article VI in the Baptist faith and message directly impacts how a woman within the SBC movement is viewed as a leader. Jackson (2022) agreed that more people would leave the convention because of the position of women and leadership if there were no changes. Therefore, in reviewing the identified literature, a women's ability to obtain high-level leadership roles is challenging in an organizational structure in both the public and private sectors.

Article XVIII of the Baptist Faith and Message addresses the convention's belief in the family. The beginning of Article XVIII addresses the convention's belief in the structure of a traditional family. As it relates to the role of husbands and wives, the article is very complementarian in its language:

The husband and wife are of equal worth before God since both are created in God's image. The marriage relationship models the way God relates to His people. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his

helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation. (SBC, 2000)

Doctrinally, the SBC supports its complementarian position by acknowledging that from the beginning of time, men and women were equally and fully created in the image of God, as seen in Genesis 1:27 NIV, which says, “God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” The SBC believes in the distinct roles and order of authority between men and women, as the Apostle Paul articulates in 1 Corinthians 11:3 NIV, 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, and 1 Timothy 2:11–13 (SPC, 2000).

- But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God (*New International Version*, 1973/2011, 1 Corinthians 11:3).
- Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church (*New International Version*, 1973/2011, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35).
- 1 Timothy 2:11–13 (NIV) states, “A woman should learn in quietness and for submission. I do not permit any woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve (*New International Version*, 1973/2011, 1 Timothy 2:11–13).

It is essential to acknowledge that just as Christian scholars, theologians, and denominations like the SBC use scriptures that align with a complementarian position, a similar review can be conducted for those who align with an egalitarian position. This literature review focuses on the position of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Complementarianism Versus Egalitarianism

In society and evangelical movements, views on women in leadership tend to focus on two positions related to the relationship between men and women: complementarianism and egalitarianism. Complementarianism stresses that although men and women are equal in personhood, they are created for different

roles (Piper & Grudem, 2016). Specifically related to evangelical movements like the SBC, the position of complementarian holds that male and female were created by God as equal in dignity, value, essence, and human nature, but also male and female have distinct roles. The male was given by God the responsibility of having loving authority over the female, whereas the female was to offer willing, glad-hearted, and submissive assistance to the man (Ware, 2007).

The overall objective of a complementarian position is to understand a perception of Biblical hierarchy that suggest women should remain subordinate to men. One of the major criticisms of a complementarian position is that while it claims to uphold the essential equality of men and women, it seems to affirm a position that only views women as inferior, second-class citizens who are not as important to God as men. In contrast, an egalitarianism position agrees with the complementarianism position that men and women are equal in personhood. The egalitarian position also holds that there is no gender-based limitations on the roles of men and women (Archer & Archer, 2019). Many who hold a complementarian position argue that the New Testament of the bible is explicitly clear on a woman's role in leadership, specifically when Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:11–15 that women are to learn in submission and not to teach or exercise authority over men.

Essentially, egalitarianism views hold that men and women are wholly and genuinely equal. In contrast, complementarianism argues there is a distinction in the roles, men have compared to women. Evangelical movements that hold a complementarian position ultimately believe God created and designed both male and female equal and fully human, however, within that equality, each gender has a unique and specific way to express themselves in humanity. Thus, in agreement with Paul in 1 Timothy 2:11–15, those who advocate a complementarian position believe this biblical passage applies to the positions women can hold in leadership. Dizon (2014) compared the arguments used by theologians from both complementarian and egalitarian positions to see how they differ in foundational presuppositions and hermeneutical methods (see Table 1).

Table 1

Complementarian and Egalitarian Perspectives on Biblical Gender Roles (Dizon, 2014)

Complementarianism	Egalitarianism
Derives from the word “complement”	A belief in human equality, especially concerning social, political, and economic affairs
There is no difference in worth. However, men and women, though equal, have separate roles in marriage, the church, and elsewhere	A social philosophy advocating the removal of inequalities among people
God created masculinity and femininity as meaningful distinctions	There are no gender restrictions on what roles men and women can fulfill in the church, home, and society

Critical Race Theory

This critical race theory (CRT) section requires a literature review because this theory has become a polarizing topic within the culture and the Southern Baptist Convention. Over the past 3 years, critical race theory has been the center of much racial tension within the SBC. Many scholars who advocate CRT believe the goal of the theory is social transformation, which begins by discussing race openly (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Mills and Unsworth (2018) suggested that CRT has a multimodal construction that provides a critique of racial color blindness, simulation, multiculturalism, revitalizing race-consciousness, and critiquing White racial privilege. Although the critiques and controversies surrounding critical race theory are complex and multilayered, this literature review only deals with CRT, as it relates to the project’s primary focus, the SBC.

There has been constant conversation in the public, private, and evangelical movements. Moreover, one of the more controversial theoretical concepts and literature relevant to this project is critical race theory and the validity of its concept. Scholars like Closson (2010) have suggested that CRT is just an academic

and legal framework that denotes that systematic racism is still an ongoing part of American society, from education and housing to employment and healthcare. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) took it a step further and outlined five major tenants of CRT: (a) the notion that racism is ordinary and not aberrational, (b) the idea of interest convergence, (c) the social construction of race, (d) the idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling, and (e) the notion that Whites have been recipients of civil rights legislation (see Table 2).

Table 2

Five Major Tenants of Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, pp. 8–11)

Basic Tenants of Critical Race Theory	Definition
Racism is ordinary, not aberrational	The usual way society does business is the standard, everyday experience of most people of color in this country
The idea of interest convergence or material determinism	Racism advances the interests of both the White elite (materially) and working-class Whites (psychically), and large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it
The social construction of race	Race and races are products of social thought and relations. Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; instead, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient
The idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling (the “voice of color”)	People of color are uniquely qualified to speak on behalf of other members of their group (or groups) regarding the forms and effects of racism
Intersectionality or anti-essentialism	No individual can be adequately identified by membership in a single group. Example: An African American person may also identify as a woman and Christian

Background of CRT

Critical race theorists define racism as the beliefs, practices, or structural systems that oppress racial groups. Scholars of color initially organized critical race theory and other individuals in legal studies and analysis in the United States during the post-war civil rights movements to challenge and change racial politics and power relations in institutional systems (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Many critical race theorists believe that political liberalism could not sufficiently address fundamental problems of injustice in American society. Because of the emphasis on the equitable treatment under the law of all races, also known as “color blindness,” politics and the powers institutional systems were only capable of recognizing the most blatant racism and apparent racist practices while ignoring or dismissing those that were relatively indirect or systemic (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023).

Critical Theory and CRT

Many scholars agree that critical race theory is a derivative of Karl Marx’s work and Sigmund Freud’s critical theory. Critical theory’s primary goal of philosophy is to help understand and overcome the social and political structures through which people are dominated and oppressed (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023). The central perspective of critical theory was its ability to see the fundamental relationship between one’s thought and action (Thomas, 2017). The key insight of both critical theory and CRT is that its aim is not meant to impose a set of values, beliefs, and ideas onto society, but to expose the apparent contradictions within society (Mills & Unsworth, 2018). Critical theory and CRT scholars share similar goals; they aim to deeply explore beneath the surface of culture and society, with the hope of uncovering perpetual systems and structures of oppression and social injustice that keep minorities and marginalized groups of people from fully experiencing equality within the world (Pane & Salmon, 2009).

Application of CRT

CRT has evolved into a methodological approach to study complex phenomena involving race, racial injustices, and the powers in and across disciplines in education (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Advocates of CRT suggest that this

theory provides a comprehensive way to theorize, examine, and challenge the ways that race, and racial injustices secretly and explicitly impact the social structures, practices, and conversations that occur within various settings (Yosso, 2005). CRT requires researchers to take into context the distinctive realities and lived experiences of marginalized people, primarily Black people (Burrell-Craft, 2020). Critical race theorists contend, appropriate application of the theory cannot take place without the voice of Black people contextualizing their daily lived experiences and struggles with issues like racism and racial injustice (Yull et al., 2014).

Criticism of CRT

Various aspects of the critical race theory framework have been criticized by scholars, politicians, and members of evangelical communities like the Southern Baptist Convention. Some critics have faulted CRT for its apparent embrace of an incoherent, postmodernist-inspired skepticism of objectivity, and truth, as evidenced in the application of the storytelling tenant (Fasching-Varner, 2009). Other critics have accused critical race theorists of undervaluing the traditional liberal ideas of neutrality, equality, and fairness in the law and legal procedures and of unreasonably spurning the notion of objective standards of merit in academia and public and private employment, instead interpreting any racial inequity or imbalance in legal, academic, or economic outcomes as proof of institutional racism and as grounds for directly imposing racially equitable outcomes in those realms (Bartlett & Brayboy, 2005). Most notably, critics suggest that critical race theorists unfairly treat any outside criticism or critique of their approach as evidence of blatant racism (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Despite the critiques, CRT has been noted as a theory that has influenced scholarship and fields outside the confines of legal studies, including women's rights, education, American studies, and sociology.

SBC on CRT

The Southern Baptist Convention has suggested that CRT conflicts with their theological beliefs, despite the comprehensive literature on critical race theory. On November 30, 2020, the six SBC seminary presidents—all White

men—took a stance condemning critical race theory (Huckabee, 2020), describing it as dangerous to view humans and conflict primarily through race, gender, or sexuality instead of scriptural concepts such as sin (Bailey & Boorstein, 2020). In the November 2020 edition of the Baptist Press, the presidents agreed that affirming critical race theory, intersectionality, and any version of critical race theory is incompatible with the Baptist Faith & Message (SBC, 2000). The SBC's turmoil over critical race theory continues to get political. Page (2021) noted that many Southern Baptists opposed to CRT are affiliated with the Republican Party and are still significant supporters of former President Donald Trump. At the same time, the members who support CRT are more minority, primarily aligned with the Democratic Party.

In addition to the SBC seminary presidents, other majority members of the convention share similar concerns and criticism of critical race theory. Many White male leaders within the SBC believe CRT promotes division within the body of Christ and division between identity groups by dividing people into either the oppressor class or the victim identity groups (Cloud, 2022). Likewise, White male leaders within the SBC believe CRT teaches that all Whites suffer from racism because they have power and exhibit micro-aggressions, which are hidden or unperceivable slights of language and behavior that imply the person is secretly a racist that demonstrates bigotry (Pulpit & Pen, 2019). One of the significant oppositions of White male leaders, as it relates to the validity and doctrinal alignment of CRT, is the theory's connection with critical theory and cultural Marxism (Pulpit & Pen, 2019).

Prominent White male leaders within the SBC have dismissed CRT due to their interpretation of Cultural Marxism and their negative views of the theory's position on subjectivity, White privilege, social justice, and what it means to be "woke" (Trueman, 2021). These leaders believe Marxism teaches that the central fact of history and human existence is one of economic class struggle, with oppressed classes working for the violent overthrow of their so-called oppressors (Eidsmoe, 1990). Prominent White male leaders within the SBC hold firm their

position on by clarifying several critical concepts of Cultural Marxism (see Table 3).

Table 3

White Male SBC Leaders’ Critical Concepts Based on CRT and Cultural Marxism (Eidsmoe, 1990)

Cultural Marxism Term	Definition
Woke Theology	Becoming aware of injustice and oppression, whether real or perceived and becoming motivated to act to end these evils
White Privilege	The inherent advantages of being White
Subjectivity	Truth is subjective, not objective. Cultural Marxists arrive at truth by feeling and identifying, not logic and evidence
Social Justice	Marxists believed justice was not justice in the sense of rendering a verdict in accord with the evidence and the law but attained when there was a massive shift of power from oppressors to the oppressed

CRT originated in 1989. It was designed to provide post-civil rights legal analysis, aid in the preservation of the history of minorities that have been marginalized and provide a process of personalization through storytelling. Over the years, however, it has evolved in a way that only brings alienation and separation instead of education. Today, there is a reiteration of CRT that combines its original theoretical framework and connects itself with two movements viewed by members of the SBC as “woke theology”: Cultural Marxism and Black Lives Matter (BLM). The SBC’s issue with Cultural Marxism was discussed in the

previous paragraph. In 2013, the BLM was initially formed in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the Trayvon Martin case (Black Lives Matter, n.d.).

The organization's original mission was to eliminate White supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes (Black Lives Matter, n.d.). Over the past 8 years, the organization has moved away from its traditional civil rights mission and aligned itself with a more liberal theology that is counter to the beliefs of the SBC. For example, the organization supports deconstructing the nuclear family, defunding the police, and the pro-life agenda (Black Lives Matter, n.d.) In reviewing the literature on the SBC's issues with the theological validity of CRT, much of the research found that the major criticism focuses on the theory's attachment to the entity of Black Lives Matter and the idea of Cultural Marxism.

Racial Injustice

Racial injustice may be the most morally and intellectually vexing problem in the public life of this country. Racial injustice is any injustice where the source includes either present or past discrimination based on race (Gutmann, 1995). Traditional literature on racial injustice refers to the topic as anytime a person is denied their constitutional rights based upon their ethnicity. Whether it is apparent or not, when this form of discrimination is woven into the very fabric of culture or society, from the economy, the healthcare system, or the education system, it is a form of racial injustice (Matthew, 2017).

Much of the literature on racial injustice is connected to the term *implicit bias*. An implicit bias is an unconsciously triggered belief in the inferiority of, or negative attitude toward, a group of people who are typically labeled minorities. These beliefs, based on research in cognitive psychology and its nascent interaction with cultural sociology, can impact expectations and actions in a negative manner (Clair & Denis, 2015). The unconscious negative beliefs and feelings about racial groups tend to lead to various forms of racial injustices taking place.

The topic of racial injustice continues to evolve. Most of the current literature surrounds the rise of the BLM movement that gained momentum due to

the high-profile murder cases of George Floyd, Ahmad Aubrey, Breonna Taylor, and the Kenosha, Wisconsin shooting (Kendi, 2019; Tisby, 2021). Much of the literature on the Black Lives Matter movement was discussed in the previous section. The overall concept of racial injustice consistently speaks to the lack of human rights and unequal treatment of a group of people, which results in one group being disadvantaged in comparison to another group (Wisdom et al., 2019). Term racial injustice is used to address both issues of racism and social injustice. In literature, social injustice is the lack of human rights and unequal treatment of a group of people, which results in one group being at a disadvantage over another group (Wisdom et al., 2019).

Current scholars have highlighted the unequal treatment of all people, including members of the LGBTQ+ community, and how the community has experienced several forms of discrimination and victimization (Williams et al., 2021). I acknowledge the overall concept of racial injustice that may apply to the LGBTQ+ community; however, because the SBC is theological and doctrinal in its framework, the focal literature does not include a discussion of the LGBTQ+ community.

Consequently, an example of a similar argument that could be made is the racial injustice African American college students are subjected to who attend predominantly White institutions. There is much literature on how African American students are underprepared to excel in ethnically diverse or predominately White college communities (Barbatis, 2010). Due to the nature of this research project, the focal literature is related to racial injustice in the Southern Baptist Convention, which is discussed in the next section.

Much of the literature on racial injustice in the SBC evolves around African American pastors and leaders. These tensions may be due to questions of leadership transparency and ethical morality, as well as the controversy of race, CRT, and the lack of diversity and prominent leadership roles within the convention (Roxburgh, 2019). Koon (2021) reported that African American pastors and leaders felt the convention's attempt to half-heartedly acknowledge the need to move towards racial reconciliation during the 2019 annual meeting, while still moving away from

CRT was an insult (see Table 4). The literature reviewed on this topic affirms that many African American leaders felt the statements on CRT were misguided and, at worst, a callback to the overwhelmingly White SBC’s founding in 1845 in the defense of missionaries who enslaved people (Radnofsky & Ciechalski, 2021).

Table 4

2019 SBC Annual Meeting and Inserts of Resolution on CRT and Intersectionality

Statements of CRT	Resolutions on CRT
Whereas some evangelicals have raised concerns over the use of frameworks such as CRT and intersectionality	Resolved that CRT and intersectionality should only be employed as analytical tools subordinate to Scripture, not as transcendent ideological frameworks
Whereas CRT is a set of analytical tools that explain how race has and continues to function in society, and intersectionality is the study of how different personal characteristics overlap and inform one’s experiences	Resolved that Southern Baptist churches and institutions repudiate the misuse of insights gained from CRT theology, intersectionality, and any unbiblical ideologies that can emerge from their use when absolutized as a worldview
Whereas CRT and intersectionality have been appropriated by individuals with worldviews that are contrary to the Christian faith, resulting in ideologies and methods that contradict Scripture	Resolved that we deny any philosophy or theology that fundamentally defines individuals using categories identified as sinful in Scripture rather than transcendent reality shared by every image bearer and divinely affirm distinctions
Whereas Evangelical scholars who affirm the authority and sufficiency of Scripture have employed selective insight from CRT and intersectionality to understand multifaceted social dynamics	Resolved that we denounce the misuse of CRT and intersectionality, we do not deny that ethnic, gender, and cultural distinctions exist and are a gift from God that will give Him absolute glory when all humanity gathers around His throne in worship because of the redemption accomplished by our resurrected Lord
Whereas CRT and intersectionality alone are insufficient to diagnose and redress the root causes of the social ills that they identify, which result from sin, yet these analytical tools can aid in evaluating a variety of human experiences	Resolved that Southern Baptist churches seek to exhibit this eschatological promise in our churches in the present by focusing on unity in Christ amid image bearers and rightly celebrate our differences as determined by God in the new creation

Note. Adapted from Southern Baptist Convention. (2019, June 1). *On critical race theory and intersectionality*. <https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/on-critical-race-theory-and-intersectionality/>

According to scholars, critical race theory is an approach to the issues of racism that analyzes systems and biases embedded in social structures (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The approved resolution at the 2019 annual meeting shows that the SBC only views CRT as “a set of analytical tools that explain how race has and continues to function in society” (Southern Baptist Convention, 2019). Bailey and Boorstein (2020) reported that four key Black pastors publicly left the denomination soon after the statement made by the six SBC seminary presidents against CRT. The article reported that one Black pastor stated, “we are tired of watching the country progress on racial justice while our religious community tepidly advances or even regresses on the topic” (Bailey & Boorstein, 2020, p. 3).

Two prominent Black church pastors, Charlie Dates of Chicago’s Progressive Baptist Church and Ralph West of Houston’s the Church Without Walls, elected to break with the SBC after the convention and the SBC seminary president’s declaration that CRT was incompatible with the denomination’s statement of faith (Shellnutt, 2022). Charlie Dates was interviewed by *Christianity Today* Magazine. Pastor Dates stated, “How did they, who in 2020 still do not have a single Black denominational entity head, reject once and for all a theory that helps to frame the real race problem we face” (Shellnutt, 2022). Many other Black pastors and leaders have voiced their discouragement with the lack of diversity within prominent positions in the SBC and how this lack of diversity leads to a lack of understanding of the lived experiences of minority groups, and the adaptation of resolutions like CRT (Roach, 2020).

Today, Black pastors and leaders still feel these types of statements dismiss the actual lived experiences of Blacks as it relates to racial injustice (Roach, 2020). The current statistical analysis affirms the minority pastors and leaders’ views on the impact of the SBC’s position on CRT and racial injustice on the future growth of minority churches. The SBC experienced 43 percent growth in Black-minority churches between 1998 and 2002, compared to only 11 percent over the most

recent 4 years (Southern Baptist Convention, 2020). The literature reviewed that addresses racial injustice within the SBC suggest minority pastors and leaders feel there is only acknowledgment; however, there is little to no action.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to review the theoretical literature on the topic of diversity, equity, and inclusion, primarily as it relates to the SBC and matters of women in leadership and racial injustice. This literature review was divided into four sections: DEI, DEI, and the SBC, women in leadership, and racial injustice. Ultimately, I aimed to help the SBC identify potential blind spots that are prohibiting the movement from future growth.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

In the current study, I explored how the Southern Baptist Convention, the second-largest evangelical denomination in the country (Mead & Hill, 1985), perceives diversity, equity, and inclusion as it relates to matters of race and gender. I aimed to provide a better understanding of the quality of experience African American pastors and leaders have within the SBC, in contrast to how the convention perceives their experience, as well as to identify blind spots within the convention that must be addressed immediately if the SBC desires to continue attracting ethnically and gender-diverse members and leaders. Future studies on the Southern Baptist Convention may focus on DEI-related topics: publishing, church planting recruitment and retention, church engagement, and the attendants of Christian schools and seminaries.

Researcher Orientation

I have been a member of the SBC for the past 30 years. During this time, I have not only worked with all three levels of the convention, but also personally experienced many of the challenges that minority pastors and leaders have dealt with in the past and are facing today. For the first 24 years of my affiliation with the SBC, I served as Pastor of Youth Development and Executive Pastor at Peace Baptist Church in Decatur, Georgia. Peace Baptist Church is a predominantly African American church that has been a part of the Southern Baptist Convention since its conception in 1993. My senior pastor served on several committees within all three levels of the convention. As an associate pastor of the church, I had personal access to key leaders in the convention and attended several meetings that related to racial injustice and diversity challenges.

Currently, I serve as the Chief Strategic Officer for a Christian nonprofit organization called Student Leadership University (SLU). Our mission at SLU is to equip student leaders with the necessary life skills to learn how to think critically, dream intentionally and lead with integrity. We strive to instill within every student the importance of future tense thinking, character-driven decision-making, and ownership of a biblical worldview through a four-step leadership training program

that takes place in Orlando, Washington DC, Europe, Israel, and Jordan. Although SLU is a para-church organization that partners with a diverse group of denominations, churches, and Christian schools and colleges, the majority of the organization's partners are a part of the Southern Baptist Convention.

I have served in this executive director's role for the past 6 years. I am the first African American executive in the organization's history. As the first African American executive, I have experienced several leadership challenges internally and externally in relation to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Therefore, this 30-year exposure to the Southern Baptist Convention has allowed me to witness many challenges, relating to DEI, women in leadership, and racial injustice. Although I acknowledge that these challenges exist, I also believe that reconciliation, healing, and organizational change is possible.

My Hope for Reconciliation

As a member of the SBC, one would suggest that if the convention desires to approach DEI in a healthy manner, the organization must be willing to move beyond what *has been* and what *is* to what *will be* (Williams, 2011). Likewise, if the SBC desires a positive approach to DEI, reconciliation must be a part of its strategy. The word *reconciliation* has a variety of meanings. For some, it means bringing together "a multiethnic group of people from similar socioeconomic and educational backgrounds" (McNeil, 2020, p. 23), whereas others consider reconciliation to mean "the pursuit of racial and ethnic diversity but did not include the participation of women in leadership" (McNeil, 2020, p. 23). I suggest that the SBC should combine the two definitions above, along with the belief that women need to be included in leadership.

Reconciliation is a spiritual process. It is my belief that as a Christian institution, every aspect of how the SBC interacts with its members should be conducted through the lens of a holistic biblical worldview. Reconciliation can only be achieved when the position of active members and the organization are equally committed to seeing equality experienced for everyone, regardless of gender or ethnicity. As a Christ follower and a minority, I acknowledge that reconciliation is an ongoing process that requires a willingness from all parties to experience

forgiveness, inclusivity, repentance and justice, and restoration of broken relationships and systems that reflect God's original intentions for all His creation (McNeil, 2020). I also believe that as it relates to the SBC, DEI and reconciliation will require a corporate change of heart, mind, and ideology. "Only God can make this possible as he leads us to repentance, justice, humility, peace, community, and a transformed spirit" (Kim & Hill, 2018, p. 147).

My Hope for this Research

As I approached the research topic, I acknowledged my personal bias and vested interest in the investigation. If minority pastors and leaders lived experience of DEI within the convention is going to move from negative to positive, I suggest that the marginalized members must be strategically elevate from being just members of the convention to also equal partners with the convention. When addressing the topic of authentic and sustainable reconciliation, Kim and Hill (2018) recommended taking "active steps toward community building," pursuing "conflict resolution, intercultural communication, and problem solving," and relinquishing "destructive power dynamics" (p. 141).

As a Christian organization, my personal conviction is that it is imperative that the SBC consistently adhere to its theological practices, principles, and beliefs. Therefore, as a minority pastor and leader within the convention, as I explored this research topic, my hope was that my findings could facilitate the Convention's willingness to acknowledge the live experiences of other minorities and embrace the concept of biblical DEI. The Southern Baptist Convention must be willing to go on collaborative journey of expanding its current leadership structure and organizational practices, as well as intentional modification of its current noninclusive language and tone. A positive approach to DEI must be systematically planned out if the strategy is going to be a part of the future DNA of the convention. A sustainable strategy will require major decision-makers on all levels of the convention to be opening to incorporating DEI in key influential positions; this informed my selection of the current research topic. The convention's ability to positively change the minority experience could increase exponentially if key

leaders share in their desire for a preferred future for the organization (Sanders, 2013).

Research Design

Research design focuses on the process from the conception of a problem to writing research questions and data collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth identified five phases of the research process related to qualitative research design. These phrases include (a) identifying the researcher, (b) examining any theoretical paradigms, (c) discussing research strategies, (d) collecting and analyzing the data, and (e) providing a detailed evaluation. The methodology used for this dissertation was phenomenological in nature. In a phenomenological study, the researcher describes the common themes and means for different individuals related to their lived experiences through a series of phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Psychologists such as Moustakas (1994) have often used phenomenological research because of its systematic process and procedures for data analysis. The primary purpose of the current study was to aid in possibly reducing an individual's negative experiences with a situation or phenomenon based on scientific methods (Terrell, 2016). Phenomenological studies require the researcher to collect data from individuals who have experience with a specific phenomenon. The current study focused on African American pastors' and leaders' lived experiences within the Southern Baptist Convention. I developed a multifactorial report of the essence of African American's experience that reflected "what [the participants] experienced and how they experienced it" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75). Using this approach allowed me to determine the urgency the SBC must have when approaching diversity, equity, and inclusion practices within the convention.

Therefore, the methodology used for this research project was a qualitative phenomenological study. Phenomenology is a study often used to understand the essence of a particular group of people's lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A phenomenological study focuses on the essence of a lived experience that can be perceived or sensed by people who have different viewpoints (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Phenomenological researchers aim to capture the way that an

occurrence was lived by people who participated in that occurrence (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). This type of study consists of “what” an individual experienced and “how” the individual experienced it (Moustakas, 1994).

The sample participants of this study were recruited from all three levels of the SBC: executive, state, and local. They were from the North American Mission’s Board, the California Baptist Convention, the Florida Baptist State Convention, and the Georgia Baptist Convention. The four research questions for this study were as follows:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of African American leaders and pastors on DEI in the SBC?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of African American leaders and pastors on women in leadership in the SBC?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of African American leaders and pastors on racial injustice in the SBC?

RQ4: What are the similarities and differences of the perceptions of the three levels of the SBC related to DEI, women in leadership, and racial injustice?

Participants

The participants of the study consisted of African American pastors and leaders (male and female) who have been a part of the Southern Baptist Convention for at least 5 years. The selected participants had both an eclectic and well-versed knowledge of the SBC. They were pastors and leaders who have worked within at least two of the three levels of the convention during their tenured. These participants provided a clear and comprehensive perspective on how African American leaders view their experiences within the convention. During annual convention meetings, the reports only outlined the number of churches planted and missionaries sent abroad (SBC, 2022). To date, no comprehensive research has been conducted on African American pastors, and leaders lived experiences within the convention. There have been conversations, but a lack of official research.

This research project included a total of 10 participants. The participants were selected from all three levels of the SBC, specifically from SBC churches,

conventions, and entities from California and the Southeast regions. Two of the 10 participants were women. One of the 10 had served in all three levels. The other nine participants came from each level of the convention: executive, state convention, and the local church.

Research Bias

I acknowledge that the Southern Baptist Convention comprises members from other ethnic groups besides African Americans and women. The current study had bias and was limited to the perspective of the identified participants. I acknowledge that the make-up of the groups studied does not represent the holistic experiences of all members within the Southern Baptist Convention.

Data Collection

To ensure that participants felt comfortable being open, honest, and transparent, the data collection process for this research project consisted of 45–60 minute recorded one-on-one interviews. The preferred method for conducting each interview was via Zoom. I created a controlled environment to make the participants comfortable. I served as the moderator and was responsible for facilitating the discussion using predetermined questions (Appendix B).

The one-on-one interviews were very casual and informal. This process involved establishing a permissive and nonthreatening environment (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Before conducting the interviews, I first reached out via email and phone call to get verbal consent for the interviews. After I received verbal consent, a written consent form was provided for each participant to sign (Appendix A). I scheduled a series of 45- to 60-minute Zoom interviews upon receiving the signed consent forms. Each interview followed a specific protocol, including an opening script, a list of open-end questions, and a closing script (Appendix A). The interview questions were designed to help me explore how the SBC perceives DEI as it relates to matters of women in leadership and racial injustice, in contrast to the lived experiences of African American pastors and leaders. After each interview, I systematically analyzed the data and provided appropriate reporting (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Analysis

Analyzing the data of the current study began with gathering information from the recorded Zoom interviews. The participants' responses to the interview questions were transcribed and coded. The four coding methods that I used were *in vivo*, process, emotion, and value. First, *in vivo* coding reflects the interviewee's exact words. *In vivo* coding is known for utilizing the participant's language as the primary symbol for qualitative data analysis (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Second, process coding is an action coding system that uses gerunds, also known as "ing" words, as codes (Charmaz, 2008). The purpose of process coding is to identify forms of the participant's action, reaction, and interaction, as suggested by the data (Charmaz, 2008).

Third, value coding is used to analyze an individual's value system, based on three concepts: attitudes, values, and beliefs (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Values coding is often used to explore "cultural values, identity, intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions in case studies, oral history, critical ethnography, psychology, and sociology" (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018, p. 129). By using the three identified forms of coding, I identified key phrases, actions, and emotions that the participants express and highlight their thoughts and perspectives by handwriting codes on the side of the transcript. The fourth, emotion coding, was used due to the sensitive nature of the selected topic. Emotion focuses on the emotional experiences of an individual. The purpose for using emotion coding was to identify words and phrases that tracked the trajectory of the participant's emotions and how they progressed throughout the interview. After the data were gathered and codes were handwritten, I systematically collapsed each code into overarching themes that further illustrated their lived experiences within the Southern Baptist Convention.

Ethical Considerations

As I approached this study, several ethical considerations were made to protect the participants. The first consideration was an informed consent form. Participants were made aware of the entire purpose of the study and their rights as participants. The participants provided a written acknowledgment of their

agreement with the terms and requirements of the study (Terrell, 2016). I thoroughly examined the nature and scope of threats and advantages fundamental to the study (Terrell, 2016). I created and monitored unbiased procedures for identifying and selecting participants in this study (Terrell, 2016).

Interview Questions

As seen in Appendix B, the interview protocol began with introductory questions and transitioned to questions specifically related to each research question.

IQ1: How long have you been a member of the Southern Baptist Convention?

IQ2: What level of the SBC best describes your position: NAMB, State Convention, or Local Church?

IQ3: How do you feel about the current direction of the SBC?

Research Question 1

RQ1: What are perceptions of African American leaders and pastors on DEI in the SBC?

IQ4: How do you feel the SBC handles matters of diversity?

IQ5: How do you feel the SBC handles matters of equity?

IQ6: How do you feel the SBC handles matters of inclusion?

Research Question 2

RQ2: What are perceptions of African American leaders and pastors on women in leadership in the SBC?

IQ7: What are your perceptions of the SBC's official position on women in leadership?

IQ8: How do you feel the SBC responds to the concerns of our female constituents?

IQ9: What are your thoughts regarding women in varying roles of leadership in SBC? (i.e., pastors, deacons, elders, executive directors)

IQ10: Would like to see the SBC make changes to its doctrine and polity (Baptist Faith and Message) on women in leadership? If so, what would they be?

Research Question 3

RQ3: What are perceptions of African American leaders and pastors on racial injustice in the SBC?

IQ11: How do you feel the SBC handles matters of racial injustice?

IQ12: How do you feel the SBC responds to your concerns as an African American leader?

IQ13: How do you feel the SBC handled the topic of CRT at the SBC 2022 National Convention?

IQ14: As a follow-up, what are your thoughts about the passed resolutions on CRT and racial injustice at the convention?

IQ15: As you consider everything that has been discussion in our conversation, are there any final thoughts that you would like to add?

Summary

The current study was designed to explore how the SBC perceives DEI as it relates to matters of women in leadership and racial injustice, in contrast to the lived experiences of minority pastors and leaders. The methodology used for this dissertation was phenomenological, which describes the common themes and means for different individuals related to their lived experiences through a series of phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Future study of the Southern Baptist Convention should focus on DEI-related topics: publishing, church planting recruitment and retention, church engagement, and Christian Schools and seminaries attendants. The current phenomenological study provided a better understanding of the quality of experience that minority groups truly have within the SBC, in contrast to how the convention perceives the experience. I also aimed to identify blind spots within the convention that must be addressed immediately if the SBC desires to continue attracting ethnically and gender-diverse members and leaders.

Chapter 4 – Findings

Through this phenomenological study, I aimed to explore perceptions of DEI in the ecclesiastical and denominational setting of the SBC, compared to African American pastors' and leaders lived experiences. I explored the lived experiences of African American pastors and leaders who are current members of the SBC from four perspectives:

RQ1: What are their perceptions of the SBC's overall views on diversity, equity, and inclusion?

RQ2: What are their perceptions of the SBC's views of women in leadership?

RQ3: What are their perceptions of the SBC's views on racial injustice?

RQ4: If the three perceptions listed are similar or different in all three levels of the convention (national/executive, state/convention, and local church).

The findings from this study proved that African American pastors and leaders have a tremendous concern regarding the current direction of the convention and its ability to handle matters of DEI in a balanced Christocentric manner properly. To accomplish this research, data were collected through one-on-one interviews resulting in 144 individual data codes and 2,538 overall occurrences, which I further condensed into 20 subcategories. Upon completion of condensing the data, the subcategories were put into five final themes. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that qualitative research codes typically fall into one or more of three categories: expected codes, surprising codes, and codes of unusual or conceptual interest. The findings from the present phenomenological research study revealed codes from all three categories, ultimately resulting the following five themes: (a) concern over current SBC direction; (b) emotional and psychological toll; (c) mishandled cultural, social, and political flashpoints, (d) distinctiveness of the Black church experience; and (d) cautiously optimistic and hopeful.

Data Collection

Phenomenological research consists of “what” the individual or group experienced and “how” they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological

research focuses on the core of a lived experience or phenomenon that can be observed or undergone by people who have different viewpoints (Flood, 2010). This phenomenological study required me to collect data from African American pastors and leaders from the SBC and develop a multifactorial report of the essence of their experience. Because the aim of phenomenology is to understand a phenomenon from the people that experienced it, I conducted 10 individual one-on-one interviews with African American pastors and leaders directly impacted by the SBC as the sole source of my data collection.

For the interviews and data analysis, I used a multidimensional method recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018). I used the recommended method for gathering the data from the interviews until I could identify specific themes. For my progression, I followed Creswell and Poth's five-step process: (a) organize and prepare the data analysis, (b) read or look at all the data, (c) start coding all the data, (d) generate a description and themes, and (e) represent the description and themes. This methodology allowed me to synthesize, filter, and funnel the participants' responses into usable themes and codes throughout the process.

Interviews

To ensure that each participant felt comfortable being open, honest, and transparent, the data collection process for this research study consisted of 45- to 60-minute recorded one-on-one interviews. The preferred method for conducting each interview was via Zoom recording. There was intentionality to ensure a controlled environment was created that made the participants comfortable. I served as the moderator and was solely responsible for facilitating the discussion using pre-determined questions.

The one-on-one interviews were all casual and informal. This process established a permissive and nonthreatening environment (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Before conducting the interviews, I contacted participants via email and phone to get verbal consent. After I received verbal consent, a written consent form was provided for each participant to sign (Appendix A). Upon receiving the signed consent forms, I then scheduled a series of 45–60-minute Zoom interviews. Each interview followed a specific protocol, including an opening script, a list of open-

end questions, and a closing script (Appendix B). The interview questions were designed to help me further explore the lived experiences of African American pastors and leaders in the U.S. regarding DEI and matters of women in leadership and racial injustice. After the interviews were conducted, I examined the components of everyone's input and began systematically analyzing the data to provide appropriate data reporting (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participants

The participants for this research study represented a population sample of African American pastors, leaders, and women who have been a part of the SBC for at least 5 years. These participants' experiences and exposure to the SBC provided a clear and comprehensive perspective on how African Americans view their experiences within the convention. To prevent oversaturation of data, the population sample included 10 interviewees, comprised of African American leaders from all three levels of the convention (national/executive, state/convention, and local church).

The gender distribution of the 10 participants was eight males and two females. Their experience and membership with the SBC ranged from 10 years to 38 years. The 10 participants currently serve on the national/executive, state/convention, or the local church level of the Southern Baptist Convention (Table 4). During the data analysis process of my research, I divided the interviews into two phases. For Phase 1, I asked three interview questions to provide a general overview of each participant's tenure as a member of the SBC, their current role, and their initial perceptions of the current direction of the convention.

Participants Information

The first IQ allowed me to highlight the level of personal experience each participant had with the SBC by asking how long they have been members of the Southern Baptist Convention. As mentioned in previous paragraph, the participants' membership tenure ranged from 10 years to 38 years. The sample population for this research consisted of leaders with significant knowledge, insight, and exposure into the inner workings of the SBC. Thus, they brought tremendous credibility to this research when sharing their experiences as African

American pastors and leaders in the SBC. Both Participants 3 and 9 are influential African American female leaders within the SBC (Table 5).

The second IQ helped me categorize which level of the SBC best described their current position: National/Executive, State/Convention, or Local Church. Most participants have been members of the SBC for more than 20 years, and many have worked in at least two of the three levels. Therefore, the purpose of this IQ was to identify where each participant is currently serving in the denomination. To maintain the integrity of the research and the confidentiality of each participant, the three identified categories represent a wide range of SBC entities.

Participants who identify with the national or executive level serve in one of the following: SBC Executive Committee, Ethics, and Religious Liberty Commission, Guidestone Financial, International Mission Board, North American Mission Board, Lifeway Christian Resources, Woman's Missionary Union, or six Theological Seminaries. Participants who identify with the state convention level serve in one of the 41 state conventions. Participants who identify on the local church level serve in one of the 3,492 African American churches. This research approach not only ensured the protection of the identity of the participants, but also allowed the participants to answer all the research questions transparently and authentically.

Table 5

Population Sample Summary

Participant	Gender	SBC Level	Tenure
Participant 1	Male	National/Executive	36 years
Participant 2	Male	National/Executive	38 years
Participant 3	Female	National/Executive	38 years
Participant 4	Male	State/Convention	25 years
Participant 5	Male	State/Convention	37 years
Participant 6	Male	State/Convention	10 years
Participant 7	Male	Local Church	14 years
Participant 8	Male	Local Church	30 years
Participant 9	Female	Local Church	29 years

Participant 10	Male	National/State/Local	31 years
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Data Analysis

After receiving approval from the IRB committee, I conducted one-on-one individual interviews with each participant. All interviews were conducted via Zoom and used the same protocol and interview questions. All questions asked were specific to gain an understanding of African American pastors' and leaders' lived experiences as members of the Southern Baptist Convention. To prevent over-saturation of data, each participant interviewed was required to be currently serving in one of the three levels of the convention (national, state, or local), and one male participant was represented from each of the three levels. In total, 10 interview participants contributed to the research. The data analysis involved the following steps. First, I used Otter.ai software to transcribe all recorded one-on-one interviews. Second, I conducted interview condensation to reduce the length of each interview. Third, I compared all the data and concepts from each interview. Fourth, I condensed all the data and concepts into subcategories. Fifth, I condensed subcategories into codes. Last, I condensed the codes into five themes.

The coding process for this research began with *in vivo* to allow me to review each participant's exact words and key phrases. *In vivo* coding aided in my ability to understand better the participant's language and tone for my data analysis (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). I then used process coding. This form of coding helped me identify gerunds, also known as “ing” action or interaction trends (Charmaz, 2008). The primary purpose for using process coding was to help me identify forms of each participant's action, reaction, and interaction, as suggested by the interview questions. I also used value coding. This method allowed me to analyze each participant's value system based on three concepts known as VAB: values, attitudes, and beliefs (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). This coding method was vital to the data analysis process because it revealed significant cultural values, perspectives, and perceptions that each participant had experienced as an African American member of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The fourth coding used was emotion coding. I used this coding technique because of the sensitive nature of the topic. Emotion focuses on the emotional

experiences of an individual. Using emotion coding, I identified words and phrases that tracked the trajectory of the participant's emotions and how they progressed throughout the interview based on their views on how the SBC handles matters of DEI, women in leadership, and racial injustice. By employing these four identified coding forms, I identified key phrases, actions, value systems, and emotions the participants expressed as they articulated their thoughts and perspectives. After all the data were gathered and coded, I systematically collapsed each code into overarching themes that further illustrated African Americans’ lived experiences within the Southern Baptist Convention.

Summary of Themes

Associated explicitly with RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3, I identified five themes from the coding process: (a) concerned over SBC direction; (b) emotional and psychological toll; (c) mishandled cultural, social, and political flashpoint; (d) distinctiveness of the Black church experience; and (e) cautiously optimistic and hopeful. Table 6 is an overview of the final themes, 20 categories, and number of occurrences for each category.

Table 6

Findings Overview: Categories to Themes

Theme	Categories	Occurrences
Concerned over SBC Direction	Lack of Agreement and Clarity of BFM	196
	Lack of Collaboration	85
	Optics	83
	Tokenism	36
	Black Leaders’ Negative Perceptions	141
	Selective Solidarity	221
	Hypocrisy	82
Emotional and Psychological Toll	Frustration Over Women in Leadership	265
	Mental Impact	154
	Emotional Impact	233
	Relational Impact	225

Mishandled Cultural, Social, and Political Flashpoints	Mishandled Racial Issues Mishandled CRT Issue SBC Presidents Response to CRT Politics	50 70 80 186
Distinctiveness of Black Church Experience	The Black Church Experience Black Church Views of Women in Leadership	149 84
Cautiously Optimistic and Hopeful	Partially Optimistic Belief in the Convention of Old	64 41

Note. These occurrences represent individual data segments associated with each category.

The data revealed an overwhelming concern over the current direction of the Southern Baptist Convention. Many participants expressed concern primarily due to a lack of agreement and clarity of the conventions doctrine policy known as the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. There is a specific concern with the BFM as it relates to how it impedes women's views in leadership. Many participants also expressed concern about how politics have impacted many inconsistencies and biased interpretations White members have of the Baptist Faith and Message. The example of how Beth Moore was treated resonated with each participant in a negative capacity.

Concerned over SBC Direction

The theme “concerned over SBC direction” consisted of eight categories: (a) lack of agreement and clarity of BFM (196), (b) lack of collaboration (85), (c) optics (83), (d) tokenism (36), (e) Black leaders’ negative perceptions (141), (f) selective solidarity (221), (g) hypocrisy (82), and (h) frustration over women in leadership (265). The category “lack of agreement and clarity of BFM” consisted of 14 codes: (a) lack of clarity on women in leadership (34), (b) BFM unclear on “role” & “title” of pastor/minister (16), (c) goal post moves (10), (d) dogmatism (12), (e) views on essential vs. nonessentials (35), (f) no change (12), (g) it gives room to disagree (in a healthy way) on the nonessentials (12), (h) it gives room to cast a larger tent (5), (i) very basic (9), (j) does not speak specifically to issue (9),

(k) change will limit women in leadership (12), (l) do not touch essentials (12), (m) consider amendment/adaption to include women in leadership (9), and (n) future tense thinking (9).

The category “lack of collaboration” consisted of five codes: (a) limited seat/involvement at national/executive level table (13), (b) no real strategy for DEI (9), (c) lack of communication (20), (d) self-preservation (25), (e) primarily older White males in national, executive, state-level leadership (18). The category “optics” consisted of six codes: (a) verbal desire for unit [lip service] (22), (b) the verbal desire of DEI (22), (c) no/limited action (22), (d) prefer cosmetic surgery over radial surgery (3), (e) the position of toleration rather than real repentance (7), and (f) temporary regret (7). The category “tokenism” consisted of three codes: (a) band-aid approach (5), (b) inauthentic approach to DEI (21), and (c) charity over valuing leadership (10). The category “Black leaders' negative perceptions” consisted of nine codes: (a) matters of DEI (10), (b) matters of women in leadership (20), (c) matters of racial injustice (25), (d) the influence of politics and polity (22), (e) major blind spots (10), (f) insensitive to minority issues (17), (g) outside pressure leads to inside response (17), (h) current climate hinders the progress of unity (9), and (i) lack of consciousness (11).

The category “selective solidarity” consisted of eight codes: (a) towards women (26), (b) towards African Americans (26), (c) poor response to issues/matters (30), (d) address some issues, but not all (34), (e) inconsistent in approach to issues (31), (f) do not see racial injustice as a broad problem (28), (g) think racial injustice happens as isolated incidences (28), and (h) lack of understanding/awareness (18). The category “hypocrisy” consisted of four codes: (a) over women's issues (22), (b) over politics (21), (c) interpretation of doctrine (21), and (d) difference of opinion (18). The category “frustration over women in leadership” consisted of 10 codes: (a) disappointment in the handling of Beth Moore (29), (b) surprise more White women did not come to her [Beth Moore] defense (10), (c) gender matters over calling [*Cannot deny calling*] (36), (d) SBC is restrictive and limited to women in leadership (32), (e) church polity over doctrine (33), (f) not willing to be elastic enough in terms of our polity, constitution, and

bylaws (10), (g) no real progress (17), (h) gifted women (31), (i) qualified women (36), and (j) voice of women (31). Overall, the participants expressed extreme frustration and concern with the current climate of the SBC, as the data revealed 1109 total occurrences for these categories.

Emotional and Psychological Toll

The theme “emotional and psychological toll” consisted of three categories: (a) mental impact (154), (b) emotional impact (233), and (c) relational impact (225). The category “mental impact” consisted of eight codes: (a) difficult (32), (b) disappointment/disagreement throughout the convention (30), (c) controversial (26), (d) challenging (20), (e) tension (13), (f) unfortunate (9), (g) segregation/isolation (9), and (h) more reactionary/reacting (15). The category “emotional impact” consisted of eight codes: (a) disheartened (30), (b) discouraged (38), (d) frustrated (44), (c) angry (40), (e) concerned (55), (f) unhappy (11), (g) struggling (9), and (h) embarrassing (6). The category “relational impact” consisted of nine codes: (a) disrespect (35), (b) marginalized/devalued (32), (c) feel ignored (10), (d) no/limited voice (34), (e) powerless (10), (f) not equal (41), (g) underappreciated (15), (h) condescending (22), and (i) offensive (26). All participants shared stories of how the last few years have been emotionally draining. The research showed that the emotional and psychological impact of the current climate has dramatically influenced African American pastors and leaders' overall lived experiences. All the expressed feelings are overlapped in each research question. Based on the three categories presented, the total number of emotional and psychological toll occurrences was 612.

Mishandled Cultural, Social, and Political Flashpoints

The theme “mishandled cultural, social, and political flashpoints” consisted of four categories: (a) mishandled racial issues (50), (b) mishandled CRT issues (70), (c) SBC presidents' response to CRT (80), and (d) politics (186). The category “mishandled racial issues” consisted of five codes: (a) George Floyd (10), (b) Breonna Taylor (10), (c) Ahmad Aubrey (10), (d) emotional toll over controversies, and (e) controversies led to some [African Americans] leaving (10). The category “mishandled CRT” issues consisted of six codes: (a) lack of

understanding of CRT tenants (18), (b) theory [CRT], not meant to be the bible (9), (c) alarmed (15), (d) lived experience and Perspective #1 – They do not want to hear our story or see our pain (10), (e) lived experience and Perspective #2 – We can tell the story of Jesus, but cannot tell the story of Blacks (9), and (f) unhealthy co-mingling of theology and theory (9).

The category “SBC presidents' response to CRT” consisted of seven codes: (a) impact [CRT] resolution (10), (b) six White men spoke on behalf of the entire convention (25), (c) overstepped (10), (d) inappropriate/cross the lines (15), (e) provide a single-story perspective (5), (f) attempted to whitewash history (10), and (g) silence from others [non-Blacks] communicates consent (5). The category “politics” consisted of 13 codes: (a) impacting biblical worldview (24), (b) political influence/climate (31), (c) redefining conservatism (15), (d) the rise of conservative Baptist network (15), (e) more comfortable (5), (f) more headline (4), (g) narrow understanding of the doctrine (8), (h) more capitalistic view (5), (i) anti-women in ministry (18), (j) polarizing culture/society (28), (k) permeated the church (13), (l) infiltrated the church (10), and (m) secular/cultural infiltration (10). The data revealed 386 total occurrences for this theme.

Distinctiveness of the Black Church Experience

The theme “distinctiveness of the Black church experience” consisted of two categories: (a) the Black church experience (149) and (b) the Black church views of women in leadership (84). The category “the Black church experience” consisted of six codes: (a) Black church pastors maintain their prophetic voice (44), (b) Black churches agree with men only in the role of senior pastor (43), (c) Black churches are traditionally more conservative but also inclusive (12), (d) Black churches are more welcoming to other races (13), (e) voices of African Americans matter (27), (f) the voice of minorities matter (10).

The category “the Black church views of women in leadership” consisted of six codes: (a) women have a financial impact (12), (b) women have a numerical impact (15), (c) women have influential leadership impact (15), (d) women are efficient and proficient (9), (e) women are excellent and proclamation (8), (f) women can be youth pastors, children pastors, worship pastors, etc. (25). This

theme provided perspectives on the cultural differences between Black and White churches. All participants expressed their freedom as pastors and leaders in a Black Southern Baptist church. From their perspective and experience, their prophetic voice matters and can be fully experienced in the Black church.

Cautiously Optimistic and Hopeful

The theme “Cautiously Optimistic and Hopeful” consisted of two categories: (a) partially optimistic (64), and (b) belief in the convention of old (41). The category “partially optimistic”, consisted of seven codes: (a) new leadership (10), (b) Bart Barber [SBC President] (10), (c) Willie McLaurin [Interim Executive Director] (10), (d) long way to go (8), (e) redemptive (11), (f) some confidence/limited hope (8), and (g) rise of young leadership on local and state level (7). Although all participants expressed great concern and frustration with the convention, many also expressed cautious optimism and hope. Most of the optimism was articulated by the Black male members who have participated in the convention for at least 20 years. The common theme in their optimism was based on how it once was in the convention and what they hoped to achieve. The participants felt the convention of old had more of an authentic desire for diversity and inclusion than today's experience. The participants hope that as the convention continues striving to be relevant in today's culture, it will return to its missional roots.

There is also great optimism because of the election of the new SBC president (Bart Barber), and they are hopeful that the interim executive director (Willie McLaurin) will become a permanent role. From their perspective, Willie McLaurin was a highly respected African American leader throughout the convention. Bart Barber seems more open to moving away from simply talking about DEI to more of a strategy of action towards DEI. The participants believe leaders like Willie McLaurin and Bart Barber can stay in their positions, and others with similar passions for DEI can join their teams. Then, there is a possibility that the convention can genuinely be on the right side of history.

Concerned with Direction of SBC

The third IQ was designed to be a big-picture question that helps guide and funnel the conversation when addressing the four research questions. This question asked how each participant felt about the current direction of the SBC. Eight out of the 10 participants answered that they were “very concerned.” Participants 2 and 4 were the only interviewees who expressed a small amount of optimism about the direction current direction of the convention; however, Participant 2 qualified his response as follows:

The Southern Baptist Convention has always had an open flow. When it comes to specific issues, the convention will lean one way one day; when a new set of leaders come on board, there is a tendency to lose ground from what previous leadership has done [*hypocrisy*]. The critical issue we are dealing with right now is that we have some folks in leadership that are leaning a bit toward extreme conservatism, which makes the Black church very uneasy [*politics*].

Participant 4 qualified his hope and optimism by mentioning,

With the election of the new SBC president (Bart Barber) and appointing of the interim executive director, Willie McLaurin, I am cautiously optimistic that the convention can progress forward in a positive manner [*partially optimistic*].

Although there is some optimism with the appointing of new leadership on the national and executive level, as each participant responded to IQ3, the data revealed that all 10 participants separately agreed the convention is in “great need of change,” and they are concerned about the overall tone. The participants expressed great apprehension among the African American pastors and leaders with the current direction and believed the convention was heading in an unhealthy direction. Participant 5 stated, “There are many challenges we face. I am deeply concerned because I feel like the convention has lost its ground regarding leadership [*relational impact*].” Participant 8 shared Participant 5 perspectives by saying, “The recent events that have occurred in the convention have brought great concern to me, and there is a need for real change [*mishandled racial issues*]

[*mishandled CRT issue*]. The strong racial and political climate has greatly impacted the convention's tone, spirit, and unity [*politics*].

Research Question 1

RQ1 focused on the lived experiences of African American pastors and leaders on matters of DEI in the SBC. In gathering the data for RQ1, I asked each participant the following three interview questions:

IQ4: How do you feel the SBC handles matters of diversity?

IQ5: How do you feel the SBC handles matters of equity?

IQ6: How do you feel the SBC handles matters of inclusion?

The answers to RQ1 yielded that the participants' overall current lived experiences with the SBC, as it relates to matters of DEI, have not been positive. The data also revealed that the participants who have been members of the convention for more than 20 years expressed that their previous experiences were better than their current experiences [*belief in the convention of old*].

Interview Question 4: Matters of Diversity

When researching these pastors and leaders lived experiences with the SBC related to matters of diversity, the participants general position was that the SBC has handled this issue in an unauthentic manner. Participant 8 had strong opinions on this question. Participant 8 stated,

In a very simple answer...it's just lip service [*lack of collaboration*]. They strategically place a few African Americans in different positions to be able to 'claim DEI', however, although those leaders are 'at the table', they're not able to really have influence because their role is very much minimized in a lot of ways, and the office is sometimes ceremonial [*tokenism*].

Participant 6 stated,

I think there are major blind spots and insensitivity, as it relates to matters of DEI. I have experienced that firsthand [*Black leaders' negative perceptions*] ... not just in the marketing material, but also in the way, ministries and programs are prepared and considered for different cultures. It is somewhat offensive [*optics*].

The research also revealed that not all participants had the same lived experience. Participant 2 stated,

I have had a great experience, and the Southern Baptist Convention related to matters of diversity. I had the opportunity to serve at different levels. I had the privilege to be involved in southern Baptist life, even in the formation of the African American fellowship that met in Houston Texas in 1993 [*belief in convention of old*]. I know we have some challenges to address, but my overall experience as it relates to diversity has been fairly good [*partially optimistic*].

Like Participant 2, Participant 4's experience was not all bad:

I think the convention is doing marginally well [*partially optimistic*] ... I think the works of former SBC President Fred Luter and Unified Project was a good example of the convention's desire to attempt to bring more Black leadership to the table and really be transparent about the barriers that remain [*belief in convention of old*].

Interview Question 5: Matters of Equity

Interview Question 5 revealed the participants views on how the SBC has handled matters of equity. For this question, the participants shared their perspectives on if their experiences with the SBC have yielded the belief that every member of the convention had the same opportunities. Equity calls for the righting of systemic, institutional, organizational, and structural injustices (Bernstein et al., 2020). Inequity is often experienced when there is the presence of institutional and systematic discrepancies between different ethnic groups (Chin & Chien, 2006, p. 79). In reflecting on his experience, Participant 7 expressed that he felt the convention cared more about the optics of DEI:

I feel that the SBC only responds to matters of DEI when there is outside pressure. Every time I am a part of a DEI initiative, it is always rendered from outside pressure [*selective solidarity*]. It is never initiated from the inside. It is like the bad press or outside opposition creates the perceive desire for DEI [*optics*].

There were some unique perspectives on how the SBC has handled matters of equity. Participant 10 expressed,

The convention seems to react to a crisis or issue and their response is more of a Band-Aid approach...it's very cosmetic [*optics*]. I don't think we need cosmetic surgery. We need radical surgery. It is an issue at the heart. To address the immediate problems or tensions, there must be a radical change [*relational impact*]. I think the convention is in a position of just toleration, rather than real repentance [*Black leaders' negative perceptions*]. There's a difference between repentance and regret. There's a difference between remorse and repentance [*selective solidarity*]. True equity will come when there's true repentance.

As some of the participants reflected on their current lived experiences and how the SBC handles matters of equity, there was a sense of grief and sadness because the previous climate of the convention was not as divisive as the current climate. Participant 5 noted,

When I think back, historically, on my time, as a member of the SBC, you would be surprised, but there was more of a desire for equity and inclusivity than there is now [*belief in the convention of old*]. I would like to see us get back to that place [*partially optimistic*]. Our agencies like the North American Mission Board were very intentional about trying to make room around the table for leaders of all colors. What used to draw us together was our theology and doctrine. Now, it feels like you can only sit around the table if you are aligned politically [*politics*].

Interview Question 6: Matters of Inclusion

Interview Question 6 focused on the participants perspective on how the SBC has handled matters of inclusion. The purpose of this question was to gather data to determine whether the participants felt that within the SBC, there was a continuous and intentional effort to ensure that African Americans are valued members and considered full participates in all aspects of leadership and decision-making (Tan, 2019). The data revealed the degree to which each participant felt involved in the major decision-making processes of the convention.

The consensus from the data collected showed most of the participants felt there was a limited amount of inclusivity. Specifically, Participant 3 believe the commitment to “self-preservation” is a major factor in how the SBC currently deals with matters of inclusion. This participant stated, “We have a group of older White men who have held on to power for so long, and now, with the continuous growth in minority population, there is a desperate need for them to hold onto whatever kind of power they have by any means necessary [*lack of collaboration*].”

Participant 4 echoed similar views with a scathing sentiment:

Most of our major convention leadership is made up of primarily White aging men, who are saying, ‘by any means necessary, we got to hold on to the upper hand.’ And it’s frightening how close the SBC is following the secular culture and politics in terms of the power struggle [*Black leaders’ negative perceptions*]. I do not see much diversity, equity, or inclusion, as I have seen in the past [*belief in convention of old*]. I see more desperation of ‘we have to keep the White people in power [*lack of collaboration*].’

Research Question 2

RQ2 focused on the lived experiences of African American pastors and leaders on matters of women in leadership in the SBC. Interview Questions 7–10 were as follows:

IQ7: What are your perceptions of the SBC’s official position on women in leadership?

IQ8: How do you feel the SBC responds to the concerns of our female constituents?

IQ9: What are your thoughts regarding women in varying roles of leadership in SBC? (i.e., pastors, deacons, elders, executive directors).

IQ10: Would like to see the SBC make changes to its doctrine and polity (Baptist Faith and Message) on women in leadership? If so, what would they be?

Interview Question 7: SBC’s Position on Women in Leadership

All 10 participants collectively agreed that the SBC’s official position on women and leadership is inconsistent, restrictive, and unclear. All 10 participants

expressed that the conventions position and is narrow in its doctrinal view. As a female leader, Participant 3 specifically dealt with the current inconsistency of the convention's position on women in leadership. She stated,

It used to be that we all agreed the title of senior pastor was the only role a woman in the convention could not hold. Now, there is so much inconsistency on how we interpret the Baptist Faith and Message, as it relates to who can have the title minister or pastor. In some SBC churches, it's OK to have a female youth pastor or worship pastor, however, in other SBC churches, that same position is relegated to the title of director, if it is held by a woman [*lack of agreement and clarity of BFM*].

Participant 4 felt there is a lot of ambiguity on the SBC's position on women in leadership. He thought there should be some revisions made to the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 that provided a more clarity on the role of women in leadership:

I think the language in the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, concerning women in leadership, needs to be updated and revised [*frustration over women in leadership*]. My sense is, the revisions should not penalize churches who refer to women as pastors of ministries like children's ministry, women's ministry, congregational care, or whatever it might be. We shouldn't be allies, we should all be working towards unity in body of Christ. I think there needs to be a clear distinction with the senior pastor role being a male, however, I do think we are creating unnecessary friction and division [*lack of agreement and clarity of BFM*].

Participant 8 said,

Today, people are redefining the role and position of women in leadership [*frustration over women in leadership*]. The main topic of conversation is if women can hold the title of Pastor's. There used to be a time when it was OK if a woman was called a children's pastor or minister, worship pastor or minister, or a women's minister, as long as she was not named senior pastor. Now, the position and interpretation are all over the place. There is no consistency [*lack of agreement and clarity of BFM*].

Participant 7 responded, “I don’t know what the real position of the convention is right now. It’s disappointing that we don’t value women more when it comes to ministry. I don’t think it’s equity between women and the SBC.”

Interview Question 8: Response to Concerns of Female Constituents

Like Interview Question 7, when asked about how the participants feel the SBC has responded to the concerns of their female constituents, the response was the same. Participant 4 is a leader on the state level and has much involvement with leaders on the national and executive level:

The convention does not fully embraced women in ministry, especially in terms of preaching, or proclamation of God’s word [*frustration over women in leadership*]. That seems to still be taboo. That kind of bothers me, that perception, because the proclamation of God’s word, seems to me, that it should not matter whose voice it comes from. That’s my perspective.

Furthermore, I feel like my female counterparts have been marginalized, devalued, and underappreciated. They are definitely not equal, and it really hinders the progress of unity [*Black church views of women in leadership*].

Participants 3 and 9 shared a unique position when asked IQ8. As female leaders within the convention, they both answer the question based on how Beth Moore was handled. Participant 9 stated,

I was angry, disheartened, and offended at how Beth Moore was handled. For decades, she brought so much financial resource and spiritual influence on the SBC, through the resources she created, and with the power her voice. It seemed that, as soon as she stood in solidarity with minorities and stood against the polarization of our culture and the infiltration of politics in the pulpit, she immediately became the enemy. I was hurt by how they handed her. They no longer treated her as a colleague or sister in Christ. They treated her as if she was the devil...and that is just flat out wrong [*frustration over women in leadership*].

In her interview, Participant 3 shared a similar view as Participant 9. Participant 3 took it a step further:

I was not surprised at how Beth Moore was treated by the older White men in the convention. I was more surprised how White women did not speak up on her behalf. You saw more African American women defending Beth Moore than White women. That was really discouraging to me. As African American women, we unapologetically support one another and stand up for each another. And as a sister in Christ, and a fellow female leader in the convention, my heart, just broke for her [*frustration over women in leadership*].

Interview Question 9: Women Roles of Leadership

Interview Question 9 dealt with the participants thoughts regarding women in various roles of leadership in the SBC. The research revealed that all of the participants felt that women were extremely qualified to operate and any, and all positions within the convention, with the exception of the senior pastorate. Participant 5 said, “God doesn’t call a gender, he calls individuals. I believe a woman can be a great deacon and a great executive director.” Participant 10 said, “In my experience, women have been proficient and efficient in their leadership. No one can deny it. They are oftentimes more prepared in their leadership and proclamation of God’s word than men [*Black church views of women in leadership*].” Participant 7 responded from a different perspective:

If the convention wants to have longevity and relevance for years to come, it will behoove the convention to start bringing more women to the table. I think, in the next few years, we’re not going to have much of a choice, but to allow women to serve in all types of leadership and ministry roles. Unfortunately, far too many of our male leaders don’t have great succession plans, or they are falling to moral failure or having legal issues [*hypocrisy*]. I think there’s going to be a push that is going to force the convention to allow women to lead in multiple capacities. And don’t forget their financial contribution. They bring a lot to the table [*frustration over women in leadership*].

Interview Question 10: Potential Changes to Baptist Faith and Message

The research gathered on the topic of women in leadership primarily focuses on the lack of clarity on a women's role based on the doctrine of polity known as the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. Interview Question 9 asked the participants whether they felt the Baptist faith and message needed to be modified—and if so, how it should be done. Although there were differences in perspective, all of the participants responses focused on not wanting to give the SBC any more leverage that will continue to restrict or limit women's ability to lead within the convention. Participant 8 said,

I don't think we ought to change the Baptist Faith and Message. Let's just hold true to the essentials: God the Father as the creator of all things, Jesus as God's Son who died on the cross for mankind and his body resurrected three days later, and the Holy Spirit who ministers to those who have been redeemed. And let's continue to be OK with different interpretations or agreement with secondary and tertiary beliefs (like complementarianism vs egalitarianism), because they are fewer essential ideas of Christianity. Some of our theological views on the relationship between men and women are a matter of interpretation, but it's the essentials that should be the non-negotiables [*lack of agreement and clarity of BFM*].

Participant 1 explained,

Yes, I would like to see the Baptist faith and message be amended that made changes, as far as allowing gifted and qualified women who are capable, to serve in major positions of leadership. I would like it to say that women could be president, executive director, and head of a state convention. I would love to see our convention just think outside of the box and realize that we have some gifted females in this convention [*lack of agreement and clarity of BFM*].

The data from RQ2 revealed the cultural difference between Black church and White church, as well as exposed the difference in how African American SBC pastors and leaders interpret scripture and the doctrine of polity known as the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, as it relates to the Baptist Faith and Message

2000. Based on the responses to Interview Questions 7–10, every participant affirmed the value and importance of women in leadership. Thus, I concluded that the only doctrinal agreement between these participants and the majority of their White members, as it relates to women and leadership, is the belief that woman cannot hold the role or title of senior pastor.

Research Question 3

RQ3 focused on the lived experiences of African American pastors and leaders on matters of racial injustice in the SBC. In gathering the data for RQ3, I asked each participant Interview Questions 11–14:

IQ11: How do you feel the SBC handles matters of racial injustice?

IQ12: How do you feel the SBC responds to your concerns as an African American leader?

IQ13: How do you feel the SBC handled the topic of CRT?

IQ14: As a follow-up, what are your thoughts about the passed resolutions on CRT and racial injustice at the convention?

Interview Question 11: Matters of Racial Injustice

Interview Question 11 asked how the participants feel the SBC has handled matters of racial injustice, particularly highly publicized flashpoint moments like the tragic murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmad Aubrey. RQ3 was very personal to each participant because they all stated how these flashpoint moments could have been any one of their own family members. The general consensus from all 10 participants was that the convention handled matters of racial injustice poorly. Participant 7 said,

When it comes to matters of racial injustice, they turn a blind eye to it. They sometimes flat out ignore it. They only respond to it when they're forced to. They say that they want to be on the right side of history, but many times I have witnessed the SBC look at racial injustice matters and just say, "Let's continue to preach the Bible." But you can't just preach the Bible and never weep with those who weep and mourn with those who mourn [*mishandled racial issues*].

Participant 6 said,

It bothers me that they think it only happens as isolated instances. They don't see it as a broad problem that needs to be addressed in terms of their approach or policies. The leadership seems to be oblivious. They use their platform to avoid talking about racial injustice. They only like to talk about things they feel are safely appropriate like sex trafficking, religious freedoms, and abortion. They love all these big issues, but racial injustice never enters the conversation [*mishandled racial issues*].

Interview Question 12: Response to African American Concerns

Interview Question 12 provided an opportunity for the participants to share their lived experiences as it relates to how the SBC has responded to their concerns as an African American leader. Participant 9 expressed,

To be honest, at this point, I no longer think they can respond to my concerns, nor do I think they will ever. So, I do not have any expectations. I don't want to sound hopeless, but I am getting to the point of feeling hopeless [*emotional impact*]. I just don't understand how you can call yourself a Christian but treat your so-called 'own' the way you do. And if they treated Beth Moore that way, why should I expect them to care more about me? In many ways, as a member of the local level, I feel free now, because they have no power over me [*mental impact*].

Participant 4 said,

There is a time for making statements, but then there comes a time where you must have some strategic boots on the ground and move to action. Their silence speaks just as loudly to Black pastors and leaders. It says you don't really care enough about this issue [*relational impact*]. My Anglo brothers must be willing to count the cost and make sacrifices to lead their churches in discipleship regarding race relations. They lead the way in other topics but for some reason, when it comes to racial reconciliation and racial injustice, nothing happens [*selective solidarity*].

Interview Question 13: Response to Topic of CRT

Interview Question 13 focused on the participants perspectives on how the SBC handled the topic of CRT. The data revealed two overarching ideas: (a) the

initial response what was not appropriate or acceptable [*mishandled CRT issue*], and (b) the six seminary presidents overstepped by creating a statement against CRT [*SBC presidents' response to CRT*]. Many of the participants felt the way the convention responded to CRT, in the mist of dealing with all the other racial injustice flashpoint moments communicated a lack of solidarity and compassion towards African American members. Participant 8 said,

I think we as a convention have mishandled CRT terribly. I think the seminary president did a terrible job and made it worse [*SBC presidents' response to CRT*]. CRT is not a social tool that is meant to be comingled with the Bible. This moment gave an opportunity for some of the individuals (Conservative Baptist Network) with a different agenda to be able to use it as a sounding board. It really alarmed me. We have seen a mass exodus of ethnic groups, leaving the southern Baptist Convention over this [*mishandled CRT issue*].

Participant 10 said,

I don't think they (Seminary Presidents) really understand CRT. I don't think they really read it [*SBC presidents' response to CRT*]. I don't agree with everything in CRT because it's not meant to be the Bible. It is a little theologically too liberal for me. But at the very heart of, it is a response to some of the struggles and challenges of our people. However, I think that if you have accepted C.H.R.I.S.T., then you can appreciate some of the expressions of CRT because it's incarnational. They don't want to let American history be an informed history [*mishandled CRT issue*]. They want to be selective in what and how they respond to things [*selective solidarity*].

Interview Question 14: Response to Recent SBC Resolution

CRT and the racial injustice flashpoint moments has served as a catalyst for a lot of the tensions between African American pastors and leaders and the Southern Baptist Convention. This interview question for was a follow-up question that reviewed the participants perspective of how the convention try to resolve some of these issues with a resolution at its previous convention meeting. Many of

the participants admitted that they were satisfied with the final resolutions, however, it did not rectify all the challenges that the convention still faces.

Participant 2 said,

I believe the resolution was handled appropriately. The people heard the discussion on the floor of the convention, and what the resolution was all about. Everyone voted in favor of the motion [*mishandled CRT issue*]. Everyone also acknowledged that the six seminary presidents defined CRT, not from a social life perspective, but from a totally different perspective. They (seminary presidents) read more into it from their own cultural understanding of CRT versus an academic understanding of the purpose of CRT [*SBC presidents' response to CRT*].

Participant 4 opined,

Initially, it was handled very poor. I just think how the seminary presidents handled it, in terms of given the appearance that they spoke on behalf of the convention, even though that wasn't their intent, people took it that way. In the end, they (seminary presidents) didn't understand the structure of CRT, and they gave the impression that the entire SBC shared their position [*SBC presidents' response to CRT*]. The resolution on race was written well, in the sense that it seemed to be acceptable by African American churches. I think it ended well because it prevented (at least for now) a potential a further mass exodus of African American churches [*mishandled racial issues*].

The data related to RQ3 revealed how the impact of the current political climate and how the SBC seminary presidents responds to CRT has perpetuated the division between African American pastors and leaders and the convention. The data also revealed that how the manner in which the SBC handled matters of racial injustice and sensitive flashpoint moments is in direct correlation with the recent departure of many African American churches. All 10 participants acknowledged that these issues have taken an emotional toll on them and members of the congregations, as well as it has hindered the progress of unity.

Research Question 4

Research Questions 1–3 focused on the lived experiences of African American pastors and leaders, as it relates to how the SBC has handled matters of DEI, women in leadership, and racial injustice. The 10 participants currently work in one of the three levels of the SBC (national/executive, state/convention, local). Five of the participants have either worked in multiple levels. All 10 participants have direct and consistent interactions with the leadership from all three levels. Research Questions 1–3 were also used as a funnel that helped guide the data for Research Question 4.

RQ4 focused asked whether there were any similarities or differences of African American pastors and leaders lived experiences, and the three levels of the SBC related to DEI, women, and leadership, and racial injustice. Based on the data gathered, RQ4 revealed research that categorized, the different levels have different experiences (Table 6). This category yielded six codes: (a) freedom on local level (32), (b) limited on state level (21), (c) loss voice on national level (20), (d) higher the level, influence is minimized and ceremonial (10), (e) African American leaders must be twice as good (5), (f) no room for error (5). The data were gathered using IQ15: As you consider everything that has been discussed, do you feel the experience is similar or different depending on the three levels?

The goal of this research was two-fold. First, to explore the lived experiences of African American pastors and leaders who are members of the Southern Baptist Convention. Second to identify any similarities and differences of African American passes in leaders, lived experiences based on the three levels of the convention: national/executive, state/convention, local. Table 7 outlines the findings under RQ4.

Table 7

RQ4 Findings: Codes to Category

RQ4 Theme	Categories	Occurrences
Different levels have different experiences	Freedom on local level	32
	Limited on state level	21
	Loss voice on national level	20
	Higher the level, influence is minimized and ceremonial.	10
	African American leaders must be twice as good.	5
	No room for error	5

Note. This theme represents the perceived overall lived experiences of African Americans.

Similarities and Differences Among All Three Levels

The research findings revealed that the participants felt there was a significant difference in the lived experiences of African American pastors and leaders based on the three levels. Although research revealed that there are few positive similarities between the experiences on the state level and local level, the consensus of the participants was that African American pastors and leaders have a more prophetic voice and influential voice on the local level. Specifically, as it relates to the local church, these African American pastors and leaders felt there is a lot of freedom. The participants can operate and lead with such freedom because of the interpretation of the governance and polity of how the local church can operate based on the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. Article VI of the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 address the autonomy of every local SBC church:

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous, local congregation of baptize believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each

congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation, each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons.

Based on Article VI in the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, the participants consistently expressed that being a leader on the local level has been the best lived experience as a member of the Southern Baptist Convention. Participant 8 summed up the consensus of all the participants when he stated,

I believe that Black senior pastors of local churches must hold to their prophetic voices [*freedom on local level*]. And in some way, when you get to higher positions (state or national), you lose your prophetic voice, the positions that are much higher levels (national/executive), by their very nature, make them (Black leaders) lose a little bit of their prophetic voice to speak to the real issues [*higher the level, influence is minimized and ceremonial*]. So, for us, the strongest leader is the senior pastor. I know don't want to lose my power, voice, or influence by diminishing it or diluting it by being a leader in the convention or national level [*loss voice on national level*].

National/Executive Level Experiences

Of all the levels, the data revealed the lived experiences of African American pastors and leaders are the most challenging executive level. The research revealed that the executive level of the Southern Baptist Convention has the least amount of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Participant 4 said,

I would say no doubt, the lived experiences of African Americans are drastically different than our White Christian brothers in the Southern Baptist Convention, which is part of the continual problem that exists. We continue to deal with the challenge of helping our White brothers understand that the lived experience of African Americans contributes greatly to position on issues of race and on politics. It continues to be a challenge because they (White leaders) don't have the same lived experiences. Their lived experiences are more...one of comfort and privilege. Even if they acknowledge the wrongs that have been done in

history, they often they don't realize they still contribute to the problem by remaining silent or always defending their positions.

Participant 5 stated,

I'm a bit troubled and don't understanding what is taking so long to remove the 'interim' title from our executive director. He (Willie McLaurin) is a proven and dedicated leader who has always been above reproach. He has made significant strides in his role. I'm not sure what's the hold up or what people waiting at for. It feels like they are waiting for him to fail [*no room for error*]. We (African American leaders) must be twice as good, just to be "considered" for a single opportunity that everyone knows we're qualified for [*African American leaders must be twice as good*]. We can't mess up at all, while our White constituent mess up all the time [no room for error].

State/Convention Level Experiences

The research revealed that although there are still challenges that the convention faces on the state level, as it relates to DEI, many of the participants expressed that the experience is not as bad as the executive level; however, there is definite room for improvement. Participate 6 said,

The way I function on the state level compared to the way I would be able to operate on the executive level, it's like a night and day difference. I have gotten a chance to see firsthand, you know, what it's really like, and the freedom I have on the local level, is much greater in terms of being able to express how I really feel to leverage influence with respect to certain issues, and to help other African American pastors.

Participant 1 said,

I think, because I've been involved with the local, state, and national level, it seems to be that our leadership is more accepted locally and on a state level. On the national level, it seems our only involvement is when they give convention reports. Every year baptism reports...Sunday school reports, you know, our name, our church's name was in there. So, we get a bit of a respect there. I've even been invited to speak at certain events hosted by

local and state convention, however, when it comes to a national level, the same is not true.

Local Church Level Experiences

There was no ambiguity in the research as it related to the positive lived experiences, African American pastors and leaders have on the local level. The local level is the place where these leaders feel their voice and their leadership is valued and affirmed most. Specifically, as it relates to women in leadership, the participants concluded that the local level is the only level within the convention where all who are called, regardless of gender, can leader, serve, and be used.

Participant 9 stated,

As a female leader, who is a member of this convention for quite some time, it has become painfully clear to me that the only place I can be the leader I know God has called me and qualified me to be, is within my local church. I pray that there will be a day when my experiences will not be my daughter's experience. I pray for the day where my daughter will be seen as a qualified candidate who can serve on the state or national level as an Executive Director of the convention, just as she has been affirmed as a qualified leader to serve as the Children's Director at our church.

Participant 3 expressed how, from her perspective, the lived experiences for most minorities (Black, women, other), are far better on the local level than the state or executive level. Participant 3 shared,

Over the years, I have served on a few committees and teams on the state level, however, my influence and voice as a leader was always minimized. What has been interesting to me is, I can teach Sunday school or Bible studies at my church, but I cannot teach that same class or lesson at a national convention gathering because there are men in the room. That feels so barbaric and demeaning. What do you do when you feel like God has called you to do something and 'man' tells you that you're not qualified because of your gender? I often feel like there is this desire for diversity within our convention. However, the views and perspective on what that diversity should look like is very subjective...and sometimes, in my

opinion, that subjective view is not biblical. That is why I love serving the local church.

It is vital to this research to note that not all the experiences of the participants were negative. Participant 5 has had a unique experience with the Southern Baptist Convention where his interactions with all three levels have been positive. Participant 5 said,

Admittedly, I'm in the minority with my experience, but I would say, it's been similar. Yes, there is a lot of freedom we [African American pastors] have on the local level, however, during my tenure on the national level, there was an intentionality to make sure we provided resources for African American churches. We were very intentional to make sure no one felt any division as a member of the SBC. When I served on the national level, we had a denominational network called Black Service Denominational Network. For the pastors, we had the National African American Fellowship. We were very intentional to make sure the pastors and the convention worked together and not in opposition with one another. We needed to empower the local church, and in particular the local pastors, so they could carry out the Great Commission. We were intentional to make sure that bridges were being built and crossed on all three levels.

Ultimately, the data yielded the theme "different levels have different experience," as it was expressed throughout each of the interviews. RQ4 provided data that overlapped the data gathered from RQ1–RQ3. RQ4 also highlighted the great sense of pride, heritage, and responsibility these African American pastors and leaders felt when talking about their lived experiences as members of an SBC Black church. Although the research revealed there are differences in the experiences, depending on the level, there is also a commitment to ensuring that the Black church experience is preserved, maintained, and respected by the Southern Baptist Convention. All 10 of the participants expressed a legacy commitment to continue to challenge the SBC to stand against any agenda that would attempt to perpetuate a desire to whitewash history. Therefore, these leaders value the

freedom they have on the local level because it is the platform they use to empower, inspire, encourage, and inform other African Americans.

Summary

This phenomenological study explored perceptions of DEI in the ecclesiastical and denominational setting of the SBC, compared to African American pastors' and leaders lived experiences. Specifically, I aimed to understand better how African American pastors and leaders view their value and worth as members of the SBC. I collected data by conducting a series of one-on-one Zoom interviews to accomplish this research. I used four coding passes (*in vivo*, process, emotion, and value), resulting in 144 individual data codes with 2,538 total occurrences, which I then condensed into 20 subcategories. The 20 subcategories ultimately revealed five themes. Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the limitations of the study, the implications of the findings, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

The problem that I aimed to address through this phenomenological study was the SBC's perceptions of DEI, women in leadership, and matters of racial injustice among the three levels of the convention: national/executive, state/convention, and local. In this research, I specifically explored the SBC's overall perception of DEI, women in leadership, and racial injustice compared to African American pastors' and leaders' lived experiences. There is much research on DEI in secular and public organizational structures; however, there have been limited studies on this topic in the context of private faith movements such as the SBC. More specifically, few scholars have explored the lived experiences of African American pastors and leaders.

By exploring the lived experiences of these African American pastors and leaders, I attempted (a) to provide comprehensive data on how some minority members perceive their voice and value to the convention, (b) to compare the experiences based on the three levels, and (c) to identify ways the convention can move forward and create a more reconciling and inclusive environment. The findings suggest that the experiences differ based on the levels, as well as that African American pastors and leaders have a tremendous concern regarding the current direction of the convention and its ability to handle matters of DEI, racial injustice, and women in leadership issues. The findings could serve as an opportunity for the SBC to identify exact blind spots that will aid in the convention's ability to create a more diverse and inclusive denomination experienced equally throughout all three levels.

First, this research outlined the background of the problem, provided a brief overview of the data regarding the tensions and challenges, and identified an appropriate framework for conducting this phenomenological study. The data indicated that within the evangelical movement of the Southern Baptist Convention, there have been many specific challenges with African American members regarding issues related to race, gender, equality, questions of leadership transparency and ethical morality, the validity of critical race theory, and the impact political partisanship has had on the overall unity of the convention. The issues

mentioned have directly impacted the lived experiences of African American members of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Second, I created a synthesis of scholarly literature, and a conceptual framework emerged around DEI, women in leadership, and racial injustice. These three concepts served as the conceptual foundation of the identified problem. The concept of DEI aimed to explore the experiences of DEI among the three levels of the SBC: national/executive, state/convention, and local. The primary purpose of this framework was to research these leaders' experiences of DEI and identify differences between each of the three levels. The concept of women in leadership focused on stereotypes and the marginalization of women in leadership in an SBC setting.

The SBC adheres to a document called the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. The Baptist Faith and Message 2000 serves as the SBC's doctrinal and theological statements (SBC, 2000). It is the document set forth as the teachings and beliefs of every member affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC, 2022). Article VI of the Baptist Faith and Message states, "While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture" (SBC, 2000). Article VI in the Baptist faith and message 2000 directly impacts how a woman within the SBC movement is viewed as a leader.

The concept of racial injustice focused on these African American pastors and leaders' perception of how they believe the SBC has some of the recent racial flashpoint moments like the tragic deaths of George Floyd, Ahmad Aubrey, and Breonna Taylor. The overall concept of *racial injustice* referred to in this study speaks to the lack of human rights and unequal treatment of a group, which results in one group being disadvantaged over another (Wisdom et al., 2019). Specifically, within the context of the SBC, the concept of racial injustice focused on how African American pastors and leaders perceive their experiences as members of the faith movement.

Third, I provided an in-depth discussion of the research methodology used in this study. The methodology and design used for this research were qualitative and phenomenological, respectively. Phenomenology is used to understand the

essence of a particular group of people's lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A phenomenological study focuses on the essence of a lived experience that can be perceived or sensed by people who have different viewpoints (Tomaszewski et al., 2020) and aims to capture the way an occurrence was lived by people who participated in that occurrence (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). This type of study consists of “what” an individual experienced and “how” the individual experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). All the participants of this research project have been members of the SBC for at least 5 years, and they were all selected from the three levels of the SBC: national/executive, state/convention, and local.

Data were collected through a one-on-one 14-question interview protocol, which resulted in 144 individual data codes and 2,538 overall occurrences. The 144 codes were further condensed into 20 subcategories. After condensing the data, the subcategories were put into five final themes. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that qualitative research codes typically fall into one or more of three categories: expected codes, surprising codes, and codes of unusual or conceptual interest. The findings from the present phenomenological research study revealed codes from all three categories, ultimately resulting in the following five themes: (a) concern over current SBC direction; (b) emotional and psychological toll; (c) mishandled cultural, social, and political flashpoints; (d) distinctiveness of the Black church experience; and (e) cautiously optimistic and hopeful.

Research Questions

This phenomenological study included four main research questions that I designed to explore the lived experiences of African American pastors and leaders in the SBC concerning DEI, women in leadership, and racial injustice. The answers to RQ1 through RQ3 provided insight and a framework for the answers to RQ4. The research for this project consisted of 15 interview questions. IQ1 through IQ3 focused on identifying the demographics, leadership level, and tenure of the participants' membership with the SBC, as outlined in Table 4. There were five overarching themes associated with RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3. RQ4 focused on any similarities or differences between African American pastors and leaders' lived experiences based on the three levels. RQ4 revealed its own theme, which provided

a holistic view of the current experiences of African Americans who are members of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 focused on the lived experiences of African American pastors and leaders on matters of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the Southern Baptist Convention. Primarily, I explored how African American pastors and leaders view the current direction of the convention as it relates to handling matters of DEI, separately or altogether. Interview Questions 4–6 helped guide the research for RQ1. The answers to RQ1 yielded that the participants' overall lived experiences with the SBC, as it relates to DEI, have not been consistently positive. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the data also revealed that the participants who have been members of the convention for more than 20 years expressed that their previous experiences were better than their recent experiences [*belief in the convention of old*]. For many of the more extended tenured African American members, there is a grieving over the current tone of the convention, because they remember how the “convention of old” once had a universal missional focus that felt more inclusive.

When asked about their perceptions on how the convention currently handles diversity matters in IQ4, many participants indicated that the convention's desire for diversity was more about *optics* than authentic diversity. From their perspective, there is a *lack of collaboration* between African American pastors and leaders and SBC leaders at the national/executive level. Due to the limited amount of African American leadership represented at the national/executive and state/convention, the participants felt the few hired leaders on the national and state levels were more ceremonial. The participants perceive that this is *tokenism* more than anything else. Based on the responses to IQ4, the data concluded that the overarching experience of these African American pastors and leaders was negative [*Black leaders' negative perceptions*].

As mentioned in the first paragraph of this section, not all experiences of the interviewed participants were negative. A few African American pastors and leaders who have been a part of the convention for at least 20 years still have a

sense of optimism and hope [*partially optimistic*]. Two of the 10 participants reflected on their previous experiences with the convention. From their perspective, the “convention of old” was more missional, authentically diverse, and welcoming to everyone. These two participants reflected on diversity initiatives they were a part of, where they felt they had both a seat at the table and a voice at the table. As these participants reflected on their previous experience, they were saddened and dejection because newer members and young African American leaders have not had an opportunity to experience that type of Southern Baptist Convention [*belief in convention of old*].

When asked about their perceptions on how the convention currently handles equity matters in IQ5, many of the participants' responses were like IQ4. There was an overwhelming sense of *optics* over authenticity. From their perspective, the *lack of collaboration* fosters the lack of relational and leadership equity among African American pastors and leaders. Their view of equity is both subjective and selective. These African American pastors and leaders believe the Southern Baptist Convention’s desire for equity is often based on what is comfortable and acceptable to the convention alone [*selective solidarity*]. In addition to what the data revealed from IQ4 and IQ4, on matters of inclusion from IQ6, the participants felt there was a limited amount of inclusivity, primarily because of their perception of a commitment to *self-preservation*. The research indicated that the perspective of African American pastors and leaders was, long as older White men are in leadership from the top of the convention, there will always be a lack of inclusion related to leadership.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was designed to determine the lived experience of African American pastors and leaders regarding the SBC's official position on women in leadership matters. Additionally, I sought the participants’ views on the SBC doctrine and polity known as the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 and whether they felt there needed to be any changes to better the experiences of the female membership. RQ2 resonated with all participants, specifically with the two female leaders. The responses to IQs 7–10 revealed three overarching truths. First, in

Black church culture, women are valued more and seen as equals, compared to how they are viewed in the convention as a whole [*Black church views on women in leadership*]. The data revealed that 100% of the participants expressed how disheartened they felt about how Beth Moore was treated and how women are marginalized, devalued, and underappreciated [*frustration over women in leadership*].

As I mentioned in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, the tension with this topic is based on the two theological views of women in leadership: complementarianism and egalitarianism. Second, 50% of the participants believed there should be some amendment or adaptation to the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, where the language is more inclusive to accepting women in leadership; however, the other 50% of the participants believed there should be no change to the policy because the ambiguity in the language and the autonomy of the SBC church gives freedom on the local level to appoint and affirm women and high-level leadership roles. Third, all participants agree with the SBC's position that a man should hold the office of the senior or lead pastor. They do not believe, however, that position limits a woman from having the title of pastor or executive.

Complementarianism stresses that although men and women are equal in personhood, they are created for different roles (Piper & Grudem, 2016). Specifically related to evangelical movements like the SBC, the complementarian position holds that God created males and females as equal in dignity, value, essence, and human nature. In addition, males and females have distinct roles. The male was given by God the responsibility of having loving authority over the female, whereas the female was to offer willing, glad-hearted, and submissive assistance to the man (Ware, 2007). The overall objective of a complementarian position is to understand a perception of Biblical hierarchy suggesting that women should remain subordinate to men.

The egalitarian position also holds that there is no gender-based limitations on the roles of men and women (Ware, 2007). Many who hold a complementarian position argue that the New Testament of the Bible is explicitly clear on a woman's role in leadership, precisely when Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:11–15 that women are

to learn in submission and not to teach or exercise authority over men. Essentially, egalitarianism views hold that men and women are wholly and genuinely equal. In contrast, complementarianism argues that there is a distinction between men's and women's roles. Although the SBC holds to more of a complementarian position, the findings of this study revealed that these African American pastors and leaders ultimately held a more egalitarian position, except for the senior pastor role.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 was designed to study the lived experiences of African American pastors and leaders as it relates to their perception of how the SBC has handled matters of racial injustice. Interview Questions 11–14 gathered data to answer RQ3. This research question focused on three aspects of these leaders' experiences: (a) how the SBC has handled recent racial injustice flashpoint moments, (b) how the SBC handled the topic of CRT, and (c) these leaders' thoughts about the passing resolution on CRT. Additionally, the data from RQ3 revealed some of the long-standing systemic racial issues that African American pastors and leaders have been dealing with at the convention.

The highly publicized flashpoint moments like the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmad Aubrey served as the litmus test for these African American pastors and leaders viewed their experience with the SBC in SBC handling matters of racial injustice [*mishandled racial issues*]. The two significant challenges identified from this part of the research correlated with some of the codes expressed in our RQ1, like selective solidarity and self-preservation. The data also revealed that the participants' perception was that the SBC did not have the same level of compassion or desire to lament racial injustice issues as they did regarding issues like sex trafficking, religious freedoms, or abortion.

The data showed that the perception of *self-preservation* was revealed when the participants addressed the SBC's mishandling of critical race theory. The participants articulated that the public responses of the six SBC seminary presidents, all older White males, began the convention's mishandling of the issue of CRT [*SBC presidents' response to CRT*]. The overarching perspective of the participants was that the seminary presidents spoke on behalf of the entire

convention, and other majority essential leaders never spoke up to refute the position of the president. From the African American pastors' and leaders' perspective, the White majority leader's silence on this issue equated to agreement with the seminary presidents. The convention's mishandling of the above-mentioned racial injustice flashpoints and the mishandling of the topic of CRT played a role in negatively impacting the lived experiences of these African American members of the SBC.

The third aspect of RQ3 addressed the participant's thoughts about the passing resolution on CRT at their annual national convention meeting. Although these pastors and leaders expressed a negative experience relating to how the convention handled matters of racial injustice, and the topic of CRT [*mishandled CRT*], they were satisfied with the language of the final resolution, even though it did not ratify all of the challenges the convention steel face. Additionally, the findings related to RQ3 also revealed how these pastors and leaders believed that the current political climate had significantly impacted some of the positions taken by many of the prominent White male figureheads on the national and state level [*politics*]. The data from RQ3 revealed that the miss handling of racial injustice had been a pivotal contributor to the perpetuation of division between African American pastors and leaders and the convention. This division has impacted the trust and relational equity between the two groups and has taken an *emotional* and psychological toll on African American members [*mental impact*].

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 identified any similarities or differences between African American pastors and leaders' lived experiences on the three levels of the SBC related to DEI, women in leadership, and racial injustice. RQ1–RQ3 served as the funnel that helped guide the data for RQ4. All 10 participants have directly interacted with or been exposed to leadership from all three levels. The data revealed that, ultimately, different levels of the convention have different experiences, as shown in Table 6. The answers to RQ4 were determined using the participants' responses to IQ15. Ultimately, the African American pastors and leaders believed the level that freely allows them to use their prophetic voice,

leverage their influence, and maximize the God-given calling on their lives, regardless of gender, is the local level.

It is important to note that even though all 10 participants expressed that the best SBC experience is on the local level, two of the participants shared that they have had a good experience as leaders on the national and state level. These participants acknowledged that their experiences had been the exception. The findings of this research revealed that there are different experiences depending on the level. Ultimately RQ4 provided data that overlapped the data gathered from our RQ1 through RQ3. Additionally, RQ4 highlighted the great sense of responsibility these African American pastors and leaders felt when talking about their lived experiences as members of an SBC Black church and the SBC. There is also a universal desire from these leaders to see the lived experiences of the emerging generation of African American SBC members change for the better.

Implications

This section is a discussion regarding the practical implication of this phenomenological study as it relates to the five themes based on RQ1–RQ3 and one overarching theme revealed from RQ4:

1. Concerned over SBC direction.
2. Emotional and psychological toll.
3. Mishandled cultural, social, and political flashpoints.
4. Distinctiveness of Black church experience.
5. Cautiously optimistic.
6. Different levels have different experiences (RQ4).

The practical implications discussed in this chapter focus on the themes listed above and the four conceptual frameworks: DEI, women in leadership, racial injustice, and experiences on all three levels.

Implications for DEI

As supported by the research, the lived experiences of African American pastors and leaders, as it relates to matters of diversity, equity, and inclusion, the two themes *concerned over SBC direction* and *cautiously optimistic* emerged based on the data collected. The categories for these themes that highlighted the

experiences of the African American participants in the study included: *lack of collaboration, optics, tokenism, Black leaders' negative perceptions, selective solidarity, hypocrisy, frustration over women in leadership, partially optimistic, and belief in the convention of old*. The data suggest a significant need for the key leaders within the SBC to access current DEI practices and identify new ways to approach this topic from an organizational change perspective if the convention genuinely desires to improve African Americans' lived experiences.

The data revealed implies that if the SBC desires to improve African Americans' perceptions and experiences of DEI, the convention should consider imploring organizational change strategies like Kotter's (2014) eight steps to organizational change:

1. Establishing a sense of urgency.
2. Creating a guiding coalition.
3. Developing a vision and strategy.
4. Communicating the change vision.
5. Empowering others for broad-based action.
6. Generating short-term wins.
7. Consolidating gains and producing more change.
8. Anchoring new approaches in the culture.

Kotter's strategy is not only referring to organizational change as it relates exclusively to DEI. Many of the principles found in these eight stages can be implemented in various contexts. The focal point of most DEI strategies found in literature leans towards how to help organizations systematically and positively approach a process for change. Kotter outlined a strategy that can aid the SBC in making necessary DEI changes that minority members like African Americans will welcome. When it comes to implementing DEI within any organizational structure and culture, literature would suggest that it starts with buy-in from the people, like key leaders on the national and executive levels of the convention.

For the SBC to effectively approach diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies, there must be a visible change in the leadership structure, starting from the national and executive levels. If traditional leadership structures are present,

DEI will never be implemented. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Scholars Chin and Trimble (2015) provided a challenging resource that identifies various dimensions of studying diversity, equity, and inclusion, specifically regarding leadership. These scholars stressed the importance of leveraging DEI and leadership because of the ethnocentric bias in current leadership theories. As the participants in this study affirmed, the majority demographic of vital influential leaders in the SBC is held by older White men. In order for new DEI strategies to be successfully implemented, the corporate buy-in must start with that demographic.

Although the participants expressed concern over the current direction of the convention, it is essential to note that the research also revealed a level of cautious optimism and hope among some of the longer-tenured African American pastors and leaders. This cautious optimism is due to the current SBC president, Bart Barber, and the appointment of the interim executive director, Willie McLaurin. In all the challenges the convention currently faces, these two appointments of new leaders in key position have provided some level of optimism. The optimism of these participants is also present because of their prayer, belief, and hope that the convention can soon regain the missional roots and willingness to bring diverse leaders to that table, as it once did in the past.

Implications for Women in Leadership

As supported by the research, the lived experiences of African American pastors and leaders, as it relates to women in leadership, the themes *concerned over SBC direction* and *distinctiveness of Black church experience* emerged based on the collected data. The categories for these themes that highlighted the difference in how African Americans valued the role of women in leadership compared to how the convention viewed and valued women included: *lack of agreement and clarity of BFM*, *frustration over women in leadership*, and *Black church views of women in leadership*. The data suggest that although there is universal agreement that from a theological perspective, a man should hold the title of senior pastor, while a woman should be allowed to hold the role of minister or pastor and serve as the figurehead over high-level departments.

The data revealed implies an excellent need for the SBC to return to its original theological and doctrinal positions on primary issues versus secondary and tertiary issues. The participants affirmed that the *convention of old* stood in unity around the primary beliefs of the Christian faith that dates to before AD 250 with the formation of the Apostles' Creed (Enns, 1989). The purpose of the Creed was to be a clear statement concerning what the church believed, thus protecting it from heresy. The term "creed" comes from the Latin *credo*, meaning "I believe." A creed is a statement of belief and acknowledgment of personal trust in God that is to be affirmed by individuals and groups who profess to follow Jesus (Harrison, 1976). The Apostle's Creed, as outlined by Packer (1994), states:

They believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilot, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from hence, He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy Catholic Church; the communion of the Saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

The data in this study implied the need for clarity and consistency with the essentials of the SBC's doctrine and polity known as the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 as it relates to the role of women in leadership. This creed is worded so that it "retains the sense of universality and thus accents the unity of the church despite its wide diffusion" (Harrison, 1976, p. 112). Primarily, the research reveals that SBC churches should be able to indeed operate in their autonomy as long as it affirms the following essential beliefs based on the participant's interpretation of the BMF:

1. The belief in God the Father as the creator of all things.
2. The belief in Jesus as God's Son who died on the cross for mankind and his bodily resurrection three days later.

3. The belief in the Holy Spirit who ministers to those who have been redeemed and are thus part of the church; and will one day spend forever in heaven.

These three essential beliefs listed above have always been the non-negotiables of an SBC member. The participants affirmed that “secondary” and “tertiary” beliefs have always been considered the less essential ideas of Christianity and a diverse interpretation of these positions did not impact one’s ability to be a member of the Southern Baptist Convention. Table 8 is a list of some of the identified examples of secondary and tertiary beliefs shared by the participants in the research.

Table 8

Examples of Secondary and Tertiary

Examples of Secondary Issues	Examples of Tertiary Issues
Method of how God created the universe	Timing of the return of Christ
Views on healing	Styles of music, methods of preaching, church architectures
Gifts of the Holy Spirit	Politics
Church government	
Modes of baptism	
Women preaching	

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, in the overall Evangelical community, the views on women in leadership tend to focus on two positions related to the relationship between men and women: complementarianism and egalitarianism. Complementarianism is the primary position held by the SBC. Complementarianism stresses that although men and women are equal in personhood, they are created for different roles (Piper & Grudem, 2016). The complementarian position holds that God created males and females as equal in dignity, value, essence, and human nature, but also that males and females have distinct roles. The male was given by God the responsibility of having loving

authority over the female, whereas the female was to offer willing, glad-hearted, and submissive assistance to the man (Ware, 2007).

Fundamentally, egalitarianism views hold that men and women are wholly and genuinely equal. The egalitarian position also holds no gender-based limitations on men's and women's roles (Ware, 2007). In comparison, complementarianism argues that there is a distinction between men's and women's roles. The SBC holds a complementarian position in the belief that God created and designed both males and females as equal and fully human; however, within that equality, each gender has unique and specific ways to express themselves in humanity, specifically in relation to a woman's role and title of pastor. The research suggests that before the SBC can honestly approach articulating and imposing its position on women in leadership, there needs to be universal clarity, alignment, and agreement on the true doctrinal essentials of the denomination and the nonessentials of the denomination. Additionally, the data revealed that with the significantly higher number of female members within the convention, it would behoove the convention to affirm more qualified women in high-level leadership roles.

Implications for Racial Injustice

As supported by the research, the lived experiences of African American pastors and leaders relate to how the SBC has handled matters of racial injustice, the themes *mishandled cultural, social, and political flashpoints* and *emotional and emotional and psychological tolls* emerged based on the data collected. The categories for these themes included: *mishandled racial issues, mishandled CRT issues, SBC presidents' response to CRT, politics, mental impact, emotional impact, and relational impact*. The data suggest how the SBC responded to these issues and fostered a spirit of division and disunity instead of promoting unity and solidarity.

The data indicate that how the SBC handled racial injustice flashpoint moments like the high-profile murder cases of George Floyd, Ahmad Aubrey, and Breonna Taylor (Kendi, 2019; Tisby, 2021) had a significant impact on their perspectives on the SBC's ability and desire to stand in solidarity with their African

Americans members truly. The overall concept of *racial injustice* consistently speaks to a group's lack of human rights and unequal treatment, which results in one group being disadvantaged over another (Wisdom et al., 2019). Additionally, the research revealed that these African American pastors and leaders acknowledged the tensions due to the response of the six seminary presidents to the validity of CRT. Koon (2021) reported that African American pastors and leaders perceived the convention's attempt to half-heartedly acknowledge the need for racial reconciliation during the 2019 annual meeting while still moving away from CRT as an insult.

The data indicates and affirms that these African American pastors and leaders believe that the SBC's position on CRT and lackluster response to critical racial injustice flashpoint moments could majorly impact the future growth of minority churches within the SBC. Suppose the convention hopes to prevent a mass exodus of African American churches from the SBC. In that case, the data implies that there must be an intentional theological and theoretical move toward reconciliation. From a theological perspective, there must be a kingdom of God reconciliation, where the SBC truly sees the human value of African Americans around the doctrine of the *imago Dei*.

Imago Dei comes from the Latin version of the Bible, translated to English as *image of God*, and is defined as the theoretical expression associated distinctively with humans, which indicates the symbolical connection between God and humanity (Grudem, 1994). The phrase originated in Genesis 1:27, which states, "God created man in his own image." The Genesis 1:27 text does not imply that God is in human form but that humans are in the image of God in their moral, spiritual, and intellectual essence. Consequently, humans imitate God's divine nature in their ability to attain the irreplaceable characteristics with which humans have been bestowed (Grudem, 1994).

The moral implications of the doctrine of *imago Dei*, as it relates to the SBC is, if humans are to love God, they must equally and wholly love and value others as an expression of God. In correlation with this research, the doctrine of *imago Dei* should eradicate all postures of selective solidarity and primary positions

around political partisanship and compel the SBC to pursue a genuine desire for reconciliation. Understanding the doctrine of the imago Dei should ultimately inspire every Christian in living out the biblical example of reconciliation found in 2 Corinthians 5:11–21, when Paul challenges us to embrace reconciliation. First, Paul explains God reconciled us to Himself (i.e., Jesus' death on the cross). Then Paul reminds us that God reconciles us with each other. This passage affirms the conceptual framework for the ministry of reconciliation.

From a theoretical perspective, an active and strategic process toward reconciliation must move the SBC from lip service and optics to a willingness to lament and renew. Scholars Kim and Hill (2018) suggested that reconciliation can only happen when there is a willingness to foster lament, repentance, forgiveness, justice, partnership, dignity, and equality. McNeil (2020) outlined a strategic process known as the Reconciliation Roadmap that the SBC should consider adopting if there is a genuine desire for reconciliation. McNeil's roadmap is a four-step process designed to move an organization from isolation and preservation to transformation and reconciliation. The four steps consist of:

1. The realization of a new reality.
2. The identification that your people are my people.
3. The preparation of creating systems for lasting change.
4. The activation of repairing broken systems together.

McNeil's (2020) Reconciliation Roadmap provides a comprehensive and adaptable process for reconciling communities with racial, ethnic, and other societal differences. This tool can aid the SBC in navigating the difficult path toward enduring systemic change. To change the negative perceptions of these African American pastors and leaders' lived experiences with the SBC, as it relates to matters of racial injustice, the combination of the theoretical and theological perspective mentioned in this section are essential to the process of reconciliation. A genuine commitment to reconciliation requires all parties to come together with a collective commitment to accomplish three fundamental objectives.

First, it is necessary to honestly admit what is not understood. It is culturally impossible for a Black person to fully understand the lived experiences of a White

person, just as it is equally impossible for a White person to understand the lived experiences of a Black person. Second, there must be an acknowledgment of the things that are understood. In this imperfect and broken world, unfortunately, prejudice, racism, sexism, and the marginalization of certain ethnic groups still exists.

Third, in desiring to be the body of Christ and live out the reconciliation ministry, it is necessary to build bilingual bridges around God's Word. When God's Word is our starting point and primary position, our faith filters our responses to secondary issues and how we navigate conversations of race and social injustice. Paul provides an example of biblical DEI in Galatians 3:26-28 (NIV) when he declares, “²⁶ So in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Implications for Improving Experiences on Levels

RQ4 of this study revealed that the participants felt a noticeable difference in the lived experiences of African American pastors and leaders based on the three levels: national/executive, state convention, and local. The findings indicated that the overarching theme that emerged was *that different levels have difference experiences*. The categories for this theme included: *freedom on a local level, limited on a state level, loss of voice on a national level, influence is minimized and ceremonial at higher level, African American leaders must be twice as good, and no room for error*. Ultimately, these participants concluded that the level with the best experience is the local level, specifically the local Black church. In the Black church experience environment, both men and women leaders believe there is respect and appreciation for their prophetic voice, gender equality, clarity in the role of women in leadership, and the ability to fulfill the God-given calling placed on their lives.

From a theoretical perspective, one of the overarching criticisms of the SBC by these African American pastors and leaders is that the higher the level, the more limited the leadership influence. The convention should consider leveraging the

cultural intelligence theory if the SBC desires to change that perception and provide a consistent experience on all levels. Cultural intelligence (CQ) is known as an intercultural theory. Cultural intelligence serves as a process, model, and approach organizations can use to learn how to become more inclusive of other cultures.

CQ is a theoretical extension of contemporary approaches to understanding intelligence. Scholars including Van Dyne et al. (2009) have agreed that CQ can cope and interact effectively in all culturally diverse environments and organizational structures. Suppose the SBC collectively desires to gain more wisdom in developing a healthy multiethnic mindset and provide more of an equivalent denominational experience, regardless of the level. In that case, it should consider using the CQ model to aid in the SBC's ability to understand cultural practices, values, and behaviors different from their own. Livermore (2015) cited the four factors that consist of the overall posture of cultural intelligence:

1. Knowledge CQ: Understanding cross-cultural issues and differences. It refers to understanding cultures and cultures, roles and shapes, behavior, and social interaction.
2. Interpretive CQ: The degree to which one is mindful and aware when interacting cross-culturally. It is the ability to make meaning accurately from what is observed.
3. Perseverance CQ: Level of interest, drive, and motivation to adapt cross-culturally. What matters most is the ability to personally draw on cultural strategic thinking that comes from knowledge CQ and interpretive CQ to interact in ways that are effective cross-cultural.
4. Behavior CQ: How one appropriately changes their verbal and nonverbal actions when interacting cross-culturally. It refers to the ability to observe, recognize, regulate, adapt, and act appropriately in intercultural meetings.

Of all the implications discussed in this chapter, improving the denominational experiences on the national, executive, and state conventions poses the most significant challenge. Given the established hierarchical organizational structure of the convention, fully implementing CQ throughout the convention will

take time. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, many of the longer-tenured African American pastors and leaders desire to do all they can to leave a legacy for future generations of African American pastors and leaders. Therefore, it is possible that for an extended time, a commitment to the theory of cultural intelligence could improve the overall experiences of African American pastors' leaders on all three levels in the future, not just the local level.

Limitations

It is essential to recognize the limitations associated with this research. The study of diversity, equity, and inclusion is broad and complex and can apply to multiple environments. As noted in Chapter 1, the current research on DEI is limited in its perception and perspective. First, the study focused exclusively on the SBC. No other denomination or Christian fellowship was considered. Second, the study of women in leadership exclusively focused on natural-born women. Any concerns about studying the sexual identity or the LGBTQ-plus community are outside this research's scope. Last, there are other reported issues and challenges the SBC is currently facing. This research study focused on the tensions between African American members and the SBC that primarily evolved around matters of racial injustice, women in leadership, and CRT.

From the participants' demographics, this study instinctively has limitations because it narrowly focuses on just one minority group. The Southern Baptist Convention's membership consists of various ethnic groups. The participants in this study only represented an African American sample population associated with the convention. The only other minority group represented in this study is African American females. Additionally, not having an equal number of men and women participants represented in this research poses some limitations in the perspectives of the female experience within the SBC. The two females interviewed have been a part of the convention for over 20 years and have had direct access to the leadership of all three levels. The experiences of females in other ethnic groups may vary from that of these two African American females. Ultimately, researching exclusively African American pastors and leaders limits the ability to assess the lived

experiences of other SBC minority ethnic groups like Latino, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian.

Suggestions for Future Research

As mentioned in the limitation, this study provided a perspective from two African American female leaders and eight male African American pastors and leaders affiliated with the local church, state convention, and the national/executive levels of the convention. In addition to state conventions and local churches, the SBC is governed by three major institutions and entities: North American Mission Board, International Mission Board, and LifeWay Christian Resources. There are also six colleges and seminaries affiliated with the convention. Future research on DEI will call for more in-depth qualitative case studies to assess minorities' experiences with these entities and universities. Future research must also include focus groups from majority leaders and executives to gain their perspective and insight. A holistic approach to this research topic would require an expansion of participation in ensuring results represents lived experiences from all levels of the convention. Future scholars could seek to understand better how other minority groups in the SBC perceive matters of DEI and women in leadership.

Future study of the Southern Baptist Convention should focus on DEI-related topics like publishing, church planting recruitment and retention, church engagement, and the attendants of Christian schools and seminaries. Additional phenomenological studies can aid the key leaders in the SBC in their ability to better understand the quality of experience minority groups truly have within the SBC, in contrast to how the convention perceives their experiences from a linear single-story perspective. The findings of additional phenomenological studies could identify blind spots within the convention that must be addressed immediately if the SBC desires to continue attracting ethnically and gender-diverse members and leaders.

Summary

In this phenomenological study, I explored the perceptions of DEI in the ecclesiastical and denominational setting of the SBC compared to African

American pastors and leaders' lived experiences. The lived experiences were based on the three levels of the convention: national/executive, state convention, and local. The 10 participants for this study were African American pastors and leaders (male and female) who have been members of the conventions for at least 5 years. Data were gathered through one-on-one interviews with four research questions and 15 interview questions.

The findings from this study provided three main research outlines. First, African American pastors and leaders have tremendous concern regarding the current direction of the convention and its ability to handle matters of DEI. Second, the recent experiences of African Americans significantly differ, depending on the convention level. The higher the level, primarily national/executive, the more limited the influence and voice of the African American leader. Third, although there is a concern for the current direction and different experiences based on the level, there is also cautious optimism and hope that the newly appointed executive leadership will return the convention to its missional and more inclusive roots.

The cautious optimism and hope of these participants are birthed out of their desire and prayer to see the convention move away from *lip service*, *tokenism*, and *optics* and move towards an authentic and sustainable change that collectively leverages the following strategies:

1. Kotter's (2012) Organizational Change
2. Livermore's (2015) Cultural Intelligence
3. McNeil's (2020) Roadmap to Reconciliation

Suppose the convention desires to change the negative narratives about itself and approach DEI from a positive and authentic perspective. In that case, leaders on the national and executive levels must be willing to move beyond what *has been* and what *is* to what *will be* (Williams, 2011). Equally, suppose the SBC desires to repair the relational equity damaged due to the response to women in leadership and racial injustice. In that case, reconciliation must be a part of its DNA and strategy.

Suppose the SBC hopes to improve the lived experiences of African American pastors and leaders. In that case, there must be an awakening, followed

by action to the realities of the challenges of this demographic. Based on the participant's responses, the SBC would be wise to leverage and incorporate a combination of the three strategies listed above, along with the belief that women must be assimilated appropriately and included in leadership on all three levels. More specifically, the research suggested an improved lived experience for African American SBC pastors and leaders requires a “both/and” strategy, not an “either/or” strategy, that correlates with Psalm 89:14 (NIV): “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you.”

A “both/and” strategy incorporates the belief in righteousness and justice. Righteousness is the moral and ethical standard of right and wrong, to which God holds us accountable based on his divine standard. At the same time, justice is the equitable and impartial application of God's moral law in society. Additionally, the data indicated that the SBC needs to move from selective solidarity to holistic solidarity and active reconciliation. Holistic solidarity and active reconciliation require the denomination to be practical and theological in activism and evangelism, protest and prayer, personal piety and social justice, intimacy with Jesus, and proximity to the marginalized (Hill, 2017).

Suppose African American pastors and leaders lived experience of DEI within the convention will move from negative to positive. In that case, the research indicates that the marginalized members must be strategically affirmed, valued, and elevate from being just members of the convention to equal partners with the convention. To improve the lived experiences of African American pastors and leaders, researchers have also suggested that the SBC needs to take active steps towards bridging the DEI gap through a genuine pursuit of conflict resolution, intercultural communication, and willingly sharing the power dynamics with women and other ethnic groups. Each participant agreed that it is imperative that the SBC consistently adhere to its theological practices, principles, and beliefs. The participants also agreed, however, that the convention must willingly acknowledge the lived experiences of all minority groups and embrace the concept of biblical DEI.

My hope for this research is that it will be viewed as not just informative, but also redemptive. A research project that highlights what the SBC can be and where the SBC can go. I do not believe it benefits the kingdom of God when there is a mass exodus of any ethnic group from an evangelical movement. Additionally, I do not believe the kingdom of God benefits when there is a perpetuation of negative and divisive rhetoric that hinders unity within the body of Christ. My hope for this research is that it would help bring awareness to how we can reshape and reframe the reputation of the SBC. I share in the cautious optimism that many participants expressed. I still believe in the sovereignty of God, which is far greater than any political affiliation or unhealthy cultural tensions. My hope and prayer are that we would choose love and not sides so there can be true reconciliation,

Ultimately, the Southern Baptist Convention must be willing to go on a collaborative journey of expanding its current leadership structure and organizational practices and intentionally modifying its current non-inclusive language and tone. In researching this study, I concluded that ultimately, a positive approach to DEI and to improve the lived experiences of African American, there must be a systematic and intentional strategy that will be a part of the future DNA of the Southern Baptist Convention. Such a strategy will require the significant decision-makers on all levels of the convention to be open to incorporating DEI in crucial influential positions. The SBC's ability to positively change the African American experience, along with the experiences of other minorities, will not only help in the longevity of the convention, but also expand the convention's membership and influence exponentially if the key leadership share in their desire for a preferred future for the SBC for generations to come.

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Appendix A

Jeff Wallace Dissertation Methodology Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research focus group interview on perceptions of diversity, equity, and inclusion within the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) compared to women and minority (African American) pastors and leaders.

You were chosen for the interview because you have been a member of the Southern Baptist Convention for at least five years. Please read this form and ask any questions you have before agreeing to be part of the interview.

This interview will be conducted by a researcher named Jeffrey Wallace, a doctoral student at Southeastern University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this interview is to participate in a doctoral qualitative research case study to learn about minority pastors' and leaders lived experiences as a member of the SBC.

Procedures:

If you agree, you will be asked to participate in an audio-recorded zoom interview, lasting approximately 30 minutes.

Voluntary Nature of the Interview:

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. The researcher will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be interviewed. No one at Southeastern University will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the interview. You can change your mind later if you decide to join the interview. If you feel stressed during the interview, you may stop anytime. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Interview:

There are no benefits to you for participating in this interview. There is a minimal risk of psychological stress during this interview. If you feel stressed during the interview, you may stop anytime. The interviewer will use this researcher for his doctoral research.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for participating in this interview.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any interview reports.

Contacts and Questions:

If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can contact Jeffrey Wallace, a doctoral candidate in the Southeastern University Ph.D./DSL programs, at jwallace@seu.edu. The researcher's name is Jeffrey Wallace. The researcher's committee chair is Dr. Josh Henson, Ph.D. You may ask any questions you have now. Alternatively, if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email at jwallace@seu.edu or the instructor at jdhenson@seu.edu.

Statement of Consent:

I am 18 years or older and consent to participate in the interview.

I have read the above information. I have received answers to any questions I have at this time.

Printed Name of
Participant

Participant's Written
Signature

Researcher's Written
Signature

Appendix B

Dissertation Interview Protocol

Interview Purpose: Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this interview. This interview is designed to provide insight to the researcher (Jeff Wallace) on your lived experiences as an African American pastor and leader, who is a member of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). This phenomenological study is guided by four research questions to further explore the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) perception of diversity, equity, and inclusion (D.E.I), compared to African American pastors and leaders lived experiences, within the three levels of the convention: (1) national/executive, (2) state/convention, and (3) local. The four questions for this research are:

RQ1: What are the experiences of African American pastors and leaders on matters of diversity, equity, and inclusion (D.E.I.) in the SBC?

RQ2: What are the experiences of African American pastors and leaders on matters of women in leadership in the SBC?

RQ3: What are the experiences of African American pastors and leaders on matters of racial injustice in the SBC?

RQ4: What are the similarities and differences of African American pastors and leaders lived experiences in the three levels of the SBC related to D.E.I., women in leadership, and racial injustice?

Interview Details: It is estimated that it will take approximately 45-60 minutes to participate in this one-on-one interview. All your responses are anonymous and will be kept confidential.

The first three IQ provide a general overview of each participant's tenure as a member of the SBC, their current role, and what are their initial perceptions of the current direction of the denomination.

Interview Question 1. How long have you been a member of the Southern Baptist Convention?

Interview Question 2: What level(s) of the SBC best describes your position(s): National/Executive, State/Convention, or Local Church?

Interview Question 3: How do you feel about the current direction of the SBC?

Research Question 1.

What are the experiences of African American pastors and leaders on matters of DEI in the SBC?

Interview Question 4: How do you feel the SBC handles matters of diversity?

Interview Question 5: How do you feel the SBC handles matters of equity?

Interview Question 6: How do you feel the SBC handles matters of inclusion?

Research Question 2.

What are the experiences of African American pastors and leaders on matters of women in leadership in the SBC?

Interview Question 7: What are your perceptions of the SBC's official position on women in leadership?

Interview Question 8: How do you feel the SBC responds to the concerns of our female constituents?

Interview Question 9: What are your thoughts regarding women in varying roles of leadership in SBC? (i.e., pastors, deacons, elders, executive directors)

Interview Question 10: Would like to see the SBC make changes to its doctrine and polity (Baptist Faith and Message) on women in leadership? If so, what would they be?

Research Question 3.

What are the experiences of African American pastors and leaders on matters of racial injustice in the SBC?

Interview Question 11: How do you feel the SBC handles matters of racial injustice?

Interview Question 12: How do you feel the SBC responds to your concerns as an African American leader?

Interview Question 13: How do you feel the SBC handled the topic of CRT at the SBC 2022 National Convention?

Interview Question 14: As a follow-up, what are your thoughts about the passed resolutions on CRT and racial injustice at the convention?

Research Question 4.

What are the similarities and differences of African American pastors and leaders lived experiences in the three levels of the SBC related to DEI, women in leadership, and racial injustice?

Interview Question 15: As you consider everything that has been discussion in our conversation, do you feel the experience is similar or different depending on the three levels:

(1) national/executive, (2) state/convention, and (3) local?

Closing Script: Thank you for participating in this qualitative research study. I appreciate your transparency, authenticity, and willingness to participate in this project. Your participation will aid in my ability to provide comprehensive research on how the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) perceives diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), as it relates to matters of women in leadership and racial injustice, in contrast to the lived experiences of minority pastors and leaders.

Appendix C

IRB Approval

SOUTHEASTERN
UNIVERSITY



NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

DATE: September 21, 2022

TO: Jeffrey Wallace, Joshua Henson

FROM: SEU IRB

PROTOCOL TITLE: The Southern Baptist Convention's perception of diversity, equity, and inclusion; Compare to African American pastors and leaders lived experiences

FUNDING SOURCE: NONE

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 22 MT 09

APPROVAL PERIOD: Approval Date: September 21, 2022 Expiration Date: September 20, 2023

Dear Investigator(s),

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human subjects has reviewed the protocol entitled, The Southern Baptist Convention's perception of diversity, equity, and inclusion; Compare to African American pastors and leaders lived experiences. The project has been approved for the procedures and subjects described in the protocol.

Any changes require approval before they can be implemented as part of your study. If your study requires any changes, the proposed modifications will need to be submitted in the form of an amendment request to the IRB to include the following:

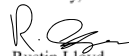
- Description of proposed revisions;
- If applicable*, any new or revised materials;
- If applicable*, updated letters of approval from cooperating institutions

If there are any adverse events and/or any unanticipated problems during your study, you must notify the IRB within 24 hours of the event or problem.

At present time, there is no need for further action on your part with the IRB.

This approval is issued under Southeastern University's Federal Wide Assurance 00006943 with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). If you have any questions regarding your obligations under the IRB's Assurance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,


 Rustin Lloyd
 Chair, Institutional Review Board
 irb@seu.edu