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Sense of Belonging, Achievement Motivation, and Goal Attainment Through the Lens of Transgender Activists

Donella Gray
Walden University

Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

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Donella O. Gray

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Review Committee
Dr. Sandra Street, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Livia Gilstrap, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Nadine Lukes-Dyer, University Reviewer, Psychology Faculty

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

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Abstract

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MS, Walden University, 2017

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Developmental Psychology

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Abstract

It was not known how transgender activists' lived experiences of a sense of belonging influence their motivations to achieve personal goal attainment. Using the theory of achievement motivation, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how transgender activists' lived experiences of a sense of belonging influenced their motivations to achieve personal goal attainment. Two topics guided this study: how transgender activists' community participation influenced their sense of belonging and how transgender activists' lived experiences of a sense of belonging influenced their motivation to achieve and personal goal attainment. Thematic analysis was used to identify five themes collected from interviews with eight participants. The five themes included (a) participating in activities that help other transgender individuals, (b) found people with whom they could relate, (c) increased motivation to achieve from the outcomes of community participation, (d) became confident in themselves and their beliefs, and (e) felt empowered to do things for others. Findings indicated transgender individuals were motivated to achieve their goals when they believed those goals were attainable through activism and their community. Therefore, these findings are crucial in enabling medical leaders, healthcare providers, and other relevant stakeholders to understand, engage, and educate transgender activists on effective techniques to manage their experienced barriers to community belongingness and goal attainment. The findings may be used for positive social change by enhancing such practitioners' abilities to relate with this vulnerable community.

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Dedication

This works is dedicated to my daughter, my parents, all the people who have supported me throughout this journey, and the LGBTQ+ community. Thank you all for inspiring me to see this adventure to the end!

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I would like to thank my research committee, faculty and staff at Walden University that that helped me through this process. I personally would like to acknowledge the following faculty: my Chair, Sandra Street. My Second Committee Member, Livia Gilstrap and, finally, my URR- Nadine Luke's-Dyer.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Transgender individuals commonly experience social injustices, prejudices, discrimination, rejection, social exclusion, and psychological distress in stigmatizing environments (Fabbre & Gaveras, 2020; Moolchaem et al., 2015; Stanton et al., 2017; Wagaman et al., 2019). According to Fabbre and Gaveras (2020), transgender individuals encounter these negative experiences due to violating gender norms, resulting in internal conflict. Hagen et al. (2018) revealed that due to these examples of negative experiences of oppression, discrimination, and stigmatization, transgender individuals might engage in social justice activism. The transgender community experiences these struggles while attempting to achieve many of the same goals as their cisgender counterparts: fulfillment in personal relationships, achievement in education, professional and career success, physical safety and health, and happiness and overall quality of life (Ellis et al., 2016; White Hughto & Reisner, 2018).

As a result, transgender individuals often report poor emotional well-being levels and diminished quality of life (Haimson, 2020; Mirza & Rooney, 2018; Stanton et al., 2017). However, research has shown that having a sense of belonging may yield positive well-being outcomes for individuals in stigmatizing environments (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Chen et al., 2017; Craig et al., 2017). Therefore, this study is significant for exploring transgender activists' lived experiences of a sense of belonging and how this belonging influences their motivations to achieve personal goal attainment.

In this chapter, I start with an introduction to the current chapter. I then discuss a background overview regarding the sense of belonging among transgender activists

aligned with the research problem while providing explanations of the study's purpose, research questions, and frameworks. Further, I discuss an overview of this study's nature, including this study's areas of assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and definitions of key terms. This chapter is then concluded with a summary, highlighting the key details of the chapter.

Background

Various researchers and scholars have revealed negative reports regarding discrimination in the transgender community (e.g., Chen et al., 2017; Muhr et al., 2016; Poteat et al., 2013). Chen et al. (2017) noted that transgender individuals had common experiences of discrimination, rejection, concealment, and alienation. Transgender individuals are more vulnerable, given that they tend to have less social support and acceptance than their cisgender counterparts due to victimization experiences (Ellis et al., 2016; White Hughto & Reisner, 2018). This situation is vital to examine further as research has shown that victimization predicts mental health issues, including suicidal ideation (SI), negatively impacting their goal attainment (Daniels et al., 2019; Hatchel et al., 2019). When compared to other population groups, transgender individuals have reported mental health challenges, especially related to social exclusion and struggles in pursuing their goals, and decreased quality of life (Ellis et al., 2016; White Hughto & Reisner, 2018). Additionally, transgender individuals have limited access to resources especially related to their healthcare needs (Applegarth & Nuttall, 2016; Dowers et al., 2019; Moolchaem et al., 2015; Muhr et al., 2016).

Although past findings on the transgender community, such as those above, are distressing, the examination is sparse of the transgender community's experiences of belonging regarding community participation or how these experiences impact achievement motivation and personal goal attainment (Gilbert, 2019; Nicolazzo, 2017). Information is also lacking on how activist work facilitates a sense of belonging among transgender individuals (Gilbert, 2019; Nicolazzo, 2017). The phenomenon, a sense of belonging, was essential in understanding how transgender activists' motivations to achieve and personal goal attainment could be enhanced and supported.

Many researchers have cited and reported on the victimization and experiences of oppression faced by transgender activists (Hagen et al., 2018; Haimson, 2020). However, scarce research has been found regarding their achievement motivation and personal goal attainment in line with these experiences of oppression and victimization (Hagen et al., 2018; Haimson, 2020). Further, researchers have noted that transgender individuals have vital needs related to a positive self-image, belongingness, esteem, wellbeing, and physiological needs (Haimson, 2020; Stanton et al., 2017). Other researchers have underscored the need to support transgender individuals, increasing their levels of resilience as they face various challenges unique to their population (Wagaman et al., 2019). These needs are vital to ensure better wellbeing and achievement outcomes among transgender activists. Therefore, policymakers may acquire insight into the experiences of sense of belonging and how these experiences affect motivation to achieve and personal goal attainment among transgender activists in the Northeastern United States. Such policymakers may understand how activist work facilitates a sense of belonging among

transgender individuals and how these experiences of belonging influence achievement motivation and personal goal attainment. These findings can also be used to design transgender-inclusive policies and programs to address transgender activists' needs.

Problem Statement

The U.S. transgender community is disproportionately subject to discrimination in life, including in work, education, and healthcare (Chen et al., 2017; Muhr et al., 2016; Poteat et al., 2013). Despite some increased social acceptance and the addition of some legal protections, transgender individuals still suffer mental health issues and suicidality at greater rates than cisgender populations, including lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals (Mirza & Rooney, 2018). Qualitative researchers have focused on the experiences of the transgender community and revealed several factors contributing to these mental health challenges: social exclusion; struggles to pursue academic, professional, and career goals; and various difficulties in the transitioning process (Applegarth & Nuttall, 2016; Dowers et al., 2019; Moolchaem et al., 2015; Muhr et al., 2016).

Robust theorization posits that achievement motivation or an individual's need to meet goals and achieve is an antecedent to goal attainment (McClelland, 2005). Furthermore, research results have shown a sense of belonging as a motivator for personal achievement (Anderson, 2016; Peter et al., 2015). A sense of belonging can be facilitated through community participation and connectedness (Anderson, 2016; Stanton et al., 2017), particularly when the community is social justice-oriented and empowered by activism and advocacy (Hagen et al., 2018; Wagaman et al., 2019). However,

insufficient research has explored how transgender activists experience a sense of belonging from their community participation or how that experience influences achievement motivation and personal goal attainment (Gilbert, 2019; Nicolazzo, 2017).

Therefore, it is not known how transgender activists' lived experiences of a sense of belonging influence their motivations to achieve and personal goal attainment. Gaining a better understanding of how activist work facilitates a sense of belonging among transgender individuals and how their experiences of belonging influence achievement motivation and personal goal attainment may encourage educational, organizational, and healthcare leaders to create spaces to enable success among the transgender community.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how transgender activists' lived experiences of sense of belonging influenced their motivations to achieve and personal goal attainment. The phenomenon of interest in this study was a sense of belonging. According to Yuval-Davis (2011), "belonging involves an emotional or ontological attachment of feeling 'at home' and in a 'safe space' even when these feelings are not warm and positive" (p. 10). The population for this study consisted of transgender individuals participating in activism to promote rights and social justice for transgender individuals.

I sampled from two transgender activism organizations located in the Northeastern United States, conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with eight individuals. The resulting data were analyzed using Braun et al.'s (2014) six-step method for thematic analysis to yield an understanding of the experiences of transgender

activists. The results of this study may inform educational, organizational, healthcare leaders, and policymakers on how they can improve their transgender inclusion and activism initiatives to promote community connectedness and successful goal attainment.

Research Questions

Drawn from the theory of achievement motivation (see Atkinson & Feather, 1966) and the conceptualization of belonging as a fundamental human motivation (see Baumeister & Leary, 1995), I sought to provide answers to the following research questions and fill the current gap in the literature related to transgender activists' sense of belonging and how their experiences of sense of belonging would impact their motivations to achieve and personal goal attainment. These theories underpinned this study and its research questions, which were the following:

CQ. How does transgender activists' community participation influence their sense of belonging?

RQ1. How do transgender activists' lived experiences of a sense of belonging influence their motivation to achieve and personal goal attainment?

Theoretical Framework

With this research, I aimed to answer the research questions about motivation to achieve and personal goal attainment as it related to transgender activists' sense of belonging in California. For this analysis, the research problem was examined through the lens of the theory of achievement motivation (see Atkinson & Feather, 1966) and the conceptualization of belonging as a fundamental human motivation (see Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

According to Atkinson and Feather (1966), the theory of achievement motivation

Views the strength of an individual's goal-directed tendency as jointly determined

by his motives, by his expectations about the consequences of his actions, and by

the incentive values of expected consequences will have wider utility when these

concepts are applied toward other goals. (p. 5)

Achievement motivation has also been referred to as "one's motivation to engage in achievement behaviors, based on the interaction of such parameters as a need for achievement, the expectancy of success, and the incentive value of success" (Harter & Connell, 1984, p. 222). Therefore, achievement motivation can be conceptualized as wanting achievement and expecting and valuing success. This conceptualization of achievement motivation has informed other theories.

Several motivation theorists drew from the theory of achievement motivation, including Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory, which suggests that motivation is regulated by internal cognitive processes and the need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness; Wigfield and Eccles' (2000) expectancy-value theory, which presents the idea that individuals' engage in goal-directed behavior when they believe that the outcomes are valuable; and Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, which indicates that people engage in behaviors based on their perceived ability to succeed. Through the lens of achievement motivation, transgender individuals are motivated to achieve their goals when they feel the goals are attainable; the outcome of attaining the goal is valuable to the greater good; and the goal meets their needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness.

The sense of belonging relates to achievement motivation because it influences the same cognitive and emotional processes underlying motivation (Walton & Cohen, 2007). The sense of belonging as a source of motivation is not a new concept. For example, Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs references the need for love and belonging as the third level of motivation in the pyramid of needs. This sense of belonging is "the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment" (Hagerty et al., 1992, p. 173). Baumeister and Leary (1995) argued that the need to belong is a fundamental characteristic of human motivation. In a comprehensive review of the literature, Baumeister and Leary (1995) discovered that the need to belong met several criteria for fundamental human motivations:

> A fundamental motivation should (a) produce effects readily under all but adverse conditions, (b) have affective consequences, (c) direct cognitive processing, (d) lead to ill effects (such as on health or adjustment) when thwarted, (e) elicit goal-oriented behavior designed to satisfy it (subject to motivational patterns such as object substitutability and satiation), (f) be universal in the sense of applying to all people, (g) not be derivative of other motives, (h) affect a broad variety of behaviors, and (i) have implications that go beyond immediate psychological functioning. (p. 498).

Baumeister and Leary (1995) found that a sense of belonging influenced emotion and cognition that would require continuous, regular connection with the same group or community to elicit feelings of attachment, safety, and concern for one another's

wellbeing. Therefore, I used the theory of achievement motivation and the conceptualization of a sense of belonging to understand transgender individuals' perspectives in the Northeastern United States to gain a robust viewpoint of their sense of belonging. The theory of achievement motivation and the conceptualization of a sense of belonging helped me explain how transgender individuals' involvement in activist groups could foster a sense of belonging and that sense of belonging would influence goal-directed cognitions and behaviors.

Nature of the Study

I explored transgender adults' lived experiences using a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research is appropriate when a researcher seeks to obtain detailed, information-rich data from participants' subjective experiences and perceptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The opposing approach, quantitative research, is used when a researcher seeks to obtain quantifiable data to make inferences about a broader population or establish cause-effect relationships by manipulating variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Based on the definition of quantitative research, a quantitative approach would not have been appropriate for this study, as I was not interested in discerning cause and effect relationships between variables.

The chosen research design for this study was phenomenology. Researchers of the phenomenological research approach seek to explore the lived experiences or essence of an event, activity, or phenomenon occurring (Patton, 2015). In other words, phenomenology researchers focus on pre-reflective accounts of lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research questions for this study aligned with a

phenomenological qualitative approach because they asked about participants' current lived experiences with a particular phenomenon (see Patton, 2015). Specifically, this study was driven by participants' lived experiences of belonging sense that had resulted from participating in a transgender activist group and their perspectives on how belonging had influenced achievement motivation and personal goal attainment. Furthermore, the phenomenological design was chosen because it allowed the participant to elaborate and provide personal accounts of their experiences through in-depth interviewing (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018), which aligned with the purpose of this study.

Ethnographic, grounded theory, narrative, and case study research designs were explored but considered inappropriate for this study. An ethnographic design would not have aligned with this study because it is used to discover meanings attached to cultural practices or describe a cultural phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I did not choose a grounded theory design was not chosen because the purpose of its use was to develop new theories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), which was not the purpose of this study. Narrative research was considered inappropriate because using storytelling would limit my ability to structure the interviews in a way that would elicit specific information about the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), such as its influence on motivation and achievement. Finally, case study research was considered inappropriate for this study because the phenomenon of interest was not bound by time or space (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), as a sense of belonging was a phenomenon shared by individuals in a wide array of contexts.

The population for this study consisted of transgender individuals participating in an activist group to promote rights and social justice for transgender individuals. I used a purposive sampling technique because it was the preferred method for selecting individuals with a specific characteristic or set of characteristics (see Patton, 2015). The sample size for this study was eight participants, who fell within the suggested range of five to 25 participants for phenomenological research (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The target participants for this study must identify as female-to-male (FTM) or male-to-female (MTF) and be in the process of successfully changing the gender marker on their identification cards. The participants also must be 18 years old or older, have a career, work full-time, be part of the military, or go to school. Participants were members of any transgender activist community or group affiliated with the Capital Pride Alliance and Northeast Transgender Alliance. This study was added to the Walden Participation Pool so I could find participants from a pool of people who had made themselves available to participate in studies.

Definitions

The following key terms were used throughout the study. This section explains the definitions of these key terms to clarify the contexts in which they are used.

Achievement motivation: According to Atkinson and Feather (1966), achievement motivation is an individual's measure of goal-directed inclinations driven by their motives, expectations, and encouragement or incentives to achieve these goals. Achievement motivation can also be referred to as "one's motivation to engage in achievement behaviors, based on the interaction of such parameters as [a] need for

achievement, expectancy of success, and the incentive value of success" (Harter &
Connell, 1984, p. 222).

Goal attainment: Goal attainment relates to achieving one's goals, usually
accompanied by goal setting (Rodríguez-Carvajal et al., 2019). According to King
(1994), goal attainment leads to self-satisfaction and enhances one's capacity to achieve
success.

Sense of belonging: According to Yuval-Davis (2011), one's sense of belonging
refers to an "emotional or ontological attachment of feeling 'at home' and in a 'safe space'
even when these feelings are not warm and positive" (p. 10). Researchers have noted how
one's sense of belonging is an antecedent to goal attainment and a motivator for personal
achievement (Anderson, 2016; Peter et al., 2015).

Transgender activists: Transgender activists are defined as transgendered
individuals who engage in acts of activism to advocate transgender rights (Shapiro,
2004). Transgender activists employ techniques of motivational framing to promise
transgendered individuals "a more permanent emotional resolution" to their feelings and
experiences of shame, fear, powerlessness, alienation, and inauthenticity" (Schrock et al.,
2004, p. 61).

Transgender individuals: Transgender individuals have a gender identity the
opposite of their birth-assigned sexes and genders (Schrock et al., 2004). Transgender
individuals may also include those not exclusively masculine or feminine (Shapiro,
2004).

Assumptions

Assumptions refer to statements accepted by a researcher as fact or truth, essential to facilitate research (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). For this study, the first assumption was that the information gathered from interviews would help explore and determine transgender activists' community participation and a sense of belonging experienced by transgender activists, including how these experiences impacted their achievement motivation and personal goal attainment.

A second assumption for my study was that the participating transgender activists would provide complete and honest responses during in-depth, semi-structured interviews (see Engward & Davis, 2015). I also assumed that the selected participants would adhere to the research protocols and requirements and that they would remain transparent about their lived experiences of a sense of belonging. Another assumption of this study was that the engaged participants were without bias; these assumptions were essential in deeming the gathered data as precise, valid, and truthful.

During the in-depth, semistructured interviews, I assumed that the participants would provide vital information and be able to explain themselves freely and without fear. Given this research topic's sensitivity, I remained just, transparent, and free from prejudice, unbiased, considerate, and friendly towards the participants (see Patton, 2015). Additionally, I assumed transgender activist participants had prior experiences of community participation and a sense of belonging because of their community participation so they could duly and accurately answer the in-depth interview questions, which was sufficient to answer the research questions of this study.

Scope and Delimitations

The research problem I addressed in the study is that the transgender community experiences challenge unique to their population while attempting to achieve their goals. This problem is crucial to address, given that the transgender community has the same goals as their cisgender counterparts, including fulfillment in personal relationships, achievement in education, professional and career success, physical safety and health, happiness, and overall quality of life (Ellis et al., 2016; White Hughto & Reisner, 2018). However, the transgender population group faces additional challenges such as social alienation, inauthenticity, struggles to pursue academic, professional, and career goals, and various difficulties in the transitioning process (Applegarth & Nuttall, 2016; Dowers et al., 2019; Moolchaem et al., 2015; Muhr et al., 2016).

The qualitative research design determined the scope of this study. The delimitations were transgender activists in the Northeastern United States, including the Capital Pride Alliance and Northeast Transgender Alliance. Given that the recruitment procedures occurred via email and social media (Facebook), one delimitation that needed to be considered was that prospective participants must have access to the Internet. Additionally, participants must be members of the transgender activism organizations in the Northeastern United States, including the Capital Pride Alliance and Northeast Transgender Alliance. The participants of this study were contacted via email, along with the consent of the gatekeepers of the transgender activism organizations. All participation was voluntary.

Limitations

The limitations in the study entailed the flaws and inadequacies that could be a result of various phenomena, such as insufficient resources, small sample size, and chosen methodologies. For one, this study had limitations and challenges, especially due to the exposure of a community underserved and underresearched and a qualitative research methodology. The participants involved in the study might not be an accurate representation of the transgender community because of purposive sampling; participants were recruited based on specific criteria.

I examined the experiences of transgender activists part of transgender activism organizations in the Northeastern United States, including the Capital Pride Alliance and Northeast Transgender Alliance. Thus, the findings might not apply to transgender activists in other areas of the country; this study might not apply to transgender activists who would form part of transgender activism organizations outside of the Northeastern United States. These findings might not apply to transgender activists who did not belong to the Capital Pride Alliance and Northeast Transgender Alliance.

Furthermore, qualitative researchers use small sample sizes, limiting the generalizability of results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative researchers do not allow the generalization of findings of a diverse population, given that they are not all part of the sample size (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There were challenges in recruiting an equal number of FTM and MTF participants that might have influenced the themes revealed regarding transgender lived experiences. Another potential challenge was that transgender individuals' levels of engagement in advocacy might have differed depending

on their levels of *outness* (see Goldberg, 2018), possibly creating variations in participants' lived experiences of a sense of belonging.

Significance

The study may fill a gap in the literature by exploring how transgender activists' lived experiences of a sense of belonging had influenced their motivations to achieve personal goal attainment. Past studies on transgender individuals have shown the community's experiences with being subjected to prejudices, stereotypes, and limited access to resources (Applegarth & Nuttall, 2016; Dowers et al., 2019; Moolchaem et al., 2015; Muhr et al., 2016). Transgender researchers continue to focus on the injustices that transgender individuals experience without considering how transgender activists experience a sense of belonging from their community participation or how that experience influences achievement motivation and personal goal attainment (Gilbert, 2019; Nicolazzo, 2017).

Providing a better understanding of how activist work facilitates a sense of belonging among transgender individuals and how their experiences of belonging influence achievement motivation and personal goal attainment may contribute to positive social change. This study may encourage leaders to create spaces that enable success among the transgender community. I found the research of Goldberg (2018) supportive of my assertion, noting that transgender-inclusive policies and support would lead to an enhanced sense of belonging among the transgender community. The results of this study may also have implications for practice by informing educational, organizational, and healthcare leaders. They can learn how to improve their transgender

inclusion and activism initiatives to promote community connectedness and successful goal attainment.

Furthermore, there is limited evidence and insufficient knowledge on the experiences of a sense of belonging experienced by transgender activists and how that experience influences achievement motivation and personal goal attainment (Gilbert, 2019; Nicolazzo, 2017). This issue is vital to address because transgender activists face unique challenges and barriers to goal achievement, such as social exclusion, struggles to pursue academic, professional, and career goals, various difficulties in the transitioning process, and roles in society (Applegarth & Nuttall, 2016; Dowers et al., 2019; Moolchaem et al., 2015; Muhr et al., 2016). Therefore, this study may provide further understanding and awareness of the lived experiences of a sense of belonging among transgender activists. The findings of this study may contribute to advancing knowledge in the discipline of developmental psychology, especially as transgender activists face various barriers and challenges in achieving their goals that are left unaddressed (White Hughto & Reisner, 2018). More effective programs and transgender-inclusive policies may be developed by addressing and promoting community connectedness and successful goal attainment among transgender activists.

This study is also significant given its potential to advance the practice of developmental psychology. The findings of this study may help provide more in-depth information on how to address the needs of transgender activists, especially about their motivations to achieve and personal goal attainment, than before. Medical clinicians, healthcare leaders, and mental health practitioners may use the findings to develop more

targeted initiatives and interventions effective in equipping and supporting goal attainment and community connectedness of transgender activists in the Northeastern United States.

Furthermore, I addressed the underresearched area of transgender activism and the lived experiences of the sense of belonging of this population group. Past literature has shown that transgender community belongingness is a vital factor in improving the wellbeing, achievement, and mental health of transgender individuals (Barr et al., 2016; Mirza & Rooney, 2018). This information is vital because transgender individuals still suffer mental health issues and suicidality at greater rates than cisgender populations, including LGB individuals (Mirza & Rooney, 2018). The findings derived from this study may help provide increased advocacy and awareness beneficial for mental health service providers and social work programs, highlighting the need to promote community connectedness among transgender individuals. The results can also assist policymakers in formulating transgender-inclusive policies to increase a sense of belonging among the transgender community.

According to Gilbert (2019) and Nicolazzo (2017), most research on the transgender community has focused on understanding transgender community belongingness and wellbeing among transgender individuals. However, scarce research has been found regarding how transgender activists' lived experiences of a sense of belonging influence their motivations to achieve and personal goal attainment (Gilbert, 2019; Nicolazzo, 2017). The findings of this study may reduce the gap in the literature on this topic of a sense of belonging and how such belonging influences transgender

activists' motivations to achieve and personal goal attainment. The primary objective of this study was to understand the lived experiences of a sense of belonging among transgender activists and how these experiences influence their motivation to achieve and personal goal attainment. Therefore, these findings are crucial in enabling medical leaders, healthcare providers, and other relevant stakeholders to understand, engage, and educate transgender activists on effective techniques to manage their experienced barriers to community belongingness and goal attainment (Fabbre & Gaveras, 2020; Hagen et al., 2018).

Summary

In this qualitative phenomenological research study, I aimed to explore how transgender activists' lived experiences of a sense of belonging had influenced their motivation to achieve and personal goal attainment in the Northeastern United States. This chapter introduced the topic, including a comprehensive background of the topic under examination. The introduction also discussed the phenomenon of interest in this study, a sense of belonging, and stated this study's problem statement, research questions, nature, purpose, and significance. The next chapter discusses the current literature that has established and explored the subject of a sense of belonging among transgender activists. Chapter 2 also contains past literature on the relevance of the problem based on the theory of achievement motivation (see Atkinson & Feather, 1966) and the conceptualization of belonging as a fundamental human motivation (see Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Chapter 2: The Literature Review

The U.S. transgender community is discriminated against in various aspects of life, including work, education, and healthcare (Chen et al., 2017; Muhr et al., 2016; Poteat et al., 2013). Transgender individuals still suffer mental health issues and suicidality more than cisgender individuals and LGB individuals despite some increased social acceptance and the addition of some legal protections (Mirza & Rooney, 2018). Several factors contribute to transgender mental health challenges, including social exclusion, struggles to pursue academic, professional and career goals, and numerous difficulties in the transitioning process (Applegarth & Nuttall, 2016; Dowers et al., 2019; Moolchaem et al., 2015; Muhr et al., 2016). Fulfillment in personal relationships, achievement in education, professional and career success, physical safety and health, happiness, and overall quality of life are goals the transgender community attempts to achieve while experiencing these struggles (Ellis et al., 2016; White Hughto & Reisner, 2018).

Achievement motivation (i.e., an individual's need to meet goals and achieve) is a precursor to goal attainment (McClelland, 2005). Research results have also shown that a sense of belonging motivates personal achievement (Peter et al., 2015). A sense of belonging can also be eased through community participation and connectedness, especially when the community is social justice-oriented and empowered by activism and advocacy (Hagen et al., 2018; Wagaman et al., 2019). An inadequate amount of research has explored how transgender activists experience a sense of belonging from their community participation or how that experience influences achievement motivation and

personal goal attainment (Gilbert, 2019). It is unknown how transgender activists' lived experiences of belonging enable a sense of belonging among transgender individuals. Knowing how their experiences of belonging influence achievement motivation and personal goal attainment may encourage professionals and leaders to create spaces to enable the transgender community to succeed.

The theoretical framework I chose to guide this qualitative research methodology study was the theory of achievement motivation, as discussed later in this chapter. As discussed, the conceptual framework chosen was the conceptualization of belonging as a fundamental human motivation. Chapter 2 presents a review of literature based on the purpose of the study. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how transgender activists' lived experiences of a sense of belonging influenced their motivations to achieve and personal goal attainment. The topics discussed include transgender individuals, transgender community, poverty, lack of legal protection and transgender rights, discrimination, stigma, violence, harassment, mental health issues and suicidality in transgender individuals, transgender community support, and transgender individuals' sense of belonging. Goal attainment and achievement motivation are discussed, along with transgender activism/advocacy.

Literature Search Strategy

The following keywords were used to search for articles related to the purpose of the study in the search engine, Google Scholar: *transgender*, *transgender individuals*, *community*, *social acceptance*, *legal protections*, *mental health issues*, *suicidal*, *experiences*, *involvement*, *marginalization*, *stigma*, *activism*, *inclusion*, *discrimination*,

sense of belonging, *achievement*, *motivation*, *goal attainment*, and *activism*. The following databases were used to conduct these searches: ERIC, Sagepub, Taylor and Francis Online, PsycNet, HeinOnline, Research Gate, ScienceDirect, Elsevier, and Wiley Online Library. Most scholarly peer-reviewed articles used in this literature review were published within the last 5 years.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical framework for this study was the theory of achievement motivation. The theory of achievement motivation views the strength of an individual's goal-directed tendency as determined by their motives, expectations about the consequences of their actions, and by the incentive values of expected consequences with wider values when applied toward other goals (Atkinson & Feather, 1966). Murry (1938) first popularized the concept of achievement motivation, and McClelland (1961) and Atkinson and Feather (1966) concentrated on the study of achievement motivation in later years (Sarangi, 2015). Atkinson and Feather developed the theory of achievement motivation, and McClelland subsequently popularized the concept of achievement motivation (Nazir et al., 2019). According to Sarangi (2015), the theory of achievement motivation is concerned with the interaction of personality and the immediate environment. This interaction acts as a contemporary factor of aspirations, efforts, and persistence when individuals expect performance to be evaluated as a success or failure concerning some standard of excellence.

The first inclusive definition of achievement motivation is attributed to McClelland and Winter (1969). These researchers described a relatively stable

predisposition of the individual as representing an important achievement factor (Ružić &

Štefanec, 2016). According to Smith et al. (2020), one of the recent definitions of

achievement motivation is the determined desire to achieve a high level of performance

in every activity. Thus, it is a form of motivation satisfying high standards of

performance characterized by a competitive drive. Another two definitions of

achievement motivation are individuals increasing efforts in all activities or keeping

efforts as high as possible. Achievement motivation consists of various and complex

evaluations, estimates, inferences, values, standards, sets of assumptions, and emotional

reactions that may be unreasonable, flawed, and contradictory (Smith et al., 2020).

     Atkinson and Feather (1966) stated in their theory of achievement motivation that

a person's achievement-orientation behavior was based on the individual's predisposition

to achievement, the probability of success, and the individual's perception of the value of

the task. Kubíková and Pavelková (2016) stated that the theory of achievement

motivation was focused on two motives: chance to achieve success and fear of failure. In

their theory of achievement motivation, Atkinson and Feather said that individuals

derived energy from two motivation sources to reach their goals (Nazir et al., 2019).

These two motivation sources included extrinsic motivators and intrinsic motivators.

Intrinsic motivation is when an individual is motivated to engage in a behavior to do

something without any obvious external rewards (i.e., the desire of an individual to

complete or fulfill a task because of internal motivators, such as personal goals).

Extrinsic motivation is a behavior driven by external rewards, such as money, fame,

grades, and praise. Extrinsic motivation refers to an individual's desire to complete or fulfill a task because of external motivators (Nazir et al., 2019).

Several researchers have used the theory of achievement motivation when studying the motivation to achieve in individuals, and achievement motivation has been studied in both business and educational settings (Smith, 2015). McClelland (1961) researched the achievement behaviors of entrepreneurs and related findings to economic development. The researcher concluded that levels of achievement motivation displayed by leaders in business directly affected the economic growth of a nation. Research in business and industry showed that it was possible to increase the need to achieve in adults over a short amount of time (McClelland & Winter, 1969).

Successive studies found that levels of achievement motivation could be increased in educational settings and are predictors of student success (Smith, 2015). Koca (2016) reviewed literature that focused on the importance of adolescents' inspiration to learn in their academic and social capabilities, the effects of the standard of teacher-student relations on their inspiration to learn, and the implications of students who exhibited poor motivation in the early school years. The theory of achievement motivation was one of the theories I used to provide the foundation of the study's rationale.

High (2019) investigated the motivational structure of Chemistry Olympiad summer camp participants. The researcher asked participants to complete a combination of qualitative and quantitative questionnaires. The questionnaires included the Motivational Induction Method, the Achievement Motivation questionnaire, and the Learning Motivation questionnaire. The last-mentioned questionnaire was based on

Atkinson and Feather's (1966) theory of achievement motivation and exposed that

participants' need to prevent failure was less than the authors anticipated, with

participants indicating they were unafraid to fail

Conducting this study through the lens of the theory of achievement motivation

was the right theoretical framework for this study. Atkinson and Feather (1966) stated in

their theory of achievement motivation that a person's achievement-orientation behavior

is based on three parts: the individual's predisposition to achievement, the probability of

success, and the individual's perception of the value of the task (Bansal & Pahwa, 2015).

Transgender individuals are motivated to achieve their goals when they feel the goals are

attainable; the outcome of attaining the goal is valuable to the greater good; and the goal

meets their need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the conceptualization of belonging

as a fundamental human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The idea of a need to

belong has deep roots in social psychology (Over, 2016). Maslow ranked love and

belongingness in the middle of his hierarchy of needs (Over, 2016). Maslow emphasized

that self-actualization entailed a sense of "being-in-the-world-with-others" (Bland, &

DeRobertis, 2017, p. 20), interindividual, community feeling, and interest in making

changes for an ideal society. Baumeister and Leary (1995) provided the clearest

formulation of this need (Over, 2016). Baumeister and Leary argued that the need to

belong was a fundamental characteristic of human motivation. Through a comprehensive

review of the literature, Baumeister and Leary discovered that the need to belong met

several criteria for fundamental human motivations. A fundamental motivation should (a) under all but adverse conditions produce effects readily, (b) have affecting repercussions, (c) direct cognitive processing, (d) lead to ill effects when upset, (e) provoke goal-oriented behavior designed to please it, (f) be general, (g) not be imitative of other reasons, (h) affects an extensive diversity of behaviors, and (i) have implications that go beyond instantaneous psychological functioning. Baumeister and Leary also found that a sense of belonging influenced emotion and cognition, requiring continuous, regular connection with the same group or community to provoke feelings of attachment, safety, and concern for one another's well-being. Baumeister and Leary hypothesized that human beings had a pervasive need to belong and imitated their needs to have constructive interactions with others.

There were no articles found on the conceptualization of belonging of transgender individuals. The literature reviewed included different types of human beings, such as patients with chronic illnesses; thus, the conceptualization of belonging could be based on all types of human beings. Peoples et al. (2018) explored how people with advanced cancer experienced occupational engagement and perceived quality of life, which pointed to the importance of doing things with and for others. Those findings resonate with the theoretical conceptualization of belonging within occupational science. Peoples et al. then attempted to understand how the quality of life of people with advanced cancer who lived at home was associated with belonging, as mediated through occupation. The researchers generated data through semistructured interviews and photo-elicitation from nine participants. The researchers found that they associated the upholding of engagement in

careers to empower a sense of belonging with quality of life. Social belonging might become especially important when living with advanced cancer, and isolation might create a barrier to feeling a sense of belonging.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) defined belonging as a need to develop significant, consistent interpersonal relationships within a group. The researchers argued that if one felt a sense of belonging anywhere, it would satisfy the need to belong or increase the likelihood of one feeling a sense of belonging in other settings. The conceptualization of a sense of belonging explains how transgender individuals' involvement in activist groups promotes a sense that they belong, and that sense of belonging influences goal-directed cognitions and behaviors.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables

In this qualitative phenomenological study I aimed to explore how transgender activists' lived experiences of a sense of belonging influenced their motivations to achieve and personal goal attainment. The literature review focuses on transgender individuals and what transgender individuals must struggle with daily. A sense of belonging is a focus point, as the feeling of belonging motivates individuals to achieve and attain their goals. Lastly, transgender activists are reviewed.

Transgender Individuals

Historically, transgender individuals have been a part of all cultures, yet the appearance of and support for transgender individuals in the Western world have only become prominent in recent decades (Wylie et al., 2016). Transgender or trans is described as an incongruence between an individual's gender assigned at birth and their

current gender identities or their sense of being male, female, both, or neither (Cicero et al., 2019). In other words, transgender people experience a degree of gender incongruence between their sense of their gender (gender identity) and the sex assigned to them at birth (Winter, Diamond, et al., 2016). Some transgender individuals choose to undergo medical treatment to align their physical appearances with their gender identities (Safer & Tangpricha, 2019a). The transgender population is a culturally diverse population across the U.S. population (Crissman et al., 2017).

Estimates suggest a transgender identity prevalence of 0.3% to 0.5%, although accurate data concerning the size of the transgender population globally are lacking (Reisner, Biello, et al., 2016). Crissman et al. (2017) estimated the proportion of U.S. transgender adults to compare the transgender and nontransgender populations' characteristics. The results showed that transgender individuals made up 0.53% of the population and were more likely to be non-White (40% vs. 27.3%), to live below the poverty line (26% vs. 15.5%), to be married (50.5% vs. 47.7%), to live in a rural area (28.7% vs. 22.6%), to be employed (54.3% vs. 57.7%). Compared with nontransgender individuals, they were less likely to attend college (35.6% vs. 56.6%). According to Safer and Tangpricha (2019b), studies estimated that about 0.6% of U.S. adults or 1.4 million individuals were transgender.

Transgender individuals face social stigma relating to minority stress; they have experienced discrimination and face physical and psychological violence (Flores, 2015). These experiences show relationships with suicidality among transgender people. Miller and Grollman (2015) suggested that gender-nonconforming trans individuals faced more

discrimination and were more likely to engage in self-harming behaviors than trans individuals who were gender-confirming. Nascent epidemiologic research suggested a high burden of gender-based violence among trans populations, with an estimation that ranged from 7% to 89% and between 2008 and 2016; moreover, a total of 165 trans persons were reported to be murdered in the United States (Wirtz et al., 2020). Emerging research also suggested that transgender individuals might experience worse overall health than their cisgender counterparts (Griffin et al., 2019). For example, a higher burden of disability and mental/chronic health conditions among transgender respondents than cisgender respondents were found in a national survey of over 2,000 transgender individuals (Griffin et al., 2019).

Transgender individuals also face an uncertain legal climate, and efforts to include gender identity in politics have been met with successes and failures (Flores, 2015). Policies are often developed in the legislative process, directly involving public opinion (Flores, 2015). Flores (2015) examined public attitudes about transgender rights in the United States and found that respondents more informed about transgender individuals tended to have more supportive attitudes toward transgender individuals than others. Harrison and Michelson (2019) explored how genders, attitudes about traditional gender roles, and threats to masculinity and femininity affected U.S. participants' support for transgender rights. The researchers found that women were more supportive of transgender rights than men. Attitudes toward transgender individuals and rights were strongly connected with the way people thought and felt about their own gender identities and expectations of gender performance. Bowers and Whitley (2020) evaluated how

individuals' beliefs about the biological origin of a person's transgender status influenced support for transgender rights and found that believing transgender status was correlated with increasing support for transgender rights.

Transgender Community

In countries like the United States, the transgender community has grown in prominence (Reisner, Vetters, et al., 2015). Due to long-standing marginalization, the transgender community is underserved and faces numerous social and health challenges, such as brutality, stigma, prejudice, social rejection, and insufficient specialized healthcare facilities (Chrisler et al., 2016; Sweileh, 2018). The transgender community also has higher than average rates of smoking, drug and alcohol abuse, HIV infection, and suicide attempts than other communities (Chrisler et al., 2016). According to the Human Rights Campaign, the challenges the transgender community face include lack of legal protection, poverty, harassment, stigma, antigender violence, barriers to health care, and identity documents (Tilak & Singh, 2019).

The transgender community is extremely diverse; even though the visibility of the transgender community has multiplied, the challenges and difficulties they face remain prevalent within society (Tilak & Singh, 2019). There are great efforts in many developed countries to recognize the human rights of transgender individuals (Sweileh, 2018). Meaningful engagement and involvement of transgender individuals are required to understand the global health burden and needs of transgender communities (Reisner, Keatley, et al., 2016).

Part of the agenda for action was to get researchers and academics engaged in research activities relating to health needs and the challenges transgender individuals face (Sweileh, 2018). According to Sweileh (2018), the scientific community can endorse the transgender community in several ways. Sweileh gave one example of such endorsement as *The Lancet*, which published a series of statements and reports on transgender health to enhance awareness and encourage better health services for the transgender community. Another example is specific journals launched to endorse the health and human rights of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (or questioning; LGBTQ) community (Sweileh, 2018).

Poverty

Transgender people are more likely to be affected by poverty than nontransgender individuals (Johnson, 2015). In 2008, a national survey conducted in the United States found that transgender individuals were four times more likely to live in poverty than the general population (Meerwijk & Sevelius, 2017). Over the years, researchers have shown that LGBT individuals face significant economic inequalities compared to heterosexual individuals (Badgett et al., 2019).

Even though previous research documented poverty rates among LGBT individuals and showed evidence of economic disparities for LGBT individuals, most studies could not fully describe the entire U.S. LGBT community (Badgett et al., 2019). Badgett et al. (2019) examined the poverty rates separately for cisgender straight men and women, cisgender gay men and lesbians, cisgender bisexual men and women, and transgender individuals. The results showed that poverty rates differed by sexual

orientation and gender identity. LGBT individuals had a much higher poverty rate than cisgender straight individuals (21.6% vs. 15.7%); among LGBT individuals, transgender individuals showed especially high poverty rates (29.4%). Crissman et al. (2017) calculated the percentage of U.S. adults who identified as transgender to compare the characteristics of the transgender and nontransgender individuals, finding that transgender individuals were more likely to be below the poverty line (26.0% vs. 15.5%).

Carpenter et al. (2020) provided the first large-scale evidence on transgender status, gender identity, and socioeconomic outcomes in the United States. The researchers used representative data from 35 states in the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. More than 2,100 respondents between the ages of 18 and 64 identified as transgender who completed the survey. The results showed that the individuals who identified as transgender were significantly less likely to be college-educated and have significantly lower employment rates, lower household incomes, higher poverty rates, and self-worth than individuals who did not identify as transgender. According to the U.S. Transgender Survey (USTS), nearly one-third (29%) of respondents had lived in poverty, more than double the poverty ratio amongst the overall U.S. adult population (12%). The survey also revealed that respondents living in poverty (82%) were more likely to take steps to avoid discrimination.

Lack of Legal Protection and Transgender Rights

The legal protection of transgender individuals has been an contentious issue for a long period, with courts often pathologizing or refusing the recognition of transgender identities (Vogler, 2019). Despite the increase in legal protection rights for LGB

individuals, few laws prevent transgender people from discrimination, such as employment and housing discrimination (Hill et al., 2017). Even though international and regional resolutions call for the legal protection of transgender people, states still do not meet these obligations (Lanham et al., 2019). The lack of legal protection increases the challenges transgender individuals face, with most experiencing harassment on the job, struggling to get appropriate health care, and being excessively impacted by poverty.

There is a lack of legal protections for transgender individuals, and they encounter negative experiences when they use legal services. The country's foremost social justice policy advocacy association is the National Center for Transgender Equality, which is committed to halting discrimination and violence against transgender people (James et al., 2016). The National Center for Transgender Equality made the 2015 USTS report. The USTS is the largest ever survey examining the lives of transgender people in the United States, with 27,715 respondents (James et al., 2016). According to the USTS, 12% of the sample used legal services in 2015. Those who did not use legal services that year were afraid of mistreatment as transgender people (James et al., 2016). Of all the respondents, 57% who used legal services believed that the employees knew or thought they were transgender, and 6% of those respondents were denied equal treatment or service, harassed, or attacked because they were transgender.

Numerous states and the federal government have suggested or legislated laws that allow residents to discriminate against LGBTQ individuals (Pomeranz, 2018). For instance, Arkansas's Intrastate Commerce Improvement Act of 2015 prevents or forbids local governments from endorsing civil rights protections for LGBTQ individuals. States

should endorse laws that increase protections for LGBTQ individuals because state laws, such as Arkansas, weaken local control, damage the economy, and create injustice that harms LGBTQ individuals (Pomeranz, 2018). Arkansas's preventative legislation also undermines other public health efforts aimed at addressing health inequalities. Pomeranz (2018) recommended that states should avoid endorsing discriminatory legislation regardless of its legality and that Arkansas, Act 137 should be regarded as unconstitutional.

The decision by the U.S Supreme court in *Obergefell v. Hodges* establishing marriage equal opportunity for same-sex couples marked a key shift in recognizing LGB individuals as central to the makeup of American society (Barry et al., 2016). Obergefell also added the "T" to "LGB." An equal protection challenge was filed by a transgender female to a department of the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) in January 2015, which excluded several medical conditions closely associated with transgender individuals (Barry et al., 2016). The lawyers for the plaintiff argued that transgender people were a suspect or quasi-suspect class entitled to heightened scrutiny, further arguing that the ADA's transgender exclusions were unconstitutional no matter what level of scrutiny applied because the moral attitude against transgender people was not a legitimate basis for lawmaking. According to Barry et al. (2016), this equal protection challenge paves the way for the extension of disability rights protections to transgender people under the Rehabilitation Act, Fair Housing Act, and state anti-disability discrimination laws that reflect the ADA while marking a new break for equality law.

Lawmakers face the need for a successful equal protection challenge beyond disability laws that single out transgender people (Barry et al., 2016). Kimberly (2016) attempted to understand the nature of the general population's attitudes toward transgender rights separate from gays and lesbians. According to Kimberly, the issues related to the transgender community had seldom been teased apart from LGB concerns, which was especially problematic due to the delayed passing of legislation to protect transgender legal rights compared to those of various sexual orientations. Kimberly used a multiple-segment factorial vignette to clarify the similarities and differences in political attitudes about sexual orientation and gender identity. The results showed how attitudes about legal rights differed between groups and how stable the opinions were for policies to support transgender individuals. Even though researchers, politicians, and advocates have progressively explored the progression and implementation of programs to protect LGBT, exclusively focusing on sexual orientation policies does not include the whole LGBT community (Kimberly, 2016).

The need to support transgender rights has never been more urgent or more important than today (Powell et al., 2016). LGBTQ individuals and their allies have been fighting for decades for public approval and legal recognition of their rights, and this recognition depends on gaining the support of other members of the public (Michelson, 2019). According to Powell et al. (2016), supporters of transgender rights frequently rely on the "born that way" arguments. These arguments claim that gender identity is inborn, unchanging over time, and not associated with choice (Powell et al., 2016). The

researchers stated that those arguments were vulnerable to attack on several grounds and that stronger support for transgender rights would develop from human rights arguments.

Both cisgender and transgender individuals deserve to live and flourish in their communities with the freedom to learn, work, love, and play and build lives connected with others at home, in the workplace, and in public settings without fearing for their safety and survival (Powell et al., 2016). Powell et al. (2016) stated that associated choices about the expression of gender must be supported by laws and policies. The researchers concluded that transgender individuals' best arguments must rely on the concept of undisputable human rights, including the right to live safely and without fear of discrimination.

Discrimination, *Stigma*, *Violence*, *and Harassment*

Numerous transgender people live on the borders of a society facing stigma, discrimination, and harassment (Winter, Settle, et al., 2016). Downing and Przedworski (2018) agreed by stating that transgender people had experienced significant interpersonal, cultural, and structural discrimination, stigma, and harassment. In an European-wide survey, 54% of transgender participants reported having personally felt discriminated against or harassed because of being seen as transgender (Granberg et al., 2020). In another survey of 6,436 transgender individuals from the United States, 50% reported experiencing harassment at work, and 44% reported having experienced hiring discrimination based on their identity (Granberg et al., 2020). The National Transgender Discrimination Survey confirmed that transgender individuals had faced persistent violence, harassment, and discrimination (Liu & Wilkinson, 2017).

Transgender or gender nonconforming individuals experience widespread discrimination and health inequities (Reisner, Vetters, et al., 2015). Massachusetts law has protected against discrimination based on gender identity in employment, housing, credit, public education, and hate crimes since 2012 (Reisner, Vetters, et al., 2015). However, this law does not protect against discrimination in public accommodations. Reisner, Hughto, et al. (2015) examined the frequency and health associate of public accommodations discrimination against gender minority transgender or gender nonconforming individual adults in Massachusetts. A total of 452 respondents completed a one-time, electronic survey assessing demographics, health, health care utilization, and discrimination in public accommodations venues. The results showed that 65% of respondents reported public accommodations discrimination in the past 12 months. The five most prevalent discrimination settings consisted of transportation (36%), retail (28%), restaurants (26%), public gatherings (25%), and health care (24%).

Reisner, Hughto, et al. (2015) concluded by stating that discrimination in public accommodations was common and was associated with unfavorable health outcomes among transgender and gender nonconforming adults in Massachusetts. Similarly, Casey et al. (2019) examined reported experiences of discrimination against LGBTQ individuals in the United States. Data were collected from a national, probability-based survey and included 487 LGBTQ individuals. Reported experiences of discrimination in health care and several other areas related to their sexual orientations and gender identities were calculated. The findings showed that interpersonal discrimination was common for LGBTQ individuals, which included insults (57%), microaggressions (53%),

sexual harassment (51%) violence (51%), and harassment regarding bathroom use (34%). Some LGBTQ individuals (18%) also reported avoiding health care due to probable discrimination, and 16% of LGBTQ individuals reported discrimination in health care encounters.

Casey et al. (2019) concluded by stating that discrimination was widely experienced by LGBTQ individuals across health care and other domains. Similarly, Puckett et al. (2020) examined the types of discrimination faced by transgender and gender diverse individuals and the associations with signs of depression and anxiety. Most participants (76.1%) reported discrimination over the past year, and more exposure to discrimination was related to heightened signs of depression and anxiety. The researchers concluded that many transgender individuals would encounter discrimination, which was associated with greater psychological distress.

Transgender people experience excessive levels of discrimination, violence, and high levels of safety concerns (Veldhuis et al., 2018). Nearly 60% of U.S. transgender individuals in have experienced violence or harassment (Azagba et al., 2019). National coalitions of antiviolence projects have reported that transgender women of color have accounted for 67% of all hate-motivated homicides of LGBT individuals in 2013 (Reisner, Biello, et al., 2016). According to the U.S. National Transgender Discrimination Survey, 41% of Black transgender individuals were incarcerated because of antitrans bias compared with 4% of White respondents (Reisner, Biello, et al., 2016).

Despite the many legislative advances in transgender rights, this crisis has been ongoing in the United States (Reisner, Biello, et al., 2016). Griner et al. (2020) explored

the rates of violence experienced by transgender students ($n = 204$) compared with male ($n = 27,322$) and female ($n = 55.012$) college students. The results showed that after adjusting for individual factors, transgender had higher odds of experiencing all nine types of violence compared with males and higher odds of experiencing eight types of violence than females. Sexual victimization, including attempted sexual penetration, sexual penetration without consent, and being in a sexually abusive relationship, were the highest experienced by transgender students (Griner et al., 2020).

LGBTQ employees experience sexual harassment at work (Brassel et al., 2019). Brassel et al. (2019) showed that compared to lesbian, gay, or cisgender heterosexual targets, participants perceived harassment toward transgender targets as less acceptable when they viewed it as more motivated by power and prejudice and less by attraction. Participants perceived sexual harassment toward female targets as less acceptable when they viewed it as more motivated by prejudice compared to male targets. Finally, perceiving the harassment as less acceptable was associated with recommending that the target report the harassment (Brassel et al., 2019). Veldhuis et al. (2018) conducted an Internet-based mixed-methods study among a nationwide suitability sample ($N = 242$). The goal was to understand better transgender, genderqueer, and gender-nonconforming individuals' worries about and experiences with discrimination, violence, and hate crimes after the 2016 presidential election. The results showed that respondents reported high levels of election-related concerns about security and discrimination since the election. Most respondents had been directly exposed to hate speech and violence. The stress that

occurs from these high levels of violence and discrimination has significant effects on mental and physical health (Veldhuis et al., 2018).

Mental Health Issues and Suicidality

As explained by the minority stress model, transgender and gender nonconforming individuals experience disproportionate rates of discrimination, harassment, violence, and sexual assault that trigger negative mental health issues (Carmel & Erickson-Schroth, 2016). As shown, transgender individuals experience momentous interpersonal, structural discrimination and stigma, but little is known about the health of transgender individuals (Downing & Przedworski, 2018). Researchers have evaluated transgender health in areas unexamined in previous literature, with one study confirming that all transgender groups experience mental health and disabilities. Scandurra et al. (2017) stated that transgender individuals represented an extremely stigmatized population at increased risk of developing mental health issues. The researchers applied the minority stress model as a theoretical model used to understand social stigma as a potential cause for mental health differences faced by transgender individuals to a sample of Italian transgender people ($n = 149$). The researchers analyzed the effects of prejudiced events, expectations of rejections, internalized transphobia, and their interactions with protective factors on mental health. The results suggested that experiences with everyday discrimination and internalized transphobia were associated with increased mental health problems.

There is a link between experiences of discrimination, marginalization, and poor physical and mental health (James et al., 2016). Individuals who face extensive stigma

and discrimination are more likely to report poor overall health and are more exposed to a diversity of physical and mental health conditions than others. Previous researchers have described significant health disparities affecting transgender individuals and the impact that experiences of discrimination, rejection, and violence have on these disparities (James et al., 2016). Depressive symptoms, suicidality, interpersonal trauma exposure, substance use disorders, anxiety, and general distress have been consistently higher among transgender individuals. According to Carmel and Erickson-Schroth (2016), research demonstrated an increased risk of depression, substance use disorders, self-injury, and SI/attempts in transgender populations. However, the findings are less conclusive regarding rates of anxiety disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder, psychotic disorders, eating disorders, body dysmorphic disorders, autism spectrum disorders, and personality disorders.

Mental health issues within transgender individuals are not limited to a specific age group; researchers have studied transgender individuals' mental health between the ages of 3 and 65 (Meyer et al., 2017; Olson et al., 2016; Oswalt & Lederer, 2017; Reisner, Vetters, et al., 2015). Previous researchers have found remarkably high rates of anxiety and depression in children with gender identity disorder (Olson et al., 2016). Olson et al. (2016) examined the mental health of socially transitioned transgender children (aged 3 to 12 years) and found that transgender children did not vary from the control groups on depression symptoms and had only slightly higher anxiety symptoms. Durwood et al. (2017) examined self-reported depression, anxiety, and self-worth in socially transitioned transgender children (9 to 14 years old) and found that transgender

children reported depression and self-worth that did not differ from their peers. Like the previous study, participants also reported marginally higher anxiety. Reisner, Vetters, et al. (2015) studied transgender adolescents and emerging adults (12 to 29 years old) to compare their mental health with their cisgender peers. The results showed that compared to cisgender individuals, transgender youth had a two- to three-fold bigger risk of mental health issues, suicidal tendencies, commit suicide, self-harm, and health treatment. Oswalt and Lederer (2017) used a national dataset of college students (aged 18-26; $N =$ 547,727) to examine how transgender college students ($n = 1,143$) varied from their cisgender peers. The results showed that transgender students had twice the risk of most mental health conditions compared to cisgender female students. A noteworthy exception was schizophrenia, where transgender individuals had about seven times the risk compared to cisgender females.

There is previous research related to the mental health of transgender youth. The review by Connolly et al. (2016) provides an update on this topic. The researchers searched for studies published from January 2011 to March 2016, finding 15 articles that presented quantitative data related to the prevalence of transgender youth and their mental health. Studies since 2011 showed that transgender youth had higher rates of depression, suicidality, self-harm, and eating disorders compared with their peers.

More recent research demonstrated increased rates of psychiatric illness among transgender youth compared to their peers. Veale et al. (2017) focused on transgender youth, documenting the frequency of mental health problems among 923 transgender youth in Canada who completed an online survey. The results indicated that transgender

youth had a higher risk of psychological distress, self-harm, major depressive episodes, and suicide. Of the 923 respondents, 65% seriously considered suicide in that past year, and only a quarter of the respondents reported that their mental health was good or excellent (Veale et al., 2017). Meyer et al. (2017) described the health status of the transgender population (18–65 years old) in the United States, finding that transgender individuals disproportionately rated their health as good or bad compared to cisgender adults. Regression analyses indicated that being nonheterosexual was a greater predictor of mental health concerns. According to the USTS, 39% of respondents reported experiencing significant mental distress, almost eight times higher than the U.S. population (5%); the respondents also reported poor psychological health results, including higher percentages of substance usage, and suicide attempts (James et al., 2016). Su et al. (2016) studied whether transgender identity was associated with higher odds of reported discrimination, depression symptoms, and suicide attempts. The researchers collected survey data from online respondents, 91 transgender and 676 nontransgender, in Nebraska. The results showed that transgender identity was associated with higher reported discrimination, depression symptoms, and attempted suicide compared to nontransgender individuals.

The field of transgender health is dominated by mental health research (Sweileh, 2018). According to Sweileh (2018), social stress and stigma created a higher prevalence of depression and SI in transgender individuals compared to cisgender individuals. SI is a too common mental health issue reported by transgender individuals. The findings from the study conducted by Rood et al. (2015) indicated that transgender individuals who

experienced discrimination or victimization reported more lifetime SI compared with those who had not experienced discrimination or victimization. Toomey et al. (2018) examined the prevalence rates of suicidal behavior across six gender identity groups: female; male; transgender, male to female; transgender, female to male; transgender, not exclusively male or female; and questioning. The researchers also examined variability in the associations between key sociodemographic characteristics and suicide behavior across gender identity groups. The results showed that 14% of adolescents reported a previous suicide attempt. Female to male reported the highest rate of attempted suicide (50.8%), followed by the group not exclusively male or female (41.8%), MTF (29.9%), questioning (27.9%, female (17.6%), and male (9.8%).

Virupaksha et al. (2016) attempted to understand the issues around suicidal behavior among transgender individuals because the suicide rate and suicidal tendencies among transgender individuals were significantly high compared to the general population. According to the results, the suicide attempt rates among transgender individuals ranged from 32% to 50% across the countries. The main risk factors that affected suicidal behavior among transgender individuals included facing gender-based discrimination, mistreatment, and violence; being banned by the family, friends, and community; facing harassment by an intimate partner, family members, police, and public discrimination; and experiencing ill-treatment at health-care institutions. The researchers stated that the transgender community held several resiliency factors despite facing hardship in their day-to-day lives. The transgender community needs support to strengthen their resiliency factors to fight this high rate of suicidality.

Social Support

Social support, especially from families, has been identified as an important promotive factor to help transgender individuals overcome mental health problems (McConnell et al., 2016). Johnson and Rogers (2020) used ethnographic methods to explore how peer support and community involvement influenced the mental health and well-being of transgender individuals. The researchers built on existing research suggesting that the transgender community and peer support among transgender people enhanced medical health experience and lessened the effects of stigma and discrimination on health outcomes. The article revealed how community involvement and peer support enhanced emotional and psychological well-being by normalizing transgender identities and experiences, creating social support networks, and empowering transgender individuals (Johnson & Rogers, 2020). The researchers recommended the importance of including efforts to build peer transgender community support networks to resemble the individuals they serve and normalize a range of transgender experiences in transgender health care.

With research showing the benefits of social support, such as preserving effects on life stressors, not much research has been done on the different types of support resources for transgender individuals (Puckett et al., 2019). Puckett et al. (2019) examined family support, support from friends, and connectedness to a transgender community to show how these types of support come together to influence mental health and resilience. A total of 695 transgender respondents completed an online survey, and more than half of the respondents reported moderate to severe levels of anxiety and

depressive symptoms. The results showed that family social support had the strongest connections with symptoms of anxiety and depression while being the only type of support associated with resilience. The respondents were divided into four groups. The first group had high levels of support from family, friends, and community connectedness. This group showed lower levels of depression and anxiety, with higher levels of resilience, compared to the other groups who did not have the same support.

In a similar study, Weinhardt et al. (2019) examined social support and how it was related to well-being and resilience among transgender youth. The researchers found that family support was positively associated with the likelihood of living as one's affirmed gender. The support received from friends and significant others were not significant indicators of living as one's affirmed gender. As shown by previous studies, this study found that transgender individuals with greater family support were less likely to report mental health problems. The support transgender individuals received from friends was positively associated with connectedness and finding meaning in life.

Even though public awareness of transgender individuals has grown tremendously, a great number of transgender youth still find it difficult to be accepted and get support (Austin et al., 2020). Developing evidence suggests that the Internet may offer transgender youth safety, support, and community that were previously unavailable. Cipolletta et al. (2017) attempted to understand how transgender individuals had given and received help online. The researchers collected 122 online community conversations between 2013 and 2015 from Italian forums and Facebook groups that involved transgender individuals. The main categories that arose from the conversations were

motives to join an online community, online support, differences between online and offline relations, status, disputes, and specialist help. The results revealed that participants in online communities often gained from the users' need for help. They could receive this help from peers with similar experiences and from professionals who participated in the discussions as moderators. The study confirmed that transgender individuals might benefit from online platforms of help and support, which might minimize distance problems, increase financial convenience, and encourage disinhibition.

Social media might also be an effective place for addressing health disparities in transgender adolescents' because most adolescents' have access to online information and socialization. For example, Selkie et al. (2020) explored transgender adolescents' uses of social media for social support. Categories included emotional-, appraisal-, and informational support participants received from transgender-related online communities. Selkie et al. (2020) stated that transgender adolescents received emotional, appraisal, and information support through social media platforms that they might not be able to access otherwise. Austin et al. (2020) aimed to engage in an in-depth exploration of online experiences and processes to help protect transgender youth against psychological distress and promote their well-being. The researchers collected data from a mixed-methods, online study of sexual gender minority youth across the United States and Canada. A sample of 260 between the ages of 14 and 22 respondents participated in this study. The data revealed that the Internet gave transgender youth supporting spaces that did not exist, most of the time, in their offline lives. Over the Internet, transgender youth could meaningfully interact with others as their authentic selves. These experiences

promote well-being, healing, and growth through five processes: finding and escape from stigma and violence, building confidence, feeling hope, giving back, and experiencing a sense of belonging. Experiencing a sense of belonging and connectedness with a community conciliated the sense of well-being of transgender individuals, and helping transgender individuals find online communities that increase their sense of belonging might be important interventions (Barr et al., 2016).

Transgender Individuals' Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging has shown important relationships with depression and suicidal thoughts (Fisher et al., 2015). Fisher et al. (2015) used structured clinical interviews and self-report measures to assess depression, suicidal behavior, hopelessness, life stress, social support, and a sense of belonging. The results showed that a lower sense of belonging was significantly associated with greater severity of depression, hopelessness, SI, and a history of previous suicide attempts. The researchers concluded that cognitive, behavioral, and interpersonal interventions might decrease feelings of depression and hopelessness and enhance an individual's feelings that they belong. Feeling a sense of belonging is a basic human need and an essential aspect of individuals' growth and development throughout their lives (Barr et al., 2016).

According to previous research, a healthy sense of belonging results in psychological, social, spiritual, or physical involvement (Fisher et al., 2015). To feel a sense of belonging means that an individual feels accepted, appreciated, and understood in relationships with other individuals and groups (Riley & White, 2016). The experience

of not belonging is painful and can increase self-denial and self-contempt, leading to

suicidal thoughts and actions (Benestad, 2016).

Research results have also shown that a sense of belonging is a motivator for

personal achievement (Peter et al., 2015), contributing to the increase and maintenance of

resilience (Scarf et al., 2016). Stout and Wright (2016) assessed the relationship between

LGBTQ students' sense of belonging in computing and thoughts about leaving the field.

The results indicated that thoughts about leaving a computing program related to the

feeling of not belonging among undergraduate and graduate students. The study

conducted by Zeeman et al. (2017) reaffirmed the results from previous research,

showing that resilient strategies involved young people being intentionally proactive in

accessing supportive educational systems and connecting to a trans-affirming community

where they could reframe mental health challenges, and navigating relationships with

family and friends. According to another study conducted by Hackimer and Proctor

(2015), a sense of belonging and inclusion corresponded to a significant improvement in

the emotional well-being and resilience of trans youth.

Many human behavior concerns attempt to achieve a sense of belonging in a

group, a society, a family, a partnership, or the world (Benestad, 2016). Transgender

individuals tend to lack a sense of belonging among cisgender individuals (Buckler &

Gates, 2019). Positive belonging is to be perceived and approved by others in the same

way one perceives and approves oneself. Many transgendered adults have experienced an

almost total lack of support; thus, they lack positive belonging feelings (Benestad, 2016).

Barr et al. (2016) examined transgender community belongingness as a mediator between

the strength of transgender identity and well-being by assessing surveys completed by 571 transgender adults. The results proposed that transgender community belongingness was an important structure in the mental health of transgender individuals and that the strength of an individual's transgender identity was an important structure in transgender individuals' well-being through its relationship with transgender community belongingness.

A sense of belonging can be facilitated through community participation and connectedness (Anderson, 2016; Stanton et al., 2017), particularly when the community is social justice-oriented and empowered by activism and advocacy (Hagen et al., 2018; Wagaman et al., 2019). According to Jones et al. (2016), more than half of the transgender individuals who completed a survey felt better about their gender identities, had fun, and felt part of a larger community when engaging in activism. Approximately one-third of the respondents felt more resilient than before and that participation eased their depression and thoughts of self-harm. Jones et al. (2016) concluded that the findings demonstrated the potential for activism and advocacy to enhance transgender individuals' well-being, personal agency, and community belonging.

Goal Attainment

People pursue goals throughout their lives; even though some of these pursuits may fail, many end in success (Huang & Aaker, 2019). Research has shown that goal content and goal framing affect the likelihood of goal attainment (Gollwitzer & Oettingen, 2019). Concerning goal content, the perceived desirability and viability of the goal matter. The perceived desirability is high when the goal aligns with the individual's

needs, wishes or fantasies, possible selves, higher-order goals, identity goals, and attitudes (Gollwitzer & Oettingen, 2019).

Individuals who feel that they can perform the responses that produce the desired goal have strong self-efficacy beliefs; this belief promotes high goal commitment and successful goal pursuit. Gollwitzer and Oettingen (2019) stated that mentally contrasting a desired future with present reality would lead to energization, which would heighten goal pursuit strong enough to lead to successful goal attainment. Planning one's goal and striving in advance are powerful strategies to promote goal attainment (Gollwitzer & Oettingen, 2019).

Self-control is an important factor responsible for effective self-regulation and personal goal attainment (Milyavskaya & Inzlicht, 2017). Milyavskaya and Inzlicht (2017) investigated the immediate and semester-long consequences of effortful self-control and temptations on depletion and goal attainment. The results showed that goal attainment was influenced by experiences of temptations rather than by actively resisting or controlling those temptations. The results also showed that experiencing temptations led individuals to feel depleted; such depletion mediated the link between temptations and goal attainment. Individuals who experienced increased temptations felt more depleted and were less likely to achieve their goals (Milyavskaya & Inzlicht, 2017).

The control theory and other frameworks for understanding self-regulation have shown that monitoring goals is important between setting and attaining a goal to ensure that goals are translated into action (Harkin et al., 2016). According to Harkin et al. (2016), progress monitoring serves to identify differences between the current and

desired state, enables individuals to recognize when additional effort or self-control is needed, and should promote goal attainment. According to Cameron et al. (2018), positive affect serves as a goal of self-regulation, as well as a resource for self-regulation. Positive affect shows the individual to adopt a reachable goal and leads to a higher goal attainment rate than a neutral mood (Cameron et al., 2018). In short, positive affect increases the rate of goal attainment.

Achievement Motivation

Achievement motivation (i.e., an individual's need to meet goals and achieve) is an antecedent to goal attainment (McClelland, 2005). Zhang et al. (2015) defined motivation as "the power that drives a person to attain high levels of achievement and performance and to overcome obstacles to make a difference" (p. 20). Individuals are motivated to achieve when challenged and aware that the outcome will reflect their success or failure (Smith, 2015).

Achievement motivation identifies three distinct needs: a need for achievement, a need for affiliation, and a need for power (Karaman & Watson, 2017). These are learned and acquired over time, as shaped by one's own life experiences. Researchers have demonstrated that achievement motivation is a strong predictor of success, perceived accomplishment, and academic ability (Karaman & Watson, 2017). Zhang et al. (2015) showed a significant positive correlation between self-efficacy and achievement motivation.

The psychological capital theory identifies four psychological capacities in the framework of positive organizational behavior that influence motivation and performance

in the workplace. These psychological capacities are self-efficiency, hope, positivity, and resilience (Magnano et al., 2016). Emotional intelligence addresses the self-regulatory processes of emotions and motivation that enable individuals to adjust and achieve individual, group, and organizational goals. According to Magnano et al. (2016), emotional intelligence is strongly correlated with individual advancement and success in an organizational setting and individual performance. Magnano et al. aimed to verify if emotional intelligence mediates the relationship between resilience and achievement motivation by investigating the role of resilience and emotional intelligence in achievement motivation. The findings confirmed the significant role played by emotional intelligence on resilience and motivation to achieve.

Transgender Activism/Advocacy

Since 2019, around 20 nationally committed transgender rights interest groups have worked in the United States (Nownes, 2019b). The groups included several relatively well-resourced professional organizations. There were also a lot of active state, local, and regional transgender rights organizations (Nownes, 2019a).

Activism refers to intentional actions to bring about social, political, or institutional change through protest and persuasion, such as speeches, protests, and marches. Advocacy refers to formal or informal efforts to speak, write, or argue on behalf of a group, person, or cause (Goldberg et al., 2020). Activism and advocacy are valuable ways for marginalized people to foster themselves and other community members. Transgender individuals can experience many benefits from activism or advocacy,

including the development of their voice and a feeling of connection to others (Goldberg et al., 2020).

The first group of transgender activists was formed in 1970 in New York City, Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, in the wake of the Stonewall Riots and was largely powered by drag queens of color (Wilchins, 2017). Texas attorney, Phyllis Frye, organized the first conference on transgender law in 1992: the International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy, which was the first of its kind. In 1994, Phyllis Frye and Activist Karen Kerin founded, It's Time America, an early politicization group that developed chapters in several states (Wilchins, 2017). Anne Ogborn launched the Transgender Nation modeled on the street action group Queer Nation. At first, these efforts failed to catch on with the greater community (Wilchins, 2017).

Three major events fueled organized resistance to the inclusion of trans women in lesbian communities: the expulsion of Beth Elliott from the lesbian organization; the Daughters of Bilitis in 1972; the campaign that led to Sandy Stone leaving the women's music label Olivia Records in 1977; and the publication of Raymond's (1979) attack on trans women, *The Transsexual Empire* (Rossiter, 2016). These events set in motion ongoing resistance from trans-exclusionary radical feminists, which led to the ban of trans females from the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival and the creation of Camp Trans to protest this exclusion (Rossiter, 2016). Camp Trans marked the first-time transgender activists who coordinated a complex political event on a national level, representing the beginning of the end for them in women's spaces. Transgender issues were moving beyond transgender individuals, attracting wide-based support from within

the women's community itself (Wilchins, 2017). Transgender rights interest groups have worked tirelessly to advance the cause of transgender rights in the United States (Nownes, 2019a).

In 2014, the U.S. Department of Justice announced that discrimination based on gender identity instituted sex discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Department of Health and Human Services proclaimed that it would no longer prevent Medicare from covering gender reassignment surgery (Nownes, 2019a). The District of Columbia, 20 states, and 100s of local authorities in states without statewide protections had laws on the book banning employment discrimination on the ground of gender identity by the end of 2016 (Nownes, 2019a). According to Nownes (2019a), in recent years, gender-variant people, including transgender people, have won public policy victories that seemed unwinnable a few years ago. The rise of transgender rights interest groups in the United States was accountable for these victories. The proliferation of transgender rights interest groups reshaped the advocacy for transgender individuals and gays and lesbians. Transgender rights interest-group advocacy then flourished in the United States (Nownes, 2019a).

Increased empowerment, social connectedness, and resilience are psychosocial benefits of activism, and research has suggested that activism can mitigate everyday experiences of discrimination, social marginalization, isolation, shame, and internalized oppression (Hagen et al., 2018). There are three levels of activism through which empowerment may occur: intrapersonal (micro/individual), interpersonal (meso/community), and sociopolitical (macro/societal; Hagen et al., 2018). Individuals

examine and challenge experiences of prejudice, harassment, and invisibility at the microlevel. At the meso-level, individuals connect to communities of people who work to create social change; at the macrolevel, activism challenges political institutions, cultural ideologies, and historical understanding.

Hagen et al. (2018) developed an empirical model of social justice activism for sexual minority women (SMW) and transgender activists. The researchers prioritized the experiences and meanings of SMW and transgender participants by their activism. Relationships and human connections were central to the meaning of social justice activism emphasized by the participants in the study. The study provided evidence that participants' connections with individuals who shared their identities and values were central to the meaning of social justice activism. Social justice activism contributed to this study's perceptions and experiences of empowerment and well-being. Participants felt increased empowerment, trauma healing, social connection, pride, and joy when engaged in social justice activism. Hagen et al. (2018) concluded that social justice activism might contribute to increasing personal strength, resilience, and empowerment and that activism could provide an overall sense of purpose and meaning in life.

Transgender students face institutional and interpersonal discrimination that exposes them to minority stress; some transgender students react to marginal stress and perceptions of unfairness on their campuses through engaging in activism or advocacy (Goldberg et al., 2020) and performing the emotional, physical, mental, and social labor to address oppression on their campuses (Linder et al., 2019). Hamrick (1998) proposed

that student activists could offer alternate opinions, conclusions, and judgments to enrich discourse and dialogue while advocating for specific causes (Rosati et al., 2019).

Student activists often intend to bring together different populations to advance equity. Goldberg et al. (2020) explored transgender undergraduate and graduate students' explanations for engaging or not engaging in activism or advocacy and the types of activities with which they would engage. The students engaged in various formal and informal activism and advocacy activities. These students mentioned their principles, sense of personal and community responsibility, longing for community, and chances for engagement and explaining their involvement. The students who did not engage in activism or advocacy activities highlighted other obligations and identities, such as taking precedence, visibility concerns, lack of connection to campus transgender communities, burnout, mental health issues, activism not being a priority, and cultural barriers. A negative campus climate was related to a bigger possibility of activism or advocacy, and incidents of discrimination were related to a bigger possibility of engagement (Goldberg et al., 2020).

Minoritized students also engaged in campus activism to hold institutional leaders accountable for addressing oppression and these activists often advocate for change to survive in their minoritized bodies (Linder et al., 2019). A concern of student activists taking on more than their fair share of commitment to improve the community has reduced time to participate in creative, intellectual, and other activities that would benefit their development during and after college (Linder et al., 2019). Ansala et al. (2016) analyzed university students' motives for participating in student activism to enhance the

development of active citizenship in students. A total of 47 student activists of Finnish university student activist organizations wrote personal narratives about their careers as student activists. Participation in student activism was categorized into five categories: social motivations, the need to partake and influence, the gratitude of experience and benefits from student activism, activism as a lifestyle, and coincidence. Three types of social motives were distinguished from the data. Making friendships appeared the most important social motive for participating in student activism. The second was recommendations by friends, and the third was to partake in student activism with friends and encouraged by idols.

Activists' work is troubled with unique challenges, such as vocational burnout, and research has suggested that social justice and human rights (SJHR) activists can be especially vulnerable (Chen, & Gorski, 2015). Chen and Gorski (2015) attempted to gain insight into SJHR activists' experiences by adopting a grounded theory approach to analyze interview data from 22 SJHR activists involved in various activities and groups in the United States. The researchers captured three categories of general burnout symptoms: exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy in one's work through the interviews. Closer analysis revealed that the above categories failed to capture the scope and depth of how the participants seemed to understand their experience with burnout sufficiently. Instead of feeling just exhausted, many associated serious emotional or physical health ailments with stress, long hours, and other conditions characterizing their activists' work; many participants experienced increasing levels of hopelessness and disbelief, which is more than cynicism.

Through this analysis, three somewhat different categories were revealed; the deterioration of physical health; the deterioration of psychological and emotional health; and hopelessness. Activists' burnout causes activists to disengage from their activism and is a challenging barrier to the sustainability of social justice movements (Gorski, 2015). According to Gorski (2015), these movements often disregard the importance of self-care, which is seen as self-indulgence, placing activists at even greater risks of exhaustion. Gorski assessed the impact of specific self-care strategies on activist burnout by analyzing interviews with 14 social justice education activists. The analysis exposed a diversity of ways in which mindfulness lessened the participants' burnout experiences, including yoga, tai-chi, and medication. The analysis also revealed that beyond helping sustain their activism, mindfulness made them more effective activists.

Summary and Conclusion

The transgender community is a culturally diverse population across the United States; even though the visibility of the transgender community has multiplied, the challenges and difficulties they face remain prevalent within society (Tilak & Singh; Crissman et al., 2017). Transgender individuals in the Western world have only become prominent in recent decades, even though historically, transgender individuals have been part of all cultures (Wylie et al., 2016). Accurate data concerning the size of the transgender population globally are lacking (Reisner, Keatley, et al., 2016). According to Crissman et al. (2017), transgender individuals make up 0.53% of the population. Safer and Tangpricha (2019b) estimated that about 0.6% of U.S. adults (1.4 million) are transgender.

In countries like the United States, the transgender community has grown in prominence (Reisner, Hughto, et al., 2015) but is still underserved, facing several health challenges from long-standing marginalization (Chrisler et al., 2016; Sweileh, 2018). The transgender community also has higher than average rates of smoking, drug and alcohol abuse, HIV infection, and suicide attempts (Chrisler et al., 2016). The challenges the transgender community face include lack of legal protection, poverty, harassment, stigma, antigender violence, barriers to health care, and identity documents (Tilak & Singh, 2019). Meaningful engagement and involvement of transgender individuals are required to understand the global health burden and needs of transgender communities (Reisner, Keatley, et al., 2016).

The lack of legal protection increases the challenges transgender individuals face. Most transgender individuals have experienced harassment on the job, struggle to get appropriate health care, and are excessively impacted by poverty. The legal protection of transgender individuals has been an argumentative issue for a long period, and courts often pathologize or refuse the recognition of transgender identities (Vogler, 2019). Even though international and regional resolutions call for the legal protection of transgender people, states still do not meet these obligations (Lanham et al., 2019). LGBTQ individuals have fought for decades for public approval and legal recognition of their rights, and this recognition depends on gaining the support of other members of the public (Michelson, 2019). Powell et al. (2016) stated that associated choices about the expression of gender must be supported by laws and policies. The researchers concluded that transgender individuals' best argument must rely on the concept of undisputable

human rights, which would include the right to live safely and without fear of discrimination.

Transgender people still experience significant discrimination, stigma, and harassment (Downing & Przedworski, 2018). In a European-wide survey, 54% of transgender participants felt discriminated against or harassed because of being seen as transgender (Granberg et al., 2020). Transgender or gender nonconforming individuals also experienced health inequities (Reisner, Vetters, et al., 2015). According to Casey et al. (2019), interpersonal discrimination was common for LGBTQ individuals, including insults, microaggressions, sexual harassment, violence, and harassment regarding bathroom use. Discrimination is also widely experienced by LGBTQ individuals across health care and other domains (Casey et al., 2019). Nearly 60% of U.S. transgender individuals have experienced violence or harassment (Azagba et al., 2019). LGBTQ employees also experienced sexual harassment at work (Brassel et al., 2019). Despite the many legislative advances in transgender rights, this issue has been an ongoing crisis in the United States (Reisner, Biello, et al., 2016).

Transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals experience discrimination, harassment, violence, and sexual assault that trigger negative mental health issues (Carmel & Erickson-Schroth, 2016). Individuals who face extensive stigma and discrimination are more likely to report poor overall health and are more exposed to various physical and mental health conditions. These issues can include depressive symptoms, suicidality, interpersonal trauma exposure, substance use disorders, anxiety, general distress, and SI (James et al., 2016; Sweileh, 2018). The suicide rates and suicidal

tendencies among transgender individuals are significantly high compared to the general population (Virupaksha et al., 2016). The main risk factors that affect suicidal behaviors among transgender individuals include facing gender-based discrimination, mistreatment, and violence; being banned by the family, friends, and community; experiencing harassment by an intimate partner, family members, police, and public discrimination; and facing ill-treatment at health-care institutions (Virupaksha et al., 2016).

Social support, especially from families, has been identified as an important promotive factor in helping transgender individuals overcome mental health problems (McConnell et al., 2016). Community and peer support enhance emotional and psychological well-being by normalizing transgender identities and experiences, creating social support networks, and empowering transgender individuals (Johnson & Rogers, 2020). Support from the community promotes well-being, healing, and growth through five processes: finding and escaping stigma and violence, building confidence, feeling hope, giving back, and experiencing a sense of belonging (Barr et al., 2016).

A sense of belonging is a motivator for personal achievement (Peter et al., 2015) and contributes to the increase and maintenance of resilience (Scarf et al., 2016). A lot of human behavior concerns attempts to achieve a sense of belonging in a group, in a society, in a family, in a partnership, or in the world (Benestad, 2016); transgender individuals tend to lack a sense of belonging among cisgender individuals (Buckler & Gates, 2019). Transgender community belongingness is an important structure in the mental health of transgender individuals, and the strength of an individual's transgender identity is an important structure in transgender individuals' well-being through its

relationship with transgender community belongingness (Barr et al., 2016). A sense of belonging can be facilitated through community participation and connectedness (Anderson, 2016; Stanton et al., 2017), particularly when the community is social justice-oriented and empowered by activism and advocacy (Hagen et al., 2018; Wagaman et al., 2019).

Since 2019, there have been approximately 20 nationally active transgender rights interest groups in the United States (Nownes, 2019a). Transgender individuals can experience many benefits from activism or advocacy, including developing their voice and a feeling of connection to others (Goldberg et al., 2020). In recent years, transgender individuals have won public policy victories that seemed unwinnable a few years ago (Nownes, 2019b). Increased empowerment, social connectedness, and resilience are psychosocial benefits of activism, and research has suggested that activism can mitigate everyday experiences of discrimination, social marginalization, isolation, shame, and internalized oppression (Hagen et al., 2018). Social justice activism may contribute to increased personal strength, resilience, and empowerment, and that activism can provide an overall sense of purpose and meaning in life (Hagen et al., 2018).

There is a gap in the literature; insufficient research has explored how transgender activists experience a sense of belonging from their community participation or how that experience influences achievement motivation and personal goal attainment (Gilbert, 2019). It is unknown how transgender activists' lived experiences of a sense of belonging influence their motivations to achieve and personal goal attainment. The results of this study may encourage educational, organizational, and healthcare leaders to create spaces

that enable success among the transgender community. The methodology is discussed in

Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how transgender activists' lived experiences of a sense of belonging influenced their motivations to achieve and personal goal attainment. Although past research examined the transgender community in the United States, limited studies have examined how transgender activists' lived experiences of a sense of belonging influence their motivations to achieve and personal goal attainment (Gilbert, 2019; Nicolazzo, 2017). This chapter contains a discussion of the selected research design, as well as the rationale for the research design of this study. The role of the researcher is then discussed, followed by a detailed outline of the methodology, including the section on participant selection logic, instrumentation used in this study, procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, and procedures for data analysis. This detailed outline of the methodology is followed by a discussion regarding trustworthiness issues. Then, the ethical procedures are described, along with plans to address those procedures. Finally, a summary of the chapter concludes this third chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

There were two research questions that guided this study:

CQ. How does transgender activists' community participation influence their sense of belonging?

RQ1. How do transgender activists' lived experiences of a sense of belonging influence their motivation to achieve and personal goal attainment?

The phenomenon of interest in this study was the sense of belonging of transgender activists. The unit of analysis was the transgender activist participants' lived experiences of a sense of belonging.

I employed a qualitative research method, as the selected area of topic necessitated in-depth investigation of the participants' subjective experiences. According to Davidsen (2013), a qualitative approach is best suited for research that examines participants' experiences related to the topic of interest and how these experiences are within the participants' backgrounds, lives, situations, and cultures. Miles et al. (2014) also noted how a qualitative approach would allow a researcher to capture and comprehend a social issue under analysis. A qualitative approach enabled me to examine the participants' experiences of a sense of belonging through in-depth, semistructured questions. These questions were developed to encourage authentic conversations with the participants while providing more insights into their experiences.

The research tradition in qualitative studies entails gathering first-hand accounts from participants commonly obtained through qualitative approaches, such as interviews, focus groups, and observations (Walliman, 2011). In contrast, quantitative studies entail gathering numerical data for statistical analysis (Cleland, 2017). However, a quantitative approach was unsuitable for the current study. Quantitative data and responses are designed to describe the behavior of groups rather than unique experiences (Walliman, 2011), as focused on in the current study. Therefore, a quantitative approach was not selected for this study. Cleland (2017) defined a qualitative research approach as investigating the *how* and *why* of the phenomenon under scrutiny, which was in line with

the current study. Thus, a qualitative research approach was selected for the current study.

Specifically, I used a phenomenological qualitative research design. Various qualitative research designs were deemed as options for the current study: ethnography, narrative, phenomenological, and grounded theory (Cleland, 2017). Ethnography is a qualitative research design focused on participants' motivations and challenges as rooted and established in their culture. The objective of the present study was not to investigate a specific culture; therefore, ethnography was not selected for the current study. A narrative research design focuses on gathering participants' narratives and stories and deems these as data from participants (Cleland, 2017). However, it was not my aim to gather narratives and stories. Grounded theory is another qualitative research design I considered for this study. Grounded theory design describes a theory underpinning events to formulate hypotheses or theories based on existing phenomena (Glaser, 1992). However, I did not aim to formulate a theory based on the gathered data. Therefore, a grounded theory approach was not best suited for this study.

Finally, a phenomenological study examines and describes selected participants' lived experiences regarding a specific situation or activity. These gathered lived experiences act as information from participants (Cleland, 2017). I aimed to explore how transgender activists' lived experiences of a sense of belonging influence their motivations to achieve and personal goal attainment. As such, a phenomenological research design was best suited to meet the study's objective to identify and understand how the sense of belonging of transgender activists influenced their motivations to

achieve and personal goal attainment. The phenomenological research approach was used to explain the experiences of transgender activists in the Northeastern United States.

Role of the Researcher

I was essential in gathering information in this qualitative research study. According to Walliman (2011), the researcher is the primary lead for conducting and administering qualitative data collection procedures and techniques, such as in-depth, semistructured interviews. However, the role of the researcher poses the risk of potential bias, as building a relationship and building rapport with participants may influence the researcher. Additionally, the researcher's thoughts and convictions regarding the topic under study may influence the researcher. Another role of the researcher is that of observer-participant (Unluer, 2012). According to Unluer (2012), participants are informed of the study when the researcher meets the participants; participants also interact with the researcher throughout the data collection process.

I maintained a research journal for continuous reflection to mitigate any personal bias that could have arisen (see Creswell, 2007). I used the journal to capture reoccurring themes, research developments, and changes over time; record personal biases, feelings, and emotions; and keep track of research plans. Additionally, I did not select any participant with whom I had a prior personal or professional relationship. No incentives were given to the participating transgender activists to avert other ethical issues; their participation was wholly voluntary.

Methodology

A qualitative research approach was used to study the topic of transgender activists' sense of belonging, motivation to achieve, and personal goal attainment. I aimed to understand how transgender activists' lived experiences of a sense of belonging influenced their motivations to achieve and personal goal attainment in the Northeastern United States. In-depth, semistructured interviews with eight participants were conducted via an online video-conferencing platform, Skype or Zoom. This section discusses the methodology in more detail so that other researchers can replicate the study.

Participant Selection Logic

I included transgender individuals participating in an activist group to promote rights and social justice for transgender individuals in the Northeastern United States. The sample size for this study was eight participants and recruitment continued until data saturation was reached (see Etikan et al., 2016). The anticipated sample size for this study was within the suggested range of five to 25 participants for phenomenological research (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). One of the inclusion criteria included individuals who identified themselves as FTM or MTF and were in the process of or had successfully changed the gender markers on their identification cards. The participants also must be 18 years old or older, currently working full-time, part of the military, going to school, or have a career. Participants could have been members of any transgender activist community or group affiliated with the Capital Pride Alliance and Northeast Transgender Alliance. These criteria allowed me to investigate and identify how transgender activists'

community participation influenced their sense of belonging and how a sense of belonging influenced their motivations to achieve and personal goal attainment.

The nonprobability strategy of purposive sampling was the sampling technique employed in this study (see Alvi, 2016; Etikan et al., 2016). A purposive sampling technique was the best method for selecting individuals who shared a specific characteristic or set of characteristics (see Patton, 2015). Furthermore, this purposive sampling strategy was best suited to qualitative research, allowing me to set the inclusion criteria to gather data from targeted and relevant participants (see Etikan et al., 2016).

Before any data collection procedure, I contacted transgender activism organizations located in the Northeastern United States, including the Capital Pride Alliance and Northeast Transgender Alliance, to ensure that they allowed the recruitment of participants for the study. I also contacted and sent a message of the recruitment flyers to LGBTQ+ activist group administrators to gain their consent to post in their groups. This process was done before applying for institutional review board (IRB) approval from the university; I requested and asked for a written authorization from the leaders of transgender activism organizations in the Northeastern United States, as well as LGBTQ+ activist group administrators, to invite their members to participate. After obtaining authorization from the leaders of transgender activism organizations located in the Northeastern United States, I sought and secured IRB approval from the university.

Recruitment was done via email and social media (Facebook). After gaining approval from the leaders of the said organizations and IRB approval from the university, the gatekeepers of the organizations contacted potential participants via email by using an

invitation to participate letter that I had provided them. I also recruited social media (Facebook) participants through an LGBTQ+ activist group. I first sent a message of the recruitment flyers to LGBTQ+ activist group administrators to gain their consent to post in their groups. Furthermore, I recruited participants from the Walden Participation Pool, a pool of people who had made themselves available to participate in studies.

Attached to the recruitment email were a description of the study, the participant's rights, how the results would be used, and my personal contact information. Additionally, the recruitment email/message contained information on the inclusion criteria to ensure that participants were known to meet the criteria. Interested respondents were requested to contact me if interested in participating using their email addresses to ensure privacy. Individuals interested in participating were sent a letter of informed consent and asked to select a date and time to participate in an in-depth, semistructured interview for approximately 90 mins using an online video-conferencing platform, such as Skype or Zoom. Participants had the option of video conferencing or audio recording the interview.

In contrast to quantitative studies, qualitative research studies have a smaller sample size. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), the smaller sample size is because it is not the objective of qualitative research to generalize results. Data saturation is used in qualitative research studies to assess and identify whether the number of participants is sufficient for the study. Purposive sampling saturation was used to determine the final sample size for the current research study. Etikan et al. (2016) defined data saturation as the point when selecting and including more participants in the study would not result in new information. The sample size consisted of eight transgender individuals participating

in an activist group to promote rights and social justice for transgender individuals in the Northeastern United States.

Instrumentation

The primary data source in this study was participants' responses to interview questions. The main data collection instrument was in-depth, semistructured interviews with the participants using a researcher-developed interview protocol (Appendix). For this reason, I developed an interview guide based on using the interview protocol refinement framework proposed by Castillo-Montoya (2016). The framework consisted of four steps guided by the research questions. The four steps in the development process included "(1) ensuring interview questions align with research questions, (2) constructing an inquiry-based conversation, (3) receiving feedback on interview protocols, and (4) piloting the interview protocol" (Castillo-Montoya, 2016, p. 811).

The interview questions were worded to elicit information regarding transgender participants' lived advocacy experiences and how participation in an activist organization fostered a sense of belonging. The interview questions were developed to collect information regarding participants' perspectives on the influence of a sense of belonging on their motivations to achieve and personal goal attainment. I asked follow-up questions for increased clarity of the participants' responses.

I took field notes throughout the interview process, considering the participants' nonverbal communication, including facial expressions, gestures, and vocal tones. I used video recording during the interview for participants who consented to it using the informed consent form. The video recordings were used to capture the participants' facial

expressions, body language, and gestures to gather information-rich data (see Creswell, 2007) for interview transcription purposes. Interviews were conducted with audio-recording and on-the-spot visual observations for participants who did not consent to video recording. I took notes of nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions, body language, and participants' gestures. Consent for audio-recording was part of the general consent—only participants who consented participated. The interviews lasted approximately 90 min. I transcribed interviews to approximately 15 to 20 pages, single-spaced, and typed transcriptions.

My field notes, together with notes on the video recordings that occurred during or after the interview, were considered and included as information for the data analysis phase. Additionally, the participants' names were not used as shown during the interviews via Zoom; instead, participants were assigned respective code names to maintain their confidentiality. There was a likelihood that the transgender activist participants would not be comfortable with being video-recorded due to the sensitivities about the topic. In the case where the participant(s) opted not to be video recorded, I focused on the audio-recording throughout the interview process and transcribed them directly after the interview. This process was in addition to the interview and field notes written in my journal. This process helped ensure the validity and credibility of the gathered data.

I developed the interview protocol based on the knowledge from the literature review. The use of an interview protocol ensured that all participants were asked the same set of semistructured questions. Further, semistructured questions through an interview protocol were suited for research that entailed managing and capturing

participants' experiences or sensitive topics (see Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The semistructured questions for this study were developed based on the existing literature. That is, I developed interview questions grounded in the literature by attaching an empirical reference for each interview question, as shown in the examples below:

1. How do you think your community influences your achievements? (Derived from the concept that achievement is a result of the interaction of the individual with their immediate environment such that a standard of excellence is socially constructed; Sarangi, 2015).

2. How does your activist experience influence your personal goal attainment? (One of the three levels of activism is the micro/individual level. Activism is believed to increase empowerment, social connectedness, and resilience that contribute to goal attainment; Hagen et al., 2018).

3. How would you describe your personal drive when attempting to achieve your personal goals? (One's competitive drive contributes to the motivation of being persistent and impulsive to attain achievement; Smith et al., 2020).

4. What influences you to increase your efforts in a certain activity? (Achievement motivation consists of various factors that influence increasing or maintaining one's efforts in relation to goal achievement; Smith et al., 2020).

The interview protocol also included questions about the demographic information of the participants. Demographic data were collected with the interview protocol to describe this study sample.

To ensure the robustness of the interview protocol, two expert researchers were identified for an expert panel review. The goal of this expert panel review was to ensure that the questions were easily understood, without bias, and were clearly worded (see Kallio et al., 2016). In addition, a field test was conducted, wherein interviews were practiced. During this process, two to three individuals were selected for the practice interviews to determine whether the questions were understandable and adequate to yield sufficient data for this study (see Kallio et al., 2016). The information obtained during the expert panel review and the field test was not used in the study's results. I amended the initial interview protocol using the feedback as a reference to refine the semi-structured interview questions further.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

As previously discussed, the main data source of this study was in-depth, semi-structured interviews via *Skype* or *Zoom*. I was the primary lead for conducting the interviews. Hence, I scheduled the interviews via email and social media (Facebook) through an LGBTQ+ activist group, in which participants determined their most suitable schedules for the interview session. Before the interview, I ensured the reliability of the video recording feature of the selected online video-conferencing platform. I made any necessary observational and field notes in my journal throughout the data collection procedures. This journal was used throughout the interviews, wherein I made notes should the participant(s) decline to be video recorded. My contact details were provided to each participant, providing them an avenue to reach me for any concerns that they might have regarding the study.

Before starting the interview, I first established rapport with the participants to make them more comfortable in the interview setting. This step was important because this study's topic might relate to personal and sensitive issues for the participants. Therefore, making the participants more comfortable before actual data collection could encourage authenticity and trust throughout the interview process (Janesick, 2011). An informed consent form was emailed to each participant; during this time, participants were encouraged to ask clarifying questions regarding the study or their participation. I used the informed consent form to emphasize the respondents' voluntary participation in the current study. Participants were informed that they could choose to withhold an answer to a specific question or withdraw their participation at any given time without any penalties. During this phase, I asked for the verbal confirmation of each participant regarding their consent to participate in video-recorded interviews. If the participant chose not to provide consent to video-recorded interviews, I took notes on the tones and nonverbal cues instead.

Lastly, before the interview, participants were reminded and assured of their rights to confidentiality, ensuring their privacy and protection. An interview protocol consisting of uniform, in-depth semi-structured questions were used for all participants. Each interview lasted approximately 90 min and entailed using the selected online video-conferencing platform.

After concluding the interview, I conducted member checking of the data transcription via email. This step was vital to ensure the validity and accuracy of the responses and findings (Patton, 2015). The interview was audio recorded for

participant(s) who did not consent to their interviews being recorded. After the interviews, I transcribed the recordings and sent the participant a copy of the full data transcription via email. This process allowed the participant to review the notes and their responses, ensuring that the notes and results were accurate according to their experiences. Each participant was given 10 days to reply via email and send their amendments, if any, after receiving the interview transcripts.

Data Analysis Plan

This study had two research questions. The gathered data from the interviews were focused on answering these research questions. After conducting the interviews, the video-recorded data and handwritten notes from the journal were transcribed by me using Microsoft Word. The responses from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed through thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2014). Through Braun et al.'s (2014) six-step method for thematic analysis, I organized, coded, and analyzed the data. I identified the major themes from participants' responses, yielding an understanding of the experiences of transgender activists. The six steps of thematic analysis included (a) becoming familiar with the data by reading and rereading transcripts, (b) assigning initial codes to text, (c) applying secondary pattern coding to generate themes, (d) evaluating themes for relevance, (e) refining and defining themes, and (f) developing a narrative report of results (Braun et al., 2014). The following paragraphs of this section further discuss Braun et al.'s (2014) six-step method for thematic analysis.

After transcribing the data, I reviewed and read the transcriptions repeatedly to gain familiarity with the data. Any words, phrases, or paragraphs relevant to the topic of

this study were highlighted, as they could have been linked to answering the research questions. Each highlighted data section (specific words, phrases, or paragraphs) was reviewed, further determining the relevance of the two research questions. Data sections not deemed relevant to answering the research problem were omitted. The relevant, remaining data sections were assigned initial codes, specifically by assigning a unique number to each respective data section. The resulting codes were grouped and categorized. This analysis step showed the emerging pattern, wherein I then described, named, and summarized each common pattern. Each generated theme was assigned a unique secondary code for ease of reference and management. After this step, I further evaluated the themes for relevance. Each identified theme was attached with the direct quotes from participants' responses during the interviews.

After identifying emergent patterns, a larger categorization of patterns emerged, forming the overarching themes. I attached a unique code and identifier for these emerging, overarching themes. Finally, I developed a narrative report of the results of each participant, wherein a comprehensive analysis for each theme was the output. I also utilized the software analysis tool NVivo to store, categorize, and manage the relevant data. The NVivo software enabled me to manage and analyze the data easily, identifying consistent themes across the participants' data. The overarching themes were summarized as related to their links to the research questions.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Issues of trustworthiness are vital to discuss to ensure that all data are represented truthfully and relevantly (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability for this study is discussed in this section.

Credibility

Credibility refers to confidence in the truthfulness of the study and its findings (Polit & Beck, 2014). To ensure the credibility of this study, I employed several techniques, including member checking, prolonged interaction with participants, and reflective journaling. According to Connelly (2016), member checking ensures that the data collected from qualitative approaches are accurate, improving the study's credibility. Furthermore, I ensured prolonged interaction with participants, linking and reviewing the study results to my theoretical position and experiences (see Noble & Smith, 2015). Additionally, I upheld reflexive thinking to mitigate the risk of personal and researcher bias. Reflexive thinking is the constant act of thinking and reflecting on any possible biases that may arise, especially during the interpretation of qualitative findings (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Reflective journaling was done throughout the data collection process, as I took the interview and reflective notes in my journal. Moreover, several experts reviewed and assessed the researcher-developed instrument to ensure that the data collection instrument was unbiased and credible for this study (see Kallio et al., 2016).

Transferability

Transferability is focused on establishing the external validity of the research (Connelly, 2016). Connelly (2016) wrote that transferability focused on the extent to

which the study results were useful to other scholars in similar fields and areas of knowledge. To ensure the transferability of this study, I thoroughly described and provided a thick description of the study's procedures of methodology, specifically concerning population, participant selection, sampling, data collection, and data analysis. Providing thick descriptions of the study's procedures enables other researchers in similar situations and fields to use this study for their research (e.g., Amankwaa, 2016).

Dependability

Dependability is crucial in establishing the trustworthiness of the study (Baskerville et al., 2017). Dependability can be defined as the chance of finding similar conclusions if the study is replicated in other settings (Baskerville et al., 2017). I enhanced the dependability of this study by employing strategies of audit trails and triangulation. I employed the technique of triangulation by using various data sources, comparing them to one another to increase the dependability of the results (see Baskerville et al., 2017). I also recorded and provided audit trails, ensuring sufficient evidence of the study's procedures.

Confirmability

Confirmability can be defined as the objectivity and consistency of a study (Noble & Smith, 2015). Confirmability was achieved in this study by ensuring reflexivity to mitigate researcher bias (see Morse, 2015). The provision of an audit trail also helped further establish confirmability, which I provided, as previously noted. Overall, I used techniques of triangulation and reflexivity to enhance the confirmability of the study.

Ethical Procedures

Various ethical procedures were conducted for this qualitative research. These ethical procedures are vital to qualitative research, especially when human participants are involved in the study (Laumann, 2018). One of the steps taken to gain access to participants or data included the IRB approval from the university. I secured IRB approval from the university before any data collection procedure. Furthermore, protocols and restrictions for the research were duly observed throughout the data collection process. Additionally, permission to recruit members from transgender activism organizations located in the Northeastern United States, including the Capital Pride Alliance and Northeast Transgender Alliance, was obtained from the leaders of these organizations. Using recruitment emails, which included the details of the study, the purpose of the study, inclusion criteria, research activities for the participants with the timeframe, and my contact details, participants were informed of the details of their participation.

Additionally, participants provided informed consent before any data collection procedure, informing and reminding them of their rights to withdraw at any given time without penalties. Each participant was informed and reminded of the measures taken to ensure their privacy and confidentiality. This process was done electronically twice during the recruitment phase and verbally during the interview. After participants expressed their wishes to participate in the study voluntarily, I established and confirmed their eligibility based on the inclusion criteria. After establishing their eligibility, I emailed an electronic informed consent form, wherein each participant was tasked to sign

the form electronically stating, "I consent." The signed electronic informed consent form was sent back to me.

Participants were assigned a respective, unique code or identifier to protect their privacy. These unique codes or identifiers were used throughout the data collection and management processes, even during the video recording. I kept and stored a secured, encrypted file containing the participants' real names and their respective codes or identifiers. Further, all the electronically signed consent forms were stored in a secured, encrypted file. These secured, encrypted files were stored in a password-protected USB to which only I had access.

To address any potential issues in data treatment, all gathered data were stored in a drawer of a locked file cabinet located in my locked home office. These stored, gathered data included the video recordings from the online interviews, stored in a password-protected digital USB. Additionally, the transcribed data were stored in password-protected Microsoft Word documents on my personal password-protected computer. Only I had access to these passwords. The journal used to make notes throughout the interview process was placed in an unmarked envelope and stored in my locked file cabinet drawer. Again, only I had a key to this locked file cabinet. All collected data will be stored for 5 years after the research study is completed. To further protect confidential data and preserve participant privacy, all data from this study will be permanently destroyed and deleted after the storage span of 5 years.

Summary

This chapter focused on discussions regarding the study's methodology, providing an overview of the research design and rationale, my role, and thick descriptions of the study's methodology. This chapter provided robust descriptions of the participant selection logic, instrumentation, recruitment, participation, and data collection procedures. I conducted a qualitative study to answer the research question. Transgender activism organizations located in the Northeastern United States, including the Capital Pride Alliance and Northeast Transgender Alliance, were selected as participants of the study. Approximately eight to 12 transgender activists in the Northeastern United States were recruited as participants through purposive sampling. Recruitment letters with the inclusion criteria were sent via email and Facebook Messenger after gaining written permission from leaders of the said organizations and LGBTQ+ activist group administrators to recruit participants for this study.

Individuals interested in participating were sent a letter of informed consent and asked to choose a date and time to participate in an in-depth, semi-structured interview for 90 min using an online video-conferencing platform, such as *Skype* or *Zoom*. A researcher-developed interview protocol containing in-depth, semi-structured interview questions were used to guide the interviews with each participant. I kept a journal for writing observational and reflective notes throughout the data collection procedure. All the data were analyzed for final interpretation and themes identification through Braun et al.'s (2014) thematic analysis.

IRB approval from the university was obtained to mitigate potential ethical issues. Only participants who provided a signed electronic informed consent form were allowed to participate. The participants' privacy and data confidentiality were secured by using assigned code names for each participant, as well as encrypting all gathered data, saving them in password-protected documents, and storing them in my locked file cabinet in my private home office. After 5 years, all data related to this study will be permanently destroyed and deleted. Chapter 4 proceeds to discuss the setting and demographics in more in-depth detail. Chapter 4 also discusses the details of the data collected, focusing on the results of the data analysis.

Chapter 4: Findings

Transgender activists' experiences of belonging from their community participation and how this experience influences achievement motivation and personal goal attainment was previously unknown. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how transgender activists' lived experiences of a sense of belonging had influenced their motivations to achieve and personal goal attainment. This study was guided by the following research questions:

CQ. How does transgender activists' community participation influence their sense of belonging?

RQ1. How do transgender activists' lived experiences of a sense of belonging influence their motivation to achieve and personal goal attainment?

The findings of this study were derived from the interview data collected from eight transgender activists participating in activist groups to promote rights and social justice for transgender individuals. The participants were selected from various transgender activism organizations located in the Northeastern United States. The interview data were analyzed to generate five themes that answered the research questions. The findings are presented in this chapter.

Setting

The setting of this study was various transgender activism organizations located in the Northeastern United States. The organizations included transgender activism groups on Facebook. The data collection took place from February 10, 2022, to March 17, 2022, during which the COVID-19 pandemic had been ongoing for 2 years. Physical

gatherings of groups were restricted or limited during the past 2 years, which might have affected the activities of the transgender activism organizations. For instance, Participant 3 spoke of attending virtual pride events in place of in-person events.

Demographics

The sample of this study was eight transgender activists participating in an activist group to promote rights and social justice for transgender individuals located in the Northeastern United States. All the participants were over the age of 18 and employed. Participants 4, 5, and 6 shared were enrolled in college, while Participant 7 planned to enroll in college during data collection. The other participants had associate degrees or bachelor's degrees. Three participants identified as MTF, and one participant identified as FTM. Four participants identified as female-to-fluid (FTX). Participant 1 identified as nonbinary, Participant 8 as "free-spirited," and Participants 3 and 7 as "two-spirited" or both male and female at times. Table 1 summarizes the participants' demographic information, including their preferred pronouns, gender identities, employment statuses, and types of work.

Table 1

Demographic Information

Participant	Preferred pronoun	Gender identity	Employment status	Type of work
1	They/their	FTX	full-time	animal rescue
2	They/their	MTF	self-employed	spoken work artist, realtor, retail
3	They/their	FTX	full-time	security guard
4	They/their	MTF	full-time	accounting
5	He/his	FTM	full-time	retail
6	She/her	MTF	part-time	food delivery
7	Fae/Faer	FTX	full-time	retail
8	They/their	FTX	full-time	musician

Data Collection

The data collection method utilized in this study was individual in-depth semistructured interviews. The interviews were conducted to facilitate dialogues with the participants providing greater insights into their experiences. The interviews were held on the video conferencing platform Zoom. Transgender individuals participating in an activist group in the Northeastern United States were the study sample. Individuals who identified as transgender and were in the process of successfully altering the gender markers on their identification cards participated. They were also 18 years old or older, acting in the military, attending school, or working full-time.

Using purposive sampling to gather qualitative data, eight transgender individuals participated. They were recruited by contacting, requesting, and asking for written authorization from various transgender activism organizations in the Northeastern United States. Another recruitment strategy employed in this study was sending a message of the recruitment advertisement to the LGBTQ+ activist Facebook group administrators to obtain permission to post on their social media groups. I also looked for participants from the Walden Participation Pool who fit the study's criteria.

The recruitment email sent to these transgender activism organizations and LGBTQ+ activist group administrators on social media (Facebook) contained the outline of the study, the participants' rights, how the results would be used, my contact information, and details on the inclusion criteria to guarantee that the participants met the criteria. Individuals who expressed their interest in joining were asked to contact me using their email accounts to protect their privacy. I sent a letter of informed consent to

these interested participants. I inquired about their available schedules to engage in an in-depth, semistructured interview for around 90 min through their preferred online video-conferencing platforms. They were also told to pick between video conferencing or audio recording only during the interview.

Before the interview, I double-checked the chosen online video-conferencing platform's video and audio recording features. I gathered observational and field notes as necessary throughout the data collection methods and wrote these in a journal. I also took notes in the journal for those participants who opted to have their interview audio recorded.

I built rapport with the participants before the interview to make them feel more at ease. The interview started with a scripted recap of the study, and I began the audio recording or video recording. Verbal confirmation of each participant was obtained for those who had consented that their interviews could be video recorded. The participants were encouraged to clarify any concerns about the study and their participation. I also reminded and assured them of their rights to confidentiality.

Based on the interview protocol, participants were asked about their lived experiences of a sense of belonging influencing their motivations to achieve and personal goal attainment as transgender activists. As needed, probing questions were asked to deepen the discussion and gather more information on their experiences. All interviews lasted for 45 to 60 minutes, and the data collection process was completed in 1 month, from the middle of February to the middle of March 2022. Table 2 shows the descriptive data of the interviews.

Table 2

Descriptive Data

Participant	Date of interview	Number of pages of interview transcript
1	2/10/2022	16
2	2/16/2022	6
3	2/18/2022 and 2/24/2022	5
4	2/26/2022	5
5	2/27/2022	5
6	2/28/2022	5
7	3/1/2022	5
8	3/17/2022	8

There were no unusual conditions noticed or observed throughout the data gathering procedure. Seven of the eight participants were scheduled for the interviews once. Participant 3 was scheduled twice due to a technical error. Data saturation was also achieved during the fifth participant's interview because the information supplied had previously been discussed in the interviews of all previous participants. The sixth to eighth interviews validated the achievement of saturation, as discovered during the coding of the interviews following data collection.

After completing the interview, the audio and video recordings were verified immediately following each session. The recordings were promptly transcribed, and member checking was employed by emailing the participants a copy of their interview transcripts. They were asked to review their responses and confirm the correctness of the transcription. After receiving the interview transcripts, they were given 10 days to respond via email and submit any modifications. Participants agreed on the interview transcripts sent to them; thus, no changes were made. The transcripts were then prepared for data analysis.

Data Analysis

I used thematic analysis to examine the participants' responses using NVivo software. The data collected through in-depth semistructured interviews were processed and analyzed for data analysis. After the interview, the video recording and handwritten notes from the diary were transcribed using Microsoft Word.

According to Braun et al. (2014), thematic analysis organizes, processes, and evaluates data and discovers the main themes from the participants' responses. Six steps are recommended for thematic analysis: familiarization, code generation, theme identification, theme review, theme naming and definition, and report production (Braun et al., 2014). These steps were taken to answer the research questions of this study.

Familiarization involves immersing oneself in the facts and engaging with the data in numerous ways. I familiarized myself with the data gathered in the study by reading and rereading the transcriptions at least three times and highlighting any words, phrases, or paragraphs significant to the research topic. The first reading occurred immediately after transcribing the interview recordings. Notes on the recurring ideas that emerged from the data during the first reading involved two general patterns: influences on the sense of belonging to represent the CQ and influences on motivation to achieve and personal goal attainment to represent RQ1. Five general but fewer broad patterns were identified during the second and succeeding readings. Under the influences on the sense of belonging, the patterns were a sense of belonging in helping others and a sense of belonging in finding people with whom they related. Under the influences on motivation to achieve and personal goal attainment, the general patterns were motivation

from acceptance, motivation from modeling behaviors, and motivation from seeing success in others.

Each highlighted data section was reviewed for code generation to establish the relevance of the data gathered to the study objectives. The texts were considered relevant by evaluating the responses of the participants to the questions, as well as the texts' relevance to the five general patterns that emerged in the data. These relevant chunks of texts were highlighted and assigned with short descriptors of the meaning of the text. The descriptors served as the initial codes. Thirty-seven codes were generated during this step of the analysis. Data sections determined irrelevant to the research problem were retained in the transcripts but left with no highlight and no assigned code.

The generated initial codes were then classified and organized. The classification of codes was based on this study's theoretical and conceptual framework. Figure 1 shows a sample of the classification of codes to identify themes visually represented using the hierarchy feature of NVivo.

Figure 1

Sample Initial Theme
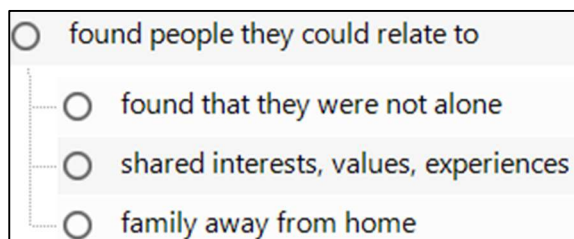
The codes showed that they were not alone and shared interests, values, experiences, and family away from home contained texts relevant to belongingness

experiences from community activities. From Maslow's concepts of love, belongingness, and self-actualization, the participants' experiences allowed them to have a community feeling of being in the world with others (see Bland & DeRobertis, 2017). Six initial themes were identified during this step. Table 3 shows the initial themes and concepts from the theoretical foundations of this study.

Each recurring pattern was described, labeled, and summarized. These themes were further evaluated to ensure their relevance to the study on the influence of transgender activists' lived experiences of a sense of belonging on their drive to succeed and personal goal achievement. Excerpts from the participants' responses also accompanied each selected theme during the interviews.

After determining emergent patterns, a wider classification of patterns emerged, becoming the overarching theme. Each of these emerging and overarching themes was assigned a unique code and identification. A narrative report of each participant's results was created, thoroughly analyzing each output. Using NVivo, significant data from participant responses were saved, classified, and analyzed, allowing me to uncover common patterns throughout the participants' data.

Following a review of the themes in their relationship to one another and the study objectives, five themes emerged to understand how transgender activists' community engagement had influenced participants' sense of belonging. Each theme was assigned a unique name and meaning to guarantee that no themes overlapped one another. The final themes with their definition are presented in the results section.

Table 3

Initial Themes

Themes	Codes	Concepts for classification
Participating to help	- Raising awareness in the community - Providing a safe space for others - Community transgender group supports transgender teens - Pride events - Bringing hope - Providing transportation and helping in the local pantry - Representing for other transgender individuals	Provoke goal-oriented behavior designed to please their need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995)
Found people they could relate to	- Found that they were not alone - Shared interests, values, experiences - Family away from home	Have a community feeling of being in the world with others (Bland & DeRobertis, 2017)
Increased motivation	- Motivated by being accepted for who they are - Motivated by seeing transgender individuals succeed - Motivated by seeing the needs of other transgender individuals being addressed	Under all but adverse conditions produce effects readily (Baumeister & Leary, 1995)
Set personal goals	- Do something worthwhile - Earn money - Improve oneself - Making personal goals seem attainable - Rely on oneself - Not to suffer self-esteem issues	Motivation with no other reason other than to progress (Baumeister & Leary, 1995)
Standing up for themselves and others	- Not tolerating uncomfortable situations - Not tolerating oppression	Affective consequences of constructive interactions with others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995)
Felt empowered	- Empowered to do things for others - Empowered to persist	Being general in their actions towards others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995)

Evidence of Trustworthiness

I used various techniques during data collection and analysis to increase the trustworthiness of the study findings. Trustworthiness entailed ensuring that all data were represented truthfully and relevantly. Increasing trustworthiness involved establishing the credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability of the data (see Lincoln & Guba, 2013).

Credibility is the confidence that the study assesses what is intended and is a realistic representation of the participants' experiences (Maher et al., 2018). I used several procedures to assure the study's credibility. Member checking was performed to make sure that the information gathered from the participants was correct. Participants were given a copy of their interview transcripts to correct and validate their responses during the interviews, the transcription, and my interpretations of their responses. The member-checked transcripts were then used for data analysis because no participants modified the data. Likewise, I conducted lengthy interactions with the participants involved with the data, from conducting the interviews to completing the transcribing process up to data analysis. Reflective journaling was also used to engage reflexive thinking to minimize the chance of any personal bias influencing the study. Furthermore, several experts reviewed and analyzed the researcher-developed interview protocol to verify that the instrument used to gather data for this study was nonbiased and accurate.

According to Pandey and Patnaik (2019), transferability is the capacity of the findings to be transferred to different contexts or settings. This study provided a detailed description of the methodology, including the target population, participant selection,

sampling, data collection, and data analysis. This process would allow other researchers to determine whether the study's procedures would apply to their research.

Dependability means that the procedure is detailed enough for another researcher to repeat the study (Johnson & Rogers, 2020). Triangulation was used in the study to strengthen the trustworthiness of the results by combining many data sources and comparing them to one another. The inclusion of eight transgender activists in the study allowed me to collect additional data and create themes to address the research questions, allowing for data triangulation. In addition, I documented and maintained audit trails to guarantee sufficient proof of the study's methodology, increasing the possibility that future researchers would acquire the same themes.

Confirmability refers to the impartiality and consistency of quantitative research to reduce researcher bias by acknowledging researcher predispositions (Maher et al., 2018). Confirmability was improved and obtained in this study by using audit trails, data triangulation, and reflexivity through reflective journals.

Results

Five themes emerged to answer the research questions of this study. The themes were derived from the thematic analysis of the interview collected from eight transgender individuals participating in an activist group to promote rights and social justice for transgender individuals located in the Northeastern United States. Table 4 shows an overview of the themes.

Table 4

Final Themes

Theme	Definition
Participating in activities that help other transgender individuals	Community participation increased transgender activists' sense of belonging as they work with others to help transgender individuals
Found people with whom they could relate	Community participation increased transgender activists' sense of belonging as they found other people who shared their experiences, struggles, and ideas
Increased motivation to achieve from the outcomes of community participation	Sense of belonging readily resulted in increased motivation to help other transgender individuals as transgender activists witnessed and experienced from community participation
Became confident in themselves and their beliefs	Sense of belonging increased motivation to achieve and personal goal attainment from pleasant feelings in asserting oneself
Felt empowered to do things for others	Sense of belonging increased motivation to achieve and personal goal attainment through feelings of including others in their empowerment

Participating in Activities That Help Other Transgender Individuals

This theme refers to the transgender activists' increased sense of belonging when participating in community activities as they worked with others to help transgender individuals. All eight participants contributed to the development of this theme. The participants experienced that they were essential to the transgender community through their roles in the transgender organizations' activities and events.

Five participants believed that they increased their sense of belongingness by raising awareness of transgender individuals' experiences within the community. Participant 1 shared their experiences of having a sense of belongingness from being able to answer questions about being a transgender individual, including the experience of "coming out," and the evidence-based arguments about proposed bills to include transgender individuals. Participant 1 found a sense of belonging from engaging in

"mutual debates and conversations" with people who had similar and opposing views. Participant 1 generally used Facebook as their platform to engage with other people. Participant 2 had similar perceptions and experiences, but they used preaching in church and public speaking to raise awareness.

Participant 1 further believed their role in community participation and raising awareness about the LGBTQ+ community included representing FTX individuals. The participant believed that exposing oneself to cisgender or non-FTX people increased their sense of belonging, as several were open-minded and accepting once they learned about Participant 1's gender identity. Participant 1 elaborated with the following:

I present very masculine. I just want to go pee in a public place and whether it's Walmart or not. I was working and ended up getting bad looks from people while trying to use the women's restroom. I've had people say they're going to call security on me … I got like yelled at and chased by security. I was like, yeah, I'm female and then he apologized, and the cool thing was that later in the night he did find me in this bar and said, "Hey, I'm sorry about that," and it made me realize like he's just never had to deal with it like he's never been exposed to this, and I'm sure that experience like he showed general genuine remorse for it …. I think the overall outcome was positive and it just makes me want to continue to be that source of exposure for people who haven't had the experience with a FTX person.

Participant 5 explained that his efforts in community participation resulted in his increased sense of belonging. Participant 5 stated, "My activities such as volunteering

with queer camps, HIV advocacy, writing and playing music influence my sense of belonging. It makes me feel grounded and connected to people. In my music, I can tell stories." Participant 7 believed a sense of belongingness in raising awareness for the benefit of other transgender individuals as the participant related faer own experiences of past and present struggles. Participant 7 explained, "Helping those in need because I needed help at one point, and I still do. Knowing that I have support when I need it." Participant 6 also saw herself in the young transgenders that she supported through her community participation. Participant 6 shared, "Being a part of the [community project name redacted] where I look after and support transgender teens … makes me feel proud like I belong in society because I am helping children who are like me."

Moreover, Participants 1, 2, and 7 perceived that their participation in the community led them to find a "safe space" to be themselves, resulting in their desire to provide other transgender individuals with that safety. Participant 2 explained with the following:

> I feel most included or a part of my community when fostering a seat for someone or assisting people even in uncomfortable places. I've been in uncomfortable such as church as who I am, I've been to protests and even been in the room being the tallest woman with broad shoulders getting all the attention and stares. But love always saves you a seat.

Found People With Whom They Could Relate

All eight participants contributed to this theme about the transgender activists' increased sense of belonging when they found other people who shared their experiences,

struggles, and ideas. Through community participation, the participants found out and understood that they were not alone with their struggles and that a community of people had the same ordeals as them. Participant 5 shared his first experience of community participation through a queer camp when he was a teenager. Participant 5 stated, "I attended Queer Camp and it helped me understand that I wasn't going through a phase, and it was other people that I could relate to." Participant 5 further shared that he was now a volunteer camp counselor for the same queer camp. Participant 6 expressed, "[Organization name redacted] helped me so much. I am not alone in society … I am around people like me." Participant 8 perceived that shared ideas within the community inspired shared goals among the community members. As a result, Participant 8 felt a sense of belongingness while working with other people to achieve a common goal. Participant 8 stated the following:

> I am integrated into a network of people who are showing up with compassion as a first language and like to serve. I think it's like it's what influences the transformation from within. Nobody is in it alone, you see it when communities form, right? That's like that's the beauty of [community participation].

Participants 1 and 3 found "family" in within their communities, as they found people who worked toward a common goal and accepted them. Participant 1 stated that they did not have to keep a defensive stance around the people in their community and that they could be themselves. Participant 1 expressed the following:

> Just [euphoric], being happy about myself, my identity, feeling like I can just be myself in the world … finding a family within people, whether it's our animals,

whether it's being a part of the LGBTQ+ activist community and the online

support or it's just people that like to go out and go line dancing. Like in all

aspects, like just having some place that people can come together over one single

thing is so helpful in just helping me feel happy about being alive about being

myself and allowing me to let my guard down and just do what I want to do.

Participant 4 described their community as "a community of people who share the

same issues, interests, or experiences" as them. Their activities, such as "counseling

groups," exposed them to people "with the same gender identity or similar experiences,"

making them feel safe and as though they belonged. Participant 1 had misconceptions

about themselves as a transgender individual, but community participation led them to

find people with similar struggles, ideas, and experiences. This experience was how they

found a sense of belongingness. Participant 1 explained the following:

I thought that to be seen as transgender, I should at least want to have a surgery or

hormone replacement therapy. And I think that that was kind of the image that I

had in my mind where I had so much anxiety. I'm not a guy. I'm not transitioning

to be one. That's not who I am, but again, looking at the definition of what it

means and finding other people in the community and listening to their stories and

how they identify … [my identity] makes sense to me and that has given me more

of a sense of belonging.

Increased Motivation to Achieve From the Outcomes of Community Participation

This theme referred to the transgender activists' increased motivation to help

other transgender individuals as they experienced belongingness from witnessing and

experiencing the favorable outcomes of community participation. Seven participants shared their experiences of increased motivation because of seeing the consequences of their community participation. The participants shared the outcomes of being accepted for who themselves, seeing other transgender individuals succeed, and seeing the needs of other transgender individuals being addressed.

Five participants reiterated the influences of other people's acceptance on their motivation to achieve and personal goal attainment. Participants 1, 2, 3, and 6 emphasized the influences of finding acceptance in the local community as a vital experience. Participant 6, who participated in community activities that supported transgender adolescents, was motivated by the adolescents' parents' acceptance of her and trust in her work. Participant 6 shared, "I think that my community influences my achievement because of what they do – accepting me and trusting me and my team with their kids." Participant 1 shared that their biological family caused them "trauma" and that their community, particularly their friends and coworkers who were their "chosen family," influenced their motivation and personal goal attainment. In relation to work, Participant 1 shared the following:

> Another thing I wouldn't necessarily say is like an activity, but I'm so passionate about my work because I care about animals so much and have a workspace like I do right now. We're a very small team. We're a family … in one of our meetings at the end of it was just like, by the way, I'm nonbinary …. It's one of the most drama free workplaces. We just cooperate. We get along. We all have this shared motivation, and this shared goal and that allows us to do such amazing things and

alongside that, having that acceptance of just who I am as a person, that it's no big deal.

Six participants shared that identifying and having a sense of belonging with other transgender individuals from their community activities and events increased their motivation and personal goal attainment. The participants perceived that seeing transgender individuals overcome the same barriers that they had and succeed in their endeavors was motivating. Participant 3 stated, "For me, seeing other people who share similarities with me and from the same community lets me know I can do it. I do whatever I put my mind to." Participants 2 and 6 shared that they were motivated being witnessing the career success of another transgender individual. Participant 2 disclosed the following:

I have a trans community that I can look up to. There are very successful trans women out there and it gives home. I have a friend who is the CEO of a very wealthy insurance company. I know where she started and where she is now. That is inspiration that I can reach my personal goals.

Four participants were motivated by seeing the needs of other transgender individuals being addressed because of their community participation. Participant 3 shared that their participation in a community pantry activity during the pandemic increased their motivation to "combat world hunger" with their network. Participant 6 had similar experiences in her work on supporting transgender adolescents and Participant 4 had similar experiences in their workplace advocacies. Participant 6 shared, "Also, seeing the results of what my efforts do … I feel like if I don't stand up for people,

I am not doing my job and helping people also makes me want to do more." Participant 4 stated,

> I love seeing the impact I have made by participating in a certain activity. For example, in the workplace, I enjoy seeing the results and the efforts that are being made in the LGBTQ community which motivates me to continue to advocate and be a part of LGBTQ activism. Seeing the results of activism in the workplace, there is power in activity and that is fulfilling, and it gives me thrill and the end results being rewarding.

Became Confident in Themselves and Their Beliefs

This theme referred to the transgender activists' increased motivation to achieve and personal goal attainment from pleasant feelings of asserting oneself. Seven participants contributed to this theme. Confidence in themselves entailed being able to create and achieve personal goals, as well as to stand up for themselves and for their ideals. Participants 3 and 4 shared that finding a sense of belonging influenced them to not tolerate oppression. Participant 1 shared, "[My experiences] increased my drive to keep fighting for my rights as a human being … [people in the community are] able to … give me that validation and understanding…so that I can continue to go back out and fight." Participant 4 shared their experiences of discriminatory behavior in the workplace and how community participation resulted in their intolerance for similar situations:

> My activist experience influences my personal goal attainment because before participating in activism, I was not growing. I did not know I could defend myself

and advocate for what I believe in. I have learned how to fight for myself and not tolerate situations I am uncomfortable with.

Due to Participant 4's experiences, they started feeling safe enough to be confident in who they were and work toward what they wanted in life. Participant 4 shared, "As long as I am safe, I can grow and advocate for my life and not suffer with self-esteem issues. My main goal is to grow, that is what motivates me to achieve my goals."

Participants 1, 3, and 8 perceived that community participation helped them understand that their personal goals were not difficult to attain. For example, Participant 3 articulated the following:

My activist experiences [make] me more driven in my personal life. I know what I can achieve on the activist level. So, it makes me think about what I can achieve on an individual level. It makes me more patient with my personal goals. Activism your already fighting, so it makes me look at my personal goals as even more attainable.

Felt Empowered to Do Things for Others

This theme referred to the transgender activists' increased motivation to achieve and personal goal attainment from feelings of including other transgender individuals in their empowerment. All eight participants contributed to this theme. The participants' experiences of belongingness enabled them to persist in their goals of helping other people through activism. Participant 1 explained that they found their own pace in achieving their goals and determined their own definition of success, which empowered

them to do things for others. Participant 2 shared that being accepted and regaining their ability to speak publicly through the church allowed them to "shine" and inspire other transgender individuals to be themselves. Participant 2 shared,

> And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others. In the trans community- passing privilege and unlocking- to look and sound cisgendered seems to be everyone's goal. I plan to have a concert that shows my voice as it is. I am not ashamed of my deeper tone. It's a part of who I am. I want to my voice to be heard in its many tones because it is a part of my trans experience.

Participant 4 shared Participant 2's perceptions in that they "strong," "resilient" and "not fearful" to pursue their goals because they found acceptance and belongingness in their community. Participant 7 shared that fae gained a feeling of community through faer participation and felt empowered to continue with the community activities to help other people. Participant 7 stated, "My activities helped me by knowing that I have community especially through the LGBTQ center of [place redacted]. They helped me with resources, and it makes me want to stay involved and help other people."

Summary

This chapter contained the presentation of the findings on how transgender activists' lived experiences of sense of belonging had influenced their motivations to achieve and personal goal attainment. Eight transgender activists participating in an activist group to promote rights and social justice for transgender individuals in the

Northeastern United States were selected as the sample. The participants were interviewed using one-on-one semi-structured format. The interview data were analyzed thematically, resulting in five themes that answered the research questions. The development of the themes was guided by the concepts of the theory of achievement motivation (Atkinson & Feather, 1966) and the conceptualization of belonging as a fundamental human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

The five themes included the following: participating in activities that help other transgender individuals, found people with whom they could relate, increased motivation to achieve from the outcomes of community participation, became confident in themselves and their beliefs, and felt empowered to do things for others. The participants found a sense of belongingness in their participation in their organizations' activities. Transgender activists' community participation influenced their sense of belonging as they found other people who shared their experiences, struggles, and ideas. They also worked with other members of the organizations to help transgender individuals move away from similar struggles. The participants' sense of belonginess increased their motivations to achieve and their drive for personal goal attainment. Their motivations to help other transgender individuals increased from experiencing success themselves or from witnessing other transgender individuals become successful. In having a feeling of belongingness, when participating in community activities, the participants had pleasant feelings about themselves, increasing their self-confidence and enhancing their beliefs. Additionally, they felt empowered not just to assert themselves but also to stand up for individuals like themselves.

The next chapter contains the discussion of the study findings. The discussion includes how the findings answered the research questions and how the findings contributed to the body of knowledge on how transgender individuals experience a sense of belonging from their community participation and how their experiences influence achievement motivation and personal goal attainment. The next chapter also contains the implications, limitations, recommendations, and conclusions of this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Transgender activists' experiences of a sense of belonging from their community participation and how those experiences influence achievement motivation and personal goal attainment was previously unknown. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how transgender activists' lived experiences of sense of belonging had influenced their motivations to achieve and personal goal attainment. Providing a better understanding of how activist work facilitates a sense of belonging among transgender individuals and how their experiences of belonging influence achievement motivation and personal goal attainment may contribute to positive social change. Leaders may be encouraged by the study to create spaces that enable success among the transgender community, as suggested by Goldberg (2018).

Eight transgender activists participating in an activist group to promote rights and social justice for transgender individuals in the Northeastern United States were selected for one-on-one, semistructured interviews. The interview data were analyzed thematically, resulting in five themes: (a) participating in activities that help other transgender individuals, (b) found people with whom they could relate, (c) increased motivation to achieve from the outcomes of community participation, (d) became confident in themselves and their beliefs, and (e) felt empowered to do things for others. The participants found a sense of belongingness in their participation in their organizations' activities.

Interpretation of the Findings

Participating in Activities That Help Other Transgender Individuals

Eight participants contributed to this theme, referring to the transgender activists' increased sense of belonging when participating in community activities as they worked with others. The participants believed that they were essential to the transgender community through their roles in transgender organizations' activities and events. These beliefs were corroborated by research reviewed in Chapter 2 about activism. Hagen et al. (2018) showed that activists increased empowerment, social connectedness, and resilience for underserved communities. Research suggested that activism could also mitigate everyday experiences of discrimination, social marginalization, isolation, shame, and internalized oppression (Hagen et al., 2018). In this study, Participants 1, 2, and 7 agreed with these findings, perceiving that their participation in the community led them to find a "safe space" to be themselves, resulting in a desire to provide other transgender individuals with the same feelings of safety. In alignment with this study's participants, Hamrick (1998) proposed that student activists would offer alternate opinions, conclusions, and judgments that can enrich discourse and dialogue while advocating for specific causes (Rosati et al., 2019). Participant 2 agreed by explaining the following:

> I feel most included or a part of my community when fostering a seat for someone
> or assisting people even in uncomfortable places. I've been in uncomfortable such
> as church as who I am, I've been to protests and even been in the room being the
> tallest woman with broad shoulders getting all the attention and stares. But love
> always saves you a seat.

This quote leads into the next finding, as Participant 2 discussed feeling othered by not finding relatable people with which to share their lives. This finding aligns with Johnson and Rogers (2020), who showed the importance of including efforts at building peer transgender community support networks that resemble the individuals they serve and normalize a range of transgender experiences in transgender health care. This finding is discussed further in the following section.

Found People With Whom They Could Relate

All eight participants contributed to this theme, referring to the transgender activists' increased sense of belonging when finding other people who had shared their experiences, struggles, and ideas. Through community participation, the participants found out and understood that they were not alone with their struggles and that a community of people had the same ordeals. This finding was in alignment with most research, such as Johnson and Rogers (2020) and Puckett et al. (2019) who both found community support greatly enhanced transgenders' lives but slightly differed from Weinhardt et al. (2019) who found that family support was more important than friends or community support.

In the current study, Participant 5 stated, "I attended Queer Camp and it helped me understand that I wasn't going through a phase, and it was other people that I could relate to." In agreement, Participant 4 described their community as "a community of people who share the same issues, interests, or experiences" as them. In alignment with such findings, Puckett et al. (2019) examined family support, support from friends, and connectedness to a transgender community and how these types of support come together

to influence mental health and resilience with 695 transgender respondents. The results showed that supports would lower symptoms of anxiety and depression. Johnson and Rogers's (2020) findings aligned with Puckett et al.'s (2019) findings, with Johnson and Rogers showing the importance of building peer transgender community support networks with people who resemble one another, normalizing their populations. Conversely, Weinhardt et al. (2019) found that family support was positively associated with the likelihood of living as one's affirmed gender, with the support received from friends and significant others as insignificant indicators of living as one's affirmed gender. These supports can increase sense of belonging, as shown by the participants in this study (e.g., Participant 4 stating such activities "with the same gender identity or similar experiences" made them feel safe and that they belonged) and other researchers (Peter et al., 2015; Scarf et al., 2016). These findings lead into the following theme.

Increased Motivation to Achieve From the Outcomes of Community Participation

Seven participants shared their experiences of increased motivation because of seeing the consequences of their community participation. This finding aligned with other research reviewed in Chapter 2. Research results showed that a sense of belonging, like that gained from transgender individuals joining a community, was a motivator for personal achievement (Peter et al., 2015), contributing to the increase and maintenance of resilience (Scarf et al., 2016). The participants in the current study generally shared the same outcomes of being accepted for themselves by seeing other transgender individuals succeed. Specifically, Participants 1, 2, 3, and 6 emphasized the influences of finding acceptance in the local community as a vital experience.

In my study, six participants shared that identifying and having a sense of belonging with other transgender individuals from their community activities and events increased their motivations and personal goal attainment, supporting research (e.g., Zeeman et al., 2017). Participant 3 stated, "For me, seeing other people who share similarities with me and from the same community lets me know I can do it. I do whatever I put my mind to." This response agreed with Zeeman et al.'s (2017) results, showing that resilient strategies involved young people being intentionally proactive in accessing supportive educational systems, having a connection to a trans-affirming community where they can reframe mental health challenges, and navigating relationships with family and friends.

Became Confident in Themselves and Their Beliefs

Seven participants developed this theme, referring to the transgender activists' increased motivation to achieve and personal goal attainment from pleasant feelings of asserting oneself. Participants 3 and 4 shared that finding a sense of belonging influenced them to not tolerate oppression. Participants 1, 3, and 8 perceived that community participation helped them understand that their personal goals were not difficult to attain. These perceptions were like research discussed in Chapter 2 (e.g., Barr et al., 2016; Benestad, 2016; Buckler & Gates, 2019). Benestad (2016) stated that many human behaviors concern attempts to achieve a sense of belonging in a group, in a society, in a family, in a partnership, or in the world; however, transgender individuals tend to lack a sense of belonging among cisgender individuals (Buckler & Gates, 2019), as participants in this study admitted.

In agreement with those findings, Participant 3 articulated the following:

My activist experiences [make] me more driven in my personal life. I know what I can achieve on the activist level. So, it makes me think about what I can achieve on an individual level. It makes me more patient with my personal goals. Activism your already fighting, so it makes me look at my personal goals as even more attainable.

In alignment with this belief and study, Barr et al. (2016) examined transgender community belongingness but used it as a mediator between the strength of transgender identity and well-being by assessing surveys completed by a total of 571 transgender adults. The results showed that transgender community belongingness was an important structure in the mental health of transgender individuals and that the strength of an individual's transgender identity was an important structure in transgender individuals' well-being through its relationship with transgender community belongingness.

Felt Empowered to Do Things for Others

Eight participants contributed to this theme, referring to the transgender activists' increased motivation to achieve and personal goal attainment from feelings of including other transgender individuals in their empowerment. This finding aligned with research from Chapter 2 (e.g., Anderson, 2016; Hagen et al., 2018; Stanton et al., 2017; Wagaman et al., 2019). In this study, the participants' experiences of belongingness enabled them to persist on their goals of helping other people through activism. Participant 4 and Participant 2 stated that such communities enabled them to feel "strong," "resilient," and "not fearful" to pursue their goals because they found acceptance and belongingness.

Other researchers found findings that aligned with this study participants' assertions. Such researchers found that a sense of belonging can be facilitated through community participation and connectedness (e.g., Anderson, 2016; Stanton et al., 2017), particularly when the community is social justice-oriented and empowered by activism and advocacy (e.g., Hagen et al., 2018; Wagaman et al., 2019).

Participant 2 shared that being accepted and regaining their ability to speak publicly through the church allowed them to "shine" and inspire other transgender individuals to be themselves. This belief aligned with findings by Jones et al. (2016). Jones et al. found that more than half of the transgender individuals who had completed a survey felt better about their gender identity, had fun, and felt part of a larger community when engaging in activism. Approximately one-third of the respondents felt more resilient and felt that participation eased their depression and thoughts of self-harm. Jones et al. concluded that the findings demonstrated the potential for activism and advocacy to enhance transgender individuals' well-being, personal agency, and community belonging, aligning with Participant 2.

Theoretical Framework Discussion

The theoretical framework for this study was the theory of achievement motivation. The theory of achievement motivation views the strength of an individual's goal-directed tendency as determined by their motives, expectations about the consequences of their actions, and by the incentive values of expected consequences that will have wider value when these concepts are applied toward other goals (Atkinson & Feather, 1966). The theory of achievement motivation was supported by the findings of

this research and other research (Jones et al., 2016). My study showed that the participants' sense of belonginess increased their motivations to achieve and their drive for personal goal attainment. Their motivations to help other transgender individuals also increased from experiencing success themselves or from witnessing other transgender individuals become successful. These findings were supported by the theory in the study and can be better understood through its lens; for example, Kubíková and Pavelková (2016) stated that the theory of achievement motivation was focused on two motives: chance to achieve success and fear of failure. The chance to achieve was enhanced by the activism of the transgender participants and the communities they developed from that activism. These communities lowered their fears of failure, making them feel included, just as Jones et al. (2016) mentioned: Activism and advocacy would enhance transgender individuals' well-being, personal agency, and community belonging.

Conducting this study through the lens of the theory of achievement motivation was the right theoretical framework for this study. Atkinson and Feather (1966) stated in their theory of achievement motivation that a person's achievement-orientation behavior was based on three parts: the individual's predisposition to achievement, the probability of success, and the individual's perception of the value of the task (Bansal & Pahwa, 2015). My study showed that transgender individuals were motivated to achieve their goals when they believed those goals were attainable from experiences with activism and the community. They also perceived the outcome of attaining the goal was valuable to the greater good, with the goal meeting their need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations entailed the flaws and inadequacies that could be from insufficient resources, small sample size, and chosen methodologies. This study had limitations and challenges, especially due to the exposure of an underserved and under-researched community using a qualitative research methodology. The participants involved in the study might not be an accurate representation of the transgender community because of purposive sampling; participants were recruited based on specific criteria.

The study examined transgender activists' experiences as part of transgender activism organizations in the Northeastern United States, including the Capital Pride Alliance and Northeast Transgender Alliance. Thus, the findings may not apply to transgender activists in other areas of the country; the findings of this study may not apply to transgender activists who form part of transgender activism organizations outside of the Northeastern United States. These findings also may not apply to transgender activists who do not belong to the Capital Pride Alliance and Northeast Transgender Alliance.

Furthermore, qualitative researchers use small sample sizes, limiting the generalizability of results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative researchers do not allow the generalization of findings of a diverse population, given that all people are not part of the sample size (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There were challenges in recruiting an equal number of FTM and MTF participants, influencing the types of themes revealed regarding transgenders' lived experiences. Another potential challenge was that transgender individuals' levels of engagement in advocacy might have differed

depending on their level of outness (e.g., Goldberg, 2018), creating variations in their lived experiences of belonging.

One limitation that developed after the initial proposal was that I provided an incentive in the form of a $40 gift card to encourage participation in the study interviews. Thus, participants might have participated due to the incentive, not because they wanted to help and engage in the process. This limitation might have influenced the results, as respondents may have little or no knowledge of the transgender communities' sense of belonging.

Another limitation that developed after the proposal was that cameras were inconsistently used in the participants' virtual interviews. Thus, only some data could be confirmed with videos of participants. Other participants were not visible during the interviews; thus, I could not confirm the person was truly the participant speaking to me or someone else. I had to trust participants to remain honest about their identities when interviewing without video. The virtual aspect of the interviews was a limitation, influencing the surety behind participants being all part of this specified study.

Recommendations

Because the community and population in this study represents vulnerable peoples who are underserved and underresearched, future research is still encouraged. Future researchers should replicate this study in a different geographical area as the results may not generalize to a broader population. Different geographical regions may have people with various cultural beliefs that can influence interview outcomes; thus,

further studies like this one should be conducted with various races, cultures, and ethnicities to see how such differences influence the transgender communities' outcomes.

Future researchers can also replicate this study by increasing the sample size, addressing the limitation of this study. This study also had the limitation of a lack of observations in some interviews without video. Future researchers can address this study's limitation by interviewing in person because COVID-19 mandates have lowered in some areas, making this possible in future studies. Observations are important in interviews as the researcher can better view body language and conduct note taking to enhance the spoken words of an interviewee (Walliman, 2011). Thus, future researchers are encouraged to address this limitation.

Future researchers may also conduct a quantitative study of two different communities of transgenders. They can conduct a causal comparative study and compare these two communities' outcomes to one another to see if differences in belongingness exist among the two communities. Such a study may inform the community about additional barriers in place to the community from cultural beliefs varying. Such differences may influence the ability for someone to experience belongingness. Baumeister and Leary (1995) defined belonging as a need to develop significant consistent interpersonal relationships within a group; such belongingness can vary across groups, making future research important in this area.

Implications

There is limited evidence and insufficient knowledge on the experiences of sense of belonging experienced by transgender activists and how that experience influences

achievement motivation and personal goal attainment (Gilbert, 2019; Nicolazzo, 2017). Transgender activists face unique challenges and barriers to goal achievement, including social exclusion, struggles pursuing academic, professional, and career goals, various difficulties in the transitioning process, and roles in society (Applegarth & Nuttall, 2016; Dowers et al., 2019; Moolchaem et al., 2015; Muhr et al., 2016). Therefore, this study could provide further understanding and awareness into the lived experiences of the sense of belonging among transgender activists. The findings of this study have potential contributions in advancing knowledge in the discipline of developmental psychology, especially as transgender activists face various barriers and challenges in achieving their goals, which are left unaddressed (White Hughto & Reisner, 2018). As such, more effective programs and transgender-inclusive policies could be developed, addressing and promoting community connectedness and successful goal attainment among transgender activists while possibly leading to positive social change, as discussed in the following section.

Positive Social Change

Providing a better understanding of how activist work facilitates a sense of belonging among transgender individuals and how their experiences of belonging influence achievement motivation and personal goal attainment may contribute to positive social change. Leaders may find the results encouraging to create spaces that enable success among the transgender community, as supported by Goldberg (2018). The researcher noted that transgender-inclusive policies and support would lead to enhanced senses of belonging among the transgender community.

Furthermore, this study addressed the under-researched area of transgender activism and the lived experiences of sense of belonging of this population group. Researchers showed that transgender community belongingness was a vital factor in improving the wellbeing, achievement, and mental health of transgender individuals (Barr et al., 2016; Mirza & Rooney, 2018). However, they still suffer mental health issues and suicidality (Mirza & Rooney, 2018). The findings from this study may help provide increased advocacy and awareness beneficial for mental health service providers and social work programs, highlighting the need to promote community connectedness among transgender individuals. Policymakers may also use the results to assist in formulating transgender-inclusive policies to increase levels of sense of belonging among the transgender community. Both changes may help enhance society positively.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study may also have implications for practice by informing educational, organizational, and healthcare leaders on how they can improve their transgender inclusion and activism initiatives in a way that promotes community connectedness and successful goal attainment. This study is significant given its potential in contributing to the advancement of the practice of developmental psychology. Practitioners can use the findings of this study to gain more in-depth information on how to address the needs of transgender activists than before, especially in relation to transgenders' motivations to achieve and personal goal attainment. Medical clinicians, healthcare leaders, and mental health practitioners may use the findings to develop more targeted initiatives and interventions than before. These new interventions may be

effective in equipping and supporting goal attainment and community connectedness of transgender activists in the Northeastern United States.

According to Gilbert (2019) and Nicolazzo (2017), most research on the transgender community has focused on understanding transgender community belongingness and wellbeing among transgender individuals. However, the objective of this study was to understand the lived experiences of sense of belonging among transgender activists and how these experiences had influenced their motivations to achieve and personal goal attainment. Therefore, these findings are crucial in enabling medical leaders, healthcare providers, and other relevant stakeholders to understand, engage, and educate transgender activists on effective techniques to manage their experienced barriers to community belongingness and goal attainment (Fabbre & Gaveras, 2020; Hagen et al., 2018). The findings may be used to enhance such practitioners' abilities to relate with this vulnerable community.

Conclusion

The U.S. transgender community has grown in prominence (Reisner, Hughto, et al., 2015) but remains underserved, facing several health challenges from long-standing marginalization (Chrisler et al., 2016; Sweileh, 2018). The transgender community also has higher than average rates of smoking, drug and alcohol abuse, HIV infection, and suicide attempts (Chrisler et al., 2016). Adding to these challenges, the transgender community faces lack of legal protection, poverty, harassment, stigma, anti-gender violence, barriers to health care, and identify documents (Tilak & Singh, 2019).

The lack of legal protection increases the challenges transgender individuals face, with most transgender individuals experiencing harassment on the job, struggling to get appropriate health care, and living in poverty. The legal protection of transgender individuals has been an argumentative issue for a long period, with courts often pathologizing or refusing the recognition of transgender identities (Vogler, 2019). Even though international and regional resolutions call for the legal protection of transgender people, states still do not meet these obligations (Lanham et al., 2019). Therefore, studies like the current one are important for future researchers to continue conducting to influence positively policies, knowledge, and society's views of the transgender population.

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Appendix: Interview Guide Questions

Demographic Information

The demographic information questions were derived from the selection criteria detailed in the methodology section.

1. How would you describe your gender identity?

2. Are you 18 years old or older?

3. Are you employed? What is your current job?

4. Are you enrolled in school? What are you studying?

5. Are you a member of any transgender activist community or group? Which one/s?

CQ. How does transgender activists' community participation influence their sense of belonging?

1. What motivates you to achieve your goals? (Motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic (Atkinson & Feather, 1966; Nazir et al., 2019) This question can help identify whether the participant is motivated by belongingness).

2. What activities in your local community make you feel as though you belong? (This question will be used to elicit responses regarding involvement in the community that could promote belongingness (Fisher et al., 2015).

3. How do your activities influence your sense of belonging? (Central question)

4. How do your activates influence your sense of resilience? (Resilience is an indicator of personal achievement and motivation (Peter et al., 2015; Scarf et al., 2016).

RQ1. How do transgender activists' lived experiences of sense of belonging influence their motivation to achieve and personal goal attainment?

5. How do you think your community influences your achievements? (Derived from the concept that achievement is a result of the interaction of the individual with their immediate environment such that a standard of excellence is socially constructed (Sarangi, 2015).

6. How does your activist experience influence your personal goal attainment? (One of the three levels of activism is the micro/individual level. Activism is believed to increase empowerment, social connectedness, and resilience that contribute to goal attainment (Hagen et al., 2018).

7. How would you describe your personal drive when attempting to achieve your personal goals? (One's competitive drive contributes to the motivation of being persistent and impulsive to attain achievement (Smith et al., 2020).

8. What influences you to increase your efforts in a certain activity? (Achievement motivation consists of various factors that influence increasing or maintaining one's efforts in relation to goal achievement (Smith et al., 2020).