

Everyday positive experiences and self-acceptance among LGBTQ+ youth: The role  
of autonomy, competence, and relatedness

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## Samenvatting

Recent onderzoek suggereert dat lesbische, gay, biseksuele, transgender en queer (LGBTQ+) jongeren meer psychische problemen ervaren en worstelen met zelfacceptatie van hun seksuele oriëntatie en genderidentiteit. Gebaseerd op de zelfdeterminatietheorie onderzoekt deze studie in hoeverre de vervulling van de drie psychologische basisbehoeften autonomie, competentie en verbondenheid door positieve alledaagse ervaringen bijdraagt aan zelfacceptatie. Door de focus te verleggen van negatieve ervaringen naar beschermende factoren, worden mogelijkheden onderzocht om de veerkracht van LGBTQ+ jongeren te versterken. Dit werd onderzocht aan de hand van een open vraag over positieve ervaringen uit een twee weken durend dagboekonderzoek onder Nederlandse LGBTQ+-jongeren. Hun schriftelijke antwoorden werden geanalyseerd met behulp van Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count 2022 (LIWC22) om niveaus van autonomie, competentie en verbondenheid te meten. Er werd een meervoudige regressieanalyse uitgevoerd om te onderzoeken in hoeverre de drie basisbehoeften samenhangen met zelfacceptatie. In de antwoorden op de open vraag bleek autonomie het meest voor te komen. Vanwege de lage interne consistentie van de samengestelde constructen en het gebrek aan significante associaties met zelfacceptatie, leverden de resultaten echter geen betrouwbare schattingen op en kon er geen correlatie worden aangetoond. Dit kan mogelijk worden verklaard door de beperkte validiteit van de gebruikte meetmethode en de mogelijkheid dat positieve ervaringen zelfacceptatie alleen op de langere termijn beïnvloeden.

*Sleutelwoorden: LGBTQ+ jongeren, zelfdeterminatietheorie, zelfacceptatie, positieve ervaringen, LIWC*

## Abstract

Recent research suggests that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) youth experience increased rates of mental health problems and struggle with self-acceptance of their sexual orientation and gender identity. Based on self-determination theory, this study investigates the extent to which fulfilment of the basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness through positive everyday experiences contributes to self-acceptance. By shifting the focus from negative experiences to protective factors, it explores opportunities to strengthen LGBTQ+ youths' resilience. This was investigated using an open-ended question on positive experiences from a two-week diary study among Dutch LGBTQ+

youth. Their written responses were analysed using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count 2022 (LIWC22) to measure levels of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the extent to which three basic psychological needs were associated with self-acceptance. In the responses given to the open-ended question, autonomy was found to be most prevalent. However, due to the low internal consistency of the composite constructs and the lack of significant associations with self-acceptance, the results did not provide reliable estimates and no correlation could be demonstrated. This could possibly be explained by the limited validity of the measurement method used and the possibility that positive experiences affect self-acceptance only in the longer term.

*Keywords: LGBTQ+ youth, self-determination theory, self-acceptance, positive experiences, LIWC*

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## Introduction

Recent research indicates that Dutch people's attitudes towards people from the LGBTQ+ community have taken a more positive turn compared to previous years (Huijnk et al., 2022). However, despite these positive findings, significant disparities persist between the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals and their heterosexual, cisgender counterparts. Several studies indicate that people from the LGBTQ+ community disproportionately experience discrimination, bullying, and violence (Geerlings et al., 2022; Van den Broeck et al., 2022). Such negative experiences are associated with a lack of self-acceptance and mental health problems (Van Beusekom & Kuyper, 2018; Kiekens et al., 2022). This is problematic for several reasons. Notably, self-acceptance is considered a fundamental condition for psychological well-being. Self-acceptance can be facilitated by fulfilling the three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci et al., 2017; Deci & Ryan, 2002; Kloosterman et al., 2021). A supportive environment and recognition can contribute to the well-being of these young people (Frost & Meyer, 2012; Hatzenbuehler & Pachankis, 2016; Meyer, 2003). Thus, a protective factor against mental health problems faced by LGBTQ+ youth rests in positive experiences, which may foster a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Therefore, this study seeks to address the following research question: "To what extent do daily positive experiences of LGBTQ+ youth include the presence of the three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness? And to what extent is the presence of these three needs in daily experiences related to self-acceptance?"

The concerning mental health situation among LGBTQ+ youth in the Netherlands is well-documented. Among other factors, these young people are reported to experience minority stress and a lack of self-acceptance, leading to various adverse mental health effects (Broekroelofs & Bool, 2019; De Lange et al., 2022; Van Beusekom et al., 2014). For instance, the rates of depression and anxiety are higher among this population, with LGBTQ+ youth being twice as likely to develop mental health problems compared to their heterosexual, cisgender peers (Huijnk et al., 2022; King et al., 2008; Marshal et al., 2013). Additionally, there is an alarming prevalence of suicidal ideation and suicide within this group, with suicide rates among LGBTQ+ youth being 4.5 times higher than those of their heterosexual, cisgender peers (Kuyper, 2015).

Furthermore, the developmental stage of adolescence and early adulthood highlights the critical need to address the mental health of this group. During this period, identity

formation is a central developmental task, making LGBTQ+ youth particularly vulnerable to challenges related to self-acceptance, among others (Gmelin et al., 2022; Sonneveld & Bungener, 2022). Despite the recognition of these vulnerabilities, there is still little research on protective factors and other opportunities to improve the mental health of LGBTQ+ youth. Therefore, this study aims to investigate potential protective factors.

### **Self Determination Theory and Adolescent Wellbeing**

Negative experiences encountered by LGBTQ+ youth, such as social rejection, feelings of insecurity, and fear of expressing their authentic identity, are suggested to undermine self-acceptance (De Lange et al., 2022; Deci et al., 2017; Deci & Ryan, 2002). Generally, self-acceptance is seen as a leading factor in adolescent development. Among other things, it contributes to developing a more positive self-image and greater self-confidence. Furthermore, increases in self-acceptance have been associated with reductions in psychological issues such as anxiety and depression among young people (Remmerswaal, 2015; Van der Lee, 2024).

Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) positions self-acceptance as an important facet of healthy psychological development. Although this theory focuses mainly on intrinsic motivation and psychological well-being, it also refers (indirectly) to the self-acceptance achieved when the individual feels autonomous, competent, and related (Deci & Ryan, 2017; Deci & Ryan, 2002). Autonomy refers to the need for individuals to make their own choices. It allows individuals to be in close contact with their authentic selves, which can enhance self-acceptance (Ryan & Deci, 2006). This sense of autonomy extends to various life domains, such as academic, professional, and personal contexts. Competence relates to the human drive to develop skills and achieve goals in both personal and educational matters. The development of these competencies contributes to a stronger sense of self-worth, which can increase self-acceptance. Relatedness refers to the need to establish relationships with others. In particular, the recognition and support are derived from social relationships. These relationships include all existing social networks, such as friends, family, and classmates. Relationships with other individuals and the recognition associated with them also have a promoting effect on the level of self-acceptance. These three basic needs reinforce each other without hierarchy. This means that a deficiency in one basic need cannot be fully compensated by one of the other needs (Deci et al., 2017; Deci & Ryan, 2002).

Empirical research has demonstrated that self-determination theory provides a valuable framework for understanding adolescent development (Van den Broeck et al., 2016;

Vansteenkiste et al., 2010). Young people are thought to become more motivated by fulfilling the three basic psychological needs (Van den Broeck et al., 2016). For instance, research shows that young people who feel supported by their environment in gaining autonomy are more likely to score higher on intrinsic motivation. According to the researchers, a correlation was shown between higher motivation and more positive well-being (Vallerand et al., 1997). In addition to promotive intrinsic motivation, the fulfillment of these psychological needs is associated with greater self-confidence in young people (Deci et al., 2017; Deci & Ryan, 2002). Thus, it is suggested that when there is more focus in education on fostering feelings of competence, through feedback, for example, young people become more confident in their own abilities. Moreover, this is then associated with a lower risk of depression and anxiety (Jang et al., 2009). Finally, young people who experience strong connectedness with peers and family members score better on coping with social and emotional challenges. This also works to promote individuals' psychological well-being (Niemic et al., 2008).

### **Need Thwarting in LGBTQ+ Youth**

The self-determination theory focuses mainly on the *fulfilment* of psychological needs autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). However, there is also a focus from this theory on need *thwarting*, meaning that the three basic psychological needs are actively frustrated (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Especially in the context of minority groups, such as LGBTQ+ youth, it is important to pay attention to need thwarting. Indeed, these youth, due to fear of social rejection, among others, often feel that they should hide their sexual orientation or gender identity (Geerlings et al., 2022; Legate et al., 2012; Quinn et al., 2014; Van den Broeck et al., 2022). This process, also described as identity repression, is seen as a direct example of need thwarting (Ryan & Deci, 2012). Indeed, the lack of openness regarding one's identity can compromise the three basic psychological needs. For example, autonomy can be undermined when one does not feel free enough to be oneself. Such experiences can lead to problems in the psychological functioning of these young people (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Legate et al., 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Ryan et al., 2015; Weinstein et al., 2012).

Indeed, empirical research suggests that LGBTQ+ youth conceal their sexual identity less vigilantly in contexts where autonomy is supported. They were also less likely to experience psychological problems and more self-appreciation in these environments (Legate et al., 2012; Weinstein et al., 2012). Within self-determination theory, the balance between repressing and integrating one's identity is considered to have a major impact on psychological well-being. Here, it is essential to note that identity repression entails the active

undermining (need thwarting) of fundamental psychological needs, rather than merely the absence of need fulfillment. Thus, when there is identity integration, this can have positive effects on self-image, whereas suppressing one's identity can lead to mental problems (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Legate et al., 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Ryan et al., 2015; Weinstein et al., 2012).

### **Positive Experiences among LGBTQ+ Youth**

Several protective factors against minority stress have been identified among LGBTQ+ youth. One of these factors is found in positive experiences. For instance, positive interactions could be protective factors in minority stress and other mental health problems faced by LGBTQ+ youth (Frost & Meyer, 2012; Meyer, 2003). These positive experiences can be interpreted broadly. For instance, a qualitative study of various sexual minority groups by Frost & Meyer (2012) found that a sense of belonging can be a protective factor for the mental well-being of these young people. According to this study, this acts as a protective factor in several contexts (family, peers, school). Social support and positive identity formation are also seen as protective factors (Meyer, 2003).

The added value of positive experiences in the lives of LGBTQ+ young people, among others, is shown in the study by Mohr & Sarno (2016). For instance, daily positive experiences contribute to mental well-being. Also, positive interactions with other LGBTQ+ individuals can lead to less negative feelings regarding one's sexual orientation (Mohr & Sarno, 2016). Thus, peer and community support can help strengthen self-acceptance. This again highlights the importance of more research into the positive experiences in the lives of LGBTQ+ young people.

### **Current Study**

While most studies targeting LGBTQ+ youth focus on negative experiences, the present study focuses exclusively on positive experiences (Hatzenbuehler & Pachankis, 2016; Meyer, 2003; Proost, 2022). It examines a possible link between LGBTQ+ youths' positive experiences and fulfilment of the basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Moreover, it examines whether the fulfilment of these needs is related to self-acceptance. A daily diary study that was conducted among Dutch LGBTQ+ youth was used to examine these associations.

Diary studies are relatively commonly used in research on adolescents to monitor and better understand their daily experiences, emotions, and behaviours in real-time (Dalenberg et al., 2016; Klootwijk et al., 2021). For example, in the study of Mohr & Sarno's (2016), a diary

study was used to investigate identity-related daily stress and support processes. This research found, among other things, that when individuals experience more positive feelings, daily stress decreases. Another diary study by Dalenberg et al. (2016) examined adolescents' romantic and sexual development. The results of this study showed that in adolescents, this is mainly a romantic process, with an emphasis on attraction and infatuation. A positive factor in this development was found in an open and tolerant rapport with parents concerning this topic.

## **Methods**

### **Design**

The data used for this quantitative study were derived from a diary study conducted in 2019. This study employed a correlational and longitudinal research design, where the researchers did not manipulate variables or influence outcomes. The two-week longitudinal approach allowed for the identification of daily fluctuations in experiences and their short-term associations with mental health. This study specifically focused on the experiences of Dutch LGBTQ+ youth, with participants selected based on their non-heterosexual/cisgender sexual orientation and/or gender identity. To recruit participants, a convenience sampling method was used, in which the participants were chosen in a nonrandom manner. In this way, a sufficiently large sample could be obtained within the specific target group. In this study, focusing on the positive experiences of LGBTQ+ youth, no distinction is made between the specific groups within the LGBTQ+ community (e.g., lesbian, transgender, etc.).

### **Participants**

The total sample size of this select sample consists of  $N = 409$  participants. As this is a descriptive and exploratory study, no statistical power analysis was performed in determining the required sample size. The inclusion criteria required young people to consider themselves part of the LGBTQ+ community or that they experienced same-sex attraction. The average age of this sample is 18.4 years with a minimum age of 16 and a maximum age of 25 ( $M = 18.4$ , min-max=16-25). Although the sample consisted mainly of high school students, several participants did not (or no longer) attend school (19.5%). Furthermore, 21% of the respondents attended a VWO education program (Pre-University Education), while 6.8% followed a HAVO education program (Senior General Secondary Education) and 11.5% followed an HBO education program (University of Applied Sciences). Additionally, 18.3% of the respondents were enrolled in an MBO education program (Secondary Vocational

Education), 3.2% attended a VMBO education program (Pre-vocational Secondary Education), and 15.1% were studying at a university. The remaining respondents did not follow any of these education programs. The youth's place of residence was unknown.

### **Variables and Instruments**

***Positive Experiences.*** This study used a dataset that was collected through an open-ended question included in the diary survey. Over a two-week period, participants were asked this question daily, focusing on positive experiences in relation to sexual orientation or gender identity. The initial question read: “In the past 24 hours (after  $t_1$ , since completing the previous logbook), have you had a positive experience related to your sexual orientation or gender identity? For example, going to an LGBT café, watching a film with an LGBT+ character, or a positive reaction to your sexual orientation or gender identity.”

Participants who answered ‘no’ to this question could skip the follow-up questions. If this question was answered ‘yes’, they were directed to the main question of this study: “Can you describe this positive experience? You may answer as elaborately as you wish.” The responses were analysed to assess the extent to which the described experiences contribute to the fulfilment of the three basic psychological needs outlined in the self-determination theory: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

***Self-acceptance.*** Self-acceptance was measured in this study using five questions related to internalised homophobia. Meyer's (2003) research implies that this is a useful measure of self-acceptance. This scale consisted of the following items:

1. I wish I did not have this sexual orientation or gender identity.
2. Because I have this sexual orientation or gender identity, I don't feel completely myself.
3. If someone offered me the chance to become heterosexual or cisgender, I would seize the opportunity with both hands.
4. My sexual orientation or gender identity is seen as positive by others.
5. For myself, this sexual orientation or gender identity is not a problem at all.

### **Procedure**

Participants for this study were recruited through online advertisements placed on platforms focused on LGBTQ+ youth, such as Instagram pages and Facebook groups aimed at this target group. The advertisement contained a link directing potential participants to an information page that provided detailed descriptions of the study's objectives and procedures,

as well as an informed consent form outlining their rights and participation requirements. Upon providing informed consent, participants received an online invitation by text message or email to an online diary. As compensation for their participation, they received a modest financial incentive.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the University of Groningen, ensuring that the research adhered to established ethical standards and safeguarded the rights of participants during the process of data collection and analysis. Moreover, the consent form emphasised that participation was voluntary and could be stopped at any time. The form also underscored the confidentiality and anonymity of the data, ensuring that participants' responses would be processed in a manner that protected their privacy.

During the entire two-week period, participants completed a brief daily questionnaire that inquired, among other things, about their positive experiences related to their sexual orientation or gender identity. The diary could be completed at any location, as long as the participants had access to the platform via a mobile phone, laptop or tablet.

### **Analysis plan**

The textual answers given by the participants to the open-ended question regarding positive experiences during the diary study were analysed with Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count 2022 (LIWC22). This analysis software programme allows psychological and linguistic characteristics of language to be retrieved. Using this software, an attempt was made to determine the extent to which positive experiences in the lives of LGBTQ+ youth include language related to the three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Since LIWC22 does not directly measure these three constructs, new categories were constructed using language patterns associated with these three constructs. LIWC calculated the Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 (KR-20) for the individual sub-categories. These values indicate the internal consistency of each word category, based on the presence or absence of words within a given text. A higher KR-20 value indicated greater consistency between words within a category, implying a more reliable measurement of the underlying concept.

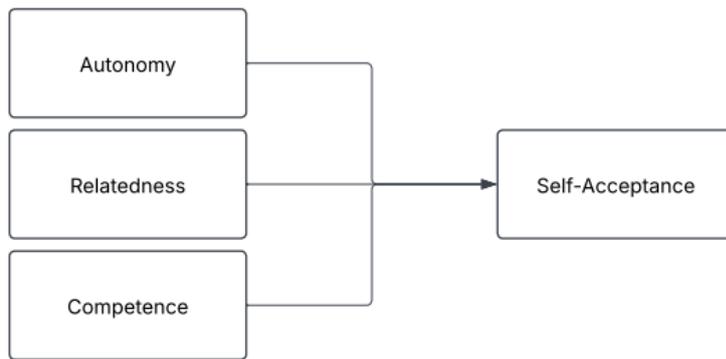
First, to measure the construct autonomy, sub-categories were chosen that are closely related to this construct. Thus, pronouns used in the data will be analysed. Indeed, the use of personal pronouns may indicate a focus on personal experiences, which may indicate autonomous feelings (Gonzales et al., 2009; Pennebaker & King, 1999). This will be done by

merging the subcategories 'I' (KR-20 = .85) and 'we' (KR-20 = .78). In addition, attention will be paid to words that express conviction, such as 'definitely' and 'absolutely'. Indeed, these words refer to making certainty in making one's own choices, which, according to self-determination theory, is an important condition for autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This corresponds to the subcategory 'Certitude' (KR-20 = .88) from the 'Cognitive Processes' domain. These subcategories were found to be reliable (Kuder-Richardson Coefficients, KR-20) according to the LIWC manual. The closer KR-20 is to 1, the more reliable the test. Thus, the new construct 'Autonomy' consisted of the subcategories: 'I', 'We', and 'Certitude'.

Second, the construct competence will be measured by the presence of performance words. Examples of such words are: 'success' and 'ambition'. These words fall under the LIWC22 category 'Achievement' (KR-20 = .92) from the 'Drives' domain. Such words refer to confidence in one's ability, and this corresponds to the definition from self-determination theory. Competence also refers to experiencing ownership and control over one's own life and the choices made. Therefore, the category 'Power' (KR-20 = .96), which also belongs to the 'Drives domain, is included in the new formulated category 'Competence' (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Third, in self-determination theory, relatedness is seen as experiencing commonality and forming relationships (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In particular, interactions with peers are important in this for LGBTQ+ youth (Van Bergen & Spiegel, 2015). Therefore, the new 'Relatedness' category consisted of the subcategories 'Friend' (KR-20 = .75) from the 'Social References' domain and 'Affiliation (KR-20 = .94) from the 'Drives' domain.

The output of LIWC was imported into the statistical computer programme SPSS. To investigate to what extent autonomy, competence, and relatedness were present in the responses, SPSS was used to assess the frequency of these three constructs. To examine the relationship between the presence of these three basic psychological needs and self-acceptance, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. Scores for self-acceptance were measured using a Likert scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). In this analysis, the degree of self-acceptance, as measured by the internalised homophobia scale, served as the dependent variable (Y). In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha for self-acceptance is .77. Figure 1 is the conceptual model that contains these relationships



*Figure 1.* Conceptual model.

Since the diary survey involves a multi-day procedure, there may be participants who did not provide answers every day. To address missing data, pairwise deletion is used. This means that a participant is included in the analysis when they have answered the required questions and no complete exclusion occurs. This ensures that as few participants as possible are entirely excluded from the analysis. The same methods will be applied to the questions in the scale of self-acceptance.

## **Results**

First, the extent to which daily positive experiences included references to the three basic psychological needs was assessed. The mean and standard deviation of the newly constructed categories 'Autonomy' (KR-20 = .49), 'Competence' (KR-20 = .31), and 'Relatedness' (KR-20 = .69) were described in Table 1. Competence initially consisted only of the variable 'Achievement'. Since calculating internal consistency based on only a single item is not possible, it was chosen to combine it with the variable 'Power'. The choice of this variable was supported by the literature. Although this does not result in a high KR-20, this variable was included in the analysis.

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for Autonomy, Competence and Relatedness*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Autonomy	2.97	2.13
Competence	.48	.97
Relatedness	3.15	3.83

The results revealed that 4.3% of the words used in the responses to the open-ended question on positive experiences could be categorized into the developed category of ‘Autonomy’. In the case of ‘Competence’, this percentage rested on 0.6%, and in the case of ‘Relatedness’ on 3.2%. This indicates that the basic need autonomy was more present in the responses to the open-ended question than competence and relatedness. A repeated measures ANOVA showed a significant difference between the three categories. The analysis indicated that the category of ‘Autonomy’ was most frequently used in the responses to the open-ended question  $F(1,32) = 228.19, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.42$ .

**Self-Acceptance**

The extent to which the presence of the three categories for basic psychological needs was related to self-acceptance was also investigated. To examine a possible relationship between the categories autonomy, competence, and relatedness (independent variables) and self-acceptance (dependent variable), a multiple regression analysis was performed. The assumptions of linear regression have been tested and are largely met. However, minor deviations were found in the assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity. Nevertheless, these deviations remained within acceptable limits. Thus, no serious violations of the regression assumptions were observed. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 2.

The multiple regression analysis showed that the three categories for basic psychological needs were not significant predictors of self-acceptance ( $ps > .05$ ). The explained variance of the model was low ( $R^2 = 0.01$ ) suggesting that autonomy, competence, and relatedness explained only a small (non-significant) part of the variance in self-acceptance.

Table 2

*Regression Coefficients for Predicting Self-Acceptance*

	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Autonomy	-.02	.02	.355
Competence	.01	.05	.778
Relatedness	.02	.01	.138

**Note.** Dependent Variable: Self Acceptance.

The individual items that were part of the composite constructs for basic psychological needs were also examined in relation to self-acceptance. Linear regression assumptions were checked. Again, slight deviations were observed in linearity and homoscedasticity. However, these deviations remained within acceptable boundaries. It can be concluded that the model satisfies the main regression assumptions. The results for this multivariate regression analysis are shown in Table 3. Out of the seven categories, two were found to be significant predictors of self-acceptance ( $ps < .05$ ). A more frequent occurrence of the category ‘we’ (e.g., we, our, us, lets) was associated with lower levels of self-acceptance, while a more frequent occurrence of the category ‘affiliation’ (we, our, us, help) was associated with higher levels of self-acceptance.

Table 3

*Regression Coefficients for Individual Items Predicting Self-Acceptance*

	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
I	-.01	.01	.438
We	-.11	.05	.029
Certitude	.02	.03	.545
Achievement	.01	.03	.625
Power	.00	.04	.906
Friend	-.02	.02	.351
Affiliation	.03	.01	.016

**Discussion**

This exploratory study examined the extent to which the three basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) were mentioned in daily positive experiences in the lives of LGBTQ+ youth, and whether these were associated with self-acceptance. Several studies emphasised the importance of positive experiences in countering minority stress in LGBTQ+ young people (Frost & Meyer, 2012; Hatzenbuehler & Pachankis, 2016; Meyer, 2003). By understanding more about the fulfilment of basic needs, interventions may be able to better target the specific support these young people need to promote their well-being. Given this exploratory nature of the current study, the results found are indicative.

Out of the three basic psychological needs, words related to ‘autonomy’ seemed to be most frequently mentioned in the positive experiences of LGBTQ+ youth more often than words related to ‘competence’ and ‘relatedness’. This may suggest that positive experiences in particular fulfil the need for autonomy. However, when the reliability of these three scales was assessed, none were of an acceptable level. This implies that the internal consistency of the composite constructs made in the current study was low, and the subcategories comprising these constructs did not correlate strongly with each other. Even after conducting item

analysis, internal consistency remained low. It can thus be concluded that the composite scales did not accurately or reliably measure a homogeneous construct.

The relationship between the presence of the categories for the three basic psychological needs and self-acceptance was also examined. The findings showed that none of the constructs were associated with LGBTQ+ youth's self-acceptance. There are several explanations for this. First, methodologically, this can be explained by the low degree of internal reliability of the three constructs. Second, the limited contextual interpretation ability of LIWC may be another explanation. Importantly, LIWC assesses the presence of words, not the context in which they are used. Finally, it may be that these basic needs are only effective in increasing self-acceptance when they develop over a longer period of time and not through the occurrence in two weeks. Based on the current results, the three basic needs measured in this study did not predict self-acceptance. This contrasts with self-determination theory, in which the fulfilment of autonomy, competence, and relatedness is hypothesized to result in self-acceptance (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Deci & Ryan, 2017). However, in the current study, we also assessed the separate measures obtained in the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count software. These were of high reliability and could therefore be used separately to predict LGBTQ+ youth's self-acceptance. The results showed a weak negative association between the presence of words related to 'we' (e.g., we, our, us) and a weak positive association between the presence of words related to 'affiliation' (we, our, us, help) with self-acceptance. This could indicate a different psychological effect of various forms of social language use. Possibly, the way young people relate to others plays a role in the extent to which they accept themselves.

Besides the importance of fulfilling the three basic psychological needs for psychological well-being, the literature also highlights the negative consequences of actively undermining these needs, also called "need thwarting" (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Deci & Ryan, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2017). For instance, negative experiences such as discrimination and social rejection can lead to the frustration of these basic psychological needs (Legate et al., 2012; Weinstein et al., 2012). Such experiences are particularly prevalent within minority groups, such as LGBTQ+ youth, and may result in the concealment of one's identity, also known as identity repression (Geerlings et al., 2022; Ryan & Deci, 2012; Van den Broeck et al., 2022). This process, independently of the extent to which everyday positive experiences fulfil needs, may negatively affect the level of self-acceptance (Deci & Ryan, 2017; Legate et al., 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2012; Weinstein et al., 2012). This could partly explain the lack of a

relationship between fulfilment of the three basic needs and self-acceptance. Possibly, it would not only be the satisfaction of these needs in positive experiences, but also the effects of actively undermining them, specifically in this target group.

The absence of a direct relationship between basic needs and self-acceptance also suggests that there may be an indirect, mediated pathway. A promising mediating variable could be found in thwarting needs. Indeed, an autonomy-supportive environment may reduce the likelihood of identity repression, which in turn contributes to higher self-esteem and possibly more self-acceptance. Autonomy, as a basic psychological need, influences the degree of need thwarting, and need thwarting subsequently affects self-acceptance. Positive experiences, or the fulfilment of basic psychological needs, correlate with self-acceptance, but only when there is no need thwarting (Legate et al., 2012; Weinstein et al., 2012). Also, self-esteem, on its own, can be a mediating factor in the relationship between the fulfilment of basic needs and self-acceptance. Indeed, when these needs are met, it contributes to a more positive self-image. When an individual possesses more self-esteem, this can lead to more self-acceptance (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Deci & Ryan, 2017). Thus, the complex interplay between basic psychological needs and self-acceptance deserves more attention to the mediation pathways.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

A strong point of this study lies in the large number of participants who participated in the diary study, which increases statistical power and the reliability of the results. Also, the large sample size increases the likelihood that the results found were representative of the population, in this case, LGBTQ+ youth (Berg & Lune, 2012; Maso & Smaling, 1998). Further, since data was collected using a two-week diary survey, the likelihood of retrospective bias was reduced. These memory biases can occur when people are asked about past events at a later stage. With this study, participants shared their experiences almost immediately after the events occurred. Also, using this method, participants' behaviours and emotions were recorded in their natural context. These aspects increased the likelihood of reliable and accurate descriptions (Berg & Lune, 2012).

Despite these strengths, several limitations should be considered. First, a convenience sampling method was used to recruit participants for the diary study. While this is an appropriate method for obtaining a sufficiently large sample within a specific target group, it may limit external validity (Agresti, 2018). However, participants were offered flexibility and

anonymity by making the questionnaires available online and at any location. As this promotes generalisability, this mitigates concerns about external validity (Agresti, 2018).

Second, in this study, internalised homophobia was used as an inverse measure of self-acceptance. It is scientifically supported that this is a useful criterion for self-acceptance (Meyer, 2003). Thus, an individual's high level of internalised homophobia could indicate a low level of self-acceptance and acceptance of their own sexual identity. However, self-acceptance is a much broader concept than just the absence of internalised homophobia. As a result, this concept may not be comprehensive enough to make statements about participants' levels of self-acceptance. Measuring self-acceptance more directly could solve this problem. Also, self-acceptance could be measured at two levels, for example, at the general level and specifically in relation to acceptance of one's sexual orientation and gender identity.

Third, the responses to the open-ended question on the positive experiences of the diary study participants were analysed using LIWC22. Although this software programme is functional for recognising language patterns, the programme takes only slight account of the context in which the words are used (LIWC, n.d.). As a result, certain words may be interpreted differently from what the participants initially meant them to be. For example, the word 'goal' could be analysed by the programme as 'purpose', while the participant meant scoring a 'football goal'. Moreover, the programme works with word lists that are prepared in advance. This means that the accuracy of the analysis depends on the extent to which the answers given to the open-ended question match LIWC's word lists (LIWC, n.d.).

Relatedly, LIWC22 does not measure the three basic psychological needs directly. As a result, the extent to which positive experiences contribute to the fulfilment of these three needs is derived indirectly from word frequencies. Also, the Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 (KR-20) values for the newly constructed constructs 'autonomy', 'competence', and 'relatedness' were low. This suggests reduced measurement reliability and validity. Thus, the probability of measurement error is significantly higher, and these new scales are unlikely to measure what they were assumed to measure. This complicates drawing strong and generalisable conclusions from the current findings. These issues could be remedied if LIWC were improved and modernised using, for example, Artificial intelligence so that the programme learns to respond to context and the particular meaning of words in the context of LGBTQ+ youths' experiences. To address the problems concerning the low indirect measurement and low internal consistency of the scales, an alternative approach could also be applied. For instance, it could be chosen not to derive the fulfilment of the three basic

psychological needs solely from the word frequencies, but to combine this with an additional questionnaire that measures these needs directly (e.g., Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale; Chen et al., 2015). By combining the answers of such self-report questions on the fulfilment of the three basic needs with an analysis of LIWC22, the extent to which the word patterns found correspond to the experience of the needs could be investigated.

### **Scientific and Practical Implications**

This study has both scientific and practical implications. Because this study did not find a significant relationship between the three basic psychological needs and self-acceptance, it can be suggested that there may be other factors that play a more important role in LGBTQ+ youths' level of self-acceptance. This implies that it could be useful if broader, multifactorial models, are deployed with this target group. These models should not focus exclusively on the psychological needs of young people, but also on broader social factors, such as the influences of minority stress and how this may thwart needs.

While much research has been done on self-determination theory, this has only been done to a limited extent for LGBTQ+ young people. Also, only a small amount of research has looked at the positive experiences of this group of young people (Hatzenbuehler & Pachankis, 2016; Meyer, 2003; Proost, 2022). By doing more research on this topic, more insight can be gained into how the positive experiences can be increased for this target group and how these experiences can increase feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Using only LIWC does not seem adequate for measuring the fulfillment of psychological needs. This is partly because this programme does not consider the context in which words are used. To take more account of the actual content of the answers to the open-ended questions, analysis with LIWC can be combined with a self-report questionnaire or qualitative content analysis. Accordingly, greater emphasis can be placed on contextual interpretation. It can then also be further investigated whether there is a difference between the qualitative and quantitative methods. In this way, it is possible to assess how and with whom autonomy, competence, and relatedness emerge in LGBTQ+ youth's daily experiences.

The correlational study design of this study is not ideal for establishing causality, as this requires an experimental design. This could be achieved if the three basic psychological needs were tested experimentally. The values (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) should then be manipulated to investigate whether this affects the degree of self-acceptance.

However, this would entail doing this over a longer period. Further, conducting longitudinal research over a period longer than the two-week diary study would offer deeper insights into the development of basic psychological needs in relation to self-acceptance over time. In this study, the variables were measured at the same time so no temporal order can be suggested. Since self-acceptance is a process that develops as time passes, it could be interesting to examine increases or decreases over time, and what the role of psychological needs is (Bernard, 2013).

Conducting research using a diary method brings numerous positive consequences; for instance, it is possible to gain insight into daily fluctuations (Berg & Lune, 2012). Thereby, in the case of such research, it could be valuable to pay attention to daily extremes. Within this study, diary data were aggregated into averages. However, literature suggests that daily fluctuations in particular can provide valuable information (Breevaart et al., 2012). Moreover, extremes on specific days may indicate meaningful situations. By assuming averages, nuances may have been lost. Possibly, follow-up research could focus to a greater extent on the extremes on a daily basis as well as the immediate and longer-term associations with outcomes such as self-acceptance.

Finally, it could be effective if future research also measured the degree of need thwarting. If the three basic psychological needs are actively undermined, this could affect individuals' psychological well-being. In doing so, the process of integrating one's own identity may be further impeded. By including both need fulfilment and need frustration, a more complete picture is created regarding the impact of everyday experiences on the well-being of LGBTQ+ youth (Legate et al., 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

## **Conclusion**

The current study suggests that positive experiences fulfil the three basic psychological needs to a relatively small degree. In addition, the fulfilment of basic psychological needs was not associated with LGBTQ+ youth's self-acceptance, which could be explained by methodological limitations or the lack of long-term effects. This contrasts with the self-determination theory, which posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are key predictors of self-acceptance.

At the same time, it is important that practice and future research not only focus on fulfilling the three basic psychological needs but also on what might actively thwart them. Negative experiences in the lives of LGBTQ+ youth, such as discrimination and social rejection, can lead to autonomy, competence, and relatedness being frustrated. Possibly

undermining needs has a greater impact on well-being and self-acceptance than just the lack of positive experiences. Therefore, interventions must focus on creating and ensuring an environment in which young people's basic needs are actively protected.

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