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Coming Out and Thriving: The Role of Family Acceptance, Authentic Self-Expression, and Community Belongingness in Empowering LGBTQ+ Individuals

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Abstract: This study explores the psychological empowerment of LGBTQ+ individuals in the aftermath of the coming out process, with particular emphasis on the roles of family acceptance, authentic self-expression, and community belongingness. Grounded in Minority Stress Theory and Social Identity Theory, the research investigates how these psychosocial factors influence or moderate key psychological outcomes. Drawing on data from a cross-sectional survey of LGBTQ+ participants from Southeast Asia and other global regions, the study employed a 5-point Likert scale to measure core constructs related to identity and well-being. Findings indicate that both family acceptance and authentic self-expression exert significant and positive effects on psychological empowerment. Moreover, community belongingness functions as a moderating variable, strengthening the positive relationship between authentic self-expression and empowerment in socially supportive environments. In contrast, the benefits of self-expression are diminished in contexts characterized by social exclusion or rigid normative frameworks. These results highlight the critical importance of inclusive familial and communal environments in fostering identity affirmation and psychological well-being among LGBTQ+ individuals. The study offers both theoretical and practical contributions by illustrating how interconnected support systems can mitigate the effects of minority stress and enhance resilience following disclosure. Implications are discussed for mental health interventions, advocacy strategies, and future research, particularly within culturally diverse and underrepresented contexts.

Keywords: Psychological empowerment; Family acceptance; Authentic Self-Expression; Community belongingness; LGBTQ+ Identity Development

1. Introduction

The psychological empowerment of LGBTQ+ individuals after coming out is influenced by multiple psychosocial factors, notably family acceptance, authentic self-expression, and community belongingness. Family acceptance serves as a crucial protective factor, significantly reducing risks of depression and suicidal behavior. Research consistently shows that LGBTQ+ youth facing familial rejection have a much higher likelihood of suicide attempts compared to those with supportive families (Ryan et al., 2010). Authentic self-expression also plays a vital role, with open identity expression linked to better psychological well-being, whereas suppression correlates with increased distress (Roberts et al., 2024). Additionally, a sense of belonging within the supportive community acts as a moderator, strengthening individual resilience and promoting positive mental health outcomes (Tanaka et al., 2018). These findings collectively emphasize the importance of affirming social environments for fostering empowerment in LGBTQ+ populations.

Although prior studies highlight the roles of family acceptance, authentic self-expression, and community belongingness in psychological empowerment, most rely on cross-sectional designs that limit causal conclusions (Meyer, 2003). Furthermore, there is a lack of research exploring these factors across diverse cultural contexts, such as Southeast Asia, where family and community dynamics differ considerably (Yip, 2005). The interactive effects of these variables on empowerment also remain underexplored.

This study aims to fill existing research gaps by addressing two central questions: (1) "How do family acceptance and authentic self-expression contribute to the psychological empowerment of LGBTQ+ individuals following the coming out process?"; (2) "How does community belongingness moderate the relationship between authentic self-expression and psychological empowerment within this population?" In line with these questions, the study pursues three primary objectives: to assess the direct impacts of family acceptance and authentic self-expression on psychological empowerment; to explore the moderating effect of community belongingness on the relationship between authentic self-expression and empowerment; and to advance both theoretical understanding and practical applications by offering empirically grounded recommendations aimed at enhancing psychological empowerment and overall well-being among LGBTQ+ individuals.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Psychological Empowerment after Coming Out

Psychological empowerment refers to the process by which individuals cultivate and reinforce an internalized sense of purpose, competence, autonomy, and influence over their surroundings, as originally conceptualized by Spreitzer (1995). Among LGBTQ+ individuals, psychological empowerment following the act of coming out involves strengthening key psychological assets that support navigation through the nuanced challenges of identity disclosure. This empowerment fosters greater self-assurance, heightened personal agency, and increased participation in both private and communal spheres (Zimmerman, 1995). Fundamentally, it embodies not merely a subjective experience of inner strength but also functions as a critical mechanism for building resilience against discrimination, stigma, and social exclusion. From a functionalist standpoint, psychological empowerment plays an essential role in maintaining the coherence and adaptability of individuals within larger social structures. According to Christens (2012), it allows individuals to align with societal roles, preserve emotional balance, and uphold the broader cohesion of the community. Functionalist theory suggests each societal component contributes to systemic equilibrium; thus, LGBTQ+ individuals' empowerment post-coming out is vital for confronting societal pressures, safeguarding psychological health, and fostering meaningful relationships.

Empirical evidence underscores the pivotal role of psychological empowerment in shaping mental health outcomes among LGBTQ+ populations. Corrigan et al. (2013) found that individuals exhibiting higher levels of empowerment following their coming out experienced notable reductions in depressive and anxiety symptoms, alongside improvements in self-esteem and overall life satisfaction.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Minority Stress Theory

Originally conceptualized by Meyer (2003), Minority

Stress Theory offers a comprehensive framework for examining the psychological adversities faced by LGBTQ+ individuals as a consequence of their marginalized social identities. It delineates stressors into two primary categories: distal stressors, referring to tangible external experiences such as discrimination, exclusion, and victimization; and proximal stressors, which involve internalized cognitive and emotional processes like self-stigmatization, concealment of identity, and anticipatory anxiety regarding rejection. These stressors collectively impose enduring psychological burdens that can significantly impair mental health and constrain the development of psychological empowerment.

Within the process of coming out, LGBTQ+ individuals often face intensified exposure to both types of stress. Distal stressors may manifest through family estrangement, societal prejudice, or interpersonal hostility, whereas proximal stressors are shaped by self-directed negativity and fears surrounding disclosure. Family acceptance plays a critical protective role, attenuating the harmful effects of these stressors. When LGBTQ+ individuals experience affirmation and support from their families, they are less likely to internalize societal stigma, and more likely to cultivate emotional safety and self-worth. According to Snapp et al. (2015), this process cultivates essential psychological capacities—including self-efficacy and autonomy—which collectively contribute to an individual's overall sense of empowerment. Authentic self-expression, as another central variable in this framework, substantially alleviates proximal stressors by enabling individuals to express their identities in congruence with their internal values and self-perceptions. Openly articulating one's sexual or gender identity—particularly in affirming environments—can reinforce self-acceptance and psychological resilience. These processes, in turn, enhance an individual's sense of agency and psychological empowerment (Legate et al., 2011). A strong sense of belonging within affirming LGBTQ+ communities provides essential psychosocial resources such as validation, solidarity, and emotional support. As demonstrated by Frost & Meyer (2012), these social connections play a pivotal role in buffering the harmful effects of minority stress, while simultaneously promoting the development of a positive self-identity, fostering feelings of pride,

and nurturing collective resilience within LGBTQ+ communities. Empirical evidence illustrates that LGBTQ+ individuals who are embedded within affirming communities consistently report enhanced life satisfaction and lower psychological distress (Barr et al., 2016). Such community integration not only offers emotional refuge but also equips individuals with the psychological strength to challenge social inequities and engage in meaningful civic participation.

This framework is grounded in several core assumptions. Minority Stress Theory contends that individuals with stigmatized identities experience unique and persistent stressors not commonly encountered by dominant social groups. It assumes that both external prejudice and internalized stigma play significant roles in undermining mental health. Furthermore, it posits that supportive interpersonal environments and social structures can buffer against these stressors, thereby enabling individuals to build resilience and attain psychological empowerment.

2.2.2 Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Henri & John 1979) offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals' self-concept is fundamentally linked to their affiliation with social groups. The theory asserts a substantial portion of an individual's identity and self-esteem is derived from group memberships, leading to a strong psychological investment in these social connections. Within the context of LGBTQ+ individuals, SIT provides valuable insight into how family acceptance, authentic self-expression, and community belonging jointly contribute to psychological empowerment after coming-out process.

Branscombe et al. (1999) emphasize that family acceptance constitutes a critical foundation for cultivating a positive social identity by affirming one's inclusion within the family, thereby fostering a deep sense of belonging and social validation. For LGBTQ+ persons, perceiving acceptance from family members facilitates the internalization of a positive group identity, which acts as a protective factor against stigma and discrimination. This familial support bolsters self-esteem and emotional security, both of which are essential elements of psychological empowerment (Seo, 2023). Moreover, family support can ease the process of identity integration and alleviate the psychological

burdens associated with concealing one's identity, thereby promoting long-term resilience and self-actualization. Authentic self-expression serves as a vital mechanism through which LGBTQ+ individuals affirm their social identity by aligning their external behavior with their internal sense of self. This congruence enhances psychological coherence and well-being by reducing internal conflict and mitigating internalized stigma (Velez and Moradi, 2016). The process of self-disclosure, when reciprocated with social affirmation, strengthens feelings of legitimacy and self-worth, a notion underscored by Cavarra et al. (2025) and central to SIT's framework of identity-related empowerment. Community belonging further reinforces this dynamic by offering a shared social identity with others who face similar experiences and challenges. SIT posits that membership in supportive communities enhances social support networks and collective self-esteem, thereby fostering resilience and personal agency (Haslam et al., 2018).

In conclusion, SIT elucidates the psychosocial mechanisms through which family acceptance, authentic self-expression, and community belonging collectively facilitate psychological empowerment in LGBTQ+ individuals post-coming out. The theory emphasizes the critical role of positive social identities in buffering minority stress and enhancing psychological resilience and well-being (McConnell et al., 2018).

2.3 Determinants of Psychological Empowerment after Coming Out

2.3.1 Family acceptance

Family acceptance has always been a vital part of emotional development, but when embraced consciously, it becomes more than just familial tolerance, it becomes a transformative force for psychological resilience (Walsh, 2016). Instead of passive co-existence, family acceptance reflects emotional support, active listening, and the affirmation of identity, especially after a young person comes out. It reduces psychological distress, enhances self-worth, and fosters authentic self-expression (Ryan et al., 2010). Grounded in symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1986), this process shapes how LGBTQ+ individuals construct their identity through meaningful social interactions.

When family acceptance is strong and actively expressed, it profoundly enhances psychological empowerment after coming out. Durkheim's theory of social solidarity highlights how emotional bonds within families create a sense of belonging and collective support, which are essential for developing resilience, self-esteem, and authentic self-expression (Durkheim, 1897). For instance, Hamilton et al., (2021) found LGBTQ+ youth in Canada reporting high levels of family acceptance exhibited greater autonomy, stronger self-worth, and reduced mental health risks. This strong familial support acts as a psychological anchor, fostering empowerment and well-being. On the other hand, family acceptance is sometimes neutral or ambivalent rather than overtly supportive. Social role theory provides insight into this phenomenon, suggesting that shifting family expectations and cultural norms can lead to varied responses that still promote adaptive coping and gradual empowerment (Eagly, 1987). Wilson and Cariola (2019) noted many Italian LGBTQ+ youth experience neutral reactions from family but still achieve moderate psychological empowerment through engagement with peers and supportive communities. This moderate acceptance, while less immediately empowering, encourages youth to build resilience by seeking social support beyond the family unit. Together, these perspectives show that while strong family acceptance delivers the most robust psychological empowerment, neutral acceptance plays a meaningful role in nurturing resilience among LGBTQ+ youth after coming out.

Building on the contrasting effects of family acceptance, Rohner's (2021) Interpersonal Acceptance Rejection Theory explicates how parental rejection generates emotional distress and undermines psychological well-being by violating the fundamental need for acceptance and security within close relationships. This theoretical lens clarifies the profound harm caused by family rejection among LGBTQ+ youth. For instance, Ryan et al. (2010) found that family rejection significantly exacerbates negative mental health outcomes including depression, substance abuse, and suicide attempts among LGBTQ+ youth in the United States. These findings underscore the deleterious impact of absent family acceptance on psychological empowerment post-coming out, leaving affected individuals vulnerable and marginalized.

Empowerment but with effects that depend heavily on cultural and social conditions. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H1: Family acceptance positively impacts psychological empowerment after coming out.

2.3.2 Authentic self-expression

Authentic self-expression refers to the process by which an individual conveys their thoughts, emotions, and values in a manner that is truthful and consistent with their intrinsic nature and identity. It encompasses not only communicative behaviors but also reflects the coherence between one's internal self and their interactions with the external world (Al-Khouja et al., 2022). In contemporary society, authentic self-expression has become increasingly significant in shaping personal identity, particularly within LGBTQ+ communities, where living authentically entails both opportunities for recognition and risks of exclusion. The ability to express oneself genuinely is considered a fundamental factor for psychological well-being and a sense of meaningful existence, especially amid shifting social norms toward greater acceptance of diversity (Creswell, 2020). When social and cultural environments actively embrace diversity and encourage authenticity, authentic self-expression serves as an important source of psychological resilience. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) posits individuals who feel safe expressing their true selves strengthen their sense of belonging and personal value. This process is especially vital for marginalized groups such as LGBTQ+ individuals, for whom authentic self-expression is closely linked to identity development and mental well-being. A clear example can be seen in the Netherlands, where progressive policies and widespread societal acceptance of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations provide a supportive context. Many LGBTQ+ youths in this environment develop positive self-identities and higher self-esteem (Kuyper & Fokkema, 2011). However, authentic self-expression does not universally produce positive outcomes. In societies with rigid gender norms, social pressure theory (Asch, 1956) indicates individuals who diverge from traditional gender expectations often encounter exclusion and coercion to conform, leading to psychological stigmatization. In certain Asian communities, public disclosure of LGBTQ+ identities can result in familial isolation and loss of employment opportunities, causing young individuals to feel rejected and disoriented (Pease et al., 2024).

In summary, authentic self-expression is a pivotal factor in fostering empowerment following identity disclosure. Nevertheless, its impact is deeply contingent upon cultural and social conditions as well as the degree of familial and communal support. When nurtured in affirming environments, it cultivates resilience and a sense of autonomy; conversely, in hostile settings, it may precipitate psychological harm. Building on this understanding, the following hypothesis explores how the interaction between authentic self-expression and environmental factors influences psychological outcomes for LGBTQ+ individuals:

H2: Authentic self-expression positively impacts psychological empowerment after coming out.

2.3.3 Moderating Role of Community Belongingness

Community belongingness refers to the subjective experience of feeling accepted, valued, and socially connected within a particular group or community. Baumeister and Leary (2017) conceptualize it as a fundamental psychological need, essential to mental well-being and individual development. Among LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly those navigating the post-coming-out phase, community belongingness functions as a key moderating variable that influences the relationships between both authentic self-expression and family acceptance with psychological empowerment after coming out.

Sociological theory highlights belongingness not only reinforces personal identity but provides a secure and supportive environment wherein individuals can authentically express themselves in alignment with shared communal values. Within Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, belongingness is situated as a core motivational factor, immediately following physiological and safety needs. Kertzner et al. (2009), in their study of gay men in the United States, found a positive correlation between perceived community belongingness and various indicators of psychological empowerment, including self-esteem and life satisfaction. Critically, community belongingness appears to amplify the positive effects of authentic self-expression on psychological empowerment. When LGBTQ+ individuals are able to authentically express themselves within inclusive and supportive communal

settings, the resulting sense of empowerment is significantly strengthened and sustained (Frost and Meyer, 2012). Moreover, community belongingness also serves to moderate and enhance the impact of family acceptance on psychological empowerment. Although family acceptance constitutes an essential foundation for well-being and identity consolidation post-coming out, the presence of a strong and inclusive community context facilitates the extension and reinforcement of these benefits beyond the private family sphere (McLaren, 2009). In such environments, individuals can translate familial support into broader social confidence and an expanded sense of agency (Bishop et al., 2005). Conversely, in the absence of robust community belongingness, the positive influence of family acceptance on psychological empowerment may remain constrained and less enduring.

Nevertheless, the moderating efficacy of community belongingness depends greatly on the quality and depth of social interactions within the community. Frost and Meyer (2012) emphasize that its benefits are not universal but contingent upon the relational dynamics present. McLaren's (2009) study of older gay men in Australia revealed that superficial or formalized interactions within local LGBTQ+ communities often fail to foster meaningful empowerment. Similarly, online networks may enable transient connections but frequently lack the relational depth required for sustained support. Moreover, intersectionality complicates this landscape: Bowleg (2013) highlights how Black gay and bisexual men in the United States experience compounded marginalization facing discrimination based on both race and sexual orientation, while also encountering exclusion within mainstream LGBTQ+ spaces. This double minority status intensifies minority stress, erodes trust, and undermines psychological empowerment, often leading to the emergence of marginalized subgroups within broader LGBTQ+ communities.

In sum, community belongingness emerges as a critical moderating variable in the relationships between authentic self-expression, family acceptance, and psychological empowerment after coming out. When cultivated through values of inclusivity, diversity, and equality, it can significantly foster positive identity formation, inner resilience, and amplify the empowering effects of both authentic self-expression and family acceptance. In contrast, communities governed by rigid normative expectations, superficial social ties, or exclusionary practices may inadvertently exacerbate psychological distress and impede empowerment.

Building upon this understanding, we propose the following hypothesis to be tested in this study:

H3: Community belongingness strengthens the link between authentic self-expression and psychological empowerment.

By grounding the hypotheses in theoretical foundations, this study enhances its potential to make a meaningful contribution to scholarly discourse through the conceptual framework below.
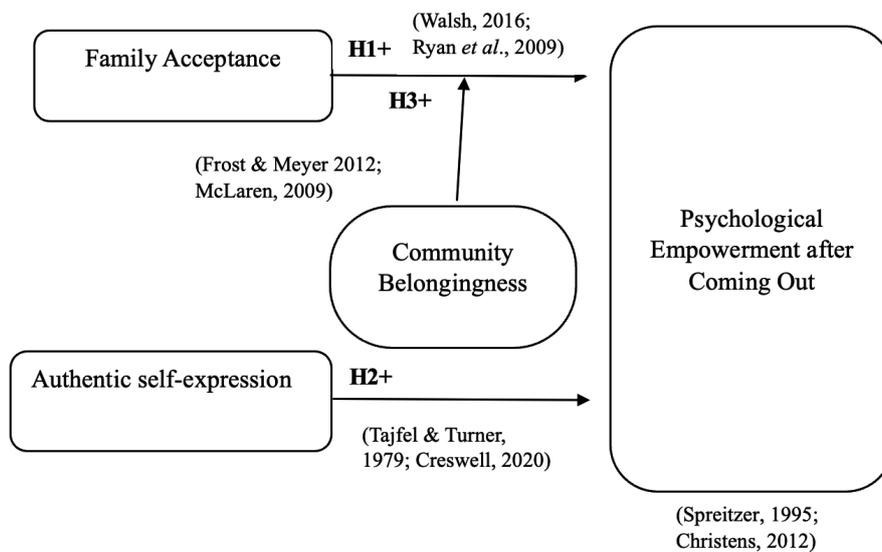

Figure 1. The Paper's Conceptual Framework

3. Methods

This research utilizes a quantitative approach to facilitate structured data collection and analysis, allowing for the identification and verification of underlying patterns (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In addition, this method incorporates statistical techniques to ensure objective evaluation and generate measurable outcomes (Babbie, 2020).

To enhance empirical validity and ensure cultural relevance, this study adopted a purposive stratified sampling strategy, specifically targeting LGBTQ+ individuals who had recently undergone the coming-out process. Eligibility criteria required participants to be at least 18 years of age and to have disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity within the preceding five years. Stratification was implemented across four critical identity and social dimensions to achieve representational diversity and capture nuanced contextual experiences: (1) Emerging adults aged 18–25, who are in the formative stages of identity development post-disclosure and are often navigating complex family dynamics and evolving peer relationships; (2) Mid-life individuals aged 26–40, who face the challenge of integrating authentic self-expression within the constraints of professional, relational, and familial obligations; (3) LGBTQ+ individuals from collectivist cultural contexts such as those in Southeast Asia, including Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines, where familial expectations and community norms exert heightened influence on identity disclosure and acceptance; (4) Gender-diverse or non-binary individuals, who frequently encounter distinct structural and interpersonal barriers to self-expression and social integration.

Eligible participants were required to have experienced at least one instance of coming out to a family member, peer, or community institution, and to be actively involved in personal or social domains encompassing identity negotiation, self-expression, and community participation. Stratification parameters included age cohort, gender identity, cultural background, and degree of community engagement, allowing for nuanced analysis across diverse demographic and sociocultural profiles. The survey was administered through secure online platforms and disseminated via established LGBTQ+ networks. In Vietnam and across neighboring Southeast Asian countries, selection was conducted through advocacy organizations such as the ICS Center (Vietnam), ASEAN SOGIE Caucus, and popular online communities including "LGBTQ+ Việt Nam," "Tụi Mình LGBTQ," as well as various queer community pages on Facebook and Zalo. Internationally, the survey was distributed via networks including the It Gets Better Project, the Global Queer Youth Coalition, and relevant academic and mental health forums such as ResearchGate and platforms addressing gender diversity and inclusion. The instrument utilized a standardized 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 5 ("Strongly agree") to assess perceptions across four key constructs: family acceptance, authentic self-expression, community belongingness, and psychological empowerment. Out of 542 total responses received, 385 were retained following a rigorous data validation process that screened for completeness, respondent authenticity, and internal consistency. This stratified and culturally diverse sample enabled robust quantitative analysis of how varying forms of social acceptance, identity affirmation, and communal integration shape psychological empowerment among LGBTQ+ individuals following the coming-out process.

Although online methods greatly expanded our reach to LGBTQ+ individuals across distant locations and those who are often difficult to connect with in person, we recognize that this strategy can introduce certain sampling biases tied to digital access and participation patterns. People with restricted or nonexistent internet access—especially in rural regions or lower-income communities—tend to be underrepresented, which risks excluding those facing even greater social exclusion yet lacking reliable connectivity. Additionally, online recruitment often draws in participants who are already comfortable with technology, well-linked within networks, or deeply involved in LGBTQ+ advocacy, which can skew the sample toward those with stronger senses of community connection and affirmed identities. Furthermore, since many prominent online LGBTQ+ spaces are centered in urban areas, the perspectives captured may lean more heavily toward city-based experiences, potentially overlooking the distinct realities of disclosure, family reactions, and daily life in rural or semi-rural settings. To address these limitations

as much as possible, we used a purposive stratified approach that deliberately targeted diversity across age groups, gender identities, cultural contexts, and degrees of community involvement. We recruited through a wide range of regional and international LGBTQ+ groups and platforms, with particular emphasis on Southeast Asian networks, rather than depending on just one online channel. Still, we acknowledge that no amount of careful planning can completely overcome the deeper structural inequalities in digital access.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Table 1. Cross-Tabulation of Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	Percentage (%)
Age Group	Under 18	5%
	18–25	46%
	26–40	34%
	Above 40	15%
	Total	**100%**
Gender Identity	Male	38%
	Female	41%
	Non-binary / Gender-diverse	16%
	Prefer to self-describe	5%
	Total	**100%**
Country / Region of Residence	Vietnam	44%
	Thailand	23%
	Philippines	21%
	Other Southeast Asian country	12%
	Total	**100%**
Came Out in the Past Five Years	Yes	72%
	No	28%
	Total	**100%**

*Source: (The authors, 2025)

Table 1 offers a rich and thoughtfully varied snapshot of the study participants across key dimensions, including age, gender identity, geographic distribution, and recency of coming out. In terms of age, the sample skewed toward younger adults, with nearly half (46%) falling between 18 and 25 years old, followed by 34% in the 26–40 range; smaller segments included those over 40 (15%) and under 18 (5%), aligning with the study's emphasis on groups most actively working through identity disclosure and emotional adjustment. Gender identity showed a balanced mix of female (41%) and male (38%) respondents, complemented by a notable 16% identifying as non-binary or gender-diverse and 5% choosing self-described labels, which reflects the project's commitment to broad inclusivity. Geographically, Vietnam accounted for the largest share (44%), with solid representation from Thailand (23%) and the Philippines (21%), plus an additional 12% from elsewhere in Southeast Asia, allowing for meaningful culturally contextualized perspectives across the region. Lastly, a clear majority (72%) had come out within the previous five years, positioning the sample particularly well to shed light on the more immediate psychological experiences and empowerment processes following disclosure.

4.2 Reliability analysis

Where PE1-PE4 are coded for survey questions 1-4 of psychological empowerment respectively.

As shown in **Table 2**, all dependent sub-variables achieved adjusted item-total correlation coefficients of at least 0.3. The overall Cronbach's alpha was 0.735, exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.7 and

higher than the values that would have occurred if any item had been removed. In addition, each dependent sub-variable displayed a Cronbach's alpha greater than its respective adjusted item-total correlation, even when individual items were excluded. Therefore, all items were retained for subsequent analysis. Similar reliability patterns were also found in the Cronbach's alpha values of the other variables.

Item-Total Statistics

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.735	4

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
PE1	8.737	7.057	.532	.565
PE2	6.005	7.666	.569	.583
PE3	7.100	7.887	.660	.679
PE4	8.922	6.383	.661	.684

Table 2. Reliability analysis of the dependent variable.

[*]Source: (The authors, 2025)

4.3 Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

Table 3. Rotated Component Matrix.

Rotated Component Matrixa

Component with loading factors

1	2	3	4
PE1 .721	FA1 .665	AE1 .794	CB1 .732
PE2 .756	FA2 .634	AE2 .792	CB2 .755
PE3 .704	FA3 .639	AE3 .752	CB3 .756
PE4 .815	FA4 .714	AE4 .695	CB4 .700

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

[*]Source: (The authors, 2025)

Where survey items FA1 to FA4, AE1 to AE4, and CB1 to CB4 correspond to questions 1–4 designed to measure the moderator variable and the two independent variables, respectively.

As shown in **Table 3**, the rotated component matrix effectively grouped the 16 sub-variables into four distinct factors, corresponding to the dependent variable, the two independent variables, and the moderator variable. All sub-variables recorded factor loadings above 0.5, and no items were eliminated during the factor analysis.

4.4 Multiple linear regression model

Table 4. Coefficients[a].

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	7.226	.637		3.100	.000
	FA	.637	.825	.592	4.660	.000
	AE	.614	.449	.537	3.780	.000

[*]Source: (The authors, 2025)

Where **PE**: mean of PE1 to PE4; **FA**: mean of FA1 to FA4; **AE**: mean of AE1 to AE4

According to **Table 4**, the t-test significance (Sig.) values of .000 fall below the standard alpha level of 0.05, indicating that both independent variables, family acceptance and authentic self-expression, have a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable, psychological empowerment of LGBTQ+ individuals following the coming out process. Consequently, the results provide support for both hypotheses.

4.5 Moderator analysis

Table 5. Results analysis of "Community belongingness".

Model: 1	Y: PE	X: FA	W: CB	Sample Size: 385		
**						
		OUTCOME VARIABLE: PE		Model Summary		

R	R-sq	MSE	F	dl1	dl2	p
.672	.451	.709	5.604	3.000	381.000	.000

			Model			
	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	7.287	.956	63.447	.000	7.882	7.857
FA	.468	.791	4.222	.000	.721	.715
CB	.450	.893	4.535	.000	.511	.507
Int_1	.418	.605	4.786	.000	.493	.484

[*]Source: (The authors, 2025)

Where **CB**: mean of CB1 to CB4

Table 5 shows that the p-value for the interaction term (Int_1) is 0.000, which is well below the conventional significance threshold of 0.05, indicating a statistically significant interaction between community belongingness and family acceptance in shaping psychological empowerment. The interaction coefficient of 0.418 suggests that stronger community belongingness amplifies the positive influence of family acceptance on psychological empowerment. Therefore, hypothesis H3 is validated.

5. Discussion

5.1 Result summary
The analysis revealed that family acceptance and authentic self-expression exert substantial positive effects on psychological empowerment after coming out, with standardized coefficients of 0.592 and 0.537, respectively. Furthermore, the results indicate that community belongingness moderates the relationship between authentic self-expression and psychological empowerment after coming out, amplifying its effect with a moderation coefficient of 0.418.

5.2 Theoretical Implication
The standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.592$) indicates a strong, statistically significant relationship between family acceptance and psychological empowerment after coming out. This supports the view that family acceptance is not only protective but foundational to LGBTQ+ individuals' well-being, as emphasized by Ryan et al. (2010) and reaffirmed in Rohner's (2021) Interpersonal Acceptance–Rejection Theory. In collectivist societies like those in Southeast Asia, where familial bonds are culturally central, this relationship becomes even more pronounced. Contrary to the argument by Wilson and Cariola (2019) that neutral responses may still foster empowerment, this study shows that ambiguous or passive reactions often lack meaningful psychological benefits. Although SRT (Eagly, 1987) recognizes the adaptive capacity of individuals facing mixed familial reactions, the strength of the association found here highlights true empowerment is more likely when support is active and affirming.

The analysis reveals that authentic self-expression has a statistically significant yet comparatively moderate effect on psychological empowerment after coming out, as indicated by a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.537$. This supports prior findings by Legate et al. (2011) and Shilo and Mor (2014), who emphasized the

importance of alignment between internal identity and external behavior in fostering mental health among LGBTQ+ individuals. However, the result challenges McGarrity's (2014) assertion that self-expression alone is sufficient for empowerment, regardless of external context. The moderate coefficient suggests although authenticity contributes meaningfully to empowerment, its impact is diminished in environments lacking acceptance, validation, or psychological safety. This finding aligns with Simon et al. (2021), reinforcing the idea that the benefits of self-expression are conditional on external reinforcement.

The moderation analysis demonstrates community belongingness significantly influences the relationship between authentic self-expression and psychological empowerment after coming out, with a path coefficient of β = 0.418. This supports the argument by Frost and Meyer (2012) affirming social environments enhance the psychological benefits of identity expression. Kertzner et al. (2009) similarly highlight the critical role of validating communities in building self-esteem and resilience. However, this finding also challenges McLaren's (2009) assumption that simple membership within LGBTQ+ spaces guarantees empowerment. The moderate strength of the effect suggests that community belongingness must be inclusive, emotionally supportive, and socially affirming to function as a meaningful moderator. Intersectionality offers a vital framework for making sense of how family acceptance, authentic self-expression, community belongingness, and psychological empowerment interconnect in this study. Although our findings point to strong positive links between family support and genuine self-expression on one hand and empowerment on the other, these patterns are far from uniform across all LGBTQ+ people. As Bowleg (2013) has argued, overlapping identities, such as race, class, disability, and diverse gender experiences, can intensify minority stress and limit access to affirming resources. For example, LGBTQ+ individuals from economically disadvantaged backgrounds or those living with disabilities might encounter extra structural obstacles that hinder authentic expression, even in otherwise accepting families. In a similar way, people who are racialized or visibly gender-nonconforming often face marginalization within broader LGBTQ+ spaces, which can dilute the protective or strengthening effects of

community belongingness that we observed. Ultimately, these intersecting forces remind us that psychological empowerment arises not just from personal identity affirmation but is also deeply shaped by larger systems of inequality. In line with critiques by Bowleg (2013), the presence of exclusionary dynamics particularly against nonbinary or racially marginalized individuals can weaken the moderating role of community. These findings reinforce the importance of intersectional approaches, demonstrating that communities must be structurally equitable and relationally supportive to promote empowerment.

5.3 Practical Implications

The empirical findings offer several critical implications for mental health professionals, educators, and LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations committed to fostering psychological empowerment among sexual and gender minorities. Firstly, the robust influence of family acceptance highlights the foundational role of supportive familial relationships in mitigating minority stress and promoting mental well-being. Interventions aimed at educating parents and caregivers should be prioritized through culturally responsive outreach programs, such as parental counseling, family dialogue initiatives, and media campaigns that normalize LGBTQ+ identities within domestic settings. These interventions are especially vital in collectivist societies across Southeast Asia, where the family remains a primary source of identity validation and emotional security (Walsh 2016). Equipping families to become sources of affirmation can substantially reduce the risks of psychological distress and increase likelihood of healthy identity integration.

Secondly, the significant effect of authentic self-expression on psychological empowerment calls for the development of safe and inclusive environments that allow individuals to openly and confidently express their identities. Schools, universities, and workplaces should implement comprehensive diversity policies, promote LGBTQ+ visibility campaigns, and adopt zero tolerance approaches to bullying and discrimination (Pease et al., 2024). When individuals feel secure in expressing their gender identity or sexual orientation, they are more likely to experience autonomy, coherence, and personal agency (Creswell, 2020; Shilo & Mor, 2014). These elements are key to achieving lasting psychological empowerment and are supported by a

growing body of evidence within social psychology and public health (Kuyper & Fokkema, 2011).

Thirdly, the finding that community belongingness moderates the relationship between authentic self-expression and empowerment emphasizes the importance of inclusive and intersectional community structures. It is not enough to promote visibility or expression without simultaneously creating communal spaces that validate and support such identities. Peer support groups, grassroots collectives, and community centers must be equipped to accommodate diverse intersecting identities. As Bowleg (2013) emphasizes, intersectionality must inform design and implementation of LGBTQ+ spaces to ensure they empower rather than marginalize vulnerable subpopulations such as racial minorities, gender nonconforming individuals, and those with disabilities. Therefore, Future research should incorporate sensitive measures and subgroup analyses intersectionally to better capture how overlapping forms of marginalization influence empowerment trajectories following the coming-out process.

5.4 Limitations

Despite its valuable contributions, this study is subject to several limitations. The cross-sectional methodology limits the ability to establish causal relationships and does not account for the temporal progression of psychological empowerment following the coming-out process. Reliance on self-reported data may also introduce social desirability bias, particularly concerning sensitive constructs such as familial rejection or internalized stigma. Although the sample includes respondents from various Southeast Asian contexts, it is skewed toward urban, digitally connected individuals, potentially constraining the applicability of findings to rural or digitally marginalized LGBTQ+ populations. Moreover, the operationalization of community belongingness was relatively broad and may not adequately reflect intersectional experiences of exclusion based on race, gender identity, or other axes of marginalization within LGBTQ+ communities.

5.5 Future Research Directions

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to better capture the evolving nature of psychological empowerment following the coming-out process. This would allow for a clearer understanding of causal pathways and temporal shifts in the influence of family acceptance, self-expression, and community belongingness. Additionally, qualitative approaches could provide deeper insight into the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals, especially within culturally specific and intersectional contexts. Expanding the sample to include rural, low-income, and offline populations would improve the generalizability of findings. Comparative studies across different cultural regions, such as Southeast Asia and Western societies, are also recommended to explore how sociocultural variables mediate empowerment outcomes and to identify both shared and distinct patterns in LGBTQ+ well-being. The findings should be interpreted with caution, particularly when generalizing to rural, offline, or digitally marginalized LGBTQ+ populations. Future research is encouraged to adopt mixed-mode recruitment strategies, including community-based outreach, collaboration with local NGOs, and offline data collection methods, to capture a broader spectrum of lived experiences and improve representativeness across digital and geographic divides.

5.6 Conclusion

This study contributes to a deeper theoretical and practical understanding of psychological empowerment among LGBTQ+ individuals in the aftermath of the coming-out process. By empirically establishing the central roles of family acceptance, authentic self-expression, and community belongingness, it underscores the dynamic interplay between personal identity affirmation and broader social environments. The identified moderating effect of community belongingness reinforces the notion that empowerment is not solely an individual pursuit but one that is fundamentally shaped by relational and communal support structures. Accordingly, interventions aimed at improving LGBTQ+ mental health and well-being must prioritize both enhancing individual agency and fostering inclusive, affirming family and community environments. These findings extend the applicability of Minority Stress Theory and Social Identity Theory to Southeast Asian contexts, offering a culturally nuanced framework to inform future empirical inquiry and targeted advocacy initiatives.

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