Mechanisms of Self-Concept Coherence in Late Adolescence Under Academic Pressure

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to explore and conceptualize the psychological and contextual mechanisms through which late adolescents maintain a coherent self-concept while navigating intense academic demands in the Brazilian educational context.

Methods and Materials: A qualitative research design was employed using semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 18 late adolescents (10 females and 8 males, aged 17–21) from Brazil who were experiencing significant academic pressure. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in gender, academic stage, and performance levels. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached. All interviews were conducted in Portuguese, lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was applied with support from NVivo software version 14, following iterative coding, category refinement, and constant comparison to ensure depth and consistency. Credibility was enhanced through peer debriefing and member checking.

Findings: Four overarching thematic categories were identified: navigating academic pressure, identity negotiation and self-concept alignment, psychological adaptation strategies, and future orientation with self-continuity. Adolescents reported internalizing family and cultural expectations while simultaneously striving for authenticity, often reframing success to protect identity stability. Cognitive reframing, emotional regulation, and self-compassion emerged as key strategies to mitigate stress and preserve self-concept clarity. Social support from peers and family played a dual role, sometimes buffering stress but occasionally intensifying pressure. Future-oriented thinking, including goal reappraisal and constructing life narratives linking past, present, and envisioned adult selves, contributed to resilience and a coherent sense of self despite academic adversity.

Conclusion: Maintaining self-concept coherence in late adolescence is a dynamic, context-sensitive process involving adaptive psychological strategies and relational negotiation. These insights provide a foundation for designing culturally responsive educational and mental health interventions to help adolescents sustain identity stability under academic stress.

Keywords: *self-concept coherence; academic stress; adolescence; resilience; qualitative study; Brazil*

1. Introduction

Late adolescence is a critical developmental period characterized by rapid cognitive, emotional, and social transitions, during which individuals strive to integrate multiple aspects of identity into a coherent self-concept. Academic demands play a particularly powerful role in shaping this integration, as adolescents face high-stakes examinations, competitive performance standards, and pressure to plan for future careers. While academic challenge can foster growth and resilience, it also has the potential to destabilize self-structure when young people equate self-worth with performance outcomes. Increasing evidence shows that academic stress is widespread and deeply intertwined with adolescents' psychological well-being, identity development, and motivation (Högberg, 2024; Saini & Devi, 2022; Shalu et al., 2025). Understanding how late adolescents maintain or reconstruct self-concept coherence when faced with intense academic pressure is therefore critical to supporting their long-term mental health and adaptive functioning.

Academic stress arises from multiple sources, including parental expectations, peer comparison, heavy workloads, and perceived competition for scarce educational opportunities (Pontes et al., 2024; Shalu et al., 2025). Adolescents often report feelings of anxiety, helplessness, and self-criticism when academic performance fails to meet internal or external standards (Astuti & Waseso, 2023; Kim & Kim, 2024). These experiences may erode confidence and meaning-making, contributing to disengagement and negative affect (Högberg, 2024; Saini & Devi, 2022). In some cases, the association between academic stress and mental health risk extends to maladaptive coping patterns such as perfectionism and self-injury (Oh, 2024), underscoring the vulnerability of identity structures during this period. Adolescents' comments often reflect these pressures, with one student describing, "It's not just about exams; it's about who I am if I don't pass," highlighting the entanglement of achievement and self-worth.

Central to these challenges is the concept of self-concept, defined as the organized system of beliefs and evaluations about one's own attributes, values, and competencies (Shikari, 2025). Self-concept is multidimensional and includes academic self-concept, which influences achievement, engagement, and well-being (Mistry et al., 2023). Research shows that high and stable self-concept clarity — a sense of knowing who one is and what one stands for — protects against anxiety and disengagement under

stress (Buritica et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2025). Conversely, fragmentation of self-concept leaves adolescents vulnerable to confusion and helplessness when academic performance fluctuates (Cruijsen et al., 2023). The neural and behavioral correlates of self-concept development continue to mature through late adolescence, making this stage both an opportunity and a period of risk for identity disorganization (Buritica et al., 2024; Cruijsen et al., 2024).

Academic stress also interacts with mental health in complex ways. High demands and effort–reward imbalance can lead to academic burnout and depressive states, which, in turn, disrupt coherent identity narratives (Jin et al., 2024; Kim & Kim, 2024). However, protective psychological factors such as self-compassion, resilience, and meaning-making have been shown to buffer the negative impact of stress on self-concept clarity (Leng et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024). Adolescents capable of cognitive reframing and positive self-talk can reinterpret failure as growth, maintaining a sense of stability despite external pressures (Wang et al., 2024). Similarly, strong general self-efficacy and adaptive emotional regulation support an enduring, integrated self-image even in competitive contexts (Kim et al., 2025; Leng et al., 2025). These processes illustrate potential mechanisms of resilience that warrant closer qualitative examination to understand how they emerge and operate in adolescents' lived experience.

Cultural and contextual factors further shape how academic stress is internalized and how self-concept coherence is negotiated. Parenting styles and family expectations may encourage achievement but also create conflicting pressures when adolescents attempt to assert autonomy (Hur, 2023; Xing et al., 2024). In societies where educational success is closely tied to social mobility and familial honor, young people often feel torn between meeting external demands and preserving personal authenticity (kang & Kim, 2025; Kim et al., 2025). Studies in multicultural and transitional settings show that adolescents navigating diverse values may experience identity tension but also develop adaptive negotiation strategies (Kwon & Shin, 2023). Social support from peers and family can provide a protective buffer, enabling adolescents to reinterpret academic struggles and maintain self-worth (Núñez-Regueiro et al., 2022; Pontes et al., 2024). However, these relational resources vary in availability and impact, especially in educational systems with limited psychological support.

Recent work on motivation and self-regulated learning further underscores the role of self-concept coherence in

academic adaptation. Adolescents with a stable academic self-view display higher grit, persistence, and proactive learning behaviors, while those with fragmented self-concept are prone to avoidance and academic helplessness (Hur, 2023; kang & Kim, 2025; Shikari, 2025). Parental supervision and emotional competencies contribute to the transition from external regulation to self-directed learning (Hur, 2023; Kim et al., 2025), supporting the formation of a self that can withstand academic adversity. These findings suggest that resilience in academic contexts is deeply tied to identity processes, but most evidence remains correlational and fails to capture how adolescents themselves articulate and experience these protective mechanisms.

Despite growing attention to academic stress and its psychological consequences, there remains a lack of in-depth, qualitative understanding of how adolescents maintain a coherent sense of self under intense academic demands. Prior studies have illuminated predictors such as self-efficacy, resilience, and social support (Leng et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2025), yet the lived narratives that explain how these resources are constructed and integrated remain underexplored. This is especially relevant in contexts such as Brazil, where competitive entrance exams and shifting cultural norms about success create a challenging environment for identity development. As one student described, "I'm not sure who I am beyond grades; I'm trying to build that person," reflecting the complex work of aligning academic experiences with a broader personal identity.

The present study aims to explore and conceptualize the mechanisms through which late adolescents in Brazil maintain self-concept coherence while navigating high levels of academic pressure.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how late adolescents develop and maintain self-concept coherence while facing academic pressure. A qualitative approach was deemed suitable as it enables an in-depth understanding of subjective experiences and meaning-making processes within participants' social and educational contexts. The target population included late adolescents, defined as individuals aged 17–21, currently enrolled in high school senior grades or early years of university in Brazil. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in gender, academic fields, and levels of

academic performance while meeting the inclusion criteria of experiencing academic demands such as competitive examinations, grade expectations, or career decision pressure. Recruitment was facilitated through outreach in educational institutions and youth networks. A total of 18 participants (10 females and 8 males) were included, with sample size determined by theoretical saturation — the point at which no new themes or insights emerged from additional interviews.

2.2. Measures

Data were gathered using semi-structured, in-depth interviews to capture participants' lived experiences and narratives regarding their self-perception and identity negotiation under academic demands. An interview guide with open-ended questions was developed to ensure consistency while allowing flexibility to probe emerging topics. Core questions explored participants' self-descriptions, perceived academic pressures, coping and adaptation strategies, and feelings of identity stability or conflict. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or via secure online video conferencing platforms depending on participants' availability and location. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned, and all personal identifiers were removed from transcripts.

2.3. Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim in Portuguese and then reviewed for accuracy before analysis. Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach, supported by NVivo software version 14 to manage and organize the dataset systematically. The process involved iterative coding: first, open coding was conducted to identify meaningful units of text; then, similar codes were grouped into categories through axial coding; finally, selective coding was used to refine and integrate categories into overarching themes that explain mechanisms of self-concept coherence. Constant comparison was applied throughout the analysis to detect similarities and differences across participants' experiences. Memos and reflective notes were kept to document analytic decisions and enhance rigor. Credibility was strengthened through peer debriefing and member checking with selected participants to validate the emerging interpretations.

3. Findings and Results

The study sample consisted of 18 late adolescents from Brazil, including 10 females (55.6%) and 8 males (44.4%), aged between 17 and 21 years (M = 18.9). Regarding educational status, 11 participants (61.1%) were first- or second-year university students enrolled in diverse fields such as psychology, engineering, and education, while 7 participants (38.9%) were completing the final year of high school and preparing for competitive entrance examinations.

In terms of socioeconomic background, 9 participants (50%) self-identified as middle class, 6 (33.3%) as lower middle class, and 3 (16.7%) as upper middle class. Most participants reported living with their families (14 participants; 77.8%), while the remainder lived independently or with peers (4 participants; 22.2%). The diversity in academic stage and living arrangements helped capture a wide range of perspectives on managing self-concept coherence under academic pressure.

Table 1

Main Themes, Subthemes, and Concepts Extracted from the Interviews

Category (Main Theme)	Subcategory	Concepts (Open Codes)
1. Navigating Academic Pressure	Internalized Academic Expectations	parental aspirations; fear of failure; striving for perfection; competitive mindset; self-criticism; internal pressure to excel
	External Performance Demands	high-stakes exams; workload overload; teacher expectations; peer comparison; scholarship competition
	Time-Management Struggles	juggling study and leisure; sleep deprivation; procrastination guilt; unrealistic schedules
	Coping through Support Seeking	consulting teachers; informal peer tutoring; seeking family reassurance; academic mentoring
	Avoidance and Withdrawal	skipping classes; emotional numbness; disengagement; delaying assignments
2. Identity Negotiation and Self-Concept Alignment	Searching for Authentic Identity	questioning future self; redefining personal values; exploring career meaning; balancing roles
	Academic Role Dominance	"being only a student"; loss of hobbies; achievement as identity; sacrificing social life
	Integrating Multiple Selves	reconciling personal and academic sides; balancing family and self-expectations; internal dialogues about worth
	Self-Validation through Achievement	GPA as self-worth; awards as confirmation; craving external approval; self-comparison with high achievers
	Reframing Personal Success	success beyond grades; acceptance of imperfection; focusing on long-term growth; valuing resilience
	Emerging Adult Independence	autonomy in decisions; resisting imposed career paths; exploring individuality
3. Psychological Adaptation Strategies	Cognitive Reframing	positive self-talk; "failure as learning"; shifting mindset to growth; perspective-taking
	Emotional Regulation	mindfulness practices; journaling; breathing exercises; crying privately; reframing stress
	Social Connectedness	sharing worries with friends; belonging to study groups; supportive peer communities
	Self-Compassion	forgiving mistakes; gentle self-encouragement; celebrating small wins
	Resilience Building	self-motivation after setbacks; persistence despite anxiety; embracing uncertainty
4. Future Orientation and Self-Continuity	Goal Reassessment	adjusting academic goals; exploring alternative career paths; rethinking priorities
	Long-Term Meaning Making	connecting present effort to future identity; sense of purpose; academic journey as self-growth
	Vision of Stability	imagining balanced adult life; hope for professional fulfillment; desire for personal coherence
	Adaptive Career Planning	seeking guidance; preparing backup options; evaluating passion vs. practicality
	Self-Continuity Narratives	"who I was vs. who I am becoming"; linking past achievements to future identity; coherent life story building

Theme 1 — Navigating Academic Pressure

Internalized Academic Expectations: Participants frequently described carrying internalized standards shaped by family and cultural values. Many felt a persistent drive to excel, often linking self-worth to performance. One student said, *"Even when my parents don't say anything, I feel their eyes expecting me to be the top of the class."* Others shared fear of disappointing their families or themselves: *"If I fail, it's like I'm not only losing marks but losing who I am supposed to be."*

External Performance Demands: Beyond self-imposed standards, participants emphasized the external intensity of Brazil's competitive academic environment. University entrance exams and high workloads created constant

pressure: *"The vestibular feels like a monster waiting at the end of the year,"* one noted. Teachers' high expectations and comparison with peers amplified stress: *"When my friends get good grades, I feel like I'm already behind, even if I passed."*

Time-Management Struggles: A pervasive challenge was organizing time between study, rest, and social life. Many described chronic sleep deprivation and guilt about procrastination. As one participant admitted, *"I plan my days, but the schedule collapses, and then I blame myself for wasting time."* Others spoke of an endless cycle of catch-up work: *"I'm always behind; it feels impossible to breathe."*

Coping through Support Seeking: Some adolescents counterbalanced pressure by reaching out for help. Strategies included attending mentoring programs, asking for teacher feedback, or informal peer tutoring. One student shared, *"I started studying with a friend who's good at math; it made me feel less alone."* Family reassurance also played a role: *"When my mom says, 'You're trying your best,' it calms my panic."*

Avoidance and Withdrawal: Conversely, a subset of participants coped through disengagement when pressure became overwhelming. Skipping classes or delaying assignments were described as self-protection: *"Sometimes I just can't face another lecture, so I stay in bed."* Others mentioned emotional numbness: *"It's like my brain shuts down. I'm there, but not really there."*

Theme 2 — Identity Negotiation and Self-Concept Alignment

Searching for Authentic Identity: Late adolescence was experienced as a stage of questioning and redefining selfhood beyond academic labels. Participants voiced doubts about life direction: *"I don't know if what I'm studying is really me or just what everyone expected."* Some explored new personal values and career meanings to feel more authentic.

Academic Role Dominance: Many described their student identity overshadowing other roles. Leisure and creativity were often sacrificed: *"I used to paint, but now it's just study and sleep."* Another participant explained, *"When people ask who I am, all I can say is 'a student,' nothing else."*

Integrating Multiple Selves: A key mechanism for coherence was combining personal and academic aspects into one narrative. This integration often required balancing family hopes and self-driven dreams: *"I'm trying to find a way to honor my parents' dream of medicine while still*

loving music." Internal dialogues about self-worth were frequent as adolescents negotiated competing values.

Self-Validation through Achievement: Achievement functioned as a short-term anchor for self-esteem. Participants equated grades with personal value: *"When I get a high mark, I feel like a whole person again."* However, some recognized its fragility: *"It's dangerous because one bad grade and everything falls apart."*

Reframing Personal Success: Several adolescents began redefining success to preserve self-coherence. Instead of perfect scores, they valued learning and growth: *"I realized that failing a test doesn't mean I'm failing at life."* Accepting imperfection and celebrating resilience marked an adaptive shift.

Emerging Adult Independence: A transition toward autonomy was evident. Some resisted imposed career paths and asserted decision-making: *"My dad wants engineering, but I'm choosing psychology because it fits me better."* Others linked independence to maturing self-concept: *"I'm learning to trust my own choices."*

Theme 3 — Psychological Adaptation Strategies

Cognitive Reframing: Reinterpreting stressful experiences helped adolescents remain coherent under pressure. Positive self-talk and seeing failure as a learning opportunity were common: *"I tell myself one test doesn't define my whole future."* Perspective-taking also reduced panic.

Emotional Regulation: Participants described deliberate emotional management, including mindfulness, journaling, and breathing techniques: *"When anxiety hits, I write everything down until it feels lighter."* Private crying or reflective silence was also reported as a release.

Social Connectedness: Belonging to peer study groups or supportive communities served as a protective factor. As one noted, *"When we share how stressed we are, it's like the weight divides among us."* Social ties created reassurance and reduced isolation.

Self-Compassion: Practicing kindness toward oneself was transformative for some. Forgiving mistakes and acknowledging effort helped maintain identity: *"I'm learning to treat myself like I would treat a friend."*

Resilience Building: Persistent adaptation emerged from re-engaging after setbacks. One participant reflected, *"I failed chemistry but didn't give up. That made me feel stronger, not weaker."* Facing uncertainty with courage helped sustain a stable self-image.

Theme 4 — Future Orientation and Self-Continuity

Goal Reassessment: Participants often re-evaluated ambitions to reduce internal conflict and maintain coherence: *"I dropped law because it wasn't me; now I feel lighter and more focused."* Shifting goals was framed as growth rather than failure.

Long-Term Meaning Making: Many created narratives linking current struggles to future identity: *"I'm suffering now, but I see it as building my future self."* This perspective brought hope and structure to self-concept.

Vision of Stability: A strong wish for a balanced adult life was expressed: *"I imagine a future where I can work but still have time for family and myself."* This vision anchored present experiences in a coherent trajectory.

Adaptive Career Planning: Planning beyond immediate academic paths helped reduce identity anxiety. Strategies included seeking mentorship and preparing backup options: *"I have a plan B so I don't feel trapped."*

Self-Continuity Narratives: Participants often narrated a life story connecting past, present, and future selves. One said, *"I'm not the same kid I was in high school, but my journey makes sense now."* This narrative building was crucial to maintaining a coherent sense of identity amid pressure.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study explored how late adolescents maintain self-concept coherence while facing intense academic demands in the Brazilian educational context. Analysis of the semi-structured interviews revealed four major thematic domains: navigating academic pressure, identity negotiation and self-concept alignment, psychological adaptation strategies, and future orientation with self-continuity. Collectively, these findings provide a nuanced understanding of how adolescents balance the external demands of academic success with the internal need for a coherent and stable sense of self.

One of the most prominent findings concerned how participants internalized and responded to academic pressure. Many adolescents described deeply embedded parental and cultural expectations to excel, a dynamic that echoes previous evidence that academic stress emerges from a combination of external evaluations and internalized performance standards (Saini & Devi, 2022; Shalu et al., 2025). Participants' narratives of striving for perfection and fearing failure align with research linking academic stress to increased self-criticism and vulnerability to negative emotions (Astuti & Waseso, 2023; Kim & Kim, 2024). Our

participants also emphasized the structural characteristics of the Brazilian educational system, where high-stakes entrance exams act as critical turning points for identity formation. This mirrors findings that competitive and exam-oriented systems can heighten stress and destabilize adolescents' self-perceptions (Högberg, 2024).

Despite these pressures, participants described nuanced ways of coping and regulating their experiences. Many reported cognitive reframing, redefining success beyond grades and cultivating acceptance of imperfection. Such adaptive reappraisal processes support prior evidence that positive cognitive restructuring can mitigate the negative psychological impact of stress and strengthen self-concept clarity (Leng et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024). Adolescents' use of self-compassion — expressed through forgiving mistakes and celebrating effort — echoes findings that compassion moderates the association between academic pressure and mental health, protecting self-worth (Wang et al., 2024). These processes seem to help maintain identity stability even when immediate outcomes are discouraging.

Another key mechanism identified was the integration of multiple selves. Participants often spoke about negotiating between externally imposed identities (such as "being a good student") and their authentic personal aspirations. This finding parallels research demonstrating that self-concept clarity is not merely the absence of confusion but involves active synthesis of diverse roles and values (Buritica et al., 2024; Cruijsen et al., 2023). Neurodevelopmental studies indicate that adolescence is a sensitive period for this integration, as brain networks related to self-referential processing continue to mature and support coherent identity construction (Buritica et al., 2024; Cruijsen et al., 2024). Our findings illustrate this developmental work in action: adolescents reframed conflicting expectations, sometimes resisting parental career paths to assert autonomy, while still seeking ways to respect family values — an especially salient dynamic in collectivistic or family-oriented cultures (Hur, 2023; Xing et al., 2024).

Social resources emerged as vital for sustaining self-concept coherence. Peers provided validation and helped distribute the weight of academic demands, while family reassurance buffered self-worth when performance wavered. These results reinforce prior studies highlighting the protective function of perceived social support against academic stress and its capacity to promote adaptive self-concept development (Núñez-Regueiro et al., 2022; Pontes et al., 2024). Importantly, support was not universally experienced as helpful; some adolescents described parental

monitoring as intrusive or escalating anxiety. This duality resonates with findings that parental involvement can either foster resilience or intensify stress depending on its emotional quality and the adolescent's need for autonomy (kang & Kim, 2025; Kim et al., 2025).

Participants also engaged in resilience-building behaviors by learning to tolerate uncertainty and persist after academic setbacks. Such perseverance reflects constructs like grit and self-regulated learning, which have been associated with stronger identity integration and sustained motivation (Hur, 2023; kang & Kim, 2025; Shikari, 2025). Several adolescents described transforming academic struggle into personal growth narratives, a process similar to the "meaning-making" strategies linked with self-concept clarity and well-being (Liu et al., 2025). This capacity to connect current efforts to a longer life trajectory aligns with studies on goal reappraisal and long-term purpose as protective factors under high stress (Leng et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024).

Interestingly, some participants narrated future-oriented self-continuity as a stabilizing force. They envisioned their present challenges as part of a coherent life story, linking past achievements, current efforts, and desired adult identities. Prior research supports this adaptive future self-anchoring, showing that imagining a stable, meaningful future can reduce anxiety and strengthen self-definition (Buritica et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2025). Adolescents in this study used alternative planning — such as having "backup" academic or career options — to reduce the identity threat posed by possible failure. This reflects findings that flexibility in goal setting can preserve motivation and psychological resilience (Leng et al., 2025; Mistry et al., 2023).

The findings also provide insight into how emotional regulation skills contribute to self-concept stability. Techniques such as mindfulness, journaling, and private emotional release described by participants align with research showing that emotion regulation buffers the link between academic stress and maladaptive outcomes (Jin et al., 2024; Kim & Kim, 2024). While prior quantitative studies have focused on emotion regulation's direct effect on depression or burnout, our qualitative results illustrate how these skills are woven into identity construction — helping adolescents integrate vulnerability and competence into a coherent self-narrative.

Moreover, the study highlights the cultural dimension of academic identity. Brazilian adolescents, similar to those in other transitional societies, must navigate evolving definitions of success and selfhood. They face globalized academic competition while managing family expectations tied to social mobility. This dynamic resembles patterns observed in multicultural adolescents balancing conflicting values (Kwon & Shin, 2023). It also parallels findings in Asian contexts where balancing collective family aspirations with individual identity is a critical resilience challenge (Kim et al., 2025; Xing et al., 2024). By situating identity coherence within these socio-cultural forces, our results call for culturally responsive approaches to supporting youth under academic stress.

Finally, the study adds depth to existing models of academic motivation and self-concept by demonstrating that coherence is not a static trait but an active process. Adolescents continually revise, test, and stabilize their self-narratives in response to external demands. This dynamic perspective extends previous research that has primarily measured self-concept clarity or academic self-concept as outcomes (Mistry et al., 2023; Shikari, 2025). Our findings suggest that educators and clinicians should view identity stability as something adolescents build through coping, meaning-making, and relational negotiation rather than as a fixed attribute.

5. Limitations & Suggestions

Although the study offers valuable insights, it is subject to several limitations. The sample size of eighteen participants, while adequate for achieving theoretical saturation in qualitative research, limits generalizability beyond similar contexts. Participants were Brazilian adolescents primarily from urban and semi-urban schools, which may not reflect the experiences of rural students or those in different cultural and socioeconomic settings. Self-report interviews may also be influenced by social desirability or participants' ability to articulate complex identity processes. Additionally, the cross-sectional design captures experiences at one point in time; identity coherence is fluid, and longitudinal data could better reveal how these processes evolve through key academic transitions. Another limitation concerns language and translation — although interviews were conducted and analyzed in Portuguese, nuanced meanings could be partially lost in conceptual translation to English. Finally, while NVivo-assisted thematic analysis enhanced rigor, interpretive bias from researchers' theoretical orientation cannot be fully excluded.

Future research could extend these findings by adopting longitudinal and mixed-method designs to track how self-

concept coherence develops across critical educational milestones such as final exams, university entry, or career decision points. Including adolescents from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds would deepen understanding of how structural inequality and cultural scripts shape coping resources and identity narratives. Cross-cultural comparisons, particularly between collectivistic and individualistic contexts, could reveal how cultural norms about success and autonomy influence self-concept processes. Integrating neurodevelopmental or psychophysiological measures with narrative data may also provide a richer multi-level perspective on how brain maturation supports identity stability under stress. Finally, intervention studies testing programs that promote self-compassion, resilience, and meaning-making could translate these qualitative insights into practical support for adolescents navigating academic pressure.

Educational and mental health practitioners can use these findings to better support adolescents under academic stress. Schools might create structured spaces for reflection and dialogue, helping students articulate personal values beyond grades and integrate them into their academic goals. Teachers and counselors could receive training to recognize signs of identity destabilization and encourage adaptive reframing rather than perfectionistic standards. Parents can be guided to provide supportive involvement that balances encouragement with autonomy, reducing the risk of intrusive control. Additionally, resilience and emotion regulation programs — including mindfulness, self-compassion exercises, and goal-setting workshops — could be incorporated into school mental health initiatives. By fostering a culture where success is defined broadly and self-worth is decoupled from performance alone, educational systems can help adolescents sustain coherent and healthy self-concepts while meeting academic challenges.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed in this article.

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