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RESILIENCE AS A MODERATOR OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ATTACHMENT STYLES AND IDENTITY CRISIS.

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Abstract

The study investigated resilience as a moderator of the relationship between attachment styles and identity crisis among adolescents, A total of two hundred and thirty (230) participants were used for this study, comprising of one hundred and three(103) male and one hundred and twenty-seven(127) female adolescent from Methodist College, Idaw River Girls Secondary School, King's Kid Secondary School, His Grace High School and Sacred Heart Secondary Schools all in Enugu state. The participants were between the age range of 11-17 years, and a mean age of 14.07 years. The secondary school students were drawn making use of purposive sampling technique. Three sets of instruments were administered in this study; they include; Adolescent Attachment Questionnaire (West et al.., 1998); Identity crisis scale (Ahmadi, 1997) and Resilience scale (Connor & Davidson, 2003). A Correlational design was adopted. Thus, moderated hierarchical multiple Regressions with the aid of S.P.S.S version (25), was applied as a statistical tool in order to test the hypotheses. Based on the outcomes of this study, all the control variables did not remarkably predict identity crisis among adolescents. However, attachment styles (goal-corrected partnership) positively predicted identity crisis among adolescents, also, resilience positively predicted identity crises among adolescents on individual capacity. Finally, resilience negatively moderated the relationship between attachment styles (goal-corrected partnership) and identity crises among adolescents. The researcher recommended that further research should also investigate other potential moderators and mediators, such as social support, Self-efficacy, and Self-esteem, in moderating the prediction of attachment styles and identity crisis.

Keywords: ***Attachment Styles, Identity Crisis, Resilience, Adolescents***

Introduction

One of the researcher's experience as a Sunday School teacher informed the choice of this topic, the researchers had observed incidents of identity crisis amongst some of the Adolescents. For instance, some of these adolescents found it difficult to answer questions about themselves, some frequently altered their values just to match their environment or relationship. Simply put, they were yet to form a coherent sense of self. While people in all stages of life can experience an identity crisis, adolescents tend to be most prone. A study conducted in 2015 found that 37% of teens were struggling with their identity, and 95% of teens reported that they had felt inferior at some point in their lives. Adolescents also tend to be less familiar with techniques used to cope with traumatic events, losses, and changes in relationships, which

increases their risk for stress and anxiety. While the development of self-worth is incredibly important for adolescents as they begin on the journey to self discovery, people at any stage in life are at risk of experiencing an identity crisis.

This study investigates how different attachment styles (availability, angry-distress, and goal-corrected partnership) predict identity crisis among adolescents, considering the moderating role of resilience. For example, adolescents with an angry-distress attachment style may face challenges in forming a stable self-identity, exhibiting behaviours such as hostility, aggression, and emotional regulation difficulties. This struggle can lead to an identity crisis marked by conflicting emotions and strained interpersonal relationships. Conversely, adolescents with an availability attachment style typically have a robust foundation of trust and emotional support from caregivers, allowing smoother navigation through identity challenges. However, resilience can influence these dynamics. An adolescent with high resilience might adopt adaptive coping strategies when faced with identity conflicts, mitigating the adverse effects of their attachment style on identity crisis.

Erikson (1968) describes identity crisis as a phase of intense exploration and self-questioning during adolescence, characterised by confusion and inner turmoil as adolescents attempt to establish a coherent sense of self. Marcia (2016) expands on this, noting that identity crisis involves a state of identity diffusion, where adolescents struggle with commitment to specific roles and values, leading to uncertainty about their beliefs, goals, and relationships. Papalia and Olds (2018) and Phinney (2010) further define identity crisis as a period of self-exploration and decision-making, often involving tension between childhood identities and emerging needs for autonomy and independence.

Identity crisis can stem from major life transitions, societal pressures, dysfunctional family dynamics, and intrinsic personality traits. Their consequences include emotional turmoil, anxiety, depression, and strained relationships, but they also offer opportunities for self-reflection, growth, and the development of an authentic self-identity.
Attachment styles, such as availability, angry-distress, and goal-corrected partnership (Weiss et al., 1982), are linked to identity crisis. Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth (1978) identify different attachment behaviours, noting how inconsistent caregiving can lead to difficulties in forming a stable sense of self. Adolescents with angry-distress attachment may exhibit hostility and aggression, while those with availability attachment tend to seek emotional support and exhibit trust in relationships. Goal-corrected partnerships are characterized by mutual trust and effective communication. Main and Solomon (1990) describe disorganised attachment as marked by contradictory behaviours, often due to unresolved trauma.

Attachment styles develop due to parental influence, early life experiences, and genetic factors (Ainsworth, 1978). Their consequences impact interpersonal relationships, emotional well-being, and parenting styles. Secure attachment fosters trust, intimacy, and self-esteem, while insecure attachment leads to emotional regulation difficulties and strained relationships.
Resilience, defined as the ability to adapt and recover from adversity, is a crucial moderating factor in identity crisis (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013; Masten, 2014). It involves emotional, cognitive, social, physical, spiritual, and environmental dimensions. Resilience enables adolescents to manage emotions, think flexibly, maintain supportive relationships, and find meaning during challenging times. It helps mitigate the negative effects of attachment styles on identity crises, promoting better psychological and physical health, long-term success, and personal growth.

Advantages of resilience encompass increased productivity, emotional well-being, improved health outcomes, long-term success, and personal growth.

This study aims to explore the relationship between attachment styles and identity crises among adolescents, focusing on the moderating role of resilience. By understanding how attachment styles influence identity crisis and how resilience can mitigate these effects, the research seeks to inform interventions and support systems that promote healthy identity development. Adolescence is marked by significant identity development, and attachment styles play a crucial role in this process. However, the role of resilience in moderating the impact of attachment styles on identity crisis is not well understood. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the interplay between attachment styles, identity crisis, and resilience, contributing to the development of effective interventions for fostering healthy identity formation in adolescents.

The Purpose of the Study to determine whether attachment styles (angry-distress, availability, and goal-corrected partnership) and resilience significantly predict identity crisis among adolescents. This research aims to deepen our understanding of the factors influencing adolescent identity development and to inform interventions that promote resilience and healthy identity formation. By examining the behavioural manifestations of attachment styles and their impact on identity crisis, the study contributes to the literature on adolescent development and provides insights for supporting adolescents through this critical period. The conceptual framework of the study is presented below.

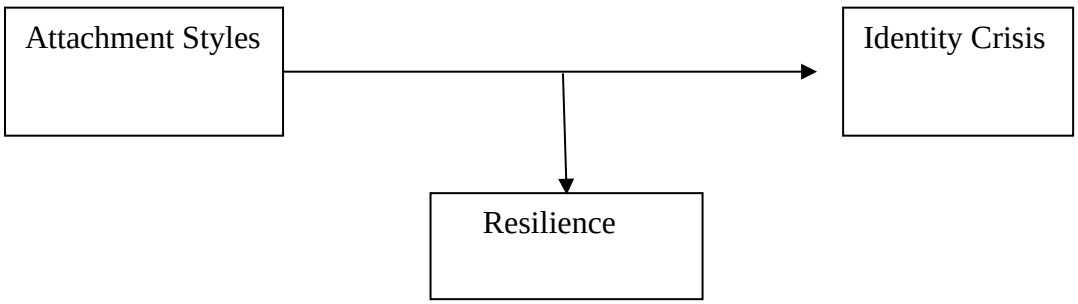

Figure 1: A diagram portraying the moderating role of resilience in attachment styles and identity crisis of adolescents

The following hypotheses were tested in the study:
1. Attachment Styles will significantly predict Identity Crisis among adolescents.
2. Resilience will significantly predict Identity Crisis among adolescents.
3. Resilience will moderate the relationship between attachment styles and identity crisis among adolescents.

Method

The study was focused on Adolescents in secondary schools located in Enugu South Local Government Area of Enugu. A total of two hundred and thirty (230) participants were used for this study, comprising of one hundred and three (103) male adolescents and one hundred and twenty-seven (127) female from Methodist College, Idaw River Girls Secondary School, King's Kid Secondary School, His Grace High School and Sacred Heart Secondary Schools all in Enugu state. The participants were between the age range of 11-17 years, and a mean age of

14.07 years. The secondary school students were drawn making use of purposive sampling technique, from the classes of JSS I to SS3. Firstly, the researchers purposely selected several schools to represent different types and levels of adolescents in Enugu South Local Government Area. Next, 5 out of these schools were randomly selected for the study, and included two private secondary schools, two missionary secondary schools, and a public all-female secondary school. Finally, adolescents (students) were randomly selected by convenience. The data collection method ensured anonymity of responses and confidentiality of the participants.

A 74-item questionnaire comprising three instruments was adapted for the study, thus: Adolescent Attachment styles Questionnaire, Identity Crises Scale and Resilience Scale. The Adolescent Attachment Questionnaire used was developed by West et al..,(1998) as a measure of Adolescent's Attachment Styles. It is a 9-item Likert scale ranging from Point 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to Point 5 (*Strongly Agree*). The 9 items were scored directly to obtain consistency of scoring for Adolescent attachment styles. The Identity Crises Scale used was developed by Ahmadi (1997). The scale has 40 items, each of which is scored on a four-point scale from 0 (no problem) to 3 (serious problem/identity crisis). The overall identity crisis score for an individual is calculated by adding the scores given to all domains (Total score range: 0-30). A total score < 9 indicates that the individual does not suffer from an identity crisis. The Resilience Scale used was developed by Connor & Davidson (2003). It is a 25-item scale which are evaluated on a five point Likert form scale ranging from 0-4; not true at all (0), rarely true (1), sometimes true (2), often true (3), and true nearly all of the time (4) – these ratings result in a number between 0-100, and higher scores indicate higher resilience.

Three hundred copies of the questionnaires were distributed directly to the participants. In accordance with the ethical guidelines for conducting psychological and educational research in Nigeria, the researchers ensured participation in the study was voluntary. Informed consent of the participants was obtained before the study commenced, and the data collection process ensured anonymity and confidentiality of responses. The participants were each given the questionnaires and asked to complete and return them after completion. Out of the 300 copies of questionnaires distributed, 252 were returned. However, only 230 were completed correctly. This rate of return was considered reasonably high and the use of the questionnaires as such not likely to affect the validity of the study. The questionnaires completed correctly were, therefore, scored accordingly.

The research design was correlational. Analysis of the data collected for the study was by moderated hierarchical regression. This was done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.

Results

The results of the statistical analysis are presented below.

Table 1: Descriptives and Correlation Matrix of study constructs

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Identity Crisis (1)	84.75	25.68	1								
Attachment Style (2)	19.78	5.94	.370**	1							
Resilience (3)	68.40	32.23	.126	.110	1						
Gender (4)	.45	.50	-.027	-.024	-.094	1					
School Level (5)	.50	.50	.026	-.052	.113	-.263**	1				
Angry-Distress (6)	7.38	1.44	-.043	.039	.001	-.243**	-.001	1			
Availability (7)	4.00	2.44	.177**	.188**	.052	-.041	.134*	-.155*	1		
Goal-Corrected Partnership (8)	3.79	2.57	.356**	.304**	.074	.026	.050	-.087	.767**	1	
Age (9)	13.58	1.74	-.085	-.037	-.050	.361**	-.065	-.109	-.198**	-.058	1

*Correlation is significant at *P<.05; **P<.01*
Note: N= 230, School Level coded as 0 (Junior, JS 1-3) and 1 (Senior, SS 1-3).Gender was coded as 0 (female) versus 1 (male).

Table 1 demonstrates the correlation matrix. The table revealed that Self-identity crisis and attachment style had a positive correlation r (230) = .370, p<.01. This implies that adolescents' perceived attachment to their parents/caregiver makes them prone to self identity crisis. However, only the availability and goal-corrected dimensions of attachment style yielded positive relationships (r = .177 and r =.356, p<.01) respectively.

Table 2: A table summarizing moderated hierarchical regression analysis on the moderating role of resilience on attachment style as a predictor of self identity crisis.

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	11.435	12.008		.952	.342
	Attachment Style	3.492	.592	.807	5.895	.000
	Resilience	.657	.169	.824	3.890	.000
	AttachStyle_Resilience	-.030	.008	-.930	-3.635	.000
2	(Constant)	27.424	14.984		1.830	.069
	Attachment Style	2.615	.612	.605	4.275	.000
	Resilience	.483	.169	.606	2.853	.005
	AttachStyle_Resilience	-.021	.008	-.667	-2.600	.010
	Angry-Distress	-.643	1.055	-.036	-.609	.543
	Availability	-1.856	.975	-.176	-1.904	.058
	Goal-Corrected Partnership	3.673	.963	.367	3.814	.000
3	(Constant)	26.797	15.769		1.699	.091
	Attachment Style	2.777	.624	.642	4.447	.000
	Resilience	.517	.171	.648	3.018	.003
	AttachStyle_Resilience	-.023	.008	-.735	-2.811	.005
	Angry-Distress	-.880	1.091	-.049	-.807	.421
	Availability	-2.070	.986	-.197	-2.099	.037
	Goal-Corrected Partnership	3.765	.966	.377	3.896	.000
	Gender	-2.596	3.232	-.050	-.803	.423
	School Level	3.059	3.184	.060	.961	.338

a. Dependent Variable: Identity Crisis

In step one of table 2 above, attachment style positively predicted identify crisis $\beta = 3.492$, t(5.895), P<.001.This indicates that the more the adolescent-parent perceive attachment styles, the more their identity crisis. Thus, the first hypothesis which stated "that attachment styles will significantly predict identity crisis was accepted. However, in step two only goal-corrected partnership dimension of attachment styles predicted identity crisis ($\beta = 3.673$, t=3.814, P<.001) whereas angry-distress and availability did not predict identity crisis ($\beta = -.643$, t=-.609, p>.05; $\beta = -1.856$, t=-1.904, P>.05) respectively. The table above further revealed in step one that the moderator variable, resilience positively predicted identity crisis ($\beta = .657$, t=3.890, p<.001). This indicates that the more resilient the adolescents are the more they experience an identity crisis. Hence, the second hypothesis which stated that "resilience will predict identity crisis" is hereby accepted.

Finally, the table revealed in step one that attachment styles and resilience jointly and negatively predicted identity crisis ($\beta = -.030$, t=-3.635, p<.001). This implies that resilience weakens the positive relationship found between attachment styles and identity crisis. Thus,

adolescents who experience high attachment but are less resilient are bound to have identity crises. Again, adolescents who have less attachment but are resilient will have less identity crisis. Hence, the third hypothesis which said that "resilience will moderate the relationship between attachment styles (angry-distress, availability and goal-corrected partnership) and identity crisis" is hereby accepted. Resilience negatively moderated only goal-corrected partnership dimension of attachment styles in predicting identity crisis. Refer to the moderation analysis in table 3 below and interaction graph in figure 2 below for more explanations. None of the two control variables as observed in step three in the table above predicted identity crisis (gender: $\beta = -2.596$, t=-.803, p>.423; school level: $\beta = 3.059$, t=.961, p>.338).

The relationship between variables entered in step one yielded (R=.437) and accounted approximately 19.1% ($>R^2 = .191$) of the variance in identity crisis scores which contributed significantly to the regression model, F (3,226) = 17.81, p<.001 (*see appendix C for model summary and ANOVA tables*).

Table 3: Moderation Analysis on attachment styles and resilience in identity crisis.
OUTCOME VARIABLE: Identity Crisis

Model summary	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	.44	.19	539.43	17.98	3.00	226.00	.00
Model	coeff	se	T	p	LLCI	ULCI	
Constant	48.77	6.02	8.10	.00	36.91	60.63	
Goal corrected	8.23	1.34	6.14	.00	.18	10.87	
Resilience	.35	.08	4.20	.00	.18	.51	
Int_1	-.07	.02	-3.96	.00	-.11	-.04	

Product terms key:
Int_1 : Goal-Corrected Partnership x Resilience

In table 3 above, the focus is on the moderation hence, observation of the table revealed that resilience negatively moderated the positive relationship between attachment styles (goal-corrected partnership) and identity crisis ($\beta = -.07$, t=-3.96, p<.001). This indicates that adolescents who adhere to the goals set for them by their parents/caregivers without being resilient will have an identity crisis while those who do not really adhere to the goals but who are also resilient will have less identity crisis. Thus, resilience weakens the positive relationship found between goal-corrected partnership and identity crisis as demonstrated in figure 2 below.

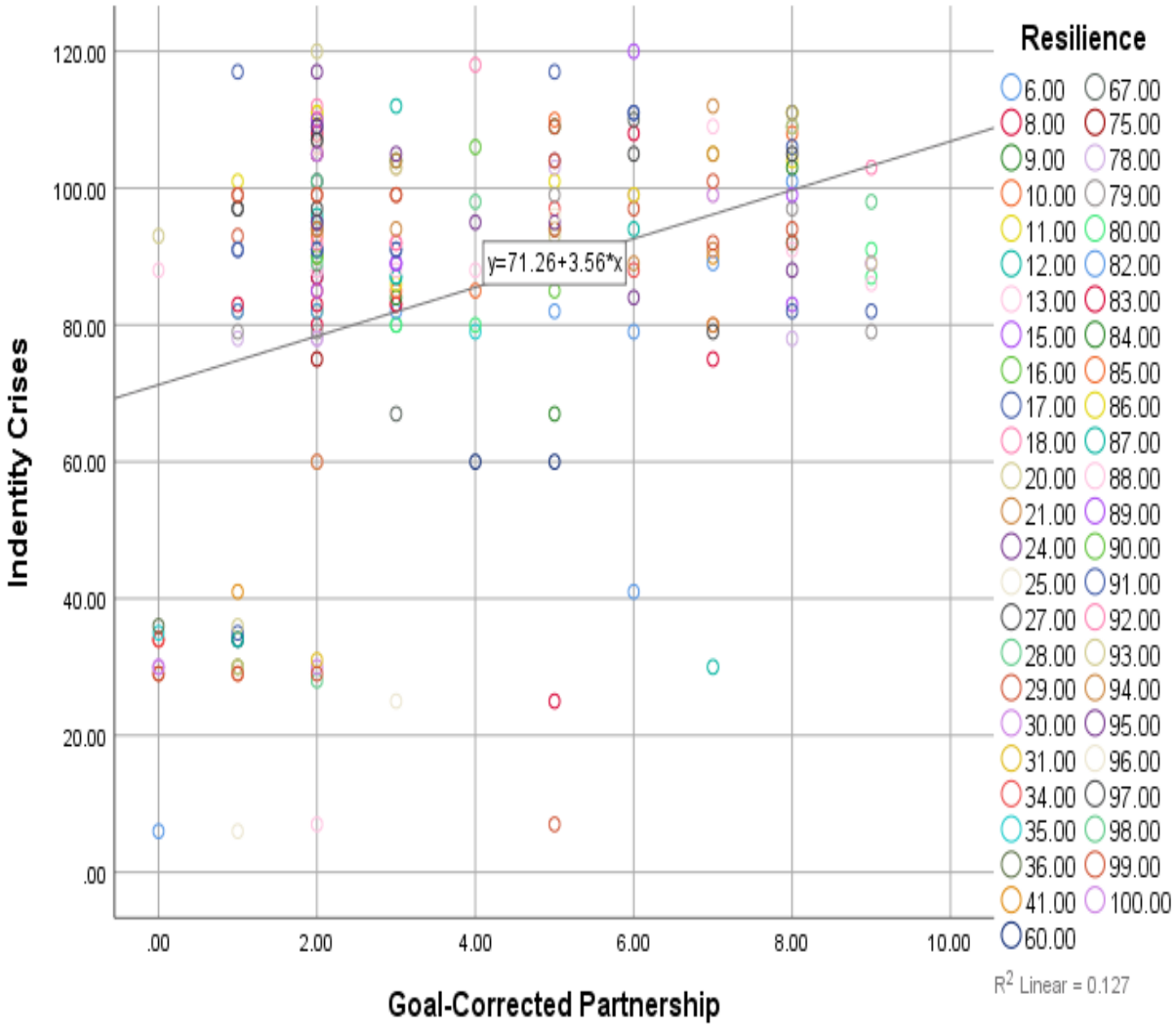

Figure 2: A graph portraying resilience as a moderator in the positive relationship between attachment styles (goal-corrected partnership) and identity crisis.

Summary of Results

1. Attachment styles (goal-corrected partnership) positively predicted identity crisis.
2. Resilience positively predicted Identity crisis.
3. Resilience negatively moderated the positive relationship between attachment styles (goal-corrected partnership) and identity crisis.
4. Gender and school level, the two demographic variables controlled in the study did not predict identity crisis.

Discussion

This study provides a complex understanding of attachment styles predicting identity crisis among adolescents, focusing on the moderating role of resilience. The first hypothesis tested which stated that "attachment styles will significantly predict identity crisis among adolescents" was found, hence accepted. It was found that attachment styles (goal-corrected partnership) positively predicted identity crisis.

Second hypothesis tested which stated that 'resilience will significantly predict identity crisis' was found, hence accepted. This result is in line with the work of Jennifer, Nicola and Einar

(2013), in a study on the role of resilience between characteristic affect and symptoms of identity crisis, indicated resilience fully mediated the effects of positive affect on change in identity crisis and partly mediated the effects of negative affect on change in identity crisis. This means that resilience is a strong factor that can assist the adolescents to withstand any heat that will come out of the daily school activities not to break. The result shows that the ability to bounce back from a stressful event, situation or circumstance is great to assist adolescents to overcome stress that comes out of the school environment.

The third hypothesis tested which stated that 'resilience will moderate the relationship between attachment styles and identity crisis among adolescents was confirmed. The result shows that resilience negatively moderated the positive relationship between attachment styles (goal-corrected partnership) and identity crisis among adolescents. This moderation effect significantly contributes to existing literature, shedding light on the interplay between attachment styles and identity crisis in adolescents (Allen, Hauser, Bell and O'Connor,2014), partially supporting the third hypothesis.

Demographic variables such as gender and school level did not predict identity crisis. Simply put, the gender and the school level of the assessed adolescents did not contribute to the level of identity crisis among the adolescents.

Resilience also is a thing of the mind, if one feels motivated and believes that he or she can survive or recover on time from any set back, it will assist the student in the role he or she plays in the school which will help to cushion identity crisis. The result agrees with the empirical reviewed like the work of Catalano, Chan, Wilson, Chiu and Muller (2011) and disagreed with the work of Jennifer, Nicola and Einar (2013), which indicated that the researched variables are relative terms that are subject to change but still retained its meaning. Also, this research has added to existing literature.

The result obtained implies that all the control variables did not remarkably predict identity crisis, resilience positively predicted identity crisis among adolescents on individual capacity, finally, resilience negatively moderated the relationship between attachment styles (goal-corrected partnership) and identity crisis among adolescents. This shows the presence of resilience can cause the absence of identity crisis among adolescents. Adolescents should learn to develop a strong resilience so as to assist them to cope with daily stress in the school environs.

Limitation of the study

The study's reliance on self-report measures for attachment styles, identity crisis, and resilience might introduce social desirability bias and other forms of response bias. Future studies could benefit from adding more objective measures or triangulating data sources to validate self-reported data. Moreover, this study's Correlational design limits the ability to establish causality. Longitudinal research could provide deeper insights into the interplay between attachment styles and identity crisis and the moderating role of resilience in the lives of adolescents over time.

Sudden increase of inflation which leads to increase of goods and services also affected this work, because it affected the researcher's budget.

Suggestions for further study

Further research should also investigate other potential moderators and mediators, such as social support, Self-efficacy, and Self-esteem, in moderating the prediction of attachment styles and identity crises. A broader understanding of these dynamics could inform more effective strategies for encouraging adolescents to learn how to develop a strong sense of self so as to assist them with navigating through identity crisis.

The researcher should try to sample participants from other geo-political regions where there are no indiscriminate calls for sit at home, so as to give room for more participants.

Few locations should be considered also by the researcher so as to accommodate the budget should in case there is inflation.

Conclusion

The study investigated the moderating role of resilience in attachment styles as predictor of identity crisis among adolescents, and the result shows that gender and school level, the two demographic variables controlled in the study, did not remarkably predict identity crisis. Resilience positively predicted identity crisis among adolescents on individual capacity, finally, resilience negatively moderated the relationship between attachment styles (goal-corrected partnership) and identity crisis among adolescents. This shows the presence of resilience can cause the absence of identity crisis among adolescents

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