

# Self-concept and Family: A Study on Greek Secondary School Students

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## Abstract

The aim of the study is twofold. On the one hand it concerns the measurement and the examination of the subjects' self-concept and on the other the detection and justification of the role of family in its configuration. The study analyzed the data collected from the answers to a research questionnaire of 1344 15 and 16-year-old school students in the Prefecture of Thessaloniki, Greece, with the use of a stratified random sampling technique. The first important finding concerned the high degree of the general self-concept of the adolescents. Among the seven specific sectors of the general self-concept a major variation was noted, with the higher average to be traced in the relationship that the students have configured with their peers and the lower one in the valuation of their academic competence. The second important finding was the ascertainment of the essential contribution of the family.

## Introduction

Self-concept, as the sum of thoughts and perceptions that a person has about himself/herself or according to Taylor, Davis-Kean and Malanchuk (2007, p. 131) as "the cognitive representation an individual has of him- or herself" plays a key role in the integration of one's personality. It exerts a decisive influence on the interpretation of various experiences, on the elaboration of information and motives for action, and therefore – to a large extent – it motivates, directs and determines human behavior (Franken, 1994, p. 443). Moreover, it exerts a strong influence on self-efficacy (Ferla, Valcke & Cai, 2009), a construct defined by Bandura (1977, 1997) as one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations, which can play a major role in how one approaches goals, tasks and challenges and also when present at a high level can help people view difficult tasks as something to be mastered rather than something to be avoided (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Creativity, inventiveness, proper socialization, popularity, adaptability, low levels of stress and mental balance are some of the characteristics of children with positive or high self-concept (Baumeister et al., 2003; Convington & Beery, 1976; Cornell et al., 1990), which also, according to the surveys of DeNeve and Cooper (1998), Diener and Diener (1995) and Furnham and Cheng (2000), is the most important predictive variable of happiness or life satisfaction. On the contrary, a child with low or negative self-concept suffers from anxiety, adopts a defensive attitude towards others, is possessed by egocentricity and has bad interpersonal relations (Laird, 2007).

The interest in self-concept goes back to ancient Greek thought. The seven sages contemplated/considered and highlighted the philosophical meaning of the Delphic aphorism "Know thyself" apprehending its importance to human development. Plato (Filivos 48.c, Hippias Major 228.e, Charmides 164.e, Protagoras 335.b) realized the importance of self-knowledge for the discharge of arrogance and for the creation of

rationally grounded knowledge (*Epistime*). He believed that a man as a rational being should know himself, understand human nature and estimate with accuracy the purpose that can be fulfilled, before making any achievement (action). Consistent with Platonic thought, Aristotle (Rhetoric, 1395a.22) in his moral theory notes that every man may determine the medium between excess and defect, but this requires the “know thyself”, namely the self-determination of the potential of human nature.

During the last decades self-concept has been a field of systematic theoretical and empirical interest to sociologists, psychologists, educators and philosophers, which focuses mainly on young people who are going through the pre-teen and teenage years. The intense interest, as reflected in the growing literature output, derives from the certainty of the priceless benefits arising from positive self-concept, which concern mainly the facilitation of the formation of the personal and social identity and the molding of the character. It derives, also, from the solid assumption of the increased difficulty of forming a stable identity in today's social reality. This difficulty concerns the fact that nowadays it has become difficult for adolescents to define themselves and self-orientate due to the plethora of options and alternatives (Baumeister, 1987). On the basis of those two considerations, the majority of the studies (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Eccles, Wingfield, & Schiefele, 1998; Neilsen & Metha, 1994) aim at assisting first with the planning and implementation of interventions in children's family and school environment with beneficial results for both children and their parents and second the facilitation of teachers' work.

In this context, one distinctive domain of research is the detection of the factors that contribute to the formation of self-concept. The most commonly examined are gender, age, place of origin, place of residence, school and family.

### **The Effect of the Family in the Formation of Adolescent Self-concept: A Literature Review**

The family, as a primary institutionalized social group, has been an attractive research field for philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, educators, anthropologists, historians, demographers, biologists and physicians. Their interest has focused on its historical development, its conceptual clarification, its structure, its functions, its roles and responsibilities, its types, its relation to society, the interaction between its members. Specifically, this interaction shapes and develops the cognitive, intellectual, emotional, social and moral development of the child. The influence of the family in the activation of the individual characteristics of the person and the detection of the role it plays in the child's life have been subjected to systematic study by scientists in the fields of sociology, psychology, anthropology and pedagogy.

In sociological terms the intense behavioral interaction among family members and especially the strong influence of father and mother in the shaping of their children's personality was first analyzed by Burgess (1926). Particularly significant was the report of the Central Advisory Council For Education (1967), according to which parents compared to teachers affect their children's attitudes more profoundly. Similar results were produced by Jencks (1972), according to which the students' ability to

learn, and even his/her IQ level, do not play a role as decisive for his/her personality as the socioeconomic status and the family environment. Coleman's study (1979) on a sample of 570.000 students and 60.000 teachers from 4.000 schools in the United States was very influential; it concluded, inter alia, that compared to the quality of the school family substantially affects the academic performance of children and their receptiveness to subsequent experiences.

Particularly, as far as the investigation of the structural variables of family is concerned, studies have concluded that children from high socioeconomic backgrounds, as they receive a variety of experiences and cultural stimuli, and are highly motivated, have better chances to evolve (Coltrane & Collins, 2001; Downey, 1995; Eijck & De Graaf, 1995; Lareau, 2003; Leivaditis et al., 2003; Sianou-Kirgiou, 2006). Furthermore, it has been empirically proved that the higher the educational level of the parents, the better the chance for the children to achieve satisfactory school performance becomes, so as to accomplish deep understanding of the world and show intense interest in meaningful activities (Bradley et al., 1977; Kiritsis, 2008; Thompson et al., 1988).

During the 1970s a shift in research interest occurred towards the functional characteristics of the family, namely the expectations and aspirations that parents have for their children, the ways they choose to implement them and especially the extent of their involvement in their children's lives. These factors are considered to have serious consequences for the adolescent's personality and for his/her academic improvement. The effect of parental aspirations and expectations on school performance, on occupational choices, on the overall progress and on the orientation of children has been sufficiently empirically proved (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Fan & Chen, 2001; Marjoribanks, 1979; Martinez Gonzalez & Corral Blanco, 1991). As far as the practices of father and mother are concerned, according to the studies by Epstein (1989), Hess and Shipman (1965) and Rogoff and Gardner (1984), children's academic success and spiritual development is more easily accomplished when parents foster an active approach to learning, stimulate the thinking process of their children, allow them reasonable space to overcome their problems, provide them with the necessary scope for getting involved into decisions related to family issues. Also, the psychological and emotional support of parents contributes to the improvement of academic performance and to the creation of a healthy and balanced personality (Campbell & Mandel, 1990; Huure et al., 2006; Oosterwegel & Oppenheimer, 1993).

Thus, within the family the child experiences situations that will enable him/her to develop and evaluate his/her physical, cognitive and social skills and to shape his/her personality. One dimension of adolescent personality is the self-concept, which according to Openshaw, Thomas, and Rolling (1984) and Yaacob (2006) is most important because of the indissoluble connection with the formation of a healthy and balanced personality. Parental support, when expressed through acts of affection and acceptance of children's actions, significantly contributes to a positive self-concept of the growing individual (Felson & Zielinski, 1989; Hattie, 1992; Rosenberg, 1979). Towards this result, as Cai Lian and Yusooff (2009) note, the interest of father and mother in the children's problems, the maintaining of serenity at home, their participation in joint activities, the provision of freedom within reasonable and well explanatory limits contribute as well. For Barber and Thomas (1986) and

Coopersmith (1967) the determination of the limits in child behaviour along with the avoidance of the imposition of very strict disciplinary methods and the consequent showing of respect for individual initiative constitute very crucial factors of the determination of a child's self-concept. Additional important factors are the constant provision of opportunities for individual expression, the encouragement of initiative which reinforces the need and desire of the young person to explore herself/himself and assess her/his abilities and the encouragement of an active participation of children in decisions related to family issues (Kenny, 1987; Moore, 1987). Also, as noted by Blake and Slate (1993), Hoelter and Harper (1987), Kaur, Rana and Kaur (2009) and Neilsen and Metha (1994), adolescents who perceive communication with their parents as supportive and open are more likely to develop a positive self-concept than their peers who perceive communication with their parents as overwhelmingly controlling. Only when exercised with democratic processes does control have positive effects on children's self-concept.

More generally, studies have concluded that the way the family functions and the quality of the developing interpersonal relationships among its members has a major impact on the self-concept of the child (Baharudin & Zulkefly, 2009; Brody & Flor, 1997; Mandara & Murray, 2000). On the contrary, empirical studies diverge as to the degree of influence that derives from the parents' socioeconomic status. Thus, while Atherley (1990), Chapman, Lambourne, and Silva (1990), Dragonas (1983) and Eshel and Klein (1981) found that self-concept is not influenced or is only minimally influenced by the socioeconomic status of the family, a number of other studies resulted in different conclusions. Specifically, Gregg, Propper and Washbrook (2007), Twenge and Campbell (2002) and McPherson and Rust (1987) found that higher income, occupational class and education level have a strong impact on the development of a positive child's self-concept. Additionally, Kiritsis and Papadopoulou (2011) and Song and Hattie (1984) concluded that many of the functional characteristics of father and mother which affect the child's self-concept (involvement in the learning and educational process, support practices, attitudes and expectations) are essentially formed from the above three structural characteristics.

In the context of detecting the contribution of parents in shaping the self-concept of adolescents, many researchers have focused on the investigation of the special role of the mother in relation to the role of the father. Hendricks et al. (2005), Nelson and Valliant (1993) and Peretti and DiVittorio (1992) found a statistically significant relevance between the absence of the father from home and the adolescent's self-concept. However this relevance was not very high. On the contrary, the study of Gecas and Schwalbe (1972) showed a strong correlation (especially between father and son). As for the mother, it has been empirically proved that she is the main person of reference for the child, the dominant figure, with whom the child develops an intense interactive relationship (Graybill, 1978; Makri-Botsari, 2000).

In conclusion, the student's academic performance and generally speaking his/her behavioural characteristics are strongly determined by the quality of interfamily life and by the interaction processes occurring within the family. Both father and mother, serving as primary carrier of instilling values, attitudes and priorities, play a central role in shaping the adolescent's personality and self-concept.

## Aims, Sample and Method of the Study

The aim of the study is twofold. On the one hand it concerns the measurement and the examination of Greek students' self-concept and on the other the detection and justification of the role of the family in its configuration. Specifically, the image of teenagers regarding their academic competence, their athletic competence, their physical appearance, their relations with peers, their emotional relationships, their job readiness and their behavioural conduct is recorded. Moreover, the role of family is extensively assessed in connection with both structural (education level, occupation and income of father and mother) and functional (quality of the relationship among family members) characteristics.

The research hypothesis is that both structural and functional characteristics of the family have a significant influence in shaping adolescents' self-concept, as the contribution of parents in the development of the cognitive and academic socialization of the child, of his/her behaviour, his/her mental health and balance, his/her social, professional and economic future and his/her personality in general has already been empirically confirmed. At the same time, based on literature findings it can be assumed that the mother, compared with the father, plays a particularly decisive role in the socioemotional development of the child and in the formation of his/her self-concept.

For the collection of data, survey research with the questionnaire as the methodological tool was conducted. Its construction was based on a scale that was used by Makri-Botsari (2001a), which was similar to Harter's (1988) manual for the self-perception profile for adolescents but adjusted to Greek population. The questionnaire (Appendix 1) consists of two parts. The first part includes questions related to some demographic information of the participants (gender, age) and especially to the structural (educational level, profession and income) and functional (quality of relation among family members) characteristics of parents. The second part includes Lickert type scale (from 1 to 5) questions designed to detect how adolescents view, assess and appreciate themselves in seven domains of self-concept. These domains are academic competence (1, 9, 15, 17), athletic competence (2, 10, 18), physical appearance/attractiveness (3, 12, 20), peer relations (4, 11, 19, 21), opposite-sex peer relations (5, 13, 22), job readiness (6, 16, 23), behavioural conduct (7, 8, 14, 24). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for assessing internal consistency of the above areas of self-concept are: academic competence=0.69, athletic ability=0.85, physical appearance/attractiveness=0.69, peer relations=0.63, opposite-sex peer relations=0.64, job readiness=0.42, behavioural conduct=0.43. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient to all questions that count adolescents' self-concept is 0.82.

Given the practical impossibility of studying the entire population of Greek adolescents, a subtotal (N=1344) was applied during March and April 2011 from 15 and 16 years old students in the Prefecture of Thessaloniki (Greece) with the use of stratified random sampling technique (Lohr, 2009, pp. 73-101). Having as key criterion the socioeconomic stratification of their inhabitants, six high schools were randomly selected from three zone areas of the prefecture of Thessaloniki.

Specifically, 35.04% attended high schools which were situated in the center of the city (where people from middle socioeconomic status live), 32.7% in the Eastern side of the city (where people from higher socioeconomic status live) and 32.2% in the Western side (where people from lower socioeconomic status live). Regarding gender, 48.7% of those who answered the questionnaire were males and 50.9% females. Regarding age, 68.5% were 15 years old and 31.5% were 16 years old.

As far as their family structural characteristics are concerned, 14.4% of the fathers had elementary education, 31.1% had graduated high school, 22.2% held a degree from Technical Meta-Secondary School and 32.3% held a university degree. Similar were the results concerning mothers' education level, as 8.8% had elementary education, 33% had graduated high school, 19.5% obtained a Technical Meta-Secondary School degree and 33.3% a university degree. Table 1 presents the configuration of the sample based on the occupation of participants' parents.

Table 1. *Profession of participants' parents*

	Father	Mother
Civil servant	13.7%	9.5%
Private employee	24.4%	23.5%
Scientist (doctor, lawyer, teacher, architect etc.)	21.9%	27.7%
Merchant/Businessman	18.2%	7.0%
Low class jobs without demanding of high educational level (Craftsman, driver, hairdresser etc.)	21.8%	11.8%
Household	0.0%	20.4%

Finally, the assessment of adolescents shows that 12.9% of their parents have a monthly income of up to 1000€, 38.3% ranging from 1001 to 2000€, 31.2% from 2001 to 3000€, 11.5 % from 3001 to 4000€ and 6.1% earn more than 4000€. Regarding participants' family functional characteristics, the quality of the relationship among family members is revealed through the answers of students to 7 important questions.

Table 2. *Participants' answers to questions which reveal the quality of their relation with their parents*

	Father	Mother
Do you discuss your problems with your parents?	2.68	3.38
Do you adequately communicate with your parents?	3.34	3.67
Are your efforts and choices supported by your parents?	3.88	4.12
Do your parents trust your abilities/potential?	4.18	4.30
Do your parents devote time to get involved with your life issues?	3.47	4.01
Do you often wish to have your personality deeper understood by your parents?	2.94	2.81
Do your parents devote time to your education?	2.59	3.05
Total Mean	3.29	3.62

These 7 questions function as 7 indicators that as independent factors exhibit high internal consistency and strong correlations with one another (Cronbach  $\alpha$  for fathers' reliability: 0.70 and for mothers' reliability: 0.64). Therefore, it was decided to merge these 7 indicators into 1 cumulative indicator for the father under the name "adolescents' relationship with their father" and 1 cumulative indicator for the mother under the name "adolescents' relationship with their mother".

## Results and Discussion

**A.** The first aim of the study was the measurement and examination of the subjects' self-concept. The level of the subjects' general self-concept could be characterized as high, as the mean of subjects' answers to all the questions ( $N=24$ ) which measure its seven domains reaches 3.67. Only one in ten teenagers has a mean less than 3, which is the midpoint of the five-point grading scale. Similar results were produced by the research conducted a decade earlier on a sample of the same age group by Makri-Botsari (2001b: p. 57), according to which the mean of the four-point assessment scale for the general self-concept of 15- and 16-year-old Greek students were 2.83 and 2.93 respectively. However, it is worth noting that the measures of central tendency of each domain of self-concept, as noted in the study of Makri-Botsari as well, show notable divergences among them. This finding highlights that the nature of the Self is multidimensional and shows that this comprehension is a prerequisite for its profound understanding. The dimension that recorded the highest self-concept score both in the present study and also in the study by Pappas (2003) in a sample of 15-year-old students in Athens is the one that explores the relationships that adolescents have developed with their peers (4.07). This result is interpreted on the basis of the escalating teenagers' tendency to diminish parental control, an attitude that leads them closer to their peers.

Job readiness is the domain that comes second, but only by a wide margin (3.87). Employability and professional fulfillment has reached the top of young people's concerns worldwide especially during the last two decades and the pursuit of a successful career has become a main goal for the majority of students (Kiritsis, Cheliatsidou, & Cheliatsidou, 2011; Leondari & Gonida, 2008). At first glance, the high degree (4.05) of students' optimism about their professional future, amid an escalating financial crisis, a continuous increase of unemployment rates and a generalized climate of uncertainty and intense anxiety in Greece comes as a surprise. This finding, however, can be interpreted by the theory of Toffler (1974) that young people's anticipation of their personal development is much more optimistic than that of their country's future and the world. This theory has been confirmed by empirical studies both in the United States and Europe (Brown, 1984; Hicks, 1996; Horatio Alger Association, 2008; Johnson, 1987; Ziebertz, 2005). Thus, it can be concluded that despite unfavorable economic conditions the level of hope for the future among youth is quite high.

On the self-concept scale of the study the dimensions that follow are the opposite-sex peer relations (3.66) and the behavioral conduct (3.63). As far as the former sector is concerned, it seems that most of the students are relatively optimistic about the

emotional attention they receive from the other sex and, generally, are intensely interested in the outcome of the opposite-sex relations. This finding is consistent with several studies that highlighted opposite-sex relations as a central topic of discussion and concern among adolescents (Connolly et al., 2004; Furman, 2002; Furman & Schaffer, 2003). As far as the latter sector is concerned, participants appear strongly assertive when it comes to defend their rights (what to study, how to dress, how to have fun, what to believe etc.) , a characteristic attitude of adolescence. At the same time, the high receptivity to advice received from their parents (3.45) and their teachers (3.02) is worth mentioning. It is assessed as significant, if certain characteristics of the majority of adolescents are taken into account. These characteristics are first the severe generalized criticism on people and institutions and second the differentiation which occurs to the interpersonal relationships within the family, while the signs of intensity among the emerging adults and their parents are obvious and the agonizing search for a new identity and new social roles is overwhelming (Laursen, 1995; Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991). This finding which shows that adolescents take into account their parents' advice is important because it reveals a positive relationship between them, which can only have beneficial effect on the life of a teenager (Borkowsky, Ramey, & Bristol-Power, 2002). Also, students' consideration of their teachers' advice highlights the multidimensional role and multifaceted responsibility of the latter, which is not limited to the transmission of knowledge and skills, but extends to the development of the teenagers' personality and the determination of their choices.

The dimensions that follow on the self-concept scale are physical appearance (3.53) and athletic competence (3.52). The level of the former is quite high, considering the ideals of flawless beauty portrayed by the media, any comparison with which inevitably puts teenagers at a disadvantage. The level of athletic ability can also be considered quite high, given the multiple obligations that derive from school and extracurricular activities for Greek students. These commitments lead to their mental and physical exhaustion and to the drastic reduction of their leisure time, which otherwise could be devoted to various sport activities (Kiritsis & Cheliatsidou, 2009).

Last on the scale we find the domain of academic competence (3.38). The teenagers' self-concept of their ability to achieve high academic performance might not be alarmingly low (with the exception of mathematics), however it leaves enough room for improvement. The responsibility for this improvement lies in the family environment and the school staff, while their influence on the students' image of their academic potential will have positive effects on the accomplishment of their academic goals.

Table 3. *Means of the participants' self-concept*

	Mean
1. Academic competence	3.38
2. Athletic competence	3.52
3. Physical appearance/attractiveness	3.53
4. Peer relations	4.07
5. Opposite-sex peer relations	3.66



6. Job readiness	3.87
7. Behavioural conduct	3.63
General self-concept (all seven dimensions)	3.67

**B.** The second basic aim of the study was the detection and justification of the role of family in the subjects' self-concept. From the statistical analysis it can be deduced that both structural and functional characteristics of the family have a significant influence in shaping adolescents' general self-concept and almost each of its single domain. More specifically, the educational level of the father ( $F(4,1305)=5,37, p: 0,00$ ) and mostly of the mother ( $F(4,1306)=5,92, p: 0,00$ ) are important factors in shaping the general self-concept, while adolescents whose parents are university graduates achieve a higher self-concept mean compared to those whose parents have a lower educational level. From the seven dimensions of general self-concept the same factor affects the academic competence, the physical appearance, the job readiness and the behavioral conduct. The finding that highlights the importance of the educational level of the parents is consistent with results from previous empirical studies (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003) and is attributed to the fact that parents instill into their children, consciously or not, a cultural heritage that is even more important if they themselves are highly educated. According to the theory of Bourdieu and Boltanski (2000, p. 905), the uneven academic performance and generally the development of many behavioral characteristics of children from different social statuses are linked/correlated to the unequal distribution of cultural capital among social classes, the main forming factor of which is the level of the parents' formal education. Their educational level has a wider significance and concerns primarily the social culture, which includes moral values, the relationship with traditions, the learning of foreign languages, the attitude towards music, art, theatre, books, literature. Through all this multiformity of conditions, the child receives strong influences, which are crucial for his/her development. Conversely, the lack of spiritual stimulation and intellectual experiences in the context of the family does not enhance the spirit of learning and weakens the development of many dimensions that form a child's self-image.

Table 4. *Analysis of variance between participants' self-concept (dependent variable) and their parents' educational level (dependent variables)*

	Father		Mother	
	F	p	F	P
1. Academic competence	17.71	0.00	21.57	0.00
2. Athletic competence	0.83	0.50	1.49	0.20
3. Physical appearance	4.88	0.00	2.39	0.04
4. Peer relations	2.18	0.69	1.66	0.15
5. Opposite-sex peer relations	0.60	0.66	1.36	0.24
6. Job readiness	1.39	0.23	4.74	0.00
7. Behavioral conduct	1.45	0.22	1.09	0.36
General self-concept (all seven dimensions)	5.37	0.00	5.92	0.00

Unlike the educational level, parents' occupation does not seem to affect the development of the subjects' general self-concept (Father:  $F(3,1199)=0.90, p: 0.44$

and mother:  $F(4,1180)=1.65, p: 0.16$ ) but only certain dimensions of it and not in the same direction.

Table 5. *Correlation of participants' self-concept with their parents' profession*

	Father		Mother	
	F	p	F	P
1. Academic competence	14.79	0.00	14.160	0.00
2. Athletic competence	5.63	0.00	2.99	0.00
3. Physical appearance	0.60	0.61	1.98	0.09
4. Peer relations	2.86	0.03	1.55	0.18
5. Opposite-sex peer relations	7.49	0.00	2.23	0.06
6. Job readiness	1.19	0.31	3.92	0.00
7. Behavioral conduct	0.72	0.54	1.04	0.38
General self-concept (all seven dimensions)	0.90	0.44	1.65	0.16

As a result, adolescents with parents who practice scientific professions have more positive self-concept in academic performance, but lower in athletic competence. As far as academic performance is concerned, a strong correlation between parents' occupation and children's academic performance has adequately been empirically proved (Coltrane & Collins, 2001; Kiritsis, 2008; Muola, 2010; Sianou-Kirgiou, 2006; Sirin, 2005). Such a correlation is, as noted by Lareau (2003, p. 238), due to the fact that parents who practice scientific professions cultivate their children's talents and develop their cognitive and social skills. As for the negative correlation that was identified between students' self-perception of athletic performance and parents who practice scientific professions, it may be due to the emphasis (often excessive) attributed by the latter to the academic progress of their children that often functions as an obstacle to their engaging in athletic activities. Furthermore, it emerged that students whose mothers carry low social status professions have more positive self-concept in the domains of peer relations and behavioral conduct. Specifically, with respect to the latter domain it was found that teenagers whose parents have low-status occupations display greater ease in accepting advice from their teachers. This increased susceptibility may partly be attributed to the children's feeling that there is more room/space to benefit from their teachers' advice in areas that their parents' contribution is perceived as insufficient. Conversely, adolescents whose parents practice a scientific profession related to their university studies may estimate that they are satisfactorily covered by the guidance they receive from their parents and as a result give less attention to their teachers' advice. This finding, however, needs further investigation.

The role of father's and mother's income seems very important in the formation of the general self-concept ( $F(4,1266)=10,77, p: 0,00$ ) and of its every dimension, while adolescents whose parents are wealthy have higher means than those with low-income parents.

Table 6. *Correlation of participants' self-concept with their parents' income*

	F	P

1. Academic competence	13.45	0.00
2. Athletic competence	5.85	0.00
3. Physical appearance	7.14	0.00
4. Peer relations	2.59	0.03
5. Opposite-sex peer relations	6.94	0.00
6. Job readiness	10.56	0.00
7. Behavioral conduct	5.84	0.00
General self-concept (all seven dimensions)	10.77	0.00

The influence of socioeconomic status on the development of self-concept is confirmed by studies conducted both in Greece (Frouzakis, 2001) and internationally (Maqsd & Rouhani, 1991; McPherson & Rust, 1987; Twenge & Campbell, 2002). The socioeconomic stratum of parents affects their collaboration with the teaching staff, their assistance to their children, their expectations for their school progress, their interest in their spiritual development, their involvement in the learning process, the way they handle situations, and their approach to everyday issues (Kiritsis & Papadopoulou, 2011). Generally, it affects the psychological climate in the family. Shortage of material resources can cultivate feelings of inferiority and insecurity, which lead to the child's negative self-concept (Song & Hattie, 1984).

Moreover, besides these three factors (education level, occupation and income) that form the structural characteristics of the family, the relevance between self-concept and parent-child relationship (for the father: *Pearson's*  $r=0,34$ ,  $p: 0,00$  and for the mother: *Pearson's*  $r=0,32$ ,  $p: 0,00$ ) seems statistically significant.

Table 7. *Correlation of participants' self-concept with their parents' relation*

	Father		Mother	
	Spearman's rho	p	Spearman's Rho	P
1. Academic competence	0.21	0.00	0.17	0.00
2. Athletic competence	0.14	0.00	0.04	0.10
3. Physical appearance/attractiveness	0.19	0.00	0.20	0.00
4. Peer relations	0.20	0.00	0.27	0.00
5. Opposite-sex peer relations	0.14	0.00	0.20	0.00
6. Job readiness	0.19	0.00	0.19	0.00
7. Behavioural conduct	0.34	0.00	0.41	0.00
General self-concept (all seven dimensions)	0.33	0.00	0.34	0.00

Specifically, as shown in Figures 1 and 2, the level of the subjects' self-concept is escalating the closer their relationship with their parents is. Therefore, the functional characteristics of the family, as estimated by the consideration of the quality of family life, the conditions of child's upbringing and the interaction processes within the family, constitute a significant predictive variable for the development of each dimension of self-concept.

Figure 1. Correlation between adolescents' self-concept and their relation with their father

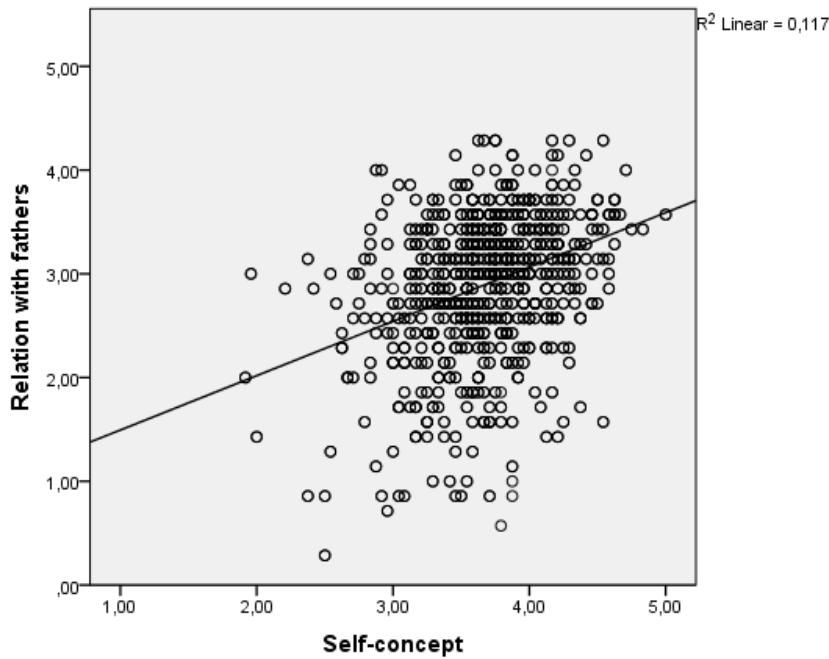
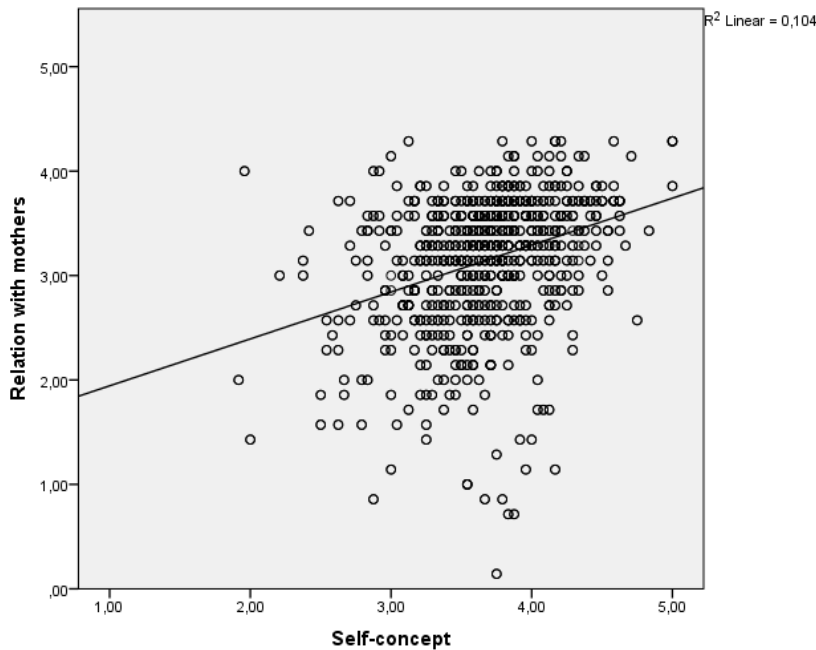


Figure 2. Correlation between adolescents' self-concept and their relation with their mother



This result confirms Erikson's (1993, p. 268) theory that the formation process of self-concept is of a psychosocial nature and involves the relations of the individual within the cultural context in which he/she lives. It also confirms findings which showed that a better self-concept is positively correlated with enhanced family functioning and that both direct and interactive influences of family dynamics and child characteristics on children's self-concept development exist (Ho et al., 2008; Brown et al., 2009).

In this study, however, the theoretically and empirically documented more decisive role of the mother (Bowldy, 1973; Graybill, 1978; Makri-Botsari, 2000; Onayli, 2010) is not verified, as the general linear model shows that the factor “adolescents’ relationship with their father” interprets 7.99 from 21% of the total variance of general self-concept versus 5.90 which explains the factor “adolescents’ relationship with their mother”. This finding was unexpected and its interpretation calls for further investigation. To some it might be related to women’s increasing professional activities during the last decade, which inevitably led to her long absence from home and a less frequent information exchange with the child. Thus, the mother’s traditional advantage of emotional closeness with her children seems to be severely declining, since the father assumes much more of the responsibility for the upbringing and socio-emotional development of the child.

Furthermore, while both structural and functional characteristics of the family as independent variables of the survey showed statistically significant correlation with the level of the general self-concept or with the level of only some of its dimensions, an attempt was made to include both of them into a general linear model, in order to measure the proportion of the dependent variable (self-concept level) explained by each one of them.

Table 8. *General linear model of general self-concept in relation to the independent variables of the study*

	B	t	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept	2.786	35.679	.000	.531
Relation with father	.150	7.39	.000	.046
Relation with mother	.142	6.67	.000	.038
Income	.047	3.59	.001	.011
Mother’s education: Elementary	-.158	-3.401	.001	.010
Mother’s education: Secondary	-.079	-2.543	.011	.006
Mother’s education: Technical Meta-Secondary	-.056	-1.596	.111	.002
Mother’s education: University	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	.
Father’s profession: Civil servant/Private employee	-.039	-1.187	.235	.001
Father’s profession: Scientist	-.127	-3.208	.001	.009
Father’s profession: Merchant/Businessman	.010	.251	.802	.000
Father’s profession: Low class jobs	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	.

The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) in the case of multiple linear regression showed that the remaining predictive variables of the model (relation with mother and father, mother’s education and father’s occupation) explain 17% of the total variance of the dependent variable. In interpreting this percentage, partial eta squared scores showed that the most important role for the determination of the general self-concept is played by “adolescents’ relationship with their father” and “adolescents’ relationship with their mother”, namely by the family functional characteristics. The following

independent factors are parental income, mothers' educational level and father's occupation.

To conclude, the present study, which builds on the elaboration and analysis of data from 1344 15 and 16 year old Greek adolescents in order to examine their self-concept and detect the role of their family, leads to two important findings. The first concerns the high degree of adolescents' general self-concept, as is evident from the estimation of the aggregation of the scores deriving from the subjects' answers to the questions that count self-concept's seven specific domain. The second important finding concerns the confirmation of the essential contribution of the family and especially of its functional characteristics.

Regardless of their cultural or socioeconomic background, Greek adolescents' self-concept could be enhanced, if schools implemented strategies that promote adolescents' self-concept and make the family's potential negative influence less decisive and overwhelming. The attitudes that one holds towards oneself are significantly associated with personal satisfaction. The level of personal satisfaction is highly determined by the perceived success in areas where students desire success and approval from significant others. Thus, the first aim of formal education should be to promote competence in domains that students consider important and additionally in domains they display low scores on the self-concept scale, such as physical appearance and athletic and academic performance. As far as physical appearance is concerned, given adolescents' tendency to base their perceptions of attractiveness on media figures, schools should help students understand that it is unrealistic and unhealthy to adopt such standards and should reinforce healthier values. As far as athletic performance is concerned, schools should encourage the participation in extracurricular activities. Pastimes such as sports not only teach adolescents how to work diligently to reach goals but simultaneously provide a sense of identity and belonging to a team, where an individual, by his/her potential and self-worth, contributes to the accomplishment of a common goal. Lastly, as far as academic performance is concerned, teachers should be wary of providing steady messages of academic incompetence (e.g. poor grades, retention, suspension) which are likely to result in low self-concept. Instead, they should be generous in giving praise or rewards to their students (either publicly or in private) or sometimes consider the extent in which non-academic areas of competence (technical, artistic/creative and practical) receive recognition in their schools.

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## Appendix 1: The Self-concept Questionnaire

### First part: Demographic-personal questions

1. Gender:  Male  Female
2. Age: .....
- 3a. Father's level of education:  
 Elementary  Secondary  Technical Meta-Secondary  University
- 3b. Mother's level of education:  
 Elementary  Secondary  Technical Meta-Secondary  University
- 4a. Father's occupation: .....
- 4b. Mother's occupation: .....
5. What range does your monthly household income fall within?  
 0-1000€  1001-2000€  2001-3000€  3001-4000€  Over 4000€

After the following questions there is an 1 to 5 scale following, where 1= None, 2= Little, 3= Medium, 4= Quite and 5= Very. Circle the number that fits you best.

6. Do you discuss your problems  
a. with your father? 1 2 3 4 5                      b. with your mother? 1 2 3 4 5
7. Do you adequately communicate  
a. with your father? 1 2 3 4 5                      b. with your mother? 1 2 3 4 5
8. Are your efforts and choices supported  
a. by your father? 1 2 3 4 5                      b. by your mother? 1 2 3 4 5
9. Do your father and mother trust your abilities/potential?  
a. your father? 1 2 3 4 5                      b. your mother? 1 2 3 4 5
10. Do your father and mother devote time to get involve to your life?  
a. your father? 1 2 3 4 5                      b. your mother? 1 2 3 4 5
11. Do you often wish to have your personality deeper understood  
a. by your father? 1 2 3 4 5                      b. by your mother? 1 2 3 4 5
12. Do your father and mother devote time to your education  
a. your father? 1 2 3 4 5                      b. your mother? 1 2 3 4 5

### Second part: Self-concept profile questions

1. How well do you succeed in most school subjects? ..... 1 2 3 4 5
2. Do you succeed in sports better than most of your peers? ..... 1 2 3 4 5
3. Comparing to your classmates are you good looking?..... 1 2 3 4 5
4. Do you easily make acquaintances? ..... 1 2 3 4 5
5. Are you interested in matters which concern your relations to the other sex? ..... 1 2 3 4 5
6. Do you believe that you will adequately meet the demands of a job? . 1 2 3 4 5
7. Do you easily control your behaviour?..... 1 2 3 4 5
8. Do you persistently claim your right? ..... 1 2 3 4 5
9. Are you better than most of your classmates in mathematics?..... 1 2 3 4 5
10. Are you athletic?..... 1 2 3 4 5
11. Are you considered popular by your peers?..... 1 2 3 4 5
12. Are you satisfied with your physical appearance? ..... 1 2 3 4 5
13. Does the other sex feel attracted to you? ..... 1 2 3 4 5
14. Do you accept the advice from your parents?..... 1 2 3 4 5
15. Comparing to your classmates do you have potential for high school performance?..... 1 2 3 4 5
16. Are you optimistic that you will have a successful carrier?..... 1 2 3 4 5
17. Are you better than most of your classmates, when you develop

- your views in the subject of Greek literature? ..... 1 2 3 4 5
- 18.** When dealing with sports that require physical skills, do you usually have confidence in yourself that you will succeed?..... 1 2 3 4 5
- 19.** Do you feel comfortable to participate in discussions with peers? ... 1 2 3 4 5
- 20.** Others find you attractive?..... 1 2 3 4 5
- 21.** Do you have real trusted friends? ..... 1 2 3 4 5
- 22.** Does the other sex respond to your interest? ..... 1 2 3 4 5
- 23.** Are you willing to make sacrifices in order to succeed professionally?..... 1 2 3 4 5
- 24.** Do you accept the advice from your teachers?..... 1 2 3 4 5