

Media release, July 19, 2018

## **Self-worth of children and teenagers develops more positively than supposed**

**Contrary to previous assumptions, self-esteem already grows during childhood and doesn't drop during adolescence. Furthermore, it increases considerably as a young adult until it reaches its peak at the age of roughly 60 to 70 years old. Our self-esteem only declines in old age. Researchers at the Institute of Psychology at the University of Bern have been able to show the development over the lifespan in a comprehensive study.**

Our self-esteem can fluctuate temporarily, for example, as a result of conflict at work. It can also change permanently, for example, as a consequence of a new partnership. However, it was unclear whether there is a typical course of development for self-esteem over a person's lifespan. Ulrich Orth, Ruth Yasemin Erol and Eva C. Luciano from the Institute of Psychology at the University of Bern have now compiled and analysed data from more than 160,000 people aged between 4 and 94 for meta-analysis. The participants had been repeatedly surveyed about their self-esteem in 331 individual studies in total. The meta-analysis results are now being published in the "Psychological Bulletin".

### **Highest self-esteem at 60 to 70 years old**

The analysis shows that the average rise in self-worth from childhood to retirement age is also large compared to other personality traits. The results contribute to clarifying previously unsolved and controversial questions regarding the direction and magnitude of self-esteem changes during childhood, early adolescence and in late adulthood. Even though the increase temporarily stagnated between the age of 11 and 15, Orth establishes: "Fortunately, self-esteem is at least stable in the time around puberty. Contrary to what had been assumed for a long time in literature, most youngsters do not experience low self-esteem during this time." The meta-analysis also paints a precise picture of how it develops in old age. The values only dropped very slowly at first from the age of 70 with stronger self-doubt increasing at the age of 90. Many people therefore have higher self-esteem in old age than in their young years, at least across most parts of old age.

### **No "Generation Me"**

In literature it has been frequently assumed that socio-cultural changes due to the growing reach of the Internet and social media have led to more self-centredness and excessive self-esteem in younger generations. However, as the meta-analysis now shows, younger generations do not differ

from previous generations in their typical course of development. This means that the 1980s and 1990s birth cohorts, which are often also referred to as the "Generation Me", show the same courses of development as birth cohorts that grew up 20 or 40 years earlier. The typical course of development over the lifespan also applied to men and women and to samples from various countries.

### **Self-esteem has consequences**

The findings on the course of self-esteem over the lifespan are important as research suggests that high self-esteem has a positive effect on key areas of life, such as social relationships, school, work, partnership and health. Earlier studies by the research group led by Ulrich Orth indicate that self-respect is not just a mere side effect of favourable personal circumstances but influences success and well-being. Even though the effects of self-esteem should not be overestimated, a person's self-esteem does contribute to social integration, fulfilling partnerships, happiness and success.

### **Details of the publication:**

Orth, U., Erol, R. Y., & Luciano, E. C. (2018). Development of self-esteem from age 4 to 94 years: A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies. *Psychological Bulletin*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/bul0000161>

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