Research demonstrates that internal factors can influence self-esteem either positively or negatively. In a study performed by Callan et al. (2014), participants listed attributes they least liked about themselves. The results of this study revealed that thinking about and describing unfavorable internal traits negatively affects self-esteem. Oishi and Ratliff’s (2013) study also examined the detrimental effects of negative internal thoughts on self-esteem. Researchers found that men exhibited lower levels of implicit self-esteem after their partner succeeded at a task because the men interpreted their partner’s success as their own failure. Furthermore, a study by Erol and Orth (2011) found that people’s internal choice to engage in risk-taking behaviors had a small negative effect on the development of self-esteem. Erol and Orth’s study also explored internal factors through the relationship between self-esteem and the Big Five personality traits. This study found that emotional stability and extraversion had the strongest positive effects on self-esteem development. Overall, the three studies reveal that self-esteem does not exist as a solo entity but rather, it is shaped by the interplay of internal, external, and comparative factors.
The first self-esteem study, conducted by Erol and Orth (2011), utilized data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth to examine the development of self-esteem throughout adolescence and into young adulthood. Experimenters discovered that self-esteem tends to increase at a moderate rate during adolescence and that it increases at a slower rate during young adulthood. Erol and Orth also examined factors such as gender, ethnicity, the Big Five personality traits, sense of mastery, and risk-taking to determine the effects of these variables on self-esteem development. The second study tested implicit and explicit self-esteem within young couples through five studies in which participants either thought about or wrote about a time when their partner either succeeded or failed (Oishi & Ratliff, 2013). The overall results found that men had higher implicit self-esteem when thinking of their partner failing rather than succeeding and that women’s self-esteem remained the same in both circumstances. Both men and women reported no change in explicit self-esteem when thinking about their partner’s failure and success. In the final article, Callan, Dawtry, and Kay (2014) conducted seven studies that examined how the experience of random circumstances affected self-esteem. The studies also looked at how those circumstances affected participants’ feelings of deservingness. The researchers then examined how these feelings led participants to accept self-defeating beliefs and participate in self-defeating behaviors. The studies concluded that self-esteem is negatively affected when people recall bad breaks, describe their worst traits, and believe mitigating circumstances greatly impact life outcomes. The participants that exhibited these thoughts and behaviors also had high correlations with self-handicapping behaviors, thoughts of self-harm, and thoughts of self-punishment.

Citations