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EFFICACY, AGENCY, AND SELF-ESTEEM

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PREFACE

Efficacy, agency, and self-esteem: Each of these constructs has had a long and somewhat checkered history in the behavioral sciences. Numerous factors could be cited as reasons for the waxing and waning of interest in such motivational and self-related constructs. However, it is not my purpose here, nor is it the purpose of this edited volume, to dwell on these reasons, for interest in these constructs is currently extremely high. At the same time, although efficacy, agency, and self-esteem clearly have implications for one another, these implications are often left unstated. Therefore, it is my hope that this book will foster increased cross-fertilization of ideas and research agendas among people who are concerned about these constructs and their implications for psychological well-being. We live in a time in which it is easy to become traumatized and to lose faith in our capacity to live full and rewarding lives. It is exceedingly important, therefore, that we seek to better understand how people can develop and utilize their capabilities to the fullest and in the process, one hopes, achieve favorable and secure feelings of self-worth.

The overriding goal behind this volume is to bring together scholars whose work either challenges existing notions in the self-esteem literature or has considerable implications for self-esteem that have yet to be fully explored. It began with a conference of the same title at the University of Georgia sponsored by the university's Institute for Behavioral Research, Abraham Tesser, Director. The speakers at this conference, organized by myself, were Nancy Cantor, Edward Deci, and Carol Dweck. Each speaker was asked to talk about her or his research, especially as it related to self-esteem processes. The level of excitement generated by their presentations made it clear that the time was right for a book with the same agenda.

I then sought out other prominent investigators and asked them to also contribute chapters that were to focus on the implications of their

work for our understanding of self-esteem. Much to my delight, I had no difficulty recruiting people. Moreover, their enthusiasm for the task was readily apparent to me as I read with great interest each arriving chapter. New insights abound in each and every one of their contributions. Taken as a group, they show quite clearly that the domain of inquiry pertaining to self-esteem-related issues can be (and should be) considerably broader than what is often seen in the literature. My hope is that investigators as well as practitioners who are concerned with the roles of efficacy, agency, and self-esteem in mental health and psychological functioning will find much of interest in these chapters for many years to come.

I want to thank Rick Snyder, the Series Editor, and Eliot Werner, Executive Editor for the Medical and Social Sciences at Plenum, for their much-appreciated guidance and encouragement. It has been a distinct pleasure to work with them. Thanks are also due to the conference participants, Abraham Tesser, members of the Attitudes and Opinion Research Group in the Institute for Behavioral Research, and the graduate students in the Social Psychology Program at the University of Georgia for their roles in ensuring that the conference was a success. Finally, I would like to give very special thanks to my wife Vicki for her help, support, and love throughout all phases of this project and beyond. Neither this book nor I would be the same without her.

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