Reflections on Nonability
Determinants of Competence

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Recent years have witnessed major changes in the conception of human ability and competence. Competence is not a fixed property that one does or does not have in one's behavioral repertoire. Rather, it involves a generative capability in which cognitive, social, and behavioral skills must be organized and effectively orchestrated to serve innumerable purposes. There is a marked difference between possessing knowledge and skills and being able to use them well under diverse circumstances, many of which contain ambiguous, unpredictable, and stressful elements.

A capability is only as good as its execution. People often fail to perform optimally even though they know full well what to do and possess the requisite skills. This is because self-referent thought mediates the translation of knowledge and abilities into skilled performance. Among the different facets of self-referent thought, none is more central or pervasive than beliefs regarding personal capabilities. Because of their substantial impact on motivation, affective arousal, and thought processes, self-beliefs of capability partly govern the level of performance attainments. Thus, with the same set of skills people may perform poorly, adequately, or extraordinarily depending on their self-beliefs of efficacy.

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MEDiating MECHANISMS

The research reviewed in this volume has added greatly to our understanding of the centrality of perceived competence in sociocognitive functioning. Some progress has also been made in delineating the processes by which beliefs of personal capabilities affect psychological well-being and performance attainments. Several features of the experimental methodology employed in research conducted within the framework of self-efficacy theory are well suited for clarifying mediating mechanisms. Self-beliefs of efficacy are measured in terms of designated domains of functioning. Because of their greater relevance, domain-linked appraisals of self-efficacy generally have higher explanatory and predictive power than do nondescript omnibus measures (Bandura 1988a). Analyses of the causal contribution of self-efficacy beliefs to behavior test the postulated dual linkage in the causal process—external influences are related to the efficacy mediator which is, in turn, related to action. The efficacy-action link is corroborated by microlevel relations between particular self-percepts of efficacy and corresponding action, or by macrolevel relations between aggregated self-percepts of efficacy and aggregated behavior. Perceived self-efficacy is systematically varied rather than merely correlated, which removes ambiguity about the direction of causality. The impact of self-efficacy beliefs is assessed in relation to diverse outcomes including cognitive, affective, and behavioral functioning.

Perceived self-efficacy is concerned with people’s beliefs in their capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to exercise control over task demands. Perceived competence is similarly concerned with judgments of personal capabilities. Self-beliefs of efficacy affect action through several intervening processes, which are reviewed next. Some of these processes, such as affective arousal and cognitive activities, are of considerable interest in their own right, rather than merely as intervening influencers of action.

Motivational Processes

People’s self-beliefs of efficacy determine how much effort they will exert in an endeavor, and how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles. The stronger the belief in their capabilities, the greater and more persistent are their efforts (Bandura 1988a). When faced with difficulties, people who have self-doubts about their capabilities slacken their efforts or abort their attempts prematurely and settle for mediocre solutions, whereas those who have a strong belief in their capabilities exert greater effort to master the challenge (Bandura & Cervone 1983, 1986; Cervone & Peake 1986; Jacobs, Prentice-Dunn, & Rogers 1984; Weinberg, Gould, & Jackson 1979). Strong perseverance usually pays off in performance accomplishments.

There is a growing body of evidence that human attainments and positive well-being require an optimistic sense of personal efficacy (Bandura 1986). This is because ordinary social realities are strewn with difficulties—impediments, failures, setbacks, frustrations, inequities. People must have a robust sense of personal efficacy to sustain the perseverant effort needed to succeed. Self-doubts can set in fast after some failures or reverses. The important matter is not the self-doubt, which is a natural immediate reaction, but the speed of recovery of perceived self-efficacy. Some people quickly recover their self-assurance; others lose faith in their capabilities. Because the acquisition of knowledge and competencies usually requires sustained effort in the face of difficulties, it is resiliency of self-belief that counts.

In his delightful book Rejection, White (1982) provides vivid testimony that the striking characteristic of people who have achieved eminence in their fields is an inextinguishable sense of efficacy and a firm belief in the worth of what they are doing. This resilient self-belief system enabled them to override repeated early rejections of their work. A robust sense of personal efficacy provides the needed staying power.

Many of our literary classics brought their authors repeated rejections. The novelist Saroyan accumulated several thousand rejections before he had his first piece published. James Joyce’s The Dubliners was rejected by twenty-two publishers. Gertrude Stein continued to submit poems to editors for about twenty years before one was finally accepted. Now that’s invincible self-efficacy. Over a dozen publishers rejected a manuscript by e.e. cummings. When he finally got it published the dedication, printed in upper case, read: With no thanks to . . . followed by the long list of publishers who had rejected his offering.

Early rejection is the rule rather than the exception in other creative endeavors. The impressionists had to arrange their own art exhibitions because their works were routinely rejected by the Paris Salon. Van Gogh sold only one painting during his life. The musical works of most renowned composers were initially greeted with derision. Stravinsky was run out of town by an enraged audience and critics when he first served them the Rite of Spring. Many other composers suffered the same fate,
especially in the early phases of their career. The work of the brilliant architect Frank Lloyd Wright was widely rejected during much of his career.

To turn to more familiar examples, Hollywood initially rejected the incomparable Fred Astaire for being only "a balding, skinny actor who can dance a little." Decca Records turned down a recording contract with the Beatles with the evaluation, "We don't like their sound. Groups of guitars are on their way out." Whoever issued that pronouncement must cringe at the sight of a guitar.

It is not uncommon for authors of scientific classics to experience repeated initial rejection of their work, often with hostile embellishments if it is too discordant with what is in vogue. Scientists often reject theories and technologies that are ahead of their time. Because of the cold reception given to most innovations, the time between conception and technical realization typically spans several decades.

The findings of laboratory investigations are in accord with these records of human triumphs regarding the centrality of the motivational effects of self-beliefs of efficacy in human attainments. It takes a resilient sense of efficacy to override the numerous impediments to significant accomplishments.

Affective Processes

People's beliefs in their capabilities affect how much stress and depression they experience in threatening or taxing situations, as well as their level of motivation. Such emotional reactions can affect action both directly and indirectly by altering the quality and course of thinking. Threat is not a fixed property of situational events, nor does appraisal of the likelihood of aversive happenings rely solely on reading external signs of danger or safety. Rather, threat is a relational property concerning the match between perceived coping capabilities and potentially aversive aspects of the environment.

People who believe they can exercise control over potential threats do not conjure up apprehensive cognitions and, therefore, are not perturbed by them. But those who believe they cannot manage potential threats experience high levels of stress. They judge themselves as highly vulnerable and view many aspects of their environment as fraught with danger (Ozer & Bandura in press). They tend to dwell on their coping deficiencies. Through such ineffectual thought they distress themselves and constrain and impair their level of functioning (Bandura 1988b, 1988e; Lazarus & Folkman 1984; Meichenbaum 1977; Sarason 1975).

That perceived coping efficacy operates as a cognitive mediator of anxiety has been tested by creating different levels of perceived coping efficacy and relating them at a microlevel to different manifestations of anxiety. Perceived coping inefficacy is accompanied by high levels of subjective distress, autonomic arousal (Bandura, Reese, & Adams 1982), and plasma catecholamine secretion (Bandura et al. 1985). The combined results from the different manifestations of anxiety are consistent in showing that anxiety and stress reactions are low when people cope with tasks in their perceived self-efficacy range. Self-doubts produce substantial increases in subjective distress and physiological arousal. After perceived coping efficacy is strengthened to the maximal level, coping with the previously intimidating tasks no longer elicits differential physiological arousal. Perceived self-inefficacy in exercising control over stressors also activates endogenous opioid systems (Bandura et al. 1988), which enables people to handle stressful situations with some relief from physical aversiveness.

Anxiety arousal in situations involving some risks is affected not only by perceived coping efficacy but also by perceived self-efficacy in controlling dysfunctional apprehensive cognitions. The exercise of control over one's own consciousness is summed up well in the proverb: "You cannot prevent the birds of worry and care from flying over your head. But you can stop them from building a nest in your head."

The influential role played by thought control efficacy in anxiety arousal is corroborated in research examining the different properties of perturbing cognitions and their correlates. The results show that it is not the extent of frightful cognitions per se that accounts for anxiety arousal but rather the strength of perceived self-efficacy to control their escalation or perseveration (Kent 1987; Kent & Gibbons 1987). Thus, the incidence of frightful cognitions is unrelated to anxiety level when variations in perceived thought control efficacy are controlled for, whereas perceived thought control efficacy is strongly related to anxiety level when extent of frightful cognitions is controlled. Analysis of the aversiveness of obsessional ruminations provides further support for efficacious thought control as a key factor in the regulation of cognitively generated arousal (Salkovskis & Harrison 1984). It is not the sheer frequency of intrusive cognitions but rather the perceived inefficacy to turn them off that is the major source of distress.
Perceived self-infficacy to fulfill desired goals that affect evaluation of self-worth and to secure things that bring satisfaction to one’s life also create depression (Bandura 1988a; Cutrona & Troutman 1986; Holahan & Holahan 1987a, 1987b; Kanfer & Zeiss 1983). When the perceived self-infficacy involves social relationships, it can induce depression both directly and indirectly by curtailing the cultivation of interpersonal relationships that can provide satisfactions and buffer the effects of chronic daily stressors (Holahan & Holahan 1987a). Depressive rumination not only impairs ability to initiate and sustain adaptive activities but further diminishes perceptions of personal efficacy (Kavanagh & Bower 1985; West, Berry, & Powlishta 1988).

Cognitive Processes

Self-beliefs of efficacy affect thought patterns that may be self-aiding or self-hindering. These cognitive effects take various forms. Much human behavior, being purposive, is regulated by forethought embodying cognized goals. Personal goal setting is influenced by self-appraisal of capabilities. The stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the higher the goals people set for themselves and the firmer their commitment to them (Bandura & Wood 1989; Locke et al. 1984; Taylor et al. 1984). Challenging goals raise the level of motivation and performance attainments (Locke et al. 1981; Mento, Steel, & Karren 1987).

Many activities involve judgmental processes that enable people to predict and control events in probabilistic environments. Discernment of the predictive rules requires effective cognitive processing of multidimensional information that contains ambiguities and uncertainties. Predictive factors are usually related probabilistically, rather than invariably, to future events which leaves some degree of uncertainty. Moreover, events are typically multidetermined. The fact that the same predictor may contribute to different effects and the same effect may have multiple predictors introduces ambiguity as to what is likely to lead to what.

In ferreting out predictive rules people must draw on their state of knowledge to generate hypotheses about predictive factors, to weight and integrate them into composite rules, to test their judgments against outcome information, and to remember which notions they had tested and how well they had worked. It requires a strong sense of efficacy to remain task-oriented in the face of judgmental failures. Indeed, people who believe strongly in their problem-solving capabilities remain highly efficient in their analytic thinking in complex decision-making situations (Bandura & Wood 1989; Wood & Bandura 1989). Those who are plagued by self-doubts are erratic in their analytic thinking. Quality of analytic thinking, in turn, affects performance accomplishments.

Self-efficacy beliefs usually affect cognitive functioning through the joint influence of motivational and information-processing operations. This is illustrated in research designed to explain variation in memory performance. The stronger people’s beliefs in their memory capacities, the more time they devote to cognitive processing of memory tasks which, in turn, enhances their memory performances (Berry 1987).

A major function of thought is to enable people to predict the occurrence of events and to create the means of exercising control over those that affect their daily life. As alluded to earlier, people’s perceptions of their efficacy influence the types of anticipatory scenarios they construct and reiterate. The highly self-efficacious visualize success scenarios that provide positive guides for performance, whereas those who judge themselves as ineffectual are more inclined to visualize failure scenarios which undermine performance by dwelling on how things will go wrong. Numerous studies have shown that cognitive reiteration of scenarios in which individuals visualize themselves executing activities skillfully enhances subsequent performance (Bandura 1986; Corbin 1972; Feltz & Landers 1983; Kazdin 1978). Perceived self-efficacy and cognitive enactment affect each other bidirectionally. A high sense of efficacy fosters cognitive constructions of effective actions and cognitive reiteration of efficacious courses of action strengthens self-percepts of efficacy (Bandura & Adams 1977; Kazdin 1978).

In their analysis of the role of self-systems in competence, Markus, Cross, and Wurf posit cognized possible selves as the guidance system for competence. Possible selves that are well-articulated help to organize behavior and energize it in pursuit of selected goals. Self-systems serve this function well when they contain the relevant plans and procedural strategies for realizing desired futures. Ill-defined possible selves remain but idle fantasies. The nonprescriptiveness of indefinite selves is captured well in Lily Tomlin’s portrayal of a character named Chrissy, who never quite manages to get her act together. Self-reflection on her unrealized ambitions leads her to an incontestable insight: “All my life I’ve always wanted to be somebody. But I see now I should have been more specific.”

Markus and her colleagues regard anticipatory cognitive simulation as the key mechanism by which self-systems get translated into behavioral competence. The evidence cited earlier corroborates that cognitive re-
hearsal of efficacious actions enhances performance. The authors consider processes by which cognitive simulation might produce its effects. On the assumption that perception, imagery, and action have parallel structural properties, cognitive simulation presumably coordinates perceptual and action schematas.

Perceptual processes play a major role in the acquisition of conceptions of skilled actions (Carroll & Bandura 1988). But the production of appropriate behavior is concerned more with conception-action coordination because, in most instances, actions are structured by conceptions rather than by perceptions of events. If structural similarities led to automatic translation of cognitive schemata into action schemata, the development of behavioral proficiency would be an easy matter. In actuality, it is usually a long arduous process, especially where complex skills are involved. An interpretation in terms of cross-modal coordination of perceptual and action schematas leaves unexplained the transformational production mechanism by which cognition is converted into proficient action.

One solution that has been proposed for the transformation problem relies on a dual knowledge system—declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge (Anderson 1980). Procedural knowledge provides production systems which embody decision rules for solving tasks. Construing the acquisition of competence in terms of factual and procedural knowledge is well suited for cognitive problem solving where solutions are cognitively generated and either no actions are involved or they are trivially simple. One must distinguish between knowledge and behavioral skills, however. Activities requiring the construction and adept execution of complex actions call for additional mechanisms to get from knowledge structures to proficient action. Procedural knowledge and cognitive skills are necessary but insufficient for competent performance. A novice given complete information on how to ski and a set of procedural rules, and then launched from a mountain top would most likely end up in the intensive care unit of the local infirmary. Procedural knowledge alone will not convert an awkward retiring person into a demonstrative adept one.

In social cognitive theory (Bandura 1986), the mechanism for transforming thought into action operates through a conception-matching process. Conceptual representations of efficacious actions are formed on the basis of knowledge gained through observational learning, inferences from the outcomes of enactive experiences, and innovative cognitive syntheses of preexisting knowledge. These conceptions then serve as guides for response production and as internal standards for response correction. Conceptions are rarely transformed into appropriate perfo-

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mance without error on the first attempt. Skilled performances are usually achieved by repeated corrective adjustments in conception matching during behavior production (Carroll & Bandura 1985, 1987). Monitored physical enactment provides the vehicle for converting conception to skilled action. The feedback accompanying the enactment provides the information for detecting and correcting mismatches between conception and action. The behavior is thus modified based on the comparative information to achieve a close match between conception and action. The amount of overt enactment needed to correct mismatches depends on the complexity of the activity, the informativeness and timing of the feedback information, and the extent to which the requisite subskills have already been developed.

Selection Processes

Thus far the discussion has centered on efficacy-related processes that enable people to create beneficial environments and to exercise control over them. Judgments of personal efficacy also affect choice of activities and selection of environments. People tend to avoid activities and situations they believe exceed their coping capabilities, but they readily undertake challenging activities and pick social environments they judge themselves capable of handling. The social influences operating in the selected environments can set the direction of personal development by the competencies, values, and interests they cultivate (Bandura 1986; Snyder 1987).

The power of self-efficacy beliefs to affect the course of life paths through choice-related processes is most clearly revealed in studies of career decision making and career development (Betz & Hackett 1986; Lent & Hackett 1987). The more efficacious people judge themselves to be, the wider the range of career options they consider appropriate and the better they prepare themselves educationally for different occupational pursuits. Self-limitation of career development arises more from perceived self-infficacy than from actual inability. By constricting choice behavior that can cultivate interests and competencies, self-disbeliefs create their own validation.

MULTIFACETED NATURE OF COMPETENCE AND ITS SOCIAL LABELING

Like other human activities, the judgment of competence is influenced by properties of the behavior and social-labeling processes. Some of the
judgmental factors are grounded in the behavior, but many are extraneous to it and may be quite subjective. Sternberg shows that, although there is some consensus in the types of behaviors that one considers indicative of intellectual competence, children, laypersons, and academics differ in the relative weight they give to such things as social adeptness, verbal facility, inquisitiveness, problem-solving skill, and abstract reasoning in their prototypic view of intellectual competence. Langer and Park identify contextual factors that influence the ascription of competence or incompetence to given performances.

A judgment of competence is, by definition, a social construction. No performances ever appear with indwelling labels of competence affixed to them. Although much emphasis is placed on how factors extraneous to behavior can influence how it is labeled, one should not lose sight of the fact that certain properties of behavior can essentially dictate the social construal. In activities in which consequences are inherently linked to quality of performance, nature renders a forceful verdict, regardless of what others may think. Thus, for example, an earnest sailor who, through extraordinary inconstancy, manages to frequently sink expensive sailboats in fine working order under optimal sailing conditions does not leave much leeway for socially redeeming labeling. He might be labeled as incompetent according to the taxonomy of competence proposed by Langer and Park. But since there is room for improvement in virtually every endeavor, the rechristening of objectively defective performances as precompetent would essentially eliminate the construct of incompetence from the psychological lexicon.

The social labeling of competence is more than a semantic issue. It serves social functions, beneficially in some applications and detrimentally in others. Societies use competence labeling so as not to place the welfare of people in the hands of those who perform in objectively defective ways. Air travelers demand a reliable system for gauging competence and are not about to climb aboard airliners piloted by precompetent pilots backed up by precompetent navigators. Unfortunately, competence labeling is also often misused for purposes of social control. In such instances, disputes arise over the indexes of competence that are used to justify such practices.

Sternberg’s review clarifies some aspects of how variations in socialization practices cultivate different intellectual skills. They may involve practical problem-solving ability, skill in analytic reasoning, or interpersonal competence. People may prefer to use their intellectual capabilities cre-

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tively, administratively, or evaluatively. If skills happen to match situational priorities and demands, the persons are viewed as intellectually competent, whereas mismatches foster ascriptions of incompetence. Discontinuities over time in which forms or styles of intelligence are valued can socially transform competence into incompetence or vice versa. One saving grace is that there exist many routes to success so that those who are fortunate in matching their intellectual styles and skills to what is socially valued enjoy a measure of self-efficacy and self-esteem.

THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENTAL SOURCES OF PERCEIVED COMPETENCE

Infants’ experiences with their environment provide the initial basis for developing a sense of causal agency. However, newborns’ immobility and limited means of action upon the physical and social environment restrict their domain of influence. The initial experiences that contribute to development of a sense of personal agency are tied to infants’ ability to control the sensory stimulation from manipulable objects and the attentive behavior of those around them. Infants behave in certain ways, and certain things happen. Shaking a rattle produces predictable sounds, energetic kicks shake their cribs, and screams bring adults.

Realization of causal agency requires both self-observation and recognition that one’s actions are part of oneself (Bandura 1986). By repeatedly observing that environmental events occur with action, but not in its absence, infants learn about contingent relations between actions and effects. Repeated experiences of efficacy in influencing events fosters development of a sense of causal agency and efficacious actions (Finkelstein & Ramey 1977; Ramey & Finkelstein 1978). Development of a sense of personal agency requires more than simply producing effects by actions. Those actions must be perceived as part of oneself. The self becomes differentiated from others through differential experience. Thus, if self-action causes pain sensations, whereas seeing similar actions by others does not, one’s own activity becomes distinct from that of all others. Infants acquire a sense of personal agency when they begin to perceive environmental events as being personally controlled—a growing realization that they can make events occur.

During the initial months of life, the exercise of influence over the physical environment may contribute more to the development of a child’s sense of causal agency than does influence over the social environ-
ment (Gunnar 1980). This is because manipulating physical objects produces quick, predictable, and easily observable effects, thus facilitating perception of personal agency in infants whose attentional and representational capabilities are limited. In contrast, causal agency is more difficult to discern in noisier social contingencies, where actions have variable social effects and some of them occur independently of what the infants are doing. With the development of representational capabilities, however, infants can begin to learn from probabilistic and more distal outcomes flowing from actions. Before long, the exercise of control over the social environment begins to play an important role in the early development of a sense of personal agency.

Efficacy experiences in the exercise of personal control are central to the early development of social and cognitive competence. Parents who are responsive to their infants' communicative behavior, who provide an enriched physical environment, and who permit freedom of movement for exploration have infants who are relatively accelerated in their social and cognitive development (Ainsworth & Bell 1974; Yarrow, Rubenstein, & Pedersen 1975). During the course of development infants and parents operate as reciprocal interactants. Parental responsiveness increases competence, and infant capabilities elicit greater parental responsiveness (Bradley, Caldwell, & Elardo 1979). In their chapter in this volume, Schaffer and Blatt underscore the importance of mutuality and the exercise of influence in social and affective transactions in the development of a robust sense of efficacy.

Children have to develop, appraise, and test their capabilities in broadening areas of functioning with increasing age. The initial efficacy experiences are centered in the family, but as the growing child's social world rapidly expands, experiences with peers contribute importantly to children's development and self-knowledge of their capabilities. It is in the context of peer interactions that social comparison processes come strongly into play. Each period of development brings with it new challenges for coping efficacy. As adolescents approach the demands of adulthood, they must master new competencies and the ways of the adult society. The ease with which the transition from childhood to adulthood is made depends, in no small measure, on the assurance in one's capabilities built up through prior mastery experiences. In young adulthood people have to learn to cope with many new demands arising from lasting relationships, parenthood, and careers. As in earlier mastery tasks, a firm sense of self-efficacy is an important personal resource in the attainment of further competencies and success.

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People's beliefs in their efficacy can be enhanced in four principal ways (Bandura 1986). The most effective way of developing a strong sense of efficacy is through mastery experiences. Performance successes build a sense of personal efficacy; failures create self-doubts. If people experience only easy successes they come to expect quick results and are easily discouraged by failure. A resilient sense of efficacy requires experience in overcoming obstacles through perseverant effort. Some setbacks and difficulties in human pursuits, therefore, serve a useful purpose in teaching that success usually requires sustained effort. After people have become convinced they have what is takes to succeed, they persevere in the face of adversity and quickly rebound from setbacks.

The second way of strengthening self-beliefs of efficacy is by modeling. The models in people's lives serve as sources of interest, inspiration, and skills. Ready access to able models fosters competencies that strengthen beliefs in one's capabilities. People partly judge their capabilities in comparison with the achievements of others. Seeing people similar to oneself succeed by sustained effort raises observers' beliefs about their own efficacy. By the same token, negative modeling can be an undermining influence. The failures of similar others can instill self-doubts about one's own efficacy to master similar activities.

Social persuasion is a third way of strengthening people's beliefs that they possess the capabilities to achieve what they seek. Social support and realistic encouragements that lead people to exert greater effort increase their chances of success. Skilled efficacy builders do more than simply convey positive appraisals. In addition to cultivating people's beliefs in their capabilities, they structure situations for them in ways that bring success and avoid placing them prematurely in situations where they are likely to experience repeated failure. To ensure progress in personal development, success is measured in terms of self-improvement rather than by triumphs over others.

People also rely partly on judgments of their bodily states in assessing their efficacy. They read their stress and tension as signs of personal vulnerability to deficient performance. In activities involving strength and stamina, they use somatic information as indicators of physical capacity or limitations. The fourth way of modifying self-beliefs of efficacy is to enhance physical status, reduce stress levels, or alter how people interpret their bodily states.

Krueger approaches the origins of a sense of personal effectiveness from a psychoanalytic perspective. In this view, perceived effectiveness originates in mastery of traumatic events, especially in symbolic play. The
exercise of control over potential threats can contribute to a sense of personal efficacy (Bandura 1988b; Williams 1987). As previously noted, however, the development of perceived efficacy relies on diverse sources of social influence, most of which function as positive enhancers of personal efficacy rather than operate through intrapsychic conflicts over tabooed impulses.

Krueger devotes considerable attention to phobic avoidance of success. He regards fear of success as arising from fear of maternal abandonment for independent behavior and oedipal competitiveness with narcissistic parents. Because successful performance would result in tabooed victory, success is sabotaged or depreciated. Self-sabotaging of success is also said to be motivated by fear of exposure of inadequacy. Considering that repeated failures conspicuously exhibit one's inadequacy, Krueger does not explain how behaving inadequately avoids exposure of inadequacy.

Krueger relies on material produced in psychotherapeutic sessions as the main source of support for the suppositions regarding the causes of human failings. There are several limitations to this approach that arise from both the causal structure of the theory and the validity of the method of verification. Although psychoanalytic theory postulates a sweeping psychic determinism, the causal dependencies between psychic dynamics and human behavior are too loosely formulated to be easily testable. The inner dynamics not only can produce any variety of effects but can show up in opposite forms of behavior as well. For example, Krueger interprets children's school failures as efforts to create individuating boundaries between themselves and overcontrolling parents. Scholastic failures can have many causes. Children may view themselves as individuated but simply rebel against high parental pressures for scholastic achievement (Brethm 1966). Educational efforts are often debilitated by anxious self-preoccupation about the adverse consequences of scholastic failure (Sarason 1975; Wine 1980). Studies that measure alternative causative factors are needed to decide between rival interpretations of scholastic failure in terms of interpersonal boundary seeking, psychological reactance, self-debilitating preoccupation, or some other psychological process. There are, of course, countless pushy parents who have high-achieving children. Scholastic failure does not characterize the children of some of the most overcontrolling and overprotective parents (Levy 1943). Clearly, the issue of scholastic performance is more complex than simply children individuating themselves by fouling up in school.

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The interview method of verification also leaves much to be desired. In a scholarly analysis of the foundations of psychoanalytic theory, Grünbaum (1984) seriously questions the evidential value of clinical data produced in psychotherapeutic sessions on the ground that such data are too tainted by the therapist's suggestive influence. As Marmor (1962), among others, has noted, each psychodynamic approach has its own favorite set of inner causes. The presupposed determinants can be readily confirmed in self-validating interviews because the therapist makes suggestive interpretations and selectively rewards clients' accounts that are consistent with the therapist's views (Murray 1956; Truax 1966). Thus, advocates of differing theoretical orientations repeatedly discover their chosen motivators at work but rarely find evidence for the motivators emphasized by proponents of competing viewpoints. The types of causal dependencies that Krueger has proposed for aborted or failed human efforts clearly require more stringent empirical scrutiny.

PERCEIVED COMPETENCE AND SELF-WORTH

Harter's chapter on the origins and functions of self-worth addresses important questions but raises a number of conceptual and methodological issues. In the literature, the terms perceived competence and self-esteem or self-worth are often used interchangeably as though they represent the same phenomenon. In fact, they encompass different things. Perceived competence is concerned with judgments of personal capabilities, whereas self-esteem or self-worth is concerned with the degree to which one likes or dislikes oneself. Judgments of self-worth and of self-capability have no fixed relation. Individuals may regard themselves as highly efficacious in an activity from which they derive no pride (e.g., a skilled forecloser of mortgages of families that have fallen on hard times) or may judge themselves ineffectual at an activity without suffering a loss of self-worth (e.g., inept skater). However, in many of the activities people pursue, they cultivate capabilities in what gives them a sense of self-worth. If empirical analyses are confined to activities in which people invest their sense of self-worth, this will inflate correlations because domains of functioning where people judge themselves ineffectual but could not care less are simply ignored.

In Harter's conceptual scheme, judgments of self-worth and of personal competence seem to represent levels of generality within the same phenomenon. Self-worth is said to be global and perceived competence is
domain-specific. Global self-worth is treated as an emergent property that is more than the sum of the domain-specific parts. Its assessment is disembodied from particular domains of functioning that may contribute in varying degrees to one’s sense of self-pride or self-dislike. That is, persons are asked how much they like or dislike themselves without any regard as to what they like or dislike about themselves. Measurement of self-worth noncontextually and perceived competence specifically presumably integrates unidimensional and multidimensional perspectives on the self-concept.

As noted earlier, judgments of self-worth and personal competence represent different phenomena rather than part-whole relations within the same phenomenon. Moreover, self-worth is no less multidimensional than is perceived competence. The following section is devoted to a more detailed consideration of the issue of multidimensionality.

**OMNIBUS VERSUS DOMAIN-LINKED ASSESSMENTS**

Psychological theories have traditionally approached the assessment of personal attributes and states in terms of omnibus tests. Such measures include a fixed set of items, many of which may have little relevance to the domain of functioning being analyzed. Moreover, in an effort to serve varied predictive purposes across diverse domains of functioning and ages the items have to be cast in a general form. The more general the items, the greater is the burden on respondents to define what is being asked of them. It is unrealistic to expect omnibus tests to predict with much accuracy how people will function in different domains under diverse circumstances. Indeed, in comparative studies, domain-linked measures of personal capability typically predict changes in functioning better than do general measures (Bandura 1988c).

Use of domain-linked scales does not mean that there is no generality to perceived capability. If different classes of activities require similar functions and subskills, one would expect some generality in judgments of competence. Even if different activity domains are not subserved by common subskills, some generality of perceived competence can occur if development of competencies is socially structured so that the cultivation of skills in dissimilar domains covaries. Commonality of subskills and covariation of development will yield generality. Multidomain measures reveal the patterning and degree of generality of people’s sense of personal competence. Some may judge themselves highly efficacious across a wide range of domains of functioning, others may judge themselves as inept in most domains, and many may judge themselves relatively efficacious in domains in which they have cultivated their competences, moderately efficacious in domains in which they are somewhat less conversant, and inept in domains comprising activities for which they lack talent. One can derive degree of generality from multidomain scales, but one cannot extract the patterning of perceived personal efficacy from conglomerate omnibus tests.

In adopting the multidimensional approach in the assessment of perceived competence, Harter does justice to the variegated nature of self-beliefs. I am puzzled, however, by why physical appearance is included as a facet of perceived competence. Physical appearance is a feature, not a capability. Another issue concerns the level of multidimensionality. As people continue to develop their competencies through selective pursuits, their perceptions of their capabilities become more differentiated. One can increase the explanatory and predictive power of measures of perceived competence by appropriate differentiations within major activity domains. Consider perceived scholastic competence as an example. High school students will vary, often widely, in the degree to which they consider themselves competent in mathematics, physical sciences, linguistic capabilities, social sciences, and the humanities. When asked in Harter’s test of perceived competence to judge their scholastic competency by rating whether they are “good at schoolwork,” they have to engage in subjective weighting and aggregation across subject matters to come up with a single judgment. Because the patterning of perceived scholastic efficacy across different “schoolwork” is likely to vary from student to student, similar overall judgments may mean different things. General items linked to an assemblage of activities within a broad class are an improvement over omnibus measures disembodied from definite activities and contextual factors, but indefinite multidimensionality still sacrifices explanatory and predictive power. Microanalytic approaches linking particularized indexes of perceived competence to distinct domains of sociocognitive functioning are better suited to clarify how self-beliefs affect human thought, affect, and action. Large-scale efforts to identify causal structures usually include a sizable set of possible determinants. When subjects’ time and patience are limited, investigators seek brief omnibus measures for each of many different things. Networks of relationships obtained with suboptimal measures may underestimate or misrepresent the causal contribution of given factors.
SOURCES AND MULTIDIMENSIONALITY OF SELF-ESTEEM

One can distinguish different sources of self-esteem or self-worthiness (Bandura 1986). It can stem from evaluations based on competence or on possession of attributes that have been culturally invested with positive or negative value. In self-esteem arising from competence, people derive self-pride from fulfilling their standards of merit. When they meet or surpass valued standards they experience self-satisfaction, but when they fail to measure up to their standards of merit they are displeased with themselves.

Other people frequently voice evaluations reflecting their likes and dislikes of particular attributes rather than in response to evident competencies. Such social judgments can influence how the recipients evaluate their self-worthiness. Moreover, people are often criticized or deprecated when they fail to live up to the ideals or aspirational standards of others.

The role played by personal competence and social evaluation in the development of self-esteem receives support from the studies of Coopersmith (1967). He found that children who exhibited high self-esteem had parents who were accepting, who set explicit attainable standards, and who provided considerable support and latitude to acquire competencies that could serve them well in their pursuits.

Cultural stereotyping is another way in which social judgments affect perceptions of self-worth. People are cast into valued or devalued groups on the basis of their ethnic background, race, sex, or physical characteristics. Those who possess socially disparaged attributes, and who accept the stereotyped evaluations of others, will hold themselves in low regard despite their talents. Persons combining limited competencies, exacting standards, and disparaged attributes are the ones most likely to harbor a pervasive sense of worthlessness.

The different sources of self-devaluation call for different corrective measures. Self-devaluation rooted in incompetence requires cultivation of talents. Those who suffer from self-disparagement because they judge themselves harshly against excessively high standards become more self-accepting after they are helped to adopt more realistic standards of achievement (Rehm 1982). Self-devaluation resulting from belittling social evaluations requires new social experiences that affirm one's self-worth. Self-devaluation stemming from discriminatory disparagement of attributes requires modeling and rewarding a sense of pride regarding those attributes. Efforts by minorities to instill pride in racial characteristics (e.g., "Black is beautiful") illustrate this approach. When self-devaluation arises from multiple sources, multiple corrective measures are needed as, for example, fostering pride in one's characteristics and also cultivating competencies that instill a high and resilient sense of personal efficacy.

Self-worth is multidimensional as is perceived competence. For example, some students derive self-satisfaction from their academic accomplishments but devalue themselves in social or athletic domains. Those who invest themselves heavily in athletic pursuits may be self-approving in athletics but self-discontented in academic activities. Hard-driving executives may value themselves in their vocational pursuits but devalue themselves as parents. Domain-linked measures of self-esteem reveal the patterning of human self-esteem and areas of vulnerability to self-disparagement.

A global measure of self-worth, as used in the research reported by Harter, may obscure the origins of self-worth or yield anomalous findings. For example, physical appearance emerges as a surprisingly large contributor to global self-worth, regardless of whether the samples include children ($r = -.66$), college students ($r = -.80$), or adults ($r = -.61$). Having just returned from a spirited meeting with graduate students who were hardly fastidiously groomed, I find it difficult to believe that their sense of self-worth springs more from how they judge their looks than from how they judge their intellectual competencies. If, indeed, self-worth were so heavily rooted in physical appearances, then beauticians, haberdashers, and plastic surgeons hold the major key to self-esteem. The role left for psychologists in this route to self-worth would be as alterners of standards of beauty.

IMPACT OF CONCEPTIONS OF ABILITY AND PERCEIVED CONTROLLABILITY ON UTILIZATION OF COGNITIVE SKILLS

Sternberg and his colleagues find that people use their conceptions of ability in judging their own intellectual competency and the competency of others. Conceptions of ability affect not only social judgment but also how effectively people use the cognitive skills they possess. Recent research has identified two major conceptions of ability to which people subscribe (M. Bandura & Dweck 1988; Dweck & Elliott 1983). In one perspective, they construe ability as an incremental skill that can be continuously enhanced by acquiring knowledge and perfecting one's compe-
ties. People with this conception adopt a learning goal. They seek challenging tasks that provide opportunities to expand their knowledge and competencies. Errors are regarded as a natural, instructive part of an acquisition process. They judge capabilities more in terms of personal improvement than in comparisons with the achievement of others.

In the contrasting perspective, ability is construed as a more or less fixed entity. Because performance level is regarded as diagnostic of intellectual capacity, errors and deficient performances carry personal and social evaluative threats. Therefore, people adopting the entity view tend to pursue performance goals of demonstrating their competence. They prefer tasks that minimize errors and permit ready display of intellectual proficiency at the expense of expanding their knowledge and learning new skills. High effort, which is often required to develop competencies in complex activities, also poses evaluative threats because high effort is taken as indicative of low ability. An entity conception of ability is less conducive to effective management of failure than is the view of ability as an incremental skill (Elliott & Dweck 1988).

According to social cognitive theory (Bandura 1986, 1988a), self-regulation of motivation and performance attainments is governed by several self-regulatory mechanisms operating in concert. They include affective self-evaluation, perceived self-efficacy for goal attainment, and personal goal setting. The conception of ability with which people approach complex activities can have a substantial impact on these self-regulatory influences. Substandard performances are likely to carry markedly different diagnostic implications depending on whether ability is construed as an acquirable skill or as a relatively stable entity. When performances are viewed as skill acquisition in which one learns from mistakes, perceived self-efficacy is unlikely to be adversely affected by substandard performances. This is because errors become a normative part of any acquisition process rather than indicators of basic personal deficiencies. In contrast, when performances are construed as diagnostic of underlying cognitive capability, frequent experience of substandard performances can take a heavy toll on perceived self-efficacy.

That conceptions of ability strongly affect the self-regulatory mechanisms governing complex decision making is revealed in a study by Wood and Bandura (1989). Much of the research on human decision making examines single trial judgments in static environments (Beach, Barnes, & Christensen-Szalanski 1986; Hogarth 1981). Judgments under such conditions may not provide a sufficient basis for developing either descriptive or normative models of decision making in dynamic naturalistic environments which entail learning and motivational mechanisms. In such environments, decision makers must weigh and integrate a wide array of information from diverse sources. Decisions must be made during a continual flow of activity under time constraints. Moreover, many of the decisional rules for exercising control over dynamic environments must be learned through exploratory experiences in the course of managing the ongoing organizational activities under conditions of uncertainty and social pressure.

It requires a strong sense of efficacy to deploy one's cognitive resources optimally and to remain task-oriented in the face of repeated difficulties and failures as one attempts to ferret out relevant information, construct options, and test and revise one's knowledge based on results of decisional actions. People with a low sense of efficacy easily fall apart under these types of conditions. Those who judge themselves ineffectual in coping with environmental demands tend to become more self-diagnostic than task-diagnostic (M. Bandura & Dweck 1988). Such self-referent intrusive thinking creates stress and undermines effective use of capabilities by diverting attention away from how best to proceed to concerns over personal deficiencies and possible adverse outcomes.

We examined the psychological effects of different conceptions of ability on the cognitive functioning of highly talented business school graduates as they managed a simulated organization. In executing their decision-making activities they had to match individuals to organizational subfunctions and to use goals, instructive feedback, and social incentives in optimal ways to achieve organizational levels of performance that were difficult to fulfill. They performed the managerial task over a series of trials under instated conceptions of ability as either an acquirable skill that is improvable with practice or a basic intellectual entity reflecting underlying cognitive capacities. They received feedback on how well their group performed relative to the challenging standard of organizational attainment. At several points in the managerial simulation, the managers' perceived managerial self-efficacy and the goals they sought to achieve were assessed. The adequacy of their analytic strategies for discovering managerial rules and the level of organizational performance they achieved were also measured.

The impact of the different conceptions of ability on self-regulatory mechanisms governing the utilization skills and performance accomplishments may be seen in figure 14.1. Managers who were led to construe
CONCLUSION

Decision-making ability as reflecting basic cognitive capacities were beset by increasing doubts about their managerial efficacy as they encountered problems. They became more and more erratic in their decisional activities, they lowered their organizational aspirations, and they achieved progressively less with the organization they were managing. In marked contrast, induced construal of ability as an acquirable skill fostered a highly resilient sense of personal efficacy. Even though assigned taxing goals that eluded them, they remained steadfast in their perceived managerial self-efficacy, they continued to set themselves challenging organizational goals, and they held analytic strategies in efficient ways that aided discovery of optimal managerial decision rules. Such a self-efficacious orientation, which is well suited for handling adversity, pays off in uniformly high organizational attainments. In path analyses, perceived self-efficacy exerts a direct effect on organizational performance and an indirect effect through its influence on analytic strategies. Personal goals also affect organizational performance through the mediation of analytic strategies.

Induced differential conceptions of ability bias how similar substandard performances at the outset are cognitively processed. Construal of substandard attainments as indicators of personal deficiencies gradually creates an ineffectual self-schema in the particular domain of functioning, whereas construal of substandard attainments as instructive guides for enhancing personal competencies fosters an efficacious self-schema. Such evolving self-beliefs further bias cognitive processing of outcome information and promote actions that create confirmatory behavioral evidence for them. This produces an exacerbation cycle of motivational and performance effects.

There are two aspects to the exercise of control that are especially relevant to belief systems that can alter how effectively personal skills are put to use (Bandura 1986; Gurin & Brim 1984). The first concerns the level of self-efficacy to effect changes by productive use of capabilities and enlistment of effort. This constitutes the personal side of the transactional control process. The second aspect concerns the changeableness or controllability of the environment. This facet represents the level of system constraints and opportunity structures to exercise personal efficacy. Human behavior is, of course, governed by perceptions of personal efficacy and social environments rather than simply by their objective properties. Thus, individuals who believe themselves to be ineffectual are likely to effect little change even in environments that provide many opportuni-

![Figure 14.1](image-url) Changes in perceived managerial self-efficacy, the performance goals set for the organization relative to the preset standard, effective analytic strategies, and achieved level of organizational performance across blocks of trials under acquirable skill and entity conceptions of capability. Each trial block comprises six different production orders (Wood & Bandura 1989).
ties. Conversely, those who have a strong sense of efficacy, through ingenuity and perseverance, figure out ways of exercising some measure of control in environments containing limited opportunities and many constraints.

In the transactions of everyday life, beliefs regarding self-efficacy and environmental controllability are not divorced from experiential realities. Rather, they are products of reciprocal causation (Bandura 1986). Thus, when people believe the environment is controllable on matters of import to them, they are strongly motivated to exercise fully their personal efficacy, which enhances the likelihood of success. Experiences of success, in turn, provide behavioral validation of personal efficacy and environmental controllability. If people approach situations as largely uncontrollable, they are likely to exercise their efficacy weakly and abortively, which breeds failure experiences. Over time, failures take an increasing toll on perceived self-efficacy and beliefs about how much environmental control is possible.

Organizational simulation research underscores the influential impact of perceived controllability on the self-regulatory factors governing decision making that can enhance or impede group attainments (Bandura & Wood 1989). People who managed a simulated organization under a cognitive set that organizations are not easily changeable quickly lost faith in their managerial capabilities even when performance standards were within easy reach and they lowered their sights for the organization (figure 14.2). Those who operated under a cognitive set that organizations are controllable displayed a resilient sense of managerial efficacy, set themselves increasingly challenging goals, and used good analytic thinking for discovering effective managerial rules. They exhibited high resiliency of self-efficacy even in the face of numerous recurrent difficulties. The divergent changes in these self-regulatory factors were accompanied by large differences in organizational attainments.

Path analyses reveal that, when initially faced with managing a complex unfamiliar environment, managers relied heavily on performance information in judging their efficacy and setting their personal goals. But, as they began to form a self-schema concerning their efficacy through further experience, the performance system was powered more extensively and intricately by self-conceptions of efficacy (figure 14.3). Perceived self-efficacy influenced performance both directly and through its strong effects on personal goal setting. Personal goals, in turn, enhanced organizational attainments directly and via the mediation of analytic strategies.

Figure 14.2. Changes in strength of perceived managerial self-efficacy, the performance goals set for the organization, and level of organizational performance for managers who operated under a cognitive set that organizations are controllable or difficult to control. Each trial block comprises six different production orders (Bandura & Wood 1989).
The findings of these studies show that a strong belief in one's personal efficacy and in the modifiability of the environment pays off in psychological well-being and personal accomplishments. The speed with which efficacy-undermining cognitive sets impair the cognitive functioning of bright graduates with managerial experience attests to the power of belief systems over capability.

**DIFFERENTIAL FUNCTION OF PREPARATORY AND PERFORMANCE JUDGMENTS OF COMPETENCE**

Norem and Cantor present the seemingly paradoxical notion that negative thinking spawns good performances. They find that some people use pessimistic expectations as a strategy to motivate themselves and to cushion the blows of failure. The anticipatory pessimism is conceptualized as a domain-linked strategy rather than a global personality trait. These findings appear to fly in the face of a large body of evidence that negative thinking typically impairs performance attainments. One would not prescribe that people approach tasks with strong disbelief in their capabilities and anticipate the futility of their efforts as the way to promote success. A solution to the apparent paradox may lie in a temporal qualifier regarding the functional properties of self-doubt.

Self-efficacy theory distinguishes between the effects of strength of self-beliefs of efficacy during acquisition phases of an endeavor and during exercise of established skills (Bandura 1986). In approaching learning tasks, people who perceive themselves to be highly self-efficacious in the undertaking have little incentive to invest much preparatory effort in it. For example, students who greatly underestimate the difficulty of academic course demands and remain blissfully free of self-doubt are more likely to party than to hit the books to master the subject matter. As Confucian wisdom warns regarding preparatory self-appraisal, “Too much confidence has deceived many a one.” Salomon (1984) provides some evidence bearing on this issue. He found that children's high perceived self-efficacy as a learner is associated with a high investment of cognitive effort and better learning from instructional media children consider difficult, but with less investment of effort and poorer learning from media they believe to be easy. Thus, some uncertainty can benefit preparation.

In applying skills already acquired, a strong belief in one's efficacy is essential to mobilize and sustain the effort needed to succeed on difficult tasks, which is hard to achieve if one is doubt-ridden. One cannot execute...
well what one knows while wrestling with self-doubt. In short, self-doubt creates the impetus for acquiring knowledge and skills, but it hinders adept use of preexisting skills.

The social manipulation of preparatory and performance efficacy is a standard procedure in athletic activities. To motivate players to improve suspect skills and competitive strategies in preparation for upcoming contests, coaches inflate the capabilities of their opponents and downgrade those of their own team. Bravado self-appraisals are frowned upon. But at the time of the contest, coaches attempt to instill a strong sense of efficacy to get the players to perform at their best. Teams strive hard to overpower their opponents at the beginning of a contest to convince them that their worst doubts are warranted. Coaches try to sustain self-efficacious thinking in the face of difficulties that can shake a team’s belief that the extra effort is worthwhile.

Instances in which optimistic anticipations were rudely dashed remain highly salient in people’s thinking. It is not uncommon for them to invoke anticipatory pessimism as a superstitious means of exercising cognitive control over untoward outcomes. We know from Langer’s (1975) research that rituals that are completely irrelevant to what will happen are viewed as providing some measure of control over outcomes entirely determined by chance. The longitudinal study by Norem and Cantor excluded negative thinking that impairs performance by confining the study to academically gifted students. Most likely, their anticipatory pessimism reflects superstitious thinking rather than genuine self-disbelief that they lack the capability to succeed. If carried too far, however, preparatory negative thinking can turn into a stressor and debilitator rather than a motivator. Norem and Cantor report that academic pessimistic thinking eventually takes a heavy toll on psychosocial functioning. Those who strive to forestall incessant anticipated misfortunes demand much of themselves, drive themselves hard, distress themselves, constrict their social life, gain little satisfaction from their activities, and begin to undermine their accomplishments. Optimists fare much better in psychosocial well-being and academic accomplishments.

**CONCLUSION**

**VERIDICALITY OF SELF-APPRAISAL: SELF-AIDING OR SELF-LIMITING?**

It is widely believed that misjudgment produces dysfunction. Certainly, gross miscalculation can get one into trouble. But optimistic self-appraisals of capability that are not unduly disparate from what is possible can be advantageous, whereas veridical judgments can be self-limiting. When people err in their self-appraisal they tend to overestimate their capabilities, which is a benefit rather than a cognitive failing to be eradicated. If self-efficacy beliefs always reflected only what people can do routinely, they would rarely fail but they would not mount the extra effort needed to surpass their ordinary performances.

Evidence suggests that it is often the so-called normals who are distorters of reality. But they distort in the positive direction. Anxious and depressed people have been compared in their skills and their self-beliefs with those who are unburdened by such problems. The findings show that the groups differ little in their actual skills, whereas they differ substantially in their beliefs about their efficacy. People who are socially anxious are often just as socially skilled as the more sociable ones. But socially active people judge themselves as much more adept (Glasgow & Arkowitz 1975).

Depressed persons usually display realistic self-appraisals of their social competencies. The nondepressed view themselves as much more adroit then they really are. As depressed people improve in treatment, they show the self-enhancing biases that characterize the nondepressed (Lewinsohn et al. 1980). In laboratory situations where people’s actions do not affect outcomes, the depressed are quite realistic in judging they lack control. The nondepressed believe they are exercising a good deal of control in such situations (Alloy & Abramson 1979). After nondepressed people are made temporarily depressed they become realistic in judging their personal control. When depressed people are made to feel happy they overestimate the extent to which they exercise control (Alloy, Abramson, & Viscusi 1981). Thus, the depressed appear as realists, the non-depressed as confident illusionists.

Social reformers strongly believe that they can mobilize the collective effort needed to achieve social change (Bandura 1986; Muller 1979). Although their beliefs and the collective sense of efficacy they instill in others are rarely fully realized, they sustain reform efforts that achieve lesser, but important, gains. Were social reformers to be entirely realistic about the prospects of transforming social systems, they would either forgo the endeavor or fall easy victim to discouragement. Realists may adapt well to existing realities, but those with a tenacious self-efficacy are likely to change adverse realities.

The emerging evidence indicates that the successful, the innovative,
the sociable, the nonanxious, the nondefensive, and the social reformers take an optimistic view of their personal efficacy to exercise influence over events that affect their lives. If not unrealistically exaggerated, such self-beliefs foster personal and social accomplishments.

In their informative review, Phillips and Zimmerman identify some of the determinants and developmental changes in the self-appraisal patterns of able students who either underestimate or overestimate their capabilities or display veridical judgment. The research of Collins (1982) shows that perceptions of personal efficacy often diverge from actual ability at all levels of ability. Moreover, perceived self-efficacy affects how well children use their capabilities. Collins selected children who judged themselves to be of high or low mathematical capability at each of three levels of mathematical ability. They were then given difficult problems to solve. Mathematical ability contributed to mathematical performance. But within each level of mathematical ability, children who regarded themselves as efficacious discarded faulty strategies more quickly, solved more problems (figure 14.4), chose to rework more of those they had failed, and did so more accurately. Level of interest in mathematics was significantly related to perceived self-efficacy but not to actual ability. Thus, children may perform poorly because they lack the ability or, if they possess the ability, because they lack the perceived efficacy to make good use of their talents.

Phillips and Zimmerman report striking developmental sex differences in disparity between ability and perceived competence. Whereas boys tend to inflate their sense of competence, girls generally disparage their capabilities. These differential patterns of self-appraisal have their origins in parental gender-linked beliefs regarding their children's capabilities. Parents judge school to be more difficult for daughters than for sons even though they do not differ in actual achievement. Girls perceive their mothers as having lower academic expectations and less stringent achievement standards for them than for boys. Adoption of feminine gender-role identity is also associated with underestimation of capabilities.

Students' beliefs in their efficacy can profoundly affect the direction of their development by influencing the career paths they follow. The choices they make in earlier years cultivate different competencies and interests and determine the occupational options that can be realistically considered. It is now well documented that students' beliefs in their efficacy govern their career decision making and career development (Betz & Hackett 1986; Lent & Hackett 1987). The stronger their self-belief in their efficacy, the more career options they consider possible and the better they prepare themselves educationally for different pursuits. Cultural practices that convey lower achievement expectations for women, stereotypic modeling of gender roles, constraining sex typing, and dissuading opportunity structures eventually leave their mark on women's beliefs about their occupational efficacy. Female students are prone to limit their interests and range of career options by beliefs that they lack the capabilities for occupations traditionally dominated by men, even though they do not differ from male students in actual ability. The self-limitation arises from perceived ineffectiveness rather than from actual inability. But things may be improving. Studies of students currently coming through the school ranks reveal a smaller disparity between male and female students in their beliefs about their efficacy to pursue successfully varied careers (Post-Kammer & Smith 1985).

Computer literacy is becoming an increasingly important factor in career development and advancement. Socialization influences that breed
perceived inefficacy in the use of computer tools are creating new career barriers for women. These are not easily overcome. Even at an early age, girls distrust their efficacy to program and operate computers despite instruction and the school's encouragement to acquire such skills (Miura 1987a). The lower the perceived efficacy in computer activities, the lesser the interest in acquiring computer competencies. Sex differences in perceived self-efficacy to master computer course work extend to the college level. Regardless of sex, college students lacking a sense of computer efficacy are computer avoiders. They show less interest or inclination to pursue computer course work and they see computer literacy as less relevant to their future careers (Miura 1987b).

In commenting on overoptimistic self-appraisal, Phillips and Zimmerman suggest that its positive effects on achievement may reflect fear-motivated defensiveness. Children presumably drive themselves to high achievement to avoid confirming their worst fears that they are untalented impostors. Should optimism regarding one's capabilities really be cast in a mask of deceit? Even the most talented people are, from time to time, beset by self-doubts because no one ever experiences unceasing ever-rising accomplishments. Pursuit of standards that are difficult to fulfill provide challenges that sustain engrossment in activities but also bring periodic discouragements. Accomplishments that look good to others may prove self-disappointing when they fail to measure up to exacting personal standards. To add further strains on positive self-appraisals, there is no shortage of superstars to occasion humbling social comparisons. In short, self-doubts are natural reactions to inevitable failures and setbacks, but people with a resilient sense of efficacy are quick to recover belief in their capabilities.

There is reason to believe that the motivational benefits of overoptimistic self-appraisal might be more fruitfully analyzed in terms of affirming processes than defensive ones rooted in pretending to be what one is not. This is the difference between motivation arising from an unshakable belief in oneself and from fear of being exposed as an intellectual phony. In the latter conception, human striving becomes largely a matter of defensive impression management. The substantial body of evidence reviewed earlier supports the view that an optimistic sense of efficacy promotes psychological well-being and human accomplishments through advantageous processes, such as self-challenge, commitment, motivational involvement, and nonintrusive task orientation rather than through fearful self-protectiveness. Indeed, a resilient belief in one's capabilities is required to succeed in pursuits that present many obstacles.

**CONCLUSION**

**THE PLASTICITY OF INCOMPETENCE**

The work of Langer and her associates provides striking testimony for the surprising ease with which contextual and social factors can convert competence into incompetence (Langer 1979). Settings in which individuals happen to perform poorly can, in themselves, come to activate a sense of incompetence that impairs future performances in those particular contexts. The contextual activation of incompetence is well illustrated in athletic performances in which winners regularly turn into losers to weaker opponents in settings in which they have come to expect difficulties. The mere presence of a person exuding high confidence undermines observers' use of routine skills. Attending to what is strange in new tasks, rather than to what is familiar and clearly within one's range of capability, may similarly hinder effective utilization of skills. Rigid mindsets impede generative use of knowledge and established skills under changing circumstances. When people are cast in subordinate roles or are assigned inferior roles, implying limited competence, they perform activities at which they are highly skilled less well than when they do not bear the negative labels or the subordinate role designations. Offering unnecessary help can also detract from a sense of competence and thereby vitiate the execution of skills.

Mindlessness is hypothesized by Langer to underly illusory incompetence. Environmental cues suggestive of personal deficiencies are said to trigger deficient performances when routine circumstances are no longer given thoughtful consideration. Undoubtedly, some instances of deficient skill utilization reflect routinized situational control of action. Situational influences, however, may activate other processes that can also detract from effective utilization of skills. Verification of an explanatory mechanism is greatly aided if the mediating process is measured rather than simply presumed to be operating. The presumptive mediation of mindlessness could be tested by assessing whether amount of cognitive activity accounts for variations across subjects in how much their performances are undermined by situational influences suggesting personal deficiency. Degree of mindful involvement in the activities at hand could also be varied systematically and its impact on effective utilization of preexisting skills measured.

We know from other lines of research that the types of situations that produce illusory incompetence diminish perceived self-efficacy with its concomitant effects on choice behavior motivation, and self-debilitating thought. For example, the mere sight of a formidable-looking opponent
instills lower self-percepts of efficacy than does one who looks less impressive (Weinberg, Yukelson, & Jackson 1980). Illusorily instated self-percepts of efficacy heighten competitive performance and resilience, whereas illusorily weakened self-percepts of efficacy debilitate competitive performance and increase vulnerability to the adverse effects of failure (Weinberg, Gould, & Jackson 1979). The more self-percepts of efficacy are diminished, the greater is the performance debilitation.

Trivial factors, such as arbitrary anchor values or sequence anchoring, that are devoid of information to affect competence nevertheless influence self-efficacy beliefs (Cervone & Peake 1986; Peake & Cervone, 1989). The illusorily instated self-beliefs of efficacy exert strong effect on level of performance motivation. Dwelling on formidable aspects of a task weakens people's belief in their efficacy but focusing on doable aspects of the same tasks raises self-judgment of capabilities (Cervone 1989). The higher the altered self-efficacy beliefs, the longer people persevere in the face of repeated failure. In these experiments, perceived self-efficacy predicts variance in motivation within treatment conditions as well as across treatments. Meditational analyses reveal that these types of external influences have no impact on motivation when variations in self-efficacy beliefs are controlled. Thus, the motivational effect of the external influences is completely mediated through changes in self-efficacy beliefs.

**COGNITIVE GUIDANCE AND AUTOMATIZATION**

It should be noted in passing that mindfulness is not an unmitigated virtue. It can impair the execution of skills as well as facilitate their use. Cognitive guidance plays an especially influential role in early and intermediate phases of skill development. After proficiency is attained, the skills are executed in recurring situations without requiring prior thought guides unless something goes awry. Attending to the mechanics of what one is doing after proficiency is achieved is likely to disrupt skilled performance. Partial disengagement of thought from proficient action has considerable functional value. If one had to think about the details of every skilled activity before carrying it out in recurrent situations, it would consume most of one's attentional and cognitive resources and create a monotonously dull inner life.

Human behavior is regulated by multilevel systems of control. Once proficient modes of behavior become routinized, they no longer require higher cognitive control. Their execution can be largely regulated by lower-level sensory-motor systems. However, when routinized behavior fails to produce expected results, the cognitive control system again comes into play. Both the behavior and the changing environmental circumstances are monitored to identify the source of the problem. New modes are considered and tested. Control reverts to the lower control system after an adequate mode is found and becomes the habitual way of doing things. However, automatization of skills usually entails a shift in the locus of attention from action patterns to their correlated effects rather than a total loss of consciousness of one's performance (Bandura 1986).

There are obviously substantial benefits to being able to think about other things while executing proficient skills. Routinization frees attention and thought from habitual routines for the cultivation of new competencies requiring judgment, generation of alternatives, and close monitoring of the effects of one's performances. For example, it would be a waste of cognitive resources if one had to continue to think about how to drive an automobile after one had perfected the skill. Routinization is advantageous when the ways that have been perfected are the optimal ones and remain so under a variety of circumstances. However, routinization can detract from effective functioning when people react with fixed ways in situations requiring discriminative adaptability. Langer identifies conditions under which thoughtless stereotyped reactions to superficial cues exact a toll on competent utilization of one's skills.

**MAINTENANCE OF PERCEIVED COMPETENCE BY SHIFTING EVALUATIVE STANDARDS**

For most activities there are no absolute indicators of level of competence. For example, the time in which a given distance is run (e.g., eight minutes) or the score obtained on a scholastic examination (e.g., 127) does not by itself indicate whether these constitute good or poor performances. When competence is not designated by an inherent outcome of performance, personal competence must be gauged in relation to some evaluative standard. The referential comparisons may take the form of normative comparison, social comparison with specific individuals, or self-comparison over time. For some regular activities, standard norms based on representative groups are used to determine one's relative standing. More often people compare themselves to particular associates in given endeavors. One's previous attainments are also used as a reference against which
CONCLUSION

Albert Bandura

Albert Bandura is a psychologist who is best known for his social learning theory. His work focuses on the role of cognitive processes in the development of behavior and personality. Bandura's theory emphasizes the importance of observational learning, which is the process by which individuals learn through observing the actions and outcomes of others. This theory has had a significant impact on the field of psychology and has been applied in various areas, including education, health, and social policy. Bandura's work has also contributed to the development of new educational strategies and approaches, such as the use of role models and peer learning in the classroom.
judgment of personal capabilities. The less talented or ill prepared suffer the greatest losses in perceived efficacy. Moreover, their self-beliefs of efficacy are more vulnerable to the negative impact of teachers with a low sense of instructional efficacy than are those of students who believe strongly in their capabilities (Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles in press).

In social cognitive theory (Bandura 1986), self-appraisal is a process in which different sources of comparative information—normative comparative, specific social comparative, and personal comparative—are weighted and integrated in formation of self-efficacy judgments and experience of self-satisfaction. Developmental changes are reflected in the relative weight given to different forms of comparative information rather than in shifts in exclusive reliance from a social-comparative standard to a self-comparative one. The relative weighting of different comparative information may vary across domains of functioning and situational circumstances.

The multidimensional influence on self-appraisal is revealed in research in which normative standards and rate of personal progress are systematically varied (Simon 1979). Students performed a cognitive task and received prearranged feedback of a decelerating pattern of improvement (improve fast initially but then taper off) or an accelerating improvement (improve slowly at first but then make large gains). They also had access to normative standards that portrayed students as performing at either the upper range or the midrange of possible attainments. The students' level of self-satisfaction was strongly influenced by both social and self-comparison. The higher the normative standards, the less self-satisfied they were with their own performance attainments. Different rates of improvement produced strikingly different patterns of self-evaluation (figure 14.5). Rapid strides occasioned rising self-satisfaction, whereas declining improvements were devalued after large initial gains had been achieved.

In the final phase, all students attained the same high performance that exceeded the normative standard. Those who surpassed the norm through accelerating improvement were highly self-approving, but those who attained the same noteworthy accomplishment through a declining rate of improvement experienced virtually no self-satisfaction. Early large success is evidently conducive to later self-dissatisfaction even though one continues to make progress. As can be seen in the right panel of figure 14.5, people who are prone to depression display even greater evaluative reactivity to their progress. They are more self-satisfied with accelerating
Many theories of motivation and self-regulation are founded on a negative feedback control model. This type of system functions as a motivator and regulator of action through a discrepancy reduction mechanism. Perceived discrepancy between performance and a reference standard motivates action to reduce the incongruity. Discrepancy reduction clearly plays a central role in any system of self-regulation. However, in the negative feedback control system, if performance matches the standard the person does nothing. A regulatory process in which matching a standard begets inertness does not characterize human motivation.

Human self-motivation relies on both discrepancy production and discrepancy reduction (Bandura 1988a). It requires proactive control as well as reactive feedback control. People initially motivate themselves through feedforward control by setting themselves valued challenging standards that create a state of disequilibrium and then mobilizing their effort on the basis of anticipatory estimation of what it would take to reach them. After people attain the standard they have been pursuing, they generally set a higher standard for themselves. The adoption of further challenges creates new motivating discrepancies to be mastered. Similarly, surpassing a standard is more likely to raise aspiration than to lower subsequent performance to conform to the surpassed standard. Self-motivation thus involves a dual cyclic process of disequilibrating discrepancy production followed by equilibrating discrepancy reduction.

The same hierarchical dual control mechanisms operate in the construction of behavioral patterns and regulation of established ones (Bandura 1986). Foresighted conceptions and forethought guide the construction and selection of actions, and the results produced by those actions verify the adequacy of the chosen course. A system of self-regulation combining proactive guidance with reactive adjustments is best suited for adaptive functioning, especially under changing circumstances.

Moretti and Higgins present a self-discrepancy theory of self-evaluation and self-regulation in which the comparative factors include sets of attributes. They focus primarily on the affective consequences of self-discrepancies. Perceived attributes are compared against either ideal standards or standards of duty and obligation. Failure to fulfill ideal standards produces dejection when the ideals are one’s own, and embarrassment when they represent the hopes that significant others hold for...
one. Failure to meet standards of obligation arouses feelings of guilt when
the standards are self-imposed but fear when they are prescribed by
others. Moretti and Higgins report several lines of evidence that provide
consistent support for the hypothesized consequences of the different
forms of self-discrepancy.

Several aspects of this model of self-regulation require clarification and
further empirical examination. In the verification tests, subjects rate their
own attributes, the standards they apply to themselves, the standards
imposed on them by others, and their feeling states. Except for a few
instances in which nonverbal reactions are assessed, subjects' verbal re-
ports are the sole source of the measures for all the variables. This can
inflated obtained relationships and leave ambiguities as to whether they
reflect genuine causal dependencies or people's intuitive theories about
how different kinds of shortcomings should make one feel.

The self-discrepancy model seems to be concerned primarily with the
self-regulation of affective states. However, self-discrepancies should
have motivational and behavioral effects as well, which are readily test-
able. For example, how are differential magnitudes of actual-ideal dis-
crepancy reflected in level of motivation? Under conditions of low social
surveillance, self-imposed ought standards should have greater restraining
power over transgressive behavior than ought standards prescribed by
others. What sets of conditions produce self-regulatory failures that
eventuate in actual-ought discrepancies breeding guilt? Such a state of
affairs appears to reflect what has been characterized as a scotch con-
sience—it is too weak to restrain transgressive conduct but strong
enough to ensure that you do not enjoy it.

Theories of self-regulation usually include a set of subsidiary processes
through which perceived discrepancies produce their effects (Bandura
1986; Carver & Scheier 1981; Kanfer 1977; Rehm 1982). Some of these
subprocesses are concerned with the self-monitoring of conduct and the
circumstances under which it occurs. Other subprocesses involve judg-
ments of the conduct in terms of different patterns of referential stan-
dards, the valuation of the activity, the perceived determinants of the con-
duct, and self-appraisal of capabilities to fulfill given standards. A third
set of subprocesses governs the nature of the evaluative self-reactions
after the conduct has been judged.

Rehm's (1982) application of the discrepancy model to depressive
affect illustrates the multifaceted nature of the self-regulation of affective
states. With regard to self-monitoring, depressed people tend to under-

estimate their successes but remain acutely aware of their failures. In
contrast, the nondepressed remember their successes but minimize their
failures. Minimizing one's successes while accenting one's failures is a
good way of driving oneself to depression. Those who are plagued by
depression also display a depressogenic style of processing performance-
related information. In judging the determinants of their performances,
the nondepressed favor a self-enhancing bias, crediting successes to
themselves and ascribing failures to situational factors. The depressed do
not necessarily discount their contribution to successes, but they are quick
to attribute failures to themselves. The depressed are also prone to use
social-comparative information in self-belittling ways. They tend to adopt
standards that exceed their perceived capabilities, whereas the nonde-
pressed favor standards that are judged to be attainable. In the self-
reactive phase of self-regulation, depressed individuals tend to be less
self-rewarding for successes and more self-denying and self-punishing
for failures than the nondepressed for identical performances. Self-
devaluation and despondency augment each other bidirectionally.

In the Moretti and Higgins self-discrepancy model, disparity between
two sets of attributes (i.e., actual-ideal or actual-ought) seems to generate
dejections, embarrassments, guilts, and fears without any other interven-
ing processes. These various affective reactions are tied to four discrete
sets of discrepancies (i.e., ideal-own, ideal-other, ought-own, and ought-
other). In everyday life, personal and social standards operate on be-

havior interactively rather than isolatedly. Different patterns of disparity
between these two sets of standards will activate different emotional
reactions. Consider the relation between actual-ought attributes. Trans-
gressive conduct will produce different reactions when personal and
social standards are congruent than when they are discordant. People
who highly value behavior that social authorities disapprove, such as
principled dissenters and nonconformists, are most likely to feel pride
rather than agitation in ignoring socially prescribed demands. People
commonly experience conflicts in which they are socially rewarded for
behavior that violates their personal standards. If the benefits for socially
accommodating behavior are highly inviting, social standards often tri-
umph over personal ones without arousal of guilt. This is because de-
velopment of a self-regulatory system does not create an invariant control
mechanism within a person. Self-reactive influences do not operate un-
less they are activated and there are many psychological mechanisms by
which moral standards can be disengaged from transgressive conduct
Selective activation and disengagement of internal standards permits different types of conduct and occasions different affective reactions with the same personal standards. Self-discrepancy theory focuses primarily on negative affective reactions. Disparities between what one is and what one would like to be or ought to be arouse depression, apprehension or guilt. As noted earlier, where human aspirations are concerned, personal discrepancies serve important positive functions. People actively create discrepancies for themselves that provide continuing challenges for their pursuits. When they fulfill hoped-for standards, those who have a high sense of self-efficacy create new motivators for themselves by setting higher goal challenges (Bandura & Cervone 1983, 1986).

Disparities between behavior and ideal standards do not necessarily create despondency. Such discrepancies can be motivating rather than depressing depending on beliefs in one’s efficacy to match them (Bandura & Abrams 1986). Negative disparities give rise to high motivation and low despondent mood when people believe they have the efficacy to fulfill a difficult goal and continue to strive for it (figure 14.6). Negative disparities generate despondent mood for people who judge themselves as inept and fail to attain a difficult goal but continue to demand it of themselves. Those who judge they lack the efficacy for goal attainment and abandon the difficult goals as unrealistic for themselves display apathetic reactions.

SOCIALIZATION OF STANDARDS

Moretti and Higgins chart the developmental cause of self-system vulnerabilities in terms of two sets of changes. The first concerns qualitative shifts in children’s cognitive capacity to represent self-other relations in increasingly complex and global ways. The second involves parental socialization practices that convey information about contingencies between children’s behavior and parents’ responses. The socialization factors that are singled out for attention include the frequency, clarity, and consistency with which parents convey their hopes and obligatory expectations in response to their children’s discrepant conduct.

Their analysis encompasses some relevant aspects of socialization, but it would need to be broadened in several directions to account fully for developmental determinants of aspirational and obligatory standards. The conceptual extensions pertain to the varied modes by which standards are socially transmitted, the social and affective properties of the transmitters, and the scope of the transmission sources.

In the Moretti and Higgins portrayal of the socialization process, parents transmit standards by their evaluative reactions to their children’s behavior. Direct training is only one of several modes of social transmission. People not only teach and prescribe self-evaluative standards for others; they also exemplify them in reactions to their own conduct. The power of modeling in transmitting standards has been verified in both laboratory and naturalistic studies. The process of acquiring standards is often complicated by conflicts in the standards exemplified by different people, by inconsistencies in the behavior of the same persons under different circumstances, and by contradictions between what people practice and what they preach. Children must construct personal standards from the multifaceted evaluative information conveyed by what is prescribed, modeled, and taught by evaluative reactions (Bandura 1986).

Moretti and Higgins emphasize the informational and cognitive aspects of socialization. However, they do not seem to give much consideration to social and affective factors that often exert strong, if not overriding, influence in developmental transactions. A great deal of research exists showing that the social and affective characteristics of socializers govern the success of their efforts. Their nurturance, interpersonal attraction, social power, and competence affect the extent to which children
adopt their prescripts and modeled standards (Bandura & Walters 1959; Goslin 1969; Perry & Bussey 1984; Sears, Maccoby, & Levin 1957). According to Moretti and Higgins, if parents convey the right contingency information frequently, clearly, consistently, and forcefully, their children will adopt standards that guide them to be aspiring and dutiful. If only it were that simple. Saliency and clarity of prescripts will carry different impacts depending on whether the socializers are liked, admired, disliked, hated, seen as powerful or weak, competent or ineffectual. Socializers, of course, are embedded in a broad network of social influences that can support their efforts or give them Excedrin headaches as sources of strife. The scope of the transmission model is addressed next.

**FAMILIAL AND SOCIAL TRANSMISSION MODELS**

In their conception of the socialization process, Moretti and Higgins focus almost exclusively on the transmission of standards via parent-child relationships. In a provocative paper, Reiss (1965) contrasts theories based on the familial transmission model with those emphasizing transmission by broader social systems. He offers several reasons why the familial transmission model cannot adequately explain socialization processes and outcomes. Assuming, at least, a twenty-year procreation difference between generations, a long time intervenes between parents’ imparting values and standards to their children and when the children can, in turn, pass on those values to their own offspring. The long time lag between succeeding descendants would produce a very slow rate of social change, whereas, in fact, extensive worldwide shifts in standards and normative behavior often occur within a single generation. The marked change in sexual standards and practices and cohabitation patterns within a relatively short time span is but one recent example. The common cohabitation of unmarried couples was not occasioned by parents inculcating in their children broad-minded views regarding sexuality. Although the familial subsystem serves as an important agency of cultural transmission, standards of behavior are extensively disseminated by extrafamilial social systems. Thus, for example, racial segregation in public accommodations and infringement of voting rights were changed more rapidly by collective protest and Supreme Court decisions than by waiting for prejudiced parents to inculcate in their children more acceptant attitudes which they would display toward minority groups when they became restaurateurs and motel operators thirty or forty years later.

**CONCLUSION**

The adoption of values, standards, and attributes is governed by a much broader and more dynamic social reality than merely the transactions in parent-child relationships (Bandura 1986). Social learning is a continuous process in which acquired standards are elaborated and modified, and new ones are adopted. Children repeatedly observe and learn the standards and behavior patterns not only of parents but also of siblings, peers, and other adults. Moreover, the extensive symbolic modeling provided in the mass media serves as another prominent extrafamilial source of influence (Liebert & Spafkin 1988). Hence, children’s values and personal standards are likely to reflect amalgams of these diverse sources, rather than simply the familial heritage.

**THE PSYCHOPATHOLOGIZING OF SELF-DOUBT**

Kolligan regards perceived fraudulence as one manifestation of perceived incompetence. Many high-achieving individuals are said to perceive themselves as impostors and frauds. In psychoanalytic theorizing, from which the construct emanates, perceived fraudulence reflects a disturbed sense of reality and identity and a compensatory narcissistic self-enhancement driven by feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness. The impostorous self-enhancement is promoted through imitativeness, verbal fluency, high social skill, personal charm, and sensitivity to others’ expectations. Women have never fared well in psychoanalytic theory. It, therefore, comes as no great surprise that they become the tragediennes in the pursuit of high aspirations. Psychoanalytic researchers find that “perceived fraudulence” is a predominantly female experience, especially among the high-achieving ones. So women get it coming and going. Socialization practices instill in women self-doubts about their capabilities and then their self-doubts and striving for intellectual acceptance get psychoanalytically labeled as indicators of perceived fraudulenceness. The psychopathologizing of self-doubts and the negative labeling of efforts at self-enhancement as fraudulence and impostorousness only further undermine a sense of personal efficacy and self-esteem.

Kolligan removes much of the pathologic coloring from the construct of perceived fraudulence. It becomes a self-referential ideation that has both cognitive and affective components. It evolves through an initial self-perception of incompetence to intolerance of the perceived incompetence, especially among those with high achievement strivings, to resort to fraudulent maneuvers as protection against personal and social de-
valuation and then to added stressful concern over acting fraudulently and threats of social exposure. People who belittle themselves and strive to excel and please others get categorized as the perceived frauds.

Labels of deceit for thoughts and feelings of inauthenticity over discrepancies between self-perceptions and social impressions can do psychological harm. The notion of impostor has already entered the pop culture with authors marketing “the impostor phenomenon” on the television circuit under catchy titles concocted by advertising wordsmiths. It is not uncommon for people who have an affinity to the pop culture to now label themselves as impostors for their fallibilities and because their self-view does not always match up to their public image. The field might be better served if self-referent thoughts and feelings of inauthenticity bore less pernicious labels.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The contributors to this volume have given us a better sense of the origins of perceived competence and the processes by which it affects human motivation, accomplishments, and dysfunctions. The value of psychological theories is judged not only by their explanatory and predictive power but also by their operative power to effect enduring changes in human functioning. Significant progress has been made in creating ways of enhancing human functioning by empowering people with coping skills and resilient self-beliefs of capability that enable them to exercise control over events that affect their lives (Bandura 1988b, 1988c; Rodin 1986; Schunk 1984). There is much to be gained from a better understanding of how to alter self-beliefs of capability in ways that contribute to personal well-being.

REFERENCES


