

Mind and Manifestation: Mental Training, Beliefs, and Perceived Goal Attainment

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Abstract: *Manifestation is commonly described as the use of thoughts, beliefs, emotions, and intentions to pursue desired outcomes. This article critically reviews manifestation-related practices- including visualization, gratitude, positive thinking, faith, and goal setting- alongside psychological research on mental imagery, self-efficacy, mental simulation, and goal-directed behaviour. The literature suggests that mental practices may support goal pursuit by helping people clarify objectives, regulate attention and emotion, build confidence, rehearse actions, and plan for obstacles. These psychological processes offer plausible explanations for some experiences attributed to manifestation. However, evidence that thoughts alone attract external events, or that the Law of Attraction and Law of Vibration operate as universal scientific laws, remains insufficient. The article distinguishes subjective and metaphysical interpretations from evidence-based psychological explanations and emphasizes that outcomes also depend on action, resources, opportunities, and social and environmental conditions. It concludes that mental training may be useful when combined with realistic planning and purposeful behaviour, but should not be presented as a guarantee of success.*

Keywords: manifestation, mental training, visualization, self-efficacy, goal setting, mental imagery

1. Introduction

The idea that thoughts and beliefs influence life outcomes appears in spiritual traditions, popular self-help literature, and contemporary discussions of personal development. Often described as manifestation, the idea generally involves focusing on a desired outcome through practices such as visualization, affirmations, gratitude, prayer, and goal setting. The Law of Attraction, in particular, proposes that people attract experiences corresponding to their dominant thoughts or emotional states (Byrne, 2006).

Manifestation can be examined without assuming that metaphysical explanations are scientifically established. Psychological research offers concepts that may help explain some of the experiences associated with manifestation. Beliefs can affect how people interpret situations, expectations can influence motivation, and mental imagery can support preparation for particular tasks. These processes may influence behaviour and, in turn, affect the likelihood of reaching a goal.

This article reviews literature on manifestation-related practices and relevant psychological research. It focuses on visualization and mental imagery, beliefs and self-efficacy, positive thinking and gratitude, goal setting, and the relationship between intention and action. It also distinguishes psychological explanations from claims that thoughts directly attract external events.

Mental Training and Goal Pursuit

Mental training refers to deliberate practices intended to influence attention, thoughts, emotions, or behaviour. Examples include mental rehearsal, imagery, relaxation, affirmations, and goal planning. These practices are not interchangeable: imagining a result, rehearsing the steps needed to achieve it, and planning when to take action involve different processes.

Research on mental simulation suggests that imagining future actions or experiences can support behaviour change. Cole et al. (2021), in a systematic review and multilevel meta-

analysis, found an overall positive association between mental simulation and subsequent behaviour. This finding is consistent with the possibility that mental rehearsal can help people prepare, focus attention, or feel more ready to act. It does not show that imagining an event causes it to occur independently of behaviour.

Mental imagery may also support specific health-related behaviours. Conroy and Hagger (2018) found generally small effects of imagery interventions on behavioural and psychological outcomes, with variation across studies and interventions. The results suggest that imagery may be useful in some contexts, but its effectiveness depends on factors such as the task, instructions, and intervention design.

A key distinction is between outcome imagery and process imagery. Outcome imagery involves picturing a desired result, such as completing an examination successfully. Process imagery involves rehearsing the actions required to reach it, such as studying regularly, practising difficult material, or asking for help. Imagining success may help clarify a goal, while rehearsing the process may better prepare someone to act. Neither guarantees achievement.

Mental imagery is also relevant to performance and clinical psychology. Martin et al. (1999) reviewed imagery use in sport, while Pearson et al. (2013) discussed its measurement and relevance in clinical psychology. Imagery may be visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, or otherwise sensory, and may serve different purposes, including preparation, coping, and rehearsal. Its effects depend on its content and use; vividness alone does not establish effectiveness.

Beliefs, Expectations, and Self-Efficacy

Manifestation literature often emphasizes belief in the possibility of achieving a desired outcome. Psychological research provides a more specific account of how beliefs may matter. Bandura's (1986, 1997) social cognitive theory and self-efficacy framework propose that beliefs about one's ability to perform particular actions can influence choices, effort, persistence, and responses to setbacks.

Self-efficacy does not mean that confidence alone produces success. Rather, confidence may influence whether a person begins a task, continues when it becomes difficult, or seeks strategies to overcome obstacles. Its effects are shaped by skills, past experience, available resources, and environmental conditions.

Beliefs can also influence how people interpret challenges. Dweck (2006) describes how beliefs about whether abilities can develop may affect responses to effort and failure. Such beliefs may support persistence, but they do not eliminate barriers or guarantee a particular result.

Implementation intentions offer another explanation for translating intention into action. Gollwitzer and Sheeran (2006) examined plans that specify when, where, or how a person will act—for example, “After dinner, I will study for 45 minutes.” Such plans make a general goal more concrete and can help connect intention with behaviour.

These findings suggest that beliefs and expectations may contribute to goal attainment through identifiable psychological and behavioural pathways. They do not establish that thoughts directly attract unrelated external events.

Visualization, Positive Thinking, and Mental Contrasting
Manifestation practices commonly encourage people to visualize desired outcomes and maintain a positive outlook. However, positive fantasies alone may not lead to greater effort. Oettingen and Reininger (2016) discuss mental contrasting, a process in which people imagine a desired future while also identifying present obstacles. This approach connects aspiration with an appraisal of reality and can support planning.

For example, someone who hopes to complete a qualification might imagine graduating, then identify barriers such as limited study time or difficulty concentrating. They can then plan how to address those obstacles. This differs from imagining success without considering what achievement requires.

Positive thinking also needs careful interpretation. Constructive expectations may support motivation, but insisting on positivity at all times can discourage people from acknowledging genuine difficulties. Negative emotions may signal unmet needs, risks, or problems requiring attention. A balanced approach involves recognizing emotions and evaluating thoughts, rather than suppressing distress or assuming that negative thoughts inevitably cause negative events.

Gratitude is another prominent practice. It involves noticing and appreciating positive experiences, relationships, or resources. Popular sources such as Byrne’s *The Magic* (2012) present gratitude as part of manifestation, while Lyubomirsky (2007) discusses intentional practices in relation to happiness and well-being. Gratitude may be examined psychologically through attention, appraisal, and interpersonal behaviour. However, the reviewed literature does not establish that gratitude attracts specific external outcomes or guarantees success.

The Law of Attraction, the Law of Vibration, and the Subconscious

The Law of Attraction proposes that people attract experiences resembling their thoughts or emotional states. The Law of Vibration similarly describes emotional or energetic states as influencing what a person experiences. These ideas are central to manifestation literature, but they should be distinguished from established psychological theories and scientific uses of terms such as energy and vibration.

Psychology can investigate how expectations influence attention, decisions, motivation, and behaviour. For instance, someone who believes a goal is achievable may be more likely to prepare and persist. Such effects provide a possible explanation for why people may perceive a connection between their mindset and outcomes. They do not demonstrate that thoughts emit a force that attracts external events.

Manifestation literature also frequently refers to the subconscious mind as a store of beliefs and suggestions that shapes reality. In psychological research, processes outside deliberate awareness are discussed through more specific concepts, including automatic processing, learned associations, habits, and implicit expectations. These processes can influence perception and behaviour, but this does not mean that repeated thoughts automatically produce corresponding events.

Murphy’s *The Power of Your Subconscious Mind* (1963) and Lipton’s *The Biology of Belief* (2005) are influential examples of popular writing about beliefs and personal change. They may help explain how manifestation is understood in self-help culture, but they should not be treated as equivalent to empirical evidence. In particular, claims that conscious beliefs directly control genes or that positive thinking alone determines health require evidence beyond these sources.

Research on placebo effects provides a narrower example of psychological influences on bodily experience. Benedetti (2005) discusses how expectations and learned associations may contribute to certain responses. This research does not establish that beliefs can cure all illnesses or replace appropriate medical care.

2. Discussion

The literature reviewed here presents two related but distinct ways of understanding manifestation. The first is psychological: mental practices may influence attention, expectations, emotional responses, planning, and behaviour. The second is metaphysical: thoughts or emotional states are proposed to attract matching external events. Evidence for psychological mechanisms does not, by itself, establish metaphysical claims.

Visualization, self-efficacy, mental contrasting, and implementation intentions provide plausible ways in which mental training may support goal pursuit. Their potential value is clearest when they help people prepare, take action,

respond to obstacles, and monitor progress. Mental practices are less plausibly treated as substitutes for action or as guarantees of outcomes.

Goal attainment also depends on factors beyond an individual's mindset. These include health, available time and money, social support, access to opportunities, environmental conditions, and chance. A balanced account should avoid implying that people are responsible for illness, hardship, or failure because they held the "wrong" thoughts or emotions.

The literature also varies in evidential strength. Empirical studies and reviews address defined interventions and outcomes, while popular self-help books often rely on personal narratives, philosophical claims, or broad interpretations. Such books are useful for understanding how people encounter and interpret manifestation, but they cannot independently establish causal effects.

3. Limitations and Future Research

This article is a narrative review rather than a systematic review. It does not report a comprehensive database search, formal screening process, or quality assessment. The sources also examine different practices and outcomes, so findings about one technique cannot automatically be generalized to all manifestation practices.

Future research could examine specific practices- such as process-focused imagery, gratitude exercises, or implementation intentions- using clearly defined outcomes. Studies could distinguish participants' perceptions of success from objectively measured outcomes and investigate how mental practices interact with behaviour, social support, and access to resources. Qualitative research could also explore how people define manifestation and interpret both successful and unsuccessful experiences, without treating personal accounts as proof of causation.

4. Conclusion

Mental training may support personal goal pursuit when it helps people clarify their aims, prepare for action, build task-specific confidence, and respond to obstacles. Psychological research offers plausible mechanisms for some benefits associated with visualization, mental rehearsal, self-efficacy, and planning. However, the available literature does not establish that thoughts alone attract external events or that the Law of Attraction and Law of Vibration are scientifically validated universal laws.

A balanced understanding of manifestation distinguishes psychological practices from metaphysical claims and recognizes the role of behaviour and external circumstances. Mental training may be a useful part of pursuing goals, but it cannot guarantee outcomes independently of action, opportunity, and context.

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