

On Writing and Publishing Woman Of Valor

By Women Writers Women Books

Is “Manifestation” Real? A Skeptic Tries it and Reports Back (with a Book Deal)

By Alexis Rockley I’m an “evidence or it doesn’t exist” kind of skeptic when it comes to self-help, so when I learned about “manifestation” in early 2017, I rolled my eyes. But, like any self-care crazed millennial, raised on equal parts skepticism and optimism—I was curious. Two years and a lot of research later, I still don’t believe in it. Except, by all accounts, I manifested a book deal. As a first-time author. With no agent. Turns out that “manifestation” is real, after all—but not for any of the reasons the woo-woo-for-profit-squad told us it is. Back Up: What is “Manifestation”?

“Manifesting” is essentially willing what you want into existence, a concept based on the “law of attraction” (L.o.A.) invented by 19th century spiritualist, Phineas Quimby¹, and popularized by 21st century TV producer and author of *The Secret*, Rhonda Byrne². The law of attraction embodies the principle that our thoughts are energy; the energy we put out is what we will attract. So, if I think I’m a loser with terrible luck, then my life will reflect that because I attracted negative energy into my life. In contrast, if I believe I’m a secret bad*ss, then my life will be great because I attracted positive energy into my life. It’s a convenient belief, because it positions a person in complete control of their life (you attract what you put out) but provides an emotional, theological safety net (the universe responds accordingly). But the real reason that L.o.A. believers can’t explain a dramatic change in their life circumstances without calling it “manifestation”? They aren’t paying attention. None of us are—that’s what it is to have a subconscious mind. A Life on Autopilot Let’s say you’ve just realized that you want something; a goal has just been introduced to your conscious mind (i.e. you just saw dreamy photos of a friend’s vacation in Tulum and decided you’d love to visit one day). When you begin to imagine what it will be like to have, do, or be this goal, your brain’s emotional center (the limbic system) is engaged³. Once activated, your subconscious mind puts that desire on autopilot, continually checking-in to see how close or far off you are from achieving that goal. (Have we been to Tulum yet? What about now? Have we visited Tulum yet?) With every behind-the-scenes mental check-in, this subconscious process, called “unconscious monitoring,”⁴ makes micro adjustments to your choices, behavior, and habits, guiding you closer to the goal you visualized. In fact, this visualization-turned-reality phenomenon has been proven in multiple scientific studies, with subjects ranging from athletes^{5,6,7,8} to college students.⁹ Visualization is the brain’s rehearsal for real-life outcomes; the part of the brain that activates when trying to “manifest” a dream job is the same area that athletes use to visualize and execute perfect aim, shot after shot. It’s mental practice. Combine conscious visualization with unconscious monitoring and what do we get? Manifestation. You and I are already manifesting our reality, whether we’re paying attention or not. How I Accidentally Manifested Losing my Job In early 2017, shortly before the downsizing of the company I worked for, I was stressed, working too

much, and unsure of myself. Apparently, a subconscious goal had crossed into my conscious mind: Get out of there. Honestly? I have no recollection of this thought, but thanks to a journaling habit, hindsight is 20/20. There it was, scrawled in one of my many notebooks: “I wish it was safe to leave. What would I do instead?” My answer was a detailed daydream about a life as my own boss, free to travel, write, and do whatever I damn well pleased. A few terrifying things about that journal entry: My position was eliminated just three weeks later. Every goal I detailed in that journal entry has since happened. I am my own boss. I am a published author. I travel the world, speaking at events and leading workshops. I’m living a life I love, in a brand-new career. Truth is, I had no “energetic” control over the company restructure—and I definitely didn’t manifest being let go because of “low vibrations.” I did, however, make a series of choices that added up to a dramatically different life. But What About the Book Deal? When I left my career, I didn’t know writing was my end goal. I only knew that I had become obsessed with researching the hard science of happiness; I was no longer anxious, depressed, or lost, and I wanted to tell someone, everyone, about the psychology-based strategies that changed my life. Blog posts spilled into chapters. A manuscript I described as “self-help for people already rolling their eyes” began to take shape. By 2018, I knew I had a book on my hands. I also knew that if I pitched it to publishers and was repeatedly rejected, I’d never put it into the world. So, I set an intention: I will self-publish this book, to keep me from hiding for fear of rejection from publishers. Find Your F*ckyeah became my top priority: I woke up early to write and research; cut back on spending and moved in with roommates to subsidize my new passion. I visualized the book’s design and pictured myself pitching my self-published book-baby to bookstores; saved my pennies to hire a professional copy-editor. And I was ready to make those changes because my intentions had been put on autopilot months earlier. It turned out that copy-editor used to work in publishing, and “...I mentioned your book to my friend who is a Marketing Director at Chronicle Books, and she is asking for an introduction. I know you said you want to self-publish, but would you be open to an email intro?” Eight weeks later I was offered a book deal. The Truth about Manifestation My publishing connection was entirely serendipitous. My “vibrations” did not will a book deal into existence. But my conscious goal (self-publish this book, no matter what!) was supported by unconscious monitoring (have we published this book yet? How about now?), so when the opportunity arose to sign a book deal, I was ready. The book was finished. I had changed so the book could exist. “Manifestation” is what happens when your conscious and subconscious mind work together to change who you currently are to better align with who you’d rather be. It’s you, not the universe. It’s your intent, not your vibrations. My still-a-skeptic advice? Visualize the hell out of what you want, and chase down your curiosity. Make room for synchronistic opportunities by working hard on what matters to you—and then let your subconscious do some of the work. References Phineas Quimby: <http://www.thelawofattraction.com/history-new-thought-authors/> Rhonda Byrne: <https://www.theseecret.tv/> Holmes EA, Mathews A. Mental imagery in emotion and emotional disorders. *Clin Psychol Rev.* 2010 Apr;30(3):349–62. doi: 10.1016/j.cpr.2010.01.001. Wegner DM. Setting free the bears: escape from thought suppression. *Am Psychol* 2011;66:671–80. 10.1037/a0024985 Alan Richardson (1967) Mental Practice: A Review and Discussion Part I,

Research Quarterly. American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation, 38:1, 95-107, DOI: 10.1080/10671188.1967.10614808 Frank, C., & Schack, T. (2017). The Representation of Motor (Inter)action, States of Action, and Learning: Three Perspectives on Motor Learning by Way of Imagery and Execution. *Frontiers in psychology*, 8, 678. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00678 Ranganathan V. K., Siemionow V., Liu J. Z., Sahgal V., Yue G. H. (2004). From mental power to muscle power – gaining strength by using the mind. *Neuropsychologia* 42 944–956. 10.1016/j.neuropsychologia.2003.11.018 Yue G., Cole K. J. (1992). Strength increases from the motor program: comparison of training with maximal voluntary and imagined muscle contractions. *J. Neurophysiol.* 67 1114–1123. 10.1152/jn.1992.67.5.1114 Taylor SE, Pham LB, Rivkin ID, & Armor DA (1998). Harnessing the imagination: Mental simulation, self-regulation, and coping. *American Psychologist*, 53(4), 429. <https://icds.uoregon.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Harnessing-the-Imagination-Mental-Simulation-Self-regulation-and-Coping.pdf> Alexis Rockley {she/her} is a writer, speaker, and human pep talk. She is the author of *Find Your F*ckyeah: Stop Censoring Who You Are and Discover What You Really Want* (Chronicle Books), the founder of *How to Like Being Alive*, an e-newsletter helping millennials prioritize mental health, happiness & meaningful careers, and host of the voicemail-style podcast, *Call Me When You Get This*. A former retail executive, Rockley now leads workshops for creatives and entrepreneurs all over the country. She earned her Specialization Certificate in Positive Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania, in a program led by the founder of the field, Dr. Martin E.P. Seligman. *Find Your F*ckyeah* Grounded in cutting-edge science but translated for people who speak emoji, *Find Your Fuckyeah* disrupts the warm and fuzzy personal growth fads made fashionable by mock gurus and self-proclaimed #selfcare experts. This bold guide combines humor, pop culture, and psychology to show us why the one-size-fits-all success formulas and trendy morning routines keep us caught in a cycle of boredom and stress, never fully sustaining our happiness. With hard science, guided experiments, and modern wisdom-from Beyonce to Carl Jung-Alexis Rockley takes us step-by-step through the biological, cultural, and social factors that create our self-limiting beliefs. Debunking self-sabotaging ideals like *You Are a Living Brand* and *You Have One Calling*, Rockley encourages us to discover our real, uncensored selves and find a sense of purpose, even when we don't have all the answers. For those of us tired of feeling the pressure to be better, do more, and work faster-to self-optimize and fall in line-*Find Your Fuckyeah* teaches us how to find joy where we are right now and to let our genuine self-expression guide us.