



Mind Over Mind: The Surprising Power of Expectations

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How our fast-forward minds make something out of nothing

From a healing placebo to a run on the bank, the self-fulfilling potential of expectations has been observed for years. But now, neuroscientists and psychologists are beginning to solve the mysteries of our expectant brain and applying their findings to fields ranging from medicine to sports to education.

Mind over Mind explores the frontiers of expectations research, revealing how our brains work in the future tense and how our assumptions—about the next few milliseconds or the next few years—bend reality. It shows how expectations can sometimes make us healthier, stronger, smarter, and more successful while other times leave us depressed and defeated.

Along the way, author Chris Berdik uncovers some fascinating phenomena, including:

- How cheering for a team can backfire.
- How optical illusions can alleviate pain.
- How stereotypes can hurt or help student test scores.

Expectations can heal our bodies and make us stronger, smarter, and more successful in many ways, or they can leave us in agony, crush our spirits, and undermine our free will. If we can unlock the power of expectations, we can maximize their potential and avoid their pitfalls.

Mind Over Mind: The Surprising Power of Expectations Details

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From Reader Review Mind Over Mind: The Surprising Power of Expectations for online ebook

Ensiform says

A collection of studies on how expectations and belief can control our performance, even our very biology. Investigating the fields of sports psychology (especially the reasons for top athletes' "choking" in the clutch), medicine (with its use of placebos and their lesser-known opposites, nocebos), wine tasting (breaking down not only the experts' claims for superior sensory discrimination but also their consistency), and others, Berdik shows the many and varied ways in which what we expect, even what we are explicitly told to expect, can influence our perception and ability. From actual fear reactions during virtual reality experiences to being rated as more leader-like simply after striking a certain pose, these studies confound and delighted me, as they do all those interested in how we can use the hard-wired functions of the brain to improve our everyday lives.

I don't like reviewing a book for what it is not (which is like saying "this cupcake is bad, because it is not a donut"), but I was expecting there to be a practical aspect to all these studies: now that we know, for example, that studies prove that most people are overconfident about their abilities, what do we do? How can we adapt these findings – such as that people who play taller, handsomer avatars in video games act more attractive in real life – to our work lives? Instead it was study after study, with no conclusion or general thesis. Fascinating, but not particularly cohesive or utile.

Will says

Provides compelling insight into how our minds effect us.

Berdik covers studies involving placebos; showing how are minds can help heal our bodies in certain instances.

He includes a favorite research experiment of mine done by Ellen Langer (a Harvard Professor who focuses on aging, the idea of "control", and mindfulness) where she gathered groups of men in their seventies and eighties in a house and had them pretend they were back in 1959. At first they were super elderly, barely able to carry luggage, and by the end of their stay they were vibrant, stood taller, etc. Quite Fascinating.

He also includes other examples of people being presented with an item, say.. wine, and had them do taste testing on an expensive wine and a cheaper wine. Most people liked the expensive one better, saying the cheaper one wasn't as good, etc. Turns out it was the same wine. This was incorporated recently in an episode of Brain Games (on NatGeo) except it included identical cakes - but the pricing components were similar. Their tastes were influenced by the brain's perception of quality to price.

I'd definitely recommend watching Brain Games if you'd like further exposure to concepts presented in this book.

The mind never ceases to amaze me!

Becky says

Maybe I should have read this earlier. As it was, just about every study cited in the book was one I had heard of from other sources. Interesting information the first time around. But not enough to sustain the book for me.

A note on the audio: the narrator mispronounced so many words that it was a real distraction.

Marc Resnick says

This is a must read for anyone interested in placebos, expectations, and how much of our performance depends on how people expect us to perform and on how we expect ourselves to perform.

The book doesn't introduce anything new, but Chris summarizes so many good quality studies that it is a great value anyway. And by the time you finish chapter 10, you will be amazed at just how much there is out there. If we could harness the powers described in this book, well, the possibilities are endless.

Osman Kent says

Learnt a lot of new things - will read it again

Gandolfication says

Well-written, thought-provoking look into the way our minds operate as much based on expectations as on almost anything else. Dopamine actually spikes not during the pleasurable experience itself, but actually in the preceding moment of anticipation. The history of how expectations of all kinds, including interrelated in our medicine, is fascinating and begs whether the 'placebo effect' should be renamed the 'meaning response.' Learn why the history and expectations of English soccer stars in particular have made them more likely to choke particularly in penalty kick shoot outs, and why cricket coaches have used thick lenses to help shorten slumps in a sport where players can't really see and react accurately anyway.

The book explores the poorly understood history and science of placebos and answers a number of tantalizing questions along the way, such as why placebos are often nearly as effective even when the patient or subject is fully aware of and consents to their use. Should they be nearly universally considered unethical to use as they are today? Will they continue to erode the efficacy of new drugs after appearing on the market? Is the mind's anticipatory response to things that modern science cannot identify as having any active physical or biological agency, imagined? Real? And what do these mean. All are dealt with squarely in this engaging read.

Heavily reliant on clinical and social science studies, Berdick weaves narrative stories throughout that combined to make for what is mostly a thoroughly engrossing and often mind-bending tome.

David Hooper says

I finished reading this excellent book more than two months ago, and I still find myself thinking about it just about every day. Chris Berdik does an excellent job of presenting a wide array of pertinent and thought-provoking information in a very accessible and entertaining manner. What he's taught me has helped to shape my perspectives on the ways in which our expectations truly create our realities. I'm hoping that I will eventually learn to harness this improved understanding and increased awareness, and thus live a happier and more effective life.

John Martindale says

Berdik did survey many studies by Dan Ariely and others' that I've already read elsewhere in more depth, but there was some new material here too. I liked how the book started with the story of Franz Mesmer. I couldn't help but notice the similarities of what Mesmer did, with exorcism and various Christian charismatic practices that lead to healing and peace of mind. What is interesting is that though Mesmer was completely off concerning the science behind what he was doing, he nevertheless, enabled other people's faith in what they thought to be science, to somehow heal them. Berdik mentioned how placebos can have genuine physiological effects, its not all merely in ones head. There are of course things placebos can help and other things they can't. But I really think its a worth while venture, to seek to understand how placebos work, in hopes we can figure out how we might be able to help our bodies heal themselves, without the need of dangerous drugs.

I remember Roy Burmeister writing about how the will-power is like a muscle that can be exhausted, which seemed to resonate with my experience, so it was interesting to hear Berdik mention Burmeister's research, but also another study where people who believed their willpower wouldn't be depleted, didn't experience its depletion like those who did think it was easily exhausted.

But yeah, this book covered a lot, taking a look at the power of expectations in the context of criminal law, athletics, dieting, medicine, wine tasting and much more. Good stuff

Gandolfication says

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Tyler says

Monkeys enjoy lettuce. A monkey watches as a scientist places lettuce under 1 of 2 cups through a window from a connected room. Then the monkey enters the cup room and immediately lifts the cup where the lettuce was placed, eats the lettuce and the monkey is happy. Next, monkeys like bananas way more than lettuce. A monkey watches the same experiment but instead this time it sees a banana placed under one of the cups. The monkey then goes to the room and looks under the cup and sees...lettuce. Now instead of a happy monkey, we have a pissed monkey. Even though lettuce makes a monkey happy, the expected greater reward was gone. That's one of the most simple and straightforward examples of the expectation affect you see in the book.

This book definitely opened my eyes to the power of a placebo too. The affect can be so powerful that researchers cannot separate it's affect from the real drug. There are even ways you can even consciously be aware you are using a placebo but your body still experiences the benefits due to previous classical conditioning methods. Very interesting stuff here. I like these books written by journalists because most of the time they have a good grasp of the subject and can write much more clearly than scientists.

Kristi says

A slow starter, but very glad I held out. This book does exactly what its title implies it will: it surprises you how much power your own expectations can hold.

There's something for everyone in this book: for athletes (you can trick your body into going faster/longer); for wine-drinkers (how much of our enjoyment of wine is due to expectations from price and awards alone?); for parents (who might unwittingly impact their children's expectations in a way that causes them to underperform on a test); for investors (consider how important expectations are to our economy); for anyone looking to stave off age (you really can make yourself "younger"), and for anyone who has ever been ill / hates how high insurance costs are (the evidence of the power of placebos -- and, by association, considering what it could mean for lowering health care costs -- is fascinating).

The science behind these incredible findings is presented in an easy-to-read, anecdotal, and sometimes laugh-out-loud-funny manner, which was great for a scientifically ignorant fiction reader like me.

Carl Koubek says

Why I read it: The concept over "mind over matter" is neither new nor sophisticated. I'm almost positive that even 1950s high school PE teachers knew this cliché. Berdik, though, presents this philosophy in an evidence-heavy read that convincingly argues the benefit of controlling one's thoughts. Although the book is not intended as a sermon, a reader gets the sense that the content of the book needs to be acted on.

This is not the first time the "Power of Mind" has come across my radar. In the classic Think and Grow Rich, Napoleon Hill argues that mental discipline unites all successful American businessmen. Roberta Gilbert's

Extraordinary Relationships was intended to redevelop familial connections by willing it on those closest to you. Currently I am reading An Autobiography of a Yogi, which depicts "Power of Mind" but with a spiritual tilt.

The difference between Mind over Mind and the other books is that Berdik tackles the issue from a more analytic and medicinal point of view. After continually being force fed this "Power of Mind" philosophy, I find myself becoming less skeptical.

Negatives: It sometimes reads as a crammed term paper as opposed to a flowing thesis. The typical order goes Evidence, Thesis, Rinse, Repeat.

Using this structure, the book leans heavily on the evidence and for good reason. The studies on placebo effects are fascinating as is the mind's ability to warp reality into the expectations of the beholder. Nevertheless, the format could have been a bit more nuanced.

Who should read this: Anyone with a interest personal philosophy or self-help reading.

Deb says

****More than expected****

The mind is a powerful thing. And, in ways that you might not even expect.

Chris Berdik's *Mind Over Mind* reveals the power that our (often hidden) expectations have over our actual experiences. This power goes way beyond the placebo effect. What we imagine will be true can actually effect the brain's neurochemical responses:

"The brain has many ways to make good on our expectations, both good and bad. In response to a clinician's promise, the brain releases painkillers as strong as morphine. Anxiety short-circuits anticipation and the athlete's worst fears come true...simply looking powerful drops cortisol and raises testosterone as much as actually being in charge, and sometimes more. Time and again, the effects of expectations and assumptions mimic at least some of the changes triggered by more conventional means." (pp. 201,180)

(Whoa.)

So, what can you expect by reading this book? The author shares his expectations:

"The research in this book doesn't promise mind control or unlimited success or freedom from struggle and loss. Its greatest value may be to encourage us to stand back and challenge our assumptions from time to time. We might be bold enough to compare that pricey wine we've grown so attached to with a cheaper bottle in a blind taste test. We might question whether we truly are shy, or not great with numbers, or a poor public speaker. Maybe we'll try to walk a little taller or reinterpret our jitters before a test for extra motivation...Hopefully, through all this questioning, we will gradually build up more trust in ourselves...Even if we don't have all the answers, we can be a little less insistent on separating what we imagine and what's real." (p. 230)

This book, no doubt, can change the way you think about your thinking. Expect to be engaged, entertained, and even surprised when reading this book. And, as (I expect) you'll see, expectations are often more than you expect!

Julian Haigh says

The power of expectations is close to the power of belief. Obviously humans are constrained by our physical limitations but we continue to surpass what we thought was possible: continually defeating speed records, most dramatically in somewhat abruptly chosen 'four-minute' mile records. Placeboes have a real impact on patient's health *even if they know it is a placebo*, regardless of having no medicinal value and simply operating by the power of expectation. Our mind develops phantom limbs that pose important questions of humanities sense of self going into a world of virtual reality and devolving of borders of the 'self'. The way we conceptualize ourselves, the way we bind ourselves to our perceived reality by defining the limitations of our processing capacity breaking reality into more easily consumable bits, devalues the real possibilities for the human race.

Become more.

Marilyn Willison says

There's no doubt that how we think is a crucial element of how well we live and how effectively we work. And while there has been a surplus of brain-centric literature during the past decade, few have been as informative and entertaining as *Mind Over Mind* by Chris Berdik (Current, \$16.00, 274pp). Originally published as a hardbound book in 2012, with a dark gray cover and a graphic of a floating red balloon tied to a concrete brick, the paperback edition instead has (more appropriately) a bright yellow cover with a smiley face, as well as a frown.

One particularly interesting chapter is *The Big Want*, which addresses the quirky aspects of our brain's reward system. Who knew that the expectations of wanting are actually measurably more powerful than the here and now of actually having what you had hoped to get? In other words, the actual expectation (of ice cream, a trip to Paris, an important promotion, etc.) is what really fires up our brains and compels us to act. Berdik calls this the luxurious anticipation.

One of the tricky aspects of expectation is that liking may fade, but wanting never quits. This doesn't mean that our brains are greedy, but they are future-obsessed. Emotionally, very few mental moments are spent in the here and now. Why? Survival of the fittest depends on the ability to spot what's new and different and the motivation to prepare for it. From an evolutionary standpoint, enjoying the moment doesn't get us very far.
