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April 1, 2021

Personal Development, Tibetan Buddhism, and Neuroscience: The Law of Attraction in Action

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Abstract

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Personal development and the self-help industry have evolved over the past century for different purposes and intended audiences. The core principles for success, nonetheless, remain largely the same. In today's popular culture, personal development and the principles attached to it originate heavily from Napoleon Hill's 1937 *Think and Grow Rich*. Most current readers of Hill's seminal book believe it discusses the Law of Attraction, which states that when we visualize the future through a positive mindset, we "attract" positive experiences to our lives, and when we visualize the future through a negative mindset, we "attract" negative experiences to our lives. The Law of Attraction has had many critics over the years who believe the idea stems from a flawed and illogical origin. They point out the lack of scholarly evidence and its appeal to those who desperately want to use it to become wealthy. My interdisciplinary honors thesis navigates this intersection of popular culture and scholarly concerns by examining the convergence of revealed truths in Tibetan Buddhism and observable truths in neuroscience in the context of how Hill's *Think and Grow Rich* defines the Law of Attraction. My hypothesis states that Tibetan Buddhism, with revealed truths, and neuroscience, with observable truths, do provide evidence for aspects of the Law of Attraction and the principles in *Think and Grow Rich* through Buddhism philosophy that originated in the late 6th century BCE and groundbreaking neuroscience research from the 21st century. Thus, I intend to provide scholarly evidence that will support the Law of Attraction from two distinct disciplines in a novel and academically sound interdisciplinary manner, establishing a claim that this law can be studied in an academic context.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	01
Chapter I: An Introduction to <i>Think and Grow Rich</i> by Napoleon Hill.....	11
Chapter II: The Ripples of <i>Think and Grow Rich</i> Throughout the Years.....	20
Chapter III: Tibetan Buddhism and the Law of Attraction.....	24
Figure 1: A visual depiction of karma.....	30
Figure 2: A visual depiction of the Law of Attraction.....	32
Figure 3: A chart comparing karma and the Law of Attraction.....	34
Figure 4: A visual depiction of dependent origination.....	35
Figure 5: A visual depiction of dependent origination.....	35
Figure 6: A visual depiction of the Law of Vibration.....	37
Figure 7: A chart comparing dependent origination and the Law of Vibration.....	40
Figure 8: A chart comparing Vipassana Meditation and Visualization Meditation.....	42
Chapter IV: Neuroscience and the Law of Attraction.....	45
Conclusion.....	61
Bibliography.....	63

Introduction

“Never wish life were easier; wish that you were better.” – Jim Rohn. Jim Rohn’s quote capitalizes on the concept of personal development: improve on yourself, and you can face life’s greatest challenges with a better perspective. Definitions.net defines personal development as “activities that improve awareness and identity, develop talents and potential, build human capital and facilitate employability, enhance quality of life and contribute to the realization of dreams and aspirations.”¹ Such a broad definition implies that personal development varies from person to person. Dreams and aspirations vary from individual to individual, and technically any activity can improve one’s awareness and help develop one’s talent. If that is the case, what exactly is personal development? Why is there a billion-dollar industry for self-help?² Are students engaged in personal development every day as they learn in their classes for a particular job market? To answer these questions, in this thesis, I examine the self-help industry and its possible relations to both the revealed truths in Tibetan Buddhism and the observable truths in neuroscience. I begin with my own personal experiences with self-help and personal development and then provide an overview of the specific chapters examining these issues in more depth.

In my own experience, personal development encompasses more than activities done for the attainment of a dream or aspiration; it involves understanding your strengths and weaknesses and making a committed decision to change your life for the better. During my first semester at Emory University, I struggled to adjust to college life from high school. I was a lonely kid in high school who was popular and had good friends but lacked depth in friendships. I was

¹ “What Does Personal Development Mean?,” accessed April 26, 2020, <https://www.definitions.net/definition/personal+development>.

² Marshall Sinclair, “Why the Self-Help Industry Is Dominating the U.S.,” Medium, August 6, 2019, <https://medium.com/s/story/no-please-help-yourself-981058f3b7cf>.

questioning the purpose of school, and I desired deep, intellectual conversations and relationships. When I arrived at Emory University, I made the initial mistake of changing my identity to fit into the crowd. Without realizing, I became lonelier and started questioning who I was. My insecurity clouded my thoughts and began to control my life; I needed to rest and reflect. During that first winter break, I did just that. I began reflecting and looking for answers regarding my loneliness and lack of sense of belonging. Through a particular Google search, I found myself on Medium.com, a publication website, reading my first personal development article.

These articles dived into personal development topics that I did not understand at the time. I created a routine of reading at least one article every day and taking notes on it. Slowly, these articles led me to personal development books and to the wider world of the self-help industry. It was around this time I also made a committed decision to change my perspective towards life and its challenges; I decided to approach everything with a positive mental attitude. And I began to see small positive results. I experienced self-doubt, however, when I tried to understand if I were improving from my readings and self-improvement habits or if I were *tricking* myself into thinking I had more control of my life. Nonetheless, I persevered and am now relatively happier as a human being than I was freshman year. Criticisms of the self-help industry and personal development in general fuel the self-doubt I experienced, and it continues today, as I am still on this personal development journey. Some of the self-doubt stems from criticisms of the self-help industry as a whole or criticisms of a specific individual.

The supporters of the self-help industry claim that the industry is worth a billion dollars and there is no better time to invest in it than now. This can be seen on social media, especially on Instagram, where influencers use the platform to highlight their personal growth podcasts,

seminars, conferences, etc. Furthermore, supporters of the personal development movement use testimonies (very similar to the one I provided above) about how personal development has changed their lives personally, and how it can change your life too. These testimonies often include a price tag for seminars or mastermind calls and explain that these resources have changed their lives forever. Moreover, supporters of the personal development movement form a community of like-minded individuals, which helps to ignore the critics of the movement.

On the other hand, critics of personal development view the self-help industry from a more cautious eye. For example, Mark Manson, a self-development blogger himself, has written a couple of blogs about the negative aspects of the self-help industry, including its pyramid scheme, lack of scientific evidence, and its expensive seminars and coaching sessions.³ Some critics believe that the whole industry is a scam, and personal development coaches are “brainwashing” their clients into buying products that they really do not need. There are also critics who point out that there exists little to no scientific evidence for the different personal development strategies that one can use to better one’s life. The stark dichotomy between the supporters and critics of the self-help industry parallels with most of the industry itself. There are those who believe in it and study it every day of their lives, and there are those who are actively against the ideas and go as far as judge individuals who do support it.

Current thinkers in the self-help movement today include individuals like Tony Robbins, Dean Graziosi, Grant Cardone, Bob Proctor, Jay Shetty, Rhonda Byrne, Dr. Joe Dispenza, and others.⁴ These individuals are social media influencers with Instagram accounts with millions of followers, podcasts, conferences, seminars, and documentaries. These leaders in the industry

³ Mark Manson, “5 Problems with the Self-Help Industry,” Mark Manson, December 12, 2012, <https://markmanson.net/self-help>.

⁴ “Our Personal Development Coach List,” *Law Of Attraction Coaching* (blog), accessed March 2, 2020, <https://www.lawofattractioncoaching.net/personal-development-coach/>.

speak and present themselves in a way that moves thousands of individuals to act and begin investing in themselves. Two leaders who serve as life coaches and consultants to the top celebrities include Tony Robbins and Bob Proctor.

Tony Robbins is the author of multiple *New York Times* best-selling books, a motivational speaker in his live seminars, and a life coach to some of the best-known celebrities in the world.⁵ I had the opportunity to attend one of his live seminars in July 2019 in Atlanta, Georgia, and to witness firsthand his authenticity, passion, and confidence for helping others with personal development. Mr. Robbins spoke for about 3-4 hours about our goals, our insecurities, and our resilience. His speeches made the crowd cry a couple of times and dance out of pure joy. The conference was like nothing I had experienced before, and I am grateful I had the opportunity to attend. Nonetheless, those in my family and my close friends judged me for attending such a conference and asked me what I had gained from it. I tried explaining, but it was difficult, and I understood how in some ways I could have been “brainwashed” by the positivity of the conference. The community I made at the conference, however, would disagree and suggest that the mindset of my family and friends was wrong. I found myself at the dichotomy between supporters and critics of the self-help industry here in my personal life, and I understood both perspectives. I wanted to understand which perspective was “right” per se, and if I did indeed waste money on the conference or if it were a valuable investment instead.

Additionally, I have been following Bob Proctor on Instagram for several years and have read his 1984 book *You Were Born Rich*. Bob Proctor is a personal development coach who specializes in metaphysical interpretations of the Law of Attraction.⁶ Rhonda Byrne’s 2006 hit

⁵ “Tony Robbins - The Nation’s #1 Life and Business Strategist | About Tony,” *Tonyrobbins.Com* (blog), accessed April 26, 2020, <https://www.tonyrobbins.com/biography/>.

⁶ “Our Story,” *Proctor Gallagher Institute* (blog), accessed April 26, 2020, <https://www.proctorgallagherinstitute.com/our-story>.

film *The Secret* features Bob Proctor among others who are well versed in the Law of Attraction.⁷ The Law of Attraction states that positive thoughts or negative thoughts bring about positive or negative experiences in one's life.⁸ One can characterize this law into the formula thoughts → feelings → actions → results. When we visualize the future through a positive mindset, we “attract” positive experiences to our lives, and when we visualize the future through a negative mindset, we “attract” negative experiences to our lives. I have also attended free online seminars hosted by Bob Proctor and have seen many of his YouTube videos. He is an expert on the Law of Attraction and has created a curriculum that teaches its phenomenon in an accessible manner. For example, his lectures suggest that the Law of Attraction is only a secondary universal law, and the Law of Vibration is the primary law.⁹ The Law of Vibration states that everything moves at different frequencies and one attracts to one life that to which he/she is in harmonious frequency with. I explore the significance of the Law of Vibration later in this thesis. Like Tony Robbins, however, while doing research, I faced great disbelief and criticisms toward the Law of Attraction and its relationship with personal development. Along with the expensive cost of Proctor's programs and the lack of scientific evidence for the Law of Attraction, critics also found flaws in the book Bob Proctor bases his personal development company on - the 1937 *Think and Grow Rich* by Napoleon Hill. It is this book that I will be using to investigate the evidence behind the Law of Attraction in this thesis.

⁷ “Bob Proctor, Law of Attraction Teacher From ‘The Secret’ Movie,” The Law of Attraction, accessed April 29, 2020, <https://www.thelawofattraction.com/people/bob-proctor/>.

⁸ “The Law of Attraction,” Psychology Today, accessed March 2, 2020, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/boundless/201706/the-law-attraction>.

⁹ Asad Meah, “The Law Of Vibration From Bob Proctor | AwakenTheGreatnessWithin,” September 23, 2017, <https://www.awakenthegreatnesswithin.com/the-law-of-vibration-from-bob-proctor/>.

In Napoleon Hill's 1937 book *Think and Grow Rich*, he discovers what he calls "the secret."¹⁰ In the book itself, Hill does not assign "the secret" a specific name or phrase, but most current readers of Hill's seminal work believe "the secret" is now known as the Law of Attraction.¹¹ Contemporary successful individuals, such as Grant Cardone, Tony Robbins, Bob Proctor, and Zig Ziglar, have cited Hill's *Think and Grow Rich* or have cited the Law of Attraction for their own successes, making the law an interesting concept worth studying in an academic context.¹²

Madame Helena Blavatsky first used the term "Law of Attraction" in her novel *The Secret Doctrine* in 1888.¹³ Ever since then, other individuals have begun using the term or describing its phenomenon, including Hill's *Think and Grow Rich*. The Law of Attraction, which has also become New Thought philosophy, states that positive thoughts or negative thoughts bring about positive or negative experiences in one's life.¹⁴ When we visualize the future through a positive mindset, we "attract" positive experiences to our lives, and when we visualize the future through a negative mindset, we "attract" negative experiences to our lives. The Law of Attraction has had many critics over the years who believe the idea stems from a flawed and illogical origin.¹⁵ These critics do not believe in the Law of Attraction or the thirteen success principles Hill discovered. They point out the lack of scholarly evidence behind the Law of Attraction and its appeal to those who desperately want to use it to become wealthy. These critics

¹⁰ Hill and Pell, *Think and Grow Rich: The Landmark Bestseller - Now Revised and Updated for the 21st Century*.

¹¹ "Using the Law of Attraction for Joy, Relationships, Money & More [Guide]," *Jackcanfield* (blog), May 29, 2017, <https://www.jackcanfield.com/blog/using-the-law-of-attraction/>.

¹² "Our Personal Development Coach List."

¹³ H P Blavatsky, "The Secret Doctrine," 1888, 1478.

¹⁴ "The Law of Attraction."

¹⁵ Mark Manson, "The Staggering Bullshit of 'The Secret,'" Mark Manson, December 16, 2019, <https://markmanson.net/the-secret>.

have also critiqued works that followed Hill's *Think and Grow Rich*, including Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking*, Tony Robbins's *Unleash the Giant Within*, and Rhonda Byrne's *The Secret*. The comments specifically against the core ideas in Hill's *Think and Grow Rich* and the Law of Attraction come from a skeptical point of view, and my interdisciplinary honors thesis will navigate this intersection of popular culture and scholarly concerns.

More specifically, my thesis examines the convergence of Tibetan Buddhism and neuroscience in the context of Hill's *Think and Grow Rich* and the Law of Attraction. I hope to determine if the convergence of Tibetan Buddhism and neuroscience can provide persuasive supporting evidence for the Law of Attraction as described in Hill's *Think and Grow Rich*, and if so, how. My hypothesis states that Tibetan Buddhism and neuroscience do provide evidence for the Law of Attraction and the principles in *Think and Grow Rich* through spiritual beliefs and philosophy that originate in the late 6th century BCE and groundbreaking neuroscience research regarding neuroplasticity and consciousness in the 21st century. With evidence in the form of revealed truths, in existence long before the term "Law of Attraction" was coined and with recent scientific research published in peer-reviewed articles in the form of observable truths, I intend to provide scholarly evidence that will support Hill's *Think and Grow Rich* and the Law of Attraction from two different disciplines in a novel and academically sound interdisciplinary manner. Through this support, I intend to shift away from the assumption that the Law of Attraction is a pseudoscientific topic and does not need to be studied in academia.

Chapter I of my thesis dives deeper into Napoleon Hill's personal life, the circumstances surrounding his book *Think and Grow Rich*, and why I chose to look at the Law of Attraction through this book particularly. I summarize all thirteen chapters in short, succinct paragraphs to provide a framework to how Napoleon Hill intends one to use the Law of Attraction in one's life.

For my readers, this summary is much needed as I connect Tibetan Buddhism and neuroscience with this framework in later chapters in more detail. Moreover, because Hill's *Think and Grow Rich* has seldom been studied in an academic context before, this summary may help future researchers in the field who are conducting research regarding the Law of Attraction. I intend this summary of *Think and Grow Rich* in this chapter to be one of the first summaries of the controversial book in an academic context, which will provide a strong foundation for connections and arguments to be made from it hereafter in other scholarly work.

Chapter II of my thesis explains the history of the self-help industry in more detail, from its Christian origins to its use in the business world today. After summarizing *Think and Grow Rich*, it is necessary to also provide context of where the self-help industry originated from, and how it has evolved. This context is necessary to understand how foundational the ideas in *Think and Grow Rich* are to this industry. The first two chapters of the thesis provide detailed background information regarding the Law of Attraction and the self-help industry in a relatively unbiased manner because the topic is considered controversial and pseudoscientific by many. To make the interdisciplinary claims that I do in chapters III and IV, a strong foundation of understanding the Law of Attraction and personal development becomes necessary to explain topics that have been considered "non-academic" and "non-scientific" by many.

Chapter III of the thesis describes Tibetan Buddhism in more detail in conjunction with the provided context from the previous two chapters. Buddhism originated in the 6th century with the Buddha and has now over 470 million followers.¹⁶ Buddhists believe in the notion of enlightenment and the freedom of suffering through guided meditations and scholarly debates of how we view the world. His Holiness the Dalai Lama leads Tibetan Buddhism and has an open

¹⁶ History.com Editors, "Buddhism," HISTORY, accessed March 2, 2020, <https://www.history.com/topics/religion/buddhism>.

mind toward how Tibetan Buddhism can be taught and understood from different perspectives, including the scientific perspective.¹⁷ In his book *The Universe in A Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality*, the Dalai Lama provides a framework for scientific theories and laws that explain Tibetan Buddhist philosophy and thought, and how the two can complement each other. Tibetan Buddhism heavily depends on introspective reflection and belief in the relationship between spirituality and the universe. A broad connection between Tibetan Buddhism and the Law of Attraction is their respective use of thoughts and belief in the spiritual universe and how that affects the material world. I explore this connection more deeply through interviews with Tibetan Buddhist monks at Emory University and through an analysis of Tibetan Buddhist concepts.

Chapter IV of the thesis then turns to an examination of recent research in neuroscience in conversation with the *Think and Grow Rich* text. Regarding neuroscience, the discovery of mirror neurons, neuroplasticity, and even the placebo effect has provided some basic understanding of the neurological mechanisms of the Law of Attraction that I will explore more deeply. Mirror neurons are a type of neuron that activate when an individual or animal observes, and therefore thinks, about a particular action.¹⁸ For example, when a monkey observes a second monkey crack open a peanut, the first monkey's mirror neurons activate, and its "peanut-cracking" neurons fire, even though the first monkey itself is not cracking the peanut. Mirror neurons have only been discovered recently in the 1980s, and scientists do not yet understand their function or purpose as an evolutionary advantage. Mirror neurons provide one way of understanding the neurological mechanisms that could occur in our brain when we think positive

¹⁷ Dalai Lama, *The Universe in A Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality*.

¹⁸ Sourya Acharya and Samarth Shukla, "Mirror Neurons: Enigma of the Metaphysical Modular Brain," *Journal of Natural Science, Biology, and Medicine* 3, no. 2 (2012): 118–24, <https://doi.org/10.4103/0976-9668.101878>.

thoughts in visualization activities and the psychological effects of such activities. We do know, however, that neuroplasticity, the everchanging nature of the brain, provides a basic framework by which one can explore the Law of Attraction and the neurobiological effects of thinking positive and negative thoughts on the body.¹⁹ Moreover, the placebo effect establishes an understanding that one's thoughts may in fact cause tangible physiological change.²⁰ Scientists have not yet explicitly studied the Law of Attraction in detail, but there exists evidence, such as mirror neurons, neuroplasticity, and the placebo effect, which may support aspects of the Law of Attraction and how the law can be applied to one's daily life as explained in *Think and Grow Rich*.

In the concluding chapter, I integrate the previous four chapters and examine how we can best conceptualize the Law of Attraction. While the Law of Attraction has been critiqued and looked down upon by some of the public and scholars for almost a century, I hope to provide the necessary interdisciplinary evidence from academic and philosophical sources that will persuade the public and scholars to approach their thinking about the Law of Attraction with an open mind. As Napoleon Hill has shown in *Think and Grow Rich*, many successful individuals apply this philosophy to their own lives and owe their successes to it. With persuasive evidence to back up the Law of Attraction, more and more individuals, including the readers of this thesis, may be able to apply the law to their own lives and thrive according to their own definitions of success in ways they previously did not think possible.

¹⁹ Pedro Mateos-Aparicio and Antonio Rodríguez-Moreno, "The Impact of Studying Brain Plasticity," *Frontiers in Cellular Neuroscience* 13 (February 27, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fncel.2019.00066>.

²⁰ Fabrizio Benedetti, Elisa Carlino, and Antonella Pollo, "How Placebos Change the Patient's Brain," *Neuropsychopharmacology* 36, no. 1 (January 2011): 339–54, <https://doi.org/10.1038/npp.2010.81>.

Chapter I: An Introduction to *Think and Grow Rich* by Napoleon Hill

Andrew Carnegie, the steel magnate, industrialist, and philanthropist of the 19th century, approached Napoleon Hill, a reporter, and asked Hill to interview successful individuals about their mindset and their daily habits. These individuals included Thomas A. Edison, Henry Ford, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Alexander Graham Bell, John D. Rockefeller, William H. Taft, and many others. Hill connected with these individuals through Carnegie, conducted interviews, and wrote his book for nearly three decades. Through these interviews, as well as narratives from his own life, Hill wrote about what is now known as the Law of Attraction. He discovered that the principles of this law were generally repeated across the interviews with these successful individuals, and the book provides insight into how one can use this law in his or her own life.

The credibility of the circumstances under which Hill wrote *Think and Grow Rich*, however, remains controversial, and critics love to emphasize this. Hill only claims publicly he met with Andrew Carnegie after Carnegie had passed away, which begs the question why Hill did not claim he met with Carnegie while Carnegie was alive.²¹ Furthermore, David Nasaw, Andrew Carnegie's biographer, stated that there exists no evidence for the meeting that had allegedly taken place between Carnegie and Hill, and he claims Hill's book *Think and Grow Rich* is inauthentic. With little to no evidence for the claims of how *Think and Grow Rich* was written, critics have questioned the authenticity of the content of the book and the credibility of Napoleon Hill.

²¹ "The Untold Story of Napoleon Hill, the Greatest Self-Help Scammer of All Time," Paleofuture, accessed April 26, 2020, <https://paleofuture.gizmodo.com/the-untold-story-of-napoleon-hill-the-greatest-self-he-1789385645>.

When I first stumbled upon *Think and Grow Rich*, I researched Napoleon Hill and read the articles that called his work a scam and advised me to not waste my money on his book.²² I also read articles praising his work; the book did sell over 15 million copies worldwide.²³ I found myself in the tangles of the evidence behind the self-help industry yet again. On one hand, most personal development articles I have read quoted Napoleon Hill's *Think and Grow Rich* and praised the book. On the other hand, there exist individuals who call him a fake and question the basis of how the book itself was written. After a few weeks in this tangle, I finally decided to purchase and read the book for myself and make my own judgement call if the lack of evidence for how the book was written has any correlation to the content of the book. Hill's book is divided up into thirteen success principles, which I briefly explain below.

Thirteen Chapters... Thirteen Principles

The thirteen chapters and thirteen steps to riches are as follows: Desire, Faith, Autosuggestion, Specialized Knowledge, Imagination, Organized Planning, Decision, Persistence, The Power of the Master Mind, The Mystery of Sex Transmutation, The Subconscious Mind, The Brain, and The Sixth Sense. Hill begins the book with a chapter titled "The Power of Thought," which is not a step to riches but an introduction to the book itself and outlines the various principles in which Hill will dive deep into.

1. Desire: The Starting Point of All Achievement

This chapter revolves around the principle of desire and knowing what you want from life. Hill provides a couple of stories to highlight this principle, using examples from Thomas

²² Michael Schein, "The Real Reason Napoleon Hill Grew Rich (Hint: It's Not What You Think)," Inc.com, February 14, 2017, <https://www.inc.com/michael-schein/brthe-real-reason-napoleon-hill-grew-rich-hint-its-not-what-you-think.html>.

²³ Napoleon Hill, "Napoleon Hill's 17 Principles of Personal Achievement," SUCCESS, October 26, 2016, <https://www.success.com/napoleon-hills-17-principles-of-personal-achievement/>.

Edison, Abraham Lincoln, Henry Ford, and others. The principle states that one must have a burning desire to achieve one's goals, even in the face of failure. Hill encourages the reader to write down what one desires by a set date, what one is willing to give for that desire to become a reality, and what definite plan of action one must achieve for that desire to become a reality. He then asks the reader to read the written statement out loud twice daily, once before going to sleep and once after waking up. While reading, he urges the reader to imagine themselves already in possession of what they desire. As desire is the starting point of all achievement, he transitions into the second principle of riches - faith, which must be used with desire to attain riches.

2. Faith: Visualizing and Believing in the Attainment of Desire

In this chapter, Hill explores the phenomenon of faith, which is related to love, another major positive emotion. This chapter is very spiritual in nature as Hill explains that faith for a particular desire helps raise the thought vibrations for the achievement of the said desire because of the *emotions* in one's faith. A stark contrast between desire and faith is that faith requires feelings and emotions, while desire does not. Once an individual is emotionally invested in a desire, that desire becomes backed up by faith. Hill then explains that the emotion of love can also play an important role in faith, and with the two, one can convert a mere thought in the subconscious mind into its physical equivalent. To do this, Hill suggests one use the law of autosuggestion, which transitions into the next principle.

3. Autosuggestion: The Medium for Influencing the Subconscious Mind

Hill defines autosuggestion as how an individual can influence the subconscious mind through the five senses and through negative or positive thoughts. In this chapter, Hill explains that if one repeats positive affirmations that outline one's desire with faith and emotion, autosuggestion will start working and influencing the subconscious mind to believe these

repeated affirmations. This chapter relies on the claim that what we think dictates our physical reality. Hill encourages the reader to trick the subconscious mind into believing that one has already achieved one's desires through faith, visualizations, and affirmations. Through this, one may control one's earthly destiny by cooperating with the universe, or the Infinite Intelligence, as Hill calls it through autosuggestion. Hill also suggests to the reader that they read this chapter aloud every night to become convinced that the principle of autosuggestion works, as this is not a long chapter compared to the others.

4. Specialized Knowledge: Personal Experiences or Observations

In this chapter, Hill differentiates between general knowledge and specialized knowledge. General knowledge is knowledge that has little value in the marketplace, whereas specialized knowledge is knowledge that does bring value to the marketplace. Hill explains the importance of a definite plan of action and how important it is to use the right knowledge in that plan of action. He introduces the concept of a "Master Mind" group, where likeminded individuals can work together to solve a business problem taking insight from all their individual specialized knowledge. Napoleon Hill also suggests that learning does not end in school but continues throughout one's life, and he encourages the reader to gain specialized knowledge in relation to one's life's major purpose. The author then mentions the use of imagination, the topic of the next chapter, in conjunction with specialized knowledge to formulate creative opportunities where one can live in vibration with his or her definitive purpose in life.

5. Imagination: The Workshop of the Mind

Hill begins this chapter by defining two forms of imagination: synthetic imagination and creative imagination. Synthetic imagination is imagination that rearranges previous concepts or ideas into new combinations and new ideas. Creative imagination can be described as an

“Eureka” moment where an inspiration or a hunch comes from the Infinite Intelligence, or the universe, into the subconscious mind. The second form of imagination can be developed with the help of thought impulses and after the use of autosuggestion for some time. Hill encourages the reader to focus on synthetic imagination, as creative imagination will develop naturally over time as one practices all thirteen principles.

6. Organized Planning: The Crystallization of Desire into Action

In this chapter, Hill explains in detail the necessary action steps one must take in the right mindset through the practice of the previous principles. He lists the importance of a Master Mind, eleven leadership qualities, ten major causes of failure in leadership, and the technicalities of submitting a resume to a future employer. He then explains how the American economy works and how one should advertise themselves in a capitalistic society. This chapter heavily discusses business etiquette and leadership development in terms of action in the current economy. The chapter is rather long and goes into extreme detail in these discussions.

7. Decision: The Mastery of Procrastination

Hill discusses the philosophy and importance of decision through the stories of Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson. If one were to create the habit of making committed and definite decisions quickly toward his or her goals and desires, one will not feed the habit of indecision, which leads to procrastination. Hill chooses to share stories from the American Revolution and the Civil War to highlight the importance of making committed decisions quickly and how one can develop this habit. He ends the chapter saying that without a committed decision to change one's life, the other principles will not work, and there will be few good results.

8. Persistence: The Sustained Effort Necessary to Induce Faith

In this chapter, Hill describes the basis of persistence as the power of will. He continues to describe why persistence is necessary for success, and how it relates to developing faith for one's desire. He also lists sixteen symptoms of a lack of persistence and four steps on how to develop persistence using one's mindset and the other principles. The four steps are directly related with the other principles, including desire, organized planning, and a Master Mind, which transitions into the next chapter.

9. The Power of the Master Mind: The Driving Force

As mentioned in previous chapters, the Master Mind is a useful strategy to keep oneself accountable and to use the specialized knowledge of others as well. The Master Mind is defined as the teamwork of two or more individuals in the attainment of a definite purpose through harmonious work and coordination. Napoleon Hill explains how one should form a Master Mind and the benefits of one in more detail than previously mentioned. He also provides a couple of stories to complement his argument, including one of Henry Ford and his Master Mind.

10. The Mystery of Sex Transmutation

This chapter explains the importance of finding a significant other who believes in your success and raises your awareness. Napoleon Hill explains that sex is one of ten mind stimuli that can help an individual feel more connected with the Infinite Intelligence. Hill suggests that one can convert the sexual desires of lust and physical touch into an energy far more productive through the control of one's emotions. He claims that sex energy has the potential to become creative energy that can be used in business and other opportunities for one's definite purpose if used properly and with complete control. He also explains the importance of love and romance with a significant other in the philosophy of success, and how these positive emotions can help with the attainment of riches.

11. The Subconscious Mind: The Connecting Link

The subconscious mind is the entity where thought impulses created through autosuggestion go to. Napoleon Hill provides the reader with seven positive and seven negative emotions. The seven positive emotions include: desire, faith, love, sex, enthusiasm, romance, and hope. The seven negative emotions include: fear, jealousy, hatred, revenge, greed, superstition, and anger. Hill explains that positive and negative emotions cannot occupy the mind at the same time and details how humankind has used the positive emotions throughout history to influence their subconscious mind, which influences their actions and results.

12. The Brain: A Broadcasting and Receiving Station for Thought

In this chapter, Hill compares the brain to a broadcasting radio station where one can increase the frequency of vibration with positive thought impulses that then attract other vibrations of the same frequency. Hill gives the reader a brief history of the discovery of the brain and scientific research in neuroscience. The scientific research Hill examines is Dr. Rhine's research titled "What is 'Telepathy'?" at Duke University, which discusses the metaphysical phenomenon of telepathy.

13. The Sixth Sense: The Door to the Temple of Wisdom

Hill explains that one must master the other principles in the book before mastering this one. The sixth sense is the creative imagination of the mind and where inspirations and ideas come from. Hill goes into detail explaining this phenomenon with a personal narrative from his own life concerning his dreams. In the dreams, Hill has a cabinet of successful individuals from Thomas Edison to Henry Ford to Abraham Lincoln. Hill interacts with these individuals and asks them questions in these cabinet meetings in his dreams. Hill receives inspirations that he then applies to his real life. This creative imagination is what he calls the sixth sense.

This summarizes the content of Napoleon Hill's *Think and Grow Rich*. After reading through the book for the first time, I forgot about the criticisms against Hill and his book, as I had begun to find value in the book itself. I slowly started to apply it towards my own life. The main points of the book depend on one's belief that thoughts influence feelings, which influence actions, which influence results.

This formula of thoughts → feelings → actions → results can be overlaid onto the chapters of *Think and Grow Rich*. For example, chapter one (Desire) and chapter two (Faith) both discuss the use of visualizations regarding the Law of Attraction. Furthermore, chapter three (Autosuggestion) discusses the use of affirmations in relation to the law. Both visualizations and affirmations provide the framework as to how “thoughts and feelings” in the formula translate to an application in the real world. I discuss visualizations in more detail in the Tibetan Buddhism chapter of the thesis and both visualizations and affirmations in the neuroscience chapter of the thesis. Chapters four to thirteen (Specialized Knowledge, Imagination, Organized Planning, Decision, Persistence, The Power of the Master Mind, The Mystery of Sex Transmutation, The Subconscious Mind, The Brain, and The Sixth Sense) for the most part portray the “action” part of the formula and how one can translate the “thoughts and feelings” into tangible “results” in the real world. Chapter eleven (The Subconscious Mind), however, does discuss the importance and power of positive emotions over negative emotions, which relates to the “feelings” part of the formula, and which will be discussed in more detail in the neuroscience chapter of the thesis. Moreover, chapter twelve, (The Brain), provides some context to the Law of Attraction that can be used to explore its relation to Tibetan Buddhism. Thus, this initial summary of *Think and Grow Rich* provides a structure to better understand how Tibetan Buddhism and neuroscience relate to the Law of Attraction.

Other books like Napoleon Hill's *Think and Grow Rich* include Wallace Wattles' 1910 *The Science of Getting Rich*, Dale Carnegie's 1936 *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, and Norman Vincent Peale's 1952 *The Power of Positive Thinking*.^{24,25,26} These books were written during the New Thought movement in America, which I will discuss further in the following chapter.

²⁴ Wallace Wattles, *The Science of Getting Rich* (New York: Elizabeth Towne Publishing, 1910).

²⁵ Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009).

²⁶ Norman Vincent Peale, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs, 1956).

Chapter II: The Ripples of *Think and Grow Rich* Throughout the Years

After understanding the content of *Think and Grow Rich*, it will help to review the history of the self-help industry to better understand why it is popular today. This analysis provides more context to the history of personal development and the Law of Attraction.

As outlined in Anne Harrington's *The Cure Within*, and more specifically, in her chapter, "The Power of Positive Thinking," the self-help industry originated early on in Christian Science.²⁷ In the late 1850s, Bernadette Soubirous, a peasant girl in France, claimed to have spiritual messages sent to her by a "lady" dressed in white.²⁸ The villagers did not believe her at first. However, after some time, they believed that the "lady" was the Virgin Mary herself. The messages led Soubirous to a spring of fresh water in the village of Lourdes. By the late 1870s, Lourdes became a pilgrimage center for spiritual healing and miracles, and people from all over traveled to Lourdes for these reasons. In this case, one of Hill's thirteen principles is at play - faith. The pilgrims believed that Lourdes's holy water could heal them of their problems and offer them miracles. Their faith, the idea goes, became so strong that through the Law of Attraction and positive thinking, these miracles came to life! They did not care how these miracles worked because the "how" was answered through religion and their belief in God. Interestingly, this belief in God's workings becomes the very faith Hill writes extensively about as one of his principles. Similar to how followers of a particular religion are convinced of its stories without traditional scientific evidence for them, followers of personal development and the self-help industry believe in the strategies because they have worked for others as seen in personal narratives. Additionally, faith itself does not need scientific evidence and heeds

²⁷ Anne Harrington, *The Cure Within: A History of Mind-Body Medicine* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2009).

²⁸ Ruth Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age* (Penguin Compass, 2000).

criticisms. The self-help industry has become so popular partly because of its origins in religion and the unwavering faith of those who practice personal development every day.

During the Great Depression, the Christian Science positive thinking movement transitioned into the New Thought movement. It is in this movement that authors such as Wallace Wattles, Dale Carnegie, Norman Vincent Peale, and Napoleon Hill became popular and introduced personal development and the ideology of a successful mindset to corporate America. In this era, Norman Vincent Peale became the spokesperson for the New Thought Movement in America, and he introduced the power of positive thinking into the average American's life through his radio program "The Art of Living." The leaders of this movement relied heavily on faith and metaphysics, which is hard to explain with science. With the nature of personal development, business leaders who practiced it every day became successful in corporate America and did not often critique or question its basis, as the authors of this movement emphasized faith (as seen in the summary of *Think and Grow Rich*). It is also around this time that the term Law of Attraction became popular, and more and more individuals began to attend seminars and conferences on this topic. Nonetheless, the scientific community had its doubt and questions.

Due to the New Thought Movement, positive thinking became popular in mainstream America. However, it took a couple of decades for the concept to be introduced to psychology and medical sciences, as seen in the placebo effect and the emerging field of psychoneuroimmunology. The placebo effect states that individuals who receive a fake pill or any inert substance for treatment show improvements in their health because they believe they are receiving actual medicine, although the placebo effect does not always involve pills and is only temporary. This is the power of positive thinking, and in turn, faith.

Psychoneuroimmunology looks at the physiological effects of positive thinking in the body. This research became one of the first to look at personal development from the scientific perspective. However, research is still ongoing regarding positive thinking and the other personal development strategies. Critiques of the movement point to a lack of scientific evidence, but followers believe in it nonetheless due to their faith and personal beliefs.

Current New Thought movement thinkers include Tony Robbins, Bob Proctor, and Rhonda Byrne. There is a direct connection from Napoleon Hill to Tony Robbins.²⁹ Napoleon Hill influenced Dr. James Jones through his books and teachings. Dr. James Jones mentored Mr. Earl Shoaff who mentored Mr. Jim Rohn. It is Jim Rohn who personally mentored Tony Robbins with the same philosophy he learned from his mentor. Regarding Bob Proctor, he quotes Napoleon Hill's book *Think and Grow Rich* in his teachings, as previously mentioned. Rhonda Byrnes, the creator of *The Secret*, a movie that explains the Law of Attraction, also mentions Bob Proctor.

As personal development grew in popularity, so did criticism of it. However, as seen in the content and history of personal development, those who practice it every day, the idea goes, develop a faith so strong that these criticisms do not affect them. This explains why I found myself in the tension between supporters and critics of the movement, but after I read *Think and Grow Rich*, the tension disappeared. I began to develop my own faith and felt good about the personal development I was practicing. This also applies to those who practiced personal development throughout the years. In the beginning, those who believed in Christian Science and the New Thought Movement developed a similar kind of faith. However, in today's world, with the amount of information we have access to, criticism for the Law of Attraction and these

²⁹ Siddharth Rajsekar, "Discover The 7 Generation Success Lineage Of Tony Robbins," *Siddharth Rajsekar* (blog), April 10, 2018, <https://siddharthrajsekar.com/success-lineage/>.

phenomena grew, especially in the scientific and academic environments. But faith and the good feelings that come from practicing personal development overpower these criticisms for the supporters. In a strange twist, the self-help industry is popular because of its content and emphasis on believing with faith, as this is what the industry is based on.

Chapter III: Tibetan Buddhism and the Law of Attraction

A Brief History of Buddhism

Buddhism is often divided into three main traditions: Theravada, East Asian, and Tibetan.³⁰ His Holiness the Dalai Lama leads about 10-20 million followers of Tibetan Buddhism, the tradition that this thesis particularly focuses on. All three traditions originate from ancient Buddhism in India with the lore of the historical Buddha.

In an abridged version, the story of Buddha is as follows. Buddha is said to be born into a wealthy and privileged family as Siddhartha Gautama. He grew up ignorant of the sufferings of life, being protected from seeing sickness, death, or old age by his family. One day, he witnesses sickness, death, and old age, and decides to alleviate all suffering from life by attaining enlightenment through an austere lifestyle and deep meditation. Through such deep meditation under a tree and an austere lifestyle, Gautama emerges as the Buddha, or the Awakened One, with Enlightenment.

The Buddha then devotes the rest of his life to the teaching of how one can relieve sufferings through meditation and how one can practice certain tenets to achieve Enlightenment. All modern Buddhist traditions originate from these teachings and have their own unique customs and traditions. Tibetan Buddhism, uniquely, structures the life of the Buddha and his teachings into a twelve-fold path in a concept titled dependent origination, which will be discussed further in this chapter in relation to the Law of Attraction. Moreover, the monks that I interview for this thesis practice Tibetan Buddhism and explain the concepts in more detail, which becomes the foundation for my analysis of Tibetan Buddhism and the Law of Attraction.

Interview Protocol

³⁰ Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1998).

For my interviews, I interviewed three Tenzin Gyatso Scholars at Emory University; Tenzin Gyatso is the name of the Dalai Lama. These scholars are Tibetan monastic science teachers who take science courses at Emory University for approximately two years. I will hereafter refer to the three Tibetan Buddhist monks I interviewed as Scholar 1, Scholar 2, and Scholar 3. I particularly chose these three scholars because of their proficient English skills. Additionally, the monks have studied Tibetan Buddhism in their monasteries back in India and have significant experience debating different interpretations of the scriptures. To that end, these characteristics make them ideal interviewees for my honors thesis interviews, as they have had years of experience thinking critically about Tibetan Buddhist philosophy and can be considered “experts” in the field. Below I explain the protocol used for these interviews, and how I obtained informed consent.

General Background Questions

1. How and why did you become a monk?
2. How has the principles of Tibetan Buddhism changed your perspective on life?
3. What is the most important philosophy of Tibetan Buddhism for you and why?

Law of Attraction Questions

4. Are you familiar with the Law of Attraction?
5. Do you see any similarities or differences between any Tibetan Buddhist philosophy and the Law of Attraction (or Law of Vibration), and if so, where? Could you explain these similarities and differences?
6. How does your interpretation of the Law of Cause and Effect (a Buddhist philosophy which happens to be another universal law), reincarnation, and dependent origination relate to the Law of Attraction (or Law of Vibration)?

Informed Consent

I explained that the interview would be used for my honors thesis, and I would maintain confidentiality before the interview on zoom had begun. After pressing the record button, I asked the monks if they would accept to be interviewed for my honors thesis, and they all said “Yes.” I am using this recorded verbal confirmation as my informed consent. I do not need Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for these interviews because the monks act as experts in the field. Thus, the interviews are more about the subject matter rather than the individuals themselves, allowing the interviews to be exempt from the IRB.

Discussion of Interview Protocol

My interaction with the monks provided information relevant to my research question. For example, at the onset of each of the interviews, I introduced myself and asked about their experience being monks. In this sense, I acted as my “interviewer-self,” and the monks acted as their “interviewee-self.” In addition to my “interviewer-self,” when I explained the Law of Attraction to the monks, I acted as an “expert-self.” When the monks explained their interpretations of the Law of Attraction in context with Tibetan Buddhism, they acted as their “expert-selves” as well. At times, these two “expert selves” clashed in disagreement for a couple of interpretations.

The transition from the “interviewee-self” to the “expert-self” for the monks eased with my parallel transition from the “interviewer-self” to the “expert-self.” In a sense, the first couple of questions I asked included a power dynamic of me being the interviewer and the monks being the interviewees. However, after I had explained the Law of Attraction and asked for their own interpretation of it, the monks and I were equals, and there was no apparent power dynamic. I asked more questions out of my own curiosity as someone who is interested in Tibetan

Buddhism rather than someone who wanted to know more information for the sake of an interview. I assume the monks sensed the transition in my identity and were more comfortable with me. Thus, they transitioned themselves from the “interviewee” into the more comfortable identity of simply a Tibetan Buddhist monk engaging with an individual who is interested in their philosophy.

More specifically, in the interview with Tenzin Gyatso Scholar 1, he introduced a metaphor for karma that I had not thought of before. I asked him to explain the metaphor in conjunction with reincarnation, and he did so gladly. For this part of the conversation, the monk switched from an “interviewee-self” to an “expert-self” and taught me something I did not know before. The ease by which he transitioned from being an “interviewee” to an “expert” shows that he was comfortable enough with me and flexible enough to not follow a strict interview protocol. As this was the transition I had intended with the interviews, my interaction with them did help me answer my research question.

However, the questions I asked did sometimes result in vagueness and resistance. I had to explain the Law of Attraction to the monks more than once in different ways. I understood that English was not their first language, and it may be difficult for them to understand me. I also understood that trying to understand a Western pseudoscientific philosophy at a level to be able to engage with it intellectually may be difficult through an online platform and with limited time. Nonetheless, the monks were honest with me if they did not understand the Law of Attraction as I was explaining it, and they did ask for clarification. For example, with Tenzin Gyatso Scholar 2, I spent some time explaining the Law of Attraction to him, as I knew a simple misunderstanding in the basic interpretation of the law may lead to an unproductive conversation later in the interview. Additionally, Scholar 3 had a limited knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism

compared to the other monks. When I asked him about the idea of dependent origination in Tibetan Buddhism, he had to converse in Tibetan with his roommate. His roommate explained the topic as quickly as possible to him, and he relayed that same definition to me in English. In this case, Scholar 3 received my question with vagueness, but he replied with genuine honesty. Thus, the monks did receive some of my questions with vagueness due to a language barrier and a potential misunderstanding of a philosophical topic, but their honesty and transparency with me was able to downplay the language barrier and any potential misunderstanding.

The questions that generated any resistance were questions that stemmed from my misunderstanding of a Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. The resistance was mainly a simple “No” followed by an explanation of the right way to interpret the philosophy. I appreciated interviewing the monks especially because of their honesty in questions that led to both vagueness and resistance. Buddhist philosophy places an emphasis on interconnectedness and letting go of any worldly possessions that may influence our different “masks.” I believe that the answers I received from the monks were their true answers regardless of if I were interviewing them for my honors thesis or if I were asking them questions in a non-interview setting. From what I have studied of Tibetan Buddhism and from what I have observed from the interviews, the monks did not have any special social role or identity they were adopting for the interview; they were just themselves.

There exist a couple of limitations, distortions, validity threats, and sources of error for my interviews given my area of intellectual interest. Foremost, like I mentioned earlier, these monks have a limited English fluency. This limitation can potentially affect their interpretations of the Law of Attraction. To reduce this limitation as much as possible, I asked multiple times if they wanted me to re-explain the law, and if they understood my interpretation. Another potential

source of error includes confirmation bias. For this honors thesis, I am looking for evidence for the Law of Attraction. If the monks explain one topic that relates to the law and one that contradicts the law, I will have the tendency to ask them to explain the topic that relates to the law more than the topic that contradicts the law. I tried to maintain an unbiased perspective in my interviews, but I feel I could have done a better job. If I were to continue the interviews again or ask more clarification questions, I would try to maintain a more unbiased perspective. My only worry of a potential limitation is if when asking questions from my own curiosity, I may have been a little biased with probing questions.

Additionally, I explain further in this chapter Tibetan Buddhist philosophies that do not directly connect with or explain the Law of Attraction. By presenting both sides, I hope to mitigate the error of any confirmation bias in my interviews as well as in my honors thesis. Because the connection between the Law of Attraction and Tibetan Buddhism has not been studied yet in an academic context, I must be careful to pave a path for future scholars who might be interested in the two. Thus, maintaining an unbiased perspective is crucial. Moreover, because I do not have an extensive background in Tibetan Buddhism, my limited knowledge may become a source of error if I misinterpret a philosophy. To lessen this source of error, I would have to clarify my interpretations as much as possible with the monks, which I will continue to do so with clarifying questions.

Karma and the Law of Attraction

Some similarities exist between the Law of Attraction and the Tibetan Buddhism topics of karma and reincarnation. From my interviews, the Tenzin Gyatso Scholars all discussed karma when I brought up my interpretation of the Law of Attraction. They all agree to an extent that our thoughts influence our feelings, which influence our actions, which influence our results.

However, they do not view this cycle to only work in one lifetime. For example, the scholars believe that if one were to “plant” positive seeds through thoughts and actions in one life, that seed may grow into its fruition later in that same lifetime or in the following life. On the other hand, believers of the Law of Attraction typically do not also believe in reincarnation, as most are Westerners based in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The latter believes that the outcome of their “positive” thinking will come into fruition in that same lifetime. Although the timeline may be different (one life vs. multiple lives), the formula by which the Law of Attraction or karma works is very similar.

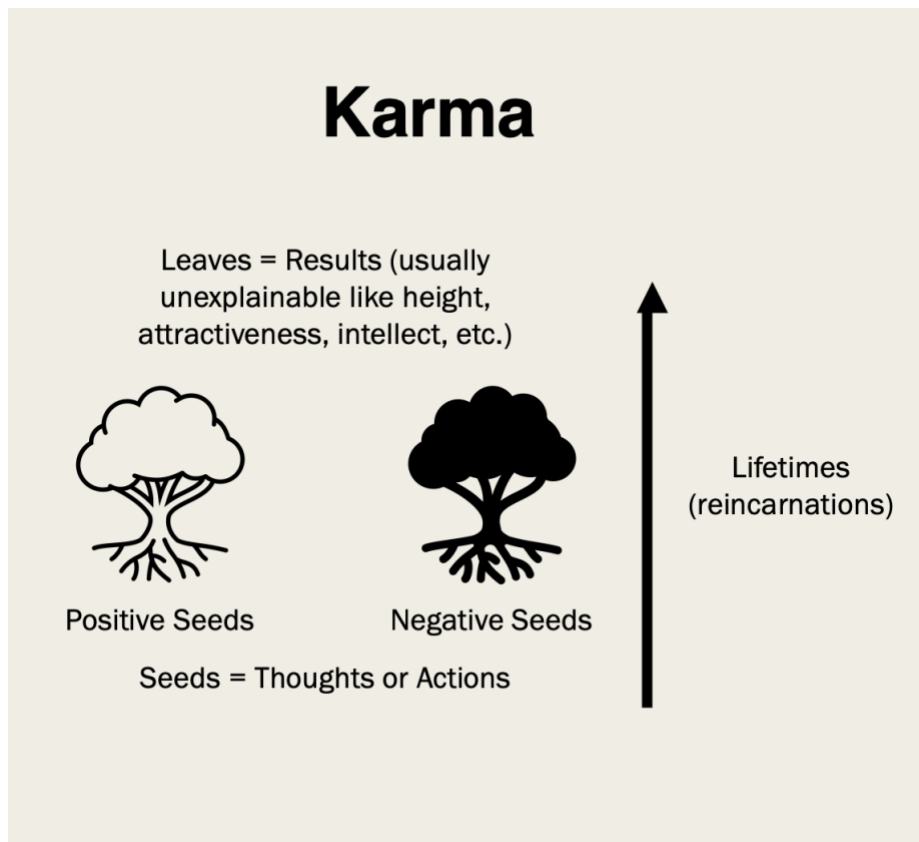


Figure 1: A visual depiction of karma designed by me

As seen in Figure 1, seeds, which can be thoughts or actions, may “manifest” themselves into reality as results lifetimes from now. One important distinction for karma revolves around the type of results. For example, Tibetan Buddhists believe that these results incorporate the

unexplainable (height, attractiveness, intellect, the socioeconomic status that one is born into, etc.) Can these seeds also explain results created in one's lifetime, including wealth, opportunities, fulfillment, success, and happiness? Theoretically, yes. However, karma is traditionally not viewed that way.

Karma, in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, is understood under the classification of the Law of Cause and Effect. The Law of Cause of Effect, as described by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in his book *The Universe in A Single Atom*, suggests "that the conditions affecting the cause have an inevitable impact on the result [the effect]. If one changes the conditions of one's state of mind (which normally give rise to habitual patterns of mental activity), one can change the traits of one's consciousness and the resulting attitudes and emotions" (146).³¹ The law, therefore, suggests that the results one has in one's life are due to some preconceived conditions that can be altered in the present to affect results in the future. In other words, the Law of Cause and Effect is another name for karma in the more traditional definition, but it also emphasizes that one can *intentionally* change the "causes" in the present to affect the "effect" in the future.

³¹ Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho, *The Universe in A Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality*.

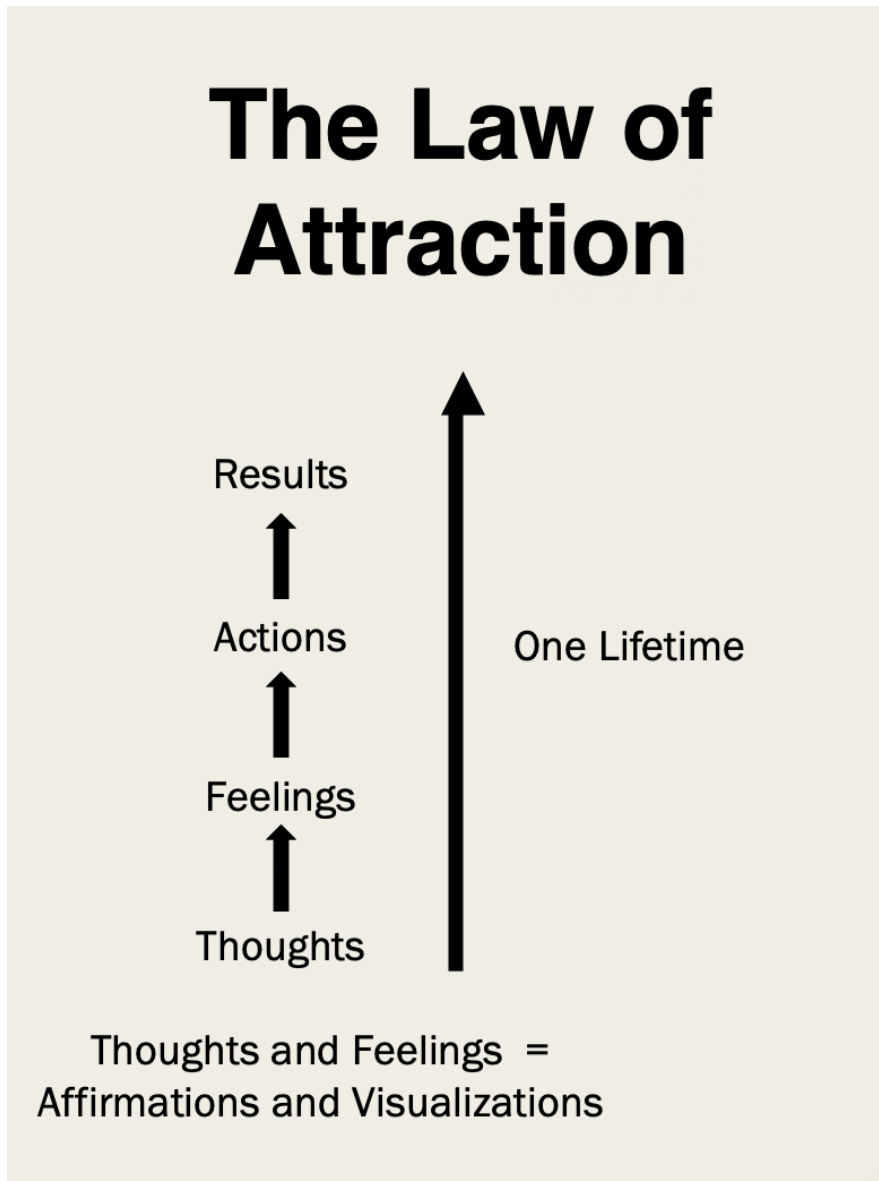


Figure 2: A visual depiction of the Law of Attraction designed by me

On the other hand, as seen in Figure 2, the Law of Attraction is intended for one lifetime. The basic formula, as mentioned previously, is thoughts → feelings → actions → results. In a direct comparison to karma, karma groups thoughts, feelings, and actions all in the metaphor of a seed, and the results signify the growth of the seed into a plant. In the figure above, I have also substituted affirmations for thoughts and visualizations for feelings. Both affirmations and visualizations (meditations) are practical applications of the Law of Attraction, which were

described in chapters one to three of *Think and Grow Rich* (Desire, Faith, and Autosuggestion). An affirmation consists of an “I am happy and grateful now that...” statement with the goal in mind completing the statement. The affirmation is a practical application of the “thoughts” in the formula for the Law of Attraction. For example, “I am happy and grateful now that I have received highest honors on my thesis.” A visualization (or meditation), on the other hand, involves one meditating and visualizing in complete detail the life that one would want or the goals that one would want to achieve. This visualization, as stated in chapter two of *Think and Grow Rich*, must be mixed with faith that one is able to achieve the visualized life. These visualizations are a practical application of the “feelings” in the formula for the Law of Attraction. The connection between this type of visualization meditation and Tibetan Buddhism meditation will be discussed further.

Thus, it is evident that there lie some similarities between karma and the Law of Attraction with the shared philosophy that thoughts and feelings (causes) can create results (effects) in one’s life. Nonetheless, the exact mechanism and context of karma and the Law of Attraction are completely unrelated. One focuses on reincarnation and the Eastern tradition of meditation in the context of an austere lifestyle, while the other focuses on results in a single lifetime and the attainment of material possessions in the context of a Western capitalistic world, as seen in the second chapter of this thesis. These differences, although important to acknowledge and interpret, do provide some evidence that there lies a similar structure in the formula for the Law of Attraction that applies to both Eastern philosophy and Western modernization.

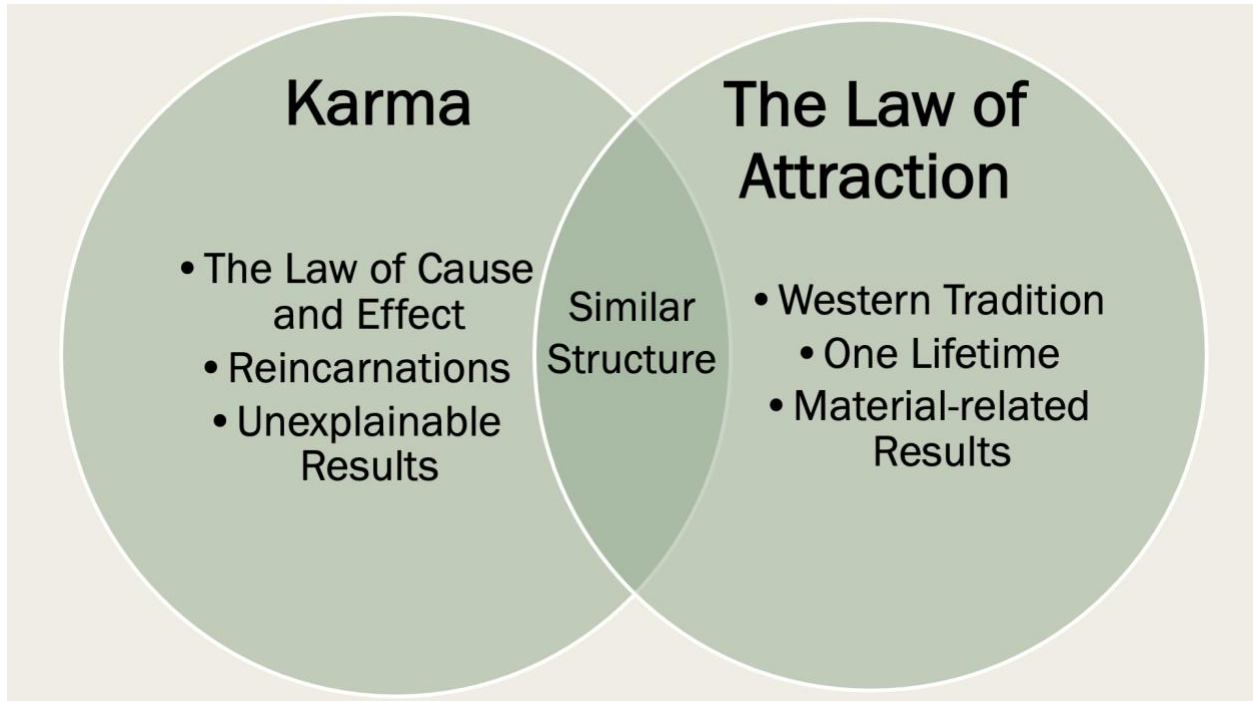


Figure 3: A chart comparing karma and the Law of Attraction

Dependent Origination and the Law of Vibration

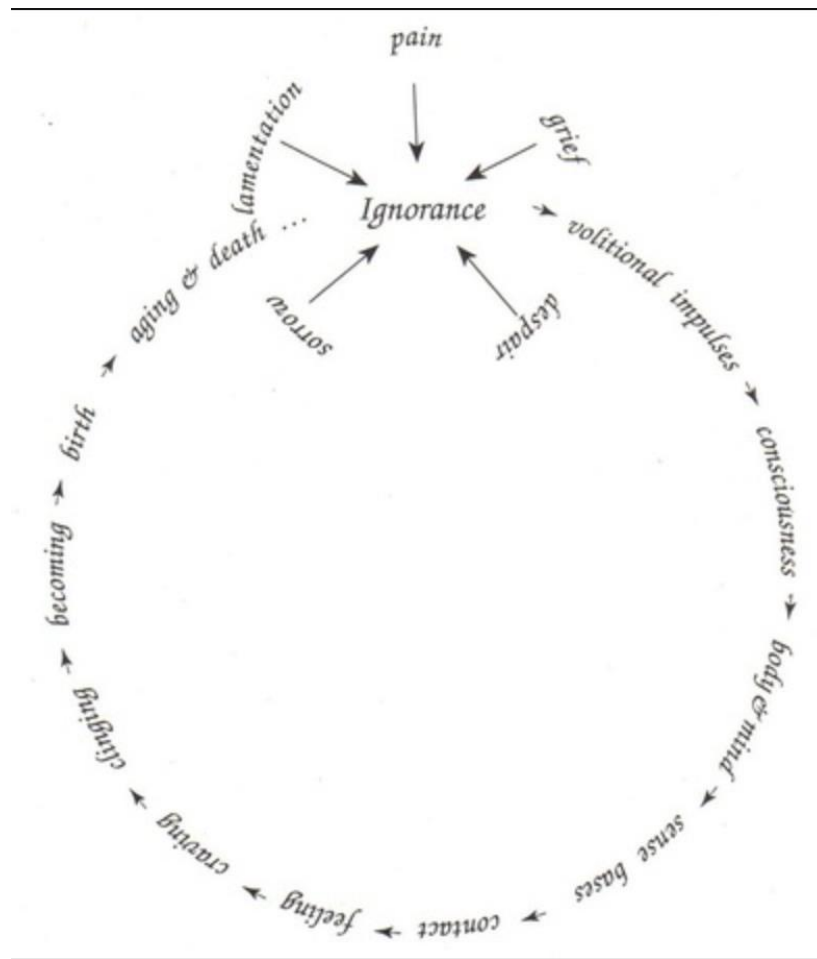
Furthermore, I can draw some potential connections between the Law of Vibration (the primary law by which the Law of Attraction is derived from) and the Tibetan Buddhist concept of dependent origination. The Law of Vibration states that everything is connected and is in constant movement (vibrations). It also states that we attract what is in our same frequency, and we can change our frequency by changing our vibrations (thoughts).³² The Tenzin Gyatso scholars elaborated on the Tibetan Buddhist concept of dependent origination when I mentioned the Law of Vibration, as the Tibetan Buddhist concept states that everything relates to each other, and everything depends on each other.³³ This similarity between dependent origination and the Law of Vibration, as well as the similarity between karma and the Law of Attraction,

³² Meah, “The Law Of Vibration From Bob Proctor | AwakenTheGreatnessWithin.”

³³ “Personalizing the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination - Mandala Publications,” accessed March 25, 2021, <https://fpmt.org/mandala/online-features/personalizing-the-twelve-links-of-dependent-origination/>.

provides a foundational and tentative framework by which I can investigate these connections further.

Stage I: Impelling Causes	1. Ignorance 2. Compounding Factors 3. Consciousness	Causes: Truth of the Origin of Suffering
Stage II: Actualizing Causes	8. Craving 9. Grasping 10. Existence	
Stage III: Results	4. Name and Form 5. Six Sense Spheres 6. Contact 7. Feeling	11. Birth 12. Aging and Death ↓ Results: Truth of Suffering



Figures 4 and 5: Visual depictions of dependent origination^{34, 35}

Dependent origination, which depends on an understanding of interconnectedness, is a Tibetan Buddhist philosophy suggesting that i) all mental and physical processes in the universe relate to each other, and ii) they arise due to certain preconditions being met in an inner cause and effect manner (essentially, the Law of Cause and Effect).³⁶ In other words, nothing is created in the universe independently of anything else; if one changes certain preconditions, one changes the physical or mental phenomena in the universe. Dependent origination is also associated with the twelve-fold path unique to Tibetan Buddhism: ignorance, compounding factors, consciousness, name and form, six sense spheres, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, existence, birth, and aging and death.³⁷ In Tibetan Buddhist literature, one must let go of this cycle of dependent origination to achieve Enlightenment. The images show how birth and death are connected to suffering in a cycle of *samsara* (cycle of death and rebirth). The image also shows how the negative phenomenon of ignorance is the root of this cycle, and knowledge (the opposite of ignorance) may help one separate themselves from this cycle and achieve Enlightenment.

When compared with the Law of Vibration, the details of the twelve links of the *samsara* cycle do not relate that much. However, the idea that everything is connected (interconnectedness), and that one can change his or her results by changing the conditions does relate to the Law of Vibration. This comparison, although logical at a surface level, proves to be

³⁴ “Personalizing the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination - Mandala Publications.”

³⁵ “Chain of Dependent Origination - for Marxists,” BUDDHIST - MARXISM ALLIANCE (UK), accessed March 25, 2021, <https://buddhistsocialism.weebly.com/chain-of-dependent-origination---for-marxists.html>.

³⁶ Anthony Le Duc, “The Doctrine of Dependent Origination as Basis for a Paradigm of Human-Nature Relationship of Responsibility and Accountability,” *Journal of Graduate Studies Review of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University* 11 (January 1, 2015): 123–44.

³⁷ “Personalizing the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination - Mandala Publications.”

confusing and difficult to understand when one attempts to make connections on a deeper level, causing a major limitation in such comparisons. Nonetheless, a similarity found on a surface level does suggest that i) the broader themes of the two philosophies are similar, ii) their interpretations are what that differs, and iii) more research between the two should be conducted.

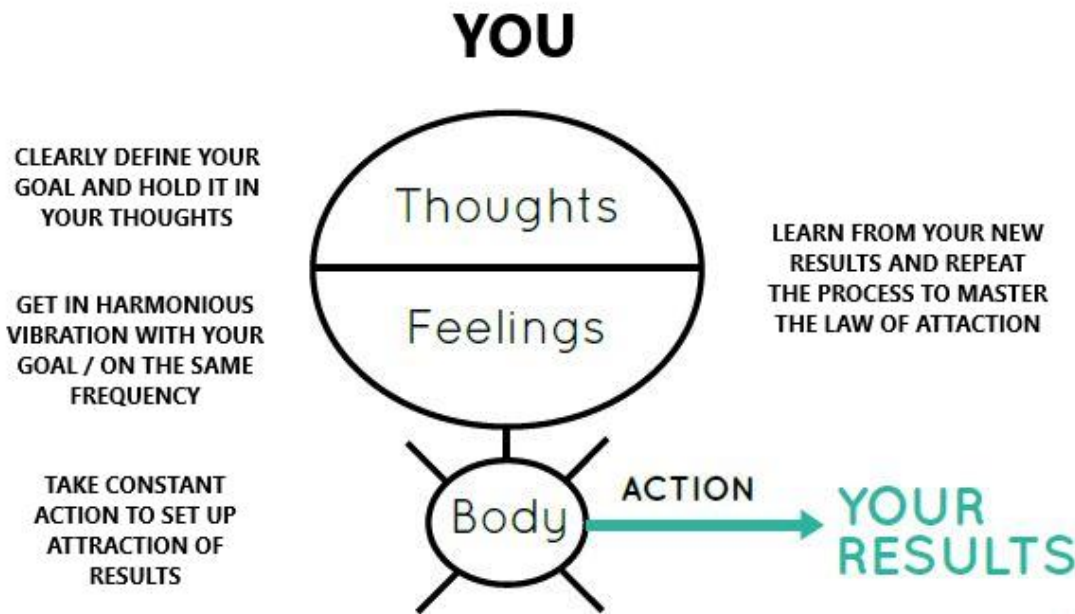


Figure 6: A visual depiction of Law of Vibration (and Law of Attraction)³⁸

The Law of Vibration is the parent law to the Law of Attraction. It states that everything is in vibration; everything is always moving in certain “frequencies.” If one wants to increase their frequency into a more positive level, one must change thought patterns and make them more positive. The law also states that one can only “attract” what one is in harmonious frequency with. Through this logical understanding, if one wants to “attract” more abundance and love into one’s life, one must match the frequency for abundance and love by changing their thought patterns. The Law of Vibration supports the basic formula from the Law of Attraction

³⁸ “Pinterest,” Pinterest, accessed March 25, 2021, <https://ar.pinterest.com/pin/814236807620432793/>.

(thoughts → feelings → actions → results), but it adds to it the metaphysical idea of levels of vibration and frequency.

Moreover, the Law of Vibration is indirectly described in chapter twelve of *Think and Grow Rich* (The Brain). As mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, Hill relates the brain to a broadcasting radio station with different levels of frequencies to help the reader better understand the potential of the brain's power. By thinking positive thoughts and increasing one's frequency, just like in a broadcasting radio station, that frequency will attract phenomena also residing at that same frequency. This metaphor for the Law of Vibration only works with the three assumptions: i) everything is moving at a frequency in the quantum level, from one's own cells to the atoms of any material possession; ii) everything that is in harmonious frequency with each other is connected at this quantum level; and iii) one can affect one's frequency through visualizations and affirmations.

Comparing this idea to the concept of dependent origination, there exist certain similarities and differences between the assumptions for both philosophies. Dependent origination requires two assumptions, as mentioned previously. The first assumption suggests that all mental and physical processes in the universe are connected, and the second assumption suggests that these connections only arise after certain preconditions are met in an inner cause and effect manner. These two assumptions clearly fit with the three assumptions for Law of Vibration, which is described below.

Foremost, the idea of interconnectedness from dependent origination is a crucial assumption in the Law of Vibration. Because everything is connected, one may access or "attract" those physical realities that are in connection with one's mental thoughts. However, dependent origination does not explicitly state that through interconnectedness, one can attract

all that one is in harmonious vibration with. This assumption, on the other hand, lies with the Law of Vibration. Nonetheless, the two ideas do share a similar philosophy that I believe is crucial to study and understand more. Both schools of thought share an understanding that everything is connected, whether by interconnectedness to explain dependent origination or frequencies of vibration to explain the Law of Vibration. This understanding depicts certain similarities, but when one examines each philosophy more deeply, the details become less connected, or more distinctive to one philosophy or the other. I do believe, however, that the general framework of having everything being connected with each other that is shared among the two is significant enough to require more academic research on any more connections between the two philosophies in the details of the two.

Furthermore, the second assumption bridges the gap between the two schools of thought even more. From dependent origination, a certain precondition must be met for a connection to be made. From the Law of Vibration, one may hypothesize that the preconditions, which involve an inner cause-and-effect method, are the thought patterns that one develops through visualizations and affirmations to reach a certain vibration frequency. For example, if one wants to become connected to an abundance of love, according to dependent origination, i) through interconnectedness, one is connected already to it and ii) through certain preconditions, one can access that connection. The interconnectedness, in nature, can suggest levels of different frequencies from the Law of Vibration, and the preconditions, in nature, can suggest that one must be in the same level of frequency for access to the connection to be achieved.

After understanding the similarities between the broader concepts of dependent origination and the Law of Vibration (and thus, the Law of Attraction), it is also necessary to examine a certain method that both schools of thought heavily rely on - meditation.

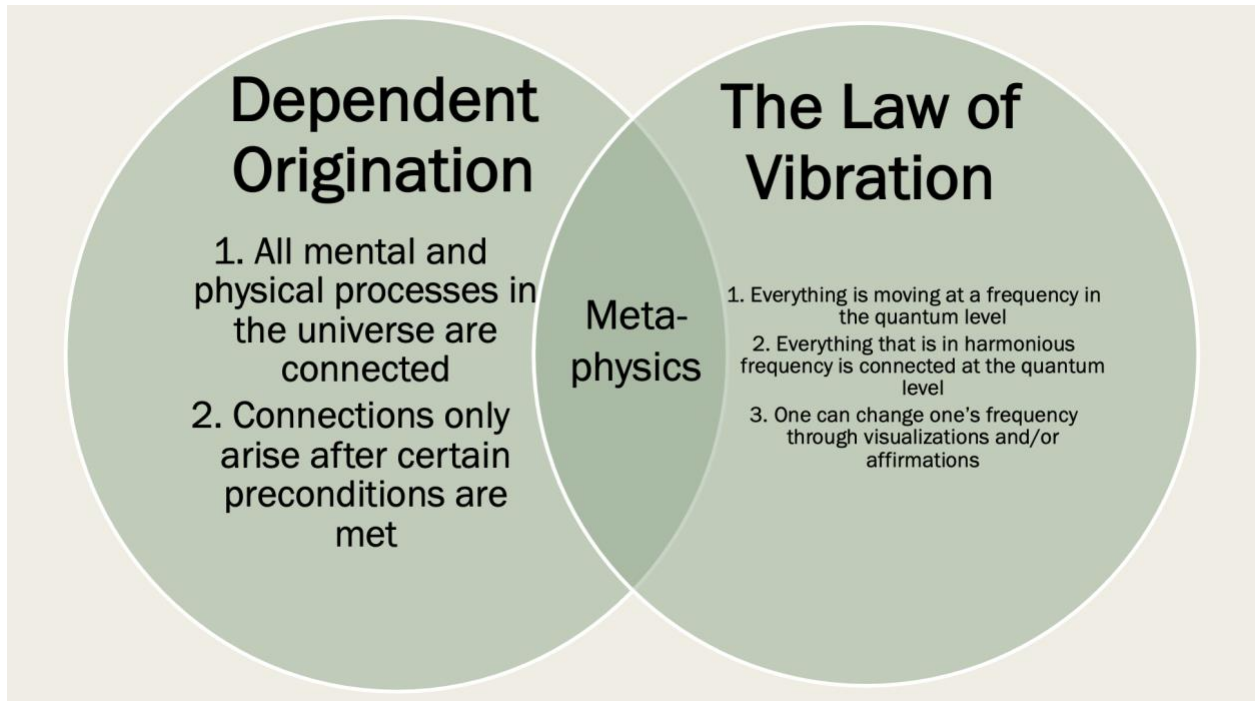


Figure 7: A chart comparing dependent origination and the Law of Vibration

Tibetan Buddhist Meditation and Visualization Meditation

Although both Tibetan Buddhism and the Law of Attraction encourage the practice of meditation, the methods of each meditation vary greatly. Here, I compare the Tibetan Buddhist practice of Vipassana with the visualization meditation as described in Hill's *Think and Grow Rich* in his chapters covering desire and faith. Through the comparison, as done previously with other Tibetan Buddhist concepts and the Law of Attraction, I hope to highlight both similarities and differences between the two.

Vipassana meditation, which translates to *seeing things as they really are*, is one of the oldest types of Tibetan Buddhist meditation, recently making a comeback to the mainstream from Southeast Asia.³⁹ It focuses on the concentration or attention on a single object or entity,

³⁹ Sayadaw U. Pandita, "What Is Vipassana Meditation and How Do You Practice It? - Lion's Roar," accessed March 25, 2021, <https://www.lionsroar.com/how-to-practice-vipassana-insight-meditation/>.

usually the breath. The meditation is an insight meditation, where one attempts to connect with the mind-body phenomenon and practice awareness. During meditation, one is instructed to close one's eyes, focus on the breath, and let any thoughts that may pass through the mind do so without any attachment towards them. The breath becomes the anchor of the meditation, while one does a full body scan from the head to the toe and asks oneself how the body feels. The purpose of the meditation itself is to gain insight into the body and mind and develop a sense of concentration and awareness towards one's feelings.

Visualization meditation, on the other hand, heavily depends on imagination and creativity. From *Think and Grow Rich*, it involves the constant visualization of the future one wants. Bob Proctor leads said visualization meditations in his personal development seminars.⁴⁰ He begins with an image and reminder of the abundance that surrounds us: abundance of trees, air, sunlight, etc. He then guides the meditator to tap into this abundance and let it flow through the body via a body scan. This meditation also involves imagining an ideal future of what one desires in complete detail. It can include a visualization of an idealized day five, ten, or twenty years into the future. This part of the meditation encourages full imagination and creativity.

When comparing the two, Tibetan Buddhist meditation places an emphasis on the self and an anchor on breathing to become mindful of the noise within. On the other hand, visualization meditation encourages the use of imagination to connect with a source of abundance while dreaming of an ideal future. I compare the two in this chapter because of the common thread of mindfulness in terms of spirituality. Although both meditation practices function for different purposes, they both take inspiration from a mind-body phenomenon. For example, in Vipassana meditation, the mind-body experience emphasizes insight and an

⁴⁰ "Guided Abundance Meditation by Bob Proctor," *The Joy Within* (blog), June 25, 2019, <https://thejoywithin.org/meditations/guided-recordings/bob-proctor-abundance-meditation>.

understanding of self-awareness of bodily experiences and breath work. On the other hand, in visualization meditation, the mind-body experience emphasizes abundance and visualizing an ideal future.

I do want to emphasize that both practices, while different, do utilize meditation and mindfulness, which itself becomes versatile in different contexts. These similarities encourage more research on the versatility of meditation and its impact for different individuals around the world. I do believe that meditation serves as a universal portal to understanding oneself better, whether it be by insight meditation or a visualization of the future, and it is an important characteristic of both Tibetan Buddhism and the Law of Attraction.

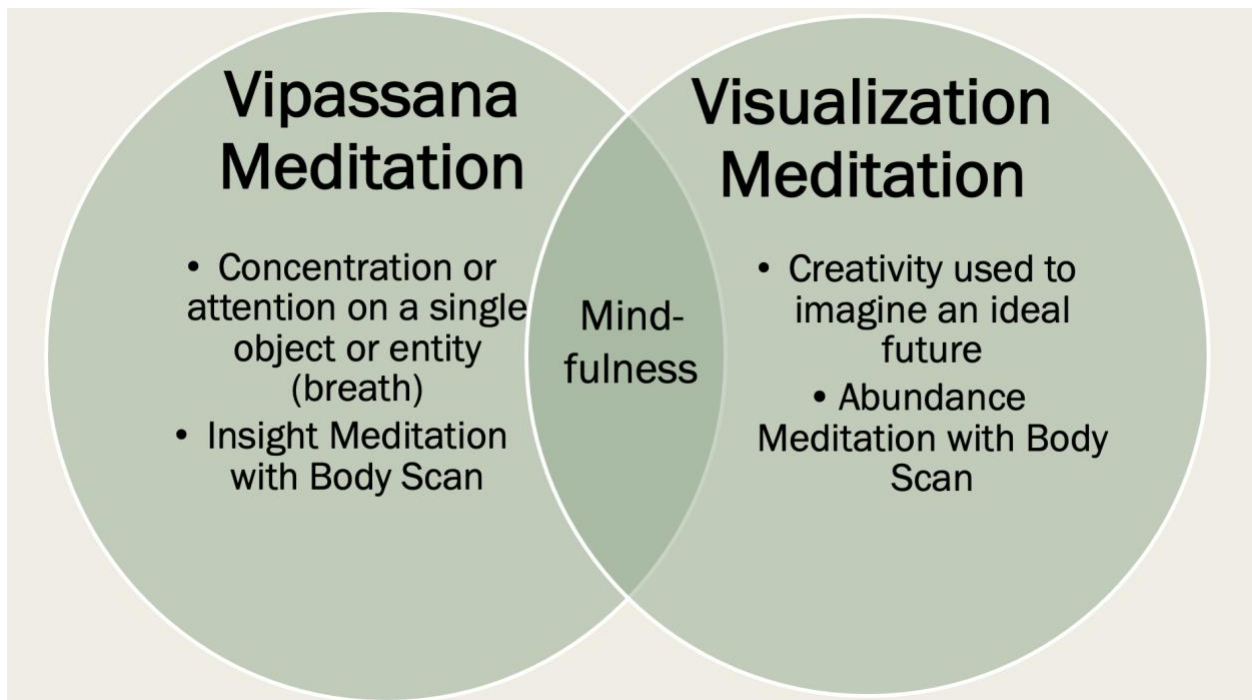


Figure 8: A chart comparing Vipassana Meditation and Visualization Meditation

Counterarguments and Limitations

This chapter attempts to provide evidence that the Law of Attraction shares common underlying principles with Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. These common principles suggest that

perhaps the Law of Attraction evolved from ancient ideas from the East and that common practices and tenets underlie both. With the evidence outlined, I hope that it becomes clearer that the Law of Attraction and its philosophy could be studied in an academic context due to its similarities with another religious philosophy; however, there exist certain counterarguments and limitations to such an argument, and I address them here.

First, most of the comparisons I construct in this chapter represent surface level comparisons. These similarities may lose some of their power when comparing the details of both philosophies and what context they are studied in. For example, Tibetan Buddhism places an emphasis on letting go of any material possession, while the Law of Attraction is utilized by others today primarily for the attainment of material possession. I suggest that although the differences do exist between the two schools of thought, the two should be compared as equals. The Law of Attraction also has a following, and certain main tenets of the law are in parallel with Tibetan Buddhism. Thus, I argue that despite any disagreement in context and history, Tibetan Buddhism does provide enough evidence for the Law of Attraction in parallel ideologies (karma and the Law of Attraction, dependent origination, and the Law of Vibration, and Vipassana meditation and visualization meditation) that the Law could and should be rigorously explored.

Another limitation in this chapter includes the lack of any scholarly evidence for the Law of Attraction and Law of Vibration. Almost all the sources for this pseudoscientific topic comes from articles or self-proclaimed thought leaders in the field and not from academic journals. Although a limitation currently, I hope that this thesis, and especially this chapter, becomes that very scholarly evidence for future academic work comparing the Law of Attraction to Tibetan Buddhism.

Finally, I must also acknowledge any confirmation bias when comparing the two philosophies. While interviewing the Tibetan Buddhist monks, I have a bias for listening to and exploring concepts that provides a bridge between Tibetan Buddhism and the Law of Attraction. Because of this, I structure my argument in this chapter understanding that the evidence in Tibetan Buddhism for the Law of Attraction I am discovering only exists on a surface level, and many differences between the two philosophies also exist. To limit this bias as much as possible, I have mentioned an understanding that certain core values of the two philosophies do differ and have presented both sides to the argument.

Conclusion of Findings

In conclusion, the interviews with the Tibetan Buddhist monks on campus clarify many similarities and differences between Tibetan Buddhism and the Law of Attraction. Foremost, an analysis of karma and the Law of Attraction allow for some visual depictions to help understand how the two differ in theory but relate in structure. Moreover, dependent origination and the Law of Vibration show how the Tibetan Buddhist concept of interconnectedness can be used as support for both philosophies. Finally, a comparison of Tibetan Buddhist Vipassana meditation and visualization meditation displays how mindfulness itself is a pillar for both concepts. Although the ancient practice of Tibetan Buddhism and the contemporary practice of the Law of Attraction differ heavily in context, purpose, and history, there exist some similarities, as seen in the previous examples, that encourage more academic research to be conducted on the pop culture topic of the Law of Attraction. These similarities do not function as concrete evidence that the Law of Attraction works. They do, however, function as evidence that suggest that there is more than what meets the eye regarding the Law of Attraction, and these similarities should hold some value in academia.

Chapter IV: Neuroscience and the Law of Attraction

The field of neuroscience is interdisciplinary in and of itself, engaging psychology, anthropology, and biology.⁴¹ My neuroscience knowledge comes from studying Neuroscience and Behavioral Biology at Emory University. Through my classes, I have learned to think of and assess evidence across scientific disciplines as a neuroscientist. Thus, when investigating evidence within neuroscience for a pseudoscientific and metaphysical topic such as the Law of Attraction, I choose to do so with a preface of the interdisciplinary context of the mind-body problem, grounded in observable truths compared to revealed truths.

The Mind-Body Problem

The previous chapter on Tibetan Buddhism examines the formula “thoughts → feelings → actions → results” in more of a metaphysical and spiritual manner. The chapter discusses broad themes among the two philosophies, and how they relate and differ. It becomes close to impossible, however, to prove with scientific evidence that the formula “thoughts → feelings → actions → results” holds true in the biological world. The exact physiological understanding of *how* this paradigm works can likely only be studied with technology and concepts not yet fully developed, further explaining the issue of the mind-body problem.

The mind-body problem asks the question of how are the mind (consciousnesses) and the body related to each other?⁴² Can thought processes translate into tangible brain processes with neurophysiological change that can be measured? What is the relationship between the two? This debate originated when Descartes offered four propositions that cannot all be true at the same

⁴¹ Cara M. Altimus et al., “The Next 50 Years of Neuroscience,” *Journal of Neuroscience* 40, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 101–6, <https://doi.org/10.1523/JNEUROSCI.0744-19.2019>.

⁴² Tapani Riekkilä, Marjaana Lindeman, and Jari Lipsanen, “Conceptions about the Mind-Body Problem and Their Relations to Afterlife Beliefs, Paranormal Beliefs, Religiosity, and Ontological Confusions,” *Advances in Cognitive Psychology* 9, no. 3 (September 20, 2013): 112–20, <https://doi.org/10.2478/v10053-008-0138-5>.

time: i) the mind is a nonphysical thing; ii) the body is a physical thing; iii) the mind and body interact; iv) physical and nonphysical things cannot interact.⁴³

In the context of what has been discussed so far regarding the Law of Attraction, the mind-body problem is relevant more than ever. How can the formula “thoughts → feelings → actions → results” be explained in neuroscience when the field itself is limited when trying to understand and solve the mind-body problem? The pseudoscientific topic of the Law of Attraction heavily suggests that mental phenomena have a direct relationship to the physical world, via the formula, and there does exist a relationship between the two. On the other hand, in academia, many disciplines are still debating whether there even exists such a connection between the mental and the physical with no explanation of how such a relationship can occur in terms of consciousness. Thus, in this chapter, instead of attempting to prove that the Law of Attraction has a neurophysiological basis to it through revealed truths, I intend to focus more so on the neurophysiological *effects* of the law as described in Hill’s *Think and Grow Rich* through observable truths.

For example, the first three chapters of *Think and Grow Rich* (Desire, Faith, and Autosuggestion) provide practical strategies one can utilize in day-to-day life. The strategies described in the three chapters are visualization meditations and affirmations. Moreover, in chapter eleven, Hill describes the power of embracing positive emotions to ease the effect of the law compared to negative emotions. Therefore, in this chapter of the thesis, I explore the neurophysiological effects of i) visualization meditations, ii) affirmations, and iii) emotions, as described in chapters one, two, three, and eleven of *Think and Grow Rich*. I explore these chapters specifically, instead of the others, because these four chapters relate directly to the

⁴³ German E. Berrios, “Historical Epistemology of the Body-Mind Interaction in Psychiatry,” *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience* 20, no. 1 (March 2018): 5–13.

“thoughts” and “feelings” components of the formula, while the others describe more so the “actions” and “results” components of the formula. By providing neurophysiological evidence for the “thoughts” and “feelings” components of the formula, I intend to avoid issues regarding the mind-body problem due to a lack of proper understanding and technology to study it in today’s age. Nonetheless, the evidence that follows still examines the Law of Attraction’s so-called benefits and can, therefore, encourage other scientists to study this law more explicitly in the scientific context, adding an additional dimension of observable truths to the conversation revolving around the mind-body problem.

Furthermore, alongside a discussion of the direct comparisons of neuroscientific articles to the *Think and Grow Rich* text, I offer a discussion of general topics and trends in neuroscience that relate to the Law of Attraction. These topics include i) mirror neurons, ii) neuroplasticity, and iii) the placebo effect. These discussions involve a literature review of current research articles and provide the foundational research and a framework to better understand such a metaphysical topic in future studies.

Desire and Faith (Visualization Meditations)

Chapters one and two of *Think and Grow Rich* describe the use of desire and faith to utilize the Law of Attraction. As a reminder, desire describes the strong motivation to achieve one’s goals, and faith describes how one can reinforce the belief that the desired outcome will become a reality. Together, the chapters explain the practical phenomenon of visualization meditation.

As mentioned in the previous chapter of this thesis, visualization meditation involves closing one’s eyes and imagining an ideal future of achieving a desired goal in complete detail. This type of meditation, as suggested by Hill, should be done on a consistent basis first thing in

the morning and also right before one goes to sleep. Although one cannot prove that this strategy itself will translate the mental images in one's mind into physical equivalents, one can examine the observable truths from such a meditation in other contexts such as sports.

Mental imagery has been proven time and again to have a positive effect on athletes who engage in a particular activity.⁴⁴ This type of imagery, in the sports context, involves athletes imagining themselves performing a particular skill or movement before a competition with no overt action.⁴⁵ This visualization may involve a mental image of winning a swimming race, scoring a homerun in baseball, or making a shot in basketball. Researchers have found that mental imagery in the sports context improves athletic performance and can be used as a supplement or even a replacement for physical practice. The mental imagery used by pro-athletes is very similar to the visualization meditation Hill suggests in his first two chapters. They both involve a detailed imagination of a desired outcome, practiced in a consistent manner. The only difference between the two is that mental imagery has been studied extensively in the sports context and even in other contexts, but it has not yet been studied under the context of personal development and the Law of Attraction. If neuroscience research has shown that mental imagery can improve performance, is it safe to assume that imagery regarding one's goals can improve the chances of achieving those goals while backed up with action? It is important to note that Hill does not stop writing his book after describing the visualization meditation. He emphasizes the use of such a meditation in conjunction with action steps as described in the other chapters. Similarly, researchers have found that mental imagery itself in the sports context is not enough;

⁴⁴ Donatella Di Corrado et al., "Imagery Ability of Elite Level Athletes from Individual vs. Team and Contact vs. No-Contact Sports," *PeerJ* 7 (May 22, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.6940>.

⁴⁵ Lesley Jones and Gretchen Stuth, "The Uses of Mental Imagery in Athletics: An Overview," *Applied and Preventive Psychology* 6, no. 2 (March 1, 1997): 101–15, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0962-1849\(05\)80016-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0962-1849(05)80016-2).

one must also take the necessary action and practice to do well. However, when the action is combined with mental imagery, performance success increases.⁴⁶ Of course, the exact reason why a mental imagery in sports corresponds to better performance is not yet fully understood, for the reasons described above regarding the mind-body problem. Nonetheless, empirical evidence does show that mental imagery can help with performance later, which relates to the Law of Attraction.

Furthermore, meditation itself has been studied greatly in neuroscience research in recent years. As described in the previous chapter of the thesis, visualization meditation and Vipassana meditation are different but both engage mindfulness, which becomes an effect of the Law of Attraction that can be studied empirically. Mindfulness is evoked in the visualization meditation when one first becomes mindful of the breath and the body and then slowly transitions into imagining an ideal future. For example, researchers have discovered that practicing mindfulness brings increased subjective well-being, reduced psychological symptoms and emotional reactivity, and improved behavioral regulation.⁴⁷ Moreover, mindfulness increases the regional brain gray matter density, which is involved in learning and memory processes, emotion regulation, self-referential processing, and perspective taking.⁴⁸ These observations from the practice of mindfulness, which can be connected to the Law of Attraction through visualization mediation, suggest the Law of Attraction could be similarly studied. This evidence, however, does not prove that the Law of Attraction works; it only suggests that the strategies it

⁴⁶ Jones and Stuth.

⁴⁷ Richard J. Davidson and Alfred W. Kaszniak, "Conceptual and Methodological Issues in Research on Mindfulness and Meditation," *The American Psychologist* 70, no. 7 (October 2015): 581–92, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0039512>.

⁴⁸ Britta K. Hölzel et al., "Mindfulness Practice Leads to Increases in Regional Brain Gray Matter Density," *Psychiatry Research* 191, no. 1 (January 30, 2011): 36–43, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychresns.2010.08.006>.

recommends work. This distinction is important, as proving that the strategies work is the first vital step into examining the law itself under a scientific context.

Autosuggestion (Affirmations)

Hill dedicates chapter three of *Think and Grow Rich* to autosuggestion or affirmations. Autosuggestion involves the repetition of positive affirmations to “convince” the subconscious mind that these affirmations are, in fact, true and will occur in the real, physical world. He mentions that through these affirmations, one becomes connected to a universal force called the Infinite Intelligence and through this metaphysical connection, one will receive the physical versions of one’s mental affirmations. I cover this part of autosuggestion in the previous chapter while discussing the Law of Vibration and interconnectedness. In this chapter, on the other hand, I examine the observable truths behind affirmations through any empirical scientific evidence. As with visualization meditations, such evidence would suggest that the *effects* of the Law of Attraction hold some truth rather than the metaphysical Infinite Intelligence part of the law itself.

In social psychology, there exists a theory called the self-affirmation theory.⁴⁹ This theory, at the intersections of social psychology, positive psychology, and social neuroscience, suggests that value-based affirmations have a positive effect on social well-being and self-esteem. Through the practice of such affirmations, one becomes better equipped to handle stressful situations that may contradict one’s identity and expectations for oneself (e.g., failing an exam with an identity that one is an intellectual individual). In conjunction with cognitive and behavioral changes, self-affirmation theory provides an avenue by which individuals can reduce a psychological threat through a change in perspective. Furthermore, researchers have shown that

⁴⁹ Andrew J. Howell, “Self-Affirmation Theory and the Science of Well-Being,” *Journal of Happiness Studies* 18, no. 1 (February 1, 2017): 293–311, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-016-9713-5>.

individuals who practice self-affirmation theory have increased activity in the brain regions associated with self-processing (medial prefrontal cortex and posterior cingulate cortex) and valuation (ventral striatum and ventral medial prefrontal cortex).⁵⁰ These results highlight a neural explanation for self-affirmation theory, and how it might change the brain when reflecting on positive values. Connecting to the Law of Attraction, this neural evidence does not support the law. Nonetheless, as the affirmations described in chapter three of *Think and Grow Rich* and the self-affirmation theory are similar, neural evidence for self-affirmation theory suggests that further studies should be conducted on neural evidence for affirmations described in Hill's book. The self-affirmation theory heavily relies on affirmative values that an individual can relate to, while the Law of Attraction affirmations rely on "I am..." statements involving future goals. Though technically different, the two are affirmations that one can deeply connect with on an emotional level. Thus, the observable truth regarding affirmations lies in self-affirmation theory and its impact on the brain, suggesting that one day the Law of Attraction's autosuggestion method as well can be studied by scientists regarding neural changes. Autosuggestion and self-affirmation theory are similar enough that although one is grounded in a pseudoscientific and metaphysical topic, it deserves to be studied at the same level as self-affirmation theory, a scientific concept studied extensively.

Subconscious Mind (Emotions)

In chapter eleven of *Think and Grow Rich*, Hill explains the difference between positive and negative emotions. He suggests that one must experience positive emotions to use the Law of Attraction. This chapter of the book covers the "feelings" component of the formula for the

⁵⁰ Christopher N. Cascio et al., "Self-Affirmation Activates Brain Systems Associated with Self-Related Processing and Reward and Is Reinforced by Future Orientation," *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* 11, no. 4 (April 2016): 621–29, <https://doi.org/10.1093/scan/nsv136>.

law. The seven positive emotions that Hill suggests one experiences include desire, faith, love, sex, enthusiasm, romance, and hope. The seven negative emotions that Hill suggests one should avoid include fear, jealousy, hatred, revenge, greed, superstition, and anger. He explains how the positive and the negative emotions cannot fully occupy the mind at the same time, and how they provide a direct link and change to the subconscious mind, where one can access the Infinite Intelligence, a so-called universal force, and attract what one desires. For example, when one feels gratitude, one cannot feel doubt or fear as well. I do not intend to provide any scientific evidence that shows how an emotion may access and change the subconscious mind because of the mind-body problem mentioned earlier in the chapter. Nonetheless, I do intend to understand how these emotions, both positive and negative, affect the neurophysiology of the brain and the firing of any brain chemicals. Although these scientific peer-reviewed articles do not mention the Law of Attraction or any metaphysical concepts, I hope that the observable truths provided from the articles for the *effects* of the law provide enough evidence for one to study the idea of the seven positive and seven negative emotions affecting the subconscious mind in the context of the Law of Attraction in an academic environment. Moreover, I also examine the positive emotion of gratitude, although not mentioned in Hill's book; Bob Proctor strongly suggests that one must practice an attitude of gratitude to fully utilize the Law of Attraction.⁵¹

Positive Emotions

Generally, positive emotions are those that evoke pleasant feelings and improve cognitive processes such as attention, memory, creative problem solving, social cognition, and

⁵¹ "How an Attitude of Gratitude Changes Everything," *Proctor Gallagher Institute* (blog), December 18, 2017, <https://www.proctorgallagherinstitute.com/6207/how-an-attitude-of-gratitude-changes-everything>.

mental rotation.⁵² Neuropsychological reward theories for such a connection between positive emotions and cognitive processes involve dopamine, a neurotransmitter in the brain usually correlated with reward systems.⁵³ The theories suggest that the dopamine system mediates positive emotion's effect on behavior and cognition. For example, these studies have also shown that an increase in creative problem-solving skills is correlated with increased dopamine levels in the frontal cortex. This correlation includes two assumptions about the ventral tegmental area (VTA), the part of the brain involved with dopamine neurotransmitters related to reward-pathways. The first assumption states that positive emotions may change the processing of any structure that receives direct projections from the VTA. And secondly, any behavioral changes caused by such positive emotions are unlikely to be in relation to structures that do not receive a direct projection from the VTA.⁵⁴ Moreover, specifically regarding gratitude, research has shown that gratitude is correlated with brain activity in the anterior cingulate cortex and medial prefrontal cortex, two structures of the brain related with moral cognition, value judgement, and theory of mind.⁵⁵

Although only correlative at this point, these studies provide some observable truths to the application of positive emotions in the body, as suggested by Hill. Furthermore, the relationship between positive emotions and creative problem solving, as discussed in some of the peer-reviewed articles, parallels Hill's understanding that by feeling these positive emotions, one's connection to the Infinite Intelligence is stronger, and flashes of inspiration along with

⁵² Jie Yin, "Study on the Progress of Neural Mechanism of Positive Emotions," *Translational Neuroscience* 10 (April 23, 2019): 93–98, <https://doi.org/10.1515/tnsci-2019-0016>.

⁵³ F. Ashby, Alice Isen, and And Turken, "A Neuropsychological Theory of Positive Affect and Its Influence on Cognition," *Psychological Review* 106 (August 1, 1999): 529–50, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.106.3.529>.

⁵⁴ Yin, "Study on the Progress of Neural Mechanism of Positive Emotions."

⁵⁵ Glenn R. Fox et al., "Neural Correlates of Gratitude," *Frontiers in Psychology* 6 (September 30, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01491>.

imagination becomes more common.⁵⁶ These flashes of inspiration and imagination can be thought of as creative problem-solving skills as discussed in the articles. Experiencing positive emotions helps increase cognitive functions (creative problem solving), and this evidence suggests that further research on the Law of Attraction itself would be useful, as neurophysiological evidence for an *effect* of the Law of Attraction in thinking positively is only the first step.

Mirror Neurons

In terms of general neuroscience trends in research years, three other concepts that relate to the Law of Attraction at a theoretical level-- mirror neurons, neuroplasticity, and the placebo effect. Unlike the first half of this chapter, the second makes some broad connections between discoveries in neuroscience and their implications to the Law of Attraction based on certain observable truths in the first half of the chapter. These implications only serve as evidence as a framework and a path for future research to be conducted around the law.

Mirror neurons are a network of neuron groups that becomes activated when an individual performs an action and/or observes an action of another agent.⁵⁷ This group of neurons was first discovered in monkeys when monkeys observe others perform a certain action and then perform the action themselves.⁵⁸ In these studies, the same group of neurons fired during the observation of the activity and the actual performance of the activity. Furthermore,

⁵⁶ Ashby, Isen, and Turken, "A Neuropsychological Theory of Positive Affect and Its Influence on Cognition."

⁵⁷ Hyeonjin Jeon and Seung-Hwan Lee, "From Neurons to Social Beings: Short Review of the Mirror Neuron System Research and Its Socio-Psychological and Psychiatric Implications," *Clinical Psychopharmacology and Neuroscience* 16, no. 1 (February 2018): 18–31, <https://doi.org/10.9758/cpn.2018.16.1.18>.

⁵⁸ Evelyne Kohler et al., "Hearing Sounds, Understanding Actions: Action Representation in Mirror Neurons," *Science (New York, N.Y.)* 297, no. 5582 (August 2, 2002): 846–48, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1070311>.

such neurons also exist in humans as demonstrated using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), electroencephalography (EEG), and transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS).^{59, 60, 61} Mirror neurons are correlated with emotion, empathy, and theory of mind. Regarding emotion, the parts of the brain that become activated when observing someone else experience disgust is the same parts that are activated when one experiences disgust for oneself.⁶² Regarding empathy, the same brain regions of participants become activated when viewing a picture of a certain positive or negative incident as when actually experiencing that incident for oneself.⁶³ And finally, theory of mind explains the metacognitive ability to predict another individual's mental state (beliefs and desires) through experiences and behaviors.⁶⁴ Brain regions associated with theory of mind, the temporo-parietal areas, medial prefrontal cortex, and temporal poles, are associated with the regions activated by mirror neurons. Of course, more research needs to be conducted regarding the relationship between theory of mind and mirror neurons to better

⁵⁹ Anat Perry and Shlomo Bentin, "Mirror Activity in the Human Brain While Observing Hand Movements: A Comparison between EEG Desynchronization in the Mu-Range and Previous FMRI Results," *Brain Research* 1282 (July 28, 2009): 126–32, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brainres.2009.05.059>.

⁶⁰ Jaime A. Pineda, "The Functional Significance of Mu Rhythms: Translating 'Seeing' and 'Hearing' into 'Doing,'" *Brain Research. Brain Research Reviews* 50, no. 1 (December 1, 2005): 57–68, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brainresrev.2005.04.005>.

⁶¹ Marc Heiser et al., "The Essential Role of Broca's Area in Imitation," *The European Journal of Neuroscience* 17, no. 5 (March 2003): 1123–28, <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1460-9568.2003.02530.x>.

⁶² Bruno Wicker et al., "Both of Us Disgusted in My Insula: The Common Neural Basis of Seeing and Feeling Disgust," *Neuron* 40, no. 3 (October 30, 2003): 655–64, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0896-6273\(03\)00679-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0896-6273(03)00679-2).

⁶³ Jorge Moll et al., "The Neural Correlates of Moral Sensitivity: A Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging Investigation of Basic and Moral Emotions," *The Journal of Neuroscience: The Official Journal of the Society for Neuroscience* 22, no. 7 (April 1, 2002): 2730–36, <https://doi.org/20026214>.

⁶⁴ Martin Schulte-Rüther et al., "Mirror Neuron and Theory of Mind Mechanisms Involved in Face-to-Face Interactions: A Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging Approach to Empathy," *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 19, no. 8 (August 2007): 1354–72, <https://doi.org/10.1162/jocn.2007.19.8.1354>.

understand the connection between the two, but these implications with neurophysiological mirror neurons forging a way to better understand psychological concepts provide a framework to study mirror neurons in relation to the Law of Attraction.

From mirror neuron research thus far, would it be possible to conduct an experiment connecting this idea with visualization meditations? If one were to visualize a certain outcome or scenario in one's head, would the same neurons fire for the visualization itself and the actual attainment of the visualized outcome or scenario in the real world? There exist some similarities. As the purpose of this chapter is to provide evidence for the *effects* of the law, a thorough understanding of mirror neurons and their connection to the visualization itself is outside the scope of this thesis. However, it serves as a logical next step regarding further research, revealed truths, and the mind-body problem.

Neuroplasticity

Neuroplasticity refers to the brain's ability to change its activity during one's lifetime in response to intrinsic or extrinsic stimuli by reorganizing its structure, function, and connections.⁶⁵ This phenomenon provides an additional framework by which the Law of Attraction can be studied through. The first evidence for neuroplasticity was discovered and studied in the 20th century with technological advancements in the field.⁶⁶ It is now known that neuroplasticity is crucial for learning and memory processes. This discovery and understanding in science are a necessary assumption when discussing the Law of Attraction.

With the framework of neuroplasticity, one can understand that the brain physically changes according to intrinsic and extrinsic factors, some of which can be controlled (our

⁶⁵ Mateos-Aparicio and Rodríguez-Moreno, "The Impact of Studying Brain Plasticity."

⁶⁶ E. R. Kandel and L. Tauc, "Mechanism of Heterosynaptic Facilitation in the Giant Cell of the Abdominal Ganglion of *Aplysia Depilans.*," *The Journal of Physiology* 181, no. 1 (1965): 28–47, <https://doi.org/10.1113/jphysiol.1965.sp007743>.

thoughts and feelings), as studies have shown.⁶⁷ Neuroplasticity, nonetheless, does act as a major first step for future research regarding the Law of Attraction and its implications with personal development and should be researched further.

Placebo Effect

And finally, the placebo effect refers to a psychobiological phenomenon that occurs in an individual's brain after administration of an inert substance, a sham physical treatment (a sham surgery), or verbal suggestions of clinical benefit.⁶⁸ It is important to note that the placebo effect is the administration of an inert substance, not the inert substance itself. This concept provides yet another neuroscience-based avenue by which the Law of Attraction can be studied in the future.

The placebo effect itself in the clinical setting can account for temporary spontaneous remission of a disease, regression to the mean (a statistical effect due to selection biases), and patient and doctor biases.⁶⁹ Many biases can explain the placebo effect, and these biases also apply to the Law of Attraction. Nonetheless, a true observable placebo effect shows neurobiological change in the brain simply due to belief that a sham treatment is working. This concrete example of the placebo effect is what I intend future studies to use when examining the Law of Attraction. Both concepts heavily rely on a desire of a perceived outcome (elimination of a disease or attainment of a certain amount of money). This desire, as shown in placebo effects, can change the brain and cause physiological effects in the body, underscoring the power of desire and thought alone.

⁶⁷ Yin, "Study on the Progress of Neural Mechanism of Positive Emotions."

⁶⁸ Benedetti, Carlino, and Pollo, "How Placebos Change the Patient's Brain."

⁶⁹ Benedetti, Carlino, and Pollo.

Can this same non-physical desire and thought change more than the physiology of the body? Can it change certain physical realities of one's life outside of the body? More research needs to be done regarding the placebo effect and the effect of desire and thought on the physical reality of the body. However, I do believe that the placebo effect can be used to examine the Law of Attraction in a clinical setting, years from now, once we have made enough strides in understanding the placebo effect and technology that can measure such an interaction between observed and revealed truths. For now, though, I write to establish a connection between these two topics and their similarity regarding desire and thoughts to further philosophical and theoretical literature on this subject.

Counterarguments and Limitations

Neuroscience is a field that is fast changing with breakthroughs and discoveries. The connections I make in this chapter between neuroscience and the Law of Attraction have many counterarguments and limitations regarding them, especially with confirmation bias. I underscore that the purpose of this chapter is not to suggest that the Law of Attraction is a real phenomenon. On the contrary, I write this chapter to suggest that there exist some observable truths in the practices encouraged by the law as written in Hill's *Think and Grow Rich*, and we should start studying this topic in the academic setting rather than considering it as a pseudoscientific and pop culture topic. Nonetheless, I acknowledge certain counterargument and limitations.

For example, confirmation bias exists when I look for articles that "support" the Law of Attraction. To avoid this bias, I found articles that do not mention the law but describe observable truths in neuroscience based off methods (visualizations, affirmations, and emotions) encouraged by the Law of Attraction. Through this strategy, I hope to show that it is possible to study this metaphysical topic, and the law is at a level parallel with other current neuroscience

research being conducted to understand the mind-body problem, which leads into the second limitation.

As mentioned at the start of the chapter, the mind-body problem presents itself as a hindrance in understanding how our consciousness can be examined with brain function. The limitation that the problem presents is a lack of understanding and little technological advancements to better understand how mental phenomena can affect physical phenomena. As the Law of Attraction depends on certain assumptions regarding mental and physical phenomena, as seen in Hill's book, we do not have the methods by which to prove or disprove the law itself. Thus, I focus more on the *effects* of the law to shift the conversation from the law being only a mainstream topic to becoming more accepted in academia as a legit topic of study.

Moreover, in the second half of the chapter, most of the connections I make among mirror neurons, neuroplasticity, and the placebo effect remain broad and surface level in nature because my intention is to provide a framework by which future researchers can use to study the law if they choose to do so. Biases and slippery slopes exist inherently in these broad connections, and they are out of the scope of the purpose of the thesis. I suggest that similarities do exist and that it is worth studying these similarities in an academic context for future research. Mirror neurons, neuroplasticity, and the placebo effect are also intricate topics in neuroscience that can stand by themselves with many theories and hypotheses surrounding them. Thus, although I suggest researchers examine the Law of Attraction by these three frameworks, this examination should only be done after we better understand these concepts by themselves. Therefore, it may take years until scientists can apply the understanding of these ideas to a metaphysical one, yet another limitation for this chapter.

Conclusion of Findings

In conclusion, the findings from this chapter show how observable truths from neuroscience can help explain the *effects* of the Law of Attraction, and how these explanations provide a reason to study the law in an academic context. The evidence for the effects holds some scientific truth in them, showing that the strategies encouraged by Hill's *Think and Grow Rich* are not entirely baseless. Because the strategies' results are backed up by neuroscience, I argue that this provides a reason to scientifically conduct experiments for the law. The strategies that I explore in this chapter include visualization meditations, affirmations, and emotions, as described in Hill's *Think and Grow Rich*.

Visualization meditations show i) a similarity to mental imagery used by athletes and ii) the benefits of mindfulness to mental health. Affirmations show a connection with self-affirmation theory in social psychology, and how this theory affects the neurophysiology of the brain. Finally, I explore both positive and negative emotions and their effects on the brain and mental health. All these explanations of Hill's strategies have evidence backed up by peer-reviewed articles and directly portray the observable truths in the Law of Attraction.

More generally, I also explore the concepts of mirror neurons, neuroplasticity, and the placebo effect at a surface level to show how researchers can use these topics as a framework to investigate the Law of Attraction in future studies. These three concepts do not directly relate to the text in *Think and Grow Rich* per se but offer broader generalizations that are parallel with beliefs grounded in the Law of Attraction. The purpose of exploring these three concepts through a literature review is to establish connections that may or may not be valid between the Law of Attraction and neuroscience for researchers to explore more in future studies.

Conclusion

All in all, this thesis starts the conversation of how the Law of Attraction, as described in Napoleon Hill's *Think and Grow Rich*, can be considered an academic topic worthy of investigation by philosophers and scientists alike. The Law of Attraction states that positive thinking brings about positive results into one's life, and negative thinking brings about negative results into one's life. I first stumbled upon this concept during my first year at Emory and ever since, I have practiced the strategies outlined consistently. Through such practice and my own intellectual curiosity, I decided to study this pseudoscientific and metaphysical law for my honors thesis through the lens of Tibetan Buddhism and neuroscience in an unbiased manner.

In the introductory chapter, I explore my own qualms with the self-help industry and my experiences of thinking at the intersection of pop culture and academia. Chapter I then examines and summarizes Hill's *Think and Grow Rich* for the first time in an academic context. Many current successful entrepreneurs and thinkers quote this book as part of their successes, and the summary outlines the very pages that these individuals studied. Chapter II puts the book in context of the entire self-help industry and summarizes the history of personal development. Both chapters provide the necessary background information to fully comprehend the ideas and connections made in chapters III and IV, the main arguments of my thesis.

Chapter III then relays my experience with interviewing the Tibetan Buddhist monks on campus, and the relationships I found between Tibetan Buddhism and the Law of Attraction through karma, dependent origination, and Vipassana meditation. Karma explores the formula of the Law of Attraction (thoughts → feelings → actions → results), dependent origination examines the ideas of interconnectedness in conjunction with the Law of Vibration, and Vipassana meditation provides an avenue to analyze visualization mediation and mindfulness.

Chapter IV of my thesis explains the neuroscience evidence for the *effects* of the Law of Attraction as seen in visualization meditations, affirmations, and emotions. I then explore broad neuroscience topics as well, such as mirror neurons, neuroplasticity, and the placebo effect.

After understanding Tibetan Buddhist philosophies and neuroscientific concepts in relation to the Law of Attraction, it becomes necessary to pause and reflect on these relationships in context of the self-help industry. I conclude in my thesis that there, in fact, does exist scientific evidence for the Law of Attraction, as heavily practiced in the self-help industry, in the revealed truths of Tibetan Buddhism and the observable truths of neuroscience. With such evidence established, the next step involves introducing the law to more and more rigorous academic investigation and to begin a culture shift revolving around such popular culture topics. This thesis paves a path for the conversation between academia and personal development to continue, where the two might learn from each other with open minds and open hearts.

Thus, through the investigation of karma, dependent origination, and Vipassana meditation from my interviews with Tibetan Buddhist monks and the understanding of visualization meditations, affirmations, emotions, mirror neurons, neuroplasticity, and the placebo effect in neuroscience, one can establish strong connections between the personal development philosophy of the Law of Attraction and disciplines of Tibetan Buddhism and neuroscience rooted in academia. Through such connections, I hope that researchers and philosophers alike use my research to continue to study the Law of Attraction in a rigorous fashion.

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