# Psychological Theory Lightning Lessons

Interactive Session

Time: 60 minutes

Theory lies at the heart of psychological research, but the purpose of theory may differ for scholars who have been trained in a variety of disciplines. Scholars engaging in interdisciplinary research should take caution to understand the role of theory from their discipline’s perspective, as well as that of the discipline into which they are beginning to collaborate. The goal of the lightning lessons session is to introduce similarities and differences in theory between theology/philosophy and psychology, and then to succinctly present four theories from psychological science. Theories should be chosen based on the expertise of the facilitators in the session. The session is comprised of three parts:

* Part 1: overview of differences in theory between psychology and theology/philosophy
* Part 2: introduction to psychological theories
* Part 3: discussion of individual perceptions of differences in theory between psychology and theology/philosophy

Part 1: Prior to the session, traineess and facilitators should read Callaway (2022) *Theorizing Theory in Theology and Psychology* (reference below). This paper was written by a scientist who holds dual Ph.D.s, one in theology and cultural sciences, and the second in psychological science. This paper outlines some observations about the role of theory in theology and psychology and can help to facilitate interdisciplinary communication and collaboration through understanding the unique ways in which these fields approach theory. A facilitator can provide a brief overview of the paper, using the outline below as a guide:

* Role of theory in theology:
  + “Interpretative, historical-critical”
  + Reminder: Need to consider a critical mass of evidence
* Role of theory in psychology:
  + “Descriptive, inferential-predictive”
  + Reminder: Psychologists have values too
* Successful multidisciplinary collaboration
  + Acknowledge your discipline’s limits
  + Clarify terminology and functions of terms
  + Actively seek out collaborators and allow them to shape you

The discussion of the Callaway (2022) paper using the outline above is designed to be completed within 10 minutes, but the discussion could be extended if desired.

Part 2: Following the discussion, trainees should be divided into four groups, and each group should be stationed at one of four places in the room. (It is helpful to have a map available to direct trainees to the appropriate table.) One psychologist will be assigned to represent each psychological theory. The psychologist should aim to provide a broad and basic overview of the method within five minutes; the time will go quickly, and these discussions will naturally be incomplete. This activity focuses more on breadth as opposed to depth in understanding a theory; the goal is exposure to theories that psychologists might rely on when they are conceptualizing research related to theological or philosophical topics. Each psychologist should also have a handout with a basic overview of the theory that trainees can retain for future reference. Materials are provided for the following theories, but other theories may be selected depending on the expertise of the facilitators involved:

1. Broaden and Build Theory
2. Self-Determination Theory
3. Systems Developmental Theory

Psychologists will spend five minutes with one group, then will rotate to the next group until all groups have received a method from all psychologists.

Part 3: After they have been exposed to four different theories, trainees can consider what they notice about differences in theory between psychology and theology or philosophy.

Extensions:

If time allows, facilitators may consider including more theories or allowing each psychologist a longer time to discuss the theory. Trainees can consider the construction or the content of the theory or consider the ways in which the theory is applied to the research process. Some discussion questions are provided below, but trainees should feel free to take the discussion any direction they would like.

* How do these theories highlight the perspective of psychological science on the types of questions that are worthy of study?
* How do these theories highlight the perspective of psychological science on the nature of the human condition?
* To what extent do these theories appear to be narrow or widely applicable? Do you think there is any way you would want to widen or narrow their scope?
* To what extent do these theories highlight weaknesses in theory from a theological perspective? To what extent do these theories highlight strengths among theological theories?
* How would someone outside the academy respond to this theory?

References:

Callaway, K. (2022). Theorizing Theory in Theology and Psychology. *Journal of Psychology & Christianity*, *41*(2).

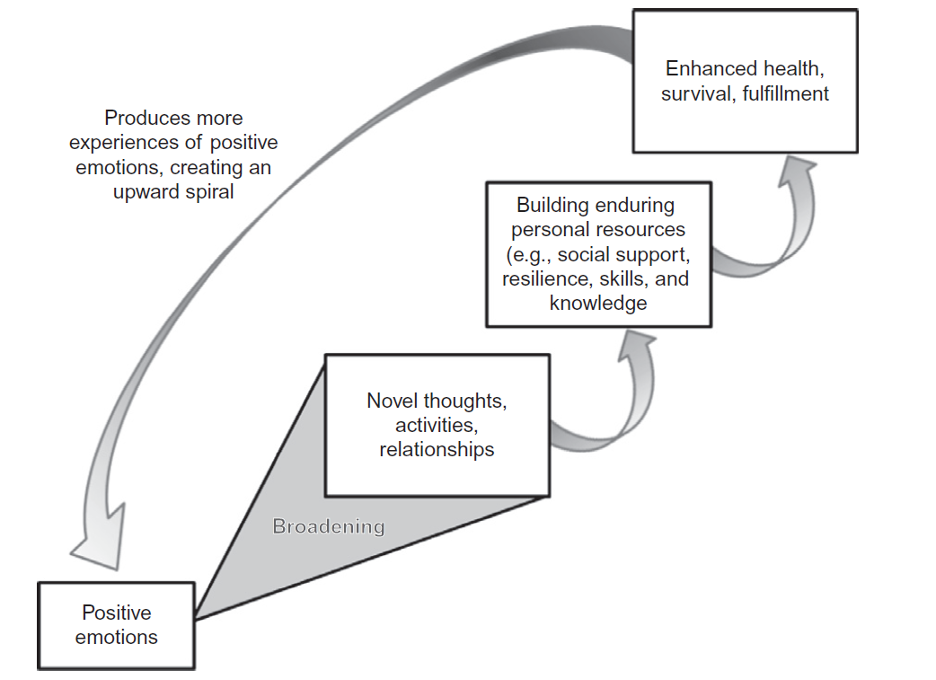
Broaden and Build Theory

A chart of negative emotions

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A diagram of a building

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**Self-Determination Theory**

A diagram of theory and its components

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**Origins**

* Core concept: “intrinsic motivation.” Motivation is intrinsic when it is not derived from external rewards or punishments, like money or social pressure, but instead by one’s own interest or desire to do something.
* People who are more intrinsically motivated to engage in a behavior tend to persist with that behavior for longer.
* Extrinsic motivators to crowd out intrinsic motivation. Adding external incentives (e.g., paying people) to do something that they would otherwise enjoy and do anyways reduces intrinsic motivation.

Some of the mini-theories are aimed at explaining this finding. But this and other work on intrinsic motivation seems to show that people have a deep-seated need to be *autonomous*, to not just do what others want or can pressure them into doing, but something that they autonomously choose to do. That idea was then expanded into Basic Psychological Needs Theory

**Basic Psychological Needs Theory**

Just as a person will be physically and well when their basic physiological needs are met, so too will they be mentally well when their basic *psychological* needs are met. These needs include a need for autonomy, but also competence, and relatedness.

A diagram of a diagram

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Systems Developmental Theories

Diagram of a diagram of different types of life cycle

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* Development is influenced by complex relationships within multiple environmental levels, ranging from immediate settings like family and school to broader contexts such as cultural norms and policies (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).
* The environment is categorized into interconnected systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem, each with distinct characteristics and levels of influence.
* Introduces the chronosystem, adding the dimension of time to consider its impact on development.
* This multi-layered approach underscores the interconnectedness of individual and environmental factors, providing a comprehensive framework to understand the collective influence of various systems on human development.

**The Relational Developmental Systems (RDS) Paradigm**

* Human development is a dynamic interaction between individuals and contexts.
* Rooted in systems theories, RDS builds on life-span and life-course perspectives.
* RDS posits that individuals and contexts are co-active, co-developing systems that reciprocally influence each other over time (Lerner, 2006; Overton, 2015).
* Emphasizes "plasticity," development can follow multiple paths towards thriving.
* Aims to explore how different levels of individual and contextual factors combine to create diverse developmental trajectories.