



Using Mindfulness and Positive Psychology to Cope with Race-Related Trauma

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Outline

- Overview of trauma and race related trauma
- Overview of positive psychology
- Positive psychology examples
- Overview of mindfulness
- Mindfulness examples and relate it to race related trauma
- Closing Practice
- Resources
- Questions

Trauma and Race-Related Trauma

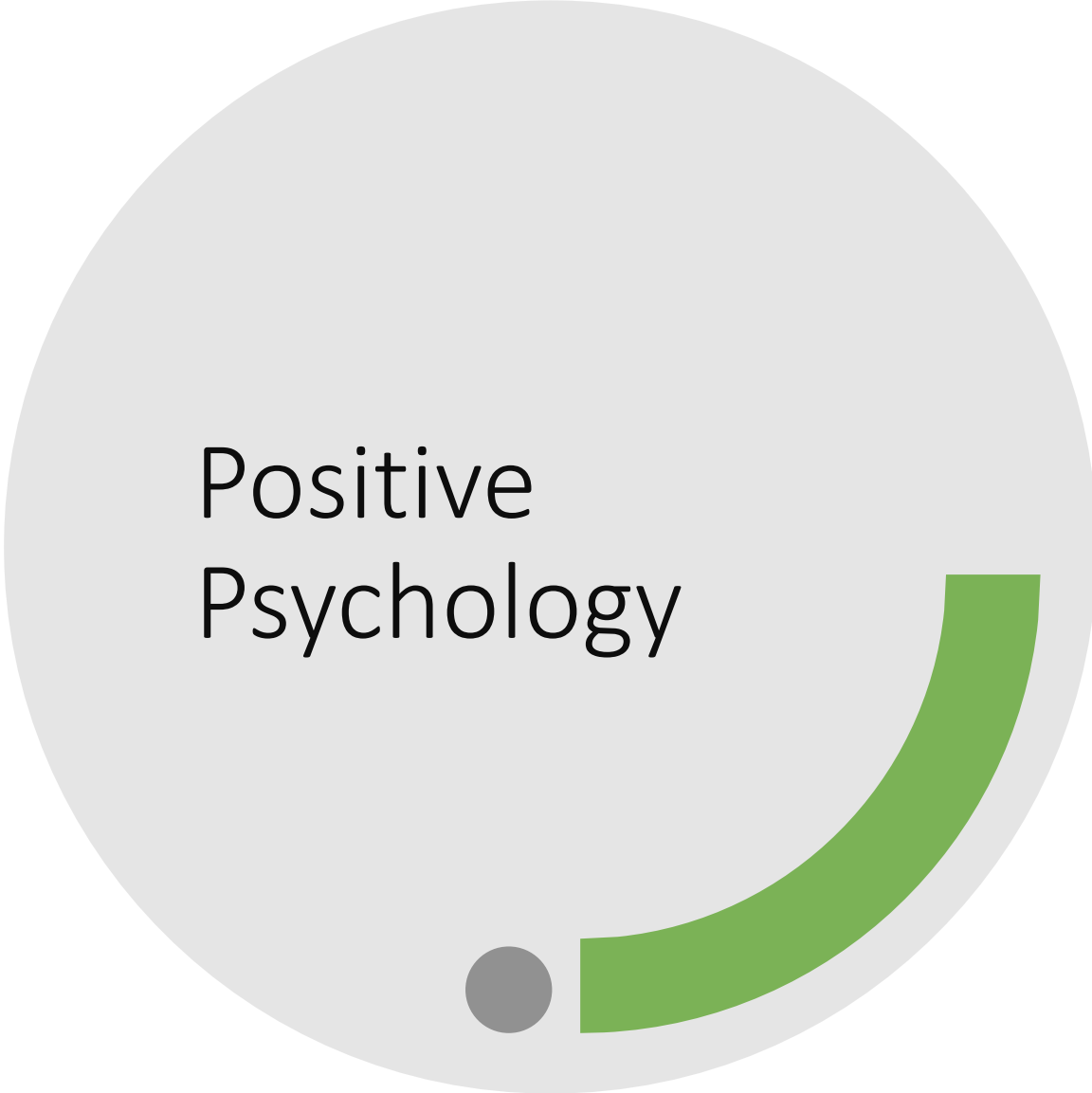
- An event is traumatic if it makes you extremely distressed and produces lasting psychological effects.
- Trauma can be as the result of a **direct or indirect** experience.
- Experiences of racism and injustice can cause intense emotional distress which can be overwhelming and affect the ability to cope with daily activities or life in general.
- **Other people don't get to decide** if an experience is traumatic for you. Some invalidating statements are, "that wasn't so bad" or "well at least it didn't directly happen to you" or "the same thing happened to me, I don't think it's traumatic."



Some Signs of Experiencing Trauma

- being scared or easily startled
 - sleep difficulty (unable to sleep or reoccurring nightmares)
 - flashbacks or bad memories of the event for an extended period
 - not wanting to talk about the traumatic event or unable to remember important aspects of the event
 - difficulty concentrating
 - feeling detached, numb
 - avoiding routine activities
 - inability to experience happiness or loving feelings
 - avoiding reminders of the event (eg., places, people, conversations)
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- The scientific study of "what makes life worth living" (Peterson, 2008)
- Psychology that pays more attention to human strengths rather than deficits (Seligman, 1998)
- The theory of well-being in positive psychology includes positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment, put together to make a life worth living (Seligman, 2012)



Positive Psychology

In 1984, Dr. Joseph White presented 7 psychological strengths of Black Americans

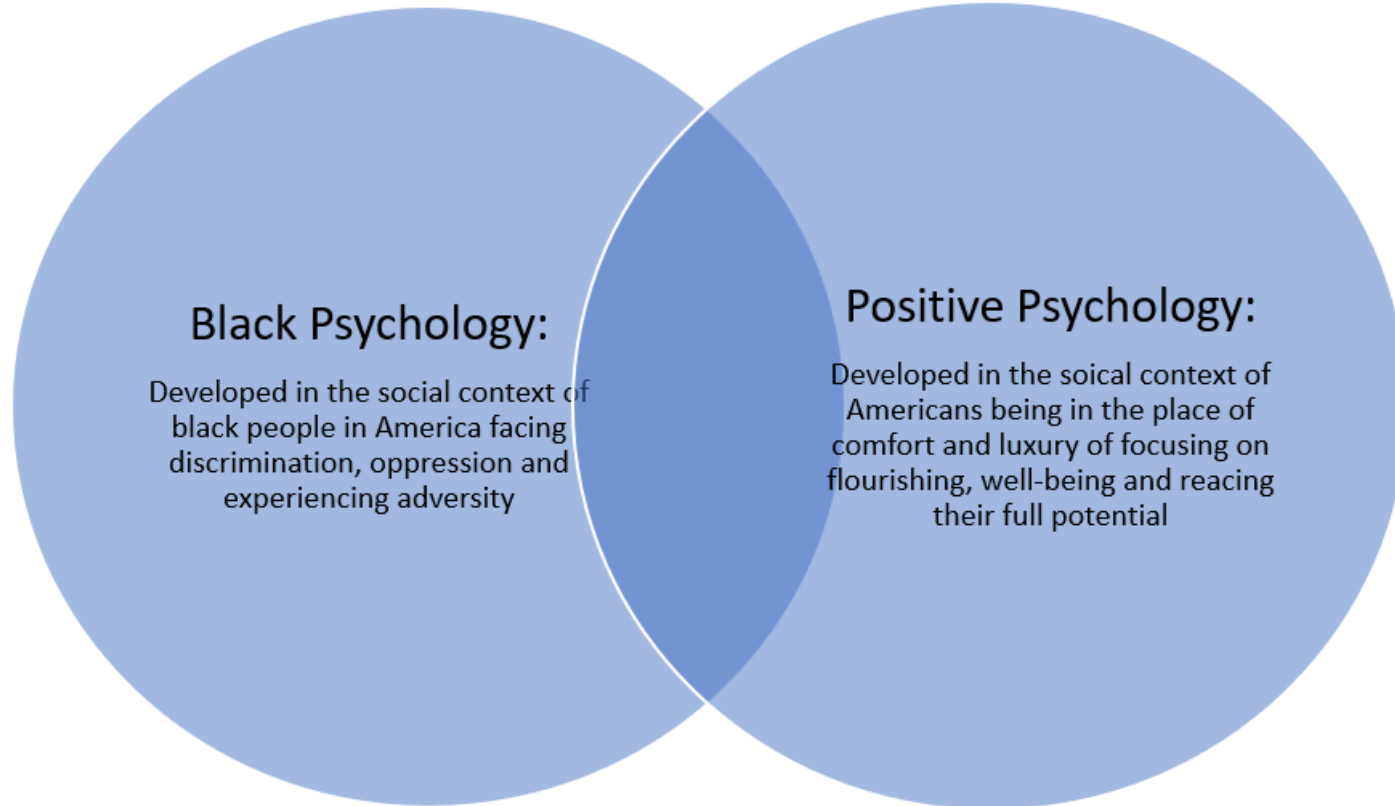
- These strengths came from black psychology and emerged *before* positive psychology, though received less attention
 - Improvisation
 - Resilience
 - Connectedness to others
 - Spirituality
 - Emotional Vitality
 - Gallows of humor
 - Healthy suspicion of "you know who"



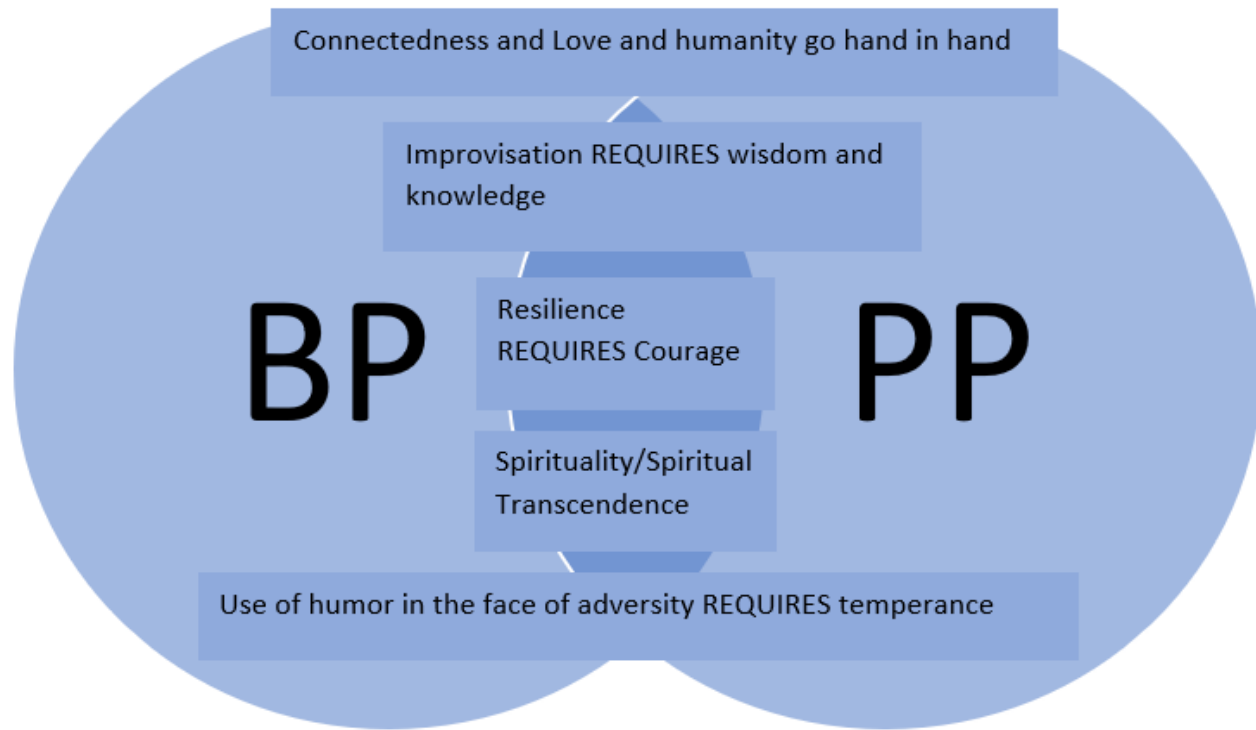
In 2002, Martin Seligman outlined 6 core virtues of positive psychology

- These virtues are cross-cultural and found in religions and philosophies worldwide
 - Wisdom and knowledge
 - Love and humanity
 - Courage
 - Justice
 - Temperance
 - Spiritual transcendence





But here's
something
interesting



Look at the overlap in these two theories!

Using this overlap, here are some suggestions for your own well-being

Improvisation (wisdom and knowledge)

- Sit down and write your own **strengths-based life story!**
 - *The Past:* Write the story of your past. Be sure to describe challenges you have overcome, and the personal strengths and wisdom that allowed you to do so.
 - *The Present:* Describe your life and who you are right now. How do you differ from your past self? What are your strengths now? How have your strengths evolved? What challenges are you facing? How can you use your strengths and wisdom to overcome these challenges?
 - *The Future:* Write about your ideal future. How will your life be different than it is now? How can you use your strengths to achieve this ideal future? How will your strengths grow? What kind of person do you hope to become? How will you be different than you are now? What would you like to achieve? Finally, how can you go about achieving these things?




Connectedness to others: Song share

- Sit down with a friend, a partner, (depending on quarantine and who's in your circle, you can share headphones, sit close, or do this at a distance) or someone you want to connect with
- Each of you pick a song you love with all your heart and then listen (while doing nothing else) to each song together
- Talk about it after you hear it
 - What about this song do you love?
 - What images or thoughts go through your mind as you listen?
 - What do you like about the performing artist?
 - What do the lyrics mean to you?





Use of courage for resilience

- Speak up when you see injustice or hear racism in any form, from a microaggression to a straight up aggression
 - Speak up to your family members about what you want or need
 - Attend a protest
 - Write a letter to a policy maker telling your story or someone else's who needs help or empowerment to tell it
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Gallows Humor (using your temperance)



For 1 week, pay attention to what funny things happen and write down 3 funny things that happened every day.

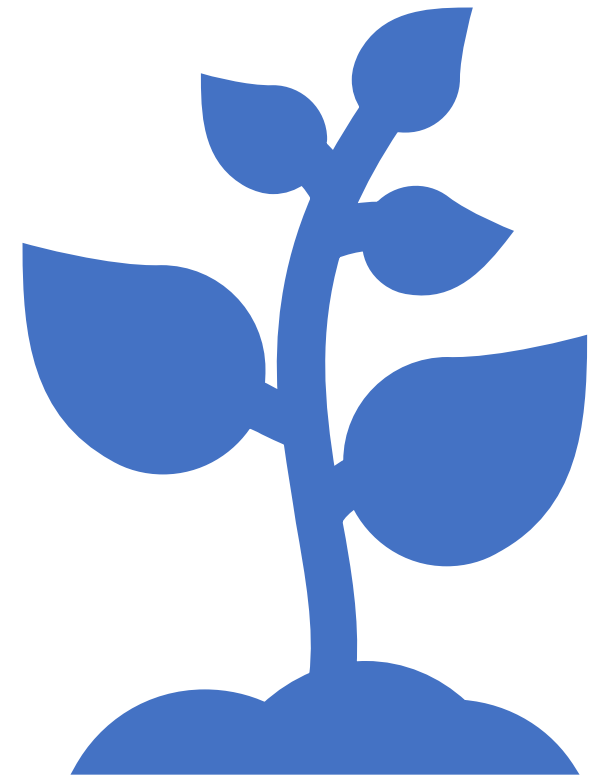


This will get you looking for humor in everyday occurrences.



You could also think of one of the funniest things that has happened to you and write it down in as much detail as you can imagine

Spirituality



About Mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2005)

- Being fully present and engaged, in the moment
- Paying full attention to what is happening or what you are doing without judgment.
- It means being awake and knowing what you are doing, and being in touch with who you are (thoughts, feelings, actions) without getting caught up with them or trying to change
- It is not aligned with any specific religious practice
- *We all use mindfulness throughout our day, we don't always realize it!*

Examples of Mindful Activities

- Prayer
- Contemplative practices
- Fully absorbed watching your favorite movie
- Eating a meal and enjoying every bite
- Giving your full attention when someone is talking with you
- Taking a moment to stop and think before acting
- Meditation
- Focusing on your inhale and exhale

How Mindfulness Can Help You Cope



Emotion regulation



Increase awareness
(self and others)



Relaxation



Regulate breathing



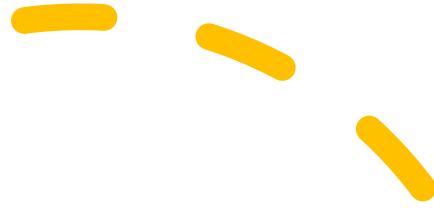
Improve
attunement (self
and others)



Slow down

Mindful TEAs

- Mindfulness of **thoughts**– what are you saying to yourself?
- Mindfulness of **emotions**– how are you feeling in the moment?
- Mindfulness of **actions**– what are you doing? What are the behaviors?
- Mindfulness of **surroundings**- where are you going? Do you feel safe?



A graphic with a dark blue background covered in water droplets. The text is centered and white. At the top, 'RAIN of Self-Compassion' is underlined. Below it are the four steps: 'Recognize', 'Allow', 'Investigate', and 'Nurture with self-compassion'. At the bottom, the author's name 'TARA BRACH' is written in small letters.

RAIN of Self-Compassion

Recognize

Allow

Investigate

Nurture with self-compassion

TARA BRACH

Closing Practice – RAIN Meditation

- **Recognize**: what is happening now? How are you feeling?
- **Allow**: Just allow the feelings to arise as it is. Don't judge yourself for having the feelings.
- **Investigate**: what is this emotion trying to tell you? Where do you feel it in your body?
- **Nurture with self-compassion**: do you need to extend some reassurance, forgiveness or love toward yourself?

Stay In Touch With Us!

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[And in Milwaukee Magazine](#)

References & Resources

Books

- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. MJF Books.
- Seligman, M. P. (2012). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and wellbeing*. Free Press.
- DeFreitas, S. C. (2020). *African American Psychology: A positive psychology perspective*. Springer.

Websites

- Tara Brach - [RAIN](#)
- Addressing Race and Trauma in the Classroom - [NCTSN](#)
- Uncovering The Trauma of Racism – [APA](#)
- Information About Racism and Counseling Considerations - [ACA](#)
- Stop centering whiteness - [Centering Blackness Instead](#)
- Song share ideas - [25 Great Civil Rights Protest Songs](#)
- Humor activities - [Psychology Today](#)