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Black Psychology: A Forerunner of Positive Psychology

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Introduction

Black psychology and positive psychology have both made impactful, but also similar, contributions to the field of psychology. The core virtues of positive psychology are very similar to the psychological strengths of African Americans that were created in Black psychology before the emergence of positive psychology. The psychological strengths of African Americans, however, did not receive as much attention as the core virtues of positive psychology in the field of psychology. Dr. Joseph White, a prominent figure in Black psychology, developed the seven psychological strengths of African Americans. Dr. White presented these seven psychological strengths of African Americans in his *book The Psychology of Blacks: An Afro-American Perspective* in 1984 (White, 1984).

In 1998, Dr. Martin Seligman, founder of positive psychology, proposed that the field of psychology start focusing more attention on human strengths (Schui & Krampen, 2010). Later, Seligman developed the six core virtues of positive psychology, which are: wisdom and knowledge, courage, love and humanity, justice, temperance, and spiritual transcendence (Seligman, 2002). Since the emergence of positive psychology over the past few decades, its popularity has risen rapidly. While the founders of positive psychology do acknowledge some forerunners of positive psychology, Black psychology has not been identified or recognized as a forerunner of, or contributor to, positive psychology.

Contributions of Black psychologists have frequently been overlooked or unnoticed by mainstream psychology (Belgrave & Allison, 2018). Although very similar in construct, the psychological strengths of African Americans and the core virtues of positive psychology were developed in significantly different historical contexts, and with very different purposes. The seven strengths of African Americans were developed as a result of African philosophies and cultural traditions being utilized within a population that was being resilient in the face of oppression and its severe effects, which included psychological, emotional, economic, and educational impacts (White, 1984). The African American struggle against oppression led to the civil rights movement, the Black Power movement, Black identity movements, and the organized efforts of Black psychologists. This social and historical context preceded the organization and presentation of the seven strengths of African Americans, by a Black psychologist, Dr. Joseph White, in 1984.

Contrastingly, the six core virtues of positive psychology were developed within a population that had the leisure to explore factors associated with flourishing and optimality (Seligman, 2002). Following World War II, the field of psychology in the United States of America focused mostly on mental disorders and psychopathology, out of necessity (Resnick et al., 2001). This focus on mental illness resulted in other aspects of psychology, such as holistic and strengths-based

perspectives, not receiving as much attention within the field. In response, the humanistic wave followed and became prominent in the field of psychology. The humanistic wave influenced a more holistic view of psychology, including a focus on strengths and virtues. This social and historical context led to the development of positive psychology, which sought to use scientific methods to study positive aspects of human functioning (Resnick et al., 2001).

Black Psychology

Black psychology is defined, in its simplest form, as the psychology of Black people (White & Parham, 1990). Dr. Joseph White explains that "Black psychology, the psychology of blackness, is the attempt to build a conceptual model to organize, explain, and understand the psychosocial behavior of Black Americans based on the primary dimensions of an Afro-American world view" (White, 1984, p.3). A fundamental component of an Afro-American frame of references is the influence of African culture despite continued exposure to Euro-American culture (White, 1984). Black culture is a representation of two cultures merging together, built upon the foundation of African culture (Nobles, 1974). The terms Black, African American, and Afro-American are being used interchangeably in the paper to represent African American people. African American culture is derived from African culture. African cultures traditionally view humans from a holistic perspective; a perspective that does not separate mind and body, or affect and cognition. In this perspective, the "total person is simultaneously a feeling, experiencing, sensualizing, sensing, and knowing human being living in a dynamic, vitalistic world where everything is interrelated" (White, 1984, p.5).

Black psychology is not merely the study of African Americans being resilient in the face of oppressive conditions; Black psychology encompasses a holistic perspective which adopted positive aspects of African philosophy, values, customs, attitudes, and behaviors (Nobles, 1972). According to John Mbiti (1970), "collective consciousness" is a significant part of African philosophy. "Collective consciousness" is a vital attitude in which unity is inherent in the community (Mbiti, 1970). For example, the Dogon people of West Africa reported beliefs that individuals are a part of an interconnected unit; and that each individual is also a microcosm of the whole (Nobles, 1972). The individual as a microcosm of the whole is exemplified in that each cell in an individual's body works together for the body to function as a unit in the same manner that each individual person works together for the society to function as a unit (Nobles, 1973). An essential part of understanding people is understanding their religion, proverbs, oral traditions, ethics, and morals (Nobles, 1972), and this certainly applies to African cultures as well. The collectivist culture and value of interconnectedness that were present in African cultures persisted in African American culture (White, 1984).

While there are differences in the various cultures within the African continent, there are some largely shared values amongst different African cultures (Nobles, 1972). For example, the Mende people of West Africa and the Ashanti people, from what is now considered Ghana, both believe that physical and the spiritual components unite in order to form human life, though they have different explanations of how this union develops (Nobles, 1972). The Mende people believe that the father contributes the physical portion of a child, and the mother contributes the spirit. The Ashanti people believe that the mother contributes the physical portion of the offspring and the father contributes the spirit (Nobles, 1972). Although these cultures have different philosophical explanations, they similar believes concerning both parents making contributions to create life that is composed of physical and spiritual components. Religion and philosophy of life are largely connected within many African cultures; spirituality and communal values are also common values within African cultures (Nobles, 1972). Spirituality and communal values are also largely prevalent in African American cultures and Black psychology as well (White, 1984).

Black psychology within America is a product of perspectives that were developed from African philosophy being developed and adopted within the context of the culture and conditions of Black people living in America (White, 1984). This largely includes the phenomenon that originated from African philosophy being adapted and utilized within a different social condition. The culture and conditions of Black people in America is a culture of people living in oppressive conditions (Guthrie, 2004; White, 1984). Before the emergence of positive psychology, Black psychological theory was being used to identify factors necessary to maximize positivity and sustain well-being (Myers, Anderson, Lodge, Speight, & Queener, 2018) while enduring oppressive conditions.

Context of the Times of Black Psychology
Similarly to other subfields within psychology, Black psychology also was influenced by social and historical contexts. Black psychology emerged in a historical context in which Black people were struggling for rights and survival. The Black community in America was impacted by over 400 years of enslavement (Grills, 2013). After the abolishment of slavery, there continued to be disparities in health, education, housing, employment, and incarceration rates between Black and White people (Grills, 2013). Data collected in 1940 stated that three-quarters of African Americans were still living in the rural south in economically marginalized areas, disproportionately living in poverty in comparison to White people, and faced segregation in social settings (Levy, 1998). In reference to the post-slavery conditions in which Black people in America lived, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said that White society caused darkness and created discrimination (King, 1968). According to Dr. King, an oppressive system created slums, and this system

perpetuated unemployment, ignorance, and poverty within the Black community. Dr. King stated, "the slums are the handiwork of a vicious system of the White society; Negroes live in them but do not make them any more than a prisoner makes a prison" (King, 1968, p. 4).

In response to unjust social conditions, the Black community made numerous social movements as part of their resilience in the face of oppression. The civil rights movement, which took place between the 1950s and 1960s, was one of the social movements to resist oppression (Levy, 1998). The civil right movement was a movement which sought to address issues rights to vote, the ability to serve in a non-segregated military, equal access to educational opportunities and occupational opportunities (Levy, 1998). The civil rights movement influenced an increased Black consciousness and demand for liberation (Barnes, 1972). The bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama was a significant event in the civil rights movement (Levy, 1998). In 1955 a Black woman named Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a White passenger when riding a bus from work in Montgomery, Alabama and was arrested as a result. Following Rosa Parks being arrested for refusing to give up her seat on the bus, Dr. Martin Luther King delivered a speech, and the Black community in Montgomery boycotted the buses (Levy, 1998). This was a part of the civil rights movement, which brought about increased awareness of the persistent poverty in the African American community and the racial injustices which prevailed in America (Levy, 1998).

The Black Power movement was another response to the social injustices that Black people in America experienced, the Black Power movement took place between 1965 and 1973 (Levy, 1998). Stokely Carmichael defined Black Power as an expression of Black people's want for political, economic, and social power (Levy, 1998). The Black Power movement was a call for Black people in America to unite and build a sense of community. It was a call for Black people to lead their own organizations, support their own organizations, and reject racist institutions and values (Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967). Some onlookers labeled Black Power advocates as racists and misinterpreted the call for self-identification and self-determination as "Black supremacy" (Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967). The Black Panther Party (BPP) was developed in Oakland, California, in 1966, this organization organized armed people to patrol the community (Levy, 1998). The FBI released a mission to disassemble the BPP; the FBI arrested and killed many of the members of the BPP. The Black Power movement was a call for social justice, which resulted in the death of many Black people (Levy, 1998).

Positive self-identify was one of the challenges that were present in the discussion of Black psychology. According to Cross (1978), a positive self-identity in African Americans involves developing an inner sense of security and self-confidence in being Black. In general, interactions between people's personal characteristics and social and environmental factors influence the development of

people's personality and identity (White & Parham, 1990). However, barriers for African American individuals exist in developing a positive self-identity. As White and Parham explained, "African American people are not always afforded the luxury of totally surrounding themselves with social and institutional support systems that enhance, promote, and affirm our humanity as African-Americans" (White & Parham, 1990, p. 45). Literature in the 1940s and 1950s discussed Black people facing challenges with self-hatred (Clark & Clark, 1947). According to White and Parham (1990), knowing one's self is fundamental in having a positive self-identity. White and Parham (1990) proclaim "to know oneself (or one's nature) means to recognize, understand, respect, appreciate, and love those characteristics and/or attributes that make us uniquely African Americans." (White & Parham, 1990, p. 53). According to Wade Nobles (1986), self-knowledge serves as a buffer that reduces the degree to which people internalize negative messages from social and environmental conditions. Movements toward racial pride and positive racial attitudes within Black populations emerged to counter barriers Black individuals faced in developing positive self-identity (Cross; 1971; Cross, 1978).

Black Psychologists
A modern era of Black psychologists began with the development of the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi) in 1968. With the development of this organization, a group of Black psychologists came together who knew firsthand the needs, aspirations, and goals of Black people (White & Parham, 1990). ABPsi was developed during a time of turmoil and racial tension in America. ABPsi was founded on September 2nd, 1968, after Dr. Martin Luther King had been assassinated on April 4th of that year. Following Dr. King's assassination, there were numerous racial riots and was a wave of consciousness in which Black people proclaimed that "Black is beautiful" (Williams, 2008). It was during this time that ABPsi was developed. The members of ABPsi came together to address some specific issues, which were the small numbers of Black psychologists, and Black students in psychology undergraduate and graduate programs. Founders of ABPsi did not believe social concerns, including racism and poverty, were being adequately addressed by the American Psychological Association (APA). They further highlighted the lack of Black representation in the APA (Williams, 2008).

These Black psychologists were uniquely qualified to develop theories and applied techniques for working with the Black population because of the combination of their lived experience in the Black community and their academic training (White & Parham, 1990). The Black psychologists, however, did not develop Black psychology. They articulated that which was already present in the Black experience in psychological terms (White & Parham, 1990). White and Parham (1990) explained that "Black psychology and the psychology of Blackness reflect an attempt to build a conceptual model that organizes, explains, and leads to

an understanding of the psychosocial behavior of African-Americans based on the primary dimensions of African-American world view" (White & Parham, 1990, p. 23).

Numerous Black psychologists have made substantial contributions to Black psychology as a subfield. Dr. Joseph White is a Black psychologist who presented the psychological strengths of African Americans (White, 1984). Dr. Wade Nobles is a Black psychologist who presented connections between the mind, body, and spirit in African cultures and discussed the influence of African philosophy on Black psychology (Nobles, 1972). Dr. Linda James Myers is a Black psychologist who developed optimal conceptual theory, an Afrocentric theory/worldview which proclaims that well-being is enhanced by developing a more optimal worldview (Myers, 1988). Optimal conceptual theory was developed to identify and enhance maximal positive and sustainable well-being (Myers et al., 2018). An optimal worldview is one that values perspectives, including intrinsic self-worth, communal self-identity, and spiritual development (Myers, 1988). While there are far more prominent Black psychologists than the ones mentioned in this paper, these are some Black psychologists who produced work discussing positive aspects of human functioning.

Psychologists have traditionally used the "deficit" model when studying African Americans. Researchers have examined factors relating to positive psychology within African American populations (Tucker & Herman, 2002). This model presents African Americans as abnormal and inferior in comparison to the dominant culture. However, some research has been done examining constructs of positive psychological functioning in African Americans. Researchers suggest that positive psychological functioning for African Americans stems from an Afrocentric worldview, and an Afrocentric worldview values collectivism, connectedness, and close interpersonal relationships (Wilson et al., 2008). Researchers found a positive correlation between Afrocentric cultural values and life satisfaction in African American adolescents (Constantine et al., 2006). Researchers also found that using collective coping strategies was found to be positively correlated with life satisfaction in African American college students (Wilson et al., 2008).

Seven Psychological Strengths of African Americans
Numerous Black psychologists (including Dr. Joseph White) have examined attitudes, behaviors, and lifestyles that have been employed by African American people surviving within an oppressive system. In 1984 Dr. White organized seven psychological strengths of African Americans; these psychological strengths are improvisation, resilience, connectedness to others, spirituality, emotional vitality, gallows of humor, and a healthy suspicion of you know who (White, 1984). Improvisation is the ability to use creativity, innovation, imagination, and

resourcefulness in pursuits. Black people needed to use improvisation because they often did not receive opportunities directly or easily (White, 1984). Resilience is the ability to bounce back up after setbacks and disappointments. Black people needed to be resilient because the oppressive system in which Black people lived made setbacks and disappointments commonplace (White, 1984). Connectedness to others displayed through relationships with members of immediate family, members of extended family, relationships with peers, romantic relationships, and relationships with mentors (White, 1984). Interpersonal relationships are an innate human need. Spirituality is a belief in/connection to a higher power; this can be expressed through religions, and religious practices can be separate from religious beliefs and practices. Spirituality has been used within the Black community to help people overcome adversity and receive inspiration and hope in the midst of trials (White, 1984). Emotional vitality is an excitement, high level of energy, zest for life, and behaving in a manner that approaches life enthusiastically. The Black church and Black music are both examples in which emotionally vitality is commonly expressed (White, 1984). Gallows of humor is the ability to use laughter and crying to help aid in persevering through adversity. A healthy suspicion of you know who is the idea of being careful about when to trust people in the dominant culture because Black people have been lied to and abused by people in America the dominant culture for centuries (White, 1984). According to White (1984) these psychological strengths are characteristics and coping strategies that were developed and implemented by African Americans who were enduring oppressive conditions. Though the psychological strengths of African Americans were developed as a psychologist's presentation of the use of strengths-based strategies, they did not become widely known within the field of psychology.

Positive Psychology

Forerunners of Positive Psychology
Positive psychology credits numerous forerunners of positive psychology. Dr. Seligman, a founder of positive psychology, stated that the tenets of positive psychology were developed out of a collection of perspectives that had been developed in earlier times (Seligman, 2002). Seligman credits religious traditions, including the Old Testament, the Talmud, the Koran, Buddha, and the Upanishads for influencing positive psychology (Seligman, 2002). In addition, Seligman stated that the concepts used by philosophical thought and thinkers, such as Aristotle, Plato, Confucius, Thomas Aquinas, and Saint Augustine, were incorporated into the development of positive psychology (Seligman, 2002). Also, Bushido (the Samurai code) and Benjamin Franklin were influential in the development of positive psychology (Seligman, 2002). Further, Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2004) credit Kant, the Bhagavad Gita, and St. Paul for influencing some of the

aspects of positive psychology. Positive psychology was also cited as being influenced by psychologists, including "William James, John Dewey, Carl Rogers, and Abraham Maslow" (Peterson & Park, 2003, p. 145). Western and eastern philosophical thought influenced the subject matter of positive psychology (Boniwell, 2012). Scholars claim that positive psychology has always been present but had not previously been integrated into a particular body of knowledge and recognized and celebrated in the way that it is now (Linley, Joseph, Harrington, & Wood, 2006).

The forerunners of positive psychology range from perspectives derived from religions, philosophers, inventors, and psychologists from various cultures. However, despite the recognition numerous forerunners preceding the emergence of positive psychology, Black psychology is not widely recognized as a subfield within psychology that focused on strengths-based perspectives. The lack of widespread recognition of Black psychology as a contributor to the strengths-based focus within the field of psychology is an example of Black psychology's contributions to the field of psychology being overlooked. This may have been the result of Black psychology's contributions being unnoticed or considered insignificant.

Humanistic Psychology

Humanistic psychology emerged around the middle of the twentieth century. Prior to the wave of humanism, the field of psychology was largely dominated by behaviorism and psychoanalysis (Wertz, 1998). Historians report that a number of sources influenced the humanistic wave. Some historians credit the social zeitgeist of the 1960s as an influential factor in the humanistic movement. The social zeitgeist influenced values and practices that promoted human dignity, freedom, individuality (Wertz, 1998). Philosophers, including Nitzsche and Satre, reportedly influenced the humanistic approach in psychology. Additionally, psychologists, including Horney, Adler, Frankl, May, and Erickson, are said to have influenced the wave of humanism. Research in cybernetics emerged in the 1960s and influenced more holistic perspectives in a variety of fields (Edwards & Jaros, 1995). In addition to this, the public becoming increasingly interested in psychology influenced the emergence of a more holistic approach in the field of psychology (Kirschenbaum, 2004). In the 1960s, there was a movement against mechanicalism and reductionism in the field psychology. The wave of humanism in psychology emerged within this movement (Wertz, 1998).

Humanistic psychology was one of the immediate forerunners of positive psychology. Humanistic psychologists suggested that the field of psychology ignored positive aspects of the human experience, such as creativity, love, joy, and the capacity to grow (Gillman & Seligman, 1999). Humanistic psychology had a significant wave of recognition between 1960 and 1980. Abraham Maslow's

examination of positive components of psychology had a significant impact on the influence of the humanistic psychology wave (Resnick et al., 2001). The humanistic perspective viewed humans holistically, as individuals who could not be reduced to parts. Humanists viewed connection, meaning, and creativity as necessary components of the human experience. Humanistic psychologists did not only want to study suffering and trauma, but also were interested in studying growth, creativity, dreams, ethics, and values.

Humanistic psychologists view humans as complex beings who have intricate subjective experiences and therefore believed it would be difficult to study the complete human experience through the use of objective measures (Resnick et al., 2001). Humanistic psychological perspective values experiences over absolute truths, and uniqueness in addition to universality, and qualitative methods of research with examine the complexity of the human experience (Resnick et al., 2001). Humanistic psychologists suggested that in order to understand humans, one should not analyze parts, but should examine the whole. Therefore, it is necessary to examine all levels of body, speech, and mind within its surrounding social and historical context (Maslow, 1971). According to the humanistic perspective, in order to completely understand humans, individual, group, social, political, physiological, cognitive, affective, imaginal, and spiritual factors must all be taken into account (Allport, 1937; Maslow, 1971; May, 1953; Resnick & Warmoth, 2001).

Humanistic psychology values an examination of positive aspects of psychology. Humanistic psychology suggests that separating positive and negative as polar opposites, which can be viewed separately, results in missing the complexity of the human phenomenon (Resnick et al., 2001). Instead of separating the positive and negative, the humanistic perspective suggests that the meaning and value of "positive" is developed through its dialogical relationship with the "negative."

Humanistic psychology sought to understand the human experience largely through subjective methodologies of examination, such as qualitative studies (Resnick et al., 2001). "They seek to understand through a deepened examination of subjective experience as an alternative to the objective, quantified study of causes, effects, and correlations" (Resnick et al., 2001, p. 80). The humanistic approach to psychology used a variety of research methods that included narrative, imaginal, and somatic approaches. Some of the results produced from the use of these methods would not always be generalizable or be able to be standardized in the way in which traditional scientific results would.

Context of the Times of Positive Psychology
Numerous factors have contributed to the extraordinary growth of positive psychology. Substantial funding and strategic efforts to publicize the message of

positive psychology have certainly had an impact on its growth (Yen, 2010). The social and historical contexts impact the direction of focus within the field of psychology. According to Yen (2010) "psychology's development in the last 100 years was shaped in significant ways by cultural, political, and ideological concerns" (Yen, 2010, p.69). Similarly, the social and historical context also influenced the emergence of positive psychology. After World War II, psychology became largely focused on healing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Before World War II, the field of psychology was largely focused on three missions: curing mental illnesses, helping people's lives be more productive and fulfilling, and recognizing and developing talent (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Two momentous events that came after World War II significantly impacted the direction of focus within the field of psychology; these events were the Veterans Administration (which is now Veterans Affairs) being founded in 1946, and the National Institute of Mental Health being founded in 1947 (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The founding of the Veterans Administration in 1946 resulted in numerous psychologists being able to make financial profits in treating mental illness, and the development of the National Institute of Mental Health in 1947 influenced psychologists with grants for research that was focused on treating pathology. As a result, there was a large shift in the field of psychology to focus on treating mental illness and producing research concerning pathology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Consequently, the field of psychology did not focus as much attention on flourishing and developing talents (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In addition to the financial incentives, there was a great need for the field of psychology to focus on helping heal the distressed. After World War II, there was a large number of people who were distressed, there was a large presence of mental disorders, and there was a pressing need to treat these people (Seligman, Parks, & Steen, 2004). During this period, the field of psychology focusing on treating mental disorders aided psychologists in diagnosing, measuring symptoms, and treating mental disorders (Seligman, Parks, & Steen, 2004). However, the field of psychology did not focus much attention on studying what would lead to happiness during this time. "We believe 'happiness' is a condition over and above the absence of unhappiness" (Seligman, Parks, & Steen, 2004). Therefore, reducing symptoms of distress and psychopathology are not the only components of enhancing happiness. The lack of attention focused on the improving of "normal" lives, and identifying and nurturing high levels of talent, resulted in numerous psychologists not having much knowledge about what makes life worth living and what condition enhance human flourishing (Boniwell, 2012).

Emergence of Positive Psychology

In developing positive psychology, Martin Seligman expounded upon some of the themes that were presented in the work of humanistic psychologists, including Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow (Resnick & Warmoth, 2001). Carl Rogers presented the concept of the fully-functioning person, and Abraham Maslow focused attention on self-actualization (Boniwell, 2012). Rogers suggested that humans had the characteristics necessary for growth and that within a supportive environment, people were able to fully utilize such characteristics (Rogers, 1978). Positive psychology expounded up Maslow's expression of the human need for connection, meaning, and creativity (Resnick et al., 2001). Positive psychology sought to use empirical methods to examine some of the concepts that had already been presented in humanistic psychology. Humanistic psychologists believed that using the scientific method of studying was not very helpful in studying human beings because of the complexity of humans.

Positive psychology emerged relatively recently in the history of psychology. In 1998, Dr. Seligman, who was the President of the American Psychological Association at the time, proposed the field of psychology focus attention on the positive aspects of human life, including strengths and virtues, instead of focusing mainly on psychopathology and treatment of disorders (Seligman, Parks, & Steen, 2004). This was a time in which the field of psychology was in need of positive psychology, a science that studied human strengths (Seligman, 1999). After its emergence, positive psychology grew rapidly and became extremely popular within the field of psychology. A large and increasing number of journals, books, articles, associations, conferences, research projects, and courses focused on positive psychology (Yen, 2010). This popularity is reflected in student class preferences; positive psychology has become the most popular course at the esteemed Harvard University (Gunnell, 2006). This popularity is also reflected in dollar amounts raised to support the research of positive psychology. By 2003 non-profit organizations had raised over $30 million for research in positive psychology (Murray, 2003). By 2005 over 25 major universities in the United States had positive psychology programs (Linley et al., 2006). Further, in 2006, the *Journal of Positive Psychology* was founded (Yen, 2010).

Description of Positive Psychology

Positive psychology is the study of positive aspects of the human experience. According to Dr. Martin Seligman and Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, founders of positive psychology, positive psychology is the scientific study of optimal human functioning; it studies the factors that enable humans to thrive and flourish (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology seeks to use scientific methods of study to examine topics such as well-being, flow, personal strengths,

wisdom, creativity, and other factors related to positive mental health (Boniwell, 2012). The focus on helping people thrive rather than simply survive is one of the key objectives of positive psychology (Seligman, 2003). Positive psychology has three pillars: 1) the study of positive emotions. 2) the study of positive traits, 3) the study of positive institutions (Seligman, 2003). The study of positive emotion focuses on positive subjective human experiences in the past, present, and future (See table 2). Within the context of the past, positive psychology focuses on contentment, satisfaction, and well-being. When focusing on the present experience, positive psychology focuses on happiness, flow, ecstasy, and sensual pleasures. When relating to the future, positive psychology focuses on optimism and hope (Seligman, 2003).

Positive psychology studies human flourishing on the subjective level, individual level, and communal level (Boniwell, 2012) (See table 3). The subjective portion of positive psychology studies positive subjective experiences, including well-being, satisfaction, contentment, happiness, optimism, and flow. The individual portion of positive psychology studies positive human strengths and virtues, including future mindedness, the capability to love, courage, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, wisdom, interpersonal abilities, and giftedness. On the group level, positive psychology studies factors that positively impact groups, such as social responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, tolerance, work ethic, and citizenship (Boniwell, 2012).

Core Virtues of Positive Psychology

Dr. Martin Seligman states that the six core virtues of positive psychology are wisdom and knowledge, courage, love and humanity, justice, temperance, and spiritual transcendence. Seligman reports that these virtues are cross-cultural and can be found in religions and philosophies throughout the world. When examining Aristotle and Plato, Aquinas and Augustine, the Old Testament and the Talmud, Confucius, Buddha, Lao-Tzu Bushido (the samurai code), the Koran, Benjamin Franklin, and the Upanishads, and numerous other virtue codes, it was discovered that every single one of these sources had sanctioned these 6 virtues (Seligman, 2002). These different traditions explained and presented the details of these core virtues in different manners. Nonetheless, every major religion and cultural tradition endorsed these same core virtues (Seligman, 2002). Dr. Seligman concluded that "Convergence across thousands of years and among unrelated philosophical traditions is remarkable, and Positive Psychology takes this cross-cultural agreement as its guide." (Seligman, 2002, p. 11).

Seligman suggests that these core virtues can be developed, and they are achieved by using one's strengths (Seligman, 2002). Strengths are personal traits that can be seen over time. Strengths are often valued because they have produced desirable outcomes within individuals' lives. Strengths are often noticed or

recognized by onlookers because of the results that they produce. Strengths are supported within cultures by the provision of institutions, rituals, role models, parables, maxims, and stories that help promote and develop the use of the strengths (Seligman, 2002). According to Seligman (2002), engaging in strengths and virtues can help enhance well-being.

Seligman suggests that people have strengths that are tonic and some that are phasic (Seligman, 2002). Some strengths that tend to be tonic are kindness, curiosity, loyalty, and spirituality. These strengths can be demonstrated numerous times within a day. Some strengths that are phasic are perseverance, perspective, fairness, and valor; these strengths are utilized in specific situations as opposed to the tonic strengths, which are used more frequently. Seligman suggests that using one's strengths results in people being authentically happy, abundantly gratified, and experiencing emotional satisfaction (Seligman, 2002).

Similarities Between Black Psychology and Positive Psychology

The seven psychological strengths of African Americans developed Dr. Joseph White, and the Six core virtues of positive psychology, developed by Dr. Martin Seligman, were constructed in different times, within different social contexts, and within populations who were attempting to meet different objectives. The seven psychological strengths of African Americans were developed in the social context of Black people in America being resilient in the face of adversity, oppression, and discrimination. The six core virtues of positive psychology were developed in the social context of Americans being in a place of comfort and having the luxury of focusing on flourishing, well-being, and reaching their full human potential. Despite these psychological concepts being developed in different social contexts, for different purposes, and within different populations, the constructs are very similar. This similarity leaves one to question, why is there such a similarity, what conclusions may be suggested by this similarity.

When viewing the psychological strengths of African Americans and the virtues of positive psychology simultaneously, one can see noticeable similarities between the specific psychological strengths of African Americans and the virtues of positive psychology (see table 1). Although "improvisation" does not mean the same thing as "wisdom and knowledge," there is a significant amount of overlap in those concepts as improvisation can require the usage of wisdom and knowledge. Additionally, "resilience" does not mean the same thing as "courage," however, resilience does require a certain amount of courage. The African American strength "Connectedness to others" is very much similar to the virtues of "love and humanity" in positive psychology. The strength "spirituality" overlaps with the virtue of "spiritual transcendence." Using "humor" to help persevere through adversity is a form of "temperance;" temperance is using restraint, and using humor

when facing adversity is a form of restraint when the natural reaction may be to respond differently. "Emotional vitality" does not have the same definition as "justice;" however, some people may believe that conforming to that which is morally upright enhances energy and zest for life. Though the psychological strengths of African Americans are not identical to the core virtues of positive psychology, they have noticeable similarities. Dr. Joseph White identified these psychological strengths as coping skills that African Americans use (White, 1984). The psychological strengths of African Americans that were presented by Joseph White (1984) were used in conceptualizing and treating African Americans. The presentation of these psychological strengths is an example of Black psychology presenting and utilizing constructs that are similar to the constructs of positive psychology prior to the relatively recent emergence of positive psychology as a prominent focus in the field of psychology.

Different conclusions may be suggested by the presence of similarities between constructs of Black psychology and positive psychology. One conclusion that can be drawn from the similarities between the seven strengths of African Americans and the core virtues of positive psychology is the suggestion that the psychological resources that humans draw upon in order to be resilient in times of adversity are similar to the psychological resources that humans draw upon in order to flourish and to be happy and emotionally satisfied. After the development of positive psychology, Seligman stated that the constructs of positive psychology could also be used as an aid in being resilient in times of adversity. Despite its emergence within a cultural context in which people were experiencing comfort and had the luxury of focusing on flourishing, the virtues and strengths which are foundational to positive psychology also can be used to be resilient in times of turmoil. Seligman reported, "these strengths and virtues serve us in times of ill-fortune as well as better moments. In fact, hard times are uniquely suited to display many strengths. Until recently I thought Positive Psychology was a creature of good times." (Seligman, 2002 p. 12). Seligman later noted that people draw upon strengths when facing challenges, setbacks, and obstacles, and these strengths that are used in the times of turmoil and despair are similar to the strengths that are used in flourishing. He explained, "we all contain ancient strengths inside us that we may or may not know about until we are truly challenged." (Seligman, 2002, p. 12-13).

Another conclusion that can be drawn from the similarities between the seven strengths of African Americans and the core virtues of positive psychology is the highlighting of similarities of the personal resources that are used between different populations of people in different social contexts. Identifying similarities between the seven psychological strengths of African American and the core virtues of positive psychology may indicate a recognition of similarities among humans

despite being racial or ethnic differences, with specific highlighting the similarities of human psychological characteristics and psychological resources.

Conclusion

Although developed in different social and historical contexts, and for different purposes, the seven strengths of African Americans and the six core virtues of positive psychology unquestionably have some key similarities. Numerous potential implications can be concluded as a result of these similarities. One possible implication is the identification of similar characteristics utilized in coping and in flourishing. Another possible implication is the suggestion of a universality of human strengths and virtues that transcends racial barriers. A third potential implication is the reflection of ancient philosophies, spiritual beliefs, and perspectives in different approaches within modern psychology. Despite contributions of Black psychology being overlooked in the field of psychology, Black psychology and positive psychology both offered significant, although similar, contributions to the field of psychology. Some of the explanatory causes for these similarities, and conclusions that can be drawn based on these similarities, remain a wonder.

Table 1
Psychological Strengths & Core Virtues

Seven Psychological Strengths of African Americans	Six Core Virtues of Positive Psychology
Improvisation: the ability to use creativity, innovation, imagination, and resourcefulness in pursuits.	Wisdom and knowledge: the ability to discern and the accumulation of information.
Resilience: the ability to bounce back up after setbacks and disappointments.	Courage: mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty.
Connectedness to others: displayed through relationships with members of immediate family, members of extended family, relationships with peers, romantic relationships, and relationships with mentors.	Love and humanity: strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties; and compassionate, sympathetic, or generous behavior or disposition.
Spirituality: a belief in/connection to a higher power	Spiritual transcendence: exceeding usual limits relating to that which is spiritual.
Emotional vitality: an excitement, high level of energy, zest for life.	Justice: acting or being in conformity with what is morally upright or good.
Gallows of humor: the ability to use laughter and crying to help aid in persevering through adversity.	Temperance: moderation in action, thought, or feeling.
Healthy suspicion of you know who: being careful about when to trust people in the dominant culture because Black people have been lied to and abused by people in America the dominant culture for centuries.	

Table 2
Positive Psychology focuses on Past, Present, and Future

Past	Present	Future
• Contentment • Satisfaction • Well-being	• Happiness • Flow • Ecstasy • Sensual pleasures	• Optimism • Hope

Table 3

Positive Psychology on Subjective, Individual, and Communal Levels

Subjective	Individual	Communal
• well-being • satisfaction • contentment • happiness • optimism • flow	• future mindedness • capability to love • courage • perseverance • forgiveness • originality • wisdom • interpersonal abilities • giftedness	• social responsibility • nurturance • altruism • civility • tolerance • work ethic • citizenship

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