RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Interplay of Situations, Social Roles, and Virtue Expression

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ABSTRACT

We discuss human traits and their contextualization in situations and social roles. Our focus is ultimately to explore the contextualization of virtue traits, but most of the research on contextualizing traits has, up to now, been centered on personality traits. Therefore, much of our examination is on how personality traits relate to contextual factors, but we extrapolate those findings to virtues and discuss theory and research related to the contextualization of virtue traits. In the exploration of trait contextualization, we clarify that current understandings of traits do not take them to be simplistic behavioral tendencies that manifest despite contextual influences. Instead, the contemporary understanding of traits is that they are influenced by both situational factors and social role expectations. This means that personality and virtue traits will be appropriate in some contexts but not others, and that when they are expressed, that expression can be expected to be modified by the context. We begin with a brief introduction to the concept of virtues, following the STRIVE-4 Model of virtues. We then explore direct situational influence on action, the ways individuals influence situations, and three types of person-situation interactions. We then present practical wisdom as a generally neglected feature of person-situation interactions. We argue that practical wisdom's role in person-situation interactions goes beyond what shows up in personality research by clarifying that some individuals see more opportunities for virtue trait expression in situations than others. Moreover, this practical wisdom underwrites high-quality decision-making. Our discussion of the social role contextualization of virtues follows that is based on Identity Theory, which explains that social roles are repetitive patterns of action that are included in social structures and result in role identity formation in the individual. We then clarify this theoretical discussion with examples of common role and virtue enactments from the parenting, teaching, and healing roles. We conclude by discussing how a virtue perspective adds important elements (agency, aspiration, and practical wisdom) to the contextualization of traits.

Keywords: trait, situation, role, traitXsituation interaction, virtue

A Brief Introduction to Virtue

Most scholars agree that human beings have traits, which can be understood as a tendency to act relatively consistently across various situations. These traits have been discussed primarily in terms of personality, but recent literature has focused on virtue traits[1-3]. One distinguishing feature of virtue traits is that they conduce to positive human functioning[4]. Virtues have been widely studied and theorized[1-3], and most of these theories draw directly from Aristotle's[5] theory of *eudaimonia* (a well-lived human life). On a first pass, Aristotle's account of virtues clarifies that virtues are conceived as having the following four characteristics.

First, Aristotelian virtue is a normative ethical concept, inasmuch as virtuous action is seen as better than non-virtuous action because virtuous action conduces to a better way of life. Virtue ethics is ethically normative because it relates to how well one lives, rather than as a source of imperatives about what one must do.

Second, virtues can be intentionally cultivated. Aristotle and contemporary theorists see virtues in a developmental, agentic perspective rather than as caused biologically. The question of how to cultivate virtue is an active area of contemporary research[2].

Third, virtues are fully integrated traits, with affective, behavioral, and cognitive components. Virtues do not simply elicit desirable behaviors, but instead describe a co-occurring complex of behavior, affect, motivation, and thought[1]. This distinction is important because it allows the virtue theorist to speak with clarity about the difference between an individual who is courageous because they recognize that their aim is worthy of risk-taking, and an individual who appears courageous, but is instead simply rash because they do not appraise the value of the aim of their risk-taking appropriately. These differences reveal a conception of human activity where behaviors are understood alongside their cognitive and affective concomitants and consistency across all three is necessary to be properly described as virtuous.

Finally, virtues are situation and role responsive. That is, whether the expression of a given trait counts as a virtue depends on the situation in which the trait is being expressed. This contextual responsivity is vital because many still hold a simplistic and outmoded view of traits wherein traits are expected to manifest in the same way across all situations. For example, giving money in some situations is conducive to positive human functioning, and in others can have catastrophic consequences. The means by which an individual contextualizes general virtues to their situation and current role has been described in terms of the capacity of *phronesis,* or practical wisdom[6]. Practical wisdom allows an individual to appraise the details of a situation, extract what is ethically relevant, integrate multiple ethically relevant concerns, and then direct their affect, cognition, and behavior toward the end of positive human functioning through a coherent, ethically sound course of action. The construct of practical wisdom has seen fruitful applications to multiple professional fields, including psychotherapy and medicine[7-10].

The role and context responsivity of virtues are the topics of this article. We discuss how situations interact with individual traits to produce actions. We explore some studies of how this occurs with personality traits, before focusing our discussion on virtue traits. We then detail how social roles also interact with both personality and virtue traits. In these explorations, we emphasize the value of the virtue concept of practical wisdom.

Traits and Situations

For much of the history of psychology, there was a strident debate about whether situational factors or personality dimensions were the chief causes of human behavior[11]. The landscape has changed, however, with psychologists settling into a consensus that both situational influences and personality dimensions are important sources of behavior, and that they frequently interact[11,12]. Yet some still err in thinking about traits that do not vary in their expression and are not influenced by aspects of the environment. As Wood and Roberts[13] pointed out, "trait models of personality have long been criticized for their failure to successfully incorporate the effect of context on behavior" (p. 780). Furr and Funder[14] have put an exclamation point on the importance of the person-situation interaction by stating that "person-situation interaction should be a key foundation for any personality theory" (p. 667). Therefore, it would be simplistic to ignore the influence of situations and roles when conceptualizing and studying personality or virtue traits, leading to serious errors. In contrast, we argue that roles and other situational factors shape both personality and virtue expression, to the point of partly constituting what it means to enact these traits.

Fowers and colleagues[1] recently proposed the STRIVE-4 Model, which elucidates virtues by recognizing their scalar, trait-like qualities, the influence of roles and person-situation interactions, as individuals seek to embody their values and live eudaimonically (i.e., flourish). The model also includes four components of each virtue: behavior,

cognition, emotion/motivation, and practical wisdom[15]. The STRIVE-4 Model incorporates the trait-situation consensus and predicts that the expression of virtue traits will vary systematically across situations. Virtue ethics has always held that traits are always enacted in ways that are sensitive to situations. The general prediction is that individuals with stronger virtue traits will recognize the ethical possibilities in situations better than those with weaker virtue traits, who will be influenced more directly by situational factors. For example, someone with a weaker virtue fairness trait will be more likely to act unfairly when a situation encourages it, but someone with a stronger virtue fairness trait will find a way to act fairly in the same situation. Therefore, this article is an elaboration on previous presentations of the STRIVE-4 Model[1,15]. We pursue this extension next with an explication of some forms of person-situation interaction.

Situational Influence

Before we discuss the interaction of person-situation factors, we want to acknowledge that there are often independent influences on an individual's actions from both person and situation factors. Hundreds of experimental studies indicate that relatively minor situational features influence behavior, ranging from location to ambient smells or noise, to bystanders[16,17]. Many studies examine consequential outcomes such as assisting an apparently injured person or reporting an apparent theft. Fisher and colleagues[16] examined the well-known effect that bystanders decrease helping behavior and the augmentation of this effect by larger numbers of bystanders. (It is worth noting that stranger bystanders are generally stooges of the investigator who have been explicitly instructed not to help. Their passivity is generally taken to be a neutral condition, but it is not neutral because it helps to set a social norm for not helping in the situation.) However, Fischer and colleagues[16] also reported that helping increased when research participants knew the bystanders and when participants were presented with more serious problems (also features of the situation). These important results are rarely cited, but they modify how we understand the bystander effect.

In their meta-analysis of 286 helping studies, Lefevor and colleagues[17] found an overall effect of situational factors on helping, but also found that control group participants helped only mildly less often than those in help encouraging conditions. This small difference across conditions suggests that there may be personal factors at work in participants' decisions about helping. However, it was extremely rare for investigators in these studies to assess any important personal factors. This absence of evidence has been fallaciously assumed by some observers[18] as evidence of absence.

Another consideration in situational influence on behavior is that some situations influence behavior only slightly, whereas other situations have strong influence. Situations with little influence are sometimes called weak situations (e.g., an art festival), and those with greater influence are sometimes called strong situations (e.g., a contemporary airport)[19]. In weak situations, there can be many reasonable actions, and individuals can choose among them. In a strong situation, the range of appropriate or sensible actions is more constrained. It is important from a virtue perspective to recognize that situations offer varying latitude for individual and communal agency.

Types of Person-Situation Interactions

Furr and Funder[14] stated that "behavior arises not simply from both person *and* situation attributes, but from processes through which persons and situations shape each other's effects on behavior. Persons shape how situations impact behavior, and situations shape how a person's attributes impact behavior" (p. 672). The systematic ways that actions are influenced by person and situation factors can be parsed in many ways. We focus on four combinations of situation- and person-factors influences on actions. First, many scholars now interpret personality dimensions as contextualized constructs. Second, individuals can alter situations. Third, situations and traits can interact. Fourth, individuals differ in how well they recognize what various situations demand and afford.

Viewing traits as contextualized dispositions. Although personality dimensions have been typically understood as broad dispositions that influence actions in stable ways, many scholars are coming to view personality characteristics as contextualized. Such contextualized dispositions remain temporally stable, but may arise only in some situations, but not in all circumstances. There are many such contextualized dispositions, ranging from the Big Five[20] to the HEXACO[i,21] to self-schemas[22].

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[i] The Big Five and HEXACO are widely recognized structural depictions of traits. The Big Five is comprised of Agreeableness, Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, and Neuroticism. The dimensions of the HEXACO are Honesty-Humility, Agreeableness, Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, and Emotionality.

The recognition that traits are contextualized encourages the systematic study of within-person variation in trait expression over time and across situations. That is, within-person variation in trait expression is not simply random, but also likely to represent systematic responses to situations. Despite this variation, individuals have very stable responses over time that indicate their average traits[23, 24]. Therefore, there is *both* stability in personal characteristics *and* meaningful variation. For example, Yao and Moskowitz[25] found the person-situation interaction of individual differences in reactivity (person variable) with others' affability or quarrelsomeness (situation variable).

Fleeson and Law[26] experimentally investigated how participants responded to up to 20 standardized situations. They had untrained observers rate participant behavior on Big Five factors and found within-person variability, stability, and between-persons differences in those personality ratings. Correlations of personality ratings across time ranged from .7 to .9, indicating strong consistency in rated behavior. This combination of within-person stability, between persons differences, and within person variation led these authors to conclude that "these correlations mean that actors were stable because of who they are… [and] was not a result of differences in situations or of highly specific reactions to repeated situations" (pp. 1095, 1099-1100). Although most of the variance in personality expression was within individuals, the data also suggested discriminative validity for situational differences.

Individual Influence on Situations. It is unlikely to be the case that situational factors have unilateral influence on persons and actions. Indeed, several investigators have documented how persons can alter the situations. Furr and Funder[14] suggest three ways that persons shape situations: selection, perception, and evocation.

Individuals can select the situations in which they participate (e.g., church meetings, bars, or protest rallies), and those choices obviously influence one's actions[27,28]. As Furr and Funder[14] put it, "individuals may seek situations that 'fit' their personality – situations that allow them to engage in the types of activities they enjoy, to have the types of experiences they value, to be in environments that they find comfortable, or to express themselves in ways that they value" (p. 677). Additionally, the individual's short- and long-term goals may guide them into specific situations to further their aims[29]. Although, most correlations between personality dimensions and situational features were small, this growing literature suggests that personality variables are related to the situation types that individuals encounter.

An individual's actions or their presence can alter the situation significantly by highlighting some aspects of the situation. A person with a strong virtue trait is also likely to evoke certain aspects of situations, with stronger virtue traits more likely to evoke desirable alterations in situation perception and action for people in the situation. For example, one would expect instances of victim-blaming will be lower when a person with a strong compassion trait is involved in discussions of victimization.

Psychologists in general recognize that situation perception is key because it is obvious that different individuals perceive the same circumstances divergently. This personal perception of a situation has been found to have a more direct effect on the individual's actions than any non-subjective or nominal features of the situation[14]. Todd and Funder[30] had participants rate video clips and found that scores on Neuroticism and Openness were related to how participants rated the clips. Two additional studies found that positive situation perception was positively correlated with participants' Extraversion and Openness scores, and negatively related to the participants' Neuroticism scores[31,32]. It seems clear that situation selection, evocation, and perception have been understudied, but the available evidence supports their importance.

Trait-Situation Interactions

As we noted, trait expression plays a greater part in weaker situations, but has less latitude in stronger situations. The converse has also been documented that the weaker an individual trait, the more situational factors will influence that individual. Traits are relative and responsive to situation features. Trait-situation interactions have been studied with (1) classical personality traits, (2) broader person characteristics (e.g., intelligence, rejection sensitivity), and (3) moral characteristics of persons.

Classical personality trait-situation interactions. Some investigators have examined interactions between situational features and Big Five and HEXACO personality dimensions. Sherman and colleagues[27] assessed within-person variation in personality expression over time to create a distribution of each personality dimension. Their most interesting result was that situational contingencies were related to variations in within-person personality expression. Two examples include that that people with higher Honesty-Humility scores experienced fewer deception situations, and individuals with higher Extraversion

scores experienced more sociality focused situations. This indicates that both personality dimensions (within person variable) and situational characteristics (between-individuals variables) influence personality expression (a within-person variable). Similarly, Zettler and Hilbig[33] found interactions among HEXACO traits and situational factors on counterproductive work behavior (e.g., rudeness, revealing organizational secrets).

A significant criticism of person-situation interaction research is the reliance on self-reports of person traits and behavior. Leikas and colleagues[34] addressed this criticism by controlling the situation and by using behavioral ratings of participant behaviors in dyadic interactions with actors enacting agreeable or quarrelsome social stances. Participants self-reported Big Five personality dimensions. Leikas and colleagues found significant situation-personality interactions with Extraversion (number of speaking turns), Openness (higher dominance), Conscientiousness (asking questions and showing interest), and Agreeableness (head nodding), but no person-situation interaction effects with Neuroticism. The control of situations and observer-based rating undercuts the critique that only generically self-reported behavior is subject to these interactions.

Broad person characteristic interactions with situational features. Simpson and Willer[35] assessed whether egocentric motivation explains giving behavior. They found that egocentric motivation influences giving behavior when participants' choices were public, but not when the choices were private. Similarly, Bolderdijk and colleagues[36] found an interaction between environmentally themed videos and individually held environmental values in encouraging environmentally friendly intentions. These interactions suggest that the influence of situational conditions may depend on the recipient's values.

Interactions between moral characteristics of persons and situational features. Some research examines how persons' moral characteristics moderate situations. Süssenbach and colleagues[37] found that greater depicted suffering (situational variable) interacted with the concern about harms (within-person variable) to produce more responsiveness to the suffering. In an experiment with three relatively weak conditions (fairness encouraging, neutral, and fairness discouraging), Fowers and colleagues[38] examined a trait-situation interaction. They confirmed their moderation prediction that the stronger an individual's fairness trait, the more likely they would act fairly in all conditions was

confirmed. Two Justice Sensitivity experiments[39,40] also suggested a person-situation interaction in that a relatively weak condition favoring unfair behavior only influences those who are low on Justice Sensitivity.

Person-Related Recognition of Situational Demands and Opportunities

Scholars generally do not discuss a fourth form of person-situation interaction that is predicted by virtue ethics[1] wherein individuals with stronger virtue traits can understand and transform situations that renders them conducive to virtuous actions (an element of practical wisdom),[6] and that most people cannot do this. This amounts to individuals having a better recognition of situational demands and opportunities or a form of expertise in perceiving and responding to specific features of situations. To give two examples, an excellent skier will recognize a pathway through a snowfield better than a novice and an expert psychotherapist will see the promise of a line of intervention with a client better than a beginning trainee[7].

Recognizing the possibilities in one's environment is often crucial in expressing a capacity, skill, or virtue by enabling the perception of important situational features that call for a specific response. Obviously, both situational features and the perceptual expertise must be present, or the action is not possible. Critically, the action occurs at the *intersection* of person and situation[41]. We offer two caveats regarding this capacity. First, being able to appropriately size up a situation and engage in a fitting response also changes the character of the situation. Once one engages a situation, new possibilities emerge. For example, when a physician diagnoses a problem by recognizing a pattern of symptoms, treatment options tend to become available as well as the importance of explaining the problem and potential treatments to the patient.

Second, true perception of a situation requires discernment[6], which depends not only on one's capacities, but also on one's aims. For example, both compassionate people and victimizers recognize others' vulnerabilities, but their responses differ markedly based on divergent aims.

The point is that people vary in how well they recognize what is important in a situation and what is possible. Someone who is adept at recognizing the morality in situations is exercising practical wisdom and perceives situational features and action possibilities that are opaque to others.[6] Therefore, the practically wise individual perceives the possibilities for moral action excellently, enabling the best possible moral actions.

Applying Person-Situation Research to Virtues

Several valuable lessons can be drawn from the person-situation interaction literature for virtue research. First, multiple studies suggest that the careful specification of person constructs generates better research results[27,33,37]. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that virtue trait measures (as more specific assessments) will be related to relevant outcomes when controlling for personality characteristics[15]. Authors[1,15] reported numerous studies confirming this incremental validity. Second, virtue ethics is consistent with the active role individuals play in selecting, evoking, and perceiving situations because this highlights the individual's agency. The goal of virtue development is to become someone who intentionally puts oneself in the best situations, evokes the important features of the situation, and perceives and enacts the best action in the situation. Research is needed to assess this situation selection effect.

Seeing virtues as acquired traits elicits a general developmental viewpoint that the rudiments of virtue can be cultivated into mature virtue[15]. Mature virtue is theorized to produce excellent actions that can alter situations favorably toward the common good. In conclusion, the available evidence indicates that person-situation interactions are a potent source of behavior. This evidence is growing regarding both personality and virtue traits, but more research is clearly necessary.

Situational factors are an important way that traits are contextualized. Another key form of context is the roles that individuals are called upon to play. We turn now to examining theory and research on how social roles interact with personality and virtue traits.

Roles and Personality Traits

In this section, we discuss two important ways that virtues are systematically influenced by the roles that persons inhabit. Roles (e.g., parent, sibling, friend, professional, teacher, etc.) can be crucial influences on actions because roles require repetitive, socially structured actions that shape individuals[42,43]. Therefore, we propose that individuals' personality and virtue expression will vary systematically based on their role contexts. We anticipate that role-sensitivity will be shaped by normative reasons (i.e., role expectations). We expect variations in the quality or strength of a trait from one role context to another within individuals. For example, courageous individuals will take risks to protect someone or something of value, but they are not required to take risks when nothing important is at stake.

Personality and virtue traits are role-differentiated because social role contexts vary in opportunities and expectations. For example, the virtue of courage is generally expected to a greater degree among armed services members and first responders than ordinary people. These variations in virtue possession and expression can be expected to increase the variation in virtue traits in people in varying social roles. This role differentiation highlights the fact that although virtue ethics is morally normative, it does not suggest a single correct model of personhood. Roles are comprised of complex social expectations that are often culturally created, so it is also important to account for cultural variation in virtue conceptions. At present, there is more evidence for the role sensitivity of personality than for virtues, but virtues operate, in many ways, similarly to personality traits, and we infer some testable predictions about virtue based on personality research.

A Sociological Approach to Roles

It is now time to make our definitions of roles more explicit. We generally follow Stryker's[43] Identity Theory to explicate roles within social structure. Stryker defined "a role [as] a set of behavioral expectations attached to a position in an organized set of social relationships. Since behavioral correspondence to expectations is variable, defining role in terms of behavior per se bypasses important social psychological issues. Role expectations specify the meaning of roles" (p. 1083). Roles also include opportunities, and they are one aspect of a patterned, repetitive social structure.

This theory also illuminates the relationships between roles and traits. Stryker clarifies that roles are often internalized, giving rise to role identities, which are internalized expectations for particular roles. These expectations are accompanied by real contingencies[44] wherein conformity results in rewards and acceptance and non-conformity leads to punishment and social disapproval.

According to Stryker[43], social structure "is defined by the patterned regularities in human interactions and involves the recognition that most of a person's social interaction tends to be with the same or only slowly changing casts of others who do essentially the same things on a repetitive basis … via a chain of relationships" (p. 1084). The many types of social structures (e.g., dyads, families, social networks, and cultures) all include specific roles.

Contemporary persons, especially in the West, inhabit many roles virtually simultaneously. This can cause role strain, role conflict, and the need to rapidly switch roles. Despite its challenges, few

would willingly relinquish this richness of life in the contemporary West. Complex, contemporary societies are riddled with roles (e.g., Facebook friend, therapist, college student, scientist, etc.), each with differing expectations and opportunities. Multiple roles tend to be fraught with challenging decisions and difficult prioritization. Of course, variations in contextual features can be harmonious, but they are often conflicting. The navigation of multiple roles, with their motivations, expectations, and opportunities depends on practical wisdom, as we discuss below.

Stryker[43] stressed that role commitments are central to clarifying one's identity. Such commitments require accepting the expectations and opportunities of a role and internalizing them to enable ready enactment. Roles require both the individual's role commitment and others' acknowledgement that a person inhabits the role[43,45]. Identity Theory clarifies that commitment to a role makes it salient for one's identity and the role's psychological significance shapes one's actions in a systematic and recurring manner[43]. Identity is salient to the degree it is called into play in a variety of situations, with the most important role identities being central to the individual. Commitment to a role is not just an individual choice, but rather also reflects the individual's ties to the social network within which the role resides. As Stryker[43] so aptly stated it, "To the degree that one's relationships to specific others depend on being a particular kind of person, one is committed to being that kind of person" (p. 1093).

Personality and Roles

Recently, psychologists have recognized that personality traits change systematically over time through the life course, which has been termed "the maturity principle"[46]. Meta-analyses[47,48] have suggested that individuals become more agreeable, conscientious, and emotionally stable through early adulthood. Increases in adults' Conscientiousness have been identified in 50 countries[49]. Beginning long-term romantic relationships seems to increase Emotional Stability compared to single peers[50]. In a one-year longitudinal study, Klimstra and colleagues[51] reported that beginning a romantic relationship was positively associated with Agreeableness among high school students, but not college students.

Social Investment Theory, derived from Identity Theory, fits this broad and growing empirical literature better than explaining change with personality genetics[47,52]. This theory suggests that these cross-culturally observed personality changes are partly due to adopting key developmental roles (e.g., entering the workforce or a committed romantic relationship). Hudson and Roberts[52] stated that, "To the extent that most individuals within a society share common experiences (e.g., commitment to romantic partners and/or careers), they may be shaped in similar ways, producing normative trends" and these trends could "coalesce into enduring trait change" (p. 13). Trait change comes from committing to and persistently enacting a social role, and Social Identification Theory suggests that this commitment influences personal identities, cognitions, emotions, and behaviors (i.e., personality states) that, in turn, fuel trait development over time. Hudson and colleagues[52,53] reported that increases in social investment in work roles positively predicted changes in Conscientiousness over three years. This was not an aggregate change in participants' social investment, but rather, among those whose social investment changed, there was a positive relationship with change in Conscientiousness. Hudson and colleagues[53] concluded that "small state-level changes to thoughts, feelings, and behaviors can eventually coalesce into enduring trait-level changes" (p. 22). Roberts and colleagues[47] reviewed the developmental change in personality literature and concluded that "the data that does exist does not support the argument that personality change, especially in adulthood, is governed by genetics" (p. 170).

Social Identification Theory Mirrors Identity Theory in four ways[47]. First, it sees identity as closely related to social role commitment. Second, social role expectations and opportunities often create a context conducive to increased maturity. Third, the key roles are quasi-universal (i.e., primarily focused on work and love). Finally, commitment to the roles is vital, as merely occupying a role does not generate the investment required for personality change. Following their predictions in 62 nations, Bleidorn and colleagues[54] found that cultures with earlier work role onset had earlier increases in Agreeableness and Conscientiousness[55].

Bleidorn[56] also assessed undergraduates' personality expression within individuals as they took on different roles (student or friend). As predicted, she reported that the student role was positively related to Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability, whereas the friend role was positively related to Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Openness to Experience. Heller and colleagues[29] summarized their results with three research paradigms (surveys, experience sampling studies, and experimental studies), wherein individuals reported greater Conscientiousness in work roles; additionally, job satisfaction was more closely related to personality at work. In contrast, marital satisfaction was more closely correlated

with personality at home. Experimental primes led participants to rate themselves as more agreeable and cooperative in a prisoner's dilemma game in the friend role than in the student role.

One surprise in this literature is the lack of evidence for personality change when one becomes a parent[54,56]. In a thorough longitudinal study, van Sheppingen and colleagues[57] compared personality traits before and after becoming a parent with a matched sample of people who did not have a child. They reported no systematic change in personality across these three groups. Bleidorn[55] reported similar results regarding the parenting role.

Roles and role identities are, of course, significantly shaped by culture. For example, Wee[58] highlighted filial piety as a role identity that is uniquely shaped by Confucian culture. She clarified that no Western practices fit the concept of filial piety well, although they seem related in some respects. It seems that filial piety is better understood through the lens of Confucian teachings than through analogizing it to more familiar Western concepts. There are likely to be many such culturally rich roles that require studying the culture that grounds them.

Roles and Virtue Traits

In connecting virtues and roles, we explain how role enactments are manifested through emotions, cognitions, behavior, and practical wisdom. At their best, role enactments are expressions of virtue. Then we exemplify the interweaving of virtues with three common, but significant roles. This reveals how roles emphasize and shape virtues and require the cultivation of those virtues. Finally, we discuss how virtues are central to enacting these roles with excellence.

Role and Virtue Enactments

We have discussed that role enactments have multiple components, and these components map well onto the four components of virtues:[1] behavior, cognition, affect, and practical wisdom. Enacting a role over time requires one to adopt that role identity. That is, one sees situations through the lens of a role (e.g., physician, carpenter, nurse, or educator). Therefore, one sees the situation in a specific light, as one that involves that role's expectations and capacities. Put differently, one appraises a situation from the perspective of the role identity. That appraisal is conducive to the cognition, affect, and behavior consonant with the role. Role enactments are inherently social because roles are elements of a social structure and common expectations for the role bearer.

Adopting roles well requires practical wisdom, with its four functions[59]. Enacting a role well means that one can (a) recognize the important and central elements of a situation, (b) harmonize potentially divergent concerns, (c) harmonize one's cognition and affect related to the situation, and (d) recognize how this situation relates to living well as a person. For example, when physicians face an emergency situation with an injured person, they (a) recognize that life-threatening issues require primary attention, (b) understand that their efforts must be harmonized with the patient's emotional state and comfort, (c) remain calm and deliberate despite the emergency, and (d) recognize that enacting the physician role is vital to their calling as a healer, which is a central aspect of the goodness of their lives.

It is not a coincidence that these four components also constitute virtues. This isomorphism is straightforward. Virtues are simply the excellent enactment of ordinary actions[60], and when these actions are recurring elements of social structures, they are role enactments. In other words, virtuous role enactment is just the excellent enactment of a role as a parent, a police officer, a teacher, or a plumber.

Two more important parallels between role and virtue enactment are that commitment and repetitive actions are central to both roles and virtues. Virtues are based on a commitment to an excellent form of action and many virtue scholars suggest that they are habituated through practice. The reliability of virtue enactment is a core feature of virtues.

Virtues and Roles

The virtues required for each role can be variously listed and described. We do not claim special knowledge in how we discuss them here. We only wish to exemplify the close relationships among some roles and some virtues as a starting point. One of the key things that adopting a role can do is to emphasize the development of the virtues related specifically to the enactment of the role. We cannot give an exhaustive description of these connections because there are so many of them. Instead, we only attempt to exemplify them in this section.

The parenting role. A widely recognized feature of parenthood is that it calls for special obligations to one's child vis a vis all other children. An entirely depersonalized ethical view would grant no distinctive status to one's own children, but few advocate such a view about parent-child relationships. Instead, the special duties that parents have to nurture and protect their children and to advance their well-being are widely accepted.

Several virtues accompany these expectations, but a primary one is the virtue of loyalty. Virtuous loyalty acknowledges and promotes precisely the special obligations of parenthood. The common expectation is that parents will disproportionately devote time and resources to their own children and secondarily to other children. Fairness is a second central virtue in parenthood because when there are multiple children, treating them fairly can be challenging. This can involve what it means to be fair to any given child, given their strengths, weaknesses, developmental status, and aims, or treating different children equitably, when their strengths and weaknesses differ. This indicates that parenting quality will be positively related to both loyalty and fairness.

The special relationship between parents and their children is also indicated by the stronger emotions that parents have toward their children and their children's welfare than toward other people. Harm to one's child, for instance, elicits greater compassion than harm to a stranger or a mere acquaintance. A muted response to one's child being hurt is a stronger marker of a weak virtue of compassion than a mild response to a co-worker's harm, for example. This illustrates how the intensity of a virtue response is likely to be systematically related to the role one inhabits.

The teaching role. Being an elementary school teacher is another role that has parallels with parenthood. The teacher role emphasizes the aims of nurturing and teaching the young, and teachers are typically assigned responsibility for a small group of students. This contingent responsibility for specific students also calls for the virtue of loyalty. The elementary teacher has a special obligation to guide and nurture these children, and this special obligation surpasses the relationships they have with other students. If, for example, this teacher has a special gift for teaching mathematics, a reasonable expectation that the teacher exercises this ability with the students for whom they are responsible before making it available to other students in the school through study groups or tutoring.

It frequently occurs that the special obligations of teachers can become complicated. Consider, for example, the situation of a teacher who is a member of a minority group that is weakly represented at a school (e.g., ethnic, racial, religious, or sexual orientation). This teacher may experience a special obligation to other members of the minority group at the school, and students, staff, or junior colleagues might turn to the teacher for guidance and nurturance. This can create a loyalty bind for this teacher, given the expectations of loyalty to both the students in the class and the needs of other minority group members in the school. We think many people experience this sort of bind, which requires them to prioritize their loyalty expressions as best they can. We do not think there is an abstract formula for how best to accomplish this prioritization and harmonization. Rather, it seems to require practical wisdom regarding what is most important in the given situation and overall.

Healer role. We want to now consider the broad category of healers (e.g., medical professionals, psychotherapeutic professionals, etc.). People have sought out healers throughout history, but healer roles have become professionalized in the West, and many people are now paid to work as healers. The importance and challenge of these roles is reflected in growing calls for developing virtues in the professions[61-64].

A key common feature across healing roles is the significant pain or distress that people present to healers. People understandably seek relief from that pain, and their help-seeking often includes experiencing the pain as unbearable or as a threat to their way of life. Therefore, healers need the virtue of compassion. Responding compassionately to pain is the beginning of healing and facilitates the reception of a more complete account of the difficulties. The virtue of compassion must be highly developed among healing professionals, however, because the difficulties that people present are often extremely distressing, private, or difficult to manage[63-64].

Psychotherapy offers a good example of how much compassion is required.[65] Clients are often ashamed of their difficulties, or they feel disgusted with themselves. For instance, clients often seek therapy when they loathe and berate themselves. This self-hatred must be addressed so that the person can come to recognize themselves as someone who is worthy and has a legitimate claim on being loved and on a good life. This is challenging because people who believe themselves unworthy experience great pain and it is difficult to confront that self-loathing. Their rejection of parts of themselves (or their entire being) leads them to expect others to do the same. Psychotherapists must listen to their clients' self-loathing with acceptance and care. Clients learn to accept themselves because they experience acceptance from their psychotherapist, even as they reveal their least acceptable aspects. Therapeutic compassion and acceptance must be complete for this process to be fruitful, which means that it must have all the features of a virtue, including a cognitive grasp of compassion and the reasons for

it, emotions and motivations resonant with compassion, behavior consonant with compassion, and practical wisdom to direct it.

A second requirement of healers is their trustworthiness because healing requires a trusting relationship[64]. If a person cannot trust a healer, the person will be unable to present their suffering in a way that facilitates treatment. Of course, trust development may be slow, and healers are not necessarily trustworthy. We focus on trustworthiness instead of trust because healers can cultivate trustworthiness and offer it to a sufferer. Only the sufferer can decide whether to trust a healer, but trustworthiness best facilitates that decision. For example, it is essential to trust that one's physician's primary interest is in healing, or at least providing the best therapy for the suffering[67]. If a physician seems to be acting primarily for financial or reputational gain, trust will be endangered.

The idea of professionalism is geared toward trustworthiness. Many professional practices are oriented to trustworthiness, including professional ethics, capacity to listen, and the expert knowledge and gravitas of a professional. Trustworthiness requires a practitioner's full commitment to the role of a healer, which will appear in the professional's cognitions, affect, and behavior. Practical wisdom is an indispensable guide for professional trustworthiness, especially when the sufferer is uncertain about trusting the healer.[7]

The virtue of honesty is closely associated with trustworthiness. Although honesty is often difficult when confronting suffering, insufficient truthfulness can undermine trust, partly through reducing trustworthiness, and partly through misleading a sufferer about their condition and treatment[63,68]. Of course, honesty does not require absolute frankness or transparency. Neo-Aristotelian virtues are flanked by a vice of deficiency and a vice of excess[1,4,68]. In the case of honesty, untruthfulness is the deficiency, and undue truthfulness is the excess. The former is readily understandable, but the excess is clarified by recognizing that healers do not necessarily disclose all their thoughts and knowledge to the sufferer. Withholding some information may be important due to timing or to compassion. Nevertheless, what healers do communicate must be true and valuable. For example, if a physician reveals all the potential diagnoses before assessing and ruling some in or out, it may produce unnecessary patient anxiety. Of course, some conversation about the diagnostic process is likely to assist in patient compliance and tolerance. Healers need to be honest with those who seek their assistance despite the difficulty of doing so, such as in cases of serious, frightening diagnoses, difficult treatments, or when helping someone to confront something they find loathsome.

It is impossible to provide an exhaustive account of virtues even for a limited set of roles. Instead, we have sought to exemplify some necessary connections between the roles of healers and the virtues that make it possible to assist in healing. We emphasize, however, that healer roles require more robust forms of some virtues than ordinary people require. Although such robust virtues are likely supererogatory in ordinary life, they are necessary for the healer role. This expectation of stronger virtues will also be true of other roles (e.g., first responder).

Conclusion

We focused on contextualizing virtue traits in this article, leaning on the more extensive theoretical and empirical literatures on personality traits. Contextualizing traits in this way adds depth and nuance to an oversimplified perception of traits as monolithic and acontextual. We argued that understanding virtues and their expression requires the recognition that they manifest at different times and in various ways, depending on the specifics of the situation and on the roles one is enacting.

The specific person will also influence how they act in situations and roles because each enactment is an interpretation of what is expected of the actor. The interpretive element involved in situations, roles, and virtues highlights a key feature of virtue ethics: practical wisdom. The complexity of the contemporary world, as seen in its myriad situations and multiple roles, frequently requires individuals to be able to recognize what is expected of them and harmonize competing demands considering how to live well overall. Personality theory and research is thin in understanding how individuals can make such choices wisely, but most virtue ethicists see wise choices as central[6,59,68].

Virtue ethics also helps us to understand two additional features of responses to situations and role enactments. First, virtue ethics emphasizes agency and aspiration in the intentional cultivation of virtues for the sake of a worthwhile life. Second, virtue ethics accentuates the idea that it is possible to act excellently (rather than merely adequately) in response to situations and roles. Although adequacy is sometimes sufficient, many people aspire to excellence in their roles, and acknowledging this striving for excellence is vital. These features of virtue ethics are unapologetically ethically normative, and they make it possible to recognize that situational and role functioning are often related to acting admirably. We also argued that adopting roles necessarily shapes the

individual's specific virtues (e.g., loyalty, fairness, compassion, etc.). along with the attendant thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Therefore, as trainers, practitioners, and scientists, it is important to track situations and roles when assessing virtue traits and their strengths.

It is also likely that cultures will include varying assumptions about situations and roles within it. Virtue trainers, practitioners, and scientists may have cultural assumptions about situations, roles, and virtues that must be considered. Understanding the ways that persons, situations, roles, and cultures influence actions and how roles shape individuals' identities are critical elements of contemporary conceptions of traits. Existing and ongoing personality research has demonstrated the importance of these factors and can guide additional training and research on virtues. Virtue ethics, in turn, adds elements that are missing or underplayed in personality theory and research (e.g., agency, aspiration, and practical wisdom). We eagerly anticipate the knowledge and capacities that we will gain by bringing all these concepts into harmony and fruition.

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