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Situationism, Factitious Virtue, and the Relevance of Traditional Virtue Ethics: A Conceptual Analysis of Bullying & Mental-health in American Youth.

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Abstract

The research question of this thesis is as follows: *Why do situationism and factitious virtue provide sufficient grounds for additional studies of bullying and mental-health disorders, and what might be the role of traditional virtue ethics in these studies?* I present a conceptual analysis that focuses on two moribund problems American youth struggle with: bullying and mental health. I claim that understanding these two problems from a situationism and factitious virtue perspectives, and the role of traditional virtue ethics in light of this, provides a way to better understand these two problems in a more fine grain and particularly applied way, specifically, how these problems function in regard to American youth. The thesis is arranged as follows: The first part introduces situationism and is devoted to the analysis of this idea and possible scenarios for its application to reveal more about bullying and mental-health disorders. I also discuss my view of the role of traditional virtue ethics in assessing pros and cons of this perspective. In the second part, I discuss factitious virtue following the same pattern. I am looking to contribute into facilitating a way of establishing a rich philosophical psychology by suggesting a view at these two problems from a different angle, enhancing understanding of the moral assessment of these problems, and the possible impact of traditional virtue ethics on this assessment.

Key words: *Virtue Ethics, Situationism, Social Virtue, Bullying, Mental-health*

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Introduction

> "*Terry and Robyn will never go back to live in that house, the white house with a green and yellow bird feeder hanging on a tree in the front yard and a creek flowing in the back, a creek where Terry loved to set minnow traps and one day came home with a family of snakes*" (Benbow 2023).

The above epigraph paints a picture of the Badger family who after a tragic incident involving their 13-year-old son Terry's suicide due to bullying, will never return to their once-beloved home. This heart-wrenching story reflects a harsh reality faced by numerous children and families in the United States. Bullying has been identified as the primary factor behind multiple youth suicide in America: Adriana Kuch, 14; Mallory Grossman, 12; Austin Pendergrass, 13; Felicia LoAlbo-Melendez; Austin McEntyre, 15; Felicia LoAlbo, 11; McKenna Brown, 16; Jamel Myles, 9 are just a few of the names tragically added to this devastating list.

I emphasize the severity of the problem and would like to suggest here an additional look at the problem from two perspectives: situationism and factitious virtue in the hope that such an approach would help shed light on the intrinsic motives that compels a young, healthy, and vigorous person to commit a potentially irreversible act. The problem I refer to here is not suicide directly. But two, as will be shown, interconnected problems which among others affect the sense of well-being in young people and these are bullying and mental-health. I examine the conceptual view of how youth moral judgment gradually changes in light of these two problems, to the point where morally extraneous beliefs are accepted as one's own and have potential to upbring unpredictable consequences. Seeing then what role virtue ethics can play in the internal comprehension of the unnaturalness of these problems, is discussed.

This thesis structure is as follows: I first touch briefly on the reasons for my interest in the topic. I then get into a deep description of the problems and assess their scope. I will first show here a growing interest in the study of these two problems. Then, I will discuss the current state of these problems from both philosophical and psychological perspectives. This gets me closer to answering the background portion of the research question which is: *Why do situationism and factitious virtue provide sufficient grounds for additional studies of bullying and mental-health disorders, and what might be the role of traditional virtue ethics in these studies?* The thesis then will be divided into two parts to continue answering this question. The first part will delve into the concept of situationism, the second will discuss the concept of factitious virtue. Both will follow the same layout: introducing the concept is first. Following is an overview of

the history and development of situationism and factitious virtue. Then is an in-depth analysis of the ideas presented by them based on relevant literature. After, I analyze bullying and mental-health asking how situationism would react to it, and I do the same with factitious virtue. What this does is answer the first part of the research question. Meanwhile, the second part of the research question discusses the potential role of virtue ethics. Both are addressed as separate parts that ask what role traditional virtue ethics has in these problems once both have been understood through both situationism and factitious virtue. The thesis then concludes with the most important points of what it means to see these two problems through these two perspectives, and the potentially powerful role virtue ethics may serve.

My interest in American youth is very personal. I naturally grew up close by, in Canada, spending my whole life there. The issues mentioned above may not be as severe in Canadian schools, but they are still very much real and understandable to me for many reasons. The first reason is that I myself went through experience of being bullied and a bully, let alone the cases around in school. I also saw various times when I was just getting out of teenage years working with kids either on projects their parents would invite me to work on, or managing camps, and often some kids were upset because of being bullying, and many often reported mental-health problems like attention-deficit hyperactive disorder. When I volunteered in my early twenties as a first responder in Distress Centers Toronto, providing over 65+ hours of life sustaining support, although the calls came mostly from adults who rarely have someone to talk to as a function of the lack of close bonds formed during youth years, on occasion, I spoke with young people who called. I recall them being 16 or 17 years of age, and all were suicidal noting mental-health problems as major reason of their current state during previous attempts. The need for close attention to bullying and mental-health is obvious. Suffice it to mention that one of the most sought-after promises on the campaign platform of the leading candidate running for mayor of my hometown Toronto this year, Olivia Chow, is the doubling of youth mental-health centers in the city.

Another reason I would like to bring up here for the focus on American Youth, is that some of the issues discussed in this thesis are based on my personal observations. Since it is all about youth, I considered it possible for myself to generalize these observations for American youth specifically. I do not by any means assert that these problems apply equally to all youth, or unequally, or that these problems are more or less relevant or vital elsewhere.

Problem Description

The task of defining bullying can be much more difficult than it seems at first glance, since bullying is extremely multifaceted. There is no single definition of bullying, it manifests itself in many forms and degrees, but in a broad sense it means the intentional intimidation by one person towards another. The purpose of bullying is to cause pain, harm, or suffering. The basis for bullying can be age, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or any internal or external characteristics of a person that are so called "pure". Different versions are put forward as to why bullying occurs, such as the desire to gain a sense of power and control over a person, temporary masking of one's own problems, the tendency to believe that by intimidating others one can become immune to bullying, etc. etc. The CDC and the American Department of Education define bullying in three main stages (see Cornell and Limber 2016). First: unwelcome aggression in the bully. Second: a power imbalance between the bully and the victim. Third: repeated occurrences of such unwelcomed behaviour. This definition helps recognize various kinds of bullying like physical, verbal, and online bullying, while also separating it from other forms of aggression (CDC 2021). Cornell and Limber for the American Psychological Association write that especially repeated bullying can lead to mental-health problems such as long-term anxiety and depression (Cornell and Limber 2016). But what I am going to talk here about is not that much mental-health as such, but mental-health disorders. I focus on what is understood as mental-health disorders from a philosophical point of view and what factors are of significance in developing such disorders. Mental-health for a person is the prism through which they define for themselves the concept of well-being, or, from the point of view of philosophy, internal satisfaction with one's own life. Mental disorder can interfere with one's ability to experience happiness, enter into meaningful relationships, achieve their goals, and find fulfillment in life. People suffering from mental disorders are often stigmatized and become victims of epistemological and social injustice (Carver, Morley, and Taylor 2017). But despite the fact that mental-health has not attracted too much attention from philosophy, there is an increase in philosophy's interest in mental disorders.

I would like to bring up in this regard one of the theories that was discussed in the paper "Mental-health and Well-being in Philosophy" by Murphy, Donovan, and Smart and seems relevant to the problem I am looking at in this thesis (2020). In their paper that asks what the putative relationship between positive mental-health and well-being amounts to from a philosophical

perspective, they identify so called Negative theory. A Negative theory identifies good mental-health as one with an absence of disorder. If certain psychological capacities are compromised, negative theorists claim, it causes mental-health to be compromised as well. To be healthy means "to be free of the breakdowns that disrupt self-monitoring and that typically cause a great deal of suffering" (Murphy, Donovan, and Smart 2020, 112). This definition looks to me quite applicable to young people since the threat of a mental breakdown and consequent disruption of self-monitoring is one of the dangers that lie in wait for them (as will be elucidated). It also would be reasonable to assume that bullying, which was discussed above, along with distorted by puberty perception of the situation (a big theme foregoing), are among reasons that might cause this breakdown. For the sake of this work, I am going to use the term mental-health disorder to mean disrupted self-monitoring.

Problem Scope

When it comes to bullying statistics, the National Center for Education Statistics (2022) claim that 22% of students report being bullied in 2019, a number that is in fact lower compared to 2009 which was at 28%; while Patchin claims "over half" of students reported being bullied in 2019 (Patchin 2019). The numbers are significantly different, which is bothersome by itself, but what I am after in this thesis is not statistics; numbers should not matter here, people do. Because arguments predicated on numbers risk a vacuity like "one is too many" the goal is to understand the general span of these problems first before honing in on the particulars.

The critical rise of interest to bullying is very clearly presented by the graph below. Note here the rise of interest from 2010-2014 to 2015-2019 of nearly 200%. If there are really less reports of bullying now compared to 2019, why has bullying as interest in the subject rose so significantly?
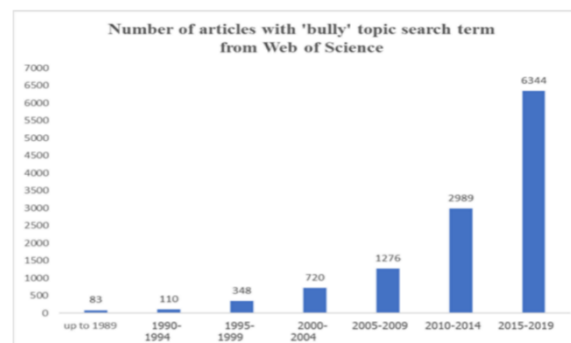

Figure 1. Growth in publications (using Web of Science searches) for the term *bully*.

Image used from Smith 2023, which this one goes up to 2014: (Smith 2019a, 3). This image is altered by Smith, used with permission, personal communication, 2023.

Abrams cites the YRBSS, a branch of the CDC, who reported feelings of chronic despair and hopelessness, as well as suicide thoughts and acts, increased by around 40% among young Americans in the ten years prior to the pandemic (Abrams 2023). Tkacz and Brady report that "from 2012 to 2018, there was a 34.6% increase in the prevalence of mental illness" (2021). Bor and collaborators (2014) write that: "Despite the growing interest in establishing causes of shifting trends in child and adolescent mental-health problems, it remains of primary importance to identify whether the burden of mental-health problems in children and adolescents is actually increasing in the 21st century" (607). What the sources that I have just presented depict is lack of clarity taking place around these problems. While mental-health problems may have increased while bullying went up only as a function of interest and not actual occurrence, I find it difficult to assume that this is indeed the case, and extend my argument that bullying did in fact occur despite it potentially being a strawman, to the supposition that bullying and mental-health are very much related. For example, Benedict, Vivier, and Gjelsvik (2014) found that "[c]hildren with a diagnosis of depression, anxiety, or depression had a threefold increased odds of being a bully… The diagnosis of a mental health disorder is strongly associated with being identified as a bully" (see also Kumpulainen, Räsänen, and Puura 2001). While there is a strong relationship and perhaps a confusion with regards to statistics that might be attributed to choices in methodology, etc., I nonetheless use these points to support my reason of staying away from statistics in this thesis and focusing more on the conceptually qualitative aspects of these problems.

Psychological & Philosophical Perspectives

In this section, I examine the psychological and philopsohical perspectives of bullying and mental-health. I will go over a critical account of Rigby (2002) that helps understand bullying with more nuance and appeasement to the previous confusion. For mental-health, I present a brief overview of what psychology has thought about as it relates to virtue. It is important to understand these problems in general first prior to looking at them through lenses of situationism and factitious virtue, which ultimately gets one a step closer to answering the research question.

Ken Rigby provides an exposition of bullying in his book *New Perspectives of Bullying* (2002). Rigby, despite writing this book in 2002, draws attention to how the 1990's witnessed a massive increase in the once neglected study of bullying. Rigby dissects and unpacks this bullying rise based on the notion that "the awareness of the complexity of the problem increased, so

too did the potential for disagreement and controversy" (14). It became clear, according to Rigby, that workers in the field were conceptualizing bullying in quite different ways. Indeed, back then and today there *are* a vast number of perspectives about bullying in various domains such as the workplace (Einarsen 1999, 17; Saunder, Huynh, and Goodman-Delahunty 2007); at home (Idsoe, Solli, and Cosmovici 2008, 460), online (c.f. Englander et al. 2017, S179 states no definition of online bullying exists to Alipan et al. 2015, 9 who does); and in school (Smith 2019b, 82-85; Cornell and Bradshaw 2015, 499) just to name a few. Rigby unpacks key questions about bullying during this rise of interest, stressing that psychology hadn't a monopoly on the study, and that there are other disciplines are capable of providing useful insight (Rigby 2002, 15).

Rigby writes of the antiquity of bullying, drawing its history as far back as to the writing of The Psalms to emphasize how deeply rooted it is. About bullying in nature, theories of Konrad Lorenz, and others who argued from an evolutionary psychology perspective are discussed by Rigby. This saw bullying as evolutionary benefiting species, facilitated mating, leadership, and social standards (ibid, 19-20). Nature further draws on bullying behaviour from an evolutionary psychology perspective with various animals from birds to rats and even hyenas, Rigby writes. This shows "two forms of behaviour that can occur" (ibid, 21). First is one-to-one bullying whereby two hyenas, one bully one victim, fight to death just for survival. Rigby does not hesitate to draw attention to how this relates to humans and the one-to-one evil they are capable of committing to each other (ibid). Second, is group-to-one bullying or the tendency for group dynamics in rats to help recognize intrudes via smells (22). As it pertains to humans, this idea extends to the interplay of studies Rigby cites that show further breakdown of sub-domains of bullying (i.e., motivated by racial or disability differences where the victim is different). In school environments, this manifests itself in schoolkids who choose to bully a new kid or someone they perceive as different. Rigby asks if bad human nature can change provided present cases where animals like the hyena tear people apart, just like mass killings of humans committed by humans, committed by "alienated youths" (19). On another side, Rigby reveals an interesting phenomenon which is based on results from empirical studies: youth experiencing bullying in some cases while to a large extent not in others (chapter 3: 60-64; 70-1). This becomes even more interesting when Rigby mentions that kids who are expecting to be bullied have this serve as their "self-fulfilling prophecy" (ibid, 58). Rigby speaks of a study here where kids who, despite the targets of bullying appearing to be relatively random, began to attract the bullying (ibid, 57).

While philosophers and psychologists understand bullying in a number of different ways through various domains, there still leaves very little to no mention of virtue ethics. Although there are mentions of the various role's virtues can play, as will be shown now, to consolidate the role assigned to virtue in discussions about mental-health, it is important to identify a common thread that runs through them as follows.

When examining the philosophy of mental-health, Martin (2006) dissects the influence of therapeutic culture on promoting morality and enhancing mental well-being. In doing so, Martin emphasizes the significance of moral values when contemplating mental-health and mental disorders (28). Within therapeutic settings, virtues assume a crucial role, as Paine and colleagues (2015) assert that "humility" stands as a key virtue in mental-health recovery. Berges (2012) defends the medical model in ethics by advocating for "virtue as mental-health" and drawing inspiration from Plato's teachings. Taking a virtue ethical approach, Ciurria (2016) explores how mental-health impacts decision-making capacity and argues that virtue can help alleviate the ensuing difficulties. In comparison to bullying, mental-health exhibits a stronger association with virtue, resulting in wider coverage beyond the purview of this thesis (see also Peteet, Witvliet, and Evans 2022; Harrist and Richardson, 2014; Sandage and Hill 2001; Walker and Ivanhoe 2007, 133-135). All of these authors in one way or another understand virtue and mental-health as related in some way, and this more prevalent in comparison to bullying and virtue.

Regarding psychology studies today about bullying, I would like to mention here a couple that address the potential relationship to virtue. Zych and Llorent (2019) found in their study that being empathetic reduced bullying, while moral disengagement increased it. Levasseur, Desbiens, and Bowen (2017) found that adolescents who stand up for victims of bullying (defenders) show stronger and more consistent moral values compared to those who bully or passively watch (bystanders); their ability to reason morally helps differentiate between different types of bullies and bystanders. There is a link here to virtue because of notions having to do with moral values. Many philosophers and psychologists understand bullying, and its various forms related to virtue ethics rather than moral reasoning through similar experimental means (Harrison 2015; Hilliard, Bowers, and Greenman 2014) or through conceptual ones (see Walton 2015; deLara 2008; Bertolotti and Magnani 2013). Few accounts, however, have something to say about the role of virtue directly. What I mean by directly is using virtue ethics to facilitate an acquisition of virtue by establishing situations which help people become traditionally virtuous, returned to in 1.5 & 2.5.

This is not to say, however, that attempts of seeing virtue as a central role when it comes to understanding bullying, are not undertaken at all. Walker (2009) for instance, speaks of a genetic virtue program that uses human ethics to enhance the use of biotechnology by claiming that this approach can eliminate biological conceptions of "evil". Harrison (2015) in his research about internet influence on children and young people mentioned that the internet definitely affects their morality, but it is impossible to conclude if this influence is "predominantly positive or negative". He specifically suggests that a philosophical foundation must be an integral part of any empirical studies in order to understand the overall trend of bullying.

The subsequent part of my thesis focuses on the potential role virtue ethics might have in assessing the inner moral component of these problems, the possibility of which appears when looking at them from two different points of view: situationism and factitious virtue. Recognizing the gap in existing literature regarding the role virtue ethics plays as it applies to American youth in both bullying and mental-health, I approach the next section without emphasizing statistics or prevalence rates. Instead, I aim to explore these two problems within the framework of the two perspectives, objectively assessing the strengths and weaknesses of each, and assessing the potential of virtue ethics in uncovering a different side of bullying and mental-health. To do this, I now shift my attention to seeing these problems from a situationism perspective.

Part 1: Situationism

Introduction

Situationism is a tradition in social psychology that challenges the notion of stable character traits and virtues as the primary drivers of ethical behavior, and here has its relation to philosophical ethics and moral study. Situationism emphasizes the influence of situational factors on human actions, suggesting people are more likely to behave morally or immorally based on specific circumstances rather than their inherent character qualities. John Doris, a well-known analytical philosopher, explores situationism in his book *Lack of Character* (2002) arguing that traditional notions of character and virtue are inferior to insights derived from experimental social psychology. Doris's work highlights the role of situational dynamics in shaping behavior, challenging long-held beliefs about character and morality. This part delves into Doris's hypotheses, what a situationism perspective on bullying would look like, and the implications of situationism for mental-health. By examining situationism's impact on these problems, I attempt to obtain a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between individuals and their environments to be able to analyze the possible role of virtue ethics as it pertains to these problems faced by youth.

1.1 A Brief History

John Doris claims that moral philosophy should take the findings of experimental social psychology seriously when it comes to finding out more about human behaviour. A niche of social psychology is the situationism tradition which says that people's behaviours are influenced heavily by the situation they are in. For example, in a large study of 11,000 eight-to-sixteen-year-old American schoolchildren, Hartshorne and May (1928) found that honesty depends on the situational context these participants were in rather than honesty being a product of something internal like their character (Doris 2002, 24). Furthermore, research by Newcomb (1929) in a sample of 51 troubled American boys, revealed that most boys displayed a mixture of introvertive and extrovertive traits without significant correlations, indicating a lack of trait consistency and suggesting that observable behavior does not clearly differentiate between introvert and extrovert types. Another important figure to mention with regard to early situationism tradition is Gardner Murphy, a social and personality psychologist. According to Murphy, a changed situation forces the change in the selection of the role to adapt to new conditions which consequently leads to a changed personality (Murphy 1947, 868). Murphy contends that "situationism is unlike the

current behavioristic systems which emphasize the *slow accumulation* of habits" (ibid, italics added). What Murphy meant is that situationists are unlike behaviourist, which refers to the paradigm in psychology around the 1920's which focused heavily on conditioning and reinforcement. Here, Murphy spoke of the prevailing traditions and movements from behaviourism which emphasizes the role of timely conditioning practices (see also Smith 2020). Although the situational doctrine may initially seem to share some similarities with behavioristic theories of social learning, Murphy says, situationism stands in stark contrast to all forms of environmentalism that place an emphasis on the fixation of character, specifically early in childhood (Murphy 1947, 868). It is not the slow onerous process of how children develop their behaviours and characters that concerns situationism, Murphy contends, insofar as "in most instances the situationist has no need for the more elaborate emphasis upon childhood experience that characterizes behaviorism on the one hand and psychoanalysis on the other" (ibid). What this means is that situationism is different from these two fields of behaviourism and psychoanalysis in that it does not see childhood experience being as critical when it comes to learning or studying it. Murphy sites more examples of this unique situationism research agenda with respect to the "the psychology of adolescences" and social factors (869).

In addition to situationism viewed from the psychological perspective, the tradition also presents a great interest from a philopsohical point of view. Sabini and Silver (2005) discuss a reconstruction of the situationism tradition to demonstrate that virtue ethics can withstand the challenge posed by social psychology (536). Kamtekar (2004) contends that character as understood in conventional virtue ethics has very little in common with the character traits as it is seen by situationists and suggests a new approach as a result of this disagreement (460). And Merritt (2000) addresses challenges to virtue ethics by proposing a conception of virtue that recognizes its dependence on social relationships and settings. All of these accounts discuss situationism and virtue in various philopsohical ways with a particular emphasis on supporting the role of traditional virtue either through a reconstruction, a different ground, or an appeasement to that which goes on around it; but no accounts in the current literature discuss situationism and bullying under one roof moreover alongside virtue[1].

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[1] I only found one exception to this: Mele and Shepherd (2013) discuss bullying in light of the seminal Stanford Prison Experiment conducted by Zimbardo in 1971, where they referred to the guards as embracing "bully" like behaviour (65).

1.2 Unpacking Situationism

Situationism rejects the notion that there are fixed, universal moral character traits or virtues guiding behavior across all situations. Situationism emphasizes the importance of context and situational factors in determining moral action, suggesting that individuals are more likely to behave morally or immorally based on the specific circumstances that they find themselves in, rather than relying on stable character traits. John Doris writes in his *Lack of Character* (2002) that "modern experimental psychology has discovered that circumstance has surprisingly more to do with how people behave than traditional images of character and virtue allows" (ix). Character traits imply time in the sense that it takes a person's character a long time to develop, and Doris wants to show that philosophical explanations referencing character traits are not only "inferior to those adduced from experimental social psychology", but that the difficulty stems from the idea that character ethics by large "presuppose the existence of character structures that actual people do not very often posses" (ibid, 6). Modern psychology shows that the divide between the demands of the situation and one's moral judgements shapes behavior more than character and virtue do, and Doris's objective in light of this argument is to show experimental evidence for this (ibid, 9). Because the result of character is difficult to capture insofar as the process is also, and that it is not easy for a person to behave consistently over time, for character to be captured by social psychology and experimental philosophy, becomes difficult. It not only takes a long time to develop by requiring a lot of consistent behaviour from the person so that a behaviour can be called *a character*, in addition to the prevailing method of expensive longitudinal studies, but it also does not reveal much according to Doris about how people *actually* behave. Doris refers to the notable Zimbardo and Milgram[2] to argue how situations dictate behaviour more than character, writing that "[these accounts] began to problematize the notions of character on which much philosophical discussion depends" (ibid, 5).

Doris describes globalists as characterized by three types of traits: "Consistency," which refers to a wide range of traits elicited under diverse conditions; "Stability," which indicates a narrow range of traits elicited consistently across repeated trials of similar conditions; and

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[2] Zimbardo and Milgram are two famous psychologists, the former of which was touched on already briefly, whose experiments are well-known. The Stanford prison experiment by Zimbardo (1971) showed that guards and prisoners' behaviour was primarily defined by their social roles as guards or prisoners. Milgram's shock experiment (1963) proved that people are ready to obey authority even contrary to their own moral convictions and shock someone who is pretending to be shocked by command of the person in a lab coat instructing them to.

"Evaluative integration," which signifies probabilistic traits that increase the likelihood of having other positive or negative traits. Doris suggests that these define globalists (Doris 2002, 22). However, despite efforts to define and study globalism, the majority of research does not support its manifestation. Indeed, if a person possesses a robust trait that is corresponding to "globalist" criteria they should consistently exhibit behavior relevant to a *specific trait across a wide range of relevant situations* (ibid, 18). However, Doris notes, there exists a low "inter-situational consistency" in human behavior, meaning that behavior is not similar across different situations. Virtues, he argues, are meant to stabilize this, but the presented evidence suggests they are unable.

At the same time, Doris continues, research reveals persistent evidence that support the thesis that people's behavior strongly varies as a function of the situation. Doris sites the study by Isen and Levin (1972) which showed that people who found a dime in a phone booth are significantly more likely to *offer* the woman help who walked by them and dropped her papers than those who did not find a dime; "a mere dime strongly influenced compassion relevant behavior", Doris writes (ibid, 31). Doris labels this lack of stable behavior as a function of individuals heavily influenced by the situation and calls this a kind of situationism.

But just incorporating situational diversity of behavior into a theory of personality *still* presents a major problem. If human personalities would be formed as evaluatively integrated associations of robust features, for virtues are supposed to be robust traits for Doris, it would be reasonable to expect a substantial degree of consistency in behavior across similar situations. But this is not necessarily the case, behavior is still unstable. The idea of human personality as evaluatively integrated associations of robust features does not readily explain the heterogeneity present in various experiments like Isen and Levin that depict even more interesting findings, like what it means to find a dime and the impact it has towards mailing a letter (1972). This instability can be argued as a form of stability, which is exactly why Doris says that situationism follows the stability thesis as mentioned above. Doris sees the solution in the possibility of "temporally stable, situation-particular, 'local' traits that are associated with important individual differences" (Doris 2002, 25). This leads Doris to argue for a *fragmented* personality structure provided that even situational changes that do not seem important can result in different personalities which can lead to inconsistent behavior. He defines fragmented personality as an "evaluatively *disintegrated* association of situation-specific local traits" (64, italics added) and claims that it can be supported by multiple evidence such as "low consistency correlations, the astonishing situation-

sensitivity of behaviour, the disappointments of personality research, and the confounds of biography" (ibid, 65). Doris does not argue against character traits, he argues against "globalism".

Doris's hypothesis of a fragmented personality is based on four hypotheses, the first being the assumption that the situational influences force the agent to behave as if the agent is not himself, and this is why behavior is unpredictable. This also explains the notion that "[o]ne can expect the "usual" only in the usual circumstances" (ibid, 64), and why the prediction of how someone would act compared to how they actually act, rarely matches. Doris mentions here that there is no point assigning a precarious ground to character based on behavior since it could be the behavior of a "fragmented" person. Doris's second hypothesis therefore states that the attribution of robust traits is weakened by the situational factors, which means that it is difficult to say anything stable about a person's character when the situation has a strong impact. Third, there are no accounts of empirical data that refutes the logic of hypothesis one and two, or depicts some sort of consistency or robustness, Doris writes. And forth, when people are asked biographical information (Doris was not clear here what this would entail), it often "reveals remarkable personal disintegration" resulting in low consistency and depicting the power of the situation from many angles previously unrevealed (ibid 65)[3]. These four hypotheses are going to be referred to with respect to the points I have to say about bullying and mental-health. While 1.1 and 1.2 honed in on what situationism stands for, and what Doris argues for in light of it, I now move on to seeing what it can and cannot inform about bullying.

1.3 Bullying and Situationism

In this section I discuss bullying and the possible benefits of the situationist's approach to it. When it comes to bullying among young people, to all the reasons behind it, one more is added, which is unique to this group. This reason is puberty. I am going to touch upon this phenomenon in sufficient detail in the next section on mental-health, but here I will confine myself to a remark that puberty is a time of significant social changes. Young people may experience social pressure, changes in their relationships with peers and adults, and the development of new interests and values. Tarazi, Hussieni, and Moro (2021) write for the US National Institute of Health which defines puberty as a *transformative experience* with traumatic impact. At the same

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[3] Doris discusses how personal judgement works in light of this hard-to-find character, in addition to discussions about ethics and responsibility (Ch 6 & 7).

time puberty occurs, researchers want to find out what externally around bullying is important to their character and how the two relate: "Certain pupils are clearly more at risk of being involved as bullies or victims, or sometimes both (bully/victims), by virtue of personality, family background factors, characteristics such as disability, and the nature and quality of friendships and peer-group reputation" (Smith, Pepler, and Rigby 2004, 1). This is not limited to many studies who embrace the "characteristics" of bullying (e.g., Smokowski and Kopasz 2005; Aluede et al. 2008; Namie and Lutgen-Sandvik 2010) and others who embrace "virtue" in relation to bullying. Researchers also try to gain a more comprehensive understanding of bullying and its underlying influences, ranging from certain kinds of peer pressure (Hamarus and Kaikkonen 2008), social dynamics (Thornberg 2015), and environmental factors (Kim 2004), and what each of these kinds of perspective have in common, is that each understand bullying as a "situation".

Recognizing the complexity of bullying, however, there is a feel of certain disproportion in researcher's attention that consider the external factors in the literature (i.e., peer pressure, social dynamics) far more than the internal ones (i.e., while there may be individual risk factors for bullying, see Farrington and Baldry 2010, there aren't many I can find that encourage self-introspection in the situation as it occurs or just occurred). While studying bullying from the position of external influences is important in terms of peer pressure, social dynamics, etc., I argue that it should be complemented by an exploration of the internal aspects of bullying as a manifestation of fragmented personalities through introspection, without making broad claims about the individuals' overall traits and nature.

I would like in this regard to return to Tarazi, Hussieni, and Moro (2021) and focus on the words "*transformative experience*". The formation of the value-moral consciousness of a teenager is in the process of transformation and might go not in the direction of unity and integrity, but rather in the direction of the polarization of value preferences. Partially this can arise from a need for self-affirmation which for some is strong at this age, and that in the name of the attention, a teenager is ready to give up their views and beliefs and take actions that are at odds with their own moral judgment. Losing authority in the eyes of peers can be a tragedy for some teenagers, or for some can be seen as one. The pronounced need of age to "be in the pack" forces one to accept the moral attitudes of the pack and be ready to adjust these attitudes where and when the pack requires it. This, speaking of teenagers, justifies Doris's reluctance "to evaluate persons in terms of robust traits or evaluatively integrated personality structures" (Doris 2002,

114-115), but rather indicates the need to adopt the idea of fragmented personality as "evaluatively disintegrated association of situation-specific local traits' (ibid, 64). As I said, the exploration of the internal aspects of bullying is crucial but when it comes to teenagers in this transformative experience of puberty, despite Doris not talking about this directly but using his words: "we should invest more of our energies in attending to the features of our environment that influence behavioral outcomes" (2002, 146). That is why I think that the situationist's approach here *is* relevant as it focuses on what is around puberty and not on stopping it because it cannot be stopped. Teenagers' tendency to constantly recheck moral values, the desire to reject the former, "outdated" for the sake of self-assertion, further emphasizes the validity of this approach.

Researchers studying the origins of bullying behavior can gain valuable insights by seeing bullying as a situation during puberty that hinders the expression of one's own moral judgments, as this perspective, while not directly eliminating bullying, can foster a deeper understanding and facilitate targeted solutions that address the unique dynamics of specific bullying scenarios (e.g., differentiating how to address Stacy's bullying of Sam vs. Smith bullying Jones). If researchers approach bullying through a situationist lens instead of solely attributing it to character, the idea of fragmented personality would allow to avoid any assumptions about human nature as being predisposed to bullying or not; one would neither embrace an idealistic approach nor a nihilistic one. Refrain from attributing traits to bullies or victims can then encourage a more nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in bullying and help to counteract preconceived stigmas that may be founded based on character (i.e., terrible teens have become a cult classic by this point). Strategies that are more nuanced here can benefit from one specific study by Frisén, Jonsson, and Persson (2007)[4] that gets very close to understanding the *why* of bullying from the internal perspective as was drawn out above. There are also various studies incorporating phenomenological approaches to hone in on the role of the body (Hosseini et al. 2020; Roques et al. 2022) that supports the idea of self-reflection (i.e., how it makes the *body* feel). New avenues of research could include more nuanced and fine-grained approaches to understanding the inner workings of the bully and the victim. In summary, keeping in mind Doris's arguments allow to take into account the impact of contextual factors on the inner state of mind of

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[4] Table 5 (756) shows 28% of adolescents attribute bullying to the bully's low self-esteem, while 26% cite the bully's desire to appear cool, and 15% mention general problems the bully may have. On page 758, 24% state that bullying stops due to the bully's maturation, highlighting the role of both situational factors and internal state of mind, rather than character alone.

the bully or the victim. Human behavior, especially in young age, is intricate and unpredictable, making it difficult to anticipate how young people will act in different situations; that is why the inner state of mind should be as comprehensive as possible.

To date, other than a handful of naturalistic observations that may come close to intervention[5], few asked youths to *reflect* on the situation specifically with respect to their feelings as the situation unfolded. Smith and Shu (2000), for instance, conducted a research study that examined decades of fighting against bullying in schools based on 2,308 students ages 10-14, and while they identified a decline in bullying incidents in addition to many interesting themes about why people choose to remain silent when bullied and the role of the teacher, nothing alluded to the *feelings* associated with being bullying. I argue that the lack of proper attention to the inner feelings or the emotions of a teenager, that is, to their own moral assessment of what happened in the situation of bullying, paints an incomplete picture. I argue that something as simple as getting the child to draw a picture of what happened right *after the fact* and how it made them feel, may serve to inform a lot about the origins of the situation and its prevailing impact (i.e., right after the teacher who sees the bullying occurring; see also Schwartz 2017). The description of an act 'after the fact', has one important advantage: that the emotions of the moment fade while the action itself and its consequences remain. The hope here is that doing this drawing of a picture (although meant to imply a literal drawing can also be taken to mean deep reflection and analysis of the *why* of behaviour), would reinforce an analysis of one's own moral judgments, not influenced by the situation, and will presumably come into conflict with the action itself or with what the consequences of it are by virtue of such self-reflection. It may be reasonable to assume that, although not meant to be an empirical claim, a person therefore who would have to make excuses and probably lie in order to relieve himself from the blame of what happened, would not do so if such an experience is considered by them as a bad experience or action, and noted as such.

1.4 Mental-health and Situationism

I would like this section to serve as an extension to the previous one, since even a short-term impact like bullying might cause way more than just short-term physical or emotional discomfort (as was touched on previously). I want to discuss the conceptual research opportunities that might open up once looking at mental-health disorders from a situationist's perspective.

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[5] For some examples see: Pepler and Craig 1995; O'Connell 2000; Drabick and Baugh 2010; Mulvey et al. 2020.

In the "Problem Description" section on page 7, I have mentioned puberty as one of the factors affecting mental-health and would like to explain myself. As per Russell Viner, there is growing evidence that puberty has a lot to do with people's mental-health and emotional well-being. Puberty itself is associated with increased behavioral problems in boys and social anxiety, depression, and self-harm in girls. "It is also associated with a *lower sense of well-being*" (Viner 2015, italics added). I would also like to quote from an article by a child psychotherapist, that is, a person whose professional activity is connected only and exclusively with young people: "The adolescent himself often experiences the impact of puberty as a *situation of extreme internal danger*" (Hoxter 1965, 281, italics added). When puberty and bullying coexist, the vulnerability of the person(s) in the situation may *amplify* adverse effects (Kaltiala-Heino et al 2003).

Why am I dwelling in such detail on puberty? I am doing this because this circumstance brings me to the validity and necessity of looking at mental-health disorders from the point of view of situationism. If one indeed feels extreme internal danger, social anxiety, and their sense of well-being is low, it is only a matter of time how soon they will start to question the value of their own moral beliefs and begin looking for them elsewhere. Needless to say, those morally extraneous features of a situation are always readily available for them. The situation in which a teenager would finds themselves in gladly provides those features to them by fragmenting their personality and passing off the moral features of the situation as this "new person's" own norms. As situationists' basic argument states, that morally relevant behavior covaries with morally extraneous features of situations rather than with person's own moral commitments. There is a substitution of concepts that happens, sometimes imperceptible, for the person who is occupied only with his own internal fears, exaggerated and amplified by puberty, possible bullying, social communication problems etc. Eventually, as they say, the tail begins to wag the dog. In the best case, they end up with Doris's fragmented personality, worst case it could leave someone with an assignment of character, often negative, for the rest of their lives. Descriptions of character then become not required but automatic (i.e., *a killer*, *a rapist*).

Is it possible to avoid such a development of events? Is there any way of even realizing that the road is potentially dangerous? I think a situationism approach can help here. The point is that looking at the problem from the situationism's perspective might open up an opportunity to determine at what point a person begins to act not in accordance with his moral convictions, but

contrary to them, since it is at this moment that self-monitoring is disrupted and a person, as this young teenager, limply moves to where the situation leads them.

I neither know whether it achievable technically nor claim that it will solve the problem of mental-health disorder. I believe it may be conceptually possible to look at the chance of when a person comes to realize that the actions they performed are not necessarily the result of their own moral judgments being bad or evil but are largely due to the requirements of the situation coming into conflict with it. This does not mean the path to justifying oneself in one's own eyes (although perhaps this is, also), but merely the fact that the behavior, whatever it may be, is done consciously. This would serve as the confirmation that self-monitoring is not lost.

1.5 Virtue-ethics role in both perspectives

I start this section from my take on virtue as described by MacIntyre (1990). Virtues are not just enduring psychological traits that automatically make someone act ethically. Having the virtues means having a clear view of the world, based on which we make decisions which are acceptable to ourselves. The combination of these decisions forms the basis of the narrative of our lives. And if this narrative is comprehensible as a virtue - only in this case we ourselves are virtuous. Therefore, virtue ethics teaches one to form character throughout their lives, each time asking themselves the question: "Who are we?" What I discuss here is whether or not concepts of virtue ethics can serve as a moral guideline for young people and what can be thought out conceptually in order to potentially make it possible.

When bullying and mental-health are looked at from the situationist's perspective in which a disbalance occurs between morally relevant aspects of the situation itself and one's internal judgements of what counts as moral, there are certain pros to this approach which have been discussed earlier. In this section, I want to specifically highlight the cons now, and argue how concepts of virtue ethics go around this and open new doors for research.

Undoubtedly, the situationist's approach carries a certain danger of excessive basing on the situation and insufficient attention to character traits. In extreme cases, the situationists might reach the absurd assertion that without any relation to the essence of a person, the behavior is determined only and exclusively by the situation (see Upton, 2009). Critics of situationism argue that the character traits considered by the situationists have nothing to do with how virtue ethics defines character. While, critics say, virtue ethics considers character as something integral,

including goal setting, motivation, and life values, the situationists views character as "independently functioning dispositions to behave in stereotypical ways" (Kamtekar 2004, 460). Moreover, if the traditional ethics of virtue explains inconsistency in behavior as a struggle with obstacles to the achievement of practical reason, the situationists consider this inconsistency as a sign of a stable mental-health showing the ability to adapt to a rapidly changing situation. While behavioral inconsistency may confuse moral and interpretive frameworks, Doris contends, it may also be a sign of good mental-health (Doris 2002, 65).

I do not consider myself entitled to unequivocally accept one or the other point of view, but I believe that elements of both theories can and should coexist *especially* when it comes to the problems that American youth face. Notwithstanding the fact that character traits, as the traditional virtue ethics sees them, are hardly fully present in a personality in its infancy, which is I believe a con in itself and Walker (2009) would likely think the same, as per the notion that they require *practice*; the presence of at least the first manifestations of such traits is extremely important to identify and use as a return to in conditions when the situation gets out of control for what appears to be no apparent reason (i.e., a mental outburst). As I have already mentioned, as per Doris, one can reasonably expect "usual" behavior only under usual circumstances, while it is close to impossible to predict how someone acts when circumstances become unusual, another con. I argue that the very appearance of situationism was precisely due to the fact that the circumstances offered by life quite often go beyond the usual ones, and when this happens, the behaviour of people who in ordinary life are quite similar to each other begin to differ significantly. It is not about who is more or less virtuous, but about what mechanisms are involved in one's mind that encourages them to behave in one way or another in the event of a particularly unusual situation. If a mere dime found in a telephone booth can change a person to such an extent that it becomes obvious to the researcher, how can one predict behavior when the situation is truly random, another con. Of the two soldiers who received the order to shoot their comrade for cowardice during the battle - one pulls the trigger, the other does not; each writes the narrative of their own life, and it is not known which of these narratives will turn out to be the story of a virtuous person in the end. Maybe neither, maybe both. Where does such a different reaction come from in otherwise regular people? What causes one's inner moral judgment to prevail over the situational, while another decides to follow the demands of the situation? Is it just the fear of one and the recklessness of the other from internal imbalance between prudence and courage? I believe

that the situationism approach can help explain these differences only in conjunction with the character traits as they are seen by traditional virtue ethics. Namely, situationists should not dismiss or question the existence or importance of character traits. The value of the situational approach lies precisely in the fact that it makes one think about the diversity of perception of traditional virtues by putting up a barrier called the 'situation' between the person and his own moral convictions. Ways to overcome this barrier, as well as the refusal to look for these ways, can provide additional information about the person himself and give another clue to understanding the motives that prompt him to act in one way or another in a given situation. When speaking about the problems facing by American youth, the word *motive* seems to me to be key. Here an attempt to analyze runs into an additional obstacle in the face of puberty, where the main characteristic of which is the intensity and unpredictability of the reaction to a seemingly insignificant change in the situation, which ultimately leads to what Doris calls 'fragmented personality'. Therefore, any possibility of additional information about what drives a teenager is a step towards understanding the inner nature of bullying and mental-health disorders, toward what makes decisions leading in the direction opposite of virtue.

Conclusion

This section explored the view on bullying and mental-health disorders from a situationism perspective. I noted the unique role of puberty in magnifying these problems among young people which further justifies the suggested approach. I discussed the concept of situationism and its take on character traits with a specific focus on John Doris's work. I unpacked John Doris's arguments against traditional notions of character while paying special attention to his position against "globalism", but not against the character seen as result of "evaluatively disintegrated association of situation-specific local traits" (2002, 64). I claimed that the situationism perspective has great potential in assessing inner states of mind of young people by suggesting the idea of fragmented personality, thus opening previously unseen opportunities for approaching the formation of moral judgement in young people and possible involvement of virtue ethics in this process. I have explicitly mentioned the role that virtue ethics might play in realizing the discrepancy between one's own moral judgement and an extraneous one, introduced from the outside to please the momentary requirements of the situation and hindering a clear view of the world. Part two of the thesis now goes into seeing these two problems from a factitious virtue perspective.

Part II. Factitious Virtue

Introduction

The second part of this thesis focuses on factitious virtue, the idea presented by Mark Alfano in his book *Character as Moral Fiction* (2013)*,* and its potential in informing more about bullying and mental-health disorders as it impacts youth. Part II is organized in the same way as the previous one, with slight deviation. I start with discussion of how factitious virtue differs from the traditional one and why this is important when thinking about the notion of robust character traits. Then I focus on factitious virtue as described by Alfano's *Character as Moral Fiction* where I reconstruct the main claims relevant to this thesis. This is followed by a discussion about how subscribing to a factitious virtue perspective when it comes to thinking about bullying opens new doors to discussion about the topic. Then I present a similar discourse with regard to mental-health issues. I conclude with an argument about the role traditional virtue ethics may come to serve when seeing these two problems faced by American youth through a factitious virtue perspective. To save space, I will use "traditional virtue" for the virtues considered in traditional virtue ethics.

2.1 Traditional Virtue and Factitious virtue

This section discusses the similarities and differences between traditional virtue and factitious virtue. I do this with a specific emphasis on robust character traits and draw back to Doris. This discussion aims to bring one closer to answering the research question and understanding the role traditional virtue may have when dealing with the two problems of bullying and mental-health, as will be further elucidated in section 2.5.

Traditional virtue focuses on cultivating good character traits as the foundation for moral life. It emphasizes the development of virtues over time through practice, and these virtues include but are not limited to honesty, courage, justice, generosity, temperance, and compassion. These traditional virtues reflect deeply ingrained character traits that guide individuals in consistently making morally good choices. Character traits are enduring qualities or attributes that shape an individual's behavior, attitudes, and actions. Someone who has a virtuous character is traditionally seen to make morally sound decisions, and this enables them to act in morally right ways when it comes to navigating moral judgments and dilemmas. The essence of virtue is *sought but*

never achieved; it was Aristotle who originally put an ideal virtuous level that people can go after, practice, and return with a sense of happiness and the good life. However, the virtues that one strives toward must be based on an ideal, so that the virtues one strives to cultivate, should model or reflect an excellence. Aristotle referred to the result of this ideal as eudaimonia, "flourishing" or "the good life." Eudaimonia is not happiness in the sense of momentary pleasure, but rather is a deeper sense of fulfillment that comes from living in accordance with one's highest potential. Although simplified, happiness then becomes robust as a function of consistently being virtuous even under unexpected circumstances. Evaluating character as a whole is achieved by traditional virtues' assessment of morality beyond isolated actions or situations.

This conception of character traits became a focal point in the argument between traditional virtue and the situationists tradition. As was discussed in the previous section, character as understood in conventional traditional virtue has little in common with the character traits as it is seen by situationists. Kamtekar argued that these are two different *kinds* of character bases, that one is built on a precarious trait that the situationist claims are meant to or *should be* robust and unfortunately aren't, and the other one based on a tradition underlying moral psychology, shared, despite their differences, by Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics (Kamtekar 2004, 460). While Alfano touched in his book on this argument between supporters of traditional and situationism approaches by "explaining away intuitions about the existence and robustness of traits" (Alfano 2013, 54) the subject of his attention was shifted more to the manifestation of such traits. This is the idea of what Alfano called "factitious virtue" saying that there *is* a way to *help acquire* those same virtues that traditional virtue requires, provided they serve as resembling these robust character traits held on to by traditionalists. To help make this point clearer, Alfano writes: "Alternatively, we could think of factitious virtue as a developmental stage on the way to traditional virtue" (Alfano 2013, 183). But before I discuss exactly what this developmental stage means in a moment, I must point out the differences between the very concepts of traditional and factitious virtues. These differences become important when seeing the two problems addressed in this thesis through factitious virtue as one gets closer to answering the research question.

The first difference is that traditional virtue requires behaving *from* virtue as a function of internalized habit, meaning that individuals who adhere to traditional virtue strive to cultivate virtuous character traits through consistent practice and repetition. Virtues are then seen as stable dispositions that guide behavior across various situations. One's moral judgment take power over

any behaviour or response the situation may induce in the person. The emphasis is on developing a genuine and deeply ingrained character that does this and leads to virtuous actions. Consider what Aristotle writes about this in his *Nicomachaen Ethics*, start of Book II:

> [M]oral virtue comes about as a result of habit... none of the moral virtues arises in us by nature; for nothing that exists by nature can form a habit contrary to its nature… Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit. (2009)

On the other hand, factitious virtue is a concept that suggests that virtues can be intentionally constructed or simulated, even if they are not genuinely internalized. Factitious virtue ethics allows for the possibility of cultivating virtues through deliberate strategies and external influences, such as using role models, incentives, or external cues (see Alfano 2013, 79; Alfano 2016, 200). The focus of factitious virtue, which is dealt more in-depth in the next section, is on creating virtuous behavior through external means rather than relying solely on the internalization of character traits.

The second difference relates to the stability of virtues. Traditional virtue assumes that virtues are stable and consistent over time, representing enduring aspects of a person's character. This virtue stability is believed to contribute to the robustness of virtues, allowing individuals to act virtuously across various contexts and situations. In contrast, factitious virtue acknowledges that external circumstances can have a significant impact on behavior, and virtues may not always manifest consistently. The situational context and external influences are considered crucial factors that shape behavior, sometimes overriding the internalized moral judgements a person may have. Therefore, factitious virtue recognizes the potential instability of virtues due to situational factors while equally honing in on the possibility of ameliorating these inconsistencies.

The third difference lies in the underlying moral psychology. Traditional virtue is grounded in a long-standing moral tradition embraced by philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. It emphasizes the cultivation of virtues as essential for human flourishing and moral excellence. The focus is on developing character traits aligned with moral principles and ideals. Factitious virtue, while acknowledging the importance of genuine virtues, departs from the traditional moral psychology by considering the influence of situational factors and external strategies in cultivating something that *resembles* virtuous behavior. It does this by specifically drawing on insights from psychology to inform of developmental strategies capable of fostering virtuous

actions. By understanding these differences between traditional and factitious virtues, one can now explore how the concept of factitious virtue might provide an alternative approach to cultivating virtuous behavior in situations where traditional virtue may face challenges. To execute this point better, I now shift to unpacking factitious moral virtue in greater depth.

2.2 Unpacking Factitious Moral Virtue

Traditional virtue may be difficult to cultivate in youth and adolescents because it requires the internalization of virtuous habits through consistent practice and repetition, as was discussed briefly in the previous section. During the formative years, youth are developing their sense of self and their moral understanding, which may act as a challenge for them to fully embody and integrate virtues into their character. This is where, I argue, the concept of factitious virtue becomes relevant. Factitious virtue ethics recognizes that external influences and deliberate strategies can play a significant role in whether virtuous behaviors are fostered or not, especially in situations where the internalization of virtues may be challenging, or not fully capable of being developed. This thought is captured by what Alfano writes:

> Alternatively, we could think of factitious virtue as a developmental stage on the way to traditional virtue. More radically, we could reconceptualize virtue as a triadic relation among an agent, a social milieu, and an environment, which would then make the social expectations (and the potential for common knowledge of those expectations) that underlie factitious virtue part of the metaphysics of virtue, rather than a situational influence that induces virtue. (2013, 183)

Virtue is not always induced in situations, rarely is it present even, as the previous part of the thesis sought to explain. Robustness, therefore, becomes not as essential as the demand characteristic of it does. In other words, it is not the sources of virtue that are important, its manifestation is, regardless of where it comes from. People often assume, Alfano writes, that if they have enough evidence to claim someone has a good quality before saying that they do, they will still have enough evidence afterwards. And if they do not have enough evidence before, they believe they will not have enough evidence afterwards either. But there is something else to consider. Sometimes, when one claims someone has a good quality, it can actually create evidence for itself, and this phenomenon forms the basis for factitious virtue. In these cases, even if there was not enough evidence to claim someone had a good quality before, the very act of *saying it* can actually provide enough evidence for it afterwards. This expectation that is created by the statement,

claims Alfano, can influence the person to behave in a way that resembles having that good quality and thus creating *a* factitious virtue. It is like when someone takes a pretend medicine and believes it will make them feel better, and then one actually starts feeling better—a phenomenon known as the placebo effect. Factitious virtue works in a similar way (Alfano 2013, 84).

According to Alfano, the placebo effect operates on the premise of 'I believe it, therefore it will happen,' even though the correct statement should be 'it happened, therefore I believe it.' Despite this incorrect reasoning, the placebo effect still functions. Alfano argues that a similar concept can be applied to factitious virtue. Believing, even without any justification, that a person is virtuous can eventually trigger that person's virtuous behavior in themselves. Certainly, such behavior would not be the result of Aristotle's method of habituation, which involves acting virtuously for the right reasons and finding pleasure in doing so (Alfano 2013, 102). However, the desire to maintain one's self-image as virtuous and live up to the expectations of others may be sufficient motivation to continue with such behavior. Of course, due to the lack of internal roots, this phenomenon will most likely turn out to be temporary, I believe. It will require constant social nourishment in the form of cueing. However, I argue, that this is a step in the right direction. At least from the point of view that a person gets the opportunity to personally feel the effect of what it means to be virtuous even if this feeling is just a simulation.

Another strategy used by Alfano when it comes to cultivating virtues deservers careful attention to because, just like the previous sections had mentioned, it differs from traditional virtue by less rigorous approaches to the definition of character traits. This point of difference is presented clearer by Alfano, who contends that despite psychological research suggesting that most people lack strong character traits like courage, honesty, and open-mindedness, this still leaves reasons to attribute these qualities to individuals because these attributions act as "self-fulfilling prophecies" (Alfano 2013, 58). This term was mentioned before in the literature review discussing Rigby. While Rigby applied this term to children expecting to be bullied, Alfano understood these self-fulfilling prophecies in the context of children who become more hard-working if told that they are studious; likewise adults become more charitable if told that are giving (ibid, 9). This cue that comes from the social environment does not mean or imply that people act predicably, however. Alfano contends (like Doris and the situationists) that the majority of people do not act predictably, that being helpful and nice isn't a guarantee, and that behaviour varies and so it cannot be consistent and adequate to define and be reasonably expected. In response to

this difficultly, Alfano offers something that emerges through the combination of unpredictable social elements and random patterns of human behaviour; something he calls moral technology. Moral technology, according to Alfano, serves as a bridge between how one *expected* to behave and how one currently behaves. It acts as a project not in identifying what is good or bad, but rather, acts as something that enables one to behave in accordance with virtue. Alfano believes that this technology compliments researchers aiming to get others to act more virtuously by telling them when they do so. These social cues reinforce virtuous behavior through the self-implementation of such moral technology and gets people "according to" or "close enough" to the virtue. As a result, this use of moral technology is able to amount to trait attributions, or a form of virtue labeling, that when assigned to someone at the right place and time, serves them then as a "self-fulling prophecy", thereby acting as reinforcement for the one being told they act "according to" virtue. Alfano works from the claim that acting *from* virtue is unachievable for most, similar to Doris, and argues against the need of achieving this difficult requirement as presented in traditional virtue as a function of ideal practice and habit, replacing such demands with social reinforcement and cues facilitated through moral technology. A good example of moral technology, although Alfano does not use this example, is a theater play that encourages kids to act virtuously like their character does, and hoping this translates to their life outside the play.

Alfano argues that attributions of virtue, even in the absence of sufficient evidence, are permissible under certain conditions. To do this, he draws on empirical studies to demonstrate that when virtuous traits are plausibly and publicly attributed to an individual, it fosters identification with those traits and creates a belief that others expect the individual to behave accordingly. To arrive at this argument, Alfano lists several studies that provided evidence supporting the effects of labeling and attributing virtues to individuals from the lens of social reinforcement (Alfano 2013, 85-90). For example, children labeled as charitable were more likely to donate more than those who received moral persuasion (ibid, 90); participants labeled as competitive exhibited consistent competitive behavior in subsequent games; labeling children as nice and helpful increased their contributions in subsequent trials compared to simply praising their actions; similar effects were seen in studies involving adults where labeling a population as willing participants in solving an energy problem, increased their intention to conserve such energy; adults that are labeled eco-friendly proved more successful in inducing cooperative environmental activity compared to just providing them with informational messages about environmental effects.

These findings that Alfano uses argue that attributing virtues to individuals through labeling has a significant impact on their behavior, and this leads to behavior that aligns with attributed virtuous traits, that these attributions function as self-fulfilling prophecies, and generate what is called factitious virtue.

Factitious virtue offers an alternative approach to cultivating virtuous behavior, particularly in situations where traditional virtue may be challenging to implement, such as during the formative years of youth (a discussion unpacked in the next sections). Unlike traditional virtue, which requires internalization and consistent practice, factitious virtue emphasizes external influences and deliberate strategies to foster virtuous behavior. By attributing virtues to individuals through labeling, research depicts that it can create a belief in the individual and others that they are expected to exhibit virtuous behavior, that their moral judgement is made stronger, and this serves as a self-fulfilling prophecy influencing individuals to align their behavior with the attributed virtues. The effectiveness of labeling virtuous like behaviours such as charitable donations, cooperative behavior, environmental conservation, etc., although when conceptually combined with factitious virtue and the notion of cueing, has the possibility to leave these virtuous like behaviours temporary, and could be seen as needing to rely on the continuous presence of social reinforcement in order to function.

At the end of this section, it should be noted that despite the apparent simplicity and accessibility of the method proposed by Alfano, his own arguments (Alfano 2013, 37, 39, 65) suggest that globally virtuous behaviors are rare, similar to Doris. These are the kinds of behaviours that apply consistently to the majority, and because they are rare, this raises a lot of questions about the stability of factitious virtue, its longevity, the absence of real internal roots, and many other conceptually serious concerns that are returned to.

2.3   Bullying and Factitious Virtue

In light of the differences between traditional virtue and factitious virtue discussed in the previous section, understanding bullying from a now better understood factitious virtue perspective becomes possible. This section introduces three philosophically relevant claims that shed light on the issue of bullying in youth. The first claim revolves around the recognition that bullies may lack genuine virtues but may exhibit factitious virtue due to external influences and social reinforcement. The second relates to the potential role of factitious virtue in addressing

bullying dynamics. And the third discusses the possibility of integration of the two to achieve a more genuine practice of virtue.

The first claim I emphasize is that even though a bully may lack what traditional ethics would deem as robust virtues, that virtue may still be fostered by external influences and social reinforcement. This "close enough" attitude builds on the understanding of factitious virtue discussed earlier, which highlighted the role of external cues and the possibility of strategies in nurturing virtuous behavior, particularly when the internalization of virtues may be challenged or not fully developed (this also has merit in discussions related to puberty). In the context of bullying, this claim suggests that even though bullies may not possess genuine virtues, their moral judgments need not be seen as either a function of their character or lack thereof, and neither on the role of the situation that makes them want to bully for reasons beyond their moral agenda. These moral judgements, rather, could be seen as occurring because there is *a lack of positive social cues and reinforcement that signals for its absence*. In case of bullying, neither the character of the person, nor the role the situation has in whether the bully has bullied or not, facilitates sounder moral judgements *through social cues*, and this is what the factitious virtue perspective may allow one to do. This is to think of what possible role the social environment could have when it comes to cueing the bully to stop. I return to a discussion about this with examples of what this means after the next claims have been substantiated.

The second claim acknowledges that while factitious virtue can potentially influence bullies' behavior as seen in the first claim, there may remain a need to critically examine the nature of the reinforcement they receive. This is because, in part, the *nature of the reinforcement* raises the question of whether an action is based on genuine moral transformation, or simply a superficial adherence to virtuous behavior due to external pressures. In traditional virtue ethics, genuine virtues are cultivated through internalization, practice, and the development of virtuous character. However, factitious virtue operates differently, relying on external cues and social reinforcement to shape behavior, as discussed above. This raises concerns about the authenticity and long-term sustainability of the virtuous actions exhibited by bullies under the influence of factitious virtue. Superficial changes in behavior may not result in a lasting transformation, and bullies may revert to their harmful actions once the external influences are removed. Moreover, the second claim prompts a critical examination of the ethical implications of relying solely on factitious virtue to have it address bullying dynamics. While factitious virtue may provide a temporary solution to

addressing bullying behavior (i.e., cueing a bully in one way or another to stop), it may not address the deeper moral issues and judgements that drive individuals to engage in bullying. As a result, approaches that would seek to combine factitious virtue with efforts to promote moral development in bullies with a specific focus on the nature of reinforcement, especially *who is doing the reinforcement and how,* may open new doors for research developing strategies to address bullying beyond superficial behavioral changes. This will then rather focus on fostering a lasting positive change which brings me to the third claim.

The third claim is that while there is a risk of neglecting the root causes of bullying and overlooking the potential for genuine moral transformation in individuals when seen through the lens of factitious virtue, it may still be possible with the help of traditional virtue to cultivate a more genuine factitious virtue ethics practice. Therefore, the third claim calls for a comprehensive approach that combines the idea of factitious virtue with efforts to address the underlying moral issues that may have the potential to provide opportunities for things like introspection, self-reflection, and the cultivation of virtuous character. Can these concepts also be cued? Can they be cued with equal effectiveness by everyone around? Such an approach acknowledges that bullying requires not only surface-level behavioral changes based on social cues, but also, a *shift in an individuals' moral judgement that lasts*. This is what I believe Alfano had in mind conceptually when he meant seeing factitious virtue as "part of the metaphysics of virtue, rather than a situational influence that induces virtue" (Alfano 2013, 183). Integrating factitious virtue with what advances personal moral development may lead, as a result, to the possibility to cultivate the robustness of virtue and the development of a genuine moral framework within individuals. Social cues enabling a factitious virtue practice, thereby, can then not just act as self-fulfilling prophecies, but also, as catalysts for moral reflection and transformation.

To illustrate the discussion and provide a practical example, consider a hypothetical scenario involving a school setting. Suppose Alex engages in bullying behavior towards his peers. According to the first claim, Alex may lack genuine virtues but could exhibit factitious virtue due to external influences and social reinforcement. In this case, Alex's moral judgments and actions may not necessarily stem from a lack of character or situational demands that can be either at odds with Alex's moral compass or not, but rather, from a lack of positive social cues and reinforcement. For instance, if Alex receives attention or validation from his peers for engaging in bullying (i.e., like being part of a friend group that bullies people) he may perceive bullying as a

socially acceptable behavior. To the same extent, if the signals received by Alex from a different source are negative, he will probably stop, one signal might contradict the other, and here comes the second claim as a reminder to critically examine the *nature* of the reinforcement, especially how trustworthy or reliable the source of reinforcement is in Alex's eyes. But even if positive reinforcement prevails and the virtue turns out to be favorable, there are still concerns about the authenticity and long-term sustainability of Alex's behaviour; superficial changes driven by external pressures may not lead to genuine moral transformation within Alex, and once the external influences are removed, or if the social reinforcement and cues no longer have any effect, Alex may revert to bullying again. Moreover, the second claim highlights the ethical implications of solely relying on factitious virtue in addressing bullying dynamics, and here bullying problems may require going beyond behavioral changes that may appear superficial. Simply conforming to external cues without addressing the underlying moral issues and judgments that drive individuals to engage in bullying may not foster lasting positive change. This brings me to the third claim, which emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach that combines factitious virtue with efforts to address the root causes of bullying and promote genuine moral transformation. By doing so, researchers may be able to cultivate robust virtue and a genuine moral framework within Alex, using social cues *as catalysts* for his deeper moral reflection and transformation, and analyse its effectiveness in understanding the underlying causes of bullying.

2.4 Mental-health and Factitious Virtue

Similar to the section 1.4 where I discussed the relationship between mental-health and situationism, seeing mental-health as disrupted self-monitoring, I maintain that same understanding here, and now wish to say a few words on how I believe these areas connect with factitious virtue, concentrating on two particular points.

First, when considering mental-health within the framework of factitious virtue, it becomes critical to examine youth experience because mental-health issues may disrupt one's ability to develop and *maintain* robust virtues. Factors such as psychological distress, cognitive dissonance, or emotional turmoil may hinder the cultivation of these virtues, leading to incongruence between one's internal moral compass and external behavior. As a result, this may give rise to the possibility for factitious virtue to occur (i.e., establishing a mentor-ship program that cues virtues through various after school exercises). Individuals may be capable of exhibiting virtuous

behavior driven by external influences and social reinforcement rather than a genuine alignment with their internal moral values. While this point was discussed with regard to situationism in section 1.4 mentioning the potential risks this has for superficial cultivation of virtue and negative judgments, I maintain that when it comes to disrupted self-monitoring, this issue of not real virtue should be of worry. Whether mental-health disorders can be socially "cued off" or not, there rests a need for more complex discussion about the source of cueing, who or what is doing it, as well as about the severity of the mental-health problem; only if factitious virtue actually has significant positive impact on an individual's behaviour, would it be possible for positive change to occur. What this means is that the superficial adherence to virtuous behavior may take place in tandem with what may be classified as a genuine moral transformation. However, this transformation may still lead to a sense of inauthenticity, emotional dissonance, or a fragmented self-identity. The extent of this negative impact and possible ways to avoid it is open for discussion.

Engaging in factitious virtue as either the person cueing the behaviour or receiving the cue through means of social communication (i.e., telling someone they are virtuous or not), may strain an individual's mental well-being by extending disconnect between their true moral values and the behavior they exhibit due to external pressures. This misalignment may generate internal conflicts and contribute to psychological distress, potentially exacerbating existing mental-health or giving rise to new problems. Factitious virtue can conceptually serve to harm a person in the case that a gap between their genuine moral principles and the behavior they display in response to external demands is maintained. In other words, internal conflicts and psychological anguish can result from this misalignment between internal values and expected behavior, which, in turn, may exacerbate current mental-health problems or create new difficulties.

When a person's views and actions are at odds, it creates cognitive dissonance that is uncomfortable for them psychologically. And if another person comes in with their own reinforcement, this can only make things more complex. Consider, for instance, an individual who suffers from mental-health disorder D but always strives to show compassion and kindness. Given his condition, it might be challenging for him to constantly demonstrate these. His sense of moral conflict, therefore, can worsen due to the discrepancy between his desired behavior, left idle, and the inability to engage the desired behavior due to D. As a result, D might become even worse. It can be completely made worse by someone who at this moment comes up to him and tries to push him into his usual act of kindness, saying something like "you seem joyful today". When an

internal moral compass is damaged, people with mental-health issues may *rely on* or *get* outside cues that might not always serve them positively. Therefore, it is not so much the positive or negative connotation of these cues that is important here, but their accuracy and timeliness. This also pays homage to Alfano who writes: "[t]rait attributions of the right sort function as self-fulfilling prophecies" (2013, 83). Keeping this in mind and practicing caution and personal approaches to each particular case, outside factors may help in providing youth with structure, assistance, and validation, thus coming closer to what Alfano seeks to achieve through factitious virtue.

Consider a young person with a disorder who occasionally goes through episodes of extreme mood swings, bipolar personality disorder. They might act hastily and recklessly during manic episodes, contrary to their usual moral principles. To assist them to preserve a sense of moral alignment and lessen the negative effects of their manic episodes, they can receive advice and external cues from someone who knows their condition well. The young person with the disorder could, potentially, make moral decisions at trying times with the help of external cues and support systems that reinforce their values and act as if they assumed temporary control over this person. However, this also means that the young person's behavior at that moment is not completely independent. As a result, it should be recognized that relying exclusively on outside indicators and societal approval (as could be common in youth with mentors) is not quite a substitution for undisrupted self-monitoring, not only since it may cast doubt on the sincerity and long-term viability of moral behavior, but because they are not being taught to monitor themselves. Simultaneously, when external pressures are lacking or when confronted with difficult circumstances, youth may find it difficult to maintain consistent virtuous behavior without real moral transformation and inner growth (i.e., in the case of parental divorce, for instance). Their mental-health may be further exacerbated by this inconsistency in matching a factitious cue to provoke a return to hazardous behavior, which thereby may result in feelings of guilt, humiliation, and self-doubt in the person for their inability of being helped.

The second point is that when considering mental-health within the framework of factitious virtue, it becomes important to note that even if the cue comes from someone good with the best intentions, and even if the result *works* and one indeed feels better because they are cued off from anguish by acting virtuously, for instance, it still results in another problem. This problem is that when examining the connection between mental-health and factitious virtue, it becomes essential to place a particular emphasis on the unique experiences of youth. During this stage of

life, the desire to be popular and accepted by peers often takes center stage. At this vulnerable age, young individuals may feel a strong pressure to conform to societal expectations and gain recognition among their peers. They may be inclined to exhibit virtuous behavior driven by external influences and social reinforcement fueled by this desire rather than genuine alignment with their internal moral values. The need for acceptance and the fear of rejection can sway their actions, potentially leading to a form of factitious virtue that is based on false premises or negative influences. In their pursuit of regard, youth may further prioritize this superficial adherence to virtuous behavior (and even often vice), even if it lacks genuine moral transformation or meaning, like Churchill writes: "He has all the virtues I dislike and none of the vices I admire." The issue of disrupted self-monitoring, as discussed earlier with situationism, becomes even more critical. The desire to fit in and be perceived as "different" may have a strong overshadow to the importance of authentic moral alignment. Peer influence and societal norms significantly shape youth behavior in many ways (Bullo and Schulz 2022; McMillan, Felmlee, and Osgood 2018). Therefore, evaluating the *quality* and *authenticity* of these cues is crucial to hone in on to understanding whether people are genuinely promoting virtuous behavior or merely reinforcing popular, perhaps manipulative, trends.

In their pursuit of popularity, young individuals may rely on external cues that do not always serve their long-term well-being or moral growth. The pressure to conform and the desire for social validation may thereof overshadow the importance of genuine moral transformation. Understanding the connection between mental-health and factitious virtue in youth is vital, given their strong desire for popularity and own vulnerability arising in this regard. The pressure to conform and gain acceptance can lead to superficial adherence to virtuous behavior, driven by external influences that only resemble a page from the factitious virtue agenda. I believe that by striking a balance between external influences and authentic moral transformation, one may be able to support the moral integrity of young individuals as they navigate adolescences.

2.5 Virtue-ethics role in both perspectives

Exploring the concepts of factitious virtue in both sections, I have emphasized the importance of critically examining the *nature* of reinforcement. Speaking of situations such as bullying and mental-health disorders, it is natural to assume the inner desire of a person in such a situation to seek some kind of refuge, as something or someone who is the personification of

security and stability. Virtue ethics in this regard can provide means for such personification. Being focused on developing and cultivating virtuous character traits, virtue ethics offers valuable insights into the potential influence of *friendship* and the power of a single friend in shaping individuals' moral development. I focus on this particular idea here since I argue it has double impact once talking about youth, bullying, and mental-health disorders: the power of a single friend.

Within the framework of factitious virtue, friendship may find itself to play a significant role in providing positive social cues and trusted reinforcement. While factitious virtue relies on external influences and social reinforcement, the presence of a single friend who embodies genuine virtues can serve as a powerful catalyst for the cultivation of virtuous character traits within an individual. This friend, through their actions and moral exemplarity, may serve to inspire and motivate the other to strive for moral growth and alignment with their internal moral compass. Such proposition follows suit with tenets found in Aristotle. In book VIII of Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle (2009) writes: "Perfect friendship is the friendship of men who are good, and alike in virtue; for these wish well alike to each other qua good, and they are good themselves." Many modern discussions on ideal friendship and what can be significant and distinctively useful about it have their roots in Aristotle's ethics, writes Dean Cocking (2014). Aristotle made a number of statements in his description of ideal friendship, but the one that has received the most attention in modern times is that ideal friendship only exists between people who are almost perfect in virtue (Cocking 2014). This outlook suggests that the kind of love and respect found in an ideal friendship is grounded and characterized by the mutual acknowledgement of one another's virtue. As a result, the intimacy, intense affection, trust, loyalty, and other qualities that characterize these friendships, writes Cocking, are based on one's mutual respect of one another's virtues.

The friendship dynamic may provide a unique opportunity for individuals to observe and learn from their friends' virtuous behavior. By witnessing genuine virtues exhibited by a friend, individuals may be prompted to reflect upon their own moral values and strive to align their actions with those virtues. This process of moral reflection and transformation certainty may have the potential to deepen their understanding of virtue more in line with traditional approaches that foster the development of more ingrained and robust character traits. What the claim here is that a real friend can greatly facilitate this process in tandem with what was already discussed. Many studies in the psychological sciences depict the importance of having friends or a friend (see Walker, Curren, and Jones 2016; Mikami 2010; Shook et al. 2009). However, according to what

William Deresiewicz (2020) writes, "[w]e live at a time when friendship has become both all and nothing at all." I claim that one possible reason for this is because the conceptual and empirical role in favour of seeing the traditional role of virtue represented through that of a single friend, in light of these two problems, has yet to be sufficiently examined. One who would be there in trying times when another gets bullied or feels the onset of what can be a potential mental-health condition, would come their friend to help them. How this process can actually occur or be facilitated is beyond this thesis, but it is important to mention when it comes to a critical discussion about what constitutes such friend and the extent they can help another cultivate virtue.

The prevalent approach to virtue cultivation is centered on the idea of role models, writes Hoyos-Valdés (2017). This is where individuals acquire virtue by emulating those who are considered superior to them in some relevant aspect (c.f. Alfano 2016, 200). However, what Hoyos-Valdés argues is that while role models are important for virtue development, it is equally critical to establish good and close relationships with individuals who are not necessarily considered to be superiors as these role models. The excessive focus on role models can be misleading and misguided, and Hoyos-Valdés draws upon the concept of *character friendship* as seen through that of a friend as advocated by Aristotle. Character friendship, argues Hoyos-Valdés, encompasses several essential aspects. Firstly, it offers a unique form of experience where two share a significant way of perceiving the world. This shared perspective fosters a deeper understanding between individuals. Secondly, character friendship facilitates a distinct kind of knowledge that involves understanding both ourselves and the other person on a personal level. This intimate knowledge enhances the cultivation of virtue (ibid). Furthermore, character friendship nurtures a broader range of emotions beyond mere admiration, including love, shame, trust, and hope. These emotions play a vital role in virtue development (ibid). Lastly, character friendship is a praxis, a practical activity, in which cooperative interactions and discussions serve as a bridge between honing virtuous habits within personal relationships and applying them to public life. With these conceptions elucidated and in mind, Hoyos-Valdés proposes her own claim which is "that it is not just from the friend that we learn virtue, but from the relationship itself" (ibid, 68).

Hoyos-Valdés argues that character friendship, which involves personal sharing, self-knowledge, and mutual collaboration, plays a crucial role in virtue development beyond the influence of role models, triggering emotions like love, shame, trust, and hope. According to Hoyos-Valdés, practical wisdom and virtue cultivation require knowledge of particulars,

emphasizing the significance of character friendship. Furthermore, Hoyos-Valdés extends the importance of character friendship into adulthood and highlights its potential impact in challenging situations, such as bullying or mental health issues, where a single virtuous friend can profoundly change the narrative for both individuals.

Conclusion

The very idea of factitious virtue offers researchers a view from another angle into the problems of bullying and mental-health disorders. The exploration of factitious virtue and its relationship with moral development highlights the complexities of cultivating virtuous behavior. Factitious virtue, emphasizing external influences and social reinforcement, provides an alternative approach to traditional virtue, particularly in challenging situations where internalizing virtues may be difficult.

Factitious virtue's connection to bullying reveals that bullies may lack genuine virtues but can exhibit factitious virtue due to external influences. While this use of the concept may temporarily address bullying, questions arise about the authenticity and sustainability of virtuous actions under external pressures. A comprehensive approach combining factitious virtue with efforts to address moral issues is crucial for lasting positive change.

Examining factitious virtue and mental-health shows how challenges hinder the cultivation of virtues, creating a misalignment between values and expected behavior. Factitious virtue, driven by external cues, may come to help in alleviating inner conditions given certain complexities are understood of the condition. Balancing external influences with genuine moral transformation promotes well-being. Virtue ethics may play a vital role in this, emphasizing the cultivation of virtuous character traits and recognizing friendship as a moral development catalyst especially during the period of personal development and formation of moral values. Friendship has the potential to offer a unique opportunity for moral reflection and the cultivation of virtues beyond role models. Integrating factitious virtue and traditional virtue therefore allow for a more comprehensive and genuine practice of virtue in light of bullying and mental-health.

Thesis Conclusion

In this thesis, I have delved into the issues of bullying and mental-health among American youth, approaching them from the perspectives of situationism and factitious virtue. By analyzing the two problems through these lenses, I also sought to explore the role that traditional virtue ethics can play in addressing these.

In the first part, I examined the concept of situationism and its implications for understanding bullying and mental-health disorders. The unique challenges faced by young people during puberty were highlighted, underscoring the relevance of taking into account this factor. The work of John Doris and his critique of traditional notions of character were explored, with particular attention given to his rejection of "globalism" while acknowledging the importance of situation-specific traits. Through the lens of situationism, the concept of fragmented personality was introduced, shedding light on new possibilities for understanding moral judgment formation among young individuals. Furthermore, the potential role of virtue ethics in reconciling one's own moral judgment with external pressures was discussed.

In the second part of the thesis, I shifted the focus to factitious virtue and its implications for bullying and mental-health. The exploration of factitious virtue provided another perspective on the complexities of cultivating virtuous behavior. By emphasizing external influences and social reinforcement, this approach offered insights into the causes and dynamics of bullying. It was noted that while bullies may exhibit factitious virtue due to external pressures, questions arose regarding the authenticity and sustainability of virtuous actions under such circumstances. Similarly, in the context of mental-health, the challenges faced in cultivating virtues were examined, and misalignment between moral values and actual behavior has been highlighted. Factitious virtue, driven by external cues, was acknowledged as potentially alleviating psychological distress, but the importance of genuine moral transformation and the integration of external influences with internal moral development was emphasized.

This thesis has provided a comprehensive analysis of bullying and mental-health in American youth, using the perspectives of situationism and factitious virtue. It has demonstrated the potential of traditional virtue in addressing these issues by navigating the complexities of character formation, moral judgment, and the influence of external factors. By integrating insights from situationism and factitious virtue, a more nuanced understanding of these moral problems has been established. Overall, the central question of this thesis has therefore

successfully answered why situationism and factitious virtue provide sufficient grounds for additional studies of bullying and mental-health disorders, and what might be the role of traditional virtue ethics in these studies may be. I claimed that situationism and factitious virtue provide sufficient grounds for additional studies of bullying and mental-health disorders in American youth by promoting a more holistic understanding and helping counteract preconceived stigmas. These ideas allow researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the underlying influences by considering situational elements, and factitious virtue elements. Moving away from character-based approaches, one can recognize the potential for personal growth and change. With this realization, the ideas of traditional virtue ethics are perceived as a natural continuation of the process of positive moral development in light of the nuances offered by these two perspectives.

Therefore, why situationism and factitious virtue provide sufficient grounds for additional studies of bullying and mental-health disorder has been answered, and the role of traditional virtue ethics in these studies was made clear.

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