

# Human Developmental Vices

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**Abstract:** As human beings develop physically, cognitively, emotionally, morally, technologically, and spiritually, so they develop vices which are moral depravity, moral fault, and/or a habitual trivial shortcoming. These vices such as biting, fornication, lying, gluttony, greed, jealousy, stealing etc. develop at different developmental milestones of a nature-nurture interaction and as early as from infancy from underlying normal behaviors. It is theorized that if the behaviors that may lead to vices are well managed, they may become virtues. However, if one skips these developments in early childhood, it might catch up with one in adulthood where the struggle to overcome the vice may become sterner. This theory of human developmental vices may be important in understanding human negative behaviors and in promoting healthy parenting as well as understanding the individual differences inherent in each child response style as it interplays between nature and nurture. Researchers are challenged to empirically investigate this theory.

**Keywords:** Biopsychosociotechno-spirituality, Developmental Vices, Fixation, Moral depravity, Vices, Virtues.

## I. INTRODUCTION

As one develops physically, cognitively, emotionally, morally, technologically, and spiritually, so does one develop vices. The development of different vices may be associated early childhood biopsychosociotechno-spiritual development. As certain vices are associated with certain stages of child moral development, the way the significant others address these vices coupled with a person's own response style (Egunjobi, 2021) will determine if a person will be fixated, outgrow, or transform the vice to another more serious vice.

A vice can be seen as moral depravity or corruption, a moral fault or failing, and/or a habitual and usually trivial defect or shortcoming (Merriam-Webster, n.d.a). It can also be a practice, behavior, or habit which is viewed as sinful, degrading, immoral, rude, deviant, or perverted in the society. It is a kind of a negative character trait, a defect, an infirmity, bad, unhealthy behavior, a transgression in a person's temperament. An Italian poet and philosopher, Dante Alighieri, identified seven deadly vices namely, *Luxuria* (extravagance, later lust), *Gula* (gluttony), *Avaritia* (greed), *Acedia* (sloth), *Ira* (wrath, more commonly known as anger), *Invidia* (envy), and *Superbia* (pride). The opposite of vices are virtues. Corresponding to the seven vices would be virtues such as, Chastity, Abstinence, Temperance, Diligence, Patience, Kindness, and Humility (Dante, Inferno, n.d). These seven deadly vices were originally known as the seven deadly sins taught by the Catholic Church. They were first created by Pope Gregory the Great (540 AD – 605 AD) and then elaborated in the 13th century *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas as an instructional guide for theologians (Britannica, 2022; Florence

Inferno, 2014). In modern times, vices can include cultism, drug abuse, examination malpractice, obscene dressing, and sexual promiscuity/harassment (Okwu, 2006) among others.

## II. DEVELOPMENT OF VICICES

The development of vices is based on nature-nurture interaction. While nature consists of the genetic predisposition or biological makeup of an individual, nurture is the environmental influence as depicted by the physical world that influences the nature (Sravanti, 2017). Human nature is the basis of human development for without nature, nurture has nothing to act on. Hence, Thomas Aquinas stated, *Gratia non tollit naturam, sed perficit*, meaning, 'grace does not remove nature but fulfills it' (Bretzke, 2003). And for Egunjobi (2019), "In the success of nature, you were nurtured; In the success of nurture, you are you". The development of vices can be attributed to nature because it seems children universally tend to behave in certain patterns. The developmental vices can be attributed to nurture because the environment can shape this development.

Vices development can be linked to some psychological theories such as Freud's (1905) psychosexual developmental theory which holds that children go through a series of psychosexual stages that result in adult's personality development. Each stage of development (oral, anal, phallic, latent, and genital) is indicated by conflicts that can help build growth or stifle development, depending on how they are resolved (Cherry, 2022). Successfully going through a psychosexual stage may result in the development of a healthy personality, otherwise, it may result in a vice development.

The same can be said in considering Erikson's (1959) eight stages of psychosocial development which holds that an individual passes through eight developmental stages which build on each other. The theory is on the supposition that the environment plays a critical role in self-awareness, adjustment, human development, identity, and vices. An individual faces a crisis at each. If this crisis is resolved, one develops a healthy character trait, otherwise, it may result in vices such as mistrust, shame, guilt, inferiority, role confusion, isolation, stagnation, and despair.

Jean William Fritz Piaget, according to Miller (2011), would look at the developmental vices from cognitive developmental perspective. For him, children's intelligence undergoes changes as they develop a mental model of their environment. Piaget (1936) believed that the thinking of children is significantly different from the thinking of adults. For him, children think differently and see the world differently from adults, children are not passive learners, they actively build up their knowledge

about their environment, and the most effective way to understand children's reasoning is to think from children's point of view. By implication, as children display their vices, they may not be aware of the behavior as negative.

American psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg developed a theory which addresses moral development in children. This was a development on Jean Piaget's cognitive development focusing on development of moral reasoning. For Kohlberg (1985) as cited in Egunjobi (2022b), moral development is a continual process that occurs throughout the lifespan. However, moral reasoning does not equal moral behavior. One can infer that when one fails to develop moral reasoning which is meant to guide moral behavior or development of virtues, vices are the results.

For Albert Bandura (1977), a social learning theorist, vice development is because of nurturing. A child learns through observation, modelling, and imitation of adult behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions. Both environmental and cognitive factors interact to influence a child's learning and behavior resulting in the imitation of adult's displayed vices.

All these theories, and more, are not explicitly dealing with the development of vices in human experiences. From nurture perspective, a vice can also be a habit. While a habit may not necessarily be a vice; a vice may be a habitual unhealthy or negative behavior. This is what I am attempting to theorize especially from the premise that what we become today (as adults) in the display of vices, is the product of our unresolved or fixated childhood character or habit. While the focus of this theory is not one the seven deadly vices or sins, the specific vices development considered herewith may touch on some of them. The vices discussed here are biting, sexual vices, lying, gluttony, greed, jealousy, and cruelty. Most of these developments begin between infancy (0 – 12 months) and school age (6 – 10 years old).

#### *Biting*

Biting is a part of normal childhood development especially between the ages of 1 and 3. When babies and toddlers bite, they do so for different reasons such as when they are in pain, they are frustrated, seeking attention, exploring the world, playing, or defending themselves (Watson, 2020). Biting is a way of getting attention which begins when a child starts teething. This is because of an unresolved or fixated teething stage in human biological development between the first twelve months of birth. For instance, when a child starts teething at around the 6<sup>th</sup> month of birth, the child may start to bite the nipple of the mother for play or to express his/her fear or frustration (Wipfler, 2013). If this situation is well handled by the mother, the child may be kind to others, otherwise, if the child gets fixated in this stage, the child may be found biting others between ages of 1 and 3, and even as an adult as a defense mechanism. As Wipfler noted, many toddlers do go through a "biting stage" when they *bite* their mommies and daddies, or other children. Yet, biting is something that may be

discouraged because it may become a vice when it becomes a habitual means of inflicting pains on others.

#### *Sexual Vices*

Sexual vices involve sexual behavior that is culturally not appropriate to certain age groups especially between toddlerhood and adolescence. Most children play with their genitals between the age of two and six. At about age 2, a child may start *masturbation* (Ajlouni, et al., 2010; Unal, 2000). This may be due to nature as it is factored by sex hormones. According to Ajlouni et al., masturbation in early childhood may be associated with reduced estradiol levels, a major female sex hormone, but not with other sex hormones. Yet, a child's masturbation is a normal part of discovering the pleasurable feelings that these parts of the body offer. This is a normal part of sexual development in children. It becomes a psychopathological issue beyond mere curiosity when it is frequent and intense in preoccupation with self-pleasure involving withdrawal from interacting with others. This experience can grow into adolescence and adulthood. As children mature physically, emotionally, and sexually, they increasingly become more curious about their sexuality and their bodies that masturbation become more common from the preadolescent and teen years and adulthood.

By the age of two to seven, children may also start to engage in *Sexual Play*. They start to engage in 'daddy and mummy play' that may also be sexual in nature (Silovsky & Swisher, 2008). This is more of environmental influence as children observe the doings of the adults. They probably see daddy and mummy engaging in sexual activities and they tried to mimic what they saw. This is a sociodramatic play, a part of social development skills in children. This may sometimes involve touching and genital contact.

According to National Center on the Sexual Behavior of Youth ([NCSBY], n.d.), it is not uncommon to find school children and young adolescents ages 9 to 13 experiencing a substantial increase in sexual thoughts and feelings. The first feelings of sexual attraction may also occur around this period with onset of sexual fantasies happening numerous times within months to one year later. This usually occurs among children of similar age, gender, and ability including siblings, rather than between new acquaintances or strangers (Larsson & Svedin, 2002; NCSBY, n.d.).

The availability of smart-things especially smartphones and tablets expose children to sexually explicit contents which they stubble at either consciously or unconsciously. Children as old as 9 years can find this intriguing. Notwithstanding, the average age of first exposure to pornography is thought to be 11 years old, according to some sources (McKee, 2020). Lakshmi (2020) reported a survey by the American Psychology Association (2017) where the average age for a child's first exposure to online pornography was 13.37 years of age with the youngest exposure as early as 5 years old. Lakshmi also noted that one in ten children under the age of ten has somehow been exposed to online pornography. With only 3% of

pornographic websites require proof-of-age, and 25% lacking any adult-content warnings, it becomes easy for a child on the internet to stumble into a pornography site by accident. Bitdefender found that children under 10 are increasingly visiting porn mega sites such as Pornhub, and 10% of 12 to 13-year-olds with possible pornography addiction. These are alarming statistics. The porn view sometimes go hand in hand with sex play. Because pornography excites children, they may become fixated in this. Adults who did not experience this as children may feel the same way when they discover this in adulthood with possible fixation or pornographic addiction which is more difficult to overcome despite one being married.

Although too early, it is not impossible to find among adolescents some "normative" sexual behaviors that include more advanced sexual activities which may be seen as problematic, immoral, and illegal by family, cultural, state, and federal laws, or violation of cultural norms (NCSBY, n.d.). This may be the onset of *Fornication* which according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.c) is a consensual sexual intercourse between two unmarried persons. This occurs between ages 9 and 16. They may also find themselves in *same sex sexual engagements* in the attempt of trying out or figuring out their sexuality. This sexual exploration may involve one or more persons. When it involves multiple partners, this may lead to adulterous behaviors in adulthood if not well resolved in adolescent age.

Sexual abuse also plays a strong force in the development of sexual vice depending on the child's response style (Egunjobi, 2022a). Child sexual abuse can be any sexual activities, including inappropriate touching, sex play, and penetration with a child as young as infant and under the age of majority (18 years) with or without consent, by an older person. One of the possible responses to the abuse according to Egunjobi is hypersexual habit which can lead to sexual promiscuity in adolescence and adulthood.

### *Lying*

It is a general belief that all children lie, or children of all ages lie (Li, 2022; Parents Editors, 2022). The dictionary definition of lying is "to make a false statement with the intention to deceive". According to Isenberg (1973, p. 248), "A lie is a statement made by one who does not believe it with the intention that someone else shall be led to believe it". It is not clear if lying is nature or nurture factor, but it seems it is the combination of both. As language skills emerges, a child may begin to tell lies as early as age 2-3, and between 4-6 years, may become a better liar. Yet the child may own up to tell the truth if questioned or asked to explain. A child may tell lie to cover up a misdeed, explore possibilities, gain attention, to be polite, to escape punishment, to show up personal ego, etc., just as adults do.

Lying is part of normal human development though, it is equally a problematic behavior. A child's lying may be because of mind development, when the child begins to understand that people have different mental states that can be different from

reality. According to Evans and Lee (2013), a child is only able to understand lying and tell convincing lies if the child is aware of her/his own and others' mental statuses. A child also learned to lie from the caregivers and older siblings. Telling a lie before a child on a subject matter to which a child is aware teaches the child that it is okay to lie. For example, a parent may tell the child to tell the oncoming visitor that s/he is not around when indeed s/he is. This is a form of modelling as Banduras (1977) postulated.

Parents are the most important role models in the lives of children. Hence, as they can be the observed liars, they can also be the redeemer of children from lying. When a child lies, parents are to take some time to engage the child in a serious discussion about, effects of lies (destroys relations, loss of trust, destruction of social network, etc.), the difference between make-believe and reality, difference between lying and telling the truth, and the importance of honesty at home and in the community which may earn one the name of "a good boy" or "a good girl". If the child adheres to the parents' correction, the child embraces the virtue of honesty. Otherwise, lying becomes the child's vice. For when lies become too repetitive or a pattern, a vice is dawn. At this point, a psychospiritual help may be needed (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2017).

### *Gluttony/Intoxication*

Children begin to cultivate eating habits early in years at about 1 to 2 years according to American Academy of Family Physicians (n.d). This is because children's appetite is closely tied to their growth as hunger tells the bodies to seek food and eat (Castle, 2019). This can lead one becoming a glutton. As described by Andrews (n.d.), "Gluttony is the excessive consumption that deprives another being of a life-giving necessity. Gluttons devour more, leaving others with less. It's immoderation". It is thought to be a sin if the excessive desire for food causes it to be withheld from the needy (Okholm, 2000). Although, usually associated with food, it also consists in overindulgence in drinking and material wealth. It all starts when a child compulsively satisfies hunger and the desire for the palatable. If a child can resolve this, it will result in healthy eating, otherwise, it may result in compulsive eating leading to obesity, compulsive use of alcohol and addictive substance in adolescent, and compulsivity towards material possession. Fixated in this stage can also lead to greed in later years.

### *Greed and Stealing*

Greed is an intense and selfish longing for something in line with the 3Ps: Possession, Power, and Pleasure. As put in the Florence Inferno (2014), it is an excessive or avaricious desire for and pursuit of material possessions. Stealing can be understood as wrongfully or illegally taking something belonging to another person or without permission, without the intention of returning it. It is an advanced greed.

Greed and stealing begin between the ages of 2 and 5, at the onset of "mine phase" (Morin, 2022). It begins with greed when children under the age of 3 begin to understand the concept of

possession. When a child becomes almost obsessed with the word, “mine”, it means that the child has reached a new developmental milestone. At this stage, they don't understand fully the difference between what is "mine" and what is not (Johns Hopkins Medicine, n.d.). They want more of everything, more toys, more food, more attachment to parents, etc., even when it is not needed. If this stage is not well resolved, with parents' intervention, it may lead to a child becoming covetous, materialistic, selfish, or start stealing.

Stealing is another phase in a child development that may be worrisome for many parents. Though worrisome, it is normal. Children often struggle with impulse control to touch and take something without regards to the ownership. From about 18 months old, they want to experiment with mischief as they become curious about their environment (Dr. Arthur Lavin, as cited by Morin, 2022). They may then begin to take things though without bad intentions.

Between the ages of 3 and 7, children begin to be aware that there are some things that belong to others and as such start to respect that. However, according to Johns Hopkins Medicine (n.d.), this age group will trade property without regard to value if something else is wanted. And by the time the child is 9, the child becomes aware that stealing is wrong. If at this stage, they continue to steal, it is a vice. At this stage, they may steal because of peer pressure and the need to fit in, the desire to buy their friends because they suffer low self-esteem, as a payback for not receiving what they requested from their parents or caregiver, etc. Children may outgrow this with good education and intervention of parents. If a child gets fixated in this stage, it may lead to criminal acts in adolescence and adulthood.

#### *Jealousy/Envy*

Jealousy is a natural emotion depicting a state of unhappiness due to someone having something or someone one wants or desires. Envy on the other hand, is a “painful or resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another joined with a desire to possess the same advantage” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.b). Although, sometimes used interchangeably, jealousy and envy are actually different in that jealousy can be positive, but envy is negative. Envy is the vice arising from natural jealousy.

Jealousy arises from the feeling of love, an attachment, and attention seeking from a caregiver or significant others. In other words, the child's capacity to love and attach is the source of jealousy (Bray, 2015). This is drawn from the children's desire to be loved so much to the point of always wanting to be the center of attention.

Jealousy begins very early in a child's development. In a study by Masciuch and Kienapple (1993), it was found that jealousy appeared most intensely more in toddlers between 1 and 2 years and at 3.5 years children could distinguish between social situations which provoke jealousy. When jealousy is well handled during a child's development, it becomes mere expression of a genuine love. If it is not well handled or processed, it becomes envy, with the imminent anger, hatred,

and the madness for destruction of anything or anyone who comes in-between the love and the loved.

#### *Cruelty*

According to Collins Dictionary (n.d.), “cruelty is a behavior that deliberately causes pain or distress to people or animals”. Animal cruelty can be noticeable among the pre-school all through the adolescent age (Johnston, 2011). In a study investigating the nexus between domestic violence and animal cruelty, mothers reported witnessing their children being cruel to animals at ages 5, 7, 10, and 12 years (McEwen, et. al., 2014). This behavior is more attributed to nurture other than nature as found in the findings of Wauthier and Williams (2022) which showed that environmental factors predicted child animal cruelty. The environmental factors include exposure to childhood adversity, experiences of violence and witnessing animal cruelty. Browne (2013) also found that those who reported witnessing animal cruelty by older siblings or a parent commit animal abuse at a younger age also reported engaging in animal cruelty at an earlier age and older age respectively. There are also psychological factors linked to animal cruelty in children. These factors include externalizing disorders, lower empathy, lower self-esteem, poorer family functioning, and attitudes accepting of cruelty as found by Wauthier and Williams.

Children who show cruelty to animals are more likely to develop to end up with antisocial behaviors as adults. They may involve in murders or serial killing later in years if not well handled in childhood. In fact, just about all violent crime perpetrators have a history of animal cruelty in their profiles (Johnston, 2011).

Human growth and development are nature-nurture factored. Hence, the way and manner in which the caregivers or the environment react and address the vices that surface at the different stages in childhood development will determine a lot. The child's response style (Egunjobi, 2021) to the adult's intervention can also not be overlooked.

It is important to know that every child must not experience all these vices as they grow. Again, the nature-nurture interaction comes to play. There is a possibility of one to escape one, two, or three vices. For some, they don't just experience it. For others, it may be pushed to later period in the adult years. Take for instance, a child which may not experience “mine phase” might not engage in taking things that did not belong to him or her and possibly not steal as a child. However, this child may engage in stealing and become self-centered as an adult. In the same way, someone who did not masturbate as a child or adolescent may find him/herself masturbating at an older age or as an adult. It may be more problematic resolving this because the skills which s/he could have acquired as a child to outgrow the situation may not be readily available in adulthood. The struggles needed to overcome the vice that slams in adulthood will be more than the struggles needed by a child who experiences this vice at the developmental stage.

*What to Do?*

Since the human developmental vices is nature-nurture factored, caregivers need to pay closer attention to children as they grow, identify, acknowledge, and correct the unhealthy and negative behaviors in charity. It is important to separate the action from the person of the child by not defining the child by the action.

*Parental Education* – Parents should be educated on child’s biopsychosociotechno-spiritual developmental stages. This will accord the parents to know what behaviors to expect as the child grows and what to do in addressing any negative behavior without resulting in physical and psychological abuse as corrective measures.

*Loving Correction* – The way and manner a child is corrected can result in the attitude of the child towards the same or similar behaviors. This is so as every child has his or her own perception, interpretation of actions, desire and will. Correcting a child in love can communicate to the child the true nature of the corrected behavior and may turn out in less likelihood of the child repeating the same negative behavior, for love conquers all.

*Consistency* – A child learning may involve repetition or consistency. In the same way, there is need to consistently reflect to the child that the behavior which may lead to a vice is not appropriate or unacceptable.

*No Blame* – Parents are to avoid victim blaming especially where abuse is involved. Blaming a child who is sexually abused as influencing or encouraging the perpetrator, for example, can be more damaging to the child’s development. This child may find it difficult sharing sensitive issues with the adults.

*Positive Reinforcement* – Instead of paying much attention to a child’s negative behaviors, caregivers are, rather to pay more attention to reinforcing a child’s positive behaviors. Uttering positive words of encouragement can reinforce healthy behaviors.

*Alternative Behavior* – Telling a child “Don’t do this”, “Don’t do that” is not enough. If a behavior is not good enough and needs to be corrected, the alternative behavior needs to be suggested. So, instead of the “Don’t”, tell rather the “Dos”.

### III. CONCLUSION

Human biopsychosociotechno-spiritual development involves development of virtues and vices. The reaction to certain behaviors associated or common with a child developmental stage can either lead to a virtue or a vice in childhood or later in years. This theory of human developmental vices is important in the understanding of human negative behaviors and in promotion of healthy parenting as well as understanding the individual differences inherent in each child response style in the interplay between nature and nurture.

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