

# Freud's Psychosexual Stages of Development

You can remember the order of these stages by using the mnemonic:  
*"old (oral) age (anal) pensioners (phallic) love (latent) grapes (genital)."*

## Oral Stage (0-1 year)

The first stage of personality development where libido is centered in a baby's mouth. It gets much satisfaction from putting all sorts of things in its mouth to satisfy libido, and thus its *id* demands, which at this stage in life are oral, or mouth oriented, such as sucking, biting, and breast-feeding.

Freud said oral stimulation could lead to an oral fixation in later life. We see oral personalities all around us such as smokers, nail-biters, finger-chewers, and thumb suckers. Oral personalities engage in such oral behaviors particularly when under stress.

## Anal Stage (1-3 years)

The libido now becomes focused on the anus and the child derives great pleasure from defecating. The child is now fully aware that they are a person in their own right and that their wishes can bring them into conflict with the demands of the outside world (i.e. their *ego* has developed).

Freud believed that this type of conflict tends to come to a head in potty training, in which adults impose restrictions on when and where the child can defecate. The nature of this first conflict with authority can determine the child's future relationship with all forms of authority.

Early or harsh potty training can lead to the child becoming an anal-retentive personality who hates mess, is obsessively tidy, punctual and respectful of authority. They can be stubborn and tight-fisted with their cash and possessions. This is all related to pleasure gotten from holding on to their feces when toddlers, and their mother's then insisting that they get rid of it by placing them on the potty until they perform!

The anal expulsive, on the other hand, underwent a liberal toilet-training regime during the anal stage. In adulthood the anal expulsive is the person who wants to share things with you. They like giving things away. In essence they are 'sharing their s\*\*\*'. An anal-expulsive personality is also messy, disorganized and rebellious.

## Phallic Stage (3 to 5 or 6 years)

Sensitivity now becomes concentrated in the genitals and masturbation (in both sexes) becomes a new source of pleasure. The child becomes aware of anatomical sex differences, which sets in motion the conflict between erotic attraction, resentment, rivalry, jealousy and fear, which Freud called the Oedipus complex (in boys) and the Electra complex (in girls) This is resolved through the process of identification which involves the child adopting the characteristics of the same sex parent.

## Oedipus complex

The most important aspect of the phallic stage is the Oedipus complex. This is one of Freud's most controversial ideas and one that many people reject outright.

The name of the Oedipus complex derives from Greek myth where Oedipus, a young man, kills his father and marries his mother. Upon discovering this he pokes his eyes out and becomes blind. This Oedipal is the generic (i.e. general) term for both Oedipus and Electra complexes.

In the young boy, the Oedipus complex or, more correctly, conflict, arises because the boy develops sexual (pleasurable) desires for his mother. He wants to possess his mother exclusively and get rid of his father to enable him to do so. Irrationally, the boy thinks that if his father were to find out about all this, his father would take away what he loves the most. In the phallic stage what the boy loves most is his penis. Hence the boy develops **castration anxiety**.

This problem the little boy sets out to resolve by imitating, copying and joining in masculine dad-type behaviors. This is called **identification**, and is how the three-to-five year old boy resolves his Oedipus complex. Identification means internally adopting the values, attitudes and behaviors of another person. The consequence of this is that the boy takes on the male gender role and adopts an ego ideal and values that become the superego. Freud (1909) offered the Hans case study as evidence for the Oedipus complex.

### **Electra complex**

For girls, the **Electra complex** is less than satisfactory. Briefly, the girl desires the father, but realizes that she does not have a penis. This leads to the development of **penis envy** and the wish to be a boy.

The girl resolves this by repressing her desire for her father and substituting the wish for a penis with the wish for a baby. The girl blames her mother for her 'castrated state' and this creates great tension. The girl then **represses** her feelings (to remove the tension) and identifies with the mother to take on the female gender role.

### **Latency (5 or 6 to puberty)**

No further psychosexual development takes place during this stage (latent means hidden). The libido is dormant. Freud thought that most sexual impulses are repressed during the latent stage and sexual energy can be sublimated (re: defense mechanism) towards school work, hobbies and friendships. Much of the child's energies are channeled into developing new skills and acquiring new knowledge and play becomes largely confined to other children of the same gender.

### **Genital (puberty to adult)**

Is the last stage of Freud's psychosexual theory of personality development and begins in puberty. It is a time of adolescent sexual experimentation, the successful resolution of which is settling down in a loving one-to-one relationship with another in our 20's or so. Sexual instinct is directed to heterosexual pleasure, rather than self pleasure during the phallic stage.

For Freud, the proper outlet of the sexual instinct in adults was through heterosexual intercourse. Fixation and conflict may prevent this with the consequence that sexual perversions may develop. For example, fixation at the oral stage may result in a person gaining sexual pleasure primarily from kissing and oral sex, rather than sexual intercourse.

***Most psychiatrists today reject the large majority of Freud's work as unsupported by evidence and best used for inspiration or historical study, if at all. Although Freud developed his method for the treatment of neuroses, some people today seek out psychoanalysis not as a cure for an illness, but as part of a process of self-discovery.***

***Freud's notion that the child's relationship to the parent is responsible for everything from psychiatric diseases to criminal behavior has also been thoroughly discredited and the influence of such theories is today regarded as a relic of a permissive age in which "blame-the-parent" was the accepted dogma. For many decades genetic and biological causes of psychiatric disorders were dismissed without scientific investigation in favor of environmental (parental and social) influences. Today even the most extreme Freudian environmentalists would not deny the great influence of genetic and biological factors.***