

FREUD'S THEORY OF PSYCHOSEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

The whole of Freud's work is built on the idea that adult behaviour is driven by instinctual impulses and desires that originate in the id in childhood. He claims that most of these impulses are to do with sex and fantasies about behaviours that are prohibited by society and so are hidden by the ego using defence mechanisms. This leads to the typical view that the sexual instinct is the source of all psychic energy. He believed that sexual impulses arising in the id are present from the earliest weeks of life and that infants and young children are sexual beings.

Freud felt that sexuality is central in life. He also felt that childhood sexuality is a normal part of development. Freud's theory of psychosexual development was very controversial . . . imagine this hitting society in the early part of the century. Freud did not believe that the sex drive was the only drive we have. However, it is the instinct that Freud focused most of his attention on and he believed that it was central to human behaviour..

Freud claimed that sexuality is not confined to adults, but is present from birth. According to Gross (1992) Freud used the term "sexuality" to refer to "the desire for physical, sensuous pleasure of any kind and, far from being a highly specific drive towards heterosexual gratification, sexuality can be satisfied in a variety of ways. The essence of sexual pleasure lies in the rhythmical stroking or stimulation of virtually any part of the body". Why refer to it in this way? Well, basically, he wanted to try to account for all form of sexual behaviour. To describe sexuality simply as the drive for reproduction would leave rather a lot of behaviour out.

Freud believed that adult neuroses are the results of inadequate solutions to problems experience in childhood at one or more psychosexual stage. Each stage involves a particular way of achieving gratification and the degree and kind of satisfaction that the child experience at each stage will depend on how the child is treated by his parents. Freud claimed that both excessive gratification and extreme frustration can produce permanent consequences for the individual. The nature of these consequences depends on the particular stage at which it occurs. The most satisfactory balance would occur when the individual is satisfied enough to move on to the next developmental stage, but not so well satisfied that he want to stay at that stage forever! So, what are these developmental stages?

Oral Stage

Birth to one year. Source of pleasurable sensations is the mouth (the nerve endings on the lips and tongue are particularly sensitive at this age). The oral stage is divided into the receptive sub-stage (first few months) where the child sucks, swallows and mouths, and the biting sub-stage which is more aggressive and according to Freud it involves some ambivalence. Freud thought that biting the fingers or breast expresses the experience of both loving and hating the same object (i.e. the mother).

Anal Stage

One to three years. Source of pleasurable sensations is the mucous membranes of the rectum and anus and the feeling of the faecal mass inside the body and as it is released. By this time the child is able to control his sphincter sufficiently so that he can take pleasure in holding or letting go of faeces. This is one of the first points of conflict for the child. He wishes to defecate where and when he pleases, but parents are madly trying to potty-train him. He might experience the idea that love from his parents is no longer unconditional and depends on how the child behaves. It is here that the child develops his attitude towards authority.

Phallic Stage

Three to five or six years. This stage centres on the penis in boys and the clitoris in girls. One sign of this new stage is that both boys and girls may begin to masturbate. This stage culminates in conflicts in both sexes as the child becomes aware of anatomical sex differences. The conflict in boys is called the Oedipus complex and in girls it is called the Electra complex (or the female Oedipus complex).

Oedipus Complex (boys)

At about the age of three, according to Freud, the boy's love for his mother becomes more passionate. According to Rappoport (1972) the boy becomes "intuitively aware of his mother as a sex object". Because of this, they will feel some conflict and rivalry with their father. The conflict arises because the child's father sleeps with the boy's mother, holds her, kisses her, generally has access to her in a way that the boy does not. The little boy does not want to share his mother with anyone, in any way, but he fears his father's power and authority.

He particularly fears what he believes to be his father's power to castrate him. He may believe this partially because he has been threatened in this way if he has been caught masturbating, partially because he may have observed that his mother does not have a penis. He may therefore want his father out of way, or dead. It may be that he feels guilt for thinking this way and therefore feels he should be punished. The most punishing event would be castration. Generally, then, the boy may have castration anxiety. Freud called this the Oedipus complex after the mythical king of Thebes, Oedipus who, through a mysterious (and prophesied) train of events, married his mother and killed his father.

To resolve the conflict between desires, guilt, fears, the child will use two ego defence mechanisms, **identification** and **introjection**. He will identify with his father, the aggressor. In doing this he will introject (take in) his father's attitudes and moral values. If the boy can do this successfully then he will become more like his father and reduce the Chances of attack and take on some of his father's power. Identification and introjection are the source of the boy's super-ego. Once the conflict engendered by the Oedipus complex is resolved the boy can put aside his sexual libido for a while.

Oedipus complex (girls) or Electra complex

The experience of the girl is different from that of the boy. Whereas the Oedipus complex and fear of castration in boys is the culmination and conclusions to the phallic stage, the girl begins this stage, Freud claims she believes she has been castrated at some stage and blames her mother for this. The girl will initially treat her mother as a love object but will transfer her affections to her father. Freud says she will do this because she experiences penis envy and blames her mother for lack of penis. She realises that she cannot have a penis, but wants a substitute. Freud claims the substitute desire is for a baby and turns to her father in the hopes that he can provide her with the baby as a surrogate for her anatomical deficiency. At this point, "the girl has turned into a little woman" (Freud, 1925).

One difficulty that Freud encountered was explaining how and why the girl will eventually identify with her mother and internalise her mother's values, morals, etc. The boy identifies with his father and develops his morals because he fears castration and identification and introjection is a way to reduce this anxiety. However, a girl cannot fear her mother in the same way as a boy fears his father. She may fear the loss of her mother's love if she is not like her, but this fear is less influential. Freud claims

that this makes the girl's identification with her mother much weaker than the boy's identification with his father. This, says Freud, makes the girl weaker morally than the boy.

Latency

Five or six years to puberty. This period is kind of a resting period from all the changes that have already taken place. The child will not be asexual, but there will be only quantitative changes in libido rather than qualitative changes. This resting period in psychosexual development appears to exist in order to allow the child to develop in other ways, intellectually and socially. During this stage, the identification with the same sex parent is extended to other members of the same sex. During this period children will mostly play with children of the same sex and will often get "crushes" on teachers or other adults of the same sex. During latency, the balance between the id, ego and superego is probably better than at any other stage in the individual's life. It is like the calm before the storm of puberty!

Genital Stage

12 years to 18 years and older. The further changes that take place to the sexual organs during puberty reawaken the libido. During this stage adult sexuality develops. Freud Claims that, provided the other stages of development have been worked through successfully and conflict have been resolved, then from the beginning of this period the child's sexual objects will be people of the opposite sex.

Of course, as we have already mentioned, Freud claimed that some people get stuck at one particular stage . . . they become fixated. Sometimes the fixation is caused by frustration, sometimes by overindulgence . . . and it's always the parents' faults!