

## PSYCHOSEXUAL STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

28

August 2010

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SATURDAY

No other field in psychology is as fascinating as 'personality'. Man is considered to be the by-product of the complex system of variables constantly interacting with personality and giving it shape. Personality is considered to be that quality or thing present in every individual to which one pastes labels as good, poor or bad on the basis of the manner of walking, talking, hairstyle, dressing etc. Thus proper personality development is considered essential for successful personal and social adjustment.

Hence, Allport, has defined personality as the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his unique adjustment to his environment. In order to understand the complex nature of personality, various theories have been put forward. They have been commonly grouped under the subheading of trait and type. Freud had put forward the psychosexual development or the Psychoanalytic Theory which essentially considered that personality development was based on two premises —

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i) a genetic approach and ii) a certain amount of libido is present at birth which progresses through the different stages, rooted in the instinctual processes of the organism thereby giving shape to one's personality.

Freud theorizes that there are 4 universal stages — oral, anal, phallic and genital which are decisive for personality formation and of which the first 3 extend from birth to five years and are called the pregenital stages. The fourth stage coincides with the onset of puberty and is called the genital stage.

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→ **ORAL STAGE** :- The oral stage extends throughout the first year of life when infants are totally reliant for survival <sup>on</sup> others, dependence is their only way of obtaining instinctual gratification. The mouth obviously is the body structure most frequently associated at this time with both reduction of biological drives and pleasurable sensations. Eating involves tactual stimulation of the lips and the oral cavity and swallowing or if unpleasant spitting out. These two modes of oral activity — incorporation of food and biting are the prototype for many later character traits that develop.

It is a central premise of the psychoanalytic theory that all infants experience some difficulty in giving up the mother's breast or bottle and its accompanying pleasure. The greater is the difficulty, more is the libido concentrated at this stage. Freud postulated that those who receive excessive or insufficient amounts of stimulation is likely to become the oral passive personality type in adulthood — having an optimistic view, passivity, immaturity, gullibility etc. During the latter half, a second phase of orality commences i.e the period of oral aggressive or oral sadistic phase. Fixating at this stage is reflected in adults who are pessimistic, sarcastic, argumentative about everything around them. People of this personality type tend to exploit and dominate others as long as their own needs exist.

Oral characters are often excessively dependent and require others to give to them and to look after them. Envy and jealousy are associated with oral traits.

Postulate - assume to be true.

Premise - a statement or idea forming the basis for a theory.

prototype - a first or earlier form from which others are developed.

Gullible - easily deceived.

Masochism - tendency to derive pleasure (sexual) from one's

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own pain or  
humiliation

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The oral stage is significant because the feelings of dependency which arise during this period persists throughout life in spite of the later ego developments and are apt to come to the fore, when the person feels anxious and insecure. Most extreme symptom of dependency is the desire to return to the mother's womb. Successful resolution of the oral phase provides a basis in character structure for capacities to give to and receive from others without excessive dependence or envy and a capacity to rely on others with a sense of trust as well as with a sense of self-reliance and self-trust.

2) **ANAL STAGE** - This stage extends throughout the second and third years of life and the focus of libidinal energy shifts from the mouth to the anal region. Young children derive considerable pleasure from both the retention and expulsion of faeces and gradually learn to enhance this pleasure by delaying the bowel movements. When toilet training is initiated, usually during the second year of life, the child has its first decisive experience with the external regulation of an instinctual impulse. Depending upon the method of training, mother's feelings concerning defaecation and the consequences of training, various specific traits and values of personality are formed. If the mother is very strict and repressive in her method the child may hold back its faeces and if this

Apt - Appropriate

Expulsion - force to leave / force out

Pleade - make an

Sadomasochistic -

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emotional request /  
argue in support  
of

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mode of reaction generalizes to other ways of behaving, the child develops a retentive character becoming obstinate and stingy. On the other hand, if the mother pleades with her child to have a bowel movement and praises when it does, the child will acquire the notion that the whole activity is important and this may lead to creativity and productivity in the future. A person fixated at this ~~level~~ level would show traits of cruelty, destructiveness, disorderliness and hostility. This is the character of anal aggressive phase.

Thus maladaptive character traits, often apparently inconsistent are derived from anal erotism and the defenses against it. Disorderliness, obstinancy, stubbornness, parsimony etc. are features of the anal character derived from a fixation on anal functions. When defenses against anal traits are less effective, the anal character reveals traits of heightened ambivalence, lack of tidiness, messiness, defiance, rage and sadomasochistic tendencies. (the psychological tendency or sexual practice characterize by a combination of sadism & masochism).

**3) PHALLIC STAGE -** During the fourth and fifth years of life, the child's libidinal interests once again shift to a new erogenous zone of the body that is the genitals. During this stage of personality development, sexual and aggressive feelings associated with the functioning of the genital organs come into focus. The dominant conflict of the phallic stage is the Oedipus and Electra complex. Freud modelled his description of Oedipus complex after the Greek tragedy by Sophocles and he asserted that the tragedy was a symbolic description of man's

Erogenous -

obstinate - stubborn / hard to deal with

stingy - ungenerous

Defiance - open disobedience

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greatest psychological conflict. In effect, the myth represents every child's unconscious desire to possess the opposite sexed parent (as was found in case of Oedipus, the king of Thebes who murdered his father and married his mother. According to Freud, the feminine reaction of the boy's Oedipus complex is the Electra complex. Other than this, the girls develop the penis envy and the boys develop - the psychological counterpart which is the castration anxiety.

Fear of castration causes a repression of the sexual desire for the mother and hostility towards the father as they are afraid that their father is jealous and might remove the offending organs. However, Freud's explanation of the electra conflict resolution was ~~not~~ obscure because mothers do not have the same apparent power as fathers in the family and they also lack a penis and so girls do not develop the same intensity of fear as boys. Freud also believed that though girls identify with mothers with increasing age, some girls desire to have as their first born a baby boy which is the expression of penis substitution.

Adult males fixated at this stage are usually boastful, ambitious, and attempt to assert their masculinity. In case of women, phallic fixation results in traits of ~~the~~ seductiveness and promiscuous. Unresolved Oedipal problems were also considered by Freud as the primary source of

boast - talk about oneself with excessive pride

promiscuous - having many sexual relationships.

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subsequent neurotic patterns. The phallic stage provides the foundations for an emerging sense of sexual identity, a sense of curiosity without embarrassment, initiative without guilt, as well as a sense of mastery not only over objects and persons in the environment but also over internal processes and impulses.

**4. LATENCY STAGE :-** The child passes through the latency period during the ages of 6 or 7 when the libido is channelled into nonsexual activities such as intellectual pursuits and is essentially a period of preparation for the important growth that will take place in the final psychosexual stage. This period does not qualify as a stage as no new erogenous zone develop and sexual instincts are dormant.

**5. GENITAL STAGE -** The genital phase of psychosexual development extends from the onset of puberty until the person reaches young adulthood. In current thinking, there is a tendency to subdivide this stage into preadolescent, early adolescent, middle adolescent, late adolescent and even post-adolescent periods. From a Freudian perspective, all individuals go through a 'homosexual' period in early adolescence. Sexual energy is directed towards the same sex. Gradually, the ~~sex~~ object of libidinal energy shifts from to a member of the opposite sex and courting begins. During adolescence, self love or narcissism becomes channelled into genuine object choices. The person in this stage is transformed from a pleasure seeking narcissistic infant into a reality oriented socialized adult. The genital character

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emphasizes the ideal type of personality in the psycho-analytic theory.

The successful resolution and reintegration of previous psychosexual stages in the adolescents sets the stage normally for a fully mature personality with a capacity for full and satisfying genital potency and a self-integrated and consistent sense of identity. Such a person has reached a satisfying capacity for self-realization and meaningful participation in the areas of work and love and in the creative and productive application to satisfying and meaningful goals and values.

The two most important outcomes of psychosexual development are the development of the ego and superego and the development of psychopathology if the stages are not successfully mastered. The anal and phallic stages are particularly critical in the development of the ego and superego. During the anal stage, ego development progresses rapidly as the child learns what he or she likes and what distinguishes him or her from other people. In the phallic stage, the development of the superego occurs as a result of the Oedipus and Electra complexes.

The development of psychopathology is closely related to psychosexual development. First: pathology is seen as a possible consequence of fixation - that is, the child's failure to resolve a given stage and advance beyond it. Second: Psychopathology may be caused by regression - the return in an earlier stage of development potency - having great power, influence

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because of conflicts or problems. Adults with oral pathology, those who either did not move further or ~~regr~~ regressed to the oral stage, are said to be dependent and afraid to be alone, impulse very hostile, evidencing verbal biting, sarcasm to prevent getting too close to people. People with anal pathology can be either very sensitive - that is, miserly, and constricted or expulsive - impulsive, disorganized, free-spending and venting. Both types of pathology are severe.

Freud has been criticized for the empirical procedures used to validate his hypothesis, because most of his observations were made in uncontrolled conditions. He has also been criticized for accepting at face value what a patient says without attempting to corroborate it by some form of external evidence secured from relatives, acquaintances, documents etc. Freud was of the opinion that a thorough knowledge of the unconscious was necessary for understanding human behaviours and that could be obtained from free association and dream analysis. Further, the criticism was also based on the fact that his writing was the end result of his thinking and that his conclusions were without the original data, upon which they were based. His theory was also markedly deficient in providing a set of relational rules by which one could arrive at any precise expectations about certain events in the future.

On the other hand, the practical usefulness of this method was also limited because it required a lot of time for administration, along with the high cost. Again, a suitable patient for this technique was also required to respond venting - an opening that allow air, gas or liquid to P/ out

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faroweably which limited its use.

Inspite of the various objections, Freud stands as a genius and as an investigator of tremendous coweage as no other theory of personality covers the range of behaviour to which consideration was given and interpretation offered by psychoanalysis.