



Freud's Psychosexual Stages

Freud put forward a controversial view of infantile sexuality whereby the libidinal instincts are the focus of the stages of development. He saw infant sexuality as bodily pleasure as the precursor to adult sexuality, connection with another and procreation being the final goal.

Psychic energy from the id is directed at each of the stages and charged with emotion. As each stage is worked through, energy is withdrawn and redirected to the next stage. If for any reason the infant's experience of that stage is traumatic or overindulgent, then energy is left behind and a fixation occurs, causing problems in adulthood.

Primary Narcissism

Here the ego is unformed so little capacity for thought. Instead there is no sense of distinction between the baby and its surroundings. The baby feels himself to be the whole world, everything that happens and everything there is, is down to him. The pleasure is auto-erotic. The best way to describe it is an oceanic feeling of being at one with everything.

Oral Stage (birth to 18 months)

Sucking and licking are pleasurable – the nipple, the teat of a bottle, the thumb or some other part of the body. The mouth can also be an early organ for the practice of aggression, i.e. biting and crying. Think about messages around routine and demand feeding – fitting into world or world responsive to needs. Think about thumb sucking. Fixations can lead to disorders/habits in later life such as anorexia; overeating; and smoking.

Anal Stage (18 months to 3 years)

Pleasure in defecating and holding it in. Parental response important: relaxed or managed – can child work things out for himself? Sexual and aggressive instincts becoming more linked here. Fixation's are about control and can lead to compulsiveness, sometimes obsessively so – to clean, to keep order in their lives.

Phallic Stage (3 years to 6 years)

Difference between the sexes emerges as does the discovery that stimulation of the penis and clitoris is enjoyable. By the middle of this stage pleasure is becoming more focused on the other and the fantasy of genital contact with the parent occurs. Resolution of the Oedipal/Electra Complex (desire for parent of opposite sex, which if successfully negotiated leads to identification with parent of same sex) necessary. Again, parental response important, i.e. allowing of masturbation or threatening it with punishment. Fixations at this stage may lead to sexual dysfunction, i.e. castration anxiety or in fear of loss of love/approval.

Latency Stage (7 years to puberty)

No investment of the libido. Energy is directed outwards to develop social and communication skills. No fixations at this stage.

Genital Stage (puberty onwards)

If all other stages successfully negotiated, there is a movement away from auto-eroticism to fantasies of shared sexual pleasures and intimacy. No fixations at this stage.