

# Freud's Psychosexual Stages

by Sophia Tutorial



## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will compare the four stages of Freud's psychosexual development theory. Our discussion breaks down as follows:

1. Psychosexual Development
2. Oral Stage
3. Anal Stage
4. Phallic Stage
5. Latency Stage
6. Genital Stage
7. Controversies

## 1. Psychosexual Development

Within psychoanalytic theory, Sigmund Freud emphasized the importance of early experiences in our development. He stated that much of personality comes as a result of pleasure-seeking energies, or libido, and how they are focused during different stages of development. Based on this theory, **Freud's psychosexual stages** are:

- Oral
- Anal
- Phallic
- Latency
- Genital



### HINT

It's important to note that when talking about psychosexual stages, it is referring more to pleasure and not necessarily sex. These stages involve any pleasure-seeking behaviors.

Freud said that successful completion of each of these stages leads to a healthy individual, whereas unsuccessful development leads to certain **fixation**. A fixation is a lasting focus on a particular stage of development. Each stage is focused on a particular part of the body. The first three stages occur during early

periods of childhood.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

### Freud's Psychosexual Stages

Stages of development identified by Freud that impact personality development

#### Fixation

Too much or too little stimulation of erogenous zones (sexual libido) during specific stages, which causes attachment/personality flaws

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## 2. Oral Stage

The first stage, from 0 to 1 year of age, is the **oral stage**. This is when the focus is on the mouth for pleasure. This is because a lot of the behaviors the child is performing involve the mouth, like sucking or eating. Because of this, a certain amount of trust with the parents must be developed since they are the providers of food. This is also the stage when weaning--from either the bottle or the breast--occurs; the child needs to be taken away from those sucking sorts of motions.

A fixation that might develop at this time if something goes wrong during this stage is that later on in life, the person might develop problems with either drinking, eating, or smoking. Or, they might develop what's called "oral dependency," where they require a lot of attention from people around them, or oral aggressive tendencies, where they are very argumentative and angry.



#### TERM TO KNOW

### Oral Stage

Sexual energy is focused on the mouth

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## 3. Anal Stage

The next stage, from 1 to 3 years of age, is the **anal stage**. In the anal stage, the focus for the child is on excretion, either from their bladder or their bowels. During this stage, toilet training is the most important event to be occurring.

The parents need to be very aware of how they are training the child. Being too harsh, on the one hand, or too supportive and lenient, on the other hand, can have unintended consequences at this time. If development goes correctly, however, it will lead to feelings of accomplishment or pride.

If a fixation occurs at this stage, a person can either be anal retentive, meaning they are very rigid or obsessive, a person who can't let go of things. Or, they can be anal expulsive, which translates to a person that is very messy, disordered, or destructive.



#### TERM TO KNOW

### Anal Stage

Sexual energy is focused on the anus/bladder (controlling bodily wastes)

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## 4. Phallic Stage

The next stage, from 3 to 6 years of age, is the **phallic stage**, where the focus for the child becomes on the genitals. A child recognizes the difference between males and females. A child notices this primarily in the parents because those are their models for what constitutes a man and a woman. This stage is characterized by a certain conflict with the parent of the same sex, for the attention of the parent of the opposite sex.

Freud referred to this as the Oedipus or Electra complex. This conflict eventually resolves itself. The child begins **identification** with the parent of the same sex, and sees themselves in that role with the parent of the opposite sex.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** A boy becomes more identified with the father, meaning he sees himself as the father in his relationship with his mother.

Successful completion at this stage leads to development of an appropriate view of people of the opposite sex. A fixation, however, at this period, would result in a person becoming overly ambitious or trying to dominate the opposite sex.



### TERMS TO KNOW

#### Phallic Stage

Sexual energy is focused on the genitals

#### Identification

Unconscious modeling of one's self upon another person. Allows for identity to group values and attitudes as well as a feeling of connection, similarity, and idealization.

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## 5. Latency Stage

While there are four stages in psychosexual development, Freud also recognized a period called **latency**. Latency is thought to occur between the ages of 6 and puberty, and is a time of lessened sexual development.

Sexual development has not really stopped, but it is not as important as in the other stages. The focus during this time is on social and intellectual development.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### Latency

Child's sexual energy is dormant

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## 6. Genital Stage

The final stage that Freud recognized is the **genital stage**. This stage begins at puberty, and continues

through the rest of a person's life. The genital stage is recognized by an increased level of sexual energy and interest in the opposite sex. It is important to note that while this stage is focused on the genitals, it's different from the phallic stage. The sexual energies are focused more in relation to others.

Issues at other stages also come back during the genital stage. This is a time when they can be resolved, so there are no further issues through the rest of an individual's life. If resolution doesn't occur, then those fixations can last for the rest of their life. If there is resolution at this period, or successful completion of the genital stage, then the person can be capable of full love and can be a well-balanced and caring person.



#### TERM TO KNOW

### Genital Stage

Sexual energy is focused on the genitals

## 7. Controversies

There is a lot of controversy about these stages. Many people say that Freud was not necessarily scientific in his analysis of these stages. Much of his research was based on case studies and anecdotal evidence, and not actual experimentation.

Another criticism is that much of the focus of the psychosexual stages is male-centered. He developed an idea, during the phallic stage, of penis envy. This means that a woman develops a feeling of inadequacy or inferiority that they carry with them for the rest of their lives--a concept that many women psychologists disagree with.

Finally, a lot of these stages are developed by Freud's own experiences and opinions. For instance, his mother was 20 years younger than his father, and she considered Sigmund to be her favorite child. This may have developed into the ideas of envy of his father at the phallic stage, as well as the idea of the Oedipus complex.



#### SUMMARY

Sigmund Freud developed an idea within the psychoanalytic theory of four stages of **psychosexual development**. Successful completion of each stage would lead to a healthy individual. If any issues occurred, then a person could develop a fixation.

The **oral stage** is the first, and pleasure here is focused around the mouth because of sucking or eating during infancy. Problems in development here can lead to oral dependency or oral aggressive tendencies. The **anal stage** is second, and the focus is on excretion. Problems in this stage can lead to a person becoming anal retentive or anal expulsive. The **phallic stage** is next, and the focus is on the genitals, as children begin to recognize the difference between male and female. A person here can develop an Oedipus or Electra complex.

The **latency stage** is a period during which energies are focused elsewhere. The **genital stage** is the final stage, and is where issues in previous stages are resolved. Lastly, there are many **controversies** associated with these stages, such as the research being based on case studies and anecdotal

evidence, and not actual experimentation.

Good luck!

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia Author Erick Taggart



## TERMS TO KNOW

### **Anal Stage**

Sexual energy is focused on the anus/bladder (controlling bodily wastes).

### **Fixation**

Too much or too little stimulation of erogenous zones (sexual libido) during specific stages causes attachment/personality flaws.

### **Freud's Psychosexual stages**

Stages of development identified by Freud that impact personality development.

### **Genital Stage**

Sexual energy is focused on the genitals.

### **Identification**

Unconscious modeling of one's self upon another person. Allows for identity to group values and attitudes as well as a feeling of connection, similarity, and idealization.

### **Latency**

Child's sexual energy is dormant.

### **Oral Stage**

Sexual energy is focused on the mouth.

### **Phallic Stage**

Sexual energy is focused on the genitals.