Freud's Psychosexual Stages of Development: Oral, Anal, Phallic, Latency, Genital

http://wilderdom.com/personality/L8-5FreudPsychosexualStagesDevelopment.html

A newborn baby, according to Freud, is bubbling with energy (libido; psychic energy). However, this energy is without focus or direction, which would not allow for survival. How, then, does the child develop the ability to control and direct his/her energy?

Psychic energy is an important concept in Freudian psychology. The structure of the mind and development all revolve around how the individual attempts to deal with psychic energy. Raw impulses provide the basic fuel that the mind runs on. But the vehicle (mind) needs to well-formed and well-tuned in order to get maximum energy.

In order to understand development (and neuroses), then, we should “follow the energy” and see where it goes. As with physical energy, psychic energy cannot be created or destroyed in a big picture sense, however it may be dealt with in non-obvious ways.

So, where does the infant’s, then the child’s, the adolescent’s, and adult's energy get focused? Freud believed that as development occurs the baby begins to focus on first one object then another. As the infant’s focus shifts the style and type of gratification being sought changes.

The focal objects for the developing child's energy serves to define five main stages of psychological development:

- **oral** (0-18 months)
- **anal** (18 months - 3 1/2 years)
- **phallic** (3 1/2 years - 6 years)
- **latency** (6 years - puberty)
- **genital** (puberty - adulthood)

Each psychosexual stage has three main parts:

1. **A physical focus**: where the child’s energy is concentrated and their gratification obtained.
2. **A psychological theme**: this is related to both the physical focus and the demands being made on the child by the outside world as he/she develops. For each stage, there can be two extremes in psychological reaction - either doing too much or not enough of what is ideal.
3. **An adult character type**: in the first three stages this adult character type is one that is related to being fixated or stuck at that stage. If a person doesn’t resolve the psychological issues that arise at that stage
Oral stage: Birth - 18 months (approx.)

Physical focus: mouth, lips, tongue (sucking). Sucking is the primary source of pleasure for a newborn. Everything goes in the mouth. Sucking = food.

Psychological theme: dependency. A baby is very dependent and can do little for itself. If babies needs properly fulfilled can move onto the next stage. But if not fulfilled baby will be mistrustful or over-fulfilled baby will find it hard to cope with a world that doesn’t meet all of his/her demands.

Adult character: highly dependent/highly independent. If baby becomes fixated at this stage Freud felt that he or she would grow to be an oral character. Mostly these people are extremely dependent and passive people who want everything done for them. However Freud also suggests that another type of oral character is the person who is highly independent and that when under stress the orally fixated person may flip from one type to the other. This exemplifies Freud’s doctrine of opposites.

Anal Stage: 18 months - 3.5 years (approx.)

Physical focus: anus (elimination). Until now the baby has had it pretty easy. Now baby is supposed to control bowels. Freud believed baby’s sexual pleasure centred around the anus at this time.

Psychological theme: self-control/obedience. These things are not just related to toilet training but also the baby must learn to control urges and behaviours (terrible twos). What goes wrong here is either parents being too controlling or not controlling enough (Freud was a great believer in moderation).

Adult character: anally retentive (rigid, overly organised, subservient to authority) vs. anally expulsive (little self-control, disorganised, defiant, hostile).

Phallic Stage: 3.5 - 6 years (approx.)

Physical focus: penis. Freud believed that boys and girls both focussed on the penis. Boys: why hasn’t she got one? Girls: why haven’t I got one? Children become particularly interested in playing with their genitals at this stage.

Psychological theme: morality and sexuality identification and figuring out what it means to be a girl/boy. Children, according to Freud have sexual feelings for the opposite sexed parent at this stage (and deal with Oedipus / Electra complexes - basically erotic attachment to parent of opposite sex, but since these feelings are not socially acceptable, it may become hostility) and feel some hostility to same-sex parent. Boys experience castration anxiety and girls suffer penis envy. During this time emotional conflicts are resolved by
eventually identifying with the same sex parent

**Adult character:** promiscuous and amoral/ asexual and puritanical (Doctrine of opposites again)

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**Latency Stage: 6 years to puberty --> (approx.)**

The latency stage is the period of relative calm. The sexual and aggressive drives are less active and there is little in the way of psychosexual conflict.

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**Genital stage: post puberty**

**Physical focus:** genitals

**Psychological theme:** maturity and creation and enhancement of life. So this is not just about creating new life (reproduction) but also about intellectual and artistic creativity. The task is to learn how to add something constructive to life and society.

**Adult character:** The genital character is not fixed at an earlier stage. This is the person who has worked it all out. This person is psychologically well-adjusted and balanced. According to Freud to achieve this state you need to have a balance of both love and work.

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If you have had problems during any of the psychosexual stages which are not effectively resolved, then you will become fixated at one of the earlier stages and when under stress will regress more and more to characteristics of that stage.