Development Theory: Oral Stage Fixation

Jacqueline Kutcher

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Professor Barragan

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**Executive Summary**

Freud’s theory on the Oral Stage of development does not account for the current research showing that prolonged breastfeeding is beneficial to infants (Quinn, O’Callaghan, Williams, Najman, Anderson, & Bor, 2001). Although Freud originally stated that infants not weaned by the age of one can form an oral fixation (Ashford & Lecroy, 2013), research shows that breastfeeding as late as three-years-old can be beneficial to their development (Molbak, Gottschau, Aaby, Hojlyng, Ingholt, & Jose de Silva, 1994). After exploring the options, my recommendation is to allow for an overlap of stages. This will benefit Freud’s theory because it will increase the theory’s reliability and efficacy which will allow it to address current problems.

**Statement of the Issue**

Does Freud’s Psychodynamic Theory of the Oral Stage account for the time infants’ need to move from the oral stage into the anal stage?

**Background**

According to Sigmund Freud’s Oral Stage, oral stimulation should be stopped around the age of one and the infant should move onto the anal stage (Ashford & Lecroy, 2013). However, Freud’s estimation on the time an infant moves from the oral stage into the anal stage does not take into account the potential benefits current research has begun to discover from oral stimulation such as breastfeeding (Molbak et al., 1994). Research has begun to explore the benefits of breastfeeding after the age of one-year-old which shows that there are cognitive benefits to prolonged breastfeeding (Horwood, Darlow, & Mogride, 2000). Despite this research Freud’s theory does not take into account cognitive development or prolonging the oral stage (Austrian, 2008). With current research suggesting breastfeeding into the second and even third year of life (Molbak et al., 1994), Freud’s theory must consider that prolonged oral stimulation may be beneficial to an infant’s psychodynamic development and begin to acknowledge the cognitive development.

**Statement of Social Work’s Interests in the Issue**

Freud’s theory is important to social workers because it helps in better understanding development. Social workers should be aware that the theory does not acknowledge the potential benefits prolonged oral stimulation can have on a developing infant. As Table 1A shows, the duration of breastfeeding has an effect on an infant’s cognitive ability but Freud’s theory fails to acknowledge any benefits of oral stimulation past the first year of life (Horwood et al., 2000).

Table 1A

Duration of Breastfeeding’s Positive Effect

**Policy Options**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Possible Solutions** | **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| Declare the stages early childhood development phases instead of a limited age stages. | * The phases would allow for development at the child own pace. * Leaves room for cultural differences to be at play. | * There will not be a clear distinction of when the child has ended the phase. |
| Get rid of the threat of fixation when a child continues to focus on oral pleasures. | * Strengths the positive of the stage rather than focusing on the possible negatives of the stage. | * No longer would be an explanation for obsessive talking, eating, smoking, and/or drinking. * Ignoring the potential impact of failing this stage could hurt children’s development. |
| Allow for overlap between stages. | * Children can develop at their own pace. * Fewer discrepancies when children do not finish the stage at their own time therefor strengthen the theory. * Cultural views can be taken into account. | * More difficult to pin point where the child is developmentally. |

**My Recommendations**

My recommendation for this discrepancy between Freud’s psychodynamic theory and the current research suggesting breastfeeding past the age of one-year-old; would be to allow overlap between the oral stage and the anal stage. By allowing overlap between the stages, the theory will be strengthened and can be applied to current problems such as breastfeeding. When Freud’s theory is applied to debates of the correct time mothers should stop breastfeeding their infants, the theory should support and acknowledge current research.

References

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