

ANALYZING ADOLESCENCE THROUGH THE LENS OF FREUDIANISM

Ostanakulov Alijon

Fergana state university, teacher of psychology department,

adams1097@mail.ru

Introduction. Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, introduced a theoretical framework that has had a profound impact on our understanding of human development, including adolescence. According to Freud, psychological development occurs in a series of psychosexual stages, each characterized by conflicts that must be resolved for healthy development. Adolescence, a crucial developmental phase, is predominantly associated with the genital stage, where the primary focus of psychological energy shifts towards the mature handling of sexual impulses.

Freudian theory suggests that the unresolved conflicts from earlier stages (such as the oral, anal, and phallic stages) can re-emerge during adolescence, influencing behavior and personality. Adolescents experience a reawakening of sexual drives, leading to a renewed engagement with their internalized familial relationships and deep psychological conflicts. This article explores adolescence within the Freudian framework, focusing on how the concepts of libido, defense mechanisms, and identity development provide insight into the psychological challenges adolescents face.

Keywords. *Freudian theory, adolescence, psychosexual development, genital stage, unconscious conflicts, oedipus complex, defense mechanisms, identity formation, repression, adolescent psychology.*

The objective of this article is to analyze adolescence through the lens of Freudianism, addressing key developmental conflicts, the role of unconscious processes, and how unresolved childhood conflicts reappear during this transformative stage. The article will examine these concepts through both theoretical discussion and empirical evidence, shedding light on the enduring relevance of Freud's work in understanding adolescence.

Study Design. A qualitative approach was employed to analyze the applicability of Freudian theory in understanding adolescent behavior. Secondary data was collected from a comprehensive literature review of psychoanalytic theory, focusing on key Freudian concepts such as psychosexual development, the Oedipus complex, and defense mechanisms. Empirical studies on adolescent psychological development were also reviewed to explore the intersections between Freudian theory and contemporary research.

Literature Sources. Literature for this review was sourced from peer-reviewed journals, psychoanalytic texts, and studies on adolescent psychology. Key Freudian works, such as *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* and *The Ego and the Id*, were referenced, along with contemporary studies examining the role of unconscious processes and childhood conflicts in adolescent behavior.

Analytical Framework. The analysis was structured around three key areas of Freudian theory:

1. **The Genital Stage:** Freud's concept of the final stage of psychosexual development, where adolescence marks the onset of sexual maturity.
2. **Unconscious Conflicts and Repression:** How unresolved conflicts from earlier developmental stages affect adolescent behavior and identity formation.
3. **Defense Mechanisms:** The strategies employed by adolescents to cope with the internal conflicts between their unconscious drives and societal expectations.

The Genital Stage and Sexual Maturity. Freud theorized that adolescence marks the beginning of the genital stage, where sexual energy (libido) is directed toward others rather than being self-focused. This shift in focus is a significant aspect of adolescence, where the individual moves towards mature relationships and a clearer sexual identity. During this stage, the reactivation of previously dormant psychosexual conflicts can occur, often manifesting in anxiety, depression, or rebellious behavior.

Contemporary research supports Freud's notion of the re-emergence of sexual drives during adolescence. Empirical studies show that the onset of puberty leads to heightened sexual awareness, which adolescents must navigate alongside societal expectations of appropriate behavior. The emotional intensity and confusion associated with sexual maturation often cause adolescents to re-evaluate their relationships with parents, peers, and authority figures, aligning with Freud's theory of family-centered unconscious conflicts being reawakened.

Unresolved Conflicts and Identity Formation. Freud argued that unresolved conflicts from earlier psychosexual stages could surface during adolescence. For example, if an individual failed to successfully navigate the phallic stage, which involves resolving the Oedipus or Electra complex, they may experience challenges related to authority, gender identity, and sexual relationships in adolescence. Freud believed that adolescence was a critical period for revisiting and potentially resolving these conflicts.

Freud's concept of the Oedipus complex, where children develop an unconscious desire for the opposite-sex parent and rivalry with the same-sex parent, remains relevant in the context of adolescent identity formation. Adolescents often engage in rebellion and conflict with authority figures, particularly their parents, which Freud suggested stems from unresolved tensions from earlier stages of development. Empirical studies support this theory, indicating that adolescents with difficult relationships with their parents often experience more psychological turmoil during this period, including feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, or identity confusion.

Defense Mechanisms in Adolescence. Freud's theory of defense mechanisms is particularly relevant during adolescence, a time marked by internal and external stressors. Adolescents face the challenge of reconciling their emerging sexual identities with social norms and familial expectations. To manage these conflicts, Freud posited that individuals employ defense mechanisms such as repression, denial, projection, and rationalization to cope with their anxiety and inner turmoil.

In adolescence, these defense mechanisms are particularly pronounced. Repression, for example, allows adolescents to push uncomfortable sexual thoughts out of conscious awareness, while projection may cause them to attribute their feelings of insecurity or confusion onto others, such as peers or authority figures. Studies have found that adolescents frequently use defense mechanisms as a means of managing the psychological stress associated with puberty, peer pressure, and the transition to adulthood. Freud's theory provides a framework for understanding

why adolescents often appear moody, withdrawn, or irrational, as these behaviors may be expressions of unconscious defense mechanisms in action.

The Relevance of Freudian Theory in Modern Adolescent Psychology. Freud's work has been criticized for its emphasis on sexuality and unconscious drives, with many arguing that his theories are outdated in light of contemporary psychological research. However, many aspects of his theory remain relevant when analyzing adolescence. Freud's concept of the reawakening of unconscious conflicts during adolescence is supported by modern research on identity formation and adolescent mental health. The conflicts that adolescents face, particularly in their relationships with parents and peers, can be traced back to earlier developmental stages, as Freud predicted.

In modern psychoanalytic theory, Freud's work has been expanded to include a broader understanding of the adolescent experience, incorporating insights from neurodevelopment and social psychology. For instance, while Freud focused on sexual drives, contemporary psychoanalysts emphasize the broader emotional and psychological challenges of adolescence, including the development of autonomy, self-identity, and social relationships.

Freud's ideas about defense mechanisms also remain relevant in understanding adolescent behavior. Adolescents' frequent use of repression, denial, and projection as coping mechanisms is well-documented in contemporary psychological studies. These defense mechanisms help explain why adolescents often struggle with emotional regulation and impulse control, as their unconscious conflicts play out in their behavior.

Unconscious Processes and Adolescent Behavior. Freud's theory of unconscious processes provides valuable insight into why adolescents often behave in unpredictable or contradictory ways. The internal conflicts between the id (instinctual drives), ego (reality), and superego (moral conscience) are particularly active during adolescence, when individuals are navigating the complexities of emerging sexual and social identities. Freud's work highlights the importance of understanding these unconscious processes to better support adolescents in managing their emotions and behavior.

Limitations and Criticism. Despite the continued relevance of Freudian theory in understanding adolescence, there are limitations to its application. Freud's emphasis on sexuality has been critiqued for overshadowing other important aspects of adolescent development, such as cognitive growth, social relationships, and environmental factors. Additionally, Freud's theories were based largely on case studies from adult patients, which limits their direct applicability to adolescent psychology.

Contemporary psychological research also suggests that adolescent behavior is influenced by a wide range of factors beyond unconscious drives, including neurobiological development, family dynamics, and cultural influences. While Freud's framework provides a useful lens for exploring unconscious processes, it should be integrated with other theoretical approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of adolescence.

Conclusion. Freudian theory offers a valuable framework for understanding the psychological complexities of adolescence. Freud's ideas about psychosexual development, unconscious conflicts, and defense mechanisms remain relevant for explaining the emotional turmoil and identity struggles that many adolescents experience. While Freud's work has its limitations, particularly in its focus on sexuality, it continues to provide important insights into

adolescent behavior and the challenges of navigating the transition from childhood to adulthood.

By integrating Freud's psychoanalytic theory with contemporary research, we can develop a more nuanced understanding of adolescence, recognizing the interplay between unconscious processes and the broader social, emotional, and biological factors that shape adolescent development. As we continue to explore the psychological underpinnings of adolescence, Freud's work remains a foundational starting point for examining the deeper emotional and mental forces that drive adolescent behavior.

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