

# Oedipus And Electra Complex

The Oedipus complex is a term coined by Freud, the father of psychoanalysis. Freud's stage theory of psychosexual development argues that between the ages of around 3-6 years old, we go through the phallic stage, where we are primarily concerned with the genitals.

The Oedipus complex can be described as a condition in which 'boys concentrate their sexual wishes upon their mother and develop hostile impulses against their father as being a rival' (Gay, 1989, p.22) Young boys assume that women must have had their penis' cut off, which leads to 'castration anxiety' and fear of their father.

Freud later went on to develop theories on the Electra complex, with girls seeing 'the absence of a penis as a lack and may be angry with her mother for having created her incomplete and inferior' (Rosenhan, Seligman, 1995, p.74), which leads to 'penis envy' in girls, and can lead to increased desire for the father, possibly even wishing to have a child by him.



Freud considered the Oedipus complex as 'a universal event in early childhood' (Freud, 1985, p.272 cited in Wright, 1992, p.291) after experiencing it himself.

Unlike the other psychosexual stages, which Freud associates with biological processes, the phallic stage is seen as a self-initiated one, arising from curiosity with one's own, and other people's bodies.

When we resolve these conflicts satisfactorily, it results in identification, where we internalize the adults' values and attitudes and mannerisms, leading to a 'normal' adult life. If these conflicts are not resolved, due to the nature of it being self-initiated can lead to depression, self-depreciation, feelings of worthlessness and suicidal impulses (Rosenham & Seligman, 1995, p.90-92)

However, problems arise when proving these theories, due to the nature of psychoanalysis in general. There is no way of definitively proving or disproving whether fixation at any of Freud's psychosexual stages actually exists, and also whether castration anxiety really leads to identification.

Freud's theory of the Oedipus/ Electra complexes are also culturally bound to western society and cannot be claimed to be universal. Freud's 'evidence' came from analysing individual patients on a small scale who were primarily middle-aged, middle-class women.

## Bibliography

Gay, P. (1989) *The Freud Reader* London: Vintage

Rosenhan, D.L. Seligman, M.E.P. (1995) 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. '*Abnormal Psychology*' London: Norton & Company

Wright, E. (1992) '*Feminism And Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*' Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd