



BY DANIEL EDWARD

*Is that pen lid you've got wedged in your mouth a sign of obsessive, uncontrollable insatiability perpetuated by your un-breastfed youth, or are you just trying to focus on your work? Sorbet sucks on the theory of oral fixation...*

Your mouth is a veritable explosion of sensuality. Over a million nerve endings tingle in your lips alone, making those pretty puckers a hundred times more sensitive than your partner's fingertips caressing them. While inside, millions more sparky nerve endings gather; a slippery saliva-soaked theme park of unadulterated joy.

And while, yes, the mouth is an essential part of human existence via which we eat, drink, practice at least half our breathing and, y'know, do other fun stuff too, for psychologists of a certain ilk, it's so much more than a portal of mastication and respiration. It's the place of childhood memories and biblical tragedies...

#### FREUD'S FIXATION

As with much in psychology we have Austrian neurologist and the godfather of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud to thank for the concept of oral fixation. At the beginning of the 20th century, the frisky Mr. Freud was getting all excited about erogenous zones and the apparent pent up frustrations that stem from the untapped libido.

Freud's overarching theory of personality is that we each possess an id, ego and super-ego. For oral satisfaction, meet id – a primitive, pleasure-driven component of our mind that feasts on base desires, like sucking, licking and smooching. The super-ego and ego develop later, bringing with them their haughty morals and social norms.

#### ALL MOUTH AND NO MORALS

According to Siggy, our fixation on the thrill of oral satisfaction starts early. As any parent will tell you, newborn babies explore the world with their mouths, primarily because they have terrible eyesight and their mouth is pretty close to their eyes. Ergo, if they're close enough to see it, they might as well try sucking it too.

As Freud's theory of psychosexual development posits, those who don't

successfully progress through the oral stage get somehow stuck there forever, eternally drawn to the self-soothing pleasures of a well-entertained mouth. Theories concerning those who demonstrate a constant need to amuse their bouche abound. Were they overfed in the first year, or malnourished? Was breastfeeding forced on the bewildered babe, or withdrawn too swiftly? Or perhaps, as some modern psychologists like to point out, it's all just bullshit.

#### SUCK, NIBBLE, LICK, REPEAT

Though scientifically sketchy, mouth-orientated tendencies do present themselves in general society. Orally fixated adults seek to satisfy their pleasure-drive by smoking, nibbling on their nails, overeating, sucking the end of pencils, running strands of their hair across their lips, licking a popsicle and more.

In pop culture, nods to oral fixation are often used as visual shorthand for immorality; the Wild West cowboy chewing on a piece of straw, the Lolita-figure sucking on a lollipop, the Mafiosi mobsters smoking cigars...

For millennia – long before Freud, or the hot lips of the Rolling Stone logo – oral sensuality has been symbolic of a lesser morality.

Roll back a couple of thousand years and Judas's betrayal of Christ was famously not a handshake, backslap or even a yelled "This is the chap you're after, Roman guys!", but a kiss.

Cast the biblical clock back further and you'll recall that it was the bite of the apple, not the picking, that was Adam and Eve's expulsive offence from the Garden of Eden.

Kissing, biting, tasting, licking... oral fixation, it seems, is intrinsic to the very fabric of recorded human history. Well, in all the stories worth telling, anyway.