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Tiger Woods - can personality explain his behaviour?

By **Anne Kennedy**

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Within Psychology personality refers to “*psychological qualities that contribute to an individual’s enduring and distinctive patterns of feeling, thinking and behaving*”. This psychohistory of Tiger Woods intends to examine several theories of personality in an attempt to discover and learn more about what motivates him. Adler’s Birth Order Effect will be explored as a possible explanation for some of Tiger Woods’ characteristics while also evaluating the influence of Bowlby and Ainsworth’s Attachment theory in relation to parent/child attachment in Tiger’s early childhood. As Tiger progresses through to adolescence Freud’s theory of psychosexual development will be examined to explore the possibility of Tiger entering the phallic stage with reference to Carl Jung’s theory of the structure of personality. Bandura’s social-cognitive theory will also be examined in length to account for how and why Tiger displays many of his personality characteristics and finally an investigation as to whether Tiger can be described or understood with regard to the Big-Five Factor model of personality.

Tiger was born in 1975 to Earl and Kultida and would be their only child. Adler (1937) put forward a theory of Birth Order Effect as a major social determinant of personality. He believed it was a critical motivator of development and explained children “*striving for superiority*”. Tiger could potentially be deemed as an only child or as the youngest of four children, as he has three step siblings. Characteristics of Adler’s youngest child birth order effect are spoilt but happy, immature and irresponsible, confident and happy, more relaxed on rules, little family responsibility and generally not given many duties. They will remain irresponsible by avoiding responsibilities and commitments once his personality is shaped. They have to take risks in order to develop their own sphere of influence and personal leadership and sometimes will refuse to grow up and become responsible. There is no doubt that Tiger was groomed from a very young age by his father’s ambition for him to excel and succeed. His father brought him up very strictly and militaristically often speaking to him in adult language as a very young child. He would sometimes use prisoner-of-war interrogation techniques on him to make him mentally strong. Tiger was labelled a ‘child prodigy’. At the age of three he shot 48 over nine holes at the Cypress Navy course. He first broke 80 at the age of eight and went on to win the Junior World Championships six times, including four consecutive wins from 1988-1991.

Albert Bandura is a social psychologist who conducted many studies on how children are most likely to model and imitate others. He believed that much of our behaviour and personality is

ABOUT ANNE KENNEDY

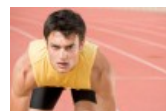


My academic background is in Business & Accounting. I hold a BA (Hons) Psychology and I’m currently pursuing a BPS accredited MSc Sport & Exercise Psychology at the University of Staffordshire. I am a qualified Hatha Yoga Teacher and have trained specifically in yoga for golfers with Katherine Roberts in Arizona. Through my passion for psychology, yoga and golf I set up my own business Yoga for Golf IRELAND. I have been fortunate enough to work with some of Ireland’s elite amateur and professional golfers. I have taught the High Performance and National Panels for the Golfing Union of Ireland and the Irish Ladies Golfing Union. I am also a coach on the Padraig Harrington Golf Scholarship Programme at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUIM).

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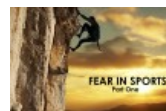
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learned, that it is the result of our nurture. Social learning is often called observational learning. A child will observe and then copy someone and in this particular case young Tiger was copying and imitating his father's behaviour. Earl used reinforcement techniques to fine tune his son's skill with golf and he also conditioned him by using his army training to groom the young boy. Environmental and social factors, particularly learning-based habit patterns and maladaptive cognitive styles, have also been identified as possible casual factors in personality development. Many of these maladaptive habits and cognitive styles may originate in disturbed parent-child attachment relationships, rather the depriving simply from temperamental differences. Early attachment relationships are thought by development psychologists to create models for children of what relationships should be like. If early models are not healthy, this may predispose a child to a pattern of personality development that can lead to the diagnosis of personality disorder later in life.

As Tiger moved into adolescence he became known as 'The Great Black Hope' adding to the already enormous pressures and expectations he had on himself. Tiger did not only want to be the best black golfer in history but to be the best golfer who ever lived. At the age of fifteen he revealed these goals inadvertently saying that he wanted to become the Michael Jordan of golf. This was one of the first signs that Tiger, according to Freud's stages of development, was moving into his phallic stage. He started to gain control on the golf course over his emotional outbursts and lapses in temper. Tiger had now set targets in his career and was striving to meet these targets. He was becoming outwardly competitive and potent on the golf course. This is a natural development according to Jung's structure of personality in which, a persona or mask is developed to represent a person's public image. Tiger was showing the world his calm, together and focused self every time he played on a golf course, creating impressions to manipulate and influence people's opinions of him.



According to the social-cognitive theory, goals play an important part in personality structure. A person's goals enable them to set down a specific course of action and, thus, motivate and direct their own behaviour. Goals therefore contribute to their capacity for self-control. Goals help a person to establish priorities. Tiger's goal at this stage was to become the greatest golf player in the world. Evaluative standards also play an important role in the social-cognitive theory. They concern one self's personal standards, and are of particular relevance to the case of Tiger. The theory recognises that people commonly evaluate their ongoing behaviour in accordance with internalised personal standards. During his adolescence, Tiger had set his standards very high. He practiced golf religiously each day; however, his high standards were not limited to golf alone. When it was time for Tiger to decide on which college he would attend he focused on three in particular, each with a history of success at golf. Tiger opted for Stanford- the most academically rigorous of the three. Tiger was not content to excel at just sport, he wanted to do well academically also. According to this same theory, evaluative standards often trigger emotional reactions. It states that we react with pride when we meet our own standards and are dissatisfied when we fail to meet them. This is certainly true of Tiger who, on winning the U.S. Junior Amateur, in a rare moment of emotional outpouring, had tears streaming down his face. The social-cognitive theory thus emphasises that evaluative standards are central to behaviour that we call "moral" versus "immoral". This aspect of the theory may account for Tiger's more recent behaviour. "People who disengage their moral standards say things to themselves that temporarily enable them to disregard their own standards of behaviour". His whole life Tiger has exercised an admirable level of self control and an imperturbable pursuit of his goals, and this may in some way explain his uncharacteristically deviant behaviour.

Tiger's adult personality can be examined under the Big-Five Factor Model as proposed by

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moderately extraverted, in

that he is very outgoing and sociable, active and talkative. He is deeply stimulated by the game of golf and excels at it. He would score very high on conscientiousness given that he is extremely driven, methodical and organised, thorough and hard-working, self-disciplined and punctual in all aspects of his profession. He is relentless and opportunistic in his pursuit to dominate golf and break previous records set by Jack Nicklaus and he is highly motivated, competitive and goal-oriented which also links with Freud's concept of the phallic personality type. Some of these conscientiousness qualities may not however apply to his personal life. He displays very little anxiety, guilt and depression which would show him low on neuroticism. When he is on the golf course he will always appear calm, relaxed and unemotional. He has a hardy personality trait that appeared unpenetrable until recent revelations of infidelities in his marriage. It could be argued however that Tiger could score quite high on neuroticism in respect of his personal life, namely due to recent news of his transgressions which would describe him as emotionally unstable and using maladaptive coping mechanisms to deal with his personal problems.



Tiger Woods is a practicing Buddhist and credits his religion for giving him self-awareness and believes that his religion has taught him that he needs to work on flaws in his personality, stubbornness and impatience. He has attributed his deviations and infidelities to his losing track of Buddhism saying that Buddhism teaches him to stop following every impulse and to learn restraint. Infidelity occurs for many reasons, ranging from personality factors to evolution-based theories.

Tiger Woods exhibits high levels of agreeableness as a factor in his personality.

Together with his parents, they established '**The Tiger Woods Foundation**' and '**The Tiger Woods Learning Centre**' in an attempt to promote both golf and other, non-sport activities for disadvantaged children. This displays true altruism and compassion for disadvantaged children helping them achieve their dreams through education. With regard to openness Tiger shows that he is sociable and charismatic, however he also shows a lack of self control, values and selfishness. Recent events in his personal life has seen Tiger described in the media as being a 'party boy womanizer' and in a public statement in February 2010 regarding his transgressions he apologised to his family, sponsors and media for his repeated irresponsible behaviour stating that "...*achievements in golf are only part of setting an example, character and decency are what really counts*".

Taking into account Tiger's achievements and misgivings since his professional career began, and exploring his personality on the Big-Five Factor model the trait theories reflect important structures of the personality but it doesn't consider all aspects. Tiger has exhibited some extreme aspects to his personality, on one hand he is a consummate professional, an extreme sports achiever and influential role model but on the other hand, there are questionable personality traits that dominate his personal life that reflect the polar opposite of his celebrity/public persona which was already discussed in relation to Jung's theory of personality

Western society believes that people are "*essentially good but society corrupts them*" and "*that people are born innocent but experience a world of temptations and fall from grace*". It is true in the case of Tiger Woods that it is not as simple as blaming society for our inadequacies. There are a myriad of factors that need to be taken into account when trying to comprehend the complex nature of personality. From this investigation, Earl Woods, Tiger's father, had a major influence on Tiger's early development not least with regard to the social-cognitive theory of learning. Tiger's slow progression to the phallic stage according to Freud may have resulted in a very conflicting public and private persona in adulthood.

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