

**Does Tiger Parenting work?** Is the attitude of strict, harsh, and tough parenting beneficial or hurtful to modern youth?

Practice piano three hours a day. Don't bother to waste your time on sports. Oh, and if you bring home a B, you dishonour the family!

These are common phrases from a stereotypical so-called "Tiger Parent." Generally, "Tiger Parents" are very strict, fairly narrow-minded and may care very little about their child's self-esteem. Looking around the demographics in UHill, most of us have experienced, or at least heard of, what it means to be a Tiger Parent. But is Tiger Parenting really worth it? Is it hurting us as students or making us stronger? (I'll talk about why I use the term "Tiger" in a moment, and I am well aware that this term does not apply to a specific ethnic group, although it seems to be more prevalent among the East Asian cultures.)

A recent article from the Wall Street Journal by a Chinese-American law professor is titled "Why Chinese Moms Are Superior." The author, Amy Chua, boasts about her style of parenting that she dished out like a dictator to her two daughters. She did not allow sleepovers and parties. She told her children to strive to be No.1 in every class except physical education and drama. She made her children learn violin or piano. She made her children learn no other instrument than violin and piano. And when her younger daughter couldn't play the song right, she refused her toys, sleep, food, and bathroom breaks until she could get it right. The 7 year-old girl eventually managed to finish the piece, and was actually grateful to her mother for pushing her through it. Chua's opinions are written in a newly-published book called "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother" - which is why I'm using the term "Tiger Parents."

Chua claims that parents "know the best for their children," and that a parent should do everything to bring out her child's potential. She did not hesitate to degrade her children and call them "garbage." She says this is all done out of love and the assumption that the child is strong. In the Tiger Parenting philosophy, Chua claims, parents believe in their child so much that they will ignore their self-esteem issues to help the child be number one. The child, on the other hand, is obligated to "pay back" the parent for their hard work - a reference to Confucius' idea of "filial piety."

Of course, this article is definitely in the extreme. I personally found it very disturbing to read. Not only was this mother obviously infringing on a number of basic human rights, she seemed to be promoting a negative generalized stereotype that all Chinese mothers act this way, when in truth, many do not. Nevertheless, the article attracted massive negative attention, and a few positive ones. Asian bloggers, such as The Korean (writer of the popular *Ask a Korean!* blog) defended the view. Others (like bigWOWO) said it was because of Tiger Parenting that got them high-paying careers and that they're happy with their lives. Still others, including students in this school, are highly suspicious of this technique.

"Grades aren't everything," says a Grade 11 student at UHill. "Life is about exploring, trying different things, making mistakes and learning from them; *being happy*."

So why do Tiger Parents act this way? There may be several reasons. Our parents from Asia grew up in a less stable era with education as the only way out of poverty. Indeed, education has long since been ingrained in Asian culture as a very respectable thing. This belief stretches thousands of years to the imperial examination system in China. Naturally, immigrant parents must have worked their backsides off to get a job good enough to earn the necessary money to immigrate to North America. But, where our Tiger Parents were studying hard, our North American parents enjoyed a much more prestigious lifestyle in that generation. They had time to date, watch movies, dance to disco, etc.

Indeed, a more competitive environment requires a more competitive attitude. The question is: how competitive can you go until you fall apart?

"I think it's not Asian parents are wrong but the education environment in Asia are wrong," says a student from China studying at UHill. "At that time, [my parents] always pushed me to study and used my grade to compare with others, and I disliked them very much. However, after we [came] to Canada, my parents have changed and they realize I need more respect. They still have requirements, but they do not push me to do anything any more. I think my parents changed because of the environment change. In China, children's bad grades mean

that their parents will lose face in front of other parents, and parents push children to study harder and in wider areas so that they feel more pride when talking to others.”

It’s true that, within my own experience, I have encountered Tiger Parents whose motive is *not* to induce the success of their children, but to use their child’s achievements to boost their own reputation. This, I believe, is absurd and unfair. Children must be treated as respected individuals, not tools for their parents.

Tiger Parents may complain that their opposite parents are too liberal on their kids and let them do whatever they want. Tiger Parents may say that other parents place too much importance on self-esteem and so lose out on revealing a child’s true potential. Tiger Parents also believe that getting good grades equals a good university degree which equals a good job which ultimately equals good money and a stable life. Have they heard of the expression: “Money doesn’t bring happiness”?

A student at Point Grey with no experience in Tiger Parenting, had this to say: “If I have to say anything about parenting, I would say that the best would in fact be how my mother raised me. She lets me go out, do things with friends and talk to her how I want to. Basically, my mother raised me to be who I want to be, let me fail and get back up on my own, and has always told me that she loves me no matter what I do and all she wants for me is to be the happiest I can be.”

I have to stress that many Tiger Parents tend to put a narrow focus on solely *academic* success. Does academic success equal multi-dimensional, *life-long* success? Not necessarily, if not at all. Academic success will guarantee you into, say, Harvard University, but not all highly-successful people are Harvard graduates. Also, just because your career is nice, doesn’t mean you’re free from stress, conflict, and everyday woes.

Unfortunately, a student who is only gifted in academics faces many dangers along his walk of life. He trains himself to be good in school, not to be good at work. He trains himself to study, not to innovate. He trains himself in left-brain tasks like mathematics and science, and spends too little time developing his creativity. All through his adolescence it has been his parents mapping his life out for him so, when he gets out into the real world, he may feel lost.

The truth is, getting an A in everything won’t make much of a difference when you’re an adult. You don’t need an A to win a Nobel Prize. Success comes from passion, not from your parents.

The Tiger style of parenting may induce healthy study habits and academic endurance. The Tiger style, however, fails to release the free thinking of a young person who is in a life-stage where he is just beginning to understand the world. The principles of Tiger Parenting may work (in theory, to some individuals) but in practice it’s hard to say.

A further browse of the Internet and the blogging world revealed many opinions from the whole spectrum on this topic. It should be noted that Chua’s article was taken slightly out of context. It belongs to a larger book with the most sensational lines pieced together in the WSJ article. A review of the book states that her daughter later rebelled, forcing her to reform her parenting style. A reader could also have been biased if they themselves were an ambitious individual without the need for parental pressure to succeed, thus not understanding the frustration of having lazy kids. Nevertheless, corporal punishment is unacceptable to me. If I had a child, I’d like him to be a well-rounded individual in the arts and athletics, have perhaps an above-average academic grade, be disciplined, but allowed free and social time. I would take in his individuality in all aspects. No two children are alike, but all kids need time for play, to expand their mind in peace, and to just be a kid. As teachers tell us all the time: it’s a dog-eat-dog world out there, so be a kid while the opportunity lasts.

*Some references to consider:*

The original article: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704111504576059713528698754.html>  
Review by Claire McHugh: [http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703667904576072110522204874.html?mod=WSJ\\_article\\_related#articleTabs%3Darticle](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703667904576072110522204874.html?mod=WSJ_article_related#articleTabs%3Darticle)

The Korean’s POV: <http://askakorean.blogspot.com/2011/01/tiger-mothers-are-superior-here-is-why.html>  
bigWOWO’s POV: <http://www.bigwowo.com/2011/01/battle-hymn-of-the-kitten-daughter/>

Charmaine Li.

