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## (1) Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior

by Amy Chua

The Wall Street Journal Online: The Saturday Essay January 8, 2011

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704111504576059713528698754.html>

Can a regimen of no playdates, no TV, no computer games and hours of music practice create happy kids? And what happens when they fight back?

A lot of people wonder how Chinese parents raise such stereotypically successful kids. They wonder what these parents do to produce so many math whizzes and music prodigies, what it's like inside the family, and whether they could do it too. Well, I can tell them, because I've done it. Here are some things my daughters, Sophia and Louisa, were never allowed to do:

- attend a sleepover
- have a playdate
- be in a school play
- complain about not being in a school play
- watch TV or play computer games
- choose their own extracurricular activities
- get any grade less than an A
- not be the No. 1 student in every subject except gym and drama
- play any instrument other than the piano or violin
- not play the piano or violin.

(2) I'm using the term "Chinese mother" loosely. I know some Korean, Indian, Jamaican, Irish and Ghanaian parents who qualify too. Conversely, I know some mothers of Chinese heritage, almost always born in the West, who are not Chinese mothers, by choice or otherwise. I'm also using the term "Western parents" loosely. Western parents come in all varieties.

(3) All the same, even when Western parents think they're being strict, they usually don't come close to being Chinese mothers. For example, my Western friends who consider themselves strict make their children practice their instruments 30 minutes every day. An hour at most. For a Chinese mother, the first hour is the easy part. It's hours two and three that get tough.

(4) Despite our squeamishness about cultural stereotypes, there are tons of studies out there showing marked and quantifiable differences between Chinese and Westerners when it comes to parenting. In one study of 50 Western American mothers and 48 Chinese immigrant mothers, almost 70% of the Western mothers said either that "stressing academic success is not good for children" or that "parents need to foster the idea that learning is fun." (5) By contrast, roughly 0% of the Chinese mothers felt the same way. Instead, the vast majority of the Chinese mothers said that they believe their children can be "the best" students, that "academic achievement reflects successful parenting," and that if children did not excel at school then there was "a problem" and parents "were not doing their job." Other studies indicate that compared to Western parents, Chinese parents spend approximately 10 times as long every day drilling academic activities with their children. By contrast, Western kids are more likely to participate in sports teams.

(6) What Chinese parents understand is that nothing is fun until you're good at it. To get good at anything you have to work, and children on their own never want to work, which is why it is crucial to override their preferences. This often requires fortitude on the part of the parents because the child will resist; things are always hardest at the beginning, which is where Western parents tend

to give up. But if done properly, the Chinese strategy produces a virtuous circle. (7) Tenacious practice, practice, practice is crucial for excellence; rote repetition is underrated in America. Once a child starts to excel at something – whether it’s math, piano, pitching or ballet – he or she gets praise, admiration and satisfaction. This builds confidence and makes the once not-fun activity fun. This in turn makes it easier for the parent to get the child to work even more.

(8) Chinese parents can get away with things that Western parents can’t. Once when I was young – maybe more than once – when I was extremely disrespectful to my mother, my father angrily called me “garbage” in our native Hokkien dialect. It worked really well. I felt terrible and deeply ashamed of what I had done. But it didn’t damage my self-esteem or anything like that. I knew exactly how highly he thought of me. I didn’t actually think I was worthless or feel like a piece of garbage.

(9) As an adult, I once did the same thing to Sophia, calling her garbage in English when she acted extremely disrespectfully toward me. When I mentioned that I had done this at a dinner party, I was immediately ostracized. One guest named Marcy got so upset she broke down in tears and had to leave early. My friend Susan, the host, tried to rehabilitate me with the remaining guests.

(10) The fact is that Chinese parents can do things that would seem unimaginable – even legally actionable – to Westerners. Chinese mothers can say to their daughters, “Hey fatty – lose some weight.” By contrast, Western parents have to tiptoe around the issue, talking in terms of “health” and never ever mentioning the f-word, and their kids still end up in therapy for eating disorders and negative self-image. (I also once heard a Western father toast his adult daughter by calling her “beautiful and incredibly competent.” She later told me that made her feel like garbage.)

(11) Chinese parents can order their kids to get straight As. Western parents can only ask their kids to try their best. Chinese parents can say, “You’re lazy. All your classmates are getting ahead of you.” By contrast, Western parents have to struggle with their own conflicted feelings about achievement, and try to persuade themselves that they’re not disappointed about how their kids turned out.

I’ve thought long and hard about how Chinese parents can get away with what they do. I think there are three big differences between the Chinese and Western parental mind-sets.

(12) First, I’ve noticed that Western parents are extremely anxious about their children’s self-esteem. They worry about how their children will feel if they fail at something, and they constantly try to reassure their children about how good they are notwithstanding a mediocre performance on a test or at a recital. In other words, Western parents are concerned about their children’s psyches. Chinese parents aren’t. They assume strength, not fragility, and as a result they behave very differently.

(13) For example, if a child comes home with an A-minus on a test, a Western parent will most likely praise the child. The Chinese mother will gasp in horror and ask what went wrong. If the child comes home with a B on the test, some Western parents will still praise the child. Other Western parents will sit their child down and express disapproval, but they will be careful not to make their child feel inadequate or insecure, and they will not call their child “stupid,” “worthless” or “a disgrace.” (14) Privately, the Western parents may worry that their child does not test well or have aptitude in the subject or that there is something wrong with the curriculum and possibly the whole school. If the child’s grades do not improve, they may eventually schedule a meeting with the school principal to challenge the way the subject is being taught or to call into question the teacher’s credentials.

(15) If a Chinese child gets a B – which would never happen – there would first be a screaming,

hair-tearing explosion. The devastated Chinese mother would then get dozens, maybe hundreds of practice tests and work through them with her child for as long as it takes to get the grade up to an A.

**(16)** Chinese parents demand perfect grades because they believe that their child can get them. If their child doesn't get them, the Chinese parent assumes it's because the child didn't work hard enough. That's why the solution to substandard performance is always to excoriate, punish and shame the child. The Chinese parent believes that their child will be strong enough to take the shaming and to improve from it. (And when Chinese kids do excel, there is plenty of ego-inflating parental praise lavished in the privacy of the home.)

**(17)** Second, Chinese parents believe that their kids owe them everything. The reason for this is a little unclear, but it's probably a combination of Confucian filial piety and the fact that the parents have sacrificed and done so much for their children. (And it's true that Chinese mothers get in the trenches, putting in long grueling hours personally tutoring, training, interrogating and spying on their kids.) Anyway, the understanding is that Chinese children must spend their lives repaying their parents by obeying them and making them proud.

**(18)** By contrast, I don't think most Westerners have the same view of children being permanently indebted to their parents. My husband, Jed, actually has the opposite view. "Children don't choose their parents," he once said to me. "They don't even choose to be born. It's parents who foist life on their kids, so it's the parents' responsibility to provide for them. Kids don't owe their parents anything. Their duty will be to their own kids." This strikes me as a terrible deal for the Western parent.

**(19)** Third, Chinese parents believe that they know what is best for their children and therefore override all of their children's own desires and preferences. That's why Chinese daughters can't have boyfriends in high school and why Chinese kids can't go to sleepaway camp. It's also why no Chinese kid would ever dare say to their mother, "I got a part in the school play! I'm Villager Number Six. I'll have to stay after school for rehearsal every day from 3:00 to 7:00, and I'll also need a ride on weekends." God help any Chinese kid who tried that one.

**(20)** Don't get me wrong: It's not that Chinese parents don't care about their children. Just the opposite. They would give up anything for their children. It's just an entirely different parenting model.

Here's a story in favor of coercion, Chinese-style. Lulu was about 7, still playing two instruments, and working on a piano piece called "The Little White Donkey" by the French composer Jacques Ibert. The piece is really cute – you can just imagine a little donkey ambling along a country road with its master – but it's also incredibly difficult for young players because the two hands have to keep schizophrenically different rhythms.

**(21)** Lulu couldn't do it. We worked on it nonstop for a week, drilling each of her hands separately, over and over. But whenever we tried putting the hands together, one always morphed into the other, and everything fell apart. Finally, the day before her lesson, Lulu announced in exasperation that she was giving up and stomped off.

"Get back to the piano now," I ordered.

"You can't make me."

"Oh yes, I can."

(22) Back at the piano, Lulu made me pay. She punched, thrashed and kicked. She grabbed the music score and tore it to shreds. I taped the score back together and encased it in a plastic shield so that it could never be destroyed again. Then I hauled Lulu's dollhouse to the car and told her I'd donate it to the Salvation Army piece by piece if she didn't have "The Little White Donkey" perfect by the next day. (23) When Lulu said, "I thought you were going to the Salvation Army, why are you still here?" I threatened her with no lunch, no dinner, no Christmas or Hanukkah presents, no birthday parties for two, three, four years. When she still kept playing it wrong, I told her she was purposely working herself into a frenzy because she was secretly afraid she couldn't do it. I told her to stop being lazy, cowardly, self-indulgent and pathetic.

(24) Jed took me aside. He told me to stop insulting Lulu – which I wasn't even doing, I was just motivating her – and that he didn't think threatening Lulu was helpful. Also, he said, maybe Lulu really just couldn't do the technique – perhaps she didn't have the coordination yet – had I considered that possibility?

"You just don't believe in her," I accused.

"That's ridiculous," Jed said scornfully. "Of course I do."

"Sophia could play the piece when she was this age."

"But Lulu and Sophia are different people," Jed pointed out.

(25) "Oh no, not this," I said, rolling my eyes. "Everyone is special in their special own way," I mimicked sarcastically. "Even losers are special in their own special way. Well don't worry, you don't have to lift a finger. I'm willing to put in as long as it takes, and I'm happy to be the one hated. And you can be the one they adore because you make them pancakes and take them to Yankees games."

(26) I rolled up my sleeves and went back to Lulu. I used every weapon and tactic I could think of. We worked right through dinner into the night, and I wouldn't let Lulu get up, not for water, not even to go to the bathroom. The house became a war zone, and I lost my voice yelling, but still there seemed to be only negative progress, and even I began to have doubts.

Then, out of the blue, Lulu did it. Her hands suddenly came together – her right and left hands each doing their own imperturbable thing – just like that.

(27) Lulu realized it the same time I did. I held my breath. She tried it tentatively again. Then she played it more confidently and faster, and still the rhythm held. A moment later, she was beaming.

"Mommy, look – it's easy!" After that, she wanted to play the piece over and over and wouldn't leave the piano. That night, she came to sleep in my bed, and we snuggled and hugged, cracking each other up. When she performed "The Little White Donkey" at a recital a few weeks later, parents came up to me and said, "What a perfect piece for Lulu – it's so spunky and so her."

(28) Even Jed gave me credit for that one. Western parents worry a lot about their children's self-esteem. But as a parent, one of the worst things you can do for your child's self-esteem is to let them give up. On the flip side, there's nothing better for building confidence than learning you can do something you thought you couldn't.

(29) There are all these new books out there portraying Asian mothers as scheming, callous, overdriven people indifferent to their kids' true interests. For their part, many Chinese secretly

believe that they care more about their children and are willing to sacrifice much more for them than Westerners, who seem perfectly content to let their children turn out badly. I think it's a misunderstanding on both sides. All decent parents want to do what's best for their children. The Chinese just have a totally different idea of how to do that.

**(30)** Western parents try to respect their children's individuality, encouraging them to pursue their true passions, supporting their choices, and providing positive reinforcement and a nurturing environment. By contrast, the Chinese believe that the best way to protect their children is by preparing them for the future, letting them see what they're capable of, and arming them with skills, work habits and inner confidence that no one can ever take away.

Amy Chua is a professor at Yale Law School and author of "Day of Empire" and "World on Fire: How Exporting Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability." This essay is excerpted from "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother" by Amy Chua, to be published Tuesday by the Penguin Press, a member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc. Copyright © 2011 by Amy Chua.

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**2.**

**(31) Is Amy Chua right when she explains "Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior" in an op/ed in the Wall Street Journal?**

The article puts forward a very strong view on behalf of Chinese/Chinese-American mothers who hold their children to rigorous and demanding standards even if that requires using abusive language as "motivation" (author's words)

I was interested in hearing the viewpoints of those who have had a mother with the characteristics that Amy Chua advocates. Did you think you benefited from it, were hurt by it or experienced a mix of the two?

Based on this WSJ article: <http://on.wsj.com/ChineseTigerMom>

**(32) Reader responses:**

**(a) Christine Lu, Co-Founder & CEO, Affinity China** (launching 2011)

**(1)** No. Chinese mothers are not superior. It's clear that the author Amy Chua has a new book out and linkbait headlines in the WSJ will help her sell them. I understand she uses the term "Chinese Mother" to represent a certain parenting style – one that I am very familiar with from personal experience.

**(33)** Here's my take on it. My family immigrated to the U.S. from Taiwan in the 70s. My mother was a stay-at-home mom raising 4 kids and was stereotypical strict. I lived in that household where getting a B on your report card was a sign of failure. A lot of focus and pressure was placed on the first child – my older sister – in the hopes that she would set an example for the rest of us. In a very painful hindsight I think you can say too much emphasis was placed on molding my sister into the example my mother wanted the rest of us to follow. I don't blame her as she did the best she could to raise us in the U.S. in the style that she was raised ...in Taiwan.

**(34)** There's a culture clash you can't overlook here. The "superior" Chinese mother in my life had a strictly results-driven, merit-based mindset and a heavy emphasis on test scores, achievements and report cards being able to show that her daughter was better than everyone else in the class – which in turn was a reflection on her success as a parent. However, the environment in which she raised us in was a different country. One that she has honestly never gotten used to or felt

comfortable in living in. (35) To her, the idea of having her children become “Americanized” was looked down upon as failure. The idea of allowing a more flexible stance, a softer tone or an expression of individualism was out of the question. This duality of living in a very “Chinese” household and going to school where our American teachers taught us to be free-thinking and creative were constantly at odds with each other growing up.

Drawing from personal experience, the reason why I don’t feel this works is because I’ve seen an outcome that Amy Chua, the author fails to address or perhaps has yet to experience.

(36) My big sister was what I used to jealously call “every Asian parent’s wet dream come true” (excuse the crassness, but it really does sum up the resentment I used to feel towards her). She got straight As. Skipped 5th grade. Perfect SAT score. Varsity swim team. Student council. Advanced level piano. Harvard early admission. An international post with the Boston Consulting Group in Hong Kong before returning to the U.S. for her Harvard MBA. Six-figure salary. Oracle. Peoplesoft. Got engaged to a PhD. Bought a home. Got married.

(37) Her life summed up in one paragraph above.

Her death summed up in one paragraph below.

Committed suicide a month after her wedding at the age of 30 after hiding her depression for 2 years. She ran a plastic tube from the tailpipe of her car into the window. Sat there and died of carbon monoxide poisoning in the garage of her new home in San Francisco. Her husband found her after coming home from work. A post-it note stuck on the dashboard as her suicide note saying sorry and that she loved everyone.

(38) Mine is an extreme example of course. But 6 years since her passing, I can tell you that the notion of the “superior Chinese mother” that my mom carried with her also died with my sister on October 28, 2004. If you were to ask my mom today if this style of parenting worked for her, she’ll point to a few boxes of report cards, trophies, piano books, photo albums and Harvard degrees and gladly trade it all to have my sister back.

(39) For every success story that has resulted from the “Chinese mothers” style of parenting, there are chapters that have yet to unfold. The author can speak to her example of how it’s worked for her but it’ll be interesting to see how long you can keep that gig up and pass it down until something gives.

(40) As a responsibility to herself as a “superior Chinese mother”, I think Amy Chua should do a bit of research outside her comfort zone and help readers understand why Asian-American females have one of the highest rates of suicide in the U.S. – I bet many of you didn’t know that. I didn’t until after the fact. It’d make a good follow up book to this one she’s currently profiting from.

(41) A few years ago I got up the guts to begin sharing the story of my sister because the more I learned about depression and suicide following her death, I found myself growing increasingly frustrated with the stigma of depression in our society. I was also shocked to learn that Asian-American females had one of the highest suicide rates in the U.S.

<http://www.pacificcitizen.org/site/details/tabid/55/selectmoduleid/373/ArticleID/490/reftab/36/Default.aspx>

(42) I have personally helped 2 young women in the last few years who reached out to me as a result of sharing my story. Both the “perfect” daughters of “superior Chinese mothers” who were sharp Ivy League grads hiding their depression from their families and friends. I was also able to

play a role in preventing the suicide of a friend of mine several months ago because of the awareness I've developed about depression and suicide since my sister's passing.

(43) I want to clarify again that my sister's story is an extreme example that hits home for me. I'm not trying to say that strict "Chinese mother" style parenting was solely the cause that led to her depression and suicide nor will it result in all kids burning out later on in life.

But I do hope it shows that this parenting style isn't a proven template that results in all kids turning into the success stories that author Amy Chua gives herself credit for raising.

(44) UPDATE: I emailed author Amy Chua this evening (1/9). Expressed my disappointment about the WSJ piece and pointed to this Quora thread. To my surprise I received a prompt reply from her that said:

Dear Christine: Thank you for taking the time to write me, and I'm so sorry about your sister. I did not choose the title of the WSJ excerpt, and I don't believe that there is only one good way of raising children. The actual book is more nuanced, and much of it is about my decision to retreat from the "strict Chinese immigrant" model.

Best of luck to you,

Amy Chua

(45) Well, the editor at the WSJ who made up the headline ...and her publisher must be happy at all the buzz and traffic this excerpt has gotten. Unfortunately, I think it comes at the expense of being able to get across the "nuance" she speaks of and definitely doesn't indicate that she has since retreated from the "strict Chinese immigrant" model we're all debating. Clearly it's because we're all expected to buy the book. I get it. Hit a nerve. Drive traffic to WSJ. Make her look evil. Penguin sells books. She gets a cut and gets to say she was just kidding about being a superior Chinese mother. Everyone profits there. Is that the play? Whatever.

(46)

(b) Yishan Wong

<http://www.quora.com/Parenting/Is-Amy-Chua-right-when-she-explains-Why-Chinese-Mothers-Are-Superior-in-an-op-ed-in-the-Wall-Street-Journal>

I have a 3-year-old and 1-year-old. The parent depicted in Amy Chua's WSJ excerpt (apparently just a provocative excerpt intended to drive sales of the book; see Christine Lu's answer) is the parental equivalent of a demanding, yet incompetent executive or manager. Such people understand that high standards and pushing your employees (or children) are necessary, but are totally at a loss about how to do it without breaking down human morale in the process. (47) Such methods lead to short-term performance gains but no long-term success. I've known managers like this, who excoriate and belittle their underlings in an attempt to "motivate" them, and their people will certainly move forward, but always only to avoid further punishment. However, it never results in long-term greatness. Treating children in the same way has similar results.

(48) I am also a child that is the envy of my parents' friends – "Carnegie-Mellon! Director of Engineering at Facebook! He plays the piano so well! Two grandchildren!" By the time my parents'

friends got around to asking them if I was considering going to work for Google, the answer they got was that Google was already passé and I was on to the next great thing, a company they'd not yet heard of. By now I look like a genius, and when Facebook IPOs, there's a possibility that I will do pretty well by Chinese parent standards.

(49) I had similar experiences with my mother when I was learning piano. She would sit with me for hours, correcting every little mistake I would make and pressing me repeatedly to get the song right. It was terrible and oppressive. Eventually I would perform to her satisfaction, and after years passed I attained a near-concert-pianist level of piano talent. I was the envy of other Chinese parents, who would admiringly ask my mom who my piano teacher was. However, my talent can only be described as robotic – my ability to play the piano is restricted solely to pure technical mimicry, devoid of any emotion. (50) At one point, I attended a “piano camp” with other equally talented white students, and what struck me is that those students actually practiced for hours because they loved music, and genuinely practiced for hour after exhausting hour because they couldn't get enough of the emotional expression that piano afforded them. Piano held none of that for me – through rote practice, I had simply acquired the ability to simulate true talent – when I had to begin adding subtle pauses and fermatas to my playing to indicate emotional expression, I would simply do so as instructed – and enough to fool the judges in the various piano competitions into which I would occasionally be entered. I won some of those competitions, again to the envy of other Chinese parents.

(51) Today, the emotionally draining oppression of 11 years of piano training has had a remarkably tragic effect: I can no longer play the piano without almost immediately feeling a sensation of impotent rage and frustration every time I make a small error (which happens all the time when you are trying out something new). Worse, the association of this feeling with music in general has made it so that I can't enjoy music to any deep degree – my appreciation of music extends only to light listening of pop songs in the car – despite years of technical training and knowledge of classical forms. After coming to this realization consciously a year ago, I've tried to overcome this by purchasing a keyboard (see [What is the best 88-key electronic piano available?](#)) and allowing myself to play “without obligation to getting it correct.” I tried in vain for a few weeks and then the novelty of the keyboard wore off; today the keyboard sits unused in our living room.

(52) My mother was similarly overbearing when it came to teaching me Chinese. Today my technical grounding in understanding spoken Chinese is pretty good, and in a pinch I can speak Mandarin without much of an accent. However, I have an extremely strong mental block against doing so – I will almost never do it voluntarily or for fun in conversation; when hanging out with other ethnic Chinese people I will speak in English and (perhaps more concerningly), I have a strange psychological aversion to speaking in Chinese to my own children, despite even the exhortations of my wife that doing so would be good for them.

(53) In contrast, my parents were relatively restrictive and discouraging of my spending time on the computer and playing video games. Video games were restricted only to the weekends, and spending a lot of time on the computer was discouraged and generally thought of as an indulgence. As I became a little older, it seemed to become apparent to them that maybe computer programming was actually a viable career path, so in my early teen years my dad made some minimal efforts to encourage me by buying me a couple programming books, but otherwise still left me alone and occasionally continued to frown at how often I was just using the computer to play games. Being on the computer was one of my favorite ways to spend time, at least until I discovered girls.

(54) The rest is history – I went to Carnegie-Mellon for computer science, finally being allowed to spend all the time I wanted on a computer, and luckily found my way into an industry where my passion is one that is pretty highly-paid.



I would characterize my parents' efforts as having been only halfway what Amy Chua describes: they pushed very strongly in a few areas (piano and Chinese), while doing a half-assed job in others (e.g. allowing me to have friends and dating, frowning vaguely at the computer). The result is that my life today is almost devoid of piano or other forms of music, as well as any actual speaking of Chinese, despite retaining high technical skill in both of those – e.g. when I was sent to China by Facebook with a couple of non-Chinese colleagues in 2008, I was able to converse with our native Chinese driver to get us to our hotel after we got lost. (55) In contrast, I developed considerable skill in computers and – especially compared to my Chinese peers – relationship-building, communication, and people-management skills. The fact that they were relatively liberal during my teen years in allowing me to have a social life (and by social life I mean “chasing girls and staying out late”) had a direct effect on developing my ability to communicate and connect with people, including later my ability to manage people and organizations.

My parents today are proud of what I've become, and when their overbearing-parent friends ask what their secret was, they proudly “brag” that it was because they didn't push me too hard and let me do my own thing. I've avoided speaking to them about the piano or Chinese thing.

(56) What I see among other Chinese children who I was raised alongside or who I see now in workplaces today is that this method of Chinese parenting is great at producing skilled and compliant knowledge workers, but it utterly fails to produce children who can achieve greatness, remake industries, or come up with disruptive innovation. All the Chinese-American people I know who now perform at the highest levels – both creatively and technically – either achieved this without being driven to it by their parents (ask Niniane Wang about her upbringing) or in rebellion against the paths their parents set out for them. The others – the skilled and compliant mediocre – make superb employees for the truly great, and if that is what their parents consider “successful,” then that's exactly what they'll get.

Postscript: I am currently not speaking to my parents (for reasons only semi-related and more complex than the things described in this answer). This might change, but it's indicative of the sort of relationship I have now with them.

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### **Why I love my strict Chinese mom**

The teenager at the center of NYC's hottest controversy speaks out in defense of her mother

By Sophia Chua-Rubinfeld    Reported by Mandy Stadtmiller

Posted: 11:29 PM, January 17, 2011    Last Updated: 11:36 AM, January 18, 2011

[http://www.nypost.com/p/entertainment/why\\_love\\_my\\_strict\\_chinese\\_mom\\_uUvfmLcA5eteY0u2KXt7hM/1](http://www.nypost.com/p/entertainment/why_love_my_strict_chinese_mom_uUvfmLcA5eteY0u2KXt7hM/1)

Everybody's talking about the birthday cards we once made for you, which you rejected because they weren't good enough. Funny how some people are convinced that Lulu and I are scarred for life. Maybe if I had poured my heart into it, I would have been upset. But let's face it: The card was feeble, and I was busted. It took me 30 seconds; I didn't even sharpen the pencil. That's why, when you rejected it, I didn't feel you were rejecting me. If I actually tried my best at something, you'd never throw it back in my face.

(58) I remember walking on stage for a piano competition. I was so nervous, and you whispered, “Soso, you worked as hard as you could. It doesn't matter how you do.”

Everybody seems to think art is spontaneous. But Tiger Mom, you taught me that even creativity takes effort. I guess I was a little different from other kids in grade school, but who says that's a bad thing? Maybe I was just lucky to have nice friends. They used to put notes in my backpack that said "Good luck at the competition tomorrow! You'll be great!" They came to my piano recitals – mostly for the dumplings you made afterwards – and I started crying when I heard them yelling "bravo!" at Carnegie Hall.

(59) When I got to high school, you realized it was time to let me grow up a little. All the girls started wearing makeup in ninth grade. I walked to CVS to buy some and taught myself how to use it. It wasn't a big deal. You were surprised when I came down to dinner wearing eyeliner, but you didn't mind. You let me have that rite of passage.

Another criticism I keep hearing is that you're somehow promoting tunnel vision, but you and Daddy taught me to pursue knowledge for its own sake. In junior year, I signed myself up for a military-history elective (yes, you let me take lots of classes besides math and physics). (60) One of our assignments was to interview someone who had experienced war. I knew I could get a good grade interviewing my grandparents, whose childhood stories about World War II I'd heard a thousand times. I mentioned it to you, and you said, "Sophia, this is an opportunity to learn something new. You're taking the easy way out." You were right, Tiger Mom. In the end, I interviewed a terrifying Israeli paratrooper whose story changed my outlook on life. I owe that experience to you.

There's one more thing: I think the desire to live a meaningful life is universal. To some people, it's working toward a goal. To others, it's enjoying every minute of every day. (61) So what does it really mean to live life to the fullest? Maybe striving to win a Nobel Prize and going skydiving are just two sides of the same coin. To me, it's not about achievement or self-gratification. It's about knowing that you've pushed yourself, body and mind, to the limits of your own potential. You feel it when you're sprinting, and when the piano piece you've practiced for hours finally comes to life beneath your fingertips. You feel it when you encounter a life-changing idea, and when you do something on your own that you never thought you could. If I died tomorrow, I would die feeling I've lived my whole life at 110 percent.

And for that, Tiger Mom, thank you.

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4.

(62)

### **Amy Chua Is a Wimp**

By DAVID BROOKS Op-Ed Columnist

Published: January 17, 2011

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/18/opinion/18brooks.html>

Sometime early last week, a large slice of educated America decided that Amy Chua is a menace to society. Chua, as you probably know, is the Yale professor who has written a bracing critique of what she considers the weak, cuddling American parenting style.

Josh Haner/The New York Times

(63) Chua didn't let her own girls go out on play dates or sleepovers. She didn't let them watch TV or play video games or take part in garbage activities like crafts. Once, one of her daughters came in second to a Korean kid in a math competition, so Chua made the girl do 2,000 math

problems a night until she regained her supremacy. Once, her daughters gave her birthday cards of insufficient quality. Chua rejected them and demanded new cards. Once, she threatened to burn all of one of her daughter's stuffed animals unless she played a piece of music perfectly.

As a result, Chua's daughters get straight As and have won a series of musical competitions.

**(64)** In her book, "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother," Chua delivers a broadside against American parenting even as she mocks herself for her own extreme "Chinese" style. She says American parents lack authority and produce entitled children who aren't forced to live up to their abilities.

**(65)** The furious denunciations began flooding my in-box a week ago. Chua plays into America's fear of national decline. Here's a Chinese parent working really hard (and, by the way, there are a billion more of her) and her kids are going to crush ours. Furthermore (and this Chua doesn't appreciate), she is not really rebelling against American-style parenting; she is the logical extension of the prevailing elite practices. She does everything over-pressuring upper-middle-class parents are doing. She's just hard core.

**(66)** Her critics echoed the familiar themes. Her kids can't possibly be happy or truly creative. They'll grow up skilled and compliant but without the audacity to be great. She's destroying their love for music. There's a reason Asian-American women between the ages of 15 and 24 have such high suicide rates.

**(67)** I have the opposite problem with Chua. I believe she's coddling her children. She's protecting them from the most intellectually demanding activities because she doesn't understand what's cognitively difficult and what isn't.

**(68)** Practicing a piece of music for four hours requires focused attention, but it is nowhere near as cognitively demanding as a sleepover with 14-year-old girls. Managing status rivalries, negotiating group dynamics, understanding social norms, navigating the distinction between self and group – these and other social tests impose cognitive demands that blow away any intense tutoring session or a class at Yale.

**(69)** Yet mastering these arduous skills is at the very essence of achievement. Most people work in groups. We do this because groups are much more efficient at solving problems than individuals (swimmers are often motivated to have their best times as part of relay teams, not in individual events). Moreover, the performance of a group does not correlate well with the average I.Q. of the group or even with the I.Q.'s of the smartest members.

**(70)** Researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Carnegie Mellon have found that groups have a high collective intelligence when members of a group are good at reading each others' emotions – when they take turns speaking, when the inputs from each member are managed fluidly, when they detect each others' inclinations and strengths.

**(71)** Participating in a well-functioning group is really hard. It requires the ability to trust people outside your kinship circle, read intonations and moods, understand how the psychological pieces each person brings to the room can and cannot fit together.

**(72)** This skill set is not taught formally, but it is imparted through arduous experiences. These are exactly the kinds of difficult experiences Chua shelters her children from by making them rush home to hit the homework table.

**(73)** Chua would do better to see the classroom as a cognitive break from the truly arduous

tests of childhood. Where do they learn how to manage people? Where do they learn to construct and manipulate metaphors? Where do they learn to perceive details of a scene the way a hunter reads a landscape? Where do they learn how to detect their own shortcomings? Where do they learn how to put themselves in others' minds and anticipate others' reactions?

These and a million other skills are imparted by the informal maturity process and are not developed if formal learning monopolizes a child's time.

**(74)** So I'm not against the way Chua pushes her daughters. And I loved her book as a courageous and thought-provoking read. It's also more supple than her critics let on. I just wish she wasn't so soft and indulgent. I wish she recognized that in some important ways the school cafeteria is more intellectually demanding than the library. And I hope her daughters grow up to write their own books, and maybe learn the skills to better anticipate how theirs will be received.

