

Tiger Moms: Is Tough Parenting Really the Answer?

It was the "Little White Donkey" incident that pushed many readers over the edge. That's the name of the piano tune that Amy Chua, Yale law professor and self-described "tiger mother," forced her 7-year-old daughter Lulu to practice for hours on end — "right through dinner into the night," with no breaks for water or even the bathroom, until at last Lulu learned to play the piece. For other readers, it was Chua calling her older daughter Sophia "garbage" after the girl behaved disrespectfully — the same thing Chua had been called as a child by her strict Chinese father.

Chua's reports from the trenches of authoritarian parenthood are indeed disconcerting, even shocking, in their candid admission of maternal ruthlessness. Her book is a *Mommie Dearest* for the age of the memoir, when we tell tales on ourselves instead of our relatives. But there's something else behind the intense reaction to *Tiger Mother*, which has shot to the top of best-seller lists even as it's been denounced on the airwaves and the Internet. Though Chua was born and raised in the U.S., her invocation of what she describes as traditional "Chinese parenting" has hit hard at a national sore spot: our fears about losing ground to China and other rising powers and about adequately preparing our children to survive in the global economy. Her stories of never accepting a grade lower than an A, of insisting on hours of math and spelling drills and piano and violin practice each day (weekends and vacations included), of not allowing playdates or sleepovers or television or computer games or even school plays, for goodness' sake, have left many readers outraged but also defensive. The tiger mother's cubs are being raised to rule the world, the book clearly implies, while the offspring of "weak-willed," "indulgent" Westerners are growing up ill equipped to compete in a fierce global marketplace.

One of those permissive American parents is Chua's husband, Jed Rubenfeld (also a professor at Yale Law School). He makes the occasional cameo appearance in *Tiger Mother*, cast as the tenderhearted foil to Chua's merciless taskmaster. When Rubenfeld protested Chua's harangues over "The Little White Donkey," for instance, Chua informed him that his older daughter Sophia could play the piece when she was Lulu's age. Sophia and Lulu are different people, Rubenfeld remonstrated reasonably. "Oh, no, not this," Chua shot back, adopting a mocking tone: "Everyone is special in their special own way. Even losers are special in their own special way." By Time Magazine

10 Questions for Final Discussion

- 1. Do you agree this method of education? Why or why not?**
- 2. If you were her child, were you against her or not?**
- 3. What methods do your parents educate you?**
- 4. If you are father or mother now, what methods will you teach your children?**
- 5. Do you think the two daughters will become what kinds of people in the future?**
- 6. Do you think they will raise their children with the same strict standards their mother applied to them?**
- 7. According to Chua, her parenting method is typical of Chinese families. Is their method—with its strict demands for high achievement—superior to that of Western parents?**
- 8. What are your opinions about the Western and the Eastern education?**
- 9. Amy Chua thinks this way will make her children much more competitive. Why does she think that? Do you think that her strict parenting method is to avoid racial discrimination?**
- 10. Part of Chua's rationale is that she understands what all Chinese parents understand: "that nothing is fun until you're good at it." Do you agree?**