

Tiger mom, tiger mom, burning bright

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Tiger Moms Amy Chua, the famous “ Tiger Mom” author, has returned to the news with her latest book, *The Triple Package: How Three Unlikely Traits Explain the Rise and Fall of Cultural Groups in America*. In 2011, Amy Chua’s first book, *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, generated a massive and impassioned response, both negative and positive. I remember reading the New York Times excerpt *Battle Hymn*, entitled “ Why Chinese Mothers are Superior,” and feeling horrified by Chua’s strict parenting style.

I put down the paper and breathed a sigh of relief. I had dodged a bullet: my “ soft’ Western parents let me quit after-school activities, have play dates, and would celebrate A- grades, none of which are permitted by Tiger Mothers. And they would never berate me verbally for a disappointing grade the way a Tiger mom does. Tiger Parents insist that their kids are never anything but the best, and will go to any lengths to ensure their children rise above the rest. Today, I know enough to want a mother who would have forced me to practice my piano piece until I perfected it, allowing me the chance to play in Carnegie Hall. I want a mother who would have forced me to pen a novel by the age of seventeen, like Mary Shelley.

I want a mother who would have banned the watching of Netflix for hours, insisting that I use the time to learn how to decode gene sequences. Like Suzy Lee Weiss, the much-hated and much-lauded author of “ To (All) the Colleges that Rejected Me”, I wish I had had a Tiger Mom. Having a Tiger Mom would guarantee my resume would be filled with awards, competition wins, and internships. I would have a perfect GPA and a transcript with only AP and Honors classes. But, my parents do not follow Chua’s prescribed parenting style.

However, according to Chua's latest book, my family is a part of a select "superior" cultural group. The Triple Package lists eight cultural groups that are "successful". These cultural groups are "superior" due to three factors they share in common: a superiority complex, insecurity, and impulse control. When I heard that the beloved Tiger Mom had labeled a cultural group I identified with as "superior", I balked. Why? Because if I am part of this so-called "superior group", why was I so average? Shouldn't I be just as accomplished as Chua's daughters? And suddenly, I had to face the fact that my mediocrity was simply due to me. It certainly helps to have a steely Tiger Mom steering you through the first part of life because let's face it: kids don't know what they want or what they will want.

But by seventh or eighth grade most kids can see that we live in a system that rewards hard work, brains and sacrifice. Whether ours moms are tigers or tiger lilies it becomes up to each one of us to make our decision: practice that scale or take a snooze? No cultural group holds a monopoly on this basic truth. Sure, the kids with tiger moms have an advantage, a big advantage...if they don't have nervous breakdowns. But so do kids with rich parents or kids with high IQ's or great eye hand coordination. Who said life is fair? Hard work can make it a whole lot fairer.

And deciding to work hard is up to each one of us.