

Original Paper

Tiger Parenting and its Influence on American High School Students

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Abstract

This paper explores the impact of Tiger Parenting on the academic performance and mental health of high school students. First, we will define what Tiger Parenting is and how it fits into the conventional parenting style categories. Then, the research findings related to the development of the Tiger Parenting style will be discussed. The results were unexpected. Contrary to what the West portrays, Tiger Parenting is actually not an authoritarian parenting style. Moreover, it does not work with any family in non-Asian cultures due to cultural reasons.

Keywords

Tiger Parenting, influence, high school students, academic performance, mental health

Tiger Parenting, a term coined by Amy Chua in her influential book “Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother,” represents a parenting style that has garnered significant attention and sparked countless debates. Rooted in traditional Eastern cultural values, this approach is characterized by its emphasis on strict discipline, high expectations, and an unwavering focus on academic and extracurricular achievements. For instance, parents set rigorous standards for their children, demanding nothing less than perfection in academics, music, sports, or any pursuit deemed worthy of investment. Tiger parents firmly believe that by pushing their children to the limits and instilling relentless work ethic and perseverance, they can ensure their children’s success and secure a prosperous future. Central to Tiger Parenting is the notion that excellence is not achieved through innate talent alone but is instead the result of hard work and dedication. They closely monitor their children’s progress, intervene when necessary, and provide relentless support to ensure their offspring consistently perform at the highest level (Guarnotta & Saleh, 2023).

While the intentions behind Tiger Parenting may stem from a genuine desire for parents to see their children succeed, critics argue that this approach can have detrimental effects on a child’s emotional well-being and overall development (Guarnotta & Saleh, 2023). The intense pressure placed on children

to meet their parents' expectations can lead to feelings of anxiety, stress, and low self-esteem (Tiger Parents, 2020). Critics argue that the relentless pursuit of achievement may overshadow a child's need for autonomy, creativity, and personal growth, ultimately stifling their individuality (What Is "Tiger" Parenting?, n.d.).

Proponents of Tiger Parenting argue that the high standards and discipline instilled by this approach can shape children into resilient, self-disciplined individuals with a strong work ethic and the ability to navigate challenging situations (Guarnotta & Saleh, 2023). These psychologists contend that the intense focus on education and extracurricular activities cultivates skills that can lead to future success and opportunities (What Is "Tiger" Parenting?, n.d.).

To understand Tiger Parenting in context, it is instructive to consider the four conventional parenting styles proposed by Western psychologists (Guarnotta & Saleh, 2023). There are authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and negligent; Tiger Parenting matches the description of an authoritarian parenting style. (Baumrind 19xx) Given the focus of this paper is on comparing and contrasting Tiger Parenting, it is also essential to have general background knowledge of other parenting styles (Tiger Parents, 2020). Most researchers conceived the authoritative style as the best style since it is both demanding and positive (Steinberg et al., 1992). The parents set explicit expectations and rules for their children but also provide explanations and reasoning behind them; hence, the children would be less inclined to rebel because they understand their parents' intentions.

Authoritative parents are open to communication, actively listen to their children's concerns, and take their feelings into account. Discipline in authoritative parenting is fair and consistent, focusing on teaching and guiding rather than punitive measures. This style promotes a healthy balance between control and warmth, leading to children who are more self-reliant, confident, and socially competent. The authoritarian parenting style, on the other hand, is less supportive of the children. The parents are highly demanding and controlling, setting strict rules and high expectations for their children. Obedience without questioning and often the use of punishment to enforce rules is the backbone structure of authoritarian parenting. Communication tends to be one-sided, with little room for open dialogue or negotiation. While these parents may be involved in their children's lives, they often lack emotional warmth and empathy. The permissive and indulgent parenting style emphasizes setting no rules for children and letting them explore on their own. The parents appear to be friends instead of people who have more authority to guide the child, providing support as needed. While this style may promote a positive parent-child relationship, children raised in permissive environments may struggle with self-control and have difficulty respecting authority figures. Moreover, they can be overly self-confident—lastly, the indulgent/ neglectful parenting style. Uninvolved parents are low in both demandingness and responsiveness. They are disengaged and emotionally detached from their children's lives, providing minimal supervision, guidance, or emotional support. Children raised by uninvolved parents may experience adverse outcomes, such as emotional and behavioral problems, due to the lack of parental involvement and care (Steinberg et al., 1992).

However, we should be aware not to generalize every Tiger parent to be authoritarian due to the fact that some Tiger parents may be leaning towards authoritative as the parents are not as cold as the authoritarian parents. Instead, Tiger Parenting really is this demanding family system that can be harsh on the children to quite some extent while having warm, solid support behind their backs. It can be seen in how Asian society's ideal is shaped to be more connected as a community, and family is just a mini-society that encapsulates many larger social norms (How Do Individualistic Cultures Influence Behavior?, n.d.). Tiger Parenting should be seen as an authoritative parenting style that has higher standards for the children.

Nonetheless, it only partially addresses the question of many future parents: Is tiger parenting suitable for my family? Or in what context does Tiger Parenting work? Hence, noticing the nuanced role cultural differences can play in parenting is a pivotal step to fully unlocking the mysteries of this foreign parenting style.

Firstly, cultural differences play a significant role in shaping parenting styles. Eastern cultures, such as those in China and South Korea, have traditionally placed a strong emphasis on academic achievement and respect for authority since children of a family are often seen as the future of the family bloodline and can also reflect a family's teachings, which can induce the social, economic class of families. Tiger Parenting aligns with these values, as it aims to prepare children for competitive environments and reinforce the importance of discipline and hard work. However, in non-Asian cultures, there is often a greater emphasis on individualism, creativity, and personal exploration. The rigid structure and intense pressure of Tiger Parenting may conflict with the values of self-expression, autonomy, and well-rounded development that many non-Asian families prioritize. Moreover, even given the context of an American education system, many Asian students are still striving for a high GPA instead of chasing after personal interests or hobbies (Kim et al., 2013).

Secondly, the contextual environment in which parenting occurs is crucial. Different from cultural differences, contextual environment focuses more on the physical environments such as schools and neighborhoods. Contextual environment refers to the environment in which parenting actions are carried out (Smollar & Youniss, 1989). Educational systems, societal expectations, and opportunities for success vary across different countries and regions. Tiger Parenting may be well-suited to societies with highly competitive educational systems, where academic achievements are heavily emphasized and can have a direct impact on a child's future prospects. In contrast, in societies with more diverse measures of success, such as a focus on creativity, innovation, or individual talents, Tiger Parenting's singular focus on academics may be perceived as limiting and fail to prepare children for a broader range of opportunities. Lastly, Asians are rather a minority ethnic group in America, 5% of the high school population on average, compared to other counterparts, such as Hispanics, 30% of the high school population on average, which results in this intricate dynamic of interaction between the newer immigrant families and society (Coe - Racial/Ethnic Enrollment in Public Schools, n.d.).

Many Asian immigrants arrived in America to search for opportunities. Perhaps those early immigrants

were not from privileged backgrounds, as there is no reason for them to abandon their wealth and restart in a foreign country. Following this reasoning and connecting with history, the first immigrants were highly hardworking and often submitted to cheap labor; at the peak of immigration, about 9,000 to 12,000 Chinese worked for the Central Pacific in some of the dirtiest and most dangerous jobs (The First Asian Americans: Asian-Nation: Asian American History, Demographics, & Issues, n.d.). Building wealth and social status on top of the fundamentals of the first generation, the second-generation Asian people started to become one of the prominent races of people who have accumulated a considerable amount of wealth a significant increase in personal income in most Asian ethnic groups (Chen, 2019). Then, the third generation is born into privilege. Looking at the trend of this generation, it seems like a reasonable induction can be made that Asians are going to get wealthier (Chen, 2019). However, it might not be the case here as many people fear that the third generation will make the uprising trend take a downturn as they longer have to or know how to work hard like the first generation and second generations. This fits with Amy Chua's three-generation model: Her grandparents immigrated to the Philippines, where they became wealthy. Her parents immigrated to Boston so that her father could earn his Ph.D. at MIT; her father then became a professor at Purdue and Berkeley. Chua and her sisters represent the second, high-achieving generation. She worries that her daughters will not be high achievers since they were born into privilege, and she believes they will not have to work as hard as their grandparents or mom. Chua also worries that her daughters will be negatively influenced by their American peers, whom she perceives as spoiled children who talk back to their parents.

Lastly, the impact Tiger Parenting brings to adolescents' performance and growth has mixed views, with one side arguing Tiger Parenting is going overboard by adding unnecessary pressure on developing adolescents and the other side arguing the long-term benefit is greater than permissible parenting styles in Western families (Young et al., 1995).

Adolescent's degree of individuation can influence the response of parenting styles. The concept of individuation, which refers to the process by which adolescents establish their self-identity while maintaining connections with their parents, is a necessary transitional period that every adolescent has to face for the purpose of developing a healthy self-identity. It allows adolescents to develop their unique identities separate from their parents' identities while still relying on them for guidance and emotional support (Smollar & Youniss, 1989). The study has shown that the process of individuation involves a transformation in adolescents' perceptions of their parents, de-idealizing their parents as all-knowing and all-powerful figures but appreciating them as individuals with their own strengths and weaknesses.

Another study showed that the effects of parental support on adolescents' life satisfaction found that specific facets of parental support, such as intrinsic support, had a significant impact on the well-being of adolescents (Young et al., 1995). The study utilized a large sample of adolescents aged 12 to 16 and their parents, exploring the relationship between different types of parental support and children's perceptions of well-being. Intrinsic support, which encompasses genuine emotional support and encouragement, emerged as the most robust predictor of life satisfaction across all parent-child dyads. Interestingly, the

study found no differences based on the gender of the child or parent, highlighting the equal importance of intrinsic support from both mothers and fathers in predicting adolescent life satisfaction.

Another misconception of Tiger Parenting is its prevalence in Asian American households. A longitudinal study conducted with Chinese American families over an 8-year period explored various parenting profiles and their effects on adolescent adjustment (What Is “Tiger” Parenting?, n.d.). The study identified four distinct parenting profiles: supportive, easygoing, Tiger, and harsh parenting. The supportive profile correlates to authoritative parenting, and the harsh profile is authoritarian parenting. Contrary to the common perception, Tiger parenting was not the most prevalent profile in Chinese-American families. The most common parenting profile was supportive parenting, which was associated with the most positive developmental outcomes for adolescents. In comparison, the Tiger Parenting profile was linked to lower academic performance, decreased educational attainment, less sense of family obligation, more academic pressure, higher levels of depressive symptoms, and a greater sense of alienation in adolescents (Kim et al., 2013).

To conclude, Tiger Parenting, though controversial and seems popular, its effects and frequency in Asian households are exaggerated and overly advertised. Tiger Parenting, in essence, is the Asian version of authoritative parenting, which defers from the conventional authoritative parenting style with a higher demand. The reason Tiger Parenting works better in Asian households is due to the unconditional support and love the parents offer to the children, which is less frequently seen in Western households where children are encouraged to explore the world on their own. As studies and surveys all point to Tiger Parenting may bring beneficial outcomes in the short run, problems may surface in the long run. Moreover, Tiger Parenting is overall performing less well than supportive parenting, which is also adopted by most Asian households (contrary to conventional beliefs), as supportive parenting would not negatively affect the mental health of adolescents and instead cultivate an environment that is healthy and encouraging for the adolescents to reach their full potential.

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