

Is there a "Tiger Mother" Effect? Time Use Across Ethnic Groups

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Although 2011 is officially the "Year of the Rabbit" on the Chinese calendar, it might become better known as the "Year of the Tiger Mother." In early January, *The Wall Street Journal* published an article by Amy Chua entitled "Why Chinese Mothers are Superior," which summarized her new book, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. The article and book set off a wave of commentary about Chua's extreme parenting approach, reaching even as far as the Davos summit where Larry Summers commented on the debate.

Chua, a Yale law professor, brought up her daughters in the "traditional Chinese" way, featuring strict discipline and an emphasis on academic success above all else. While she required her daughters to spend hours studying and practicing piano or violin, she prohibited them from watching TV, playing the computer, and engaging in play dates and sleepovers.

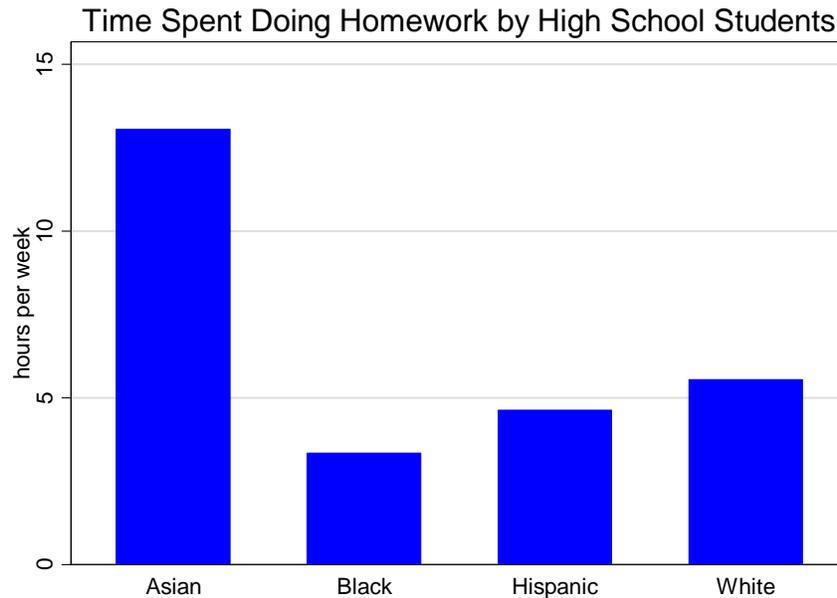
Chua's book has struck a nerve because of the stereotype of Asian academic success. The most recent academic test scores from the Program for International Student Assessment show that four of the five top scoring countries are Asian countries (Finland is the non-Asian exception). In California, Asians represent 12 percent of high school graduates, but 35 percent of admissions to the University of California. They represent 49 percent of undergraduate admissions at UCSD.

The question that naturally arises is whether Asian parenting is the source of this academic success. Do Asian children spend more time studying and practicing music than children of other ethnic groups? Do Asian parents spend more time pushing their children to academic success? To answer these questions, I analyzed detailed data from the *American Time Use Survey*. This U.S. government survey measures the time use of thousands of individuals from 2003 to 2009 based on time diaries, which are considered the most accurate way to measure time use. It includes data on individuals ages 15 and older, so I concentrate on teen time use and parent time use.

Figure 1 shows that Asian high school students indeed spend more time studying and doing homework. The bars show average weekly hours spent on studying and homework by full-time high school students, averaged over the entire year. The average (non-Hispanic) White student spends five-and-one-half hours per week, and Hispanic and (non-Hispanic) Black students spend even less. In contrast, the average Asian student spends a whopping 13 hours per week (and recall that this is averaged over summer vacation times as well!). Moreover, the differences become greater if the sample is limited to children who have at least one parent with a college degree. Thus, the educational level of their parents cannot explain the large differences. These differences

in time spent studying mirror differences between the U.S. and Asian countries. For example, in a 1991 *Journal of Economic Literature* paper, Juster and Stafford showed that Japanese high school students spent significantly more time studying than American students.

Figure 1



If Asian students are spending so much more time studying, what are they giving up? Table 1 shows time spent in a number of other activities. It appears that the average Asian high school student is not like Amy Chua's daughters in all aspects. In particular, they spend no more time practicing and performing music, about the same amount of time watching TV, and they spend more time playing on the computer. However, Asians do spend less time on sports and socializing than any of the other ethnic groups. The biggest difference, though, is in time spent working at a job, where White students spend 5.8 hours per week on average and Asian students spend only 2.4 hours. Thus, relative to Whites, Asians appear to be spending less time socializing, playing sports, doing chores, and working, but spend more time studying and playing on the computer.

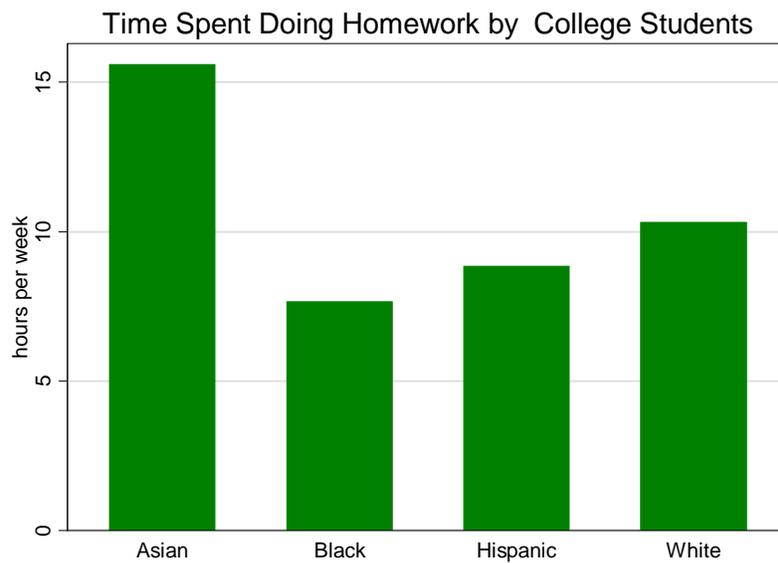
Do these Asian students "coast" on studying once they escape the grips of their "Tiger Moms?" To answer this question, Figure 2 shows study time by full-time college students. The gap is not so extreme in college, but it is still the case that Asian students spend more time studying - more than 15 hours per week in comparison with White students who spend a little over 10 hours per week, and with Black and Hispanic students who spend even less time.

Table 1
Average Hours Per Week Spent by High School Students

Activity	Asian	White	Black	Hispanic
Studying	13.0*	5.6	3.4*	4.6*
Music practice and performance	1.3	1.3	1.1	1.0*
TV watching	13.6	13.7	17.6*	15.6*
Computer (games and other leisure use)	8.5*	5.6	5.0	4.7
Sports	3.4*	5.1	6.0	4.8
Socializing	5.2*	7.7	7.5	8.1
Household chores	4.6	5.9	4.4*	5.6
Work	2.4*	5.8	4.1*	3.1*

* indicates that the average is statistically different from that of Whites at the 5 percent level.

Figure 2



When I first read Amy Chua's *Wall Street Journal* article, I wondered "where does a Yale law professor find the time to engage in such extreme parenting?" My paper with Garey Ramey, "The Rug Rat Race," published by the Brookings Institution last year, chronicled the dramatic increase in time spent by educated parents on their children since the early 1990s. Even the average White college-educated parent spends a great amount of time spent caring for their children and managing their activities. Do Asian parents spend even more time?

Table 2 shows time spent by parents by ethnic group in education activities with their children, such as reading to them or helping with homework, as well as total time spent on childcare. These averages control for differences across groups in the number and age of children, education of the mother, and marital status. The numbers show that Asian mothers do spend more time in educational activities, but only half an hour a week more than White mothers. There is no difference in time spent on all childcare between White and Asian mothers, though both groups devote more time than Black and Hispanic mothers. Thus, these "Tiger Mothers" seem to be able to make their children spend much more time studying without having to spend more of their own time. Perhaps this is what "Chinese discipline" is all about.

Table 2
Average Hours Per Week Spent by Mothers

	Asian	White	Black	Hispanic
Educational activities with children	1.9*	1.5	1.3*	1.3*
All childcare	14.1	14.4	11.0*	11.3*

* indicates that the average is statistically different from that of Whites at the 5 percent level. These averages control for family composition, age and education of mother, and marital status.