

America's Answer to the Tiger Mother: How to Raise Successful, Happy Children

Carol Cooke

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Of those who have read Amy Chau's *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, many find themselves intrigued, yet also appalled, at what this one parent has done to "further" the potential success of her children. In *America's Answer to the Tiger Mother: How to Raise Successful, Happy Children*, career educator Carol Cooke outlines an approach that is almost diametrically opposed to Chau's.

Cooke questions the very meaning of Chau's "success" in child-rearing, but her book does not function as a compare-and-contrast with the original *Tiger Mother*. Rather, Cooke presents some fundamental basics for raising self-assured, well-adjusted, and kind children who will become proactive, thoughtful, and giving adults. Cooke's approach is understated and consistent, allowing parents ways to feel confident in their ability to contribute to their children's ongoing growth.

Cooke asserts that ineffective parenting has much to do with the decline she observes in the behavior and achievement levels of America's children. While not insensitive to the overwhelming demands placed on modern-day mothers, fathers, and alternative caregivers, she has serious concerns about the ongoing deterioration of effective parenting. She firmly believes that most adults today do not know how to be good parents and need training in the basics, and she even supports mandatory parenting education classes for all high school and/or college students. Cooke's experience, not only as a parent and grandparent but also as a classroom teacher and school administrator, has given her vast insight into what does and does not work when it comes to inspiring and teaching children. Many of the suggestions she offers are based on what she and other professional educators have found to be viable and useful methods.

There is nothing particularly controversial about most of what Cooke suggests. She supports teaching by example and encouraging children to set and achieve their own goals. That the Tiger Mother gives her children no choice, that she establishes *her* goals for her children, goes against every tenet of Cooke's parenting model.

According to Cooke, when children are given the proper guidance and taught to accept responsibility for their actions, they learn to set and achieve goals for themselves. This allows them to attain a greater sense of self-esteem and, ultimately, to find their own ways to be "useful, worthy and fulfilled" in their lives. When she notes studies showing a confirmed correlation between high self-esteem and both initiative and academic achievement, she is pointing to the long-term effects of *good* parenting, implying at the same time that less constructive parenting may lead to the exact opposite outcome.

America's Answer to the Tiger Mother is a well-written, straightforward summary of positive ideas about raising children. While much of the text is simply common sense, some of Cooke's theories may provide new food for thought for those struggling with parenthood in today's world. Others may find certain of her recommendations pedantic, but even they will come away with something new to consider. Overall, Cooke offers some fine advice for parents seeking to raise "successful" children, whatever their definition of success may be.

CHERYL HIBBARD (December 4, 2012)

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