



LAW BLOG

‘Tiger Mom’ a ‘Kitten Law Professor’

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0 COMMENTS

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Amy Chua PHOTO: THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Amy Chua is famous for her iron-fisted parenting approach. But as a Yale University law professor, “Tiger Mom” is much less ferocious.

A recent interview she gave suggests that when it comes to interacting with her students, she’s more teddy bear than tiger.

Prof. Chua’s rules for her two daughters and her insistence on the superiority of Chinese parenting unleashed a firestorm of debate a few years ago. Earlier this year, she drew upon her expertise in contract law when her children, now in their early 20s, wanted to live in her Manhattan pied-à-terre for the summer while working in New York City.

A 1987 graduate of Harvard Law School, Prof. Chua spent four years working on international transactions for a Wall Street law firm before moving to academia: first teaching at Duke and then joining Yale’s faculty in 2011.

The best-selling author recently discussed her teaching approach in an interview with Randy Maniloff, an insurance lawyer who writes legal commentary at Coverage Opinions:

Is Amy Chua the Tiger Law Professor? In a way, but not really, is how I’d characterize her answer. She’s a “tiger professor,” she tells me, in the sense that she holds her students to high standards. However, she is also widely-known at the law school for her friendly and nurturing nature, her office door is always open, she has students over to her house, takes them out for beer and frequently reminds them to go have fun and not be too hard on themselves....

So how can such a Jekyll and Hyde dichotomy exist? ... [B]y the time she gets her students at Yale, Chua explains, they’ve already had wonderful parents, the foundation has been laid, their values formed and self-motivation established. At this point, her students have already gotten all the gold stars. Now she wants them to stop being on the treadmill all the time and start thinking about the rest of their lives.

Mr. Maniloff also brings up an anecdote in J.D. Vance’s acclaimed memoir “Hillbilly Elegy” about his days as a Yale Law student.

Mr. Vance wrote that Prof. Chua discouraged him from pursuing a clerkship with a federal judge because the judge “was demanding to the extreme” and “[h]is clerks didn’t take a single day off for an entire year.”

Mr. Maniloff finds the story hard to reconcile with Prof. Chua’s tigrine reputation:

I asked him to comment on the seeming oddity...Vance’s response: “I don’t think it’s that odd. Amy encouraged her students to work hard, and she wasn’t afraid to tell me to shape up or to put in long hours. But she also believed that I should be working hard for my own goals, not someone else’s. She wasn’t afraid of sending me to work for someone demanding, she was concerned that if I was going to work my butt off, I should do it in the service of something I was passionate about. And at the end of the day, I just wasn’t passionate about appellate law (and she knew it).”

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