

# Tiger mothers run risk of raising ethnic outcasts in pursuit of academic success

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For Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant parents and their children, success is equal to getting straight As, graduating from an elite university and pursuing an advanced degree. However, these narrow measures of success can make those who do not fulfil the strict aspirations feel like ethnic outliers, warn Jennifer Lee of UC Irvine in the US and Min Zhou of Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. Their findings are published in Springer's journal *Race and Social Problems*.

The researchers analyzed in-depth interviews of 82 adult [children](#) of Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants, who were randomly selected from the survey of Immigration and Intergenerational Mobility in Metropolitan Los Angeles. They found that the Asian [immigrant parents](#) see education as the only sure path to mobility and are open about their intensive efforts to groom their children through extra classes and tutors. They fear that their nonwhite children may experience discrimination in fields like writing, acting or art. Therefore they shepherd their children into more conservative professions such as medicine, law and engineering which require advanced degrees and higher education and skills.

Lee and Zhou say this trend will continue as long as Asian immigrant parents perceive that their children are susceptible to potential discrimination from their host society. They recommend that Asian immigrants should broaden their success frame, so that their children do not feel constricted in their occupational pursuits, or feel like outliers or failures when they do not achieve the same successes so often attributed

to their ethnicity.

The researchers believe that the decoupling of race and ethnicity from achievement can provide the space in which to acknowledge that most Asian Americans are not exceptional, and many do not achieve extraordinary educational and occupational outcomes. As a consequence, so-called "underachievers" may be less likely to reject their ethnic identities simply because they do not meet the perceived norm. Such efforts could also improve the self-esteem of Asian American college students, as well as the self-esteem of whites, blacks and Latinos who are often stereotyped by teachers and peers as being academic low-achievers compared to their Asian classmates.

"That Asian Americans are increasingly departing from the success frame, choosing alternate pathways, and achieving success on their own terms, should give Asian immigrant parents and their children confidence that broadening the success frame is not a route to failure. Instead, it may lead to uncharted and fulfilling pathways to success," says Lee.

**More information:** Lee, J. & Zhou, M. The Success Frame and Achievement Paradox: The Costs and Consequences for Asian Americans, *Race and Social Problems* [DOI: 10.1007/s12552-014-9112-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12552-014-9112-7)

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