



Alexander, Jessica Joelle, and Iben Dissing Sandhal. (2016). The Danish Way of Parenting: What the Happiest People in the World Know About Raising Confident, Capable Kids. New York: Tarcher Perigree.

Reviewed by: Julian Ward, MacEwan University

The book “The Danish Way of Parenting” by Jessica Joelle Alexander and Iben Dissing Sandahl is a sociological and psychological dissection that dives into the topic of the way of life of the Danes while asking the question of why they exceed the happiness scales internationally. Denmark is the one country that tends to lead globally in the worldwide pursuit of happiness. Unlike most countries, Denmark has an exceedingly higher satisfaction rate regarding livelihood, family life and raising children to be active members of today's society. In this book, Alexander and Sandahl acknowledge the generalizations made while backing up the arguments made with countless studies and research. Studies and research are quoted to dissect the background of Denmark's society in contrast to the West and provide examples.

In the book, Alexander and Sandahl introduce the Danes's parenting methods—specifically, the philosophy of Danish peoples: *The Danish Way*. Alexander and Sandahl set up background information regarding this philosophy, rooted in thirteen years of background studies and research about various aspects of the Danish lifestyle and how it differs from the western lifestyle. However, Alexander and Sandahl state that the book makes various generalizations and that it is not explicitly tied to everyone and everything Danish. Alexander and Sandahl discuss

how there is a set checklist for tips of play in regard to children in Denmark. One point to note is that Denmark mixes children of all ages during playtime, and they also let their children play unsupervised. A direct quote from this chapter that touches on this topic is, "The more they play, the more resilient and socially adept they will become" (pp. 30-31). This is an exciting point of view as this differs Denmark from the rest of the world; Alexander and Sandahl claim they have a less hands-on approach to parenting and tend to allow their children to play, learn, and explore on their own. Alexander and Sandahl further back this up by stating differences in praise of children and how parents must distinguish between the fixed mindset vs growth mindset that distinguishes Western parenting from Danish. Alexander and Sandahl further explain that the Western idea of boosting their children's confidence by praising them has been disproven through research by Stanford Psychologist Carol S. Dweck. Kids who are told they have natural smarts and talents will develop a fixed mindset, while on the other hand, kids who are told their skills and knowledge can develop over time have a growth mindset and tend to be more successful. And this is due to how kids attribute their intelligence to praise. Reaffirming children's efforts is far more beneficial than praising their natural talents. Allowing room for growth helps us prosper. Alexander and Sandahl present the different parenting styles highlighted by psychologists that can enable readers to identify and categorize themselves or their parents. These parenting styles included (1) Authoritarian, (2) Authoritative, (3) Permissive, and (4) Uninvolved (pp. 77-78). Many readers may stop, pause, and ask themselves which category they fall into, either as parents or children of parents. The author also dissects each one, breaking down the complex boundaries set and what the effects are of each parenting style. Although Alexander and Sandahl examine each parenting

style, they need to touch on specific examples for each rather than comparing and contrasting only a few techniques.

Another interesting point highlighted by Alexander and Sandahl in the book was how Danish teachers allow students to make the rules in the classroom collaboratively as a collective. This will enable students to feel as if they are not being governed by a more extensive body of authority, creating better-behaved students. Each class has a different make-up of rules; however, they are all collectively determined by the class and teacher. Alexander and Sandahl claim that not only is this a way for students to feel less pressure about the rules, but it also adds a sense of responsibility for them. Alexander provides an example from her daughter's school. In her daughter's class, there is a rule that if a student is talking too loudly, the whole class will get up and walk around the class while clapping their hands as punishment. Alexander describes how this allows the students responsible to feel some responsibility and accountability for their actions and see that they directly affect the rest of the class. Furthermore, students will feel exceptionally motivated to behave not only for the teacher's pleasure but for the rest of the class as well, as they share the consequences. In Denmark, the focus is not usually on how students or people can be punished for their actions but rather on how they can prevent the action in the first place, which is vastly different when it comes to the Western way of teaching and parenting.

Alexander and Sandahl describe the word "Hygge" and how it has been used by the Danish people to label their way of life. When it comes to traditions and gatherings, they all help each other out. The younger kids would play with the older ones, and everyone would help with meal preparation, setting tables, gathering activities and so on. This allowed everyone to feel like there

was not one sole person carrying the burden of the crowd and facilitating all the work and heavy load by their lonesome. This talking point in the book is a very interesting one as it really captures the way of life of the Danes and how it differs from our Western society. Alexander and Sandahl continue to describe that Hygge is not just about the gatherings either; it applies to individuals, with personal stress being left at the door, as there is plenty of time to worry about life and work outside of Hygge. This intertwines with Alexander and Sandahl's efforts to express how the Danes tend to practice much more empathy than the West. Empathy gets you far in terms of being more emotionally stable and understanding certain situations and family. It is much easier to navigate life with an empathetic perspective and not have expectations of people greater than yourself. When people focus on the reasons why? It is much easier to solve interpersonal issues when you put yourself in the lenses of others. Try to see things more significant than your own perspective. This mindset is highlighted to ease life's stressors and allow us to be more at peace with each other and ourselves. Overall, live a happier and healthier social life. Alexander and Sandahl further reaffirm this in the conclusion of the section: "The Individual is prized too, but without the interaction and support of others, none of us can truly be happy as a whole person" (p. 93).

Furthermore, to reassert the overall theme of the book about Danes leading a more prosperous life than the rest of the world, Alexander and Sandahl connect and highlight the relationship between social connection and health in the average individual throughout their lifespan, quoting a study done by researchers at Brigham Young University and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill:

Researchers at Brigham Young University and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill pooled data from 148 studies on health outcomes and their correlation to social relationships. When taken together, these studies, involving more than three hundred thousand men across the developed world, showed that people with poor social connections had an average 50 percent higher odds of dying earlier (about 7.5 years) than people with robust social ties (p. 97).

Permeated with knowledge and insight through various studies and research on multiple aspects of the Danish lifestyle in contrast to the West and other parts of the globe, Alexander and Sandahl accomplish the goal of proposing the ideas of the Danish lifestyle, showing how raising our children to be active members of society proves to be at the peak utilizing this frame of life while also fulfilling individual satisfaction to the maximum capacity through social interaction.

Although Alexander and Sandahl presented strong points regarding the lifestyle of Danish people, some generalizations throughout the book prohibit the prescription of the perspective portrayed universally. Still, these ideas are well articulated by Alexander and Sandahl in hopes that the audience will gain insight into how to live a healthier and happier lifestyle. Some disciplines that may benefit from reading this book are sociology, education, and psychology. I found "The Danish Way of Parenting" a fascinating book to read as it highlighted many aspects intertwined with sociological and psychological practices and theories that we see prevalent today. I recommend it to anyone interested in the topic of interpersonal relationships and children.