“One can feel a little more... at home”

- Creating and experience of *hygge* in Danish Corrections

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Agenda

- Conducting *Collaborative* Research
- The Danish Concept of *hygge* and Danish prison system
- Two Projects: Research Design and Data
- Creating and experience *hygge* in Danish corrections
- Conclusion
- Discussion
Conducting Collaborative Research
Do incarcerated people in Denmark create and experience hygge?

If so, what do they do to create hygge and how do they experience hyggen?
The Danish Concept of Hygge

- CULTURAL REFERENCE POINT
  - All Danes understand the meaning of hygge, even if they disagree on its attractiveness and legitimacy.

- THE CONCEPT
  - Hygge\(^1\) = noun. **PSYCHOLOGICAL** aspect such as a feeling, an emotion. Something nice, relaxed, safe and well known.
  - Hygge\(^2\) = verb. **ACTION** such as to do hygge.
  - Hyggelig = adjective. E.g. time where all your psychological and physical needs are balanced.

- ROUGH DEFINITION = Cozy

Dictionary of the Danish Language
Situation of penal institutions in Denmark

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Danish population on 1st January 2012</td>
<td>5,580,516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of inmates (including pretrial detainees)</td>
<td>3,829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison population rate per 100,000 population</td>
<td>68.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total capacity of penal institutions</td>
<td>4,121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison density per 100 places</td>
<td>92.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of staff</td>
<td>4,801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of staff working inside penal institutions</td>
<td>3,470</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Two Projects: Research Design & Data

- **PROJECT #1: Prison culture and prisonization**
  - Principal Investigator: Linda Kjaer Minke, University of Southern Denmark
  - PhD (2006/2007)
  - **Ethnography:** Incarcerated men (N240) in a closed Danish prison (N1090 hrs).
  - **Interviews:** Incarcerated men (N68), Ethnic Danes (54); Ethnic minorities (14)

- **PROJECT #2: Women’s Experiences with Food and Eating in Denmark**
  - Principal Investigator: Amy B. Smoyer, Yale School of Public Health
  - Funder: US Fulbright Scholar Program (2014)
  - **Ethnography:** Incarcerated women (N15) in a day area in an open prison in Denmark during 2014 (N12 hrs).
  - **Interviews:** Incarcerated women (N9). Open prison (6), Closed prison (2), Jail (1). Ethnic Danes (8), Ethnic minorities (1).

- Both projects included Informal Interviews & Conversation with Staff
Hygge as a Cultural Reference Point

- IN EVERYDAY PRISON LIFE, MALE PARTICIPANTS SPOKE ABOUT HYGGE

Fieldnotes (Project #1):

- Victor, Michael and David sit in Victor’s cell and watch American football on TV. Allan arrives to watch the game. Victor says: ‘This is hyggeligt!’

- George describes his cell as hyggelig with plants and photos of his family in golden frames in the windowsill. He jokes that he signals petit bourgeois. The only missing thing is an ‘Amager shelf’ and Christmas plates.

- Dennis speaks about a fellow inmate who has made a special light in his cell. He describes it as really hyggeligt.
Hygge as a Cultural Reference Point

IN THE WOMEN DAY CENTER, PARTICIPANTS ALSO SPOKE ABOUT HYGGE

Fieldnotes (Project #2):

- People from staff and administration say that the whole Women’s Center is about creating hygge.

- The Women’s Center atmosphere is about safety and recovery. Sleeping area and a dog makes it hyggeligt.

- How dinner is prepared and served constructs hyggeligt.
Hygge in Women’s Day Center, Møgelkær Prison
To Create and Experience *Hygge* in Prison

**ATMOSPHERE**

“It is the plants and aquariums and clothes on clothes lines and mats and shoe racks that make it *hyggeligt* (...) One can feel a little more ... home.” (P#1_17).

“It's for no use just to sit and cry. You have to make your cell *hyggelig* with photos and food.” (P#2_5).
To Create and Experience *Hygge* in Prison

- **TOGETHERNESS AND FOOD**

  “We cook together - or grandpa [nick name for an elderly prisoner] cooks because he is damn good at it. We peel potatoes and whatever else needs to be done. Sometimes we eat quickly and other times we sit and *hygger* and talk together.” (P#1_26)

  ”We can *hygge* in the cell and then we eat cholate and talk .” (P#2_1).
Never Real *Hyggeligt* in Prison

- **TENSE ATMOSPHERE**
  
  “He is nice and hyggelig, but I wouldn’t turn my back on him. I have to constantly be aware of him. When will he the attack?” (P#1_53).

- **LOSS OF SAFETY**
  
  “In prison you're never safe. You can’t count on anything, because you are in prison.”(P#2_4).
Conclusion

○ CREATION AND EXPERIENCE OF HYGGE
  ○ Among Ethnic Danish incarcerated people *hygge* is a cultural reference point.
  ○ Most Ethnic Danish incarcerated people try to create *hygge* in the same way as they do outside prison.
  ○ There are some small gender differences. It seems that incarcerated women prefer smaller spaces (cell) to experience *hygge* compared to incarcerated men, who construct this effect in larger spaces. Also incarcerated women tend to associate with fewer people compared to incarcerated men.
  ○ BUT both genders highlight togetherness as important to *hygge*. Both genders try to make a nice atmosphere by decorating their cell with personal effects and photos. Both gender associate good food with *hygge*.

○ PRISONS CAN NEVER BE COMPLETELY HYGGELIGE SPACES
Discussion

- **CULTURAL DIVERSITY & HYGGE**
  - If *hygge* is a unique cultural reference point among Ethnic Danish prisoners, do Ethnic minority prisoners experience *hygge*?
  - Is this an expectation they bring with them to prison (based on experiences in Denmark prior to incarceration), or something that they learn while incarcerated?
  - If Ethnic minority participants do not create, or seek to create, *hygge*, does this exclude them from social networks of Ethnic Danes? Does *hygge* operate to perpetuate exclusion and marginalization of ethnic minorities in prison?

- **LOSS OF HYGGE – A DANISH–SPECIFIC PAIN OF IMPRISONMENT?**