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Hygge, Hope and Higher Education: A Case Study of Denmark

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Abstract

Higher education institutions have been profoundly reshaped by processes associated with neoliberalism. In this chapter, Larsen outlines the ways in which Denmark has ushered in market-driven reforms to the Danish higher education system to enhance their institutional competitiveness over the past 30 years. Research on the impacts of neoliberal higher education reforms on faculty is reviewed and the author discusses her experiences (at a Canadian university) with market-driven, accountability reforms. The chapter shifts direction and provides the reader with an overview of the concept of *hygge*, an idealized Danish term that has connotations of coziness, safety, friendliness, and intimacy. Larsen recounts her experiences as a Canadian academic on sabbatical at a Danish university in 2017, illustrating the ways in which she experienced *hygge* in the Danish university setting. In the final section of the chapter, Larsen argues that *hygge* can be viewed as a retreat from the individualism, competition, market stratification and other challenges associated with neoliberalism. *Hygge* marks out the boundaries between the cold and heartless market-place and the warm and cozy home, and despite critiques that is instantiates exclusions, *hygge* offers hope to resist the alienation associated with neoliberalism and provide an alternative ethos for close and safe social relations within academia.

Introduction

Higher education institutions have been profoundly reshaped over the past 40 years or so by processes associated with neoliberalism. In a nutshell, neoliberalism as a theory means that the world and all social behaviour are viewed through the lens of the market. Harvey (2005) calls this "the financialization of everything" (p. 33). The idea of the superiority of the market has led to

the privatization of public assets, de-regulation of business and industry, and free trade. Through such processes, nation-states have been forced to transform themselves into national competition states. Rather than being undermined by the unavoidable forces of globalization, the competition state has become both the engine room and the steering mechanism of political globalization (Cerny, 1997, p. 274).

Although a strong welfare state, Denmark has not remained immune to the forces of neoliberal globalization. Since the 1990s, various Danish governments have implemented a range of new public management (NPM) reforms to the public sector. In this chapter, I begin by providing a brief background on general higher education neoliberal reforms before turning my attention towards the manifestation of neoliberalism through NPM reforms to Danish institutions of higher learning. The impact of these reforms constitutes the next part of the chapter in which I draw upon scholarly literature and my own experiences in a Canadian university to demonstrate the ways in which NPM reforms focusing on individualism, performance, competition and the commodification of higher education produce stress, anxiety and insecurity and shape academics as self-regulating and performing competitors in the global knowledge economy. Through these reforms, I argue, what it means to be an academic and engage in scholarly work is fundamentally changed.

The rest of the paper focuses on the Danish notion of *hygge*, broadly understood to be associated with cosiness, intimacy, friendship and warmth, and how I experienced *hygge* within a Danish University during my sabbatical in 2017. I contend that the concept of *hygge* and how it is made manifest in Danish universities provides an alternative hopeful ethos to the competitive, market-driven, individualistic focus of NPM reforms in higher education. Rather, *hygge* provides opportunities for individuals to gather together in secure and beautiful settings to engage in

friendly, relaxed and informal discussions. *Hygge* marks out the boundaries between the cold and heartless market-place and the warm and cozy place. Hope for our academic work lies in embracing the ideas associated with *hygge,* which offers academics hope to resist the alienation associated with neoliberalism and provide an alternative ethos for close, warm and safe social relations within higher education

Neoliberalism and higher education

Neoliberals claim that our well-being can best be advanced by allowing us to all be entrepreneurs in a society that has strong private rights, free markets and free trade. Central to neoliberal theory is the idea of competitive individualism. Individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market. Individuals are conceived as subjects that are active citizens as autonomous entrepreneurs, economically self-interested, and rational decision makers who are the best judges of their own interests and needs. In addition to creating conditions for profitable capital accumulation in global markets, the state's role is to facilitate conditions for the development of such entrepreneurial individuals (Harvey 2005; Olssen & Peters, 2005).

One of the ways states have done this is through market-oriented reforms to higher education, a response to the so-called panacea of market capitalism. To promote national economic prosperity, higher education institutions (HEIs) and schools are reformed so that they contribute to economic competitiveness (Wright & Ørberg 2018). Such reforms are broadly characterized as 'new public management' (NPM) reforms. NPM is broadly related to the massification of higher education and simultaneous rise of knowledge economy discourses since the early 70s when Daniel Bell (1973) suggested that knowledge will replace energy as the primary resource of the emerging society. The central commodity of the new global economy would therefore be

'knowledge' and competition lay in transforming knowledge into innovative products or services for profit. Investments in higher education are supposed to lead to economic competitiveness among HEIs nationally and internationally, which is exemplified by a reconfiguring of students as consumers and HEIs as producers of human capital (Neave 2012).

Thus, the focus shifts from society or community to the individual within HEIs. The individual student is to shape herself as an entrepreneurial actor, becoming responsible for her own future. "In this way the competition state pushes responsibility onto individuals, who must develop and deploy their personal capital, and deflects attention from structural factors, including lack of employment opportunities, a congested local labour market and a global auction for knowledge workers" (Wright & Ørberg 2018, p. 84). Higher education reforms based on competition, effectiveness and efficiency, and individualism reflect a utilitarian notion of higher education and contribute to the reconfiguration of the university to produce an adaptable, skilled, and flexible labour force that maximizes its own interests.

Neoliberal reforms and Danish higher education

Since the 1980s, Denmark, a small state with strong social welfare and equity traditions, has ushered in NPM reforms, although in comparison to other Western countries, the country has implemented such reforms at a slower pace (Greve and Hodge 2007). Among these have been market-driven reforms to the Danish higher education system to enhance their institutional competitiveness. Attention has shifted to education as an investment in human capital in order to secure Denmark's position on the competitive global market as a knowledge-based economy. NPM reforms to higher education began in the 1980s when Denmark's government introduced systems of quality assessment for HEIs, establishing various agencies to inspect and evaluate all levels of

the educational sector. In 1994 the taximeter system was introduced whereby funding was to be allocated competitively to universities each time a student passed an examination. This system was based on the idea that universities would be rewarded economically for having the most graduates, leading to competition among institutions for the brightest and the best (Degn & Sørensen, n.d.; Rasmussen, 2009; Vingaard Johansen et al., 2017; Pederson, 2011).

In 1999, the Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation brought in development contracts, which become planning tools for higher education institutions, and management and control tools for the state. The first set of development contracts focused on quality assurance, internationalization, IT-based learning and innovation. After 2004, they focused on the strengthening links with society, national and international cooperation, quality assurance and benchmarking with universities abroad (Schmidt, 2009).

Further NPM reforms were brought in over the following 20 years or so through various pieces of legislation. These have included the 1997 Danmark som foregangsland (Denmark as exemplary country); 2002 Bedre uddannelse (Better education); 2003 University Act (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, 2003) (Universitetsloven); 2007 Danmarks strategi for livslang læring (Denmark's strategy for lifelong learning); 2011 Regeringsgrundlaget (Government platform); and 2012 Danmark i arbejde – 2020 planen (Denmark at work – the 2020 plan). Together these reforms, although passed by different governments, have aimed to make Denmark competitive in the global economy by fostering "world top level universities" (Danish Government, 2006).

The 2003 University Act reformed the functions, management and governance of Denmark's universities by closing down a number of hitherto powerful governing bodies such as the Senate and Faculty Councils and introducing a (partially) external governance system with

new boards of governors with an external majority no longer necessarily recruited from among the university's academic staff (Degn and Sørensen, 2015; Vingaard Johansen et al 2017). The aim of the Act was to strengthen management and smoothen decision making and implementation of strategic targets by establishing self-governing institutions (Schmidt 2009).

Universities (like the neoliberal individual) were to be reshaped as autonomous, self-governing entities. Although granted the status of being self-governing, overall responsibility for the performance of the institutions would lay in the hands of a board comprised of a minority of collegial representatives (i.e. staff and students) and a majority of external stakeholders (e.g. business representatives) (Degn and Sørensen, 2015). These governance and related management reforms constituted a radical break with traditional academic governance structures. As Degn and Sørensen (2015) explain: "The new governance model introduced in the 2003 Act meant that the balance of power was now turned upside down at universities—as well as inside out. External stakeholders were given a key position in the governance structure and one could argue that Danish universities went from a bottom-up to a top-down governance model" (p. 936).

The 2011 University Act completed the process of streamlining the managerial system, introducing boards of governors and self-ownership. Both control and devolution of power occurred as universities were said to have more autonomy (e.g. over internal structures), but the state retained authority in key areas (e.g. accreditation; setting goals for development contracts). Thus, while the universities may have gained greater formal institutional autonomy, that autonomy was accompanied by an expectation from the state that it would be used in particular ways. These reforms fundamentally changed state-university relations. The autonomy that universities had gained was not 'real' in terms of being free from being steered (Degn & Sørensen 2015).

Henceforth, the state would steer or govern the work of universities, creating what Neave (2012) has termed the 'evaluative state'.

NPM reforms have also had a direct impact on teaching and research within Danish HEIs. Educational programs have been transformed from progressive, discipline- based approaches to learning to the acquisition of competences through modules. Programs have been developed to provide industry with knowledge to convert into for-profit innovations. Above all, the aim has been to reshape the student as a self-starter, flexible, lifelong learner and mobile 'knowledge worker' (Vingaard Johansen et al. 2017; Wright & Ørberg 2018).

The nature of research and funding has been transformed through NPM reforms as well. From the mid-1990s onwards, the Ministry of Education has attempted to make HEIs accept a system in which part of the university research budget would be redistributed between institutions on the basis of regular quality assessments (Rasmussen, 2009). Since 2003, Denmark has had a competitive two-tier, output based system for resource allocation for research. The first tier is made up of basic grants from the Financial Act allocated directly to HEIs. Additional grants are also distributed based on researcher recruitment and the ability to attract external funding. The second tier of funding is allocated in part by the research councils, strategic research programmes, the EU, ministry research and development funds and private foundations, and partly in the form of operating income obtained in return for services HEIs have sold in the market place. In 2004, the research councils were restructured into bodies corresponding to the inter-, multi-, and transdisciplinary nature of research (Schmidt 2009). Moreover, in 2009 the Danish audit system— BFI, Den Bibliometriske Forskningsindikator was introduced to create bibliographic indicators for calculating publication output and determine basic funding for universities. The system is based on so-called "authority lists" that rank journals as either Level 1 or Level 2, with journals not on

the list not counting in the calculation of annual BFI points (Berg et al. 2016). Frølich et al. (2010) conclude that these reforms have made the Danish research funding system more competitive, performance and market-oriented.

Such accountability and performance-based reforms were aligned with Denmark's goal to use international rankings to produce world-class universities (WCUs). From 2006, the Danish government policy aim was to create WCUs as Danish universities should measure up to the best in the world in order to better sustain the development of Danish society in the context of a globalizing world (Danish Government 2006). Global rankings came to prominence in Denmark in 2009, and between 2010 and 2011 became the most important set of international indicators of university performance. As Lim and Williams Øerberg (2017) explain, "the mention of rankings in government overall policy aims forged a benchmarking methodology based on rankings and thereby pushed rankings to the center of Denmark's understanding of its international competitiveness" (p. 96).

Together these NPR reforms in higher education reflected a set of entangled rationales related to individualization, the economy and global competition. The main rationale in the individualization strand is that education gives the individual more independence and freedom of choice, through the acquisition of greater knowledge. Education is seen as a way for the individual to climb the social ladder. The focus of NPM policy is therefore on the individual and the competences acquired by the individual in order to serve the global knowledge economy (Vingaard Johansen et al. 2017).

The rationale in the economic strand of these policies is that education can have a positive effect on the Danish economy. Within the global economic landscape, so the thinking goes, there is an urgent need for increased professional competence. To get that, Denmark needs a 'top-class'

educational system that provides an educated workforce able to compete in a global economy. Students are considered resources (i.e. human capital) that enable future economic growth. Higher education institutions are tasked with producing this human capital (Vingaard Johansen et al. 2017).

The global competition strand adopts the same logic as the economic strand but focuses more specifically on the economic role of the nation in an increasingly competitive global economy (Vingaard Johansen et al. 2017). NPM reforms in higher education were predicated on the idea that Danish universities would act strategically in the competitive global market economy, which would both enhance their competitiveness, efficiency and the best use of public and private money (Degn and Sørensen 2015). Indeed, following passage of 2003 University Act, the Danish Minister of Education claimed that the reforms aimed to reposition and reshape universities in the context of the global knowledge economy (Wright & Ørberg, 2018). As a result, argue Wright and Ørberg (2018), Danish universities have "shifted from being institutions ring-fenced from economic and political interests, to institutions 'driving' the global knowledge economy by providing knowledge for innovation and highly skilled knowledge workers, and being part of that global economy themselves" (p. 76). Overall, what we see with these reforms are the ways in which the economy and education have become tightly interconnected in Danish educational politics.

Neoliberalism and Higher Education: Impact on faculty

Over the last 15 years, I have personally witnessed the transformation of the university into a neoliberal regime based on performance appraisals, performance pay and promotions that are accountability driven by standardized metrics, audit and ranking systems. My university in Canada is now an institution where revenue generation guides program and student admission decisions

and professors are urged to apply for external grants to make up for declining government funding of higher education. I work in an educational setting where learning and program outcomes are standardized and driven by external evaluation and accreditation processes.

Welcome to my world of higher education, which currently exists in Canada, but can be found virtually almost anywhere else today. In the Guardian column, Academics Anonymous, a professor writes about her experience teaching in a UK higher education institution: "it feels like educational experience is being steadily reduced to a standardised output. In the process of commodification, learning as a goal in and of itself has been eroded, pedagogical innovation has been discouraged, and opportunities to establish meaningful connections with our students have been lost" (Anonymous Academic, 2018).

This is a high-pressure, punitive world guided by political technologies of governmentality. I have over the course of my career been admonished for not supporting such reforms in my own institution, warned that I will lose my job, and punished for not generating substantial external research grants (even though my research is not the kind that necessitates large-scale funding). I have experienced and witnessed the demoralizing effects of working in higher education institutions where individuals are urged to compete by publishing in higher-impact journals and increasing their citation rates and h-index scores. It is in such an environment that I have learned how to perform my role as professor, making daily decisions about what I spend my time doing in terms of research, teaching and service based on how others will perceive my contributions on my CV, in my annual performance appraisal report and through my promotion portfolio. What consumes more and more of my time is not so much researching, teaching and serving my university and academic community well, but obsessing over what my outputs will look like to others and how I will be able to demonstrate the measurable impact of what I do.

The pressures to diligently document our teaching, research and service contributions re-shape who we are as academics and what we spend our time doing. Far too many hours are spent strategically reshaping my CV, my Academic.edu, ResearchGate and university webpages to create the correct image. In the processes of presenting and fabricating myself, I actually begin to forget who I really am, becoming "transparent but empty, unrecognisable" (Ball 2015, p. 6).

Additionally (and this is the primary focus here), neoliberal reforms in higher education reinforce competition between academic individuals, departments, and institutions. In my own case, community and collective relations between me and my colleagues have been malformed into competitive relations where fear and uncertainty characterize our workplace climate, rather than openness, trust and collegiality. As Ball (2015) writes: "We cease to be a community of scholars and rather we relate to one another in a complex, overlapping set of competitions, often expressed as rankings 'whereby educational institutions and agents are viewed as isolated and distinct elements' (p. 259). Indeed, comparing ourselves to each other and competing with one another have been normalized practices in the neoliberal university (Whelan 2015; Berg et al. 2016).

Such reforms have devastating impacts on the emotional well-being and mental health of academics. Many have written about the unprecedented levels of anxiety, mental-illness and stress among university staff stemming from NPM reforms, even documenting faculty suicides that have been provoked by the pressures associated with accountability demands in a market-oriented higher education system (e.g. Berg et al. 2016). Stephen J. Ball (2015), in his short, but prosaic piece entitled "Living the neoliberal university" denounces the impact of the neoliberal technologies of power that have reshaped higher education over the past 25 years, explaining how these reforms completely destabilize and reshape who we are:

The techniques of enumeration do not simply report our practice; they inform, construct and drive it. The dry, soul-less grids and techniques of reporting elicit a range of often unhealthy emotions. Our emotions are linked to the economy through our anxieties and desires and our concomitant efforts of self-management and self-improvement...There is for many of us in education a growing sense of ontological insecurity; both a loss of a sense of meaning in what we do and of what is important in what we do. Are we doing things for the 'right' reasons — and how can we know? Constant change and constant visibility produce concomitant anxieties and insecurities .... Within all of this, as an academic subject, I am made unstable, ill at ease, out of place (p. 258-260).

Indeed, through NPM reforms what it means to be an academic in higher education is fundamentally changed. Through these reforms, we become self-regulating academics, performing in ways that change our educational work, knowledge we produce and our very selves. As Barbour (2018) in her auto-ethnographical account of working in the neoliberal university explains, "[t]o stay in the academic world, there seemed no escape from performativity and I have been dutifully "compliant and appropriately responsive" ...Thinking of myself as performing as a good academic, I have simply become part of the process of implementing difficult changes" (pp. 164-165).

Negative impacts of NPM reforms on Danish faculty have also been documented in the research literature. For example, Berg et al's (2016) comparative study documents the anxiety among academic faculty members in universities in Northern Europe produced by neoliberal audit and ranking systems. In all 5 jurisdictions in their study, including Denmark, academic audit and performance assessment systems have led to competition among academic staff, and increased

levels of anxiety and stress. However, in the scholarly literature there is much less evidence of stress, insecurity and anxiety among Danish academics compared to the wide body of literature (some of which is cited above) on the negative impacts of NPM reforms on higher education students, staff and faculty. While it could be that there are simply fewer studies done on this topic, it may be that there are other reasons to explain why these reforms have not had the same damaging consequences for academics. The next section introduces the Danish concept of *hygge* and how it may be considered a protection and retreat from the impact of neoliberalism on higher education.

Hygge in Denmark

Hygge, it has been argued, is a part of the Danish national identity (Bille, 2015) and constitutes the "national feeling" of the country (Howell & Sundberg, 2015). Although not a direct translation, the closest English words to *hygge* would be coziness, homey, warm, close, snug and welcoming (Linnet 2011). *Hygge* is idealized and ubiquitous in Denmark and as such it is used as a noun, a verb (e.g. *at hygge sig* = to be cozy, relaxed) and an adjective (e.g. *hyggelig tid* = cozy time). Having a *hyggelig* time means spending intimate time with family, friends and/or one's close partner. *Hygge* involves sharing coffee, tea, or alcohol and food (especially sweets), and engaging in activities such as chatting, telling stories and jokes, playing a board game or watching a movie together. A *hyggelig* place would most likely have candles or warm lighting to enhance feelings of warmth, intimacy and coziness. Above all, the components that create *hygge* evoke intimate feelings of companionship, togetherness and belonging (Howell and Sundberg 2015), and in this respect it is a relational approach to life.

The word *hygge* derives from the Norwegian language and dates further back in time to Old Norse. The Old Norse roots of the word are related to fire, whose heat and light offer protection

from the dangers outside the home. In this respect, *hygge* necessitates (and creates) safety in small, protected 'cozy' settings. Indeed, the 18th century Norwegian use of the term focused on the domesticity of a safe home. As Linnett (2011) explains:

> References to its meaning in eighteenth-century Norwegian center on such connotations as the safe habitat; the experience of comfort and joy, especially in one's home and family; a caring orientation, for example, toward children; a civilized mode of behavior that other people find easy to get along with, one that soothes them and builds their trust; a house that, while not splendid or overly stylish, is respectably clean and well-kept (pp. 23-24).

From the Norwegian origins, the contemporary notion of *hygge* is connected to safety, security or secureness, togetherness (physical and emotional closeness), relaxation, informality and intimacy (Bille 2015). Finally, there is a temporal dimension to *hygge* as well. It is oriented to the present moment, in being ready "to commit oneself to the experience of the moment" (Hansen 1980, p. 36). As one participant in Bille's (2015) study of light to stage *hyggelit* atmospheres in Copenhagen explained, *hygge* meant losing a sense of time, being seized by the moment and the sense that time flies.

Hygge in a Danish University: A hopeful alternative to the challenges of neoliberalism

In 2017, I spent five months in Denmark at the Danish School of Education/Danmarks Pædagogiske Universitet (DPU), University of Aarhus on my sabbatical from my position at a Faculty of Education in Canada. By the time I left Canada, I was feeling burnt out and very much in need of a sabbatical to rest, recharge and revitalize myself. Here I recount my experiences at the

University of Aarhus in Denmark and how hygge influenced social relations there and operated in ways to create, for me, a safe and secure environment based on close and warm relations among staff, students and faculty. Thus, although it is widely accepted that the most common setting for *hygge* is in the home, it can also be found in other locations such as the university.

From the start, I was made to feel most welcome at the DPU. Upon my arrival, I was invited to a welcome reception with faculty, staff and graduate students where we shared coffee, tea and bread together. The atmosphere was joyful and welcoming. Indeed, as I was to discover, this friendly gathering happened every Friday. (See photo below.) There were many opportunities to share food and drink together. Each floor of the new DPU building had a small kitchenette where colleagues stopped by to have a small chat while grabbing a coffee, tea or piece of fruit, freely available for all. Every day at noon, faculty, staff and students ate lunch together in a common room. Although my limited Danish prevented me from being able to participate in all discussion, those present made the effort to make me feel included. Regularly, faculty members stopped by my office to chat, share their research with me and ask me about my own. I was invited to share my own research at the DPU's Copenhagen campus and while there also made to feel welcome and a part of the academic community.

Figure 1

Caption: Enjoying lunch with colleagues at the DPU.

I also noticed that within the building where the DPU was located there were many informal spaces for students (and others) to gather together and chat. These pleasant gathering spaces were conducive to social encounters where individuals met up and engaged with one another. Tables and seating could be (re)arranged to suit the number and purpose of the gathering. Plants and soft lighting created a warm and inviting atmosphere. Food and drink always seemed to be present or accessible nearby. In the library, for example, there were group rooms that students could book to engage in dialogue and discuss their assignments and presentations. All were very *hyggelit* places.

Above all, I was struck by the aesthetic and calming beauty of physical spaces the DPU, especially the offices within which faculty and students worked. First, I shared a room with other visiting scholars and doctoral students. On the window-sill sat a beautiful, silver George Jensen candlestick holder. The lighting in the office was soft and warm. Pictures on the wall contributed to the *hygge*. My office colleagues were often engaged in friendly discussion about their work and their lives outside of the university. I later moved to another office, which I shared with a doctoral student who had transformed the small space into a cozy room, with pictures on the wall, potted plants on the window sill, a shelf with books and little knick-knacks and, in the corner, a comfy chair covered with a textured 'throw', and a woven rug and standing lamp on the floor.   This was a visual representation of the idea that *hygge* "is achieved by means of beautiful materials, attractive curtain, and upholstery colors, good furniture proportions, the positioning of furniture in the room, plants and good pictures on the walls" (Quoted in Lytken 2013).

Warm, dimmed lighting are also often considered essential aspects of *hygge*. As Bille (2015) in his study on the use of light to create a sense of community, solitude and security in a Danish neighbourhood explains, "[t]ogetherness and the emotional effects of light are a central part of the staging of domestic spaces...The term *hyggelys* (cosy-light) is used to denote this particular kind of light orchestration" (Bille 2015, p. 59). Indeed, the spaces where individuals worked at the university were infused with *hygge*. Warm lighting was dispersed through hallways, offices and common areas creating the conditions for students and employees to feel more relaxed, 'at home' and close to one another. As Gullestad (1992) notes, *hygge* implies that "ideas of beauty, warmth, emotional closeness, feelings of solidarity, and relaxation from work" (p. 80). Even though *hygge* aims to provide respite and relaxation from work, it was an important part of the workplace culture at DPU.

Safety and well-being are closely intertwined and along with *hygge* represent what Schwartz (1985) calls the ''three graces of Danish culture and socialization'' (p. 123). It is in this respect that *hygge* represents an alternative and hopeful ethos to the individualism, competition, market stratification and other challenges associated with neoliberalism. Linnet (2011) in writing about *hygge* among Danish middle-class families who claim that 'money can't buy me *hygge*' notes that *hygge* expresses the general opposition that pits family relations against the meanings of the market. Indeed, *hygge* is viewed as a critique of the upper classes who have lost *hygge* by focusing on "cold, market-like relations" and "excessive consumption" (Linnet 2011, p. 29). *Hygge* then marks out the boundaries between the cold and heartless market-place and the warm and cozy home. It is in the context that *hygge* resists the alienation and competition of the neoliberal modern world, by valuing collegiality, consensus and community over individualism; simple foods, drink and settings over ostentatious forms of consumption; and the safe, pleasant present over the uncontrollable, bleak future.

There is another side to this story though that is important to recognize. Critics claim that an unintended effect is that the notion of *hygge* relies on the construction of exclusionary binaries such as home and not-home, intimate and unfamiliar, and inside and outside. Inside *hygge* spaces are privileged and the outside feared and viewed as inferior. *Hygge* created within the home is contrasted with what is outside of the home. ''Faces look towards a common ga˚rd (yard), or a table with candles and bottles on it. Hygge always has its backs turned on the others. Hygge is for the members, not the strangers'' (Schwartz 1985, p. 124). Thus, the concept extends to the national context in which outsiders or those who "exhibit signs of being different" are excluded (Beltagui and Schmidt 2017, p. 407). As Gullestad (1992) explains, by "avoiding contact with people about whom one has insufficient information, by an interactional style emphasizing sameness and under-

communicating difference and by avoiding people who are considered 'too different' … hierarchy is also created and maintained. In other words, the idea of equality as sameness is not incompatible with hierarchy" (p. 174). This illustrates the unintended hierarchical and exclusionary aspects of *hygge*.

Moreover, to continue with this critique, being inward looking, *hygge* creates what Hansen (1980) calls "interactional bubbles", which are dependent on participants' "cooperative efforts to avoid thorny topics or divisive issues" (p. 42). As Linnet (2015) explains, hygge means evading conflict and issues that need to be confronted, and in the case of the Danish nation, being "a naively sleeping child who does not face up to the world" (p. 33). Perhaps then at this point it may be useful to return to the oldest form of the term, *hygge*, which referred to intelligence, contemplation, and the mastery of an intellectual issue. Indeed, the Old Norse form *hyggja* (thought, mind, courage) is cognate with Old English *hycgan* and Old High German *huggen* (to think) (Levinson, 2012). My experience with *hygge* in Danish higher education, while limited to one institution and only for a very short time, would suggest that within such settings there are at least possibilities for *hygge* to be used to promote well-reasoned thought, rather than close off discussion and exclude others, within an inclusionary and collegial environment that is supportive of difference.

Conclusion

The word *hygge* denotes a way of being together, a warm and cozy state of relaxation, a concept that expresses what it means to be Danish. However, words that are close parallels to *hygge* exist in other countries (e.gs. *craic* in Ireland, *hominess* in Canada, *irie* in the Caribbean, *mysigt* in Sweden, *gezelligheid* in Holland, gemütlichkeit in Germany, *pohoda* in the Czech Republic, *ujuut* in Russia, and *koselig* in Norway) (Linnet 2011; Beltagui and Schmidt 2017). This

suggests that the concept of *hygge*, while specific to Denmark, has manifestations outside of that country. Thus, it is worth considering the hopeful possibilities that *hygge* and other related, relational concepts provide for our work in higher education settings. *Hygge* offers hopeful possibilities for interactions within the context of the university based on trust and collegiality, which take place in cozy, safe and secure spaces. *Hygge* provides us with hope to reframe the ways in which we carry out our research, teaching and service work in a world that more often than not privileges competition over collaboration, the individual over the community, and future economic gains over present pleasant simplicities of life.

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