My World Is Not My Doctoral Program…Or Is It?: Female Students' Perceptions of Well-Being

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Abstract

As the number of women who earn doctoral degrees increases, research suggests that female doctoral students struggle with their well-being, including managing role conflict due to multiple roles, developing coping skills, and maintaining social support. The goal of the study is to illuminate different aspects of women's well-being that can add increased understandings related to student stress levels, academic achievement, and personal life fulfillment. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight current doctoral students who study at a research-intensive university. Furthermore, metaphorical analysis was used to describe the women's perceptions of well-being. The results indicate that female doctoral students perceive well-being as an individual and social process that is constantly evolving and unique to each woman. During this process, female doctoral students can develop realistic social, economic, and personal expectations associated with their studies in order to determine the best personal balance of the multiple roles they play. Implications for practice and future research are included.

Keywords: Doctoral studies, Well-being, Female graduate students, Metaphorical analysis

Introduction

The number of conferred doctoral degrees for females in America has increased by almost ten percent between 1997 and 2007, eclipsing male students for the first time (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Compared to their male counterparts, female graduate students report higher levels of stress (Oswalt & Riddock, 2007). Many of these female graduate students have added the role of student to an already existing set of care taking and other life roles (B. J. Anderson & Miezitis, 1999; Dyk, 1987; Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lusting, 2006; Stratton, Mielke, Kirshenbaum, Goodrich & McRae, 2006).

Multiple and overlapping responsibilities can impact female students' emotional well-being and the likelihood of completing their program of study (M. S. Anderson & Swazey, 1998; Bair, Haworth, & Sandfort, 2004; Hyun et al., 2006). Female students also reported the difficulties they encounter when engaging in multiple role responsibilities including being a student, teacher, and researcher (Wolniewicz, 1996). As Offstein, Larson, McNeill & Mwale (2004) suggest, "stress is at the core of the graduate student experience" (p. 396).

Given the increasing numbers of female students in graduate schools and the pressure of pursuing a graduate program, there is a need to study the effects of graduate school programs on the well-being of female students. Well-being can be viewed with both a health and a social science lens. From a health lens, well-being can be measured in terms of physical condition and illness, whereas from the social science lens, well-being reflects stress, social support, self-esteem, and psychological distress (Cotten, 2008). As education researchers interested in participant-driven qualitative methodology, we will be using the social science view of well-being to guide our research in this study.

Our purpose is to illuminate various aspects of well-being that can add to the discussion of doctoral student stress levels, academic achievement, and personal life fulfillment. More specifically, we will describe female doctoral students' metaphorical perceptions of their well-being since beginning their doctoral programs at a research-intensive university in the Southeastern United States. The central question guiding this research study is "How do doctoral students' describe their well-being since beginning their doctoral studies?"

Various Personal and Social Influences Affecting Graduate Students' Well-Being

Enrollment in graduate school can create a shift in students' focus, especially regarding physical and social well-being (Longfield, Romas, & Irwin, 2006). Because of this change, graduate students' sense of self-worth is often an outcome of their academic successes and failures. For graduate students, academics may become the priority of their life (Grube, Cedarholm, Jones, & Dunn, 2005).

For full-time graduate students performing the responsibilities of assistantships and trying to maintain a personal life, the issue of well-being becomes a concern (Brus, 2006). More so than their male counterparts, female graduate students also note finances, job, and schoolwork as the greatest contributors to their stress levels (Oswalt & Riddock, 2007). When female doctoral students add these external stressors to the need to perform multiple roles and juggle multiple responsibilities, their ability to maintain a positive sense of well-being can become challenged. In order to understand how female doctoral students perceive their well-being, we will first examine literature on managing role conflict due to multiple roles, developing coping skills, and maintaining social support.

Multiple Roles

Multiple roles may compete for a person's limited resources of time and emotional energy resulting in conflict when the time expectations of the roles are incompatible (Dyk, 1987). Graduate student roles include, but are not limited to, child, employee, friend, parent, sibling, spouse, member of cultural group, student, researcher, assistant, and writer. With this myriad of responsibilities, graduate students tend to experience inter-role conflict between their personal and academic roles (M. S. Anderson & Swazey, 1998; Dyk, 1987; Johnson, Batia, & Haun, 2008; Offstein et al., 2004). Smith, Maroney, Nelson, Lable, and Abel (2006) stated graduate students' lives in this day and age are much more complex than they were twenty to thirty years ago. Many concerns such as finances, children, aging parents, community responsibilities, and partner rela-

tionships are just some examples of the many ways today's graduate students are impacted by economical and societal discourses. This interaction/interplay between the various roles and lack of time and energy often lead to stress, which may lead to physical and psychological health problems (Johnson et al., 2008).

The differing roles of graduate students contribute to and detract from their program fulfillment and life satisfaction. They contribute by providing a new perspective and diverse viewpoint to their fellow students and detract by causing time conflicts and balance issues with personal responsibilities such as spending time with family, spiritual practice, and taking time to exercise (Stratton et al., 2006). M. S.Anderson and Swazey (1998) stated role conflicts, faculty demands, and divestiture are aspects of the graduate experience that affect stress and well-being. Unreasonable faculty expectations make it hard for students who want to be successful in their departments to balance their obligations to the faculty and their family. Divestiture, involving the loss of the sense of self, leaves many students feeling as if being a student is their life or that the academic rigor of the program has changed the person they are.

The addition of the graduate student role to other life roles of females is the most difficult for those who are parents, while some of the participants state that the "relatively relaxed pace of graduate school [is] a pleasant change from the demanding routine of the work world" (B. J. Anderson & Miezitis, 1999, Results, para. 1). Participants who were parents of young children found that stress of trying to be successful as both a mother and a student contributed to dissatisfaction in both roles. However, some see the diverse roles as a way to keep a balanced personal and academic life. They are able to separate their parent roles from being a researcher and, thus, provide an outlet outside of themselves in which to explore. This dichotomy illustrates the amount of diverse issues that every graduate student faces and that there is not a one-size-fits-all solution to the problems facing our graduate students.

Coping Strategies

When conflicts between academic goals and personal roles arise, life satisfaction can be affected (Stratton et al., 2006). In regards to an individual's perception of personal well-being, the quality of an individual's life roles may be more important for determining the level of life satisfaction than the actual number of roles an individual may have (B. J. Anderson & Miezitis, 1999). Additionally, graduate students often experience a stress–related problem that can significantly affect their emotional well-being and/or academic performance (Hyun et al., 2006).

Graduate students utilize a variety of coping strategies to deal with the demands of their graduate programs. For female students, these strategies include healthy habits, like talking to friends, receiving counseling/therapy, and aromatherapy, and negative habits, like eating comfort foods (Oswalt & Riddock, 2007). Additionally, older female graduate students use strategies including exercising and reducing course loads, while parents of young children may sacrifice aspects of their student role (B. J. Anderson & Mietzitis, 1999).

In order for graduate students to manage the multiple roles they play, they may use strategies aimed at redefining their structural roles, redefining their personal roles, or enhancing their time management skills (Dyk, 1987). Many universities offer resources to provide these strategies or teach students to use them, and female students are more likely to express interest in these resources than their male counterparts (Oswalt & Riddock, 2007).

Social Support

In their discussion B. J. Anderson and Mietzitis (1999) and Johnson et al. (2008) both argued that social supports act as buffers to alleviate the stress of adapting to graduate school. Not only is the type of support an integral part of well-being for students in graduate programs but the source of

support as well. Important factors to social support are family, friends, significant others, peers, professors and employers (B. J. Anderson & Mietzitis, 1999; Bair et al., 2004; Castro, Garcia, Cavazos, & Castro, 2011; Dyk, 1987; Johnson et al, 2008, Stratton et al., 2006). Additionally, having a social support group also attributes to good well-being and helps to diminish isolation. However, graduate students note changes in their social activities and find it more difficult to spend time with their pre-program social network without feeling guilty for not studying more (Longfield et al., 2006).

Doctoral programs that emphasize a balance between social and academic lives of students ensure better departmental integration of students (Ali & Kohun, 2007). Further, graduate students with a support group or network of colleagues tend to perform better academically, experience less emotional and physical distress, withdraw less frequently from ambiguous or tension-producing settings, and suffer from fewer severe physical and psychiatric illness that socially isolated persons suffer (Goplerud, 1980).

Characteristics associated with a positive graduate experience included a high level of administrative, social, and financial support provided by the student's department, a democratic supervisory structure, mentoring, and positive experiences when utilizing counseling services (Benton, 2003). A positive advisor relationship in which the student feels comfortable and able to approach her advisor is a key component to doctoral persistence (Earl-Novell, 2006). Graduate students who develop more relationships with their faculty members as professional colleagues are more likely to be involved in their doctoral program, more likely to develop professionally, and more likely to progress through their program (Girves & Wemmerus, 1988).

Research Process in this Study

Our research team consisted of six individuals, of which the following descriptors applied: two males, four females; four White/European Americans, one Black/African American, and one Filipino/Asian Pacific Islander; five graduate students (four doctoral and one Masters) and one faculty member. As researchers engaged in this study, we each have had several experiences that shaped our view of well-being. Three of the six researchers' reported that their well-being had been compromised within the course of their graduate studies, while additional researchers reported that their well-being was challenged. Various subjectivities and personal experiences of well-being shaped the ways in which the research team members interacted with participants and interpreted participants' experiences.

Participants

The theoretical perspective of constructivism guided this qualitative study. A theoretical perspective is the philosophical stance that informs methodology and provides a context for the research and research design (Crotty, 1998). More specifically, a constructivist study is designed to explore how individuals experience their own world through their vantage points and understandings and meanings are created within interactions (Hatch, 2002). To study individuals' experiences and meaning making process, participants in this study were purposively selected based on the following criteria: (1) be a full-time doctoral student at the research university in the southeast, (2) be in their second year of their doctoral program or beyond, and (3) be over 21 years old. We recruited eight eligible participants who volunteered to participate in individual interviews. All participants were given pseudonyms. A demographical summary of the participants can be found in Table 1.

PSEYDONYM	YEAR IN PROGRAM	DOCTORAL PROGRAM	AGE RANGE	RACE	MARITAL STATUS
Rachel	2	Education	Early-30's	White	Married
Stephanie	3	Education	Early-30's	Caribbean/African	Single
Angela	2	Education	Mid-50's	White	Married
Priscilla	3.5	Chemistry	Mid-20's	Black	Single
Makaila	4	Education	Early-30's	White	Married
Lesia	2	Education	Early-40's	Puerto Rican/ Hispanic	Single
Maria	3	Education	Late-20's	White	Married
Sandy	3	Agriculture	Late-20's	White	Single

Table 1: Demographical summary of participants

Data Collection

In general, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to begin with guiding questions but follow leads and probe areas that arise during the interview (Hatch, 2002). In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted in personal offices or library study rooms on the university campus. These spaces provided quiet places to meet and were free from distractions and interruptions. Teams of two researchers conducted the interviews: one interviewing and other one taking notes. This study was approved by IRB, and written consent was obtained in order to digitally record the interviews. Interviews lasted about 30 minutes. Furthermore, the conducting research team member transcribed interviews in verbatim within one week of the interview.

We developed the guiding questions based on our research purpose and the research literature in the area (Hatch, 2002). Interview questions were designed to gather the participants' definitions, descriptions, and examples of well-being. Some of the questions posed were, How do you define well-being?, To what extent do you think your well-being has been influenced by your doctoral studies?, and What do you do to maintain your well-being? Each interview ended with questioning whether there was anything else to add or whether there were any questions or comments.

Data Analysis

The study of metaphors is concerned with how people understand their experiences. It views language as a way to provide data that develops concepts and systems of understanding (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). In short, metaphors communicate the unknown in terms of the known (Moring, 2001). As a language tool, metaphors allow for communication of ideas across cultural differences (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). However, this communication is only effective if the metaphor is relevant in historical references of both cultures. As a research tool, metaphors can provide a creative method to understand an experience. However, metaphors always provide a partial and personal view of truth/experience (Koro-Ljungberg, 2001). To gain a description of doctoral students' perceptions of well-being, we employed a metaphorical analysis developed by Cameron et al. (2009). We will describe each of the steps here and provide an example of that step from the current research.

Identifying metaphors

First, we identified metaphors from the interview transcripts and performed deconstructive segmentation of the text. More specifically, we reviewed the texts of data and searches for metaphorical phrases that are present in the data (Cameron, et al., 2009). For instance, our review of the interview transcripts found 139 metaphorical phrases including "little steps," "feel like a hamster," and "everything just seemed to explode at once" used by the participants. Some participants used more metaphors than others did, and this created fluctuations in the data and in the frequency of metaphors per participant.

Labeling metaphors

Next, we labeled each of the metaphorical phrases. We created these labels by grouping metaphors that describe the same target (Cameron, et al., 2009). For our research, we created 20 label categories of metaphors. For instance, in our research we grouped the metaphorical phrases of, "I am just spinning my wheels," "I feel like a hamster," and "you keep getting this cycle" into the metaphorical group label "wheel."

Grouping metaphors

Finally, we combined all of the metaphorical groups identified into a reconstructed interpretive metaphor that can be used to describe the research topic. The researcher can use conventional metaphors, metaphors used routinely by the participants, or a creative metaphor that fits the cultural aspects of the participants to create this interpretive metaphor (Cameron, et al., 2009). For instance, in our research we grouped the labels "car," "wheel," and "machine" into the metaphorical group "Well-Being as Machine." While fluctuations in the data occurred, each participant had at least one indicating text in each metaphor grouping. A sample portion of the table used to organize our metaphors is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Sample portion of table for metaphors

GROUP	LABEL	INDICATING TEXT	PARTICIPANT
Constitution	Health	"If I feel disjointed in an emotional or spiritual state	Lesia
Constitution	Health	"headaches like I thought I had a brain tumor"	Stephanie
Constitution	Insanity	"voice in the back of my head"	Sandy
Direction	control (lack of)	"don't lose sight of it"	Makaila
Direction	structure/struggle	"everything just seemed to start falling"	Priscilla
Direction	control (lack of)	"I lose control in what happens"	Makaila
Force	Waves	"a lot of ups and downs"	Lesia
Force	Movement	"pushing my limits"	Maria
Force	movement/struggle	"I spend a lot of time trying to cling to the spiritual realm"	Priscilla
Force	action/ struggle	"I wasn't walking with God…so things started crumbling for me then"	Priscilla
Machine	Machine	"get me out of whack"	Lesia
Machine	Wheel	"I am just spinning my wheels, but I am not going anywhere	Lesia

GROUP	LABEL	INDICATING TEXT	PARTICIPANT
Machine	Car	"I wasn't necessarily walking with God obviously and so my focus in life was a lot like it was driven differently"	Priscilla
Measurement	Normalcy	"treat your life as much 9 to 5 as normal"	Rachel
Measurement	Normalcy	"I go home and I leave work"	Makaila
Measurement	Normalcy	"if it's good enough for Einstein then it's good enough for me ((laughter))"	Angela

Trustworthiness

Throughout the analysis process, trustworthiness was maximized through a range of validation strategies. First, we used investigator triangulation. At least two members of the research team analyzed each transcript, and discussion was held when there was not a shared agreement. Group decision was used to create metaphor labels and groupings. However, as Cameron et al. (2009) noted, "the grouping process involves imagination and creativity in describing how metaphors best fit together. Because of this and because of the dynamic nature of language in use, the groupings that we construct will inevitably have blurred boundaries and a degree of overlap" (p. 76). Additionally, we engaged in peer review, which enable us to strengthen our interpretations based on the comments that our peers provided about our preliminary findings.

Results

Our metaphorical analysis focused on five metaphors: Well-being as Constitution, Well-being as Force, Well-being as Machine, Well-being as Measurement, and Well-being as Direction. Each of the metaphors is situated in a specific socio-political context. Thus, in the following sections we will explore the context each of these metaphorical groups more in detail by providing an interpretation of the metaphor and then present an alternative interpretation.

Alternative interpretations are used to illustrate the complexity of metaphorical analysis and meaning making processes. The use of the alternative interpretations shares the authorship and ownership of the text with the participants and readers (Koro-Ljungberg, 2001, 2004). Through alternative interpretation, we like to illustrate the multiplicity of possible interpretations especially when metaphors are viewed as linguistic devices to connect unknown to known and the researchers' and readers' experiences with the research topic to shape interactions with the findings and research texts. Potentially there could have been more than two interpretations for each metaphor; however, the following interpretations represent our collectively agreed upon interpretations as the research team.

Well-being as Constitution

One metaphor in our data provides insight into the students' perceptions of well-being through the concept of constitution. Using one definition of constitution, one interpretation of the Well-Being as Constitution metaphor is that of descriptions of overall physical and psychological health. For the participants, this included indications of psychological distress, level of physical activity, and mental strain due to stress and anxiety.

Rachel and Priscilla both found role conflicts becoming a challenge for them. Rachel states "there's a lot of internal battle" between deciding priorities between her personal and academic life, and Priscilla feels "it's almost like having split personality for me" in balancing her spiritual and academic priorities. In regards to physical health, Stephanie stated, she developed "headaches

like I thought I had a brain tumor" during her first year of graduate studies. Eventually she found that reading so much without glasses contributed to her headaches, but her first reaction was to jump to the worst-case scenario. In Stephanie's mind, the most detrimental or dramatic answer was the most plausible, causing more stress and feeding into the anxiety already present in her life. A reasonable, less damaging explanation was not considered and was hard for Stephanie to accept.

Rachel states "there's a lot of internal battle" in her balance of her life, while Sandy feels she needs to listen more to the "voice in the back of (her) head" to keep her on track with her priorities. Stephanie and Lesia remark that they are stressed beyond being able to function. Specifically, Stephanie feels "people (should not) feel as if they are losing their minds" in their program and Lesia states she is least in control when she is "freaking out the most."

Using a different definition of constitution, an alternative interpretation is that of arrangement, systematic formation, or organizing document. For the participants, this included a sense of power they have and can exert over their own lives.

Lesia, Rachel, and Priscilla felt as though their priorities are being made for them in their lives and, thus, they have no control over their roles. Lesia remarked that during her studies she felt "disjointed in an emotional or spiritual state" having no order to her life. Outside factors, such as their studies, their faculty advisors, and their loved ones, are influencing their lives and in essence "calling the shots" in their decision-making processes. Stephanie has a similar situation in that many times when a health problem is not diagnosed, the individual feels powerless to solve her own problem.

Both Stephanie and Lesia exhibit feelings of a loss of control and not being the persons they want to be in either their personal or academic lives. Rachel clearly stated her feelings of control throughout her statements. For instance, she admits she is "definitely a control freak" and through her program, feels "a little out of control." Control was important to Rachel in order to make sense of her life and new roles of wife, student, and family member. She was focused on not losing part of her personal life to her academic life.

Constitution as a metaphor to overall well-being seems to be an obvious interpretation. However, as demonstrated by our participants, well-being can be both physical and emotional health as well as alternatively control over their lives, which can influence all aspects of health. The participants see they have an active role to play in their overall well-being but are concerned about the influences of outside forces, such as family, friends, and faculty advisors.

Well-Being as a Force

Another prominent metaphor in our data connects unknown to known through the concept of force. Using one definition of force, one interpretation of the Well-Being as a Force metaphor is that of intensity or strength of effect, such as a personality of great force or a program of great intensity and rigor. For the participants in this study, the intensity of the force was seen as the impacting element that affected the lives of these women.

The metaphor of force as an intensity or strength can be seen as a more peaceful intensity or a more vivacious intensity. It was Angela who found a positive effect on her well-being when her level of intensity of force was taken into account. Angela noted that her transition from coursework to research and dissertation writing would "be a little bit more flexible [since] I won't have as much to prepare for." Lesia also noted this intensity of force as going through "baby steps" to "take it in stride" while going through her doctoral program. Through these experiences, Angela and Lesia had paralleled their lives to the stretching or walking movements caused by the force of graduate student life. Lesia also found herself in a more vivacious force of "feeling the pressure

more constant" or having "a lot of ups and downs," as the role conflict between academic and personal life would cause fluctuations in well-being.

Using a different definition of force, an alternative interpretation is that of the power to influence. For the participants, this power was a sense of outside control of circumstances on student well-being caused by the demands within the doctoral programs.

Priscilla found a negative effect on her well-being in response to force as a power to influence her circumstances within her doctoral program. For Priscilla, her academic circumstances within graduate school force her to "push things forward" in order to complete her program. As a result, the influences and demands within her doctoral program are "sucking the life outta [her]" or cause "crumbling." These perceptions were in response to not passing her qualifying exams in August and to Priscilla's circumstances in being unable to gather research to support her dissertation. Priscilla's aspiration to complete her graduate degree is negatively affecting her well-being academically and pushing her to "cling to the spiritual realm" as a coping strategy to get through her program.

For some participants, this type of force was used as a way of maintaining well-being, as the tenacity of this power to influence also has its benefits. As Lesia noted "it's what pushes me." Maria also uses this force as motivation in "pushing [her] limits" to improve her academic well-being. Makaila uses this tenacious force as a battle in using her own strength to "take down the threat." Unlike Priscilla, Lesia, Maria, and Makaila cope with maintaining their well-being by using this force as something to conquer or subdue, rather than being controlled by it.

As a metaphor, Well-Being as a Force offers two perceptions in comprehending how the participants view their well-being. From one perspective, the participants maintain their well-being by being keen to the intensity of force they are facing. From the second perspective, the participants have a force to compete with in maintaining their own well-being. Together these perspectives provide a description of how the doctoral students use force as a gauge in maintaining and influencing their sense of well-being.

Well-being as a Machine

A third metaphor in our data provides insight into the students' perceptions of well-being through the concept of a machine. Using one definition of machine, one interpretation of the Well-being as a Machine metaphor is that of a device that transmits or modifies energy for efficiency. For the participants, well-being serves as system to monitor their level of functioning within their doctoral program.

Lesia feels a loss of efficiency in the system when the connection between her emotional and spiritual states is comprised. She asserts she "doesn't function" if it's "out of whack" and must get herself "back together." In a sense, doctoral students may be led to believe there is a defect or breakdown in the system, thus affecting their level of efficiency. It is in this way, as expressed by Lesia, a feeling or sense of being "disjointed" ensues relating to their state of well-being.

For machines, outside forces or friction can affect the efficiency in which energy is used. Similarly, this type of conflict is evident for Rachel. "If there is something going on in my family or my life whatever it is then it affects my studies but I mean at some point yah know when I knew that it was time to buckle down." In order to develop the constant and dependable output of well-being, Rachel just tries to "pound through it as much as I can knowing that if I do that during the day at night I don't have to study so that's kinda like my motivating factor."

Using a different definition of machine, an alternative interpretation is one of an apparatus consisting of interrelated parts with separate functions. For the participants, this included descriptions of the different aspects of their lives working together.

Doctoral students' programs of study often become the axle or "axis of rotation" in their lives. It is in this way the quality of this interaction between this "axis" and its neighboring components influences the other aspects of the student's life. This was evident in several participants' statements, specifically Stephanie when she reflects on how doctoral studies affects her present state of well-being "that's how I feel sometimes, like you know, this program and what I am doing is essentially my life and everything else revolves around me doing this."

Rachel felt "all of my worlds are colliding" in regards to her discussion of the challenging transitions doctoral students face. Rachel's perspective is based on the roles (components) of a wife, researcher, and student. Although friction is evident, it is necessary in order for the internal mechanisms to operate properly.

As a metaphor, Well-Being as a Machine offers two perceptions in comprehending how the participants view their well-being. From one perspective, the participants maintain their well-being by functioning at a certain level of efficiency. From the second perspective, the participants' well-being is a machine that functions when all the different parts (or roles) work together.

Well-Being as a Measurement

A fourth prominent metaphor in our data connects the unknown to the known through the concept of measurement. Using one definition of measurement, one interpretation of the Well-being as a Measurement metaphor is that of a proportion or defined quantity. For the participants, this proportion was indicative of a balance between the doctoral program and personal life outside of academics.

While Sandy noted "being a graduate student is not a 9-to-5 job," it was Rachel who found a positive effect on her well-being when her time was measured into different parts. Before her doctoral program, Rachel had a job that "was pretty 9-to-5." Through this experience, she had developed a system of separating her work life and her personal life by measuring out blocks of time for each. She used this same concept when she started her doctoral program and maintains her well-being if she can "treat [her] life as much 9-to-5 normal."

For some of the participants, measuring out time for their personal lives separate from their academic lives was a way in which to maintain their connection with their social supports. For Makaila, a mother of three, it was when "I go home and I leave work…I have a family." It was important for her to separate her academic time from her personal time. On the other hand, for Stephanie, who is "not currently romantically involved," well-being was maintained when she participated in activities "as if I have a life outside of the work I'm doing." Both of these women found a positive effect on their well-being when they were able to measure out time away from their academic lives.

Using a different definition of measurement, an alternative interpretation is that of a comparison. For the participants, this comparison was to some standard, whether real or idealized, of a typical person.

Rachel found herself measuring her well-being while in the program to her well-being pre-program or to that of her non-student friends. For Rachel there is a standard for maintaining well-being that *normal people* (emphasis added) are able to achieve and that she strives to achieve while in her program. She realizes that being a doctoral student "isn't a normal everyday schedule like a 9-to-5 schedule." Rachel found her balance by doing "normal things" and found her well-being was impacted when she had pressures "outside the normal, outside average."

Rachel compared her interactions with her social supports to a standard that she had for *normal people* (emphasis added) or non-students. She noticed a positive sense of well-being when what she was doing was "just kinda like typical everyday activity." These types of activities occurred

when Rachel "had to cook and be a wife…it felt normal…a whole sense of normal normalcy." Rachel was able to feel a positive sense of well-being when she felt she was measuring up to the lives of other wives and women.

As a metaphor, Well-Being as a Measurement provides us with two perspectives in which to better understand how the participants view their well-being. From one perspective, the participants maintain their well-being measuring out the various aspects of their lives. From the second perspective, the participants have a comparison by which to measure how well they are doing in maintaining their own well-being. Together these perspectives provide a description of how the doctoral students use well-being as both a separating tool and a comparison tool in order to develop their positive sense of well-being.

Well-being as Direction

Throughout the interview process, the participants included metaphors of their well-being that related to the concept of direction. Using one definition of direction, one interpretation of the Well-Being as Direction metaphor is that of a guide or direct course of thought or accomplishment. For this interpretation, participants used statements of careful movement toward a course of action with profound consideration to intended and unintended consequences.

As the participants were questioned about their well-being, some responded with direct directional language such as "I feel as if I see a light at the end of the tunnel" or "taking baby steps" when describing movement representing positive change. Although these examples give a sense of direction and careful movement, the first one lends itself to moving forward where the second is more ambiguous but movement is implied. Stephanie's response of seeing a light at the end of the tunnel gives the impression that she is moving carefully as on a train track, toward that light and the knowledge of the light gives her a sense of well-being. Lesia's comment of taking "baby steps" also gives a sense of carefully moving forward and possibly a little backward at times.

Stephanie states, "I can see myself walking across the stage" which gives Stephanie a larger view of her actions in a positive light that affects her well-being in a positive manner. In another example, Priscilla says, "You're motivated trying to push things forward." Here Priscilla is moving in a forward direction but also understands her motivation comes from the larger view of what the accomplishment of completing graduate school will bring.

Using a different definition of direction, an alternative interpretation is that of direction as purpose. This definition describes a guiding, governing, or motivating idea to consider a larger picture, plan, or purpose for the student's life. This notion relates to the participants feeling that their well-being provided direction in their purpose to complete their studies or gain further knowledge.

Participants sought to express concern that a larger plan was in play regarding their sense of purpose. Makaila stated, "There are bigger things out there." This would suggest that she understands her purpose is a larger than just her doctoral studies and would encompass more. Makaila also stated "attend to the family" as a way to balance her well-being, but it also displays her placing importance of having a larger life than just her graduate school aspirations. Priscilla described her well-being this way, 'I wasn't walking with God…so things started crumbling for me." Additionally, she said, "I spend a lot of time in the spiritual realm" indicating that her purpose is not hinged on just her graduate studies but also includes larger plans, in this case spiritually and walking with God.

Participants felt that their well-being provides a sense of purpose to complete their studies. Lesia stated, "I question my future," which insinuates that she is taking a careful look at her direction and unsure if her purpose is intact or fulfilled. This certainly affects her well-being in a negative

way. Lesia also states that she has "a lot more control of my own schedule," which suggests that she also gained some purpose through her ability to control her schedule in her doctoral program. This could contribute to a positive direction gained through her doctoral experience.

As illustrated above Well-being as a Direction can be interpreted in various ways. For example, in the first view, the graduate students see direction as moving forward to accomplish their doctoral degree and how it relates to their well-being if progress is or is not accomplished. The second view offers a sense of purpose in the larger picture or plan toward their direction of obtaining their doctoral degree and has substantial implications on their well-being. Both of these views offer a light to view Well-Being as a Direction that can provide female doctoral students with a sense that moving forward within their program and keeping a sense of a larger purpose intact can assist in maintaining their well-being.

Discussion and Connection to Literature

In order to understand how female doctoral students perceive their well-being, we used a social science view of well-being to explore items like stress, social support, self-esteem, and psychological distress (Cotten, 2008). Using the participants' descriptions, we developed metaphors that provide a method to understand the experience. Reflected within these metaphors are the actions of managing role conflict due to multiple roles, developing coping skills, and maintaining social support.

Conceptually speaking the metaphors related to Constitution and Force were similar as applying more to the individual, as an internal reflection, or as an intuitive process. The types of words used by the participants were personal to their own situation such as "leap of faith" and "out of control." This showed a focus on themselves in relation to their situation and not on external factors influencing them.

For the participants, this internal reflection on themselves was primarily in response to the role conflict that they felt. One internal role conflict for graduate students is between personal and academic roles (M. S. Anderson & Swazey, 1998; Dyk, 1987; Johnson et al, 2008; Offstein et al., 2004). Dyk (1987) and Johnson et al. (2008) state that role conflicts require enormous amounts of time and emotional energy that can lead to physical and emotional health problems, causing more stress and thus more conflict and problems for the students. Hyun et al. (2006) found in their study that almost half of graduate students surveyed had a stress-related problem that adversely affected their emotional well-being.

The interpretations of the metaphors of Constitution and Force offer some description of this role conflict and its effect on doctoral students' well-being. The magnitude of this conflict can negatively affect students' overall emotional and physical well-being. However, when female doctoral students are able to develop coping strategies for themselves, they are able to gain a certain sense of control. Control over these aspects of life for the students can give them an edge in feeling they have influence over their lives and in decision-making as a student and in other roles they identify.

Conversely, the metaphors related to Machine, Measurement, and Direction focused more on the social factors (in relation to others), external reflection, and a more technical or scientific process. Example statements such as wanting to feel like a "normal grad student" and instilling "structure" in order to achieve balance seemed to reflect on an outside standard, goal, or expectation related to experiences of well-being that is not written, but one each participant was trying to achieve or meet, at times not even knowing the purpose or end goal.

For the participants, this external reflection on their interactions with others was due to efforts to develop coping strategies and social supports. One coping strategy for graduate students to main-

tain well-being is time management (Dyk, 1987). Another is to develop multiple social support systems (White & Nonnamaker, 2008). The use of social supports by doctoral students can be seen as a positive influence on the well-being and adjustment of doctoral students (B. J. Anderson & Mietzitis, 1999; Johnson et al, 2008). Graduate students with a support group or network of colleagues tend to perform better academically and experience less emotional and physical distress (Goplerud, 1980).

The interpretations of the metaphors of Machine, Measurement, and Direction offer some description of the development of coping strategies and support systems and their effects on doctoral students' well-being. Throughout their experience, doctoral students may feel as if their systems are not functioning properly, added pressure and stress is being forced upon them, or that they are not measuring up to their academic and social peers. However, developing strategies to find inner stability and time to organize their lives helps doctoral students to feel a greater sense of connection between the multiple areas of their lives. Additionally, students can use the multiple stages of the doctoral process as measures of their success and a goal to work toward. Celebrating the small victories can assist doctoral students in seeing how this one aspect and time of their lives fits into the bigger picture, and the feeling of moving forward can provide a sense of purpose and motivation to keep going.

Implications

The study of metaphors is concerned with how people understand their experiences. As a research tool, metaphors can provide a creative method to understand an experience. Using the metaphors developed by participants' descriptions of well-being, we are able to gain insight and develop implications to address individuals from various levels of academia and the academic community.

The metaphor of Well-being as Constitution has implications for student affairs administrators and university support staff. This metaphor describes the effect of stress and feelings of loss of control on the doctoral experience. Services that encourage stress reduction could be tailored for female doctoral students. For instance, counseling services could offer a group therapy session specifically for female doctoral students. Existing services like health and wellness biofeedback labs, recreational sports group fitness classes, and seminars on time management could be marketed toward female doctoral students so that they are more aware of these services and can make use of them.

Doctoral students can gain insight from the metaphor of Well-being as Force. This metaphor describes students realizing the intensity of an external challenge and students' internal motivation to meet the challenge. In order to gain the internal motivation to meet the fluctuations of intensity in their academic programs, female doctoral students need to develop effective coping strategies. These coping strategies may be learning to be flexible and adaptable to unforeseen challenges, seeing the program as a challenge she can overcome, or using spirituality as a way to maintain balance.

The metaphor of Well-being as Machine has implications for family members, friends, and other support networks of doctoral students. While stress cannot be avoided all together, doctoral students' support networks can do their best to avoid adding unnecessary stress or friction to their students' lives. Additionally, support networks can examine ways that they can help their students personal and academic lives work together as a cohesive unit. For instance, families and friends can attend departmental social functions and attend public events held on-campus with their doctoral students.

The metaphor of Well-being as Measurement has implications for doctoral students in that there is no one perfect way to balance the multiple roles doctoral students have and no universal standard to which all doctoral students should strive. Determining the proper balance is a personal

choice and is influenced by how the women prioritize their academic roles, family roles, and personal roles at any given moment. Many of the women in this study realized that their priorities often shifted depending on outside factors, time demands, and other situational pressures.

Both faculty and doctoral students can gain insight from the metaphor of Well-being as Direction. We suggest that doctoral students could benefit from reflection and goal setting that are adjusted to realistic social, economic, and personal expectations associated with doctoral studies. Faculty members who serve as advisors and mentors can help doctoral students develop a long-term goal through the use of a program plan, but they can also assist students in developing short-term "mini-goals" that can include items like conference presentations, manuscript submissions, professional association involvement, and other academic-related activities. Through the creation of these milestones, doctoral students can develop a course of action and a sense of purpose.

Finally, this study has implications for future research. This study included a small sample of women at one institution. Additional studies can include interviews with a more diverse group of women representing different institutions and different academic programs. Future research may also examine of differences of single students to those in relationships or explore the experiences of women in caretaker roles (those caring for children or older parents). Women in these different roles may have different experiences that affect their well-being.

Conclusion

The use of metaphors allows the unknown to be placed in the known and can provide a common language across differences. This study produced metaphors that describe female doctoral students' perceptions of well-being as both an individual and internal process as well as a societal and external process. As the different metaphors suggest, developing well-being during one's doctoral program is an on-going process. For example, none of the women in this study felt they had developed their sense of well-being "just right" during their first year. Many were still developing coping skills as their studies progressed. These metaphors describe the process of developing and maintaining well-being as a constantly evolving process that is unique for each individual based on the roles that she plays.

While all graduate students play multiple roles, it becomes more important to understand the demands and pressures of female doctoral students as women enter graduate degree programs at higher rates and continue to earn more of the conferred doctoral degrees. Some women will place a higher priority on the role of student and allow their doctoral program to become their world at that time. Other women will continue to place equal or greater priority on their other life roles and allow their doctoral program to be one aspect of their world at that time. The decision on how well-being is being operationalized in one's life or how best to develop and maintain well-being will impact females' experiences not only while in graduate school but also when they transition to the work force and possibly face additional stressors and threats to their well-being.

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