

Women Graduate Students Work/Life Balance Focus Group

Fourteen doctoral students met for the conversation, thirteen of them women of color, the majority from Asian backgrounds. They were a mix of married, partnered, and single.

The session was characterized by an outpouring of pain around issues of sustaining personal relationships while fulfilling one's responsibilities as a graduate student. The women experienced a lot of tension and resentment. They did not question the pressures of work but felt it was nearly impossible to meet its demands and sustain family life. They found it especially difficult to be relationships with people not in the academy who did not understand its demands. The *price* of being in the academy was high. They felt as if they kept falling further behind.

In Asian cultures, there is a strict hierarchy where women and their needs always come last. The women are swimming against this, but they also don't want to surrender their identity or demonize their heritage. While the students had exposure to feminist theory in classes, they found it very difficult to integrate feminism on a personal level. E.g., they equated being a feminist with getting divorced.

The participants experienced a lot of isolation and loneliness. Single people felt especially lonely and suffered from high expectations from extended family that they had lots of available time. Married women felt under intense pressure to have children if they didn't yet have them. A number of women wondered if they would have children. Some felt their biological clocks ticking. Some didn't want children but were being pressured to have them.

They were delighted to be able to meet and talk and were excited about the idea of forming a group to discuss these issues. What came up again and again was the need for mentoring and support. They were unaware of the mentoring available through the AAR on things like submitting journal articles or contacting publishers. But there were also a lot of internal tensions in the group—a lot of competition generally and for the attention of faculty members.