Notes from PWiGS event with Roel Snieder (2/17):

Several myths contribute to common stresses in science:

Acknowledging that science is a competitive system, it is a myth that you have to be working all the time.

It is a myth that only the best can contribute to science – even if you are not the ‘best’, that doesn’t mean that your contributions are not valuable.

It is a myth that you need to work in the way that someone else works (even if they are better than you, someone you admire, your mentor, etc.) – scientists are different and have different ways of being successful.

Suggested actions to help alleviate stresses:

Be clear about expectations – have a conversation with your boss. Determine what is expected about productivity, hours, etc. (especially valuable when there may not be formal feedback structures).

Note that while there may be pressure from advisers, a lot of pressure can be self-imposed. External stresses can often be reduced by managing expectations (see above), while internal stresses can benefit from creating good practices and habits for yourself.

Guilt is generally not helpful – try to accept the limitations on your time and not add the extra burden of self-guilt (or ‘permaguilt’).

Get out of your comfort zone: “Once a semester, I will engage in a professional or personal activity that frightens me a little but which makes me feel alive.”

Suggested exercise: try to monitor how you spend your time for one week. Assess if that is really how you think you are spending your time, and/or how you actually want to be spending your time.

About technology:

Consider strategies to unplug: limit email, for example, by only checking it a few times a day.

Sending emails on weekends/evenings can signal that it is not OK to take breaks, especially if you are in a position of power (adviser, chair of department, etc.). Consider not sending email on weekends – you can draft emails and save them, then send them on Monday.

Technology permits working at home, but consider saving only enjoyable work to do at home.
An idea for managing increasing technological demands: “is the tool serving us, or are we serving the tool?” Set rules for yourself and technology.

General thoughts:

On the idea of running academic departments like a fire-department – camaraderie, regular conversation, and reliance on your peers can contribute to satisfaction and productivity.

Be aware that there are many choices in career, field of research, work setting – you are not required to place yourself in situations you do not enjoy.

You may think that your adviser works all the time, but keep in mind that may be partly an illusion – you do not see your adviser when they are not working! They also take breaks, but students are unlikely to see this side of their lives.

The fact that you could do something better (for example, if you had more time) doesn’t mean that you’re not already doing a good job. This might apply to the challenge of jointly working and parenting.

Further suggestions:

Book by Roel Snieder: “The Joy of Science: Seven Principles for Scientists Seeking Happiness, Harmony, & Success”

Book suggestion from Roel: “The Four Agreements”, by Don Miguel Ruiz