

Sense of self and well-being in people  
living with, and beyond, anorexia nervosa:  
A mixed methods study

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## Objective of my PhD

- To examine the relationship between ones sense of self and well-being in people living with, and beyond, anorexia nervosa

*Why did I choose this topic?*

## Anorexia nervosa (AN)

- Restriction of energy intake relative to requirements leading to significantly low body weight
- Intense fear of gaining weight
- Disturbance in the way one's body weight or shape is experienced

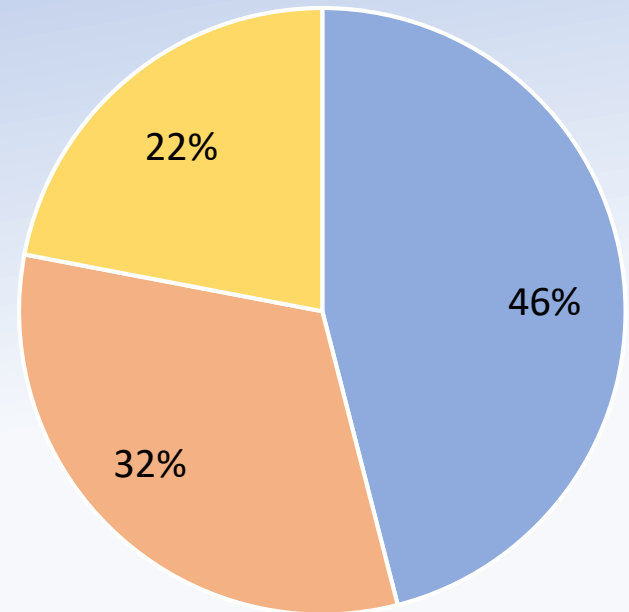
(DSM-5)

A serious and long-term mental illness where people are unable to maintain a healthy body weight

(Sullivan 1995; Arcelus *et al.*, 2011)

## Outcomes of AN

- Mental and physical health
- Quality of life (sufferer and those who care for them)
- Cost to the economy (JCPMH, 2018)
  
- The highest mortality rate of all psychiatric illnesses  
(Sullivan 1995; Arcelus *et al.*, 2011)



- Fully 'recover'
- Improve but continue to live with symptoms
- Remain chronically ill or die

(Steinhausen, 2002)

# Why are outcomes for people diagnosed with AN so poor?

- *“One of the most difficult psychiatric disorders to treat”*

(Hamli *et al.*, 2005, p.776)

- The process of ‘recovery’ from AN remains enigmatic
- Little progress has been made in developing new and effective treatment strategies for people with AN

(Patching & Lawler, 2009; Skarderud, 2007)

## Sense of self

- People's beliefs about themselves, their interpretations of past experiences, and expectations about their future own worth

(Jones, 2004)

*Who  
am I?*



Having a clear and consistent sense of self is related to well-being

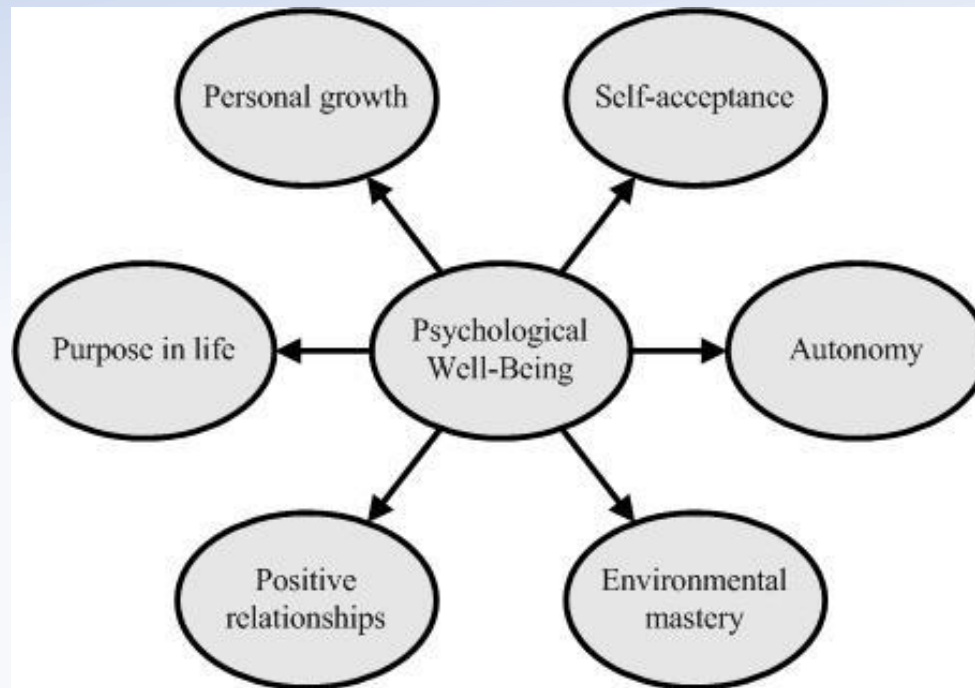
*I am...*

Human  
shy  
A baker  
Disabled  
Brunette  
Thin  
Social  
A volunteer  
Female  
A lecturer  
A student  
A daughter  
Sporty  
Normal  
Healthy  
A football fan  
Religious  
A hard worker  
A prisoner  
Fat  
Adventurous  
A perfectionist  
A doctor  
A war veteran

## Well-being (WB)

- Optimal psychological experience and functioning

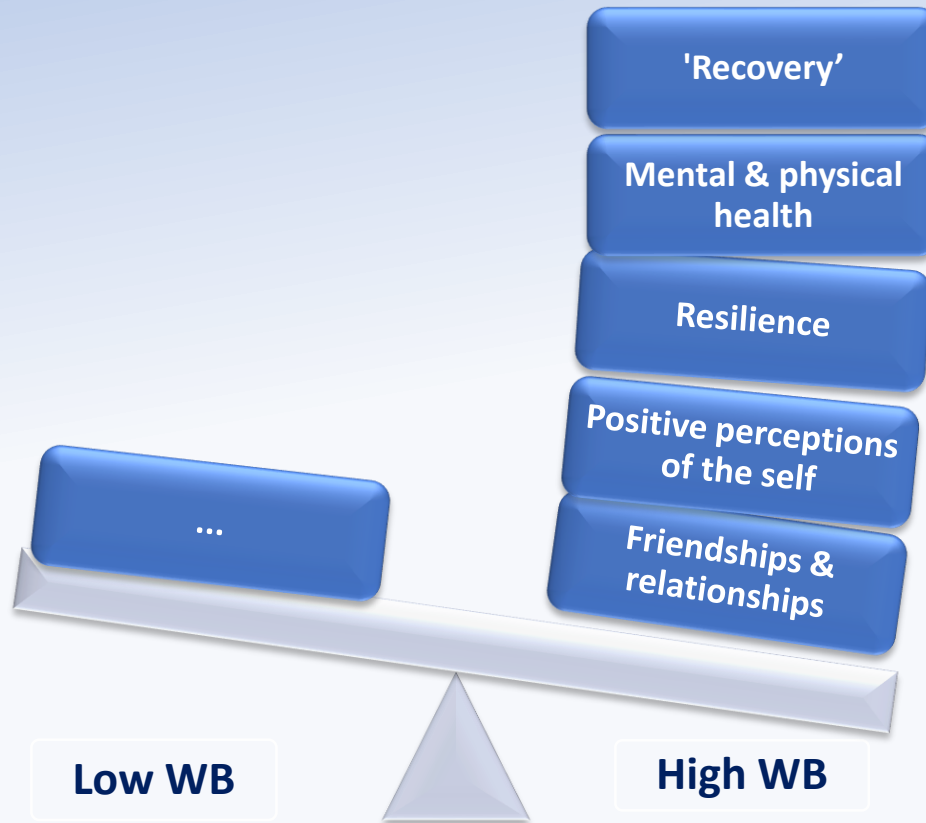
(Ryff, 1989)



(Ryff & Keyes, 1995)



## Why is WB important?



(Adapted from Lyubomirsky *et al.*, 2005)

## Sense of self and WB is particularly complex in people with AN

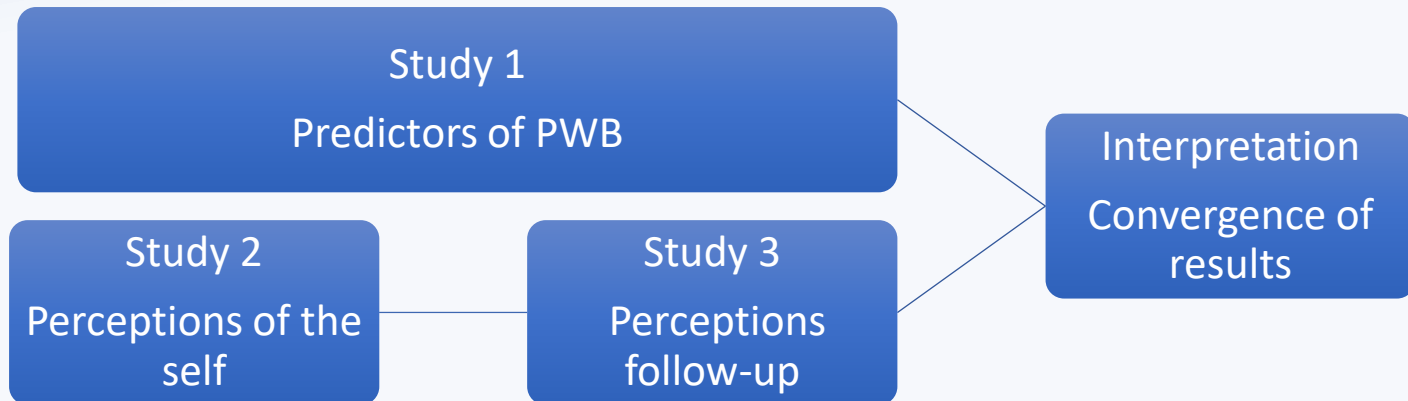


- The self becomes so entwined with AN that people no longer know who they are
- Separating the self from AN, by '*becoming the real me*' is central to the process of recovery from AN

## Objective of my PhD

- To examine the relationship between ones sense of self and well-being in people living with, and beyond, anorexia nervosa

*Three studies: Mixed methods triangulation design*



# Study 1: Predictors of PWB

To examine predictors of PWB

- Quantitative
- E-survey (N=100)
- Predictors: self-concept clarity, self-esteem, self-efficacy, \*self-compassion, perfectionism
- Recruitment: contact self-help groups, advertisements (i.e. social media), word of mouth etc.
- Multiple regression
- Statistical relationships

## Study 2: Perceptions of the self

To investigate longitudinal perspectives the self, and how such conceptualisations relate to WB over time

- Qualitative
- Recruitment: opt-in end of Study 1, word of mouth, advertisements etc.
- Semi-structured telephone interviews (N=11) (1.5 hours)
  - *experiences of anorexia*
  - *perception of the self*
  - *perceptions of well-being*
  - *views of how sense of self and well-being have changed over time as a result of anorexia*
- IPA
- Codes and themes

## Study 3: Perceptions of the self follow-up

To investigate changes in sense of self, self-consistency and WB over time

- Qualitative
- Recruitment: re-invite Study 2 participants via email
- Six months after original interview
- Semi-structured telephone interviews (N=6) (1 hour)
- IPA
- Codes and themes

# Findings

Further understanding of:

- The relationship between self-related variables and PWB
- How anorexia is incorporated into conceptualisation of the self for people living with, and beyond, AN
- To what extent it defines their identity
- The consequential effect that this has on their well-being

Implications:

- This knowledge will help to inform the target of specific interventions and therapies, with a focus on the self, to enhance individuals WB and recovery rates from AN.

Thank you

If you can help by taking part in my research, or by forwarding on the details, I would be extremely grateful.

The online survey can be accessed via the following link:

<https://glos.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/sense-of-self-and-well-being-in-people-living-with-and-be-3>

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