

# THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE PHD

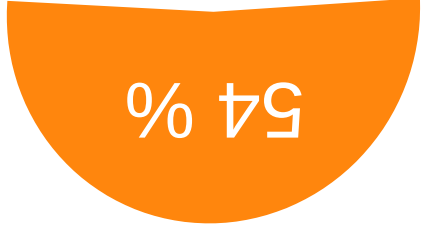
PhD is awesome...

74% of French PhD doctorates are satisfied or very satisfied with their thesis

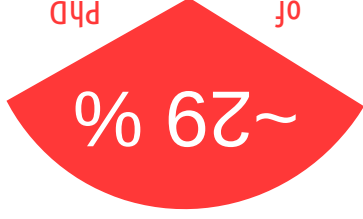


...but harder than it should :(

54% of French PhD doctorates suffer from stress



~29% of PhD doctorates feel or are clinically depressed



## Why the heck, and what to do?

SOURCES  
Statistics are mixing many studies from US/UK/France/Worldwide, see here for all the detailed references, additional resources and editable version :  
<https://not-in-our-labs.github.io/>

If you are suffering or overthinking, **you are not alone.**



## REMEMBER



### We can fight back!

We are all in this together. We can spread awareness, support and resources. We can refuse to normalize toxic behaviours and denounce them. We can join our local PhD association to set up social events or discussion groups. We can set up reading groups in our team. We can join a union to help those abandoned by institutions, or to fight back about the big political things like academic freedom or the « publish or perish » culture. And even if sometimes we do make sacrifices and follow the « publish or perish » mentality to get a position, we must keep talking about it, and keep saying it is not normal. And for those that want and get a permanent position, we can fight this in every committee we set foot.

## DISCLAIMER

Booklet by Charlie Jacomme, heavily inspired by work from Dr Zoe Ayres (the Toxic Mix poster and her book). Similar to her, I am not a medical professional, this was put together from a mix of scientific resources and experiences. I am responsible for any inaccuracies. Suggestions of resources, modifications and anything are more than welcome at [charlie.jacomme@inria.fr](mailto:charlie.jacomme@inria.fr)

# IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT -



## IMPOSTOR SYNDROM

You may think you are not good enough, or don't belong here. It's not the case, but half of the doctorates at a Belgium University suffer from it.



## OVERWORK

Half of doctorates work over 50 hours per week. Is it too much? Yes! Your PhD is not your whole life.



## PAPERS PLEASE

65% of researchers feel tremendous pressure to publish. Doing a thesis should not feel like a border control. Find and discuss some reasonable goals.



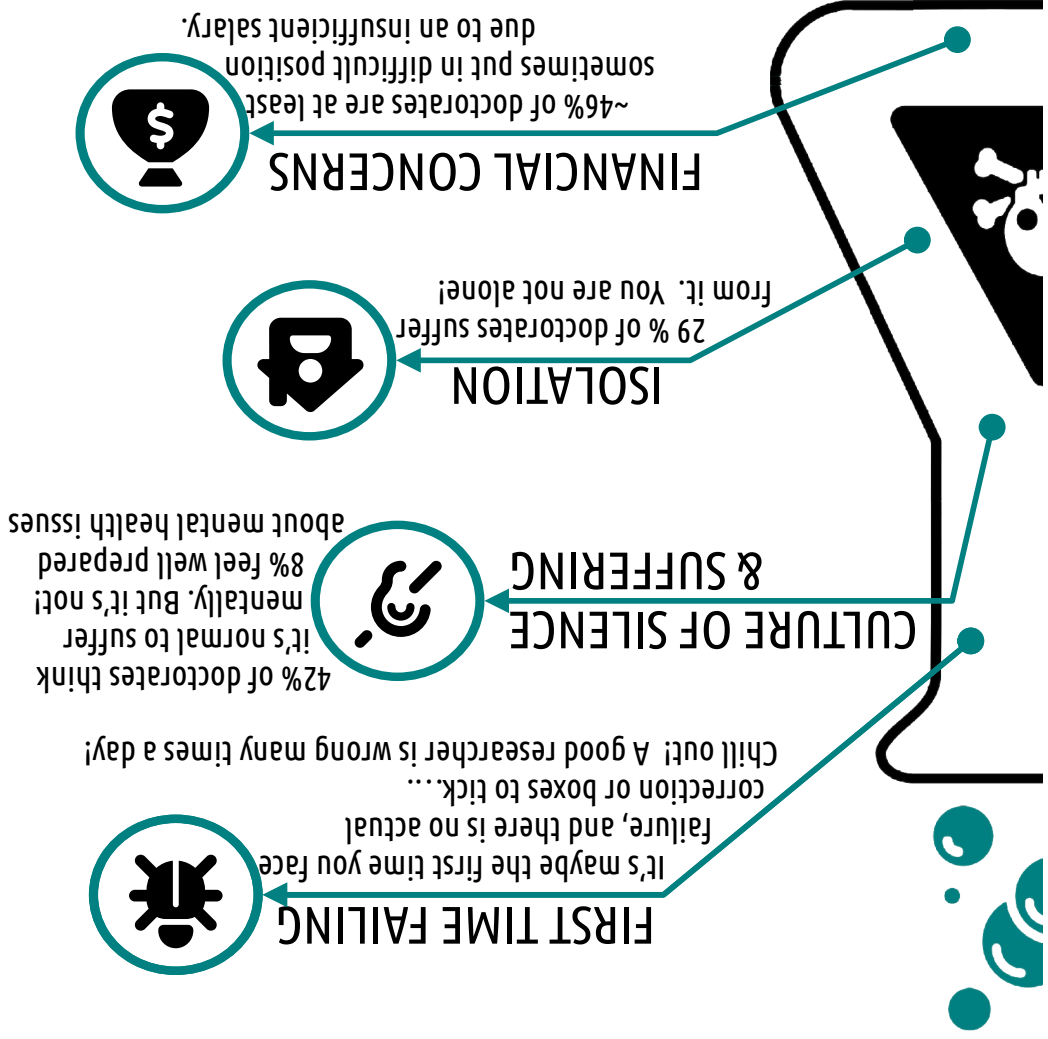
## BAD CAREER ADVERTISEMENT

36% of doctorates worry about their careers, 29% percent are given usefull advice on it, 50% don't feel they can talk about not pursuing academia, ~17,5% of computer science PhDs can get an academic position.

## RESSOURCES

- Managing your Mental Health during your PhD: A Survival Guide. Dr Zoe Ayres.
- Comment l'université broie les jeunes chercheurs. Précarité, harcèlement, loi du silence. Adèle B. Combes.
- Guide to a Doctorate in France — ANDès & CJC.  
French: <https://spartacus-idh.com/076.html>  
English: <https://spartacus-idh.com/104.html>
- Doctorate schools often have charters/guideline, to which the advisors officialy commit. It can actually be an interesting read.  
French example:  
<http://doctorat.univ-lorraine.fr/sites/default/files/user/futurs%20doct orants/charte du doctorat.pdf>

# - Part 1: any PhD is HARD



# CONTACT POINTS ?



As mentioned your lab/university should provide official points of contacts. If as a newcomer, you don't get such a list, complain to people, and ask why! This page can be edited and used by institutions to provide this. A QR code to some easy access webpage summarizing the local informations is great!

- Harassment hotline:
- Harassment institutional mail support:
- Mental health hotline:
- University occupational health-care professional:
- University therapist:
- University social worker:
- Informal trained listeners:
- Local doctorate association:
- Doctorate/student/researchers unions:



Example webpage for my lab,  
the LORAI

<https://intranet.loria.fr/vss/>

# IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT

## LEARN



Many methodologies can help you through the scientific parts of your PhD, with often dedicated courses. Also, redaction group where you write and criticize between doctorates are known to help. And Some books are dedicated to help you. See next page for resources.

## BASIC NEEDS



It's basic but we forget it when we are low. Take care of yourself, food/sleep/free time all affect directly mental health.

## TOGETHER



Share and compare experiences to understand what is normal and what isn't. If needed, you can set up dedicated groups, such as those for doctorate or groups where certain identities feel more comfortable participating.

## INSTITUTION



Your lab/uni must provide official points of contacts, and unions can also help. Institutions may also help the previous point, by organizing meetings, seminars, pizza time, WEI, ...

## MEDICAL



Most people would benefit from seeing a therapist, and there is no shame in doing so. Friends and colleagues cannot do nor provide what professionals can.

## TALK!



## OVERCONTROLLING



A thesis must give you the opportunity to become autonomous!

## WORKAHOLIC



Maybe your advisors dedicate their life to their work. That might be their choices, but it does not have to be yours. For instance, you can ask to not receive mails outside of office hours!

## GHOST



Your advisor does not owe you instant reactivity, but they owe you overall disponibility! Once a week for research is often good, and every few months for a step back and overall discussion sounds good.

## SURVIVOR BIAS



Your advisors represent the small percentage of people who did get a permanent position with a follow up promotion, and they may have forgotten it. You may need to filter their advices, and typically to turn to other people to get non-academic career advices.

# A FEW IDEAS

## -Part 2: Advisors



### ACCEPTANCE

There will be some scientific difficulties: if your project was easy, it would already be done. Do not be ashamed to struggle and don't isolate yourself.



### FUN

A PhD can be an awesome experience, full of learning, discoveries, emancipation and... fun! It can be a very special work environment where you may be free to have fun and be full of quirks, so do use this freedom!



### GROW TOGETHER

Your advisors will not be perfect. Encourage them to follow a course on advising if they never did. If they are bad at communicating, conflicts may arise from basic misunderstandings, don't hesitate to ask for clarifications. Talk to them about what you can accept or not, what are your limits, what bothers you in this relationship. If you have specific needs, try to be open about it.



### BIG CHANGES

If nothing works, your doctoral school must help you change your advisor. Finally, stopping your thesis is always an option, and honestly not such a big deal.



### SINK AND SWIM



This is a toxic mentality, that should be left to history. A PhD is hard, you deserve to be helped through it, and you need to be given the means to rise and emancipate yourself.

### IRRESPONSIBLE



Your advisors may not feel responsible about your well-being. This is legally and morally wrong, they must at least give you the resources available locally to help.

### THE RITE OF PASSAGE



Another toxic belief: depression, mental health issues, intense stress and such should not be part of the journey.

### HARASSMENT



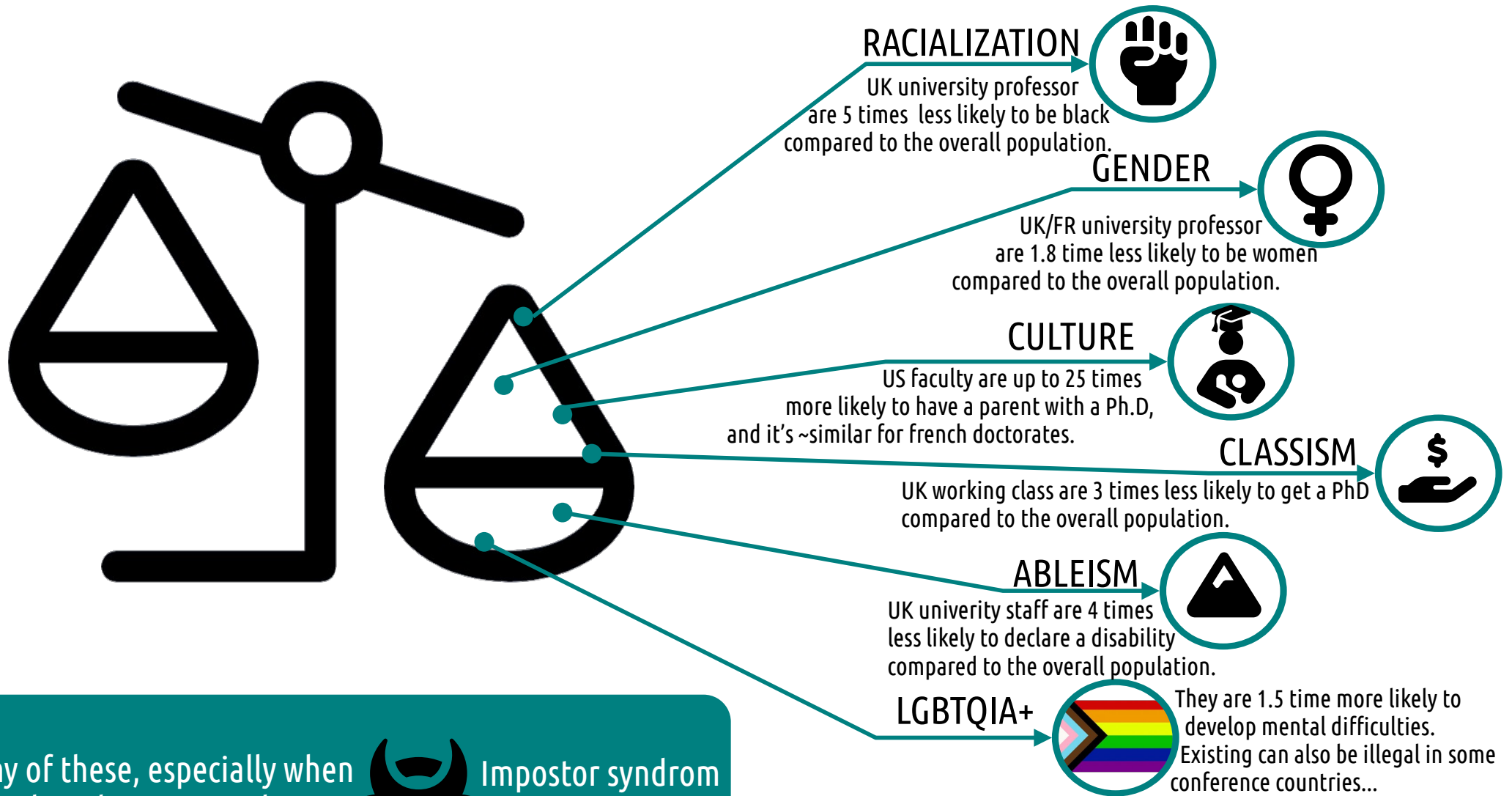
The RED line, no matter the form (mental, sexual,...). Try to seek help and support, and don't tolerate if you witness. Such behaviours often start with small things, you can learn to detect the signs, e.g., with the tool described just below.

A helpful tool - The Violence Meter (french, translation pending)

It is a scale of acceptable/inacceptable behaviours, at first on sexual harassment, and with an academic version.



# IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT – Part 3: Inequalities



Any of these, especially when combined, increases the likelihood of suffering from



Impostor syndrom  
Bullying  
Harassment