



Trinity College Dublin

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

The University of Dublin

Minding Ourselves and Each Other During the Postgraduate Experience

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Trinity Student Counselling Service

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SCS 
Student Counselling Services

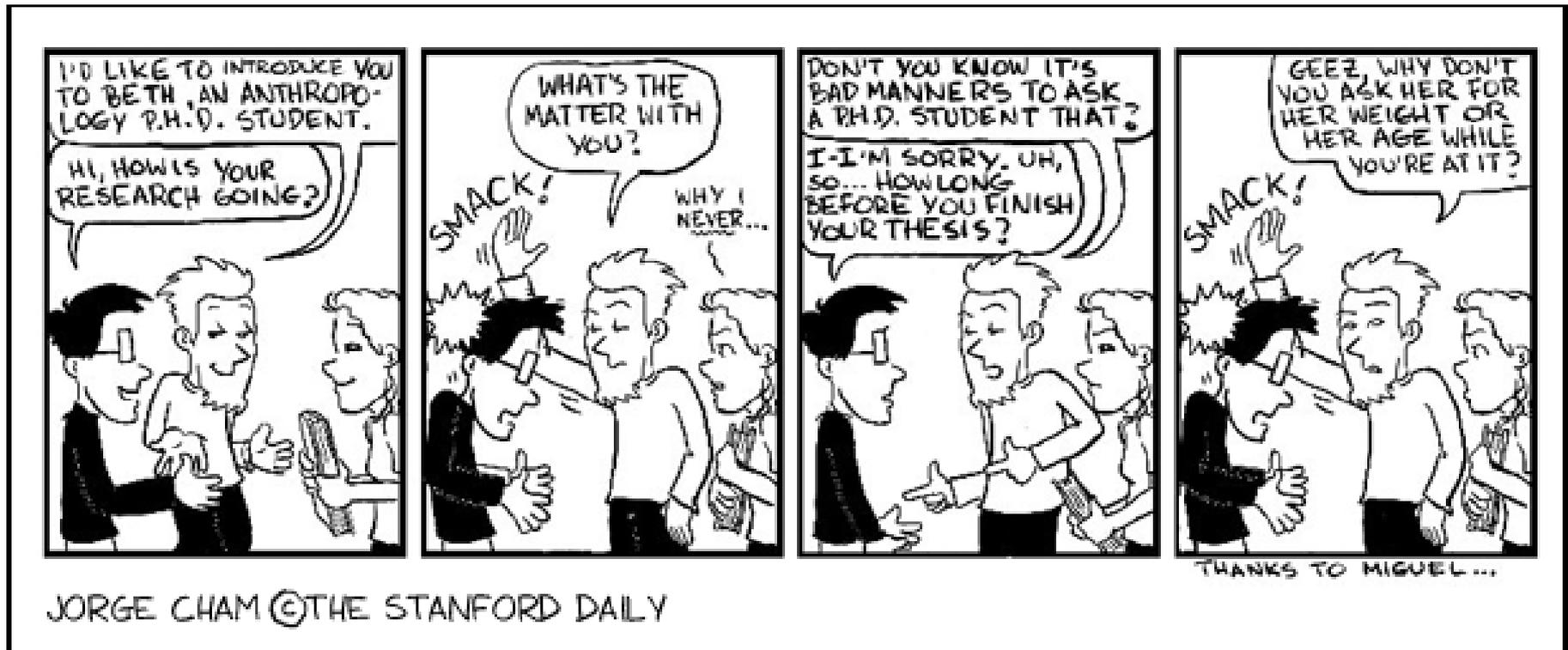
What you signed up for...

...what you can hope to develop

- **Motivated Performance**
- **Social Evaluative threat**
- **Low Controllability**
- **High unpredictability**
- **Balance: “Know thyself”**
- **Community/ Growth**
- **Ownership/ Flexibility**
- **Preparedness/ Communication**

with thanks to Callum Neill, Edinburgh Napier University

Postgraduate Etiquette



<http://phdcomics.com/comics/archive.php?comid=47>

The proactive approach to looking after ourselves



Managing your mental health



What is Mental Health?

It encompasses our capacity to work, to love and to play:

- Work: A sense of agency and the capacity to be generative/feel that what you do has meaning
- Love: The capacity to have an authentic, intimate relationship with at least one other person,
- Play: The capacity to enjoy life, sing, dance, play. To be involved rather than just observe.

Our capacity to tolerate distress not just work towards contentment.

*“Psychological wellness is not just the absence of mental health issues”
- Nancy McWilliams*

Difficulties Arise when...

Our emotional needs (safety, acceptance, love) are not being met.

The demands in our environment outweigh our available resources.

We feel powerless, under threat and overwhelmed by this to the point where we can no longer make sense of it.

We feel alone.

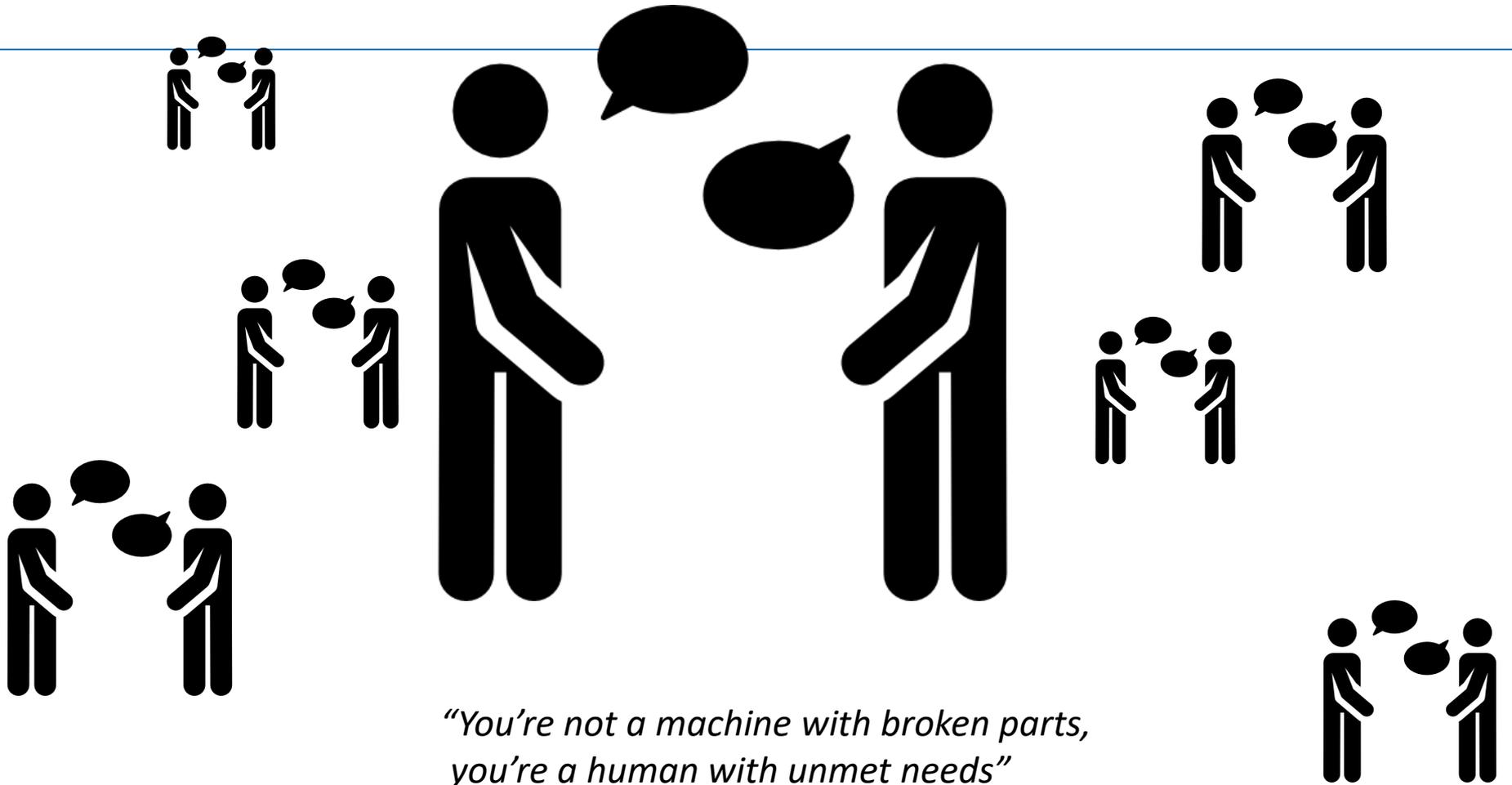
The Postgraduate Context

Postgraduate students are often:

- **More isolated from support networks**
- **Experience intercultural differences & language barriers**
- **Are dependent on their supervisory relationship**
- **Experience unrealistic expectations for themselves!**

All of which can lead to feelings of terror, shame and loneliness on a pretty regular basis

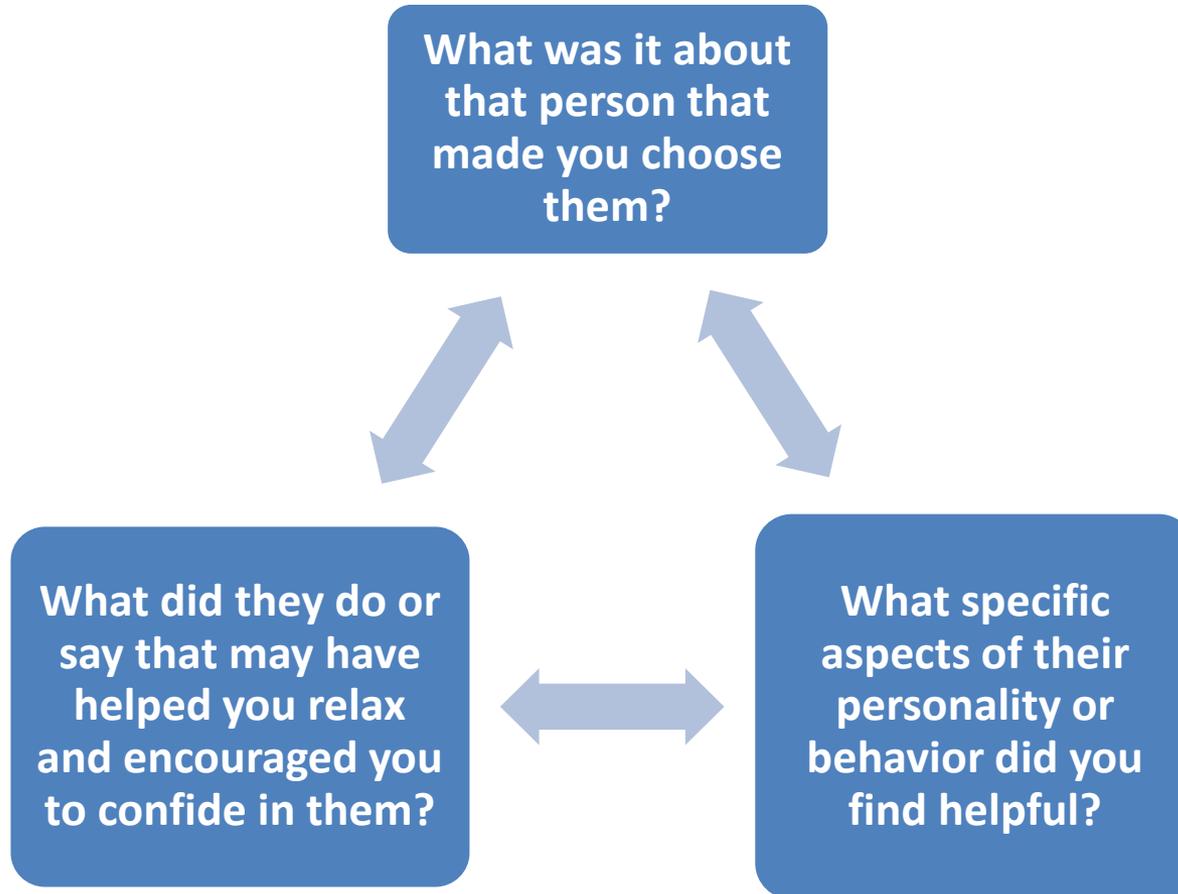
<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/the-postgraduate-survival-guide-1.1715460>



*“You’re not a machine with broken parts,
you’re a human with unmet needs”*

Johann Hari

THE IDEAL HELPER



What is stress?

- ❑ Stress occurs when the demands on us are greater than our available resources.
- ❑ It is *not unusual* to feel stressed and anxious...
- ❑ Stress/anxiety can be adaptive:
 - Focus
 - Performance
 - Alert to danger
 - Prepare

- ❑ Amount of stress we experience in these situations is determined by **our perceived ability to cope and the supports we have in place**

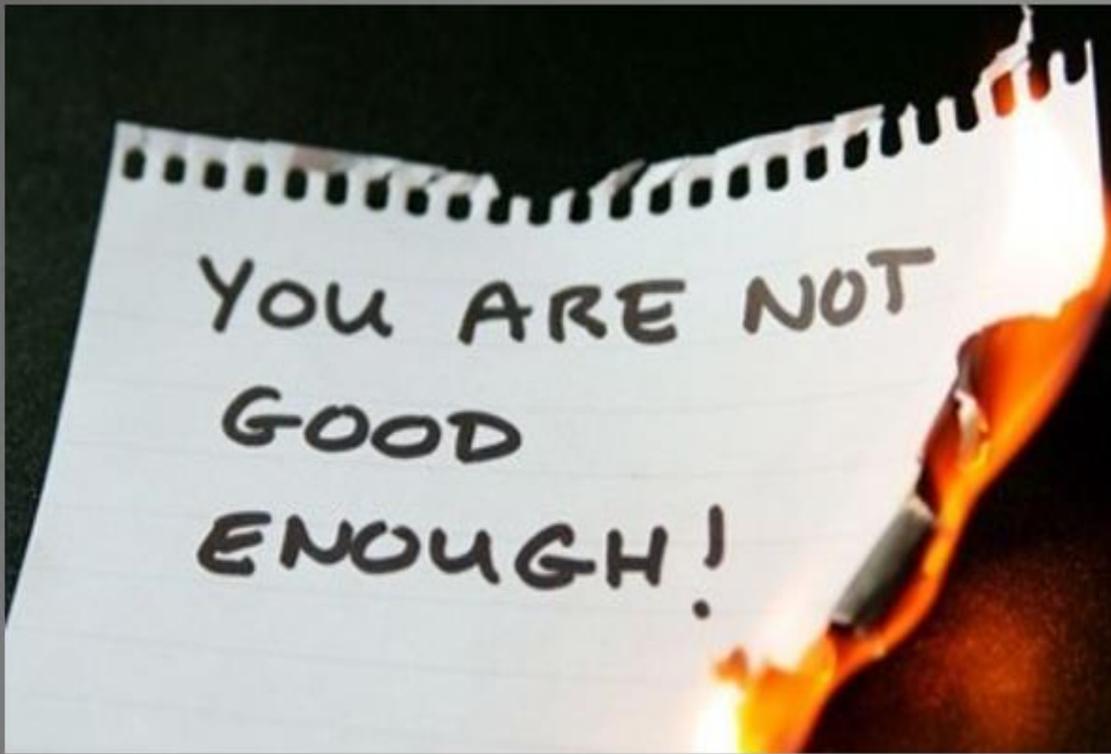
What contributes to stress?

External stressors

- Major life changes
- Deadline/expectations
- Work/College
- Relationship difficulties
- Financial problems
- Being too busy
- Family

Internal stressors

- Unrealistic expectations
- Perfectionism
- Lack of assertiveness
- Difficulty accepting uncertainty
- Engaging in negative self-talk
- Being self-critical & deficit focused



Harsh Self-Criticism

- A harsh and punishing inner critic can turn a bad day into something much worse.
- Think about how you speak to yourself in your worst moments
- Imagine that self-critic stepping outside of you

Four questions about my self- critic

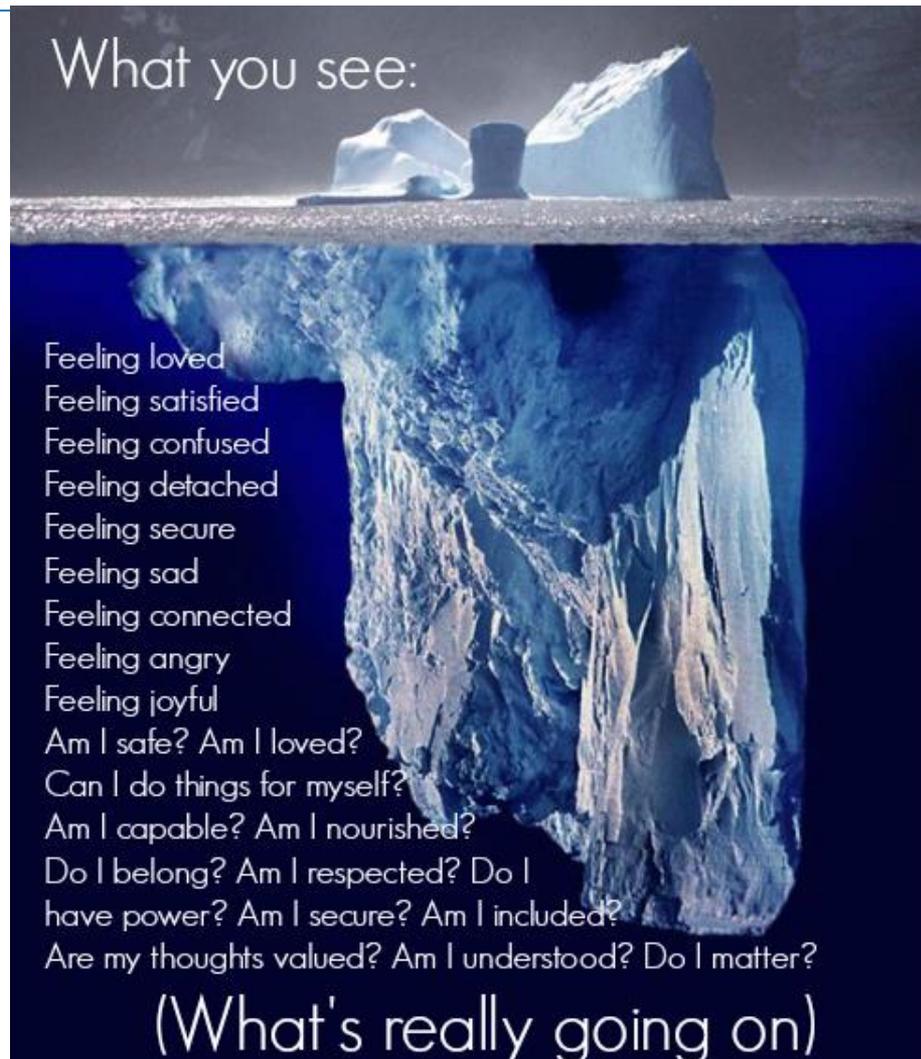
1) How do I feel when I speak to myself that way?

2) What is the cost of speaking to myself this way?

3) What is the purpose of the self-critic? (and is it working?)

4) What do I fear if I were to let the self-criticism go?

Foster a support network, and build communities.



Talk, Seek Support, Connect



SLD 
Student Learning Development

S2S 
Student to Student

SCS 
Student Counselling Services

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- Sports Centre <https://www.tcd.ie/Sport/>
 - Graduate Students' Union: www.tcdgsu.ie
 - S2S Peer Support: 01 896 2438 , student2student@tcd.ie
 - Chaplaincy: <https://www.tcd.ie/Chaplaincy/>
 - College Health: <https://www.tcd.ie/collegehealth/>
 - Disability Service: <https://www.tcd.ie/disability/>
 - Student Learning Development: <http://student-learning.tcd.ie>
 - Postgraduate Advisory Service: pgsupp@tcd.ie
 - Student Counselling Service: www.tcd.ie/student-counselling

Reflect on one way to mind yourself & support others

Spend a couple of minutes thinking about:

- one way in which you will aim to mind yourself and
 - one way in which you will try to support others you meet during the postgraduate experience
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- No feedback required
 - Some themes you might want to bear in mind:
 - Finding balance is important to sustain motivation
 - Getting to “Know thyself” is an opportunity for learning
 - Fostering community (research or social supports)
 - Cultivating a ‘growth’ mindset
 - Taking ownership of what’s in your control
 - Aim for flexibility and a compassionate tolerance of uncertainty
 - Support yourself to feel prepared where possible
 - Communicate your needs, values and desires to yourself/others



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Thank You

