



Lab Counterculture

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Graduate Student Experiences



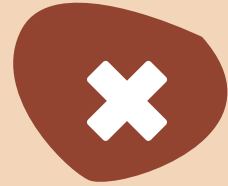
overworked¹



underpaid^{2,3}



stressed^{1,4}



depressed⁵

*Unable to prioritize their well-being without
compromising their professional success*



Junior Faculty Experiences



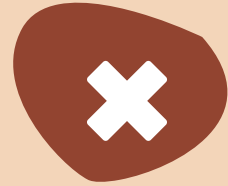
overworked⁶



*misaligned
work^{7,8}*



isolated⁹



*desire to leave
academia¹⁰*

*Unable to prioritize their well-being without
compromising their professional success*



Marginalized Graduate Student & Junior Faculty Experiences



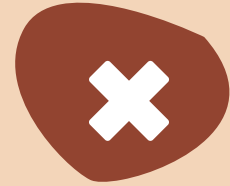
more
misaligned
work¹¹



disproportionate
pressure to
perform^{12,13}



more
anxious,
depressed⁵



lower completion
rates¹⁴

Lack of support, isolation, and racism increase
likelihood to leave academia^{15,16}



Dark Patterns in Academia



Dark Patterns

Key systemic factors in the design of academic institutions that negatively affect the well-being of graduate students and junior faculty



Lab Counterculture

OH!Lab's specific, concrete, actionable practice(s) to counter dark patterns



Promote Supportive, Inclusive, Ethical Research

Lab Counterculture

~~individualistic solutions~~

~~maladaptive responses to a~~
(mis)constructed system

systemic designs ≠ accidental;
cannot be accidentally resisted

see dark patterns
so we can design against them

Lab Counterculture

dark patterns don't affect everyone equally

**dark patterns interact with
pre-existing social systems**

**marginalized groups are
disproportionately affected**

**recognize who are most affected by dark
patterns and why so we can design
against dark patterns systemically**

Dark Patterns / Countercultural Patterns



*Focus on Quantitative Outcomes / **Celebrating Effort over Outcomes***

*Perfectionism / **Celebrating Effort over Outcomes***

*Competition / **Elevating the Value of Community***

*Time Scarcity / **Prioritizing Time with Each Other***

*Power Dynamics / **Establishing Protected Communication Channels***

*Status Quo Bias / **Mentoring & Facilitating Long-Term Goals***

*Financial Stress / **Providing Flexible & Accessible Resources***



Dark Pattern: Perfectionism

*not! Researchers trying
to do their best work

Systemic Designs

Long waits for
feedback from
advisors and/or
review committees

Focus on quantitative
outcomes

Situations

People try to
make their work
perfect & hide
uncertainty

Creates
impossible
standards¹⁷

Harms

Fuels imposter
syndrome¹⁷

Mistakes attributed to
fixed characteristics
rather than part of
learning processes or
situational factors



Countercultural Pattern: Celebrating Effort over Outcomes

Dark Pattern

Long waits for feedback
from advisors and/or
review committees

Focus on quantitative
outcomes

People try to make their
work perfect & hide
uncertainty

Creation of impossible
standards¹⁷



Counterculture

Asking & providing opportunities for
lab members to share their work at
various stages, not just outcomes

Celebrating lab members' quality
work as iterations towards excellence
rather than outcomes

Celebrating submissions, not just
acceptances, offers, awards, etc.

Changing language around outcomes:
recognizing the work's value as
separate from external metrics like
paper acceptances & as
opportunities for reflection and
improvement



Benefits

Makes it clear that
perfection is not expected

Mistakes & failure are
material for iteration;
expected part of learning

Lab members share
their work without fear,
enabling constructive
feedback at all stages



Developing Counterculture



Practice + intention to disrupt dark patterns, even on a small scale

Enactment by all members

Preparing to continue this disruption when we have more power



Shifting the window of what is normal and acceptable

Exposing dark patterns to better resist them

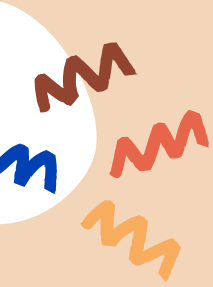
Sum of our countercultural choices creates valuable divergence



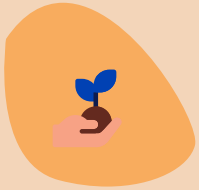
We believe it is important to live our own values now

Society needs to change; doesn't exempt us from our responsibilities to others (esp. people who have less power)

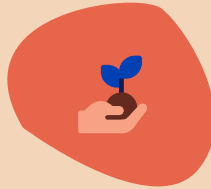




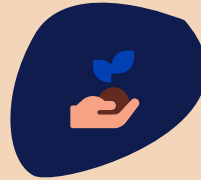
OH!Lab Experience



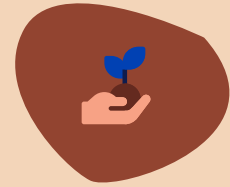
*40 hour
work week*



*Real
vacations*



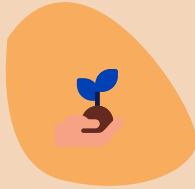
*Meaningful
mutual
support*



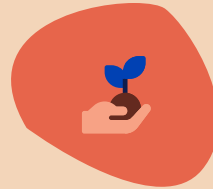
*We publish,
win awards*



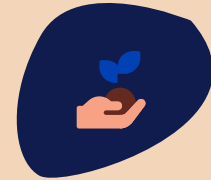
What can we do?



*Identify
system
choices*



*Understand
generated dark
patterns*



*Discuss how
to counter
them*

We can all seek justice together to create long-term sustainable research cultures that include everybody, not just the people least disadvantaged by the dark patterns of academia.





Thank you!

If you want to talk about
countercultures more,
please feel free to email me at
ecruz@cs.cmu.edu



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