

How much do Lattes cost? Understanding Postgraduate Studies as Work and its Implications for the Mental Health of Postgraduates in Administration

Quanto custa o lattes? Compreendendo a Pós-Graduação como Trabalho e suas Implicações na Saúde Mental de Pós-graduandos em Administração

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to understand whether postgraduate students recognize themselves and are recognized as intellectual workers, and how the dynamics of academic work affect their mental health. As theoretical lenses, the study adopts Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital and the theoretical framework developed by Christophe Dejours, within a paradigmatic perspective situated in the qualitative field of human and social construction. Based on a basic qualitative study, twelve interviews were conducted using a semi-structured script with doctoral students from a graduate program in administration at a Brazilian federal university, employing thematic content analysis. The results reveal common patterns among the participants, highlighting a lack of recognition as intellectual workers. The construction of this identity involves four key dimensions: (1) personal recognition; (2) legal recognition; (3) social recognition; and (4) institutional recognition. It is concluded that the mental distress experienced by postgraduate students is not the result of individual fragilities, but rather of the working conditions to which they are subjected—conditions shaped by a neoliberal and productivist logic that colonizes academic life and commodifies knowledge.

Keywords: Intellectual work. Administration. Postgraduate studies. Competitive environment. Mental health.

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RESUMO

O objetivo deste estudo foi compreender se os pós-graduandos se reconhecem e são reconhecidos como trabalhadores intelectuais e como a dinâmica do trabalho acadêmico afeta a saúde mental desses trabalhadores. Como lente teórica, se adota a teoria do capital simbólico de Bourdieu e a corrente teórica desenvolvida por Christopher Dejours, em uma perspectiva paradigmática inserida no âmbito qualitativo da construção humana e social. A partir de um estudo qualitativo básico foram realizadas 12 entrevistas utilizando um roteiro semiestruturado com doutorandos de um PPG em administração de uma Universidade Federal brasileira, com aplicação da técnica de análise de conteúdo temática. Os resultados revelam padrões comuns entre os pós-graduandos, apontando para a falta de reconhecimento como trabalhadores intelectuais. A concretização dessa identidade atravessa quatro perspectivas-chave: 1) reconhecimento pessoal; 2) reconhecimento legal; 3) reconhecimento social; e 4) reconhecimento institucional. Conclui-se que o adoecimento mental de pós-graduandos não é resultado de fragilidades individuais, mas sim das condições de trabalho às quais estão submetidos, moldadas por uma lógica produtivista e neoliberal que coloniza a vida acadêmica e transforma o conhecimento em mercadoria.

Palavras-chaves: Trabalho intelectual. Administração. Pós-graduação. Ambiente competitivo. Saúde mental.

Introduction

The university, as a space for study and work, can be understood as an organizational structure of intellectual capital in which the student is embedded. This organizational configuration encompasses actions and decisions that deeply shape students' lives, often influencing their daily routines from wake-up and departure times to dress codes, communication styles, behaviors, cognitive patterns, and emotional responses (Anjos, 2013).

This relationship between organizational structure and individual life resonates with the analyses of authors such as Karl Marx, who emphasized the influence of the economic structure on the social superstructure, including institutions like education. Marx (1867) also argued that labor is the source of value and that workers are the primary agents who provide their labor power and create value within capitalist institutions, thereby sustaining the functioning of the economic system. Consequently, the mode of production shapes a society's ideology and culture. This

perspective can be applied to the university as an institution embedded within a broader social and economic context (Marx, 1867).

The academic environment fits within this conception of labor as a symbolic and social arena of struggle, where individuals compete for resources and status. In this context, career and occupational choices are not merely individual decisions but are deeply shaped by social factors such as social class, educational background, cultural origin, and social network (Bourdieu, 1990).

The act of studying and working simultaneously emerges as a source of personal emancipation and identity construction. Thus, intellectual capital stands out for its bold endeavor to connect not only pleasure and work but also for advancing a provocative notion of emancipation one that carries the potential to generate fulfillment while simultaneously eliciting creative forms of suffering (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

This study adopts an interpretive approach to understanding work and its complexities. This also entails recognizing academic labor as *work* and acknowledging the importance of individual experiences and perceptions of workers within the context of graduate education. Such subjective dimensions may not be easily quantifiable, yet they are crucial for achieving a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Accordingly, this study adopts Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) concept of symbolic capital as its theoretical lens manifested here in the form of intellectual capital, which represents a social ritual of individual recognition. In addition, it draws upon Christophe Dejours' (2012) Psychodynamic Theory of Work, which explores the interactions among labor, subjectivity, and mental health. This framework examines how work affects individuals' psychological well-being by addressing both pleasure and suffering in the workplace, viewing work simultaneously as a potential source of fulfillment and distress, as well as a catalyst for knowledge development.

Data from the World Health Organization (WHO) indicate that more than 300 million people worldwide experience depression, making it the leading cause of disability across the globe (WHO, 2018; Elhai et al., 2020). In the Brazilian context, a 2017 WHO report shows that the country has the highest prevalence of depression in Latin America, affecting 5.9% of its population. This reality highlights suicide as the second leading cause of death among Brazilians aged 15 to 29 (Global Health Intelligence, 2017). According to Abreu et al. (2021), there is a high prevalence

of suicide risk among *stricto sensu* graduate students, reaching a rate of 40.18%. Factors such as being over 30 years old, lack of religious practice, symptoms of depression and anxiety, use of psychotropic medication during the program, absence of meaningful and inspiring academic work, poor relationships with fellow graduate students, family conflicts arising from academic demands, and financial concerns were found to be significantly associated with this risk. These findings underscore the importance of investigating potential relationships between participation in graduate education and its impact on students' psychological well-being, as reflected in increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression.

In Brazil, for instance, approximately 10% of the population around 23 million people suffers from depression, with about 5 million experiencing moderate to severe stages of the illness. This places the country fifth in the world for depression cases and first for anxiety disorders. Alarmingly, a recent study conducted by UFRJ with 85,000 adolescents aged 12 to 17 revealed that 30% experience common mental health disorders such as persistent sadness, lack of energy, and difficulty concentrating. If not properly treated, these symptoms may progress into more serious conditions, including the deeply concerning risk of suicide (Costa & Nebel, 2018).

This approach also plays a significant role in raising awareness about the importance of preserving psychological well-being among graduate students, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being. Furthermore, it underscores the crucial role of universities in promoting social and human well-being, making it increasingly evident that sustainable development is unattainable without considering mental health especially in the post-pandemic context, where anxiety and depression continue to affect individuals. In addition, this research provides a valuable opportunity to enhance the strategic planning of the graduate program in Administration at the studied federal university, incorporating mental health care as an inseparable dimension of academic work within graduate education.

Thus, this research has two main objectives: (i) to understand whether the surveyed graduate students recognize themselves and are recognized by others—as intellectual workers; and (ii) to analyze how the dynamics of academic labor affect the mental health of these workers. To achieve these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions: Q1: How can the process of expanding graduate

students' intellectual capital be recognized as a form of intellectual labor? Q2: How do the dynamics of academic work affect the mental health of intellectual workers?

This article is organized into four distinct sections. The first section presents the theoretical framework, offering a contextualization of **Intellectual Work in Graduate Education** through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's **Symbolic Capital**, while also discussing **Graduate Workers' Mental Health** from the perspective of Christophe Dejours' **Psychodynamics of Work**. The second section details the methods and techniques employed in this qualitative research. Subsequently, the third section presents the collected data, the results obtained, and the discussions arising from these findings. The final section provides the **concluding remarks**, addressing the main contributions and limitations of the study and offering suggestions for future research. This closing section delivers a coherent synthesis of the key conclusions, providing a comprehensive view of the work developed.

Theoretical Framework

INTELLECTUAL WORK IN GRADUATE EDUCATION IN LIGHT OF PIERRE BOURDIEU'S CONCEPT OF SYMBOLIC CAPITAL

Universities have historically fulfilled the dual roles of teaching and research, and since the nineteenth century, they have incorporated **extension** as a third mission, aimed at fostering integration between academia and society. In Brazil, according to the *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional* (LDB, Law No. 9,394/1996), public universities are mandated to provide free, high-quality higher education, produce knowledge, and engage in social action. However, these institutions have faced increasing challenges in fulfilling this mission, particularly due to financial pressures and the influence of neoliberal policies (Ross & Gibson, 2007; Martin-Sardesai et al., 2021). Budget cuts, student attrition, the need for modernization, and the pursuit of social inclusion have all hindered the maintenance of a democratic system of public education committed to the nation's development.

At the same time, globalization has fostered a form of political convergence, leading many nations to adopt similar policy measures. In the Brazilian context, higher education has undergone a transition marked by the rapid expansion of ins-

titions and enrollment opportunities, the implementation of diversification policies (such as the creation of new types of institutions and programs), and concerted efforts toward democratizing access particularly through affirmative action and student loan initiatives. However, this expansion has unfolded under strong state centralization, with the government imposing guidelines, evaluations, and regulations that have shaped the sector's growth in both public and private universities (Bittencourt & Pereira, 2022). This process is exemplified by the National System for the Evaluation of Higher Education (SINAES), which illustrates how the State functions as a central actor in steering quality, expansion, and access policies within Brazilian higher education.

This expansion is also evident in Brazil's graduate education system, which encompasses a wide range of academic fields and programs at various levels from professional development courses to doctoral studies, including specializations and master's programs. According to 2021 data from the *Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel* (CAPES/MEC), Brazil has a total of 122,295 students enrolled in graduate programs. Of these, 76,323 are pursuing academic master's degrees, 4,008 are enrolled in professional master's programs, and 41,964 are undertaking doctoral studies (CAPES, 2021).

It is important to note that, despite this considerable intellectual potential, the research profession is still not formally regulated in Brazil. However, Bill No. 1104/2023, currently under review in the National Congress, seeks to regulate the employment status of graduate researchers. This proposed legislation aims to ensure that graduate students and scholarship holders engaged in research activities are granted full labor rights under the law.

At present, these individuals who contribute significantly to the nation's advancement through publicly funded research lack formal recognition of their labor rights. This absence of legal acknowledgment leads to the devaluation and lack of effective recognition of this group as legitimate workers (Brasil, 2023).

“[Labor and social security legislation does not protect our young academic researchers. This legal gap may stem from an excessive emphasis on formal employment as the sole basis for rights. As a result, students and researchers—who play a vital role in our nation's human and technological development—lose recognition for a significant portion of their lives in terms of social security benefits and labor rights]” (Brasil, 2023).

Despite the absence of specific regulation for the research profession, Brazil has several funding agencies such as the *National Council for Scientific and Technological Development* (CNPq) and CAPES that function primarily as *promotion* rather than *regulatory* bodies for research (Souza, Silva & Serpa, 2023). Within this framework, the Lattes Platform stands out as a virtual curriculum system created and maintained by CNPq, operating as an integrated database that connects academic profiles, research groups, and institutions. This platform plays a crucial role in disseminating the academic trajectories and research outputs of scholars and students across the country. However, despite its central mission of promoting research, the platform and the constant need to update it is often perceived as a source of pressure for academic researchers (Souza, Silva & Serpa, 2023).

The strict bureaucratic requirements imposed by research funding institutions can have a significant impact on researchers' practices, limiting their autonomy and hindering access to funding and training opportunities. This, in turn, may constrain creativity and innovation in research (Souza, Silva & Serpa, 2023).

In this context, Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital encompasses the prestige, recognition, and power that certain groups or institutions hold in society due to their control over the production and dissemination of knowledge and culture. Consequently, the economic and political elites who dominate information and shape knowledge exert a strong influence on the accumulation of this symbolic capital, which directly reinforces their positions of power within society (Del Mar & Andreu, 2017).

Symbolic capital takes multiple forms, encompassing not only social and cultural capital but also intellectual capital, among others (Souza, 2014). In this sense, intellectual capital is intrinsically linked to the knowledge an individual accumulates, whether through independent study or through formal education in schools, universities, and other institutions that ultimately grant certificates or diplomas upon completion (Souza, 2014). This process represents a social ritual through which the individual, by engaging with educational institutions, demonstrates competence in performing specific tasks. Pierre Bourdieu conceptualizes this phenomenon as a "rite of investiture" (Bourdieu, 2001).

However, the use of the term *intellectual capital* in this article raises certain conceptual challenges. This is because the term *intellectual* often appears in con-

texts such as *academic work* or *academic themes*, where its meaning diverges substantially (Rowlands, 2018). Therefore, throughout this study, when the term *intellectual capital* is used in a Bourdieusian sense, it specifically refers to the process through which doctoral students acquire intellectual capital.

Intellectual capital manifests itself across multiple dimensions, including leadership roles within research units, participation in scientific academies, teaching positions at research-oriented higher education institutions, publishing with reputable academic presses, and presenting research at international conferences (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 40). Within the university environment, intellectual capital is closely tied to teaching and research activities, assuming that those engaged in these domains are best positioned to define academic goals and strategies to achieve them (Salter & Tapper, 2002; Rowlands, 2018).

However, in this context of academic intellectual labor, competition is far from new and institutional systems such as the Lattes Platform have increasingly intensified it by introducing mechanisms for measurement, monitoring, and reporting. This trend has become more pronounced in recent years, as these processes reflect and reproduce academic evaluation and ranking practices at both national and international levels (Rawolle & Lingard, 2013; Reay, 2015).

As a result, academics engage in this competitive game (Bourdieu, 1990), often reluctantly, partly due to the measurable impact these activities have on academic workload models, promotions, and research grant applications, among other factors (Leišytė, 2016; Rowlands, 2018). This competitive environment, in turn, may contribute to the emergence of mental health challenges, an issue that will be explored in greater detail in the following section.

THE MENTAL HEALTH OF GRADUATE WORKERS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CHRISTOPHE DEJOURS' PSYCHODYNAMICS OF WORK

In recent years, there has been growing interest in studies related to the world of work, particularly those grounded in Christophe Dejours' Psychodynamics of Work, which has gained prominence in both national and international conferences. This approach offers an innovative perspective on subjectivity in the workplace, enabling the analysis of expressions, experiences, and emotions within the work environment (Bueno & Macêdo, 2012).

In Dejours' intellectual trajectory, the foundations of his theory rest upon the essential elements of work for the individual. His ontological approach transcends the traditional scope of analysis by emphasizing that work not only transforms the social being but also posits that the human body itself is a source of knowledge production. This perspective introduces the crucial distinction between prescribed work and real work (Dejours, 2012). The knowledge required to perform real work arises from the intelligence inherent in the body, rather than from conventional intellectual reflection (Rossato, 2001; Souza, 2023; Rocha, 2023).

Dejours views work as a crucial element in shaping both health and identity, understanding that its influence extends far beyond formal working hours to encompass family life and moments of rest or non-work (Dejours, 1992, 1993, 1994).

When applied to the context of graduate workers, Dejours' (1987) concept of work offers a valuable lens for understanding the specific challenges they face, including intense academic pressures, loneliness, and financial concerns. These individuals, recognized as holders of intellectual capital (Bourdieu, 1998), do not adopt a passive stance in the face of the structural constraints of academia (Heloani & Lancman, 2004). For this reason, it is rare to consider work as an element that does *not* influence mental health (Dejours, 1999). Work, therefore, transcends mere production it also represents a process of self-construction, personal transformation, and identity formation.

In a society marked by uneven and combined economic development, the expansion of higher education has profoundly affected graduate studies, which stand out as one of the most impacted sectors of the university system. The pursuit of high-level academic qualifications by intellectual workers requires a multi-year commitment after undergraduate education—encompassing master's, doctoral, and, in some cases, postdoctoral training, depending on institutional requirements (Silva Júnior, 2017).

However, this trajectory is characterized by an intense routine filled with deadlines, credit requirements, funding calls, competitions, publications, and research grants. This structure deeply rooted in competition among intellectual workers often fosters an environment conducive to the development of mental health issues, as the pressure to perform and the emphasis on productivity and output quantity may lead to feelings of insecurity and anxiety (Silva et al., 2022). These concerns

are further exacerbated by the lack of institutional initiatives to adequately address such problems.

This scenario reflects a culture of productivism and precarity already present within academia one that was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent need to adapt to a “new normal.” Studies conducted even before the pandemic (Patrus, Dantas & Shigaki, 2015; Costa & Nebel, 2018) had already pointed to a notably higher prevalence of mental health issues among graduate students compared to the general population.

Interestingly, these subjectivities are absorbed into the relentless pursuit of the “always more” (Gaulejac, 2007, p. 173), which tends to weaken both political and personal agency. The pressure for excessive productivity reinforces this harmful cycle, perpetuating the “always more” culture that, in turn, negatively impacts the mental health of academic workers.

This phenomenon of mental distress has been the subject of investigation by numerous researchers worldwide. For instance, Evans et al. (2018), in a study published in *Nature*, surveyed 2,279 graduate students across more than 26 countries. The results revealed that 39% of respondents exhibited symptoms of depression, while 41% reported symptoms of anxiety. Compared to the general population where such rates average around 6% these figures are considerably higher. The study also identified specific demographic groups that are particularly vulnerable to mental health challenges, including transgender individuals (55% for anxiety and 57% for depression), women (43% and 41%), and men (34% and 35%).

Another study conducted in the United States with 50 doctoral students in the life sciences examined the decision-making process surrounding the disclosure or concealment of depression. The findings showed that graduate students in this field often shared their experiences of depression with peers in their programs (Wiesenthal, Gin & Cooper, 2023). However, they were notably reluctant to disclose these struggles to undergraduate students within their research groups. The doctoral students explained that their primary fear of revealing depression was the potential for judgment from their academic advisors. These results highlight how complex power dynamics among graduate students, their supervisors, peers, and mentees play a significant role in shaping decisions about when and to whom to disclose mental health struggles (Wiesenthal, Gin & Cooper, 2023).

The results also indicated that perceived resource scarcity and limited awareness of available interventions are key factors contributing to the challenges graduate students face in maintaining their mental health. However, one of the most promising alternatives identified was the use of online mental health interventions guided by professional therapists (Moghimi et al., 2023).

More specifically, graduate workers encounter a unique set of challenges as they transition from undergraduate studies to this more advanced academic stage. The graduate environment is notably demanding, characterized by intense workloads and heightened expectations compared to undergraduate education. Pursuing a master's or doctoral degree entails a demanding journey for young researchers one that involves producing dissertations or theses, completing qualifying exams, participating in national and international academic events, fulfilling course credit requirements, publishing in high-impact journals, and defending their work, among other challenges (Costa & Nebel, 2018).

In addition, graduate workers must cope with financial difficulties, family issues, personal and emotional challenges, professional pressures, and even marital strain, creating a complex and multifaceted scenario (Costa & Nebel, 2018). To achieve a high level of academic qualification, they devote many years of their lives to education. After completing an undergraduate degree, typically lasting about five years, students may pursue a master's program (approximately two years), a doctoral degree (around four years), and even postdoctoral studies, which can range from six months to six years depending on institutional regulations.

The structure of graduate education, rooted in competition among master's and doctoral students, fosters an environment conducive to the development of mental health issues. This intense competition often triggers feelings of insecurity and anxiety, leading students to prioritize the quantity of academic output over the quality of scientific research (Silva et al., 2022).

These elements illustrate how working conditions within the academic environment can trigger psychological distress, reinforcing Dejours' theory on the relationship between work and mental health. This underscores the importance of therapeutic and support-based approaches to address the mental health challenges faced by graduate workers, particularly given the complex power dynamics and economic pressures that characterize this context. The following section presents the methodological path undertaken to carry out this research.

Methodological Procedures

This research adopts a qualitative paradigmatic perspective, recognizing the inherent complexity of social issues. The epistemological approach is grounded in Dejours' (1987) concept of work and Bourdieu's (1990) notion of symbolic capital. This choice extends beyond methodological convenience, emphasizing a deep and contextually situated understanding of the studied phenomena (Glückler, 2020; Spink & Menegon, 2013). The focus is placed on graduate intellectual workers, who face challenges related to the recognition of their labor and mental health. The basic qualitative method was chosen to capture the meanings participants assign to the phenomenon, seeking to understand their perspectives and worldviews (Merriam, 1998, 2002).

This approach, widely applied in various disciplines including Administration centers on grasping participants' interpretations and meanings (Godoy, 2005). The goal is to understand the lived experiences of graduate intellectual workers and how these experiences affect their mental health. Although the Psychodynamics of Work is both a theoretical and methodological approach, in this study it serves primarily as a theoretical foundation for field reflections. Adaptations to the Brazilian context were made, recognizing that the original method proposed by Dejours does not fully align with Brazil's social and institutional reality (Giongo, Monteiro & Sobrosa, 2015; Pena & Remoaldo, 2019).

SELECTION OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

O processo de seleção dos participantes foi realizado com diligência, considerando os princípios de relevância e acessibilidade. Doutorandos matriculados no Programa de Pós-Graduação em Administração de uma instituição pública brasileira foram selecionados, visando suas contribuições para o estudo. O recrutamento ocorreu por meio do WhatsApp, resultando em 12 participantes que concordaram em participar das entrevistas.

Para preservar a confidencialidade de suas identidades, optou-se por empregar pseudônimos como designações correspondentes. O uso de pseudônimos relacionados a filósofos está fundamentado no contexto do campo intelectual, refletindo a conexão dos entrevistados com a tradição filosófica e sua busca por uma

identidade que sugere a profundidade e relevância do trabalho. Além disso, foi adotado um prefixo (e-) para facilitar a identificação dos entrevistados, os quais foram atribuídos conforme descrito na Tabela 1.

Table 1. Interviews Conducted and List of Pseudonyms Assigned to Participants.

No.	Participant Pseudonym	Data Collection Setting	Date of Interview	Duration
01	e-Socrates	Online	20/10/2023	40:52
02	e-Plato	In person	24/10/2023	15:54
03	e-Aristotle	Online	25/10/2023	14:18
04	e-Saint Augustine	Online	25/10/2023	22:09
05	e-Descartes	Online	26/10/2023	19:16
06	e-John Locke	Online	28/10/2023	20:56
07	e-David Hume	In person	30/10/2023	22:25
08	e-Rousseau	In person	30/10/2023	31:35
09	e-Kant	Online	01/11/2023	33:49
10	e-Nietzsche	In person	01/11/2023	30:13
11	e-Foucault	Online	03/11/2023	01:02:02

Regarding the exclusion criteria, the following guidelines were applied: workers who were on medical leave or not enrolled in the program at the time of the interviews were excluded; individuals under the age of 18 were also excluded, as well as workers from other graduate programs who were merely taking courses within the field of Administration.

DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews guided by a script of 20 questions based on the principles of symbolic capital and psychodynamics of work, organized into five distinct thematic sections. This method enabled a deep and meaningful understanding of participants' experiences. Twelve doctoral students were selected following an initial approach via WhatsApp, followed by phone

communication to schedule the interviews. The sessions took place between October and November 2023, with seven conducted online and four in person, lasting between 14 minutes and 18 seconds and 1 hour and 2 minutes. The interviews were transcribed using Microsoft Office Word 365, resulting in a total of 65 pages, which were subsequently reviewed and analyzed in detail. The research design adhered to ethical principles, ensuring informed consent and participant confidentiality throughout the study.

DATA ANALYSIS

This study employed thematic content analysis as the primary data analysis technique (Minayo, 2012). This approach, structured into three stages, pre-analysis, material exploration, and treatment of results, enabled a detailed and systematic examination of the collected data (Minayo, Deslandes & Gomes, 2011). The final categories were defined based on the theoretical foundations of the study, and the content was organized and coded using an Excel spreadsheet. In the concluding phase, the data were consolidated and interpreted in a reflective and critical manner. Table 2 presents the articulation among the study's objectives, thematic categories of analysis, subcategories, and the corresponding authors who informed the research framework.

This theoretical-methodological alignment enhanced the understanding of the interconnection between the research objectives, their corresponding categories of analysis, and the theoretical foundations supporting each objective. It facilitated the implementation of a comprehensive and in-depth approach to explore the experiences of intellectual workers in the graduate program in Administration, capturing their perspectives in a detailed and qualitative manner. For better visualization and organization of the data, this study adopted the coding model proposed by Merriam (2002).

Analysis and Discussion of Results

The first research question explores how the process of expanding graduate workers' intellectual capital can be recognized as a form of intellectual labor. To address

Table 2. CLinkage Between Research Questions, Objectives, Thematic Categories, Subcategories, and Supporting Authors.

Research Question	Objectives	Categories	Subcategories	Key Authors
Q1: How can the process of expanding graduate workers' intellectual capital be recognized as a form of intellectual labor?	To understand whether the graduate students studied recognize themselves — and are recognized — as intellectual workers.	CA1: Academic Work Experience and Graduate Program Demands	- Work engagement and academic responsibilities- Formalization and regulation of work- Personal recognition- Social recognition- Institutional recognition	Del Valle (2002); Bourdieu (1987, 2001); Salter & Tapper (2002); Rowlands (2018)
Q2: How do the dynamics of academic work affect the mental health of intellectual workers?	To understand how the dynamics of academic work impact the mental health of these intellectual workers.	CA2: Psychodynamics of Work and the Experience of Pleasure and Suffering in Academic Labor CA 3: Impact on Mental Health and Well-being	- Pleasure derived from work- Work-related suffering- Academic pressure - Mental health impacts- Coping mechanisms for academic pressure- Suggestions for improvement	Dejours (2004a, 2004b); Giongo, Monteiro & Sobrosa (2015); Pena & Remoaldo (2019)

this question, themes shared by graduate students were identified, particularly regarding how they manage academic demands and seek recognition. As shown in Table 2, common patterns emerged among the participants, which were then grouped, in light of Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, into five subcategories: Work Ownership, Formalization and Regulation of Work (Legal Recognition), Personal Recognition, Social Recognition, and Institutional Recognition.

CA1: Academic Work Experience and Graduate Program Demands

The perception of work, as experienced in the intellectual labor of graduate students, begins with self-identification as workers within the academic environment. In this context, work is characterized as a *living* process and understood as a subjective dimension that enables individual emancipation. However, the experiences reported by the doctoral participants often reveal that they do not perceive their academic engagement a professional work. This is evident in the reflections shared by interviewees e-Aristotle, e-Plato, e-Rousseau, e-Saint Augustine, and e-David Hume. On the contrary, the participants' self-questioning exposes moments of reflexive hesitation—illustrated, for instance, in e-Saint Augustine's remark: “[...] *in grad school or outside of it?* ” Which highlights a lack of self-identification as workers within graduate education.

Another form of identification emerges from a financial perspective, in which receiving a scholarship is perceived as a form of compensation for service provision, thus framing academic engagement as a purely labor activity. This view is exemplified by e-John Locke's statement: “[...] *but rather because I receive the scholarship [...]*”. Such a perspective reflects the notion that when an individual receives financial remuneration for performing a task, they begin to perceive themselves as a worker, situating work within the material and visible sphere. In these cases, the subjective dimension of work, understood as a living, individual, and inherently personal activity, is not fully recognized by graduate students. According to Dejours (2012), work in its essence does not belong solely to the realm of the visible; it extends beyond objective and tangible activity, encompassing a personal and subjective experience that engages both emotion and meaning.

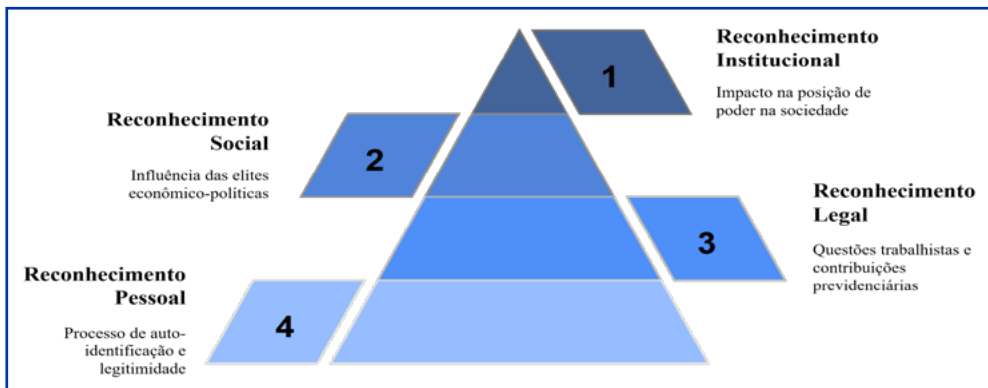
The recognition of one's worker status initially depends on self-identification. In this regard, the role of intellectual capital is notable for its bold endeavor

to foster a provocative notion of emancipation (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). However, achieving legitimacy and emancipation is a gradual process, as illustrated by participant e-Foucault: “[...] At times, I need another’s perspective to see myself. As a worker I understood how people don’t see me as one. I have difficulty recognizing myself.” This lack of immediate self-recognition often occurs at the beginning of the graduate journey.

Throughout this process of legitimation, professors play a pivotal role in reinforcing the identity of the intellectual worker, as expressed by e-Kant: “[...] I started to think about it after some professors in the program kept reinforcing that for me [...] we are workers, yes.” This act of personal recognition, as outlined by Bourdieu (1990), guides the intellectual worker toward individual emancipation. This occurs because the act of labor, manifested through intellectual activity, constitutes a social ritual of recognition, a process through which individuals affirm their competence, belonging, and symbolic value within the academic field.

Therefore, this analysis reveals that the realization and emancipation of the individual as an intellectual worker unfold through four fundamental dimensions: (1) Personal recognition; (2) legal recognition; (3) social recognition and (4) Institutional recognition. These interrelated dimensions form the basis for understanding how intellectual work gains legitimacy and symbolic value within the academic field, as illustrated in figure 1.

Figure 1. Pathway to Recognition as a Worker.



Source: prepared by the authors (2024).

Given these characteristics, personal recognition spans the entire process of self-identification until legitimacy is achieved, enabling individuals to recognize themselves as workers, as previously discussed.

In this context, legal recognition is closely tied to labor rights, encompassing defined working hours, rest periods, and social security contributions. Here, the role of economic and political elites becomes evident, as they shape the accumulation of symbolic capital and, consequently, influence power relations within society (Del Mar & Andreu, 2017).

Despite receiving scholarships, graduate students lack access to formal labor rights, which creates a sense of insecurity. This absence of guarantees is clearly perceived by doctoral participants, reflecting broader power dynamics within society. As e-Descartes stated: *“Starting with our labor rights which we don’t have.”* Similarly, e-Kant emphasized: *“[...] work is directly connected to the idea of fixed hours! Formalization, the work card, labor rights... from the moment you start contributing to social security (INSS).”*

In the Brazilian legal context, the profession of academic researcher does not receive official recognition, which creates insecurity among graduate students who devote many years of their lives to this activity without obtaining any formal acknowledgment of their status as workers. Currently, Bill No. 1104/2023 is under review in the National Congress, aiming to ensure labor rights for intellectual workers. Nevertheless, the absence of legal recognition does not negate the nature of their work—even when it is unrecognized, unpaid, invisible, or socially unacknowledged. As Dejours (1992, 1993, 1994) argues, work is not confined to the formal duration of the working day but extends into the realm of family life and non-work moments. In other words, work transcends the traditional notion of labor characterized by fixed schedules and a 40- to 44-hour workweek (Dejours, 1992, 1993, 1994).

For doctoral students, however, the lack of these formal aspects often results in a lack of social recognition. Neither family members nor, at times, the academic community itself perceive graduate students as workers unless they bear the mark of formal employment. This is clearly reflected in e-Socrates’ statement: *“[...] people don’t even know how long a PhD takes, or the level of demand it requires [...]”*. What remains largely unknown to society is that these intellectual workers, in order to achieve such a high level of academic qualification, must commit many years

beyond their undergraduate education, often pursuing master's, doctoral, and, in some cases, postdoctoral degrees depending on the regulations of each institution (Silva Júnior, 2017).

Due to the lack of recognition from much of society, particularly from those outside the academic environment, these workers experience a pervasive discrediting of their efforts, often being asked when they will “start working,” as if they were not already engaged in labor. Such questioning effectively devalues their activity as intellectual work. For most of their social circles, pursuing a PhD is often perceived as a rite of passage, regarded by some as a “personal whim” and by others as a “lack of occupation.”

In this regard, e-Socrates expresses frustration and disbelief toward the lack of recognition for his work: *“What are you going to do afterward, right? [...] They think that doing graduate studies means you can only start working later.”* This sentiment is far from isolated—it reflects a broader cultural reality within Brazilian graduate education, which, despite its expansion, still has limited accessibility. Such experiences are echoed across participants, as illustrated by e-John Locke: *“The phrase ‘Oh, but you only study’ is so common, and it wears us down because it’s not just studying [...] people say, ‘How long are you going to keep studying? Working is important too. After you retire and everything,’ you know those kinds of comments.”* This feeling is confirmed by e-David Hume. Few outside academia understand that, even while waiting for recognition through public policies or regulatory institutions, the knowledge essential to perform intellectual work stems from the natural intelligence of the body itself, not merely from conventional intellectual reflection (Rossato, 2001; Souza, 2023; Rocha, 2023).

Another form of recognition highlighted in this study is institutional recognition, particularly within the academic context where the promotion of cultural and intellectual development should serve as the primary space for acknowledging graduate students as intellectual workers. However, it is precisely in this environment that such recognition is often lacking, hindering the emancipation of graduate students as individuals. This absence of acknowledgment although unexpected given the expertise of those who contribute to scientific advancement in Brazil ultimately generates feelings of frustration. While it is understandable that family members and friends may fail to recognize this work due to a lack of understanding, the absence

of recognition within the academic institution itself produces a deeper sense of disillusionment. As expressed by e-Foucault, reflecting on the academic environment: *“It’s becoming more hostile every day.”* This statement encapsulates the emotional toll experienced when the very space that should validate intellectual work instead becomes a source of alienation and invisibility.

At the institutional level, recognition operates as a kind of currency of exchange, primarily represented by academic publications. In other words, value and recognition are measured by what one produces. This perception is illustrated by e-Descartes, who expressed dissatisfaction with this system: *“We emphasize publications so much, right? Because they’re the currency... sometimes, depending on the recommendations you get, that’s what really generates this feeling of recognition.”* This notion is reinforced by e-John Locke, who noted: *“Institutional recognition gives me the impression that if I’m in the university, I’m recognized as a student who produces, constantly publishing. Otherwise, I’m not recognized.”* Such statements reveal a performance-based culture within academia, where recognition is contingent upon measurable productivity. This dynamic reflects Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic capital accumulation, in which visibility and prestige are tied to one’s ability to convert intellectual production into institutional value and legitimacy.

In addition to being a characteristic of the specific institution and graduate program under study, this mindset is deeply embedded in the culture of stricto sensu graduate education. As e-Foucault observes: *“It’s very, very ingrained in the character of the graduate program. A spirit of competition.”* Academics engage in this competitive game (Bourdieu, 1990), often reluctantly, partly due to the measurable effects that these activities have on factors such as academic workload, promotions, and research grant applications (Leišytė, 2016; Rowlands, 2018).

Within academic life, being recognized as an intellectual worker entails following a ritualized institutional path one that has been reinforced over the years by graduate programs. Even though productivity may not come naturally to all scholars, there exists strong pressure to meet the expectations of funding agencies, which emphasize measurable outputs and performance indicators. As a result, graduate professionals face a significant workload, as expressed by e-Descartes: *“Sometimes the demands are so great that they make us question everything... to the point of wanting to give up.”* This statement encapsulates the emotional strain of naviga-

ting a system in which recognition and legitimacy are tied to relentless productivity, often at the expense of well-being.

The strict bureaucratic requirements imposed by academic institutions profoundly affect researchers' practices, often hindering creativity and innovation in research (Souza, Silva & Serpa, 2023). This pressure is also acutely felt by doctoral students, as illustrated by e-John Locke: *"They impose these very quantitative metrics... you have to write a report listing everything you've produced. So yes, we're pressured. Many professors say: we expect you to publish in high-impact journals, in good journals. But that takes time and dedication to deliver."* E-Nietzsche refers to this dynamic as the "rules of the game." This ritual shaped by intense demands—is guided by the process established by CAPES, Brazil's national research funding and evaluation agency. Although this process contains inherent limitations, it remains deeply institutionalized within the structure of Brazilian graduate education. Such a framework represents a genuine symbolic and social struggle, in which individuals compete for resources and status according to the rules of the game predefined by the field's power agents (Bourdieu, 1990).

The following category addresses the second research question: *How do the dynamics of academic work affect the mental health of these intellectual workers?*

CA2: Psychodynamics of Work and the Experience of Pleasure and Suffering in Academic Labor

In examining the dimensions of pleasure and suffering as proposed by Dejours (2012), graduate students are shown to face pressures originating from both external and internal environments. The pursuit of balance often resembles an altruistic act, something not everyone can achieve. It represents a constant yet essential challenge to maintain equilibrium between academic demands and mental health. This dynamic was analyzed through two overarching categories: Psychodynamics of Work and the Experience of Pleasure and Suffering in Academic Labor, and Impact on Mental Health and Well-being. From these categories, six subcategories were identified: pleasure in work; suffering in work; academic pressure; impacts on mental health; coping mechanisms for academic pressure and suggestions for improvement.

The analyses revealed that graduate students face inherent competition within the academic environment, reflected in activities such as publishing, seeking

scholarships, and participating in conferences, which negatively affect their mental health. For this reason, it is rare to consider work as an element that does not influence mental health (Dejours, 1999). Work transcends mere production, o it also represents a process of self-construction, personal transformation, and identity formation. The sadness evident in e-John Locke's words reveals the worsening of anxiety, especially during the doctoral stage: *"[...] I was already a person who had a certain degree of anxiety, and it ended up being exacerbated. It became more serious, more severe [...] especially during the doctorate [...] today I am still undergoing psychological treatment, my crises have decreased, but... I still have many anxiety attacks."* This account should not be underestimated. Between the lines of these sorrowful words lies a cry for help, reflecting the unfortunate perception of an academic environment considered highly unhealthy, as described by e-Socrates: *"[...] suddenly you find yourself feeling sad, lost [...] everyone who enters graduate school will develop depression, something like that."*

Therefore, the psychodynamics of work offers an important perspective for understanding the challenges faced by graduate students, including academic pressures, loneliness, and financial concerns. These workers strive to expand their intellectual capital and are far from passive. The role of intellectual work in graduate studies is never neutral; it can bring both pleasure and suffering, and how individuals deal with this dynamic determines which feeling becomes more prominent. Yet, there is also great pleasure in being an intellectual worker. The way they live and produce collectively is an essential element in this equation. Being part of an academic group allows them to share knowledge and acknowledge individual contributions within a coexistence shaped by a shared history (Moraes, 2023).

For some, graduate school represented an unattainable dream, a life goal, a moment of true personal fulfillment in the construction of their identity o it did for e-David Hume: *"I take great pleasure in knowing, in being here [...] in producing. It's something like that. I'm accomplishing something, right?"* There is also pleasure derived from the execution of their activities, as well expressed by e-Aristotle: *"My pleasure, you know, is more connected to being in the field, to being able to perceive theoretical issues. When we're in the field, having contact with people—that, for me, means a lot."*

On the other hand, it is important to note that the process can also become exhausting, leading to the loss of that pleasure, as described by e-Foucault: *“Pleasure? (At this point, they burst into loud laughter) I’ve already... I’ve already lost that perception a long time ago. Pleasure, pleasure... I think there is a certain kind of pleasure, but it’s the pleasure of being recognized.”* This feeling can persist throughout the entire graduate journey or appear only at specific moments, such as the completion of each stage, as detailed by e-Plato: *“[...] well, I think that, in the end, the greatest pleasure we have is when we finish, right? So it feels good when you can overcome stages, when you manage to complete a course, when you get a paper accepted, whether in a journal or at a conference.”*

The perspective of these workers is often reduced to a quantitative reward approach for their efforts, in which the process itself is not always valued. The competition among intellectual workers creates an environment prone to mental health issues, as the pressure for performance and the emphasis on quantity generate feelings of insecurity and anxiety (Silva et al., 2022). Following a linear perspective, from beginning to end, entering graduate school is associated with pleasure, while the entire journey is perceived as a painful process, recognized as a *“rite of passage.”*

The lack of financial support, and especially the lack of recognition, contribute to a perception of graduate studies as a source of suffering rather than pleasure, as expressed by e-Kant: *“[...] I think that if I could find more pleasure in what I do it would be easier. And even though the university sometimes helps, it can’t cover everything, so like [...] yeah, if the money lasts to live here [...] until the end, because it’s an extremely expensive city to live in [...] so if there were more facilitators, right? Throughout this process, there would be more pleasures than suffering. Today I see graduate school as more suffering than pleasure.”* In this context, Dejours’ theory recognizes that the excessive focus on productivity can harm the relationship between work and emotional well-being. For this reason, it is rare to consider work as an element that does not affect mental health, since the work environment transcends mere production, involving self-construction, personal transformation, and identity formation (Dejours, 1999).

It is not merely the lack of recognition for their efforts as workers. The loss of one’s own identity as an individual prevents these graduate students from having

an emancipatory experience, leading them to feel incapable and fostering feelings of devaluation toward their own work. In such situations, giving up is not just a sign of fatigue—it becomes the confirmation of reaching the end without the sense of pleasure for completing a stage, but rather with the materialization of suffering that accompanies it.

This scenario reflects a culture of productivism and precarity already present in the academic environment, further intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. During this period, many reactions and testimonies emerged, but there was a unanimous acknowledgment of the suffering caused by academic pressures. As e-Kant expressed: *“During the pandemic, while I was having a breakdown, I went to talk with people from the graduate program. They had produced excellent papers while I was depressed, struggling to understand what was happening, and I felt really bad about it. The competitiveness among students makes us see our own work as inferior, right?”* Meanwhile, even before the onset of the pandemic, research had already pointed to a notably higher prevalence of mental health issues among graduate students compared to the general population (Patrus, Dantas & Shigaki, 2015; Costa & Nebel, 2018).

Thus, the workers share a common concern about the work overload outside the classroom, excessive reading, and the intense pressure to publish articles. This pressure originates from two main sources: (1) the external environment, and (2) the internal environment, as illustrated in figure 2.

Figure 2. Pressures on Academic Workers.



Source: prepared by the authors (2024).

In the external environment, funding and research promotion agencies in Brazil, such as CAPES, impose strict productivity metrics. In addition, family members and society at large often expect successful outcomes, even without fully understanding what this process entails. The individual's own economic survival, and that of their family, also exerts pressure throughout the doctoral journey. In the internal environment, the agencies that oversee graduate education establish specific performance requirements for graduate programs (PPGs) to achieve what is considered a high-quality standard, and these demands are transferred to graduate students. In turn, these students impose internal pressures on themselves to maintain the level of performance deemed acceptable by the academic community, as illustrated by e-John Locke's experience: *"I almost gave up continuing. Precisely because of this issue of pressure, of not feeling good enough, of not liking what I wrote."* This dynamic creates a vicious cycle. The intense pressure for productivity fuels this harmful loop, perpetuating the "always more" culture, which in turn negatively impacts the mental health of academic workers. The excessive focus on productivity distorts the relationship between work and emotional well-being (Dejours, 2004; Gaulejac, 2007), a theme explored in greater detail in the next section.

CA3: Impact on Mental Health and Well-being

The accounts shared by these intellectual workers reflect a journey that can be both deeply rewarding and intensely distressing. Although there is no magic formula for navigating this process, seeking balance was frequently mentioned as a way to experience work and ultimately achieve personal emancipation, as expressed by e-Socrates: *"So, whenever that suffering arises, I keep thinking, thinking, thinking, because suffering doesn't help at all—it only gets in the way. So I think you have to try to find that balance, because if you start thinking too much about what's worrying you, you can't even get anything done."*

The subjectivity attributed to work is closely tied to the pursuit of balance between pleasure and suffering. Graduate students may not fully perceive this subjectivity because they are often more focused on the objective demands of academic work. However, it is essential to recognize that work is a subjective experience—one that involves both pleasure and suffering—and that individuals develop mechanisms to cope with these experiences in a healthy and balanced way.

There are several strategies (mechanisms) that graduate students use to cope with the impact experienced during their programs from walking their dogs to talking with family members all of which help relieve the tension of academic pressures. As e-Kant mentioned: *“Another way I dealt with suffering was through physical exercise. It was a way I found to calm down when I start freaking out over my papers; I go for a walk, grab my bike, take a ride, and then go back to writing.”* These small actions shape one’s relationship with work. Thus, being part of an academic collective allows for the sharing of knowledge and the recognition of individual contributions, fostering a form of sociability shaped by a shared history (Moraes, 2023).

This altruistic spirit is not very common among graduate students—not for lack of willingness, but because it is difficult to recover from the emotional toll of graduate school. Reports of anxiety, depression, medication use, intense crying spells, negative emotions, and thoughts of giving up were among the most common experiences mentioned when participants were asked about the impact of graduate studies on their mental health. It is even perceived as a destructive dynamic, as described by e-Foucault: *“It’s a destructive dynamic, right? A dynamic. It greatly affects our mental health and behavior [...] leading to a state of depression, anxiety. I don’t have depression anymore, but I still suffer from anxiety. And now, during the PhD, I’ve also been feeling really bad.”* These accounts highlight the impact of academic working conditions on psychological well-being, resulting in significant emotional suffering thus reinforcing Dejours’ (2012) theory, which argues that work can be a source of both pleasure and suffering for workers.

The dynamic experienced by graduate students, as stated by Dejours (2012), is not a passive stance. The breadth of what constitutes work and its implications for these workers’ health involves a process of self-awareness. Dejours (2012) identifies a series of psychological defense mechanisms that workers may employ to cope with suffering at work. These include denial, rationalization, sublimation, among others. Such mechanisms help workers face stressful situations and preserve their psychological integrity. At first glance, graduate school may seem like the worst place to be, yet work itself is both a source of fulfillment and of anguish, and this tension is fundamental to the development of knowledge among intellectual workers.

An important step forward would be to rethink academic culture, seeking more sustainable ways to promote research and academic development without compromising the mental health of intellectual workers. Some areas for improvement pointed out by graduate students include greater flexibility in allowing one paper to count toward two different courses and the freedom to address sensitive topics that reflect the realities of graduate life. As e-Kant emphasized: *“Working with themes that are closer to our reality, I think, would bring a greater sense of lightness.”*

In this context, the suggestions offered by these workers can be seen as heroic acts by individuals who often do not feel recognized. Dejours (2012) also highlights the importance of organizational interventions to foster a healthy work environment and reduce workers’ suffering. This includes improving working conditions, providing psychosocial support, promoting autonomy, and ensuring recognition, among other measures. From the participants’ accounts, it becomes clear that the simple act of listening makes a significant difference in balancing pleasure and suffering. Empathy and recognition in such moments open space for genuine human connection, allowing individuals to express their experiences freely and without pressure, bringing forth a subjective process that can never be quantified, only felt. As Foucault noted: *“There should be more initiatives, for example, outreach activities, more communication with students, and stronger psychological support. Greater attention, a real, effective attention to mental health.”*

E-John Locke expands on this idea, suggesting that the university should provide more psychological support services, promoting conversations and lectures to raise awareness among graduate students about the importance of mental health care. He emphasizes that, often, people only realize they are unwell once they reach their breaking point, underscoring the need to prioritize mental health from the very beginning. In many cases, it is only at the end of the graduate process that individuals recognize the true cost, the suffering, and the pleasure they experienced along the way. Despite the mental health challenges encountered throughout the journey, the academic environment also offers meaningful encounters and valuable experiences that go beyond the mere attainment of a degree. For this reason, e-Kant highlights the richness of experiences that transcend academic formalities, poignantly stating that *“literally living doesn’t fit on Lattes.”*

Final Considerations

This research aimed to understand whether the graduate students studied recognize themselves and are recognized as intellectual workers, and to examine how the dynamics of academic work affect their mental health. The study highlights the importance of rethinking academic culture and finding more sustainable ways to promote research and academic development without compromising the mental well-being of those involved.

It began with the assumption that no one becomes a worker, one already is. What may occur is the triggering of a social ritual of self-recognition, since there is no need for external validation; it is inherent to the human body as a source of knowledge. The execution of work arises from the intelligence of the body itself, not from conventional reflection. Therefore, work is alive. This study also offered a reflective analysis of the reality of graduate students, contributing to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced in the Brazilian academic environment.

The intellectual work carried out by doctoral students is revealed to be fundamental not only for personal development but also for the emancipation of the individual. It highlights their subjective experience, which intertwines pleasure and work in the pursuit of emancipation. This approach not only emphasizes the potential for enjoyment in graduate activities but also recognizes that such an endeavor can give rise to creative forms of suffering.

The patterns identified among graduate students show that the lack of recognition as intellectual workers is deeply connected to the precarious conditions and productivist demands that permeate academic training. Beyond limiting the understanding of the emancipatory dimension of work, this institutional and symbolic invisibility contributes to a context of overload, insecurity, and distress, which directly affects the everyday experiences of these individuals. The participants' narratives suggest that it is not merely the lack of recognition itself that leads to psychological suffering, but rather the way in which this lack of recognition takes shape, through disproportionate demands, intensified competitiveness, and institutional neglect. These elements strain the fragile balance between pleasure and suffering in academic work and can have a significant impact on mental health.

By exploring the dimensions of pleasure and suffering through Dejours' framework, it became evident that graduate students face pressures from both external and internal environments, revealing work as a source of both fulfillment and anguish in the pursuit of knowledge development. Thus, the search for balance appears almost as an altruistic act, something that not everyone manages to achieve. That said, the need to balance academic demands and mental health represents a constant yet essential challenge faced by doctoral students in the PPGA program.

Following this premise, theoretically, this research contributes by originally articulating Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital with Dejours' psychodynamics of work, framing the psychological distress of graduate students as a result of institutional structures that render intellectual work invisible within academia. From a practical and institutional perspective, the study highlights the need to reconfigure the organizational culture of graduate programs, which remains marked by productivist logic, performance pressure, and precarization. From a social standpoint, the research contributes by showing that academic work in graduate education is permeated by inequalities, silencing, and forms of symbolic exploitation.

Based on the findings and the gaps identified in research on the working conditions and experiences of graduate students, several areas with potential directions for future investigations have been identified. For instance, the impact of institutional policies presents an important avenue for future studies, aiming to examine how such policies influence graduate students' experiences, encompassing aspects such as funding, completion deadlines, mental health support, and recognition of academic work. Another significant direction involves conducting international comparative studies to analyze variations in the working conditions and experiences of graduate students across different countries, taking into account factors such as academic culture, funding systems, and support structures.

Finally, the mental distress of graduate students is not the result of individual weakness but rather of the working conditions to which they are subjected, conditions shaped by a productivist and neoliberal logic that colonizes academic life and commodifies knowledge. There is an urgent need for institutional and policy actions that recognize graduate students as intellectual workers, entitled to rights, boundaries, and dignified working conditions. The transformation required goes beyond

addressing symptoms, it calls for a critical rethinking and restructuring of the organizational model of graduate education, which currently normalizes precariousness, hyper-demand, and silence around suffering. Such a repositioning demands political and collective action, which poses a challenge, but also offers a possibility to reconstruct meaning in academic practice.

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