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‘HOLIDAYS ARE HOLIDAYS, RIGHT? ‘BRAZILIAN LECTURERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL LIVES

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ARTIGO

'HOLIDAYS ARE HOLIDAYS, RIGHT? 'BRAZILIAN LECTURERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL LIVES

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ABSTRACT: The work-life balance in higher education has been extensively studied but understanding of the academic work culture in the Global South, specifically in Brazil, is limited. This article explores Brazilian lecturers' perceptions of the interface between professional and personal life. Drawing on 516 responses to a questionnaire about using non-work time for academic tasks, and referencing the philosopher Byung-Chul Han and sociologist Lewis Coser, five key themes are generated which make a valuable contribution to this gap: complexity of tasks and environments, excessive dedication, strategies of adaptation, costs of adaptation, and strategies of resistance. Academics in Brazil grapple with intricate workloads in environments that often don't bolster their efforts, resulting in blurred boundaries between their professional and personal lives. Some view their roles with a vocational passion or derive pleasure from their tasks, while others are besieged by their professional demands. This dedication can lead to guilt, affecting both personal relationships and wellbeing. To navigate these challenges, many adopt rigorous planning, yet the perpetual encroachment of work responsibilities can induce exhaustion, stress, and health complications. A segment of academics, influenced by significant life events, resort to strategies emphasizing the delineation between work and leisure, often treating holidays as sacrosanct periods of rest. This study underscores the need for self-awareness and individualized strategies to manage work overload. and calls for a broader challenge to the prevalent culture of productivism in academia and its ramifications on university life. Underpinning the discussion, is the "Health promoting universities" as a possibility for future changes and health promotion for all academic community.

Keywords: academic work; work-life balance; productivism; Brazilian lecturers; higher education

'FÉRIAS SÃO FÉRIAS, CERTO? PERCEPÇÕES DOS PROFESSORES BRASILEIROS SOBRE A RELAÇÃO ENTRE SUAS VIDAS PROFISSIONAIS E PESSOAIS

RESUMO: O equilíbrio entre vida profissional e pessoal no ensino superior tem sido amplamente estudado, mas a compreensão da cultura de trabalho acadêmico no Sul Global, especificamente no Brasil, é limitada. Este artigo explora as percepções de professores universitários brasileiros sobre a interface entre vida profissional e pessoal. Baseando-se em 516 respostas a um questionário sobre o uso do tempo fora do trabalho para tarefas acadêmicas e referenciando o filósofo Byung-Chul Han e o sociólogo Lewis Coser, foram identificados cinco temas principais que ajudam a preencher essa lacuna: complexidade das tarefas e ambientes, dedicação excessiva, estratégias de adaptação,

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custos de adaptação e estratégias de resistência. Docentes universitários no Brasil enfrentam cargas de trabalho intricadas em ambientes que muitas vezes não apoiam seus esforços, resultando em limites difusos entre suas vidas profissionais e pessoais. Alguns veem seus papéis com uma paixão vocacional ou obtêm prazer de suas tarefas, enquanto outros são assediados pelas demandas profissionais. Essa dedicação pode levar à culpa, afetando tanto as relações pessoais quanto o bem-estar. Para lidar com esses desafios, muitos adotam um planejamento rigoroso, mas a constante invasão de responsabilidades de trabalho pode induzir cansaço, estresse e complicações de saúde. Um segmento de acadêmicos, influenciados por eventos significativos na vida, recorre a estratégias que destacam a delimitação entre trabalho e lazer, frequentemente tratando as férias como períodos sagrados de descanso. Este estudo destaca a necessidade de autoconsciência e estratégias individualizadas para gerenciar a sobrecarga de trabalho e faz um apelo para um desafio mais amplo à cultura prevalente do produtivismo na academia e suas ramificações na vida universitária. Subjacente à discussão, está a ideia de "universidades promotoras de saúde" como uma possibilidade de mudanças futuras e promoção da saúde para toda a comunidade acadêmica.

Palavras-chave: trabalho acadêmico; equilíbrio entre vida profissional e pessoal; produtivismo; professores universitários brasileiros; ensino superior

'LAS VACACIONES SON VACACIONES, ¿VERDAD?' PERCEPCIONES DE LOS PROFESORES BRASILEÑOS SOBRE LA RELACIÓN ENTRE SUS VIDAS PROFESIONALES Y PERSONALES

RESÚMEN: El equilibrio entre vida laboral y personal en la educación superior ha sido ampliamente estudiado, pero la comprensión de la cultura de trabajo académico en el Sur Global, específicamente en Brasil, es limitada. Este artículo explora las percepciones de los docentes brasileños sobre la interfaz entre la vida profesional y personal. Basándose en 516 respuestas a un cuestionario sobre el uso del tiempo fuera del trabajo para tareas académicas y haciendo referencia al filósofo Byung-Chul Han y al sociólogo Lewis Coser, se generan cinco temas clave que contribuyen de manera valiosa a esta brecha: complejidad de las tareas y entornos, dedicación excesiva, estrategias de adaptación, costos de adaptación y estrategias de resistencia.
Los académicos en Brasil lidian con cargas de trabajo complejas en entornos que a menudo no respaldan sus esfuerzos, lo que resulta en fronteras difusas entre sus vidas profesionales y personales. Algunos ven sus roles con una pasión vocacional o derivan placer de sus tareas, mientras que otros se ven asediados por sus demandas profesionales. Esta dedicación puede llevar a la culpa, afectando tanto las relaciones personales como el bienestar. Para navegar estos desafíos, muchos adoptan una planificación rigurosa, pero la invasión perpetua de las responsabilidades laborales puede inducir agotamiento, estrés y complicaciones de salud. Un segmento de académicos, influenciados por eventos significativos en la vida, recurre a estrategias que enfatizan la delimitación entre el trabajo y el ocio, tratando a menudo las vacaciones como períodos sagrados de descanso. Este estudio subraya la necesidad de autoconciencia y estrategias individualizadas para gestionar la sobrecarga de trabajo y llama a un desafío más amplio a la cultura prevalente del productivismo en la academia y sus ramificaciones en la vida universitaria. En el trasfondo de la discusión, está la idea de "Universidades promotoras de salud" como una posibilidad de cambios futuros y promoción de la salud para toda la comunidad académica.

Palabras-clave: trabajo académico; equilibrio entre vida laboral y personal; productivismo; docentes brasileños de universidad; educación superior

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INTRODUCTION

In Brazil, Higher Education (HE) growth has aimed to reduce social inequality and promote development. However, since the 1990s, the adoption of neoliberal economic policies has influenced the working dynamics of universities and lecturers in Brazil. Arguably, economic interest has taken precedence over the development of scientific knowledge and education. Consequently, public universities have faced budget cuts and reduced funding for research and staff hiring.

Previous government began actively investing in public universities through the Programa de Apoio a Planos de Reestruturação e Expansão das Universidades Federais (REUNI) in 2007, which led to an increase in the number of public universities and undergraduate students attending (Xavier & Azevedo, 2020).

Due to the expansionist policy, Brazil's HE system has quadrupled the number of enrolments in (INEP, 2018). However, while REUNI has contributed to the democratization of public universities, it has also led to a disorderly expansion with insufficient resources, lecturers and non-academic staff to support the increased number of students (Guerra & Rocha, 2019). This has resulted in intensified work for lecturers and increased 'precarization' – for example through frozen salaries and understaffing.

Owing to these financial and personnel constraints, the demands on academic staff have increased. There is now greater pressure to produce high-quality research, obtain funding for projects, and internationalize institutions. Recent research has identified several issues, including work overload, increased institutional control and bureaucracy, and negative impacts on lecturers' mental health (Campos et al., 2020; Fernandes et al., 2022).

In addition to research and teaching, Brazilian academics are responsible for university management, as there are no professionals hired specifically for this role and for extension' activities, which involve the university's engagement with society to promote social and economic development. Consequently, lecturers in Brazil must undertake four distinct types of work: teaching, research, management, and extension. Despite these multiple responsibilities, lecturers do not receive adequate support from the government and higher education institutions are poorly resourced to support this work (Amar al, 2019).

In addition to these challenges in recent years university lecturers have faced a political scenario that has undermined their work. Politically motivated media narratives have decreased the academic profession's prestige, questioned the validity of scientific knowledge and challenged the legitimacy of the scientific process (Amaral, 2019). This context has been linked to mental health and wellbeing challenges. Several recent studies carried out with university lecturers in Brazil have shown that they are affected by burnout and common mental health disorders (Alves et al., 2019; Costa, 2012; Leite et al., 2019; Massa et al., 2016). For example, Baptista et al. (2019) showed that 52% of 99 participants working in universities in São Paulo exhibited burnout symptoms. Matos et al. (2022a) found that 229 of 1709 participating lecturers had high levels of emotional exhaustion and medium levels of depersonalization and personal accomplishment, indicating a risk of burnout

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development. In another research, Neme and Limongi (2019) found that 29.6% of participants met the diagnostic criteria for a mental health disorder and that one of the risk factors associated with mental health difficulties was mental exhaustion caused by intense workload.

Of course, these issues are not exclusive to Brazil. The literature on lecturers' health and work highlights worsening conditions in the last decade worldwide (Cao et al., 2018; Enders et al., 2015; Garcia Padilla et al., 2017; Hall et al., 2019; Oliveira et al., 2021). Van Lankveld et al. (2016, p. 330) argued that some of the neoliberal consequences for lecturers in universities include 'suppressing creativity in teaching, leading to the reduced autonomy of lecturers, expressing a lack of trust in teachers, trivialising the complexity of teaching, and undermining core academic values like community service and academic freedom.'

In this sense, Han (2015) argues that individuals in contemporary society find themselves forced to maximise their performance, leading to a state of constant exhaustion. The author critiques the pressure for productivity and self-optimisation that characterises the current work world and asserts that nowadays individuals are not only exploited by the economic system but also self-exploit. In the pursuit of success and personal fulfilment, workers subject themselves to gruelling work hours, acting both as the exploiter and the exploited, which, according to him, results in widespread burnout. In this paper, we use Han's perspective to analyze the relationship between lecturers' perceptions of their work relationship and their personal lives.

Contemplating the work of Coser (1974), the concept of 'greedy institutions' could help explain the ways how lecturers experience working at universities. Coser (1974) uses this term to describe organisations or social structures that demand total and unquestioning commitment from their members, analyzing how these institutions can exert deep control over individuals, compromising their autonomy and causing tensions and pressuring their members to dedicate themselves intensely to the work, often leading to a level of loyalty and devotion that exceeds healthy boundaries. One of Coser's (1974) central contributions is the analysis of conflicts and tensions that arise in contexts of extreme commitment since examines how the demands of greedy institutions often conflict with individual needs and aspirations, resulting in ethical and emotional dilemmas for the involved members.

In summary, evidence from the literature suggests excessive workload permeates the lives of academic staff. Studies associate overwork with physical and mental illnesses, absenteeism, reduced quality of life and less satisfaction with work and negative impacts on the quality of teaching. Considering the existing evidence, this article aims to understand how Brazilian lecturers working at public universities make sense of these professional demands and the impact of those demands on their personal lives. To illuminate the ways in which their experience of professional demands is created, perceived and acted upon the authors draw upon the Lewis Coser's (1974) work on 'greedy institutions' and philosopher Byung-Chul Han's (2015) work on the 'achievement society'.

Therefore, this paper aim is to discern how Brazilian lecturers navigate and interpret the demands of their roles and the subsequent ramifications on their personal lives. The paper seeks to provide a unique perspective that enriches the global discourse on academic work-life balance and to offer a nuanced understanding of academic challenges, contributing significantly to

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the broader conversation on the health and well-being of educators in the contemporary academic environment.

METHOD

This work presents findings from a wider investigation into the health and quality of life of lecturers across Brazil undertaken between October 2019 and January 2020.

Data collection

The original study was conducted during the doctoral program of the first author (Matos, 2021) and was an exploratory mixed-methods study with online data collection using a sociodemographic questionnaire and three other quantitative questionnaires. The original sociodemographic questionnaire was composed of 64 questions, 2 of them open-ended, and is available for consultation elsewhere (Matos, 2021). Considering the purpose of this article, in this paper, we conduct a qualitative analysis, exploring the responses to a single open-ended question from the sociodemographic questionnaire. Thus, this paper draws on participants' answers to the question that asked: 'Several authors have pointed out that currently there is less and less separation between the workspace and personal life of university teachers. In this sense, for example, some teachers use their holiday time to participate in conferences. How does this happen in your case?'. We also explored the characterization data from the participants in the next subsection. The answers in Portuguese were translated to English for analysis.

After obtaining ethical approval from the lead institution, a questionnaire was undertaken online, with the questionnaire link available at "Online Pesquisa" website and disseminated by email, using either a request to universities Human Resources section or a directly e-mail for the lecturers when available on the university's websites. The link was also disseminated by social media, including Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

Participants

A sample of 1397 participants, from different universities across Brazil, responded to the open-ended question. An initial data cleansing process removed short responses unsuitable for further analysis (e.g. yes or no words, or not answered), leaving 516 participant comments for inclusion. In this sense, 516 lecturers participated in this research, slightly over half of these were female lecturers (54.5%). The most selected age range was between 40 and 49 years (33.7%), married (74.4%), and children (64.6%), and most respondents assessed their health as good (45.8%) or average (39%). The majority had a doctoral title (94%) and between 6 and 10 years of experience teaching in Higher Education (26.2%).

Data analysis

To analyse the open-end question results the researchers employed inductive, data-driven thematic analysis to identify codes and patterns in the participants' responses (Nowell et al.,

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2017). The initial coding round was performed in Microsoft Excel in two steps: first, applying the inclusion criteria, classifying data from the 1397 participants as 'suitable for further analysis' or 'not suitable for further analysis' based on the level of detail provided by respondents (yes or no answers were coded as not suitable for further analysis and no further explored). Secondly, in remaining participants' responses, by coding the responses as "participants use their free time for working" or "participants don't use their free time for working" to understand the frequency of participants who were engaged in work tasks outside the working hours. By doing this, we also identified first-round codes to start the coding process.

Following the steps described by Braun and Clark (2006) the coders familiarized themselves with the data, independently generating initial codes and memos. Both descriptive and simultaneous codes were produced, reflecting the richness and complexity of the responses (Saldaña, 2015). To create overarching themes from the codes, the authors applied a pattern coding process, grouping codes into 'explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation' (Saldaña, 2015, p. 236). This stage of analysis was theoretically informed with reference to relevant literature, in particular the work of Han (2015, 2019) and Coser (1974) which provided useful theoretical perspectives on both the individual and organisational factors at play. Further details of the relationships between codes and themes are presented in Table 1.

Three of the authors work in institutions in Brazil, bringing 'insider knowledge' which aided the interpretation of the data, while the other author drew on her experience as an early career researcher within UK higher education. These perspectives enabled the authors to mobilise their tacit knowledge to shape their interpretation of the data; however, they were required to maintain a reflexive and critical stance, remaining sensitive to participant experiences which did not align with their own (Lazard & McAvoy, 2020). To this end the coders met regularly to critically review their coding and interpretation. Two authors independently coded all the data, another reviewed the coding and the last one, independently reviewed the final analysis. To ensure intracoder reliability among the coders, author three extracted and coded random samples of responses (n = 70) until an acceptable equivalence of coders in intracoder reliability was met for the coded sample. A 92% agreement between coders was achieved, considered good internal consistency (Miles et al., 2014).

FINDINGS

From the initial 1397 pool of participants, the majority reported that they used their free time for work-related tasks (65.7%) and claimed that they did not cope well with work demands (60.7%). The following results are based on 516 quotes that met the inclusion criteria for further analysis. We found that 324 of the 516 participants (62.8%) presented a 'permeable boundary' between work and life, that is, they did not have a clear boundary between their professional and personal, family, or leisure activities, frequently working beyond their contractual working hours. In contrast, 143 (27.7%) participants claimed to have a strong boundary between personal and work lives, while 49 (9.5%) tried to establish a boundary but struggled to do so.

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From the analysis five overarching themes were generated which summarised the challenges experienced by the participants. These themes along with the codes from which they were generated are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 – Themes, codes and frequency (N=1080)

Theme description	Signification Code	Quotes[1]	Freq %
Complexity of tasks and environment (5.3%) Navigating the complexity of the internal and external environment of HE creates pressures and a day-to-day work environment which can create barriers to managing workload effectively.	Management	18	1.7
	Bureaucracy	15	1.4
	Environment not suitable for intellectual work	11	1.0
	Political scenario	8	0.7
	Lack of support	4	0.4
	Multitasking	1	0.1
Excessive dedication (10.7%) Perceptions about the nature of academic work as a 'sacred duty' or a 'vocation', a narrative which justifies the intense professional demands.	Catch up on work	55	5.1
	Work as pleasure	38	3.5
	Guilt	14	1.3
	Duty	5	0.5
	Financial struggles	3	0.3
	Using own money for work	1	0.1
Strategies of adaptation (18.5%) Strategies used by participants to adapt to universities' demands.	Graduate programs	64	5.9
	Research activities	55	5.1
	Work overload	52	4.8
	Role conflict	13	1.2
	Teaching activities	10	0.9
	Academic relationships	6	0.6
Costs of adaptation (37.6%)	Permeable boundary between work and life	318	29.4
	Digital intrusion	45	4.2
	Difficulty switching off	26	2.4

[1] The quotes refer to the number of times the category is mentioned, not the number of participants who mention it.

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Participants accounts of how permeable work-life boundaries lead them to health and family issues.	Health problems	11	1.0
	Family issues	5	0.5
	Productivism	1	0.1
Strategies of resistance (27.9%)	Strong boundary between work and life	142	13.1
Strategies described to manage or resist the intrusion of work into participants' personal lives.	Struggle to maintain a boundary between work and life	49	4.5
	Travelling and holidays	33	3.1
	Change in priorities (maternity or paternity)	29	2.7
	Change in priorities (Health)	26	2.4
	Planning and organisation strategies	14	1.3
	Balance	3	0.3
	Change in priorities (Experience)	3	0.3
	Retirement	2	0.2
	Total	1080	100

Source: Research material.

These themes are explored in more detail below.

Complexity of tasks and environment

The first theme describes the complexity of the workload the participants were trying to manage within the context of an environment that did not always support them to do so. Participants documented their perceptions of the excess demands and pressures associated with the job that forced them to dedicate themselves to more than one task at a time to save time and maximise productivity:

> I always bring work home with me. I associate domestic activities with leisure activities to have the feeling that I have leisure time. Whenever possible, I do two things at the same time. I drive listening to material that can be used in class, in the waiting room I correct tests and papers, I cook watching movies and series, but I'm careful not to do that when the family is around. (Female academic, Life Sciences)

Other lecturers have described the negative effects of bureaucracy and the different roles they must play as teachers, managers, and researchers.

> It is hard to be a serious lecturer in Brazil because there are too many assignments, as far as projects are concerned. The funding agencies are full of bureaucracy and demand that you would need a private secretary to attend to everything. But no, I have to be: the accountant, the secretary, the researcher, the teacher, and the messenger boy. (Female academic, Life Science)

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Many perceived a clear division between 'good' and 'bad' work, the latter being administrative and management tasks while treasuring research and teaching activities, the time available for which was being squeezed.

> The university has increasingly strengthened the overload of administrative work, by filling numerous systems and databases. This steals time from the creative work at the university. I have seriously thought of disengaging from post-graduation programs, considering the degree of demand for administrative work. (Female academic, Social Science)

Lecturers described feeling overwhelmed by short deadlines and a lack of support from colleagues and managers. They also highlighted the implications of the political situation on their well-being, including financial struggles related to salary and the cost of living. Some participants considered universities created an environment which was inhospitable to intellectual work, necessitating work outside of contractual hours and during holidays so they could focus and have silence:

> As I am not comfortable in the time and space of the work environment, I always take assignments home during the semester and in the holiday period. I am never unoccupied with academic pursuits. Time never seems enough. (Female academic, Health Science)

Excessive dedication

The second theme aggregated responses related to participants' perceptions of the nature of academic work. For some participants, separating personal and professional lives was not a goal because they considered their work as pleasure and, therefore, intrinsically rewarding:

> As I like what I do, as there is pleasure involved in the work, I realised that there is a clear confusion between the hours I dedicate to work. Preparing an article or mentoring a postgraduate student gives me more pleasure than walking [exercising] - for example. (Male academic, Life Science)

For other participants, there was evidence that they welcomed the intrusion of professional activities into personal time; some even framed this as a personal choice:

> If you do what you like, it's no sacrifice at all. It's pleasurable. I don't believe in 'professional life', as if working is a punishment. Work is part of life. Full stop. Nobody is forced to do anything. You can choose whether you want to be there or not. (Male, Agri-food Science)
>
> Yes, being a teacher and loving to be a teacher makes this separation difficult - and yes, [I work in] holidays for articles, edicts, conferences... (Female, Agri-food Science)

In addition to these narratives of work as pleasure, a perception evident in many responses was that being a lecturer is portrayed as a 'sacred duty' or 'vocation' which justifies the intense professional demands:

> I regard my profession as a missionary activity, and I try to make the work as pleasant as possible. Therefore, using holiday periods for scientific activities does not cause me any inconvenience. (Male, Humanities)

Thus, some participants assumed that overwork is fair to entail what they see as privileges of their career:

> I believe that this narrowing of work and personal life happens daily because I understand that we occupy a place of privilege in which it is necessary to pay attention to 'giving back' to the community. ... Because we are specialized professionals and citizens of opinion, the self-evaluation of class productivity is constant, especially because we have students with financial difficulties (sometimes for food and transportation) that impact the high dropout rate, so the self-challenge that the class is productive/make it worthwhile is daily. (Female academic, Health Science)

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This perception of academic work as a vocation led participants to feel guilty about avoiding working out-of-hours or on weekends. This was portrayed as an attempt to catch up on work that did not seem to be fulfilled. Some also experienced guilt from prioritizing work and, consequently, did not give enough attention to family and friends:

> Holidays are for closing articles, writing reports, and preparing projects. Not completely, because the family can also take us away from these activities, but sometimes there is a feeling of guilt for not achieving the productivity that seems necessary for academic recognition of the work. (Male academic, Humanities)
>
> I think that every time I take some time off, due to family insistence or some illness (like a virus), internally and mentally I blame myself for not being better or prioritize the demands that academic life requires. (Female academic, Health Science)

Strategies of adaptation

The third theme considered participants' comments on adapting to universities' demands. To deal with work overload and role conflicts, such as between work and family roles, the participants developed intensive planning and organisation strategies to manage all the tasks they must deal with:

> I try to separate things well. I am very organised so that I don't bring work home with me and so that I don't miss the period deadlines. I rarely work after 6 pm. (Male, Physical Science)
>
> I think that everything depends on organisation and planning; I plan all the things I need to do during the week so I can dedicate the weekend to my family; Sometimes I have to work on Saturday morning. But I can organize all the tasks I need to do during the week. (Female, Agri-food Science)

For some participants, the leaking of work time into leisure time was evidence of personal failure among colleagues to self-manage effectively, rather than a systemic issue of overwork:

> It's up to the teacher not to mix his professional activities with his personal goals. If there is no balance, it really leads to burnout. Most of the teachers I know are dedicated only to the minimum classes. Others derive pleasure from their research activities and make it their leisure. (Female, Humanities)
>
> I don't take work home with me in any way, much less on weekends. I have stressed colleagues, who have no free time and are correcting exams on weekends and at night. I play world of warcraft, as an escape from my boring life, and there I am another person, LOL. ... As for postgraduation [supervising postgraduate students], these are people who need to be in postgraduation for money and status, because they consider themselves more than others. I am out of post-graduation. (Male, Life Science)

Concerning role conflict, accommodating teaching and research activities requires a lot of personal effort in self-management to prevent them from being side-lined by more urgent tasks related to students and bureaucratic requirements:

> Department today is divided into two blocks, those who are in post-graduation and graduation, and those who are only in graduation, which creates internal conflicts that hinder strategic actions to the detriment of the preservation of space and power. In this sense, during the holidays, in the calmness of the activities, there is a greater intellectual intensity for examinations, revision and proposal of articles. (Male, Engineering)

Costs of adaptation

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This theme considered participants' accounts of the impact of using personal time to accommodate professional demands. It is evident that permeable work-life boundaries were linked by many to feelings of exhaustion and difficulties switching off, all of which could negatively impact health, wellbeing, and personal relationships.

> At the moment, I am using my holidays to write book chapters and scientific articles. It is very difficult to conciliate the writing of scientific texts during the academic period. … I've been married for 2 years, and I find it very difficult to conciliate university work and marriage. At home, I do many activities from work and my husband complains a lot. (Female, Humanities)

This seems to be aggravated by digital intrusion, since e-mail, social media, and particularly WhatsApp messages transform job demands into real-time activities, blurring the limits between personal and professional moments, which is intensified by the common practice of sharing personal mobile numbers with students:

> Yes, really, the separation between work environment and personal life are at perfect odds! The professional always takes the space of personal life. (Female academic, Science)
>
> It's a feeling of constant demand, especially because of the department and USP as a whole. And the worst, it's never enough. (Male academic, Science)

Participants described the physical and psychological impacts of overwork, such as anxiety, depression, stress, muscular pain, and headaches:

> I was completely worn out at the beginning of this year. I even wanted to quit teaching, but fortunately, I started therapy with a psychologist and today I have a much better quality of life. I managed to insert some limits that seemed impossible, such as not working at weekends. I adjusted my work schedule, which was extremely positive, but on my own, I undoubtedly couldn't have done it. (Female academic, Science)
>
> My professional life tramples on my personal life for 10 months. During this period, all health projects, such as weight loss diets, meditation, relaxation, etc. are abandoned. At the end of each semester, I am exhausted. (Female academic, Humanities)

There is also a pattern that demonstrates the internalization of guilt for their working conditions and their failure to meet the existing demands:

> I don't feel like doing anything, neither on holidays nor during work periods. I do it out of obligation. (...) It takes me five hours to get out of bed. I would have time to do everything I need to do if I had the strength to start. (Female academic, Physical Science)

Some lecturers associate their difficulties with switching off to a culture of productivity, which obliges them to 'publish or perish' in the academy:

> At any opportunity, at any time, holidays or not, I work for the university, especially with the bureaucracy and with the systematization of the processes. The production is required, but its quantity and not the quality of the production and: in the hours of work and activity, orientations, assistance to students, dedication to studies such as careful and critical reading, research of references and sources, analysis of information are not counted as hours of teaching activity. It is expected that the production comes from the few hours dedicated to research per week, without time for reading and studying sources... So, this needs to be done on weekends and holidays! (Female, Social Science)

Strategies of resistance

The final theme explored evidence that lecturers are actively engaged in practices of resistance to the excessive demands of the academy, trying (and sometimes succeeding) to find different ways of maintaining life and identity separate from their work. The majority of these are participants who previously described having a permeable boundary or no boundaries between

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professional and personal lives but have changed their perspective for different reasons. Motivations for seeking a stronger work-life boundary were often related to a change in their priorities caused by health issues, their professional experiences, or family changes such as marriage or having children:

> I have a one-year-old son and the time I am not working I devote to him and my wife. They are my rest. (Male academic, Social Sciences)
>
> My holiday period is for holidays. My weekend is for the weekends. I don't take work home. I leave everything in my office, at work. Work stays at the University, even because, I had two pregnancies in two years, I have two little girls at home and therefore, even if I wanted to work, I couldn't. (Female academic, Health Science)

Some of these participants had already established a strong boundary between work and life, although most described struggling to maintain it. What they have in common is a strong resolve to establish and maintain the boundary over the longer term, something that needs self-management to achieve. Learning to say no and walking away from unfinished work was an active process of self-discipline:

> I've done that too often, now I'm starting to police myself so that it doesn't happen anymore. (Female academic, Multidisciplinary)

A frequently cited strategy was the use of physical distance to maintain boundaries during leave periods. Travelling for holidays was a means of avoiding work and associated guilt, with several participants using the expression 'holidays are sacred' to describe their commitment to creating work-free time and space for the benefit of themselves and their families.

DISCUSSION

In this section the themes are situated in relation to the key theoretical reference points and international research on the nature of academic work.

Complexity of tasks and environment: Multitasking and hyperattention

Multitasking can be defined as 'the performance of more than one task in parallel or in rapid transition' (Alkahtani et al., 2016, p. 995). In his essay on the 'achievement society', Han (2015) draws parallels between contemporary workers and prey animals in the wild, who must maintain constant awareness of the demands and threats of the environment around them. As in the wild, multitasking is a matter of 'survival' for lecturers in our study, juggling complex tasks in the context of a hostile political and economic environment (Campos et al., 2020).

Yet for Han this 'hyperattentive' state comes with a cost, fragmenting attention and preventing deeper engagement with tasks, especially those that require concentration, creativity and time. This interpretation explains why participants reported that the university is not a space for intellectual production, with many preferring to save this task for other spaces and times of their daily lives, entering family and leisure time, and negatively impacting their quality of life (Campos et al., 2020, Matos et al., 2022a). In addition, research has shown that multitasking can lead to increased stress levels, decreased productivity, lower overall well-being, and poor self-regulation and efficacy (Alkahtani et al., 2016).

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This situation may be further exacerbated by the necessity to perform multiple roles (researcher, teacher, manager, and administrator) without adequate support or preparation. During postgraduate studies, the main recruitment criterion in Brazilian universities is research training through doctoral studies. Consequently, academics may perceive they do not have the necessary skills to meet these demands. Research suggests that increasing bureaucratic/administrative tasks are associated with a decrease in lecturers' sense of agency, undermining their sense of autonomy over their work (Laiho et al., 2022; Martinez & Pepler, 2000). A diminishing sense of agency and self-efficacy can contribute to a sense of overwhelm and, in turn, a decrease in productivity, further exacerbating work-related stress (Matos et al., 2022b).

Numerous participants' comments described the demands of their role as overwhelming, linking their practices of overwork to a sense that their formal work time 'never seems enough.' Coser's (1974) concept of 'greedy institutions', which create such excessive demands on their members' time that their ability to engage with life outside is eroded, has been applied to academic institutions in other nations (Sullivan, 2013).

This study provides clear evidence that Brazilian universities are also characterized by these patterns of excessive demand and that lecturers are at risk of feeling helpless to resist those demands given the wider economic and political context in which they operate. However, if lecturers perceive that the need for multitasking and overwork arises from these external sources, without recognising the ways in which they internalise those demands, their sense of agency may be diminished, removing incentives to regulate their behaviour and resist excessive work demands (Cravens et al., 2022).

This study also demonstrates that work overload can also be exacerbated when individuals relate to their profession as a sacred duty and a key part of their identity. The tight schedule and the long work hours can be perceived as a privilege and a choice, an intrinsic part of academic life, rather than an unnecessary risk to one's productivity, work quality, mental and physical health. This may also diminish an individual's sense of agency and motivation to create positive changes to support better work-life balance.

Excessive dedication: The nature and meaning of academic work

Ideas about vocation and identity were important to participants' meaning-making and justification about their work practices as exemplified by the themes 'excessive dedication' and 'strategies of adaptation'. The development of identity can be defined as 'an ongoing process of interpretation and re-interpretation of who one considers oneself to be and who one would like to become' (Van Lankveld et al., 2016, p. 326); it is built in a social context, being dynamic rather than static. Academic identity is composed of idealizations of what is supposed to be an academic, including expectations about ideal pedagogical, scholarly, and research capabilities (Gabriel, 2010).

The idea of academic work as a vocation is often cited as justification for intense work demands. Teaching at all levels is a profession characterised as a vocation. The consideration of university teaching as a mission or vocation has several pivotal implications.

> An occupation is the work in which a person is employed. A vocation is a summons or strong inclination to a particular course or of action, especially a divine call to the religious life ... a vocation referred to the way

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> one lives in response to God's call, so while you can leave an occupation, a vocation is forever. (Ettarh & Vidas, 2022, p. 19)

Thus, if university teaching is understood as a vocation, it can be assumed that an inner force leads the lecturer to teach, such as a calling that is more important than the lecturers themselves. One could question the implications that this assumption could have for lecturers' health and quality of life that should therefore be put on hold behind work demands. The evidence from this study highlights that this perception can lead to overwork.

In addition, the participants understood that intellectual work could be an intrinsic motivator for lecturers. While it is recognized that some work in universities can be pleasurable, it is important to understand that the work conditions in which this labour is undertaken are also important. With changes faced by universities in recent decades, including managerial measures such as quality assessments and production standards, working in academia could be considered a 'bittersweet symphony' due to the ambivalence between positive and negative aspects of the career (Knight & Clark, 2014). Since, as Han (2015) remarks, individuals are compelled to work for pleasure rather than duty, the drive for constant growth means that an individual will never feel that they have achieved their goals and lecturers must be aware of this risk. In the next section, the implications for the lecturers' health are discussed.

The personal costs of 'greedy institutions' and strategies of adaptation

In Han's vision of the achievement society individuals are inculcated with the illusion that being more active means being freer, and hyper-productivity becomes an internalised goal. The need for rest is not recognised since 'machines cannot pause' (Han, 2015, p. 22). However, humans are not machines, and health challenges and bodily limitations affect everyone at some point in their lives (Davis, 2002). Data from this analysis illustrate how respondents' health and sense of well-being are impacted by the demands of the achievement culture of their university.

Morrish (2009) suggested that there is an epidemic of poor mental health among university staff in the United Kingdom, linked to a toxic culture in which excessive workloads and excessive dedication to duty are shaped by a culture driven by performance metrics. While a preoccupation with metrics was not consistently evident from this data, excessive workloads and a demand for what Han termed 'hyperactivity' were. Respondents described the demands of the university and how these encroached on their personal and leisure time, rendering the boundary between personal and professional permeable.

A range of demands was described as persistent, excessive, and coming at all times of the day and during vacations. One commonly cited factor was the increasing prevalence of digital technology and social media for communication, which appeared to facilitate the leakage of professional demands into family hours. These demands left some feeling drained and they were unable to prioritise their own health and well-being.

Academia has been characterised as an 'anxiety machine' (Hall & Bowles, 2016, p. 33), a professional culture which pushes staff to internalise demands for productivity and availability over their own health. Directly linking work demands with feelings of stress and exhaustion was common across the respondents' comments. Participants reported feeling unable to take their

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vacations due to an excessive workload as seen in the results section. When people were forced to take time off, for example, due to illness, a sense of guilt was evident, suggesting that the notion of auto-aggression or 'destructive self-reproach' (Han, 2015, p. 11) was a lived experience for some respondents as mentioned in the results. Some lecturers attribute responsibility for their poor performance to themselves, without noticing the context in which they are operating and the impossibility of achieving what is expected from them. Thus, the person internalises their guilt for not meeting the extrinsically established productivity criteria, which became a personal standard for self-evaluation and can generate discomfort and illness.

This development of guilty feelings towards their work and questioning capabilities to work, was explored by Han (2019, p. 9) when the author stated that in a psychopolitical society 'although the achievement-subject deems itself free, in reality, it is a slave. In so far as it willingly exploits itself without a master, it is an absolute slave. There is no master forcing the achievement-subject to work'. Hence, even if the person did not have external pressures for production in universities, they would still have internal impossible standards guiding us to exhaustion and self-blaming due to our 'limitless potential' (Knight & Clark, 2014).

In this sense, being a lecturer in Brazil still has some aura of higher social recognition than working at other levels of education, with better financial compensation. Therefore, one can observe the lack of separation between working and private life with the identification of a responsibility to 'give back' to the scholarly community. At its limits, this perception could lead to just accepting working conditions as 'fair enough' relative to other less advantaged social groups and feeding the guilty feelings about poor performance.

However, there is also evidence that the experience of physical or mental health challenges could also be a trigger for critical reflection. Respondents shared stories of how health crises led them to take steps to make their work-life boundaries less permeable, to prioritise their health without guilt and to seek support and tools to make long-term changes to their relationship with work.

Although Han (2015, 2019) gives little indication of how one might resist the achievement of society, he refers to the importance of pause and interruption and the power to say no. Considering the role of health challenges as a source of interruption, these experiences could alter the perspectives and priorities of the respondents. In the next section, the strategies that individual lecturers use to adapt to universities' requirements are discussed, and their potential for collective adoption is analysed.

Strategies for resisting the achievement society

Respondents were sometimes motivated to resist through fundamental disagreements with the demands of no personal life. However, they were most often motivated by a change in circumstances that produced an equally demanding commitment or forced a reappraisal of priorities. In addition to mental and physical health challenges as a commonly cited motivator for a change in approach to work-life balance, family commitments also provided a reason for resistance.

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As previously discussed, many respondents were aware of the risks of overwork and unrealistic expectations of their job but struggled to maintain a firm boundary between their professional and personal domains of life. If 'vocational awe' is a factor in the production of overwork and excessive commitment (Ettarh & Vidas, 2022), for these academics it was notable that there was also ample evidence of awareness of both the negative effects of overwork and attempts at resistance. Specific strategies were clear within the comments. Respondents developed these strategies as a means of maintaining a sense of non-academic identity and reducing excessive demands for time and attention. Metaphors of battle, 'invasion' and evidence of intense self-management were common, demonstrating that this was an active process. For example, respondents referred to the need for self-discipline to maintain separation between work commitments and their wider lives.

This resistance to allowing work in their personal lives could have professional consequences for those who choose to defend their personal time from invasion. Some mentioned that it generates a feeling of guilt, besides leading to social constraints and discrimination. As one respondent put it: 'I pay a professional price for this [choice]' (Female, Life Sciences). Negative perceptions and poor treatment from colleagues along with less favourable career prospects were the main consequences described by participants. Given the overall tendency of respondents to use leisure time for career-enhancing activities such as conferences and producing research papers, those who tried to maintain work-life separation accepted lower productivity (in terms of research outputs) as an inevitable outcome of that decision.

The idea that care, either care of the ones-self or care of family members, is a disrupter of normative academic culture is supported by other studies. The concept of the university as a 'care-less' organisation (Lynch, 2010; Moreau, 2016) is not new, and this study reveals the ways in which the 'hidden gendered doxa of carelessness' (Ivancheva et al., 2019, p. 452), in which the 'ideal' academic is extremely productive and unencumbered by responsibilities outside of academia (Sang et al., 2015), operates within Brazillian higher education. This was illustrated by one respondent who said: 'In the first year I heard from the academic director of my unit that 'teacher who takes holidays is not a real teacher, that holidays are for working' (Female academic, Science). However, those who tried to adapt to all universities' demands reported that it can lead to disturbance and worsen their health (Matos et al., 2022a; Santos et al., 2016), reduce the time for intellectual production and work overload, and increase competition among the collegiate rather than promoting collaborative work (Bosi, 2007; Skea, 2021).

Many respondents were actively working to separate their academic and non-academic lives and identities despite the struggles and negative consequences that often accompany this work, offering a narrative counterpoint to Han's bleak assessment of the internal machinery of the achievement society. The notion of holidays as sacred, a sentiment repeated frequently by respondents, demonstrates that academic workers can and do find value, both personal and professional, in rest, leisure, and family time at the individual level.

The participants also pointed out in their answers the use of different self-regulatory and time-management strategies that have been helping them deal with the different demands of teaching in universities. Although these individual initiatives helped lecturers adapt to the

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environment, cope with challenges, and improve their well-being, more than individual issues they represent systemic constraints that must be addressed by universities and Higher Education as a whole. The participant's quote reveals a path when she states that 'I organize myself with the teachers in my area, one helping the other' (Female, Health Science). This collegiality exercise seems to be a clue for future group initiatives.

In this sense, as Skea (2021) pointed out, productivism and competition at the university also need to give space to a vision of community that promotes relationships for the development and sharing of ideas and projects, favouring the dialogue, space and creativity necessary for intellectual work. Initiatives of this nature may help challenge productivism standards.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The findings should be interpreted in the light of several limitations. First, since the survey question could be considered leading, acquiescence bias is a possibility. Potential bias in participants' self-selection might exist, as individuals using personal space for work are more likely to respond due to a sense of resonance with the topic.

Data were collected before the COVID-19 pandemic, which certainly affected the university environment and lecturers' work-life balance. This scenario could be explored in future studies, which could help understand the implications of the pandemic on lecturers' work demands.

In addition, the data were collected at the end of the semester in Brazil, a busier period of the year, permeated by tests and grading, which could have an impact on lecturers' perception of their feelings of tiredness. Therefore, it is suggested that longitudinal studies be conducted to understand if and how lecturers' perceptions change considering the time of year. This could lead universities to develop specific strategies for busier times, such as hiring support extra staff for those periods or changing other requirements deadlines.

CONCLUSION

This article explored Brazilian lecturers' perceptions on the idea that the separation between the work and personal lives of university teachers is being eroded. This adds to the existing literature by presenting an original perspective of the Global South, as most studies on the subject originate from European countries and the United States. In this sense, it is understood that getting to know the experiences of academics working in different cultural contexts is one of the main contributions of this article, since the literature points out that the blurred limits between lecturers' personal and professional lives are a globalized phenomenon.

One of the things that makes the situation of Brazilian university lecturers distinctive, and which is perhaps not so problematic in other countries, concerns the cultural variations in the teacher-student relationship in Brazilian universities. These relational differences can be demonstrated in the treatment pronouns used to address lecturers: while in the United States, for example, lecturers are addressed by their title and surname, such as Dr Doe, in Brazil, in general,

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a closer relationship is established, and lecturers are commonly addressed by their first name. Although this may seem a minor linguistic variation, this proximity between lecturer and student is reflected, for example, in the sharing of personal WhatsApp numbers with undergraduate students, and it is even common to create groups to discuss the activities of the subjects, which makes the working relationship a constant activity and not limited to moments in the classroom. It is added to this that in Brazil the figure of the teacher assistant is not very common, with the lecturers themselves responsible for all stages of the teaching and learning process which can generate a greater work overload.

The use of a qualitative methodology, which explores participants' answers and gives voice to their anguish and perceptions, represents another contribution, as most studies in the area adopt a quantitative approach. The significant number of participants also lends certain representativeness of the Brazilian academic staff in the study.

The theoretical framework adopted also serves as a notable contribution, as the ideas of philosopher Byung-Chul Han and sociologist Lewis Coser allowed for a broader discussion of the results, contextually anchoring the findings to the historical moment the participants were experiencing.

Answering the question made by many of the participants, which gives a title to this paper when they state that 'Holidays are Holidays, right?', for many Brazilian lecturers, holidays seem to be everything but a time of leisure and rest. They are used mainly to fulfil delayed duties and the development of research activities, particularly writing, and submitting papers, in addition to correcting dissertations and theses.

When writing this article, a social media joke was observed on the supposed flexibility of academic work. 'In academia, you work 18 hours a day. But you can work ANY 18 hours of the day that you want.' (Betz, 2022). Although prosaic, the comment reveals one of the great fallacies about the university environment: behind the proclaimed flexibility hides excessive demands and a multiplicity of roles that challenge lecturers daily, as observed throughout this article.

Long working hours, pressure for productivity in research and teaching, untimely demands, excessive bureaucracy, and more recently, professional instability are common issues in lecturers' lives. The aim of this article was to add to the growing body of research investigating the relationships between lecturers' professional demands and their quality of life and health, a subject of interest, particularly following the covid-2019 pandemic which further blurred the boundaries between personal and professional space.

Following the examination of the results, the argument put forward is that these issues require addressing from a broad perspective, based on the assumption that they arise and develop from a societal context rather than stemming from individual psychological questions. Laiho et al. (2022) pointed out a tendency to portray collective problems in Higher Education as individual issues. In this sense, Han (2015, 2019) highlighted the individualization of collective issues as a modus operandi in an achievement society. If contextual and social problems are allowed to be labelled as individual issues, collective action becomes difficult or even impossible. Accordingly, in some participants' claims, one can observe the accountability of lectures for their perception of work, and consequently, their (poor) health. The main problem with this type of causal attribution

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is that, if the problem is individual, there is no need for collective action to change. However, the literature states that overload and health issues are plaguing academics worldwide and require a collective, purposeful solution.

One possible solution, considering health promotion, is the calling for universities action and include health in their practices and policies, considering these institutions as a propitious space for health dissemination. In this sense, since 2003 the "Health promoting universities", portrayed by the World Health Organization, is defined as universities whose "educational and work project includes the promotion of health to improve the quality of life of its members through healthy human development, relying on the modelling and disseminating role of its members" (Bravo-Valenzuela et al., 2013, p. 467). Following the Edmonton and, more recently, Okanagan Charters, universities around the world, particularly in Europe and in the United States of America, have been implementing diverse initiatives focusing on health promote policies which include not only staff and students, but the communities where they are inserted.

In Brazil, the concept of "health promoting universities" is still in development (Faria et al., 2021). What has existed so far are mainly isolated initiatives aimed at specific health promotion activities: flu vaccination campaigns, periodic medical examinations for staff, anti-smoking campaigns, sporadic sports activities and those dependent on the degree courses in each unit, among others. Although these initiatives are important, the main point is that the idea of building a healthy, health-promoting community is still a long way off.

However, as the results of this research show, many lectures still struggle to maintain their own health due to the constraints of the Higher Education scenario. Therefore, developing universities that could truly be labelled "health promoting universities" requires a commitment to the political and social efforts needed for universities to promote a supportive work environment, implementing cultural changes to challenging the discourses of over-work and exhaustion (Skea, 2021) and defy the neoliberal context that permeates work in universities today. Building a university that promotes health for all the academic community enabling them to change their lives ecosystems and improve their health must be a target for Brazilian universities as part of their institutional projects in the next few years. As the results show, although individual changes help the lecturers to live better, few are the lecturers that can make these changes alone in an environment that does not favour collective activities.

Nevertheless, on an individual level, it must be reinforced that, for lecturers in Higher Education, prioritizing their own health and well-being is not a luxury but a necessity, as it allows them to preserve themselves and continue fighting against the systemic challenges present within academia.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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Author 1 - led the overall study, responsible for the conceptualization, data collection, and writing the manuscript.
Author 2 - contributed to the data analysis, validation, writing and translating the manuscript
Author 3 - contributed to the methodology, responsible for data analysis and visualization, and writing the manuscript.
Author 4 - contributed to the supervision process, conceptualization of the study and offered critical commentary. All authors read, commented, and wrote and approved the final manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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