

Serving Whom? An Exploration of Cultural Taxation Themes in Latinx Graduate Students

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Cultural taxation refers to the extra responsibilities (e.g., increased service expectations, serving as unofficial diversity consultants) placed on members of marginalized racial groups within academia. However, the extant literature on cultural taxation does not clearly indicate the extent to which that research applies to graduate students who often fulfill similar tasks as members of academia and faculty. Furthermore, the academic context of a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) is particularly relevant to this line of work as this designation, while projecting an image that an institution is inclusive, is not directly representative of the institution's commitment to equitable practices. The goal of the present research is to identify how Latinx graduate students are potentially taxed and whether their experiences of cultural taxation are analogous to the taxation that faculty experience. Transcripts from 20 interviews with Latinx students at an HSI were analyzed via qualitative thematic analysis to identify potential themes of this sample's experiences with cultural taxation. Findings suggest that Latinx graduate students' cultural taxation converge in some ways with faculty patterns, but with key exceptions. Major themes from students' responses include a sense of increased distance and lack of support from one's home department, as well as difficulties integrating diversity and inclusion work cleanly into one's graduate career. These findings supplement existing cultural taxation literature by highlighting the experiences of an underrecognized population within academia and presenting initial findings for taxations imposed on this group.

Keywords: cultural taxation, graduate students, Latinx students, identity taxation, thematic analysis

Cultural taxation refers to the elevated workload expected of academics from marginalized communities (Padilla, 1994). This elevated, but rarely compensated, workload often includes participation in diversity and equity work due to a faculty member's presumed knowledge of diversity, regardless of its relevance to their research expertise (Padilla, 1994; Joseph & Hirshfield, 2011; Cleveland et al., 2018). Among the most identifiable forms of taxation include: being expected to serve as an expert on all matters of diversity even when they are not relevant to one's expertise, being called on to educate the majority group on diversity issues outside of one's job description, serving on an affirmative action committee that only results in recommendations that have already been unmet, serving as a spokesperson from an ethnic community to the university, sacrificing time to serve as a multicultural problem solver, and being asked to serve as a translator or interpreter (Padilla, 1994; Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Boyd et al., 2017; Njie-Carr et al., 2020).

In practice, cultural taxation could also be inclusive of discriminatory practices such as the tokenization of a department's marginalized members (Amie, 2020). Tokens are numerically or culturally underrepresented groups within an organization who are viewed as a symbolic representation of that group as a whole (Nie-

mann, 2016). An example of this phenomenon would be a faculty member of color being pointed to by administration as a symbol of a department's commitment to diversity. While the perspectives and contributions of marginalized community members are vital to an organization's success (Page, 2007), involvement in such work that draws attention to their marginalized status can heighten the burden already in place by a standard academic teaching and research load. Faculty members expected to fulfill these extra demands have experienced stress, longer hours, and depression (Joseph & Hirshfield, 2011) as well as a difficult relationship with their professional identity (Amie, 2020).

The expectation that racialized¹ faculty will fulfill these additional responsibilities becomes more insidious when considering that White academics continue to occupy about 75% of all faculty positions (NCES, 2020; Pew Research, 2019). Even with a gradual increase in the diversity of faculty, student bodies continue to be more diverse by comparison (Pew Research, 2019). Already underrepresented, racialized faculty are also less likely to secure tenure or promotion in their institution, even after controlling for human capital, cultural taxation, and discipline (Wijesingha & Ramos, 2017).

¹ For the purposes of this project, "racialized" refers to those who are marginalized according to their racial group. This term was selected for consistency throughout the paper, but we recognize that "racialized" is an imperfect term that could falsely imply that Whiteness is not factored into the treatment of someone according to their racial group.

Increased expectations of racialized faculty impose barriers by taking time away from more personally important tasks, such as the research that is necessary to advance their careers (Domingo et al., 2022). Unfortunately, the combination of stagnant performance and increased responsibilities can lead to decreased work satisfaction, longer promotion times, and increased position resignation (Domingo et al., 2022). This translates to decreased representation among racialized faculty, which can negatively impact racialized student success and retention (Tram et al., 2020). Outcomes for students can include decreased program satisfaction due to unmet expectations, lack of financial support, and an inability to connect with faculty mentors who may not understand cultural needs (Tram et al., 2020). This domino effect speaks volumes to the importance of racialized faculty's presence in academia and students' vulnerability, particularly graduate students, who rely on a close relationship with faculty members.

While faculty have received much research attention, the extant literature is limited in directly addressing the unique positioning and circumstances of graduate students as a potentially culturally taxed population. Nearly thirty years ago, Padilla (1994) called for investigations on the effects of cultural taxation on marginalized graduate students. Padilla notes that graduate students face unique challenges in the pursuit of ethnic scholarship, finding mentorship that would accompany that work, and the inability to access all of an institution's resources (Padilla, 1994). However, clarification is needed on the ways in which graduate students with marginalized racial and ethnic identities are affected by and cope with cultural taxation, specifically in how they relate to the faculty model proposed by Padilla. Some culturally informed models identify common graduate student experiences, such as imposter phenomenon amongst Black graduate students at a predominately White institution (Stone et al., 2018). However, these models have typically failed to incorporate the perspective of Latinx² graduate students, a group sorely in need of targeted work given their status as the largest ethnic minority group in the United States. Testimonies from graduate students and early career academics reveal the immediacy with which we must address the interplay of graduate student status,

identity, and cultural taxation (Templeton et al., 2021).

Lerma and colleagues (2020) elaborated upon forms of cultural taxation in student populations in the form of "racialized equity labor." This labor refers to the actions taken by marginalized students within an organization to address racial inequity that is then appropriated by those with more organizational power. The stress and demands from this cycle can force already marginalized individuals to relinquish additional resources, such as time, which may reflect poorer performance in professional and academic settings (Lerma et al., 2020). However, Lerma's innovative work 1) did not distinguish between the work of undergraduate and graduate students and 2) sought out participants specifically for their involvement in university change that benefits marginalized students. It is unclear how racialized equity labor, and by extension, the labor appropriation cycle outlined by Lerma (2020), occurs amongst graduate students who may objectively have more power but also may have more complex tethers to their universities than undergraduates (Grady et al., 2014). Like marginalized faculty, graduate students are often expected to put their own needs or goals aside for those of the department (Grady et al., 2014). Furthermore, members of Latinx communities already face unique challenges integrating into higher education, such as increased psychological and acculturative stress (Wang et al., 2016), and the highest likelihood of holding first-generation student status compared to their Black and White peers (PNPI, 2021).

Beyond Student Status: The Importance of Gender and Culture

Beyond student status, members of marginalized communities experience cultural taxation based on race and gender intersections (Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012; Diaz & Bui, 2016). Making space for these identity intersections within research is critical to appropriately framing people's experiences with nuance and avoiding the homogenization of an entire group's experiences. At the intersection of race and gender, women of color are often looked to as supporting pillars of their communities through the perpetual association with women, inherent communality, and nurturing expectations (Gutiérrez y

²For the purposes of this project, Latinx is used during each research stage as a gender-neutral term to refer to those of Latin American descent (e.g., Latino, Hispanic, Mexican American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban American, etc.). The authors want to recognize that, while the term has gained popularity within university student populations and higher education research, Latinx is an imperfect term that may contribute to the homogenization of individual cultures (Salinas & Lozano, 2017).

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Muhs et al., 2012; Velásquez et al., 2004). Culturally taxing experiences for women of color in the professorate are further compounded by gendered ascriptions and ongoing professional disparities in academia. Women faculty are canonically more involved in departmental or university service work than their male colleagues (Niemann, et al., 2020; Njie-Carr, et al., 2020; O'Meara et al., 2017), which partially explains why women, on average, publish less and receive fewer research grants than men (Wijesingha & Ramos, 2017). Adding to their challenging experiences is the relatively small number of women of color in upper-level professor and administrative ranks (Sánchez et al., 2021).

Culturally specific circumstances may also shape experiences. Mexican Americans face marginalization within the United States that may lead to steep social consequences, such as feelings of alienation and 'othering' perpetrated through negative stereotypes (Hester et al., 2020; Olguin-Aguirre et al., 2022). Further, discrimination can be perpetrated through public policy that imposes limits on equitable access to quality education and health-related resources (Brenes, 2019; Shi et al., 2018). Arbona and colleagues (2010) theorize that Latinx individuals are especially vulnerable because their identity is uniquely affected by the simultaneous experience of generational cultural practices and of American society outside of the home. Although some Latinx academics may feel comfortable navigating a bicultural perspective, others, particularly those who have recently immigrated to the United States, could face increased adversity that may lead to acculturative stress (Berry, 1992; Meca et al., 2017).

The research outlined in this paper explores Latinx graduate students' experiences of cultural taxation at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). While an HSI designation requires that a minimum of 25% of students enrolled be Hispanic (White House, n.d.), that does not guarantee representation at the graduate level. For example, Latinx graduate enrollment at this southwestern public university (SWPU) equals about half that of undergraduate enrollment, with even fewer faculty in place to support those graduate students (SWPU Factbook, 2020). Although an HSI designation presents opportunities to apply for federal funding to serve Latinx students, assessments indicate that universities often funnel these extra funds into color-blind programs that do not prioritize Latinx students (Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2018). Investigations of fac-

ulty's cultural taxation within an HSI also indicate that this institutional designation does not protect against racism, marginalization, and taxation for faculty of color (Martinez et al., 2017). Beyond numerical enrollment, it is not clear what the term Hispanic Serving Institution means to the experiences of Latinx students.

The goal of the present study is to 1) understand how Latinx graduate students at an HSI identify with cultural taxation and related labor on campus and 2) identify how these experiences compare to faculty taxation. Specifically, we aim to identify the ways in which existing understandings of cultural taxation align with Latinx graduate students' experiences of cultural taxation unique to this population. Furthermore, we seek to understand how the intersections of race and gender play into Latinx women graduate students' experiences with cultural taxation. Findings from this work will help identify where this sample of Latinx graduate students falls in relation to existing cultural taxation literature. It is our hope that such knowledge will highlight pathways of action for programs and mentors in specific support of marginalized graduate students. Additionally, the current work seeks to bolster the understanding of graduate students' experiences as a population already subjected to exploitative practices surrounding their learning and labor (Cohen & Baruch, 2021).

Methods

Participants

A total of 20 Latinx graduate students participated, including 12 who identified as women, and eight who identified as men. Students represented over 10 different departments on campus seeking a variety of degrees, including both master's and Ph.Ds. Students came from a blend of business, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math), and social science programs with career tracks inclusive of both industry and academia. Participants' ages ranged from 22 to 48. Participants came from a range of Latinx backgrounds: 25% of the participants identified as having mixed heritage (e.g., Mexican and Salvadorian, mixed indigenous and Mexican American), 20% identified as Hispanic, 20% identified as Latinx, and the remaining participants identified as Mexican American or Argentinian.

Data collection took place during the Spring 2021 semester when many students had still not yet returned to face-to-face classes due to the COVID-19

pandemic. While questions related to participant experiences did not specify a particular timeframe, student responses are a mix of both their pre-pandemic and pandemic experiences on campus.

Research Design

A series of one-on-one, open-ended interviews were conducted and analyzed qualitatively. Open-ended questions were based on Padilla's (1994) cultural taxation framework, which specifies an increased burden of service and mentorship to students, colleagues, and the university faced by racialized faculty (Jacobs et al., 2002). Consideration was also given to other aspects of this phenomenon, such as its intersectional nature (Josephs & Hirshfield, 2012), to ensure that interviews were capturing the full breadth of graduate students' experiences with cultural taxation (Lerma et al., 2020; Blake, 2018). All questions were iterated over a series of meetings amongst the research team until the final set of 25 questions was reached (see Appendix B for list of interview questions). An example item from this list is "In what ways, if any, was your service rewarded, validated, or noticed?" To not lead participants to specific answers, questions asked participants about 'their identities' as opposed to specifying a particular racial or ethnic group. Participants who identified as women were given an additional set of four questions to discuss their experiences within the intersection of race and gender in graduate school. An example item from this set is "Do you feel as if expectations in your department are identical for men and women?"

It is important to note that the research team who conducted interviews, subsequent analyses, and authored this manuscript identify as follows: White nonbinary person, cisgender Latino/Hispanic man, cisgender biracial Mexican man, and cisgender Mexican American woman.

Procedure

The present project received institutional review board approval at a large southwestern public university (SWPU) during the Spring of 2021. Study invitations were sent to all graduate students informing them of an opportunity for Latinx graduate students to self-select into a study to discuss their experiences with race on campus. A request for Latinx students was used in the mass mailer, but participants were asked to self-report their racial/ethnic identity if

their identity was not fully encapsulated by the term Latinx. Students were also given the opportunity to specifically request a Latinx interviewer due to the sensitive nature of the questions. Following recruitment, all participants took part in individual interviews with a member of the research team. All 20 interviews were conducted via Zoom, recorded, and transcribed live using Panopto. After the interview stage concluded, the authors reviewed the transcriptions produced by Panopto for any potential errors.

Data analyses followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases for Thematic Analysis, a qualitative data analysis technique that identifies overarching themes and patterns of meaning in a particular dataset. The phases for thematic analysis are: 1) familiarizing yourself with your data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) producing the report. Overall, due to the novelty of the work, we took a primarily inductive approach, meaning our codes and themes are derived from the semantic content of the data rather than coding the data according to pre-existing theoretical concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2012). While the research team was deeply familiar with pre-existing frameworks of cultural taxation, "our analytic lens does not completely override their [participants'] stories" (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 60). This analytic technique was preferred because of its theoretical flexibility compared to other techniques such as discourse analysis which requires theoretical framing for the role and meaning of language (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

With the final transcriptions, each author independently read and generated individual lists of codes for the data using Nvivo (version 12). For this technique, codes identify a specific feature of the dataset, and these codes are grouped into overarching themes. Coding involved the individual labeling of data segments that were potentially relevant to the research question. These independent code lists were reduced collaboratively based on codes that all four research team members collectively agreed were sufficiently present and meaningful in the data, resulting in a final list of over 40 codes. After code generation concluded, the research team sorted these codes into themes through collaborative discussion (see Table 1 for overview). Themes for this project were organized groups of codes that represented patterns and shared meanings across the dataset. Coder reliability was not as

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essed quantitatively; these numeric itatively; these numeric measures of intercoder reliability are more common in qualitative work guided by post-positivist values. We aligned with a paradigm that emphasizes an organic approach to the data and each coder's natural, reflexive response (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Results

Five themes were identified using the above coding process. These themes are Distance/Isolation from Support; Power, Labor, and 'Something's Gotta Give;' Culturally Taxing Levies Against Latinx Student Identities; Unique Pressures on Women; and Reluctance to Assign Accountability and Responsibility. In general, participants reported that they were not entirely supported by their departments and largely abstained from diversity labor. Women participants reported undertaking more social and emotional labor than their male counterparts. Finally, participants provided evidence that they experienced cultural taxation (e.g., feeling that they are made into a representative for all Latinx peoples), but were hesitant to assign accountability to the parties contributing to these taxations.

An in-depth description of each theme and some supporting data points are provided below. We provide a brief overview of how each theme relates or diverges from existing literature; these points are further explored in the discussion. Throughout the following section, we refer to participants according to the identities they provided on their demographics questionnaire while still maintaining their confidentiality.

Theme One: Distance/Isolation from Support

Latinx interviewees acknowledged acute differences between the graduate and undergraduate experiences on campus. Many of these differences manifested as a physical and psychological distance from campus life and culture, as well as distance from potential campus support networks within and outside their department. This was compounded in no small amount by the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States, with many students lamenting that working from home and the stressors of the pandemic exacerbated the pre-existing lack of support for Latinx graduate students. One Hispanic graduate student speaks up about how departmental support for students of color, in general, does not necessarily fill in the needs that Latinx grad-

uates display based on their cultural backgrounds: "...being Hispanic, my views are a little bit different. I don't think [departmental support] is Hispanic serving, I don't think it fulfills that. I think for minorities as a whole, [SWPU] does a great job with lots of inclusion, lots of opportunities for graduate students to work with faculty members... But for Hispanics, they love to preach how they're going to help and that they're going to support you... but in the ways they actually do it's very, very limited... [For example] when my father was dying of liver disease... and my mother, she had breast cancer at the same time, it's like, hey, I can't live on campus because I need to live close to my parents due to that whole cultural aspect of Hispanic children taking care of their parents. So, I said "Hey, I'm not going to be able to relocate," and they said, "Ok well if you can't fulfill this, you're out."

Faculty and administrators' seeming inability to understand the responsibilities many students felt to their identity and community was not unique to this student. Other students spoke more to how physical distance from campus life inhibited the formation of more support networks. For many of the Latinx graduate student interviewees, the realities of being disconnected from the physical campus began long before the pandemic (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2011). One non-traditional male graduate student who identifies as indigenous Mexican responded "I mean, I'm so disconnected because I'm online. I really have no idea how SWPU serves students of color. I don't know honestly... There's very little interaction, at least for me..."

These feelings of isolation were further characterized by students often being in a position where their existing support networks were challenged by unique graduate student circumstances. This lack of face-to-face support, physical distance from campus, and the lack of fellow Latinx academics in one's home department played a key role in why an interviewee believes many of their Latinx peers drop out. In addition, even for students who mentioned that they had a support network in place, it was often not the case that the support network was housed within the university. These students often sought support outside of campus, such as in the form of an international Latinx graduate support group, having been driven to this by the university's failure to provide them the support they needed.

These experiences with isolation speak to a key element of cultural taxation - the feeling of a lack of

belonging in one's department due to the tokenizing nature of the lack of support for your racial and ethnic background (Joseph & Hirschfield, 2011). The common mentor/mentee model did not alleviate the isolation felt by many graduate students, especially when they sought guidance. For instance, a woman graduate student of mixed Latinx ancestry speaks about how she does not have someone in her department she can approach: "Unfortunately, no, I don't...even with my research mentor, I have asked for a lower workload in the past because I feel very overwhelmed and basically got told no. I learned very early on that I can't trust to reach out to faculty for support ... I have to be very direct to be able to get the support that I need and when I'm not, it's not as helpful. So, it's hard. When I don't know the questions to ask, then I end up not getting the help I need... And the growth that I've had, the progress I make, I always have to approach them for it. It's always about self-advocacy, rather than them bringing it to you in a potential teachable moment."

Some students were not willing to ascribe this lack of mentorship as a problem (i.e., students saying they hated to bother faculty or that they believed faculty were inherently too busy to be available for graduate students). However, students still indicated that they felt their mentors often failed to discuss information crucial to their degree advancement or failed to take notice of their major milestones. For instance, another half-Hispanic, half-White woman graduate student contributes a sentiment shared by most of the graduate student participants under the mentor/mentee model: "Looking at my department, my advisor talks to me once a semester... a lot of students in my department especially feel that we have not been supported through the [graduate student] process."

This lack of mentorship is often present for junior full-time faculty members, but the additional power differential felt by graduate students, specifically in relation to the completion of their degrees, suggests a potential gap between student and faculty models of cultural taxation.

Theme Two: Power, Labor, and 'Something's Got to Give'

Perhaps the most striking difference in how cultural taxation manifests in graduate students, compared to other members of academia, is in labor ex-

pectations. While faculty often undergo heightened expectations of racialized equity labor that their non-White peers do not experience (Padilla, 1994), respondents did not spontaneously express the same expectation. When asked specifically about how they participated in diversity labor and advocacy, surprisingly, most interviewees indicated that they did not commonly participate in racialized equity labor. Their reasons included: fear of retaliation that threatened their positions in the department, lack of knowledge of where to begin advocacy work, and just wanting to 'keep their heads down' during the turbulence of graduate school. This also bares an interesting difference with how other students' experiences of cultural taxation often manifest. As outlined by Lerma (2020), students whose personal and professional lives suffer for their involvement in racialized equity labor are often forced to let their academic performance drop due to the effort it takes to support campus change.

In contrast, respondents did not believe that a drop in academic or professional performance in exchange for engaging in racialized equity labor was a valid option. One female student with a mixed indigenous and Mexican American identity states regarding proposed bans of Critical Race Theory in U.S. schools, a politically charged discussion of which students were aware: "What makes me want to pause is being aware of legislature with what they want to do about race theory, so that does make me consider that there will be retaliation linked to [diversity] work... if this happens, it is going to come down to my professional or educational experiences being impacted... and I just can't let that happen."

When they did engage in racialized equity labor, more often than not interviewed graduate students preferred to conduct it 'behind the scenes' or even off-campus entirely. This came from, in part, the disconnection they felt from the campus community (see theme 1) as well as not wanting to jeopardize their standing in their programs. The same woman graduate student who commented on the lack of adequate mentorship in Theme 1 elaborates, "It's hard to get involved... I think I've just kind of been working behind the scenes, here for support for people who have negative experiences on campus... I've been approached to be recruited for some leadership positions [in organizations that support students of color], but with my professional life and mental health, I just didn't want to do it... I just want to graduate and move on."

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Respondents often had concerns about engaging in racialized equity labor at the forefront of their experiences. That said, unlike undergraduates of color who are perhaps more likely to ‘give up’ their academic work to support diversity labor on campus, or racialized faculty who are compelled to participate in diversity labor as an aspect of their employment, our study respondents have trouble being as active in campus equity efforts as they would like to be.

It is here that we see a unique manifestation of how cultural taxation may have been realized for this specific sample of Latinx graduate students. As much as they would like to participate in more diversity labor, many fear ‘rocking the boat’ and jeopardizing their position on campus. Simultaneously, graduate students may not be afforded as many chances to engage in racialized equity labor as faculty (even if their participation is tokenizing and directly conducive to culturally taxing experiences). This lack of engagement can turn into a threat to one’s cultural identity and affect their overall graduate school trajectory as one Indigenous Mexican student puts it: “No, personally, I don’t engage in work on behalf of campus diversity efforts... I learned that keeping people at ease gets you far, you’ve got to know how to keep people from calling the cops and, you know, not give them a reason to feel threatened, but when you start realizing that doing so definitely changes you... I’ve lost so much. I’ve had to sacrifice my own identity to, you know, stay alive... worrying about everything that’s happened distracts me so much from grad school. You’d hope that this is something that only comes up every so often, but no, it comes up every day.”

Theme Three: Culturally Taxing Levies Against Latinx Student Identity

A recurring element of responses was difficulty navigating their professional workload due to levies, or unique impositions, against Latinx identities. Students spoke about how their Latinx identity, rather than their general identity as students of color, was a specific stressor when managing their graduate careers. Navigating their program responsibilities was also difficult due to the mixed-race background of many participants, who had their diversity-centric research interests undermined due to ‘not being Hispanic enough’ for other scholars to take their work on Latinx populations seriously. One student relayed an

anecdote whereby a professor requested he change his research topic to something more ‘suitable’ to him due to ‘passing’ as a person of color. This highlights how many non-Latinx academics may be incorrectly assuming what Latinx students ‘should’ present as and how that should inform their academic interests. Additionally, many interviewees highlighted how ‘Latinx’ was not a term with a lot of explanatory power of their cultural backgrounds in the first place. Thus, it was often difficult to navigate feelings surrounding their identity (a key feature of the faculty model of cultural taxation) when treated as though they are ‘generic.’ Specifically, interviewees expressed not wanting to be forced to be a representative of all Latinx people. For instance, a graduate student from South America comments, “They confuse our different cultures and there’s this really racist notion that everything south of the U.S. is Mexico... Often times they would ask me about Mexican stuff. I always have to clarify that I’m not Mexican. It’s like constantly trying to tell them you’re not Mexican and having to prove that we [people from my country] have different cultures and things, and all I do is get asked ‘do you eat spicy food?’”

Interviewees also expressed concerns about the lack of support for first-generation and immigrant students, especially in the face of severe underrepresentation of these persons amongst faculty and staff in their graduate programs. These feelings of underrepresentation and lack of support were especially apparent in those that come from communities that were majority-Latinx. For these students, campus life brought the additional stress of being separated from a community driven by commonalities to which they were accustomed, with accompanying feelings of isolation vis a vis a culturally taxing experience. Students also often did not have access to specifically Latinx faculty and staff who understood their experience. As a result, students found themselves facing additional levels of solitude (see theme 1) not necessarily felt by those who were more used to majority-White settings. For instance, a Hispanic woman states, “I mean, I would not call myself a representative where I live in [city with Latinx majority population] because it’s a minority majority...But as far as in [City of University] or as far as campus goes... my name doesn’t fit in, I don’t know where to go, and suddenly I’m looked upon differently.”

This sentiment was echoed by other stud

dents who agreed that going from an environment where they are not looked upon as a representative of a race or culture into an environment where it is very easy to be perceived as one was jarring and disruptive to their work. Here we see a relevant, more Latinx-specific sentiment that may modulate how culturally taxing experiences are understood by Latinx graduate students. Many do not necessarily come from backgrounds where they built an understanding of their identity as coming from a 'minority group,' often traveling to academia from environments that were majority Latinx. It is specifically within academia that these students are exposed to, even at HSIs, White-dominated space.

Theme Four: Unique Pressures on Women

Women-identifying interviewees were aware of the link between their identity as women, their Latinx identity, and the social perceptions of these intersecting identities. Pressures on these interviewees were further compounded by the awareness of professionalism or leadership expectations that seem to conflict with womanhood and femininity. For instance, a woman respondent said, "But once you get into the ranks of leadership, that was always historically men. And so, you have to prove that while retaining your femininity and your womanhood, you can be an effective leader. And that may look a little bit different than it would on a male."

However, the way women responded to these unique pressures varied. Some women felt the need to stifle certain forms of expression to adhere to a more traditional archetype of professionalism. The mixed-race student who previously commented on isolation and keeping a low profile in Themes 1 and 2 elaborates, "Like facial expressions and like expressing emotion, like not wanting to come across too harsh, like continuing to be like smiley and happy...as women we have to like teeter the line of being like happy and smiley, but also not being, you know, too assertive... I think adjusting, knowing when to elevate their femininity to help in like graduate school or the workplace and knowing when to kind of dial it down to where it's like, well, she's just a woman... female students have been called too emotional by faculty... finding that balance has been the difficult part."

Further, a Latina student offers, "I have made it a point to, like in my emails, to be more definite in the way I talk and less kind. Like. I don't

want to say submissive...but less submissive...I do feel the need to be more like of a dominant person or like, I don't want to say manly, but like more just serious."

Conversely, other women, even though they were aware that their womanhood and femininity might be hypervisible, refused to modify their behavior or expressions of femininity. "And like I said, I don't and I wouldn't want to suppress it because I'm Mexican, I just can't help myself." One interviewee also describes the ways in which her identity as a woman is pressured externally both from family and the university: "Women especially have this responsibility [caring for family]... And especially being from a from a Hispanic background, that's definitely the case for myself...And so it's just really unfortunate because being a Hispanic female, trying to go through graduate school, it's almost like a double hit...Not only am I hearing it from my traditional family members, 'are you not helping take care of your parents or sick elderly parents?' But I'm also hearing from the graduate school saying, 'oh, no...this is our role. You have to stick to them.'"

While some participants felt that their departments' standards were equal for both male and female graduate students, other interviewees noted tangibly different standards, both social and procedural. When discussing faculty responses to female students' work, one Mexican woman interviewee said, "I think there has to be more behind the scenes work to present it and be taken the same way as if like a male student did." Regarding other departmental standards, another Hispanic interviewee said, "I think men are given a little bit more academic freedom to express themselves, to pursue more things, to take on more and to take on more diverse research, whereas women are kind of put into a box."

These patterns primarily align with previously discussed findings for women of color in academia, either as students, staff, or faculty members (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012; Anantachai & Chelsey, 2018; Niemann et al., 2020). Responses indicate that Latinx women engage in labor intended to balance their personal identities with others' expectations and face unique identity challenges as graduate students. This is evidenced in the frequency that interviewees discuss personal and cultural obligations to engage in these forms of labor in the context of not being adequately represented in one's department amongst students and faculty. One Latina interviewee

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stated, “I’m the only one of me. I never saw anybody that I can really think of, I saw one other Hispanic girl in all my classes this semester, but that was it.”

That same interviewee also alluded to Joseph and Hirshfield’s (2012) discussion of the ways that negative perceptions of affirmative action programs can cast a shadow on women when she says, “I did have once a guy tell me he thinks that women have more opportunities...which kind of bothered me or definitely bothered me because that’s not true.” Multiple women also discussed how they felt their research or intellectual contributions were devalued because they involved discussions of race or diversity. One woman interviewee who identifies as White Latino and Mexican states, “That [area of expertise] gets downplayed...And then also being like a female and also being like Latina, like not knowing what the issues actually are. Even though they disproportionately affect Latinos ...And so I’m not being taken seriously on all those accounts.”

Theme Five: Reluctance to Assign Responsibility and Accountability

Another theme identified by the research team was the apparent reluctance of Latinx graduate students to label their experiences and the actions of others as potential instances of racial prejudice or systemic problems. When asked if they had experienced prejudice or discrimination on campus, some participants qualified their answers as being ‘not serious,’ being unsure if it was prejudice, or otherwise not qualifying events as instances of racial prejudice, despite then proceeding to acknowledge that these events may have been racially motivated or conducive to harm for people of a Latinx background. For instance, a student who identified as half Mexican and half White said, “No, I really haven’t [experienced discrimination], for my race or ethnic background... but you know, there are aspects of your identity that causes others to discriminate or be prejudiced towards you... I guess like, with my teachers, they say things that are offensive in a classroom [to Latinx students] ... I don’t know if it counts, but there’s definitely been like things that have been said or done that are kind of crappy, but actually not really offensive to me specifically.”

Students also seemed hesitant to identify behavior as prejudiced when it was more systemic or covert in nature. Interviewees often went to great lengths to provide the benefit of the doubt, or outright deny the pos-

sibility their experiences may have been based on systemic issues. For instance, one Mexican woman states, “I couldn’t really say [if I had experienced prejudice on campus] ... but it’s not like they’re going to say, ‘we’re going to discriminate against you.’ But you see the inequalities, you see what’s happening with the person next to you and yourself... I see it, but I can’t prove it.”

One other Hispanic man describes that, “I’ve never experienced any racism or discrimination within campus... I was just given a bad set of cards in my hand and well, tough luck right? No one ever said life was fair. So sometimes you’ve got to put in the extra work, you got to put in the extra mile, but it’s not always easy, right? I think I remember sometimes where I was like man, I wish I was born a different way, I wish my family would have prepared for me to come to a college where I didn’t have to worry about work...”

When asked to elaborate on their experiences, several students cited examples that included, but are not limited to: feeling pressured to be more prepared for classroom discussion than White male colleagues who ‘got away’ with not doing their homework or the reading, being forcibly labeled with terms they actively did not associate with (such as Chicanx or Latinx), having to defend their interest in diversity research, having to defend their expertise in work unrelated to diversity, and feeling like prejudice they experienced was more a fact of reality for them rather than something with a solution that they or the university could pursue. One Mexican woman student describes, “Regardless of what I do... People are going to see the color of my skin, and they’re going to be prejudiced... but I know I can’t advocate for me or my people... this doesn’t feel like a place where the perception of you, or the perception of your classmates is ever going to change.”

This very same student in an earlier response, however, professed that they believed the university to be doing very well in supporting students of color, claiming, “The university is basically doing all the things they can to really increase the visibility of the [student of color] population, and something I pride myself in as a student of the university.”

In applying this absolutism to cultural taxation, a key distinction between the Latinx graduate, faculty, and undergraduate experiences may be unveiled here: graduate students may be more likely to undergo the mental and emotional labor associated with witnessing inequities without finding culpable players in one’s

environment. This is not to say tgraduate students deny that action is important (see theme 2). Rather, in light of a situation in which participating in diversity labor is something that is not made accessible, it may be safer for students to draw their focus away from areas in need of improvement.

Discussion

The present study explores whether current understandings of cultural taxation, often modeled from faculty's experiences, are applicable to Latinx graduate students. Findings suggest that there are aspects of Padilla's model of cultural taxation that apply, but that universal application across faculty and graduate students may not be appropriate. Themes identified in this sample suggest that there are power differentials at play that distinguish cultural taxation in graduate students from that of other academic populations. Specifically, like faculty, present Latinx graduate students outlined feelings of isolation that were often intensified by their origination from majority-minority settings and the lack of Latinx colleagues. Students also cited fatigue due to perceived slights against their identities that stemmed from being asked to represent and/or work towards diversity efforts that may or may not have been of interest to them professionally. However, diverging slightly from faculty's experiences, we see power differentials play a more direct role due to students' reliance on a direct supervisor with stark levels of control over their graduate experience (and, to an extent, livelihood). These power differentials are further exacerbated by strong ties to university administration, and all these tethers could inhibit the ease with which graduate students were able to participate in equity labor.

Isolation in one's department reflects patterns in racialized faculty outlined by Padilla (1994). Both graduate students and faculty must overcome the isolation that accompanies statistical underrepresentation throughout the department. Tokenism may also be an underlying commonality between faculty and graduate student experiences. Among the consequences of tokenism are isolation, representativeness, lack of regard for race-based research areas, attributional ambiguity (which refers to not knowing how to interpret feedback), and loneliness (Niemann, 2016), all of which were reflected in students' responses in this study.

Our sample's difficulty in incorporating diversity into their work while navigating departmental dynam-

ics is reflective of other graduate students' testimonies. Carbajal (2021) described the ways in which multiple members of his predominately White department referred to diversity and identity characteristics as nuisance variables. Discussions surrounding diversity have a steep impact on departmental and program culture, particularly for graduate students (Grady et al., 2014). Further, when faculty members are dismissive of related work or efforts, it can discourage the graduate student and add to the isolation they feel. Unfortunately, this can lead graduate students to feel that they do not have a trusted resource who can identify with their experiences to help their navigation through academia and professional skill development (Moore et al., 2020). A graduate student's livelihood is also dependent on maintaining a positive relationship with the department and, by extension, the administration. Racialized graduate students not only hold this tenuous relationship but also must endure the additional costs of being a racialized person within a predominately White space (Vargas & Villo-Palomino, 2018).

Levies or taxations against our sample of Latinx students seem to stem from multiple sources. First, the homogenization of all identities that are supposed to be encompassed by the 'Latinx' label places students in a precarious situation where they are motivated to defend themselves and their individual identity while also maintaining social harmony. This is reflective of impositions on racialized faculty who are presumed to serve as a 'cure-all' for diversity needs, recycling the racist notion that one person of color can serve as a single representative of a department's diversity values (Lopez, 1997; Niemann, 2016). However, our sample engaged in an extra layer of mental and emotional labor that sought to eclipse the university's role in inequitable practices. In application, this theme likely occurs simultaneously with both the theme of isolation and the theme of power differentials: graduate students do not feel the necessary sense of community nor the motivational autonomy to go head-to-head with powerful players in the department or administration. Therefore, to help calm their senses of personal or cultural obligation, they 1) do not seek out participation in equity labor that could put their security at risk and 2) do not place blame on those who could instigate their educational and professional destruction.

Concerning the taxation of Latinx graduate women, nearly all women participants cited unique pres-

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tures to their combined gender and cultural identities during their time as graduate students. Pressures associated with identity as it relates to womanhood and professionalism are a common challenge due to the antithetical associations between femininity and what is considered professional (Lewis, 2011). Women in working environments often feel pressured to endorse just enough womanly behaviors to avoid disconfirming feminine stereotypes while simultaneously conforming to rigid standards of professionalism (Rudman & Phelan, 2008). While women hold more than half of all graduate degrees and outnumber men in assistant professorships, academia still perpetuates these disparate standards through the overrepresentation of men in both full professorships and administrative positions (Lee & Won, 2014). Identity pressures are further exacerbated for women of color as they balance expectations based on both race and gender in addition to navigating often restrictive systems of professionalism (Rudman & Glick, 2001; Eagly & Carli, 2003; Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2008). These pressures may be exacerbated by Latinx cultural values about the primary role of women as wives and mothers.

Future research should explore other marginalized racial and ethnic groups within the graduate student population to identify unique or overlapping needs and experiences as they relate to cultural taxation. While we did not find explicit evidence of Lerma's labor appropriation cycle in our sample, this framework should still be explored in samples of graduate students (i.e., those that are actively involved in leading university diversity efforts). More work is also needed to understand the unique position of women graduate students of color, particularly regarding academic and labor expectations. While there can be similarities amongst racialized groups' experiences, researchers should take care to disaggregate their methods and analyses regarding race, gender, and cultural experiences. A simple step in this direction could be allowing participants the opportunity to provide their racial, ethnic, and gender identities in a free-response format rather than relying on normalized checkbox questionnaires that could limit participants' expression.

Limitations

There are limitations to this project that must be addressed. There may be other experiences within this population that were not presented by our limit-

ed sample. Additionally, this work relied entirely on subjective qualitative analyses. While qualitative work allows for the nuanced depiction of participants' lived experiences, these topics could be supplemented with quantitative work (e.g., a cross-university survey that could illustrate these experiences proportional to enrollment). Similarly, while quantitative measures of intercoder reliability are often considered inappropriate for judging qualitative work (Braun & Clarke, 2013), our choice not to implement such a measure may influence others' perceptions of our interpretations. Finally, data only reflect the experiences of Latinx graduate students at one university in the southwestern United States. It is possible that manifestations of cultural taxation for Latinx graduate students could fluctuate according to the region and racial and ethnic makeup of the surrounding areas.

Conclusion

Cultural taxation and related models must more inclusively account for the graduate student experience, including the psychological and physical toll that may result from tokenization, lack of cultural knowledge, and seeming practical irrelevance of the word "serving" for HSI designations. Within these contexts, students are driven to not only advocate for themselves as they navigate their degree but to simultaneously avoid rocking the boat in the hopes that they can graduate and make a difference in their families and communities with their careers. Furthermore, students may be driven to expend mental and emotional labor absolving their institutions of blame in the face of inequity due to their unique position as not-just-students and not-quite-faculty. We invite scholars to incorporate mental and emotional burdens, as well as related phenomena like tokenism, into their conceptualization of cultural taxation. The cognitive work associated with processing a discriminatory or culturally exclusive environment (e.g., questioning one's experiences and coping with isolation and discrimination) undoubtedly contributes to the invisible work conducted by marginalized members of the department.

The dearth of culturally sensitive faculty mentors exacerbates the challenges of Latinx students. For instance, despite being in an area of the country where nearly 40% of citizens self-identify as Latinx, graduate student enrollment at this project's SWPU lags significantly behind this number at 15%, which also falls be-

Factbook, 2020). Starker still is how these numbers compare to the presence of Latinx faculty. Inclusive of lecturers, tenure-track, and tenured professors, only 6% of over 1000 faculty identified as Latinx, an underrepresentation that directly impacts the mentor-mentee model that many graduate programs employ. Without knowledgeable mentors who can help Latinx students navigate and interpret feedback and experiences, students may live in a state of attributional ambiguity. That is, they may not know whether their experiences are based on their accomplishments, successes, writing, skills, etc., or whether they are a function of racism, sexism, homophobia, and other biases.

Finally, universities and institutions should not only take care to ensure that graduate students have access to the resources and mentorship that they need, but also be aware that, even within the context of an HSI, students could be challenged by culturally taxing experiences due to tokenism, isolation, heightened need for self-advocating labor, and sacrificing participation in university change. Institutions must move beyond upholding diversity for accreditation and honor, or funding, as is the case with an HSI designation. It is time for university administrators to pay particular attention to the word “Serving” in the label Hispanic Serving Institution.

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Appendix A

Table 1

Overview of Researcher-Identified Themes

Theme Name	Theme Description
1) Distance/Isolation from Support	Feeling disengaged with both the physical campus space and their own departments due to a lack of campus resources and difficulty in finding support from mentors
2) Power, Labor, and ‘Something’s Got to Give’	While acknowledging that performing diversity-work was something they wanted to engage in, students were rarely in a place where they felt they could do so publicly without risk to their graduate career
3) Levies Against Hispanic/Latinx Student Identity	Multiple intersecting stressors, such as the amorphousness of Hispanic/Latinx identity, immigration status, and cultural displacement, add stress to the graduate experience
4) Unique Pressures on Women	Women are not only pressured to be aware of how femininity is received but the image they are expected to maintain is largely only the ‘acceptable’ parts of femininity
5) Reluctance to Assign Responsibility	Considerable juxtapositions between beliefs the university doing ‘well’ to support diversity while simultaneously having numerous stories of the university providing unsupportive spaces for marginalized students.

Appendix B

Interview Questions for All Participants

1. What is your ideal version of campus diversity?
2. How does that ideal compare with current campus stances and efforts on diversity?
3. [university] is recognized as both an HSI and an MSI. In what ways, if any, does [university] serve students of color?
4. To your knowledge, has there been any pressure from students for [university] to support campus diversity efforts?
5. Have you ever done any work on behalf of campus diversity efforts? (If so) Can you tell me about that?
6. How did you come by that service? Did you volunteer, were you assigned, did someone request the service from you, etc.? (If they did not volunteer) Who requested or assigned that service from you?
7. In what ways, if any, was your service rewarded, validated, or noticed?
8. Were you satisfied with that validation? Why or why not?
9. Do you believe your White colleagues were met with the same validation?
10. Do you think anything was changed as a result of your labor?
11. In what ways is your service connected to your racial/ethnic identity?
12. What, if anything, has been the costs to you for your service? Have they been material, social, professional, time-based, etc.?
13. Would you say these costs in any way were specifically related to your status as a Latinx student and not more broadly a student of color?
14. In what ways, if any, do you feel like a representative of your ethnic/racial group on campus?
15. In what ways, if any, are you treated as an expert on issues of diversity?
16. In what ways, if any, do you believe your power compares with that of your White peers?
17. In what ways, if any, has your own area of expertise ever been downplayed by those with more power than you in favor of work on race or diversity?
18. Have you experienced discrimination or prejudice on campus as a result of your identity?
19. (If yes to previous question) Were you ever made to feel responsible for these experiences with discrimination?
20. Do you fear retaliation if/when you speak out against issues of racism?
21. Have you adapted any coping strategies to deal with anything we've discussed so far (such as experiences of discrimination or diversity/equity work)?
22. Do you feel the department and faculty keep up with your progress and milestones?
23. Do you feel like you receive adequate mentorship/advising that improves your work?
24. Do you feel like your work is ever undermined because of diversity-centric responsibilities?
25. Do you have a faculty member you feel like you could go to in order to discuss/address your elevated workload or experience of discrimination?

Additional Questions for Woman-Identifying Participants

1. Have you ever felt like you have to take on additional work because of your identity as a woman?
2. Do you feel as if expectations in your department are identical for men and women?
3. Do you feel like your male colleagues are ever threatened by your accomplishments?
4. Do you ever feel the need to adjust your expressions of womanhood or femininity within the context of your department?