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# What does Exhaustion Look Like in Graduate Students?

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## Abstract

Studies have shown that academic burnout is characterized by a feeling of exhaustion around educational activities; students develop cynicism and distance regarding their studies as well as reduced discipline about their school work (Schaufeli 2002). Emotional exhaustion is not only one of the three dimensions of burnout but is considered the main dimension which spurred other theories of burnout (Maslach 1985, 2016). A pop culture reference, The Urban Dictionary adds, "the inevitable corporate condition characterized by frequent displays of unprofessional behavior, a blithe refusal to do any work, and most important, a distinct aura of not giving a shit." Academics, along with other professionals recognize the important consequences that can result from emotional exhaustion and academic burnout. Emotional exhaustion and academic burnout are linked to mental and physical fatigue. As people start to feel this way then the decisions they make are influenced by this exhaustion. This can manifest itself in the decisions we make regarding our appearance, how we take care of and use our spaces, and what we put into our body as fuel (food).

As the field of burnout research grows, limited research examines graduate students in the social sciences and how they experience exhaustion. This project explores how graduate students who are working as teaching assistants, in a social science department experience academic burnout and emotional exhaustion. In Spring of 2017, I conducted in-depth interviews, asking questions on topics such as power, mental work, physicality of emotions, job vs. class work, adapting, and negotiating expectations versus reality. From the interviews, as the next step in this research was to see how I could visually document the students' experiences of emotional exhaustion and academic burnout.

This poster explores what emotional exhaustion and academic burnout looks like for graduate students. The participants were asked to take pictures in the four areas at three times throughout a semester. At the beginning of the semester, in the middle and at the end of the semester. They were asked to take a selfie, what they would usually eat through the day, their office space at the University, and a personal space of their choosing. Through these pictures combined with interviews, I will analyze how graduate students experience emotional exhaustion and academic burnout.

**Keywords:** Graduate Students, Academic Burnout, Emotional Exhaustion

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