

*The Journal of  
Multimodal Rhetorics*  
Volume 4, Issue 2



**Invisible Labor in the Academy**

# The Cultural Tax Refund

## Reconsidering Invisible Labor and Cultural Taxation For Early-Career Researchers Of Color

M. O'Brien and Cynthia Pengilly, Central Washington University,  
with Brittney Poston, Sound Editor

### Cultural Tax Refund Transcript

[Music Playing: "Cold Cracks Us" by TrackTribe]

**Dr. Pengilly:** I'm Dr. Cynthia Pengilly.

**Dr. O'Brien:** I'm Dr. Michel O'Brien. Our article is "The Cultural Tax Refund: Reconsidering Invisible Labor and Cultural Taxation for Early-Career Researchers of Color."

**Pengilly:** And we both teach at Central Washington University in the Pacific Northwest in the middle of the state. And we'll start with a little bit of background and introduction.

[Music Playing: "Dreams Come True" by Purple Planet]

**Pengilly:** Dr. Pengilly, I identify as a Black American cisgender female, a disabled faculty of color living a daily life with lupus. I'm a single parent and I'm an early-career researcher in a tenure track position. In terms of teaching, I'm an Assistant Professor of professional and technical writing and my primary courses include rhetoric, professional and technical writing, and new media, and I'm an affiliate faculty with Africana and Black Studies and Accessibility Studies program. I have nearly 15 years' experience teaching at the college level including online and one would say that is my specialty. I also am a digital pedagogy scholar and I study online writing instruction, online writing centers, and quite a bit with curriculum development.

**O'Brien:** My name is Dr. Michel O'Brien. I'm a non-binary multiracial faculty of color. I'm Sri Lankan Irish and my family lives in Malaysia. I live with a disabling chronic health condition. My teaching is in global and transnational literatures and ethnic studies with a focus on Asian North American studies and my classes and work combine sociological research on race with literary critique, so I was trained as an interdisciplinarian. My research is on forced migration in the trans-specific and connections between minor sites of empire like Malaysia, Singapore, Canada, and Australia and at our present institution, I also teach and work with the Women Gender and Sexuality Studies and African and Black Studies. My service work is in diversity and inclusion at the institution and curriculum related to ethnic studies, cultural studies, and areas studies.

**Pengilly:** Awesome, we're very busy.

(Both laugh)

**O'Brien:** Very busy.

**Pengilly:** Okay, great. So let's start by defining a few of the terms that we'll be using throughout this essay, such as "invisible labor" and "cultural taxation." The first being "cultural taxation" coined by Padilla in 1994,<sup>1</sup> which basically describes increased expectations of faculty of color particularly when we feel like we should address diversity related departmental and institutional concerns, and I think the emphasis is on *should*.

**[Music Playing: "Progress" by Purple Planet]**

**Pengilly:** Because of those diversity-related activities, we tend to have that lack—feeling a lack—of camaraderie with our colleagues and our research is also usually in these same areas so it's marginalized as well and that contributes to the invisible labor, and invisibility, and the solo status.

**O'Brien:** Cultural taxation seems to manifest when you're asking something of colleagues that are made uncomfortable by the ask itself, or administrators, and then also when you're actually like going up for tenure or post-tenure view or applying for a position in the institution and you're already perceived as not doing serious work.

**Pengilly:** Mm-hmm. Yeah and in the case of full faculty, like how the cultural taxation seems to multiply as you go up the ranks, rather than reduce.

**O'Brien:** Right.

**Pengilly:** I think that's a big one, for faculty of color anyway.

**O'Brien:** So for "invisible labor" I'm going to quote Nichole Margarita Garcia here where she notes that "feminist of color scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, Cherrie Morgana, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Barbara Smith and countless others have noted that invisible labor has been used to describe the unacknowledged work that faculty of color are taxed with through a heavier service burden, diversity efforts, racism, isolation, and/or mentorship that limits the amount of time allocated to work towards tenure promotion."<sup>2</sup> I myself often defer to Patricia A. Matthew's discussion of invisible labor<sup>3</sup> and how invisible labor is often that work that somehow appears on your slate or your workload that you're expected to do and there's the unspoken agreement that it will somehow appeal to you, particularly because you're a faculty of color. So additional burden of mentorship that you might want to do, but then

---

<sup>1</sup> Padilla, Amado M. (1994). Ethnic minority scholars, research, and mentoring: Current and future issues. *Educational Researcher*, 23(4), 24–27.

<sup>2</sup> Garcia, Nichole Margarita. (2019, Oct 16). Can I meet with you? Yet, never give you credit for your labor. *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*. Retrieved from <https://diverseeducation.com/article/157566/>

<sup>3</sup> Matthew, Patricia. (2016). *Written/unwritten: Diversity and the hidden truths of tenure*. University of North Carolina Press.

suddenly just appears anyway and you're forced into those roles or of sitting on every diversity committee at the institution or being the first name that comes up when there's a search committee and there that has a diversity requirement. So, invisible labor is often also when the university has decided it needs to be more diverse and it means people to fulfill those roles in order to make the university more diverse but it's still pulling from the historical lack of racial, ethno-racial diversity at the institution, so the same five or six or ten or twenty scholars are appearing on all of the same committees and assigned the same types of work.

**Pengilly:** Yes, as a single parent with some of the things that I have to do for my son for school, we joke about the concept being “voluntold” to do something and sometimes I feel like that applies with some of the work we're talking about here where, if faculty of color are few and far between at institutions, that we are voluntold where it's like, “oh you're volunteered to do this, didn't you? Didn't you want to serve on this diversity committee?”

**O'Brien:** I think similarly, we both mentioned in our openings dealing with being disabled in our everyday lives and there is the line from the disabled community: “nothing about us without us.” There's also that implication, that feeling that if we're not doing this work ourselves, it's going to be done by someone who is from an out group and who doesn't have the lived experiences, and so it's going to be done by someone who's going to speak for us, or groups of people who are going to be speaking for us. Which again means that if you're not actually making the institution more inclusive, you're still pulling from the same groups and you're still “voluntelling” them.

**Pengilly:** And that reminds me of a few of the pieces that we've talked about, so why don't we go ahead and transition to the previous research on these topics. In this article “The Burden of Invisible Work in Academia: Social Inequities and Time Use in Five University Departments,” mentorship was spoken about but it's not the same as professional advising, and what they found was that, particularly between men and women of color that are faculty, that men do the latter, which is more professional advising to keep a distance in terms of like being more objective, so they spend a lot less emotional labor and a lot less time total invested in the student versus women faculty of color, who are actually doing what we would define as mentorship.<sup>4</sup>

**O'Brien:** Right.

**Pengilly:** Which I found that to be really interesting. They also cited Jacob's 2004 and this article where women faculty who had children at home how there's even less time available for research, which is where most faculty do their research. It's not at work; it's not during the academic year; it's at home, at night, on weekends, and in the summer. But for female faculty of color, parents of color, they don't have that space at home to be able to do that. So I found—obviously I know that as a parent—but this is the first article that I'd ever come across where they actually explicitly dated it and followed it.

---

<sup>4</sup> Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group. (2017). The burden of invisible work in academia. *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, 39, 228–245.

**[Music Playing: “Progress” by Purple Planet]**

**Pengilly:** In terms of it was a study where they had faculty write in journals and stuff and labeled it so that they could track how and where faculty of color were spending their time. As we move up the ranks, we still don't reduce our amount of service and we continue to teach more courses than white faculty as full profs.

**O'Brien:** Right.

**Pengilly:** So that the cultural taxation becomes like: I guess in other words, the tax is higher. It doesn't reduce as we go up the ranks.

**O'Brien:** Yeah, the tax goes up and you deserve a rank bracket, almost like an income bracket.

**Pengilly:** That's a very interesting analogy and I would definitely agree with that, and I think this idea of a higher cultural tax and even the higher income bracket, as you just coined that phrase, also shows up in a few of our other pieces. After I finished reading “Why Don't You Get Somebody New to Do It?”<sup>5</sup> and “My Skin is Unqualified: An Autoethnography of Black Scholar-Activism for Predominantly White Education”<sup>6</sup> that was a really interesting piece for me, particularly, not just as the Black scholar, but because it's a PWI<sup>7</sup> and he's a Black scholar who talks about going through the tenure process and what he was restricted in being able to do pre-tenure versus post-tenure. He uses this term “racial battle fatigue” which I thought was a very very right clear and apt name. I was like “Oh yes, I didn't even need an explanation of what that is.”

**[Music Playing: “Redemption” by Purple Planet]**

**Pengilly:** And also just kind of reflecting on the two parts of himself as a Black man, but then as a Black education scholar and he started with a poem and one line that stood out to me is “I can't claim that I'm woke but I am having trouble sleeping / with professorial me and some company he's keeping” (19-20), which I thought was really poignant because I think as scholars of color we struggle with who do we befriend? Who do we keep in our inner circle as our actual friends and allies, our white allies? He talks a bit about that kind of hesitance of accepting white allies, which I think that all scholars of color go through. But ultimately, he came to the decision through experience that we have to have that, especially in a predominantly white institution in order to support what we're doing and to legitimize what we're doing. If we don't have the white diversity advocates working alongside us that nothing that we do will be seen and heard. It's unfortunate, but it's true that it just won't get done by Black and brown folks alone.

**O'Brien:** Yeah, definitely.

---

<sup>5</sup> Joseph, Tiffany D., & Hirshfield, Laura E. (2011). “Why don't you get somebody new to do it?” Race and cultural taxation in the academy. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 34(1), 121–141.

<sup>6</sup> Hughes, Sherick. (2019). My skin is unqualified: An autoethnography of Black scholar-activism for predominantly white education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 33(2), 151–165.

<sup>7</sup> Predominately White Institution.

**Pengilly:** That was just really interesting to me and stood out.

**O'Brien:** In Joseph and Hirshfield, I think that's the "Why don't you ask somebody else to do it?" they mention faculty of color and white diversity advocates, so the white faculty are also doing diversity work. They'll identify other people's racially problematic behavior and that they themselves, people interested in the diversity work, are deemed to be "feeling that some white colleagues believe faculty of color are overly sensitive to race issues, participants also suggested that some white colleagues are insensitive to such issues" (137). So I think that's also part of it too is that we know that the white allies or white colleagues or advocates have to be involved, but there's also that concern that if there's not an amount of education or even just affirmation for what they're doing, that they'll carry that into the classroom and that affects students. A part of the ethical driving force is to try to be the scholar and the professor and the advocate that you wish you had when you were going through the institution, then that makes it impossible without also doing that additional labor of bringing someone into your inner circle. You do have to do a lot of explaining and sort of create your teeth through culturally inappropriate jokes or racially insensitive comments because you want to bring them over onto the side of being able to implement that work or take the hit at a meeting that is going to be dealing with conflicting race issues: racial battle fatigue. Definitely.

**Pengilly:** Yes, yes. There was something else that I came across. It was also Hughes' piece. He talks about whiteness as property and that whiteness functions almost like ownership of property in that it gives power and privilege to those with white skin by not only explicit laws but hidden laws as well, much like the legal rights given to property owners. So, it ties race and class together. He goes on to talk about if we think about property owners, the rights that are given property owners, it applies to whiteness as property as a construct too in the sense that they have the right to use their whiteness, exchange it, enjoy it, dispose of it. It provides reputation and status and also provides a right to exclude others. So, all of these different traits come with whiteness as a form of property that they can choose to put on as a cloak when they want, take off, choose to ignore it, all these you know different things. I just thought that was a really interesting metaphor, thinking about it as a property owner, and you're a property owner. It makes me think about Black fishing, of course.

**O'Brien:** Also like the exchange is interesting. The cronyism that's involved with whiteness as property in CRT<sup>8</sup> is always fascinating because essentially the power that comes with whiteness and the privilege it affords you, the fact that you can exist and be the center of any conversation of any room and just be the status quo in any space the institution, which must be amazing. But then it can be exchanged and, just like you would hand your property over to your child or a loved one, you can hand over some of that power and distribute it back to someone as a form of cronyism, and that's how you get the same person hired or promoted in the same roles. The same people step into the same positions of power. It's very much the "like wants like" to join them.

---

<sup>8</sup> Critical Race Theory, a theoretical approach which examines how race and power augment socio-political structures.

**Pengilly:** Legitimacy came up in both of those articles. The idea of fighting to prove that your research is legitimate, your scholarship is legitimate: all of it. We're always fighting for that.

**[Music Playing: "Spiritual Moment" by Purple Planet]**

**Pengilly:** And in this piece by Sherick Hughes, "My Skin is Unqualified," it brought me back to the conversation we had earlier about the hypervisible and invisible and kind of being in both modes sometimes simultaneously because, we will be asked to sit in on a meeting because of our expertise only to then have our comments be dismissed. And in this piece one of the lines "I observed too often the dismissal of my contributions with my dark brown skin rendering me unqualified to offer sound ideas even from my areas of expertise" (p. 3). That's that racial battle fatigue. We're fighting all the time. Even when they're like, "Hey, we know that you know this stuff, and we really could use you on this committee or this task force." They ask that of us and we say, "yes, of course, let's solve this problem, whatever that is." And then to be dismissed because of the color of our skin. We've recognized that in several instances where then our white allies will have to step up and say something just because their skin qualifies them to make the same statements but to be heard, and valued, belonged, understood. Basically all of the things in that continuum that we're struggling with: they have just by virtue of having white skin.

**O'Brien:** There's hypervisibility of discussions about race and diversity.

**Pengilly:** Yeah.

**O'Brien:** Like not everyone can do this work. You can be trained in doing it but then support the training necessary if you want to do this work.

**Pengilly:** Mm-hmm.

**O'Brien:** As opposed to this idea of "Well anyone can do it and it doesn't require any sort of rigor or understanding or engagement."

**Pengilly:** Yeah, it's sort of like the whole "anyone can teach English."

**O'Brien:** There was this article "The Burden of Care: Cultural Taxation of Women of Color Librarians on the Tenure-Track," and all of its review study.<sup>9</sup> It was great, but it was the exact same material that we've seen elsewhere. So they, Anantachai and Chesley (2018), mention the tension between the connection provided by diversity work and the failure to recognize it by personnel committees and tenure review committees and there's not sort of much else in terms of what comes next. I found it useful in the fact they even identify that. They identified that there is a benefit to this work.

---

<sup>9</sup> Chesley, Camille, & Anantachai, Tarida. (2018). The burden of care: Cultural taxation of women of color librarians on the tenure-track. In Rose L. Chou and Annie Pho (Eds.), *Pushing the margins: Women of color and intersectionality in LIS* (pp. 301–327). Library Juice Press.

**[Music Playing: “My Personal Journey” by Purple Planet]**

**O’Brien:** There's something to be said for the return or rebates that is possible for people working on diversity and inclusion, especially for us in a rural, primarily white institution, is that it can put you into conversation with other faculty of color, with other folks of color and allow you to be seen, allow you to enter into spaces where the effects that race and ethnicity have on you is just assumed. It can also be how we develop knowledge between us: where do you go to get your haircut? Where do you go to get the particular food items that you need? It is absolutely not possible for everyone at every institution, and I don't think we're arguing this should be the bar for everyone, that you should invest in diversity and inclusion work and research and service and teaching and it will immediately pay out in this form of connection. But, it is important to acknowledge that it is one way of harnessing that invisible labor and can be a particular type of even if it's ephemeral, social capital, at least between faculty and staff of color.

**Pengilly:** Connecting to others: that for me, doing the racial and diversity work, does allow me to connect to others at our institution because it isn't what I was trained in. So, we are in a geographically isolated regional institution in the middle of the state on the other side of the mountains and it makes it difficult to get to cultural centers and large urban areas, and so the work that I do with Africana and Black Studies and with other faculty of color allows me to be connected in ways that I would otherwise be truly isolated. And, so, I'm seeking that work out because of the connections that it allows me to have with students of color and faculty of color that otherwise my disciplinary training would leave me on my own.

**O’Brien:** Yeah.

**Pengilly:** I would be really isolated. It's different, right, if we lived in Tacoma, like you said, or Seattle. If we were in larger metropolitan areas, I maybe wouldn't have to seek out this (laughs) sort of connection.

**O’Brien:** I feel like the broad race work I do doesn't really fulfill that desire to connect to people that can understand my experiences specifically, but does at least put me in conversations where there's a presumed understanding that race affects everything that you do at a PWI. That it affects your teaching, your service, what research is viable to you in effect, and literally every moment even when we're not physically on campus.

**Pengilly:** It's hard though because the articles, as you've pointed out, kind of stopped short of tying our pedagogy, our scholarship, and our service all together as informing one another.

**O’Brien:** Yeah.

**Pengilly:** That they seem to separate all of those items out when they actually are more integrated than what the current research seems to suggest.



**O'Brien:** Yeah, invisible labor seems really attached to service, and then service as it appears when it comes to extra advising out of teaching. But it doesn't seem to really extend into research except when it's critiquing how invisible labor takes time away from research.

**Pengilly:** Mm-hmm. Yeah, exactly. Basically, it can prevent you from getting tenure, right? So, that keeps coming up over and over.

**O'Brien:** Yeah.

**Pengilly:** That invisible labor actually can inform your research that leads to tenure.

**O'Brien:** Like, I don't feel like I'm taking off and putting on different hats when I'm moving between research and I'm not switching off different parts of my brain. It all extends from the same foundational expertise. It's just the difference in how interlocutors perceive it when it's something that's not taken as seriously.

**Pengilly:** There was something that we read by the journal co-editors Tuck and Yang (2018). This was out of that special issue that was referenced in the CFP.<sup>10</sup> It was a very short introduction but it also stops short with the intersections between service, pedagogy, and research. One of the lines that I liked was that people of color are what make the universities legitimate, but I think that the discussions about cultural taxation that have come up by Audrey Williams June (2015) and others, which is this kind of polite way to say Black and brown tax, but all of it still seems to be focused mostly on service as you said, instead of the fact that all of it is integrated.

**O'Brien:** I don't feel like we're working with the same definition of "invisible labor" that a lot of the articles that talk about taxation or hypervisibility are because this is work that we would want to be doing. I find it enjoyable to work with my colleagues and my peers to put together new programs and to think about student needs and to mine the data. I find the research fascinating. I enjoy it all. I just want to do it and have it be perceived as what it is: rigorous research, that is then developed into a university program. That's like in the same way that we take administration seriously as business practice, I want what we do to be taken that amount of serious. It's not anything that anyone's asking us to do particularly. It's literally that I want to do this work, but I want it to be done well and without all of the nonsense that comes along with it.

**Pengilly:** So, it sounds like what we have is a blurring of lines between hypervisibility and invisibility, and then also a blurring of lines between scholarship, teaching, and service that the current research is not necessarily speaking to. You were talking about being hypervisible, that I am hypervisible when it comes to pedagogy, curriculum design, teaching online, that sort of stuff.

**O'Brien:** Mm-hmm.

---

<sup>10</sup> The Call for Papers for this special issue on Invisible Labor in the Academy.

**Pengilly:** And then invisible with the emotional labor for student mentoring.

**O'Brien:** Yeah, there's this lacuna, this weird elision between the two things where this part of your academic profile is considered valuable, hypervisible, tangible. It gives people a good feeling that it's a Black woman who can do all of these things, and then suddenly it hits this line of "oh, and here's the invisible labor part." It's like there's not a way to validate that all of this is still part of one individual's academic profile, whereas for a traditional academic, all of that would be seen as deriving from the same research profile and the same individual.

**Pengilly:** Okay, so then how do you see yourself in that dichotomy of hypervisible and invisible?

**O'Brien:** I think like my research and my particular expertise in those areas that chugs along as hypervisible and also because we have, unlike you, I'm not rendered invisible when it comes to scholarship, I get more tokenized in terms of "Oh, we have a brown scholar who publishes and is the director of this [program]." That's hypervisible. Then when it comes to the other forms of labor that really extend immediately from my scholarship, that's seen as irrelevant. It's not actually seen as grounded in my expertise, even when I'm making the argument for more actual inclusivity on campus based on my expertise.

**Pengilly:** Yeah, so when you serve on the CAH<sup>11</sup> diversity committee, for example, it's directly connected to your research in social justice and cultural studies but it's not considered valuable.

**[Music Playing: "Redemption" by Purple Planet]**

**O'Brien:** Yes, exactly. It's like my research talks about one type of race, which is a theoretical academically viable and validated idea of race, and then when it comes to the work that I do to argue for raciality on campus, that's seen as not a real thing. That's seen as more of like a problem, or an emotional burden, or a thing that people can get defensive about. It's the same thing. I see the same reticence when I'm observing how people approach your pedagogical expertise. When it suits upholding the status quo, what you know is valuable. You're like this database of wealth of information, but also someone that can actually implement new program changes and put courses through. When it goes to the other side, when it goes to actually "this is what our students need and this is not how we're meeting their requirements," even the work with Kandee [CWU's VP of Diversity and Inclusion], that is more focused on "to have a strong student body you need to support your faculty of color," suddenly all of that other stuff that they value just kind of vanishes

**Pengilly:** Mm-hmm.

**O'Brien:** You're not seen as a pedagogical expert. It's suddenly like arguing from a place of "this somehow benefits you."

---

<sup>11</sup> College of Arts and Humanities, Central Washington University. The speakers are Assistant Professors in the English Department, which is housed in CAH.

**Pengilly:** Yeah and I think because our backgrounds are so different in terms of our pedagogy and scholarship, diversity and race work isn't necessarily central to what I do. It's not what I was trained in at least from an academic training standpoint, but I still have the lived, embodied experience as a person of color in America in a predominantly white institution that I'm able to draw from, and corporate experience, so we definitely have different ways that our knowledge is legitimized.

**O'Brien:** What you were saying about legitimizing the discipline was interesting because I think for a lot of white colleagues and scholars the drawing on personal experience or personal professional experience does allow them access to other disciplines. So, if there, I can think of a few that work primarily in a regional-based study of an area who is then allowed to become an expert on Mexican culture and teach that as Cultural Studies, but I think there would be questions about someone else, someone in our position, saying "well, I work adjacently with this area. Now I'm an expert on this particular cultural artifact." So, if anything you should have more expertise and more of an understanding by virtue of, like, living as a Black woman, but that's not really how it plays out in terms of who's afforded certain opportunities, of course.

**[Music Playing: "Spiritual Moment" by Purple Planet]**

**Pengilly:** So, when my pedagogy intersects with race, social justice, inclusivity, particularly when I start arguing for why we need better support for our online students, for example, that are oftentimes in marginalized communities, for example, then that pedagogical expertise is dismissed.

**O'Brien:** Whereas I think we're at an institution where there's a sense that like anyone can do race. But, to keep those students, it requires all of that subtended invisible labor.

**Pengilly:** Yeah, of course.

**O'Brien:** We are wanted in the room to meet that certain criteria, but the actual knowledge that we bring, whether it's lived experience but it's also lived experience informed by rigorous critical frameworks that come from our disciplines, how that's dismissed out of hand until a white colleague, or white ally reiterates something similar. The same obviously doesn't hold true for our white colleagues who can be on committees. They might have absolutely no expertise with whatever university affair committee. By virtue of being on that committee, they can then speak to "well, this is how governance works at the university and this is how budgets work, etc." So, the knowledge that they earn by being in spaces in the university is still seen as valuable and applicable to everywhere else and allows them to elevate and to move upwards in tiers and ranks of the institution. If we do the same thing when talking about race, or talking about disability, or talking about gender it suddenly becomes "well, that that's too subjective. That must just be a *you thing*." Even if we're speaking from the very same particular, "Well, no, I observed, as a member of this committee, that this was an issue around race and racism." So there's this weird, this one type of knowledge is transferable and applicable and valuable, and the other type of knowledge, because it has something to do with something more amorphous or ephemeral, like race or identity, is just dismissed out of hand. Even though they should be

like the same unit, the same item; they should have the same exchange [value]. That would also be a way for us to attach that to our CVS or attach that to our tenure and promotion files. Because that type of experience on committee is not seen as the same as someone who learns how a budget works.

**Pengilly:** Right. We recognize that we're being viewed differently than how we're perceiving ourselves and that's always at play for faculty of color. We're not actually shifting ourselves. People are shifting us in and out of these different spaces.

**O'Brien:** I think, in like critical race, we talk about that sometimes as figuration. Like how you are being figured by others.<sup>12</sup> It's not even really categorization, because it's related to too many different elements of your individuality, but how in the moment you're actually being figured into the particular space that you're entering into.

**Pengilly:** So, as we've been discussing the perceptions of faculty of color and the figurations, I've kind of been developing this chart in my head, almost like a continuum that shows the different spaces that we occupy, oftentimes simultaneously as faculty color, so I'd like to run that by you. So, I have of course, hypervisible/invisible, written/unwritten... and you said that was from whose book?

**O'Brien:** That is from Patricia A. Matthew's book, *Written/Unwritten: Diversity and the Hidden Truths of Tenure*.

**Pengilly:** So, I'll start from the top. I have hypervisible/invisible, written/unwritten, legitimate/illegitimate, valued/unvalued, qualified/unqualified, acceptance and belonging vs. rejection, and then I added in benefit/deficit. And that comes from Hughes' piece as well. Basically it's this idea of they [PWIs] want to be able to quote diversity numbers in terms of how many faculty are diverse, so that's a benefit. But then when they actually ask us to do things, it becomes a deficit. It's like "Oh, but what? They want to be compensated for that, and they want to be *heard* and *validated*?" No, now all of a sudden it's a deficit."

**O'Brien:** What's that quote? "If all you've ever experienced is privilege, being asked to give up anything or do anything different feels like oppression." Like, it feels like that in some sense. They're conceiving of two different types of race, race as "oh, we want these courses, and we want faculty of color, and we want the veneer of race as a practical object," but when it becomes "okay, well then integrate in your curriculum," it and you and me are seen as like less rigorous or less serious.

**Pengilly:** Mm-hmm.

---

<sup>12</sup> "Figuration" refers to how individuals are defined against one another through networks of power and comes from Norbert Elias' 1977 text *What is Sociology?* and has been used in Critical Race and analyses of race broadly to describe how race augments power. See Denise Ferreira Da Silva's *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (2007) for more on figuration and race.

**O'Brien:** Like that's not coming from me real place even though all of the research points that it is.

**Pengilly:** Yeah. So, that's where we are right now with this continuum chart.

**O'Brien:** Something related to agency and a lack of agency. I think you read it “The Burden of Invisible Work in Academia” by the Oregon Social Sciences Feminist Network. This is going on a tangent quickly, but they talk about how “mentoring junior colleagues or students of color, working on committees to address racial troubles on campus, and giving public lectures related to diversity issues can give faculty of color a chance to give back to marginalized communities, ameliorate feelings of isolation, and give faculty of color energy and a sense of purpose” (p. 233). Okay, yes, I think that's very astute. “In this way, race-related service work opens up the possibility for critical agency” (p. 233). So their argument is such that it can allow faculty of color to... They might be “culturally tax based on their racial and sometimes gender identity, but invisible work may provide individual and institutional benefits and that allows them to actually challenge underlying assumptions about advancement.” That one's a little bit trickier when you're an ECR<sup>13</sup> at a PWI. That's a very different set, but this idea of critical agency, I think, assumes that white faculty have agency, which is true. I think they have a lot more opportunities by the fact of existing as the status quo, and then we have whatever the opposite of critical agency is.

**Pengilly:** Yeah.

**O'Brien:** Which I think is all the unspoken rules and parameters around a faculty of color that prevent them from entering into certain rooms or roles, so we need something like that in the list.<sup>14</sup> The work needs to be done. You want these programs and this work to exist. But you also feel maligned that it's concentrated into one Black body. I think if we're talking about cultural taxation, like with invisible labor, it seems very limited to “it is service you are expected to do because you are a person of color.” But I don't really think that's what we're talking about in our experiences. We're more talking about “some of this work could be enjoyable and could be effective, but we would like it to be validated as rigorous and stemming from expertise.”

**Pengilly:** Mm-hmm.

**O'Brien:** And I think that's a different way of approaching invisible labor and cultural taxation than the articles.

**Pengilly:** It's definitely an implication, or just kind of hidden practice, among academics that as you move up the ranks you naturally take on more administrative work, which is service, and do less teaching and less scholarship.

**O'Brien:** Right.

---

<sup>13</sup> Early Career Researcher.

<sup>14</sup> See Figure 1 for a completed Continuum Chart of the ideas discussed in this audio essay.

**Pengilly:** But, that doesn't seem to apply for faculty of color. It's like an unwritten expectation or rule, or whatever, but it does not apply to faculty of color. If anything, all three areas continue to grow.

**O'Brien:** Yeah.

**Pengilly:** In that case, that would be invisible labor of the current definition, where it has a negative connotation.

**O'Brien:** Yes.

**Pengilly:** Right? But what we're talking about is not the same form of invisible labor.

**O'Brien:** It's like the responses to the work that we are wanting to do is the same as it is in the negative connotation of invisible labor, like we are perceived as burdensome, taken un-seriously, it's not treated with rigor, there's not substantive engagement with it. I think that that remains true of invisible labor irrespective of if you're on the side of "I want to be doing this work. This is fun. This is interesting," or if you're on the side of "I don't want to be doing this work and I keep on getting called up because I'm the one Black or brown faculty member."

**Pengilly:** Yeah. But even in those cases, obviously, much of it is labor and that negative sense, but there is some positive too, even as even as full prof.

**O'Brien:** Yeah, up until the point when it is wrapped up in higher-level administration, when it then moves into "okay, we need this for accreditation. We need this for the university to actually function, and receive funding, and remain accredited, and perhaps become a minority serving institution." It becomes revalidated on that side. So, yeah, there is this interesting chart of like at what point does that labor that we're doing as early career researchers make it through the pipeline and gets revalidated when a D&I<sup>15</sup> professional is doing that on the administrative side.

**Pengilly:** Yeah, I think that's a great point, and it seems like what we're getting at is that we need to redefine, I guess getting back to the quote that you read from that introduction piece by Tuck and Yang (2018), that "invisible labor" maybe was never a great label to begin with, right, that maybe it needs to be redefined. Because what you're getting at is that all of the research in this area is basically making invisible labor seem like it's a burden.

**O'Brien:** Yeah.

**Pengilly:** And maybe it's the *labor* part of "invisible labor." That the connotations of the word "labor" is very negative. It makes it seem as if it's not something that we value and want to do, and, as you said, that we are happy to do. And, I think it's maybe that word "labor" that's

---

<sup>15</sup> Diversity and Inclusivity Professional, often those working in diversity initiatives as administrators who have training in this area.

attached to “invisible labor” that is maybe bringing that negative connotation in and we need to redefine that.

**O’Brien:** Yeah, I think that's a good way of putting it because I enjoy research. I'm a researcher, of course, I enjoy research. I enjoy instruction. I'm a teacher. You're a pedagogue? Pedagogue?

**Pengilly:** Yeah (laughs)

**O’Brien:** (laughs) Yeah, you're that thing!

**O’Brien:** This is stuff that we enjoy. We're just implementing in a way that's in an exciting area because it gives students access to disciplines and knowledge that we didn't have when we started. That should be fun, and it should also be celebrated and given support at the institution because we're saying “hey, we're willing to do this work for you.” But there's just this gut response to it not being treated as a serious practice, that we are not serious about it, that it is emotional and emotionally driven, and that that's not something you can slot on Faculty 180,<sup>16</sup> that you have an investment in something when we all do. Maybe, we can start to think about how you can hold both spaces at the same time, insofar as you can be hypervisible within the space of a meeting or in an email because you're attached to a particular right like, your race, your embodiment is attached to a particular... “Like if a Black woman is asking this of me then I need to approach this differently than my white peers.” So, there's that moment of hypervisibility, but then the actual labor that undergirds it remains invisible.

**Pengilly:** So do we have any more specific examples of early career researchers kind of blending our scholarship, service, and teaching?

**O’Brien:** My example would be: it wasn't until I worked at a PWI that I realized the issues of people conflating Area Studies, Cultural Studies, and Ethnic Studies as one entity and not actually looking at the origin of each of these. And, so at our institution, we have interdisciplinary programs that are quite marginalized and not given the support, and the faculty members, the funding, and the visibility that they need to thrive on campus. Apart from the tireless work of people in those programs, there's not a lot of effort to make them viable as cornerstones of ways to retain faculty of color and students of color. And there's not a lot of parity between them, so we have some that are in Area Studies, which comes from Anthropology, so they focus on a very specific physical boundary area of the world, and then we have a bunch that are in Ethnic Studies that are more about actually dealing with the particular racial-ethno experiences of individuals. But because of that, that means that there's glaring gaps in them and there are no Asian American courses on campus, apart from one. And, even though we have an increasing number of Asian American students, we can't really serve them without a program like that. And so, my service work is then to try to make that viable and to add more broad-based ethnic studies courses and to build up these programs so that for

---

<sup>16</sup> Faculty 180 is a web-based system used for submitting paperwork or files associated with tenure, promotion, and re-appointment.

any student of color that arrives, there will be some way that they can see themselves in the curriculum. So we're not just doing it based on population and we're not just doing it based on who's currently hired, but so that we can always allow people to understand race and their individuality and their backgrounds when they come into the institution, through whatever means that might be. And now, I'm working on scholarship that discusses the ways that Ethnic Studies can actually inform Area Studies and make it more robust and allow for Area Studies to contend with race because Area Studies often involves discussing race. So, the fact that we have an Asian Studies program, while that's very exciting, the history of Area Studies has not dealt specifically with raciality and marginalization and racial violence and what that means in America. So, there's a pretty big gap there that we're not really serving our students or faculty's needs. What will happen with that? I mean all of these constraints still exist. Is that actually seen as viable service on campus? Is that seen as viable research when I'm hired to do to focus on very specific fields? But it's germane to actually being able to do my work on campus is to interrogate these questions.

**Pengilly:** My role in that project of helping us to build a more robust Cultural and Ethnic Studies program for our students and faculty of color is that I'm working on it from a different angle in that I serve on many of those same committees, but I am more on the policy, administration, grant-writing side of things in terms of service. So, that's kind of one side of it, but from a teaching or pedagogy side of it, I infuse that into my courses in professional writing, such as the grant writing course, and I'm continuing that work with a graduate student this quarter. It'll be next quarter, but we're going to continue working on the grant for getting a new academic unit put into place at Central Washington University to house these programs and provide that support system. So, that it informs my teaching but also scholarship because I will eventually end up being an author on that grant and then that will count as a category A publication [for tenure], so these conversations are all integrated and happening in all three spaces for me: for teaching, scholarship, and service. And, I think the second example would be our push to add an anti-racist graduation requirement in that I'm involved in it from the service side of sitting on the Gen Ed Committee and the Africana and Black Studies affiliate faculty and steering committee, but also, we'll be working closely with Curriculum Committee to add and build new courses. We'll be building new courses, so we'll be creating more courses to support this effort, while also going over existing courses to see how they fit in. I don't know in terms of scholarship, but there are definitely some opportunities for us to write about this important work from a programmatic perspective and publish on what it's like to start something like this at a PWI in the middle of a Black Lives Matter cultural moment, right? I think that this could be a publishing opportunity for the faculty involved, at least faculty of color, specifically involved in this endeavor of adding this anti-racist graduation requirement, and I know your side of that is going to be very different than my contributions to that project.

**O'Brien:** I think similarly, though, because it requires so much research and so much actual scholarship, like reading scholarship, mining it to develop an anti-racist and a race and ethnicity graduation requirement, it lends itself to publication because you do have to look at examples of what works successfully because our institution is behind in this area. There's 30 years of data on this to pore through. There's also, because other institutions have suddenly rushed to



institute their own or shift their own race and ethnicity requirements given the current moment and in the middle of a Black Lives Matter movement and also with the current immigration crises, there are more models to look at that are also publishing materials, and so I think would make good sense for that to be tied firmly into scholarship. My work as a Faculty Fellow of Diversity will relate to that but it'll also look at what training will be necessary for faculty to have, since we are at PWI, for this requirement to exist. So, how can we actually ensure that our fellow faculty will be able to infuse their curriculum and their current courses with things that actually meet this requirement, to have it remain a meaningful environment, and not just be that you spent one day talking about race in the classroom or you talked about anti-racism briefly as it relates to physics, or something? How can we actually make sure that this has very, very clearly delineated boundaries and if anything, still privileges and emphasizes the tireless work that's been done by faculty of color who have experienced this diminishing and dismissal of what they bring to the table when it comes to teaching at a PWI? That gives you such a very specific skill set. I never appreciated it and I never really thought about it when I first took the position. That you're learning a completely different side of bureaucracy.

**Pengilly:** Yeah, for sure. Yeah, because I don't feel like I'm taking hats off either when I am in the meetings, and my expertise is different from yours, but, like you said, because of my background in professional writing and grant writing and pedagogy, I'm at those meetings serving in a very different capacity.

**[Music Playing: "Spiritual Moment" by Purple Planet]**

**O'Brien:** Racism is bad to experience. It causes emotional pain, but when I go into meetings and I'm drawing on my background in research in race, I'm not conceiving of a different idea of race. I'm still conceiving of race as a construct, race as informed through discourse. I don't want us to build this new department or school because I want people to care more about race. I think that it's vital to have a home for not only robust areas, these are important research areas, but also for minoritized people. It's not inherently to make people less racist. That's not the goal, but I think that's how it's perceived in meetings because of this whole idea of what invisible labor constitutes. That when you show up and you're asking for help with a project to take some of the burden away from your invisible labor, you're seen as asking for people to change in something inside themselves, like "change emotionally for us."

**Pengilly:** So, I think that in both of these two examples we have with creating a new academic unit to house our Cultural and Ethnic Studies programs and then adding the race and ethnicity graduation requirement, that those two endeavors that we're working on from all three angles, it's very integrated; our scholarship, our service, and our teaching is all integrated into these two projects, and much of the scholarship talks about invisible labor and cultural taxation but doesn't actually talk about it from this kind of positive perspective. That it always seems to have a burden attached to it.

**[Music Playing: "My Personal Journey" by Purple Planet]**

**Pengilly:** That faculty of color are asked to do this without recognition. And yes, in many cases, we don't get recognition. But, we've been able to find ways as early career researchers to integrate the three, so that it is not a burden that it's helped us move up the tenure ranks, and perhaps this is a path forward that other early career researchers can take instead of feeling like they can't use the invisible labor in ways that can actually help them to move forward in their in their careers. I think it's important because we are coming from two different places in the sense that my area of expertise is *not* necessarily in diversity work, but that I've still been able to use it as an early career researcher to move my career forward in the tenure system.

**O'Brien:** What you just said about cultural taxation, it's almost like positive taxation, and you would know better than I would, but we need to term that means like what happens when you're getting your tax return back (Pengilly laughs), and how can you actually invest that intelligently. Because I feel like that's what we've done in a lot of ways. We've taken service that has no personal meaning to us and use those as doors in and to larger conversations that then when someone needed someone to do work, we were able to be like, "Okay, but you need to see our diversity work as equivalent to the work that we do with curriculum design, as equivalent to the work that we do with Senate service." So, there's something about this reinvesting of the tax that I think that we've done very shrewdly and intentionally but only because there's been no logical avenues for us to do that. Yeah, I think reconsidering invisible labor and cultural taxation for early career researchers: what happens when you want to do the work?

**Pengilly:** Mm-hmm.

**O'Brien:** Because a lot of the focus on invisible labor presumes that the person is called to do the work, and then it's not recognized and same for cultural taxation. You are expected to do the work and then it's just sort of folded into your workload expectations, but it's a little bit different when you're seeking that out. We should also frame it in the fact that we're not living in a metropole. The connections that you can form and the community that you can build for students and with other faculty is amplified if you're doing this type of connective work.

**[Music Playing: "Cold Cracks Us" by TrackTribe]**

O'Brien: If you're drawing on your background, your personal experiences, your interests, and your marginality to foster these connections. But that doesn't mean anything if when it gets to a personnel committee or review board, no one sees it as meaningful work. This *would* allow us to build different types of connections across the university. It *would* allow us to foster a different relationship and a sense of belonging.

## APPENDIX

## Continuum Chart: Perceptions and Figurations of Faculty of Color

hypervisible	↔	invisible
written	↔	unwritten
legitimate	↔	illegitimate
valued	↔	unvalued
qualified	↔	unqualified
acceptance and belonging	↔	rejection and isolation
benefit	↔	deficit
critical agency	↔	systemic limitations, or lack of agency

Figure 1. This Continuum Chart is a brief meta-analysis of the existing research on invisible labor and cultural taxation for FOC, re-imagined by two early career-researchers.

## REFERENCES

- Chesley, C., & Anantachai, T. (2018). The burden of care: Cultural taxation of women of color librarians on the tenure-track. In R. L. Chou & A. Pho (Eds.), *Pushing the margins: Women of color and intersectionality in LIS* (pp. 301–327). Library Juice Press.
- Garcia, N. M. (2019, Oct 16). Can I meet with you? Yet, never give you credit for your labor. *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*. <https://diverseeducation.com/article/157566/>
- Hughes, Sherick. (2019). My skin is unqualified: An autoethnography of Black scholar-activism for predominantly white education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 33(2), 151–165.
- Jacobs, J.A. (2004). Presidential address: The faculty time divide. *Sociological Forum* 19(1), 3-27.
- Joseph, T. D., and Hirshfield, L. E. (2011). “Why don't you get somebody new to do it?” Race and cultural taxation in the academy. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 34(1), 121–141.
- June, A. W. (2015, November 13). The invisible labor of minority professors. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 62(11), 25.
- Matthew, Patricia. (2016). *Written/unwritten: Diversity and the hidden truths of tenure*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Padilla, Amado M. (1994). Ethnic minority scholars, research, and mentoring: Current and future issues. *Educational Researcher*, 23(4), 24–27.

Purple Planet. (2020). Dreams come true [song]. <https://www.purple-planet.com/dreams-come-true>

Purple Planet. (2020). My personal journey [song]. <https://www.purple-planet.com/my-personal-journey>

Purple Planet. (2020). Progress [song]. <https://www.purple-planet.com/progress>

Purple Planet. (2020). Redemption [song]. <https://www.purple-planet.com/redemption>

Purple Planet. (2020). Spiritual moment [song]. <https://www.purple-planet.com/spiritual-moment>

Purple Planet. (2020). Uprising [song]. <https://www.purple-planet.com/uprising>

Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group. (2017). The burden of invisible work in academia. *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, 39, 228–245.

TrackTribe. (2019). Cold cracks us [song]. <https://www.tracktribe.com/>

Tuck, E. & Yang, K. W. (2018). Introduction by the journal coeditors. *Journal of the Critical Ethnic Studies Association* 4(1), 1-3.



Dr. **M. O'Brien** is an Assistant Professor in the English Department at Central Washington University on ancestral Yakama Nation land. Their work focuses on Asian North American and Asian diasporic literatures and theory, multiculturalism, comparative raciality, and transpacific studies. They are currently completing a manuscript that examines connections between forced migration and constructions of race in Canada, Singapore, Malaysia, and Australia. Their work has been published or is forthcoming in *Postcolonial Text*, *New Global Studies*, *The Comparatist*, and *Antipodes*.



**Cynthia Pengilly** (Ph.D., Old Dominion University) is an Assistant Professor of English and Co-Director of the Technical Writing Program at Central Washington University. She teaches courses in technical and professional communication, cultural rhetorics, medical/health rhetoric, and new media. Her research explores rhetoric, technology, and activism with a particular focus on competing representations and articulations of identity in online spaces. She also specializes in digital rhetoric and innovative pedagogical strategies in online writing instruction (OWI) and online tutoring. Dr. Pengilly has several forthcoming articles and book chapters.