

# *Hiding in the Ivy: American Indian Students and Visibility in Elite Educational Settings*

BRYAN MCKINLEY JONES BRAYBOY  
*University of Utah*

*In this article, Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy explores how the experiences of Tom, Debbie, and Heather, three Native American students attending Ivy League universities in the 1990s, reflect larger societal beliefs and statements about the perceived place of Native Americans in higher education and U.S. society. Brayboy posits that Native Americans are visible in these institutions in ways that contribute to their marginalization, surveillance, and oppression. In response, the three Native American students exercise strategies that make them invisible to the largely White communities in which they attend school. These strategies help to preserve the students' sense of cultural integrity, but further serve to marginalize them on campus. At times, the students in the study make themselves visible to emphasize that they are a voice in the campus community. Brayboy argues that these strategies, while possibly confusing to the layperson, make sense if viewed from the perspective of the students preserving their cultural integrity.*

On many of the days that I spent with Debbie, an American Indian woman from the Southwest, we met at a place not far from her apartment around 8:00 in the morning for coffee, a bagel, and a cup of yogurt.<sup>1</sup> After breakfast, we went to her class in the university museum. Although Debbie lived on the same street and only seven blocks from the museum, she did not go to class using the most direct route. Rather than walk down the street to the museum, Debbie turned away from the street (a main campus thoroughfare) after only two blocks and walked behind a large health institution. She negotiated the hidden alleys and tricky turns that traveled through and between buildings, emerging on the other side of the hospital. From there she slid down another alley and entered the museum from the rear. She took the stairs rather than

the elevator, where she rarely met another soul. Although she might occasionally encounter physical plant workers and delivery people, her communication with them was minimal.

The first time I accompanied Debbie on this walk, I was amazed at her knowledge of these buildings and their intricate layouts, and the fact that there was a back door to the museum accessible to students. I was even more impressed by her decision to take this circuitous route, which took forty-five minutes, rather than the more efficient 15-minute walk directly down the street between her room and the museum. It was not long before I began to recognize the value she placed on avoiding contact with other students. When I asked Debbie why she chose such a route, she said she needed to go out of her way to not see anyone who knew her or might look at her like she is “from another planet.” To those from the larger student population at this university, her behavior might seem strange. To some American Indians, however, her choice makes sense and can be interpreted as one way of acting in a culturally appropriate manner and maintaining her cultural integrity (Deyhle, 1995). By discovering and using the route she did, Debbie demonstrated her ability to “fly under the radar screen” and to make herself less visible to others on campus, actions that had strategic purposes and allowed her to interact minimally with others throughout her day.

In order to be a “good” Indian and a “good” student simultaneously, Debbie employed strategies that allowed her some control over how visible (or invisible) she would be to others in the institution. The fact that Debbie had some control over the amount of distance between herself and others (i.e., her degree of visibility) remains a major finding of my original study (Brayboy, 1999) and a challenge to many theories of accommodation, assimilation, and resistance (e.g., Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1987; Tinto, 1993).<sup>2</sup>

In this article, I explore the ways in which the situations, views, and actions of American Indian students attending Ivy League universities in the late 1990s reflect larger societal beliefs and practices about the perceived “place” and status of American Indians in U.S. society. I examine the experiences and hardships that three American Indian students encountered at two prestigious Ivy League institutions in order to understand the nature and challenges of their everyday lives. I argue that American Indian students are both visible and invisible on such campuses in ways that contribute to their marginalization, oppression, and surveillance. By surveillance, I refer to being closely watched in a way that controls one’s identity and actions (Phelan, 1995; Vizenor, 1998).

Surveillance can take multiple forms, such as White peers asking American Indian students if they can “clean up the mess in the classroom” (mistaking them for housekeeping staff), or White students questioning American Indian students’ admission status with statements like, “You are American Indian? Wow, you must have really benefited from affirmative action. You must have

gotten in everywhere.” Surveillance can also occur when White peers place American Indian students in the role of either the romantic “Other” (e.g., with comments like, “Can you talk to us about what it took for you to be here, having grown up on the reservation?”) or as a savage who is “intimidating” because a student is quiet and reserved. As a result, American Indian students use strategies to make themselves less visible to the dominant population, thus minimizing the surveillance and oppression they experience on a daily basis. I conclude that, although the use of such strategies does not eradicate the marginal status of American Indian students in school communities, the strategies make sense when viewed through the lens of cultural integrity (Deyhle, 1995).

Cultural integrity refers to a set of beliefs, and actions directly linked to these beliefs, that are shared by a group of people. The beliefs are free from outside influences and are “distinct and independent tradition[s]” (Deyhle, 1995, p. 28). Individuals who participated in this study described this notion of cultural integrity in terms of their “Indianness” or “those things that make me [and others] Indian or tribal.” These students used strategies that helped them maintain a connection with their cultural and tribal backgrounds, and thus preserved their individual and group identities within an uncomfortable and often oppressive context. It also allowed them to succeed academically: each student graduated from his or her university and achieved a minimum grade point average of 3.2.

### Doing a Fancy Dance: Methods and Methodology

The data I present come out of a larger two-year ethnographic study that relied on participant observation, interviews, focus groups, and institutional documents to examine the experiences of seven American Indian students attending two Ivy League institutions. I attended class, studied, ate, and socialized with these students. I also accompanied each of the students to their family homes during semester and summer breaks. In the original study, I focused on the academic, social, financial, cultural, psychological, and political costs and benefits of being academically successful for these individuals. I became increasingly interested in the ways that the students in the study developed strategies for maintaining their cultural sense of self (what they called their Indianness) while simultaneously thriving academically. In other words, the students found ways to be both good Indians and good students.

It is important to note that my role as a researcher and an Indigenous person is complicated in the reporting of Heather’s, Tom’s, and Debbie’s experiences. I offer my analysis from both viewpoints in this text.<sup>3</sup> I also hold graduate degrees from an Ivy League university, so my analysis in this article is professional, cultural, and experiential. I understand what it means to be an Indigenous person and have a grasp of the demands to be both a good Indian and a good student. My analysis, then, is multilayered and has a range and variation in its con-

clusions. I use knowledge as an Indigenous person to explore the personal implications of (in)visibility, and my knowledge as an Ivy-educated person to analyze the larger structural implications of the in(visibility).

I have decided to use the terms *visibility* and *invisibility* in my analysis of space management and issues of cultural integrity because they capture the dynamic and complicated nature of the American Indian students' relationship to the institution and the actors in it.<sup>4</sup> By using these terms, I capture the ways two seemingly opposing states are intimately related, explain the complicated role of individual agency, and describe the ways individuals respond to issues of marginalization and surveillance. For the students in this study, their visibility and invisibility simultaneously create and are created by processes of marginalization, exclusion, assimilation, and oppression. By focusing on the policies and practices of the institution in relation to American Indian students' (in)visibility, this work contributes to an understanding of the dynamic relationship between historical structures or processes and the everyday experiences of individual actors (Holland & Lave, 2001).

Specifically, I examine the following three questions. One, in what ways do these students make themselves (in)visible in educational settings and spaces and to what ends? Two, in what ways do institutions and their agents make American Indian students (in)visible in educational settings and spaces, and to what end? Three, what is the relationship among (in)visibility, marginalization, surveillance, and cultural integrity?

### Visibility, Marginalization, Surveillance, and Cultural Integrity

Owens (2001) has argued that American Indians must hide behind the masks created by White America in order to be the Indian that Whites want to see. Shanley (2001) argues similarly that America loves its Indians as long as they are hidden from view. I would extend this argument to U.S. institutions of higher education — see King and Springwood (1996) and Spindel (2000) for examples that document the use of Native Americans as team mascots. On the other hand, postcolonial literature frequently argues that visibility — often in the form of voice and perspective — is one important vehicle for addressing processes of marginalization and the silencing of underrepresented, marginalized, colonized peoples (e.g., Fanon, 1967; Grossberg, 1997; Hall, 1991). Like Phelan (1995), however, I am not totally convinced that invisibility is always negative and visibility is inherently positive. hooks (1990) makes a similar point when she calls for the margins to serve as sites of resistance and affirmation, rather than simply as wastelands of passivity and destruction.<sup>5</sup> That is, individuals can be powerful and resistant when they are hidden. In this article I argue that avoiding surveillance can — like being in the margins — be a source of strength.

Phelan (1995) also argues that the binary distinction between the power of visibility and the impotence of invisibility is misrepresentative. She notes that

there is real power in remaining unmarked and that there are serious limitations to visual representations as a political goal. In the September 11 aftermath, for example, Muslims became marked as visible Others. This was complicated further by the visions that many Americans had of what a Middle Easterner or Muslim looked like. For example, in Salt Lake City, Utah, a man tried to set on fire a restaurant owned by East Indian Punjabis (Cantera, 2001). In this case, the man's (false) image of a Muslim was more important than whether the owners of the restaurant were actually Muslim. In this way, visibility — real or imagined — offered serious limitations for the restaurant owners and for the man who tried to set it on fire.<sup>6</sup>

Phelan (1995) also argues that visibility becomes a trap when it summons surveillance by the law (or, I would argue, by anyone holding power), voyeurism, fetishism, and the colonialist appetite for possession. For American Indians, this means that being watched or located as a noble savage or romantic Other, being fetishized, or being identified as someone from the past is constricting and paralyzing. Vizenor (1994, 1998) specifically discusses the surveillance of Indigenous people through their visibility as the invented Other. He notes that the image of the Indian produced by the dominant society is “treacherous and elusive in histories [that] become the real without a referent to an actual tribal remembrance” (p. 8). Vizenor also argues that the image of the Indian is invented and does not exist within tribal communities, but has been created by Whites in dominant society to fulfill their need to create and own a “real Indian” that they can control and manipulate. The need for control and manipulation by members of dominant society influences their creation of an image that is visible and that suits their own agenda. Still other Indigenous scholars (Almeida, 1997; Kaomea, 2000, 2001) have noted the role of invisibility and visibility among Indigenous peoples, observing that Indians are beloved (or romanticized) when they fit a particular image but loathed when they fit another. There are few images of American Indian people that fall somewhere in between.

I do not mean to suggest that American Indians do not have a sense of what their Indianness means to them. My point is that this image often contradicts what the media, larger society, and non-Native individuals hold for American Indian people. In this study and in previous work, I found that Indians were seen variously by their classmates, administrations, and institutions as romantic Others, welfare mongers, whiners who need to get over past injuries, affirmative action babies, and noble savages (Brayboy, 1999). In contrast, the American Indian individuals viewed themselves as viable citizens contributing to the dominant society and to their tribal nations, as well as individuals capable of both honoring their cultural and spiritual ways and being admitted to Phi Beta Kappa at elite institutions of higher education.

In a race- and color-conscious society, it is inevitable that race and color are issues for the students in this study. Almost all of them concluded that the cost of being visible was rarely mitigated by the benefits associated with that visibil-

ity. It is worth mentioning that individuals cannot always control their visibility. They become visible because of their physical appearances as well as by their words and actions. The examples of Debbie, Tom, and Heather illustrate that the ways individuals become visible are based marginally on the ways they present themselves and more substantially on the background, experiences, and visions of the seer, as well as the context in which they are being seen. The same individuals are seen differently, depending on who is seeing them and when. They also view themselves differently, based on the context and situation. The co-construction of self, how students view themselves, how they are viewed by others, and the importance of the context becomes complex, complicated, and varied.

Although being a visible American Indian does not necessarily have to be problematic, it currently is, due to the racialized nature of social relations in the United States and the history of colonization of the Americas with its accompanying oppression of Indigenous peoples. Owens' (2001) idea that present-day American Indians must hide behind a mask created by White America refers to the unfortunate reality that members of dominant groups in the United States often have inaccurate perceptions of the norms, traditions, and values of American Indians. These inaccurate perceptions lead to harmful stereotyping, a lack of understanding, and behavior motivated by racist views and assumptions. Marginalized from and misunderstood by the larger society, American Indians are constantly under surveillance. Other researchers have discussed the simultaneous "presence" and "absence" of colonized Indigenous peoples and other disenfranchised groups in the United States in terms of invisibility:

In the case of indigenous peoples, migrants, women, and working-class students, the historical movement has been from an outright namelessness and invisibility to an inclusion in public discourses and human sciences as colonized, deficit human subjects. This ontology of simultaneous presence and absence continues. Cultural imperialism involves a paradoxical state where the colonized are rendered invisible and marked as different, at once both absent and present. (Young, cited in Luke, 1995–1996, p. 38)

Tom, Debbie, and Heather are simultaneously visible and invisible, marked and absent. Their visibility as American Indians and members of formerly colonized groups and their need to preserve their cultural integrity motivate their desire to make themselves as invisible or visible as possible within certain contexts.

An American Indian may choose to make him- or herself less visible as a way to avoid romanticization, marginalization, and surveillance, while actively maintaining their sense of cultural integrity or Indianness. Striving for invisibility (a state that can never be entirely reached), individuals may behave in ways that make them less noticeable to others, which becomes a strategic response to oppression and surveillance. In this way, invisibility can be a con-

scious choice and an active state with certain beneficial results. For at least two of the individuals in this study, this was true. At the same time, however, there are certain costs associated with invisibility and visibility. Below, I examine visibility and invisibility as strategic responses to oppressive circumstances, the ways these strategic responses enabled individuals to maintain cultural integrity, and the immediate short-term costs associated with invisibility.

### The Context: Prospect and Sherwood Universities

Prospect and Sherwood<sup>7</sup> are Ivy League universities that pride themselves on being selective institutions and among the best of the best. Sherwood is the smaller of the two. It has a structure congruent with its relatively small size, which is characterized by small, seminar-like classes with a faculty to student ratio of roughly 15 to 1. While there are a few professional schools within this university, it emphasizes its undergraduate liberal arts and humanities curriculum, which offers students an opportunity to read and write extensively. Many of the classes focus on close examinations of text, and writing is an integral part of the entire curriculum. Most students have a sophomore, junior, and senior writing project. The town culture revolves around university activities, and local businesses rely on the student body for their livelihood.

Prospect is larger than Sherwood and has a substantial number of professional schools and larger classes. With almost twice as many students as Sherwood, many of Prospect's classes are held in large lecture halls, and undergraduate students have more of an opportunity for professional specialization. Reading and writing are, of course, important here, but the emphasis is not as great as at Sherwood.

### The Actors: Debbie, Tom, and Heather

Debbie, who attends Prospect, is from the Southwest. She was born and raised on a reservation and speaks the language of her tribal nation. Debbie has attended schools both on and off the reservation, and during high school and summer breaks from Prospect, she has worked in the town that borders her reservation. She has long black hair the color of her eyes, and her skin is deep brown. She usually dresses in jeans, and t-shirts (or sweatshirts), and sneakers.

Debbie chose to attend Prospect because she "wanted to do something for [her tribe]":

I can be a role model for girls, you know, and also I think we need someone to study what I study. . . . I had never been out East and never lived in a city. . . . I wanted to try that and see what it was like.

She enrolled in an undergraduate program that she hoped would allow her to address problems encountered by her tribal nation.

Tom, a student at Sherwood, is also from the Southwest. Like Debbie, he was born and raised on his tribe's reservation, and he speaks the language of his tribal nation. He attended the local reservation schools, and he told me that one summer he had "lived on twelve dollars a month." His black hair is cut to the middle of his back. His eyes, like his hair and the boots he often wears, are dark and his skin is a rich brown. I never saw him dressed in anything except jeans and a t-shirt, although during winter months he would wear a jacket, and once I saw him with a sweatshirt over his t-shirt. Explaining why he chose to attend Sherwood, Tom discussed the importance for his community of his earning a credential from such a prestigious institution:

It is a recognizable name. I knew I wanted to go here or to [another Ivy League university] and I liked it here better. . . . I knew that if I could make it here, I would be able to go back home and do my part. I feel like I need to go back and do that . . . to just do whatever they want me to do.

During this conversation, Tom told me he missed home and intended to return there as soon as possible. When I met Tom, he was enrolled in an undergraduate program that gave him the flexibility to pursue many areas of work. He was acquiring a liberal arts education in the truest sense.

Heather, who also attends Sherwood, is from a western tribe. She grew up on the fringes of her tribe's reservation, and is not fluent in her tribal nation's heritage language, although she understands much of it and can speak it a little. Her hair is long and black, her eyes are brown, and she dresses according to the occasion. Heather is a chameleon, changing her appearance to fit the context and situation. She looks equally at home in jeans and sneakers or a formal dress. She attended public schools in the city bordering her reservation. She matriculated at Sherwood because she believed that:

[Sherwood] can provide me with a foundation to pursue my goals. The name of [Sherwood] means a lot and I think it will help. . . . Having a law degree will allow me to help [my tribe] in our struggles with the government and [the local city]. . . . I've always wanted to be able to do this work and help us and others. . . . I would like to have a firm one day that services only Indian clients.

Heather majored in a field that allowed her to read widely and focus on topics that were pertinent to preparation for both law school and the issues facing her tribe. She later attended law school and now works on her reservation for her tribal nation.

In this article, I examine data gathered from these three students during my earlier study. Data gathered from other students in the study also highlight the issues of marginalization, surveillance, (in)visibility, and cultural integrity, but I am able to provide a rich account of the experiences of only three individuals.<sup>8</sup> Although these data are not generalizable, they are illuminating in that they represent the situations and difficulties encountered by a number of American Indian students attending Ivy League institutions.

### Debbie's Story: Invisible Strategies and Hidden Hurts

Returning to the opening vignette about Debbie, I examine some of the factors that may have influenced her decision to take such a circuitous route to her classroom in the museum. I asked her about what appeared to me to be confusing behavior, and she explained the complicated rationale behind her actions:

I go that way for a lot of reasons. Mostly because I don't want to see anyone or anything. I can do my own thing; it's less noisy and people can't stare at me. I don't like it when people stare at me and a lot of people here do that. It's like they have never seen an Indian, or whatever they think I am, before. I mind my own business and leave people alone and hope they'll leave me alone. I don't want to have to look at people or talk to them either. . . . Back home, many people understand me; no one minds my business or stares at me. They leave me alone and I leave them alone unless it's family. . . . I also don't want to see someone I know because I'll have to stop and talk to them. I have an obligation to talk to my friends and I need to go to class. . . . Then I end up coming to class and everyone looks at me, because they are all on time most of the time. It's hard, you know. . . . Plus people who have seen me before when I spoke when I first got here will want to talk to me about their work on the reservation or hang out and talk to me about stuff. It's easier for me to just avoid them.

This statement is loaded with reasons why some American Indian students might want to be less visible in certain contexts. Taking her circuitous route, Debbie was seen by only a few people who saw her regularly, as opposed to great numbers of unfamiliar students. She felt ignored, which did not bother her. However, while walking down the street among other students, Debbie felt that people were staring at her, which made her uncomfortable. Although the university is tucked in the middle of a diverse residential area, the student body itself is predominantly White. Many students at Prospect assumed people of color were from the local area (which was largely African American and poor), and thus constructed as problematic. The university itself is like a fortress where "outsiders" (e.g., the local African American population) are viewed suspiciously and with disdain.<sup>9</sup> Debbie was aware of these dynamics, as people stared at her as if she were an "outsider" too. Student or not, she felt like an outsider because she looked much different from everyone else. For these reasons, Debbie chose to minimize her contact with other students at Prospect and hoped this would make her less visible.

Once in the museum, we found ourselves sitting in an undergraduate anthropology class called "Indigenous Peoples of the Americas." The class was interesting and was taught by a White male professor. It was a survey course that covered as many tribes as possible during the semester. On one occasion, the professor's actions highlighted the problems associated with teaching a class about topics that are not the instructor's area of expertise. I was sitting next to Debbie during a lecture when the professor described her tribe and its

characteristics. He characterized her tribe as having a primitive clan system and a fairly easy language. Contrary to his description, the clan system of this tribe is complex and difficult for outsiders to understand. In addition, the language of her tribe is extremely difficult to understand and learn.<sup>10</sup>

I watched Debbie as she sat patiently through the lecture, and we left the classroom as soon as it was over. One of her classmates, another Indigenous person, asked her, “Why didn’t you tell that [#\$@!\*\*\*] that he is an idiot? You should have called him on that. Your language is so hard to learn, and the clan system is so damn hard. I should have said something.” Debbie said nothing at the time but later told me that she “felt like jumping out of [her] skin” as the professor was speaking. When I asked why she had not said anything and how she felt about what happened in class, she paused for a few minutes, which seemed to me like hours. She finally responded:

I was always taught to respect my elders. He is my elder, and I must respect him. What he said is not right, but it is not my place to correct him. He will learn. . . . I could not say anything to him.

In essence, she told me the professor represented someone who deserved her respect even if he was insulting her. Debbie told me she was always taught to be “nonconfrontational” and that it was easier for her to just let it go. Debbie’s interactions in this particular class also highlight an entirely different form of invisibility she encountered. By not speaking up in class, she illustrated a real sense of loyalty to her cultural background and the maintenance of her cultural integrity or Indianness. This contrasts with the academically appropriate action, which might have been to educate the professor and the one hundred students in the class. This is a strategy Debbie employs for a larger cause: she and her elders recognize the power of a degree from an Ivy League university. They have made a choice for her to engage in schooling for the long-term good and not to get caught up in issues that may impact her psychically.

This situation begs the question of where students like Debbie go to “decompress” after a class like this. That is, where are American Indian students finding a safe space to talk about the day’s events and the assaults (intentional and not) on their cultural beings? Implicit in this story is a critique of the institution and the professor for teaching information that is not only wrong, but also problematic for a student. It also highlights the ways that visibility leads to marginalization. Debbie is made visible when the professor misrepresents characteristics of her tribal nation in the classroom. If he had fairly and accurately represented her tribal nation, that visibility could have been empowering and given her a sense of pride in the midst of an institution that was often harsh when she was made visible, but the moment was lost.

Debbie’s decision to not draw attention to herself during the lecture illustrates her ability to maintain her traditional values by respecting her elder while simultaneously engaging in the “untraditional” act of getting a degree

from an elite institution of higher education. Her participation in the class allowed her to “buy in” to the system of higher education, but she did this while maintaining her identity as an Indigenous person.

On the other hand, if Debbie had spoken up, she might have enlightened others in the classroom, including the professor, and her participation could have led to a lively and interesting discussion. If she opted for this approach, Debbie could have made herself visible in a way that is appropriate according to rules of classroom participation. But she plays by a different set of rules, which makes her perception and participation different from many of the other students in the classroom and at the university. In order to be able to evaluate Debbie’s classroom participation, others must readjust their perceptions to better understand why she does what she does.<sup>11</sup> The costs associated with being visible in and out of class for American Indian students help to explain why they may choose to make themselves less visible to others.

Part of Debbie’s avoidance of others is rooted in her cultural beliefs. Her avoidance of attention is not uncommon among Indigenous people; other researchers have found that many Native American Indian students are hesitant to receive any attention (Collier, 1973; Deyhle, 1995; Dumont, 1972; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Foley, 1996; Lipka & Ilustik, 1995; Macias, 1987; Philips, 1972, 1983; Suina & Smolkin, 1994). Another part of her avoidance strategies result from her experiences with students at Prospect. At the time this study was conducted, many applicants (and later students) at these elite institutions, in order to illustrate a diversity of experiences, would pay to work on a reservation and be around Indigenous people.<sup>12</sup> On several occasions, Debbie would meet White mainstream students who had “spent time building houses” on her reservation as part of a summer service project. Many of these students would try to speak some of her heritage language to her and engage her in conversations about life on the reservation. These students would also tell her either how beautiful the country was or wonder how she ever survived in such a “backward place.” Each instance placed undue attention on her as an Indigenous person and highlighted other ways that visibility leads to fetishism or romanticism. The fact that Debbie’s behavior was based on both her cultural background and experiences at Prospect complicate the analysis of this issue. In essence, this reiterates the point that context and situation are important.

Visibility in terms of skin color and other marked characteristics led to surveillance on a daily basis for students like Debbie. Other students occasionally asked Debbie why she had been admitted to Prospect. For example, while we ate together at an on-campus dining area, people sometimes asked us if we were “Indians.” They especially asked about Debbie, because she looked like a traditional Indian — she had long, straight black hair and deep brown eyes and skin. At the time I had wavy hair cut to my shoulders, and my eyes, like my skin, are dark brown. We would tell students that we were not Indians, but rather American Indians or Native Americans, or tell them our tribal affiliation.<sup>13</sup> They would continue to ask questions and eventually say something

like, “Oh, you must have gotten in everywhere as a Native American” or “You don’t have to pay tuition to go here, huh?” Implicit in such statements is a belief and discourse that many American Indian students in elite institutions are admitted because of their ethnic background. The qualities that American Indians bring to these educational institutions and their abilities to fully engage in the intellectual process are often disregarded.<sup>14</sup>

Inherent in Debbie’s interactions with such students is a notion that some students receive preferential treatment from the university based on their skin color or cultural status. Preferential treatment occurs with many individuals at Prospect and Sherwood based on their status as athletes (most of whom are White), veterans, and children of alumni and/or large donors to the universities. Still, much of the thinking and public discourse appears to be arguing that everyone should be judged on their individual merit.

After having fellow students assume she was a “special admit” so often, Debbie began to say less and less about herself and to limit her interactions with other students. She once told me, “I just don’t deal anymore. I try to just do my work and hang out with the people who understand me. You know, it’s all good, but sometimes I just don’t want to deal.” Rather than being seen as an active, viable part of the university community, Debbie’s visibility as an American Indian student had put her in a place of deficiency or an unearned special status. Once again, visibility becomes a trap in which students are held up for surveillance that is unfair and rooted in problematic conceptions of what Indians are supposed to be.

While the university has provided Debbie with a number of opportunities, her experiences have been laden with racist undertones and innuendoes. Foley (1996) captures the motives behind her efforts to become invisible when he writes, “Silence is this political retreat into a separate cultural space and identity far from the white world” (p. 88). In other words, Debbie chose to be silent and to withdraw in order to find a more comfortable and positive space for herself in the midst of misinformation about her tribe, attacks on her abilities, and other harmful stereotypical images.

### Tom’s Story: Slowly and Brutally Erasing the Visible Indian

It was a cold winter day as I walked through the chilled air to the dining hall where I was meeting Tom. I found him sitting at a formica-topped rectangular table. Tom was sitting by himself, eating, with empty chairs on either side of him. Beyond the empty chairs were several groups of students. I had noticed on other occasions that he was eating alone; when he did eat with others, it was with a friend from town or a member of the American Indian student group. In class, a similar phenomenon occurred. He would sit at a table in a seminar and all of the seats around him would fill up, except for those directly next to him. The late stragglers would be forced to sit next to him or opt to sit behind the seminar table.

During the two years I spent time with him, isolation or lack of interaction was the norm for Tom. In one of our first informal interviews, he said to me, "I don't feel like I exist here. I feel like I am invisible." Initially I thought this was the frustration of a student in a new environment making sense of his time away from home. At the end of the first year, however, he contemplated not returning to Sherwood for a number of reasons. Perhaps the most prominent reason was the fact that he did not seem to fit the mold of students at Sherwood and the interactional norms or the guiding rules of interaction between and among individuals; he clearly was not an active part of the Sherwood community. As a result, he worked at becoming less and less visible by limiting his interactions with non-Indian students and by focusing on his work. On the day before he left to go home after his first year, he said to me, "I don't know if people know I exist here." He did return, but over the next twenty months he said he felt increasingly invisible. Although people knew he existed, that existence was characterized by surveillance, marginalization, and ostracism. The next pages outline the ways he suffered from mistreatment.

Tom told me that he came to Sherwood because an admissions officer told him that Tom had "something to offer Sherwood." About a month after my initial meeting with Tom, he asked a pretty woman with light red hair and green eyes why she and others did not talk to him. She looked at him and responded, "I'm intimidated by you." When he asked her what he had done to make her feel this way, she said he was always so quiet and no one was really sure what to make of him.

Tom's behavior had real costs that are reminiscent of those encountered by the Indigenous people in Foley's (1996) study, which addressed the issue of the "silent Indian" (p. 79) with respect to Meskwaki youth. The teens in his study chose to be silent as a way of coping with the stresses of school and in order to intimidate teachers, get out of schoolwork, and rebel in classrooms. He writes, "The price for heroic retreat into silence may be lost in future educational opportunities. . . . In their cultural milieu, it is often the honorable way of handling the garrulous, aggressive whites" (p. 78). The students in Foley's study, it appears, were forced by "garrulous, aggressive whites" to choose from a number of options — the "ways of the school" and those of their home culture. The costs of either choice are heavy; the former asks them to override their own culture, while the latter leads to "lost . . . future educational opportunities." The heavy choices illustrate one kind of brutal bargain that students are asked to make at institutions like Prospect and Sherwood. This bargain essentially asks American Indian students to assimilate, accommodate on others' terms, or suffer marginalization. Any of these "choices" requires these students to give up significant pieces of who they are. Many White students are not required to make such bargains; instead, they enjoy a certain amount of privilege (McIntosh, 1995). In Tom's case, his everyday mode of interaction did not meet the norms at Sherwood and he was therefore cast as an intimidating person. In these instances, Tom's identity as an American Indian has be-

come visible to his peers who attached negative meanings to behavior and actions that would be considered valuable personal attributes among members of his tribe.<sup>15</sup> But at Sherwood, the way he was constructed as an Indian “other” became a liability for him.

After three years at Sherwood, Tom ultimately adopted strategies similar to those used by Debbie, although his differed in that invisibility was a reactive tool of survival, rather than a proactive, strategic response. I visited him one gray fall day when the leaves were changing from green to rich yellows, oranges, and reds. After having coffee, he said to me, “Life at Sherwood outside of my room does not exist anymore. It might, but I am not a part of it. I don’t go out anymore.” These words were hauntingly familiar to the ones that Debbie had said to me a few years before. During three and a half years at an institution of higher education, Tom had been reduced to spending the majority of his time outside of class in his dorm room. At the heart of this transformation in how he socialized was the tension between being *forced* to assimilate into the norms of the institution or spend the majority of his “free” time in his room, and his ability to *choose* what he did in his spare time. But this was more than simply an either/or argument or a case in which Tom’s choices were limited by the institution. Rather than limit his options to those offered by the institution, he found another outlet. Tom told me when I asked him if he literally spent all of his spare time in his room:

Not really all of it. You know, I hang out up town with the Townies [people from the local town who do not attend the university] and enjoy them. . . . I like them because they are real people and we connect on a level that most of the people at [Sherwood] don’t like or understand. I want to be a musician in my spare time and they [the Townies] don’t have a problem with that. It’s cool and I get a chance to get out of my room. . . . Sometimes they come to my room, but it is always easier for me to go out than for them to come in.

Rather than be completely isolated in his room by the prevailing culture at Sherwood, Tom found a way to maintain his cultural integrity. This form of invisibility is directly tied to the surveillance (e.g., being called “intimidating”) and marginalization (e.g., being continually shunned in class and the dining halls) he experienced with his Sherwood peers. His adaptive response highlights some of the negative consequences of visibility; he is not a part of the Sherwood community and his absence hurts everyone. He had a set of friends completely outside of the university setting who had a connection with him. His love of music and the fact that he writes and plays it gave him a freedom to have another social outlet. This social outlet, along with his desire to “contribute to my tribe’s betterment” and a need to “prove all those people wrong,” were the primary reasons for Tom to stay through until graduation.

The social costs of being in an environment in which differences are devalued are tremendous. I reflected on how resigned Tom was to biding his time until graduation. The outgoing nature that marked his first years in college had been replaced by a hardened resolve to survive and get by.<sup>16</sup> I believe that

Tom's attitude much more closely resembled Debbie's after the realities of social interaction were presented to him. The beliefs and values with which these students entered the institution were crucial to the ways in which they interacted with others. Because of their Indianness and systems of belief that are different from the university norm, Tom and Debbie were outsiders looking into the system. Even if they had decided to try to integrate (as Tom did) and were accepted by their peers, they were tied to their belief systems and culture. Interestingly, Tom and Debbie began with intentions, beliefs, and ideas that were quite different, but they exited in similar positions. A constant for both of these students was attendance at an elite institution of higher education and a desire to successfully complete the degree requirements so that they could return home and help their tribe.

Tom's interactions with others continued to be influenced by feelings of intimidation, a lack of understanding, and an unwillingness to embrace difference. Certainly, Tom could have chosen to become more overtly talkative, cut his hair, and act more like those around him in order to make other students "feel comfortable" or less "intimidated," but he chose not to. He understood the costs associated with such adaptation and assimilation, telling me, "I can never truly be one of them [White students]. . . . Look at me. I'm [Indian] and I would never cut my hair or change who I am. I can't . . . and if I could, I wouldn't do it anyway. Besides, [White society and students] won't ever let me fully be like them." At the same time, he found the pain and discomfort associated with his visibility to be extremely undesirable. As a result, Tom opted to make himself as invisible as possible and retreated into silence to do so, thus choosing the lesser of two evils. His silence makes him simultaneously visible (because he's different and thus noticeable and intimidating) and invisible (not an active contributor to conversation, class, etc.). He once told me, "I'm just going to do my thing and hang out . . . enjoy my music and wait for the day to get out of here." This quote highlights another sense of the heroic retreat into silence previously referenced by Foley (1996). In the end, Tom's desire to assist his community outweighed the great personal difficulties he encountered in his everyday existence at Sherwood.

I want to return to the experience that eventually inspired Tom to make himself less visible. It is a sad and traumatic one, because it is based on his experiences with people who clearly do not understand what they are doing or seeing or simply do not care. For Tom, his hair and shoulders were sacred parts of his body. He did not expect anyone to touch them or to come into contact with them at any time. He told me the story of how his sense of "personal and spiritual space" was violated by various students at Sherwood:

During my freshman year, someone touched my hair and shoulders at a party. By doing this they were being disrespectful and I did not like it. I slapped the guy's hand away and told him not to do it again . . . that it was disrespectful. . . . This guy was obviously drunk. People here get drunk and feel like they can do anything. . . . So he did it again and again. Finally, I hit him. This made him stop, but

it also made everyone around me uneasy because people don't deal with things that way here. I had to defend myself and he was being [disrespectful].

This interaction happened the first week in which all students were back from summer break, and returning and new students were attending a party hosted by a social group. It was unclear if this person simply wanted to touch Tom's hair (not an uncommon occurrence during the time I spent with Tom) or if he had another motivation. Whatever the reason, Tom made it clear to the student that he did not want his hair touched. Much of this is tied to an idea of "sacred space" that should not be crossed. This particular individual failed to heed Tom's warning and a fight ensued. How much of this was about a lack of respect? How much about a lack of understanding? Couldn't Tom just realize that he was in a different place with a different set of rules and "loosen up"?

In terms of how Tom dealt with the situation, I can imagine some people arguing that Tom should adapt and adjust to the situation. An argument of this type is based on a clear misunderstanding of the issues. Touching his hair would be no different than someone invading a personal, sacred space for another person. Invading an American Indian's spiritual space and disrespecting his religious beliefs represents an assault not only on his culture, but also on him as an individual (Locust, 1998). In this case, Tom's visibility and how someone else was constructing his visibility were largely negative. He was placed in a position of defending himself and the ideas and beliefs that he holds sacred to his disadvantage. Because the religious aspects are misunderstood and/or devalued, the institution and its agents simply branded Tom as a "troublemaker" rather than a defender of principles.

Phelan (1995) argues that visibility may lead to a colonialist appetite for desire. In the cases where Tom's sacred spaces were invaded even though he objected, it appears that the students at Sherwood may have believed that they owned the Indian or that his desires to be left unmolested were invalid because of his status as an Indigenous person. On other occasions, while I walked through campus with Tom, men would say to him, "I'm going to cut your hair" or "Don't let me catch you at night, I'll cut your hair, you little Indian." I was always amazed that the groups of students who did this were capable of doing so without ever breaking stride or looking directly at Tom. The other men and women in the group would laugh loudly as they continued walking. It was infuriating; it also illustrates the manner in which the students acted as if they owned Tom.<sup>17</sup> These examples highlight the fact that visibility leads to surveillance, and marginalization speeds the process toward invisibility. The choice to become invisible also highlights the brutal bargain established between the university and the Indigenous student who wants to maintain ties to his home culture. Tom could either sacrifice his spiritual beliefs in order to fit into the system, or he could actively seek to be invisible in order to maintain his cultural integrity in a hostile, unwelcome environment. The

choices offered to Tom were limited and constricting. Tom chose to deal with these incidents in a manner that made sense to him at the time.

Adding to the notion that these institutions serve as oppressive structures, the institutions and their administrative agents played an active role in making students feel as if their cultural beliefs were not valued. Tom had little faith that Sherwood would address his cultural and spiritual needs. Much of his distrust arose from an incident that involved another American Indian student at Sherwood, a woman who was a member of a tribe from the plains of the United States. After a number of weeks of living in the dorm, she discovered that the remains of former Sherwood students and alumni were buried within the grounds of the dorm. She had, unknowingly, walked past the gravesites daily. When it was brought to her attention, she realized she could not continue to stay in the dorms, for it was against her spiritual and cultural beliefs to live in an area with the dead.

She appealed to the dean of residence and asked to be moved from the dormitory to another on-campus residential space. Because the time had passed for moving requests, the dean would not allow this student to move. When she persisted, the dean asked her to write “an essay” on her reasons for wanting to move and “provide justification” for the move. To complicate this display of cultural insensitivity, the student was required to write and complete the essay within a three-hour time slot. The student refused to abide by this, believing the act to be a violation of her religious freedom. Word of the conflict quickly spread to a vice president of the university, who intervened on behalf of the student and moved her within a few hours.

This vignette highlights a somewhat different notion of invisibility of Indigenous students in troublesome ways. Essentially, the administrator asked the student to justify her religious and cultural beliefs in a way that was not consistent with many other students’ beliefs. The administrator who asked for the essay highlights a deep misunderstanding of American Indian spiritual beliefs. In and of itself, ignorance is not necessarily problematic; however, in this case, because of the manner in which the incident was initially handled, the visibility of the student’s belief system became illegitimate and was held up for surveillance and judgment. Whatever the reasoning behind the action (or, in this case, inaction), the results were devastating to Tom and the other Indigenous students who were aware of the problem with the dean of residence. Clearly, actions like this from the administration (and hence, by the institution) influence the ways students act or behave, and directly influence the choices that they make.

### Heather: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Visibility

Heather’s experiences highlight the ways that strategic visibility can lead to both positive and negative results. On a warm day in early April, I accompa-

nied Heather to office hours. I saw the way Heather used office hours to demonstrate to her professor that she understood the material; this allowed her to be strategic in terms of maintaining her cultural integrity. The office we entered was large and contained antique furniture. Books and papers were scattered on the floor in piles, and the professor's desk had a layer of books and papers that, to my eye, was about eight inches high.

Heather introduced me to her professor and told him that I was "studying Native American students in college . . . and he is a friend of mine." She asked permission for me to stay while they talked so that I could know what she does when she is not in class. The professor asked me about my findings and about my own graduate work. The three of us chuckled as we discussed the past basketball season and results of the games between some of the Ivy League teams. The professor told me to "sit wherever you can find a spot" and turned his attention to Heather. I found a small chair in the corner and, after removing a pile of books and paper, sat down. At this point, Heather, as she would tell me later, "went to work." She was organized with questions and had a clear direction to guide the conversation. She explained to me later:

I learned from Sara [her American Indian friend who was a senior when Heather was a first-year student] to be organized when you go into these meetings. The prof thinks you are always this organized and is more willing to help someone who seems focused than someone who does not. I keep telling other people [other Indigenous students] this, but no one wants to listen. . . . Anyway, I have a plan when I go in and they [professors] give me so much back.

Heather's planning highlights how social networks can be used to disrupt reproduction of inequality in educational institutions (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Heather is also clearly building on the work of others to maintain her cultural integrity in a creative and strategic manner. She successfully illustrates one way she was able to be a "good student" and a "good Indian" simultaneously.

Heather provided the professor with a sheet listing her questions. She offered an overview of the questions and methodically went through each one. Before beginning a conversation, Heather "let the professor know that I'm not fishing for answers" by telling him what her own understanding of the issue or topic was. In this case, they were discussing John Rawls' book *A Theory of Justice*. The professor would nod and say things like, "um . . . hmm . . . very good, but you may also want to think about what Rawls' argument of the greater good might mean for you as a young woman in today's society." He later added, "Remember that I am also going to ask you about the connections between Rawls and Kant. . . . We talked about that in class." By the end of her meeting with the professor, Heather had her questions answered and the professor had given her "a strong clue" about what was going to be on the upcoming exam. I found myself making notes about how to take better advantage of my own time with my professors. Heather showed me that she could use her visibility as a meticulous student to succeed academically without losing her cultural integrity.

I later asked her about her strategies for using office hours, and why she did not ask these questions in class. She responded, “I think about my profs in ways similar to — not exactly the same — but similar to elders in my own community. They just know so much, and I have a lot to learn.” She continued later, saying,

I would never dream of bothering or interrupting an elder, but having some quiet time when I know [the professor] is there to answer questions makes it easier. . . . The other thing is that [Sara] reminded me that I need to have good letters of recommendation to go to [law school], and stopping in on a regular basis, being organized and all, means that I make an impression.

Heather used her time with her professor to work toward academic success. That she was advised to do this by another American Indian student is important. Citing Boissevain, Stanton-Salazar (1997) writes,

Personal access to many valued resources and opportunities in society — by way of social networks — occurs through the messy business of commanding, negotiating, and managing many diverse (and sometimes conflicting) social relationships and personalities, and which usually entails skillfully negotiating the rules and constraints underlying the social acts of help-seeking and help-giving. (p. 4)

Heather is “skillfully negotiating” social (and academic) relationships to help her maintain what many have thought were conflicting goals: being a “good Indian” and a “good student.” Clearly, these two descriptors need not be in conflict; Heather does both well.

She summed it up by telling me that her professor “knows who I am and that I think about this. I’m able to do this without feeling like I’m showing off for anyone.” She demonstrated in a private setting that she understood the material; the intimacy of the setting allowed her to maintain fidelity to her own cultural norms and values regarding interaction in public places. In this way, she is using visibility as a strategic form of activism and advocacy; that is, she is able to be visible to her professor, maintain a sense of her Indianness, and advocate for her “participation” grade. Interestingly, the participation happens outside of a formal class setting and in a one-on-one arena. This is very much in keeping with her own beliefs regarding interactions, as it highlights other research about American Indians (Deyhle, 1995; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; McCarty, 2001; Philips, 1983). Her visibility, however, was not always positive; in fact, an incident the prior fall illustrated ways that visibility can become a trap and be hurtful to some American Indian students.

One Columbus Day, I attended a small “awareness day” organized by the Indigenous group at one of the campuses. The activity took place in a prominent spot in the middle of campus, where many students had to pass in order to get to the gym, dining halls, and the undergraduate library. As Heather spoke about the injustices of the past and the ways Indigenous people have been mistreated, a group of students walked by, and one of the young men shouted, “Go back to the reservation or get with the program, lady. Stop whin-

ing about the past and get on with it. Wa-hoo-wah!” Such comments ignore larger historical issues and how they continue to affect individuals’ lives in profound ways.

This incident highlights the fact that Indigenous people who are active and serve as advocates may be made invisible by their peers because they do not fit the mold of what an American Indian should be, or they may be made visible in pejorative, destructive ways. In ways described by Owens (2001) and Shanley (2001), Heather has stepped from behind the mask and no longer represents a romantic picture or that of the noble savage. She clearly highlights the fact that visibility, when used strategically, can have positive consequences; yet visibility can also be constructed as problematic because it leads to surveillance and to her peers telling her to “stop whining.” Ultimately, context matters in terms of how visibility or invisibility is constructed.

### Debbie, Tom, and Heather: Showing the Intricacies of (In)Visibility

What is especially interesting about the three stories outlined above is the way visibility and invisibility are interrelated. Debbie, Heather, and Tom have cultural backgrounds and physical characteristics that stand out in certain situations, particularly at institutions full of members of dominant groups (e.g., the power-holding, mostly upper-middle-class White populations at Ivy League universities). In this way, the appearance and behavior of American Indian students like Heather, Debbie, and Tom are “marked,” and thus visible.

The experiences of American Indian students like these are typically either ignored or misrepresented by university policies and practices that privilege the dominant group’s experiences, norms of interacting and behaving, and perspectives. As a result, American Indian students are left to choose between the lesser of two evils: retreating into the silence and invisibility that are more comfortable, or challenging inaccurate representations and sharing information about what “real” Indians are, and thus becoming more visible. This can be an uncomfortable position for students like Debbie, Tom, and Heather, who are interested in maintaining some degree of cultural integrity. Unfortunately, even extreme silence (because it is so different) is visible, while true identities remain unknown or invisible.

There is clearly a range and variation in the experiences of American Indian students, who often are portrayed as a group of people who have uniform experiences. Tom and Debbie grew up on reservations 100 miles apart, and their experiences were significantly different. Heather’s reservation was located within a day’s drive of Tom’s and Debbie’s. Tom believed that he had something to offer Sherwood, and that the college had something to offer him as well. He believed in a reciprocal relationship, yet his peers continually rejected his entrance into their world. He was, in a sense, an unwelcome guest. Like those of many institutions of higher education, Sherwood’s publications and recruitment efforts offer an image of community and diversity, but in real-

ity, the institution is as exclusive for its members as it is for those applying for membership.

On the other hand, Debbie decided she did not want to be a part of the Prospect experience almost immediately after arriving on campus, when it became clear to her that she was different from many other members of her class. She became as invisible as she could within the structure of the institution. She recognized that her life, her belief systems, and her very presence at this elite institution would be questioned, but she resolved not to change how she lived in spite of the pressure many young people feel to belong. She found a way to stay connected to her cultural norms and mores in the face of an institutional culture that was oppositional to her own. She was, and continues to be, grounded in her culture.

Her experiences and ties to her own culture, as well as her will to succeed academically, complicated Debbie's experiences at Prospect. In a discussion of why she decided to become mostly invisible, Debbie pointed out the ways that her efforts to remain invisible to her peers are tied to her attempts to maintain cultural integrity: "Sticking out is not a good thing. I am part of a community, and to draw attention to myself as an individual would not be looked upon favorably. . . . I've never thought about it; it's just that way." Debbie also declined offers to speak in class and other educational/social arenas about her experiences as a tribal person. While she could have made some extra money by doing so, she believed that this would not be an appropriate way to act as an Indigenous person. There were strong tensions between what the institution requested from her and what she felt she was able and willing to give.

Heather chose to be an active part of Sherwood's American Indian community. She worked hard at being visible in appropriate ways. Her use of office hours highlights the fact that she could be a "good" student and a "good" Indian simultaneously. Rather than acting inappropriately in class (e.g., by drawing attention to herself), she simply employed another structural part of higher education — office hours — to illustrate her knowledge and ability to the professor.

Debbie, Tom, and Heather illustrate the dangers of assuming that two members from the same group will have similar experiences. Both Tom and Debbie worked at making themselves invisible as a strategy for dealing with the oppressive aspects of their experiences, and both eventually chose to isolate themselves and become as invisible as possible, although for very different reasons. Heather made herself visible in a strategic manner that allowed her to maintain her cultural integrity *and* excel academically. She did not isolate herself, although she did retreat in the face of racism perpetuated by her college peers.

The three students' experiences are tied, in part, to Owens's (2001) and Shanley's (2001) arguments around visible Indians. Americans from the United States want an Indian as long as she or he fits behind the mask that dominant society has constructed for her or him. Those Indigenous people

who do not fit into the mask are either not seen, or they are seen in mostly negative and pejorative ways. Because the environment was different and at times hostile toward these students, they worked to achieve invisibility, or in Heather's case, controlled visibility. In Tom's case, the process of making himself invisible resulted from a rejection by others based on his physical appearance, his quiet nature, and his beliefs that were antithetical and foreign to students at Sherwood. Debbie simply worked toward invisibility because of her fears of encountering situations like those faced by Tom. Heather's visibility was made problematic by the group of men who suggested she go "back to the reservation."

Debbie, Tom, and Heather have struggled with the negative consequences of visibility as American Indian students at Ivy League universities. When they are visible, it is often for negative or stereotypical reasons (e.g., as an affirmative action admit or an intimidating person). Debbie, Tom, and Heather are quiet, and for the most part keep to themselves. According to their cultural norms and backgrounds, calling attention to oneself is unhealthy and undesirable. Debbie said:

I work hard at being anonymous. I keep my head down, don't make eye contact, and I don't talk in class. This is not the place for me to do this and the other [students] here do plenty of talking. I was taught to deflect attention, not seek it.

Heather provides an example of the ways that American Indian students at Sherwood and Prospect were often selectively made visible during Native American Month (or at a Columbus Day event) or when a new movie about Indigenous peoples was released. Suddenly, individuals who were excluded and ignored from the larger campus conversations that related to all students became highly visible, and the consequences were difficult. These students, because there are so few at Prospect and Sherwood, are made visible by their very presence, and their lives are romanticized or relegated to images of the past. In almost every case visibility serves to educate a few, and serves as the exotic "Other" for many.

### Ollie, Ollie, In Come Free: Concluding Remarks on (In)Visibility

In this article, I explain the strategic uses of (in)visibility to illustrate that these three individuals were able to manipulate certain campus structures to their benefit. Whether an out-of-the-way route to class or a strategic use of office hours, their choices highlight thoughtful, complicated responses to oppressive institutional structures. However, it is also clear that they were not always able to control how, and in what ways, they were made (in)visible. The power of the institutions and their agents to define the identities of American Indians illustrates the individuals' lack of control. Ultimately, these students' experiences show that visibility can lead to surveillance, marginalization, and ostracism, while simultaneously having positive consequences that are directly

related to strategic forms of activism, advocacy, and the maintenance of cultural integrity. Invisibility serves to assist some students in “flying under the radar” in order to maintain their cultural integrity, but it can also have damaging influences on students regarding marginalization.

This article is largely based on how individuals position themselves in relation to others and how the institution and its agents position them. Evading surveillance is necessitated by a hostile environment that forces individuals to make a brutal bargain. The bargain requires American Indian students to be visible — and therefore romanticized, fetishized, watched, or seen in pejorative ways, co-opted by individuals who still see American Indians as static figures from the past or as more romantic versions of the noble savage, or hidden from view. The brutal bargain encountered by these students is largely rooted in their visibility as members of groups that are fixed in the past or as individuals asked simply to adapt and change without a full understanding of the consequences of these actions. Other underrepresented and majority students face dilemmas, but I believe they are distinctly different because the numbers for Native American Indians at both universities represented in this study are miniscule. Additionally, the differences in cultures are so vast that it becomes clear that the dilemmas cannot be easily answered or rectified.

The individuals in this article were made visible and marginalized in ways that are problematic and, in response, actively made themselves invisible in order to maintain their cultural integrity. Still others made themselves visible in order to illustrate their abilities to a professor without being overtly active in class. In this case, visibility is a strategic form of activism that illustrates that American Indians are not only present, but are capable, viable members of the university community.

The students in this study have backgrounds and qualities that stand out in certain contexts, particularly at Ivy League universities where the power holding, mostly upper-middle-class populations predominate. In this environment, the actions and behaviors of American Indian students are “marked” and thus noticeable. Such students are simultaneously visible and invisible to their peers; their differences (e.g., silences) are visible, while their true identities are invisible.

Ultimately, Tom, Debbie, and Heather highlight the power of (in)visibility for marginalized students in institutions of higher education. How do we — as academics, policymakers, students, and teachers — examine and help resolve the tensions these students face in their lives in a fair and equitable manner?

## Notes

1. Throughout this article I use the terms *American Indian*, *Indigenous*, and *Native American* interchangeably.
2. In the original study, I found that students were able to be both “good” Indians and “good” students simultaneously. They did so by enacting strategies that allowed them

both to maintain their cultural integrity and to meet the requirements of the university. Before I began the original study, I believed that the “action” would be in the classroom; at the conclusion of the ethnography, however, I found that the most important actions and strategies were enacted or formed outside of the classroom.

3. I am an enrolled member of the Lumbee-Cheraw tribe from North Carolina.
4. I draw on the work of Ellison (1994), Kaomea (2000, 2001), Phelan (1995), and Shanley (2001) to address notions of visibility and invisibility, although I aim to extend the ways they have used these terms.
5. I am not necessarily arguing here against representation or having a voice; rather, my intention is to examine the ways that both visibility and invisibility are manifested in the lives of the subaltern.
6. Incidentally, the local community was outraged, and the would-be arsonist was sentenced to five years in prison. Inebriated at the time of the attempted arson, he apologized for his behavior.
7. The names of both the institutions and the individuals that appear in this article are pseudonyms. I have consulted with the individuals and with the cultural affairs offices of their tribal nations. In every case, the individuals and the tribal nations asked me to change certain identifying traits so that they would be anonymous. One individual told me, “I’m not important in this, the story that is being told is important. It could happen to any of us.” Additionally, an elder in one of the communities told me, “Tell your story, and make sure that [readers] understand how hard it is for us to do this work. We don’t want people to know who we are when it comes to how we are doing our business.” Although I believe the analysis could be richer given the knowledge about their tribal nations, I follow my own sense of what is “right,” including my agreements with the tribal nations. Additionally, Lomawaima (2000) has outlined the importance of working with tribal communities when research interfaces with the community and its members.
8. I do not claim that these students’ experiences are generalizable, although their demographics do represent many of the students at these institutions. Due to space constraints in this article, I only focus on three of the original seven students in the larger study. It is important to note that at Sherwood there were twenty-one undergraduate American Indian students, and at Prospect the number was twenty-two. I culled these numbers from a list generated by the registrar’s office. Importantly, I contacted each of the students who self-identified as American Indian. Of the original forty-three at both institutions, twelve were willing to talk to me. The other thirty-one students were fairly represented by one student I met. After being unable to get him to return my phone calls and e-mails, I knocked on his dorm room door. He answered and told me that he had no interest in participating in the study. When I asked him about his tribal affiliation, he looked me in the eye and said, “My grandmother was Cherokee, and I thought it would help me get in here. It did . . . it served its purpose, and I have no interest in your group or any other Indian group.” At the end of his sentence, he politely slammed the door in my face. Others have written eloquently about ethnic fraud among American Indians and the implications on campus (e.g., see Grande, 2000; Guerrero, 1996; Machamer, 1997; Pavel, Sanchez, Pueblo, & Machamer, 1994).
9. There were numerous editorials and articles in the student newspaper around an idea of constructing a 12-foot-high fence around the perimeter of campus. While the idea never was implemented, there were places on campus where large brick columns were constructed with wrought iron gates attached. The gates were closed and locked each morning at 2 a.m. Interestingly, these locked gates directly faced the side of campus closest to the local community. Prospect struggled with its image of a “safe” campus and they employed one of the largest police forces in the state. More recently, the university has offered generous benefits to its employees (the majority of whom are White) who buy houses in the local neighborhoods. These benefits and the individuals who have

- taken advantage of them have forced lifelong residents out of the area and driven house prices up.
10. In fairness to the professor, he has gotten much better. A student confronted him about his treatment of cultural groups. He decided to stop simply reading books and to talk to people who know something about the tribes he was discussing. More importantly, a fidelity to good, correct information exists in his present courses.
  11. I have wondered if there were gender issues at work here. While I never asked Debbie if she believed this was an issue, I believe it was not in the same way it may have been for a woman in another setting or culture. I base this opinion on my observations of Debbie at home and outside of class. When I traveled home with her, I saw that she engaged in interactions with others in very much the same ways as her brothers. She carried firewood, cooked, worked on cars, and did many of the things they did. Outside of classrooms, she played basketball and volleyball at the university gym. Often, she was the only woman on the court. She had, by the time I visited her at the gym, earned respect from the young men for her abilities. The very fact that she ventured over to the courts is a testament to her confidence in her abilities (she can play!) and her sense that gender barriers do not directly influence her perceptions in the same ways they may other women's.
  12. I worked and consulted in the admissions offices on both campuses, reading applications, assisting applicants in getting interviews, and recruiting American Indian students. The admissions staff would regularly joke with me when they read the application of a non-Indigenous applicant who did this work. Invariably, the applicant would discuss this work in their personal statement and application.
  13. We would refer to each other or other Indigenous people as "Indians" but felt fairly protective of outsiders referring to us in this manner.
  14. This analysis oversimplifies the issue. Clearly, there are admissions policies in place to assist Native Americans in getting admitted to college, but once there, students are forced to do the work of everyone else. Ironically, it is the children of alumni at institutions of higher education who receive the most preferential treatment in admissions. The fact that this issue is not highlighted in public discussion of affirmative action while racially based measures are illustrates the way that students of color are marked and made visible in pejorative and damaging ways.
  15. Some of the attributes include being extremely quiet, soft spoken, and contemplative; in keeping with his style, Tom rarely made eye contact with others.
  16. By outgoing I mean someone who is interested in getting to know other people. Remember in the previous pages that a woman referred to Tom as "quiet." I believe that outgoing means different things to different people and is contextual. Outgoing at a sales representatives conference would look much different than outgoing at a pow-wow.
  17. White people who have read this article in draft form have, almost without fail, asked me, "Why didn't he go to the dean or legal authorities about this treatment. . . . Isn't there something he could do?" At the time these acts were being committed, I similarly wondered where Tom's protection resided in the institution. I thought very much about a marginalized student's safe space and where (or if) that exists on campus. I believe that, for the African American students on these campuses, there was a "safe space" in theme-related housing that celebrated African Americans. A space like this does not exist for any of the Native American Indian students on either campus. I understand that the idea of a safe space is problematic on many fronts. For those who do not hold membership to the marginalized group, this appears to be self-segregating. For members of the marginalized group, there are concerns that the institution recognize that the environment is harsh enough to provide students with a "safe space." Additionally, the groups argue that safe spaces are not always so safe, as housing of the

sort described here often come under attack from the outside. Finally, feeling completely comfortable in an environment that is often unfriendly, insensitive, and foreign is difficult. The safe space only allows a brief respite from the tensions of everyday life in these institutions.

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Acknowledgements: I am grateful to the Spencer and Ford Foundations for their generous support of this project. Additionally, I received funding from the Kellogg Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good, Karen Dace, the associate vice president for diversity, and the University of Utah. This article has been greatly improved by the substantive feedback of my colleagues Donna Deyhle, Frederick Erickson, Kathleen Hall, Dottie Holland, Harvey Kantor, Frank Margonis, Larry Parker, Audrey Thompson, and Doris Warriner. Ashley Atkinson provided wonderful research assistance; the article could not have happened without her. Finally, I am grateful to Debbie, Tom, and Heather; while I cannot name them here, they know who they are, and I am grateful for their willingness to spend time with me and open up their lives to my research. All problems are mine.

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