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Synopsis

The authors discussed media representation and the way that mass media shapes the way we understand the self and others. They note that representation is not only about quantity (amount), but also quality (depth). They look specifically at representations of Native Americans in media, noting that there is little to no accurate representation of Native Americans, which in turn negatively impacts the public’s perception of this group as well as this group’s perception of itself. The authors note that when there is any representation of Native Americans at all, it is almost always stereotypical and historical and does not accurately depict the lives of modern Native Americans. The authors examine the way this underrepresentation and stereotyping affects Native American identity and self-understanding. They argued that the invisibility of this group as well as the homogenization of it in media leads to Native Americans engaging in deindividuation and self-stereotyping. The representations of this group, they argue, limit the possibilities for Native Americans that are associated with how to be a person and put limits on what they can imagine for the self. They end the article in a slightly hopeful way by saying that with the support of policy-makers and educators, there is potential to help underrepresented groups be seen and understood in positive ways as the people they truly are.

Key Concepts

- **Theory of invisibility:** “when a group is underrepresented in the media, members of that group are deprived of messages or strategies for how to be a person” (p. 40).
- **Relative invisibility:** A type of limited and negative representation of a minority group where they are shown in media representations as negatively stereotyped, which in turn impacts their identity and self-understanding (p. 40-41).
- **Deindividuation:** “the point at which an individual sees oneself as interchangeable with other members of the group” (p. 46).

Key Quotes

- “What self-stereotyping demonstrates is that members of underrepresented groups may be motivated to identify with any available representation simply because one representation is better than no representation (i.e., absolute invisibility)” (p. 47).
- “By promoting limited, homogeneous prototypes of Native Americans, the media inhibits the development of characteristics or abilities beyond those supported by these Native American prototypes and inadvertently promotes maladaptive self-strategies (e.g., deindividuation and self-stereotyping) that undermine individual potential” (p. 47).
- “Media outlets have tremendous potential to either harm (by way of fostering negative stereotypes) or to help (by way of fostering new identities and new future possibilities) Native Americans” (p. 49).

Essential Question

- How can mediamakers shift the negative and stereotypical media representations of Native Americans, and minority groups in general, to positive and truthful representations?