

Three Representational approaches to Unequal Representation

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HPR 124: Superheroes, Political Leaders and the Power of Myth

In my course students read a wide array of articles to inform our discussion of the media material we assess, to add political and analytical perspectives that go beyond the ones provided in lecture segments or emerging from observation. However, I wanted students to also reflect explicitly about how, even before delving into the ideological tilt of a publication, the very timing of the information cycle affects the conversation. The three articles are referred below for reference (students were provided with pdfs to minimize their cognitive load and side-step the need to access jstor and similar databases)

[Facciani, Warren, Vendemia, *A Content-Analysis of Race, Gender, and Class in American Comic Books*](#)

[Newkirk, *The Provocation and Power of Black Panther*](#)

And

[Gerard, Poepsel, *Black Widow: Female Representation in the Marvel Cinematic Universe*](#)

Course Changes

Students, particularly those coming from a STEM background, were consistently **displaying naïve ideas on authority and the use of data as self-demonstrating, and had sometime shown difficulties in engaging interpretational texts (or develop theories of complexity – Cf. Luhman 2003).**

Students were first asked to (in groups) reflect on the difference in the format and approach presented by the three articles, and to establish (either by accumulation or by definition) **what the crucial distinctions between them could be and how could these affect our usage of the information therein.**

Two student volunteers were then asked to facilitate a mediation between the groups to reach a common definition of the three *types* of approaches and highlight what advantages and possible drawbacks each one presented.

Results

Students autonomously reached a recognition of the quantitative (one group insisted on *numerical*), qualitative, and ideological (*/political/*"idea based") nature of each analysis, although they struggled to situate the latter in relation to the former two. They were hesitant in their classification of the quantitative, which they found the less "relevant" despite being quite "convincing" (two axes of evaluation that we had consistently applied to the main theoretical text in the course, and with which they were therefore quite familiar).

Collectively, they felt that the transparent ideological tilt of the third source (both in collocation – *The Post* – and in style) solved the (mostly unnamed) "problems" with ideologically inspired texts.

A few students felt that the qualitative analysis was "*just an opinion*" even if convincing and well presented.

Interestingly, they did not levy the same objection to either the summarizing elements of the quantitative article, nor to the whole process of the ideological review piece.

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