The New York Times on Feminism

A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

This study takes on the idea of placing The New York Times on the liberal American political spectrum, as the Trump administration suggests. Within a framework of hegemonic ideology theory, the investigation seeks to disclose if it is justifiable to claim that The New York Times is pro-liberal in its discourse. Using a theory and methodology of critical discourse analysis, this paper examines The New York Times discourse in relation to the feminist movement. The study found that there were few to no patterns of representing the feminist movement in a favorable way. However, the patterns that did show suggested a more conservative, even far right at times, discourse on feminism. Thus the findings, although limited, suggest that The New York Times is not partaking in a liberal agenda. This leads to a discussion of a possible dangerous misplacement of the media and underlines the importance of continuous investigation of media discourse.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, feminism, media, hegemonic ideology, social representation

1. Introduction

On January 20th 2017, Donald J. Trump was inaugurated as the 45th president of the United States of America. Only two days later, he declared *war on media.* Mr. Trump was the Republican nominee for the presidency, running on a platform in which he banned *political correctness*. He won on the promises of building a wall that would keep the Mexicans out, and the American jobs in, yet his campaign run was covered in controversy. Mr. Trump himself had during his rallies called all Mexicans rapists, made fun of a disabled reporter and incited violence towards his opponents. Even towards the end of his campaign, a video recording surfaced of Mr. Trump himself talking of how he would consistently sexually assault women. When the media reported on these events, Trump himself would dismiss the media as *fake news*.

'Fake news' became a critical discursive strategy during Donald Trump's campaign. Media that would report of any negativity surrounding the campaign or Mr. Trump himself was labeled as fake. The fake news discourse also included calling the same media outlets *biased* and *failing*. This strategy of placing distrust in the media has been known for many decades, but has arguably never been so central to a running candidate; this is partly due to the many controversial statements and events, which without the fake news strategy might have cost him his presidency.

After being elected president, Trump continued to attack certain media outlets. In January 2018, a mock award-institution called the Fake News awards was published by the Republican Party (GOP) itself, naming the winners of *Fake News 2017*. Among the winners were The Washington Post, CNN and ABC News, but in first place came The New York Times (*The Highly Anticipated 2017 Fake News Awards*, 2018). The New York Times has since been infamously known as *The Failing New York Times* among Trump's supporters; a newspaper that is biased and pushing against the current establishment.

Meanwhile, The New York Times itself maintains its stance on covering 'the news as impartially as possible — "without fear or favor,"' ('Standards and Ethics', n.d.). While some would argue that it is never good for a newspaper like The New York Times to be labeled biased, being accused of being biased against the Trump administration has not affected the trust of the newspaper negatively ('In the U.S., the left trusts the mainstream media more than the right, and the gap is growing', n.d.). After Trump's accusations, the subscriber numbers went up (The New York Times Company, n.d.).

1.1 Aim

Instead of attempting to suggest whether The New York Times is portraying the Trump administration in a certain way, this paper will attempt to reveal the underlying beliefs and attitudes of The New York Times' discourse concerning a marginalized group of society, the feminist movement. This is due to Trump declaring The New York Times as one of his enemies, which has, in turn, made The New York Times image more liberal and progressive.

This paper will investigate the discourse of The New York Times by analyzing the specific discourse on activism, and more specifically the feminist movement and Feminism, using a theory of hegemonic discourse and social representations. The study aims to identify social representations in articles on feminism in order to suggest an ideological basis for The New York Times' discourse.

2. Background

In order to investigate The New York Times' current discourse on feminism, one needs a basic understanding of the political ideologies, which has shaped America since the 1980s and up until the current Trump administration. It is also essential to understand the development of the feminist movement in order to explore the social representation of feminism in the newspaper.

Political ideologies in the Trump-era

According to Heywood (2013), Ronald Reagan, the running candidate for the Republican Party, was part of The New Right. The New Right broke with the postwar thought of state-intervention and liberal social values. The ideological foundation of The New Right was a combination of the two political traditions known as *neoliberalism* and *neoconservatism*.

While there are some fundamental differences between the two ideologies stemming from two different traditional political thoughts, classical liberalism and classical conservatism, the result was best described as an ideology centered on freeing the economy and strengthening the state (Heywood, 2013), framing the Republican Party as being the party of moral values and big business (Brown, 2006). This essentially resulted in massive deregulations of the market and tax cuts domestically, while maintaining a strong military presence against communism internationally; also known as *peace through strength*. The neo-conservative thought rekindled a new sense of nationalism in the United States (Heywood, 2013). Similar attitudes can be seen in the policies of the current Trump administration.

Admittedly, it can be challenging to create a satisfying portrayal of a current administration, since it is ongoing and thus the policies and the *defining moments* undoubtedly will change over time. However, we can look at previous and current events, statements and policies and try to establish a fair picture of the political basis for the current administration.

Mr. Trump ran as the Republican candidate for the presidency. Trump adapted the traditional attitude of conservatives relating to issues of abortion, strict immigration policies, and a zero tolerance on crime. His policy on economics and foreign affairs bear a strong resemblance to that of Ronald Reagan's: boost the economy 'through needed tax cuts and reform' ('Economy & Jobs', n.d) and 'preserve peace through strength' internationally ('National Security & Defense', n.d). However, Trump set himself apart from the other Republicans with his reluctance to censor himself. He managed to distance himself from the classic stiff-upper-lip Republican stereotype by being blatant about his attitudes towards the different issues presented. However, the decision to dismiss the political correct discourse was often on the expense of marginalized groups such as Mexican immigrants, Black Americans, and women (Schwartz, 2015; 'Trump questions taking immigrants from "shithole countries": Sources', 2018; 'Transcript: Donald Trump's Taped Comments About Women', 2017).

The abandonment of political correctness pared with a greater sense of nationalism has since made scholars question the ideology of the Trump administration. While Trump ran on the conservative platform, some have explored, due to the rise of nationalists and alt-right rallies, the idea that Trump is effectively leading the country through a more radical right-wing discourse (Hartzell, 2018). According to Hartzell (2018), the alt-right fall under the umbrella of pro-white ideologies, along with neo-Nazism and white nationalism. While an official alt-right ideological platform has not been released from the movement itself, Atkinson (2018) suggests that there are eight central ideas to the alt-right: 'the Jewish Question, the 14 words, white genocide, white nationalism, identitarianism, race realism, misogyny, and the ethno-state' (Atkinson, 2018, p. 309). In relation to this study, it is worth noting that the alt-right believes that gender, like race, is 'a biological fact and not a social construction' (Atkinson, 2018, p. 311), that feminism is an attempt to undermine the natural role of the male in the society, and they believe that we live in a post-feminist society, where women have already gained the equal status of a man, and therefore they view the feminist movement as greedy for continuing their fight (Atkinson, 2018; Kinser, 2004).

Since Trump has been hesitant of distancing himself from the alt-right, journalists have admitted that 'the "alt-right" has gained a sense of mainstream legitimacy, attention, and recognition' (Hartzell, 2018, p. 15).

Feminism in the U.S.A.

Talking feminism often involves the metaphor of different waves of feminism, and this paper will continue the tradition by discussing the different goals and feminist ideologies within their respective waves. However, one should consider the appropriateness of these historically defined waves, as feminist views were expressed long before the first wave in many different cultures and because they tend to focus mainly on the white woman's struggle and achievements (Springer, 2002; Kinser, 2004).

The American feminist movement is foregrounded by earlier feminist writers and coincided with the abolition movement. The book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* by Mary Wollstonecraft, inspired by the Enlightenment and the French revolution, was one of the first women to make the notion of *gender inequality*. However, it was not until the 19th century that an organized American women's movement was established, marked by the first Women's Convention at Seneca Falls in 1848. The so-called first-wave can come across as a more coherent and united movement than the successive waves, as it had one common goal: gaining the right to vote. By attaining the same legal status as men, it was expected that other social and economic inequalities would fade as well. However, it was too early to talk about a feminist ideology as such at this early stage. When American women got the right to vote in 1920, the feminist movement seemed to dissolve as the primary goal was obtained, although the predicted social and economic changes never followed (Heywood, 2013; Kinser, 2004).

Forty years after women gained the right to vote, the second wave of feminism arose. Many believe it came about with the publication of *Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan, and the Civil rights movement. It occurred to women that change was not going to come without a fight. Whereas a defined feminist ideology was not clearly outlined through the first wave, second wave feminism in the 1960's evolved through different already established political ideologies such as socialism and Marxism. Similar to Marxist theorists, women were questioning the status quo. Women were confined to the four walls of their homes and were deeply depended on the man: the public man, and the private woman (Ferree & Ehlstain, 1983). The new *Women's Liberations Movement* thus moved from the public sphere into the private sphere becoming a struggle against personal, psychological, and sexual oppression. The term *patriarchy* was coined as a key term, especially for radical feminism. *Rule by man*

in the family was seen throughout the society, and radical and socialist feminism argued that politics did not only exist on a public level but that politics also existed within the home at all times and that sexual inequality was not natural but created by the patriarchal society (Heywood, 2013).

New feminist ideologies branched out in reaction to these core feminist ideologies. From the '60s and throughout the '90s, different feminisms surfaced; notably black feminism and trans-feminism. In the US, feminism and the fight for equal rights of the Black Americans had always seemed to run side by side and sometimes even intertwine. The term *sexism* was intentionally and coined after the word *racism*, as gender inequality were also a result of prejudice and discrimination (Masequesmay, 2016). Still, it was not until towards the end of the second wave of feminism that the feminist movement came to realize that a Black American woman's experience of oppression was different from that of a white American woman. The trans-community made a similar realization. Feminism then became the broad concept of a range of different feminist groups with different sub-ideologies and goals (Heywood, 2013; Kinser, 2004).

While it would seem likely that these sub-groups predicted the death of the feminist movement, these sub-groups came to define the ideology of the new wave, the third wave of feminism. It was the new awareness of different types of women, which became the focal point of the new movement. The term *intersectionality* became the new identifier of feminism. By adopting and unifying many of the sub-feminist groups' beliefs under one banner, feminism succeeded in renewing itself once again. Going back to the core lexical meaning of the word feminism, the fight for gender-inequality became decentralized to the movement. Instead, feminism became about fighting for various societal injustices, replacing gender-inequality with inequality in general. (Kinser, 2004).

According to Kinser (2004), two of the main goals of third wave feminism is embracing a 'pluralistic thinking within feminism and work to undermine narrow visions of feminism and their consequent confinements, through in large part the significantly more prominent voice of women of color and global feminism' and to combat a life in 'constant tension with post-feminism, though such tension often goes unnoticed as such' (Kinser, 2004, p. 133).

2.1 Theoretical background

This study relies on the notion of a hegemonic culture and dominant ideology in order to examine the discourse of The New York Times. This theory explains the relationship between the media, the state, and the public, and relies on the idea of discourse as a critical element in

our shared social practices. In a section of critical discourse analysis theory, the notion of discourse and societal structures is further explored.

<u>Media discourse and a dominant ideology</u>

The concept of a dominant ideology became popular within Marxist theory. Opposing capitalism, Marxism wished to emancipate the working class people from the constraints of the bourgeois and the elite and predicted a revolution would follow once people were enlightened of the unjust socio-economic structure of their society. However the Western revolution never came, and thus Marxist A. Gramsci theorized about a hegemonic culture that could explain why people were allowing this power (ab)use (Croteau & Hoynes, 2003; Heywood, 2013).

Gramsci argued that there were two possible ways for a state to exercise power. One way was through consent, and the other through force; a third option would be a combination of both. Military regimes and dictatorships were the essence of ruling by force, while democracies were in large relying on consent. One of the ways the state could exercise its power was through media discourse, as is most overtly expressed through propaganda, where the state is in direct control of the media. However, this could also be done more subtly if the dominant ideology was veiled as *a matter of fact*-knowledge through different social institutions: one of these institutions being the media. The media could reproduce a specific discourse and create a hegemonic culture where certain social practices were normalized. The elite who, by virtue, had a more significant influence on different media outlets, would be able to influence the way the media talked about specific topics, and thus the ideological beliefs would eventually be perceived as common sense, providing legitimacy to the assumptions made and dismissing further questioning (Croteau & Hoynes, 2003; Bates, 1975; Heywood 2013).

This Marxist theory became the backdrop to many new studies within many different fields of social sciences, and by large critical discourse analysis. The attention to *the matter-of-fact* social practices became crucial for many scholars to start questioning the knowledge that was taken for granted. Today, it is largely agreed among many social scientists that media is contributing to 'the production and reproduction of the Northern, Western, white, and neo-liberal dominance of economic markets, political hegemony, social marginalization, and cultural mentalities' (Dijk, 1995, p. 30).

However, this assumption has received some critique for the lack of evidence of media discourse and actual effect on media users. One attempt to connect discourse and action came

from van Dijk who takes on a socio-cognitive approach. He understands this connection through mental models (Johnson-Lair, 1983; van Oostendorp & Zwann, 1994; Dijk, 1995). A model is a representation of a specific event, which is an individual interpretation and evaluation of said event in within a specific context. Human beings can thus have a different interpretation of different events, which in theory all have different discourses. However, event discourse cannot be purely private; they are shaped by already socially shared knowledge and attitudes. Thus to create a meaning of a specific event, the individual will need to make use of pre-existing discourse and knowledge. The power of the media lies within being able to create a specific model and discourse of a specific event, which the media users will thus reproduce and use in other similar models. Thus media has the power to construct a specific representation, a preferred model, of specific events to a larger crowd through a specific discourse, thus contributing to a hegemonic culture of particular shared social representations (Wodak, 2009).

Critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is rooted in different academic disciplines, e.g., socio-psychology, cognitive science, rhetoric, applied linguistics, and pragmatics etc., which implies that CDA has no interest in analyzing linguistic units in itself, but rather in investigating these linguistic units, for the sake of examining the social structures that lie behind them. These structures are complex and therefore require a multidisciplinary and multi-methodical approach (Wodak, 2009). According to van Dijk, CDA is 'at most a shared perspective on doing linguistic, semiotic or discourse analysis' (Wodak, 2009, p. 5).

However, a common interest within CDA is to unveil ideologies and power structures by systematic investigation of semiotic data. At the very core lies the assumption that language is a social practice and that discursive practices are always exercised in a specific context and can therefore 'help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between (for instance) social classes, women and men, and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent things and position people' (Wodak, 2009, p. 6). There are three central concepts to CDA; power, ideology, and critique.

Critique is not to be understood as negatively approaching the discourse, rather as trying to clarify the complex structures of society by incorporating different social sciences, following the tradition of critical theory (Wodak, 2009). Critique in the context of CDA should also follow the Frankfurt School sense of critical theory that dictates that social theory

should seek to not only critique but also change society as a whole, as spreading knowledge facilitates social change (Wodak, 2009).

The concept of power should be regarded as Foucault theorized; 'power as a systemic and constitutive element/characteristic of society' (Wodak, 2009, p. 9). Like Foucault, CDA theorists also deal with power in the sense of societal structure, and not power by force. The main premise within CDA is that seemingly transparent power structures in society can be unveiled by investigating discourse.

Lastly, ideology should not be interpreted as any specific political ideology, as in the Marxist sense. It should be understood as the underlying ideology that influences any social practice, the worldview or set of beliefs that is reproduced through social action. Ideology in this study should be understood as 'the "worldviews" that constitute "social cognition"': 'schematically organized complexes of representations and attitudes with regard to certain aspects of the social world' (Wodak, 2009, p. 8). To scholars like van Dijk, the most dangerous ideologies are the ones, which are overlooked and presented as *common sense*-knowledge (Dijk, 1995).

2.2 Specific background

Using CDA to disclose ideological discourse in media is a popular field of inquiry, especially for Western scholars. These studies often highlight discourse on a marginalized group of society, who are, purposely or not, challenging the status quo of the societal structures. This is seemingly due to the tendency of making marginalized groups 'political issues', towards which there are two or many conflicting attitudes. These are just some of many studies relating to different aspects of the following analysis.

A study by Peter Gale (2004), senior lecturer at the Unaipon School, University of Australia, investigates the intersection of populist politics and media discourse in Australia in his study 'The refugee crisis and fear'. The study primarily focuses on the media representation of immigrants, and how they contribute to growing racism or 'national identity' in society. The research sample consisted of articles extracted from a number of newspapers, based on the use of words 'refugees' and 'asylum seekers'. Using a Faircloughian understanding of CDA, the study sought to identify representational themes in the newspaper articles. The analysis centered on contrasting these themes with the idea of national identity and the media discourse. Accepting that the media is an institution of

production and reproduction, Gale concludes that Australia, being a liberal nation-state, is indeed receptive to the populist discourse of fear of the *Other*.

Van Dijk, one of CDA's founders, has also researched this field of media discourse in his article 'The Mass Media Today: Discourse of Domination or Diversity?' (1995). Here van Dijk takes on a broad perspective on how the neo-liberalist ideology is pervasive in general media discourse on marginalized groups such as immigrants and feminists but chooses to focus on the growing reproduction of ethnocentrism and racism by the media. Using CDA concepts such as *polarization, victimization, preferential access*, and *positive self-reflection*, van Dijk makes the argument that both conservative and liberal media is prone to make use of such discursive strategies in order to create an *Other*. Van Dijk applies a socio-cognitive framework of mental models to explain the link between media discourse and cognition.

And lastly, Raili Marling's 'The Intimidating Other: Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of the Representation of Feminism in Estonian Print Media' (2010) attempts to explain the alleged anti-feminist consensus in Estonia, through textual analysis of a corpus of articles containing the word feminism, extracted from Estonia's biggest newspaper. Like van Dijk and Gale, Marling also accepts that media is contributing to the production and reproducing of socially shared representations. Her analysis is grounded in a Faircloughian theory of CDA and a feminist approach to CDA by Lazar (2005). Moreover, the analysis is made up within a multi-methodological framework of Corpus Linguistics and CDA, relying on both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Through her analysis, she finds that while feminism is not enduring explicit anti-feminist discourse, she does see a pattern of negative representation of feminism. She also finds that preferential access is given to anti-feminist representatives. She concludes that her results show the media contributing to the Estonian societies attitudes towards feminism.

3. Design of the study

This study aims to investigate the claim that The New York Times is a biased media source, which appeals to liberal attitudes. In an attempt to reveal the underlying ideologies of their media discourse, the marginalized non-governmental feminist movement was chosen as the main topic of the selected articles. Discourse on issues and movements that are seen as activism often provokes discursive manifestation of pre-assumed attitudes in society, also known as *social representations* (van Dijk, 1995).

While a considerable amount of studies have been done on anti-feminist discourses, and what it means to undertake a feminist discourse (Lazar, 2005), the main aim of this study does

not concern feminist or antifeminist discourse. In an attempt not to 'over-privilege resistance' and leave the underlying ideology understudied (Marling, 2010), the study maintains a more traditional CDA outlook and thus focuses on the concept of dominant ideological discourse.

The framework of this study is known as the Socio-Cognitive Approach (SCA) of CDA. Discourse within this framework is understood as the conditions of the political, social and linguistic practices colluding to impose itself on the subjects, while these subjects stay ignorant of this process (Wodak, 2009). These processes are often masked through different discursive concepts such as *polarization, victim blaming, and positive self-reflection* (Van Dijk, 1995). Through these tools, they create the social representations, the 'consensual we' (Fowler, 1991). The analysis itself relies on the methodological approach of both qualitative and quantitative CDA.

The analysis deals with articles published by The New York Times within the period of a hundred days, from 20th of January 2017 to the 29th of April 2017. The New York Times shows as one of the largest paper by circulation in 2017, only second to The Wall Street Journal ('Leading newspapers in the U.S. by circulation 2017', n.d.). However, since The Wall Street Journal is considered a niche newspaper that appeals to the business sector of the U.S., The New York Times was chosen as the main data source. Furthermore, President Trump has specifically targeted The New York Times as being liberal fake-news media; *The Failing New York Times*. Accordingly, there is also three main reasons for this particular time-span; Trump's inauguration on the 20th of January, the first Women's March on the 22nd of January, and Trump declaring 'war on media' by a tweet the following week (Wendling, 2018). It is during this weekend that the state, the media, and the feminist movement all seem to collide. The hundred days span is chosen, as it is a politically accepted as the time span in which a newly instated administration is judged on their success to implement new policies and set the tone for next four years in office. The hundred days thus seem to be a clear marker of a specific socio-political climate, in which all articles are written.

The actual data-collection was derived from The New York Times own search engine. The word 'feminism' was chosen as the first marker of the data, which resulted in 121 articles within the given time frame. The articles were then further sorted into thematic categories following The New York Times' categorizations of *News*, *Opinion*, *Arts*, *Living*, and *More*, although the three latter categories have been combined under a section called *Culture* in this study. These categorizations are usually helping the readers determine the type of article they are about to embark on; they situate the articles in different contexts. The first stage of the

analysis will discuss the distribution of articles within these categories, constituting the quantitative stage of analysis.

Following the discussion of the categorization of the articles, four articles were selected for a qualitative CDA analysis. Since this paper investigates the discourse of The New York Times as an entity, the articles that fell under the categories of *Opinion* and *Culture* were disqualified for further investigation, due to the nature of such articles, which is discussed in the first stage of analysis. This left 26 articles under the category of *News*. In order to maintain the importance of ensuring that the discourse in the articles was representing The New York Times as one unite, all 26 articles were examined for markers of writer biases, such as writers being labeled obviously biased or being columnists. Articles, which were of a bullet-point nature, summaries of the weekly news, were also marked. All marked articles were then removed from the data-collection, leaving only 13 articles of actual *News*.

In order to avoid writer bias in this study, I converted these 13 articles into text documents, deleting all multi-media from the articles, to create a corpus of 15.523 tokens. To ensure that the four articles were randomly selected for the analysis, the text search engine AntConc was used. A concordance search on 'feminism' resulted in 30 hits, in which the four texts at the top of the list would undergo a qualitative CDA analysis.

The goal of this investigation is to examine the discourse for 'preferred models' or 'social representations', through discursive strategies of *polarization, positive self-representation* and *victim blaming* (Dijk, 1995). Polarization should be understood as contributing to the marginalization of a group or representing the group as extreme or radical. Positive self-representation is often the result of contrasting two groups, making your own group appear *better*; and victim blaming is meant in the most literal sense of making the victims responsible for their own struggles. Lastly, the analysis will elevate the findings in stage one and two to the socio-political structure of American society.

This study is only meant as a basis for further research on the subject of media discourse, considering the scope of the data collection. The results are only suggestions of patterns and tendencies that could be the motivation for further investigations. In the spirit of CDA, this study hopes to inspire other scholars to keep questioning and informing the public on the media's discourse.

4. Results

Table 1 shows the distribution of categories''' of the 121 articles matching the word search 'feminism' within the 100 days time span, collected through The New York Times search

engine. Each category has multiple sub-categories, which follows The New York Times own categorization and sub-categorization.

Table 1. *Distribution of articles*

Categories	*Opinion*	*News*	*Culture* (*Living, Art, More*)	
Sub-categories	*Sunday Review, Opinion, Times Insider*	*U.S., Australia, Asia Pacific, Corrections, Briefings, New York, Live, NYT Today, Canada*	*Magazine, Style&Beauty, Television, Theater, Fashion&Style, Food, Music, Design, Art(s), The Learning Network, Listen Plans, Book (Review), Watching*	
Number of Articles	36	26	61	Total: 121

Thematic analysis

Looking at *Table 1* most articles were situated within the culture section or considered opinion pieces. Even within the 'News' category, only 13 were presented as traditional journalism within the article itself; a total of 11 articles were marked as having a rubric clearly stating the writers biases, containing 'opinion:' in the headline, being a bullet-point summary of the weekly news or clearly stating the experimental nature of the article.

Considering the timeline given for these articles, two days before the Women's March and a hundred days forward, it would seem fair to expect that feminism was a current topic. These findings do not suggest whether there were a progression or regression relating to how many articles that were written during these particular hundred days. However, what is interesting about these results is the categorization of these articles, organized by The New

York Times itself. A total of 36 articles belongs to the category of opinion pieces; articles where writers are allowed to be biased, but also are being held responsible as individuals for their writings. A total of 61 articles were marked within the culture section; articles that deals with all kinds of cultural endeavors. Out of 121 articles, only 24 were marked as 'News', and even fewer were eligible for upholding the traditional journalism standards, which was necessary for the next stage of the analysis.

These findings suggest that *feminism*, feminist attitudes, is a controversial subject to cover, that is, attitudes that conflict with the norm. Already at this stage, feminism is de-centralized from the core news, which is contributing to the marginalization of feminist ideas. Feminism is thus confined to *opinion* or a progressive cultural elite. It is not to say that opinion pieces, nor cultural articles, cannot be impressive pieces of journalism, but they do risk being dismissed as articles that are pushing an agenda, especially when they tackle subjects which are considered political issues.

There are other issues with placing feminism in the midst of the art world. The peripheral and elitist status this world is perceived to have (Bourdieu, 1986) can make it hard for the average citizen to identify with these ideas. Furthermore, the art world is known for pushing the boundaries of what is acceptable; it is provocative. The problem with provocation is the risk of drowning the message in a lot of noise. This again could contribute to a representation of feminism as a lot of noise, with no real message.

The result of the data-collection concludes the quantitative stage of the analysis and is only to be considered to be suggestive of future patterns for the rest of the qualitative analysis. Similar quantitative findings were made by Marling (2010) study on feminism in Estonian media.

Qualitative discourse analysis

The primary content of article one concerns the cancelation of guest speaker Milo Yiannopoulos at the University of California, Berkley. The cause of the cancelation, according to The New York Times, was a group of demonstrators protesting Mr. Yiannopoulos, who has at best been the source of some controversial statements. 'Berkley Cancels Milo Yiannopoulos, Trump Tweets outrage' was written by Thomas Fuller & Christopher Mele and published online on the 1st of February 2017.

The article starts with a very specific location marker 'BERKLEY, Calif. –'. This location marker is factual but also by nature very limiting, for the reading of the following portrayal of events. By narrowing the situational context, the following discourse can be

disregarded as very specific to this particular event. In other words, the mental model becomes less implacable to future events.

The word *feminism* plays into this event only by choice of the writer. In an attempt to describe Mr. Yiannopoulos, the writer indicates that he is an anti-feminist, racist and anti-immigration advocate, and not afraid to challenge his own communities as he himself is a gay immigrant. In sum, he is known for his 'gleeful attacks on political correctness'. Within one paragraph three forms of activism are reduced to one term; *political correctness*. One of the winning arguments for President Trump's voters was Mr. Trump's refusal to undertake a politically correct discourse. Political correctness became increasingly and semantically related to the action of politicians, who were hiding an agenda behind what was socially accepted discourse, or in more simplistic terms; lies. The term political correctness therefor reduces activism to actions that are only happening for the sake of *looking good*. Moreover, Mr. Yiannopoulos' sexuality and ethnicity become the two identity-markers, which in return allows him to be victimized, as 'he has faced backlash from other gay people'.

Since the article is reporting on a conflict, the article is attempting to represent the two sides involved. On one side, the actors identified are the demonstrators, faculty members, 'the liberals', and the university as an institution; on the other side, there is Mr. Yiannopoulos, the police, the president, the president's advisers, and the alt-right. Yet, the actual struggle is centered at police vs. the demonstrators. Three times during three different paragraphs, the demonstrators are challenging the police; 'police said […] students should leave the area because of the violent demonstration', 'last month developed into an intense standoff between protesters and police (about another scheduled speech by Mr. Yiannopoulos)', and 'Berkley Campus Police described it as major protest attacks […] urged people to stay away'. Framing demonstrations as being on the other side of the law contributes to a polarized view on activism. The reason the demonstrators were at the university was not to contest the law enforcement; they were there to protest Mr. Yiannopoulos.

The second article initially centers specifically on feminism and the Women's March. However, the point of view taken within this article is of the Chinese Feminism Collective, and a large part of this article is structured after an interview with Lu Pin, a Chinese feminist living in the United States. 'Fighting on Behalf of China's Women – From the United States' was written by Lou Siling and published online on the 15th of February 2017.

Although the article does deal with feminism, the overall discourse can only be described as a positive self-reflection of feminism in the United States, with very limited argumentation to support this representation. According to the article the Chinese Feminism

Collective are supporting feminist activities in China, as it faces severe political pressure. Five Chinese feminists were detained when trying to execute a public awareness campaign, and the Chinese police had raided Ms. Lu's apartment. These Chinese events are contrasted with the feminist experience in the United States.

The Women's March in Washington, The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in New York and the fact that Ms. Lu came to New York for her Master's Degree in Gender studies are all highlighting the supposed status quo of a higher tolerance for feminist activism in the states. There is an implicit *'at least we are not as bad as them* attitude'. It is particularly stressed through Ms. Lu's decision 'to stay in the United States' after hearing of the raid of her apartment in China.

Another issue with this article is the representation of the feminist movement. The article states that 'hundreds of thousands of women' marched for the Women's March, contributing to the misconception that the women's movement is only for women. The current women's movement does not have one main goal, as was more or less how the first wave was understood. It fails to acknowledge the ideological process of the organization, which today exists of a very diverse crowd of supporters, who are fighting against all inequality, whether it is of a sexual, racial or class nature. The nuances and intersectionality of the movement seem to be lost, even as they are talking to a Chinese feminist who highlights this diversity.

This article does, however, suggest that there is an awareness of the clashing of the feminist movement and the election of President Trump. One interview question asks 'how have Hillary Clinton's loss and Donald J. Trump's victory' influenced the movement. At the very minimum, without the knowledge of current American politics, it is suggested that a woman lost to a man in a presidential election, and therefore there is a reaction from the feminist movement. However, the following Women's March was not declared as a protest against men. The march was a protest against men who used their power to sexually assault and overthrow women; men like Donald Trump. I could also argue that the writer might assume that the American readers of The New York Times know the basics of the presidential election, but nonetheless, the discourse leaves room for interpretation.

The third article is a profile of a man named Mike Cernovich. Mr. Cernovich became famous when the president's son, Donald Trump Jr. named him in a tweet as his personal favorite to win the prestigious Pulitzer Prize, the greatest honor in American journalism. The article asks the question: who is Cernovich? 'Who is Mike Cernovich? A Guide' was written by Liam Stack and published online on the 5th of April 2017.

The word *feminism* is again tied to someone who is anti-feminist. According to The New York Times, Cernovich's self-help book '"disdained feminism" and promoted a message of men's empowerment'. Additionally, he is a self-proclaimed 'National American' who is contributing to the politics of the alt-right. While there can be no doubt that the feminist movement and the alt-right disagree on key issues, there is no indication that feminists are 'anti-men'. This particular sentence structure, suggests that feminism and men's empowerment are opposites.

Nonetheless, the representation of Mike Cernovich is fairly negative. Even though a statement from Mr. Cernovich himself is included, rejecting that he is part of an alt-right movement, the article is determined to tie him to this movement and states more than once that Mr. Cernovich has helped shape the politics of the alt-right. The article continuously states that he is infamously known for promoting factually incorrect claims and conspiracy theories, even after they have been proven wrong. Whether his anti-feminism is negative or positive is of course then a matter of opinion, but it is strongly highlighted. Not only by how many of his false statement concerned the female runner-up for the presidency, Hillary Clinton, but also how he, through books and video-blogs, are advising men 'to embrace their "gorilla mindset" when dealing with the opposite sex'. Even with the quotation marks on *the gorilla mindset*, which could be the reason for dismissing this whole sentence, the word choice of *embrace* is revealing to understand the underlying attitude. To embrace something entails that that something is already there, but has previously been ignored or even suppressed. If we accept this, Mr. Cernovich's advice, formulated by The New York Times, thus becomes about freeing men from being suppressed by women. The idea of the women's movement being pro-women and anti-men is thus reinforced.

I could also argue that the article is unfairly attempting to tie Mr. Cernovich views onto the Trump presidency via Donald Trump's own son. Donald Trump Jr. has no official post within the current administration and his views do not necessarily reflect those of his fathers. Still, the article does not exactly do any favors for feminism, in that it again portrays the alt-right and feminism as two opposites, polarizing feminist ideas in the same way alt-right policies are polarized.

The last article this analysis will deal with is an article on sexual harassment on a soap opera film set in Brazil. A wardrobe assistant became the victim of repeated sexual harassment by an actor named José Mayer, who had eventually been suspended and forced to make a public apology. 'A win over Sexism in Brazil: A Soap Star is Punished for Harassment' was written by Dom Phillips and published online on the 13th of April 2017.

Like the first article, this article is also marked by a specific location marker; 'RIO DE JANEIRO', and like the second article, feminist struggles are outsourced to a different country, Brazil. An increasing number of accusations have been applauded by an 'increasingly active feminist movement that has long denounced the deep-seated sexism in Brazilian culture'. Sexism is then dismissed as an issue rooted in the Brazilian culture, ignoring the similar issues of sexism in American and other Western cultures. This discourse also outlines sexism as a feminist struggle and not a societal issue.

The article goes on to describe the situation as an atypical scene in a soap opera, saying it is not 'exactly the sort of happy ending that neatly ties up overlapping subplots'. Cases of sexual assault are never *neat* as they are directly challenging the power structures that the society is built upon. They are complex and difficult to navigate in since they often require the 'victims' to reclaim the power from the assaulter. While soap operas are often overly dramatized representations of real-life events and often ends in a predictable love affair, it is striking to suggest that the accusation and the public apology is not a victory or happy ending in itself.

The accusations themselves consisted of anything from inappropriate comments to actual physical assault. The physical assault even happened in front of two females, who allegedly just laughed at the entire situation. While this information is important to underline how deeply structured these sexist behaviors are rooted, in the female as well as male consciousness, it is also a subtle form of victim blaming, testifying to the argument that both male and females are responsible for letting these assaults happen.

5. Discussion

From the analysis, we get a sense of the social representation of feminism, which The New York Times is producing and reproducing. The analysis also forces us to discuss what happens when a media outlet, like The New York Times, is mistakenly labeled and perceived as being liberally biased.

Representation of feminism

One of the re-occurring patterns with the media discourse on feminism is the failure to provide a sufficient and fair representation of feminism and the feminist movement. A fair representation would be providing an accurate ideological framework for the reader to make sense of the 'feminist activities' reported on. When this framework is not present, the Women's March is about being politically correct, anti-all men, anti-right-wing politics or

even anti-law enforcement. Instead of presenting feminism with concepts of gender equality or equal opportunity, it is instead a feminist narrative provided by anti-feminists such as Mr. Cernovich and Yiannopoulos, which is reproduced.

Allowing anti-feminists to provide the discourse for a feminist movement is furthering the notion that feminism is a radical and controversial ideology just by making alt-right the direct opposite. The quantitative data in stage one of the analysis, supporting these patterns of presenting feminism as being controversial or radical, by outsourcing the subject to opinion or as cultural experiments, is a testimony to the overall ideological discourse on the subject. Admittedly it is a bit of a stretch to suggest that The New York Times adopts alt-right discourse to talk about feminism, but from these four articles, there has been no attempt to moderate or provide any other discourse for the representation of feminism.

The other re-occurring pattern is the examples of positive self-representation which is promoting this post-feminist argument that America does not have issues with sexism or gender-inequality, unlike China or Brazil, despite having an entire crowd of marginalized women across the country march for equality in what is estimated to be the historically largest single-day demonstration in the U.S. to date (Chenoweth & Pressman, 2017). It seems fair to say that The New York Times is not participating in a progressive ideological discourse with a hidden liberal agenda as suggested by Donald Trump. The results are rather suggesting that The New York Times are often adopting a more conservative, and at times right-wing, discourse. This media representation of the women's movement is contributing to making feminism a marginalized, de-centralized and controversial ideology.

The positioning of the media

According to the analysis, the media is still working as a megaphone for the hegemonic ideology of the sitting administration in the United States, to the extent that it regards feminism as a controversial subject and mainly reproduces pre-existing discourse on the subject. Although the image of The New York Times has always been considered socio-liberal; being pro-abortion, pro-immigration and pro-feminism, I could also argue that Trump's dismissal of the newspaper re-enforced this image. According to The New York Times own press release, they gained a total of 276.000 new subscribers in 2016 (The New York Times Company, n.d.) after the conservative candidate, Trump, labeled them *The Failing New York Times*, moreover the demographic of their readers are still mainly identified as liberal. Thus, the Trump discursive 'fake news' strategy was not only affecting his own voters choice of news media, but it also motivated liberal voters to turn to The New York

Times. While 'fake media' became the primary defense of Trump's supporters, it also suggested to the leftist voter which news outlets would be ready to take on the many controversies surrounding the former candidate and current president.

The Trump administration's strategy of announcing specific media sources as their enemies eventually resulted in drawing up a line with the Trump administration on one side, and media, unsympathetic to Trump and his administration, on the other side, alongside people of a more leftist conviction. The strategy has thus created an illusion of The New York Times, fighting the same fight as a liberal feminist, immigrants, and Black Americans; minorities in general. Still, taking the results of this paper into consideration, The New York Times discourse does not show any signs of this kind of liberal bias. It could be argued, adopting the warfare rhetoric, that Mr. Trump has placed allies behind enemy lines, fighting his battles.

This makes for a dangerous displacement of the media as an institution, especially when the media is in fact still partaking in sustaining a hegemonic culture of marginalization. Moreover, it could also be argued that this displacement of the media is resulting in a shift of the entire spectrum of political ideologies. If we can agree that the New York Times are using, at the very minimum, a conservative discourse, portraying The New York Times as a liberal newspaper, de-centering the newspaper altogether, makes the conservative discourse shift to a more moderate or even liberal discourse. This results in leftist ideologies becoming even more peripheral and radical, all the while right-wing politics moves more towards the center.

It is therefore important to inform the public about the medias actual discursive position and for the media to keep defending their position as an independent institution. Although it should also be public knowledge that a newspaper's attempt to be unbiased will lead to the reproduction of hegemonic discourse as the findings suggest.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, this study on The New York Times discourse on feminism suggested that The New York Times is not partaking in a particular liberal discourse. The New York Times is more likely to reproduce the discourse of those in power, that is, a more conservative, and at times right-wing, discourse.

The foundation of the inquiry was the claim made by the American President Trump that The New York Times, among other media sources, was liberally biased. This claim had been accepted by not only Trump's supporters but also by the left-wing voters.

In order to investigate media discourse, the study worked with the theory of a hegemonic ideology in media and investigated The New York Times discourse on a specific marginalized group in the American society which had a long history of fighting the status quo; the feminist movement. Using both qualitative and quantitative data the study found that The New York Times were often adopting a conservative, and at times, a more radical alt-right discourse on the subject of feminism.

The results showed a very limited representation of feminist ideology and little understanding of the identity of the movement. The quantitative data showed a pattern of reinforcing feminism as a peripheral and controversial ideology. The qualitative data suggested the use of discursive strategies such as polarization, victim-blaming, and positive self-reflection. In sum, the results ultimately suggested that there was no reason to believe they were promoting a feminist agenda, and by virtue, a liberal agenda.

The findings pose the issue of placing the media on the political spectrum, and more importantly on the wrong side of the spectrum. The 'fake news' strategy thus becomes more problematic than initially suspected by creating an entire shift of the American political spectrum.

As previously suggested, this study empathizes the need to continue the investigation of public media discourse. This study is grounded on limited data, but the findings are sufficient enough to make a further commitment to a more substantial in-depth discourse analysis of the New York Times' discourse. The study should also motivate other researchers to investigate other media sources, which are involuntarily placed on an ideological spectrum.

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