A screenshot of a game

Description automatically generated

I chose these two complimentary graphs because I found them interesting, but I think that they stopped just short of telling us about something useful. The first figure is a correlation matrix that indicates the top Avengers that appear in the same issues with other team members in the Avengers comic books. It uses a heat map to indicate the extent of common appearances, where darker shades indicate more shared appearances. The second figure outlines character appearances over time with shaded lines indicating appearances within comics; more shaded area indicates more appearances.

In both figures, I think that a more useful story would be to discuss how these overlaps relate to representation. Although simply knowing things about individual superheroes is fun in itself, it might also be interesting or useful to know about the social categories to which the superheroes belong. For example, in the first figure, do women typically share appearances with other women? Or, is it more common for women to share appearances with men? Which social categories of superheroes (e.g., people of colour) share the least appearances with other superheroes? Looking at the graph right now, we can pick out individual points, such as the fact that Luke Cage does not share appearances with a lot of other superheroes. As a Black superhero, one question is whether he as an individual simply doesn’t appear in comics with a lot of other heroes, or whether there is a larger pattern of Black superheroes not sharing comic book space with other people. More closely identifying the social categories of the superheroes could give us this information.

In the second figure, I have a similar suggestion. Each superhero is given their own individual colour, using overlap based on hero relation (e.g., Spider-Woman and Spider-Man appear to be the same colour). However, it could be useful to give these colours more meaningful connections. For example, if one were interested in how often different genders appeared in the comics, the shaded parts for women superheroes could be one colour and the shaded parts for male superheroes could be another colour. You could also do a separate graph using shading that separated White superheroes from superheroes of colour. Both of these options would still retain all of the information about the individual superheroes, but it would also allow for a broader look at the trends in the graph.

A screenshot of a chart

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