

From Name-Calling to Insidious Rhetoric: Construction and Evolution of the Transgender Imagery in News Discourse, 1953-2016

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Abstract : This essay aims to examine how the transgender imagery has been constructed in the Taiwanese news media and its evolution from 1953 to 2016. It also explores the discourse patterns and rhetorical strategies in the transgender-related issues which contributed to levels of evaluation in forming 'social deviance.' Samples for analysis were selected from mainstream newspapers, including China Times, United Daily and Apple Daily. The time frame for sample selection is from August 1953 (when the first transgender case was reported in Taiwan) to June 2016. To enhance understanding of media representation as nominalistic-based, the author refers to the representative of critical rhetoric Raymie McKerrow for his study on remembrance and forgetfulness in public discourse (especially in his model of 'critique of domination'); thereby categorizing the 64 years of transgender discourse into five periods: (1) transgender as 'intersex' of surgical-reparative medical treatment; (2) transgender as 'freak gender-bender' with criminal behaviors; (3) transgender as 'ladyboy' ('katoey in a Thai term) of bar girls or sex workers; (4) transgender as 'cross dresser' of transvestite performance; and (5) transgender as 'life-style or human right' of spontaneous gender identification. Based on the research findings, this essay argues that the characterization of transgender reporting as a site for the production of compulsory sexism and gender stereotype by the specific forms of name-calling. Besides, the evolution of word-image addressing to transgender issues also pinpoints media as a reflection of fashion of the day. While the transgender imagery might be crystallized as 'still social problems' or 'gender transgression' in insidious rhetoric; and while the so-called 'phobia' persistently embodies in media discourse to exercise name-calling in an ambiguous (rather than in a bullying) way or under the cover of humanist-liberalist rationales, these emergent rhetorical dilemma should be resolved without any delay.

Keywords : critical rhetoric, media representation, McKerrow, nominalistic, social deviance, transgender

Conference Title : ICSMPC 2017 : International Conference on Social Media and Political Communications

Conference Location : Zurich, Switzerland

Conference Dates : January 13-14, 2017