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Signs of Disability in Malaysian Press Photographs: A Critical Semiotic Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

In a society which idealises human strengths and conceptualises images of physical and intellectual perfection, a disabled body signifies both difference and strangeness. Disability has been contended as a 'sign system' and the disabled body is argued as a 'signifier' in de Saussure's term. It is a site of discursive production and consumption, institutionalized by social practices in society. In response to this position, this study engages in a critical semiotic inquiry into 1002 press photographs of disability from *The Star*, a Malaysian mainstream English newspaper (July 2008 - June 2011). Drawing on Fairclough's dialectical-relational framework (Fairclough, 2010), this presentation identifies signs and typical features of news photos of disability in relation to different disability categories. Findings show that the construction of loss of attributes and capacity has presented the disabled persons with negative categorizations. Sociologically, this is an expression of the Other in binary opposition to the non-disabled.

Keywords: signs, photographs, critical discourse analysis, discourses of disability, critical disability studies

Key Reference:

Fairclough, N. (2010) *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language* (2nd Ed). Essex: Longman.



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