

BENEDMO

Report:

Beyond Visibility

Framing LGBTQIA+ topics
in Dutch news and current
affairs broadcasting



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Visuals

Unless otherwise credited, all visuals included throughout this report are screenshots taken from the segments analyzed as part of this research. Visuals sourced from external collections are credited individually where they appear.



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Introduction

A Dutch broadcaster reports on an arson attack at a neighborhood bar in Rotterdam. Police suspect the attack was motivated by anti-gay violence and the bar's solidarity Pride flag. In lieu of on-site coverage, the program uses a video clip of a drag performer applying makeup to introduce the segment.

A television panel discusses what the presenter calls the "growing phenomenon" of people wanting to change gender. What follows is a debate between multiple anti-transgender organization leaders, a detransitioner (someone who reversed or discontinued their gender transition), and a single transgender individual.

Across segments on violence, healthcare, legislation, and international politics, visuals of drag queens, Pride marches, rainbow flags, and festival crowds appear as generic illustrations for LGBTQIA+ topics of every kind.

The increasing visibility of LGBTQIA+ people and topics in Dutch broadcasting reflects broader societal shifts toward recognition of sexual and gender diversity. Yet this visibility is not neutral.

What appears on screen is not only a matter of who is present and who is absent, but also of framing, repetition, and association, revealing recurring patterns through which normative ideas about gender, sex, and sexuality are constructed, reinforced, or challenged.

This raises an important question:

What patterns emerge in both discourse and visual framing when LGBTQIA+ topics become "newsworthy" or politically relevant?



The findings presented in this report are based on an exploratory analysis of Dutch news and current affairs broadcasting material collected via [FactRank](#), a tool that monitors public debate and automatically detects check-worthy claims from subtitles, transcripts, and social media. The tool was accessed and used within the [CLARIAH Media Suite](#), a research environment facilitating scholarly engagement with large Dutch media collections. The source materials consist of broadcasts from 2024 and 2025, including news bulletins (*NOS Journaal*), current affairs programs (*Nieuwsuur* and *EenVandaag*), opinion-oriented current affairs formats (*Ongehoord Nieuws* and *PowNed of View*), and the long-form interview program *VPRO Zomergasten*.

The corpus was generated through keyword-based retrieval using a broad set of terms related to sexual and gender diversity such as *lesbisch* (lesbian), *queer*, *homoseksueel* (gay), *LHBTI* (LGBTI), *transgender*, and *non-binair* (non-binary). Of these searches, 24 unique keywords yielded relevant broadcast segments containing explicit LGBTQIA+-related statements, resulting in a dataset of 40 claims identified by FactRank. These claims provided the basis for a broader qualitative examination of the segments in which they appeared.

The analysis considers not only what was said, but how LGBTQIA+ topics were made meaningful through the selection of voices, the organization of debate, the narratives in which issues were situated, and the visual material used to represent them.

This work draws on a multi-partner fact-checking initiative conducted in early 2026 within the [BENEDMO](#) project, a Flemish-Dutch collaboration involving fact-checkers, media professionals, scientists, and other experts. The initiative was accompanied by a Factchecking Deep Dive on LGBTQIA+ mis/disinformation, which identified recurring narratives across Dutch-language fact-checks, including the so-called "gay agenda," narratives portraying LGBTQIA+ people as threats to children, exaggerated claims about LGBTQIA+ influence, and broader anti-gender discourse. This Deep Dive provides a point of comparison for the analysis. FactRank-identified claims and statements are, therefore, treated not as isolated units of misinformation or opinion, but as entry points into the broader interpretation of LGBTQIA+ representation and framing in contemporary Dutch broadcasting.

[Click here](#) to read
*BENEDMO's LHBTQIA+
Factchecking Deep
Dive (in Dutch)*

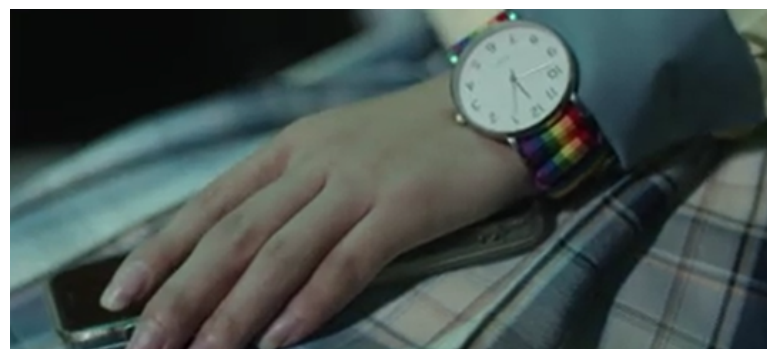
Patterns in representation

In 2008, the then Dutch minister for education, culture and science, Ronald Plasterk outlined a new vision on the role of public media in stimulating the balanced representation of different groups of society in mainstream media. While not the first effort to redefine diversity in Dutch public service broadcasting, the letter titled *Visie op Media en Diversiteit (Vision on Media and Diversity)* marked an important moment in the ongoing efforts.

Six years later, an Erasmus University Rotterdam study found that while broadcasters did indeed diversify or “mainstream” representation, that representation was flattened and favored more acceptable or simplified forms of difference to appeal to the average Dutch public.¹ Diversity became more visible, but not necessarily more complex or nuanced. The material analyzed for this report suggests a similar tension.

The most prevalent pattern observed in this work is one of generalization.

LGBTQIA+ issues are frequently referred to through broad collective labels such as the commonly used Dutch-Flemish terms *LHBTI* (lesbisch, homoseksueel, biseksueel, transgender en intersekse) or *LHBT+ers*. While more specific references to identities such as lesbian, gay, and transgender were present in the material, they occurred far less frequently. Other identities including bisexual, intersex, agender, and asexual, were largely absent altogether. As a result, internal differences within the LGBTQIA+ community were seldom made explicit. Rather than being represented as a collection of distinct identities and lived experiences, LGBTQIA+ people were more likely to be constructed as a single social or political category that could be addressed in aggregate.



¹ Engelbert, J., & Awad Cherit, I. (2014). Securitizing cultural diversity: Dutch public broadcasting in post-multicultural and de-pillarized times. *Global Media and Communication*, 10(3), 261-274. Article 3. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742766514552352>

This tendency toward generalization also mirrors findings from the accompanying Factchecking Deep Dive. Across sixty one fact-checks, the report identifies the “gay agenda” as the most prevalent recurring narrative, one that similarly collapses diverse sexual orientations and gender identities into a single political actor, which in this particular case, is pursuing some kind of shared plot to unravel various aspects of our society. While the mechanisms underpinning broadcast framing and fact-check reporting differ, both datasets converge in treating LGBTQIA+ categories as internally undifferentiated through the use of homogenizing labels.

An important exception is the attention particularly devoted to transgender-related topics. Transgender issues receive a disproportionate amount of attention within LGBTQIA+ coverage, constituting a distinct and highly visible part of news and current affairs broadcasting. At the same time, this visibility is often concentrated within polarized media debates. Related coverage clusters around a small set of recurring

themes such as medical discussions (e.g. puberty blockers, hormone replacement therapy, and access to care), legal debates (e.g. gender recognition overall, gender in sports, gender in prisons, institutional classifications, etc.), and identity-focused narratives (e.g. transition vs detransition).

The question, however, is not only which identities receive attention, but also the circumstances in which that attention is produced. In other words, visibility itself does not necessarily indicate inclusion.



Problematization of visibility

Visibility is often treated as an indicator of inclusion, yet presence alone does not necessarily reflect the quality or nature of representation. Attention to a group may increase without producing more nuanced or everyday portrayals, making it important to consider the contexts in which visibility occurs. Research shows that minority groups often gain visibility through conflict, controversy, or other exceptional circumstances. Studies of Dutch² and German³ media similarly demonstrate that greater visibility can coexist with representations that remain selective and politicized rather than normalized.

The pattern is also evident in this analysis. A significant portion of the material frames LGBTQIA+ topics through narratives of conflict, discrimination, or social risk. Rather than appearing as part of ordinary social life, LGBTQIA+ individuals and communities are frequently made visible through events such as legal disputes, political controversies, public debates, or instances

of violence and social tension. As a result, visibility is structured through selection processes that prioritize conflict-oriented and exceptional narratives which presumably garner more interest from viewers but woefully limit the extent to which everyday lived experiences are represented.

Although misinformation narratives circulating online and mainstream news are produced in different environments, they often rely on similar attention-grabbing and conflict-focused styles of communication. Digital platforms may enable more explicit, intensified, or adversarial forms of discourse due to differences in moderation and gatekeeping compared to regulated broadcast environments. Nevertheless, these cross-media narratives can converge in constructing LGBTQIA+ communities as subjects of controversy, reinforcing a broader pattern in which their visibility is not merely increased but

² Engelbert, J., & Awad Cherit, I. (2014). Securitizing cultural diversity: Dutch public broadcasting in post-multicultural and de-pillarized times. *Global Media and Communication*, 10(3), 261-274. Article 3. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742766514552352>

³ Schotel, A.L., (2023) Mainstream or Marginalized? How German and Dutch Newspapers Frame LGBTI, *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, Volume 30, Issue 2, Summer 2023, Pages 444-469, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxac004>

problematized through recurring associations with conflict, threat, and ideological struggle.

Importantly, this problematization operates in multiple directions. LGBTQIA+ communities may be constructed as vulnerable groups exposed to discrimination, exclusion, or violence, while simultaneously being represented as objects of suspicion and social concern. The latter pattern is particularly evident in misinformation narratives involving transgender people, where individuals are sometimes falsely associated with violence through claims that attribute such acts to psychological instability or identity-related characteristics.

These patterns of problematized visibility make editorial framing particularly consequential: when LGBTQIA+ issues enter the news primarily through conflict and controversy, how that conflict is organized can further shape how audiences understand the issue.



Editorial framing and the **construction of meaning**

It is also important to consider the editorial structures that shape how these patterns of visibility are produced and presented. These structures determine how topics are selected, contextualized, and presented. In current affairs formats, they can influence how LGBTQIA+ issues are understood not only through the explicit claims made by participants, but also through the ways topics, voices, and disagreements are organised within the coverage itself.

The selection and distribution of voices can shape how audiences understand an issue before any individual argument is even presented. When LGBTQIA+ topics are primarily introduced as matters of public dispute, the existence of disagreement itself can become the central feature of the story, potentially overshadowing questions about lived experiences, empirical evidence, or the broader social context in which these debates occur. This dynamic can be understood as “two-sidesism” where organizing coverage around opposing viewpoints positions the representation of disagreement itself as a marker of journalistic objectivity.

Such formats may create an appearance of balance while giving less attention to differences in evidentiary support, social impact, or lived realities.

The analysis shows, for example, that transgender individuals are often present within media debates and discussions, and their continued inclusion remains an important aspect of representative coverage. However, the segments also show that they may still occupy a structurally unequal position within them. As illustrated by the example presented at the beginning of this report, a discussion framed around a “growing phenomenon” of gender transition placed multiple representatives of anti-transgender organizations and a detransitioner alongside a single transgender individual. The issue then is not simply whether transgender topics are addressed or whether transgender voices are included, but how those voices are positioned in relation to others participating in the discussion.

This organization of disagreement is also only one dimension of editorial framing. The analysis demonstrates how LGBTQIA+ issues can be placed within broader narratives that give the immediate topic a particular social or political meaning. A debate on the perceived “Islamization of the Netherlands,” for example, intertwined LGBTQIA+ rights with questions of immigration, religious values, and national identity. Coverage on transgender emancipation similarly connected gender-related healthcare debates with concerns that resources would become unavailable for others, particularly children. Likewise, debates on sexual education in schools framed LGBTQIA+ inclusion as a potential threat to children, with claims that young people are being encouraged by adults to engage with topics such as gender reassignment, anal sex, threesomes, or drag culture. Within these frames, the LGBTQIA+ community is not only discussed as a social group or policy subject but is positioned as a symbol in debates about changing social norms, morality, and the boundaries of acceptable public values. The effect is that

the specific experiences or policy questions under discussion can become secondary to the broader conflict in which they are situated. LGBTQIA+ issues consequently become legible not only as questions concerning particular people or policies, but as symbols within wider struggles over social and political change.

Visual framing is another part of this editorial process, but it will be considered separately in this report to foreground the particular role of images in meaning-making. Examining visual choices makes it possible to identify associations and patterns that may be less visible when attention is focused on spoken discourse alone. The analysis, therefore, turns to the visual editorial choices through which these framing logics may be reproduced, intensified, or disrupted.



Visual framing patterns

Let's go back to the very beginning of this report. *Why* is a video clip of a drag performer applying makeup used to introduce a news segment on a suspected arson attack targeting a bar associated with LGBTQIA+ solidarity? The connection is not evidential, but symbolic. It points towards a broader pattern in broadcast journalism where images are not always selected to document what happened, but rather to provide audiences with an immediate visual cue that the story relates to an LGBTQIA+ issue. This distinction can be understood through *anchored visuals*, which are images directly related to the topic under discussion, and *drift visuals*, where imagery functions primarily as a symbolic or generic illustration. The latter is especially prevalent here. Such images are effective, and affective, in an immediate sense. They are vivid, emotionally legible, and quickly understood by audiences, allowing broadcasters to signal “this is LGBTQIA+ related content” without explanation.

What this leads to is a gradual separation between narrative content and accompanying visuals whereby, over time, certain images become interchangeable markers of “LGBTQIA+ content” instead of

specific to what is being covered. Across segments, LGBTQIA+ topics are frequently represented through a limited repertoire of visual shorthand motifs (think Pride flags, Pride parades, drag performances, and rainbow everything). These editorial choices come with a cost. In some cases, this reliance on visually striking material can produce a subtly sensationalizing effect. Eye-catching imagery can heighten emotional salience and reinforce familiar associations, even when only loosely connected to the subject being reported. While this does not constitute misinformation, it can contribute to misleading contextualization, stereotyping, and a narrowing perception of how LGBTQIA+ communities are visually understood.



A related issue concerns the conflation of distinct identities and cultural practices in visual framing. Sexual orientation (e.g. gay, lesbian), gender identity (e.g. transgender, non-binary), and cultural expression or performance (e.g. drag) are conceptually different, yet are not consistently distinguished in visual representation. Studies from Maastricht University have shown that LGBTQIA+ representation in Dutch television often relies on simplified and stereotypical depictions, flattening distinctions between groups and lived experiences.⁴ Drag imagery in particular is often used as a generic signifier of LGBTQIA+ topics, regardless of its relevance to the specific content.

These patterns do not necessarily reflect deliberate editorial choices (though they might), but rather routine production practices likely shaped by time constraints, archival availability, image licensing costs, and audience readability. Their cumulative effect, however, is to structure LGBTQIA+ visibility in ways that privilege recognizability over specificity, shaping which associations become most readily available in public understanding and which forms of experience remain less visible.

⁴ Weimar, C., (2024). LGBTQ+ media representation in the Netherlands. Maastricht University. <https://blogs3.fasos.maastrichtuniversity.nl/EUS2517/fighting-for-lgbtq-plus-rights/2024/01/17/lgbtq-media-representation-in-the-netherlands/>



Summary of findings

Taken together, this report points to several interconnected patterns in how LGBTQIA+ issues become newsworthy:

- identities are frequently aggregated into broad categories;
- visibility is often concentrated around conflict, controversy, or exceptional events;
- editorial structures organize coverage through competing positions and wider ideological narratives;
- and visual choices can reinforce these associations through recurring symbolic shorthand.

These patterns matter because news and current affairs broadcasting does not simply reflect how social issues are understood; it also participates in making them publicly intelligible. Balanced representation involves more than ensuring that LGBTQIA+ people and perspectives are visible. It also requires attention to the contexts, relationships, and associations through which that visibility is constructed. Broadcasters do not simply reflect existing understandings of social issues, they also participate in shaping how those issues become publicly intelligible. And they do so through the selection and presentation of material. In this context, balanced representation involves more than ensuring that LGBTQIA+ people and perspectives are present. It also requires attention to the recurring discursive and visual associations that can make some understandings of LGBTQIA+ identities more readily recognizable than others.

The archival dimension is, therefore, not separate from the framing processes identified throughout this report. The materials preserved today are traces of the ways in which LGBTQIA+ communities were made visible, discussed, and understood at particular moments in time. At the same time, those preserved materials make it possible to examine how such representations shaped public discourse and to question the frames through which they were constructed. The archive does not simply preserve the history of representation, it also provides the means through which that history can be studied, contextualized, and reconsidered. Expanding the archival record contributes not only to preservation, but also to a broader understanding of how representations are formed, challenged, maintained, and transformed over time, shaping how future generations encounter LGBTQIA+ histories.



Images from the National Archives of the Netherlands (Nationaal Archief).

Sources: [Top](#), [Middle](#), [Bottom](#).



A call to archives

The discursive and visual patterns identified in this analysis raise important questions not only about the societal role of broadcasters, but also about the role of archives in preserving and shaping how these representations are understood over time. Audiovisual archives do not simply preserve media, they influence which images, narratives, and experiences remain accessible. Decisions surrounding collection, description, and discoverability play an important role in determining what becomes visible within the historical record.

The same framing patterns identified in Dutch news and current affairs broadcasting could also become embedded within archival structures. When LGBTQIA+ communities are predominantly represented through moments of controversy, political debate, or a limited set of symbolic images, these patterns risk being reproduced through the materials that are collected, described, and made retrievable. This does not mean that such materials lack historical value. Pride events, activism, political debates, and cultural performances are essential parts of LGBTQIA+ history. The challenge is that these forms of visibility cannot solely represent the breadth of LGBTQIA+ life. Expanding the archival record, therefore,

requires attention to the everyday, the personal, and the diversity of experiences that may be less visible within broadcast narratives.

Queering the Collection initiatives, such as those at the [Netherlands Institute for Sound & Vision](#) and [IHLIA](#), demonstrate how archives can actively respond to these challenges. By questioning existing collection practices, identifying gaps, improving discoverability, and foregrounding underrepresented histories, such projects can help move beyond the narrow frames through which LGBTQIA+ communities are often encountered. Importantly, this work is not just about adding more material to collections. Providing context around existing or new materials as well as making them accessible to researchers, journalists, and other users can enable a more critical understanding of how media representations are produced, circulated, and experienced, including the ways in which they may inform public understandings of LGBTQIA+ issues.

[Click here](#) to read about *Sound & Visions's Queering the Collection Symposium (in Dutch)*

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