

# Trans Scripts

## The Representation of Transgender Persons in the Media (1991-2016)



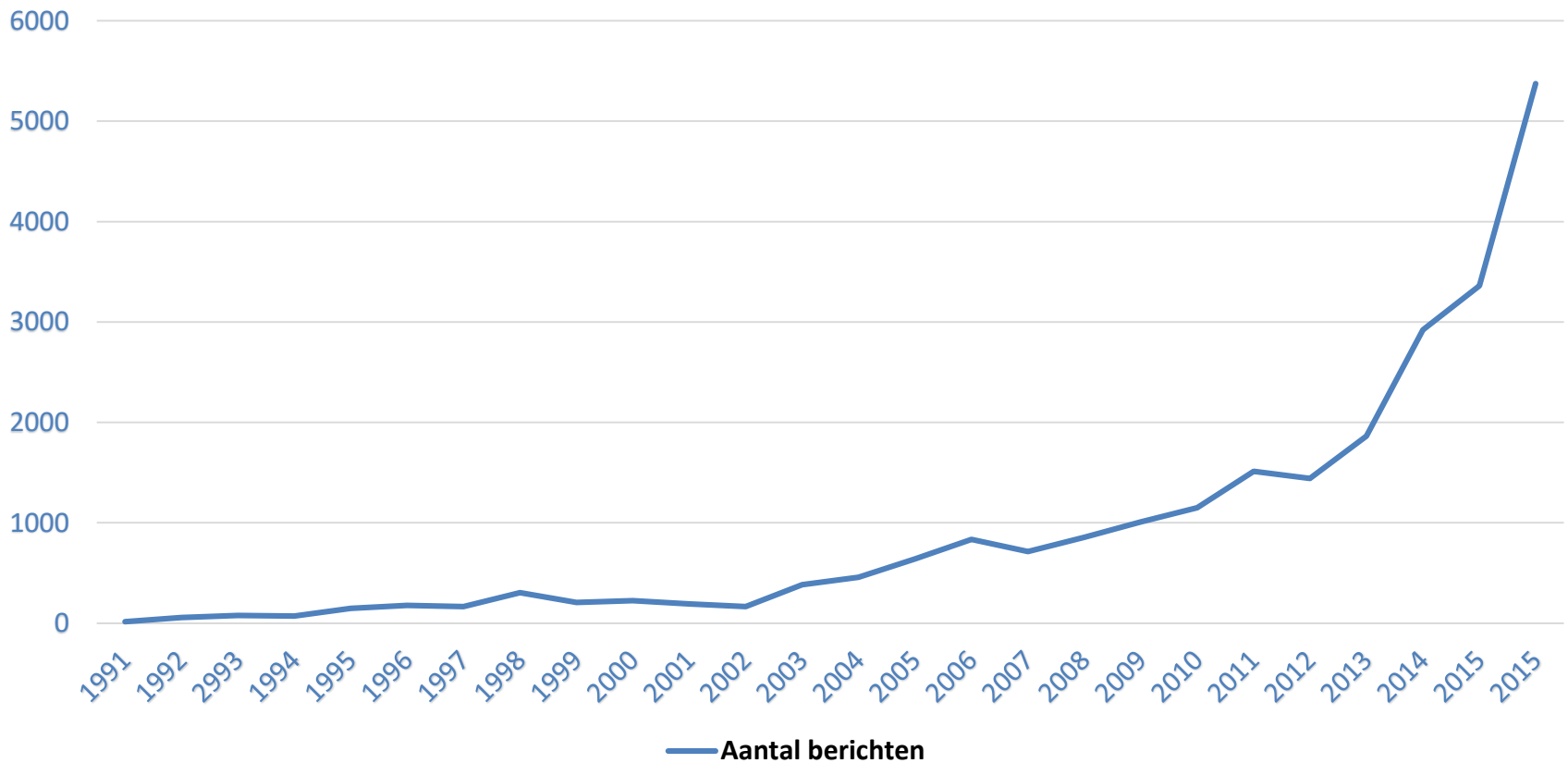
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Pokja gender, 2 November 2020

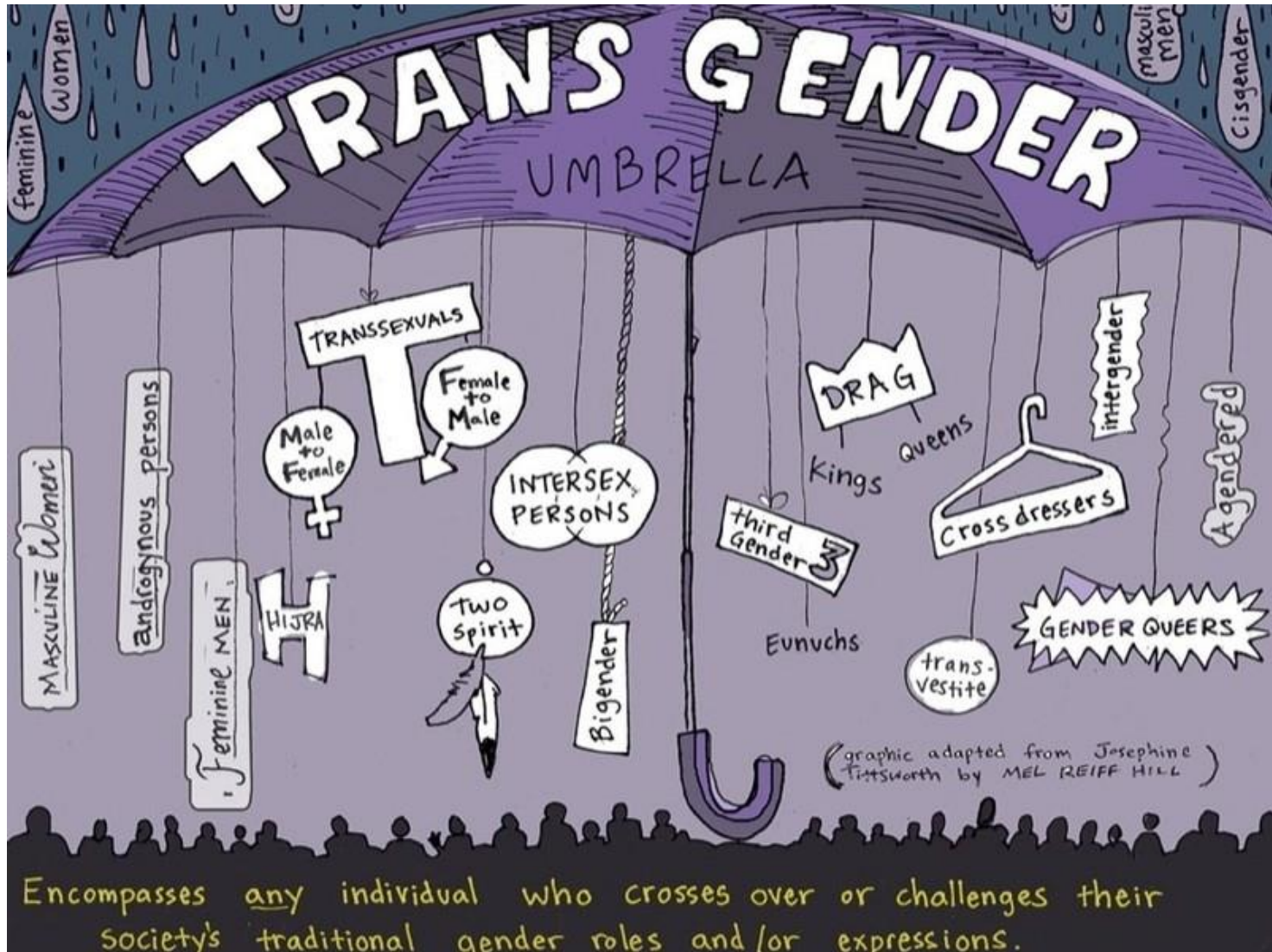
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# Representation in the Netherlands

Newspaper articles on transgender 1991-2016



# Transgender?



# Research project

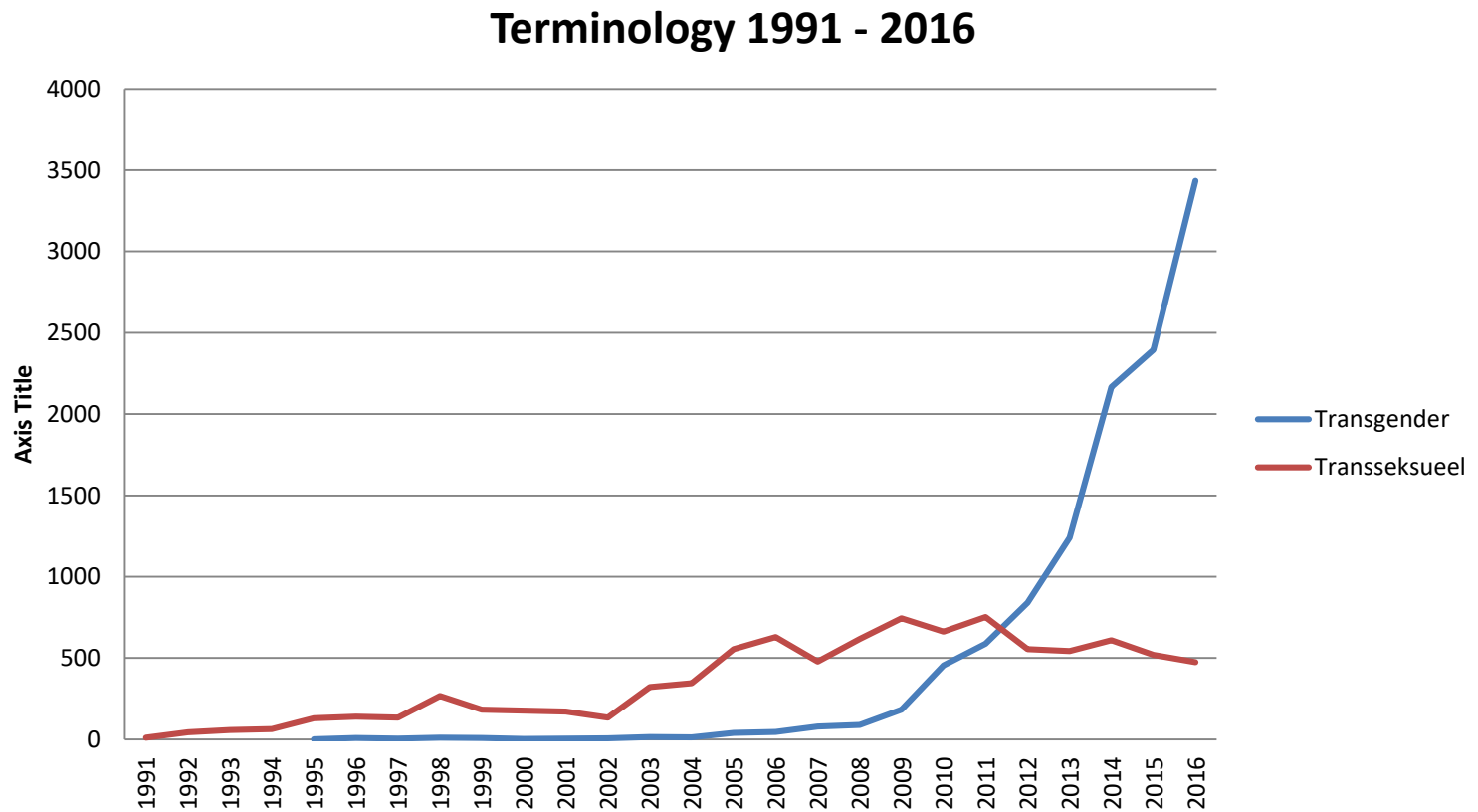
- Social acceptance of new ways of gender expression?
- Or reinforcing dominant, binary gender ideologies?

# Research design

- 1991 – 2016 (25 years)
- Three newspapers (*De Volkskrant, Trouw, Telegraaf*)
- Two TV shows (*Hij is een Zij, Love Me Gender*)
- Focus group

→ Looking for dominant and alternative transgender scripts

# Terminology



# Transgender scripts

The collection of possible roles, story lines, plots, supporting acts, protagonists and antagonists that together construct 'the transgender' as a public figure.

In other words: which stories are told about transgender people, by whom and with what purpose?

# Six scripts



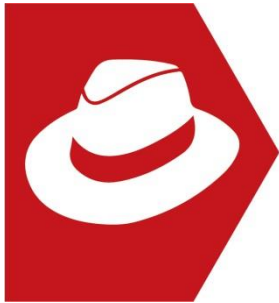
Successful trans



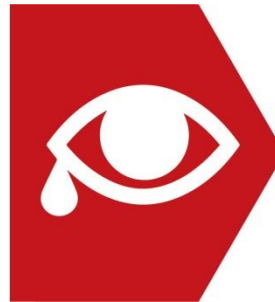
Pioneer



Pawn



Fringe figure



Victim



Fraud



# Successful trans



*Michiel is happy, very happy. Because of the sex change, everything in his life seems to fall into place. (De Volkskrant, 06-18-2003)*

- Transition
- Focus on the body
- Before / after
- Emphasis on “passing”
- Supporting role of family, friends and medical staff
- Where is the political in personal narrative?



# Pioneer

*The versatility, mastery and acting qualities of the performers are outstanding. The statement in itself –that masculine and feminine are fluid concepts, shaped by clichés and in the eye of the beholder– are full of complex implications. (De Volkskrant, 22-06-2015)*

- Vanguard role
- Art
- Extending to professionals
- What about actual trans lives?

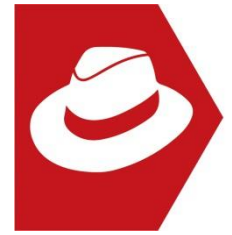


# Pawn

*The news opens with Moroccan bullies who force a transsexual woman to move out of her house: any well-integrated Moroccan ought to feel ashamed about that. Try it the other way around: would Dutch kids go off like that in Al-Hoceima? (Telegraaf, 15-04-2009)*

- Construction of 'tolerant' Dutch national identity
- Vs. Muslims, Eastern Europe
- 'Linkse hobby'
- Masks transphobia among white, secular Dutch

# Fringe Figure



*Ten years and three hundred interviews later he has expanded the club with kids who have Down syndrome, autistic kids, kids who are both physically and mentally disabled, schizophrenic youth, kids who were born in the wrong body and who want to change their sex, kids of rapists, young criminals and even prodigies. (De Volkskrant, 11-30-2013)*

- Trans people in world of organized crime/ the social margins
- ‘Spicing up the story’
- Emphasis on the exotic, the strange, the ‘freakishness’
- Gender fluidity is possible (even preferred) but relegates trans persons to the margins



# Victim

*“I was bullied by those around me and my father, too, thought I was weird.” (Telegraaf, 22-10-2008)*

- Vulnerability
- Extra risks: non-Dutch nationality, being of colour, being a sex worker, being religious
- Empathy
- “Stuckness”: What happens to trans agency?

# Fraud



*Karin Kienhuis from Groningen had never felt as powerless as in the arms of Ednanci Silva. 'I was slaughtered.' The Brazilian is a transsexual and has been active in the women's competition for several years now. She still walks like a man and throws like a dude. 'I was stuck, she just pulled me in any direction she pleased', said Kienhuis after she lost her match in the weight division up to 72 kilos. (De Volkskrant, 10-10-1997)*

- “Gender deceivers”
- Pronouns
- ‘Actually’
- Chelsea Manning

# Alternative scripts

- Continuity
- Non binary
- Post-op
- 'Whatever'

# Trends

- ‘Successful trans’ presently most dominant script
- “Politicization” of trans people
- Overall, a shift is noted...
  - ...from the representation of ‘tragic’ trans people in the margins of society,
  - to a focus on trans people as the spectacles of showbiz and the mysteriously ambiguous characters in the arts,
  - to, presently, a perspective on trans people as individuals who may lead a ‘normal’ life when they transition ‘successfully’
  - *and* whose existence is increasingly becoming of social and political significance.



# Who gets to be 'successful'?

Some trans people are welcomed into the script of 'successful trans' while others are pushed into less affirming or non-affirming scripts.

Assumptions on:

- Gender
- Age
- Race / ethnicity
- National identity

# Who gets to represent transgender people?

- Commercial interests
- Role of producer, director, host
- Mainstreaming trans productions (e.g. The Transketeers)?

# Questions/ discussion