

Understanding

non-binary

people

A guide for the media

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What non-binary people say...

“Show us in our spaces, show our art and our activism.”

“Include us in the media representation of the world. We exist in society so we should exist in places where society is portrayed .”

“Gender variety of all kinds should be a part of historical, sociological and political programming and dramas.”

“Show us as 'real' people, with the same dignity and respect as binary gender people. Show that our non-binary identity is just as valid as binary gender identities, we aren't just uncertain, indecisive or attention-seeking. “

What are non-binary people?

Non-binary is an umbrella term used to describe people who do not feel male or female. They may feel that they embody elements of both, that they are somewhere in between or that they are something different.

Non-binary people can still have a strong sense of gender. They can find it very distressing to be told that they must identify themselves as male or female. Many identify as transgender.

Being non-binary is different from being intersex. Most non-binary people are born with bodies that look conventionally male or female, but grow up feeling different. Like most people, they usually develop a sense of gender between the ages of three and seven. They may not describe themselves as different until a lot later because they don't have the words with which to do so, and because there are very few visible non-binary role models.

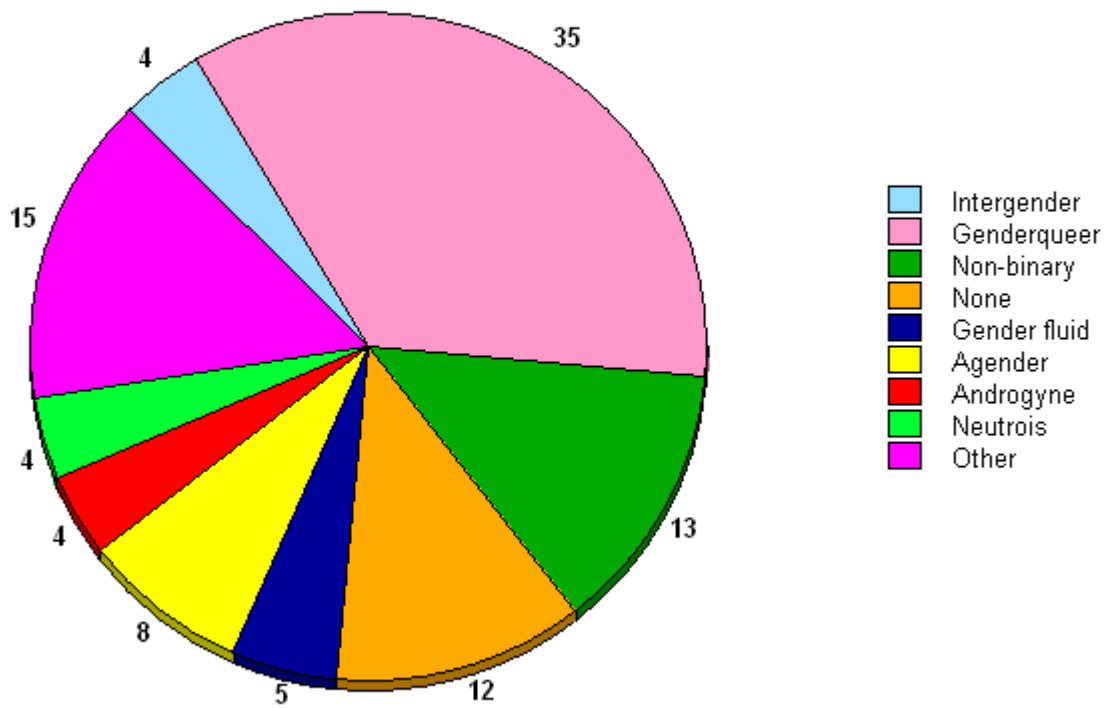
Being non-binary has nothing to do with sexual orientation. Non-binary people have the same range of preferences as other people.

Some non-binary people choose to have surgery or take hormones to alter their bodies and help them feel more comfortable. Others don't feel that this could help them, or are satisfied with their bodies as they are. Some present themselves androgynously while others look conventionally male or female but may still 'come out' by discussing their identities openly. Many try to blend in because they don't want to risk rejection.

As an increasing number of non-binary people choose to live their lives openly and push for official recognition, their stories are becoming visible in the media.



Self-identification



Seph, mathematician

"I often feel that people like me are invisible."

What's in a name?

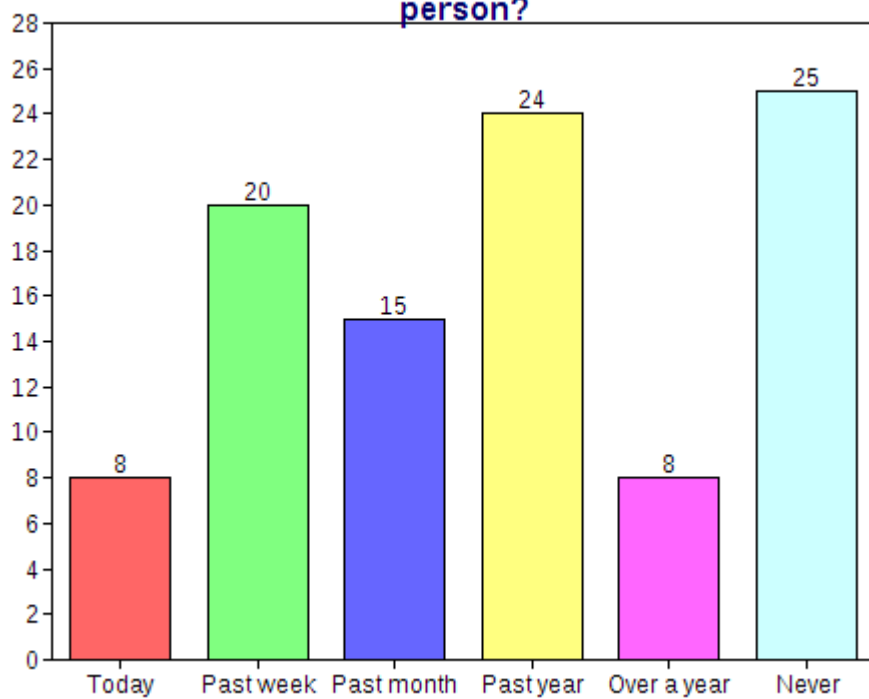
As this chart shows, non-binary people use a range of different terms to describe themselves. We recommend that, where possible, journalists ask them what they prefer. Most such people are neutral about the term *non-binary* so this can be used as default.

Pronouns

Most non-binary people do not feel it's appropriate for people to refer to them as *he* or *she*. Various new pronouns are used to solve this problem, including *xie* and *xir*, *zie* and *zir*, and *sie* and *hir*. Where using a subject's preferred pronouns is not possible, we recommend using singular *they*. This usage, where gender is unclear, goes back a long way in English. It has enjoyed the support of literary figures like Jane Austen and today it is used by major organisations like Facebook. It is widely accepted and understood.



When did you last see a media item about a non-binary person?



Ludo, PhD candidate

"I am a non-binary trans* masculine person. I exist. My identity cannot be erased."

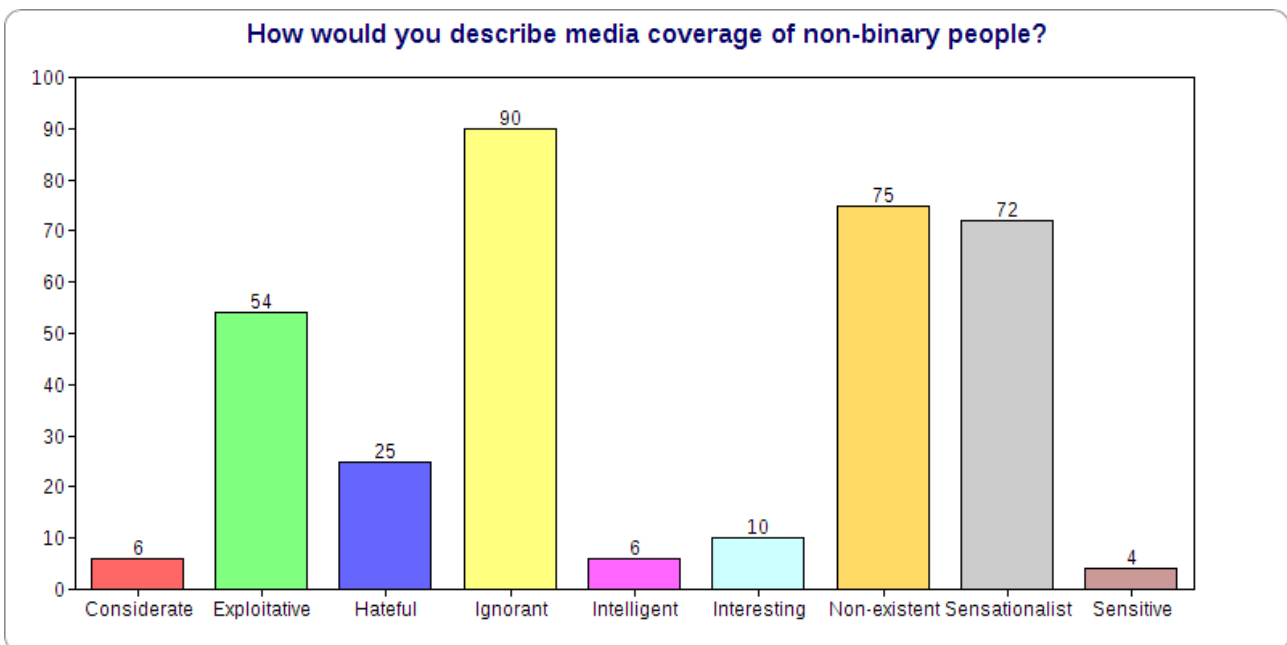
Invisibility

Many non-binary people tell us that they feel ignored by the media.

"Allow us to exist in stories and media, don't sensationalise the fact that we are non-binary, give us stories outside of our identities and cast non-binary people to play non-binary people. Don't make jokes about not being able to tell someone's gender, or belittle non-binary people's experience ," said one of the people we spoke to.

"It would be a massive step forward to see mention of non-binary people in the mainstream media, without their gender being the sole focus of the coverage," said another.

86% of the people we spoke to said it would help them to have visible non-binary role models in the media. This rose to 92% when it we asked if it would have been helpful when growing up.



As this chart shows, most non-binary people are unhappy about the way they are represented in the media.

Alex, psychotherapist,
photographer, activist

"I get to live successfully
as a non-op transwoman
and it works."

Current coverage

Many non-binary people feel that current media coverage misses the mark, with 80% of those we spoke to describing it as *bad* or *very bad*. 74% said that they think this is a subject the media knows nothing about. Several told us that they think it's time big media organisations made the effort to speak to non-binary people directly in order to improve their understanding.

One of the people we spoke to wanted "more thoughtful exploration like BBC Radio 4's Analysis episode *Who Says I'm A Woman?*"

"I think non-binary gender is a collection of identities that much of the public would be able to understand, and perhaps even identify with, if positive and accurate dialogue surrounding these identities was present in the media," said another.



Non-binary icons

There are already famous people who cross gender boundaries. We asked non-binary people to name some of their role models.

Eddie Izzard
Brian Molko Pete Burns Del LaGrace Volcano
Richard O'Brien Anthony Hegarty
Grayson:Perry
Kate Bornstein Norrie May Welby B. Scott
Dennis Rodman Morrissey CN Lester Andrej Pejic
Justin Vivian Bond
Rae Spoon

Polly, married 38 years

"Non-binary is almost invisible to the media, except for human interest/freak show stories."

Points to note

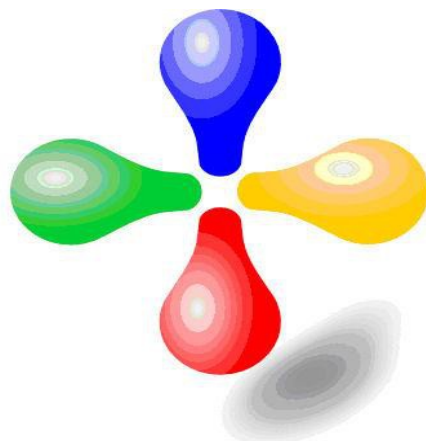
- * Most non-binary people do not want to do away with gender. They just want their own genders to be respected.
- * Having a non-binary identity is something innate within a person. It is not simply a lifestyle choice.
- * Non-binary people face an elevated risk of street harassment and assault. This is partly due to poor public understanding.
- * Countries like India and Australia legally recognise genders other than male and female.
- * British businesses and local councils are increasingly acknowledging multiple gender options.

Find out more

If you're thinking of publishing an article or making a programme about non-binary people, Trans Media Watch can provide step by step advice and support.

If you would like to improve the general understanding of these issues within your newsroom, production company or agency, we can provide training.

Trans Media Watch is committed to ensuring that all kinds of transgender people, including non-binary people, are represented in the media with accuracy, dignity and respect.



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