

## NON-BINARY IDENTIFICATION AS A SOCIAL ELEVATOR OF YOUTH

Alexander S. Stoyanov\*

Department of Advertising and Public Relations EMERCOM Academy of Civil Defense,  
Moscow, Russia  
Institute of Public Administration, Law and Social and Humanities of the Pridnestrovskiy State  
University T.G. Shevchenko, Tiraspol, Pridnestrovie, Russia

### Abstract

This article discusses and analyzes the problem of non-binary identification as a possible social lift for youth. The main goal is to identify the impact of the emergence and spread of non-binary identification on the social status of young people. When working on the article, the following methods were used: analysis of scientific sources, formalized interviews with subsequent interpretation of the data. The article analyzes the degree of success of non-binary people in the eyes of society. As a result, it was concluded that non-binary identification is accessible as a social lift among young people. In the course of the study, such signs of a social lift in non-binary identification were noted: recognition and discussion non-binary people (16 out of 17 respondents noted these signs); increase in the number of subscribers (9 out of 17) and income level (10 out of 17).

### Keywords

*Gender, influence, non-binary identification, social lift, mainstream, youth, propaganda.*

---

**Citation:** Stoyanov, A.S. (2024). Non-binary identification as a social elevator of youth. *Social Issues*, 2(3), 185-192. <https://doi.org/10.30546/SI.2024.3.3.128>

---

## 1. Introduction

Recently, the so-called gender ideology, according to which every person has the freedom to choose their own gender, has been widely discussed, especially in Europe and the United States. And as information about the possibility of gender change spreads, the number of people wishing to change gender increases, which indicates not an increase in the frequency of transsexualism, but the heterogeneity of conditions within which such ideas can arise (Kibrick & Yagubov, 2018). This growth is due to other reasons besides non-binary itself, for example, the desire of people to use this trend as a social elevator. That is, the study of problems of social mobility has an increasing tendency due to the emergence of new areas of its manifestation (gender, identification of belonging) (Skok *et al.*, 2020).

### *Literature review*

In order to better understand the topic, you should pay attention to the term “non-binary” itself and analyze this phenomenon. The main difference between non-binary people is that they have a single expression of similar features as binary people or specific rules and classifications. The main idea of non-binary people is not to follow a certain

---

\*Corresponding Author: Alexander S. Stoyanov, e-mail: [stoianoff@mail.ru](mailto:stoianoff@mail.ru)

gender role, but to express their individual characteristics. Such people do not perceive themselves as women or men; they may also be in both categories at the same time, according to their own perception or they may belong to the third category. An individual is a carrier of any traits in completely different configurations. The unisex phenomenon allows us not to divide the world into male and female; it suggests that every person has both feminine and masculine qualities that do not depend in any way on biological sex and gender. It follows that literally all characteristic features are depersonalized and become universal (Kovalev, 2021). Thus, global brands idealize non-binary people, creating a fashion cult out of them. Thus showing that non-traditional orientations are free to express themselves. In recent years, many brands, such as Comme des Garçons and Saint Laurent, have turned to unconventional and unconventional creative strategies. They delve into androgyny and unisex clothing, transforming gender from a tool of demarcation into an endless, disconnected space for self-expression. The increased interest in diverse gender relationships shows the fashion industry's desire to explore the gender spectrum (Movchanova, 2019). It is necessary to additionally pay attention to the fact that the environment is created precisely from the consideration of binary gender identity, which means that in order to change the status of non-binary gender identification it is necessary to use neutral pronouns. The use of gender-neutral pronouns gives reason to believe that with the help of language the struggle for the right of self-identification and self-expression in society is carried out. With their help, a certain desire to change the established binary gender identity is realized (Tsikhiselli, 2021).

The formation of gender identity occurs from adolescence and is also one of the main developmental tasks that arise during puberty. Adolescents and young adults develop their identities by actively exploring the options available to them and taking on specific roles in society. Teenagers are more susceptible to the influence of external factors than adults. Young people have become more active in advocating for the expansion of ideas about gender beyond the traditional categories of man and woman. Thus, a study was conducted among 135,760 adolescents under 21 years of age. The prevalence of opposite gender identification was 0.6% and non-binary identification was 3.3%. For boys, non-binary gender identity increased from early to late adolescence, while among girls, opposite-sex and non-binary identification decreased from younger to older age groups (Kaltiala-Heino & Lindberg, 2019). A study was also conducted among the older age category. In a UK survey of 14,320 transgender people, almost 52% identified as non-binary. In a Canadian study of 839 transgender people, 41% identified as non-binary (Monro, 2019). As a result, at the moment we can say that non-binary people are acquiring new positions in society, popularizing the trend of non-binary identification.

As a result of the growing popularity of this identification, many non-binary people are acquiring a variety of rights and opportunities in different states. Over time, this trend is gaining more and more popularity among young people. The growing number of people publicly declaring non-binary identification is characterized by such Western transgender figures as actress Laverne Cox, athlete and media figure Caitlyn Jenner, directors Lana and Lilly Wachowski and others speaking publicly about their orientation (Zimman, 2017). For many, public and successful people are idols and role models, including those of unconventional orientation. Young people react quite quickly and actively to such a promoted appeal, become interested in the information and are easily inclined to the point of view presented. Perceiving this direction as an opportunity to

express oneself, show individuality and concentrate on self-development, which is an important part of the life of this society.

Ideas about non-binary identification come from Western countries. In some of them, at the moment, it is possible to note the possibility not to officially recognize one's gender or to indicate the gender that is desired for the individual. This approach helps gay people to have an easier time living in society and finding a position at work. Additionally, from a legislative point of view, it is possible to ensure the dissemination of non-binary identification, including from an official point of view. Not just in the UK or US, but throughout the world, LGBT+ people are working to ensure the inclusion of transgender people in the workplace and in everyday life, as well as in national legislation. (Gibson & Fernandez, 2018). Currently, the media serve as a solid basis for the creation and transmission of social information in society. The media communicates the idea of non-binary people to readers by showing that they are physically no different from heterosexual people. Social media offers readers an excellent opportunity to gain a comprehensive understanding of transgender people, issues that are inseparable from the broader social context and their linguistic representation. A variety of terms are used to describe people whose biological sex does not match their personality gender. Gender identity is closely related to gender socialization and gender expression (Koshkarova, 2019). On the one hand, non-binary people are already acquiring a certain status and rights in society. On the other hand, non-binary individuals are still subject to violence in society.

The social lift for young people can be varied. Non-binary people are characterized by both significant growth in the eyes of society and serious problems with acceptance from the outside world. As a result, at the moment we can say that non-binary identification in any situation changes the position of each individual in society. Such gender identities beyond the binary of female and male are increasingly recognized in legal, medical and psychological systems and diagnostic classifications in line with the emergence and support of these groups of people. But at the same time, people of this gender remain at risk of victimization and minority stress or marginalization as a result of discrimination (Richards, 2016). At the same time, it is necessary to pay attention to the fact that such a social lift can help establish a position in society for non-binary people, but much more often, it causes a number of psychological problems and difficulties in understanding from others, especially when it comes to the CIS countries. People's thinking, generated by stereotypes, creates situations of discrimination based on sexual orientation, which manifest themselves in various spheres of society (Vinogradova, 2021). Society's rejection of non-binary people is becoming a pressing problem and causes rejection, even to the point of complete separation from society. In such a situation, it is necessary to pay attention directly to the difficulties that non-binary identification causes. Transgenderism is perceived as a mental illness, something shameful or perverted. Transgender people are often forced to hide their problems and lead double lives to avoid discrimination. It is worth noting that the state practically does not provide support to such people and their rights and freedoms are constantly violated (Ushkova *et al.*, 2017).

Thus, the instability, dynamism, of a developing social system forms a set of "challenges" that are relevant for society as a subject of social action, each time solving a dilemma for itself: to take initiative or to refrain from it (Klimov, 2016). Non-binary identification is directly related to perception in society, which means it can be a social lift. This is especially true for young people, whose position in society is unstable and dynamic. Nevertheless, such people are gaining wide popularity, even among their friends

they are actively discussed. Therefore, some, in order to increase their popularity and social status, even deliberately classify themselves as “gay”, just to gain fame and success (Zorina, 2015).

## 2. Materials and methods

To identify the influence of non-binary identifications on changes in social status among young people, we used a formalized interview method. During the study, 17 respondents were interviewed. Most of them have not decided on their gender (10 out of 17) and only a part considers themselves a woman (2 out of 17) or a man (2 out of 17); people with the following types of non-binary identification were also interviewed: agender, catgender, enby - all these identities are outside the gender binary. The age of most of the respondents was 17-20 years (14 out of 17) and 20-25 years (3 out of 17). The respondents are residents of Moscow (7 out of 17), a significant number are from St. Petersburg (3 out of 17). Respondents from other 6 cities of Russia were also surveyed: Novosibirsk, Yekaterinburg, Voronezh, Tula, Syktyvkar, Volgograd, as well as from Ukraine - the city of Lvov.

## 3. Research results

Everyone understands the term “Non-binary person” in their own way: for the majority of respondents, it is a person who does not identify themselves as a man or a woman or exclusively as one of these two genders (13 out of 17); some respondents understand it as persons born “not in their body”, in the process of socialization, who decided to change gender (2 out of 17). This definition is not reliable, since a non-binary person is “any person whose gender identity goes beyond the binary gender system”, that is, there is no specific state: man or woman” - this answer was obtained during the interview. Also during the research, an answer was given regarding the phrase “not in one’s body”; one of the respondents states that “everyone perceives the term non-binary differently. Generally speaking, non-binary is an identity outside of the binary system. An “NB” person can feel dysphoric or feel comfortable in their body (it all depends on the person themselves)”. Thus, collecting all the definitions from the interview - a non-binary person is any person whose gender falls outside the binary system. Representatives of non-binary gender identification experience themselves differently in their bodies, just like binary people in general.

Non-binary identity develops at different age stages: 8 out of 17 respondents realized that they were non-binary people in adolescence (12-16 years); 5 out of 17 in childhood (3-11 years); in their youth (17-21 years old), 2 out of 17 interviewees realized they were non-binary; the same number of people found it difficult to answer. Consequently, adolescents develop their identities by actively exploring the options available to them and adopting certain roles in society. Adolescents are more susceptible to the influence of external factors than adults (aged 21 years or older).

External factors are the channels through which adolescents receive information. Answering the question “Where did you first hear about the term “Non-binary?” more than half of the respondents (10 out of 17) answered “through social media networks non-binary persons”, a significant portion heard it from friends (4 out of 17) and the least number of respondents heard the term through television (2 out of 17). Also during the study, the answer was received: “A very long time ago I began to teach myself gender theory. I learned about the term non-binary during that period”. Most likely, the training

took place among the popular channels described above. Thus, media personalities, who most often have a large audience on social networks, influence the formation of gender identification, showing by their own example: their life, achievements, success.

Speaking about media presence, it is worth noting that many respondents also have their own audience, that is, they can be considered public figures. 5 out of 17 respondents have up to 3 thousand subscribers; the same number of people (5 out of 17) have from 3 to 5 thousand subscribers. 3 out of 17 non-binary people have 10-30 thousand followers, over a hundred thousand are interested in social networks, 2 out of 17 respondents. Also 30-100 thousand are subscribed to 2 out of 17 interviewees. Like any other media persons, they can influence the formation of gender identification.

The target audience also interacts with bloggers and provides feedback in return. The majority of respondents (8 out of 17) are more likely to feel support from subscribers than not. 4 out of 17 definitely feel supported, 3 out of 17 answered no rather than yes and 2 out of 17 do not feel supported at all. In this way, subscribers of non-binary people provide feedback, allowing the development of non-binary identification on social networks, supporting and raising the self-esteem of the blogger. It also has a positive effect on disseminating information about non-binary people and increases general awareness of the population on this issue.

Each non-binary person interviewed went through the process of publicly acknowledging their gender identity, followed by consequences. Answering the question “What changed in your life after publicly admitting your non-binary identity”, non-binary people, first of all, noted that after recognition, the number of subscribers increased (9 out of 17), their social circle grew and they also became interesting to other people (7 of 17). Of no small importance for gay bloggers is the level of income, as the survey showed, it has increased (5 out of 17). However, there are also negative aspects - the circle of friends has decreased for 5 out of 17 respondents, as well as communication with parents (6 out of 17). In equal percentages, respondents chose the following options: one respondent shared his story: Accepting your identity is never easy. Everyone has a different experience after coming out. For me, this greatly changed everything in my life (from my social circle to understanding what I am comfortable and not comfortable with) (1 out of 17), self-acceptance (1 out of 17) and invitations to public events (1 out of 17). Thus, public recognition led to the arrival of a new target audience and subsequently recognition on the Internet. Along with this, a negative impact was also clearly visible. It can be said that after coming out publicly, a non-binary person usually faces conflicting consequences.

Answering the question “Are you being discussed (at school/at work/at college) because you are non-binary?”, the respondents answered as follows. As the study showed, 8 out of 17 respondents claim that they are being discussed because they are non-binary, (4 out of 17) doubtfully answered, more likely yes than no and in an equal percentage of respondents confidently answered no (2 out of 17) and found it difficult to answer this question (2 of 17). Nevertheless, such people become widely popular, even among their friends and are actively discussed.

Beyond discussion, non-binary people are recognized in public spaces. Respondents claim that they have been recognized at least a couple of times in their lives (5 out of 17), several times a year (4 out of 17) and several times a month (4 out of 17), as respondents answered - they are recognized in public places. And only 2 out of 17 people noted their recognition every day. By recognizing a non-binary gender identity, a person can achieve success through popularity by attracting public attention.



According to the data obtained during the study, the majority of respondents (9 out of 17) believe that the development of gender identification was most influenced by characters from TV series, films, a little less the environment (6 out of 17) and media personalities (5 out of 17). And also in equal quantitative proportions, respondents were inspired by bloggers non-binary identity (3 out of 17), the prospect of earning more money (3 out of 17), the desire to get into the mainstream non-binary, for the sake of popularity and reaching more subscribers on social networks (3 out of 17). The answer was also given that “one does not become a non-binary person, non-binary has always been there, it’s just that people do not immediately accept or understand themselves (mostly due to the lack of gender theory in teaching children and people of other ages)”.

The majority of respondents (5 out of 17) claim that they follow the success of other non-binary people every day, which indicates a desire to be like this person or even more successful than him, copying ideas from him on his blog. In equal quantitative proportions (3 out of 17) they observe others once every few days, once a month. And only 2 out of 17 have never done this.

**Table 1.**

Question 1	Question 2	Question 3
Do you think your following would increase if you were cast by Marvel for Ironheart (Marvel is casting non-binary people for the 2023 series)?	Do you think the number of subscribers will increase if you are invited to the casting of the voice of a non-binary Disney character (Disney Studio presented the first non-binary character in its long history - the debut took place as part of the popular children's animated series “The Owl House”)?	Do you think the number of subscribers will increase if a TV presenter invites you to a talk broadcast both on television and on Internet platforms (You-Tube), with the aim of interviewing you about your non-binary identity? Would you agree?
Yes (3 out of 17)	Yes (8 out of 17)	Yes (7 out of 17)
More likely yes than no (8 out of 17)	More likely yes than no (3 out of 17)	More likely yes than no (4 out of 17)
More likely no than yes (1 of 17)	More likely no than yes (1 of 17)	More likely no than yes (0)
I would not go to the casting (4 out of 17)	I would not go to the casting (4 out of 17)	I would not go to the casting (5 out of 17)
Difficult to answer (1 of 17)	Difficult to answer (0)	Difficult to answer (0)

Answering a number of questions related to an interest in increasing the number of subscribers and reconciling roles in various castings (Table 1).

Question 1: respondents with doubt answered yes, the number of subscribers will increase rather than no (8 out of 17), a significant number would refuse to go to the casting (4 out of 17). Most likely, these answers are related to numerous parallel roles in the series, which means there is a possibility that the character will not be noticed in it.

Similar indicators were observed in the following: in the second question, 8 out of 17 confidently claim that after voice acting in the animated series, the number of their subscribers will increase, however, the same number of respondents (4 out of 17) would not express a desire to go to this casting.

Answering the last question in this series (3), the opinion remained almost identical: 7 out of 17 would go to the casting in order to increase the number of

subscribers, 5 out of 17 would not go to the casting. The increase in the last percentage in the answers may be associated with the expectation of negative comments, but nevertheless, the majority are ready for this, since they believe that any discussion will entail a number of disputes and therefore interest.

Non-binary bloggers have the opportunity to monetize their content. Answering the question “Due to public recognition of your non-binary identity, have you begun to earn more?”, The respondents answered as follows. Mostly, respondents claim that income rather remained the same (6 out of 17) and the opinion was equally divided between yes, income increased, but not by much and no, income remained stable (4 out of 17). However, for some respondents, their income increased several times (2 out of 17). One interviewee found it difficult to answer this question. Thus, due to the increase in popularity through the recognition of one’s non-binary identity, it is possible to monetize one’s blog.

Non-binary gender identification is currently at the peak of popularity among young people. Respondents were asked a provocative question: “If non-binary ceases to be mainstream, will you stop considering/calling yourself such?” 11 out of 17 interviewees clearly believe that they will not stop being non-binary even if it ceases to be mainstream, while 5 out of 17 people are unsure whether they are willing to continue to adhere to a non-binary gender identification or not. Also during the research, the opinion was revealed - “calling any identity mainstream is transphobia / homophobia / queerphobia. Of course, there is a possibility that a person can change the label, since the “adventure in finding gender” can last a very long time”. Consequently, there is a possibility that gender identification will be replaced after the cessation of the mainstream, but respondents doubt this, since non-binary is only gaining popularity among young people.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Study revealed that the majority of non-binary people gained recognition in society (16 out of 17) participants were recognized on the street or in public places and active discussion of their gender identification (12 out of 17) respondents were discussed in schools/at work/at institute because of their non-binary nature. After the recognition, the circle of friends and acquaintances also increased (7 out of 17) and gained popularity.

After recognizing non-binary identification publicly, the number of followers on social networks increased (9 out of 17), which resulted in an increase in earnings (10 out of 17). Respondents began to be invited to public events as main characters, as well as guests and experts.

The majority of non-binary people are willing to star in TV series (11 out of 17), voice characters in cartoons (11 out of 17) and talk about their non-binary identity both on television and on social media platforms (11 out of 17). The respondents are not afraid of criticism; rather, on the contrary, they want to be noticed and discussed in society.

Thus, the Social Elevator is opening up to non-binary people. Thanks to the recognition of non-binary gender identification, a person, attracting public attention, can achieve serious success through popularity.

Non-binary people understand that it is now mainstream to be “different” from everyone else, so they have no doubt that this fashion for non-binary will continue for a long time. But nevertheless, if their popularity declines, they are ready to continue searching for the topics under discussion, trying on different roles and gender identifications.

## Acknowledgment

The author is grateful to Marya Aleksandrovna Permyakova for her assistance in collecting and initially processing information.

## References

- Gibson, S., Fernandez, J. (2018). *Gender Diversity and Non-Binary Inclusion in the Workplace: The Essential Guide for Employers*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 10.
- Hassan, I., Nadeem, S. & Ahmed, T. (2024). Influence of emotional intelligence on teenagers' contentment: Investigating the mediating influence of self-esteem. *Socium*, 1(2), 128-138 <https://doi.org/10.62476/soc12127>
- Kaltiala-Heino, R., Lindberg, N. (2019). Gender identities in the adolescent population: Methodological issues and prevalence across age groups. *European Psychiatry*, 55, 61-66.
- Kibrik, N.D., Yagubov, M.I. (2018). Clinical features of gender identity disorders and patient management tactics. *Andrology and Genital Surgery*, 19(3), 35-41.
- Klimov, I.A. (2016). Social mobilization - morphogenesis of structure and action. *Russia Transforming Society*, 328-333. Moscow: KANON-press-C. (In Russian).
- Koshkarova, N.N. (2019). Media coverage of transgender discourse. *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioral Sciences*. London, United Kingdom, 350-357.
- Kovalev, S.S. (2021). Gender identity in modern Western culture: The phenomenon of unisex. *Sciences*, 1-51. <https://nauchkor.ru/uploads/documents/60d5ec19e4dde5000108c2a9.pdf>
- Monro, S. (2019). Non-binary and genderqueer: An overview of the field. *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 20(2-3), 126-131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15532739.2018.1538841>  
Access date: 03.13.2024.
- Movchanova, I.Z. (2019). Analysis of gender markers in modern fashion. *Design and Art - Strategy of Design Culture of the 21st Century*. Moscow: Federal State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Education Russian State University named after A.N. Kosygin, 273-276. (In Russian).
- Richards, C. (2016). Non-binary or genderqueer gender. *International Review of Psychiatry*, 28(1), 95-102. <https://doi.org/10.3109/09540261.2015.1106446> (Access date: 03.13.2024).
- Skok, N., Akvazba, E., Koltunova, Y. & Zinenkova, A. (2020). Channels and lifts of social mobility of modern young townfolk. *Amazonia Investiga*, 9(30), 24-31.
- Tsikhiseli, M.P. (2021). Gender-neutral pronouns in modern English (based on Twitter). *Collegium Linguisticum-2021*. Moscow: Moscow State Linguistic University, 111-118.
- Ushkova, I.V., Kireev, E.Yu. (2017). Transgender in modern Russian society. Monitoring of public opinion. *Economic and Social Changes*, 2(138), 82-96.
- Vinogradova, A.A. (2021). Legal status of sexual minorities in modern Russia. Problems of development of modern society. *Collection of Scientific Articles of the 6th All-Russian National Scientific and Practical Conference*. Kursk: Southwest State University, 179-182.
- Zimman, L. (2017). Transgender language reform: Some challenges and strategies for promoting trans-affirming, gender-inclusive language. *Journal of Language and Discrimination*, 1(1), 84-105.
- Zorina, E.A. (2015). Channels of social mobility of the individual: Established and newly emerged. *Russian Journal of Education and Psychology*, 53(9), 264-271. <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/kanalny-sotsialnoy-mobilnosti-lichnosti-ustoyavshiesya-i-vnov-poyavivshiesya>

**Received:** 23 August 2024;

**Accepted:** 23 September 2024;

**Published:** 24 October 2024.