

PRONOUNS / NON-BINARY

Singer Demi Lovato has announced they identify as non-binary and is changing their pronouns from she/her to they/them.

Lovato took to Twitter to reveal the news and said: “Today is a day I’m so happy to share more of my life with you all. I am proud to let you know that I identify as non-binary and will officially be changing my pronouns to they/them moving forward.”

In a video accompanying the tweet, they added: “Over the past year and a half, I’ve been doing some healing and self-reflective work, and through this work I’ve had the revelation that I identify as non-binary.

“I feel this best represents the fluidity I feel in my gender expression.”

Last year, singer Sam Smith also revealed they identify as non-binary and genderqueer in an interview with Jameela Jamil on Instagram.

But, what exactly does it mean to be non-binary?

While Smith defined the term as a “mixture of all different things”, revealing that they don’t identify as “male or female”, non-binary can mean different things to different people.

Here, we take a look at the definition of the term, explore how it differs to being transgender and reveal what you can do to be a better ally to non-binary individuals.

What does non-binary mean?

According to Stonewall UK – a charity that campaigns for the equality of lesbian, gay, bi and trans people across Britain – non-binary is described as an “umbrella term for people whose gender identity doesn’t sit comfortably with ‘man’ or ‘woman’”.

The definition is purposefully broad given its multiple definitions.

While some non-binary individuals identify as either having a gender which is in-between the two categories ‘man’ and ‘woman’, others can fluctuate between them, or have no gender, either permanently or some of the time.

The LGBT Foundation – a charity that supports the needs of the diverse range of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans – explains that there are a number of other terms people within the non-binary community may also use to describe their gender, including genderqueer, neutrois, agender, gender fluid, bigender and third gender.

Why the term non-binary?

As the National Centre for Transgender Equality explains, “some societies – like ours – tend to recognise just two genders, male and female.”

This concept, which suggests there are only two genders, is often referred to as a gender binary, with binary meaning “having two parts”. Therefore, “non-binary” is a term people can use to “describe genders that don’t fall into one of these two categories, male or female”.

Is non-binary different to being transgender?

Transgender is a term used to describe people “whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth,” says Stonewall UK.

For example, a transgender man is a term used to describe someone who is registered as female at birth but identifies and lives as a man.

Non-binary, on the other hand, refers to someone who does not fit into rigid gender categories and is neither female nor male.

While they can identify with aspects of either gender, they can also have an identity outside the binary, which can also change and evolve over time.

What pronouns are used to describe someone who is non-binary?

Pronouns are the words that take place of a person’s name and some people feel more comfortable using certain pronouns than others.

Non-binary people can use a range of pronouns, including 'he' and 'she'.

However, they may also prefer to use gender neutral pronouns such as 'they' and 'them' to reflect that they don't identify as either male or female.

There are also various new pronouns, including xie and xir, zie and zir, and sie and hir.

If a person is non-binary, it is perfectly polite to ask them what pronouns they would like you to use, so as to avoid using the incorrect terms.

How can you be a better ally to non-binary people?

Aside from using the correct pronouns, there are many ways you can support non-binary people.

From educating yourself on the term to being an advocate for non-binary friendly policies and donating to or fundraising for LGBTQ+ charities.

There are a number of organisations currently doing life-saving work for trans and non-binary people, including The Albert Kennedy Trust – which helps with housing needs – to Mermaids – a charity that provides family and individual support for gender diverse and transgender children, parents and schools.

For more information or advice about being non-binary or any issues affecting LGBT people and their families, you can visit www.stonewall.org.uk or call the charity's information service on 08000 50 20 20.

You can also contact The Albert Kennedy Trust regarding housing on 020 7831 6562 and Mermaids on 0808 801 0400.