

# The Men's Toolbox



Tool for  
intervention

## Working with Sexually Diverse Men Part 1: Theory and Glossary

### Goal

Understand the reality and specifics of a sexually diverse male clientele.

### 1 Who are “sexually diverse men”?

The term *sexually diverse men* refers to all men whose sexual orientation is not heterosexual or whose gender identity differs from the sex he was assigned at birth.

*Sexual orientation*<sup>1</sup> is the physical or emotional attraction to a person of the same sex (homosexuality) or the opposite sex (heterosexuality). There is a range of sexual orientations that fall in between or outside of these two poles, such as bisexuality, pansexuality, asexuality, etc.

*Gender identity* refers to the deep, personal sense of being male, female, neither, or both. A person whose gender identity is consistent with the sex assigned at birth is called *cisgender*. When someone's identity does not match the sex assigned at birth, they are called *transgender*.

1 All definitions in this section are inspired from the *Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation* web page produced by the Government of Quebec and updated on October 9, 2020: <https://www.quebec.ca/en/family-and-support-for-individuals/child-development/effects-stereotypes-personal-development/gender-identity-sexual-orientation>

### 2 Why account for sexual diversity in our practice?

Sexually diverse men face more barriers than other men, including internalized homophobia, i.e., when people internalize the stigma they experience. This process causes some men to hide their sexual identity, avoid “looking gay,” or engage in homophobic behaviour toward other sexually diverse men. This is on top of the problems common to all men, such as difficulty recognizing that they need help or resistance to getting the services they need.

These men in particular are often reluctant to get help from assistance services because they are exhausted from constantly having to explain their lives or the terms they use, and they frequently face homophobia from staff at some organizations. Like all men, they may also seek counselling for an issue unrelated to sexual diversity (relationship breakup, children, etc.), and want the same type of support for these issues.

The glossary presented on the following pages is intended to provide tools to better address the issue of sexual diversity among men.

### 3 What stress factors impact these men?

While the concept of “coming out” is better understood these days, many people are still unaware that this painful disclosure has to be done over and over again. Every meeting with a new doctor, kiss in public, or introduction of your life partner is yet another “coming out” that can be just as stressful as the last.

Because of the many prejudices and barriers they face, sexually diverse men are more frequently confronted with the phenomenon of minority stress (Meyer, 2003), in which people who experience frequent discrimination, whether real or anticipated, also experience more stress (and therefore more related physical and mental problems) than the majority population. Specifically, they have a higher observed prevalence of anxiety, depression, alcohol and drug use, and heart disease. These problems are even more frequent among people who experience other types of discrimination, i.e., related to their ethnocultural origin, a disability, or HIV status.

Another major stress factor is the constant struggle against heterosexism, which promotes heterosexuality as a universal, natural, and superior model that at the same time devalues homosexuality and associates it with deviant behaviour (Ryan, 2003). The model of two parents of different sexes who come together to have children remains the most socially valued family unit, and even aid agencies are not immune to this bias. A sexually diverse man first experiences the stress of rejecting this model (a pivotal step in accepting his identity) and then the recurring and almost daily stress of constantly being exposed to this model that is difficult for him to access.

### 4 Which prejudices to eliminate?

To build an approach adapted to the realities of sexually diverse men, we have to recognize our own lack of knowledge and let go of preconceived ideas, for example, that:

- All gay men are effeminate.
- They don't like sports.
- They all have an insatiable libido.
- They are more likely to be pedophiles.
- They all have HIV.
- They are all white men.
- Same-sex couples are more unstable than heterosexual couples.
- Same-sex couples do not want children.

### 5 Which terms should you use?

Once criminalized and still judged by many people today, sexually diverse men have shown resilience in creating their own spaces and inventing language that describes their sexual and intimate lives in order to defend their rights. Here is a short glossary to help you understand them better<sup>1</sup>.

#### Cisgender or “cis”

A person whose gender identity, or the gender with which they identify, is consistent with the gender they were assigned at birth.

#### Dating websites and location-based dating apps

These are sites or apps to meet other people nearby, whether for a one-night stand or multiple encounters. These tools are widely used by sexually diverse men, to the point that many need them in order to develop relationships with each other. A lack of awareness of this reality is one of the most common blind spots among health professionals and community organizations. Different sites and apps are for different populations; even people who don't use them certainly know about them. Here are some examples:

- Grindr is the most common.
- Scruff is for hairier men (“bears”) and men who love them.
- BarebackRT is for men looking for bareback sex (without a condom).
- Badoo and Tinder are for people who want long-term relationships.
- Hornet is a more general social network.

#### Gender dysphoria

A medical term that refers to the feeling of great distress when a trans person feels that the gender they have been assigned at birth does not match the gender with which they identify.

#### Internalized homophobia

A feeling of embarrassment or shame that can hinder a person's assertion of their sexual diversity that is caused by an unconscious belief in the insults, ideas, and myths about sexual minorities that one has heard for years, e.g., the fear of being seen going into a gay bar, the embarrassment and/or fear of holding hands with your partner on the street. Heterosexual people can also experience this, for example, the fear of “looking gay.”

<sup>1</sup> Many definitions in this glossary are taken from pages 5 to 7 of the *Lignes directrices relatives aux élèves transgenres de la Commission scolaire de Montréal*, updated February 23, 2017: <https://www.cssdm.gouv.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/lignes-directrices-transgenres.pdf>

## 5 Which terms should you use? (continued)

### Intersex

This term refers to someone born with sexual characteristics that do not correspond to the feminine and masculine poles and who may have differences in their genitalia, genes or hormones.

### LGBTQI2+

This acronym refers to the entire sexual diversity community. The letters stand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, two-spirit, and plus. This acronym is often reduced to LGBTQ or "GBTQ men" to refer to a male population.

### Non-binary

A person who identifies as gender neutral, either as somewhere between male and female, or as both, neither, or in fluctuation.

### Open relationship

Partners who have sex outside of their relationship.

### Polyamory

When partners agree to have romantic relationships with other people. The rules and agreements for these arrangements will vary for each relationship.

### Three-way relationships or throuples

A romantic relationship involving three people.

### Queer

A word that was historically used to belittle LGBTQ people. Today, the term has been partially reclaimed especially by more politicized youth and often refers to a queer identity, i.e., anything that is not heterosexual.

### Sexual fluidity

The concept that sexual orientation (heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, etc.) and gender identity (male, female, non-binary, etc.) fluctuate over time.

### Sexual positions

Men from sexual diversity use specific terms for different positions during the sexual act. These terms play an important role in defining their identity.

#### Top

Someone who penetrates his partner.

#### Bottom

Someone who is penetrated by his partner.

#### Switch

Someone who practices both positions.

#### Note!

These definitions are for information purposes only: they are *very familiar* terms to be used only in the context of sexuality counselling.

### They

The singular third-person "they" is commonly used as a gender-neutral pronoun. This pronoun is increasingly used in non-binary language to inclusively represent all genders. Other pronouns include "ze/zim" or "sie/hir," among others.

#### Note!

In French, the gender-neutral pronoun is "iel," which can also be spelled "yel" or "ielle" and is pronounced as a single syllable [jɛl].

### Trans or transgender

A person whose gender identity, or the gender with which they identify, is not consistent with the gender they were assigned at birth. This term is preferred over *transsexual*, which refers to the genitalia and therefore automatically to the sexual aspect of the trans identity.

- Transgender men use different expressions to describe their transition, such as *FTM* (*female to male*) or *AFAB* (*assigned female at birth*).

### Transition (medical)

Medical transition refers to a series of medical procedures that change a person's body to match their gender identity, e.g., facial surgery, "top" surgery (breast, including bilateral mastectomy and nipple reconstruction), "bottom" surgery (genitals), hormone therapy, etc.

#### Note!

In the context of a therapeutic relationship, if the consultation is not specifically about the person's medical transition, it is highly inappropriate to ask questions about this, just as one would not ask about the private parts of any other man who comes for a consultation.

### Transition (social)

For a trans person, social transition refers to any non-medical transition (e.g., change in name or pronoun, clothing style).

### Two-spirit

A concept related to Indigenous spiritualities (especially in North America) that encompasses any person whose gendered characteristics are both male and female. This can relate to gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation.



## References

- Commission scolaire de Montréal. (2017). *Lignes directrices relatives aux élèves transgenres de la Commission scolaire de Montréal*. <https://www.cssdm.gouv.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/lignes-directrices-transgenres.pdf>
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- Meyer, I. H. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129(5), 674-697. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.5.674>
- Ryan, B. (2003). *A new look at homophobia and heterosexism in Canada*. Canadian AIDS Society.

## Useful sites

- [interligne.co/en/](http://interligne.co/en/)  
Interligne is a frontline centre that provides support and information for people affected by sexual and gender diversity issues.
- [rezosante.org](http://rezosante.org) (in French)  
RÉZO is a Montreal-based community organization that promotes the health and well-being of gay, bisexual, cis and trans men.
- [astteq.org/index.html](http://astteq.org/index.html)  
Action Santé Travesti(e)s et Transexuel(le)s du Québec (ASTTeQ) is a project of the non-profit organization Cactus Montréal that promotes the health and well-being of trans people.
- [gris.ca/en/](http://gris.ca/en/)  
The Groupe de Recherche et d'Intervention Sociale (GRIS) is a non-profit community organization that demystifies sexual orientation and gender identity by gathering stories.
- [en.lasterisk.com/accueil](http://en.lasterisk.com/accueil)  
L'Asterisk is a caring, bilingual, non-commercial space for young 2SLGBTQIA+ people aged 14 to 30.

## Consult all the toolbox tools

[www.polesbeh.ca/en/documentation/mens-toolbox](http://www.polesbeh.ca/en/documentation/mens-toolbox)

## To cite this tool

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