

Gay and Lesbian Identity Development Model (Cass Identity Model)

Stage I: Identity Confusion

- Having questions about whether one is gay
- If same-sex attraction occurred, explaining it away
- Internal conflict about whether one is gay
- May have attitudes that being homosexual is incorrect and undesirable, correct but undesirable, or correct and acceptable

Stage II: Identity Comparison

- Accepting possibility that one may be gay
- Significant decrease in confusion
- Initial commitment to gay or lesbian self-image
- May experience isolation and alienation from others
- Developing identity as a gay or lesbian person rather than straight
- Awareness of loss of heterosexual privileges
- May still choose to pass as straight

Stage III: Identity Tolerance

- Accepting that one is probably gay or lesbian
- Greater tolerance of being gay or lesbian
- Partial relief because now can acknowledge their emotional and relational needs
- Seeking out gay and lesbian community and role-models
- Getting more support from others
- Greater self-esteem

Stage IV: Identity Acceptance

- Greater contacts with other gay and lesbian people
- Having more “normalizing” experiences of homosexuality
- Seeing gay community in opposition to straight
- Choosing to pass or selectively disclose

Stage V: Identity Pride

- Accepting and preferring being gay or lesbian
- Greater immersion into gay and lesbian subculture
- “Them versus us”
- Anger and frustration with homophobic and heterosexist attitudes
- Disclosures are more common

Stage VI: Identity Synthesis

- Dichotomy of “them vs. us” is let go
- Selective contact with allies and supportive heterosexuals
- Synthesize public and private aspects of self
- Peace with oneself – free to attend to all other aspects of life

Reference: Vivian Cass (1979, 1984, 1990). In Ritter and Terndrup (2002)
Handbook of Affirmative Psychotherapy with Lesbians and Gay Men