Cass Model of Gay and Lesbian Identity Development

Adapted from materials found on www.ecu.edu.au/equ/resources/docs/Sexuality_cass_model.pdf and http://www.joekort.com/articles17.htm

STAGE	DESCRIPTION	POSSIBLE RESPONSES	POSSIBLE NEEDS
Identity Confusion "Could I be gay?" *I am asking, "Who am I?" I accept, deny, and reject the answer I sense within me.*	Person is beginning to wonder if "homosexuality" is personally relevant to him/her. Person experiences denial and confusion.	Person may recognize thoughts/behaviors as homosexual, usually finds this unacceptable, and tries to inhibit them. She/He redefines meaning of behaviors ("experimenting," "an accident," "just drunk"). Person may quietly seek information on homosexuality, or she/he may overtly avoid information about gays or lesbians. Males may keep emotional involvement separate from sexual contact, while females may have deep relationships that are non-sexual, though strongly emotional.	Person in this stage may need to explore internal positive and negative judgments. Person needs to be permitted to be uncertain regarding sexual identity. Person may find support in knowing that sexual behavior occurs along a spectrum. She/He may need permission and encouragement to explore sexual identity as a normal experience (like career identity, and social identity).
Identity Comparison "Maybe homosexuality does apply to me." *I must figure this out on my own, and I must deal with this mounting sense of social alienation.*	Person accepts possibility she/he might be homosexual. Self-alienation becomes isolation.	Person may feel positive about being different, and starts exhibiting this in ways beyond orientation. At other times, person may accept <u>behavior</u> as homosexual but claim <u>identity</u> as heterosexual ("It's only temporary", "I'm just in love with this particular woman/man" etc.). At yet other times, person may accept homosexual identity, but inhibits behavior (ex: heterosexual marriage / anonymous sex). Internally, person may begin to grieve for losses and the things she/he will give up by embracing her/his sexual orientation. She/He may compartmentalize own sexuality.	It is very important that the person be allowed to develop her/his own definitions. Person will need information about sexual identity, lesbian and gay community resources, encouragement to talk about loss of heterosexual life expectations. Person will need to feel permitted to keep some "heterosexual" identity (it is not an all or none issue).
Identity Tolerance "I'm not the only one who feels this way." *I want to decrease social alienation by seeking out other homosexual people.*	Person increasingly accepts probability of being homosexual, recognizes sexual / social / emotional needs that go with being homosexual. There is an increasing commitment to being gay or lesbian.	Person may seek out meeting other Gay / Lesbian people through groups, bars, etc. Personal experience builds sense of community and self (positive contact leads to more positive sense of self, negative contact leads to devaluation of the culture, stops growth). Person is beginning to have language to talk and think about the issue. Person is recognizing that being lesbian or gay does not preclude other options. Person may accentuate differences between self and heterosexuals, sometimes even by try out variety of stereotypical roles.	Person needs to be supported in exploring her/his sense of shame that is derived from heterosexism. Person also needs support in dealing with external heterosexism. Person may receive support in finding positive lesbian and gay community connections. It is particularly important for the person to know community resources in her/his "backyard" (teachers, family, friends, colleagues, etc.)

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Identity Acceptance "I will be okay. I will find peace with who I am" *I must deal with inner tension of no longer trying to be what society wants me to be and bring together my private and public view of self.*	Person accepts (vs. tolerates) homosexual self-image. There is continuing and increased contact with the gay and lesbian culture, and there is a drawing away from heterosexual culture.	Person may feel increased anger toward the anti-gay society. She/He feels greater self-acceptance as well as acceptance of gay or lesbian self-identification. She/He may compartmentalize "gay life" by maintaining less and less contact with heterosexual community, while attempting to "fit in" and "not make waves" within the gay and lesbian community. Person begins some selective disclosures of sexual identity. There is more social coming out, and person feels more comfortable being seen with groups of men or women that are identified as "gay." She/He practices more realistic evaluation of situation.	Person needs to continue exploring grief and loss of heterosexual life expectations. She/He also needs to continue exploring internalized "homophobia" (learned shame for heterosexist society). Person needs to find support in making decisions about where, when, and to whom she or he self discloses.
Identity Pride "I've got to let people know who I am! And if they can't deal with it, so what! *I must deal with the incongruent views of heterosexuals.*	Person becomes immersed in Gay / Lesbian culture, and has very little interaction with heterosexuals. She/He views political/social world divided as "gay" or "not gay", "us" and "them".	Person experiences confrontation with heterosexual establishment. She/He discloses sexual orientation to family, co – workers, and more. She/He may split the world into "gay" (good) and "straight" (bad). She/He experiences disclosure crises with heterosexuals as he or she is less willing to "blend in" ("I don't *want* to hide my sexual orientation anymore from you, even if you're not comfortable with that.") Person identifies gay culture as sole source of support (all gay friends, business connections, social connections, etc.).	Person needs to receive support for exploring anger issues. She/He may need support for exploring issues of heterosexism. Person needs support in developing skills for coping with reactions and responses to disclosure of sexual identity. Person needs reminders and support to resist being defensive during adverse encounters.
Identity Synthesis "I am gay; I am me." *I must integrate my homosexual identity so that instead of being the identity, it is one aspect of myself.*	Person begins to integrate Gay / Lesbian identity with other aspects of self. She/He develops a holistic view of self by defining self not just in terms of sexual orientation.	Person's sexual identity is still important, but it is not a primary factor in relationships with others. She/He continues to be angry at heterosexism, but with decreased intensity. Person recognizes supportive heterosexuals, and allows trust of others to increase and build. Gay and lesbian identity is integrated with all aspects of "self." Person feels all right to move out into the general community and not simply define space according to sexual orientation.	Person needs what any person needs – needs no longer defined by homosexual identity development.

While this model was developed with lesbian and gay people, the process may be similar for bisexual and transgender people. It is important to keep in mind that not all LGBT individuals go through all the stages, that they may not do it in order, and that they may not clearly fit in any one stage at a particular time.