

The Cass Model of Identity Development



Adapted from: Cass, Vivienne. Homosexual Identity Formation: A Theoretical Model. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 4 (3), 1979.

Identity Confusion

Individuals in this stage feel “different,” but are often unable to identify why. They may begin to wonder if they are LGBTQ. They rely on the reactions of people around them to understand whether being LGBTQ is “right” or “wrong.”

Identity Comparison

Individuals in this stage compare themselves to other LGBTQ individuals in their environment and in the media and ask themselves “does this fit for me?”

Identity Tolerance

Individuals in this stage admit to themselves that they are LGBTQ, but view it as no one’s business but their own. They may grieve for the loss of privilege and fear potential alienation and loss of family, friends, employment, etc.

Identity Acceptance

Individuals in this stage begin to feel that they will be ok. A more positive sense of identity develops. They may begin to come out to others and seek out the LGBTQ community.

Identity Pride

Individuals in this stage realize their identity is fully legitimate and they are out, proud and visible. Their entire identity may be wrapped up in being LGBTQ. They may feel anger at how society has stifled them in the past. They may have fewer straight/cisgender friends, and have little patience for “closeted” people.

Identity Synthesis

Individuals in this stage feel settled in their identity. They know that they are more than their LGBTQ identity, but they also understand that their LGBTQ identity is an important part of who they are. They may still have a sense of anger and frustration, but it is tempered by a holistic view. They have a sense of pride and self-confidence.

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