

Developing a Positive Identity: Members of Targeted Groups

Stage One: Pre-Awareness/Naive/Acceptance

- a. See self as member of mainstream group
- b. Denial of any differences or that they should matter
- c. Denial of reality of oppression of own group
- d. May internalize negative stereotypes of group
- e. May act in ways that support or perpetuate status quo

Stage Two: Encountering

- a. Begin to “come out of the fog”
- b. Encounter someone or something that breaks through the denial system
- c. Inner struggle and conflict over what is true and real
- d. Feelings of shock and disbelief

Stage Three: Immersion/Emersion

- a. Immerse self in own group culture/activities/literature, etc.
- b. Often feel a deep rage vs. dominant group/culture
- c. Feel arrogance/pride in new identity
- d. May adopt/heighen stereotypic behaviors and characteristics
- e. May isolate self from mainstream values/activities

Stage Four: Internalization

- a. Acceptance and integration of new identity
- b. May go through five stages of grief to let go of old identity and all of advantages of old privileges
- c. Internalize pride/positive feelings about identity
- d. Channel anger and energy to work for constructive change

Stage Five: Synthesis/Commitment

- a. Typically “out” in this stage
- b. More at peace with self
- c. Living a life consistent with values
- d. Actively work to change the status quo and fight oppression

Adapted from: Cass, V. (1979). Homosexual identity formation: Testing a theoretical model. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 4, 219-235.