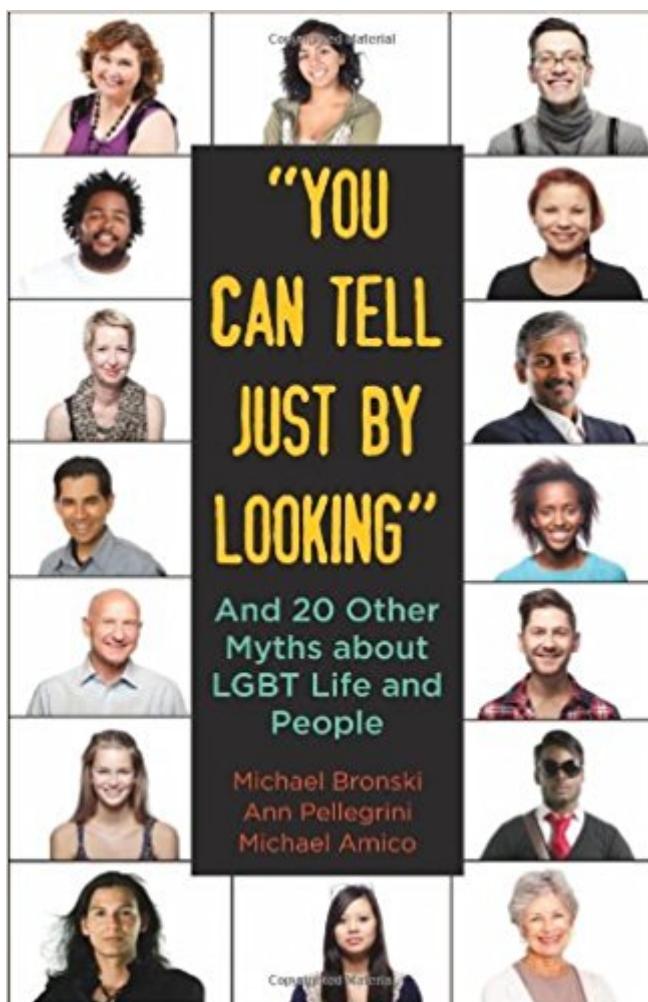


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# "You Can Tell Just By Looking": And 20 Other Myths About LGBT Life And People (Queer Ideas/Queer Action)



## Synopsis

2014 Lambda Literary Award Finalist: LGBT NonfictionBreaks down the most commonly held misconceptions about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and their lives . In “You Can Tell Just by Looking,” three scholars and activists come together to unpack enduring, popular, and deeply held myths about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, culture, and life in America. Myths, such as “All Religions Condemn Homosexuality” and “Transgender People Are Mentally Ill,” have been used to justify discrimination and oppression of LGBT people. Others, such as “Homosexuals Are Born That Way,” have been embraced by LGBT communities and their allies. In discussing and dispelling these myths—including gay-positive ones—the authors challenge readers to question their own beliefs and to grapple with the complexities of what it means to be queer in the broadest social, political, and cultural sense.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Dispelling common myths, stereotypes, and false assumptions is just part of the ambitious goals set by established gender-studies experts Bronski, Ann Pellegrini, and Michael Amico. Exposing the claims and myths LGBT people accept is another key aspect of their other mission. Beginning with the observation that LGBT as a single, clearly defined cultural entity is itself a myth, the authors classify myths and the social compromises they enforce by upholding existing norms, erasing complex differences, encouraging secrecy, and inhibiting logical discussion. This impressive

undertaking covers the struggles associated with coming out, sexual abuse, gay identity, and homophobia, subtle and aggressive. This groundbreaking book is rich in smart, stirring, and forthright examinations of myths, negative and positive, and in clarifying examples, and holds to scholarly standards while compellingly and revealingly addressing the curiosity and concerns of mainstream readers. --Whitney Scott

"This powerful book demands that we look more closely at the ways we move in and structure our society, and asks vital questions that will steer the culture toward justice and equality."

•Publishers Weekly, starred review "This groundbreaking book is rich in smart, stirring, and forthright examinations of myths, negative and positive, and clarifying examples, and holds to scholarly standards while compellingly and revealingly addressing the curiosity and concerns of mainstream readers." •Booklist "One of the most complete sourcebooks about science, sociology and LGBT life out there." •PopMatters

This took me longer to read than I expected because it was so carefully written with lots of content. I'm trying to learn, trying to catch up with cultural change, and this book helped.

Amazing how well this book addresses issues that I have had for several years now...frustrated with much of the negative publicity I have had 'shoved down my throat,' this book is an easy read and one I would recommend to anyone having trouble with LBGT negative publicity - pass it on to family and friends and continue with positive awareness of what loved ones have had to put up with. Easy to comprehend...a good read for anyone questioning these issues. Love should be unconditional...and expected by each of us.

Fantastic book. Got this for a class I'm taking and it's a really great and informative book. I would recommend it.

In a very professional and sensitive manner, this book takes on the contradictory and paradoxical and often times confusing research into sexual attraction. It will certainly cause one to rethink their assumptions about sexual orientation.

The book arrived on time and has NO visible damaged whatsoever. Thank you very much.

OK book. Not terrible or great. Depends on your knowledge of LGBT issues or people whether you would find the book interesting.

I suggested this book as a future discussion item for the group but I'm glad it didn't get many votes because I don't much like it. Since the group turned it down, I decided to get a copy and read it myself anyway. I understand that minority groups use myths to boost self-esteem and argue with detractors and I don't mind those myths being busted in the cause of truth but I don't think this book succeeds in its aim. It doesn't back up its claims with much evidence. Whilst the authors don't want readers to get bogged down with footnotes, they simply cannot get away with exposing simplistic statements by assertions and simplistic counter statements. The book is also parochially American. Things are very different in other parts of the Western world and we are fighting different battles, albeit some echoing American views. "You Can Tell Just by Looking". The authors admit that this might have been true in the past when gays dressed in certain ways or adopted certain mannerisms but some tests have shown that straight people have as much as any other people. "About 10 Percent of People Are Gay or Lesbian." Figures are unreliable because of self-selecting. The sort of people who reported to Kinsey were more likely to be sexually adventurous than the average population. Surveys with a low percentage tend to be conducted face to face where some people are more reluctant to tell the truth to a stranger. "All Transgender People Have Sex-Reassignment Surgery." This surprised me but then again I know little about this subject. "Sexual Abuse Causes Homosexuality." This is a handy weapon for those who want to pathologise LGBTs. However, the assertions by the author which question the notion of children being innocent are redolent of statements by the Paedophile Information Exchange of the 1970s. "Most homophobes are repressed homosexuals." I thought this was based on sound psychological research about projection. There are also plenty of anecdotal cases where hate preachers are caught in gay bars or with rent boys. The authors simply say that the myth is absurd without really saying why. "Transgender People Are Mentally Ill." Well, maybe society's prejudice makes some so. The authors suggest that if society was more tolerant, there would be no need to have the operation but I once thought that and have been forced to rethink. "Homosexuals Are Born That Way." The nature/nurture debate will rumble on for a long time but it is more complicated. If being gay is a lifestyle choice it isn't a once and for

all decision but the result of thousands of decisions over many years. "LGBT Parents Are Bad for Children." There have been plenty of surveys that show this to be false. The authors could have quoted more from them. "Same-Sex Marriage Harms Traditional Marriage." There is plenty of research going on that disproves this but the authors rely on assertion again. "All religions condemn homosexuality." It isn't enough to quote a few liberals. In this Anglican diocese there are only three gay-friendly churches listed compared with hundreds of others not so listed. "Gay Rights Infringe on Religious Liberty." Thus some Christians rant without being aware that a secular constitution like America's allows religious liberty among all the various other conflicting liberties. Since it is different in the UK, different arguments would need to be marshalled. "People of colour are more homophobic than white people." Only last week I read a detailed survey that compared attitudes in black-led churches with those of others to things like gay marriage. Black Christians in the UK were much more likely to be anti-gay, to say nothing of Ugandans and Nigerians. "Lesbians Do Not Have Real Sex." Echoes the obsession with penetrative sex as being the only sort. "All bisexual men are actually gay. All bisexual women are actually straight." Bis are the least understood but if sexuality is fluid then everyone is (potentially) bi. "Transgender People Are Gay." Apparently they aren't but need the support of gay people in fighting for a society that embraces differences. "There's No Such Thing as a Gay or Trans Child." Now that trans people are more visible, more children are likely to identify with them. Before, they would have been seen as "not normal" but would not have had the vocabulary to understand it. It isn't causal. "Positive Visibility in the Media Increases Tolerance and Acceptance of LGBT People." In the 1970s, when many cities were hosting their first gay pride parades, there was considerable opposition expressed by many members of the gay and lesbian community to the presence of drag queens in their flamboyant outfits because they gave a "bad image" of the community. Similar opposition was leveled against women and men in the leather community. The truth is not about positive images. Positive images often actually conspire with mainstream culture's desire not to change. They are a false measure of social progress. It eventually became evident that the strength of lesbian and gay pride marches came from celebrating the incredible diversity of the entire community and worrying less about presenting a positive image of which some mythical lesbian and gay "we" could all be proud. True equality values difference; it

should not demand sameness.ÃƒÂ¢Ã  ¬Ã  "Coming Out Today Is Easier Than Ever Before."ÃƒÂ¢Ã  ¬Ã  "Or a young gay man may be more out at school than at home, fearing that his parents might kick him out. These aren't idle fears. About 40 percent of homeless youths in the United States are LGBT.ÃƒÂ¢Ã  ¬Ã  "Anti-discrimination laws in the United States protect LGBT people.ÃƒÂ¢Ã  ¬Ã  "Not really because most states donÃƒÂ¢Ã  ¬Ã  â„¢t have them.ÃƒÂ¢Ã  ¬Ã  "Hate crime laws prevent violence against lgbt people.ÃƒÂ¢Ã  ¬Ã  "They get the Matthew Sheppard story right ÃƒÂ¢Ã  ¬Ã  âœ that it wasnÃƒÂ¢Ã  ¬Ã  â„¢t a simple hate crime but was more to do with poverty and drugs.ÃƒÂ¢Ã  ¬Ã  "Getting tested on a regular basis helps prevent the spread of HIV.ÃƒÂ¢Ã  ¬Ã  "No, it lulls people into a false sense of security and they take a risk bare-backing.

"You Can Tell Just By Looking And 20 Other Myths About LGBT Life and People," a collaboration between Michael Bronski, Ann Pellegrini, and Michael Amico, is a brave attempt to dispel the many myths about the people labeled with the title acronym (which I'm sure most people recognize as shorthand for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender). This is a brave book because some of the myths are ones perpetuated by the LGBT community itself, and many gays do not take kindly to anyone who strays from the script. "Homosexuals Are Born That Way" is popular among gays as a way to suggest that sexual orientation is like race or gender, something that one does not choose and, therefore, not a valid reason to discriminate. Pity the person, like actress Cynthia Nixon of *Sex and the City*, who publicly proclaimed that her sexuality was a choice. Some others are popular as a defense mechanism ("Most Homophobes Are Repressed Homosexulas") to conveniently label opponents in the battle for LGBT equality. Other myths explored and debunked concern religion ("All Religions Condemn Homosexuality"), gaydar ("You Can Tell Who's Gay Just by Looking"), transgender people ("All Transgender People Have Sex-Reassignment Surgery," "Transgender People Are Mentally Ill," and "Transgender People Are Gay"), race ("People of Color Are More Homophobic Than White People"), and the media ("Positive Visibility in the Media Increases Tolerance and Acceptance of LGBT People"). Simply put, people are not simple, and neither is sexuality. Brian W. Fairbanks

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