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BOOK REVIEW: IAN AYRES & JENNIFER GERARDA  
BROWN, *STRAIGHTFORWARD: HOW TO MOBILIZE  
HETEROSEXUAL SUPPORT FOR GAY RIGHTS*

EVAN WOLFSON\*

In July 2005, Spain's new Prime Minister, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, kept his campaign promise and led the parliament to a historic vote to abolish the different-sex restriction on marriage.<sup>1</sup> Zapatero's leadership helped Spain become the third nation in the world to permit committed same-sex couples to marry, following the Netherlands and Belgium and just snatching the bronze away from Canada, where marriage equality became nationwide a few days later.<sup>2</sup> (Thanks to Massachusetts, the U.S. at least has one foot over the finish-line.)<sup>3</sup>

Following the law's passage, Zapatero declared, "[i]t is true that [gays and lesbians] are only a minority, but their triumph is everyone's triumph. It is also the triumph of those who oppose this law, even though they do not know this yet: because it is the triumph of Liberty."<sup>4</sup> Zapatero was right: ending anti-gay discrimination is not just a matter of protecting and respecting gay citizens and their loved ones, assuring them equal rights and responsibilities, including the freedom to marry. Rather, equality and inclusion are necessary for the good of society as a whole, including non-gay people.

In fact, non-gay people have a vital stake in the current civil rights struggle for the freedom to marry, equality, and respect now centered on gay families. This is not just because many non-gay people love or know gay people — their siblings, children, parents, cousins, co-workers, or neighbors. It's because the battles over gay people and gay equality are part of the larger struggle over what kind of country we are going to be: a nation where we *all*, minorities

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1. Renwick McClean, *Spain Legalizes Gay Marriage: Law Is Among the Most Liberal*, N.Y. TIMES, July 1, 2005, at A9.

2. *World Briefing Americas: Canada: Gay Marriage Approved*, N.Y. TIMES, July 21, 2005, at A6.

3. Pam Belluck, *Same-Sex Marriage: The Overview; Marriage by Gays Gains Big Victory in Massachusetts*, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 19, 2003, at A1.

4. Jose Luis Zapatero, Spanish Prime Minister, Address to Recognize Same-Sex Couples' Right to Marry (June 30, 2005) (transcript available at [http://www.freedomtomarry.org/document\\_print.asp?id=3065](http://www.freedomtomarry.org/document_print.asp?id=3065)).

as well as majorities, popular as well as unpopular, get to make important choices in our lives, not the government — or a land of liberty and justice only for some? A nation that respects the separation of church and state, where government does not take sides on religious differences, but rather respects religious freedom while assuring equality under the law — or a land governed by one religious ideology imposed on all? A nation where two women who build a life together, maybe raise kids or tend to elderly parents, pay taxes, contribute to the community, care for one another, and even fight over who takes out the garbage are free and equal — or a land where they can be told by their government that they are somehow lesser or incomplete or not whole because they do not have a man in their lives?

Believing that all Americans have a stake in a nation that treats everyone fairly, Jennifer Gerarda Brown and Ian Ayres have written *Straightforward: How to Mobilize Heterosexual Support for Gay Rights*,<sup>5</sup> a “how to” call to arms for non-gay people to speak up and take action on behalf of a minority under siege. A married, non-gay couple with kids and stellar careers, Ayres and Brown know that many non-gay people don’t know how to translate their personal fairness and support for gay equality into action. They see non-gay friends and family-members wrestling with their own uncertainty about how to get involved, their questions about how to speak on gay rights as non-gay people, and their concerns about not appearing presumptuous or uninformed. *Straightforward* approaches the question of involvement from the perspective of non-gay people, not gay activists, and offers specific suggestions about how heterosexuals can make a difference for equality both in day-to-day interactions with others, as well as more ambitious activism.

Ayres and Brown begin by owning “heterosexual privilege,” the advantages that come with being in the majority and noting the disadvantages — lack of information, lack of awareness, lack of connectedness — that may accompany it.<sup>6</sup> They offer a range of “strategies for managing privilege: exercising it, disabling it, and renouncing it.”<sup>7</sup> They examine “when, for instance, to speak expressly as heterosexuals, and when to speak in ways that make their sexual orientation ambiguous,”<sup>8</sup> and “when heterosexuals should work within institutions to economically support gay-friendly

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5. IAN AYRES & JENNIFER GERARDO BROWN, *STRAIGHTFORWARD: HOW TO MOBILIZE HETEROSEXUAL SUPPORT FOR GAY RIGHTS* (2005).

6. *Id.* at 3.

7. *Id.* at 4.

8. *Id.*

policies, and when they should walk away from institutions, boycott bigoted vendors, and renounce the benefits of privilege.”<sup>9</sup> They look at diverse settings — the workplace, schools, houses of worship, family conversations, public forums — and give concrete examples of how heterosexuals can find their voice and speak or act to persuade others.

Moving beyond the individual and simple things anyone can do to make a difference, Brown and Ayres also set forth more elaborate collective projects, drawing on their expertise in law, economics, and analysis of how markets and private actors affect public policy and personal choices. They invite non-gay people to create incentives for others to do the right thing — for example, pledging to vacation in states that end the exclusion of same-sex couples from marriage.<sup>10</sup> They encourage companies to qualify for a “Fair Employment Mark” that would certify that their policies do not discriminate, so that consumers may use their economic leverage accordingly.<sup>11</sup> As relatively fair employers such as Microsoft, Disney, Procter & Gamble, or Ford increasingly face boycott threats mounted by right-wing groups — most more successful at boosting their P.R. and membership rolls than actually influencing consumers — *Straightforward* calls for “buycotts” to inform and guide the fair-minded majority in supporting good companies.<sup>12</sup> Brown and Ayres also lay out a variety of big and small steps people can take to make sure their workplace is non-discriminatory, to support an end to discrimination by the military against gay personnel, and to deal with organizations such as the Boy Scouts of America when their leadership elects to impose a policy of discrimination based on sexual orientation that harms gay young people and teaches non-gay kids it’s okay to look down on people who are different. They describe gay organizations that welcome non-gay participation and support and discuss the predominantly non-gay organizations most active in working for an inclusive America. While some of *Straightforward’s* specific proposals may never fully take flight, the book is full of action steps as well as inspiration that can empower any non-gay person of goodwill to do his or her part.

Gay rights are non-gay rights made available to all. Ayres and Brown, who have enjoyed (and role-modeled) the security, joy, and commitment of marriage, believe that it should not be denied to

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9. *Id.*

10. *Id.* at 67; see also Vacation Pledge for Equal Marriage Rights, <http://islandia.law.yale.edu/vacationpledge> (last visited Mar. 30, 2006).

11. AYRES & BROWN, *supra* note 5, at 79.

12. *Id.* at 64.

loving gay couples. As parents, they want the best for all their children, whether they turn out to be gay or non-gay. As parishioners, they want their country, like their church, to be a welcoming place of inclusion and human respect, and they understand that if we want it so, we must make it so.

No civil rights movement is ever won solely by those who are the primary targets of discrimination. With our country in a civil rights moment marked, as they always are, by attacks as well as advances, we in the gay minority under assault state by state look to our non-gay neighbors, fellow citizens, and loved ones to break their silence and speak up. Brown and Ayres have not only set an example, they've literally written the book on how heterosexuals can make this the kind of country we all, gay and non-gay, want it to be — for all.