

arts & leisure

BOOKS:

Enlisting Allies for Equality

BY BETH ROBINSON

Straightforward: How to Mobilize Heterosexual Support for Gay Rights
By Jennifer Gerarda Brown & Ian Ayres
Princeton University Press, April 2005
Hardcover, 304 pages

The fact is, queer Americans will never achieve full legal and social equality and inclusion completely on our own; there simply aren't enough of us. Even the most active recruiting program isn't likely to change that numerical reality any time soon. (That was a joke.) As a matter of necessity, as well as of justice, the support of our straight allies is essential to our struggle for our own seats at the metaphorical table.

Many allies get that, but don't know how, exactly, to help. Not everyone has the time or commitment to volunteer for a local glbtq civil rights organization or to march as an ally at Pride. *Straightforward* offers a helpful guidebook for supportive straights of all stripes - from "PFLAG Moms" to supportive non-activists who want to help where they can.

Husband-and-wife authors Jennifer Gerarda Brown and Ian Ayres weave theoretical reflections about different strategies for dealing with one's heterosexual privilege with specific suggestions for straight (and non-straight) folks looking to help further our collective civil rights. The latter offerings - the concrete and pragmatic steps for advancing social change - are particularly useful to the well-intentioned supporter who's looking for direction.

Day-to Day Advocacy

Brown and Ayres advocate that heterosexuals exercise their unique privilege in our society to promote glbt civil rights in every sphere of their daily life. They challenge heterosexuals who say

they "have no problem" with homosexuality to translate their global philosophies into daily practice at home. For example, parents should talk to their children about love and marriage in a gender-neutral way that acknowledges that their own child might partner with a man or a woman, read aloud gay-affirming children's books, encourage play without regard to gender, and talk openly about LGBT friends and family members.

Brown and Ayres systematically enumerate similar concrete steps allies can take in the schools - where straight parents with school age children enjoy particular access to power - in houses of worship, and in the workplace to create a more inclusive society for us all, providing their readers with extensive resources along the way.

Some New Ideas

Recognizing the power of the economics to promote social good, Brown and Ayres have started two visionary projects to harness straight support to foster social change. Opting for a "boycott" - rather than a "boy-cott" - approach, the two have developed "The Vacation Pledge for Equal Marriage Rights" (www.vacationpledge.org), an online petition by which signers pledge "to vacation in the first state to democratically choose (by either legislation or voter referendum) to legalize same-sex marriage, within three years of the effective date of the legalization." The goal is to provide a significant economic incentive - or at least to blunt fears of an anti-gay boycott that may serve as a disincentive - for some state to do the right thing. Readers are encouraged to take the pledge. Why not put your travel dollars to a good cause?

Likewise, as set forth on the same web site, Ayres and Brown have developed a "Fair Employment Mark," a certification available to employers who have adopted a complying non-discrimination policy, allowing consumers who care about full

civil rights to direct the power of the purse to like-minded businesses.

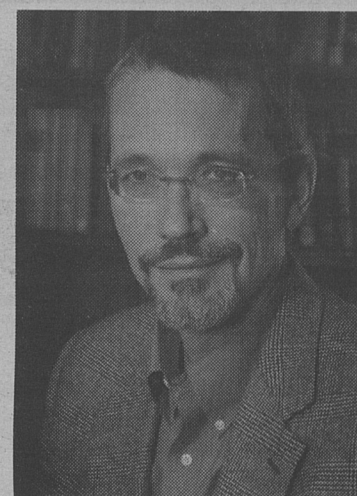
Other creative ideas include an incremental step toward a



Jennifer Gerarda Brown

fully integrated military in the form of a "voluntary inclusive command" consisting solely of

soldiers who indicate a willingness to serve with openly gay colleagues, and an "Informed Association Statute" requiring organizations that discriminate



Ian Ayres

on the basis of sexual orientation (such as the Boy Scouts) to obtain written acknowledgments

from their members affirming that they have chosen to associate with an organization that retains the right to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation.

Although it occasionally bogs down in academic discussions and sometimes in the authors' meticulous (and admirable) care to avoid giving offense, *Straightforward* is an important read for anyone - gay or straight - looking for ways to help the cause. I hate to spoil the ending, but here's a clue: if everyone who professes support for glbt civil rights read the book and followed just a handful of the suggestions, it would involve love, justice, and inclusion for all. ▼

Beth Robinson is an attorney at Langrock, Sperry, & Wool, and president of Vermont Freedom to Marry. She argued the Baker case before the Vermont Supreme Court that resulted in civil unions legislation.

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