

VIRTUALLY NORMAL: AN ARGUMENT ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY

Andrew Sullivan (*Knopf, \$22*) The first book by Andrew Sullivan (editor of *The New Republic*) is a calm, scholarly approach to what he quaintly terms “the homosexual experience.” Sullivan groups arguments into four categories—the prohibitionists, the liberationists, the conservatives, and the liberals—then quietly points out why their stances are illogical, immoral, and so on. His central tenet—that activists should focus on legal recognition of gay marriages and the right to serve openly in the military—is both politically savvy and philosophically redoubtable, which is why similar arguments have been gaining currency in the last few years. Little is new here, but the tone is surely Sullivan’s own: While others on both sides stamp their feet and yell and scream, he patiently makes his point. And not always convincingly. It’s hard not to laugh when he suggests to the prohibitionists—as if such an insight might appeal to them—that homosexual marriages would complement heterosexual ones, just as redheads complement blondes and brunettes. Throughout, Sullivan only grudgingly concedes that prejudice is at the heart of the arguments he is tackling. And that may be the admirable flaw of his treatise: Sullivan assumes only the best of those who would deny him his identity. **B** —*Michael Giltz*