

# Doing Their Part

Queer women advocating on the home front and in the wider world. **By Sheryl Kay**

## Minority Report

For the past four years, **Marcie Fisher-Borne** has studied the HIV/AIDS epidemic and its impact on young gay and bisexual African American men as part of her work toward a Ph.D. at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. There, as a research associate for Project STYLE (Strength Through Youth Livin' Empowered), she has helped develop cultural competency training for healthcare providers to improve their capacity to work with this underserved population.

Fisher-Borne first got turned on to activism as an undergraduate. As a Point Scholar, she was the first student to major in women's studies at Louisiana State University. "It was in these classes that I began, for the first time, to find a language to articulate a critique of social inequality and injustice," she recalls.

She's also been involved in two notable studies that have looked at youth issues—one examining the strengths and challenges of different kinds of families, including the working poor, parents with cognitive limitations, gay and lesbian families and grandparents raising grandchildren; and the other involving a five-year, \$1 million Federal Children's Bureau grant to develop training to enhance the effectiveness of child welfare workers and supervisors who serve rural communities.

"So often, we set the tone for how people will engage with us," she says. "If you are proud of who you are, connect to people with as much love as possible and give folks a chance, they are likely to surprise you."

## Gayby Booming

For almost a decade, **Dana Rudolph** developed marketing and business strategies for various online services and served as a vice president at Merrill Lynch, where she also led an LGBT employee network.

Today, she's a stay-at-home mom and

writes for [www.mombian.com](http://www.mombian.com), a lifestyle blog for lesbian moms and other LGBT parents. Although the original arrangement was for her partner, Helen Maynard, a semiconductor engineer, to stay at home with their newborn son, plans changed.

"When I tell this to straight friends, they look at me like I'm from Mars," she says. "That's one advantage lesbian couples have—without rigid gender expectations, we may



feel freer to form our own roles and be more flexible in child rearing than opposite-sex couples."

Overall, however, the similarities between straight and gay parenting far outweigh the differences, Rudolph says. "There's not a lesbian way to change a diaper," she jokes.

Still, there are some critical differences between straight and gay parenting, particularly involving legal issues that might, for example, impact which partner can visit a sick child in the hospital. There can also be tremendous financial burdens involving health insurance and IRA contributions.

"I think there can be great pressure on LGBT parents to be perfect, as if we need to prove to the world that we are good parents," says Rudolph. "That can lead to pressure on

our kids to be perfect as well. Being a good parent doesn't mean being perfect, however; it means trying our best, learning from our mistakes and realizing that most of parenting is on-the-job training."

## A Revolutionary Among Us

At 13, she volunteered at the local draft resisters' office and, after weeks of stuffing envelopes, she asked if there was something more important she could do.

"They told me there's nothing small in a big movement," says **Donna Red Wing**, 58, who today is a senior advisor to the Interfaith Alliance in Washington, D.C., and to the National Crittenton Foundation in Portland, Ore. Over the years, Red Wing has held executive positions with grassroots activist organizations such as the Child Assault Prevention Project of Central New England, the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, the Human Rights Campaign and the Gill Foundation.

All lesbians, she says, have a part to play in the work for equality and that part can be as big or as small as the individual wants it to be.

Simply being out is a great and courageous beginning. And while she believes the LGBT movement has made some real "atmospheric, cultural and attitudinal changes," many issues are still unresolved.

"I would like to see an equality revolution, a strategic, grassroots, not AstroTurf, movement, that engages our friends, our adversaries and those in the middle, connecting houses of worship, academia, government, the independent sector, Madison Avenue, Wall Street, Main Street, Hollywood and our families," says Red Wing. "Our goal is simple—equality—nothing more and nothing less." ■

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