

### Views: Mombian-LGBT Parents Creating Change

by Dana Rudolph  
02-06-2008

How can LGBT parents create change? **I've been pondering the question in light of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's annual Creating Change conference in Detroit this week ( Feb. 6-10 )** . Becoming a parent is itself a life-altering change. We must then master the fine if chaotic art of guiding our children through 18 or more years of constant transformation, from teething and potty training through school, puberty and leaving home. Children also often motivate parents to create change in the world around them, whether at the local PTA fundraiser, campaigning against drunk driving, or making extra efforts to care for the environment.

Within the LGBT community, parents play an important and unique role in creating change. It's a tried-but-true marketing trick: children tug at heartstrings. That's why every slate of plaintiffs in marriage-equality cases across the country includes at least one couple with kids. More than that, by the mere fact of being good parents ( as credible research attests ) , we destroy the special status of opposite-sex marriage as the only acceptable child-raising institution. The New York State Court of Appeals relied on this status when it issued its ruling last July denying marriage rights to same-sex couples. Now, part of convincing the legislature to pass a marriage equality law will be demonstrating that good childrearing isn't limited to opposite-sex couples, and marriage shouldn't be, either. Likewise, last year's second-parent adoption law in Colorado will "give gay and lesbian couples the opportunity to showcase their worth as partner-parents," and thus "help erode resistance to same-sex matrimony," as Time magazine noted ( July 5, 2007 ) . In Oregon, a judge ruled in 2007 that it was unconstitutional for the state not to recognize non-biological parents as equal to biological ones. He found that Oregon's pending Domestic Partnership law was a permissible remedy, "provided it goes into effect as scheduled on January 1, 2008." It didn't, and was placed on hold pending judicial review. The delay caused some to wonder if the state would face a legal crisis, with non-biological parents having no easy option to gain legal recognition, as required by the judge ( Basic Rights Oregon press release, July 16, 2007 ) . A Feb. 1 ruling in favor of domestic partnerships averted the predicament, which could have seen parents again coming to the fore in the battle for relationship recognition.

Not every activist with children wants or has the opportunity to be part of a major lawsuit, however. Most of us settle for volunteer work with various events or campaigns. The problem is that parenting itself takes time. It's hard to answer phones at the local LGBT community center when you have to take your child to ballet practice. It's tough to demonstrate at the statehouse when your child is sick in bed. Traveling to march on DC? Not with two squabbling siblings in the back seat for five hours. This doesn't make it impossible, though, to be both parent and activist. At some point, our children are old enough to be off doing their own thing while we organize letter-writing campaigns to our senators. The kids may even want to join us at the statehouse someday ( though we should always respect their need to determine their own level of involvement with LGBT rights ) . Until then, one simply has to get creative, or get online. We can send e-mail to our elected officials or to journalists who have covered LGBT stories. We can take part in online conversations on mainstream parenting forums and blogs, offering an LGBT parent's perspective on everything from sharing household tasks with a co-parent to bullying in schools. We can write reviews on Amazon.com or other online bookstores in support of LGBT children's books we've read.

We can also simply be visible in our daily lives, showing that being LGBT and being a good parent are not mutually exclusive. Within our communities, we have an immediate point of commonality with straight parents, who see us involved at school and soccer practice. Making a personal connection by explaining “I’m Daddy; he’s Papa,” can do more to change someone’s mind about LGBT people than an abstract segment on the evening news. We must take care, however, that our desire to set a good example doesn’t mean we—and more so, our children—feel pressured to be perfect. Every parent at some point forgets to pack his or her child’s school lunch. Every child experiences some emotional struggle or social misunderstanding. The key is to show that our families are like any others, skinned knees and all.

Equally important is to create change by raising children of awareness and acceptance. Evidence indicates we are doing well here. The long-running National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study found that the children in the study “demonstrate a tremendous resilience and awareness of diversity issues and appreciation for tolerance that is really quite sophisticated for 10-year-old kids. We see even more of that in the 17-year-olds.” ( Dr. Nanette Gartrell, phone interview, December 2007 ) LGBT families don’t have a monopoly on this, of course, but we can take a leadership role.

Whether as naptime activists at the computer, plaintiffs in the courts, or cheering Little League fans, LGBT parents will play a leading role in creating change for both our families and communities. Our longest-lasting legacy of change, however, may be to inspire our children to do the same, whether for LGBT rights or other issues that matter to them. They will carry our desire for a better world into the future.

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of Mombian, [www.mombian.com](http://www.mombian.com), a blog and resource directory for LGBT parents.