Justify My Love

February 10, 2014 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

I admit to being a big fan (as in fanatic) of Madonna. That doesn't mean I've enjoyed all of her work (I could've done without Shanghai Surprise and Body of Evidence). It does mean I enjoy her as an entertainer—and a role model.

If being a role model means being a saint, Madonna would not qualify. No one would. I believe being a role model should not mean anything more (or less) than being an example for others, more often than not.

Question her talent, if you must, but not her tenacity. The strength that she projects inspires many women and gay men, if not men in general, which perhaps it should.

Taking control of your life is a message Madonna has sung for decades ("Express Yourself," "The Power of Good-bye," "Die Another Day"). It's a message that many of the folks in this issue have taken to heart.

The women on our cover are wonderful role models. They've overcome HIV and many other painful obstacles. Click here to read how they grew the HIV intervention Common Threads into a microenterprise.

Taking control of your wallet is important for your financial health, but taking control of your body is important for your general health. To that end, condoms can be just as important as diet, exercise and moderation.

Nevertheless, the condom conundrum cannot be ignored. Condom use remains about 50 percent for men who have sex with men, and about 30 percent for straight men. Many men like them, but many just do not.

The answer? Make a better condom, of course. There are numerous hurdles, but researchers and entrepreneurs are taking up the challenge to build better barriers for both men and women—and all types of sex. Click here to read about the new search to improve an old prevention tool.

Kathie Hiers, CEO of AIDS Alabama and president of the National AIDS Housing Coalition, more than understands what it means to take control. She has been a leader among leaders in HIV

advocacy for decades.

Although she is HIV negative, Hiers has a positive outlook on the epidemic, despite the seemingly insurmountable problems that need to be resolved, especially in the South. Click here to read our Q&A with Hiers.

Jessica Whitbread, the youngest global chair of the national steering committee of the International Community of Women Living With HIV, also knows about taking control. Click here to read her story.

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