

Recently we detailed the importance of internet activists by capturing the story of Antonia Ayres-Brown challenging McDonald's "tendency to box kids in by gender when doling out Happy Meal toys."

The positive response she received from the CEO of McDonald's, and the public acceptance of her petition, shows how gender is universal, even when selecting a toy at the drive-thru lane.

Gender Spectrum believes that objects and activities don't have a gender. In other words, a child shouldn't be made to feel less of a boy or a girl because they prefer one Happy Meal toy to another. But it is undeniable that whenever a fast food joint asks the question — "Do you want a boy's toy or a girl's toy?" — they place parents and children in an awkward position of having to conform to gender stereotypes.

The Ayres-Brown situation made me think of my relationship with my brother during my childhood. Our dad took us on weekly trips to fast food chains. And there were moments when the two of us were more drawn to the "girl" toy. Sometimes it looked cooler, or it would allow us to complete a collection of a set of toys; and sometimes we just wanted that particular toy for no particular reason. There were moments my brother and I would strategize on how one of us would ask for the "girl" toy. The one who asked would have to deal with the awkward stare from the employee and deal with internal feelings of breaking some unspoken rule. I wonder if our dad was ever judged for allowing his sons to choose the "girl" toy.

Gender Spectrum has long supported siblings of Gender-expansive young people. We recognize that these siblings also face challenges when understanding their own gender, especially when they find themselves comparing their own experience to their gender-expansive sibling.

Reaffirming the message for siblings, that toys and activities don't have a gender, is crucial as they develop their own sense of Gender identity and expression. To the parents and caregivers out there, you shouldn't be concerned with "signs" that a child might be Transgender unless those signs are truly persistent, consistent, and insistent. Instead, we challenge you to keep an open mind when a child expresses their gender.

To share yet another example of how siblings cope with gender diversity, we can look to Marsha and Aiden Aizumi's (a mother and her transgender son) book, "Two Spirits, One Heart." As a child, Aiden was Ashley, and Ashley's brother is Stefen. Marsha writes, "In later years, when [Ashley] had a choice between a Little Mermaid or Ninja Turtle sleeping bag, guess which one she convinced her baby brother he should have?" In Aiden's dedication, he writes: "to my brother, Stefen, for always taking the Little Mermaid sleeping bag." We may not always get along with our siblings, but they can sometimes be our greatest allies.

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