

## Case #9: De-Sexing Children<sup>1</sup>

Most children grow up gradually learning to make decisions about what they like to eat, what games they like to play, and when to do their homework. Typically, children do not have to choose their gender identities because most parents assume that their children will identify with the gender associated with their physical sex and raise the children accordingly. But recently some parents are allowing their children to choose their own gender identities free of outside influence.

Traditionally, the birth of a new child is followed by gender-specific gifts from friends and family: blue gifts if the child is a boy, pink if a girl. But not in the Talvarez family. The gender of the Talvarez children was not included on birth announcements. Instead, they just listed two gender-neutral names: Jordan and Riley. Their friends (and even close family) were mystified. “Baby girls like some things and baby boys like others. That’s not a radical theory; it’s just reality,” said Ronnie Bratman, a close friend of the family.

The Talvarez family plans on going even further than not disclosing the sex of their children to family and friends. They also plan on letting their children make all of their own choices about gender. “We don’t dress them in just one kind of clothes. And once they get old enough we plan on letting them choose their own clothes from the store. We’ll just let them pick something that appeals to them as individuals. If Jordan wants to grow long hair and wear dresses, so be it. If Riley decides to take up dancing and play with trucks, we’ll support that too,” says Chris Talvarez. Ultimately, the family just wants to give their children the freedom to create their own gender identities instead of allowing society to dictate who they should be and how they should act.

Child psychologists and educational experts would tend to agree that the Talvarez family has the right to raise their children the way they see fit. But they also note that this decision is not without risks to their children; the Talvarezes should be conscious of those risks. Child psychologists and educational experts argue that while adults have a lot of information and experience with which to make choices about gender roles, children can feel lost and confused if left to their own devices. Parents can be tempted to think that children naturally know what is good for them, but that may not always be true. Some draw an analogy to food: if you let a child make all of her own choices in the grocery store, it is unlikely she will get adequate nutrition.

The parents respond that they do not plan on hiding anything from their children, just promoting choice. “We just think that society wants to put us all into neat little categories. Life can be so much richer than that. Gender is about more than what happens between your legs. Our society needs to stop making so many choices that limit our children’s lives.”

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<sup>1</sup> This case is based on real events, but names and circumstantial facts have been changed to respect the privacy of those involved.