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## Sesame Family Newsletter

April 23, 2008

### Girl Power

by Jordan Brown

A father hopes his "girly-girl" daughter stays feisty.

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#### Featuring:

"One Kid's Meal with an Order of Stereotypes, Please..."

A Hairy Situation

A Big Brother's Influence

Being Fashionable AND Feisty



### Games & More

#### Girls Rock!

- [Girls Can Do Anything](#)  
You decide what these girl Muppets will do when they grow up.
- [Write a Letter to Zoe](#)  
Is Zoe afraid of bugs? Why does she rhyme all the time? Send her an email to find out the answers to these questions and more!
- [Betty Lou Goes Skin Diving](#)  
Go under the sea with Betty Lou to find some interesting fish.
- [Weekly Trivia](#)

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### Khokha & Fatma: Two Little Girls with Big Dreams



Seven-year-old Fatma from Cairo already knows she wants to be a lawyer. Where did she get this idea? From Khokha, an exuberant female Muppet on Egypt's *Alam Simsim*. Khokha and the other *Alam Simsim* Muppets inspire Fatma to imagine a future full of possibilities.

Read more about [Khokha and Fatma](#)

## "ONE KID'S MEAL WITH AN ORDER OF STEREOTYPES, PLEASE..."

It's 11:30 on a weekday morning. I just picked up my three-year-old



daughter Olivia at nursery school. On a whim, I decide to take her to a fast food restaurant for lunch. Watching Olivia bouncing around in her car seat, I hope that the restaurant's play area will provide some exercise, so that she'll eat well, and then (please-please-please) take a loooooong nap. Olivia is a delight to be with, but truth be told, a little parental "down time" is also a thing of beauty.

I give our order at the counter. Meanwhile, Olivia is having fun running back and forth between my legs. "One more question" the friendly cashier asks. "For that kid's meal, do you want a boy toy or a girl toy?"

Overhearing this question, Olivia calls out, "Get a GIRL toy, Daddy!" When I honor her request, she adds, "Maybe it's a princess...or a baby doll!"

I am reminded once again how often our children are exposed to gender stereotypes. Whether watching TV or browsing the toy store, kids are constantly bombarded with images and ideas of what's "for girls" and what's "for boys." When I look at some of Olivia's current passions (wearing sparkly shoes and pink, frilly dresses; playing "mommy" to her baby dolls), I wonder how much of her "girl-ness" is hardwired and how much of it is due to society's stereotypes. What can my wife Ellen and I do to help Olivia focus on what naturally appeals to and interests her, as opposed to what society tells her is "for boys" or "for girls"?



#### [MUSIC VIDEO: WOMEN CAN BE](#)

Search the word "gender" in Sesame Workshop's new online video player to see women sing about their wonderful jobs.

#### [GENDER: BIRTH TO TWO](#)

Our experts discuss how children learn what it means to be masculine or feminine.

#### [GENDER: TWO TO FIVE](#)

It's equally great to be a boy or a girl.

#### [MUSIC VIDEO: GIRLS OF THE WORLD](#)

Search the word "girls" in Sesame Workshop's new online video player to see some of your favorite female Sesame Muppets Muppets sing about the joys of being a girl.

## A HAIRY SITUATION

As we are leaving the fast food restaurant, Olivia points to a man at a nearby table. He's in his 50s or 60s and is engrossed in a book.

"Look, Daddy, look!" she shouts.

"What is it, honey?" I whisper, hoping that my muted tone of voice will inspire Olivia to do the same.

"HE CAN'T BE A MAN!" she calls out. All ears perk up, awaiting her next words. "He has long hair!" Olivia declares.

I notice that this now-smiling guy (thank goodness!) does, indeed, have a ponytail. He gives Olivia a friendly wave, then returns to his burger and book. I'm a little embarrassed but actually relieved that she hasn't made a more scathing observation about this random stranger.

Chuckles from all the tables abound, as I quietly explain to my daughter that some men have long hair, and some have short hair. "Look at you!" I say. I point out that she, in fact, has short hair -- just like Mommy. "And we know you're both girls, right?" Olivia nods and grins.

This experience reminds me of a story a parent told me, when I asked how her four-year-old son Buddy was enjoying his preschool. She said that on the first day of school, Buddy was having a wonderful time playing trains with another kid. Later that day, Buddy's mom said, "You really had fun playing trains with Chris!" He agreed, but then added, "One thing I can't figure out, though." When Buddy's mom asked him what that was, he said, "Why was he wearing a dress?" Turns out Buddy didn't realize Chris was a girl because it didn't occur to him that girls also enjoy playing with trains.

What appearances and actions make someone "male" or "female" through a child's eyes? And, what



#### [SPUNKY GIRLS. SENSITIVE BOYS](#)

Free your kids to be both tough and tender.

#### [STEREOTYPES \(CHILDREN AND MEDIA\)](#)

Advice for parents from the PBS website.

#### [DRIBBLING WITH MOM](#)

Search the word "mom" in Sesame Workshop's new online video player to see a mom and daughter shoot hoops together.

can Ellen and I do to broaden our children's views about gender?

## A BIG BROTHER'S INFLUENCE

Olivia idolizes her older brother Finn, age 7. If he's running around the house in his Darth Vader costume, she asks, "Can I be a storm trooper?" If Finn is practicing his Taekwondo moves, she, too, wants to make high kicks and knife-hand chops the air. And if he's telling an endless stream of "poop jokes," guess who tries to top each one?

As much as Olivia enjoys imitating Finn, she definitely has a "girly-girl" side. Since she was a toddler, Olivia has enjoyed dressing up like a ballerina and is enchanted with princesses, mermaids, and so on. She loves to wear butterfly wings and wave her magic wand. She seems to have more sparkly shoes than Imelda Marcos! Olivia enjoys accompanying Finn to his Cub Scout meetings. But on such occasions, she makes a point of donning one of her frilly tutus over her regular clothes.

Finn's current obsessions include Star Wars and inventing things, while Olivia's favorite activity is playing "mommy" to her large collection of babies. While Ellen and I are eager to nurture Olivia's imaginative play, we sometimes worry that we put too much emphasis on stereotypical "girl" activities. Likewise, we sometimes wonder if Finn's enthusiasm for Star Wars puts too much emphasis on violence, fighting, and other stereotypical "boy" activities. We try to balance such pursuits with his other interests, which include cooking, gardening, and painting.



### [NATURE, NURTURE, OR NEITHER](#)

The latest theories on what it takes to shape a child.

### [PERSONALITY: TWO TO FIVE](#)

Tips for developing a "can-do" attitude in your preschooler.

### [DADDY'S GIRLS](#)

Getting to the heart of the father-daughter bond.

## BEING FASHIONABLE AND FEISTY

I am always looking for ways to help Olivia challenge traditional notions of how girls should behave. I enjoy reading her stories about Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty, but also encourage her to watch the *Shrek* movies, which feature Fiona, an ogre princess who is smart, independent, assertive, and funny. When I notice Olivia sticking up for herself, I smile and tell her, "You're feisty, Olivia!" I chuckle when she uses this word herself in other contexts, like when Finn grabs a toy that she's playing with. Olivia may boldly respond to her brother, "Hey, I was playing with that!" Then she'll smile at me, and say, "See? I'm being FEISTY!"

The other day Finn asked me to read him a new *Super Friends* comic book for young children, published by DC comics. Olivia, of course, came over, too to see what the excitement was all about. In addition to marveling at the feats of Superman, Batman, and the Flash, I made sure to point out the female in the mix: Wonder Woman.

"Look, Olivia, Wonder Woman is strong and fast like you -- and she can fly an invisible airplane!" The comic book not only shows off each superhero's powers, but also makes a point of teaching kids how important it is to help other people in need and to do the right thing. Later that afternoon, we all dressed up as our favorite superheroes and spent an hour "saving the day" in our home. Finn was Superman, Olivia was Wonder Woman, and I was Underdog.

Best of luck helping your children realize that they can become super girls and super boys -- even when they try activities that aren't traditionally encouraged for their gender.



### [LEARNING TO ROLLERBLADE](#)

Search the word "rollerblade" in Sesame Workshop's new online video player to see a girl and her mom learn the sport of rollerblading.

### [SENSE OF SELF: TWO TO FIVE](#)

When a two year old continually says no, she is asserting her sense of self.

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## WEEKLY TRIVIA

### Did you know?

Zoe is a female monster whose character represents the psychological age of a three-year-old child.

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## ABOUT THE WORKSHOP



Sesame Workshop is a nonprofit educational organization making a meaningful difference in children's lives around the world. Founded in 1968, the Workshop changed television forever with the legendary *Sesame Street*. Today, the Workshop continues to innovate on behalf of children in 120 countries, using its proprietary research methodology to ensure its programs and products are engaging and enriching. Sesame Workshop is behind award-winning programs like *Dragon Tales* and *Sagwa, The Chinese Siamese Cat*, *Pinky Dinky Doo* and ground breaking multimedia productions in South Africa, Egypt and Russia. As a nonprofit, Sesame Workshop puts the proceeds it receives from sales of *Sesame Street*, *Dragon Tales* and *Sagwa* products right back into its educational projects for children around the world. Find the Workshop online at [www.sesameworkshop.org](http://www.sesameworkshop.org).

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