

Boy or girl blues

Do you have a secret gender preference?

BY LISA EVANS



Around your 20-week appointment, you're likely to be peppered with one question: "Are you hoping for a boy or a girl?" You answer that you simply want a healthy baby, but the truth is many of us harbour a secret gender preference.

Toronto mom Karen Davey always wanted a little girl. "I knew how to relate to girls. I knew how to have fun with them. I would enjoy tea parties and Barbies versus hockey games and fighting," she says.

Karen gave birth to a little boy. While she was slightly disappointed to see a little penis on the sonogram, now that her son is born, she says she's actually happier with a boy. "Watching my husband connect with him is wonderful. I think I get more enjoyment watching the bond that the two of them have," she says.

It turns out there may be a biological reason for our gender preferences. A 2011 study from Queen's University showed men have a stronger preference to have boys while women tend to want girls. "It comes from an ingrained desire to leave something of oneself for the future," says Lonnie Aarssen, a

biology professor and co-author of the study. In other words, we see children as an opportunity to create a little Mini Me.

Gender disappointment can often lead to a host of emotions including guilt. Questions of "Will I love my son enough even though I secretly wished he was a girl?" begin to emerge. While most of these feelings go away once the child is born, Chatham, Ont., psychologist Maya Hammer says they can become a burden if not dealt with.

HOW TO DEAL WITH GENDER DISAPPOINTMENT:

ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR FEELINGS
"The more you suppress something or avoid it, the bigger it becomes," says Maya. Ignoring your disappointment can cause you to unknowingly pass those negative feelings onto your child once he or she is born.

ASK YOURSELF WHY YOU'RE UPSET
Maya says gender disappointment often comes from expectations of gender roles. Perhaps you grew up with sisters and always imagined doing manicures with your daughter, while your husband who grew up with brothers always imagined weekends play-wrestling on the living room floor with his son. The problem with these expectations, Maya says, is that they aren't based in reality. "Lots of little boys like to help out with baking and sometimes boys aren't into sports," she says. Remember, your child's gender doesn't dictate their personality.

GET IN THE GENDER MOOD
Spend time with friends or relatives who have children of that gender and ask them what they enjoy about having a little boy or girl. Watch how they interact with their children and start envisioning your life with your son or daughter. Karen got into the gender mood by decorating her son's nursery in traditional blues and shopping for gender-specific clothing. While it did help her get over her initial disappointment, she admits "girls do have cuter clothes." ○



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