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**Keeping the Gender of a 2-Year-Old Secret**

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During last week's discussion of whether couples choose to learn the sex of their baby before he or she is born, a number of you said you wanted to keep the secret as long as possible, because the moment people hear "boy" or "girl" they begin to make assumptions about a child.

One couple in Sweden decided to take that logic a few steps further, and are refusing to tell anyone whether their toddler is a boy or a girl.

The child - called Pop in [Swedish papers](http://www.thelocal.se/20232/20090623/) to protect his or her identity - is now two-and-a-half-years-old, and only a handful of close relatives (those who have changed the child's diaper) know the sex. Pop's parents, who are both 24, say they made this decision in the hope of freeing their child from the artificial construct of gender.

"We want Pop to grow up more freely and avoid being forced into a specific gender mould from the outset," Pop's mother told the Swedish newspaper Svenska Dagbladet last spring. "It's cruel to bring a child into the world with a blue or pink stamp on their forehead."

Pop wears dresses, and also "male" styled pants, and Pop's hairstyle changes often, from traditionally feminine to traditionally masculine (and, one would imagine, to some untraditional styles now and then.)

The online Swedish newspaper, [The Local,](http://www.thelocal.se/20232/20090623/) quotes Anna Nordenström, a pediatric endocrinologist at the Karolinska Institutet, who won't even hazard a guess as to the long-term effect such an upbringing could have on a child:

"It will affect the child, but it's hard to say if it will hurt the child," says Nordenström, who studies hormonal influences on gender development.

"I don't know what they are trying to achieve. It's going to make the child different, make them very special."

She says if Pop is still "genderless'" by the time he or she starts school, Pop will certainly receive a lot of attention from classmates.

"We don't know exactly what determines sexual identity, but it's not only sexual upbringing," says Nordenström. "Gender-typical behaviour, sexual preferences and sexual identity usually go together. There are hormonal and other influences that we don't know that will determine the gender of the child."

Pop will soon welcome a brother, or a sister. Pop's parents will not reveal the sex of that child, either, except, perhaps, to Pop.

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**Directions:** You’ve read the article now think about **your** gender and think about how it was formed. Most people know their **gender identity** (the biological sex group to which you belong) at an early age. However, what it means to me “feminine” or “masculine” is shaped by other factors. Please reflect on your childhood and answer the questions on LOOSE LEAF.

1. Do you recall your parents or teachers ever talking to you about what it means to be a boy/girl? What did they say and what sort of things did they say? Please be specific.
2. Did your parents or teachers or friends ever tell you weren’t acting like a boy/girl and that you needed to change your behavior? Please give a detailed answer or story.
3. Think about the clothing you wore when you were a young child (elementary school). Who made decisions about what you wore? Was it you or was it a parental decision? If it was you, why did you dress the way you and more specifically DESCRIBE what kind of clothes you wore (dresses, pants, sports teams, trucks, pink, yellow, green, blue, Disney princesses, etc.)? If it was your parents, why do you think they chose those clothes for you?
4. Think about the toys you played with as a very young child. Please write a list of the toys you played with and NEXT to the toy tell me if it was a) something YOU asked for or picked out yourself or if b) someone gave it to you because they thought it was gender appropriate or something they thought you should play with.
5. **Gender role** refers to the set of behaviors that society considers to be appropriate for each sex. I want you to create TWO columns – a Boy column and a Girl column. Under each column be honest and tell me what **you** think are INAPPROPRIATE behaviors for boys and girls. Then, tell me WHY you have come to think these things.
6. There are three theories of gender development. Review them in your textbook (p. 465 – 469) or your Barron’s (Chapter 9). Which one do you think applies to your life and gender development? Why?