

MAX, MARTY, PAUL, AND ME

John Bennett
Criminology
Katy High School, Katy, TX

[Assignment: Write a short essay which makes a point about gender and/or about the writers we have read. You can write about your own experience in order to support or oppose something we have read, or else you can analyze the ideas of the writers without referring to your own experience.]

I suppose it all started innocently enough that day I was taking care of Marty and Paul, two of my cousins. At the time, Marty was two-and-a-half and Paul was just over a year old. I was sent with Marty by my Aunt Laura to go to Wal-Mart and buy him one of the cheap, ten dollar, plastic pools that only last one summer. On the way there I asked Marty what color pool he wanted. Being a two year old who is just beginning to make sense with words, he quickly replied, "I want a boo pool!" obviously meaning a blue pool. But being the little two year old that he was, he promptly changed his choice to purple, and then finally green, or so I thought. As it turned out, when we finally arrived at Wal-Mart he saw that they also had pink pools and, without hesitation, let it be known that he wanted a pink pool. Being the dutiful cousin that I was I told him, "You don't want a pink pool; pink is for girls. You want a blue pool; blue is for boys." He did not put up much of a fight but as soon as we returned home and Aunt Laura found out what had happened, she corrected me and said, "We are trying to bring these boys up in a gender-neutral environment." I madly apologized for my narrow-mindedness, because before that point I had never really given much thought to the fact that it might be possible to raise a child in a gender-neutral environment.

This raises an interesting question: Is it possible for a child to be raised in a gender-neutral environment? Lois Gould seemed to think so in her version of a unigender childhood with "X." And I suppose that it could be possible because, after all, are we not more enlightened now about the equality of the sexes than we were just a century ago? In order for this to work, though, every parent of every child would have to raise their child in the neutral environment. If every parent is not working toward the same goal, once the gender-neutral children enter into social settings where they are learning from other children who have not been raised gender-neutral, they will become what I would like to call "gendered." Take my cousin Marty, for example. He is now four years old and is starting to go to preschool and is in the socializing environment of other children. At Thanksgiving and Christmas it was obvious that my aunt and uncle's attempt to raise him in a gender-neutral environment was failing. He was starting to play "guns" and "war" and other such games associated with young boys. I could also tell that he was starting to have an effect on his younger brother, Paul. Marty had become more aggressive, and as a younger brother Paul too was becoming more aggressive in an effort to defend against the attacks that Mom and Dad could not see. As the youngest in my family, I too can attest to this fact. I have a brother who is four years older than me, and for many years I bore the brunt of his attacks. So by my personal understanding, I would have to disagree with Gould on the hope for an "X" someday.

Through all my trials and tribulations with Marty and Paul it is obvious that kids socialize other kids, and the possibility of a gender-neutral environment may be in jeopardy. But what if the traits regarding gender are inborn? This is the idea that Prudence Mackintosh was getting at in her personal narrative. She soon realized that "boys will be boys," meaning that despite her attempts at raising gender-neutral sons, she found that it was hopeless because her boys were naturally more like the stereotypical "boy," and she realized this without her boys being socialized by other children. Basically what she meant, and what I am trying to convey, is that gender is possibly an inborn trait and nothing can be done about it. A fine example of this, but at the other end of the spectrum, is my cousin Max. Max is in third grade and is exceptionally smart. When he first started school he was already reading on the fifth grade level. Not exactly what one would call normal, but that is not even the tip of his story. Max, through no prodding from his father, mother, or any other family member for that matter, has been very feminine his entire life. He has always wanted to play with Barbie and wear aprons that he pretends are dresses. He is also very theatrical. He is constantly wanting to play The Wizard of Oz, or The Little Mermaid, and of course Max is always Dorothy or Aerial, respectively. At the same time he has shown little or no interest in what many consider typical "boys" games, like football or baseball, but is instead content to be the way he is. I am by no means putting him down, nor is anyone else in the family, but he has suffered through two-and-a-half years of teasing for his actions in school. This leads me to believe that his gender role was set from within because practically everyone has tried to teach him differently, and he is still himself. The bottom line in his case is "Max will be Max."

The bottom line in all cases is that children should grow-up in the gender role in which they feel most comfortable, not the one their parents, society, or other children want them in. The fact of the matter is that most kids do not even have a clue when it comes to gender roles. They are too busy just being kids. I grew up the epitome of what society would call a "boy." I was always rough-housing, playing basketball, football, or baseball, and I would never be caught dead playing with Barbie or the girls because I might run the risk of getting "cooties." Through it all, I had no idea of what gender role I was supposed to be playing, because I had never been told what specific role I was supposed to play; my parents let me find my own role, albeit a role many call the typical male role. This does not make me a bad person; it is what makes me the person that I am. Therefore, I say leave the political correctness of forming gender roles out of life all together, because people should just be themselves.