MAX, MARTY, PAUL, AND ME
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[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.

58
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.