

SAMPLE LESSON PLAN, WR 323: ADVANCED WRITING AND ARGUMENTATION

YOUTUBE VIDEO [10 MINUTES]

Play 5:30-17:00:  Mind-body dualism and being transgender | Sophie Grace Chapp...

INTRODUCTION [5 MINUTES]

We might be tempted to reduce the debate over transgender identity to a disagreement between pro-trans individuals, on the one hand, and anti-trans individuals on the other. But this would be misleading. The truth is that sharp disagreements exist *among* trans activists, just as sharp disagreements exist among their detractors.

Consider, for example, the following disagreement between Sophie Grace Chappell and Mey Rude, both of whom are transgender women and advocates of trans rights. Rude argues that the concept of biological sex is transphobic: she says that those who believe in biological sex “can pretend they’re just standing up for science, but they’re really just saying that trans women aren’t fully women and that trans men aren’t fully men.” Chappell, by contrast, *does* believe in biological sex, despite Rude’s position, and even contends that the sex/gender distinction accounts for her experience of gender dysphoria. She writes: “sex is nature, gender is nurture.”

If one were to adopt Rude’s position they would be forced to call Chappell transphobic, but Chappell is herself a transgender woman who publishes articles in support of transgender rights. To call her position transphobic, for this reason alone, strikes me as shortsighted, the result, perhaps, of treating complicated issues as though they were black and white. The truth, however, which I hope to demonstrate in today’s lecture, is that these issues are *deeply* complicated. As we have already seen, individuals can adopt contrasting, even contradictory positions and still be supporters of trans people and their rights.

ON GENDER DYSPHORIA [5 MINUTES]

According to the American Psychiatric Association, “The term ‘transgender’ refers to a person whose sex assigned at birth does not align with their gender identity.” Gender dysphoria therefore describes a **MISALIGNMENT** between sex and gender.

Thus, in order for gender dysphoria to occur, the individual in question must notice a mismatch between their sex and their gender. Otherwise, there would be no grounds for misalignment.

But if **MIS**-alignment is a problem to which **RE**-alignment is the solution—and, obviously, **RE**-alignment is a clear solution to **MIS**-alignment—then we are faced with a difficult question: where does an individual’s **TRUE SELF** reside, in their biological sex or their gender identity, which is to say, in their reproductive system or in their mind?

How you answer this question typically reveals where you land in the public debate. For Matt Walsh, our **TRUE SELF** resides in the reproductive system; for Mey Rude, however, our **TRUE SELF** resides in the mind. Notice this important contrast in my summary of their arguments below.

Walsh argues that sperm producers are male, that egg producers are female, and that people with atypical chromosome development are intersex. A person's biological sex, in turn, determines their gender identity. Therefore, a person's gender identity is determined by their sex, not by how they perceive themselves. For Walsh, an individual's **TRUE SELF** resides in the body.

By contrast, Mey Rude argues that "biological sex" must be socially constructed because the male attributes thought to be biologically determined—things like XY chromosomes, testosterone levels, body hair distribution, muscle mass, bone density, testes, and the phallus—are changeable and by no means universal. Therefore, a person's identity is not determined by their sex, but by how they perceive themselves. For Rude, an individual's **TRUE SELF** resides in the mind.

Thus, in order to win the debate, Walsh must prove that a person's gender is determined by their body, or biological sex; by contrast, Rude must prove that a person's gender is determined by their mind, or how they perceive themselves. To resolve the debate, we must therefore determine whether gender identity—or our **TRUE SELF**—resides in the body or the mind. Consider this question as you watch the next video.

YOUTUBE VIDEO AND DISCUSSION [20 MINUTES]

▶ Arguments Against Personal Identity: Crash Course Philosophy #20

In small groups of 4, discuss the following questions for the next 5 minutes. [5/5]

1. Is your identity, or **TRUE SELF**, located in your body or your mind? Backup your answer with logical support.
2. Notice that the arguments presented in this video counter Walsh's argument as well as Rude's. A fixed gender identity cannot exist in the mind because the latter is discontinuous and ever changing. Your self-conception on Monday could be radically different from your self-conception on Friday. Likewise, a fixed gender identity cannot be caused by your biological sex, according to the video, because the body too is discontinuous and ever changing. How do you respond?

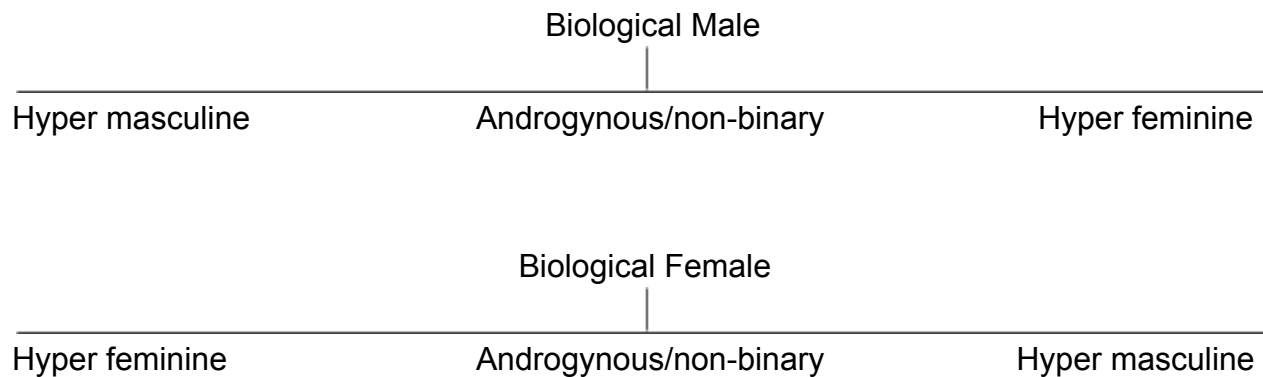
BIOLOGICAL SEX AND THE SEX-GENDER DISTINCTION [10 MINUTES]

▶ Chromosomes Are Not Sexes

▶ Do You Know The Difference Between Sex and Gender? | Queer 101 | The Advoc...

GENDER DYSPHORIA AND THE SEX-GENDER DISTINCTION [20 MINUTES]

The videos argue that biological sex is binary and entirely different from gender identity. This latter view is referred to widely in our culture as the sex-gender distinction.



I want you to notice that this fact alone disproves biological determinism. If a person's gender expression is **determined** by their biological sex, as Walsh argues, there could literally never exist a hyper-masculine female or a hyper-feminine male. It would be biologically impossible. That being said, Walsh does appear to get one thing right: the sex-gender distinction seems to be logically incompatible with gender dysphoria. More on this below.

**In small groups of 4, discuss the following questions for the next 5 minutes.
[5/10]**

1. In "Being Transgender and Transgender Being," Sophie Grace Chappell writes the following: "When I was small I had magical beliefs about clothing. The more emphatically 'feminine' it was—by which, I meant: the pinker, the frillier, the prettier, the girlier—the more power I believed it would have to make me female. ... I wanted to be feminine in order to be female, and I wanted to be female in order to be feminine. It ran in both directions. It still does." For Chappell, becoming a woman is akin to becoming feminine, but, as we've already established, women can be hyper-feminine, hyper-masculine, and everything in between. In light of this, what could it possibly mean for a biological male to "feel like a woman" or for a biological female to "feel like a man"?
2. A true gender constructivist would not consider feminine males or masculine females to be **MIS**-aligned with their natal sex because, in their view, men can be naturally feminine or masculine just as women can be naturally feminine or masculine. In other words, **RE**-alignment is impossible for the gender constructivist because **MIS**-alignment was never possible in the first place. If gender is not determined by sex, then how can a person's gender ever be misaligned with their sex?

3. In the podcast *Gender: A Wider Lense*, Dr. Paul Vasey argues that the fa'afafine of Samoa experience gender dysphoria, but rather than identify as “real women,” they identify as feminine males. When asked if they view themselves as biological females, the fa'afafine, you might remember, dismissed the question as ridiculous and pointed to their penises. What is the difference between transgender people and the fa'afafine, between a “real woman” (see Rude) and a feminine male (see Vasey)?

TWO LOGICAL PROBLEMS [20 MINUTES]

These questions pinpoint two logical problems.

Ostensibly, our notion of gender dysphoria, or **MIS**-alignment, requires a belief in biological sex. Logically speaking, there cannot exist a mismatch between one's gender identity and biological sex if the latter doesn't exist. Plain and simple.

-Illustrate this point on the board

Similarly, our notion of gender dysphoria, or **MIS**-alignment, seems to depend on gender essentialism, or the belief that men are naturally masculine and that women are naturally feminine. Thus, when a gender essentialist encounters either a feminine male or a masculine female, they consider that person's gender expression to be **MIS**-aligned with their biological sex. Gender constructivists, by contrast, do not consider feminine males or masculine females to be **MIS**-aligned because, in their view, an individual's gender expression is not determined by their biological sex. Gender expression and biological sex are entirely separate phenomena. Thus, **RE**-alignment is impossible for the gender constructivist because **MIS**-alignment was never possible in the first place. Gender dysphoria appears to be logically incompatible with gender constructivism, or the sex-gender distinction.

-Illustrate this point on the board

As I just demonstrated, the APA's definition of gender dysphoria, or **MIS**-alignment, is logically incompatible with gender constructivism, which sees gender as a way of styling the body, not as an internal essence. In fact, the key difference between someone like Matt Walsh, a biological determinist, and Mey Rude, a trans activist, is that Walsh locates our gender essence in the reproductive system while Rude locates it in the mind, but both are forms of gender essentialism. For this reason, both positions are irreconcilable with gender constructivism, which explicitly rejects the notion of a gender essence that determines your identity.

With this point now articulated, I can ask a final question that will become even more difficult to answer in our discussion of *transracialism* next week.

In small groups of 4, discuss the following questions for the next 5 minutes.
[5/10]

1. According to Chappell, “Some feminists see transgender people as treacherous because they often buy ... into an ideologically constructed version of femininity which is just another part of the patriarchy’s intricate system of oppression. ... The feminists in these debates insist that there’s more to being a woman than any socially constructed version of what it is to be a woman. And they’re right.” Such feminists are widely referred to in our culture as TERFS, or trans-exclusionary radical feminists. TERFS argue the following:

- Trans women reinforce the patriarchy by appropriating offensive, hyper-feminine expressions of womanhood (stereotypes designed to oppress women).
- Trans women were not born and raised as victims of the patriarchy, so they cannot claim to be real women. Real women, TERFs insist, are united by their shared experience of oppression under the patriarchy, so it is extremely offensive when trans women appropriate the female cultural experience as their own.

How do you respond? If you disagree, form a counter argument.

CLASS DEBATE: IS GENDER IDENTITY AN INTERNAL ESSENCE OR A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT? [15 MINUTES]

- Divide the class into groups A & B. Form circles on opposite sides of the room.
- Group A must form a logical argument in support of the claim that gender identity is an internal essence.
- Group B must form a logical argument in support of the claim that gender identity is a social construct.
- Both groups should anticipate their opponents’ objections, counter arguments, and ideological presuppositions.