

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S SPORTS SUMMIT
July 21-23, 2023
The Importance of Using Accurate Sex-Based Language

WDI USA president Kara Dansky delivered these remarks during the July 21-23, 2023 summit of ICONS, the Independent Council on Women's Sports. The title was "The Importance of Using Accurate Sex-Based Language."

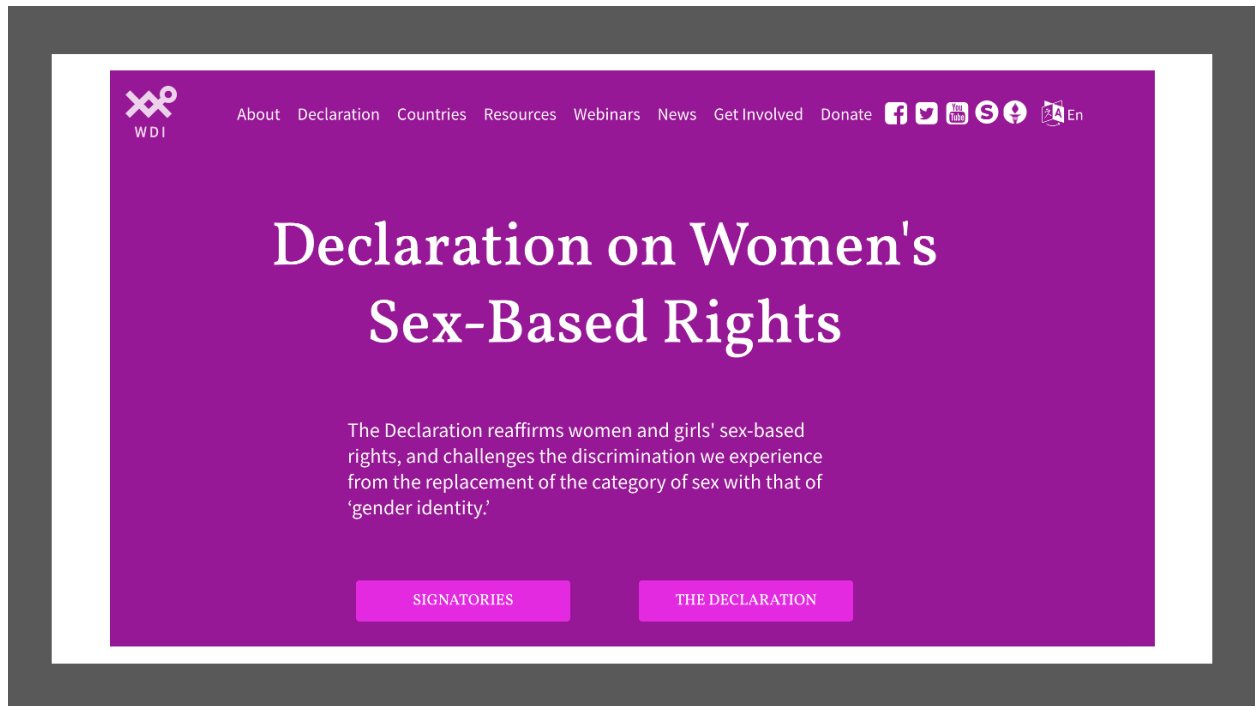


The Importance of Using Accurate Sex-Based Language

KARA DANSKY
JULY 21, 2023

Good afternoon. I really want to thank ICONS for having me here today to talk about the importance of using accurate sex-based language when talking about women's sports. I realize that some of the things I have to say are going to be a bit controversial, and that's okay. There's plenty of room for respectful disagreement. I know that ICONS is focused on many aspects of women's sports, of which keeping male athletes out of them is but one example. I'm here today to focus on that particular aspect of ICONS's work and my views about the importance of using accurate and sex-specific language when we talk about it.

There are several types of individuals and organizations that are working to protect women's sports. For example, there are non-ideological groups like ICONS and Sex Matters, conservative-leaning groups like the Independent Women's Forum, and biologists like the great Emma Hilton and Colin Wright who focus on male athletic advantage among other things. And then there are the TERFs. That's groups like Women's Declaration International - we're leftist radical feminists dedicated to women's sex-based rights, including sports.



The heart of our work at WDI is the Declaration on Women's Sex-Based Rights, an international document that re-affirms women's sex-based rights, including women's rights to physical and reproductive integrity, and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls that result from the replacement of the category of sex with that of "gender identity." The document relies heavily on CEDAW (a.k.a., the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women). This is a U.N. Convention that the U.S. has not ratified, and to which we are not bound. Still, it contains some principles to which we at WDI think the U.S. and all 50 states ought to adhere.

Article 7

Reaffirming women's rights to the same opportunities as men to participate actively in sports and physical education

Article 10 (g) of the CEDAW provides that States Parties shall ensure “[t]he same Opportunities to participate actively in sports and physical education” for girls and women as for boys and men. This should include the provision of opportunities for girls and women to participate in sports and physical education on a single-sex basis. To ensure fairness and safety for women and girls, the entry of boys and men who claim to have female ‘gender identities’ into teams, competitions, facilities, or changing rooms, inter alia, set aside for women and girls should be prohibited as a form of sex discrimination.

The Declaration consists of nine articles, Article 7 of which reaffirms women's rights to the same opportunities as men to participate actively in sports and physical education. It cites CEDAW and goes on to state that CEDAW's mandate that counties ensure the same opportunities to participate actively in sports and physical education should include “the provision of opportunities for girls and women to participate in sports and physical education on a single-sex basis. To ensure fairness and safety for women and girls, the entry of boys and men who claim to have female ‘gender identities’ into teams, competitions, facilities, or changing rooms, etc., set aside for women and girls should be prohibited as a form of sex discrimination.” We do not compromise on this position.

I'd like to suggest three main reasons for always using accurate sex-specific language and dispensing with the language of the “gender identity” proponents completely. First is the psychological damage that comes with using the language of gender. Second is that any compromise on this ultimately harms women and girls as a sex class. Third is that compromise doesn't even work because proponents of “gender identity” will never be satisfied with any of it.

Pronouns are Rohypnol

4th June 2019 by [GUEST AUTHOR](#)



In 2019, the U.K. group Fair Play for Women posted a guest post called “Pronouns are Rohypnol.” For anyone who doesn’t know, “rohypnol” refers to what is known colloquially as the date rape drug. In it, the author states: “One of the biggest obstacles to halting the stampede over women’s rights is pronoun and preferred name ‘courtesy.’ People severely underestimate the psychological impact to themselves, and to others, of compliance.” In this piece, she was talking specifically about the use of wrong-sex pronouns to refer to people in the third person, but I would argue that the points she is making apply to any use of language that obscures the material reality of sex.

To illustrate her point, she talks about something called “The Stroop Effect,” described as a delay in reaction time between congruent and incongruent stimuli. You can take a test online to determine how much longer it takes the average person to recognize various colors, depending on whether the color is written in the color being named or in another color. We can run through it quickly here.

The test goes like this: looking at the next slide, see what it feels like to say to yourself what each color is. Remember, you’re saying to yourself what the color of the word *is*, not what the word *says*.

RED	GREEN	BLUE	YELLOW	PINK
ORANGE	BLUE	GREEN	BLUE	WHITE
GREEN	YELLOW	ORANGE	BLUE	WHITE
BROWN	RED	BLUE	YELLOW	GREEN
PINK	YELLOW	GREEN	BLUE	RED

Now looking at this next slide, see what it feels like to say to yourself what each color is. Again, you're saying to yourself what the color of the word *is*, not what the word says.

RED	GREEN	BLUE	YELLOW	PINK
ORANGE	BLUE	GREEN	BLUE	WHITE
GREEN	YELLOW	ORANGE	BLUE	WHITE
BROWN	RED	BLUE	YELLOW	GREEN
PINK	YELLOW	GREEN	BLUE	RED

I asked you to see what it *feels* like to say to yourself what each color is and I didn't time us, but when you take the test online, the system will tell you the difference between how long it took you to say the colors out loud when reading the first slide versus how long it took you to say the colors out loud when reading the second slide. For nearly all of us, it takes us around twice as long to read the colors in the second slide. The basic reason why is that our brains take longer to process obvious incongruences.

Pronouns are Rohypnol

4th June 2019 by [GUEST AUTHOR](#)



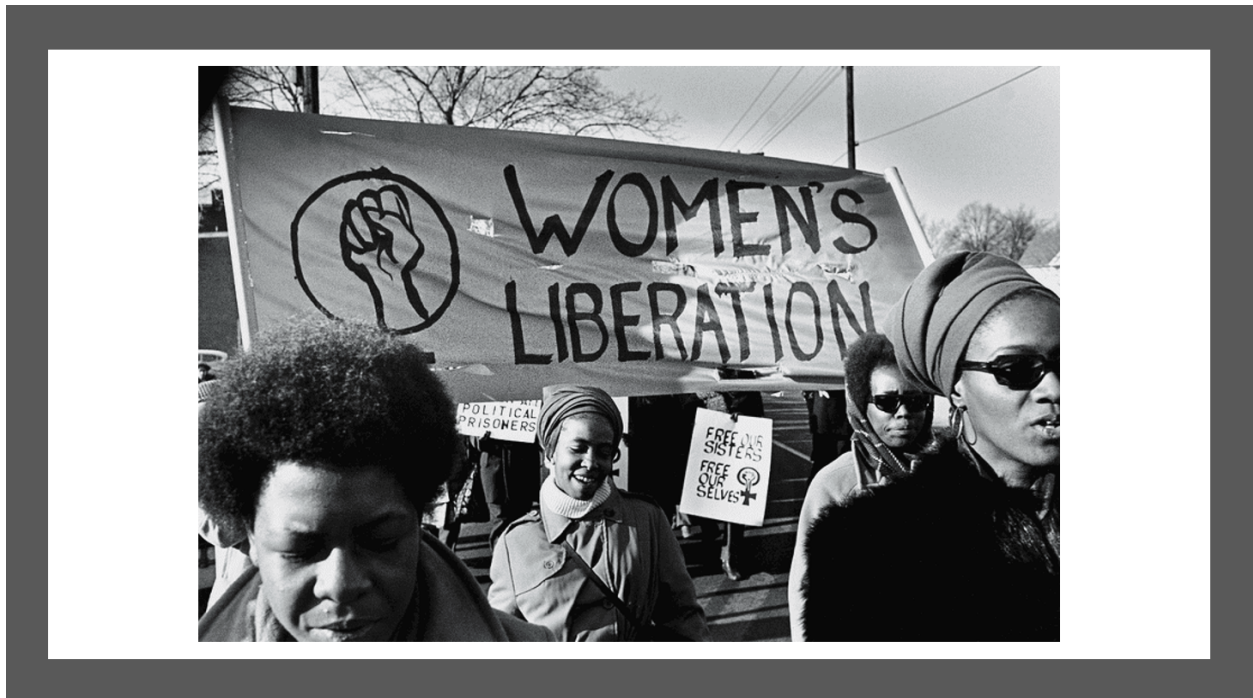
Getting back to the pronouns are rohypnol article, the author states that when taking the test, “You’ll find you have to consciously fight the conflict of input to your brain each and every time. And it leaves you confused, distracted, slower, frustrated and fatigued. Forcing our brains to ignore the evidence of our eyes, to ignore a conflict between what we see and know to be true, and what we are expected to say, affects us.” She continues, “Using preferred pronouns does the same. It alters your attention, your speed of processing, your automaticity. You may find it makes you anxious. You pay less heed to what you want to say, and more to what is expected of you. It slows you down, confuses you, makes you less reactive. That’s not a good thing.”

So that’s the author’s views, which I share, on why we shouldn’t use wrong-sex pronouns *ourselves*. She also encourages readers to do a similar experiment examining what happens to our brains when we read or hear incongruent things that are written or said by *others*. For example, when you go home, take an article you might read about who I will call Will Thomas that describes him using “she” and “her” pronouns and rewrite the article, changing all the pronouns to he and him, and using the name Will instead of Lia. Knowing that Thomas is male, how do you feel reading an article that pretends he’s female versus how you feel reading it accurately? The author encourages readers to ask themselves questions like these as they read both versions: “Do you feel anxious?” “Do you feel uncomfortable?” “Is your sense of injustice alerted?” Her hypothesis is that if the use of wrong-sex pronouns is harmless, reading these two versions of the article shouldn’t make a difference. But for most people, it actually does.

So why are pronouns rohypnol according to her, instead of some other substance that obscures our perceptions? Why doesn’t she say that pronouns are LSD or magic mushrooms, for example? She explains that at least for women, “They dull your defenses. They change your inhibitions. They’re meant to. You’ve had a lifetime’s experience learning to be alert to ‘him’ and relax to ‘her.’ For good reason. This instinctive response keeps you safe. It’s not even a conscious thing. It’s like your hairs standing on end. Your subconscious brain is helping you not get eaten by the sabre tooth tiger that your eyes haven’t noticed yet.”

The article concludes with this: "I want to be alert. I want others to be alert. I want people to see the real picture, and I want those instinctive reactions that we feel when something is wrong, to be un-blunted, un-dulled by this cheap but effective psychological trick. I feel like I owe this to myself, and I absolutely owe it to other women. And more than anything, I owe this to girls. I don't want to play even the tiniest part in grooming them to disregard their natural protective instincts. Those instincts are there for a reason. To keep them safe. They need those instincts intact, and sharp. And that's why I won't use preferred pronouns. Using Rohypnol on others isn't a courtesy."

Again, she's talking about pronouns here, but I would argue that the same analysis applies to the use of any language that obscures the material reality of sex. That includes phrases like "transgender athletes," if we're talking about male athletes. It includes the phrase "transgender prisoners" when we're talking about male inmates. It includes any and all language at all that concedes the idea that there is a sex class other than female and male or that sex isn't real or that it might matter.



My second reason for insisting on using accurate sex-based language is that any concession to "gender identity" is an attack on women and girls as a sex class. Women as a class have always been oppressed by men as a class (regardless of the benign behaviors of any individual men) *on the basis of sex*, and many of us are quite angry about it. There is a reason that suffragists had to fight for the right to vote after being denied the franchise for centuries and that countless men and institutions fought hard to stop them. There is a reason that all over the world, men beat, rape, torture, and murder women and girls at astronomical rates. There is a reason that lesbians are routinely targeted for harassment or worse. There is a reason that men used to burn women for allegedly engaging in witchcraft. It was not on the basis of their "gender identities," and no one bothered to ask women which pronouns they preferred. It was on the basis of sex. And now, the entire "gender identity" movement denies that sex even exists or that it might matter.

A couple of years ago, author Andrew Sullivan published a piece called “A Truce Proposal in the Trans War.” In it, he proposed a number of compromises on what he framed as “the transgender issue.” I wrote a response piece (which I doubt he read because he probably has no idea who I am). In my response, I said, “I have been thinking a lot about compromise and what it might look like in the context of the fight for the rights, privacy, and safety of women and girls. The question I keep arriving at is this: ‘Why on earth should women be required to compromise when it comes to our own humanity?’” My concluding paragraph was this: “Those of us who are interested in finding ‘compromise’ here must ask ourselves: How much of our humanity are we willing to sacrifice? If our answer to that question is greater than zero, we have to acknowledge that we are simply willing to leave our humanity, and the very nature of reality, at the door. No thanks, Andrew, I won’t be compromising today.” None of that has changed in the two years since.



Lastly, I want to address the frequently-made argument that it’s important to use the language of “gender identity” proponents in order to help people understand what’s happening and to get them to listen, because if we insist on using sex-specific language, they will tune us out. I understand this argument, but I think it’s misplaced. I have learned in my eight years of working on this issue that there is no amount of compromise that will ever appease the proponents of “gender identity.” None. Radical feminist Mary Daly once said, “I know that I will be punished just as much for being an itty-bitty feminist as for going the whole way. And so I go the whole way.” I feel the same way about this. There is no amount of compromise that will appease proponents of “gender identity.” They’re going to call me a TERF if I insist on even a little bit on sex-specific language, so I may as well go all the way in insisting on *exclusively* sex-specific language.

By the way, we really can do this. I was once invited to address a group of Republican women in a fairly major US city, and I was happy to accept the invitation, even though I’m not a Republican. We were chatting and one woman asked me what we’re going to do about the problem of “transgender athletes” competing in women’s sports. I said “Okay, we can talk about that, but first I want to ask what you mean by ‘transgender athletes.’” The room fell silent and

tense. Then I asked, “Do you mean men and boys?” She paused and then said cautiously, “I didn’t think we were allowed to say that.” My response was basically that if you mean men and boys you can just say men and boys. The sense of relief in the room was palpable. But I thought that was fascinating. This woman, a political conservative, felt so socially and culturally compelled to deny material reality that she didn’t think we were *allowed* (her word) to name it. We’ve got to get past this if we’re going to have any hope of preserving reality, including the reality that women are female and men are male.



And finally, I am finding that the people who compromise on language aren’t even getting very far anyway. I know she’s a bit controversial, and I understand why, but I don’t think it can be denied that some of the most successful women fighting this fight are women like Kellie-Jay Keen in the U.K., who never compromises on language. She has arguably done more to raise awareness of this topic, and to get women talking about it, than many of us, and she does it using accurate sex-specific language without compromise. If insisting on accurate sex-specific language is good enough for Kellie-Jay, it’s good enough for me.

Thanks so much.