



Women's Declaration International

The Declaration reaffirms women and girls' sex-based rights, and challenges the discrimination we experience from the replacement of the category of sex with that of 'gender identity.'

Declaration on Women's Sex Based Rights can be download in multiple languages

<https://www.womensdeclaration.com/en/declaration-womens-sex-based-rights-full-text/>

Our weekly webinar series Feminist Question Time can be viewed on our Youtube channel <https://www.youtube.com/c/WomensDeclarationInternationalWDI>

Article 7

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

The following is a speech given by a mother of an Ivy League swimmer on 26th February 2022

Alright, well Hello and Good day. Thank you for inviting me to speak about the effects of Lia Thomas and women's swimming.

I'm grateful for the chance to share how this experience unfolded and impacted our family.

I would like to make clear that I'm anonymous at the request of my daughter and I am honouring that request to protect my relationship with her.

So, before I begin, I have to say how much I missed the world I thought I was living in just a few short months ago, but then I'm glad to not be living obliviously any longer.

Lia caught my attention at the start of the swim season.

As I was glancing through the early season meet results.

Having been a swim parent at regional, national and international competitions for the past decade and a half. I'm pretty familiar with the names of the top swimmers.

A 146 200 free in a practice suit at this time of the year was eye popping for anyone. An obvious future NCAA qualifier likely an NCAA score.

It didn't take much digging to figure out that Lia Thomas was Will Thomas, a man who swam on the men's team at Penn for three years, but was now swimming with the women.

I remember being stunned that this was happening, and even more stunned that it had gone unreported, and unwhispered, among the talkative swimming community.

A little history for those unaware, prior to renaming Will was a respectable Ivy League swimmer, finishing second at conference in the distance events of the 500 1000 & 1,650-yard freestyles. Will was not an NCAA championship swimmer.



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In fact, Will was not even fast enough to be, not, not even fast enough in the 200 free to be one of the four men on Penn's team selected for the men's four by 200-yard freestyle relay.

I relay that in its own right, didn't come close to qualifying for NCAA and finished fourth out of eight teams in the Ivy League in 2019.

The next phone call that I had with my daughter after I learned this, I'd mentioned Lia and asked her if she was aware of the situation. She wasn't she quietly said, "That's not fair."

And the disappointment in her voice was clear.

But she perked up and said, "I am sure they'll figure this out once everyone understands."

Oh, how I wish her faith in those that have the power to make change had been well placed. Fast forward a few weeks to the mid-season travelled meets where Lia posted the fastest times in the country among women. Faster than the NCAA winning times from the previous year and faster than all of our Olympians, still racing in women's collegiate swimming.

All of a sudden, everyone but the major news networks was talking. Among Lia's, among the swimming families that I know it was on the tip of everyone's tongue.

No one could believe the insanity.

I talked with families far and wide who were curious about what was happening in the Ivy League. I called a lawyer that I knew at the ACLU to ask how the law, women's rights and title nine, might be handled in a case like this.

I was trying to be respectful in my language, using trans women and biological women to differentiate and trying to use requested pronouns.

I made clear that I didn't want to offend but pleaded that it seemed there was an obvious conflict here for women who already have so much less opportunity in sport, to now have to give spaces away to individuals who identify as women.

I was met with the single most stunning response I've ever received on any issue.

I was told that the words biological and genetic have no business being in a discussion around sex and gender.

I was told trans women are women.

They're female, they're girls, no language that minimises that point should be tolerated.

I was told it was an offensive question, my language was out of date.

I was told that sex and gender are equally important, and that the ACLU is actively removing sex from legal documentation and legal language.



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I tried to gently prod at the preposterous arguments I was hearing, and I was met with an absolute brick wall, when she concluded with.

“Let me tell you with certainty. The ACLU will never represent cis women, against women.”

I didn't sleep that night.

The word, the wool, had been utterly stripped from my eyes, I now understood.

And when I shared this with my mother-in-law the next day she said, “Well, there you go. We are literally flying the plane upside down now, aren't we.”

The next morning my education began.

I woke up determined to figure out what had gone wrong. What did I miss? I started researching feminism, I read JK Rowling statement, read court history and medical papers, I started writing emails to politicians.

I ordered books online and read every article I could find.

I could not bear to see women's sports redefined and reworked to no longer be a place where women could pursue and celebrate their physical limits without comparing themselves to men.

While, I was reading my daughter and the rest of the girls in the Ivy League were getting another kind of education, the kind no one should receive. The Ivy League released their statement, literally dripping with sexism, I quote,

“The Ivy League releases the following statement of support regarding Penn’s Lia Thomas's participation on the women's swimming and diving team.

Over the past several years, Lia and the University of Pennsylvania have worked with the NCAA to follow all the appropriate protocols in order to comply with the NCAA policy on transgender athlete participation and compete on the Penn women's swimming and diving team.

The Ivy League has adopted and applies the same NCAA policy, the Ivy League reaffirms its unwavering commitment to providing an inclusive environment for all student athletes while condemning transphobia and discrimination in any form.

The league welcomes her participation in the sport of women's swimming and diving and looks forward to celebrating the success of all of our student athletes throughout the season”

end quote.

My daughter screenshotted the message, and sent it to me.

“I'm so confused”, was the text I received.

But not to worry, the schools were ready and prepared to address any confusion their athletes might have. Mandatory meetings were called, with scripts, read off by coaches



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from the athletic department or in some cases, handed out. The girls already caught off guard and intimidated, but upset. Were now silenced.

They were manipulated, coerced and emotionally blackmailed. They were told their leagues and their schools had spoken and made their positions clear. They as athletes had made the decisions to be a part of these schools and this league and they needed to support it. They were told if they had opinions or were asked to speak, they had to clear it through their coaches and their athletic department leaders.

This was also of course for their own protection as no one wants their team slung through the mud.

Finally, they were told their first priority needed to be the safety and protection of their of their trans classmates who are being thrust into the media, any harm or damage that befell their classmates due to expressing opinions that might not support them would be their responsibility.

Work done! Message received.

Now, there was little to no chance they would speak out.

I know girls from Harvard, Penn and Yale and Dartmouth, that all received various versions of the same message.

After these meetings I spoke to my daughter, the influence was clear, she thought it was completely unfair that Lia was competing, she confirmed that almost all the girls did and they spoke about it amongst themselves.

She said there had been talks of one team of girls boycotting their dual meet, and some of the faster girls from other schools wanting to sit on the blocks in direct races with Lia.

But those ideas were disappearing.

She wanted no part of being hated on her campus, no part of hurting people that she knew, and no part of being embarrassingly kicked off her team.

She said the instructions.

(Coughing - Excuse me).

She said the instructions she got were to extend to the families of the swimmers.

I said, "hell no."

We agreed, I would do my best to stay anonymous.

There were still conversations among the mothers as the girls prepared for dual meets.

How are you helping your daughter?

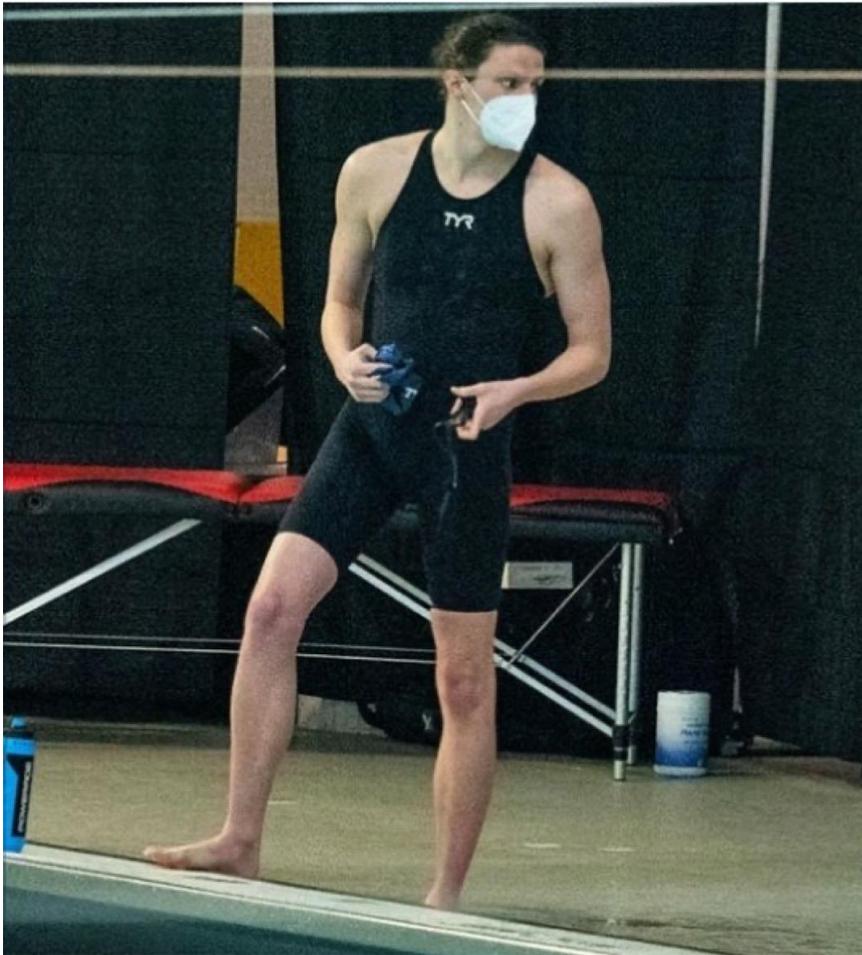
What is she telling you?

What should I tell my girl?



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I know that my daughter took two days to emotionally prepared to race Lia.

She spent the days, writing down her thoughts, working through her emotions, trying to mentally prepare for standing in front of a crowd, next to a man, where everyone president knew the race was unfair.

But no one would speak.

She knew she would not win.

But this was not about shame and losing.

This was about being asked to measure her worth, as a female athlete,

next to a pharmaceutically hamstrung man who would make her look like a child.

(With Mother of Swimmers voice breaking Jo stepped in

“I’m just going to step in for a second to give you time to compose yourself Mom. This is just an amazing talk and it’s so fantastic to hear from you.

particularly this photo, we’ve never seen before.

The one that’s on the screen now, which is so blatantly, obviously a man.

But anyway, it’s brilliant. So, I’m going to hand back over to you.”)

Sorry, I had muted myself for a second.

Yep. She worked through how to shake hands, at the end of the race, and how to make sure that she wouldn't cry, something I'm apparently not doing.

She also worked through how many towels to take in her bag into the locker room, in case she needed to cover herself completely as she changed.



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All the girls new Lia was still physically intact and had been using the locker rooms.

It turned out that stress was not necessary as Lia used another locker room space during the meet.

But it came up again before Ivy championships, where the girls usually share a space for all the teams.

I asked my daughter what she would do with Lia was changing in there.

And she said resignedly. "I'm not sure I have a choice."

I still can't believe I had to tell my adult age daughter.

"You always have a choice about whether you undress in front of a man"

What messages had these girls been receiving this year!

How many of the other girls were feeling this? My heart was ripped apart.

Damage far greater than the sports arena was now apparent to me.

After the Ivy League released its statement, the NCAA released their own. Washing their hands of any responsibility of women's sport by deferring to the governing bodies of each sport, as they said effective immediately.

USA Swimming quickly put together a policy that appeared it would limit Lia's participation, while still couched in language that didn't clearly define sex or women, the relief among the girls and the parents was palpable.

That relief was not long lasting as the NCAA quickly reneged on its words, stating that the new USA Swimming policy would not be implemented this year.

It argued that doing so would be unfair to athletes already training for the season.

Unfair!

To whom?



It appeared that the concern of fairness only extended to the lone Male Athlete participating, misogyny and the worth of women confirmed.

At this point, I had openly spoken with mothers across the Ivy League, swim parents across the country, friends involved in high level sports with their daughters,



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neighbours, and former elite athletes from all walks of life, all races and all political backgrounds. I had yet to run into someone who wasn't outraged and indeed several other parents confronting the same issue with their daughters and younger club level competition.

Everyone thought Lia's participation was wrong and humiliating. In safe conversation, parents didn't know what to do, but they still talk freely. While their daughters, especially as the season progressed grew clearly more uncomfortable discussing the topic. Like my daughter, the girls wanted to put their heads down. Wish it away and plough through as bravely as they could.

I know there are a few girls on the Penn team that support Lia. And I know several that signed the petition circulated by Pink Manta ray, Skyler Baylor, the former female swimmer that transitioned and participated on the Harvard men's team, who now earn a living as a trans consultant. That petition was widely reported to be supporting Lia's participation in the media but it was more of a request to not change the rules midseason.

Every girl on my daughter's team was asked to sign it, as we're most of the girls on teams in the Ivy League, hardly any did, a small act of free will.



A few weeks later, Ivy championships was underway, a huge banner was draped behind the starting blocks that read

“Eight against hate”, referring to the eight Ivy League schools and every team was given t shirts with the same message, several teams were required to wear it.

I know many of us desperately wanted to rewrite that logo with “Eight agreed to discriminate”.

The warm ups would begin, the announcer reading his monologue at the beginning of every session,

“The Ivy League condemns all forms of transphobia” and went on from there.

Not a word about sexism in the message, was a warning. Don't say one thing perceived as transphobic but women deserve the abuse they are receiving and



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should stay silent when confronted with their schools and their lead robbing them of opportunities and fair treatment.

Supporting the girls had begun to feel like it was taking on an element of rot, a sickening twist in our stomachs as we took our places in the stands, determined to cheer our daughters on as best we could.

The joy of the meet was spoiled from the onset but we couldn't bring ourselves to let our girls face this alone.

Day after day, we watched as a young lady was replaced in a final swim, replaced on the podium, erased from a record, a relay spot. And finally replaced for *Swimmer of the Meet* by a man, a six-foot four man with a back twice as wide as any one of the girls out there.

A man, that didn't appear to put forth full effort in all of the races. In reflection, there were a few bright spots, several beautiful swims young women accomplishing some amazing things.

And one big highlight, on the last night of the meet, when no one was in danger of being kicked out of participation when no one was in danger of being kicked out of the participation, the distance free girls who had race Lia all season, finally had a race to themselves in the final of the 1650.

The one race in the meet where the girls all knew beforehand, who was competing and had a chance to talk to each other across multiple teams.

They all marched out, holding hands from the ready room around the pool and all the way behind the blocks.

I have never seen this at a meet it's never been done. It was a message, it was silent but it was a message, we support each other.

I wish the women had responded collectively and angrily as soon as the news of Lia had broken.

I wish that seas of people were to incensed to stand by and had protested outside athletic departments and presidents' offices of universities.

I wish that power in numbers had turned the tide against silence.

I wish that society was in a place where it would recognize the effects of this run deeper than one person.

I wish people knew the ACLU's current stance and the danger of mangling the meanings of words that define women.

I wish that women and men for that matter, we're not in a place where we had to defend ourselves from the absurd idea that men can be women, that men can compete as women.

I cannot believe that we are having to argue that women and girls deserve to be able to get dressed and undressed without men in their locker rooms.



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Now, more teams and more women across the country will race against Lia at NCAA.

I want this to go away, but I need it to stay in the limelight. And in the news.

Now that I see it now that I know I desperately want people to wake up to the world we are creating for women.

That's the end of my speech so thank you for having me.

