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Submission to the Meta Oversight Board

Re: Gender Identity Debate Videos

By: Carrie Lukas, President, Independent Women's Forum

Dear Meta Oversight Board,

As the preeminent non-profit organization dedicated to developing and advancing policies that actually enhance women's freedom, opportunities, and well-being, Independent Women's Forum (IWF) has been steadfastly defending societal acceptance of sex itself, an understanding necessary to protect women's safety and privacy.

The Oversight Board is considering two videos for removal, one described as a woman videoing her discussion with a male identified as a woman in a women's bathroom, and another showing a track meet in which a male competitor handily wins a race against his female competition. IWF encourages you not to censor these videos and others like them from the digital public square.

IWF is engaged in this issue both as an organization and through its ambassadors, who have personally been affected in a variety of ways by males entering spaces and competitions meant for females, in situations ranging from swim meet locker rooms to prison cells.

Riley Gaines swam against Lia Thomas at the women's 2022 NCAA championships, tying for 5th in the 200-yard freestyle. Lia Thomas, a male, had previously competed as Will Thomas, ranking 554th in that event among collegiate men. Thomas was given the career capstone trophy over Gaines, however, because the NCAA preferred to recognize Thomas over Gaines for public relations reasons. Gaines's decades of dedication in the pool were discarded because she was a woman. Gaines has since become influential nationwide in arguing that the inclusion of males in women's sports is unfair and regressive, and today 26 states have established sex-based participation requirements for women's sports. She has almost half a million followers on Instagram and posts daily, often highlighting new stories about identity-based access to women's sports and spaces.

Paula Scanlan is a survivor of sexual assault and a former member of the University of Pennsylvania women's swim team. When Lia Thomas switched from the men's to the women's team, Scanlan and her teammates had to change and shower with the 6'4" fully intact male, 18 times per week. Her body exposed, Scanlan experienced extreme discomfort in the locker room and began having regular nightmares, but was unable to gain support from her coaches, school administration, or the NCAA. Scanlan has since traveled across the country to advocate for sex-based spaces, to protect other vulnerable young women. Scanlan has almost 21,000 followers on Instagram and frequently posts about the need for biology-based intimate spaces.

Amie Ichikawa is the founder of WomanIIWoman, and provides re-entry services and advocacy for women incarcerated in California. She was herself incarcerated at the Central California Women's Facility in Chowchilla for five years and maintains contact with women in the Central California Women's Facility and the California Institution for Women, serving as their advocate. Ichikawa receives daily reports from women inside the prison suffering from physical and psychological terror from males permitted to self-identify into the women's prison. Ichikawa has more than 4,000 followers on Instagram and frequently posts about the dangers of identity-based access into prisons, with the goal of ending this policy in California and nationwide.

Payton McNabb was permanently injured when a male on the opposing women's volleyball team powerfully spiked the ball, striking her head. The ball's impact caused neurological impairments including a concussion, vision problems, and partial paralysis to the right side of her body. Though she was a three-sport athlete hoping to play in college, that spike ended her sports career entirely. McNabb and her story—which was caught on video—were critical in changing the law in North Carolina, to require sex-based participation in female athletics.

These women have also written their own comment to the Board based on their specific experiences.

There Is Nothing Harmful About Videos that Show the Truth

Circulating truths about the profound biological differences between the sexes, far from being harmful, is instead necessary for both the preservation of women's rights and to protect robust freedom of speech in public discussion of contentious issues. Neither of the videos show or encourage any aggressive behavior, violence, or depict in any way anything other than a blunt exchange of words or a demonstration of simple male-female strength differentials. It's critical that merely stating the truth about biological sex differences not be mischaracterized by Meta's Community Standards as somehow harassing or harmful in itself.

One side of the debate asserts harm in hopes that alarmism, without further inspection, will help further its goals. The reality is, only a quarter of Americans endorse allowing

male athletes to participate in women's sports due to identification, a number that already represents a significant downward trend from the third who thought so two years ago. Videos, like the one the Board is currently considering, that plainly show the male advantage in physical competition have had an "emperor's new clothes" effect on the discourse, which is why one side of the debate—the one that's losing support—wants Meta to use censorship to remove that truth from public discussion for its nearly four billion users around the world.

Sensing a loss of public support, proponents of identity-based sports and spaces will point to the alleged harm of videos like these, using tenuous insinuations to link tragic statistics like higher suicide rates among trans-identifying minors. This connection is too often unsupported by real data. But cherry picked data is just an anecdote. For example, some data shows that increasing access to cross-sex medical intervention (supported by the same activists on the same basis of higher threatened suicide rates), actually increases the suicide rate among trans-identifying minors.

Nevertheless, the insinuation that something as straightforward as a video of a male athlete emerging victorious when allowed to compete against females could be so harmful as to drive suicide rates is often used to great effect to silence debate, and we urge the Board to not allow the emotionality of these assertions to sway them without asking for evidence a stronger causal link.

Permitting This Discussion to Flourish Helps Everyone

While women's sports are an important battleground for the fight to retain some semblance of reality around biological sex, they're hardly the only frontier. If these videos, in which plain biological truths are either spoken or demonstrated, are "disappeared" from the digital public square, it will affect the ability of women to advocate for their rights to single-sex prisons, domestic abuse shelters, or sex-separated facilities for minors in schools or camps.

Videos like the ones the Board is considering for removal are a crucial part of the public discussion on this important cultural issue; more than that, they represent an irreplaceable way to clearly tell the truth about sex differences and the situations in which they must be recognized if women are to be able to keep enjoying the privacy, freedom, opportunity, and safety they have become accustomed to in the United States.

The women who are posting and sharing these kinds of videos are not asking for trans activists to be silenced by Meta. If the Board recommends that these videos are permitted to stay a part of the Facebook discussion, nothing will prevent those who are upset or offended by the videos from condemning or attempting to rebut the conclusions many are drawing from them in their own posts and comments.

IWF supports the robust speech of activists who disagree with us about the reality of

biological sex; we believe that when free people are allowed to speak and debate ideas, the truth is more likely to emerge. In the case of restoring and protecting the definitions and guardrails around biological sex, more Americans every day are persuaded by the truths these videos and others like them demonstrate.

In preemptively short-circuiting the public discussion by removing videos as some are urging the Board to do, Meta would be censoring the view of the majority of people in the United States, and diminishing the ability of all our citizens to fully examine a contentious issue and come to their own conclusions.

Carrie Lukas
President
INDEPENDENT WOMEN'S FORUM
4 Weems Lane #312 Winchester, VA 22601
(202)807-9986
clukas@iwf.org