



Episode 773: Psychology Professor Resists “Gender Identity” Crowd, Gets Attacked

Guest: Jordan Peterson

WOODS: In introducing you I didn't give too much detail, because I thought it would be much better for you to tell the story. You're in Canada; you're at the University of Toronto where, as far as we understand in the United States, political correctness is worse than it is here, and you are enduring rather an interesting ordeal because of a line in the sand, in effect, you drew. And I'd rather just have you tell the story. When did you become – I mean, you've been a distinguished scholar for a long time, but when did you become this celebrity surrounding the cause of anti-political correctness? What were the circumstances, and how long has this been going on?

PETERSON: Well, it's been going on for a full month in Canada. I released some videos on my YouTube channel, Jordan Peterson Videos, between September 27th and the first days of October. One of them detailed out my opposition to some new Canadian legislation called Bill C-16, which is already law in many Canadian provinces, by the way, that adds gender identity and gender expression to the list of protected groups in the Canadian Human Rights Act in the Criminal Code, making discrimination based on those two categories hate speech. And also objecting to the University of Toronto human resources department's decision to make so-called anti-racism and anti-bias training mandatory for their staff, advised by a group called the Black Liberation Collective, which is in my opinion a reprehensible group that will not disavow violence in their demands for social transformation. And then third detailing out what I called the PC game, which was my attempt to summarize the mental algorithms that the politically correct activists use to simultaneously oversimplify the world and put themselves in a state of moral superiority.

So I released those videos, mostly because I was upset about and have been for some time about the galloping march of political correctness through the university campuses and through society at a broader level. And I wanted to articulate my concerns about that occurring, and it's ignited an absolute firestorm. It's been major news in Canada now for a month, a month straight. And so even this weekend, for example, there were a number of columns in Canada's major newspapers and television coverage, as well as an explosion of continued interest on YouTube, where young people seem to get almost all of their political information.

I should correct just one thing you mentioned, though. Political correctness isn't as large a phenomena in Canada yet, I think, as it is on American campuses, and partly what I was objecting to at the U of T was attempts to make it as dominant here as it is

already in places like Brown University, for example, or Yale or Berkeley or New York University, where it's really gotten out of hand.

WOODS: Yeah, I guess what I had in mind when I said that was that some of these ideas have the force of law. Like there are —

PETERSON: Yes.

WOODS: There isn't a First Amendment tradition that's as strong as the US has in its First Amendment to the Constitution. We don't see that as much in Canada, so they can get away with these human rights statutes, so called, that can criminalize certain kinds of speech. We haven't quite gotten there yet.

PETERSON: Well, but it's happened in New York City, you know? In New York City, if you don't use someone's preferred gender pronoun, which is whatever gender pronoun they want you to apply to them, you can be fined \$250,000 for mis-gendering someone. And New York City has already protected 31 different gender identities, so-called gender identities. So the legislation is on the march in the US as well.

WOODS: Well, you've said that you will not use gender neutral pronouns, which are these crazy pronouns that look on paper like they're unpronounceable, and if somebody comes up to you and says I would like you to use these pronouns in referring to me, you've refused to do it. And this is one of the things that's gotten you into trouble, because the claim is that you're going to cause these people undue mental distress by this impertinent refusal of yours.

PETERSON: Yes, well, there's multiple claims. One of them is that I'm producing an unsafe campus environment. The other is that I'm violating the policies of the Universities of Toronto. And the third is that I'm breaking provincial law. And I already warned in my video that even discussions of the sort that we're having right now I think are potentially illegal under the Ontario statutes, and are soon to be made into law, federal statutes, because the law also instantiates a very particular conception of human sexuality in the most fundamental sense.

So the law is predicated on the proposition that biological sex — if it exists at all, because one of the opponents that I've been debating recently on Canadian television said that the scientific consensus was that biological sex didn't exist. But in any case, if it does exist, it is functionally independent from gender identity, which is your felt sense of what gender you are, which can vary from moment to moment or day to day. And on top of that, there's something called gender expression, which varies independently from gender identity and biological sex. And gender expression as near as I can tell is little other than fashion choice, because the Ontario Human Rights Commission, which details out many of the policies surrounding this sort of legislation describes gender expression as the manner in which you do your hair and dress and decorate yourself. And so as far as I can tell, criticizing someone's fashion choice has now become a hate crime in Ontario.

And so one of the big problems with this is that the claim that these things vary independently — gender identity, gender expression, biological sex, and even sexual

preference, which I didn't add to the list – that's a radical social constructionist claim, and that's a particular kind of doctrine of human development that insists that the profound differences that we see, for example, between men and women are nothing but constructs of socialization. And that's a very weak theory from a scientific perspective, because the evidence that, say, personality differences and differences and interests between men and women have a biological foundation is I would say overwhelming and irrefutable. Yet the legislation is moving in the direction of making this radical social constructionist claim the official doctrine of the land.

I've been trying to warn biologists, especially evolutionary biologists and evolutionary psychologists that the social justice warriors are going to come for them next. But faculty members, I wouldn't say that they attend very well to their own self interest. That's a charitable way of putting it.

WOODS: Well, it seemed to me that it was a combination of you are in general just opposed to bullying in academia, and the fact that this particular kind of bullying is so anti-science. And the funny thing is that a lot of people who would identify with the politically correct crowd would pride themselves or claim that science is their banner when it comes to – Whether it's global warming or whatever, they're on the side of science, and yet here what you're saying is that they are so preposterously not on the side of science that it's almost not even debatable.

PETERSON: The social justice warrior types are not on the side of science at all. They're perfectly willing to use scientific arguments when it fosters their ideology, when it supports their ideology, but they're not allied – I wouldn't say they're allied with the spirit of scientific inquiry at all. I mean, one of the fundamental historical sources for, let's say, political correctness is postmodernism, especially the writings of Jack Derrida. And Derrida, although it's not always to figure out what he's talking about, he's made extraordinarily radical claims about such things as fundamental as human categorization. For Derrida, the only reason that people use categorization schemes is to exclude and oppress in the name of power, and Derrida as also famously said essentially that there's nothing outside the context, or there's nothing outside the text. His supporters deny that he meant what he meant when he said that, but basically his position is that of a radical relativist, that everything is interpretation and there's no such thing as objective facts.

And so the anti-science politically correct types regard science itself as part of the oppressive patriarchy that they are basically sworn to overthrow in the name of radical egalitarian, not opportunities, but outcomes. There's nothing about them at all that's scientific. They're anti-science right to the core, far worse than the Christian fundamentalists, who are really only upset that evolutionary biology seems to exist in contradiction to their avowed Christian literalist traditions.

WOODS: I'm glad you clarified that, because up to now I haven't really heard any real discussion of the actual reality of these so-called gender identities. It's just been taken for granted that people have them, and so you're just bigoted if you deny them.

PETERSON: No, no, no. Look, the best research, the most interesting research that has been done on this has been done by personality researchers who concentrated on cross-cultural comparisons of the personality differences between men and women.

Now, the personality differences between men and women on any individual trait are small to moderate in size, but if you add them up across all the traits, there's not that much overlap between men and women. So you can segregate men and women into their biological sex on the basis of their personality with perhaps 80% to 90% accuracy.

But you might say, well, that's okay; that doesn't prove that those differences are biologically predicated. But here's the kicker: if you do a cross-cultural comparison of personality differences between men and women and include many countries in that comparison, which is something that's been done with tens of thousands of people now by multiple researchers, what you find is that the biggest personality differences and differences exist in the Scandinavian countries, where precisely the largest attempts have been made to render the societies gender neutral. So what's happened is that as the Scandinavian countries have pursued those policies, the differences between men and women have gotten larger, and now they're larger there than they are anywhere else in the world. And no serious researcher disputes that, by the way. They're very, very solid studies.

WOODS: So why is it then that, if the scholarship runs completely against these people, why is academia completely silent? In other words, the relevant professors – I don't care what the sociologists say. Why are the relevant professors – Have they all just been bullied into silence?

PETERSON: I think the biological types are pretty apolitical. Like, they tend to concentrate on their scientific work, and I think most of them are relieved that they don't have to attend to this sort of hyper-political nonsense that's invaded most of the rest of the campus. But what they don't understand is that they're next on the chopping block, so to speak.

And then one of the things that I've observed about university faculty is that – and this may be just true of people in general, and it probably is – is that I wouldn't say that an excess of bravery is one of their cardinal features. I mean, I've noticed for many years that in our faculty meetings, despite the fact that we're protected by tenure, the probability that we will oppose in any meaningful sense any of the university administration's reasonable and unreasonable requests that are put on us is extraordinarily low. And I mean, the silence from the faculty across Canada and even the United States with regards to what I've been experiencing has been absolutely deafening. I mean, I've received at least a thousand letters from people supporting what I've been doing – and by the way, very few letters criticizing it. I think I could count them on the fingers of two hands. But faculty are definitely not lining up behind me to help support their freedom of speech.

And it's really appalling, because one of the things that I've noted, for example, that even among my senior graduate students and the PhD students that I've produced, there is an increasing reluctance to do such things as discuss gender differences in the classes where those sorts of things are relevant topics of discussion. I mean, I'm a personality researcher, and so gender differences and personality are something that I know a fair bit about, but my students are increasingly afraid to have discussions about the profound biological differences between men and women because it's not politically correct. And believe me, it's a small step from being unable to discuss

the biology of masculinity and femininity to being able to discuss anything that smacks of biological influence or biological determinism.

So I hope the faculty wake up, but I don't hold out a lot of hope for that. The universities are very much infiltrated or dominated by Marxist, postmodernist, social justice warrior types. I think one out of five social scientists identifies as Marxist, for God's sake.

WOODS: Did I read somewhere – and I'm sorry I was reading it a bit in haste – that as a result of what you're doing, there is a debate about the subject of gender identity? Now, did they mean that you're provoking debate, or there's a literal debate that's going to be held?

PETERSON: No, no. So look, this is what happened. So the university wrote me these two letters, which I've detailed on my website, by the way, so people can go there and listen to them, because I read them and also formulate a response. But in any case, after I got the second letter, which basically told me to stop talking about these things – it started out with a ringing defense of free speech and ended with a request that I silence myself – I thought about it for a while, and then I went and talked to the dean who was one of the signatories of the letter.

And I spent some time with my family before I went to the meeting, sort of meditating on what the desired outcome would be, and I have a technical way of thinking about desired outcomes that I formulated over many years of thinking. So if you want a good outcome, the outcome should be good for you, and it should be good for your family, and it should be good for the people that you know and for the broader society all at the same time. That's a good optimal definition of "good." And I thought, well, the best possible outcome for this would be that the university host a debate on the relevant issues, because obviously there's something to be discussed here given the insane interest that this series of events has produced.

So I suggested to the dean that the university take the moral high ground and say that we'll have a public debate on the issues that I'm raising, specifically about the inclusion categories in Bill C-16, and that hopefully we'll be able to scare up some opposition, some people on the other side who will be willing to take the opposite position and that we'll live cast that on YouTube, host a public debate and live cast it on YouTube. And the university agreed. The dean went off to talk to the president of the university and to some of the other people involved, and they agreed to host a debate. I'm going to see the dean again at 2:30 today to see if they've found anyone who will debate me and to figure out when this is going to be held, but it should be within the next week; that's the plan.

WOODS: Can I make a prediction about this debate?

PETERSON: Sure.

WOODS: Having had some experience in this area. There will be people who, in whatever, in the transgender community or whatever, who will say –

PETERSON: Yep.

WOODS: – who will protest the very existence of the debate –

PETERSON: Oh yeah.

WOODS: – because they'll say, It denies my right to exist.

PETERSON: Yes, yes. Well, the thing is it's become increasingly clear as this debate has progressed in Canada and I think online that the fact that it's focusing on gender pronouns is in some sense almost incidental. There are much larger issues at stake here, and I think that's become clear. But we've also had preliminary discussions about such things as security, and we've already worked out some general principles for security, which is that all the fire alarms will be guarded, because the counter-protestors for this sort of thing like to pull the fire alarms. It's happened many times on the University of Toronto campus. And that there'll be a very low level of tolerance for uncivil outbursts during the debate, so we're going to – Because both sides are going to be represented and there'll be room for questions for both sides at the end of the discussion, we're going to do everything we can to ensure that this debate proceeds without colorful, untoward interruptions that will just stifle the discussion.

Now, you're right already. I mean, I'm sure – I mean, I had a debate on Canadian public television that's been watched by about 100,000 people now. And even the people on that program who posed their viewpoints against mine expressed misgivings about even the existence of the debate, and that's sort of this idea of no platforming, that it's unreasonable to give an opposing viewpoint, even airtime, and certainly not to speak with people who do hold an opposing viewpoint, because all that does is give them a platform to parade their contemptible views. Well, that just shows you exactly how much respect the social justice warrior PC types have for free speech. To me of course it's just an indication that their arguments are ill formulated and they're too damn cowardly as a general rule to stand up and actually subject their algorithmically oversimplified beliefs to the harsh light of public criticism. But there's always a rationalization for that.

WOODS: Let me ask you something about people who have actually undergone gender reassignment surgery.

PETERSON: Yeah.

WOODS: Now, there's no necessary connection between that and the idea that there are 31 gender identities or whatever. That could be binary, right?

PETERSON: Well, that's an interesting thing, because I've received a lot of letters from trans people, and without exception – I guess "a lot" would be ten, but given how many trans people there are that's quite a few. The genuine trans people and not the transtrenders or the gender benders as they're sort of called now, they actually don't have any objection to the idea of gender itself; they just want to be the other one. So like if you're a male-to-female transsexual, generally you want to be called "she."

That's the whole point. And so the people who want these strange designations are a tiny minority of a tiny minority.

You know, up to 70 of these categories have now been generated. It isn't even obvious to me that some of those categories have any members. And I don't believe that the people who formulated the legislation in Canada thought for a moment that we would go from two genders to 70. They were thinking more like 2.1 and maybe thinking that people would learn to use "they" instead of merely "he" and "she." But it's pretty obvious that the number of categories has multiplied to the point of self-evident absurdity. I mean, even one of the professors at University of Toronto who is gender non-binary wanted to be referred to as "they." I debated they on CBC News the other day – that's Canadian Broadcasting Corporation News – and they said that in order to keep track of the gender pronouns of their friends, they had to use their cellphone.

WOODS: Ugh.

PETERSON: Yeah, exactly. And so I said, well, look, do you really think that legislating that people speak in a manner that requires electronic memory aids really a tenable solution?

WOODS: (laughing)

PETERSON: Yeah, that'd be funny if it wasn't bloody wrong.

WOODS: It's absolutely – It's happening all around us. Is there anything that's been written that doesn't just say, Boy, this is ridiculous, but that tries to deal with this in a scientific way that's accessible to the layman that I might be able to link my readers to?

PETERSON: Yeah, sorry, that refers to what specifically?

WOODS: That explains that there's nothing to this crazy 70 genders thing, that this is just made up. There's no scientific basis for it. Is there anything that just goes through that?

PETERSON: No, I think that it's so new that it – I mean, it's very difficult to formulate a scientific opinion on the nonexistence of something.

WOODS: (laughing) Right.

PETERSON: Right? I mean, I can certainly send you a link to the papers detailing gender differences in Scandinavia. In fact, I can do that for you. I'll send you an op-ed that I wrote, and it contains the references. So I can do that right away.

WOODS: Well, in the meantime I want to know just a quick thing before I let you go, because I know your time is unbelievable precious these days.

PETERSON: Yes, it's crazy.

WOODS: Right, so I just want to ask you about – not about anything having to do with scholarship or the substance of this stuff, but rather about how your life has changed. Like, I understand that somebody glued your office door shut? What kinds of things have been going on?

PETERSON: The first thing that's worth pointing out is several thousand people have commented on my YouTube videos and also written me letters, but I would say 95% of those have been extraordinarily supportive. And there's been a petition with 10,000 names delivered to the university and another one with 5,000 names, two separate petitions supporting what I'm doing. And so although I've been subject to, say, the sanctions that the university has placed on me, they've also agreed to have a debate, and the vast majority of public opinion directed my way has been overwhelmingly positive. And I should also say that it has also been overwhelmingly thoughtful. Of the thousand letters I've received, I would say 600 are two pages long, and the citizens who wrote them put an awful lot of thought into them. And they've also sent them to the university.

And increasingly in Canada, especially over the last week or so, the press has moved to a position where they're supporting what I'm doing. Canada's perhaps most famous journalist, Rex Murphy, wrote a devastating article for the *National Post* on the weekend, taking the university administration to task and calling for the resignation of the U of T president for failing to support me in this endeavor. So I'm feeling – I mean, I was very nervous for a while, and so was my family, about potential threats to my livelihood, although I am buttressed in various ways because of my other activities against that. But the attention has been sufficiently overwhelming, so I've basically been doing nothing for the last month except responding to journalists, essentially.

But I'm not feeling oppressed by this. I don't like to think of myself as an oppressed victim. I think it's a mistake for people to think of themselves that way, and it isn't self evident to me that this is a fight I'm going to lose. And I already decided when I made the videos that I was going to pay the price for speaking out instead of paying the price for not speaking out, because I know what the price for not speaking out is. I've studied totalitarianism and authoritarianism for a very long period of time. I wrote a book called *Maps of Meaning* back in 1999, which has become kind of a minor classic on the topic, that is a psychological analysis of religious belief and its hijacking by radical ideologues. I've studied *The Gulag Archipelago* and the Soviet Union and Mao's China and Nazi Germany intensely for decades and learned the most terrible things.

But one of the things I've learned is that you speak your mind because it's people speaking their minds that keeps individuals stable and sane and keeps societies secure and flexible. And I'm not mouthing the words of left-wing ideologues. That's why I won't say the gender neutral pronouns. I don't like left-wing ideologues. I don't like ideologues at all. And so I'm feeling – It's been nerve-racking certainly, but that's okay. It's also forced me to sharpen my arguments and brought the debate before the public, so so far so good.

WOODS: If people want to follow your travails as this unfolds, would the best place be – I can see you have Twitter, and you have YouTube. Should I link to those? Is there any – I mean, you have a professional website, but you're probably not dealing with this stuff there.

PETERSON: No, I would say it's the YouTube account – that's Jordan Peterson Videos – and the Twitter.

WOODS: Okay, we're going to link to both of those at TomWoods.com/773. Well, I'm going to let you run. I really, really appreciate your time, and best of luck.

PETERSON: I'll send you those references too, okay? I'll send you those references, and you can post those, and people can read the damn papers for themselves.

WOODS: You bet I'll put them up on that same page. Thanks so much, and good luck.

PETERSON: You bet. I'll send those very soon. Buh bye.