

In disciplining Lindsay Shepherd, Wilfrid Laurier chooses catechism over education

The university's tribunal wasn't debating with the teaching assistant, they were chanting pious phrases while hovering over her eye with an ice pick



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Nobody wanted Jordan Peterson to be right.

The University of Toronto psychology professor was an accomplished academic, but was little known outside his field until he decided to oppose Bill C-16, intended to make discrimination based on gender identity or expression illegal under federal human rights law. Peterson gained attention for arguing the bill was an unconscionable infringement of freedom of speech; eventually, he has said,

hate speech restrictions will make it impossible for us to debate transgender issues, or to decline, if asked, to use personal pronouns like “ze” and “zir.”

Peterson should have been easy to dismiss as an old fart, but the campus left has become so predictably hysterical that Peterson’s opposition to the bill — now law — has been elevated to high drama, complete with violent altercations and screaming matches. The professor has become an alt-right folk hero, his crowdfunding account thriving and his upcoming book already an Amazon bestseller.



University of Toronto psychology professor Jordan Peterson. *Tyler Anderson / National Post*

He is now waging a war against what he considers a conspiracy of post-secondary Marxists trying to indoctrinate youth — and this, too, should be easy

to dismiss, but for the increasing number of campus controversies perfectly demonstrative of his claims.

Take, for example, the unnerving case of Lindsay Shepherd. The graduate student and teaching assistant at Wilfrid Laurier University showed a three-minute clip of TVO's *The Agenda*, featuring a debate on the pronoun issue that pit Peterson against academics, a writer and a transgender activist.

During the hour-long debate, first aired in 2016, Peterson's main antagonist, a gender studies professor at the University of Toronto, argues that Peterson's refusal to use people's preferred pronoun was tantamount to abuse, violence and hate speech. Peterson's response — that it would soon be considered unacceptable to even host a debate, as TVO did — proved prescient.

Shepherd, the teaching assistant, was called to account in front of a three-person panel to explain her decision to expose her students to the clip. She surreptitiously recorded the encounter with her superiors, in which she was reduced to tears as she defended what she naively imagined to be the role of a university.

Wilfrid Laurier University teaching assistant Lindsay Shepherd was castigated for showing a debate that originally aired last fall on the well-regarded TVO news show *The Agenda*, hosted by Steve Paikin. *CNW Group/TVO*

“I don't see how someone would rationally think it was threatening. I can see how it might challenge their existing ideas but for me that's the spirit of the university challenging ideas that you already have,” she said. “Can you shield people from those ideas? Am I supposed to comfort them and keep them insulated away from this? Is that what the point of this is? Because to me that is so against what a university is about.

“I was not taking a side, I was presenting both arguments.”

One of the professors, Nathan Rambukkana countered: “You have to think about the kind of teaching climate that you are creating and these arguments are counter to the Canadian Human Rights Code,” especially since C-16 passed.

Nathan Rambukkana, Assistant Professor, Communication Studies, Wilfrid Laurier University. *Wilfrid Laurier University*

“I understand your positionality. The reality is that it has created (a) toxic climate for some of the students,” he added. The fact that Peterson has, in the past “doxxed” his critics — exposing them to online harassment — means any opinion he expresses “creates an unsafe learning environment for students.”

He goes on, saying he is reluctant to compare everything to Hitler, but “this is like neutrally playing a speech from Hitler.”

Putting aside for a moment Peterson’s history of doxxing: the position Peterson expressed in The Agenda clip itself is, at worst, impolite. Canada is a society that prizes peace, order and good government so it’s no surprise impoliteness can be a sin. But we don’t need to compel our citizens to be polite by threat of the cruder tools of law. As with pronoun use, this matter belongs to the realm of civil society.

Transphobia is a real issue; it’s important that trans people have the ability to live lives as free of discrimination as possible. But if listening to a well-moderated TVO debate is beyond the ken of a university student, God help them the day they are exposed to Twitter.

If students opt for a protracted childhood, pop culture has no shortage of unproblematic textbooks, virtue-signalling manifestos, listicles, cat gifs and navel-gazing essays featuring a myriad of lived experiences. These alone may be thin

gruel on which to sustain an adult intellect, but one of the joys of adulthood is that we all get to choose our own degree of complacency.

- What the Wilfrid Laurier professors got wrong about Bill C-16 and gender identity discrimination
- Rex Murphy: University bullies student who dares to play Peterson clip from The Agenda
- Christie Blatchford: Thought police strike again as Wilfrid Laurier grad student is chastised for showing Jordan Peterson video

The Shepherd tape is viscerally disturbing. Listening to anyone being bullied is uncomfortable. But more than that, the tapes are Kafkaesque. Shepherd's antagonists aren't trying to argue that her vision of a university's role is wrong — they know they can't. Instead, they are trying to impose an incongruent set of values by force.

In the *Closing of the American Mind*, the late Allan Bloom wrote that the destruction of prejudice is an admirable goal. But if you destroy prejudices without replacing them with higher values — the pursuit of truth, the ability to reason and argue, to challenge and be challenged in turn — then what you are providing is not education, it's a lobotomy: virtuous but morally hollow.

The Laurier tribunal wasn't debating Lindsay Shepherd — they were chanting doctrine, ice pick close at hand.

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