

Jordan Peterson

Jordan Bernt Peterson (born June 12, 1962) is a Canadian clinical psychologist and a professor of psychology at the University of Toronto. His main areas of study are in abnormal, social, and personality psychology,^[1] with a particular interest in the psychology of religious and ideological belief,^[2] and the assessment and improvement of personality and performance.^[3]

Peterson studied at the University of Alberta and McGill University. He remained at McGill as a post-doctoral fellow from 1991 to 1993 before moving to Harvard University, where he was an assistant and then associate professor in the psychology department.^{[4][5]} In 1998, he moved back to Canada, as a faculty member in the psychology department at the University of Toronto, where he is currently a full professor.

Peterson's first book, *Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief*, was published in 1999, a work which examined several academic fields to describe the structure of systems of beliefs and myths, their role in the regulation of emotion, creation of meaning, and motivation for genocide.^{[6][7][8]} His second book, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*, was released in January 2018.^{[4][9][10]}

In 2016, Peterson released a series of videos on his YouTube channel in which he criticized political correctness and the Canadian government's Bill C-16 because of free speech implications. He subsequently received significant media coverage.^{[4][9][10]}

Jordan Peterson



Peterson in June 2018

Born	Jordan Bernt Peterson June 12, 1962 Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
Residence	Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Nationality	Canadian
Education	Political science (B.A., 1982) Psychology (B.A., 1984) Clinical psychology (Ph.D., 1991)
Alma mater	University of Alberta McGill University
Spouse(s)	Tammy Roberts (m. 1989)
Children	2
	Scientific career
Fields	Psychology
Institutions	McGill University (1985–1993)

Contents

Early life

Education

Career

Works

Books

Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief

12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos

YouTube channel and podcasts

Self Authoring Suite

Critiques of political correctness

Postmodernism and identity politics

Bill C-16

Personal life

Bibliography

Books

References**External links**

Early life

Peterson was born on June 12, 1962, and grew up in Fairview, Alberta, a small town northwest of his birthplace Edmonton, in Canada. He was the eldest of three children born to Beverley, a librarian at the Fairview campus of Grande Prairie Regional College, and Walter Peterson, a schoolteacher.^{[11][12]} His middle name is Bernt (/ˈbɛərənt/ *BAIR-ənt*), after his Norwegian great-grandfather.^{[13][14]}


When he was 13, he was introduced to the writings of George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and Ayn Rand by his school librarian Sandy Notley – mother of Rachel Notley, leader of the Alberta New Democratic Party and 17th Premier of Alberta.^[15] He also worked for the New Democratic Party (NDP) throughout his teenage years, but grew disenchanted with the party due to what Orwell diagnosed in *The Road to Wigan Pier* as a preponderance of "the intellectual, tweed-wearing middle-class socialist" who "didn't like the poor; they just hated the rich".^{[11][16]} He left the NDP at age 18.^[17]

Education

After graduating from Fairview High School in 1979, Peterson entered the Grande Prairie Regional College to study political science and English literature.^[2] He later transferred to the University of Alberta, where he completed his B.A. in 1982.^[17] Afterwards, he took a year off to visit Europe. There he developed an interest in the psychological origins of the Cold War, particularly 20th century European totalitarianism,^{[2][18]} and was plagued by apocalyptic nightmares about the escalation of the nuclear arms race. As a result, he became concerned about humanity's capacity for evil and destruction, and delved into the works of Carl Jung, Friedrich Nietzsche, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn,^[11] and Fyodor Dostoyevsky.^[18] He then returned to the University of Alberta and received a B.A. in psychology in 1984.^[19] In 1985, he moved to Montreal to attend McGill University. He earned his Ph.D. in clinical psychology under the supervision of Robert O. Pihl in 1991, and remained as a post-doctoral fellow at McGill's Douglas Hospital until June 1993, working with Pihl and Maurice Dongier.^{[2][20]}

Career

From July 1993 to June 1998,^[1] Peterson lived in Arlington, Massachusetts, while teaching and conducting research at Harvard University as an assistant and an associate professor in the psychology department. During his time at Harvard, he studied aggression arising from drug and alcohol abuse and supervised a number of unconventional thesis proposals.^[17] Two former Ph.D. students, Shelley Carson, a psychologist and teacher from Harvard, and author Gregg Hurwitz recalled that Peterson's lectures were already highly admired by the students.^[4] In July 1998, he returned to Canada and took up a post as a full professor at the University of Toronto.^{[1][19]}

	Harvard University (1993–1998) University of Toronto (1998–present) ^[1]
Thesis	<i>Potential psychological markers for the predisposition to alcoholism</i> (http://digitool.library.mcgill.ca/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=39261&sil_o_library=GEN01) (1991)
Doctoral advisor	Robert O. Pihl
Influences	Jung, Freud, Piaget, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Solzhenitsyn
Website	jordanbpeterson.com (https://jordanbpeterson.com/)
	Signature
	

Peterson's areas of study and research are in the fields of psychopharmacology, abnormal, neuro, clinical, personality, social, industrial and organizational,^[1] religious, ideological,^[2] political, and creativity psychology.^[3] Peterson has authored or co-authored more than a hundred academic papers.^[21]

For most of his career, Peterson had an active clinical practice, seeing 20 people a week. He had been active on social media, but in September 2016, he released a series of videos in which criticized Bill C-16 that changed his career and life.^{[15][22]} In 2017, he decided to put the clinical practice on hold,^[9] as well since 2018 temporarily stopped teaching because of new projects.^{[12][23]}

Works

Books

Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief

In 1999 Routledge published *Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief*. The book, which took Peterson 13 years to complete, describes a comprehensive theory about how people construct meaning, beliefs and make narratives using ideas from various fields including mythology, religion, literature, philosophy and psychology in accordance to the modern scientific understanding of how the brain functions.^{[17][5][24]}

According to Peterson, his main goal was to examine why both individuals and groups participate in social conflict, explore the reasoning and motivation individuals take to support their belief systems (i.e. ideological identification^[17]) that eventually results in killing and pathological atrocities like the Gulag, the Auschwitz concentration camp and the Rwandan genocide.^{[17][5][24]} He considers that an "analysis of the world's religious ideas might allow us to describe our essential morality and eventually develop a universal system of morality".^[24] Jungian archetypes play an important role in the book.^[4]

Something we cannot see protects us from something we do not understand. The thing we cannot see is culture, in its intrapsychic or internal manifestation. The thing we do not understand is the chaos that gave rise to culture. If the structure of culture is disrupted, unwittingly, chaos returns. We will do anything – anything – to defend ourselves against that return.

– Jordan Peterson, 1998 (*Descensus ad Inferos*)^[5]

In 2004, a 13-part TV series based on Peterson's book *Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief* aired on TVOntario.^{[11][19][25]}

12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos

In January 2018, Penguin Random House published Peterson's second book, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*. The work contains abstract ethical principles about life, in a more accessible style than *Maps of Meaning*.^{[9][4][10]} To promote the book, Peterson went on a world tour.^{[26][27][28]} As part of the tour, Peterson was interviewed by Cathy Newman on Channel 4 News which generated considerable attention, as well popularity for the book.^{[29][30][31][32]} The book was ranked the number one bestselling book on Amazon in the United States and Canada and number four in the United Kingdom.^{[33][34]} It also topped bestselling lists in Canada, US and the United Kingdom.^{[35][36]}

YouTube channel and podcasts

In 2013, Peterson began recording his lectures ("Personality and Its Transformations", "Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief"^[37]) and uploading them to [YouTube](#). His YouTube channel has gathered more than 1 million subscribers and his videos have received more than 50 million views as of April 2018.^{[22][38]} In January 2017, he hired a production team to film his psychology lectures at the University of Toronto. He used funds received via the [crowdfunding website Patreon](#) after he became embroiled in the Bill C-16 controversy in September 2016. His funding through Patreon has increased from \$1,000 per month in August 2016 to \$14,000 by January 2017, and then to more than \$50,000 by July 2017.^{[15][22][39]}



Peterson at the University of Toronto
March 2017

Peterson has appeared on many podcasts, conversational series, as well as other online shows.^{[38][40]} In December 2016, Peterson started his own podcast, *The Jordan B. Peterson Podcast*, which has 45 episodes as of April 26, 2018, including academic guests such as [Camille Paglia](#), [Martin Daly](#), and [James W. Pennebaker](#),^[41] while on his channel he has also interviewed [Stephen Hicks](#), [Richard J. Haier](#), and [Jonathan Haidt](#) among others.^[41] Peterson supported engineer [James Damore](#) in his action against [Google](#).^[10]

In May 2017, Peterson began *The psychological significance of the Biblical stories*,^[42] a series of live theatre lectures, also published as podcasts, in which he analyzes [archetypal narratives in Genesis](#) as patterns of behavior ostensibly vital for personal, social and cultural stability.^{[10][43]}

Self Authoring Suite

In 2005 Peterson and his colleagues set up a for-profit company to provide and produce a [writing therapy](#) program with series of online writing exercises,^[44] titled the *Self Authoring Suite*.^[11] It includes the *Past Authoring Program*, a guided autobiography; two Present Authoring Programs, which allow the participant to analyze their personality faults and virtues in terms of the [Big Five](#) personality model; and the Future Authoring Program, which guides participants through the process of planning their desired futures. The latter program was used with [McGill University](#) undergraduates on academic probation to improve their grades, as well since 2011 at [Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University](#).^{[45][46]} The programs were developed partially from research by [James W. Pennebaker](#) at the [University of Texas at Austin](#) and [Gary Latham](#) at the [Rotman School of Management](#) of the [University of Toronto](#).^[4] Peterson's co-authored 2015 study showed significant reduction in ethnic and gender-group differences in performance, especially among ethnic minority male students.^{[46][47]} According to Peterson, more than 10,000 students have used the program as of January 2017, with drop-out rates decreasing by 25% and [GPAs](#) rising by 20%.^[11]

Critiques of political correctness

Peterson's critiques of [political correctness](#) range over issues such as [postmodernism](#), [postmodern feminism](#), [white privilege](#), [cultural appropriation](#), and [environmentalism](#).^{[40][48][49]} Writing in the *National Post*, [Chris Selley](#) said Peterson's opponents had "underestimated the fury being inspired by modern preoccupations like white privilege and cultural appropriation, and by the marginalization, shouting down or outright cancellation of other viewpoints in polite society's institutions",^[50] while in *The Spectator*, [Tim Lott](#) stated Peterson became "an outspoken critic of mainstream academia".^[18] Peterson's social media presence has magnified the impact of these views; [Simona Chiose](#) of *The Globe and Mail* noted: "few University of Toronto professors in the humanities and social sciences have enjoyed the global name recognition Prof. Peterson has won".^[22]

According to his study – conducted with one of his students, Christine Brophy – of the relationship between political belief and personality, political correctness exists in two types: PC-egalitarianism and PC-authoritarianism, which is a manifestation of "offense sensitivity".^[51] He places classical liberals in the first type, and places so-called social justice warriors, who he says "weaponize compassion", in the second.^{[11][2]} The study also found an overlap between PC-authoritarians and right-wing authoritarians.^[51]

Peterson considers that the universities should be held as among the most responsible for the wave of political correctness which appeared in North America and Europe.^[22] According to Peterson, he watched the rise of political correctness on campuses since the early 1990s,^[52] and considers that the humanities have become corrupt, less reliant on science, and instead of "intelligent conversation, we are having an ideological conversation". From his own experience as a university professor, he states that the students who are coming to his classes are uneducated and unaware about the mass exterminations and crimes by Stalinism and Maoism, which were not given the same attention as fascism and Nazism. He also says that "instead of being ennobled or inculcated into the proper culture, the last vestiges of structure are stripped from [the students] by post-modernism and neo-Marxism, which defines everything in terms of relativism and power".^{[18][53][54]}

Postmodernism and identity politics

Peterson states that postmodern philosophers and sociologists since the 1960s,^[48] while typically claiming to reject Marxism and communism, have actually built upon and extended their core tenets. He says that it is difficult to understand contemporary society without considering the influence of postmodernism which initially spread from France to the United States through the English department at Yale University. He argues that they "started to play a sleight of hand, and instead of pitting the proletariat, the working class, against the bourgeois, they started to pit the oppressed against the oppressor. That opened up the avenue to identifying any number of groups as oppressed and oppressor and to continue the same narrative under a different name [...] The people who hold this doctrine – this radical, postmodern, communitarian doctrine that makes racial identity or sexual identity or gender identity or some kind of group identity paramount – they've got control over most low-to-mid level bureaucratic structures, and many governments as well".^{[53][21]} Some in the media have compared these critiques to Cultural Marxist conspiracy theories.^{[31][55][56][57]}

And so since the 1970s, under the guise of postmodernism, we've seen the rapid expansion of identity politics throughout the universities, it's come to dominate all of the humanities – which are dead as far as I can tell – and a huge proportion of the social sciences ... We've been publicly funding extremely radical, postmodern leftist thinkers who are hellbent on demolishing the fundamental substructure of Western civilization. And that's no paranoid delusion. That's their self-admitted goal ... Jacques Derrida ... most trenchantly formulated the anti-Western philosophy that is being pursued so assiduously by the radical left.
– Peterson, 2017^[53]

He emphasizes that the state should halt funding to faculties and courses he describes as neo-Marxist, and advises students to avoid disciplines like women's studies, ethnic studies and racial studies, as well other fields of study he believes are "corrupted" by the ideology such as sociology, anthropology and English literature.^{[58][59]} He states that these fields, under the pretense of academic inquiry, propagate unscientific methods, fraudulent peer-review processes for academic journals, publications that garner zero citations,^[60] cult-like behaviour,^[58] safe-spaces,^[61] and radical left-wing political activism for students.^[48] Peterson has proposed launching a website which uses artificial intelligence to identify and showcase the amount of ideologization in specific courses. He announced in November 2017 that he had temporarily postponed the project as "it might add excessively to current polarization".^{[62][63]}

Peterson has criticized the use of the term "white privilege", stating that "being called out on their white privilege, identified with a particular racial group and then made to suffer the consequences of the existence of that racial group and its hypothetical crimes, and that sort of thing has to come to a stop. ... [It's] racist in its extreme".^[48] In

regard to identity politics, while "left plays them on behalf of the oppressed, let's say, and the right tends to play them on behalf of nationalism and ethnic pride" he considers them "equally dangerous" and that instead should be emphasized individualism and individual responsibility.^[64] He has also been prominent in the debate about cultural appropriation, stating it promotes self-censorship in society and journalism.^[65]

Bill C-16

On September 27, 2016, Peterson released the first installment of a three-part lecture video series, entitled "Professor against political correctness: Part I: Fear and the Law".^{[15][66]} In the video, he stated he would not use the preferred gender pronouns of students and faculty as part of compelled speech, and announced his objection to the Canadian government's Bill C-16, which proposed to add "gender identity or expression" as a prohibited ground of discrimination under the Canadian Human Rights Act, and to similarly expand the definitions of promoting genocide and publicly inciting hatred in the Criminal Code.^{[66][67]}

He stated that his objection to the bill was based on potential free speech implications if the Criminal Code is amended, as he claimed he could then be prosecuted under provincial human rights laws if he refuses to call a transsexual student or faculty member by the individual's preferred pronoun.^[68] Furthermore, he argued that the new amendments paired with section 46.3 of the Ontario Human Rights Code would make it possible for employers and organizations to be subject to punishment under the code if any employee or associate says anything that can be construed "directly or indirectly" as offensive, "whether intentionally or unintentionally".^[69] Other academics challenged Peterson's interpretation of C-16,^[68] while some scholars such as Robert P. George supported Peterson's initiative.^[15]

The series of videos drew criticism from transgender activists, faculty and labour unions, and critics accused Peterson of "helping to foster a climate for hate to thrive".^[15] Protests erupted on campus, some including violence, and the controversy attracted international media attention.^{[70][71][72]} When asked in September 2016 if he would comply with the request of a student to use a preferred pronoun, Peterson said "it would depend on how they asked me [...] If I could detect that there was a chip on their shoulder, or that they were [asking me] with political motives, then I would probably say no [...] If I could have a conversation like the one we're having now, I could probably meet them on an equal level".^[72] Two months later, the National Post published an op-ed by Peterson in which he elaborated on his opposition to the bill and explained why he publicly made a stand against it:

I will never use words I hate, like the trendy and artificially constructed words "zhe" and "zher." These words are at the vanguard of a post-modern, radical leftist ideology that I detest, and which is, in my professional opinion, frighteningly similar to the Marxist doctrines that killed at least 100 million people in the 20th century.

I have been studying authoritarianism on the right and the left for 35 years. I wrote a book, *Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief*, on the topic, which explores how ideologies hijack language and belief. As a result of my studies, I have come to believe that Marxism is a murderous ideology. I believe its practitioners in modern universities should be ashamed of themselves for continuing to promote such vicious, untenable and anti-human ideas, and for indoctrinating their students with these beliefs. I am therefore not going to mouth Marxist words. That would make me a puppet of the radical left, and that is not going to happen. Period.^[73]

In response to the controversy, academic administrators at the University of Toronto sent Peterson two letters of warning, one noting that free speech had to be made in accordance with human rights legislation and the other adding that his refusal to use the preferred personal pronouns of students and faculty upon request could

constitute discrimination. Peterson speculated that these warning letters were leading up to formal disciplinary action against him, but in December the university assured him that he would retain his professorship, and in January 2017 he returned to teach his psychology class at the University of Toronto.^{[74][15]}

In February 2017, Maxime Bernier, candidate for leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, stated that he shifted his position on Bill C-16, from support to opposition, after meeting with Peterson and discussing it.^[75] Peterson's analysis of the bill was also frequently cited by senators who were opposed to its passage.^[76] In April 2017, Peterson was denied a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant for the first time in his career, which he interpreted as retaliation for his statements regarding Bill C-16.^[77] A media relations adviser for SSHRC said "[c]ommittees assess only the information contained in the application".^[78] In response, The Rebel Media launched an Indiegogo campaign on Peterson's behalf.^[79] The campaign raised C\$195,000 by its end on May 6, equivalent to over two years of research funding.^[80] In May 2017, Peterson spoke against Bill C-16 at a Canadian Senate committee on legal and constitutional affairs hearing. He was one of 24 witnesses who were invited to speak on the bill.^[76]

In November 2017, a teaching assistant at Wilfrid Laurier University first year communications course was censured by her professors for showing a segment of *The Agenda*, which featured Peterson debating Bill C-16 with another professor, during a classroom discussion about pronouns.^{[81][82][83]} The reasons given for the censure included the clip creating a "toxic climate", being compared to a "speech by Hitler",^[16] and being itself in violation of Bill C-16.^[84] The censure was later withdrawn and both the professors and the university formally apologized.^{[85][86][87]} The events were criticized by Peterson, as well as several newspaper editorial boards^{[88][89][90]} and national newspaper columnists^{[91][92][93][94]} as an example of the suppression of free speech on university campuses.

Personal life

Peterson married Tammy Roberts in 1989.^[15] They have one daughter and one son.^{[11][15]}

Politically, Peterson has described himself as a classic British liberal,^{[95][18]} and has stated that he is commonly mistaken to be right wing.^[38] He is a philosophical pragmatist.^[43] In a 2017 interview, Peterson identified as a Christian,^[96] but in 2018 he did not.^[97] He emphasized his conceptualization of Christianity is probably not what it is generally understood, stating that the ethical responsibility of a Christian is to imitate Christ, for him meaning "something like you need to take responsibility for the evil in the world as if you were responsible for it ... to understand that you determine the direction of the world, whether it's toward heaven or hell".^[97] When asked if he believes in God, Peterson responded: "I think the proper response to that is No, but I'm afraid He might exist".^[9] Writing for *The Spectator*, Tim Lott said Peterson draws inspiration from Jung's philosophy of religion, and holds views similar to the Christian existentialism of Søren Kierkegaard and Paul Tillich. Lott also said Peterson has respect for Taoism, as it views nature as a struggle between order and chaos, and posits that life would be meaningless without this duality.^[18]

Starting around 2000, Peterson began collecting Soviet-era paintings.^[16] The walls of his house are covered with this art, which he keeps as a reminder of the relationship between totalitarian propaganda and art, because how idealistic visions can become totalitarian oppression and horror.^{[4][23]} In 2016, Peterson became an honorary member of the extended family of Charles Joseph, a Kwakwaka'wakw artist, and was given the name Alestalagie ("Great Seeker").^{[16][98]} Since late 2016, Peterson is on strict diet eating only meat and some vegetables, to control severe depression and an auto-immune disorder, including psoriasis and uveitis.^{[12][99]} After he became famous in 2016, he changed his manner of speech and his style of dress to a more old-fashioned style, which he calls "prairie populism".^{[22][23]}

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- [Official website \(https://jordanbpeterson.com\)](https://jordanbpeterson.com)
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