

*At the Forks: Where Indigenous and Human Rights Intersect*

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## Anti-Fascist Solidarity Now

Noah Schulz

The roundtable this essay is built from was created partly in reaction to something harmful occurring on the University of Winnipeg campus, but it was, and is also an opportunity to imagine something better together and to begin to build that better right now.

The fight for trans liberation is an interconnected fight with many other struggles for liberation, for justice, for equality... for all the things universities and otherwise purport to care about. The fight for trans access to healthcare is a fight for holistic healthcare for everyone. It is a fight against capitalism's commodification of this human right, a declaration that we do not need to surrender to those mechanisms of capitalism that commodify healthcare. We all need healthcare, and for trans people or otherwise, these are fights for bodily autonomy, for the right to live with dignity, with some control over one's body, and the life-plan one pursues.

It is crucial to centre trans voices and perspectives in this fight, but it is equally important to recognize that trans people are not only fighting for ourselves but are rightly part of a coalition of groups fighting against authoritarian and fascist forces within government and within community. We want to especially attend to the most vulnerable within these movements. This includes racialized trans women who face disproportionate violence, especially if their positionality intersects with Indigenous identity.

**Trans students should not be left to defend themselves alone in the face of such power imbalances.**

In a case involving universities, we also want to protect students. While it is right that trans people advocate for ourselves and build community within ourselves, there are massive power differentials between tenured faculty and students, or university administrations and students, and those must be taken into account as well.

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Trans students should not be left to defend themselves alone in the face of such power imbalances.

Certainly, the University of Winnipeg's response to the poster and resulting talk given by Professor Boucher was inadequate. Even if there was a trap, as Jarvis Brownlie describes in his article "Organized Transphobia and the University" (see article 2 in this special issue), where there is really no response from the University that could be successful, listening to the perspectives of trans people signalling the alarm that we felt when seeing the poster advertising the talk would have been a good place to start. Rather than patting itself on the back for caring so much about trans people, the University could have listened to them.

Researchers should also listen to the communities they are writing about. This is true for research about trans and other marginalized communities, but really for any kind of social scientific research. As academics, **we should listen to the situated scholars who have already shared their knowledge when beginning our research.** Even if you are located within a community, you should still listen to a diversity of perspectives from other scholars and other activists. No community – trans or otherwise – is a monolith, and so a diversity of situated experiential knowledge has to be utilized.

Ethical research needs to engage with a diversity of perspectives from the community at hand. Much of the harm that the talk given by Professor Boucher produced — if it truly was unintended — could have been avoided **if existing scholarly research by trans people and medical experts had been included.** If the most up-to-date medical research on the life-saving and safe nature of gender affirming healthcare had been substantively engaged with, perhaps the damaging nature of the poster and the talk itself could have been avoided. For example, if any of that existing research had been engaged with, the poster could have avoided the harmful use of the anti-transgender dogwhistle *transgenderism*. Instead of ignoring them, the talk itself could have addressed trans perspectives, including highlighting the very low rates of regret around transition and accessing gender affirming care, surgeries or otherwise.

Instead of doing so, Professor Boucher did not cite a single credible source, and her talk demonstrated a troubling lack of understanding about trans health care, both the challenges in accessing it and the many positives it offers for trans folks. As others have noted,<sup>1</sup> the only citation Professor Boucher offered was a recent New York Times article. This is not a strong academic source and is also a paper that has been actively called out for its dangerously misinformed coverage of trans issues.<sup>2</sup> Rather than active dialogue with situated scholars and up-to-date medical research,

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this talk relied heavily on speculation and made use of harmful dogwhistles like transgenderism and natal sex. The speculation about external, market-drive forces potentially being behind the expansion of access to gender affirming healthcare in recent years that Professor Boucher's contained is especially troubling given growing anti-trans sentiments that frame the rising rates of openly transgender and gender diverse people as a worrying trend that must be questioned and potentially even eliminated.

Trans people should not be seen as unique or isolated in caring about our rights and bodily autonomy, in part because we are being targeted as part of a broader organized movement will not stop at controlling access to drag shows or gender affirming healthcare. As Judith Butler argues, "as a fascist trend, the anti-gender movement supports ever strengthening forms of authoritarianism."<sup>3</sup> The time for anti-fascist solidarity is now. This entails recognizing that trans people are not the only target of these authoritarian and reactionary movements. Although the struggle for trans rights is part of a larger interconnected fight against fascism and lack of autonomy for all, trans perspectives should be listened to in these discussions because we know what is used to target us. We know what coded terminology is used to attack us, and when that knowledge is being offered institutions should respond positively.

It is heartening that so many people came to the rally for trans, 2S, non-binary and gender diverse safety held on the University of Winnipeg campus. The support to celebrate the drag queen story hour at Scout's Books in Winnipeg in the spring of 2022 was another beautiful moment of community coming together.<sup>1</sup> We must continue to build those moments, not just in times of reaction to something harmful, but because it is joyous to come together in community and we are so much stronger together.

### **About the Author**



Noah Schulz (he/him) is a transgender white settler living in Treaty 1 Territory. He has been working as an Instructor at the University of Winnipeg since 2014 and teaches courses in a wide range of topics including Canadian politics, political theory, queer theory, feminist theory, decolonial theory & Indigenous resurgence politics, city politics, and the politics of mass media.

His current research focuses on grassroots, bottom-up approaches to multiculturalism as a form of relationship building and epistemic cooperation.

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