

The Harm of 'Harm': An Examination of the Relationship Between Conceptions of Prejudice and Support for Free Speech

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Background

- Is support for free speech related to how students define harm related concepts like prejudice?
- ~ 1 in 4 students think violence to stop a campus speech is acceptable to some degree (Stevens, 2023)
- Concept Creep Theory can help elucidate these campus trends
- Concept Creep assess the expansion in psychology's harm related concepts such as prejudice, trauma, abuse, and bullying (Haslam, 2016)

Results

Concept Breadth and General Free Speech: $r = -.32^{**}$

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Concept Breadth	97	4.88	.87	-	-	-	-
2. Free Speech-Examples	97	2.54	.81	-.51**	-	-	-
3. Free Speech-Abstract	97	3.67	.56	.05	.33**	-	-
4. Political Orientation	97	3.02	1.41	-.63**	.55*	.16	-

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .001$

Implications

Offense → Harm → Violence

- Broader conceptions of harm may explain a lack of support for free speech
- There is a greater tendency to stigmatize harm, reflecting a sensitivity towards others' well being
- Victims of harm v. Perpetrators of harm
- Free speech climate at Wooster
- Wooster policies targeting harm

Research Question & Hypothesis

- Is there a correlation between support for free speech and concept breadth?
- **Main hypothesis:** I predicted a negative association between students' conceptions of harm and their overall support for free speech

Method

A survey was conducted among Wooster students using the following measures:

Table 1
Example vignettes from each concept subscale.

Concept	Example Item
Bullying	Arlene works as a salesperson for a large company. Her colleagues like to play practical jokes on one another. Arlene is embarrassed by the jokes and has asked her colleagues to stop, but sometimes they still play pranks on her.
Mental disorder	Sara hates getting up in front of people and avoids all types of public speaking. She is dreading having to walk on stage to collect her high school diploma and has asked the school administration whether it can be mailed to her instead.
Prejudice	Dolly is walking in the mall prior to closing. She sees two African American men walking toward her. She doesn't realize it, but she automatically clutches her purse and walks a bit faster.
Trauma	Danny is fifteen years old. At the end of summer his father was offered a new job and the family moved interstate. Danny is finding it hard to make friends at his new school.

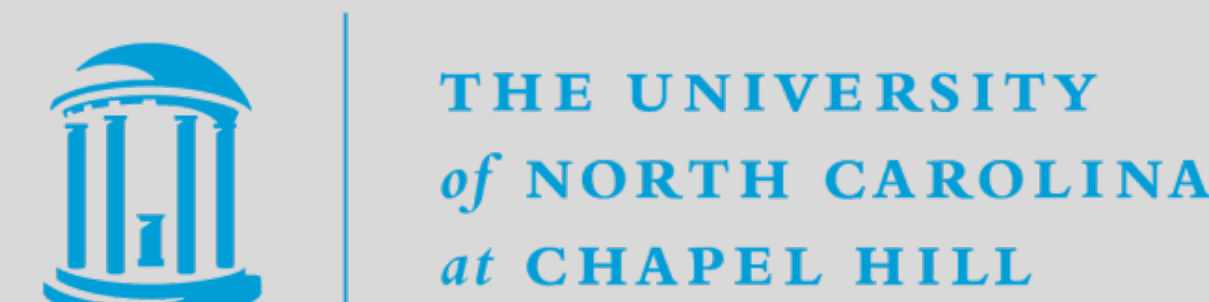
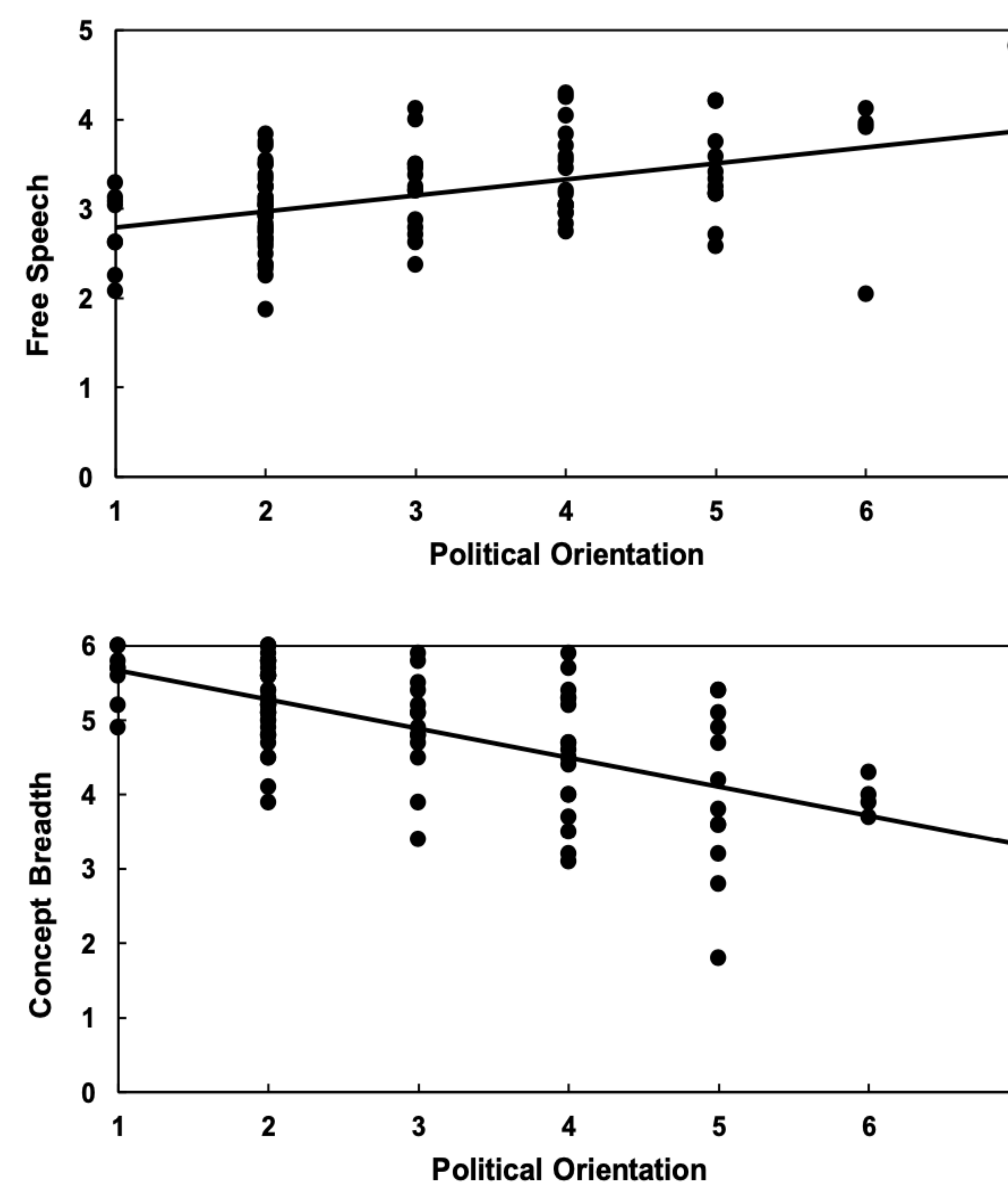


Figure 1
Participants Responses for Political Orientation and Overall Support for Free Speech (upper pond) & Concept Breadth (lower pond)



Future Research

- Replicate findings!
- What makes college campuses unique?
- Research the concept creep of prejudice beyond the context of free speech

References

- McGrath, M. J., & Haslam, N. (2020). Development and validation of the Harm Concept Breadth Scale: Assessing individual differences in harm inflation. *PLoS ONE*, 15(8).
- The Knight Foundation & Ipsos. (2022). *College Student views on Free Expression and Campus Speech*.
- Stevens, S.T. (2023). 2024 College Free Speech Rankings: What Is the State of Free Speech on America's College Campuses? The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression.
- Haslam, N. (2016). Concept creep: Psychology's expanding concepts of harm and pathology. *Psychological Inquiry*, 27(1), 1–17.

Concept Breadth

Free Speech

