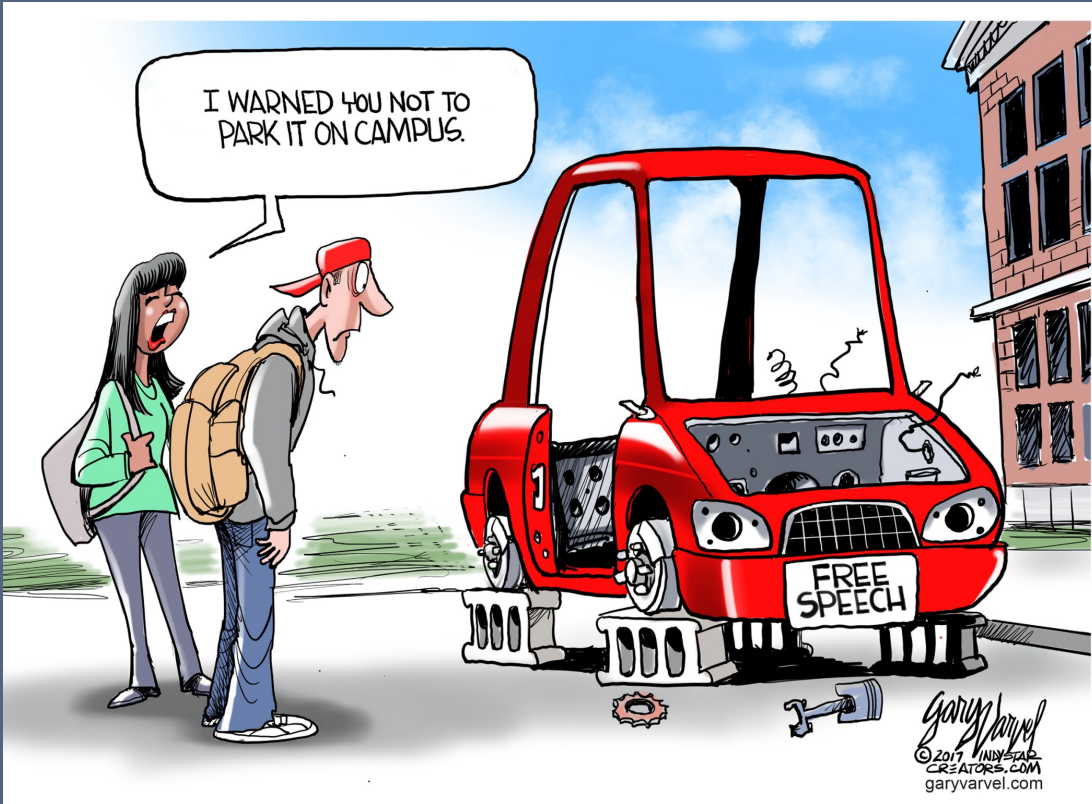


The Harm of 'Harm': An Examination of the Relationship Between Conceptions of Prejudice and Support for Free Speech

By: Dylenn Lasky

Background



- 65% of students believe their campus climate stifles free speech (Knight-Ipsos, 2022)
- ~ 1 in 4 students think violence to stop a campus speech is acceptable to some degree (Stevens, 2023)
- Why do students think about free speech in this way?
- How can we better understand these trends?

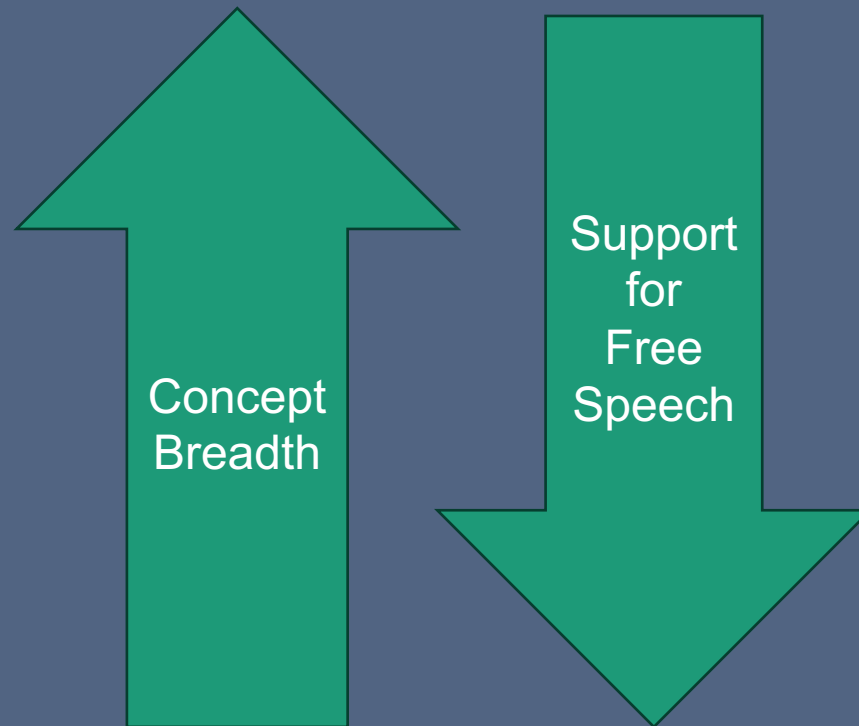
Theoretical Framework

- Concept Creep is the main theoretical framework that was used to learn more about students' attitudes towards free speech
- Concept Creep is a theory that has identified semantic expansions in the meaning of psychology's harm related concepts (Haslam, 2016)

Prejudice Trauma
Abuse Bullying

Research Question & Hypothesis

- Is there an association between students' support for free speech and their conceptions of harm as implicated through the concept of prejudice?
- **Main Hypothesis:** I predicted a negative association between students' conceptions of harm and their overall support for free speech



Methodology

- A survey was conducted amid 97 College of Wooster students which assessed concept breadth, support for free speech, and demographics

Concept Breadth Scale

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.

(McGrath & Haslam, 2020)

Free Speech Measure



THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL



Results

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

Figure 1

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

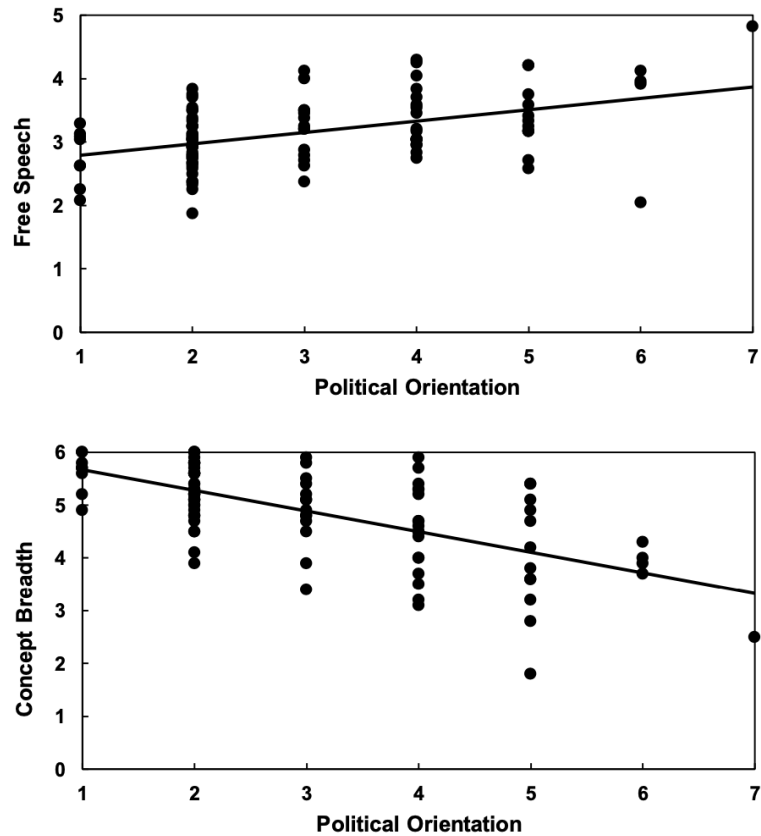


Table 1

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 other's well being
- Victims of harm v. Perpetrators of harm
- Free speech climate at Wooster
- Wooster policies targeting harm

Future Research

- Replicate findings!
- What makes college campuses unique?
- Conduct research on how an expanded definition of prejudice may correlate with other variables of interest such as moral foundations and perspective taking (empathy)

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.