

Predicting the Importance of Freedom of Speech and the Perceived Harm of Hate Speech

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Although freedom of speech is a fundamental value in the United States, individuals vary in the importance they place on it. The purpose of this study was to examine personality and attitudinal factors that may influence an individual's judgments of the importance of freedom of speech and, secondarily, the harm of hate speech. As expected, the importance of freedom of speech was positively related to intellect, individualism, separate knowing, and negatively related to right-wing authoritarianism. Men rated freedom of speech more important than did women. The perceived harm of hate speech was positively related to intellect and liberalism, and women perceived a greater harm of hate speech than did men.

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

—*The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution*

The First Amendment was ratified on December 15, 1791, and has generally been held as the foundation of modern democracy. The freedoms granted in the First Amendment have been discussed, debated, and fought over throughout American history. The Founding Fathers believed in the power of ideas and debate, not censorship. Ideally, the First Amendment, or freedom of speech, involves the protection and conservation of differences (Delgado, 1994). As an end, free speech permits individuals through debate to achieve a common good. The premise behind freedom of speech and the First Amendment is to protect the ability of the people, as a collective, to decide their own fate and permit true self-determination (Raikka, 2003). Freedom of speech is predicated on a free society, and to limit it would contradict self-government and limit our rights (Meiklejohn, 1948). Blasi (1985) contended that free expression should be protected, since

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freedom of speech is valuable and worth defending. Thus, governmental restrictions should not impinge on free expression. It is imperative that society and the legal system develop First Amendment jurisprudence (Emerson, 1967). According to Bollinger (1986), tolerance for hate speech strengthens society.

Those who consider freedom of speech in the context of harm to the target claim that hate speech subordinates and harms members of oppressed groups (e.g., women through pornography, ethnic minorities through hateful speech; Lederer & Delgado, 1994; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). These “critical race theorists” (Matsuda et al., 1993) claim that there is an existing imbalance of power, and freedom of speech reinforces inequality with oppressive speech, violating the 14th Amendment of the Constitution’s guarantee of equal protection under the law. Some argue that hate speech must be regulated to protect members of these groups (Butler, 1997). However, just because one recognizes the harm of hate speech does not imply that one also wants to regulate or censor speech.

Free-speech defenders in the case of support of Nazis’ right to speak and Holocaust deniers in this country likely recognize the harm of such speech, but believe that freedom of speech is more essential than censoring speech content. For example, Aryeh Neier (1979), who was the Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) at the time, was highly criticized for supporting a neo-Nazi group’s efforts to march in Skokie, Illinois, which is highly populated by Holocaust survivors. He contended that Jews are best protected by allowing all groups the right to freedom of speech. One may argue with the notion that there is no challenge in defending something with whom you agree. The difficulty would be standing up for your opponent, so that everyone’s rights are preserved, as is done by the ACLU. It is important to note, however, that speech has been a powerful weapon in the past to inflict harm by degrading, terrorizing, wounding, and humiliating individuals (MacKinnon, 1993; Matsuda et al., 1993).

On the other hand, those who believe in the importance of free expression conceive that, ultimately, unrestricted speech, regardless of the content of such speech, will benefit society as a whole. For example, although hateful speech has been directed toward oppressed groups, freedom of speech has also been an essential tool in the advancement of minority groups (Cole, 1996; Gates, Griffin, Lively, & Strossen, 1994; Kelley, 1996). Historical movements that are the result of the free expression of ideas include the civil rights movement, the gay liberation movement, and the women’s movement (Strossen, 1995). If speech is restricted, it silences those who may benefit largely from its expression.

Freedom of speech and protection from the harm of hate speech are two core values that are frequently in opposition (Boeckmann & Turpin, 2002;

Cowan & Khatchadourian, 2003; Cowan, Resendez, Marshall, & Quist, 2002). Examples of issues that have raised value conflicts of harm versus freedom of speech are pornography; racist speech; heterosexist speech; sexist speech; hate speech on college campuses, including in the classroom itself; and recent issues surrounding national security, Holocaust denial (not considered free speech in England and Canada), virtual child pornography, and Internet speech, including Twitter. Value conflict may be experienced when individuals value freedom of speech and, at the same time, experience sympathy for the targets of hateful speech. The likely collision between the core values of freedom of speech and protection of targets of hateful speech suggests that we need to understand the psychological dimensions of each.

Attitudes about hate speech have been examined across a diverse range of constructs, including empathy, gender differences, interdependence, ways of knowing, and value saliency (Cowan & Khatchadourian, 2003; Cowan et al., 2002). Little work has examined the psychology of freedom of speech; specifically, the individual predictors of the importance of freedom of speech to the individual (Hense & Wright, 1992; Suedfeld, Steel, & Schmidt, 1994).

Prior research has only examined the relationship between separate knowing and gender and the importance of freedom of speech (Cowan & Khatchadourian, 2003). In Cowan and Khatchadourian's study, the predictors were designed based on the construct of the harm of hate speech with consideration of what individual-difference variables would be related to sympathy for targets of hate speech. However, the predictors in the current study were designed from consideration of the conceptual psychological underpinnings of attitudes toward freedom of speech (i.e., liberalism, separate knowing, individualism, authoritarianism, intellect).

Intellect is an individual attribute that should be related to understanding and acknowledging the importance of free speech. To understand the true concept of freedom of speech, one must be able to distinguish between the costs of speech in the immediate state and the broader, more long-term implications of freedom of speech. That is, the costs of harm to the target of hate speech must be balanced by the long-term social harm of censorship of speech. An intellectually oriented individual may view free speech as beneficial to society as a whole, despite its immediate harm. Moreover, someone who thinks intellectually may believe that it is the future of society and all its citizens—not the present society—that will benefit from free expression. The more an individual approaches social issues through intellect, and thus is likely to think more broadly about the benefits of free speech, the stronger that person's stance may be regarding the importance of freedom of speech.

An individual who possesses intellect may be defined as being insightful, introspective, imaginative, and having wide interests (McCrae & John, 1987). In addition, intellectual individuals have an expressed desire to engage in and

understand the world, as well as a preference for a complete understanding of a complex problem (McCrae & John, 1987). For example, those who think intellectually may not support a Ku Klux Klan march, but might believe that the restriction of even racist speech may be harmful long-term to a democratic society. That is, they may be able to see beyond the immediate costs of freedom of speech and take a more systemic perspective. In a study examining the perceived causes of rape, Cowan and Quinton (1997) found a significant relationship between intellect and support for systemic causes of rape (i.e., society causes rape). Therefore, individuals who possess higher intellect may be more likely than those less intellectually inclined to view free speech in a systemic way (i.e., relating to or affecting society as a whole).

Liberalism also is likely to be related to the importance of freedom of speech. The word *liberal* is derived from Latin, meaning *free*. The meaning of *liberal* is rooted in the terms *intellectually independent* and *broad-minded* (Ferguson, 1999). The term *liberal* has had many definitions and contextualized meanings, which have varied historically, culturally, economically, and politically. In addition to a quality of mind, *liberalism* may also refer to a political system or political party, or a tendency of opposition to authority (Ferguson, 1999), or to a political position in contrast to conservatism and non-democratic forms of government. A succinct definition of *liberalism* that strongly implicates free speech by Gray (2002) is that the essence of liberalism is toleration of different beliefs and of different ideas as to what constitutes a good life. Liberals promote ideals that favor proposals for reform and new ideas for progress. They have the tendency to be tolerant of change (i.e., not bound by authority, orthodoxy, or tradition; Coady, 1995). Although Kang (2008) argued that liberalism promotes peace and safety and, therefore, is incompatible with pornography, liberals tend to believe that freedom of speech—even hateful speech—is necessary to advance progress and human welfare. We expect that the extent of liberalism is related to the importance of freedom of speech.

In addition to liberalism, one who values individualism may emphasize the importance and value of freedom of speech since *individualism* refers to the opposition of external control and authority, emphasizing individual liberty instead (Hui & Triandis, 1986). Katz and Haas (1988) described *individualism* as self-reliance and personal freedom. Also, it can be defined as a “social pattern that consists of loosely linked individuals that view themselves as independent of collectives” (Triandis, 1995, p. 354). Schimmack, Oishi, and Diener (2005) conceptualized individualistic cultures as stressing the rights of individuals and de-emphasizing subordination and obligations to groups. Katz and Haas contrasted the two values of individualism and communalism in a study on racial ambivalence by priming either humanitarian/egalitarian or individualistic values.

An additional factor that may be related to freedom of speech is *separate knowing*, which is defined as abstract analysis, objective observation, and the comprehension of great ideas (Galotti, Clinchy, Ainsworth, Lavin, & Mansfield, 1999). Galotti et al. conceived knowing as two dimensions, thus separate knowing is one type of intellect that focuses specifically on logical reasoning. Galotti et al. identified separate knowing as a form of procedural knowledge (i.e., formal reasoning ability), in contrast to connected knowing. Separate knowing, a form of intellect (i.e., critical thinking), requires one to be impersonal and to void feelings and emotions in the service of objectivity. Separate thinkers distance themselves from the content they study (i.e., impersonal analysis) and have objectivity as the framework for their knowledge (Galotti et al., 1999).

Consequently, separate thinkers may be able to perceive the long-term benefits of freedom of speech and separate themselves from an emotional approach that emphasizes the immediate harm to an individual. Separate knowing can be considered an analytical tool that allows an individual to perceive free speech objectively as benefiting society in the future, rather than viewing free speech as potentially victimizing members of minority groups in the present. Therefore, one who is capable of and values separate thinking may be able to perceive the importance of freedom of speech. In Cowan and Khatchadourian's (2003) study, separate knowing was related to the importance of freedom of speech—as was gender—and separate knowing was found to be a partial mediator of gender differences in freedom of speech (i.e., when separate knowing was controlled for, the relationship between gender and freedom of speech was reduced significantly, but not completely).

The present study examined right-wing authoritarianism as a predictor expected to be negatively related to the importance of freedom of speech. Assessment of right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) was developed by Altemeyer (1981) to provide an empirically coherent set of components of the original authoritarianism dimensions (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950). RWA encompasses three dimensions: authoritarian submission (i.e., submission to authorities), authoritarian aggression (i.e., aggression toward out-groups), and conventionalism (i.e., adherence to traditional norms and authorities; Altemeyer, 1981).

Although in theory, right-wing authoritarians could be found at both ends of the political spectrum, it is higher among those with a conservative political ideology than with a more liberal political ideology (Altemeyer, 1996). High RWA scorers tend to support authority figures (e.g., the government) and support taking action to censor certain social groups (i.e., often those who are viewed as physically or morally threatening; Cohrs, Moschner, Maes, & Kielmann, 2005). Lambe (2004) found significant positive relationships between RWA and willingness to censor both hate speech

and pornography. If attitudes toward censorship assessed by Lambe are inversely conceptually related to freedom of speech, more authoritarian individuals would be expected to be less likely to support freedom of speech. Suedfeld et al. (1994) assessed attitudes toward censorship and found that support for censorship was positively related to authoritarianism, political conservatism, and conventional family ideology. Freedom of speech acknowledges the rights of speech to those whose views are different: non-normative and nonconventional.

Another goal of the current study is to examine gender differences in the importance of freedom of speech. Gilligan (1982) proposed that men tend to be more abstract thinkers than women, and women tend to be more contextual thinkers than men. Freedom of speech requires one to utilize these abstract reasoning abilities in order to fully understand its importance (Cowan & Khatchadourian, 2003). In previous research, men rated the importance of freedom of speech significantly higher than did women and, conversely, women scored higher than did men in the perceived harm of hate speech (Cowan & Khatchadourian, 2003; Cowan & Mettrick, 2002; Cowan et al., 2002). Thus, we hypothesize that men should indicate a higher level of importance of freedom of speech and a lower level of perceived harm of hate speech than should women.

Finally, in light of the arguments that pit freedom (i.e., First Amendment rights to free speech) versus equality (i.e., 14th Amendment of equal rights under the law), we hypothesize that the importance of freedom of speech will be positively related to the value ranking of freedom and equality. That is, those who rank freedom as more important than equality should be more likely to perceive the importance of freedom of speech than those who rank equality as more important than freedom.

To summarize, we hypothesize that the importance of freedom of speech will be positively related to levels of intellect, individualism, liberalism, separate knowing, and prioritizing freedom over equality; and negatively related to authoritarianism. We expect gender differences in both importance of freedom of speech, with men more in support of freedom of speech than women. Although these predictors are based on derivations about people who would favor freedom of speech, we also examined the harm of hate speech as a criterion variable. The only prediction regarding the harm of hate speech is based on previous research (Cowan & Khatchadourian, 2003; Cowan & Mettrick, 2002), which has shown a gender difference in the perceived harm of hate speech. Consistent with these past studies, we expect that women will rate hate speech as more harmful than will men.

In addition to testing the aforementioned hypotheses, another objective of the current study is to examine the independent contribution of each of the predictors, controlling for the other predictors, to the importance of freedom

of speech and the perceived harm of hate speech. In addition, we examined the total amount of variance in freedom of speech and the harm of hate speech accounted for by all of the variables.

Method

Participants

This study was conducted using 210 students (115 female, 95 male), who were recruited from undergraduate psychology courses at California State University, San Bernardino. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 58 years ($M = 25.7$ years, $SD = 8.0$). The racial composition of the participants was as follows: 84 Hispanic (40%), 67 Caucasian (32%), 17 African American (8%), 16 Asian (8%), 3 American Indian (2%), and 21 "other" (10%). Participation was voluntary, and extra credit was given to all participants as an incentive to participate.

Measures

For all scales, the scores were summed and the means were used in data analyses. Thus, each scale's possible range was the range of the response options for that scale.

Demographic information. The demographic sheet was used to assess the participants' background information. Participants were asked to provide their gender, age, ethnicity, average annual income, and level of educational attainment.

Freedom of Speech Scale (FSS; Cowan et al., 2002). The FSS was used to assess attitudes toward the importance of freedom of speech. It consists of 16 items, which were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). A sample item is "Free expression offers hope for changing intolerant attitudes." Scores on the item ranged from 1 (*nonsupportive of freedom of speech*) to 5 (*supportive of freedom of speech*). Alpha coefficients for the FSS were .85 (Cowan et al., 2002) and .81 in the present study.

Harm of Hate Speech Scale (HHSS; Cowan et al., 2002). The HHSS was used to assess participants' perceived harm of hate speech. It consists of 16 items, which were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). A sample item is "Hate speech encourages discrimination against minority groups." Scores on the item ranged from 1 (*low level of perceived harm of hate speech*) to 5 (*high level of perceived harm of hate speech*). Higher means indicate a higher level of perceived harm of hate

speech. Alpha coefficients for this scale were .88 (Cowan et al., 2002) and .89 in the present study. Items from the FSS and the HHSS were intermixed for administration to participants.

Intellect: Mini-Markers (MM; Saucier, 1994; Brief Version of Goldberg's Unipolar Big Five). The MM scale consists of 20 items and was designed to assess intellect. According to Saucier, *intellect* is defined as imagination, curiosity, and intellectualism. Intellect is one dimension of the Big Five personality traits. Responses were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*very inaccurate*) to 5 (*very accurate*). Scores ranged from 1 (*low intellect*) to 5 (*high intellect*). Cronbach's alphas for this measurement were .87 (Saucier, 1994) and .82 in the present study.

Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R; Costa & McCrae, 1992). We used the NEO-PI-R scale to examine individuals' political viewpoints. The scale consists of 10 items that assess an individual's liberal political views on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*very inaccurate*) to 5 (*very accurate*). A sample statement is "I tend to vote for liberal political candidates." Individuals' responses to the 10 items were summed together and the means were calculated, yielding a mean score ranging from 1 (*low liberalism*) to 5 (*high liberalism*). After deleting 2 items, the resulting Cronbach's alpha for the current study was .60 with 8 items. Because the internal reliability of this scale was low, only the political orientation question was used to measure liberalism. Political orientation is an item that asked participants to indicate their political orientation, which was presented on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*very conservative*) to 7 (*very liberal*).

Individualism-Collectivism Scale (ICS; Triandis, 1995). For the full ICS, 16 items are used to assess participants' individualistic social orientation, and 16 items are used as indicators for collectivism. For the present study, we used only the 8 items that measure horizontal individualism (i.e., independence). The items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 7 (*strongly disagree*). A sample individualism item is "One should live one's life independently of others." The scores ranged from 1 (*low individualism*) to 7 (*high individualism*). Cronbach's alphas for responses to the ICS were .84 (Triandis, 1995) and .77 in the present study.

Attitudes Toward Thinking and Learning Survey (ATTLS; Galotti et al., 1999). The ATTLS scale was developed to assess separate knowing (i.e., objective analysis) and connected knowing. The scale consists of 20 items total: 10 items for separate knowing and 10 items for connected knowing. For the present study, we used only the separate knowing items. The items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). A sample item for separate knowing is "It's important for me to remain as objective as possible when I analyze something." Higher scores indicate a higher level of separate knowing. Cronbach's alphas

for separate knowing were .87 (Galotti et al., 1999) and .82 in the present study.

Right Wing Authoritarianism Scale (RWA; Altemeyer, 1996). The RWA scale measures authoritarianism as shown by three attitudinal clusters: authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism. The full scale consists of 30 items. We used a 20-item version in the present study. Consistent with Altemeyer's recommendations, the responses were scored on a 9-point scale ranging from -4 (*very strongly disagree*) to 0 (*neutral*) to $+4$ (*very strongly agree*). A sample item is "What our country really needs is a strong, determined leader who will crush evil, and take us back to our true path." Scores ranged from -4 (*low authoritarianism*) to $+4$ (*high authoritarianism*), with higher means reflecting higher levels of RWA. Cronbach's alphas for responses to the RWA were .89 (Altemeyer, 1996) and .86 in the present study.

Rokeach's Value Survey (RVS; Rokeach, 1968). We used a modified and limited version of the RVS to examine the relative importance of freedom and equality (i.e., freedom > equality vs. equality > freedom). In the present study, we used 8 of Rokeach's 18 terminal values. The items were listed in alphabetical order with brief definitions. The eight values are (a) a comfortable life; (b) a sense of accomplishment; (c) a world at peace; (d) equality; (e) family security; (f) freedom; (g) inner harmony; and (h) wisdom. Six of the eight items (with the exception of freedom and equality) were provided as context (i.e., filler items) for the rankings of the two key values in this study: freedom and equality. Participants were asked to rank the eight values and, according to the ranking, they were classified into either the freedom > equality group (scored as 1) or the equality > freedom group (scored as 2).

Procedure

The questionnaires were administered to students in undergraduate psychology classes. The participants were informed about the general nature of the study, that their participation was completely anonymous, and that extra credit was available as incentive for participating.

The scales were presented to participants in four counterbalanced orders to control for potential sequencing or carryover effects. However, the demographic page, the RVS, the FSS, and the HHSS always appeared first in each order, so as not to be influenced by responses to the predictor scales.

Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and possible ranges for all variables. Table 2 presents the intercorrelations between the variables.

Table 1

Scale Means and Possible Ranges

Scale	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
Freedom of speech	208	3.11	0.57	1–5
Harm of hate speech	206	3.56	0.62	1–5
Intellect	210	3.83	0.48	1–5
Political orientation (liberalism)	199	4.18	1.30	1–7
Individualism	210	5.47	0.77	1–7
Separate knowing	210	4.41	0.86	1–7
Authoritarianism	208	–1.02	1.32	–4–+4

Note. Higher scores reflect greater levels for each scale.

The importance of freedom of speech was negatively related to the perceived harm of hate speech. Regarding the predictors and the importance of freedom of speech, the importance of freedom of speech was positively associated with intellect, individualism, and separate knowing; and negatively associated with authoritarianism and gender. That is, the higher the score on the intellect, individualism, and separate knowing scales and the lower the score on authoritarianism, the more important freedom of speech was rated. Men were more likely to rate the importance of freedom of speech higher than were women. The perceived harm of hate speech was positively associated with gender and political orientation. Women were more likely to perceive the harm of hate speech than were men; and the more liberal the self-rating, the higher was the perceived harm of hate speech.

Because gender differences were found for the harm of hate speech and the importance of freedom of speech, further analyses were conducted to examine intercorrelations between the variables for men and women separately. Table 3 presents the intercorrelations between the variables for male participants. The significant predictors for freedom of speech were the same as those in the overall sample: individualism, separate knowing, and RWA. The higher men scored on the individualism and separate knowing scales and the lower they scored on RWA, the higher they rated the importance of freedom of speech. Freedom of speech was not significantly related to intellect in men. Among men, similar to the overall sample, the perceived harm of hate speech was positively associated with political orientation (liberal attitudes). The more liberal their political orientation, the more men perceived the harm of hate speech.

Table 2

Scale Intercorrelations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Freedom of speech	—							
2. Harm of hate speech	-.36***	—						
3. Intellect	.14*	.07	—					
4. Political orientation (liberalism)	.01	.26***	.09	—				
5. Individualism	.30***	-.01	.39***	.20**	—			
6. Separate knowing	.25***	-.12	.28***	.02	.32***	—		
7. Authoritarianism	-.23**	.01	-.23**	-.50***	-.23**	-.01	—	
8. Freedom vs. equality	-.03	.10	-.04	.01	-.09	.00	.05	—
9. Gender	-.16*	.30**	-.12	.12	-.03	-.31**	-.10	.02

Note. Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female. Freedom vs. equality: 1 = ranked freedom first, 2 = ranked equality first.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3

Scale Intercorrelations for Male Participants

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Freedom of speech	—						
2. Harm of hate speech	-.39*	—					
3. Intellect	.18	-.01	—				
4. Political orientation (liberalism)	.12	.27*	.06	—			
5. Individualism	.35**	-.14	.37**	.20	—		
6. Separate knowing	.34**	-.10	.31**	.07	.41***	—	
7. Authoritarianism	-.36***	.08	-.25*	-.51**	-.27**	-.14	—
8. Freedom vs. equality	.09	-.03	.03	.05	-.12	.06	.09

Note. $n = 95$. Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female. Freedom vs. equality: 1 = ranked freedom first, 2 = ranked equality first.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 4 presents the intercorrelations between the variables for female participants. For women, only individualism was significantly related to the importance of freedom of speech. In contrast to the male participants, separate knowing and RWA were unrelated to the importance of freedom of speech. The higher women scored on the individualism scale, the more important freedom of speech was to them. Among women, consistent with the male participants, liberalism was associated with the harm of hate speech. However, additional correlates between the harm of hate speech and the predictors were found that were not significant for the men. For women, the harm of hate speech was significantly related to prioritizing equality versus freedom and intellect. The more women perceived the harm of hate speech, the more likely they were to rank equality more important than freedom, and the higher their intellect scores.

We performed standard simultaneous regression analyses to examine the extent to which variability in the criterion variables of freedom of speech and the harm of hate speech could be accounted for by the predictor variables (i.e., intellect, individualism, separate knowing, authoritarianism, political

Table 4

Scale Intercorrelations for Female Participants

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Freedom of speech	—						
2. Harm of hate speech	-.25**	—					
3. Intellect	.07	.24*	—				
4. Political orientation (liberalism)	-.08	.20*	.15	—			
5. Individualism	.24*	.18	.40***	.21*	—		
6. Separate knowing	.10	.04	.22*	.06	.26**	—	
7. Authoritarianism	-.14	-.01	-.24*	-.49***	-.19*	-.04	—
8. Freedom vs. equality	-.15	.22*	-.09	-.03	-.07	-.03	-.01

Note. $n = 115$. Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female. Freedom vs. equality: 1 = ranked freedom first, 2 = ranked equality first.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

orientation [liberal attitudes], gender, and the value ranking of freedom vs. equality), controlling for the other predictors (see Table 5). For the FSS, the equation was significant, $F(8, 175) = 5.51, p = .001 (R^2 = .19)$. The significant individual predictors were political orientation, individualism, separate knowing, and authoritarianism. Intellect and gender were no longer significant. It is also important to note that gender approached significance ($p = .06$). For the HHSS, the equation was significant, $F(8, 175) = 6.10, p < .001 (R^2 = .20)$. Political orientation (i.e., liberal attitudes) and gender were significant individual predictors.

Discussion

The goal of the present study was to understand what may account for individual differences in the importance of freedom of speech in a culture that prioritizes freedom of speech above other values (Rokeach & Ball-Rokeach,

Table 5

Regression Analysis Summary for Relational Variables Predicting Importance of Freedom of Speech and Harm of Hate Speech

Predictor variable	β	t	p	$F(8, 175)$	R^2
Freedom of speech				5.51****	.19
Intellect	-.05	-0.58	.56		
Political orientation (liberalism)	-.16	-1.98	.05*		
Individualism	.20	2.51	.01**		
Separate knowing	.16	2.01	.04*		
Authoritarianism	-.29	-3.48	.001**		
Freedom vs. equality	-.03	-0.46	.65		
Gender	-.14	-1.88	.06		
Harm of hate speech				6.11***	.20
Intellect	.15	1.95	.053		
Political orientation (liberalism)	.30	3.73	.000***		
Individualism	-.06	-0.75	.45		
Separate knowing	-.06	-0.77	.44		
Authoritarianism	.16	1.87	.06		
Freedom vs. equality	.07	0.95	.34		
Gender	.32	4.37	.000***		

Note. Beta coefficients computed with all variables in the equation.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. **** $p = .001$.

1989). For some social issues, freedom of speech and the harm of hate speech are juxtaposed. For example, campuses have had to deal with toleration of hateful speech, often having speech codes and then having these speech codes rejected by the courts. The issue of pornography has been very much involved with harm versus freedom, and though it may seem that pornography has won its fight in the name of the First Amendment, issues continue to surface, such as the issue of virtual child pornography on the Internet. Frequently, the issue of speech emerges anew.

In this age of terrorism and war, some aspects of speech have come to be viewed as threatening. Thus, another goal of this study was to contrast patterns of the associations of predictor variables with freedom of speech with the associations of predictor variances and the perceived harm of hate speech.

Freedom of Speech

We should note that, as expected, the importance of freedom of speech was negatively associated with the harm of hate speech. Perhaps participants recognized that the liberty of free speech and self-expression can result in the harm and oppression of another. Hate speech trades on prejudice, and it intimidates and stigmatizes its targets. As a society, when hate speech is prevalent, we are subjected to issues of concern about limitations and consequences of freedom of speech. At least in the United States, hate speech as speech, no matter how heinous, still falls under the protection of the First Amendment.

The regression equation showed that four of the six significant individual correlates of freedom of speech independently accounted for significant variance in the importance of freedom of speech when simultaneously controlling for the other predictors. Intellect was no longer significant, and the effect of gender became marginally significant ($p = .06$). The individual predictors were liberalism, individualism, separate knowing, and authoritarianism. Higher levels of the rated importance of freedom of speech were related to higher levels of self-assessed liberalism, individualism, and separate knowing and were related to lower levels of authoritarianism.

As predicted, intellect was related to the importance of freedom of speech in the correlations, but not when controlling for other predictors in the regression. Intellect was moderately related to the other predictors, and that may account for why it was not independently associated with freedom of speech. In addition, though significant, the correlation of intellect with freedom of speech was small. The measure of intellect that encompasses constructs such as imagination and curiosity may have not adequately assessed the tendency to think broadly in terms of long-term consequences, rather than immediate effects.

Liberalism was also independently associated with freedom of speech, although in the regression analysis, but not in the correlational data. Broadly speaking, liberals seek a society characterized by freedom of thought for individuals, and limitations on power, especially that of government. However, critics of free speech (e.g., critical race theorists; Matsuda et al., 1993) argue for more governmental control, particularly to ensure that underrepresented voices are heard.

It can be argued that liberalism no longer stands unequivocally for freedom of speech. Liberalism is a complex combination of attitudes and values, which could be why a strong association was not found with freedom of speech. Because the scale we used to measure liberalism was not reliable, we depended instead on a more direct, one-item measure that asked participants to rate their liberalism. Future research should consider a more

differentiated view of political liberalism. When studying freedom of speech and liberalism, researchers should consider incorporating multiple measures of political liberalism, or partialing out components of liberalism that are theoretically irrelevant to freedom of speech.

It appears clear why one who values individualism (i.e., the ability to do whatever one pleases with very few restrictions) in American culture would indicate a greater value of the importance of freedom of speech. Democracy and the First Amendment involve and endorse the rights of the individual. In American culture, individualism is promoted and can be contrasted with other, more collectivistic cultures in which members place the group's concerns before their own (Katz & Haas, 1988). In our individualistic culture, the rights of the individual are promoted more than are the rights of the group, and freedom is rated more highly than is equality (Rokeach & Ball-Rokeach, 1989).

In view of the complexity and abstractness of freedom of speech (i.e., perceiving the long-term benefit to groups and society beyond the individual), it is not surprising that separate knowing was related to the importance of freedom of speech. A person with a separate knowing learning style whose analytic skills focus on objective knowledge may be able or predisposed to separate oneself from an issue and from personal reference and emotions. These findings on separate knowing are consistent with previous research that supports the association of the importance of freedom of speech and separate knowing (Cowan & Khatchadourian, 2003).

Not surprisingly, RWA was found to be negatively associated with the importance of freedom of speech. Past research has shown that RWA is associated with punitiveness, support for military intervention, and political intolerance (Cohrs et al., 2005). Also, according to Altemeyer (1998), RWA has accounted for a large percentage of the variance in generalized prejudice; and Whitley (1999) showed that RWA predicts prejudice toward homosexuals, specifically. An authoritarian individual may not perceive the importance of freedom of speech because speech can be used to promote equality and to criticize the government. Crowson, Thoma, and Hestevold (2005) found that RWA was positively associated with closed-mindedness and preference for order. Also, individuals who grow up with authoritarian beliefs gravitate toward traditional values and tend to hold a right-wing ideology (Butler, 2000). Thus, the violation of traditional values that occurs in speech may be unacceptable to authoritarian individuals.

The prioritization of freedom versus equality was unrelated to the importance of freedom of speech. Cowan et al. (2002) found that priming for freedom of speech and equal protection (equality) predicted the prioritization of freedom versus equality using the same measure as we used in the current study. Of those in the free-speech condition, 77.2% rated freedom as more

important than equality, whereas the majority of participants in the equal protection condition (57.9%) rated equality as more important than freedom. Perhaps the difference in findings is related to the use of priming in Cowan et al.'s study versus measuring the importance of freedom of speech in the current study.

In the present study, we found support for gender differences in the importance of freedom of speech. Why would men rate the importance of freedom of speech more highly than would women? Tracing the trajectory of the First Amendment to its origin, one could concede that its purpose is personal power. It could be argued that a possible explanation for gender differences in the perceived importance of freedom of speech may be a result of men's and women's differential access to power. Historically, men may have had more power to make their speech heard, understood, and accepted, which could explain why the men in this study were more likely to favor free speech, as compared to the women. Haines and Kray (2005) found that men, as compared to women, held stronger implicit and explicit associations between self and power. In addition, they found that women who were assigned to high-power roles had stronger implicit self-masculine associations than did women who were assigned to low-power roles.

Throughout history, men have had both access to speech and more power to be heard. Lakoff (1973) theorized about the relationship between gender and language, and importantly recognized the fundamental role of power in this relationship. The freedom to speak one's beliefs and thoughts may be more central for men than for women. Therefore, not having speech may be a greater concern for men, as compared to women. Only in recent times have women fully utilized free speech. However, the women's movement has brought about broad societal change with regard to power and may ultimately balance the gender difference in the importance of freedom of speech.

Harm of Hate Speech

The regression equations accounted for similar amounts of variance in predicting the importance of freedom of speech and the perceived harm of hate speech. However, the conceptual variables were better predictors of freedom of speech than of the perceived harm of hate speech because gender was the major predictor that accounted for the most variance in the harm of hate speech.

There are two predictors—liberalism and gender—that were related to the perceived harm of hate speech. Historically, liberalism has been associated with freedom of speech. For example, anti-pornography feminists, such as Catherine MacKinnon (1993), have been critical of liberals who defend

pornographic speech despite its harm (for a defense of pornography on the basis of freedom of speech, see Strossen, 1995). The group “Feminists Against Censorship” was formed to defend pornography in the name of freedom of speech (Cowan, 1994). However, in the present study, self-description as a liberal was not related to the importance of freedom of speech, but, instead, was positively related to the perceived harm of hate speech: the higher the self-rating of liberalism, the higher the perceived harm of hate speech.

Women were more likely to perceive the harm of hate speech, as compared to men. In previous research, women have shown a greater sensitivity to the harm of hate speech and have been more likely to censor hate speech, as compared to men (Cowan & Hodge, 1996; Cowan & Mettrick, 2002; Cowan et al., 2002; Lambe, 2004). Prior research has also suggested that women are more likely to censor pornography than are men (Cowan, 1994; Lambe, 2004).

Results indicating that women are more likely to perceive the harm of hate speech could be because of women’s ability to empathize with the victims of hate speech. In Cowan and Khatchadourian’s (2003) study, empathic concern was positively correlated with the harm of hate speech; and empathy completely mediated the relationship between gender and the harm of hate speech. That is, differences in empathy explained gender differences in beliefs about the harm of hate speech. Also, women may perceive the harm of hate speech because it creates inequality and oppresses minority groups, and women are often the targets of hate speech.

Gender Differences in Correlations

Since we found gender differences, we conducted further analyses to examine intercorrelations between the variables for men and women separately (see Tables 3 and 4). Individualism was a significant predictor of the perceived importance of freedom of speech for both men and women. However, separate knowing and authoritarianism were related to freedom of speech among men, but not among women. For both male and female samples, liberalism was positively related to the harm of hate speech. However, two correlations were significant for female participants and not for male participants in predicting the perceived harm of hate speech: intellect and freedom versus equality.

It is unclear why specific predictors were significant for one gender and not the other. The pattern suggests that more predictors are significant for men regarding freedom of speech, and more for women regarding the harm of hate speech. Because gender differences and differences in correlational

patterns were found, future studies on these important values should be careful to include analyses by gender. In particular, it is worth exploring why the harm of hate speech, but not the importance of freedom of speech, would be associated with intellect among women.

Limitations and Future Directions

Further testing should be conducted with a sample more representative of the population to improve confidence in generalizability. Reliance on a college student sample limits the generalizability of the results. A national sample that varies in age and educational level, as well as in political attitudes, may be able to provide insight into other independent variables that may be related to attitudes about freedom of speech and the harm of hate speech. It is important to emphasize that the results yield correlational data; therefore, claims about the causal relationships between the predictors and outcome variables cannot be made. It is also possible that attitudes toward freedom of speech and the harm of hate speech are contextual and depend on the specific setting and content of the speech.

Why should we examine the psychological and social dimensions associated with the importance of freedom of speech? Lambe (2004) suggested that a reason to examine public norms and beliefs in the importance of freedom of speech is that public opinion is important in maintaining a free society. Although most Americans strongly believe in freedom of speech, they may not be absolutists (i.e., those who support freedom of speech with no exceptions; Matsuda et al., 1993). Understanding how and why individuals prioritize freedom of speech may clarify our understanding of the public's positions on this important value and lead to more effective campaigns to influence public opinion (Lambe, 2004).

For those who are concerned about the abridgment of freedom of expression in the name of national security and the delicate balance between freedoms and security, understanding attitudes toward freedom of speech is important. An application of understanding important values was demonstrated by Rokeach (1973; Rokeach & Cochrane, 1972), who argued that by examining the relative ranking of important values and by confronting inconsistencies in people's values, he could change their behavior and even their values. Rokeach's work on understanding rankings of freedom and equality has led to methods enhancing the importance of equality.

Identification of the psychological and social correlates of the importance of freedom of speech may increase our understanding of the social and political dilemma of freedom of speech, juxtaposed with the harm of speech. Such understanding is a relatively neglected area of applied social

research. It is important to note that people can understand the harm of hate speech and still support freedom of speech. Free-speech defenders may recognize the harm of hate speech, but believe that freedom of speech is more essential than is censoring speech content. Others may believe that some regulation is necessary. In either case—defending hateful speech as protected speech or desiring regulation—the study of these important attitudes and belief structures will promote understanding of these core social psychological values.

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