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**Western Illinois
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Free Expression among Races: Differences Between the Metro and the Nonmetro

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Abstract

This paper highlights differences in beliefs about the First Amendment and free speech rights among three different races: Whites, African Americans, and Asians. Data are from a survey conducted by the Knight Foundation. While African Americans are more skeptical about the First Amendment and free speech rights, a majority of White respondents believe that the use of free speech is for the wealthy.

Introduction

The lexical definition of the concept 'expression' is one's statement or utterance of ideas or feelings through words, signs, or other means of communication². The adjective 'free' implies that the expression is voluntary, free of coercion. Psychological theory states the extent that an outcome contingent on an action is desired and expected, that action will be selected and activated³.

The First Amendment guarantees freedoms concerning religion, expression, assembly, and the right to petition. Yet, the interpretation of the First Amendment and its practice differ among

¹ Professor, Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, Western Illinois University.

² Adapted from www.Merriam-Webster.com.

³ See Mowrer, R. R., & Klein, S. B. (Eds.). (2000). *Handbook of contemporary learning theories*. Psychology Press.

racism and geography⁴; perceived sense of efficacy of free expression is uncertain or minimal for certain demographics.

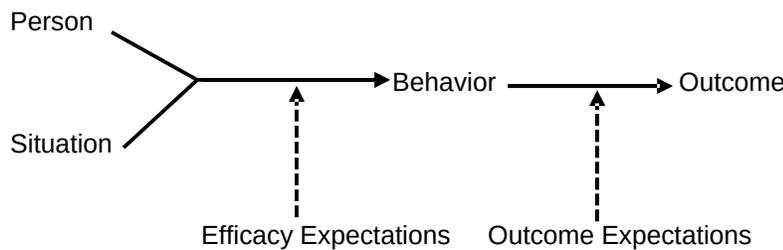
How could we explain differences in perceptions about free expressions among races? This paper uses learning theory to address this question.

Conceptual Framework

Behavior can be described as an organism's expectancy that a given action will result in a given

consequence⁵. Conceptually, there are two kinds of expectations⁶; *efficacy expectation* is the organism's conviction that it can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes and *outcome expectation* is the person's estimate that a given behavior will lead to certain outcomes (Figure 1). Thus, a person may know that a reward will follow a given behavior, but have doubts about her ability to perform that behavior effectively.

Figure 1: Types of Expectations



For the target behavior, free expression, factors that influence a person's efficacy expectations include (i) past accomplishments of one's free expressions; (ii) observing others'

successes with the behavior, and (iii) verbal persuasion by self or others. Of these, a successful performance provides a more reliable source of evidence on which to change one's

⁴ See, for example, Hansford, J (2018). The First Amendment Freedom of Assembly as a Racial Project. *The Yale Law Journal*, 127, January. Available: https://www.yalelawjournal.org/forum/the-first-amendment-freedom-of-assembly-as-a-racial-project#_ftnref18.

⁵ See the conceptual model in my recent paper on youth e-cigarette use; <http://www.iira.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Youth-E-Cigarette-Use--RB418.pdf>.

⁶ Bandura, A. (1977). *Social Learning Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

efficacy expectations⁷. In addition, vicarious learning, observing other's success with the behavior, is also a

salient influence on efficacy expectations⁸.

Methodology

Data are from the Knight Foundation Free Expression Survey⁹. The survey, conducted by Ipsos, interviewed 5,366 adults during July-August, 2021¹⁰; the microdata of the survey was accessed through Cornell University¹¹.

To model efficacy expectations, non-demographic variables listed in Table 1 were analyzed for main effects and interactions; loglinear models were calibrated and results analyzed for associations among variables.

⁷ Martin, G., & Pear, J. (2019). *Behavior modification: What it is and how to do it*. Routledge.

⁸ Bandura, A., Grusec, J. E., & Menlove, F. L. (1966). Observational learning as a function of symbolization and incentive set. *Child development*, 499-506.

⁹ <https://knightfoundation.org/topics/freedom-of-expression/>.

¹⁰ Includes 1,000 college students.

¹¹ See www.iPoll.com.

Table 1: Variable Definitions

Variable	Operational Definition
Race	Three levels: White = 1, Black = 2, and Asian = 3.
Region	Metro = 1 and Nonmetro = 2.
Education	Less than High School = 1; High School = 2; Some College = 3, and Bachelor or Higher = 4.
Gender	Female = 1 and Male = 2.
Employment Status	Working Fulltime = 1; Working Part-time = 2, and Not Working = 3.
First-Amend	How much does the First Amendment protect people like you? A Great Deal = 1; A Fair Amount = 2; Not Very Much = 3, and Not at All = 4.
Beliefs-Rights	To what extent do you think each of the following rights is secure or threatened in the country today? 11 Items were scored on a 1-4 scale; Very Secure = 1; Secure = 2; Threatened = 3; Very Threatened = 4. The rights were: Freedom of religion; Freedom to petition the government; Freedom of press; The right to a speedy trial with an impartial jury; The right to bear arms; The right to vote; Freedom of speech; Freedom for people to assemble peacefully; Freedom from unreasonable searches or arrests; The right to privacy; That all people have equal protection under the law.
Beliefs about free expression	How easy or difficult is it for the following people to use their free speech rights without consequence in America today? On a scale of 1 to 7 with 1 being very difficult and 7 being very easy. Six items were included in the data analysis: People like you; Conservatives; Liberals; Wealthy; LGBTQ, and Immigrants.

Findings

Most of the respondents were White (64%), female (52%), and from the metro (90%) (Table 2). A majority had

some college education or a college degree (71%) and were employed either fulltime or part-time (61%).

Table 2: Demographic Profile of the Survey Respondents

Race	Percent	Gender	Percent	Region	Percent
White	64	Female	52	Metro	90
Black or African American	19	Male	48	Nonmetro	10
Asian	9				
Other ¹²	8				
N		Ranges from 5,182 – 5,299			

Education	Percent	Employment Status	Percent
Less than High School	6	Employed, Fulltime	44
High School	23	Employed, Part-time	17
Some College	35	Not Working	39
Bachelor or Higher	36		
N		Ranges from 5,297 – 5,299	

Protection from the First Amendment

Table 3 shows responses to the question about the First Amendment (see the variable ‘First-Amend’ in Table 1). The Karl Pearson chi-square statistics for the table ($\chi^2 = 376.94$) implies that one’s response to the question, “How much does the First Amendment protect people like you” is related to one’s race; more than one-in-three African-Americans (35%) believe

that the First Amendment *does not protect them*; the same number for Whites is 12% .

To test the hypothesis of equiprobable responses among the races, the likelihood ratio statistic, defined as $G_R^2 = 2[2073 * \ln(\frac{2073}{1279.75}) + \dots + 96 * \ln(\frac{96}{1279.75})]$, was computed. The result shows that the responses are not equally distributed¹³.

¹² Mixed race

¹³ $G_R^2 = 3,080.52$; $p < 0.01$.

Table 3: Perceptions about First Amendment

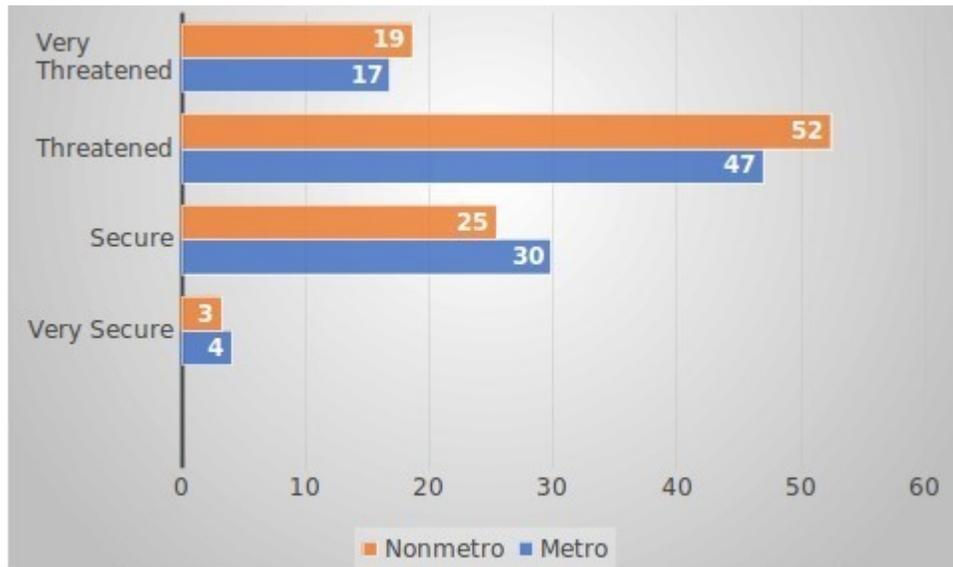
The Extent to Which the First Amendment Protects People Like Me...	Percent (%)			
	White	Black	Asian	Other
Great Deal	45	23	37	41
Fair Amount	42	41	52	38
Not Very Much	11	30	9	17
Not at All	1	5	1	3
N	3316	976	469	421

Perceptions about Freedom of Speech

Figure 1 shows the proportion of respondents in the metro and the nonmetro with different beliefs about

freedom of speech in the nation. In general, one-in-three metro residents believe that freedom of speech is secure whereas a much lower proportion of nonmetro residents share that belief.

Figure 1: Beliefs about Freedom of Speech: Metro versus Nonmetro Respondents (unit= % of Respondents)



Note: $\chi^2 = 17.81, p < 0.01$.

When queried about engaging in free speech without fear of consequences, a majority of African Americans expressed difficulties in doing so (52%). They also believe that one’s wealth doesn’t protect

one from engaging in free speech without consequences.

In contrast, White respondents believe that the wealthy can practice free speech without consequences (Table 4).

Table 4: The Ease of Free Speech Use by Various Societal Groups: Perceptions of Whites, African-Americans, and Asians

Group	Response Range: Very Difficult to Somewhat Difficult			
	Whites	Blacks	Asians	Others
People like you	24%	52%	23%	37%
Wealthy	24%	69%	40%	41%
Liberals	30%	51%	29%	39%
LGBTQ	25%	43%	30%	29%
Conservatives	25%	26%	16%	31%
Immigrants	23%	50%	30%	33%
N	Ranges from 1,416 to 5,182			

Note: For all six groups, chi-square statistics revealed significant differences in perceptions among races; in general, African-Americans are more skeptical about the First Amendment and free speech rights.

Summary and Conclusion

This paper explored differences in perceptions or beliefs about the First Amendment and free speech rights among different races; data are from the Knight Foundation Free Expression Survey.

Results of data analysis suggest:

- (i) More African Americans than Whites believe that the First Amendment offers little or no protection for African Americans;
- (ii) Living in the metro is associated with positive beliefs about freedom of speech;

- (iii) A majority of nonmetro residents (71%) believe that freedom of speech is threatened in the nation, and
- (iv) A majority of Whites believe that wealth is correlated positively with free speech rights; wealthier the person, easy for her to engage in free speech without consequences.

In an earlier paper, I asserted that the nonwhite minority population in the nation believes that they are disadvantaged in life ¹⁴. The results of this research add to that conclusion by highlighting some first-order correlates of overall disadvantaged belief among minorities, lack of free speech and little or no faith in the First Amendment.

¹⁴ Athiyaman, A. (2021). Differing perceptions of external environment: The case of ethnic groups in the Midwest, Metro versus Nonmetro. Research Brief, 3(11), July 16. Available: http://www.iira.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ethnicity_pereceptions_v3_n11_3.pdf