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The Effects of Cognitive and Affective Persuasion on Supporting the Death Penalty

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The Effects of Cognitive and Affective Persuasion on Supporting the Death Penalty

BY

Jason Wayne Hortin

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

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IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

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The Effects of Cognitive and Affective Persuasion on Supporting the Death Penalty

Thesis for a Master of Arts Degree
In Clinical Psychology
Eastern Illinois University
Charleston, Illinois

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examined how participants with cognitively based favorable attitudes toward the death penalty were influenced by cognitive or affective arguments that criticized the death penalty. College students' general attitudes toward the death penalty were measured using a Likert-type scale. They were then asked to write out their thoughts and/or feelings about the death penalty. Some of the participants received two cognitive arguments while others received two affective arguments against the death penalty. After reading these counterarguments, the participants' positions and thoughts/feelings were once again measured.

Only participants with cognitively based attitudes that were supportive of the death penalty were included in the data analysis. Their positions before and after reading the counterarguments were compared. The same was done on the amount of statements the participants generated in support of the death penalty.

Regardless of whether they received a cognitive or affective counterargument, the participants' positions after reading the counterarguments were significantly less supportive of the death penalty. However, there were no significant reductions in the amount of statements generated in support of the death penalty.

Although the type of counterargument had no significant influence on the positions taken, there was a non-significant trend that suggested that affective counterarguments seemed to be more effective than cognitive counterarguments in reducing support toward the death penalty.

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The Effect of Cognitive and Affective Persuasion on Supporting the Death Penalty

The purpose of this study was to test what type of persuasion (cognitive or affective) would be most effective in changing the views of people whose attitudes towards the death penalty are either affectively or cognitively based. The basis of 75 undergraduates' attitudes (cognitive or affective basis) towards the death penalty was assessed. The participants were given either affective or cognitive persuasive appeals that criticize the use of the death penalty. For the specific purpose of the study, only data from those who are in favor of the death penalty were used in the analyses.

Attitudes and attitude change have been a focal point of many social psychologists for a number of years. Determining how one forms and changes an attitude could give one some insight into what factors and conditions are most predictive of attitude change. Prior research suggests that attitudes can have either an affective or cognitive base and that changing people's attitudes may depend on whether the persuasive message is affective or cognitive (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986; Zanna and Rempel, 1988).

Affectively and Cognitively Based Attitudes

An affectively based attitude is an attitude that is primarily based on the positive and/or negative emotions that one feels about an attitude object (Fabrigar & Petty, 1999). An example of this could be when someone does not like to read scary novels because of the fear he or she experiences when reading them. In this case, the attitude toward scary novels is affective because the attitude is based on the negative emotions elicited by the scary novels.

A cognitively based attitude is an attitude that is primarily based on rational thought, specifically the positive and/or negative attributes one associates with an attitude

object (Fabrigar & Petty, 1999). Someone may not like to read scary novels because he or she believes the content of scary novels has no substance and therefore is a substandard form of literature. In this case, the attitude toward the scary novel is cognitive because the attitude is based on the negative attributes one associates with scary novels.

When speaking about the differences between affectively and cognitively based attitudes, it is important to keep in mind that very seldom is an attitude entirely affective or cognitive. More often than not, an existing attitude has both an affective and cognitive basis although an attitude usually has one side that is dominant (Millar, 1990).

The Role of Affect and Cognition in Attitude Change

Changing an affectively or cognitively based attitude may depend on whether the persuasive information received is either affective or cognitive. Research concerning the relationship between affect and cognition in relation to attitude change is well documented. Studies have indicated that the constructs of affect and cognition have some independent influence on attitudes (Crites, Fabrigar, & Petty, 1994). Current research has focused on whether the affective and cognitive bases of attitudes determine susceptibility to affectively and cognitively based persuasion (Edwards, 1990; Edwards & von Hippel, 1995; Fabrigar & Petty, 1999; Millar, 1992). These studies have examined whether affectively or cognitively structured persuasion is more effective when matched or mismatched with the basis of the attitude.

There are some studies that give support to the notion that affectively based attitudes are more susceptible to cognitive arguments while cognitively based attitudes are more susceptible to affective arguments. Three studies (Millar & Millar, 1990; Millar, 1992) gave support to this notion of a mismatching effect that occurs in attitude change.

In the first experiment (Millar & Millar, 1990), participants were asked to rate a beverage after they were given persuasive messages that were either affective or cognitive. The six beverages included milk, orange juice, hot chocolate, coffee/tea, and Diet Coke. In order to assess the participants' general attitudes toward each beverage, they were first asked to rate each beverage on a Likert scale with one representing "like" and seven representing "dislike". The participants were then given six pages on which each page contained sixteen statements about one of the six beverages. Four statements were affectively negative (e.g. "Water is boring to drink"), four were affectively positive (e.g. "Water makes me feel refreshed"), four were cognitively negative (e.g. "Water has too many chemicals"), and four were cognitively positive (e.g. "Water is naturally low in calories"). Each participant was asked to choose the three statements that coincided the most with his or her existing attitude about each of the beverages.

Once these pretest measures had been taken, each participant was classified as having a cognitive or affective attitude based on which statements he or she chose on each of the six pages of statements. An attitude about a particular beverage would be classified as affective if two or more of the three statements chosen by the participant were affective in nature. An attitude would be classified as cognitive if two or more of the statements the participant chose were cognitive in nature.

For each participant, four of the beverages that he or she rated were selected. In an attempt to elicit change in the attitudes, for each of these beverages, either a cognitively based or affectively based counterattitudinal argument was given through random assignment. If one had an affective, positive attitude toward milk, for example, by random assignment one could receive either a negative affective argument or a negative cognitive

argument against milk. Once the participants had processed these arguments, they were asked to reevaluate the beverages on the same Likert type scale that was used before. Results of this experiment showed that rational arguments tended to produce greater attitude change when attitudes were based on affect rather than cognition, and that emotional arguments tended to produce greater attitude change when attitudes were based on cognition rather than affect.

The second experiment conducted by Millar and Millar (1990) was very similar to the first. The participants were once again asked to evaluate the six beverages used in the previous experiment, (milk, orange juice, hot chocolate, coffee, tea, water, and Diet Coke) using the same measures found in the first experiment. In this second experiment, however, the types of counterarguments the participants were exposed to differed. In the first experiment, the arguments presented to the participants were constructed from comments generated during the pretest measure. In the second experiment, the counterarguments presented to the participants were advertisements collected from popular magazines over the previous five years. This was done to expose the participants to arguments that were well developed.

For each beverage, two of the advertisements were selected, one that represented an affective argument and one that represented a cognitive argument. Each of the advertisements advocated the drinking of a particular beverage. Those who disliked drinking the particular beverage would therefore be reading a counterargument from the ad while those who liked the particular beverage would be reading a supportive argument from the ad. Participants were randomly assigned to receive either an affective argument or a cognitive argument for one of the beverages they rated.

Unlike the previous experiment, the participants' reactions to the arguments were measured. They were asked to indicate their reaction to the arguments using a Likert type scale with 1 representing a "completely agree" response and 7 representing a "completely disagree" response. The next phase of the study asked the participants to complete a thought listing procedure in which they simply wrote out what they thought about each advertisement. After completing this thought listing exercise they were then asked to place a (+) sign after a thought that was favorable to the advertisement and a (-) sign after a thought that was unfavorable to the advertisement. If the thought was neutral they were asked to place a (0) sign next to the thought.

Analyses of the change data supported the mismatching hypothesis. More attitude change occurred when the basis of the participants' attitudes did not match the basis of the argument. Analyses of the reactions to the arguments further support this finding. The participants were not able to generate as many negative responses to counterarguments whose basis was different than the basis of their attitude. This means that if one held a negative affective attitude toward milk, he or she were not able to produce as many negative reactions toward cognitive advertisements that advocated the consumption of milk as affective advertisements that advocated the consumption of milk.

In the third experiment (Millar & Millar, 1990) took a different approach when testing the mismatching effect by measuring the attitudes differently and requiring different tasks. The purpose of this study was to look at the mismatching effect of attitude and type of argument, and to test whether one could create an attitude that is either affectively based or cognitively based. In this particular experiment, rather than rate a beverage, participants were asked to solve various analytic puzzles. These problems included tasks

that involved choosing the correct relationship between two numerical quantities (e.g. the relationship between the numbers 16 and 64 is that both are multiples of 4), picture matching (participants are asked to choose which picture in a series is most like the target picture), sentence completion (participants are asked to fill in the word that best completes the incomplete sentence), analogies (a target relation is given and the participant must choose the best analogy relates best to the target), and letter series (participants choose which series of letters completes the longer series of letters).

In order to create a cognitively based attitude before solving these puzzles, half of the participants were instructed to focus on why they felt the way they did while solving each puzzle. In order to establish an affectively based attitude, the other half were asked to focus on how they felt while performing each puzzle. After they had completed each problem, participants were then asked to write down either their reasons for liking or disliking the problems or the positive and negative feelings they may have felt while working on the problems. This was done to validate the induction of the attitudes. After these two groups had written down either their thoughts or feelings about the puzzles they were given Likert type scales of like (1) to dislike (7) to measure their general attitudes towards the puzzles.

In the next phase, participants received counterattitudinal messages about two of the puzzles. Each participant received two counterattitudinal arguments about a given puzzle. One of those arguments was affective and the other was cognitive. An example of an affective argument is “The problem made me feel relaxed (nervous), and when I performed it, I became very calm (anxious)”, and an example of a cognitive argument is “The problem requires the right amount of (too much) thought, and is (not) suited for

most university students.” After the participants had read the arguments, they were then given another Likert type scale to measure any changes in general attitudes about the problems. They were also given another Likert type scale that measured the participants’ willingness to accept an argument that is constructed differently than their own. Lastly, the participants were then asked to write down what they were thinking or feeling while reading the counterattitudinal messages. This was done to give a more in depth look at how the participants defended his or her existing attitude and how those defenses may differ when those existing attitudes were attacked by different types of counterarguments.

With feelings classified as affective and reasons for liking or disliking classified as cognitive, the number of affective and cognitive statements were then summed. With the basis of the attitude being the independent variable (cognitive vs. affective), and the dependent variable being the number of thoughts listed for each type of counterargument, the first analysis revealed that cognitively focused attitudes produced significantly more reasons for liking or disliking a problem than affectively focused attitudes. This validated the notion that affective and cognitive attitudes could be created through appropriate priming.

Another analysis was conducted in which the two independent variables were the basis of the attitudes (affective vs. cognitive) and the type of counterargument (affective vs. cognitive). The dependent variable was the number of negative responses to the counterarguments that the participants generated. This analysis found that when participants held cognitive attitudes, they were able to produce more negative responses that attacked cognitive counterargumentation than emotional counterargumentation and when participants held more affective attitudes, they were able to produce more negative

responses that attacked affective counterargumentation than cognitive counterargumentation.

The third analysis conducted by Millar and Millar was much like the first in that the two independent variables (basis of the attitude and type of counterargument) were the same. The dependent variable, however, was number of positive responses to the counterarguments generated by the participants. The results showed that when the participants held cognitive attitudes, they were more willing to agree with arguments that contradicted their own when that argument was affective. When the participants held affective attitudes, they were more willing to agree with arguments that contradicted their own when that argument was cognitive.

Millar and Millar (1990) later stated in their study that this phenomenon may not only be accounted for by the mismatching effect. They proposed that these findings might also be influenced by the fact that rational arguments presented more novel information to participants with affective attitudes and emotional arguments presented more novel information to participants with cognitive attitudes. These effects however, were controlled for by Millar and Millar by using information generated in the pretest condition to produce counterargumentation against those attitudes.

In an earlier study, Petty & Cacioppo (1977) showed that forewarning counterattitudinal argumentation is likely to develop negative responses to that argumentation because individuals then activate attitude relevant knowledge on the participant. This knowledge, no doubt, is one that is in favor of their position. One could hypothesize that mismatching the type of argumentation to the attitude basis could make

an individual process information that is incompatible with his or her already existing knowledge base that supports his or her general position on the participant.

As mentioned earlier, there is also a wide base of research that suggests that matching the type of persuasion to the type of argument is the most effective means of attitude change. In three recent studies by Edwards, von Hippel, Fabrigar, and Petty (Edwards & von Hippel, 1995; Fabrigar & Petty, 1999) researchers created attitudes toward novel attitude objects that were either affective or cognitive. After these attitudes were instilled into the participants, the researchers then tried to change the attitudes they had induced. They did this by giving the participants persuasion that was either affective or cognitive in nature. Results of these studies show that persuasion was more effective when the type of appeal matched the basis of the attitude. An affective appeal was more effective in changing an attitude when the basis of the attitude was affective in nature, and likewise with cognitive persuasion for a cognitively based attitude.

In some recent research by Edwards and von Hippel (1995), researchers instilled within the participants either an affective or cognitive attitude about a prospective job applicant. Participants were told that they were there to participate in an experiment that studied the interviewing process. Each participant was told that he or she would be interviewing another person over a single channel intercom system. These interviewers were given a fixed set of questions to ask each applicant. Before the interview took place the interviewers were assigned into one of two conditions. In the first condition, participants were asked to view a photograph of a prospective applicant. The photograph showed an attractive female college student whose facial expression conveyed warmth and friendliness. Consequently, all of the interviewers were male. This was done to maximize

the effect of showing a female photograph to the interviewers. It was believed that showing a photograph would elicit an affective attitude toward the applicant (Edwards & von Hippel, 1995).

In the second condition, the interviewers were given a questionnaire that had purportedly been completed by the applicant. This questionnaire contained different kinds of information about the applicant including demographic information, job related skills, experience, and pertinent personality information. This condition was thought to induce a cognitive attitude toward the applicant.

Each interviewer was given both the photograph and the questionnaire to review. In an attempt to manipulate the interviewers' attitudes toward the applicants, the order in which the interviewers received the conditions was counterbalanced. It was believed that whatever condition the interviewers received first would be the basis of the attitude. Once the interviewers had received both conditions, they were then asked two questions about the applicant. The first question was "How likable do you think the applicant is?" The second question was "What is your overall impression of the applicant?" Once these two questions had been answered, the interviewers were then asked to indicate their confidence in these judgments using two 9-point scales, with higher numbers indicating more favorable responses.

Whereas the first part of the experiment portrayed the applicants in a favorable light, the second part of the experiment portrayed them in an unfavorable light. In the affective persuasion condition, the interviewers would have a chance encounter with the applicant (an encounter set up by the experimenters). Rather than see the attractive young female with a friendly expression, the applicant's expression was cold and unfriendly. Her

appearance also changed. She now wore clothes that did not match, large glasses, and her hair was messed up.

In the cognitive persuasion condition, when the interviewers asked the applicants the set of questions given to them earlier the applicants would give answers that would be considered unwise in the context of a job interview. An example of a question asked in the interview may be, "In your job\career, would you prefer regularity and predictability, or irregularity and variety?" An example of a bad answer may be "Regularity and predictability. That way there are no surprises. I like having a routine." All interviewers received both manipulations, but the order in which they were presented was counterbalanced. Once this had been done, the interviewers were then asked to re-answer the questions and re-rate their confidence in those answers like they had earlier in the study.

The results of the study provided support for the idea that affectively based attitudes toward people are more susceptible to affective than cognitive types of persuasion. These findings also support the notion that cognitive means of persuasion are slightly more effective at changing a cognitive attitude than an affective persuasive appeal. Furthermore, results showed that affectively based attitudes are held with more confidence than cognitively based persuasion (Edwards & von Hippel, 1995).

A current study by Fabrigar and Petty (1999) used a different approach in that the participants were exposed to only one condition whether it be affective or cognitive to form the initial base of the attitude. Participants were first asked to rate a fictional beverage called Power-Plus using either a 14 item cognitive list or a 16 item affective list developed by Crites, Fabrigar and Petty (1994). This was done to prime the affective or

cognitive dimensions of the attitudes and increase the likelihood that the researchers would be able to induce the types of attitudes. The participants were asked to rate the beverage based on whether they tasted the beverage or read a passage about the beverage. This was done to create an attitude based on either affect (tasting) or cognition (reading the passage). Later analyses showed that this manipulation was successful in creating the attitudes.

Once these initial attitudes were induced, one half of the participants in the cognitive group and half of the participants in the affective group were then randomly assigned into one of two conditions. In the first condition participants would receive the beverage that had been tampered with to give it a highly negative taste, or asked to smell the beverage after ammonia had been added to the beverage to give it a highly negative smell. In the second condition, participants received written statements that criticized the beverage and gave numerous reasons it did not compare to existing beverages.

After this was done, the Crites scales were then re-administered to the participants, relevant affect was measured using the 16-item affect scale and relevant cognition was measured using the 14 item cognitive scale. General attitudes were measured using an eight-item scale consisting of words reflecting general positive or negative evaluation. The scale contained words such as good, positive, dislike, and dislike. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which he or she either agreed with each descriptor using a seven point scale with 1 representing a “completely disagree” response and 7 representing a “completely agree” response. Findings of this study supported the theory submitted by Edwards and von Hippel (1995) that affective persuasion was more effective at changing

affectively based attitudes and cognitive persuasion was more effective at changing cognitively based attitudes.

Given the conflicting results of these studies, one must ask what accounts for these discrepant findings? One explanation proposed by Mess' e, Bodenhausen, & Nelson in 1995 was that findings proposed in both types of studies were not really testing the matching and mismatching hypotheses. Mess' e et al proposed that change occurred through direct or indirect experience with the attitude object. For example, in the Edwards and von Hippel study (1995), participants were either asked to taste a beverage or to read a pamphlet about it in order to form their initial attitude. Mess' e et al would conclude that the participants who tasted the beverage would form an attitude based on direct experience with the attitude object while the participants who read a pamphlet about a beverage would form an attitude based on indirect experience with the attitude object. Mess' e argued that the number of experiments demonstrating matching effects are really testing the direct experience\indirect experience matching effects rather than affect\cognition matching effects. He also proposed that mismatching effects have tended to use attitude objects on whose people's attitudes have been based upon direct experience and the persuasive appeals were always written information (indirect experience) about the attitude object.

Measuring an Attitude to be Affectively or Cognitively Based

Despite the wide base of research regarding the effects of matching versus mismatching affective and cognitive persuasion to affectively and cognitively based attitudes, little attention has been given to empirically assessing whether an attitude is predominantly affective or cognitive in nature.

One study (Crites, Fabrigar, & Petty, 1994) attempted to develop an empirical system for measuring the basis of an attitude. In this study, the researchers constructed four different scales. A semantic differential scale was developed that consisted of eight affective items such as love/hateful, delighted/sad, and acceptance/ disgusted and seven cognitive items such as useful/useless, wise/foolish, and beneficial/harmful. A multiresponse checklist was developed that consisted of sixteen affective, fourteen cognitive, and eight general evaluative terms. An example of one of these terms could be the word “wholesome”. Of these descriptive terms, the individual then chooses whether these terms describes: a) how he or she feel about the object, b) the traits of the object, or c) his or her attitude toward the object (an example of one of these terms could be the word “wholesome”). A dichotomous checklist was developed that was identical to the multiresponse checklist with the exception that the participants could indicate only if each word did or did not describe their feelings toward the object, attitude toward the object, or traits of the object. Likewise, a word variation scale was developed that contained various sentences worded in sentence form such as “it is disgusting” (cognitive), and “I feel disgust” (affective) (Crites et al, 1994).

Analyses of the scales revealed good internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. A series of Cronbach alphas and factor analyses revealed that these four general scales displayed good levels of internal consistency, convergent validity and discriminant validity. Structural equation models also revealed that both the affective and cognitive scales were predictive of attitude.

Although these scales have shown a good ability to assess the basis of an attitude, a question that could be raised is whether these scales would have such a high success rate

when looking at an existing specific attitude towards a socially relevant topic such as capital punishment. The Crites scales were used in studies such as Fabrigar and Petty (1999), in which the attitude assessed was one that was instilled into the participants, and that dealt with an arbitrary attitude such as attitudes toward a beverage. Scales such as these would not be able to accurately assess an attitude that is based upon very specific content. For example when speaking about a topic such as abortion, one may have a negative attitude toward abortion based upon the fact that taking a human life in any form is wrong and against his or her religious beliefs. This type of support for this particular argument could not be accurately assessed by a general checklist or scale of adjectives.

With this in mind, it seems the most effective means available for assessing an existing attitude would be those employed by Millar and Millar (1990) in which the participants were given both general evaluative terms of an attitude object and asked to write down the thoughts and feelings the participants have about the attitude object. Raters then coded those thoughts and feelings and the number of affective and cognitive statements was counted. These thoughts and feelings tap into the specific content relevant to the attitude itself.

The Contribution of this Study

As mentioned before, the problem with previous research is that prior studies measure attitudes that have been induced through experimental manipulation. Most attitudes that exist in the real world however have already been formed and individuals possessing attitudes have knowledge and evidence that support their attitudes. This study was different in that the attitude was measured and was an attitude that was already existing and socially relevant. The issue will be about the favorableness or

unfavorableness of the death penalty. The death penalty was chosen as a topic because it is socially relevant and therefore most people would have some opinion or attitude about the issue. Thus the study was about an existing, socially relevant attitude.

In a 1986 Gallup poll, 65% of the adults surveyed claimed that the death penalty was an issue that they “felt very strongly about” (Ellsworth & Gross, 1994). An ABC news exit poll during the 1988 presidential election showed that 27% of the voters admitted that the candidates’ stance on the death penalty played a part in who they decided to vote for. Despite this small percentage, the death penalty issue weighed more heavily, as a whole, than other important issues such as the candidates’ stance on illegal drugs (26%), education (22%), health care (21%), and social security (19%) (Ellsworth & Gross, 1994).

This study specifically examined people whose attitudes are initially in favor of the death penalty. One reason for using only initial attitudes that are in favor of the death penalty is that various polls have shown that roughly 72% of all Americans favor the death penalty for persons convicted of murder (Bureau of Justice Statistics). Likewise, the amount of literature that criticizes the death penalty is much more abundant and readily available. It is likely that when assessing general attitudes toward the death penalty, more individuals responded that they are in favor of the death penalty.

This study was different in the respect that the participants were first asked to answer a Likert-type question that measured their general attitude toward the death penalty. A response of one representing a very unfavorable position and a seven representing a very favorable position. The participants were then asked to “write out all your thoughts and/or feelings about the death penalty.” Each individual was randomly

assigned either two cognitive or two affective arguments that criticized the death penalty. There were four different arguments in this experiment, two affective and two cognitive. Cognitive argument number one attacked the deterrence effect of the death penalty, while cognitive argument number two discussed the outrageous costs associated with the death penalty. Affective argument number one discussed the barbarous nature with which criminals are executed in the United States. Affective argument number two discussed the irreversible nature of the death penalty and past instances of wrongful execution. Once these counterarguments were given, the participants were then asked to re-take the original pretest measures including the Likert-type question and “writing out of thoughts and feelings measure”. The individuals were then given a debriefing statement.

Other Factors that Influence Attitude Change

The process of attitude change is a very complex process, and many variables come into play such as source, the message, the recipient, and the context of the persuasion.

Source is defined as the aspects of the person or group presenting the persuasive appeal. The credibility of the source must be taken into account. If the intended audience does not believe the source is credible, they will simply dismiss the information presented to them (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). Research has shown that high expertise sources have led to more persuasion than low expertise sources specifically, when the topic is of low personal relevance (Petty, Cacioppo, 1981). In this present study, sources of the arguments will be cited, giving the arguments themselves more credibility than an unidentified source.

The quality of the arguments presented to the participants has also been shown to have an effect on the likelihood of attitude change. Unfamiliar or unique arguments have a greater effect on attitude change than familiar ones because a novel or unique argument will have a greater affect on attitude change because a novel or unique argument does not have previous counterargumentation pre-generated against it (Vinokur & Burnstein, 1974). This will be measured in the study by asking the participants the extent to which they are familiar with the counterarguments presented to them.

Within this study, participants were asked to first fill out a Likert-type question to assess their general attitude toward the death penalty. In order to assess the basis of the participants' attitudes, the participants were asked to write out their thoughts and/or feelings about the death penalty. Participants then received through random assignment, one of two arguments, the affective argument contained both a section on the irreversible nature of the death penalty and the barbarous nature in which the death penalty is carried out. On the other hand, they could have received the cognitive argument that contained a section on the inability of the death penalty to serve as a deterrent to violent crime and a section on the large costs involved in executing a criminal. Once they processed the arguments, all participants were asked to once again fill out the Likert-type question and write out their thoughts and/or feelings about the death penalty. It was predicted that one of two phenomena would occur. The first phenomenon was that much like the results of the Millar & Millar study (1990), those who had a cognitive attitude would be more easily persuaded by affective arguments and those who have an affective attitude would be more easily persuaded by cognitive arguments. The second phenomenon was that like the results of the Fabrigar & Petty study (1999), those who had a cognitive attitude would be

more easily persuaded by cognitive arguments and those who had an affective attitude would be more easily persuaded by affective arguments.

Method

Participants

A total of 128 Eastern Illinois University undergraduate students, 48 men and 80 women, were recruited from various psychology and sociology courses. Seventy-five students (59%) held favorable attitudes towards the death penalty while 53 (41%) disagreed with the death penalty.

This study aimed at testing only those participants with favorable attitudes toward the death penalty. Among those who had favorable attitudes ($n = 75$), 15 had predominantly affectively based attitudes, two had neutral attitudes toward the death penalty, and 58 had cognitively based attitudes toward the death penalty.

Because of a possible lack of statistical power, the 15 participants with affectively based attitudes were not included in the final analysis. Thus, this study was unable to test how the attitude base interacted with the two types of counterarguments in eliciting change.

Design

This study started as a 2 (basis of attitude: cognitive vs. affective) x 2 (basis of counterargument: cognitive vs. affective) between-subjects factorial design. The first independent variable was the basis of the participants' attitude toward the death penalty (cognitive vs. affective). The second independent variable was the basis of the counterargument given to the participants (cognitive vs. affective).

The first dependent variable was the participants' attitude towards the death penalty. It was measured by responses in a Likert-type scale to the question: "Do you believe that the death penalty is an acceptable form of punishment?" A response of 1 indicated an "I strongly disagree that the death penalty is an acceptable form of punishment" response and a 7 represented an "I strongly agree that the death penalty is an acceptable form of punishment" response. This question was given to all participants before and after the counterarguments were presented.

The second dependent variable was the amount of supportive statements the participants made about the death penalty. It was measured by calculating the proportion of favorable statements to total statements the participants made about the death penalty before and after reading the counterarguments.

Because of the low number of participants with positive affective attitudes toward the death penalty acquired, the design of the study was changed to a 2(type of counterargument: cognitive vs. affective) X 2(time position on the death penalty was measured: before vs. after reading the counterarguments) mixed factorial design.

Procedure

Participants were given the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time. Confidentiality was assured by assigning each participant a code. At the end of the study, the participants were given a debriefing statement that revealed the purpose of the study. All participants were also given the option of receiving information of the results of the study.

Each participant was asked to perform five tasks administered by a clinical psychology graduate student. The five tasks took approximately twenty-five minutes to

complete. In the first task, measures of the participants' general attitude towards the death penalty were assessed using a Likert-type question.

The next task involved assessing the basis of the participants' attitudes. The participants were asked to write out all of their thoughts and/or feelings regarding the death penalty.

In the next phase of the data gathering, the participants were asked to read two of four constructed arguments criticizing the use of the death penalty. One set of two arguments was affectively based and another set of two was cognitively based. The set of affective arguments had two sections. One section discussed the barbarous nature in which society executes its criminals in the United States. It described many documented cases of executions going awry and the pain and anguish they caused to those whom they were supposed to humanely execute. The other section discussed how the death penalty is something that is irreversible. It is therefore fair only if the justice system never makes mistakes. This argument also described some documented cases of individuals being exonerated of their crime before they were executed and those who were found to be innocent after they had already been executed. This argument also examined the feelings associated with being sentenced to death for something one did not do.

The set of cognitive arguments also had two sections. One section discussed the ineffectiveness of the death penalty as a deterrent to crime. Results of a longitudinal study where the national murder rate has remained constant while the number of individuals executed each year has progressively risen was presented. This argument also makes other rational points that attack the inability of society to administer capital punishment consistently. The other section discussed the cost associated with the application of the

death penalty. This argument dispelled the misconception that a sentence of life imprisonment is more expensive than execution. In actuality, the cost of executing a criminal is close to six times more expensive than housing a criminal for twenty years.

Following each specific section or argument were two Likert-type questions. The first question asked, "To what extent are you familiar with this argument?" A seven represented an "I am very familiar with this argument" response and a one represented an "I am not familiar with this argument at all" response. The second question asked, "To what extent do you agree with this argument?" A seven represented a "strongly agree" response and a one represented a "strongly disagree" response.

The fourth task involved asking the participants to fill out a Likert-type question that was identical to the one the participants were asked to do in the first part of the experiment. This was used to measure any change in the participants' general attitudes toward the death penalty.

The next thing the participants were asked to do is write out their thoughts and/or feelings about the death penalty much like they were asked to in the first part of the study. Once these measures had been taken, the participants were given a debriefing statement and released. Because the basis of the attitudes could not be known before receiving the counterarguments, an uneven number of participants received each type of counterargument.

Coding

There were two coders involved in this study, one was a clinical psychology graduate student and the other was an undergraduate student who was trained to code statements for content. Both the clinical psychology graduate student and the volunteer

were trained in how to code the participants' responses. When trained how to distinguish between an affective statement and a cognitive statement, the coders were first given definitions of what an affective statement and cognitive statement was. An affective statement was defined as "a statement that reflects an emotion or how one feels", and a cognitive statement was defined as "a statement that reflects one's thoughts or how one thinks".

With these definitions as criteria, the coders were then given several sets of ten statements about the death penalty. Each set of ten statements contained both affective and cognitive statements. Each coder individually coded each statement as affective or cognitive. Subsequent lists of statements were given to the coders until a 90% agreement rate had been reached between the two coders. Once the 90% agreement rate had been attained, the training was deemed sufficient. The coders then undertook the task of assessing whether the statements made in the "writing out of thoughts and feelings" measure were affective or cognitive in nature. The coders reached a reliability estimate of 88% agreement.

A similar process was undergone in training the coders to distinguish a favorable statement about the death penalty from an unfavorable statement about the death penalty. Both coders were given several sets of ten statements about the death penalty and given subsequent lists until a 90% agreement had been reached between them. Once again, after the 90% agreement rate had been reached, training for that portion was terminated. The coders then undertook the task of identifying the sentences that either give support or criticize the death penalty. The coders attained a reliability estimate of 85% agreement.

In instances where the coders had incompatible codings on a particular statement, they discussed the statement and arrived at an agreement on how to code the statement. In a few instances some of the statements were so ambiguous that they could not be used in the study at all. For example, the statement “I don’t feel informed enough to make a definite decision” could be seen as a cognitive statement but it gives no indication of whether the participant supports or criticizes the death penalty. There were approximately 13 statements (2%) out of 533 like this that could not be used.

Once all materials had been coded, two measures were generated. The first figure generated was the proportion of favorable statements to total statements about the death penalty each participant made. This was obtained for statements generated before and after reading the counterarguments. The second measure was the proportion of cognitive statements to total statements made about the death penalty. The proportion of affective statements made about the death penalty would be the opposite of the proportion of cognitive statements (i.e., percent affective = 100 percent minus percent cognitive). In order for one to be classified as having a cognitive or affective attitude, at least 60% of the statements made by the participant must have been cognitive or affective respectively.

The participants’ classification as having a positive or negative attitude toward the death penalty was determined by the participants’ responses on the first Likert-type question asking, “Do you think the death penalty is an acceptable form of punishment?” A score of 1 indicated that the participant strongly disagrees with the death penalty and a score of 7 indicated that they strongly support the death penalty. In order for one to have been classified as having a positive attitude toward the death penalty, his or her response would have to be 4, 5, 6, or 7.

Results

Only those who had a favorable attitude toward the death penalty and who were assessed as having cognitive attitudes were used in this study. Of the 58 participants with cognitively based favorable attitudes, 35 of them (60%) received cognitive counterarguments against the death penalty while 23 of them (40%) received affective arguments against the death penalty.

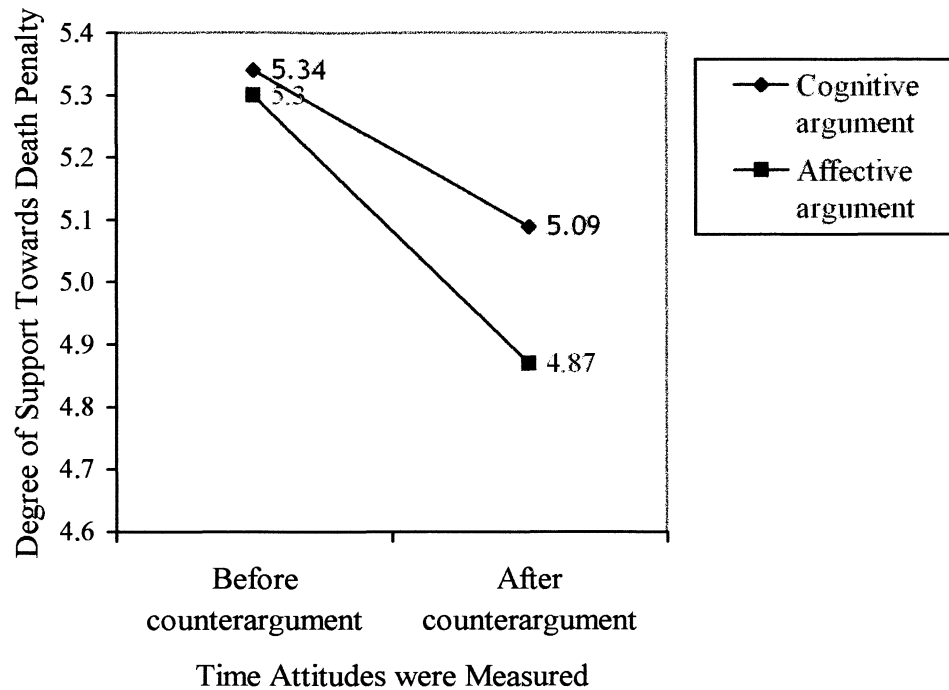
The Effect of Type of Counterargument on the Positions Taken on the Death Penalty

Which type of counterargument influenced the participants' subsequent position on the death penalty? A 2(type of counterargument: cognitive vs. affective) x 2(time position on the death penalty was measured: before vs. after reading the counterarguments) ANOVA for mixed factorial designs was conducted on the positions taken on the death penalty. The between-subjects predictor was the type of counterargument received (cognitive vs. affective) and the within-subjects predictor was the time the position on the death penalty was measured (before vs. after reading the counterarguments).

Results show that there was no significant interaction between the type of counterargument and the time the position on the death penalty was measured, $F(1, 56) = .81, p > .01$. However, the main effect of time was significant, $F(1, 56) = 12.27, p < .01$. Regardless of type of counterargument received, the participants were significantly less supportive of the death penalty after reading the counterarguments ($M = 5.32$) than before they read them ($M = 4.99$). There was no main effect of type of counterargument, $F(1, 56) = .18, p > .01$.

Though the interaction was not significant, an examination of the graph below indicates that the reduction of support for the death penalty tended to be greater among

those who received affective counterarguments than those who read cognitive counterarguments. Both sets of participants had very comparable positions on the death penalty before reading the counterarguments.



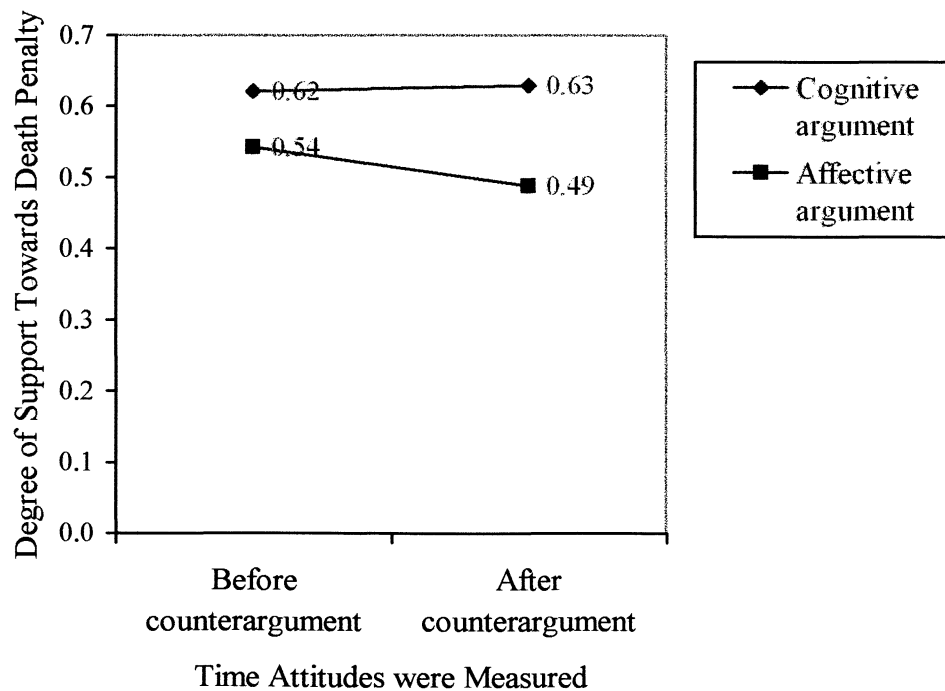
The Effect of Type of Counterargument on the Proportions of Favorable Statements Made About the Death Penalty

Which type of counterargument influenced the subsequent favorable statements the participants made about the death penalty? A 2(type of counterargument: cognitive vs. affective) x 2(time the position on the death penalty was measured: before vs. after reading the counterarguments) ANOVA for mixed factorial design was conducted on the amount of favorable statements the participants generated on the death penalty. The between-subjects predictor was the type of counterargument (cognitive vs. affective) and

the within-subjects predictor was time the position was measured (before vs. after reading the counterarguments).

Results indicate that there was no significant interaction between the time the positions of the participants was measured and the type of counterargument they received, $F(1, 54) = .42, p > .01$. Likewise, there was no main effect of the type of counterargument, $F(1, 54) = .68, p > .01$. There was no main effect of time the positions of the participants was measured, $F(1, 54) = 1.90, p > .01$.

Though the interaction was not significant, a close examination of the graph below indicates that those who received affective counterarguments tended to generate fewer supportive statements toward the death penalty after reading the counterarguments. On the other hand, those who received cognitive counterarguments generated relatively the same amount of supportive statements before and after reading the counterarguments.



The Relationship Between Familiarity and Agreement with the Counterarguments

This analysis was run to test if there was a relationship between participants' familiarity with the counterarguments and their agreement with the counterarguments. Keeping in mind that there were four topics (two for each type of counterargument), four correlations were run. The results in Table 1 showed that only the cognitive topic about the cost of the death penalty had a correlation between familiarity and agreement. The more familiar the participants were with this topic, the more they tended to agree with it.

Table 1

The Relationship Between Familiarity and Agreement by Topic

	Correlations
Cognitive Counterarguments ($n = 35$)	
The Death Penalty is not a Deterrent	.27
The Death Penalty Costs too Much	.44*
Affective Counterarguments ($n = 23$)	
The Death Penalty is Barbarous	-.23
The Death Penalty is Irreversible	.05

* = $p < .05$

Participants' Familiarity and Agreement with the Counterarguments and Changes in Positions Taken on the Death Penalty

A correlation was run to determine if the participants' familiarity or agreement with a counterargument was correlated with the degree of change in general position on the death penalty. Change was measured by calculating the difference in positions on the death penalty before and after the counterarguments were given (i.e., before – after).

It was predicted that those who received counterarguments that were unfamiliar to them would be less supportive of the death penalty (i.e., would change their general position on the death penalty). Likewise, it was predicted that those who agreed with the counterarguments would also be less supportive. Because there were four topics, a separate correlation was run for each topic. Results in Table 2 showed that familiarity and agreement with any of the topics was not correlated with the change the participants made on their position on the death penalty.

Table 2

Familiarity and Agreement with the Counterarguments and Changes in Position on the Death Penalty.

	Correlations
Cognitive Counterarguments ($n = 35$)	
Familiarity with Deterrence	-.01
Agreement with Deterrence	-.20
Familiarity with Cost	-.10
Agreement with Cost	-.29
Affective Counterarguments ($n = 23$)	
Familiarity with Barbarous	.02
Agreement with Barbarous	-.06
Familiarity with Irreversible	.07
Agreement with Irreversible	.11

Familiarity and Agreement with the Counterarguments and Changes in Proportion of Favorable Statements on the Death Penalty

A correlation was run to determine if the participants' familiarity or agreement with a counterargument was correlated with the changes in the amount of favorable statements generated about the death penalty. Change was measured by looking at the

differences in the amount of favorable statements made about the death penalty before and after reading the counterarguments.

It was predicted that those who received counterarguments that were unfamiliar to them would have greater changes in the amount of favorable statements on the death penalty. Likewise, it was predicted that those who agreed with the counterarguments would have greater changes. Once again, because there were four topics, a separate correlation was run for each topic. Results in Table 3 showed that familiarity and agreement with any of the topics was not correlated with the changes on the amount of favorable statements about the death penalty.

Table 3

Familiarity and Agreement with the Counterarguments and Changes in Proportion of Favorable Statements on the Death Penalty

	Correlation
Cognitive Counterarguments	
Familiarity with Deterrence	.24
Agreement with Deterrence	.04
Familiarity with Cost	.24
Agreement with Cost	.07
Affective Counterarguments	
Familiarity with Barbarous	.14
Agreement with Barbarous	-.22
Familiarity with Irreversible	.19
Agreement with Irreversible	-.06

These findings do not support the theory put forth by Millar and Millar (1990) in which they proposed that presenting novel information that attacks one's attitude may be an effective method of attitude change because that individual may have less attitude-relevant knowledge to refute the novel information.

Discussion

This study was able to test the effect of the type of counterargument on the general position the participants took on the death penalty. It also tested the effect of the type of

counterargument on the amount of supportive statements the participants generated about the death penalty.

Due to the low number of participants with positive affectively based attitudes, only participants with positive cognitive attitudes toward the death penalty were tested. Thus, the study was unable to test the effects of the participants' attitude base on their general position as well as on the amount of supportive statements on the death penalty. Likewise, the interaction between the participants' attitude base and type of counterargument could not be examined.

There are a few reasons for the low number of participants with affective attitudes. One stems from the fact that writing out one's thoughts and feelings may primarily be a cognitive task. Asking the participants to write is priming them for cognitive processing. Secondly, feelings or emotions are difficult to express in words and are more easily expressed in speech or body language. Participants who harbor strong feelings about the death penalty may have difficulty expressing those feelings in words.

Type of Counterargument and Changes in Positions and Support

Results of the study show that participants significantly lowered their support for the death penalty regardless of what type of counterargument they received. This finding somehow suggests that receiving challenging information lowers one's support to a position. However, it is unclear if such a reduction of support is truly a function of being challenged or of time alone. The passing of time or being able to think more about the issue might lower one's support. A control group that does not receive any counterarguments is needed to test the effect of receiving challenging information.

Although there were no significant differences between the participants who received cognitive counterarguments and those who received affective counterarguments (in regards to changes in position and supportive statements), trends indicate that those who received affective counterarguments became less supportive of and generated fewer supportive statements about the death penalty than those who received cognitive counterarguments.

Even though these trends were not significant, they seem to imply that the affective counterarguments were more effective at reducing the amount of support for the death penalty and reducing the number of supportive statements for the death penalty. The non-significant result may be due to a lack of statistical power. Out of 58 participants in the study, 35 of them received cognitive counterarguments and 23 of them received affective counterarguments.

If these trends were significant, they would confirm the proposal put forth by Millar & Millar (1990) that affective arguments would have a greater likelihood of changing a cognitively based attitude. However, because participants with affectively based attitudes were not examined, we were not able to test the other half of Millar and Millar's hypothesis which stated that cognitive arguments would be more effective at changing affectively-based attitudes. Study results show that familiarity or agreement with a counterargument was not predictive of changes in position or support for the death penalty.

Contributions and Limitations of the Study

One aspect of this study that separates it from much of the prior research in the area of attitude change is that this study deals with a socially relevant topic. In this case the

topic is the death penalty. Much of the prior research regarding the matching and mismatching hypotheses of attitude change focuses on an attitude about an arbitrary object such as a beverage or an individual's outward appearance. The problem with using arbitrary objects in this type of research is that they have no ability to generalize to the general population and if they do, they can only make inferences about the specific attitude objects contrived by the various researchers. Attitudes are complex and attitudes about broad subjects such as the death penalty are the most complex. This study was an attempt to explore these types of attitudes and examine the factors that change them.

The study, however, was unable to test the matching or mismatching hypotheses of attitude change. It simply examined which type of argument (cognitive vs. affective) was more effective at changing a cognitive attitude toward the death penalty. Although there were no significant differences in the effects of cognitive versus affective counterarguments, non-significant trends in the study seem to show that affective counterarguments were better at changing attitudes and reducing support for the death penalty among those with cognitively based attitudes. However, the study was unable to test this among those with affective attitudes.

Further Research

One of the biggest difficulties in running this study was obtaining participants with attitudes that were affectively based. One possible solution is to ask participants to encircle pre-generated statements about the death penalty that coincide the most with his or her attitude. Much like the Millar & Millar study (1990) mentioned earlier, the sets of statements would contain four affective-positive statements, four affective-negative statements, four cognitive-positive statements, and four cognitive-negative statements.

Participants would then be asked to encircle the three statements that most coincide with his or her attitude toward the death penalty.

Another area of improvement is the assessment of the attitudes themselves. This study used two coders who classified each idea generated by each participant as affective or cognitive. One way to alleviate subjectivity in coding would be to gather pilot participants who would be asked for instance, to generate some emotional statements to support the death penalty or some other given topic. Other pilot participants would be asked to generate rational statements to support the death penalty. Keeping in mind that these lists would stay separate from one another, one list would be compiled of all the affective statements; the other list would contain all the cognitive statements. These lists could be used in two ways. First, it could be used as a teaching guide for the coders. After reading all of these statements, each coder would have a better idea of what statements would constitute an affective statement or cognitive statement. Secondly, the lists generated by the pilot subjects would be used as a checklist so to speak in assessing the statements made by the participants of the study. When participants of the study generate reasons for supporting their position, those statements are then compared to both the affective and cognitive lists generated by the pilot participants. Only statements that match the ideas made on the pilot lists would be used to assess the basis of the participants' attitudes.

Another way of improving on the study is to maximize the manipulation of the type of counterargument. In this study, both cognitive and affective arguments were presented in written form. Reading is more of a cognitive process and therefore participants were more likely to process whatever type of information presented to them in

a cognitive manner. In future studies, researchers could present a cognitive argument in written form and present an affective counterargument through a different form of media such as a video. This would be done to help insure that the manipulation of the counterarguments would be maximized. A study like this would be confounded, however, because of the differences in how the arguments are presented. The confound could then be treated as a separate independent variable. Thus, a 2(type of counterargument: cognitive vs. affective) x 2(type of presentation: print vs. video) factorial design could be adapted. One group would receive a written cognitive counterargument. One group would receive an affective written counterargument. The third group would watch a video that contains primarily cognitive information and the last group would watch a video that contains primarily affective information. All forms of counterarguments would contain material that criticizes the death penalty. An example of an affective video could be a video that discusses how individuals on death row have been exonerated of their crimes and their reaction to such. If it is someday made available to the public, showing a taped execution and watching the criminal's emotional expression and demeanor as they prepare him. An example of a cognitive video could be a video that discusses the cost of the death penalty to the taxpayer or the death penalty's failure to act as a deterrent. The written counterarguments would be very similar to those used in this study.

It is understood that existing social attitudes are complex and difficult to manipulate but results of studies on simple attitudes about arbitrary objects such as beverages may not necessarily generalize to the more complex and socially relevant attitudes that people hold. The difficulty in this kind of research lies in our ability to examine complex attitudes. Attitudes are complex and tailored to the individual who holds

them. Despite this, there are also features and dimensions in attitudes that are common across individuals such as the basis of the attitude. Two types of bases identified in prior research are the cognitive and affective bases. These features systematically respond to different types of persuasive appeals despite individual differences. The present study has shown some of those persuasive factors that influence attitudes. It suggests that giving participants counterarguments about the death penalty increases the likelihood that they will change their attitude. It also shows that affective types of counterarguments may be more likely to dissuade others from supporting the death penalty. This may be particularly true with people who have a predominately cognitive favorable attitude toward the death penalty.

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INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The purpose of this study is to examine people's attitudes toward the death penalty and their perceptions and reactions to arguments about the death penalty.

Your participation will remain anonymous. Your name will be coded on the questionnaire so as to protect your identity. The only time you will be required to sign your name will be on the consent form or if you wish to find out the results of the study.

The study will involve the following tasks: a) indicating your gender; b) answering a Likert-type question about your attitude toward the death penalty; c) writing out your thoughts and/or feelings about the death penalty; d) reading an argument about the death penalty; e) answering a Likert-type question identical to one asked earlier in the study; f) re-writing your thoughts and/or feelings about the death penalty. Nobody will have access to the materials with the exception of the researcher and two trained individuals who will code the responses in the "writing thoughts and feelings" exercise.

It will take around 20 minutes to participate in the study. There are no anticipated negative consequences to participating in the study. Some individuals, however, may find it difficult to express their views on the death penalty. Please understand that you do not have to participate in the study and do not have to sign the consent form. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Feel free to ask questions about the study at any time during the study and they will be answered when possible. Should there be questions feel free to contact Jason Hortin (clinical psychology graduate student) at (618) 456-3560.

I agree to participate in this study as described above.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

CODE: _____

Gender: Male Female (circle one)

Major: _____

Age: _____

Do you believe the death penalty is an acceptable form of punishment?

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

I strongly disagree
that the death
penalty is an
acceptable form
of punishment.

I strongly agree
that the death
penalty is an
acceptable form
of punishment.

Please write out all of your thoughts and/or feelings regarding the death penalty in the space provided below. You can also use the next blank page to continue writing your thoughts and/or feelings.

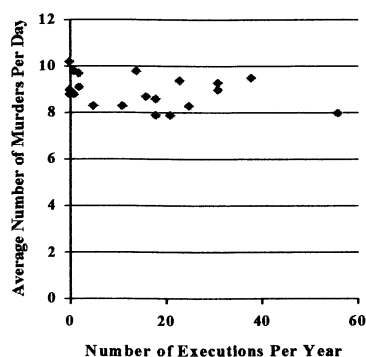
Capital punishment is a very volatile issue in today's society. What makes the death penalty such an interesting topic is that almost everyone has an opinion on this subject. There is a wealth of literature that has recently come into light that attacks the use of the death penalty in America's penal system.

Capital Punishment is not a Deterrent to Criminals

Murder Rates are not Affected by the Number of Executions

One of the arguments given by those who support capital punishment is that the death penalty deters or prevents other potential criminals from committing a similar act. Unfortunately, all evidence that has been collected shows that this is not true. According to the Death Penalty Information Center, a year by year analysis shows that the number of executions carried out has no direct effect on the national murder rate as shown by the following graph and table.

<u>Year</u>	<u># of Executions/ year</u>	<u>Avg. Number of Murders/ day</u>
1976	0	8.8
1977	1	8.8
1978	0	9
1979	2	9.7
1980	0	10.2
1981	1	9.8
1982	2	9.1
1983	5	8.3
1984	21	7.9
1985	18	7.9
1986	18	8.6
1987	25	8.3
1988	11	8.3
1989	16	8.7
1990	23	9.4
1991	14	9.8
1992	31	9.3
1993	38	9.5
1994	31	9
1995	56	8



The graph and table shows that as the number of executions per year increases, the average number of murders per day does not decrease but actually remains constant. *Capital Punishment can be Effective only if it is Delivered Consistently and Promptly*

Capital punishment is something that cannot be administered consistently. This is shown by looking at the proportion of first degree murders who are sentenced to death. According to the Death Penalty Information Center in Washington D.C., of those who were convicted of criminal homicide, only three percent (around 300 per year) are sentenced to death. This is an average of one out of every thirty-three.

Secondly, the death penalty cannot be administered promptly is because murder trials take far longer when the death penalty is being sought. This can be attributed to the fact that the outcome of a death penalty case is far more grave for the accused than an average murder case therefore more scrutiny will be given to the prosecution's case. Furthermore, given the seriousness of a death penalty conviction, the post-conviction appeals in death penalty cases are much more frequent than in other cases. These two factors greatly lengthen the amount of time between the actual criminal act and the execution.

To what extent are you familiar with this argument?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I am not familiar
with this argument
at all.

I am very
familiar with
this argument.

To what extent do you agree with this argument?

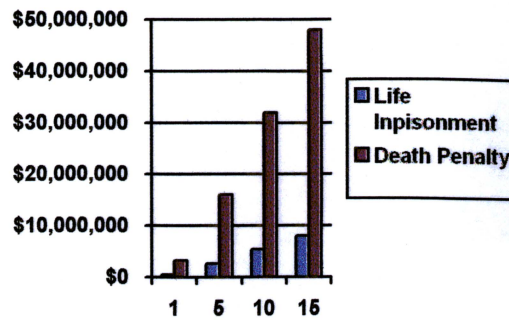
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

Capital Punishment Costs Greatly Outweigh the Costs of Life Imprisonment

A lot of people assume that life imprisonment is more expensive than execution. Thus they erroneously believe that abolishing capital punishment is unfair to the taxpayer. If one takes into account all the relevant costs, however, the reverse is true. The death penalty is not now, nor has it ever been, a more economical alternative to life imprisonment. A 1982 study conducted by the state of New York found that the cost of a capital punishment trial alone would be more than double the cost of a life term in prison. Florida, with one of the nation's most populous death rows, has estimated that the true cost of each execution is approximately 3.2 million dollars, or six times the cost of a life imprisonment sentence. According to the book **Death Row** by Bonnie Bobit, from 1973-1998 the State of Florida spent 57 million dollars to achieve 18 executions. The following is a graph showing the discrepancies between the costs of handing down both a life sentence and a death sentence.



A 1993 study of the costs of North Carolina's capital punishment system revealed that simply litigating a murder case from start to finish adds an extra \$163,000 to what it would cost the state to keep the convicted offender in prison for twenty years. The extra cost goes up to \$216,000 per case when all first degree murder trials and their appeals are considered, many of which do not end with a death sentence and an execution. The main point made by these various statistics is that wherever the death penalty is in place, it siphons off resources which could be going to the front line in the war against crime.

To what extent are you familiar with this argument?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I am not familiar
with this argument
at all.

I am very
familiar with
this argument.

To what extent do you agree with this argument?

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

Capital punishment is a very volatile issue in today's society. What makes the death penalty such an interesting topic is that almost everyone has an opinion on this subject. There is a wealth of literature that has recently come into light that attacks the use of the death penalty in America's penal system.

Capital Punishment is Barbarous

Prisoners are executed in the United States by any one of five methods. These methods are hanging, firing squad, electrocution, lethal injection, and the gas chamber. The one thing that these five methods has in common is the barbarous nature by which they put people to death. The following are just some examples of how these methods are cruel and unusual.

When being executed by hanging, the process is easily bungled. If the drop is too short, there will be a slow and agonizing death by strangulation and if the drop is too long, the head will be torn off completely.

When being executed by a firing squad, the criminal is strapped to a post and shot by five marksmen. When this occurs, the prisoner must feel the four bullets enter his body and is not guaranteed to die from those four shots, from which he must then suffer as the marksmen reload their guns and fire again.

The following is a first hand account of the electrocution of Allen Lee Davis on July 8, 1999. According to Davis's lawyer, before he was pronounced dead, the blood from his mouth had poured onto the collar of his white shirt, and the blood on his chest had spread to about the size of a dinner plate, even oozing through the buckle holes on the leather strap holding him to the chair. Later Florida Supreme Court Justice Leander Shaw commented, "the color photos of Davis depict a man who for all appearances was brutally

tortured to death by the citizens of Florida”. Numerous other reports have described scenes in which flames have erupted from the heads of the men being executed. The executions of Frank Coppola, John Evans, and Pedro Medina are just a few examples of these reports.

The execution of Jimmy Lee Gray, who died in the gas chamber, brought the account of Gray gasping desperately for air, turning red and purple, and banging his head repeatedly against a steel pole in the gas chamber as the reporters counted his moans. The Associated Press counted eleven.

Lethal injection, the proclaimed “most civil form of execution” has its stories also. According to the Houston Chronicle, on May 24th 1989, Stephen McCoy has such a violent reaction to the chemicals (heaving chest, gasping, choking, back arching off the gurney) that one of the witnesses fainted. Other reports have told of syringes coming out of the prisoner’s vein and spraying deadly chemicals at the witnesses. Other reports told of prison officials taking over an hour to find a suitable vein in other prisoners. These reports include the execution of Stephen Morin, Randy Woolls, Elliot Johnson, and Billy White.

In essence, the point made by these examples of brutality is that despite the fact that the men who suffered these painful and violent deaths were being punished for their crimes, the fact remains that these men are human beings. Human beings who feel pain and anguish just like any other person. The terms brutality and torture are used to describe things that are inherently bad. They should not be used to describe our society’s form of justice.

To what extent are you familiar with this argument?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I am not familiar with this argument at all.

I am very familiar with this argument.

To what extent do you agree with this argument?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

Capital Punishment is Irreversible

Although some proponents of capital punishment would argue that its merits are worth occasional execution of innocent people, most would hasten to insist that there is little likelihood of the innocent being executed. Since 1990, there have been on average more than four cases each year in which an innocent person was convicted of murder and sentenced to death. The fact of the matter is that no innocent person should die for someone else's crime and that a large body of evidence from the 1980's and 1990's shows that innocent people are convicted of crimes and that some have been executed.

In 1985, Kirk Bloodsworth was sentenced to death for rape and murder, despite the testimony of alibi witnesses. In 1993, newly available DNA evidence proved he was not the killer and he was released. He had seven years in prison to think of his impending death for the crime he did not commit.

In 1980, Clarence Brandley, a black high school janitor, and a white co-worker found the body of a missing 16 year old girl. Interrogated by the police, the two men were told that one of them was going to hang for this. Brandley was tried, convicted, and sentenced to death based upon the fact that he was a black man being accused of killing a white girl and the jury would be more likely to convict him even though there was no evidence against him. In 1990, evidence emerged that proved another man had committed the murders and Brandley was released. In this case, he spent 10 years rotting away in prison, fearing the day when his wrongful execution would take place, fearing death.

Jesse Tafero, however was not that lucky. In 1990 he was executed for the murder of a state trooper. His wife, Tonya Jacobs, was convicted of the same offense based on the same evidence presented at Tafero's trial. This evidence consisted of the perjured testimony of ex-convict who turned state's evidence to avoid a jail sentence of his own. In 1992, Tonya Jacobs's case was vacated by a federal court, two years after Tafero's execution. Should Tafero have been alive, his case too would have been overturned. It is truly a helpless feeling to imagine what Jesse Tafero felt during that long walk down the hallway to the execution chamber knowing that he had done nothing wrong. Tafero is not the only one, however. Roger Keith Coleman was executed in 1992 despite overwhelming evidence that he had nothing to do with the crime he was accused of.

The scariest thing to think about when reviewing some of these cases is that these people who you are reading about could be a friend, a brother, a father, or even a husband. It is extremely difficult to imagine all the thoughts and feelings one would experience if he or she were the person wrongly convicted and sentenced to death.

To what extent are you familiar with this argument?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I am not familiar with this argument at all.

I am very familiar with this argument.

To what extent do you agree with this argument?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

CODE: _____

**Do you believe the death penalty is an acceptable form of punishment?
(circle one)**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I strongly disagree
that the death
penalty is an
acceptable form
of punishment.

I strongly agree
that the death
penalty is an
acceptable form
of punishment.

Please write out all of your thoughts and/or feelings regarding the death penalty in the space provided below. Include the same thoughts and/or feelings that you mentioned before reading the arguments if you feel they still apply. Please use the space below and the next page to write out your thoughts and/or feelings.