Graphic Evidence and Arousal: Investigating Need for Affect in Processing of Emotional Evidence

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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

- Jurors are instructed to make legal decisions without influence from emotions
- Social psychology research indicates affect and cognitions are intertwined when making decisions (Forgas, 1995; Kuvaas & Kaufmann, 2004)
- Lawyers introduce graphic evidence as a trial strategy to invoke negative and prejudicial emotions among jurors
- Research supports that jurors are more likely to provide guilty verdicts when exposed to graphic photographs (Douglas, Lyon, & Ogloff, 1997; Bright & Goodman-Delahunty, 2006)
- Anger mediates the effect of graphic photographs on likelihood of guilty verdicts (Bright & Goodman-Delahunty, 2006)

PRESENT STUDY – Research Questions

- Does an individual’s need for affect (NFA) moderate one’s mood state and subsequent verdict decisions?
  - Need for Affect: Individual differences in the motivation to approach or avoid emotions (Maio & Esses, 2001)
  - HIGH Need for Affect
    - Motivated to seek out emotion-inducing situations
    - Open to experiencing strong emotions
    - Seek out affective information when forming opinions
    - Adept at utilizing emotions for decision-making
  - LOW Need for Affect
    - Desire to avoid emotion-inducing situations
    - Neutral emotional reactions (not as extreme as High NFA)
    - Reduced emotional reactions to emotion-inducing situations
    - Less likely to refer to emotionally evocative evidence when making decisions

- Will individuals who report high NFA be more biased after exposure to graphic photographs? Will they report greater ratings of anger and subsequently provide more guilty verdicts than individuals who report low NFA?
- Do individuals who report high NFA incorporate emotionally-evocative stimuli into attitude development and decision-making in a substantive manner (i.e., as opposed to a heuristic/peripheral manner)?

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- Materials
  - DV Measures: Juror Judgment Questionnaire Perpetrator Blame Scale (PBS)
  - Moderator Measures: Need for Affect Scale Need for Cognition Scale
  - Mediator Measures: Positive and Negative Affect Scale State Anger Scale (SAS)
- Stimuli
  - Photographs (see below for example of each IV condition)
  - Case Presentation: A video excerpt of direct and cross-examination testimony of expert witness (actor) in a murder trial. A total of four crime scene photographs are presented full-screen for a total duration of 20 seconds. Participants only see pictures of one IV condition.

DESIGN

- Between-subjects experimental design
  - IV: Graphic Nature of Photograph
    - 3 Levels: Low, Medium, High
  - DV: Dichotomous: Verdict (Guilty, Not Guilty) Continuous: Likelihood of defendant guilt Recall of defendant characteristics
  - Moderator Variables: Need for Affect Need for Cognition
  - Mediator Variable: Mood State (Anger)

PROPOSED MODEL

- Graphic Photos
- Mood State (Anger)
- Verdict

PRIMARY HYPOTHESES

1) Mock-jurors in the high graphic photograph condition will provide the most guilty verdicts and highest ratings of likelihood of defendant guilt.
2) Mock-juror anger, as measured by the SAS and PANAS, will be positively related to likelihood of defendant guilt.
3) Mock-jurors who endorse high need for affect will respond more extremely to photographs with high graphic content.
4) Mock-jurors who endorse high need for affect and medium need for affect will provide the most guilty verdicts and the highest ratings of likelihood of defendant guilt.
5) Mock-jurors who endorse low need for affect will exhibit no difference between guilty and not guilty verdict decisions.
6) The effect of the graphic photographs on likelihood of defendant guilt will be mediated by mood state (anger).
7) Need for affect will moderate the effect of the graphic photographs on mock-jurors’ ratings of likelihood of defendant guilt.

EXPLORATORY QUESTIONS

- How will NFA and NFC interact when processing emotionally-laden information?
- Will mock-jurors who endorse high need for affect respond more extremely to photographs with high graphic content?