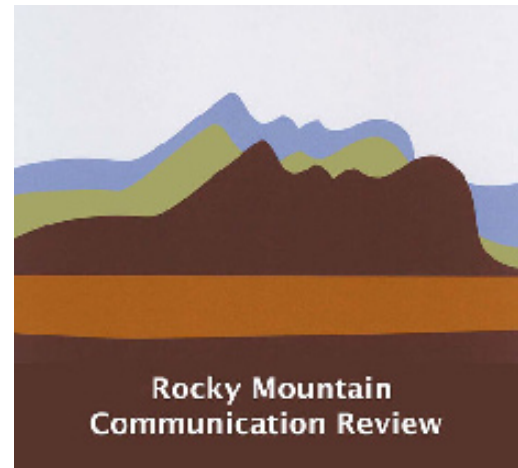


# Rocky Mountain Communication Review



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## Editor's Note

Due to the support of the graduate community, RMCR is pleased to announce that it will become a semi-annual publication. The editorial staff would like to thank all who have submitted their research, and we look forward to continue serving the communication discipline in the future.

This issue of the Rocky Mountain Communication Review reflects the journal's tradition of publishing an array of quality research done by graduate students. First, Jeffrey Hall and Brian Householder examine the effects of agreement as well as issue importance on how the quality of an argument is assessed in *Objective Rejection?: The Effects of Agreement and Involvement on Message Quality Evaluation*. Although issue importance did not predict argument quality assessment, Hall and Householder found that the effects of agreement on argument quality were consistent at high levels of issue importance as well as low at levels of low issue importance.

In *The Balancing Act: Addressing Analog/Digital Relation States within Balance Theory*, John Dowd investigates theory within the realm of interpersonal communication. Dowd seeks to enhance Heider's Balance Theory through incorporating the analog/digital dichotomy as addressed by Gregory Bateson. Such a blending, Dowd argues enriches the theory and aids in tracking the subtleties inherent in interpersonal relationships.

Jermaine Martinez's *Codes of Death Denial: Applying Ernest Becker to a Semiotic Study of Athletic Advertisements* featuring Runners provides a rich analysis of Nike advertising that focuses and features runners. Martinez blends semiotics, Becker's work on death denial, and terror management theory to answer how such advertisements express codes of excellence and cosmic significance as well as how the lived-body of runners within the ads are presented.

In *Within Reach: Publishing as a Graduate Student*, Daren Brabham provides an introduction to the peer-reviewed journal publishing process. He offers insights and strategies authors should consider when submitting their work to a peer-reviewed journal.

In closing, I would like to thank my entire 2006-2007 editorial board. I would specifically like to acknowledge two reviewers who exemplify the role of reviewer both in the number of reviews they were given as well as the depth of the reviews that they returned. These two reviewers—Dan Reimold (Ohio University) and Daren Brabham (University of Utah)—are extremely appreciated, and I hope both will continue to serve the journal.

Keith Massie

Editor, RMCR 2006-2007

# Objective Rejection?: The Effects of Agreement and Involvement on Message Quality Evaluation

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Jeffrey A. Hall & Brian J. Householder

*To extend argument quality research, this article explores the effects of agreement and issue importance on argument quality assessment for eight different topic areas to explore whether there is systematic bias in the evaluation of an argument's quality. Prior agreement was the primary and often sole variable predicting argument quality assessment for both supporting and counter position messages. The effects of agreement on assessment are consistent at high levels of issue importance and less consistent at low levels of issue importance. Issue importance did not predict argument quality assessment. Implications for the investigation of argument quality assessment are discussed.*

Persuasion research utilizing the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) has investigated how the level of involvement (measured by frequency of thought) and the strength of an argument (measured by the amount of positive and negative thoughts) influence attitude change (Petty & Caciopo, 1986). The theory predicts that under high involvement conditions high quality arguments should elicit greater attitude change than weak arguments. In low involvement conditions, peripheral cues, rather than the quality of the argument, should elicit attitude change. Persuasion research extending from the ELM has suggested that argument quality assessment mediates the effects of involvement

and message strength on attitude change (Hullet, 2002). Argument quality assessment is comprised of two related components that influence the perception of message quality: message design characteristics and human characteristics. Research has identified message characteristics that influence argument quality assessment (e.g., McDonald, Samuels, & Rispoli, 1996; McGuire, 1960; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987; Sloman, 1996). The present research is concerned with two attitudinal characteristics: degree of agreement with the argument's conclusion and degree of issue importance or involvement. To extend research in persuasion, it is important to understand how these variables influence the evaluation of the quality of an argument. Specifically, the present research intends to demonstrate that the evaluation of argument quality is not simply a mediator between involvement and attitude change but is itself affected by the attitude and involvement of the evaluators. Argument quality is an important variable in persuasion research and deserves careful scrutiny.

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Brian J Householder (Ph.D., University of Georgia, 2005) is an Assistant Professor and Director of the Basic Communication Course at Baruch College in New York. His research interests include Persuasion and Social Influence, Interpersonal Communication and Forensics.

## Argument Quality Perception

The quality of an argument is an important variable in persuasion research, especially research utilizing the ELM. Although instrumental

in advancing persuasion research, the ELM has been criticized for the self-fulfilling nature of the thought listing technique (Areni & Lutz, 1988; Mongeau & Stiff, 1993; O'Keefe, 1990), the challenges of manipulating involvement for topics pertinent to the participants (Fazio, 2000; Johnson, 1994), and the complicating effects of attitudinal predisposition on the effectiveness of the model (LaFrance & Boster, 2001; Wood, 1982; Wood, Kallgren, & Preisler, 1985). Four pertinent conclusions can be drawn from the research on the ELM and its critics: 1) A message that is able to persuade does not necessarily contain objectively high quality message characteristics, 2) A message with high quality message characteristics is not necessarily effective at changing attitudes; a message's ability to persuade is dependent on the audience it addresses, 3) The importance of a topic fundamentally affects the persuasiveness of messages, 4) The ELM is most capable of predicting attitude change under high involvement conditions and when the audience is unfamiliar with the attitude object. These findings reinforce the need to separate argument quality assessment from attitude change and to explore the effects of issue importance under non-experimental conditions. An investigation of multiple topic areas with varying levels of importance and agreement for an audience should be able to explore what individual attitudinal characteristics might influence argument quality assessment. However, both prior attitude and issue importance have been shown to influence persuasion yet have had inconsistent effects on argument quality assessment.

Recent persuasion research has demonstrated an inconsistent relationship between attitude change and argument quality assessment. In some research, argument quality assessment predicts attitude change (DeBono & Packer, 1991; Fazio, 2000; Hullett, 2002; Lavine & Snyder, 1996; Lavine & Snyder, 2000). In other research, an argument's rated quality does not produce the predicted effects on persuasion (Johnson &

Eagly, 1989; LaFrance & Boster, 2001; Levin, Nichols, & Johnson, 2000; Petty & Cacioppo, 1979; Slater & Rouner, 1996; Wood, 1982). One explanation for these unpredicted results is that the participants' prior attitudes influenced the effectiveness of the message. Attitudes are formed because situational cues lead the person to conclude that it may be beneficial to have a summary evaluation of the attitude object (Fazio, 2000). Once a person determines that it is valuable to have an evaluation of or attitude about an attitude object, then subsequent experiences or information about that attitude object are processed in accordance to that evaluation (Converse, 1970; Fazio, 2000). This suggests that argument quality evaluation is subject to selective perception, which reinforces existing attitudes and dismisses counter-messages. An argument is more highly rated in quality when the message is similar to one's views (Hovland, Havey, & Sherif, 1957; Johnson, Levin, & Killeya, 1997 (cited in Levin, et al., 2000); Lavine & Snyder, 2000; Turner, 1991; Wood, 1982). However, there is disagreement whether the processes that resist persuasion also influence message quality evaluation. Some research argues that individuals are capable of distinguishing a high quality from a low quality argument, even if attitude change is resisted (Dresser, 1963; Luchok & McCroskey, 1978; Slater & Rouner, 1994). The perspective that argument quality evaluation is independent of biases endemic to attitude changes has mixed support. In some research, messages that are disconfirming to existing attitudes are assessed as being of high quality but are not effective at changing attitudes (Wood, et al., 1985; Zuwerink & Devine, 1996). This research suggests that individuals might be capable of assessing the quality of an argument even when influenced by prior attitudes. Although individuals holding opposing viewpoints may be able to distinguish between a high quality and a low quality argument, this does not dismiss the influence of agreement on argument quality evaluation. Prior attitudes could influence message quality

evaluation yet not enough to overcome the distance between arguments that are vastly different in quality. The present study does not intend to determine if participants are able to identify the objective quality of an argument or to identify characteristics of individuals able to identify the quality of an argument objectively.<sup>1</sup> Instead, we intend to demonstrate that argument quality assessment is biased by similar processes that systematically hinder persuasion.

### **Involvement or Issue Importance**

The second central element of the ELM is the participant's level of involvement with the attitude object, measured by frequency or amount of thought (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Although many different types of involvement have been studied in conjunction with attitude change (see Johnson & Eagly, 1989), the concept of involvement studied in ELM research is most similar to the construct of issue importance. The construct of involvement has been measured using questions assessing importance (Maio & Olson, 1995; Krosnick, Boninger, Chuang, & Matthew, 1993). Issue importance and involvement demonstrate similar resistance to persuasion and are often analyzed using similar rationale (Zuwerink & Devine, 1996; Maio & Olson, 1995). For the purposes of this manuscript, Zuwerink and Devine's (1996) definition of issue importance is used here: "the degree to which an individual cares about, is concerned about, and attaches personal importance to an attitude" (p. 932). Attitudes can be formed about any topic, but some attitudes are much more developed than others. The importance of any issue or attitude object may vary considerably between individuals. Issues or attitude objects that are of relatively low importance for a given audience are often called non-attitudes (Converse, 1970; Fazio, 2000). As an attitude becomes more developed, involvement manipulation does not always evoke the predicted results (see LaFrance & Boster, 2001; Levin, et al., 2000; Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). Due to the difficulty of changing

attitudes with high issue importance, or strongly developed attitudes, persuasion research often has relied upon topic areas and attitude objects for which an attitude has not been formulated, often unimportant or remote attitude objects or issues (Converse, 1970; Fazio, 2000; Johnson, 1994). Using non-attitude objects such as shampoo (Petty & Wegener, 1998), peanut butter (Wu & Shaffer, 1987), and college exit exams (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) involvement is more easily manipulated and attitudes are easier to change than with topic areas with which participants are more familiar.<sup>2</sup> To further determine the relative effect of involvement on argument quality, it is important to test attitudes that are highly developed and ones that are undeveloped to determine if the importance of the issue itself influences argument quality assessment.

The ELM has argued since its inception that high involvement encourages systematic processing, and the condition of low involvement usually does not afford people the ability to distinguish good arguments from bad. Under conditions of high involvement, persuasion is resisted, but low involvement participants have shown less consistent responses to arguments of various strengths (Johnson & Eagly, 1989; Lavine & Snyder, 2000; Petty & Wegener, 1998; Shavitt & Nelson, 2000). Critics of the ELM (e.g., Areni & Lutz, 1988; Johnson & Eagly, 1989; O'Keefe, 1990) have argued that the relationship between argument quality and involvement has been practically guaranteed by its definition of message quality. By defining message quality by positive or negative thoughts, it ensures that messages that yield positive feelings are deemed "strong" and messages that generate negative thoughts are considered "weak." Requiring a good argument to be one that is persuasive confounds argument quality and argument effectiveness, because definitionally a high quality argument must produce attitude change to be a high quality argument (O'Keefe, 1990). Any exploration of argument quality must allow for the

possibility that an argument will not produce more agreement or attitude change under conditions of higher involvement. Furthermore, most research in persuasion has been concerned with attitude change, not message quality evaluation. Therefore, it is unclear whether the effects of involvement are limited to attitude change or whether involvement also influences message quality evaluation.

The effects of involvement on persuasion are well documented, but definitional confounds of the ELM have made the effects of involvement on message quality evaluation less clear. There are two possibilities. First, high issue importance may create a more polarized rating of argument quality, where arguments that confirm an individual's viewpoint are seen as very good and disconfirming arguments are seen as very bad. Under low involvement conditions, argument quality ratings might be unaffected because participants do not care enough about the issue to evaluate the merits of the argument. On the other hand, Zuwerink and Devine (1996) found that even when issues were of great importance high quality arguments were still rated highly by respondents with opposing viewpoints, as demonstrated by their responses on the instrument as well as post hoc testimony. These authors suggest that issue importance deters attitude change, but it may not influence argument quality assessment. The preponderance of persuasion research suggests that the interaction between involvement and persuasion will also apply to evaluations of argument quality. This suggests an interaction effect between agreement and issue importance:

H1: Greater agreement will increase argument quality assessment.

H2: When the topic is of high personal importance, issue importance will predict argument quality assessment. When a topic is of low personal importance, issue importance will not predict argument quality assessment.

## **Methods**

### **Instrument Development**

There were two stages in instrument development. First, twenty-seven topic areas were identified by the researchers. Topic areas used in prior persuasion research were used (e.g., capital punishment, college exit exams) as well as unique topic areas that were recently topics of news and media coverage (e.g., homosexual boy scout leaders, human cloning bans). Multiple topic areas were identified so that the final topic areas used would have a wide variance in level of agreement. Two position statements were then developed for each topic area, one supporting the issue and one that did not support the issue. Twenty-eight participants at a large public university in the southern United States were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on seven-point, Likert-type scales with 27 position statements representing various topic areas. Twelve arguments that had the greatest variance in the prior attitudes were chosen so that each topic would have supporters and detractors. To create arguments, a separate group of 15 participants at a large public university in the southern United States completed the argument development instrument.<sup>3</sup> Participants generated a pro and counter argument for each issue. Eight final topic areas were selected based upon the clarity and similarity of arguments written by participants. The final topics are the following:

- A) Human cloning should be illegal,
- B) Universities and colleges should pay their athletes,
- C) The United States should provide free health care to elderly Americans,
- D) The legal drinking age should be lowered to 18 from 21,
- E) All college classes should require group projects,
- F) Capital punishment should be banned

until all death row inmates are given the opportunity to be DNA tested,

- G) Homosexual men should not be allowed to be Boy Scout troop leaders,
- H) International travel should be required for graduation.

Finally, one applicable pro argument and one applicable counter argument were chosen from the list of arguments participants created. These arguments were chosen by the researchers when the argument was clearly in support or against the topic area and was written clearly and convincingly.<sup>4</sup>

### **Participants**

134 participants at the same university completed the study instrument for partial fulfillment of course credit. Participants were 55% female, 87% white, 7% black, and 4% Asian, and 2% other races. The average age was 21 years.

### **Materials**

A survey instrument was used to gather data. For each topic area, participants indicated their level of agreement with statements and completed a corresponding issue importance scale using two items identified by Zuwerink and Devine (1996) in measuring issue importance (“My attitude toward this issue is important to me personally.” “I do not have very strong feelings toward this issue.” (R)). Participants were then asked to rate the quality of two arguments for each topic area; one argument in support of the topic area and one in opposition to the topic area. The 16 arguments were randomly listed. Argument quality was measured using a four item semantic differential scale (convincing/not convincing, logical/illogical, compelling/not compelling, and easy to argue against/hard to argue against) as developed by LaFrance and Boster (2001).

### **Scoring**

Scores for the argument quality assessments were combined to form a 1 to 7 point range where a 7 indicates high argument quality assessment. The following Cronbach’s alpha reliability scores were obtained for the four argument quality dimensions:

- A) Banning human cloning (pro  $\alpha = .90$ , con  $\alpha = .86$ ),
- B) Pay college athletes (pro  $\alpha = .89$ , con  $\alpha = .94$ ),
- C) Universal health care for the elderly (pro  $\alpha = .91$ , con  $\alpha = .88$ ),
- D) Lowered drinking age (pro  $\alpha = .83$ , con  $\alpha = .86$ ),
- E) Requiring group projects (pro  $\alpha = .81$ , con  $\alpha = .86$ ),
- F) DNA testing death row inmates (pro  $\alpha = .89$ , con  $\alpha = .92$ ),
- G) Banning homosexual Boy Scout leaders (pro  $\alpha = .92$ , con  $\alpha = .89$ )
- H) Requiring international travel for college education (pro  $\alpha = .88$ , con  $\alpha = .88$ ).

The two importance items were correlated. One item was reversed scored (“I do not have strong feelings about this issue”) and scores were combined. The scores had a 1 to 7 range where a 7 indicates high personal importance. The following correlations were obtained for the two importance items:

- A) Banning human cloning ( $r = .55$ ),
- B) Pay college athletes ( $r = .56$ ),
- C) Universal health care for the elderly ( $r = .59$ ),
- D) Lowered legal drinking age ( $r = .59$ ),
- E) Requiring group projects ( $r = .51$ ),

- F) DNA testing for death row inmates ( $r = .59$ ),
- G) Banning homosexual Boy Scout leaders ( $r = .60$ ),
- H) Requiring international travel for college education ( $r = .71$ ).

Agreement was measured by a one Likert-type item where 7 indicates strongly agree and 1 indicates strongly disagree.

### **Results**

Table 1 presents the mean agreement and importance ratings and standard deviations for the eight topic areas. Participants indicated that they agreed most strongly that human cloning should be banned and disagreed most strongly that college athletes should be paid. Participants also indicated that legal drinking age was the most important to them and a human cloning ban and DNA testing for death row inmates were least important. Table 2 presents the overall argument quality ratings for each topic area. Pro-position argument quality ratings ranged from 5.34 for required group projects to 3.37 for lowered legal drinking age. The con-position argument quality ratings ranged from 4.88 for the required international travel to 3.93 for free health care for the elderly.

In order to test the effects of agreement and issue importance on argument quality rating, an OLS regression was performed for each argument. For example, separate regression analyses were performed for the argument in support of and the argument in opposition to required group projects. These regressions were performed separately rather than collapsed into one analysis of the effects of agreement and involvement. The rationale of not collapsing arguments is that a person can have strong agreement with one issue and strong disagreement with another. If scores were combined an individual's agreement for

each issue would not be reflected in a sum score. Furthermore, combining these scores does not allow for exploring the effects of agreement and involvement regarding a particular issue on the assessment of argument quality for that particular issue. Thereby, separate regression analyses were repeated for all 8 topic areas, and the results are presented in Table 3. Hypothesis one received strong support: Agreement predicted argument quality assessment for 13 of the 16 arguments. Holding the level of personal importance constant, agreement with the topic statement positively predicted argument quality assessment when the argument was pro-attitudinal for all 8 topic areas. Holding the level of personal importance constant, agreement with the topic statement negatively predicted argument quality assessment when the argument was counter-attitudinal for 5 of 8 topic areas. Agreement did not predict argument quality rating for the counter arguments for required group project, DNA testing, and international travel topic areas. When analyzed as one continuous measure, involvement failed to predict argument quality assessment in 14 of 16 arguments. Personal importance only predicted argument quality assessment for the pro and counter arguments for paying college athletes.

In order to test hypothesis two, participants were separated into high importance (greater than 4 on 7-pt scale) and low importance (less than 4 on 7-pt scale) groups for each of the topic areas. The level of involvement was measured for each topic independently, therefore the size of the group for high or low involvement varied between topic areas. Separate OLS regression analyses were performed to determine whether involvement had an independent and significant effect in predicting argument quality rating, holding agreement constant. Agreement and issue importance were expected to predict argument quality assessment for high issue importance participants. Hypothesis two was only partially supported. Agreement predicted argument quality assessment at the high level of issue



importance for 14 of 16 arguments. However, involvement did not predict argument quality in 14 of 16 arguments. Only for the counter position arguments for paying college athletes and for banning homosexual Boy Scout leaders did issue importance predict argument quality assessment in the expected direction. Under low involvement conditions, hypothesis two predicted that issue importance would not effect argument quality assessment. Agreement predicted argument quality assessment for low issue importance participants for 11 of 16 arguments. Agreement did not predict argument quality assessment for either drinking age argument, for the pro required group project, and for the counter universal health care and counter DNA testing arguments. For low involvement participants, issue importance did not predict argument quality assessment for any of the arguments. Taken together, these results suggest that hypothesis two is only partially supported. Issue importance does not affect argument quality assessment overall. Issue importance does, however, seem to influence whether agreement will predict argument quality assessment, wherein at higher levels of importance agreement is a better predictor of argument quality assessment than at lower levels of importance.

### **Discussion**

There was strong support that agreement with an argument's conclusion predicts argument quality assessment. When arguments were in support of prior attitudes, they were assessed as being of higher quality. Less consistently, when arguments were contrary to prior attitudes they were assessed as being of lesser quality. This suggests that agreeing with an argument's conclusions consistently affects the argument quality rating, but disagreeing with an argument's conclusion less consistently affects the argument quality rating. The level of issue importance did not impact argument quality assessment. It was not the case that topics which were of greater importance to participants were more likely to be rated of being of higher or lower quality. The two

exceptions were for the arguments for and against paying college athletes. Unlike all other topic areas, this issue offered a personal and tangible reward for the object of the arguments – athletes. Although we did not ask if any of our participants were athletes, this may explain why personal importance affected argument quality assessment for that topic area. Levin and colleagues (2000) suggested that arguments offering a personal benefit to the evaluators are often affected by the degree of issue importance because even if the arguments are weak, high quality evaluations demonstrate wishful thinking. The results strongly support hypothesis one: agreement with the argument's conclusions predicts evaluations of the quality of arguments for and against the topic. There was less support for hypothesis two. The level of issue importance does not seem to play a role in argument quality assessment. However, it did appear that the level of importance of an issue does effect how much agreement with an argument's conclusions predicts argument quality assessment. For example, when a topic is important to individuals, how strongly they agree or disagree with the argument's conclusion is the primary predictor of how they will evaluate arguments both in support of their attitude and, to a lesser degree, in opposition to their attitude. On the other hand, when issues are of low personal importance, agreement was a less consistent predictor. Although agreement still predicted argument quality assessment for 11 of 16 arguments, it did so less consistently and less strongly than in high importance situations. This suggests that the interaction predicted in hypothesis two only showed limited support, while the effect of agreement on argument quality assessment (hypothesis one) was much more robust. Our results have two theoretical implications for the discussion of argument quality assessment.

The present research helps to extend our knowledge of the effects of agreement and issue importance on persuasion to argument quality

assessment. One explanation for the impact of agreement on argument quality assessment harkens back to the original functional theorists' explanation of attitudes (Katz, 1960; Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956). Functional theory assumes that individuals hold an attitude because it is in some way beneficial for them. Attitude formation is not inevitable. Simply having an attitude is a demonstration of the importance of that attitude. Our findings suggest that the distinct effects of agreement are less demonstrable for non-attitudes (low importance issues) than for developed attitudes (high importance issues). When an audience is asked to evaluate an argument, whether they disagree or agree with the proposition, they will consistently evaluate arguments that reinforce their viewpoint as being of high quality. This suggests that research exploring the quality of arguments about issues may run the risk of conflating the perceived quality of the argument with the audience's level of agreement. Argument quality assessment may be a measure of a priori agreement with an issue. Therefore, when pre-testing an argument to evaluate its perceived strength, it might be advantageous to control for an individual's agreement with the argument's conclusions.

Zuwerink and Devine (1996) argue that issue importance is stable over time and contributes to resistance in changing attitudes. Our results suggest that persuasion is likely to be inhibited at the level of argument quality assessment. Stability of issue importance may be due to the biased processing of supporting and contradictory arguments. Especially for arguments in accordance with prior attitudes, the evaluation of the argument is biased to favor one's attitude. As others have argued, "attitudinally biased processing helps maintain the individual's attitudes" and thus maintains a consistent worldview (Fazio, 2000, p. 25; Anderson, Lepper, & Ross, 1980). Our findings suggest that distinguishing the characteristics of an argument from the characteristics of individuals may be complicated by the impact of

prior attitude on argument quality evaluation.

This research helps to clarify the degree to which agreement and issue importance influence argument quality assessment. Our findings are particularly robust given that the topics ranged from those of interest to students (i.e., lowered legal drinking age and group projects) to more remote topics (i.e., DNA testing and human cloning). It may be useful to replicate these findings using other measurements of issue importance and argument quality assessment. The limitations of this study include the convenience sample of college students and single item measure of agreement. Future research may also explore how different types of involvement or attitude functions may play a role in argument quality assessment.

#### **Endnotes**

1. Although Reinard's (1988) argues that the ability to distinguish between evidence quality requires some level of understanding of the attitude object, knowledge is not enough to determine quality. Tversky and Kahneman (1971) note that statistical and probability related errors (i.e., the gambler's fallacy) are pervasive even with highly educated subjects (college professors).

2. This reliance upon college exit exams has evoked some criticism because involvement manipulation (your school versus another school) seems to alter the perception of the attitude object rather than increasing scrutiny (Liberma & Chaiken, 1996). Liberman and Chaiken (1996) argue that the involvement manipulations do not lead to attitude change because of greater thought processing, rather the initial assessment of the attitude object is different depending on the high or low involvement condition.

3. Persuasion researchers usually generate strong or weak messages, and use raters or the thought listing technique to determine argument quality. The method we used did not attempt to

ensure the quality of the argument, but instead attempted to leave the quality of the argument more open to interpretation and to ensure that the arguments were more germane to our participants' understanding of the issues.

4. DNA testing: Pro-position statement: Recent research shows that for many death row inmates DNA testing exonerates them from committing the crime they were convicted of. We must ban all death sentences for death row inmates until they are given the opportunity to be DNA tested. Counter-position statement: Evidence has yet to show that DNA testing is a 100% accurate way to prove that an accused person is innocent or guilty, therefore capital punishment should not be banned. Unless it was a sure fire way to prove innocence it isn't worth it. Pay athletes: Pro-position argument: Athletes make millions of dollars for their schools, but they can't even get part time jobs. College athletes should be compensated because they should receive money since they are working for the university. Counter-position argument: Most athletes won't be making any money from their sport in the future so education is more important than sports. Colleges should never pay its athletes because all the university will get is an undereducated well-paid person. Health care for elderly: Pro-position argument: The younger generation has an obligation to society and should provide free health care to the elderly. Providing free health care would not only benefit the older generation, but would be a safeguard for generations to come. Counter-position argument: The US should not provide free health care to elderly Americans because the government would have to raise taxes to pay for it, which would make life more difficult for all Americans and everyone would resent their money being used to care for people that they aren't related to. Human cloning: Pro-position argument: Human cloning should not be legal because it is a form of playing God. Cloning conflicts with the whole process and life cycle of being a human, and is a

blatant disregard for the sanctity of life. Counter-position argument: Human cloning should be legal because of the millions of lives that can be saved by the genetic research and manipulation. If human lives can be saved, morally it is the right thing to do. Drinking age: Pro-position argument: When I visited Ireland the legal drinking age was 18, and from my experience 18-year-olds are responsible enough to handle this privilege, so the legal drinking age should be reduced to 18 years old. Counter-position argument: The drinking age should not be lowered because 18 year olds are irresponsible and unable to handle drinking responsibility. Looking on the University scene, younger students display a lack of concern about drinking, and lowering the age limit will increase harms when drinking. Homosexual Boy Scout leaders: Pro-position argument: Gay men should not be allowed to be boy scout troop leaders because they may influence the susceptible young minds of children, leading them to become gay, or to perceive that homosexuality is an acceptable practice. Counter-position argument: Gay men should be allowed to be Boy Scout troop leaders because any ban on homosexual leaders is a discriminatory act that infringes on human and equal rights. We shouldn't teach Boy Scouts that discrimination is the right way to go. International study: Pro-position argument: International study should be necessary for a complete college education because students will be introduced to new cultures and be able to see and experience things first hand that they would normally only read about. Counter-position argument: Most students don't have the money to travel internationally, so colleges should not require it. Students with no money will feel they are being isolated or ostracized for not being able to gain international experiences, and it would make them envious of friends.

## Objective Rejection?

Table 1

Mean Agreement and Issue Importance by Topic

Topic	Agreement		Issue Importance	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Required Group Project	3.37	1.95	4.72	1.42
Lowered Drinking Age	3.86	2.25	5.12	1.34
Ban Human Cloning	5.31	1.86	4.08	1.47
DNA Testing	4.22	1.66	4.08	1.47
Pay College Athletes	2.51	1.83	4.31	1.52
Health Care for Elderly	4.77	1.73	4.84	1.23
Gay Scout Leaders	3.60	2.12	4.47	1.46
Required International Travel	3.83	2.25	4.47	1.53

Note. 7 indicates strongly agree and 1 indicates strongly disagree.

Table 2

Mean Argument Quality Rating by Topic (N = 134)

Topic	Mean Argument Quality Rating		Standard Deviation	
	Pro	Con	Pro	Con
Required Group Project	5.34	4.28	0.99	1.34
Lowered Drinking Age	3.37	4.48	1.26	1.31
Ban Human Cloning	4.57	4.19	1.58	1.29
DNA Testing	4.53	4.29	1.31	1.45
Pay College Athletes	4.06	4.18	1.51	1.65
Health Care for Elderly	4.37	3.93	1.39	1.37
Gay Scout Leaders	3.65	4.60	1.59	1.47
Required International Travel	4.25	4.88	1.32	1.34

Note. Argument quality scores range from 1 to 7 with 1 representing the lowest quality argument and 7 representing the highest quality argument.

Table 3

The Results for OLS Regression Analyses (Standardized  $\beta$ ) for the Effects of Agreement and Personal Importance on Argument Quality Assessment for All Topics

Argument Quality Ratings		N	R <sup>2</sup>	$\beta$	t
Required Group Project	Agreement	132	0.21	0.39	4.68***
	Importance			0.12	1.48
Con Argument	Agreement	132	0.12	-0.04	-0.38
	Importance			-0.12	-1.30
Lowered Drinking Age	Agreement	133	0.18	0.42	5.30***
	Importance			0.01	0.10

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Con Argument	Agreement	133	0.15	0.36	4.75***
	Importance			-0.13	-1.56
Ban Human Cloning					
Pro Argument	Agreement	131	0.23	0.48	6.23***
	Importance			-0.03	-0.44
Con Argument	Agreement				
	Importance	131	0.19	-0.44	-5.52***
				0.10	1.31
DNA Testing for Death Row					
Pro Argument	Agreement	131	0.23	0.48	6.18***
	Importance			0.06	0.83
Con Argument	Agreement	131	0.01	-0.04	-0.45
	Importance			0.06	0.71
Pay College Athletes					
Pro Argument	Agreement	131	0.28	0.46	6.04***
	Importance			-0.22	-2.94**
Con Argument	Agreement	131	0.16	-0.33	-4.10***
	Importance			0.19	2.31*
Free Health Care for Elderly					
Pro Argument	Agreement	130	0.34	0.58	8.02***
	Importance			0.01	0.15
Con Argument	Agreement	130	0.13	-0.36	-4.27***
	Importance			0.00	-0.02
Gay Scout Leaders					
Pro Argument	Agreement	131	0.30	0.52	6.91***
	Importance			0.08	1.07
Con Argument	Agreement	131	0.47	-0.44	-5.54***
	Importance			-0.10	-1.30
Required International Travel					
Pro Argument	Agreement	132	0.21	0.39	4.68***
	Importance			0.12	1.48
Con Argument	Agreement	132	0.02	-0.04	-0.38
	Importance			-0.12	-1.30

Note. \*\*\*p < .001. \*\* p < .01 \* p < .05

Table 4

*OLS Regression (Standardized β) of the Effects of Issue Importance on Argument Quality Rating for High Importance*

Argument Quality Ratings		N	R <sup>2</sup>	β	t
Required Group Project	Agreement	76	0.11	0.35	3.06***
	Importance			0.09	0.76
Con Argument	Agreement	76	0.16	-0.35	-3.09**
	Importance			0.13	1.15

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Lowered Drinking Age					
Pro Argument	Agreement	93	0.23	0.47	4.91***
	Importance			-0.04	-0.41
Con Argument	Agreement	93	0.17	-0.42	4.30***
	Importance			-0.13	-1.36
Ban Human Cloning					
Pro Argument	Agreement	55	0.20	0.44	3.55***
	Importance			-0.02	-0.15
Con Argument	Agreement	55	0.29	0.50	-4.27***
	Importance			0.16	1.32
DNA Testing for Death Row					
Pro Argument	Agreement	55	0.37	0.60	5.44***
	Importance			0.11	0.97
Con Argument	Agreement	55	0.02	-0.13	-0.93
	Importance			0.01	0.08
Pay College Athletes					
Pro Argument	Agreement	59	0.28	0.53	4.15***
	Importance			-0.09	-0.77
Con Argument	Agreement	59	0.17	-0.31	-2.53*
	Importance			0.29	2.38*
Free Health Care for Elderly					
Pro Argument	Agreement	85	0.46	0.58	8.02***
	Importance			0.01	0.15
Con Argument	Agreement	85	0.37	-0.36	-4.27***
	Importance			0.00	-0.02
Gay Scout Leaders					
Pro Argument	Agreement	70	0.34	0.53	5.19***
	Importance			0.16	1.58
Con Argument	Agreement	70	0.33	-0.30	-4.15***
	Importance			-0.43	-2.90**
Required International Travel					
Pro Argument	Agreement	64	0.40	0.41	3.36***
	Importance			-0.07	-0.60
Con Argument	Agreement	64	0.01	0.11	0.87
	Importance			-0.03	-0.19

Note. \*\*\*p < .001. \*\* p < .01 \* p < .05

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Table 5

*OLS Regression (Standardized  $\beta$ ) of the Effects of Issue Importance on Argument Quality Rating for Low Importance*

Argument Quality Ratings		N	R <sup>2</sup>	$\beta$	t
Required Group Project Pro Argument	Agreement	58	0.08	0.25	1.85
	Importance			0.11	0.84
Con Argument	Agreement	58	0.12	-0.33	-2.50*
	Importance			-0.09	-0.69
Lowered Drinking Age Pro Argument	Agreement	41	0.05	0.23	1.45
	Importance			-0.01	-0.09
Con Argument	Agreement	41	0.08	-0.28	1.82
	Importance			0.03	0.19
Ban Human Cloning Pro Argument	Agreement	77	0.29	0.51	5.18***
	Importance			0.15	1.51
Con Argument	Agreement	77	0.18	-0.39	-3.71***
	Importance			-0.14	-1.35
DNA Testing for Death Row Pro Argument	Agreement	77	0.15	0.31	2.88**
	Importance			0.20	1.89
Con Argument	Agreement	77	0.00	0.06	0.48
	Importance			0.01	0.11
Pay College Athletes Pro Argument	Agreement	73	0.16	0.39	3.55***
	Importance			-0.12	-1.10
Con Argument	Agreement	73	0.14	-0.37	-3.31***
	Importance			0.03	0.30
Free Health Care for Elderly Pro Argument	Agreement	46	0.10	0.31	2.12*
	Importance			0.11	0.79
Con Argument	Agreement	46	0.10	-0.28	-1.96
	Importance			0.15	1.01
Gay Scout Leaders Pro Argument	Agreement	62	0.21	0.41	4.56***
	Importance			0.17	1.45
Con Argument	Agreement	62	0.16	-0.36	-3.01**
	Importance			0.16	1.30
Required International Travel Pro Argument	Agreement	64	0.19	0.40	3.53***
	Importance			0.11	1.01
Con Argument	Agreement	64	0.07	-0.25	-2.07*
	Importance			-0.05	-0.41

Note. \*\*\*p < .001. \*\* p < .01 \* p < .05

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