

NEWSPAPER EXECUTION PUBLICITY AND HOMICIDE RATES:
A MIAMI HERALD, DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA STUDY

By

DALE MARTINEZ

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN MASS COMMUNICATION

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

1997

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	vi
ABSTRACT	vii
CHAPTERS	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
Deterrence and Communication	2
Brutalization and Communication	3
Research Questions	5
Relevance of the Study	6
Significance to Mass Communication Research	7
2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE	8
Eleven Studies	8
Three Early Studies	8
Post- <u>Furman</u> Research	12
Summary	19
3 METHODOLOGY	21
Study Period	21
Study Population	23
Execution Week	25
Weeks of Analysis	26
Homicide Data	27
Dade County Population Figures	29
Calculating Weekly Homicide Rates	32
Execution Publicity	32
A Definition	33
The <u>Miami Herald</u> and Dialog	34

	Story List	35
	Measuring Execution Publicity	36
	Story Play Index	36
4	RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	40
	Results of Execution Story Coding	40
	Story Observations	40
	Execution Publicity for White and Atkins	42
	A Word About Spengelink's Execution Publicity	43
	Stories in 34 Execution Weeks	43
	Amount of Execution Publicity	46
	Results of Data Analysis	48
	Execution Publicity Measurements	49
	Execution Publicity and Homicide Rates	52
	The Phillips Analysis	54
5	CONCLUSIONS	62
	Execution Publicity and Homicide Rates	62
	Word Count and Play Index Scores	63
	A Phillips Analysis	64
	Research Problems	65
	Dade County's Population	65
	Weeks That Overlap	66
	Suggestions for Future Research	67
	Content Analysis	69
	Executions, Homicides, and Other Kinds of Violence	70
	Role of Media	71
	APPENDICES	
A	STORY LIST	73
B	WEEKLY HOMICIDE RATES FOR 34 EXECUTIONS	100
	REFERENCES	102
	BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	109

Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School of the
University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts in Mass Communication

NEWSPAPER EXECUTION PUBLICITY AND HOMICIDE RATES:
A MIAMI HERALD, DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA STUDY

By

Dale Martinez

August, 1997

Chair: Leonard P. Tipton
Major Department: Journalism and Communications

Execution publicity in the Miami Herald and homicide rates for Dade County, Florida, for 35 post-Furman Florida executions between 1983-1995 were analyzed to determine if the amount or display of execution publicity during the eight-week study period affected homicide rates. A list of 157 Miami Herald execution stories, compiled from Dialog, a computerized database, included the story date, edition, page number, and word count. Word count was compared to a "play index" of four variables--page, fold, headlines, and photographs. Points were scored for stories on section front pages and for stories above the fold. A headline and photograph size score, obtained by measuring headlines and photographs diagonally to the nearest $\frac{1}{8}$ inch, was added to the page and fold scores creating the total play index score.

This study found no significant correlation between the number of story words and homicide rates or the play index and homicide rates. Execution publicity in the Miami Herald does not appear to be associated with Dade County homicide rates, supporting neither deterrence nor brutalization arguments about capital punishment.

The extremely high correlation ($r = .99$) between word count and play index indicated that these variables are interchangeable as measurements of newspaper coverage of execution publicity in the Miami Herald. Word count is a quick, easy, and precise measurement of space.

In an effort to replicate David P. Phillips' London, England, study (1980b) using American data, additional analysis examined the relationship between execution publicity and the number of weekly homicides. Based on Phillips' methodology, this study found no statistically significant tendency (a probability of .70) for homicides to rise or fall in the week of a publicized execution. The correlation between the amount of execution publicity and the difference between the number of homicides in the control and experimental periods approached traditional levels of statistical significance ($r = .298$; $p = .086$), but a Pearson correlation found no relationship between the two variables ($r = .065$; $p = .712$). Graphing the number of weekly homicides for the eight-week study period revealed a tendency for homicides to decrease for two weeks after an execution and to rise through the fourth week after an execution. Homicides drop 3.8 percent in weeks one and two following an execution and rise 2.5 percent in weeks three and four. This analysis did not appear to indicate any significant short-term deterrent effect.

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>		<u>page</u>
1.	Florida Executions (1983-1995)	24
2.	Dade County July 1 Population (1983-1995)	30
3.	Execution Publicity: Word Count and Play Index Scores	44
4.	Sum and Means--Words, Play Index Score, Headline, Photo	45
5.	Number of Stories per Execution	46
6.	Words and Play Index Correlations	50
7.	Words, Play Index Score, and Homicide Rate Correlations	53
8.	Weekly Homicides Before, During, and After 34 Florida Executions (1983-1995)	55-56
9.	Number of Homicides for Eight-Week Study Period	59