was true among students who opposed capital punishment. In short, the very same stimulus was viewed in opposite ways by people with differing attitudes.

The participants were also asked to make written comments regarding each report. Table 6.4 presents a sample of these comments. Looking at these comments, it is easy to see why the two groups had such divergent reactions to the research reports. Evidence that seemed compelling and convincing to one person seemed obviously flawed and specious to another (see also Eagly, Kulesa, Brannon, Shaw, & Hutson-Comeaux, 2000).

Finally, Lord and colleagues assessed how these biased perceptions influenced participants’ attitudes. Considering that each participant was exposed to contradictory evidence regarding the effectiveness of capital punishment, we might expect that each participant’s attitude would become less extreme. Instead of finding evidence for this type of attitude moderation effect, Lord and colleagues found an attitude polarization effect. When asked to indicate how their attitudes had changed as a result of the materials they had read, proponents of capital punishment reported that they were now more in favor of capital punishment, and opponents reported that they were now less in favor of capital punishment. It’s important to understand the significance of this effect. The same evidence that strengthened the convictions of those who support capital punishment also led those who oppose capital punishment to become more entrenched in their position (see also Plous, 1991).

To summarize, the Lord, Ross, and Lepper (1979) findings make three important points. First, they establish that people with different attitudes evaluate the same stimulus in different ways. Second, this occurs largely because people give greater credence to evidence that supports their attitudes and beliefs than to opposing

**FIGURE 6.4**  
The Biased Assimilation Effect  
Students who favored capital punishment thought the pro–capital punishment research was more convincing than was the anti–capital punishment research, but the opposite was true for students who opposed capital punishment. These findings reveal that attitudes function as schemas, biasing the way people process information.  