The Effects of Motive Information and Crime Unusualness on Jurors' Judgments in Insanity Cases

Kerri L. Pickel1,2

This study investigated the effects of motive information and crime unusualness on mock jurors' judgments in two homicide cases in which the defendant pleaded insanity. Undergraduates (N = 371) read case information and rendered a verdict, estimated the probability that the defendant was insane, and made additional judgments about the defendant's mental state. The defendant was more likely to be judged insane if the crime was oddly committed rather than committed in a typical manner. Prosecution motive information also affected judgments; the defendant was considered more sane if the prosecution presented evidence of a strong, reasonable motive. Evidence of a "crazy," unreasonable motive, presented by the defense, caused jurors to see the defendant in one of the cases as more insane.

Most U.S. states use one of two standards as the basis of their legal definition of insanity: either the M'Naghten rule or the broader standard developed by the American Law Institute (ALI). The M'Naghten rule is a "cognitive" test, requiring jurors to evaluate a defendant's ability to understand the nature and quality of the illegal act and the wrongfulness of the act (Ogloff, 1993). According to the ALI standard (American Law Institute, 1962), a defendant should be found not guilty by reason of insanity (NGRI) if, at the time that the illegal act was committed, a mental defect substantially reduced the defendant's ability either to realize that the act was wrong or to conform his or her behavior to the law. Because it considers not only the defendant's thinking, but also his or her ability to exert self-control, the ALI rule is said to contain both cognitive and volitional "prongs."

Researchers have identified several variables that legally should not affect jurors' judgments in insanity cases but nevertheless do. For example, McGlynn and Dreilinger (1981) found that when the prosecution's evidence was more incriminating, jurors were less likely to judge the defendant insane. The authors argued

1Department of Psychological Science, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana.
2Correspondence should be directed to Kerri Pickel, Department of Psychological Science, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana 47306 (e-mail: UOKUpickel@bsu.edu).
that jurors have difficulty separating the issue of the unlawfulness of the defendant's actions from the issue of his or her responsibility for those actions.

Another variable jurors seem to consider is evidence of planning. Roberts and Golding (1991) reported that if a homicide appeared planned, mock jurors believed that the defendant was more able to appreciate the wrongfulness of his or her actions than if no evidence of planning was presented, and they were less likely to find the defendant NGRI.

In addition, Whittemore and Ogloff (1995) found that jurors may try to draw inferences about the defendant's mental state at the time of the crime by considering his or her behavior at the time of the trial. The authors noted that, because the defendant's mental state may not be stable over time, this strategy could result in improper verdicts.

A variable that should affect jurors' verdicts is the legal instruction they are given. However, Ogloff (1993) found no difference in verdicts among mock jurors given different insanity standards, and Finkel and Handel (1988) found no difference between jurors given an insanity standard to use and those given no standard at all. Although jurors might have difficulty comprehending legal instructions (Elwork, Sales, & Alfini, 1977; Elwork, Sales, & Suggs, 1981), Ogloff (1993) has argued that “even if they could understand them, jurors may not find the elements of the standards important” (p. 196).

In fact, it may be that jurors rely more heavily upon their own schemas of what constitutes insanity than upon the law as explained to them (Finkel & Handel, 1989; Roberts & Golding, 1991; Roberts, Golding, & Fincham 1987). Smith (1991) has shown that mock jurors' naive representations of crime categories affect their interpretations of the evidence presented as well as their verdicts. These representations are schematic and include the prototypical features that jurors associate with different crimes. For example, a robbery schema might be “the taking of money or other valuables from a home by an armed perpetrator” (p. 508). These naive schemas often conflict with the legal definitions of the crimes.

If jurors do rely on an “insanity schema,” perhaps one element of the schema is the bizarre nature of the crime. Roberts et al. (1987) hypothesized that jurors might associate insanity with bizarre crimes, even though case law in some states, such as Hawaii (State v. Nuetzel, 1980, cited in Roberts et al., 1987) indicates that bizarre alone should not be considered evidence of the defendant’s insanity (several other states have similar rulings, e.g., Barany v. Indiana, 1995). According to State v. Nuetzel, a “bizarre” crime could be either (1) oddly committed or unusual or (2) especially vicious or heinous. Roberts et al. manipulated bizarre by writing one version of a homicide scenario in which a mail carrier's heart was cut out and later found in his mail pouch (bizarre condition) and another version which said only that the victim was killed by “a major stab wound” (nonbizarre condition). Thus, their bizarre crime was both vicious and unusual. The result was that mock jurors were more likely to find the defendant guilty, but mentally ill, rather than simply guilty, if they read the bizarre scenario.

Another element of the insanity schema might be “the lack of a reasonable motive.” Stone (1993) argued that when a homicide occurs, “we look for motives, and when there is no apparent motive we look to psychiatry” (p. 175). Furthermore,
"the more senseless the act, the more convinced we are that there must be a hidden psychiatric explanation" (p. 176). Stone presented no data to support his argument, but he did raise the interesting possibility that a defendant is more likely to be viewed as insane if there is no readily apparent, logical motive for the crime. It should be noted that the ALI standard does not require jurors to search for and fail to find a reasonable motive that could account for the actions of someone in the defendant’s position. In fact, such a strategy could lead to an improper verdict, as the defendant’s true motive might not be obvious given the evidence introduced or might not be explicitly presented by the prosecution.

A study that relates to this hypothesis is one conducted by Kleinke and Baldwin (1992). Participants read cases in which actors committed deeds that were either good or bad (saving a life versus murder) and gave either sane or crazy explanations for their actions (sane explanations were logical, whereas crazy explanations referred to instructions from God or possession by the Devil). Thus, the authors did not actually manipulate motive information, although inferences about motive could perhaps be obtained from the actors’ statements. The participants did not render verdicts, but made judgments about the actors’ mental states and decided whether they should be imprisoned, committed to a mental hospital, or left free (regardless of whether the act was good or bad). The results were that actors giving crazy explanations for their deeds were perceived as more insane and having less intent and responsibility. Among those actors participants believed should be committed to mental hospitals, the ones giving crazy explanations were assigned more years of confinement.

Also relevant is Finkel and Handel’s (1989) research in which mock jurors read descriptions of four homicide cases, chose a verdict, and listed the reasons for the verdict. No legal instructions were given, so that the researchers could better investigate the participants’ intuitive understanding of “insanity.” The authors found that the presence or absence of an evil motive was cited by some jurors as a reason for their verdict. It may be that motive information has a causal effect on the choice of verdict. Alternatively, the jurors could have thought up justifications for their verdicts after choosing them, so that the verdicts determined the reasons cited rather than the other way around. People are not always aware of, or able to report, the factors upon which their judgments are based (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977).

In the present study, mock jurors read two homicide cases in which the defendant admitted killing the victim, but entered a plea of insanity. The jurors then selected a verdict of either guilty of second-degree murder or NGRI and made some additional judgments about the defendant’s mental state. Two cases were used instead of one in order to investigate the generalizability of the results. One purpose of the present study was to examine the possibility that motive information presented by either side (prosecution or defense) affects jurors’ judgments. One independent variable was motive information presented by the prosecution. In the Strong Motive condition, the prosecutor introduced evidence that the defendant’s actions were inspired by a strong, reasonable motive (i.e., the defendant had a strong, logical reason for wanting to kill the victim). In the Weak Motive condition, the prosecutor introduced a reasonable motive, but it was not as compelling as in...
the Strong Motive condition. In addition, a control condition was included in which the prosecutor did not suggest a motive.

Motive information presented by the defense was also manipulated. In the Crazy Motive condition, the defense attorney argued that the defendant felt that he had a reason to murder the victim, but the described motive was not logical or reasonable. In a control condition, the defense did not present this information. In contrast to evidence of a reasonable motive, evidence of a crazy motive is legally relevant to the issue of sanity, because it deals with the defendant’s mental state at the time of the crime. It was predicted that mock jurors would be less likely to judge a defendant insane if a reasonable motive had been suggested to them, but more likely to find the defendant insane if a crazy motive was suggested.

A second goal in the present research was to investigate the effects of the unusualness of the crime. Recall that Roberts et al. (1987) found that jurors were more likely to judge a defendant guilty, but mentally ill, rather than simply guilty, if the crime had some bizarre aspect to it as opposed to being committed in an ordinary way. Recall also that some case law (e.g., State v. Nuetzel, 1980) has specified that bizarreness alone should not be a criterion for determining insanity, regardless of whether a "bizarre" crime is defined as one that is oddly committed or especially vicious. In the study conducted by Roberts et al., the bizarre crime was both oddly committed and vicious. However, in the experimental condition of the present study, the crime was oddly committed, but not more vicious than in the control condition. It was hypothesized that bizarre crimes do not have to be vicious to induce jurors to see the defendant as insane, and a main effect of unusualness (similar to what was found by Roberts et al.) was expected. Furthermore, the possibility was considered that unusualness would interact with motive information presented by the prosecution such that suggesting a reasonable motive would make the defendant seem less insane only if the case was not unusual. Due to a lack of previous research in this area, no specific prediction was made about whether the interaction would be obtained.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

Jury-eligible students at a Midwestern university (N = 371) participated in partial fulfillment of a course requirement. They were assigned randomly to conditions and were tested in small groups.

**Materials**

Two homicide cases were created for use as stimuli. The details of both cases were varied in different versions so as to manipulate three independent variables, one of which was the motive suggested by the prosecutor. In different versions, either a strong reasonable motive, a weak reasonable motive, or no motive was
suggested. A second manipulation involved the motive suggested by the defense attorney. Either a crazy motive or no motive was proposed. The third independent variable was the unusualness of the crime; it was either unusual or not. Participants read both cases; thus, the design of the study was $3 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$, with three between-subject factors and one within-subject factor. Each case booklet was approximately 950 words in length.

Case 1 (The “Neighbor” Case)

The first case involved a defendant who shot his neighbor to death after the neighbor knocked on his front door one afternoon. The defendant admitted killing his neighbor, but his attorney argued that the defendant was insane. To support this argument, the defense attorney called an expert witness, a psychiatrist who had evaluated the defendant. The psychiatrist testified that the defendant exhibited some, but not all, of the symptoms of paranoid schizophrenia.

In the Strong Motive condition, the defendant's wife testified that shortly before the murder, she had confessed to her husband that she and the neighbor had been having an affair and that she had had a child with him. In the Weak Motive condition, a police detective testified that the neighbor had mailed a Valentine card to the defendant's wife. The card, addressed to the wife and signed “love, Scott,” had arrived in the mail on the day of the murder and had been opened by the defendant. In the condition in which no motive was suggested, neither of these two pieces of evidence was introduced.

Motive information presented by the defense attorney was also manipulated. In the Crazy Motive condition, the defendant told his psychiatrist that, when he saw his neighbor at his front door on the afternoon of the murder, he realized that the neighbor was actually an extraterrestrial alien coming to abduct him. He explained that he had seen TV programs about aliens abducting humans and performing experiments on them. The defendant's explanation is similar to statements attributed to defendants in stimuli used by previous researchers (e.g., Finkel & Slobogin, 1995; Roberts & Golding, 1991) and to claims made by actual insanity acquitees (e.g., Finkel & Slobogin, 1995). It supports a verdict of NGRI by suggesting that, because the defendant felt threatened with death and did not see the victim as a living human being, he did not realize that his actions were wrong. In an alternative version of the case, the defendant did not claim that the neighbor was an alien.

The third independent variable was the unusualness of the crime. In the unusual version, the police officer who discovered the body testified that he found dozens of strange designs or symbols written on the victim's body with a yellow substance that turned out to be mustard. In the alternative version, this information was not provided.

The motive manipulations were tested using 18 pilot participants, who read a brief outline of the case and then rated different motives according to whether they seemed reasonable or “crazy.” Participants were told that a reasonable motive is a logical reason that the defendant might have for wanting to kill the victim, and they rated the probability that each motive would lead to murder. The results
showed that participants considered the strong motive \( (M = .91, \ SD = .09) \) to be a more probable incentive to murder than the weak one \( (M = .49, \ SD = .30) \), \( t(17) = 6.64, p < .001 \). Participants were also told that a crazy motive is one that cannot logically explain why a mentally healthy person would commit murder. The crazy motive \( (M = 6.50, \ SD = .51) \) was rated (on a 7-point scale) as “crazier” than was the weak one \( (M = 4.39, \ SD = 1.29) \), \( t(17) = 8.76, p < .001 \) (the strong motive was rated as least crazy; \( M = 2.44, \ SD = 1.38) \).

Case 2 (The “Supervisor” Case)

In the second case, the defendant admitted entering his supervisor's office at work and stabbing him to death with a letter opener. His attorney urged the jurors to find him insane and called to the stand a psychiatrist who testified that the defendant exhibited some, but not all, of the symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder. Three years before, the defendant had been attacked on the street by a mugger and severely beaten. A patrol officer had witnessed part of the attack and had chased the mugger, eventually shooting and killing him when he seemed to draw a gun.

To suggest a reasonable motive, the prosecutor called the vice president of the advertising company where the defendant worked. The vice president testified that the defendant had stated during recent employee evaluations that he wanted his supervisor’s job and intended to apply for it when the supervisor got promoted or left the company. Further, the defendant expressed confidence that he would be given the supervisor’s job if he applied. In the Strong Motive version, the vice president said that the supervisor had a high level of status within the company and earned a much higher salary than did the defendant. In the Weak Motive version, the supervisor's level of status and salary were only slightly higher than the defendant's. In a third version, the prosecutor did not suggest a reasonable motive for the murder.

To suggest a crazy motive, the psychiatrist reported that defendant claimed that when he looked into the office and noticed his supervisor sitting at the desk, he saw that the supervisor was actually the mugger who had attacked him 3 years earlier. The defendant said that he was aware that the mugger had been shot and killed, but assumed that he must have come back from the dead. Afraid for his life, the defendant grabbed a letter opener from the desk and stabbed the supervisor. As in the Neighbor case, the crazy-motive information is similar to statements made by defendants in previous research and by actual insanity acquitses, and it portrays the defendant as unable to appreciate the wrongfulness of his behavior. In another version of the case, the defendant did not make the above claims.

Unusualness was manipulated by varying the testimony of a secretary who worked at the advertising company. The defense attorney asked her to describe the defendant's appearance when he left the supervisor's office immediately after committing the crime and disappeared into a stairwell. The secretary said that the defendant was completely naked. This information was omitted in the version of the case that was not unusual.

As with Case 1, the motive manipulations were evaluated using 18 pilot participants. The participants thought that, compared to the weak motive \( (M = .52, \ SD = .09) \),
The participants were told that they would read information about two legal cases and then would act as jurors, making several decisions about the cases. Each participant was given two cases that were identical in terms of the conditions of the three independent variables. The order in which the cases were read was counterbalanced. After reading the first booklet, the mock jurors read a page that explained the legal definition of insanity, using the ALI standard. The ALI wording appeared on the page, followed by a paraphrase of the definition: “The law says that a defendant should be found insane if a mental disease or defect causes him to be either (1) unable to understand that his behavior is wrong or (2) unable to control his behavior.”

After reading the legal definition, the jurors completed a short questionnaire. They chose a verdict (either guilty of second-degree murder or NGRI) and estimated the probability that the defendant was insane. They also used a 7-point scale to rate their opinion of the extent to which the defendant (1) realized that his actions were wrong, (2) was able to control his behavior, (3) planned the crime in advance, and (4) intended to kill the victim. Finally, as a manipulation check, the jurors rated the unusualness of the murder using a 7-point scale.

After the first case booklet had been read and the questionnaire completed, the process was repeated for the second case. When both questionnaires had been completed, the participants were thanked and debriefed.

**RESULTS**

To evaluate the potential effects of the order in which jurors read the case booklets, chi-square analyses (to examine verdicts) and t tests (to examine other dependent variables) were conducted. No order effects were revealed; therefore, all subsequent analyses were conducted while collapsing across order. To examine each dependent variable, multivariate analyses of variance with three between-subject factors (prosecution motive, defense motive, and crime unusualness) and one within-subject factor (case) were used.

**Manipulation Check**

In the case involving the defendant who shot his neighbor, the unusual version included the information that the victim’s body had been decorated with strange symbols written in mustard. In the second case, in which the defendant stabbed his
supervisor, the unusual version contained testimony from a witness who reported that the defendant was completely naked when he fled from the scene. As expected, mock jurors rated the unusual versions \((M = 3.86, SD = 1.36)\) of both cases as more unusual than the control versions \((M = 3.21, SD = 1.16)\), \(F(1,359) = 27.43, p < .001\). It also turned out that jurors considered the Supervisor case \((M = 3.82, SD = 1.53)\) to be more unusual than the Neighbor case \((M = 3.24, SD = 1.71)\), \(F(1,359) = 33.35, p < .001\).

### Verdict and Probability of Insanity

For verdict, there was a main effect of unusualness (see Table 1), \(F(1,359) = 30.02, p < .001\). More jurors found the defendant NGRI when the crime was unusual rather than not. A main effect of prosecution motive approached significance, with slightly more jurors selecting the NGRI verdict when the prosecution presented no motive rather than a weak or strong motive, \(F(2,359) = 2.59, p = .077\). There was no main effect of defense motive.

Defense motive interacted with case, \(F(1,359) = 7.69, p = .006\) (see Table 2). In the Supervisor case, but not in the Neighbor case, more jurors in the Crazy Motive condition than in the control condition voted NGRI. There was also an interaction between unusualness and case in that the effect of unusualness was stronger in the Supervisor case than in the Neighbor case, \(F(1,359) = 7.44, p = .007\). An interaction between prosecution motive and case approached significance. Prosecution motive had a somewhat stronger effect in the Neighbor case than in the Supervisor case, \(F(2,359) = 2.49, p = .085\).

Turning to estimates of probability of insanity, there was a main effect of unusualness such that jurors thought the defendant was more likely insane if the crime was unusual rather than not, \(F(1,359) = 57.88, p < .001\) (Table 1). A main effect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crime unusualness</th>
<th>Prosecution motive information</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonunusual</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.29(.16)</td>
<td>.29(.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unusual</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.45(.18)</td>
<td>.41(.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.37(.19)</td>
<td>.34 (.18)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Values at the top of each cell are percentages of NGRI verdicts. Values at the bottom of each cell are estimates of the probability that the defendant was insane and (in parentheses) standard deviations of those probability estimates. Values in brackets in the row and column marginals indicate sample sizes.
of prosecution motive was also found, $F(2,359) = 5.63, p = .004$. A post hoc Newman-Keuls test revealed that the defendant was considered significantly less likely to be insane if a strong prosecution motive was suggested rather than no motive. The mean for the Weak Motive condition fell between the other means and did not differ from either. There was no main effect of defense motive.

All three between-subject factors interacted with case. The effect of unusualness was stronger in the Supervisor case than in the Neighbor case, $F(1,359) = 5.72, p = .017$. As with verdicts, probability of insanity judgments were higher in the Crazy Motive condition than the control condition, but only in the Supervisor case, $F(1,359) = 11.37, p = .001$. For prosecution motive, the effect was greater in the Neighbor case than in the Supervisor case, $F(2,359) = 5.04, p = .007$.

Other Judgments

One of the additional judgments made by mock jurors about the defendant's mental state at the time of the murder dealt with the extent to which he realized that his actions were wrong. Regarding this judgment, there was a significant main effect of unusualness, $F(1,359) = 16.04, p < .001$. Compared to jurors who read the unusual case ($M = 4.57, SD = 1.17$), those who read the nonunusual case ($M = 5.07, SD = 1.26$) thought it was more likely that the defendant appreciated the wrongfulness of his actions. There were no other main effects and no interactions.

Jurors also estimated the defendant's ability to control his behavior. This variable was affected by crime unusualness, $F(1,359) = 23.33, p < .001$. Jurors thought the defendant was better able to control his behavior if they read the nonunusual ($M = 4.84, SD = 1.27$) rather than the unusual case ($M = 4.23, SD = 1.30$).
A third judgment involved the extent to which the defendant planned the crime. A main effect of prosecution motive was obtained, $F(2,359) = 10.38, p < .001$. A Newman–Keuls test revealed that jurors in the Strong ($M = 3.32, SD = 1.34$) and Weak ($M = 3.17, SD = 1.17$) Motive conditions thought the defendant had done more planning than did those in the control condition ($M = 2.65, SD = 1.14$). There was also a main effect of defense motive, $F(1,359) = 9.66, p = .002$. Compared to those in the control condition ($M = 3.24, SD = 1.19$), those in the Crazy Motive condition ($M = 2.87, SD = 1.28$) thought less planning occurred.

Finally, jurors rated the extent to which the defendant intended to kill the victim. For this judgment, no main effects or interactions were found.

Multiple regression was used to determine whether the four judgments discussed above were related to verdicts (see Table 3). The best-fitting model excluded the judgment about intent and included the judgments involving appreciation of wrongfulness, control, and planning; $R = .66, F(3,367) = 95.67, p < .001$. Compared to those who chose a guilty verdict, jurors who found the defendant NGRI thought he was less able to understand that his actions were wrong, was less able to control his behavior, and planned the crime to a lesser extent.

**DISCUSSION**

The unusualness of the crime had a clear effect on mock jurors’ judgments about the defendant’s sanity. Jurors who read the unusual case were more likely to select a verdict of NGRI than were jurors in the control condition, and they also thought it more probable that the defendant was insane. These results extend the work of Roberts et al. (1987), which showed that a defendant who commits a homicide in a manner that is “bizarre” (both vicious and unusual) is more likely to be perceived as mentally ill than is a defendant who commits a more typical murder. However, the effect of unusualness in the present study is not identical to the effect of bizarreness in the previous study. Roberts et al. asked their participants to render a verdict twice, first with guilty and NGRI as the two options and then with guilty, but mentally ill as a third option. They obtained an effect of bizarreness only in the latter situation, leading them to conclude that "bizarre actions by the defendant shift subjects' judgments" from guilty to guilty, but mentally ill (p. 223); bizarreness did not increase the likelihood of a verdict of NGRI. In contrast, the results in the present study, with guilty and NGRI as the only verdict options, were that unusualness increased the probability of a verdict of NGRI.

**Table 3. Results of Multiple Regression Analysis Using Verdict as the Criterion**

| Predictor | $B$   | SE $B$ | $|B|$ | $t$   | $p$   |
|-----------|-------|--------|------|-------|-------|
| Wrongfulness | .0921 | .0133  | .3668| 6.90  | .000  |
| Control    | .0797 | .0109  | .3279| 6.43  | .000  |
| Planning   | .0248 | .0125  | .0971| 2.29  | .023  |
| (Constant) | -.1555| .0540  | -2.88| .004  |       |
It is possible that the difference between the results of the two studies occurred because Roberts et al. made the defendant’s actions both odd and vicious (in the experimental condition), whereas in the present study the defendant’s actions were merely odd. When an act is vicious, jurors may see it as more reprehensible and see the defendant as more deserving of punishment than they otherwise would. Therefore, they might feel reluctant to find the defendant “not guilty” by reason of insanity, preferring instead to judge him “guilty” but mentally ill. This interpretation is similar to McGlynn and Dreilinger’s (1981) conclusion that jurors have difficulty separating the unlawfulness of the defendant’s behavior from his responsibility for his behavior, so that the stronger the evidence against him, the less likely jurors are to find him NGRI. In any case, despite the rulings in some states (e.g., State v. Nuetzel, 1980), it appears that jurors are inclined to associate unusualness with insanity. An unfortunate implication of this is that a mentally sound defendant might successfully claim insanity by acting in a bizarre manner.

Along with unusualness, motive information presented by the prosecution also appears to influence jurors’ judgments. By suggesting a strong, reasonable motive that the defendant may have had for killing the victim, the prosecution can increase the likelihood that jurors will conclude that the defendant was probably sane at the time of the crime. It is possible that this works because “absence of a reasonable motive” is part of jurors’ insanity schema, and they expect insane people to act in ways that cannot be logically explained. However, as discussed earlier, the fact that a reasonable motive is not readily apparent or is not introduced by the prosecution does not necessarily imply that the defendant’s actions were driven by insanity.

A possibility that was considered was that the reasonable motive evidence would have an effect only if the crime was not unusual, as the power of unusualness to portray the defendant as more probably insane might override the prosecution’s motive information. However, an interaction between unusualness and prosecution motive was not obtained, which suggests that a prosecutor can take steps to influence jurors’ perceptions of the defendant’s sanity regardless of how unusual the crime may be.

There was no main effect of defense motive information; however, this variable did interact with case. In the Supervisor (but not the Neighbor) case, jurors were more likely to consider the defendant insane if the defense suggested a crazy motive for the defendant’s actions (that the defendant believed the victim had returned from the dead and might try to kill him) than if the defense did not suggest a motive. One difference between the two cases is the relative unusualness of the crimes. The Supervisor case was rated by jurors as more unusual overall than was the Neighbor case. It could be that the more unusual the crime is, the more receptive jurors are to a crazy motive. But if this hypothesis were true, interactions between defense motive information and unusualness should be expected, and no such interaction was obtained. Another possibility is that jurors saw the crazy motive in the Supervisor case (about the back-from-the-dead attacker) as believable because it grew out of an experience in the defendant’s life, whereas the crazy motive in the Neighbor case (about the alien abductor) was more generic. The present

3This hypothesis was suggested by an anonymous reviewer.
data do not definitively show why the effect of a crazy motive was different in the two cases or whether jurors consider evidence of a crazy motive to be very important.

Legally, jurors should be interested in evidence of a crazy motive because it potentially sheds light on the defendant’s mental state at the time of the crime. In both cases used in the present study, the crazy motive evidence suggested that the defendant did not see his actions as wrong. Of course, jurors have the option of ignoring evidence of a crazy motive if they doubt that it accurately reflects the defendant’s beliefs. However, jurors in the present study did not completely dismiss this evidence; it affected their judgments of the extent to which the defendant planned the crime. When the crazy motive was presented, jurors thought the defendant did less planning.

If the jurors followed the ALI instructions given to them, they should have first assessed the defendant’s capacity to understand that his actions were wrong and to conform his behavior to the law. Then, they should have used these assessments to determine whether or not the defendant was insane. Thus, if the jurors’ decisions were made in a legally normative way, their verdicts should be correlated with their judgments about the defendant’s ability to appreciate the wrongfulness of his behavior and to control his behavior. In fact, these two judgments were correlated with verdicts. However, the verdicts were also correlated with judgments about the extent to which the defendant planned the crime (as found by Roberts & Golding, 1991). The judgments about planning may have influenced the verdicts directly, or they may have affected jurors’ perceptions of the defendant’s ability to know right from wrong and to control his behavior, which in turn influenced the verdicts.

A related finding was that the unusualness of the crime influenced judgments about the defendant’s ability to understand that his behavior was wrong and his ability to control his behavior. When the cases were unusual, jurors thought the defendant was less able to appreciate the wrongfulness of his actions and less able to control himself. These results suggest that crime unusualness may be a variable that jurors consider when evaluating the two prongs of the ALI rule.

In summary, the present results support the hypothesis that in reaching a verdict jurors rely upon their own naive schemas of legal concepts (Finkel & Handel, 1989; Roberts & Golding, 1991; Roberts et al., 1987; Smith, 1991). Jurors seem to associate insanity with a tendency to commit crimes in an unusual way, and this unusualness is part of their schematic representation of insanity. The schema may also include the absence of a reasonable motive, as Stone (1993) suggested.

This study has several limitations. One is that the participants were college undergraduates, whose attitudes and judgments might differ in important ways from those of the general adult population. It would be useful to repeat the study using demographically different participants, although some studies involving the insanity defense (e.g., Finkel & Handel, 1988; Roberts & Golding, 1991) and other criminal issues (Cutler, Penrod, & Dexter, 1990) have not found differences between the judgments of college students and those of other adults within a trial context.

Another limitation is that the stimuli used in the present research are not as realistic and involving as an actual, live trial would be, and it is not necessarily true
that motive information and crime unusualness would affect real jurors' verdicts. Future research should address this issue. However, the use of relatively simple, written stimuli is defensible. The use of simplified stimuli, scaled down so as to include the most essential aspects of the cases, can reveal effects that, although reliable, might be obscured if the stimuli were lengthy and complex. Further, many previous researchers (e.g., Finkel & Handel, 1988, 1989; Finkel & Slobogin, 1995; Kleinke & Baldwin, 1992; McGlynn & Dreilinger, 1981; Roberts & Golding, 1991; Roberts et al., 1987; Whittmore & Ogloff, 1995) have successfully used written stimuli quite similar to those in the present study. In addition, using written materials rather than videotaped enactments may not be a disadvantage; researchers have not yet determined whether verdicts and other judgments are influenced by the stimulus format, and studies involving some types of cases (e.g., Bottoms & Goodman, 1994) have shown no effects.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to Samantha Caldwell for conducting legal research and to Natalie Barone, Jenny Henry, Jen Klimek, Brian Lerner, and Lynette Stellwag for their assistance in preparing stimuli and collecting data. Thanks also go to Richard Wiener and three anonymous reviewers for providing comments on an earlier version.

REFERENCES


