

Researchers say

Juries make rational decisions on verdicts

Do juries decide cases responsibly? Or are they easily swayed by a defendant's appearance or by their own view about the fairness of the law?

Some recent laboratory experiments have suggested that variables such as a defendant's attractiveness or a juror's attitudes and personality traits may significantly affect the outcome of a trial.

"These findings fuel the concern that juries employ legally irrelevant evidence in arriving at verdicts," says University of Michigan sociology Prof. Joseph Sanders, "and that they disregard the judge's explanation of the law."

As a lawyer and a sociologist, Sanders challenged these findings, noting that the experiments have only involved college students reaching decisions by themselves. He conducted his own experiment, enlist-

ing some 300 experienced jurors in group deliberations.

THE TWO-YEAR project strongly upheld the rationality and reliability of the American jury system. "The 48 six-member 'juries' each watched a videotape of a simulated court trial," explained research associate Diane Colasanto, "and conferred for 30 minutes in reaching their decision."

"By varying the status of the victim and the judge's instructions to the jury, we ended with eight slightly different versions of the trial. The key correlation we were looking for was between the judge's instructions and the verdict."

THE CASE involved a man who admitted removing a quantity of bricks during daylight hours from some property that turned down nine months earlier. He

claimed that he thought the bricks had been abandoned.

The tapes included testimony and cross-examination of four witnesses: the property owner, the defendant, the arresting officer and a neighbor who saw the bricks being taken. In half the cases, the property was owned by a private individual, and in half, it belonged to the State of Michigan.

"By varying the facts except the 'size' of the victim, we examined whether the jury is influenced by irrelevant evidence. This is similar to the status of defendant or victim attractiveness or character traits. We found no significant correlation between the identity of the victim and the final verdict," Colasanto said.

THE SECOND, more crucial variable in the experiment was the judge's instruction to the jury. In half the trials, the judge ordered a verdict based on "general intent"—to remove the bricks—and in half, a verdict based on "specific intent"—to steal them.

The result was almost an even split. The jurors instructed to decide general intent ruled "guilty" in 14 of the 24 cases. The jurors instructed to decide specific intent ruled "guilty" in 14 of the 24 cases. Most of the specific-intent jurors either voted "not guilty" or were unable to reach a decision.

"Without the 15-minute time limit, many of the latter group would have deliberated for hours," Sanders believes. This shows that juries do, in fact, pay close attention to the judge's instructions and that they take their responsibility very seriously," Sanders said.

"One of the key reasons the system works is that juries reach their decisions together, after much thoughtful sharing of opinions. We believe that juries usually weigh and interpret evidence in the light of the specific instructions which the judge gives them."

PREVIOUS RESEARCHERS have reached the opposite conclusion. Sanders and Colasanto believe, because they based their studies on student "juries" who had no courtroom experience and who did not deliberate as a group. To demonstrate this, they presented the eight videotapes to 94 individual students.

"None of the variables proved significant in predicting the student verdicts," the researchers report. "While the data indicate that they interpret their evidence in a similar manner to 'real' jurors, they do not consistently follow the responsibility instructions as defined by the judge. They are more likely than the regular jurors to admit they do not remember what the judge said about specific or general intent."

"This may be because they are less attentive, however, we suspect it is because they did not have the benefit of group discussion to clarify the judge's instructions."

THE LAW has never been completely at ease with the jury system. Sanders noted in 1964, a jury acquitted a man accused of treason and was committed to prison for their verdict. Though such harsh measures have passed, jury decision-making is still not entirely trusted.

Sanders and Colasanto conclude that the skepticism is unjustified. "The common sense that juries employ is an important adjunct to the legal rationale of the courts," Sanders said.

Need a desk?
Need a chair?
Need a file?
Need office supplies?
Call Us!
Modern Office Supply Co.

31535 Southfield Rd.
Between I-75 & I-94 M-16 R-16
642-5600

... just beautiful things
for your home

U.S. Professional
Interior Design



Michigan's
largest display
of
Decorative Heritage

RAY INTERIORS

31500 KILCUP
Farmington 478-7377

SEMTA considers public transit system

What kind of hardware will be chosen for southeastern Michigan's public transportation system?

The public will get a look at the choices facing the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA) at an informational meeting at 7 p.m. May 18. It will be held in the Oak Park Community Center, 1080 Oak Park Boulevard, which is near Coolidge and just north of Nine Mile Road. It's not a public hearing, although public questions and comments will be invited, according to SEMTA officials.

Rather, the session is aimed at explaining such options as:

- An all-bus system
- Bus and heavy rail
- Bus and commuter train
- Bus, commuter train and light rail (the new term for streetcars)
- Reserved bus lane and rail

After consulting with its staff and hired specialists, the SEMTA board will pick the three most promising candidates from the myriad of options and hold public hearings in early fall.

Final approval for funding will be up to the federal Urban Mass Transit Administration (UMTA).

At the May 18 meeting will be Clarence Jenerette, SEMTA's general manager; David Shepherd, first vice-chairman of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG); and other SEMTA personnel.

The SEMTA presentation will last 45-60 minutes. During a short break, cards solic-

iting questions and comments will be distributed. The final portion will be a question-and-answer session.

This is the second of two such informational meetings SEMTA is holding. The first was held April 29 in Detroit.

Oakland 'Y' holds membership drive

The Oakland Branch of the Detroit Metropolitan YWCA is one of six branches holding annual membership drives through May 14.

"Women on the Move" is the theme of the 1976 membership drive. The Oakland Branch is on Crooks in Clarno. Co-chairwomen of the drive are Cynthia Eusteb of Troy and Betty Quinn of Birmingham. All board members, class teachers and other interested volunteers are participating in the drive.

Workers from Birmingham are Win Frederick, Ann Rutapough and Diane Murphy. Troy workers include Marel Roudas, Gerry Smith, Ruth Martel, Renee Scherferstein, Alice Harabedian and Catherine Prevost.

Summer activities are being planned at the YWCA and baby-sitting is available for most activities except golf. Tennis classes will be forming again in June.

How much
will do it
for you?

\$1,000



We find
ways to
help.

Commercial Credit has been helping people for more than 50 years. So whatever you need, A few hundred. Or even as much as \$1,000. We'll bring you our problem. We'll find you a way to help.

COMMERCIAL CREDIT

PERSONAL LOANS

COMMERCIAL CREDIT CORPORATION

Detroit • 2155 W. 8 Mile Rd. • Phone: 658-7000
Plymouth • 6064 N. Sheldon Rd. • Phone: 459-2400

Credit Life Insurance Available in Eligible Borrowers



Savings on the latest carpet fashion; not old-distress merchandise. That is the very reason we are so excited about this sale.

29 distinctive stylings in 500 colors. That's selection. Not just a few restricted items. Every major carpet style represented in every color made in each group. Come in and look us over during our extravaganza.

We will offer professional helps in quality style, performance and decorating for your assistance. We take great pride in our earned reputation. Ask your neighbor.

SERVING FOR OVER 50 YEARS

MON-WED-THURS-FRI 9-9 TUES & SAT 9-6 SUN 1-5