DOES KNOWING AN OFFENDER'S PSYCHIATRIC DIAGNOSIS IMPACT CRIMINALITY JUDGMENTS? EFFECTS OF SPECIFIC LABELS AND CRIME TYPES

by

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DEDICATION

For those who value justice and fairness for everyone.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Individuals with mental illness interact with the criminal justice system (CJS) at disproportionate rates (Batastini et al., 2018). Understanding how psychiatric labels (i.e., labelling a defendant as having a psychiatric condition) influence criminality judgments has important implications for understanding jury and judge decision making (Berryessa, 2014; 2019; Blackhurst et al., 2022). One label of particular interest is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), which is characterized by differences in social interaction and communication and the presence of unusual behaviors or interests (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

Given increasing rates of autism diagnosis, the number of autistic individuals interacting with the CJS has increased over the past forty years. Recent research has explored how labeling defendants as autistic influences judgments of culpability, credibility, and choice of punishment. However, such research has not specifically addressed whether the effect of an autism label is consistent over crime types and whether an autism label has differential effects than a schizophrenia label. Additionally, less is known about how criminality judgments intersect with an individual's biases towards autistic individuals. Improving our understanding of how potential judicial personnel and jury members make criminality judgments has implications for mapping the role of biases in the CJS (Termeer & Szeto, 2021).

Interactions Between Autistic Individuals and The Criminal Justice System

Recent reviews of interactions between autistic individuals and the CJS suggest mixed evidence with regards to whether individuals with an autism diagnosis are disproportionately represented in jailed populations (King & Murphy, 2014). While the rate of incarceration may not be elevated, autistic individuals are more likely to have negative and unsafe interactions with the CJS from the point of initial arrest until incarceration (Helverschou et al., 2018). Many

autistic adults and youths report their interactions with the CJS as unjust, unsafe, and fear-inducing (Bastini et al., 2018; Cheely et al., 2012; King & Murphy, 2014). In a paper written by Cheely et al. (2012), the authors noted that youths diagnosed with ASD who had committed a crime had their cases handled differently compared to similar youths with no mental diagnosis. The youths who were diagnosed with ASD tended to be prosecuted for school-based offenses more often than non-ASD youths. However, due to assumptions that ASD youths have more supervision, these youths were less likely to receive probation violations and instead their cases resulted in detainment or deferred to mental health services.

Lack of knowledge, misperceptions, misunderstandings, and poor communication contribute to negative interactions between vulnerable populations and the CJS (Mayes, 2003). For example, Helverschou et al. (2015) pointed out that CJS professionals started to see an ASD diagnosis as a risk factor in criminals. As a result of the negative stigma and biases, the decision to incarcerate can lead to a difficult and unsafe time in jail for those who have special needs (Helverschou et al., 2018).

Influence of Labeling Offenders as Autistic on Criminality Judgments

Theoretical Foundations

Much of the research examining the impact of psychiatric labels on criminality judgments is rooted in blame theory. Blame theory addresses how we morally evaluate behaviors (Alicke, 2000). To morally evaluate behaviors, we first employ moral and philosophical models alongside our predisposed biases to ascribe the effects and outcome of an event onto another or self. In the context of legal culpability, blame theory relates to how likely an offender is seen to be responsible for a crime given information on demographics, motives, and circumstances.

Another related theory that plays a role in criminality judgements is attribution theory.

Defined by Kelley and Michela (1980), attribution theory is the study of perceived causation and how people interpret behavior from internal and external factors that consequently influence reactions and behaviors. In terms of criminal behavior, causal factors that observers may consider include poor parental upbringing, bad environments, poverty, unemployment, and mental illness (Blackhurst et al., 2022; Carroll et al., 1987). When placing judgement or determining sentencing, individuals consider the extent to which factors are controllable and dependent upon the will of the person (Axt & Johnson,2021; Cheung & Heine, 2015). For example, those who believed that crime was caused by environmental factors were more likely choose a sentence of rehabilitation and have more empathy, whereas those who attributed crime to internal factors such as making the wrong decision or lacking the intellect to do better, tended to choose more punishment types of sentencing and were less likely to employ empathy (Alicke, 2000).

Carroll et al. (1987) has proposed that attribution theory has strong relevance to understanding sentencing decisions. During the attribution process, biases and errors can occur which can lead to distortions in attributions thus affecting social and criminality judgements (Kelley & Michela, 1980). In the literature, many authors suggest that when conducting moral judgements and contemplating sentencing, judicial personnel should consider their own pre-existing knowledge of crime and take in social context of the offender (such as their social background, needs, and motives; Alicke, 1990, Axt et al. 2018).

Furthermore, Carroll and the other researchers (1987) found that crime can be attributed to three types of motivating factors: social, economic, and individual causes. As a result of how judges and jury members take into account the motivating factors behind offending, individuals vary in whether the outcome of their sentencing is either rehabilitation or punitive measures to

decrease their criminal behavior (Alicke, 1990; 2000).

Blame theory and attribution theory are related in that they both deal with how people consider the causes of crime. For example, past research has asked the question of where blame should be placed on the person or external factors (Blackhurst et al., 2022). Because attitudes about psychiatric illness may influence blame and attributions, there is a theoretical reason to think that they will impact criminality judgements. Indeed, one of the founders of blame theory investigated whether revealing information about a defendant would decrease sentencing and increase resources being available to the defendant (Alicke, 1990). In addition, Alicke (1990) found that when it comes to ascriptions of blame, mental incapacity is a more acceptable reason than inability to control emotional stress or momentary impulses. This early work, however, did not examine autism specifically but more on mental illness as a whole.

Building off of work on attribution and blame theory, there are theoretical reasons to think that labelling an offender as autistic might influence criminality judgements. In particular, the public may have a perception about how autism influences empathy and theory of mind. Theory of Mind (ToM) is the social cognitive ability to comprehend and infer the mental states (i.e., beliefs, desires, emotions, and intentions) of self and others (Baron-Cohen et al., 1985). Autistic individuals may have difficulty interpreting social cues, which can lead to miscommunication between an autistic individual and a non-autistic individual (Blackhurst et al., 2022; Berryessa et al., 2015; Maras et al., 2019). The public may assume that this means that the autistic individual has difficulty understanding or taking into account others' emotions, even though this is not well-supported by the literature (Berryessa, 2014; 2019). Such conceptions about autism may influence the blame and attribution judgments of potential jurors, judges, and other CJS professionals. Furthermore, within the CJS, there is a negative stigma that those with

mental/cognitive deficits are more likely to commit criminal behavior (Cheung & Heine, 2015), but it is less well-known how this stigma may extend to autism in particular versus other psychiatric conditions.

Empirical Studies

When examining how an autistic label influences criminality judgements, the most commonly employed method involves giving participants written vignettes to evaluate. Broadly, researchers have found that labeling a defendant as diagnosed with autism results in more empathy to the offender (Blackhurst et al., 2022; Maras et al., 2019; Sturges & Nuñez, 2021). For example, in a study conducted by Blackhurst et al. (2022), the authors had participants read a scenario and rate their empathy and judgments towards the hypothetical offender then had the participants reread the same scenario with diagnostic (i.e., ASD) information added. Participants then rerated their empathy and judgments. Researchers found that participants rated the defendants as more honest and gave less blame after the inclusion of a diagnostic label and information about symptomatology.

Similarly, Sturges & Nuñez (2021) employed a vignette-based design where their participants read a vignette about a crime that either included information about an ASD diagnosis or did not. Their findings showed that when participants had diagnostic information revealed about the offender, ratings of criminality judgements were more lenient and participants viewed the offender as less culpable.

In a study by Maras, Marshall, and Sands (2019), they examined how participants rated the culpability of an autistic defendant in comparison to someone with no label. The authors concluded that when given no information about an offenders' diagnosis, people were more likely to place blame or guilt on the offender and were more willing to associate and label the

offender with negative traits like deceitfulness and aggression.

Most prior studies only examined the effect of an ASD label on culpability judgments about one crime type (i.e., only presented a single vignette). However, Vermeulen (2023) examined whether the effect of an ASD label operated differentially across crime types that were more versus less related to ASD symptomatology. Results suggested a potential interaction effect such that the crime type impacted the effect of the ASD label. This potential interaction effect showed that compared to the control condition in the study, those in the ASD and ASD + Knowledge conditions tended to give lower sentencing lengths for majority of the crime types, but results were preliminary.

The broader literature on criminality judgments and psychiatric labels suggests a potential difference between autism and other psychiatric diagnoses. Past research on cognitive biases against individuals with mental illness has shown that such biases heavily influence decision-making in the CJS (Axt & Johnson, 2021; Bastini et al., 2018; Berryessa, 2019; Mowle et al., 2022). One vignette study compared the effects of labelling an offender as having schizophrenia, major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, or panic disorder (Stone, 2021). Results indicated that a significant effect of disorder, such that conditions perceived as more severe results in higher judgments of guilt. This finding is in contrast to much of the literature finding that an ASD label results in lower judgments of guilt. To my knowledge, however, no study has directly compared an autism diagnosis versus other psychiatric diagnostic label across multiple crime types.

Current Study

Although the current literature has examined the impact of autism labels on criminality judgments, several important questions remain: first, whether the effect of label varies across

crime types; second, whether the effects of a label differ between autism and other psychiatric conditions, specifically schizophrenia; and third, whether criminality judgments are influenced by the respondent's own biases and knowledge about specifically autism. To address these questions, a survey study design was used with vignettes to examine the effect of labeling an offender as autistic or having schizophrenia across six types of crimes and assessed the role of knowledge and biases in criminality judgments.

There were three hypotheses. First hypothesis stated that there would be a main effect of diagnosis on variables related to criminality: (1) guilt, (2) recidivism, and (3) intentionality. Second, hypothesis stated that there would be an interaction between diagnosis and crime type on my three criminality judgments (i.e., guilt, recidivism, and intentionality). Finally, for participants who answered questions about autistic offenders, it was hypothesized that criminality judgments of guilt, recidivism, and intentionality would be significantly negatively correlated with autism knowledge and positively correlated with autism stigma.

II. METHODS

Participants

Participants were recruited via the Texas State University SONA system. In total N = 293 participants completed the survey. After excluding participants who failed three or more attention checks, a total of N = 283 participants remained in the final sample. The demographic breakdown of the participants were female (82%), male (14%), and non-binary (2%) with the age range of 18-36. The racial composition consisted mainly of White/Caucasian (69.7%), Black/African Americans (9.7%), and Asian (5%). The ethnic composition consisted of those who either identified as Hispanic/Latino (39%) and those who do not (56.3%). Most students were freshmen or sophomores and came from a variety of majors.

Study Materials and Procedure

Participants completed an online survey on Qualtrics that took approximately 45 minutes. The specific survey instruments used in this study are detailed below and additional measures were included that were outside the scope of this project.

Vignettes

Participants read six vignettes corresponding to six types of crimes (murder, assault, theft, arson, robbery, and drug violation). Participants were assigned to either autism, schizophrenia, or physical disability conditions and were shown vignettes in which offenders had one of those three labeled conditions. The vignettes were based on prior work in this area in which participants read vignettes about crimes (Blais & Forth, 2014, Maras et al., 2019; Stone et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2022).

Each vignette followed this basic structure: (1) a character is introduced, along with specific information about that character's traits and the context of the situation, (2) the crime

explained along with the specific charge, and (3) the character's diagnosis is explicitly labelled. The vignettes were primarily structured after Stone (2021) but added more diagnostic behavioral information like Maras et al. (2019). As for the types of crimes, we used the majority of the crimes from Xu et al. (2021) and included physical assault (like the vignette from Maras' case vignette).

We selected our three diagnoses/disabilities based on gaps in the current literature. Maras et al. (2019) examined ASD and Stone (2021) examined other mental disorders such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, but ASD and schizophrenia had not been directly contrasted in the same sample. We included physical disability as a comparison condition.

After each vignette, participants answered criminality judgment questions. The main analyses focused on (1) blame, (2) recidivism, and (3) intentionality. Guilt was indexed by combining two questions: "Is the defendant guilty?" and "How confident are you in your decision?". Scores were converted to a –7 to 7 scale where negative values indicated that the participant found the defendant not guilty at varying levels of confidence and positive values indicated that the participant found the defendant guilty. Thus, -7 indicated extreme confidence in the defendant's innocence and +7 indicated extreme confidence in the defendant's guilt.

To calculate participant judgements of recidivism, we averaged together three questions: "How high is the defendant's risk of future violence against others,"; "How high is the defendant's risk for future criminal acts?"; and "How likely is it that the defendant poses a threat to society?" All questions were answered on a 1-7 Likert scale.

To measure intentionality, we averaged together five questions: "What was the level of awareness do you believe the defendant had of their actions in the moment?"; "How likely do you believe the defendant was aware of the potential consequences of their actions?"; "Do you

think the defendant intended this outcome?"; and, reverse coded, "How much control do you think the defendant had of their actions?" and "How much do you think mental health/illness explains the defendant's actions?". Again, all questions were answered on a 1-7 Likert scale.

Autism Knowledge

For information on participant's autism knowledge, the study design included the Autism Spectrum Knowledge Scale-General Population Version (ASKSG) measure which is a 31-item true/false statements to gauge the level of knowledge the participants have on ASD (Golson et al., 2022). The ASKSG measure was designed for the general population and is a validated measure with an internal consistency of $\alpha = .73$ raw, $\alpha = .75$ standardized; $\lambda 6 = .80$. A single composite score was used in subsequent analyses.

Mental Health Stigma

To test whether participants have any mental health stigma toward autism, the questionnaire included 6 questions adapted from Pescosolido et al., 2010. The items were modified to ask about attitudes toward autism specifically (e.g., "How willing are you to live next door to an autistic individual/ individual with schizophrenia?"). We created two averaged scores: one representing willingness to interact with autistic individuals and one representing beliefs that autistic individuals were likely to harm themselves or others.

Demographics

The study asked participants for their age, gender, race, ethnicity, parental education, major, year in school, and interest in pursuing careers in mental health and/or criminal justice.

Attention Checks

The design included four attention checks in the main study. Two attention checks asked a question about the vignette the participant just read (e.g., "Whose house was Alex at?") and

two asked the participants to follow specific directions (e.g., "To ensure participants are paying attention, please select 'other' and write 'green' in the textbox"). Participants who failed three or more attention checks were excluded from the data.

Pilot Study

To ensure that our vignettes were believable, a pilot study was conducted with $N = 57$ participants. In the IRB-approved pilot study, participants responded to all six vignettes, but all information related to mental or physical condition of the offender was removed. That is, participants just read about the crime committed. We asked participants how believable they found each vignette (Table 1). Overall, participants found vignettes to be quite believable, with every vignette scoring above the midpoint of a 1-5 Likert scale ranging from extremely unbelievable to extremely believable. We also asked participants if they had any additional comments about the vignettes, but no one mentioned implausibility and several free responses showed extensive engagement with the task.

Table 1

Believability Ratings of Vignettes Based on Pilot Study

Crime Type	Vignette Believability (*SD*)
Murder	3.72 (1.14)
Theft	4.43 (.72)
Arson	4.07 (.95)
Physical Assault	4.41 (.66)
Robbery	4.59 (.60)
Drug Violation	4.79 (.45)

Additionally, we asked participants to rate the severity of the crimes on a 1-7 Likert scale ranging from not at all serious to extremely serious. Results fit the expected pattern, with murder showing the highest average rating ($M = 6.20$, $SD = 1.09$), followed by arson ($M = 4.96$, $SD = 1.61$). Theft ($M = 3.9\ 3$, $SD = 1.41$), assault ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.54$), and robbery ($M = 3.65$, $SD =$

1.47) showed comparable ratings and the drug violation (M = 3.04, SD = 1.59) showed the lowest ratings. These ratings suggest that our selected crime types capture variability in severity and are appropriate for our planned study.

III. RESULTS

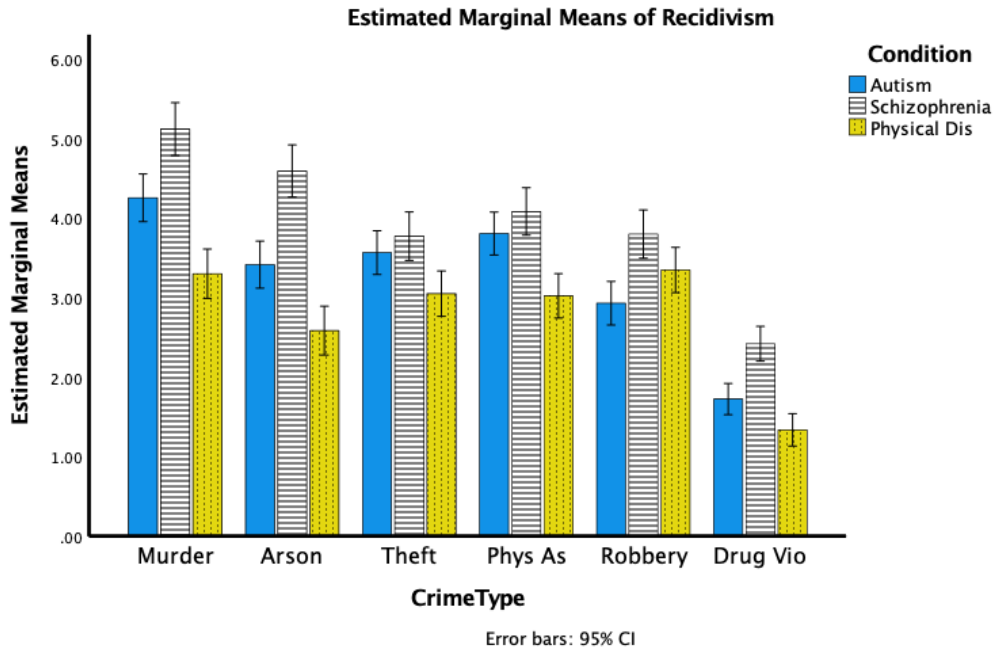
To test the first hypothesis—that diagnostic label would significantly influence criminality judgments—a MANOVA was conducted. Crime type was entered as a within-subjects variable, diagnosis label was entered as a between-subjects variable, and the three criminality judgement variables (recidivism, intentionality, and guilt) were entered as dependent variables. Consistent with my hypothesis, there was a significant main effect of diagnosis condition on the criminality judgements, $F(6, 576) = 45.24$, Wilks' Lambda = .462. Follow-up analyses that this effect of condition was significant for all three dependent measures: Recidivism $F(2, 280) = 35.12$, $p<.001$, Intentionality $F(2, 280) = 24.74$, $p<.001$, and Guilt $F(2, 280) = 62.86$, $p<.001$.

Post-hoc pairwise comparisons indicated that all three conditions were significantly different from each other for all three dependent measures. For recidivism, schizophrenia (M = 3.97, SD = .10) and autism (M = 3.29, SD =.09) both had higher ratings than physical disability (M = 2.78, SD = .10). In contrast, physical disability had the highest rating for intentionality (M = 4.11, SD = .06), followed by schizophrenia (M = 3.72, SD = .07) and autism (M = 3.49, SD = .06). Guilt followed a similar pattern, with physical disability earning the highest scores (M = 4.43, SD = .22), followed by schizophrenia (M = 3.13, SD = .24) and autism (M = 1.04, SD = .21).

To test the second hypothesis, we examined whether there was a significant interaction between crime type and condition in the aforementioned MANOVA. Overall, there was a significant interaction (F(30, 4104.08) = 19.86, Wilks' Lambda = .672). Follow-up analyses indicated that this interaction was significant for all three dependent variables (ps<.0001). Although condition label played a large role in criminality judgements, this was heavily

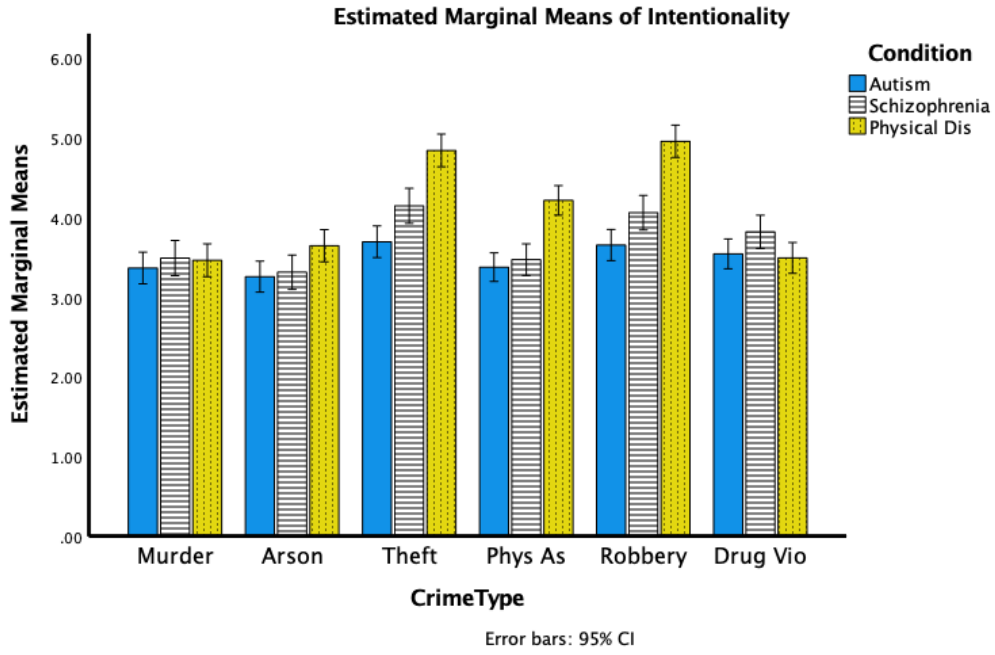
impacted by specific crimes (Figures 1-3).

Figure 1



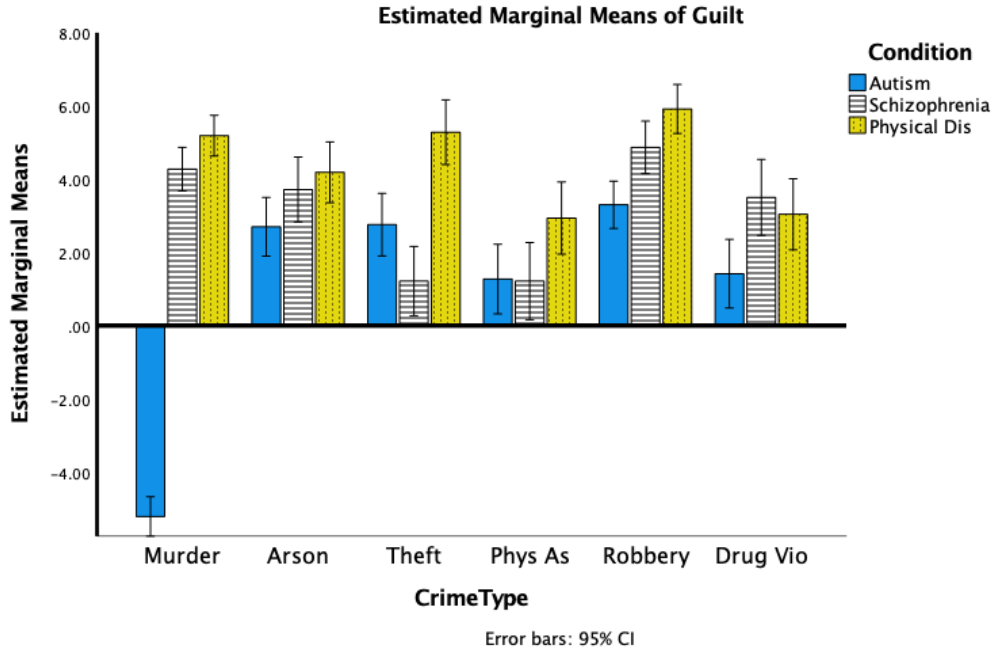
Mean Scores for Each Crime Type for Recidivism

Figure 2



Mean Scores for Each Crime Type for Intentionality

Figure 3



Mean Scores for Each Crime Type for Guilt

Post-hoc analyses indicated that all pairwise comparisons for recidivism judgments were significant for murder, arson, robbery and drug violations. For the remaining two crimes (physical assault and theft), there was no significant difference between autism and schizophrenia, but both were significantly higher than physical disability.

For intentionality, there was a slightly different pattern. There were no significant effects of condition for murder, whereas all conditions were significantly different from each other for theft and robbery. For physical assault and arson, autism and schizophrenia judgements did not differ from each other, but both were significantly lower than physical disability. Drug violation represented the only case where intentionality judgements were significantly higher for a psychiatric condition (schizophrenia) than physical disability.

Finally, for guilt, there were significant differences between all conditions for murder, theft, and robbery. For arson, the only significant difference was higher guilt judgments for physical disability than autism, for physical assault, physical disability scored higher than both autism and schizophrenia, and for drug violations, physical disability and schizophrenia both scored significantly higher than autism but were not significantly different from each other.

To test the third hypothesis, we examined the relations between autism knowledge, autism stigma, and criminality judgements for participants in the autism condition. Autism knowledge was not related to any criminality judgements (rs<.14, ps>.05). However, increased bias against associating with autistic individuals was related to higher composite recidivism and intentionality ratings (r (101) = .237, p = .015; r (101) = .199, p = .042, respectively). There was also a relation between beliefs that autistic individuals are likely to self- and other-harm with composite recidivism ratings (r (101) = .323, p <.001).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether the effects of psychiatric labels vary across crime types, whether the effects of a label differ between autism and schizophrenia, and whether criminality judgements are influenced by the respondent's own biases and knowledge about autism. Individuals with mental illnesses frequently interact with the criminal justice system (CJS) at disproportionate rates, raising questions about the impact of psychiatric labels on criminality judgments. In this study, we focused on the specific label of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and its potential influence on criminality judgments compared to other psychiatric labels like schizophrenia. We also examined how these judgments varied across different crime types. Our investigation further delved into the intersections between criminality judgments, biases toward individuals with autism, and other psychiatric conditions. The findings of this research contribute to a deeper understanding of how judicial personnel and jury members make criminality judgments, revealing the role of biases within the CJS (Termeer & Szeto, 2021).

When testing for a main effect of condition on the three criminality judgement scores, the results showed interesting patterns for intentionality, recidivism and guilt. For intentionality and guilt, responses followed a stairstep pattern of autism scoring the lowest, schizophrenia scoring higher, and physical disability scoring the highest. In contrast, recidivism judgements were the lowest for physical disability, followed by schizophrenia and then autism. Although the current study cannot identify the mechanism driving this pattern of findings, it is possible that because crimes from those with psychiatric labels were deemed less volitional, participants may have believed that they had less control over deciding not to commit that type of crime in the future. These results suggest an interesting separation between the ideas of guilt and recidivism that may

have implications for the criminal justice system. Both blame and attribution theories may also intersect with these findings (Alicke, 1990; Axt et al., 2018).

To delve deeper into our results and their implications, it is essential to explore the intricate interactions that was observed between the diagnosis condition and crime type in shaping criminality judgments. The findings revealed significant interactions between diagnosis condition and crime type on all three dependent measures: recidivism, intentionality, and guilt. It is difficult to cleanly summarize these results, given the idiosyncratic findings across crime types and condition. Broadly, distinctions between autism and schizophrenia were smaller for physical assault, potentially suggesting that in the case of physical harm, more lenient autism judgements may disappear. Arguing against this, however, is that all conditions were significantly different from each other for robbery, which also involved physical harm. Future work should try to titrate which aspects of vignettes are driving specific findings. Overall, this research suggests that studies that involve only one or two crime types may be misleading when considering the effect of psychiatric labels.

Turning our attention to the correlations between our variables, we find intriguing patterns that shed light on the complex interplay between autism knowledge, autism stigma, and criminality judgment. Contrary to our hypotheses, our analyses revealed that there was no significant correlation between the three composite criminality judgment variables and autism knowledge. This result suggests that perhaps knowledge alone is not responsible for criminality judgments. However, when examining the correlations between the composite recidivism and intentionality ratings with autism stigma, results showed a significant positive correlation. This finding suggests that pre-existing biases may have real-world impacts on the criminal justice system and future work should explore these results in studies of jury behavior.

Although this research used vignettes and a student population, this work is foundational for future studies. For example, one important consideration is the difference between vignette and real-life scenarios. In a paper by Allely and Cooper (2017), they reviewed the literature on how judges and juries let social bias (the positive or negative evaluation of judgement or behavior of one social group based off another) influence their perception of defendants diagnosed with ASD. Behaviors difficult to capture in vignettes, such as limited eye contact or flat affect, can influence perception. Even when the judge and jurors have knowledge that the defendant has ASD, when faced in person with the autistic defendant**,** the judge and jurors tend to perceive and assess guilt based off normative social standards. This can impact sentencing and outcomes for the defendant, thus harming and perpetuating prejudice against the ASD communities (Berryessa, 2014; 2019, Berryessa et al., 2015). Future research should use more real-world sampling and examine the effects of labelling on perceptions of video testimony or even actual criminal hearings in order to continue to apply the research started in this thesis.

In summary, the current research sheds light on the need for increased awareness and sensitivity regarding how individuals with autism may be perceived differently within the legal context compared to individuals with other psychiatric conditions. These interactions between condition and crime type illustrate the complexities surrounding the integration of psychiatric labels into criminality judgments, highlighting the need for more research in this area to better understand the intricacies of these relationships. By addressing these nuances, we can work toward reducing biases and stereotypes and ultimately create a more equitable legal system for individuals with autism and other psychiatric conditions.

APPENDIX SECTION

Appendix A

Sample Vignette
Crime Type: Murder
General Premise (seen by all participants)

Alex is attending a small event with coworkers at their boss's house.

ASD Paragraph (seen by 1/3 of participants)

A couple of Alex's coworkers were in an animated discussion about politics, but Alex was having difficulty in keeping up with the conversation and would repeat sentences or fixate on one part of the conversation. Towards the end of the party, Alex grows frustrated with the coworkers as they begin to ignore what Alex says. As Alex begins to becomes overstimulated and starts to cover their ears and rock back and forth. Alex begins the ritual with the kitchen light and a coworker enters the kitchen.

Schizophrenia Paragraph (seen by 1/3 of participants)

A couple of Alex's coworkers were in an animated discussion about politics, but Alex was energetically and erratically inputting into the conversation that was off topic. The past few months, Alex has been hearing voices and is feeling paranoid that someone has been watching them. They have been isolating from friends and family due to their paranoia. A few days ago, Alex's coworkers noticed that Alex has been more excitable and disorganized. Towards the end of the party, Alex grows irritated with the boring topics of conversation.

Physical Disability Paragraph (seen by 1/3 of participants)

Alex and a couple of coworkers are in an animated discussion about politics. Towards the end of the party, Alex grows tired and calls for a ride home. Alex is wheelchair bound and has lost complete use of their legs. To get home safely, Alex has to use a special transport service company that can accommodate the wheelchair.

Crime Description (seen by all participants)

A coworker comes up to Alex to confront them about major financial mistake Alex has made earlier in the week. Alex gets frustrated and doesn't want to talk about the mistake, but the coworker insists. Alex gets so angry that they push the coworker into the marble countertop in the kitchen. The coworker hits their head and is dead soon after. Alex's boss heard the loud commotion and walked into the kitchen to investigate and witnessed the physical interaction. The boss calls the emergency hotline, and the police and ambulance arrive shortly at the residence. The EMTs pronounce the coworker as dead when they arrive arrival. The police begin to investigate the altercation between Alex and the coworker and arrest Alex. Now, Alex is on trial for Manslaughter for pushing their coworker and causing their death.

Autism Prompt (seen by 1/3 of participants)

The psychologist has diagnosed Alex with Autism Spectrum Disorder and says they are competent to stand trial.

Schizophrenia Prompt (seen by 1/3 of participants)

The psychologist has diagnosed Alex with Schizophrenia and says they are competent to stand trial.

Physical Disability Prompt (seen by 1/3 of participants)

The psychologist has said Alex is competent to stand trial.

Final Framing (seen by all participants)

During the trial process in the United States criminal justice system, the prosecutor is trying to prove that Alex is guilty of killing their coworker.

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