

When a Child Takes the Stand

Jurors' Perceptions of Children's Eyewitness Testimony*

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Children testify in courts of law, yet little is known about jurors' reactions to them. We describe the first studies of simulated jurors' reactions to child as compared to adult witnesses. Our methodology involved exposing mock jurors to trial descriptions. In the descriptions, the age of the eyewitness who provided crucial testimony varied. Across three experiments, potential jurors judged children to be less credible eyewitnesses than adults. Eyewitness age did not, however, determine the degree of guilt attributed to the defendant. This same pattern of results was found regardless of the sample tested (college students versus a more heterogeneous group), the type of trial presented (vehicular homicide versus murder), or the medium employed (written trial descriptions versus videotaped mock trial). Our findings indicate that biases against children's credibility are likely to appear when a child bystander witness takes the stand.

INTRODUCTION

When a child witnesses a crime, that child may be called upon to testify in a court of law. Children, like adults, provide eyewitness testimony about events as consequential as murder, sexual assault, personal injuries, car-pedestrian accidents,

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and kidnappings. While children must usually pass a competency examination before testifying (*American jurisprudence*, 1976; Goodman, 1984; Melton, 1981), once a child qualifies, the child can testify like any other witness. In some cases, the child will provide the only or key testimony, and the case will rest largely on whether or not that child is believed. If the trial takes place before a jury, the jury members must decide the credibility of the child's statements.

Little systematic research has been conducted on the perceived credibility of children's testimony. But the impetus to study jurors' reactions to children is growing. The reporting of crimes against children (e.g., child sexual assault) and of crimes that children are likely to witness (e.g., spousal abuse) is alarmingly high and increasing (Finkelhor, 1984; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980; Walker, 1979; Whitcomb, Shapiro, & Stellwagen, 1985). Courts have become more and more willing to qualify children as competent witnesses (Rule 601, *Federal Rules of Evidence*, 1984; Whitcomb et al., 1985), and prosecutors seem more intent on prosecuting cases even if their key witness is a child (Bulkley, 1985). Legislatures throughout the country are changing laws to accommodate the child witness (Bulkley, 1985; Whitcomb et al., 1985). These trends are likely to increase the number of children testifying—either directly or indirectly (e.g., through video tapes or closed-circuit TV)—in courts of law.

Aside from the experiments we describe below, we know of only two published studies that have examined the perceived credibility of child witnesses. Yarmey and Jones (1982, 1983) surveyed several groups of people—potential citizen jurors, psychologists who research eyewitness testimony, legal professionals, law students, and college students—about their attitudes toward the reliability of a hypothetical 8-year-old child's testimony in response to police questions or in a court of law. Less than 50% of any group felt the child would respond accurately; 91% of the researchers, 69% of the citizen jurors, and 60% of the legal professionals believed the child would either be quite suggestible or say, "I don't know." The finding was part of a larger questionnaire study of attitudes about eyewitness testimony; only one question about child witnesses was included. The respondents did not see an actual child and were not exposed to any information about the content of the child's or others' (e.g., the defendant's) statements. Moreover, the age of the witness was not varied, so it cannot be determined if the responses would have been the same for adult witnesses.

It is likely, however, that views of child witnesses are often more negative than views of adult witnesses. The average child probably exhibits many of the characteristics that lower a witness's credibility—e.g., powerless speech style, low status, and lack of confidence (Deffenbacher, 1980; Erickson, Lind, Johnson, & O'Barr, 1978; Miller & Burgoon, 1982; Wells, Ferguson, & Lindsay, 1981). The legal system has feared, however, that jurors will place too much weight on children's testimony and has developed jury instructions to counter this possibility. These instructions often implicitly or explicitly communicate that children are less credible witnesses than adults either by stating that children are more suggestible than adults or by proclaiming that jurors may take a witness's age into account in determining the witness's credibility (*American jurisprudence*, 1976; Greene & Guidaboni, 1978; see Goodman, Golding, & Haith, 1984). While the

weight of the evidence may be the prime determinant of a jury's decision (Kalven & Ziesel, 1966), if jurors are biased against believing children it may be more difficult to obtain convictions based on their statements.

In our experiments, we examine not only the perceived credibility of children but also how their credibility relates to the degree of guilt attributed to a defendant. To the extent that children are viewed as less credible witnesses, one might expect that their testimony would have less influence than adults' testimony on jurors' judgments of a defendant's guilt. The specific aim of the research described here is thus to test the assumptions that (a) jurors tend to disbelieve children, and (b) such biases make jurors less likely to believe that a defendant is guilty when crucial eyewitness testimony is provided by a child.

EXPERIMENT 1

In Experiment 1, participants read a written description of a car-pedestrian accident. A vehicular-homicide trial was chosen because it seemed likely that witnesses of varying ages could be called upon to provide eyewitness testimony in such cases. In fact, children have testified as bystander witnesses in vehicular-homicide trials (e.g., *Davis v. Weber*, 1963).

In the first experiment, a written description was used in an attempt to tap adults' stereotypes of child and adult witnesses. Because an actual witness was not seen, potential jurors were forced to use their own biases in determining the credibility of child versus adult witnesses. This tack is similar to the one taken by Yarmey and Jones (1982, 1983) except that we provided more information about the trial and the eyewitness's statements, and we varied witness age.

Method

Participants

Seventy-two introductory psychology students (35 female and 37 male) participated in the study for course credit. All of the participants were American citizens.

Materials

A description of a fatal car-pedestrian accident was constructed. In it, five witnesses testified, three offering circumstantial evidence and only one offering eyewitness testimony. The eyewitness claimed that the defendant ran a red light. The defendant claimed that the light was green and that the pedestrian ran out in front of his car.

A separate rating sheet presented 7-point scales for judgments of the defendant's degree of guilt and the credibility of each witness. For the degree-of-guilt judgments, a scale of 1 (not guilty) to 7 (guilty) was presented. For the credibility judgments, participants could rate how strongly they "valued and relied on" each

witness's testimony using a scale from 1 (hardly at all) to 7 (very strongly). The witnesses' names appeared in one of three orders; the three orders were counter-balanced across groups.

Procedure

Participants, tested in groups of about 20, were randomly assigned to the experimental conditions. Before distributing the stimulus materials, the experimenter explained the importance of psycholegal research. Each participant read a short description of the trial and rated each witness's credibility and the defendant's degree of guilt. The mock jurors did not deliberate as a group. Completion of the task took approximately 20 minutes. An equal number of participants read that the eyewitness was either 6-, 10-, or 30-years-old.

Results

Credibility

Mean credibility ratings for the eyewitness in all three experiments reported in this paper are presented in Table 1. For Experiment 1, each mock juror's credibility ratings were analyzed by a 3 (age of eyewitness) \times 2 (sex) \times 5 (witness) analysis of variance, with the witness factor the only one to vary within subjects. The main effect of witness, $F(4, 264) = 14.76, p < .001$, was significant, as was

Table 1. Simulated Jurors' Reactions to the Testimony of a 6-, 10-, and 30-Year-Old Eyewitness^a

| | Age of eyewitness | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|----------|----------|
| | 6 years | 10 years | 30 years |
| Experiment 1 | | | |
| Credibility of eyewitness | 3.25 a | 4.70 b | 5.67 c |
| Guilt of defendant | 4.90 a | 5.00 a | 5.30 a |
| Experiment 2 | | | |
| Credibility of eyewitness | 3.27 a | 3.99 ab | 4.50 b |
| Guilt of defendant | 2.79 a | 3.29 a | 2.54 a |
| Experiment 3 | | | |
| Before deliberations | | | |
| Credibility of eyewitness | 3.60 a | 4.20 ab | 5.00 b |
| Guilt of defendant | 2.90 a | 3.20 a | 3.80 a |
| During deliberations | | | |
| Proportion positive statements | .25 a | .25 a | 0.24 a |
| Proportion negative statements | .52 a | .26 ab | 0.19 b |
| Manipulability | .25 a | .03 a | 0.00 a |
| Poor perception/memory | .20 a | .07 a | 0.10 a |
| After deliberations | | | |
| Credibility of eyewitness | 3.30 a | 3.70 a | 4.70 b |
| Guilt of defendant | 2.10 a | 2.40 a | 2.90 a |

^a Within each row, condition means with the same subscript did not differ significantly (planned comparisons: $p = .05$ or less).

the age of the eyewitness \times witness interaction, $F(8, 264) = 4.44, p < .001$. Simple effect analyses indicated that the credibility of the eyewitness significantly differed across the age of the eyewitness conditions, $F(2, 69) = 17.17, p < .001$, but the credibility of the other witnesses did not. Specifically, the 6-year-old was rated as a less credible witness than the 10- and 30-year-old, and the 10-year-old was rated as a less credible witness than the 30-year-old.

Degree of Guilt

Mean degree-of-guilt ratings for all three experiments are also shown in Table 1. For Experiment 1, the degree-of-guilt rating made by each participant was analyzed by a 3 (age of eyewitness) \times 2 (sex) analysis of variance with all factors varying between subjects. The main effect of age of the eyewitness was not significant, $F(2, 66) = .79$. Because the mean degree-of-guilt ratings increased with eyewitness age, a linear trend analysis was conducted. A significant linear trend did not emerge, $F(1, 69) = 1.49$.¹

Discussion

As predicted, the credibility of the eyewitness increased with age. Despite this trend, the degree of guilt attributed to the defendant did not reliably differ as a function of the age of the eyewitness. A number of interpretations could be offered to account for these findings, but before discussing them, we test for the replicability of the results in Experiments 2 and 3.

EXPERIMENT 2

Experiment 2 was conducted to determine if the results of Experiment 1 would generalize to a different type of trial. The trial in this experiment concerned murder rather than vehicular homicide. Children have been known to testify in courts of law as bystander witnesses to murder (e.g., *Jackson v. State*, 239 Ala 38, 193 So 417; see Pynoos & Eth, 1984).

Method

Participants

Sixty-one introductory psychology students (32 female and 29 male) participated in the study for course credit. All of the participants were American citizens over the age of 18 years. There were approximately 20 students in each of the eyewitness conditions.

¹ The linear trends reported throughout this paper were conducted using the following weights: -28, -16, and +44. These weights are proportional to the ages (6, 10, and 30 years) used in the studies. When the more traditional weights of -1, 0, and +1 were employed, the results were substantively identical to those reported, but the strength of the effects was somewhat less strong.

Materials

The materials were comparable to those used in Experiment 1 but the trial now concerned a case of murder. The eyewitness, described as female, testified that she saw the defendant enter the victim's apartment shortly before the murder, and that she recognized the defendant in a photo line-up administered by the police the next day.

Procedure

The procedure was identical to that of Experiment 1.

Results

Credibility

Each participant's credibility ratings were analyzed by a 3 (age of eyewitness) \times 2 (sex) \times 6 (witness) analysis of variance, with witness the only factor to vary within subjects. A main effect of witness, $F(5, 275) = 3.42, p < .01$, and a witness \times age of eyewitness interaction, $F(10, 275) = 2.00, p < .05$, were significant. The interaction was further analyzed for simple effects. These analyses revealed that only the credibility of the eyewitness varied as a function of the age condition, $F(2, 58) = 3.36, p < .05$. The 6-year-old was rated as a less credible witness than the 30-year-old. The other age comparisons failed to reach significance, although the means were in the predicted direction.

Degree of Guilt

Each participant's degree-of-guilt rating was analyzed as in Experiment 1. The main effect of age of eyewitness was not significant, $F(1, 55) = 1.67$. A significant linear trend did not emerge, $F(1, 58) = 1.12$.

Discussion

Again, the credibility of the eyewitness increased as a function of age, while the defendant's degree of guilt did not. Thus, for the trial descriptions used in Experiments 1 and 2, virtually identical patterns of results were found.

EXPERIMENT 3

Experiment 3 was conducted to determine if the results of the first two experiments would generalize to a more realistic trial depiction. To this end, a videotaped mock trial was created based on the scenario of Experiment 1. In addition, we examined a more representative sample of potential jurors from the surrounding community.

Method

Participants

Participants were solicited through newspaper advertisements and club memberships. Our sample was comparable to actual jury members in Denver

County, CO (Jury Use and Management Program, 1980), with the exception that our juries contained fewer minority members and more individuals of a lower mean income.

Eighty-eight individuals participated in the experiment and were each paid \$5.00. Of these people, 72 were randomly assigned to one of six 12-member juries. The remaining 16 were excluded before ratings were requested and according to criteria often used in actual jury selection (e.g., the person had been involved in a vehicle–pedestrian accident as either driver or victim). All of the 72 mock jurors were United States citizens and 18 years of age or older.

Materials

The materials consisted of three versions of a simulated trial, recorded on-video tape, involving the same case of vehicular homicide as used in Experiment 1. One version contained a 30-year-old eyewitness, one a 10-year-old eyewitness, and the third a 6-year-old eyewitness. The sex of the eyewitness was always female. Other than the person acting the part of the eyewitness and age-appropriate variations in the posing and response to questions, the trial was identical across the three versions. (In fact, the same footage was used.) The entire simulated trial lasted 30 minutes.

Procedure

Juries were randomly assigned to one of the three eyewitness-age conditions. Participants met at a laboratory at the University of Denver. Each group was told the importance of psychological research to the law. This brief introduction was followed by the viewing of the videotaped trial. When the tape was over, the 12 jurors were given the “before deliberation” questionnaire. Each juror rated the defendant’s degree of guilt and the witnesses’ credibility on the same scales used in Experiments 1 and 2. For the credibility judgments, two witness orders appeared.

After all the participants had completed their ratings, the jurors were instructed to deliberate in an attempt to reach a unanimous verdict of guilt or innocence. They were told to deliberate until a verdict was reached or until the experimenter reentered the room (after 50 minutes). A microphone was hidden in the “jury room.”

Deliberation by the jury was followed by presentation of the “after deliberation” questionnaire, which was identical to the before deliberation questionnaire, and a separate sheet on which each juror indicated his or her own verdict of guilt or innocence. Following the completion of these ratings, the jurors were debriefed. The length of the entire experiment ranged from one to two hours.

Results

Credibility

For the before-deliberation judgments, each juror’s ratings were analyzed as in Experiment 1. A main effect of witness, $F(4, 260) = 13.18, p < .001$, and a

witness \times age of eyewitness interaction, $F(8, 260) = 2.12, p < .05$, reached significance. The interaction was analyzed for simple effects. The credibility of the witnesses as a function of age varied significantly only for the eyewitness, $F(2, 69) = 3.13, p < .05$. The 6-year-old was rated as reliably less credible than the 30-year-old, but the other age comparisons were not significant.

An analysis of variance was also conducted on the after-deliberation credibility ratings. For this analysis (which included witness and age of eyewitness as factors), the mean credibility rating for each *jury* was entered as the dependent measure. Given the relatively small number of juries tested, the power of this analysis was fairly low. The main effect of age of eyewitness was not significant, $F(2, 3) = 2.82$. Despite the nonsignificant effect, we had predicted an effect of age, so planned comparisons were performed. The adult eyewitness was viewed as more credible than the 10- and 6-year-old. The comparison between the two child witnesses was not significant.

Degree of Guilt

The before-deliberation degree-of-guilt rating given by each participant was analyzed as in Experiment 1. There were no significant main effects or interactions. A linear trend on the means for each age condition was only marginally significant, $F(1, 69) = 2.66, p < 0.11$.

The after-deliberation judgments were analyzed using the mean degree-of-guilt rating of each *jury* as the dependent measure in a one-way analysis of variance. The age of the eyewitness was the only factor, and its main effect was nonsignificant, $F(2, 3) = 1.60$. The linear trend was also nonsignificant, $F(1, 3) = 2.82$.

Correlations Between Credibility and Degree of Guilt

An interesting pattern emerged when the correlations between credibility and degree of guilt were considered for the before-deliberation judgments (see Table 2). When the 30-year-old testified, there was a high correlation between the eyewitness' credibility and the defendant's degree of guilt. The credibility of the other witnesses did not reliably correlate with the degree-of-guilt ratings. In contrast, when a 6- or 10-year-old testified, not only the credibility of the child witness, but in addition the credibility of several other witnesses reliably correlated with the degree-of-guilt ratings. For participants who were exposed to an adult eyewitness, it thus appeared that the statements of the eyewitness were the pri-

Table 2. Correlations of Degree of Guilt and Credibility of the Witnesses for Experiment 3

| Age of eyewitness | Eyewitness | Witness 1 | Defendant | Witness 2 | Witness 3 |
|-------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|-----------|
| 30-year-old | .65 ^a | .30 | .16 | .21 | .09 |
| 10-year-old | .66 ^a | .56 ^a | -.20 | .53 ^a | .31 |
| 6-year-old | .64 ^a | .33 | -.52 ^a | .34 ^a | .22 |

^a $p < .05$.

mary evidence on which the jurors relied. In contrast, when a 6- or 10-year-old testified, the statements of other witnesses increased in importance.

The results of multiple regression analyses supported this interpretation. For each eyewitness condition, the five witnesses' credibility ratings were used to predict the degree-of-guilt ratings in a simultaneous multiple regression analysis. The standardized regression coefficients (Beta weights) for the eyewitnesses changed across age conditions. Relative to the other witnesses, the 30-year-old's testimony was quite influential, $\beta = .76$, $F(5, 17) = 16.05$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .56$. The 10-year-old's testimony was still relatively influential, $\beta = .53$, $F(5, 18) = 10.31$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .64$, but the 6-year-olds' credibility did not correlate with the degree-of-guilt ratings any more than did that of the other witnesses $\beta = .37$, $F(5, 17) = 2.31$, $R^2 = .58$.

Deliberations

The type of statements made by jurors during deliberations were transcribed and categorized as "positive," "negative," or "neutral." Positive comments concerned the witness's general credibility, accurate perception and/or memory, impartiality, or unwavering testimony. Negative statements concerned the witness's lack of credibility, inaccurate perception and/or memory, bias of the witness, and manipulability. Neutral comments concerned restatements of witnesses' testimony, statements concerning omission of evidence, impartial questions, or unscorable comments. A second rater scored 35% of the relevant statements. The reliability across raters, as assessed by the proportion of agreement, was .86. For each jury a proportional measure was created by dividing the number of comments by the length of that jury's deliberations. This procedure was necessary because some juries deliberated longer than others and would have disproportionately contributed to the overall means for their age condition.

The proportion of positive statements about the eyewitness remained the same for the three types of juries (see Table 1). The proportion of negative statements increased as age decreased. The number of positive and negative statements for each jury was analyzed by a 3 (age) \times 2 (comment: positive versus negative) analysis of variance, with comment as the only within-subject factor. The age \times comment interaction was not significant, $F(2, 3) = 2.17$, probably because of the small n . Because we predicted that jurors would make more negative statements about the child witnesses, planned comparisons were performed despite the nonsignificant result. The juries that viewed the 6-year-old eyewitness made more negative comments than did the juries that viewed the 30-year-old eyewitness, $F(1, 3) = 11.00$, $p < .05$. Other planned comparisons involving the juries that viewed the 10-year-old versus the 6- or 30-year-old were not significant. Examination of the positive and negative subcategories revealed that no one mentioned the manipulability of the 30-year-old, but the issue did come up occasionally for the 10-year-old and was the topic of some concern for the 6-year-old. Also while the 30- and 10-year-olds' perception and memory were doubted, the 6-year-old's was questioned more often.

Verdicts

All but one jury hung. The one jury to reach a unanimous verdict viewed the 6-year-old eyewitness and decided that the defendant was not guilty. When the number of dichotomous ratings of guilt or innocence were considered for the juries at each eyewitness age, the following means were obtained: 30-year-old/guilty, $M = 4.0$, and not guilty, $M = 8.0$; 10-year-old/guilty, $M = 2.0$, and not guilty, $M = 10.0$; 6-year-old/guilty, $M = 1.0$, and not guilty, $M = 11.0$. Thus the number of individual not-guilty verdicts increased as the age of the eyewitness decreased. The chi square test was significant, chi square (2) = 15.02, $p < .001$.

Discussion

In contrast to Experiments 1 and 2, a more realistic trial and a more representative sample of potential jurors were used in the present study. Nevertheless the 6-year-old eyewitness was rated as being less credible than the adult eyewitness. Regardless of the age of the eyewitness, however, the defendant's degree of guilt did not reliably change.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

These experiments are the first to examine the credibility of child witnesses in simulated jury trials. Regardless of the type of case (vehicular homicide versus murder), the population used (college students versus a wider cross section of potential jurors), or the medium of presentation (written trial summaries versus videotaped mock trial), two consistent findings emerged. First, potential jurors view children, particularly those as young as 6 years, to be less credible bystander witnesses than adults. Second, for the trial descriptions we used, potential jurors' judgments of the defendant's degree of guilt did not differ reliably as a function of the age of the eyewitness.

The credibility of child witnesses has been a topic of debate for some time (see Goodman, 1984). Recent studies suggest, however, that children can provide accurate eyewitness reports (Goodman, Aman, & Hirschman, in press; Goodman & Reed, 1986; Marin, Holmes, Guth, & Kovac, 1979). The present study suggests that mock jurors are concerned that children may remember less than adults do and that children may be easily manipulated into giving false reports. Current research on age differences in eyewitness testimony provides only partial support for these concerns (Cohen & Harnick, 1980; Goodman & Reed, 1986).

Given the lower credibility attributed to children, it might be expected that jurors would judge the defendant's degree of guilt to be higher when an adult eyewitness testifies. Across the three studies reported here, this prediction was not supported. There are a number of possible interpretations for the lack of a significant relation. Perhaps the most likely interpretation relates to the ambiguity of the trials used. We deliberately presented trials in which the evidence was ambiguous so that we could examine potential jurors' biases about children. By

doing so, we decreased the likelihood that the defendant would be judged guilty of the crime. Thus, even those mock jurors who thought the eyewitness was highly credible might have felt there was still insufficient evidence to attribute a high degree of guilt to the defendant.

A second interpretation concerns a possible "sleeper effect." It has been proposed that, over time, messages from low-credibility sources can still affect decision making (Cook & Flay, 1978). According to this view, the message becomes dissociated from its source over time. It is thus possible that, even though the children were viewed as less credible witnesses, the content of their testimony affected the mock jurors' judgments about the defendant's degree of guilt as much as the adult's eyewitness testimony did.

Finally, it is possible that, when a child testifies, jurors have a stronger tendency to look to other witnesses for corroborating evidence. If corroboration can be found, jurors might then use the child's testimony plus the corroborating evidence to form a judgment of the defendant's guilt. The resulting decision about the defendant's guilt might equal the decision made when jurors base their degree-of-guilt ratings primarily on the adult eyewitness's testimony. The finding from Experiment 3 that degree of guilt correlated only with eyewitness credibility when an adult testified but with the credibility of several additional witnesses when a child testified may offer some tentative support for this possibility. This finding may help clarify why, until recently, corroboration of children's statements has been required by law in several states (Lloyd, 1983). Given the present data, it is not possible to differentiate among these three alternative hypotheses.

It is interesting, however, that in our most realistic study (Experiment 3), there was some evidence to indicate that the testimony of the adult eyewitness was more influential than that of the children. The most realistic trial produced a marginally significant linear trend indicating that the adult's eyewitness testimony led to somewhat higher degree-of-guilt ratings. Moreover, as age of the eyewitness increased, a larger number of individual mock jurors felt, after the deliberations, that the defendant was guilty. Thus, the more realistic trial produced some evidence that the adult's testimony might indeed lead to an impression of greater guilt, although not to the extent that unanimous verdicts of guilt were obtained. In that regard, it should be noted that not a single jury voted to convict, even when the adult eyewitness testified.

Our findings indicate that adults can have negative biases about the veracity of children's testimony. However, it is important to remember that the study of jurors' reactions to child witnesses is quite new. Many questions remain about the generalizability of this phenomenon. While this is a sobering concern, we also believe that this issue opens up promising avenues for future research. We will discuss three directions for future work that we feel could have both conceptual and practical value: factors that may affect jurors' perceptions of child witness credibility; jurors' abilities to discriminate true from false testimony; and the effects of recent legal innovations on children's credibility.

We suspect that a variety of factors will affect adults' perception of the credibility of children's testimony. These factors include: the type of trial (e.g., sexual

assault versus murder); the role of the witness (bystander, victim, or perpetrator); individual differences among witnesses (e.g., sex, race, mental health, demeanor); individual differences among jurors (e.g., sex, amount of experience with children); and trial factors (e.g., attorneys' tactics, use of expert witnesses). Thus, we do not believe that children will always be viewed as less credible witnesses than adults. For example, different types of trials probably stimulate different theories about children; it is even possible that the more pervasive trend to view children as less credible with decreasing age is actually reversed in some cases. For example, jurors may believe that young children's reports of sexual abuse are more likely to be true than those made by older children or adults (especially if suggestive questioning can be ruled out), because an inexperienced child would not possess the relevant knowledge to fabricate a believable story of sexual activity whereas older children and adults would. Studies that vary factors like these are likely to provide a richer understanding of the kinds of theories adults have about children and how these theories affect judged believability.

A second line of work concerns jurors' ability to discriminate true from false reports and to reach the truth in their decisions. Obviously, this is of major legal concern. Regardless of jurors' biases about children if they can detect accurate from inaccurate witnesses, justice is likely to be served. It is important to know the relation between actual differences in the accuracy of children's and adults' testimony to the perceived accuracy by jurors of such testimony. Researchers might borrow the exemplary methodology that Wells and Leippe (1981) successfully employed to study jurors' reactions to variations affecting the accuracy of adult testimony.

The third line of research we would like to mention is suggested by recent legal innovations that are being implemented or are under consideration for implementation around the country. These innovations, which are often restricted to cases of child sexual abuse (Bulkley, 1985; Whitcomb et al., 1985), include the elimination of requirements for competence examinations of children; the use of videotaped testimony or testimony given via closed-circuit television; the use of a "neutral" party (e.g., a mental-health professional) to interview child witnesses; the coordination of interviews across different agencies (e.g., police, social services, and prosecutors' offices); and the introduction of special hearsay exceptions (see Bulkley, 1985).

The implementation of these innovations suggests interesting avenues for future research. For example, several states have passed laws that permit children's testimony to be videotaped and, under certain circumstances, for the video tape to be presented at trial. In Texas, for example, one such law specifies that videotaped testimony can be used in lieu of live testimony in child sexual-assault cases. The one exception is that the child must submit to cross-examination in open court if defense counsel so requests (Chaney, 1985). In this way, the defendant's 6th Amendment right to confrontation of witnesses is preserved. Research exists on the effects of videotaped versus live testimony for adult witnesses (Farmer et al., 1976; Miller, 1976), but there is no comparable research for child witnesses. A variety of questions arise from the use of videotaped testimony: When children testify, do videotaped interviews have less impact on jurors

than does live testimony? Does videotaped testimony help or hinder jurors' abilities to reach the truth?

The proposed use of a neutral party to interview child witnesses poses additional researchable questions. According to Libia's (1980) and Parker's (1984) proposals, attorneys (prosecution and defense) could submit questions to the interviewer, and then a videotape of the interview and the witnesses reactions would be shown to the jury. One question concerns the legal system's assumption that cross-examination leads not only to more accurate testimony but also to jurors' greater ability to reach the truth. Does cross-examination of children as opposed to more neutral interviewing accomplish these goals?

As usual, our findings raise more questions than they answer. We are clearly only on the threshold of a new research discipline. It is our hope that this discussion will stimulate further study of jurors' reactions to child witnesses.

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