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JURORS' REACTIONS TO SATANIC RITUAL ABUSE ALLEGATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Some of the most highly publicized child sexual abuse trials of this century have involved bizarre allegations of satanic ritual abuse, yet little is known about jurors' reactions to ritual abuse claims. We investigated how jurors' judgments of defendant guilt and witness credibility are affected by the presence or absence of satanic ritual abuse allegations.

Method: Two hundred forty-three mock jurors rendered judgments about a case involving childhood sexual abuse allegations made by either a 5-year-old child or a 30-year-old adult survivor. The presence or absence of satanic ritual abuse allegations was varied between subjects. Jurors' religiosity was measured.

Results: Although jurors were significantly less likely to believe the satanic ritual allegations than other case details, they were as likely to vote guilty and to believe the victim in satanic as in nonsatanic cases. Victim age had no significant effect on mock jurors' judgments, but there were marked individual differences in decisions: When the allegations involved satanic ritual abuse, religious jurors were more likely than less religious jurors to believe the victim. Further, across all conditions, women made more pro-victim judgments than did men.

Conclusions: Our findings suggest that highly bizarre details may be discounted by jurors (particularly less religious jurors), but that jurors may set aside their skepticism of satanic ritual details and make judgments about child sexual abuse cases based on their perceptions of the credibility of nonsatanic allegations of harm. Whether or not this is an accurate approach to decision-making in these cases remains an empirical question. © 1997 Elsevier Science Ltd

Key Words—Satanic ritual abuse, Juror decision-making, Children's testimony, Sexual abuse.

INTRODUCTION

SOME OF THE most highly publicized child abuse trials of this century have involved allegations of satanic ritual abuse: multi-victim, multi-perpetrator sexual abuse involving quasi-religious satanic rituals and unspeakable acts of torture, murder, and cannibalism (Kelley, 1996; Weir & Wheatcroft, 1995; Young, Sachs, Braun, & Watkins, 1991). Allegations of ritual abuse have been made by both children and adult survivors who claim to have been abused during their childhood. Considerable controversy surrounds these claims. Although many alleged victims have given convincing accounts of their ritual victimization, such claims are rarely substantiated with conclusive evidence and often appear to be highly implausible (Bottoms, Shaver, & Goodman, 1996). Professionals from mental health, social service, and legal disciplines are divided over the validity of ritual abuse. Some assume the literal truth of ritual claims and are concerned with its proper

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diagnosis and treatment (e.g., Feldman, 1993; Leavitt, 1994; Ross, 1995; Sinason, 1994) and prosecution (state legislatures have passed special laws targeting ritual child abuse, e.g., Illinois Public Act #87-1167). Others doubt the validity of many satanic ritual abuse allegations and assert that ritualistic elements may be suggested to alleged victims through various misleading sources (Ganaway, 1989; Lanning, 1991, 1992; Loftus, 1992).

Ritual allegations have been brought to the attention of the general public through sensational media accounts (Rivera, 1988), popular press books (Feldman, 1993; Kahaner, 1988; Nathan & Snedeker, 1995; Smith & Pazder, 1980; Smith, 1993), and widely publicized trials. Little is known about the average citizen's reactions to ritual claims, yet lay people are charged with extremely important decisions concerning ritual abuse; as jurors, they must decide the guilt or innocence of defendants accused of the crime. In some actual trials involving allegations of satanic ritual abuse, juries have convicted defendants (e.g., the Paul Ingram case in Thurston County Washington, see Wright, 1994; the Hamilton, Ontario case, see Marron, 1988; the Kern County California case, see Nathan & Snedeker, 1995). In others, children's reports of ritual abuse have been questioned (e.g., *Felix v. Nevada*, 1993) and defendants have been acquitted (e.g., the *McMartin* case, *People v. Raymond Buckey*, 1988, see Waterman, Kelly, Oliveri, & McCord, 1993). How do jurors react to ritualistic child abuse allegations? Are these unusual claims likely to bias jurors' overall assessments of a victim's credibility? Are some jurors more likely than others to believe ritual abuse allegations? Our research was designed to answer these questions. After reviewing relevant literature, we discuss the theoretical basis for our predictions, then detail our methods and results.

Perceptions of Ritual Abuse Allegations

Although one might predict that jurors would be skeptical of an alleged victim's bizarre allegations like satanic ceremonies or the breeding of infants for satanic ritual sacrifice, many Americans are actually quite willing to believe in unusual, even supernatural phenomena (Gallop & Newport, 1991; Gilovich, 1991; Marin, 1996). More than half of Americans believe in the devil (10% say they have talked to him) (Gallup & Newport, 1991), and many are prone to believe rumors of satanic cult conspiracies (Victor, 1993). There is only one study that we know of specifically examining jurors' reactions to ritual abuse allegations (Schutte, 1994). In that study, mock jurors considered a case in which an adult survivor reported childhood abuse memories that had been repressed for years, then recovered. The abuse involved either satanic sexual abuse or nonsatanic sexual abuse. Jurors' guilt judgments did not differ as a function of abuse type, suggesting that people are as willing to believe ritual abuse allegations as nonritual allegations. But there is another possibility, one that cannot be assessed from Shutte's research: that people selectively choose which parts of a claim they believe and which they doubt, and that some details may be discounted without affecting a jurors' overall belief in the basic abuse charges in a case. That is, jurors may discount bizarre ritual details but separately consider the validity of a victim's claims of more common forms of sexual maltreatment. In fact, some child advocates have recently argued that clinicians and forensic interviewers should take this approach when encountering child abuse claims that contain fantastic elements (fantastic sometimes being synonymous with ritualistic or satanic). Specifically, it is argued that just because a child's plausible claims of abuse are accompanied by more unlikely details, one should not discount the entire claim (Dalenberg, 1996; Everson, 1997). Only recently has any research addressed the actual relation between the presence of bizarre details and the overall truthfulness of a child's report. Specifically, Dalenberg (1996) compared the allegations of children whose abuse was uncorroborated and therefore considered unlikely to have happened to the allegations of children whose abuse was corroborated (by medical evidence, perpetrator confession, etc.). Allegations of children in the corroborated group were more likely than those in the uncorroborated group to include fantastic details (e.g., that monsters or dinosaurs were involved in their abuse). Thus, Dalenberg argues, the presence of bizarre details in

a child's story may not be an accurate indicator of the veracity of the basic sexual abuse claims. However, this conclusion must be considered tentative, as the base rate of fantastic details in her sample was quite low.

What is the perceived relation between the presence of fantastic details and overall allegation accuracy? As Dalenberg (1996) has pointed out, the idea that one should ignore bizarre details in forming assessments of overall credibility is counter to the beliefs of some who have attempted to isolate indicators of truthfulness and falsehood in abuse statements. For example, Gardner (1995) maintains that one marker of false reports is the presence of unusual or implausible details. Others contend that a detail has to be realistic before it can be considered a criterion of a true statement (Raskin & Esplin, 1991; Steller & Koehnken, 1989). The second most common reason cited by child protective services professionals for judging a sexual abuse allegation to be false is the presence of unlikely details in the claim (Everson & Boat, 1989). Legal professionals appear to think that jurors will intuitively use these same guidelines: Defense attorneys highlight fantastic details in child abuse trials, while prosecutors may be reluctant to have implausible details included in case records (Everson, 1997; Finkelhor, Williams, & Burns, 1988). Is this reasoning correct? Do jurors discount child sexual abuse claims when they involve bizarre allegations? Or, are jurors skeptical of some allegations without doubting a child's entire story?

THE PRESENT STUDY

We sought answers to these questions by testing whether mock jurors would react differently to child sexual abuse allegations that do and do not contain bizarre, satanic ritual details. We were also interested in whether jurors' reactions would be affected by the age of the victim who reported the childhood abuse (child vs. adult survivor) and by the religiosity and gender of the jurors. Next, we discuss the theoretical rationale for investigating each of these variables and detail our experimental hypotheses.

Victim Age

Because many states have passed statute-of-limitation exceptions to accommodate child abuse claims that arise many years after the crime as recovered, previously repressed memories (Bowman & Mertz, 1996), some ritual abuse allegations made by adult survivors have reached courtrooms. Thus, it is important to explore jurors' reactions to childhood abuse allegations made by both adults who recall the abuse after some delay as well as by children who recall the abuse after little delay.

Research investigating jurors' reactions to child sexual abuse finds that young child victims of sexual abuse are often perceived to be more credible than older children (particularly those over the age of 13 years) and adults (Bottoms & Goodman, 1994, Experiments 1 and 3; Duggan, Aubrey, Doherty, Isquith, Levine, & Scheiner, 1989; Gabora, Spanos, & Joab, 1993). This is because, compared to older children, young children are thought to be more sexually naive, thus, less able to fabricate false allegations of sexual abuse and less likely to encourage sexual encounters (Bottoms & Goodman, 1994; Duggan et al., 1989; Goodman, Bottoms, Herscovici, & Shaver, 1989). As children's age increases, jurors' presumptions of their honesty and sexual naivete decrease, prompting concern that children have sufficient knowledge to lie about or even be responsible for sexual acts with adults.

In all of these studies, mock-trial scenarios portrayed victims who reported abuse fairly soon after it allegedly happened. Researchers have just begun to investigate jurors' perceptions of victims who significantly delay in reporting childhood sexual abuse (which is often the case with alleged adult survivors of ritual abuse, Bottoms et al., 1996). For example, in studies by both Loftus, Weingardt, and Hoffman (1993) and Key, Warren, and Ross (1996), adults' recovered,

formerly repressed memories of childhood sexual abuse were less believable to mock jurors than always-remembered abuse memories. Of more relevance to the present research, Golding, Sego, Sanchez, and Hasemann (1995) explored the perceived credibility of allegations made by adult and child victims. Mock jurors were more likely to believe a 6-year-old's report of sexual abuse than an identical allegation made by an adult survivor after a 20-year delay (whether or not the adult claimed to have repressed the memory during the intervening years).

We examined jurors' reactions to a child victim versus an adult survivor who claimed to have experienced the abuse 25 years earlier (but we did not specify that the victim had ever repressed the memory). Based on previous findings, particularly Golding and colleagues' (1995), we predicted that allegations of sexual and ritual abuse would be more believable when made by a child victim than by an adult survivor, who would be perceived to be a less trustworthy witness.

Juror Religiosity

It has been suggested that highly religious individuals (particularly fundamentalist Christians) may be more prone to accept allegations of ritual abuse than less religious individuals are (Bottoms & Davis, 1997; deYoung, 1994). Religious individuals may find it more plausible that Satan exists, that he has the power to motivate people to do his evil work, and therefore, that satanically motivated crimes like child abuse are plausible. Survey research offers support for this hypothesis: For example, Christian psychologists are more likely than non-Christians to diagnose ritual abuse among their clients (McMinn & Wade, 1995). Highly religious police officers are more likely than other officers to believe that satanic activity poses a danger to society and that it results in criminal activity such as child abuse, teen suicide, homicide, mutilation, and drug use (Crouch & Damp-house, 1991).

To investigate the relation between religious beliefs and perceptions of ritual abuse allegations, we included a measure of jurors' religiosity in our study. We predicted that highly religious jurors would be more likely to believe satanic abuse claims than would less religious jurors. In his mock jury study, Schutte (1994) measured subjects' religiosity and tested for verdict differences between high and low religiosity jurors (two groups formed from a median split on religiosity scale scores). He found no main effect of religiosity on guilt judgments across satanic ritual abuse and nonritual abuse conditions, but he did not report the significance of the abuse type (ritual or nonritual) \times religion interaction. A significant relation between religiosity and verdict preference would be predicted only in the satanic ritual condition. In our study, we examined the relation between juror religiosity and case judgments for jurors in our ritual and nonritual conditions separately.

Juror Gender

Previous research has revealed that perceptions of child sexual assault victims and child sexual abuse case decisions are reliably affected by another individual difference factor, juror gender. On average, women make more pro-victim case decisions than do men, finding children to be more credible and defendants more likely to be guilty (e.g., Bottoms, 1993; Bottoms & Goodman, 1994; Golding et al., 1995; Goodman et al., 1989; Isquith, Levine, & Scheiner, 1993; Swim, Borgida, & McCoy, 1993). Men are also sometimes less likely than women to believe adult rape victims (for review, see Borgida & Brekke, 1985). Given the importance of juror gender in determining case decisions, we examined this variable in our study. We predicted that previous findings of gender differences would replicate when allegations included ritual abuse elements, and that regardless of allegation type, men would be more reluctant than women to believe a victim's allegations.

Overview and Design

Participants in our study read a case scenario describing sexual abuse allegations that were either satanic ritual or nonsatanic in nature. The alleged victim was either a 5-year-old child or a

30-year-old adult survivor who reported sexual abuse that occurred when she was 5 years old. Participants assumed the role of juror and made individual judgments concerning defendant guilt and victim and defendant credibility. Afterward, the mock jurors were asked to recall each of the victim's allegations and then to rate the believability of each allegation. The study conformed to a 2 (abuse type: satanic ritual or nonsatanic) \times 2 (juror gender) \times 2 (victim age: 5 or 30 years old) between-subjects design.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 243 Introductory Psychology students (128 women, 115 men) who participated in return for class credit at the University of Illinois at Chicago. As are actual jurors, all participants were at least 18 years old ($M = 19.4$ years, range = 18–49) and United States citizens. The sample was ethnically diverse: 118 Caucasians, 52 Hispanics/Latinos, 24 African Americans, 37 Asian Americans, and 12 of other backgrounds.

Materials

Case scenario. A one-page written scenario provided jurors with details about a child sexual abuse case alleged to have occurred in a day care center. To increase ecological validity, we roughly modeled many case details after allegations made in the McMartin Day Care case (Waterman et al., 1993). The testimony of seven witnesses was described in the scenario: an alleged female victim, the victim's mother, two co-defendants (a man and woman who operated the day care center), two expert witnesses (a psychologist for the defense and a psychologist for the prosecution), and one of the defendants' co-workers from the day care center. In brief, the alleged victim reported that she had been sexually abused when she was 5 years old by the man and woman who owned and operated her daycare center. She described children and adults engaging in sex acts and nude games, adults making pornography, and adults threatening her to keep the abuse a secret. The victim's mother testified that, at about the same time the abuse was alleged to have occurred, she remembered catching her child posing nude with playmates. The mother said that when she questioned her child about this behavior, the child acted upset, but made no disclosure of abuse. The alleged victim made the disclosure after several months of therapy with a psychologist. The two defendants' testimony was exactly the same: They denied all charges, claiming that the victim's therapist suggested the false allegations to her during the course of therapy. The defendants' co-worker testified that the day care center had a good reputation and that the constant presence of other workers would have made abuse difficult to conceal. The prosecution expert (the victim's psychologist) testified that it was his opinion that the victim suffered from trauma caused by sexual abuse. The defense expert (also a psychologist) claimed that the victim's psychologist had used suggestive therapy techniques with the victim.

There were four different versions of this basic scenario to accommodate factorial variations of the two main independent variables: nature of the abuse (satanic ritual or nonsatanic) and victim age (5 or 30 years old). In the satanic ritual version, the abuse was described as taking place during ceremonies in which children and adults made references to the devil, wore black robes, and chanted around a circle of candles. In the nonsatanic version, the abuse was described as taking place under the guise of a game in which children and adults made references to movie stars, wore movie star clothes, and sang songs. (Our nonsatanic comparison case was not meant to represent the most typical child sexual abuse case.) Age was varied by identifying the victim as 5 or 30 years old: The 5-year-old was said to have been placed in therapy by her mother; the 30-year-old was

said to have entered therapy at age 30 for depression (but it was not specified that her memory of the abuse was ever repressed). All other case details were constant across participants.

Rating scales. Separate rating scales were used to assess participants' judgments of each defendant's guilt/innocence (dichotomous guilt verdict) and their confidence in that verdict (on a 3-point scale ranging from 1 *not at all confident* to 3 *very confident*). The combination of these ratings resulted in a more sensitive, 6-point degree-of-guilt scale that ranged from 1 (*not guilty, very confident*) to 6 (*guilty, very confident*). Separate scales also assessed the victim's and defendants' perceived credibility, ranging from 1 (*not at all believable*) to 6 (*extremely believable*).

Victim allegation questionnaire. On the victim allegation questionnaire, participants were asked to recall and list the specific allegations made by the alleged victim, then, to rate how believable they considered each allegation to be on a scale from 1 (*not at all believable*) to 6 (*extremely believable*).

Demographic questionnaire. Several questions were used to gather information about participants' basic demographic characteristics: age, citizenship status, ethnicity, and gender.

Religiosity questionnaire. A specially-constructed 7-item scale measured juror religiosity. Four of the scale items were: "I would be upset if my child married someone from another religious faith," "My religious beliefs are very important to me," "It is important to regularly attend religious services," and "I would not marry someone who is from a different religious background than me." Participants indicated their agreement or disagreement with these items on separate 7-point rating scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). In addition, participants answered two items, "How religious do you think of yourself?" and "How important is religion in your life?" on scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very*); and "How often do you attend religious services?" on a scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*). Several items were modeled after those used by McIntosh, Silver, and Wortman (1993). All were embedded among numerous, unrelated filler items (e.g., "I can be comfortable with nearly all kinds of people."). The religiosity scale had good internal reliability for our sample (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$, mean inter-item correlation = .49).

Procedure

The study was conducted in two sessions. During Session 1, participants completed the demographic questionnaire and the religiosity measure along with numerous other unrelated questionnaires submitted by other experimenters in the Department of Psychology. For Session 2, approximately equal numbers of men and women who had participated in Session 1 were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions. In noninteracting, mixed-gender and mixed-condition groups of approximately 10 to 20, these participants received instructions, then individually read the case scenario and completed the rating scales and victim allegation questionnaire at their own pace. When finished, participants were debriefed and excused.

Because Session 1 included many questionnaires, occurred from 1 to 3 months before Session 2, and participants were not informed that Sessions 1 and 2 were related, participants were unable to connect the religiosity questionnaire with the mock-jury task. This eliminated the possibility of the questionnaire influencing participants' decision-making, or vice versa.

RESULTS

We now present analyses of (a) guilt and credibility judgments; (b) recall of and belief in specific victim allegations; and (c) the relation between jurors' religiosity and case judgments.

Table 1. Mean Case Judgments as a Function of Juror Gender, Abuse Type, and Victim Age

Abuse Type	Juror Gender				Mean
	Men		Women		
	Child	Adult	Child	Adult	
Guilt					
Satanic	.37	.37	.61	.59	.49
Non-satanic	.48	.43	.70	.57	.54
Degree of guilt					
Satanic	3.10	3.20	3.91	3.84	3.54
Non-satanic	3.46	3.29	4.39	3.92	3.76
Defendant credibility					
Satanic	3.42	2.91	2.94	2.73	3.00
Non-satanic	3.55	3.21	2.55	2.95	3.06
Victim credibility					
Satanic	3.73	3.71	4.36	4.52	4.10
Non-satanic	4.07	3.97	4.76	4.50	4.33

Note. For all measures, only the main effects of juror gender are significant, all F s (1, \geq 233) \geq 9.31, $ps < .01$.

Guilt and Credibility Judgments

Preliminary t -tests revealed no significant differences between jurors' perceptions of the male and female defendants' guilt (M s = .52 and .52, $t[232] = .58$), degree-of-guilt (M s = 3.64 and 3.63, $t[231] = .45$), or credibility (M s = 3.01 and 3.06, $t[234] = 1.05$), respectively, nor would one expect a difference because both were accused of exactly the same crime and gave the same testimony. Therefore, we averaged across the male and female defendants' ratings to create defendant guilt, degree-of-guilt, and credibility measures.

We conducted separate 2 (victim age: child or adult) \times 2 (abuse type: satanic ritual or nonsatanic) \times 2 (juror gender) analyses of variance (ANOVAs) on guilt and degree-of-guilt judgments. As predicted, there were significant main effects of juror gender for both judgments: Compared to men, women were more likely to judge the defendants to be guilty (M s = .61 for guilt and 4.00 for degree-of-guilt) than were men (M s = .41 for guilt and 3.26 for degree-of-guilt), F s (1, 227) \geq 10.27, $ps > .01$ (see Table 1). There were no other significant main effects or interactions, all F s \leq 1.15.

Two similar ANOVAs also revealed significant main effects of juror gender on witness credibility judgments (see Table 1). Specifically, women perceived the victim to be significantly more credible ($M = 4.53$) than did men ($M = 3.87$), $F(1, 234) = 13.42$, $p < .001$. Women also considered the defendants to be less credible ($M = 2.80$) than did men ($M = 3.27$), $F(1, 233) = 9.31$, $p < .01$. There were no other significant main effects or interactions, all F s \leq 2.85.

Thus, like Schutte (1994), we found no statistically significant differences in judgments as a function of case type: Jurors were as likely to believe the witnesses and vote guilty when the case involved satanic allegations as when it did not. Further, we replicated gender differences found in the literature on jurors' perceptions of nonsatanic sexual abuse. However, we found no significant effects associated with victim age.

Victim Allegation Ratings

As shown in Table 2, there were two types of victim allegations that participants could have reported on the Victim Allegation Questionnaire: "common allegations" and "condition-specific allegations." The label common allegations refers to the five allegations (e.g., children playing the

Table 2. Percentage of Mock Jurors Who Remembered Each Allegation and the Mean Believability Judgments for Those Who Remembered

Specific Claims	% Who Remembered	Belief Rating
Common Allegations ($N = 243$)	$M = 53.1$	4.04
Children playing the "Naked Game"	56.8	4.38
Children dancing around naked	34.6	4.06
Children involved in pornography	66.3	3.96
Sex between children and adults	79.8	3.74
Children being threatened to keep the events secret	28.0	4.93
Condition-specific Allegations ($N = 243$)	$M = 17.0$	3.33
Non-satanic ($N = 119$)	$M = 9.5$	3.86
Adults making references to movie stars	7.6	3.75
Adults wearing movie star clothes	16.0	3.82
Adults singing songs	5.0	4.17
Satanic ($N = 124$)	$M = 24.2$	3.12
Adults making references to the devil	7.3	3.00
Adults wearing scary black robes	45.2	3.11
Adults chanting around candles	20.2	3.28

Note. Belief in allegations ranged from 1 (*not at all believable*) to 6 (*extremely believable*).

Naked Game, children dancing naked, children involved in pornography) that were alleged by the victim in both of the abuse-type conditions (satanic ritual and nonsatanic). Thus, these five allegations were common to both experimental conditions. In contrast, three condition-specific allegations were parallel, but different, across the two abuse-type conditions. Specifically, in the nonsatanic condition, the victim alleged that adults (a) made references to movie stars; (b) wore movie star clothes; and (c) sang songs. In the satanic ritual condition, the victim alleged that adults (a) made references to the devil; (b) wore black robes; and (c) chanted around a circle of candles. (Making references to movie stars is parallel to making references to the devil, and so on.)

Recall. We first explored whether there was a difference in the memorability of common and condition-specific allegations, which might indicate a difference in salience. Specifically, we calculated the percentage of participants who recalled each allegation. For example, as shown on Table 2, 56.8% of the mock jurors recalled that children supposedly played the "Naked Game." Then, we averaged across the five common allegations and, separately, across the three condition-specific allegations. Using a within-subjects t -test, we compared the mean percentage of recall across the five common details (53.1%) to the mean percentage of recall across the condition-specific details (collapsed across satanic and nonsatanic categories) (17.0%). Common allegations were significantly more likely to have been remembered than condition-specific allegations, $t(242) = 18.94, p < .001$, suggesting that condition-specific details were generally considered to be more peripheral aspects of the victim's allegations.

Next, we conducted a between-subjects t -test to determine whether satanic condition-specific allegations were any more or less likely to be remembered than nonsatanic condition-specific allegations. As shown on Table 2, jurors who read the nonsatanic scenario were less likely to recall the condition-specific allegations (e.g., adults wearing movie star clothes) ($M = 9.5\%$) than their counterparts in the satanic ritual condition were to remember the condition-specific allegations (e.g., adults wearing black robes) ($M = 24.2\%$), $t(241) = 4.72, p < .001$. Thus, it appears that the satanic elements were more salient and memorable than the corresponding nonsatanic ("movie star") details.

Believability. Were all of the victim's allegations equally likely to be believed by the jurors? First, we conducted a between-subjects t -test on the mean level of jurors' belief in the condition-specific

Table 3. Correlations Between Religiosity Scale Scores and Case Judgments as a Function of Abuse Type

Judgments	Abuse type	
	Satanic	Non-satanic
Guilt	.15*	.11
Degree of guilt	.12	.13
Defendant credibility	-.19*	-.17
Victim credibility	.23**	.09

* $p < .05$, one-tailed; ** $p < .01$, one-tailed.

allegations as a function of whether the jurors were in the satanic or nonsatanic condition (i.e., comparing belief in "movie star" allegations to belief in the "satanic" allegations). Jurors in the nonsatanic condition found the "movie star" allegations to be significantly more believable ($M = 3.86$) than their counterparts in the satanic ritual condition found the satanic elements to be ($M = 3.12$), $t(85) = 2.11$, $p < .05$ (see Table 2).

Next, we conducted within-subjects comparisons using only the satanic-condition jurors to explore how believable they thought the condition-specific allegations were relative to the common allegations. They rated the common allegations as significantly more believable ($M = 3.98$) than the condition-specific satanic allegations ($M = 3.12$), $t(61) = 6.05$, $p < .001$. Did their skepticism of the satanic allegations taint their perceptions of the common abuse allegations relative to the jurors in the nonsatanic condition? We compared, between subjects, the mean belief ratings for common allegations as a function of abuse-type condition. There was no significant difference between the common-allegation belief ratings of the jurors in the satanic ritual condition ($M = 3.91$) and those in the nonsatanic condition ($M = 4.18$), $t(222) = 1.46$, *ns*.

Thus, our failure to find differences in jurors' credibility and guilt judgments between satanic and nonsatanic conditions does not necessarily indicate that jurors are as likely to believe satanic as nonsatanic abuse allegations. Instead, jurors who hear satanic ritual allegations appear to be able to discount the satanic allegations somewhat (though not wholly) while maintaining more belief in the nonsatanic sexual abuse allegations, an important finding we revisit in the discussion.

The Relation of Religiosity to Judgments and Beliefs

Finally, we explored the relation between mock jurors' religiosity and their reactions to the case. Because we expected that religiosity would be related to case judgments in the satanic ritual but not the nonsatanic condition, we conducted analyses for the jurors in each abuse-type condition separately.

Rather than dividing the sample into high and low religiosity groups, we utilized the entire range of religiosity scale scores in correlational analyses, arguably a more sensitive approach. First, we computed correlations between religiosity scale scores and case judgments (see Table 3). As predicted, religiosity was not significantly related to judgments when the allegations were nonsatanic. But when the case included satanic ritual elements, religiosity scores were significantly correlated with guilt judgments and perceptions of the victim's and defendants' credibility in the satanic ritual condition: The more religious the juror, the more likely he or she was to vote guilty, believe the victim, and distrust the defendants. Even so, correlations were modest. The relation between religiosity and victim credibility was the strongest.

Second, we examined the relation between juror religiosity and, separately, recall of and belief in the specific allegations made by the victim. Religiosity was not significantly correlated with recall of common or condition-specific allegations, either for jurors in the satanic ritual or

nonsatanic condition (all $r_s \leq .12$). Religiosity was also unrelated to belief in the common allegations of sexual abuse for jurors in both the satanic ritual ($r = .12$) and the nonsatanic ($r = .08$) conditions. However, as we predicted, for jurors in the satanic ritual condition, religiosity was significantly correlated with belief in condition-specific (satanic) allegations: Highly religious jurors were more likely to believe the satanic allegations than were less religious jurors ($r = .33$, $p < .01$). For jurors in the nonsatanic condition, there was no significant correlation between religiosity and belief in condition-specific (nonsatanic or "movie star") allegations ($r = .06$).

Finally, in Schutte's (1994) study, gender interacted with religiosity to affect guilt verdicts: Less religious women were more likely than less religious men to vote guilty; more religious men and women did not differ in their guilt judgments. To test for the presence of significant interactions between religiosity and gender in our data, we conducted multiple regression analyses using gender, religiosity, and the interaction of the two to predict the main dependent variables. Separate regression analyses were conducted for jurors in the satanic ritual condition and jurors in the nonsatanic condition. There were no significant interactions of gender and religiosity for jurors in either condition for guilt, degree of guilt, or victim or defendant credibility, $t_s(\geq 109) \leq 1.03$, standardized betas $\leq .32$, or for believability of common or condition-specific allegations, $t_s(\geq 21) \leq .89$, standardized betas $\leq .40$.

DISCUSSION

The Believability of Satanic Ritual Abuse Allegations

Taking into account only our findings concerning guilt and credibility judgments, it would appear that jurors are as likely to believe allegations of sexual abuse involving occult and ritualistic activities as nonsatanic sexual abuse allegations, regardless of the age of the alleged victim. A similar conclusion would follow from the findings of Schutte (1994). However, by analyzing jurors' memory for and belief in the victim's specific allegations, we illustrated the more complex nature of jurors' reactions to satanic ritual abuse cases. Specifically, jurors may not automatically discount sexual abuse allegations when they contain unusual or bizarre claims such as those involved in satanic ritual abuse cases. But they do not necessarily accept the bizarre claims either. In our comparisons of satanic and nonsatanic condition-specific allegations, we found that participants were more likely to recall satanic ritual abuse allegations than the parallel nonsatanic allegations, suggesting that satanic ritual details are particularly salient or memorable. Even so, participants found satanic ritual allegations to be somewhat less believable than nonsatanic allegations. Our results support prosecution fears that fantastic details may be discounted by jurors; however, our findings also suggest that jurors may set aside their skepticism of satanic ritual allegations and make judgments in child abuse cases based on their perceptions of the credibility of the nonsatanic allegations of harm.

Is this strategy an accurate one for assessing ritual abuse claims? Research has yet to provide an answer to this question. There may be many explanations for a satanic ritual abuse allegation. The entire allegation may be true, representing actual experiences of the victim. Or, the entire allegation may be false, suggested to the child or adult reporter by the media, parents, forensic interviewers, or therapists. Such situations have been documented (Corwin, 1996; Weir & Wheatcroft, 1995). Alternatively, part of the allegations may be true, and part may be false; for example, sexual or physical maltreatment may have actually occurred, but the victim may embellish the disclosure of that abuse with inflated, bizarre details that are false. What could explain the false ritual details? The bizarre details could be suggested by a well meaning, but overzealous adult interviewer or by way of media exposure (Coons, 1994; Goodman, Quas, Bottoms, Qin, Shaver, Orcutt, & Shapiro, in press). The trauma of the real abuse may psychologically affect a victim in a way that leaves

him or her more open to suggestions and to reporting distortions in the story (Ganaway, 1989). The perpetrators of the crime may have staged events to ensure that the victim would report implausible details and not be believed (Finkelhor et al., 1988; Lanning, 1989, 1992). The victim may have exaggerated the claim to gain sympathy or approval from listeners or may have misunderstood the actual events (see Everson, 1997, and Dalenberg, 1996, for more extensive discussions of such explanations). We cannot know which is a more likely explanation without further research and careful investigation of actual cases, although research suggests that it is unlikely that most satanic ritual cases are wholly true (Bottoms et al., 1996). In our opinion, all possibilities have probably occurred. Thus, in some cases, it may be an accurate strategy to carefully consider each of a child's allegations, and not automatically discount an entire abuse allegation because of exaggerated details. As the number of fantastic details in a disclosure increases and the amount of available corroborating evidence decreases, however, skepticism about the entire allegation may be warranted.

Factors Affecting Belief

Surprisingly, we found no significant effects associated with the age of the alleged victim. In contrast to the findings of Golding and colleagues (1995), participants were as likely to believe the allegations of an adult survivor who reported abuse that occurred 25 years earlier, as they were to believe a child victim. This also stands in contrast to previous findings that jurors have a tendency to find younger victims of nonritual sexual abuse to be more naive, and thus, more credible than an adult victim (Bottoms & Goodman, 1994, Experiment 1). Age differences are not always found in the literature, however. For example, Bottoms and Goodman (1994, Experiment 2) found no differences in the perceived credibility of 6-, 10-, and 14-year-old victims. Thus, age may not always affect jurors' judgments, but when it does, it is likely to be in the direction of younger victims being particularly credible. More research is needed to determine the circumstances under which age will affect jurors' perceptions of victims' allegations.

We found interesting individual differences in perceptions of satanic ritual abuse allegations. Across satanic and nonsatanic cases, compared to women, men found the defendants to be more credible and less likely to be guilty, and the victim to be less credible. Thus, gender differences found in recent research on jurors' perceptions of nonritual child sexual abuse allegations generalize to cases involving ritual abuse allegations. Bottoms (1993) investigated the underlying causes of such gender differences, finding that they may be explained in part by gender differences in empathy for child victims and in attitudes toward child sexual abuse and toward children's believability in general.

Also, as we predicted, religiosity was related to belief in satanic ritual abuse allegations: Religious individuals were more likely than less religious individuals to believe the satanic ritual abuse claims. Further research is necessary to fully explain this relation. It is possible that religious individuals may know more about Satan, satanic practices, and ritual abuse allegations than others, having learned of them through religious services, the Bible, prayer groups, religious media, and so forth (Bottoms & Davis, 1997). Because religious sources do not often offer skeptical perspectives of satanic abuse claims (but see Passantino, Passantino, & Trott, 1990 for an exception), religious individuals may also be more believing of ritual abuse. Thus, individuals who share culturally sanctioned beliefs in supernatural religious forces may find it more plausible than others that satanic groups focus their efforts on destroying children and are a serious threat to society.

Of course, there are other individual difference factors we failed to measure that may affect reactions to satanic ritual abuse cases. For example, as we just mentioned, pre-existing beliefs or knowledge about ritual abuse may affect perceptions of ritual cases. Popular press books and magazine articles, television specials, and high profile cases have served to bring the issue of satanic ritual abuse to the general public. Does differential exposure to such information affect

judgments? Individual differences in attitudes toward the occult or paranormal, and beliefs about children's credibility and ability to fabricate fantasy stories may be other factors that influence decisions in ritual cases. Future researchers would do well to explore such individual variables.

Caveats

There are several methodological points that should be weighed in considering the generalizability of our data. Because it is legally impossible in nearly all jurisdictions to study the behavior of real juries, our study has some of the same limitations as many mock-jury experiments: (a) We used students posing as jurors rather than community-member jurors hearing an actual case; (b) we used a written case scenario as the trial stimulus rather than more realistic alternatives; and (c) we did not allow our mock jurors to deliberate. For such reasons, experimental jury studies cannot fully duplicate the experience of serving on a real jury (Diamond, in press; Weiten & Diamond, 1980). Even so, there are several justifications for using the simulated jury paradigm and for having confidence in our findings. The primary justification is that our method allows us to have the experimental control necessary to draw cause and effect conclusions about our variables. Further, some studies have shown that similar mock trial outcomes are found regardless of whether participants are community jurors or student jurors (Cutler, Penrod, & Dexter, 1990; Isquith, 1991), or whether stimuli are written scenarios or more realistic videotaped stimuli (Bottoms & Goodman, 1994; Goodman, Golding, & Haith, 1984; Scheiner, 1988). Finally, following deliberations, jury verdicts are often likely to be the same as the predeliberation verdict preference of the majority of jurors (Kalven & Zeisel, 1966; Sandys & Dillehay, 1995). Thus, we believe our results can be useful in understanding actual jurors' reactions to ritual child abuse cases. We believe they can also be useful in understanding how adults in general, not just jurors, react to ritual abuse cases.

CONCLUSION

Over the past decade, there has been an increase in the number of trials involving allegations of satanic ritual child abuse. These cases are challenging at best. As researchers, practitioners, and legal professionals struggle to determine whether ritual claims are valid or not, so do lay persons—as jurors in the legal forum. The results of our investigation give important insight into jurors' reactions to satanic ritual abuse allegations, insights that should be of value to all parties involved in the adjudication of ritual child abuse cases.

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RÉSUMÉ

Objectif: On compte parmi les procès d'agressions sexuelles qui attirent le plus de publicité, ceux qui ont porté sur des accusations de rituels bizarres et sataniques. Pourtant il existe peu de renseignements sur la façon dont les membre d'un jury réagissent à ces allégations. Cette étude s'est penchée sur la façon dont la présence ou l'absence d'allégations de rituels sataniques influencent les jugements des jurés vis-à-vis de la culpabilité de l'accusé et la crédibilité des témoins.

Méthode: Dans un procès simulé, 243 jurés ont jugé un cas d'allégations d'agressions sexuelles de la part d'un enfant de 5 ans, puis d'un adulte de 30 ans qui rapportait une agression durant son enfance. On manipula la présence ou l'absence des allégations de rituels sataniques dans les deux cas. La dévotion religieuse des jurés a été prise en compte.

Résultats: Bien que les jurés furent moins portés à croire les allégations de rituels sataniques que d'autres types de mauvais traitements, ils étaient portés à trouver l'accusé coupable et à croire la victime, peu importe s'il y avait rituels sataniques ou non. L'âge de la victime n'était pas un facteur dans les jugements rendus, cependant les décisions se sont avérées d'une grande variance individuelle. Lorsque les allégations portaient sur des rituels sataniques, les jurés à tendance religieuse étaient plus aptes à croire les victimes. De plus, dans tous les cas, les femmes étaient plus aptes à croire les victimes.

Conclusions: Nos constats suggèrent que les jurés (surtout quand ils sont moins dévots) font peu de cas des détails fort bizarres. Cependant, les jurés mettront de côté leur scepticisme vis-à-vis des rituels sataniques et porteront jugement sur les cas d'abus sexuels des enfants selon qu'ils considèrent vraisemblables les allégations de tort subi dans les cas où il n'y avait pas eu de rituels sataniques. Ce processus décisionnel est-il valable, demeure une question empirique.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Algunos de los procesos sobre abuso sexual infantil de este siglo más conocidos públicamente, han implicado acusaciones extrañas de abusos de ritual satánico. Sin embargo, se conoce poco acerca de las reacciones de los miembros de los jurados con respecto a las acusaciones de abuso ritual. En esta investigación se ha estudiado cómo las sentencias del jurado sobre la culpa del acusado y sobre la credibilidad del testigo están afectadas por la presencia o ausencia de acusaciones de abuso ritual satánico.

Método: Se evaluaron las sentencias de 243 sujetos, actuando como jurados simulados, sobre un supuesto caso con acusaciones de abuso sexual infantil realizadas por un niño de 5 años o por un adulto de 30 años. La presencia o ausencia

de acusaciones de abuso con ritual satánico fueron manipuladas para diferentes grupos de sujetos. Se evaluó también la religiosidad de los sujetos.

Resultados: A pesar de que los jurados tenían una menor tendencia a creer las acusaciones de ritual satánico que otros detalles del caso, se produjo una tendencia similar a votar culpable y a creer a la víctima, tanto en los casos considerados como satánicos como los no satánicos. La edad de la víctima no tuvo un efecto significativo en las sentencias de los jurados simulados, pero se produjeron importantes diferencias individuales en las decisiones: cuando las acusaciones implicaron abuso ritual satánico, los jurados más religiosos tenían una mayor tendencia que los menos religiosos a creer a la víctima. Además, en todas las condiciones, las mujeres pronunciaron más sentencias a favor de la víctima que los varones.

Conclusiones: Estos resultados sugieren que los detalles muy extraños pueden no ser tenidos en cuenta por los miembros del jurado (especialmente los de menor religiosidad). Pero los miembros del jurado pueden dejar de lado su escepticismo sobre los detalles sobre el ritual satánico y emitir sentencias acerca de casos de abuso sexual infantil basadas en sus percepciones de la credibilidad de las acusaciones de agresiones no satánicas. La cuestión de si ésta es o no una aproximación adecuada para la toma de decisiones en estos casos, permanece como una cuestión empírica.