

of complex trauma (ITCT). Although these are recognized forms of trauma treatments, there was very little discussion as to why these particular modalities might be more appropriate for individuals with disabilities or why other commonly used treatments, such as prolonged exposure therapy, may not be appropriate. Unfortunately, this limitation is prevalent throughout most of the book. Although developmental disabilities are the stated focus of the text, there is little in-depth discussion on the research base to support the use of these techniques in individuals with disabilities. Further, other than a few very basic recommendations (e.g., use language that can be understood, being mindful of sensory input limitations, and consider using cognitive testing or speech therapy evaluation results to better tailor approach), there is very little guidance provided to the reader on how these treatment approaches are to be modified specifically for this population. There are sections that discuss developmental disabilities, but they are often cursory in nature, akin to what may be found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition.

In summary, this is a basic cognitive behavioral treatment workbook. Future editions of the book may benefit from further developing sections describing the research base supporting the content and specific applications of targeted treatment modalities for this population. It may be an appropriate initial foray for trainees, but more seasoned forensic psychiatrists will likely find this book too basic.

Ryan C. W. Hall, MD  
Lake Mary, Florida

Disclosures of financial or other potential conflicts of interest: None.

DOI:10.29158/JAAPL.003934-20

## **Unbelievable: Myths and Realities of Sexual Assault**

Directed by Lisa Cholodenko, Michael Dinner, and Susannah Grant. Written by Susannah Grant, Michael Chabon, Ayelet Waldman, Jennifer Schuur, and Becky Mode. Released: September 13, 2019.

*Unbelievable*, an eight-episode miniseries on Netflix, dramatizes a true story of police insistence that a young woman's report of a stranger rape at knife-

point was fabricated. The series broadens to two simultaneous stories from different viewpoints that eventually intersect, similar to a 2015 article about a case of stranger rape in Lynnwood, Washington, that occurred in 2009.<sup>1</sup>

"An 18-year old said she was attacked at knife-point. Then she said she made it up. That's where our story begins." is the subtitle of the Pulitzer prize-winning ProPublica article.<sup>1</sup> On February 26, 2016, "This American Life" published an episode based on this article, called *The Anatomy of Doubt*,<sup>2</sup> which begins by explaining the differences between two different police departments in handling similar cases of stranger rape. In contrast, the Netflix series begins with a frightened and shaken Marie Adler (played by Kaitlyn Dever), her foster mother, and the police the morning after she was attacked in the bedroom of a new apartment for young adults aging out of foster care.

At first the police consider her story and interview her. She describes the attack in detail. He wore a mask so she could not describe his face. She remembered he wore a gray sweater. Then, a supervising officer conducts another interview. And then there's the hospital interview ("we need it for our records") and a rape kit. On the fourth time she was asked to repeat her story, she said it was a gray hoodie, maybe not a sweater. While asked about details by a cold male detective, she escapes to a beach in her head. She comes back to the aftermath of her attack and how she was able to cut off the shoelaces (her own) he used to tie her hands. She is then asked by the detective to write a statement, which would require her to focus on the attack in detail a fifth time. He lets her take the statement home to complete later. This series of scenes imply that slight changes in memory over the course of many evaluations indicate untruth.

Marie is initially comforted by friends and peers, but eventually one of her former foster mothers decides that Marie's behavior is not conforming to her own expectations of victimhood and goes to the police with her doubts. Marie has acted out before with "look at me behavior," she reports. Evidence is scarce, and police want to close their case. The doubt spreads like contagion throughout Marie's life. The police ask for the victim's child protective services file. Under pressure, Marie recants her report. The police eventually decide to press charges against her for filing a false report, after coercing her to take back her statement. Eventually, Marie, with the assistance

of counsel, accepts a plea bargain and agrees to treatment. Although everyone in her life doubts her, seeing the story through Marie's eyes leaves little room for the viewer to doubt her.

Two years later in Golden, Colorado, another young woman reports a similar attack to a compassionate detective with a very different interview style named Karen Duvall (played by Merritt Wever). Karen Duvall's character is based on the detective described in the ProPublica article, Stacey Galbraith. Unlike the detectives in Marie's case, Detective Duvall believes the young woman's story. She is affected by it and later tells her husband, also a police officer. He told her they have a similar case in his department.

Detective Duvall calls that department and eventually partners with another, more experienced female detective, Detective Grace Rasmussen, gracefully played by Toni Collette. Her character is based on Sergeant Edna Hendershot, portrayed in the ProPublica article. Although these two strong women have a rocky start, rather than compete with each other, they form a bond and ultimately work together to track down the serial rapist. When they do, he has photos that confirm Marie's rape for the viewer, and that her fragmented memories were real.

Research demonstrates that at least 80 percent of sexual assaults are never reported to the police.<sup>3</sup> False reports of sexual assault are quite rare, estimated to make up two to 10 percent of all such reports.<sup>4</sup> Perpetrators often seek out vulnerable victims who are seen to lack credibility because they don't fit the stereotypes of rape myths, including those who are transgender, homeless, in the sex trade, runaways, and those with substance use disorders or with physical or mental disabilities.<sup>3</sup> (In Marie's case, she had been raped before and had spent most of her life in the foster system.) This leads to higher victimization rates in these populations, and it can also lead to serial offending occurring unchecked. In fact, Archambault and Lonsway note, "Estimates suggest that anyone who commits a forcible rape has less than a three percent chance of being convicted and incarcerated for it" (Ref. 3, p 6).

The interweaving stories told in the Netflix series illustrate the importance of believing victims (often female) and the potentially extreme consequences of dismissing them. Because Marie Adler was not believed, a serial rapist remained free and many more women were raped. Trauma can manifest differently

in different people, especially the trauma of rape. It is important to understand that sometimes there will appear to be inconsistencies in a trauma survivor's story. Dissociation can affect how someone behaves and remembers after a traumatic event. Marie Adler found comfort in imagining the beach where no one could touch her. She wanted everything to be the same as if it never happened, including finding the exact same sheets to replace the ones the rapist ruined.

*Unbelievable* portrays important stories for forensic psychiatrists dealing with the effects of trauma, reactions to trauma, and dissociation. There is no universal response to being sexually assaulted. *Unbelievable* deals with society's unfounded beliefs of how a rape victim is supposed to act and the consequences of not believing a victim of trauma. The series also shows the difference empathy can make when an officer interviews a victim, similar to a forensic psychiatric evaluation in which an evaluatee may be incorrectly seen as malingering when they are just not able to open up and reveal what is really going on. Perhaps *Unbelievable* will also help the lay public understand some reasons why victims may not report being raped (such as thinking that the police will not believe them or help them) and remind forensic psychiatrists about topics to explain, and myths to dispel, with police, judges, and juries.

## References

1. Miller TC, Armstrong K: An unbelievable story of rape. ProPublica and The Marshall Project. December 16, 2015 Available at: <https://www.propublica.org/article/false-rape-accusations-an-unbelievable-story>. Accessed November 29, 2019
2. The Anatomy of Doubt. This American Life. February 26, 2016. Available at: <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/581/anatomy-of-doubt>. Accessed January 13, 2020
3. Archambault J, Lonsway K. Reporting methods for sexual assault cases. End Violence Against Women International. 2018. Available at: <https://www.evawintl.org/library/documentlibraryhandler.ashx?id=35>. Accessed January 13, 2020
4. National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2012. False reporting overview. Available at: [https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications\\_nsvrc\\_overview\\_false-reporting.pdf](https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications_nsvrc_overview_false-reporting.pdf). Accessed January 13, 2020

Karen B. Rosenbaum, MD  
New York, New York  
Joshua B. Friedman, MD, PhD  
Susan Hatters Friedman, MD  
Cleveland, Ohio

Disclosures of financial or other potential conflicts of interest: None.

DOI:10.29158/JAAPL.003935-20