

acters have been thrown into situations not of their design. So too, litigants and prisoners have narratives, and we have an ethics duty to regard them with respect. In a sense, most of the individuals we assess are far from our trees. The film is a reminder to be open to the diversity of human experience, permitting us to translate subjective reality into objective information.

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The Umbrella Academy

Netflix series, first aired February 15, 2019 (Season 1, 10 episodes)

The Netflix series *The Umbrella Academy*, based on the Eisner-winning comic book series written by Gerard Way (also co-founder and lead vocalist for the band *My Chemical Romance*) and illustrated by Gabriel Bá, begins with a mystery. In 1989, a svelte young Russian woman unexpectedly gives birth in a swimming pool after giving her crush a chaste peck on the cheek. Forty-three babies were born on that day, and none of their mothers had shown any signs of pregnancy leading up to their births. Enter Sir Reginald Hargreeves (aka The Monocle), scientist and rich eccentric, who “adopts” seven of the 43 infants to raise as his own. The audience soon learns that six of the seven Hargreeves children are super-powered. Sir Reginald’s intention is to train his “Umbrella Academy” of special children to save the world; as a byproduct, however, they become emotionally stunted adults struggling to form healthy identities and relationships. On the first episode of the show, the siblings reunite as adults following the death of Sir Reginald.

There are many fascinating characters in *The Umbrella Academy*. Sir Reginald is emotionally detached and devoid of any actual parenting skills. His closest confidant, a talking chimpanzee called Pogo, demonstrates more capacity to nurture than he does. To meet the practical and emotional needs of his adopted family, Sir Reginald creates an android “Mom” (Grace Hargreeves). The Hargreeves children include:

Number 1/Luther: leader of the siblings, loyal to dad, possesses exceptional strength;

Number 2/Diego: knife thrower, vigilante, does not like authority;

Number 3/Allison: movie star, mom, has the power of persuasion;

Number 4/Klaus: chemically dependent, traumatized, can hear the dead;

Number 5: nameless, traveler through time and space, assassin;

Number 6/Ben: reluctant tentacle monster, deceased; and

Number 7/Vanya: “no discernable talents,” medicated, mediocre violinist and music teacher, author of *Extra-Ordinary: My Life as Number Seven*.

The Umbrella Academy is full of potential discussion or teaching topics for psychiatrists, forensic or otherwise. Hours could be spent reflecting on the psychological impact of growing up with a cold, distant, and demanding father. Klaus and Leonard could be used to demonstrate how childhood trauma can produce different kinds of pathology. Entire seminars on addiction could be taught using clips of Klaus. Professionals could debate the ethics of Allison using her persuasive power (or not) in different contexts. From a forensic psychiatry standpoint, however, it is Vanya’s journey that is most interesting. Be warned, there are some spoilers ahead.

In the later episodes of *The Umbrella Academy*, the viewers learn that Vanya does, in fact, have powers. Her abilities worried Sir Reginald enough that he started giving her medication that kept her powers in check. As a result, Vanya was excluded from her family’s missions and more. In the wake of Sir Reginald’s death, Vanya forgets to take her medications and feels better. Unnoticed by Vanya, at least at first, her powers begin to emerge. Over time, Vanya’s powers

and her knowledge of them evolve, and she becomes both more purposeful and skillful at using her abilities. Vanya's burgeoning awareness of her powers has several parallels to the insight that individuals with severe mental illness have regarding their psychiatric symptoms.

Vanya's superpower awakening begins benignly enough and without her realization. The viewing audience gets visual glimpses of her powers, but Vanya is blind to them. She is also unaware that her powers help her advance in her music career. When a romantic relationship becomes intimate for the first time, the viewers see the white light visual representation of Vanya's powers that is used with increasing frequency throughout the series. Vanya eventually becomes fully aware of what she is capable of, but that awareness waxes and wanes with the plot twists of the series.

For example, in episode seven, Vanya unintentionally unleashes her powers in a destructive way to protect someone she loves, leading to injuries and even death. If Vanya's powers are like a mental illness, did that illness in this instance render Vanya unable to conform her conduct to the requirements of the law? Did she know at the time of the act she was doing something wrong?

With only three episodes left, Vanya's awareness and control of her powers increase, but she would still rather be practicing her violin than honing her ability. When one of the siblings confronts Vanya with troubling information, Vanya gets insight into a difficult period from her childhood and lashes out at the sibling with her power, resulting in a grave injury that she immediately apologizes for. At this point in the story, Vanya knows very well the deadly potential of her powers (i.e., her "mental illness") and has willfully declined to perfect them (akin to purposeful medication nonadherence), but she has not yet progressed from negligently and recklessly to knowingly and purposefully.

The final episodes of the first season show the culmination of Vanya's transformation from fragile loner to . . . something else. She uses her powers knowingly, purposefully, and without regret to punish perceived wrongs inflicted upon her, both past and present. She is seemingly in control of her powers. Vanya's final show of power leaves some ambiguity regarding her specific intent regarding the ultimate outcome of her unleashed ability.

Not infrequently in forensic psychiatry, evaluators are asked to assess defendants with mental illness who commit crimes while noncompliant with their medications. Often, evaluators consider what role the noncompliance played in their level of symptomatology. Some evaluatees are aware that, even prior to offending, failure to take their medications could result in illness exacerbation, which could contribute to negative consequences, such as unlawful behavior. Other evaluatees lack knowledge, awareness, or insight into relationships between treatment, illness, and behavior. Some individuals with severe mental illness do not even know or believe they have an illness.

If Vanya's ability can be thought of as akin to a serious mental illness, can Vanya be held criminally responsible for something she had no knowledge of and no ability to control? Does she have a valid affirmative insanity defense for some of her actions? The affirmative defense of insanity differs from state to state. All jurisdictions that permit insanity defenses have a cognitive test as part of their statutes, with fewer jurisdictions also having a volitional component. Cognitive tests for insanity also differ but generally focus on the impact of mental illness on a person's ability to know, appreciate or understand the wrongfulness or criminality of their act(s).

Viewers are also left to consider what Vanya's *mens rea* was as she progressed from "extra-ordinary" Number 7 to super-powered human. *Mens rea* is Latin for "guilty mind," and it refers to the state of mind that is statutorily required to convict an individual of a specific crime, excluding strict liability crimes. There are four levels of *mens rea*: acting purposefully, knowingly, recklessly, and negligently. Purposefully and knowingly are necessary for specific-intent crimes like assault. In some jurisdictions, forensic psychiatry evaluators are asked to assess a defendant's ability to form the intent necessary to be legally responsible for a specific intent crime. Mental illness symptoms, whether they are new-onset, an exacerbation, or secondary to treatment nonadherence, can affect an individual's *mens rea*.

The Umbrella Academy streaming on Netflix is a highly entertaining and thought-provoking comic book adaptation with hints of *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001 – prodigy siblings, insensitive father), *The Watchmen* (2009 – another comic book adaptation, super-powered vigilantes), Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* in its esthetics (2004, orphaned siblings and a scheming guardian), and even a trace of

Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994 – philosophical hitmen, dancing!). The show utilizes flashbacks, alternate timelines, dance sequences, and even a brief visit to the afterlife to develop both plot and characters. There are many psychiatric themes to unpack and discuss in the series, including an exploration of Vanya Hargreeves' mental state and *mens rea* as she comes into her power. This will make the series particularly appealing to forensic mental health professionals.

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Leaving Neverland: HBO's Controversial Documentary

Directed and produced by Dan Reed. Premiered at the 2019 Sundance Film Festival on January 25, 2019. Broadcast on HBO Network in two parts, March 3–4, 2019.

In this three hour and 56-minute documentary, Dan Reed tells a story through the eyes of two men, Wade Robson (born in Brisbane, Australia) and James Safechuck (born in Simi Valley, California), and their families. Both men assert that they were sexually abused by Michael Jackson when they were boys. The first part of the documentary introduces the story of each man's family of origin and how they met Michael Jackson. Their mothers were also introduced, and each explained their background and the initial positive effect of meeting the superstar. For example, Wade Robson's mother described the anticipation of meeting Michael Jackson for the first time as feeling like something "magical was going to happen." Throughout the documentary, videos of the families and Michael Jackson were interspersed.

There were many commonalities between the two men's stories, including that both families were middle-class (Wade's father had a fruit business and James's father had a rubbish business), and both boys were very talented. Both had older siblings. Both boys were enamored by the idea of Michael Jackson. Wade Robson won a dance competition when he was five, and the first prize was to meet Michael Jackson at a concert in Australia. James Safechuck starred in a

Pepsi commercial with Jackson when he was 10 years old. James Safechuck explained, "How do you explain Michael Jackson? He's larger than life. There's no stars like that now, that kind of mega star."

What is most notable about the documentary is the juxtaposition of Michael Jackson as a larger-than-life star and as an alleged sexual abuser. Wade Robson described that, prior to meeting Michael Jackson, he had practically wall-papered his bedroom walls with images of Michael Jackson when he was four and five years old and watching videos over and over to imitate his dance moves. He described first meeting him as "other worldly" and as if he had been "anointed."

In *Oprah Winfrey Presents: After Neverland*, which aired after the second part of *Leaving Neverland*, Oprah Winfrey emphasized that, regardless of whether the men are to be believed, the documentary is an excellent description of the concept of grooming. She said that over the years, she spent 217 episodes of her show discussing child sexual abuse and the idea of grooming and seduction, but that Dan Reed did in less than four hours what she could not do in 217.¹ Both men described how being seduced made them feel complicit, as if they desired the sexual attention. It was also noted in Oprah Winfrey's special that there was a context of litigation, but that the documentary was focused on grooming and the boys, rather than being focused on Michael Jackson.

Grooming is the seduction stage that child molesters use to gain access to future victims. Bennet and O'Donohue explain that part of the difficulty in clarifying the definition of grooming is that some of the methods used by perpetrators can also be seen in normal adult-child relationships, such as buying them presents or taking them on an outing. They proposed that grooming be defined as "antecedent inappropriate behavior that functions to increase the likelihood of future sexual abuse" (Ref. 2, p 969). Examples of grooming given by Bennet and O'Donohue that were also each reported in the documentary included inappropriately discussing sex, showing pornographic material, inappropriate gift-giving, "inappropriate nonsexual communication with the child" (Ref. 2, p .969) (e.g., telling the child he or she is the only one who understands the adult), inappropriate touching of the child (e.g., excessive hugging, tickling, sitting on lap), bribes for inappropriate contact, inappropriate isolation of the child (i.e., separating the child from family), favoritism