**Fiction as an ally to make journalism more believable:**

**Rape, trauma and secondary victimization in the Netflix miniseries *Unbelievable***

*This article compares the Netflix miniseries 'Unbelievable' (2019) with the journalistic works on which it is based in order to decide how fiction based on real events contributes to the journalistic narrative of sexual abuse. To that end, we accomplish a comparative and interpretative analysis that show who the invented sequences and scenes contribute to show: the trauma and secondary victimization suffered by the victim; how an investigation should be carried out in order to minimise such suffering and dispel rape myths; and the different ways a woman may be the victim of abuse. This is achieved as the fiction allows us to focus on the perspective of the protagonists by showing their characters, feelings, motivation and the consequences for their private lives of both the trauma and the commitment to the victims. Thus, this analysis shows how fiction based on real events can make a story that has been covered by journalism more believable.*

In this era of overexposure to information and distrust of the media, the greatest challenge of journalism is to present reality in a credible and attractive manner. This challenge becomes even greater when the truthfulness of the story to be told is constantly questioned, as occurs with rape cases in which the victim's credibility is often queried. Then journalism needs to be simultaneously truthful and attractive. In such stories, the use of fiction might highlight some key aspects of the narration and may be able to make it more appealing.This is the case of *Unbelievable* (2019), a Netflix miniseries that fictionalizes a real story about rape and second victimization already told by the press. In order to determine how this production contributes to the journalistic narrative it adapts, this paper compares both the fictional and the journalistic pieces that tell Marie's story (this is not her real name), a 18-year-old woman in Washington that reported having been raped.

A man got into her house, raped her and left after taking photographs and threatening to publish them. Her calmness, her past (a victim of abuse and a childhood in foster care) and some inconsistencies in her story made her former foster mothers doubt. One of them shared her suspicions with the detective in charge, who, believing these misgivings to be true, obliged Marie to recant. Although she later tried to retract this statement, the police finally prosecuted her for false reporting. In 2011, two women police detectives in Colorado investigated a case of serial rape. The rapist got into his victims' homes, raped them, took photographs, and made them shower to remove evidence. When he was arrested, they found photographs of his victims; one of them was Marie.

Since the case was solved, journalism and fiction have attempted to tell this story from the victim's perspective in order to fight some rape myths. The firsts to do so were journalists Ken Armstrong and Christian Miller (2015) in the article *An unbelievable story of rape*, which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting in 2016. Then, the podcast *This American Life* made a special called *Anatomy of Doubt* (Ira Glass 2016) and, two years later, Armstrong and Miller (2018) published the extended version of their story in a 304-page book. After these three journalistic works and with the collaboration of their authors, Netflix released the based on real events (it could also be categorized as docudrama) miniseries *Unbelievable*, produced by Susannah Grant (2019). After a journalistic story that was given an award "for a startling examination and exposé of law enforcement's enduring failures to investigate reports of rape properly and to comprehend the traumatic effects on its victims" («T. Christian Miller of ProPublica and Ken Armstrong of The Marshall Project» s. f.), one could wonder how fiction contributes to the fight against rape myths.

It could be argued that the social relevance of the subject forecasts its success and earning power, and that this is reason enough for its production. After all, the series was produced

before the #MeToo movement but released after it, so the audience may have been influenced by the moment we are living in; a moment in which there is a democratic in-depth reflection on sexual equality and violence against women (Jackie Hogan 2021; Júlia Havas and Tanya Horeck 2021). It also could be argued that fictions that narrate real events are the principal source through which many people shape their view of past events that affect current public issues (George F. Custen 1999; Tom W. Hoffer and Richard Alan Nelson 1999), and that this implies that they have a substantial power of influence. Netflix (2019) itself announced that *Unbelievable* had been watched by 32 million people in the first 28 days after its release. However, this power of influence does not mean that fiction has the capacity to change reality by itself: it only "can make a contribution (...) where a climate for change already exists" (Derek Paget 1999: 51).

Hogan (2021) has studied the miniseries' capacity to contest rape myths, and has concluded that it presents rape as "horrifying, brutal, and deeply traumitizing" (13) and secondary victimization as "a gross injustice so firmly institutionalized that it is unthinkingly perpetrated by even the 'good guys'"(13). However, Hogan's article compares the miniseries with previous fictions and not with the journalistic work it is based on. And herein lies the novelty and pertinence of our research, as it compares a work of fiction based on real events with the journalistic work it adapts with trying to determine what the fiction contributes to the understanding of the complex chiaroscuro reality of sexual abuse. This issue becomes even more relevant considering that the journalistic article is exemplary, so the fiction does not attempt to remedy something that was badly done, but rather to add to a story which has already been told with journalistic excellence.

**Rape myths, rape discourse and contemporary culture**

Sexual abuse has always borne the stigma of scepticism, and the fallacies regarding rape mean it is frequently hidden or obscured. These fallacies have been long studied, being Susan Brownmiller (1975) a pioneer, but we consider it worth it to contextualize the discussion. The most usual definition of rape myths is that of Martha R. Burt (1980), who described them as "prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists" (217). These false beliefs may be related to the victim, the rapist or the context. Regarding the victim, it is common to believe they are lying, that they were 'looking for it' or that there is an archetype individual susceptible to sexual abuse. Regarding the rapist, it is either believed that they could not resist an uncontrollable urge or is a psychopath. Finally, regarding the context, rapes are commonly thought to be trivial or inevitable, always occurring in public spaces, and committed by strangers (Burt 1980; Helen Benedict 1992; Kimberley A. Lonsway and Louise F. Fitzgerald 1994; Renae Franiuk, Jennifer L. Seefelt, Sandy L. Cepress and Joseph A. Vandello 2008; «Myths and Facts» 2015).

These generalised beliefs in rape myths lead to a public discourse (in which journalism and fiction take part) about sexual abuse that sometimes impedes a rape being recognised (Martha R. Burt and Rochelle Semmel Albin 1981; Renae Franiuk, Jennifer L. Seefelt, Sandy L. Cepress and Joseph A. Vandello 2008) and tends to blame the victim and to minimise their suffering (Burt 1980; Stacie Merken and Veronika James 2020). It also aggravates the problem of the low percentage of victim reports (David Lisak, Lori Gardinier, Sarah C. Nicksa, and Ashley N. Cote 2010), and spreads the idea that only those who voluntarily run risks are in danger (Benedict 1992; Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1994; Franiuk, Seefelt, and Vandello 2008).

***Rape myths and sexual abuse in the media***

Much research has studied rape as presented in the media and its relationship with rape myths. Frequently, this research analyses the coverage of high profile cases like gang rape (Meenakshi Gigi Durham 2015; Rosemarie Pennington and Jessica Birthisel 2016) or abuse by celebrities, either politicians (Nancy Worthington 2010; Lindsey E. Blumell and Jennifer Huemmer 2017) or élite sportsmen (Franiuk et al. 2008; Deb Waterhouse-Watson 2016). Less frequent are studies that analyse the coverage of acquaintance rapes (John McManus and Lori Dorfman 2005), the language used by the press (Alessia Tranchese 2019; Shahid Ahmad, Shanthi Nadarajan, and Ahmed Shamsul Bahari 2020), coverage on television (Kenneth Dowler 2006) or the victim's viewpoint (Nancy Worthington 2008; Lisa M. Cuklanz 2020)**.**

Although the panorama is changing (Dustin Harp, Josh Grimm, and Jaime Loke 2018; Gabriella Nilsson 2019; Cuklanz 2020), most studies agree that media coverage of rape cases still tends to perpetuate rape myths (Franiuk et al. 2008; Shannon O'Hara 2012; Pennington and Birthisel 2016; Merken and James 2020), which could, among other things, affect people bahavior and way of thinking; influence legal and police procedures; or even create a false security that 'normal people' do not suffer sexual violence or cause it (Franiuk, Seefelt, and Vandello 2008; Tranchese 2019). And one of the main causes for which news perpetuate these rape myths is the predominance of the rapist's viewpoint. When the press focuses on the perpetrator and what they stand to lose instead of giving voice to the victim, there is greater risk of isolating and silencing the victim and the potential empathy of the public is lower (Blumell y Huemmer 2017; Harp, Grimm, and Loke 2018; Cuklanz 2020).

***Rape myths and sexual abuse in fiction***

There are also numerous studies of sexual violence in audiovisual fiction. Some focus on productions about rape from different countries (Tuba Inal 2017; Amanda Spallacci 2019); others broaden their study to rape culture (Indigo Willing 2020) or to the analysis of blockbuster series (Hogan 2021). But rape in fiction seems to be further from rape myths than it is in the media. This is the tendency observed by Lisa M. Cuklanz (1999), who sees two main changes. Firstly, fiction comes closer to reality because it reduces the prevalence of the basic argument (the rapist is a violent stranger attacking the victim outdoors), and includes more stories of acquaintance rapes. Secondly, the author sees a greater presence of the victim's perspective and trauma. Despite these two changes, she finds that masculinity remains at the center of these narratives, especially in detective stories where the inspectors are almost always men.

Many authors after Cuklanz have followed up her research and focused on two points: the rape itself and the victim's trauma. Regarding rape, it looks like the material "needs to be increasingly shocking and graphic for many of us to consider it to be out of the ordinary" (Tara M. Emmers-Sommer, Perry Pauley, Alesia Hanzal, and Laura Triplett 2006: 311). But graphic displays of sexual violence nourish rape discourse (Sarah Projansky 2001), desensitise the audience and contribute to the idea that the victim is partially responsible (Emmers-Sommer et al. 2006). In short: "The pervasiveness of representations of rape naturalizes rape's place in our everyday world, not only as real physical events but also as part of our fantasies, fears, desires and consumptive practices" (Projansky 2001: 3). Contrary to rape scenes, the presentation of the victim's perspective and their trauma help to consolidate their credibility (Lisa M. Cuklanz 1995). Productions that eliminate explicit violence and present images of the victim's trauma, as it happens in *Unbelievable,* mark a change in the

fictional narrative which offers a discourse on rape prioritising the victim's viewpoint and credibility (Spallacci 2019).

**The story of *Unbelievable* as a fictional miniseries**

*Unbelievable* fits perfectly into Netflix's attempt to produce content that goes deeper into gender politics and constitutes a "feminist revision of TV crime drama" (Havas and Horeck 2021: 258). According to Rebecca Campbell and Sheela Raja (1999), who follow J.E. Williams (1984), "[secondary victimization is] a prolonged and compounded consequence of certain crimes; it results from negative, judgmental attitudes (and behaviors) directed toward the victim, [which results] in a lack of support, perhaps even condemnation and/or alienation of the victim" (262). In Marie's case, the second victimization begins with the mistrust of her foster families; it continues with the police pressure to admit to having lied; and is overwhelming after the forced confession which leads to her rejection, loss of her job and an accusation of false reporting. And the series addresses these behaviors influenced by its serialised format, since its complexity, together with the widespread practice of binge-watching, allows Grant "to plot the show differently and to narrativise the rape in such a way that would maximise what they wanted to convey to viewers about how rape should -and should not- be handled both procedurally and narratively" (Havas and Horeck 2021: 259). Plus, the fact that it is based on real events makes the viewers "outraged about what they see happening on the screen" (Havas and Horeck 2021: 267). What Armstrong and Miller (2015) did with their article, as well as the journalistic pieces that followed, is to narrate the facts that expose this second victimization. But *Unbelievable* adds to these facts the possibility to mix nonfiction and fiction.

As it has been mentioned, the series could be considered a docudrama, understanding it "as a spectrum that runs from journalistic reconstruction to relevant drama with infinite graduations along the way" (Leslie Woodhead 1999: 103). This implies a combination between fact and fiction from which the audience should be able to expect a certain level of accuracy. Here, fiction and nonfiction are being considered under the genre theory proposed by Stacie Friend (2012), who eliminates the dichotomy between belief/nonfiction and imagining/fiction by considering them "different genres into which works may be categorized" (175). This categorization depends on different factors, and implies not only a broader category, but also the existence of particular genres within each category. The accuracy expected from each particular genre is not the same, and docudrama is a fiction subgenre from which we should expect some accuracy because it is based on events that really happened: it combines the accuracy derived from the facts with the imagination needed to create a work of fiction. This act of imagining, says Friend (2012), comes from the narrative structure needed to create a fiction production (many nonfiction works such as documentaries also have a narrative structure and therefore imply an act of imagining), and from the freedom of the dramatist to make things up. And here is where *Unbelievable* becomes radically different from the journalistic works it is based on: it makes things up.

This ability to create new content should not be considered a reason to devalue docudramas' capacity of shaping the collective imaginary, since there are no reasons to think that the audience would take a fictional work as an objective truth (David Edgar 1999). The only way to verify the truthfulness of the fictional narration (what really happened and what has been invented) is by referring to texts and data outside the series, and this is something that applies to any work about the past (Robert A. Rosenstone 1999). Plus, although a fictional work is

unable to achieve a literal truth (if journalism is able of it is something to be considered), it is able to tell a general truth. As stated by Edgar (1999):

> (...) the dramatic power of dramadocumentary lies in its capacity to show us not that certain events occurred (the headlines can do that) or (...) why they occurred ((...)we can go to the weekly magazines or history books) but *how* they occurred: how recognizable human beings rule, fight, judge, meet, negotiate, suppress, an overthrow (182).

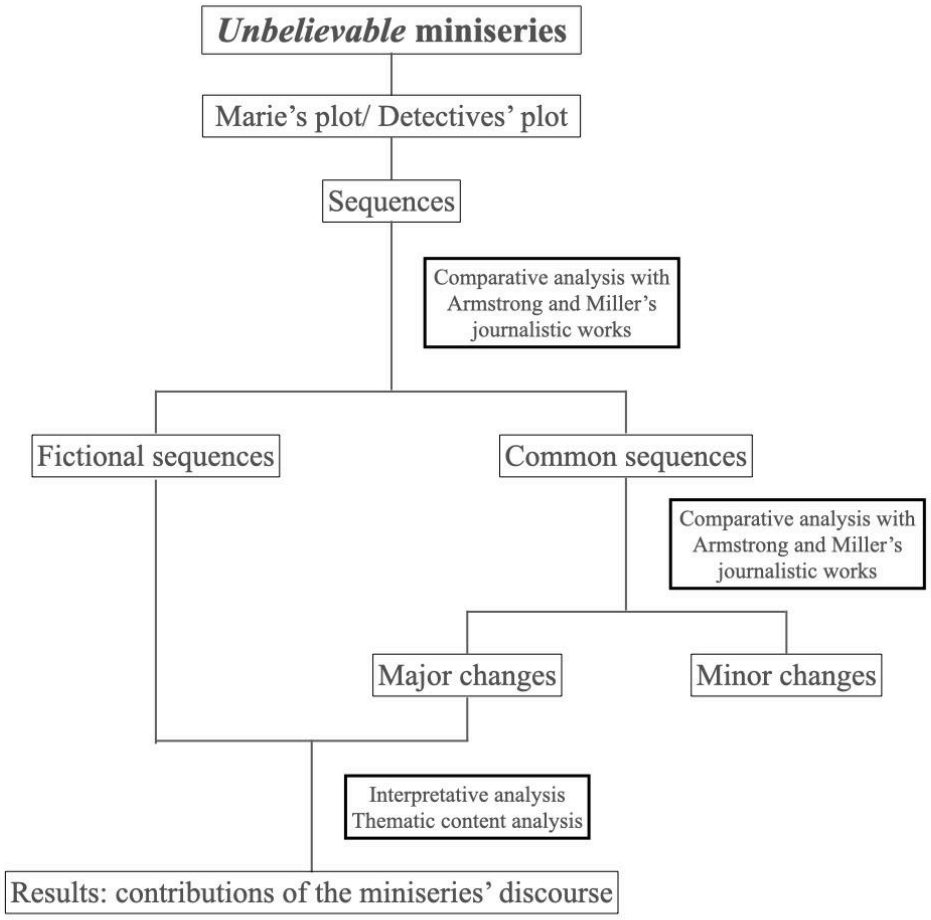
**Methodology**

To determine the contribution of the miniseries *Unbelievable* to the story previously told by journalists, we carried out a structural comparative analysis taking the narrative structure and discourse of the fictional work as the starting point.

Firstly, we divided the miniseries in sequences, which are the elements to be compared. For that matter, the series was separated into the two plotlines aforementioned (Marie's and the detectives'), that have been analyzed separately. Then, the sequences for each plot were registered, taking "sequence' as a "unit of dramatic action, made up of scenes, determined by a diagenetic criterion: a line of approach-crux-denouement, not subject to time or spatial criteria" (Antonio Sánchez-Escalonilla 2014: 188). Some groups of scenes were considered sequences although they do not appear one after the other because, as the miniseries has two different plotlines, on occasion scenes are interrupted, dividing sequences which do maintain a narrative unity.

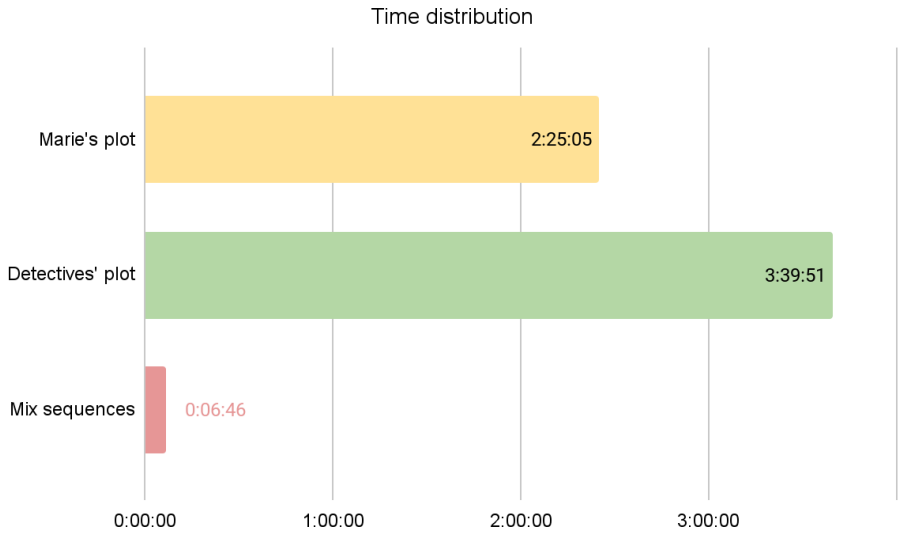
On these basis, sequences were compared with the journalistic works by establishing a hierarchy with the aim of looking for correspondences in their discourses. First, we pinpointed the miniseries sequences which appeared in print and those which were completely fictional. Secondly, we sought the changes made by the fictional version in the sequences that also appeared in the journalistic pieces, either through a full narration of the events or through the inclusion of some data or information (we called them 'common sequences'). Then we introduced a second correspondence hierarchy by classifying the changes made in the 'common sequences' as 'major' and 'minor', the former being those that imply one or more invented scenes within a sequence. After that, we focused on the so-called 'major changes' and we analyzed them from a thematic content perspective, trying to offer an interpretation that determines what these 'major changes' add to the miniseries discourse.

The sources for the series' comparative analysis were chosen after a work of selection and exclusion. The article and the book by Armstrong and Miller were chosen as the article was published first, and the book is an extension of the article. The podcast was excluded despite its interest as it did not add any information to that given in the article and because it added another voice, that of its editor. By excluding the podcast, Armstrong and Miller's original perspective is maintained as they also advised on the miniseries' production.




**Results**

*Unbelievable* has eight 44 to 58-minute episodes (6 hours 11 minutes total) and includes two plotlines: one for Marie and one for the investigation. The first episode deals entirely with Marie's trauma and, beginning with the second episode, the two plots alternate, with the investigation becoming more and more important. The series was divided based on the analysis, resulting in 71 sequences, 28 of which belong to Marie's plotline and 41 to that of the investigation. The two remaining sequences combine both plotlines.




The two plotlines have sequences in common with the article and book with greater and smaller modifications and scenes entirely created by the series. The fictional sequences do not change Armstrong and Miller's viewpoint, but match with Linda Seger's (1993) assessment that the adaptation is a new original that conserves the spirit of the text. In this new original, it is important to notice that the prevailing conflict in each plot is different and that that affects the way in which the modifications are made. While the detectives' plot is based on an external conflict, in Marie's plot the internal conflict prevails (Robert McKee 2002). Thus the former's changes are often oriented to build the crime narrative (suspects, clues, evidences, etc.) and to promote the act of binge-watching, while the latter's modifications focus on Marie's internal transformation after being victimized twice.

Some changes are indispensable in both plots to transform a written work into an audiovisual one, and to turn hundreds of pages into a limited-duration film. Among these modifications are ellipsis or time expansion, changes of place, reconstruction and elimination of characters, and story simplification (Seger 1993; Frederic Suboraud 2010). However, the authors are

addressing the film adaptation for works approximately two hours long, and *Unbelievable* lasts more than six hours, which allows more details and characters. Nonetheless, the adaptations suggested are necessary due to the very nature of audiovisual production and, in the case of *Unbelievable*, help to make the information more comprehensible and to turn the limelight on the three female characters:

1. Time changes, as occurs with the misgivings of one of the foster mothers (Episode 1, 18:53).
2. Setting changes such as the place where the two detectives meet with the FBI agent (E4, 04:29).
3. Adding or eliminating details as when one of the victims does not want to call anyone (E2, 03:51) whereas, according to the book, called her boyfriend.
4. Conversion of data or phrases from the journalistic works into full scenes. For example, Marie's harassment by the press (E2, 01:51).
5. Changes in the communication channels, as it happens in a conversation between Marie and one of the foster mothers (E4, 28:05) that, in the book, takes place by phone.
6. Eliminating characters or attributing actions to characters other than those mentioned in print. Some character changes may be necessary for the film version, either because of the length of the miniseries or the relevance of the figure on screen (Suboraud 2010). For example, the two detectives carry out actions they did not do in the book such as a chase (E6, 36:24) or an interrogation (E7, 41:25). However, there are other changes which give a different meaning to scenes and should be considered separately. For example, the sequences in which the detectives talk to the victims (E3, 06:30; E4, 01:00; E6, 01:00). The victims' testimonies are included in the book, but there is no

evidence that these conversations happened and, with them, the series shows the detectives' relationship with the victims and their implication.

Apart from these small changes, the analysis has classified as sequences with major changes, those which, although appearing in print, present fictional scenes. This occurs, for instance, in the interrogation in which Marie confesses to having lied (E1, 37:46), a sequence that ends with a clash with her foster mother that does not appear in the book.

Both the made-up scenes added to those existing in print, and the completely fictional sequences in the series reinforce certain messages which deconstruct rape myths and explain what happened. This is done by showing:

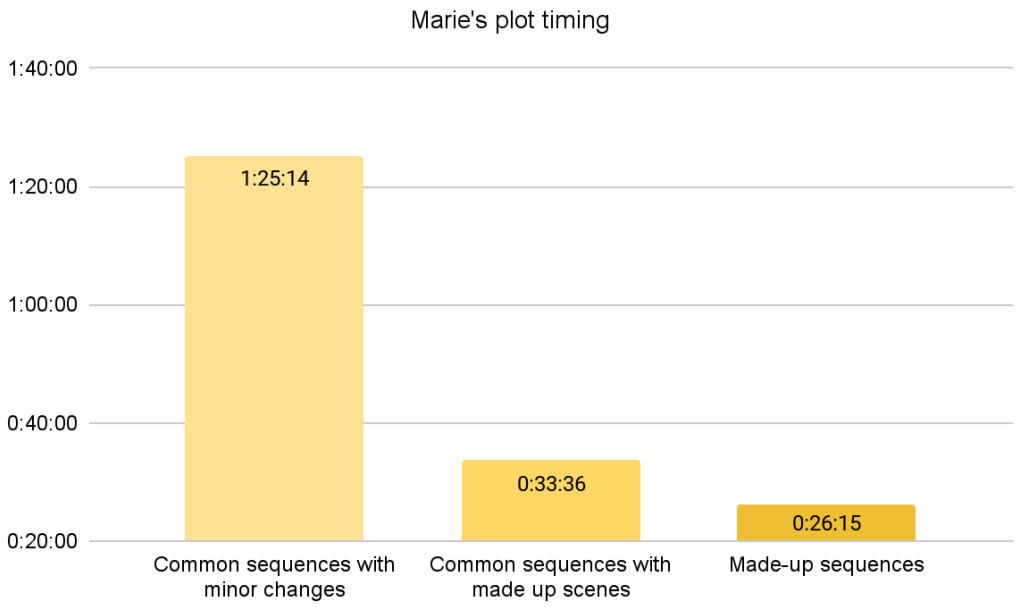
1. The victims' trauma, including their thoughts and memories, statements and flashbacks, and changes in their day-to-day lives.
2. Marie's second victimization, which is seen in the scorn of her friends, the misgivings of her former foster mothers and her discriminatory treatment at work.
3. New suspects who did not exist or were not considered in real life.
4. The detectives' private lives in scenes in which they interact with their families or practice their hobbies.
5. The detectives' relationship through conversations and gestures of solidarity.
6. The detectives' involvement with the victims in scenes where they interact that show their commitment.

These contributions allow the miniseries to combat different rape myths, as they show greater understanding of the victim's trauma and the consequences of a second victimization, and

explain why the success of an investigation of this kind depends on police expertise and empathy with the victims.

***Marie's storyline***

Marie's storyline has been divided into 28 sequences, of which 23 appear in the book (17 in the article), and five are fictional. Of those 23, 18 present minor changes, and five major ones.




Below is a classification of the two contributions pointed out at the beginning of the section that appear in the scenes and sequences created for this plotline: trauma and second victimization.

| Common sequences with made-up scenes | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Invention: | Contribution: | Ep.: | Minute |
| 1 | Confrontation between Marie and her | Second | 1 | 37:46 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | former foster mother | victimization | | |
| 2 | Conversation between Connor and Marie | Second victimization | 3 | 32:09 |
| 3 | Confrontation between Marie and her former foster mother | Second victimization | 6 | 04:21 |
| 4 | Marie in the car with strangers | Trauma | 6 | 16:34<br>25:28 |
| 5 | Marie reading news on her computer | Trauma | 8 | 08:31 |

| Made-up sequences | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Invention: | Contribution: | Ep.: | Minute |
| 1 | Marie's problems at work | Trauma<br>Second victimization | 5 | 09:49<br>18:46 |
| 2 | Conversation between former foster mothers on sexual abuse | Trauma<br>Second victimization | 5 | 11:23 |
| 3 | Marie has anxiety attack during driving lesson | Trauma | 6 | 14:38 |
| 4 | Marie opens up to psychologist | Trauma<br>Second victimization | 7 | 02:18 onwards |
| 5 | Marie finds lawyer to demand financial settlement | Second victimization | 8 | 15:33 |

Firstly, the series reinforces the portrayal of Marie's trauma in six made-up scenes and sequences. For instance, it stresses a sequence in which she has problems at work (E5, 09:49), and another in which she has an anxiety attack because she sees a man who reminds her of her attacker (E6, 14:38).

The series also represents the trauma through flashbacks:

| Flashbacks | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | When: | About: | Ep.: | Minute |
| 1 | Police interrogation | Rape | 1 | 03:20 |
| 2 | Police interrogation | Rape | 1 | 12:55 |
| 3 | After watching news about similar case | Rape | 4 | 32:30 |
| 4 | Talking to lawyer about accepting deal | Rape | 6 | 04:45 |
| 5 | At the trial, pleading guilty | Police interrogation | 6 | 35:40 |
| 6 | After seeing a picture of her attacker | Rape | 8 | 13:20 |

The use of flashbacks to show traumatic events is common, and "portraying rape via flashback demonstrates how trauma returns and imposes itself upon the subject" (Tanya Horeck 2004). However, the miniseries goes further: it gives the flashbacks from the perspective of the victim and eliminates that of the rapist. Susannah Grant, the director, explains: "Shooting it all from her point of view so (...) you're never a voyeur of sexual assault (...) we really wanted to avoid that" (Daniel Montgomery 2020). Sometimes these flashbacks are mixed with flashbacks of Marie on the beach, representing the happy memories she uses to escape from suffering; these are also mentioned in print. The series includes a final flashback (E6, 34:55) in which Marie recalls not the rape but the interrogation, which places it at the same level as the attack, emphasising the double suffering.

Secondly, the fictional scenes and sequences show Marie's second victimization. In several conversations with her former foster mother, the latter is harsh or shows little comprehension (E1, 37:46; E3, 12:11; E6, 04:21), and in Episode 3 (32:09) Marie talks to a friend about wanting to start anew, and ends with the collapse of her dreams when the allegation of false reporting arrives. Finally, in a sequence ongoing throughout Episode 7, Marie talks with her

psychologist. Although the book mentions that she went to therapy and confessed her innocence, it does not include any conversation, therefore, the sequence has been considered fictional. At the end of it, the psychologist evidences Marie's second victimization: "So, basically, you were assaulted twice. Once by your attacker, then again by the police" (46:57).
This made-up content also allows Marie to speak about the reasons why she confessed to having lied although she had not done so. In Episode 3, talking to his friend, she says:

> Do you know how many situations I have been where grown-ups want something messed-up from me that I don't want to give them? Or they want me to say something that I don't want to say (...)? A lot. (...) When they're bigger than you, you can't win (3, 33:20).

This idea gains strength during the conversation with her therapist, when she affirms that she would lie again, but "earlier and better (...) 'cause even with people that you can kinda trust, if the truth is inconvenient (...), they don't believe it" (48:21).
To sum up, the fictional scenes and sequences in Marie's plotline emphasize her trauma and double victimization by showing the consequences for her day-to-day life and the behaviour of those around her, and allow her to express her feelings and the reasons why she said she lied.

***The detectives' storyline***

The detective's plotline has more made-up sequences than that of Marie because, beginning with Episode 2, the two women (Galbraith and Hendershot in the series) become the leads that conduct the TV crime drama, so the series stresses their characters much more than the

journalistic works. Of the 41 sequences in this storyline, 28 appear in the book (16 in the article) and most turn descriptions or data from the book or the article into scenes led by the detectives; 12 of these 28 sequences make major modifications and 13 of the 41 are completely fictional.


In this storyline, the made-up scenes and sequences include five of the six contributions aforementioned: the detectives' private lives, their relationship, their involvement with the victim, trauma and new suspects.

| Common sequences with made-up scenes | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Invention: | Contribution: | Ep.: | Minute |
| 1 | Galbraith drives the victim to a friend's house | Detectives' private lives<br>Detectives' | 2 | 13:54 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | involvement with the victim | | |
| 2 | Hendershot arrests a suspect | Detectives' private lives | 2 | 41:43 |
| 3 | Galbraith lectures her team | Detectives' involvement with the victim | 3 | 17:48 |
| 4 | Galbraith and Hendershot during the investigation | Detectives' relationship | 3 | 25:36 |
| | Galbraith and Hendershot suspect the perpetrator is a cop | New suspects | | 29:25 |
| 5 | Galbraith at home | Detectives' private lives | 3 | 39:51 |
| 6 | Galbraith and Hendershot suspect the perpetrator is a cop | New suspects | 4 | 13:56 |
| 7 | Questioning of a suspect<br>Data on percentage of cops guilty of domestic violence | New suspects | 4 | 16:19 |
| 8 | Hendershot reflects on her responsibility as a police officer | Detectives' implication with the victim | 4 | 32:44 |
| 9 | Conversation between Hendershot and Galbraith on the likelihood the perpetrator is a cop | News suspects<br>Detectives' relationship | 5 | 24:03 |
| 10 | Hendershot gives up the arrest to Galbraith | Detectives' relationship | 7 | 21:12 |
| 11 | Conversation between Hendershot and Galbraith | Detectives' relationship | 7 | 36:27 |
| 12 | Conversation between Hendershot and Galbraith | Detectives' relationship<br>Detectives' involvement with the victim | 8 | 28:54 |

| Made-up sequences | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Invention: | Contribution: | Ep.: | Minute |
| 1 | Galbraith investigates a victim's neighbour | New suspects | 2 | 25:55 |
| 2 | Galbraith visits one of the victims | Detectives' involvement with the victim | 3 | 15:41 |
| 3 | Conversation between Hendershot and her husband on the possibility that the perpetrator is a cop | New suspects<br>Detectives' private lives | 4 | 37:01 |
| 4 | Galbraith stops a car like the suspect's | Detectives' private lives<br>Detectives' involvement with the victim | 4 | 39:36 |
| 5 | Galbraith and Hendershot in their free time | Detectives' private lives | 5 | 14:21 |
| | Galbraith meets one of the victims | Detectives' involvement with the victim<br>Trauma | | |
| 6 | Galbraith goes to Kansas | Detectives' involvement with the victim | 5 | 30:20 |
| 7 | Hendershot finds a suspect cop and asks her husband for help | New suspects<br>Detectives' private lives | 5 | 35:21 |
| 8 | Hendershot talks to her husband about the cop suspect | New suspects<br>Detectives' private lives | 6 | 08:34 |
| 9 | Hendershot gets close to cop suspect | New suspects | 6 | 11:33 |
| 10 | Conversation between Hendershot and Galbraith | Detectives' private lives<br>Detectives' relationship | 7 | 11:21 |
| 11 | Hendershot and Galbraith at home | Detectives' private lives | 7 | 41:26 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12 | Hendershot and Galbraith celebrate arrest with colleagues | Detectives' private lives<br>Detectives' relationship | 8 | 28:54 |
| 13 | Hendershot and Galbraith say goodbye | Detectives' relationship | 8 | 35:18 |

Eleven of the invented scenes and sequences show Galbraith and Hendershot's private lives, which allows for a more in-depth characterisation by showing their feelings and motivation. It shows Galbraith as a Christian with gentle way who is married with two children (E3, 39:51; E5, 14:21), and Hendershot as a car enthusiast with brusque manners who is also married but with no children (E2, 41:43; E4, 37:01; E5, 14:21).

The evolution of their relationship is seen in eight of the made-up scenes and sequences. It starts as an agreement between two women who cooperate to save other women, and ends up as a bond of trust between two professionals who admire each other (E3, 25:36; E7, 11:21; 36:27; E8, 35:18). In fact, the day the suspect is to be arrested, Hendershot (more experienced) passes the arrest to Galbraith (E7, 21:12), something that does not appear in the book and seems to be a reaction to the prevailing competitiveness in the policing landscape.

Besides, the series shows the detectives' involvement and empathy with the victims in seven of the made-up scenes and sequences. Only once in this plotline there is a flashback of a rape, and the person remembering is Galbraith; it seems that the detective's empathy makes her feel the victim's trauma as if it were her own (E2, 26:00). Similarly, the series shows sequences in which the detectives are personally involved with the victims, as in Episode 5, when Galbraith asks one of the victims about her suffering (14:21). The series also introduces conversations between the detectives and the victims that have not been considered invented because they include evidence that appear in the book (E3, 06:30; E4, 01:00; E6, 01:00). According to the

written work, the detectives did not speak to every victim, so the construction of the scenes in which the detectives act kindly and understanding "serves to correct the excruciatingly ignorant and bullying behaviour of the male police officers that viewers have just witnessed" (Havas and Horeck 2021: 259) in Marie's case.

These conversations also evidence how individuals with different features can be victims of sexual assault (Havas and Horeck 2021) and show different reactions to trauma. While the first victim remembers every detail (E2, 14:20), the second only remembers sounds (E3, 06:30); the third feels pity for her attacker (E4, 01:00); and the fourth is angry (E6, 01:00). Moreover, during the trial (E8, 19:30), which also appears in print, the series just gives voice to the victims. Although the print pieces state that the rapist made a declaration during the trial, in the series this does not happen; the only time he speaks is after the trial on a video that the detectives pause at will. This absence of the rapist's point of view constitutes, for Havas and Horeck (2021), "one of the series' greatest achievements" (262).

Finally, the series presents nine invented scenes and sequences with suspects who do not appear in print or who were given no importance. This may be an audiovisual strategy for building a TV crime drama, but their analysis also offers messages on gender violence.

Fiction adds the possibility that the perpetrator is a police officer. This suspicion, which appears in eight sequences in the series (E3, 29:25; E4, 13:50; 26:30; 37:00; E5, 24:10; 35:30; E6, 08:30; 11:40) is only mentioned in the book in the sentence "maybe he was a cop" (Armstrong and Miller 2018: 12). Adding this possibility allows the series to introduce two relevant facts: 40% of male cops present as domestic abusers in America (E4, 27:20) and, in Florida, 30% of officers who beat their wives are still on the job (E5, 27:40). It also offers the chance to judge their FBI colleague, who does not seem angry enough (E5, 28:00). At the

same time, the fiction denounces the levels of gender violence among police officers and shows the hostile landscape in which the two detectives work.

But there are two more suspects. In Episode 2, Galbraith visits the home of a victim's neighbour that seems suspicious to other neighbours. He turns out to be a special-needs man who was not in the city the morning of the rape. While Galbraith is talking to the man's mother, the latter sends out a message: "(...) it's never the oddballs (...) It's the guys that look nice (...) the ones that turn around and mess you up" (36:40).

In Episode 4, reinforcing the idea that the guilty parties often seem 'normal', a student accuses another of sexually abusing girls. Although the book does mention this accusation, the series makes significant changes and adds the interrogation of the accused. During this questioning, the young man gives a spiel:

> It happens all the time now. Girls making all these claims (...). There's a status to being a victim. Which is bullshit. Because there are real victims out there (...) it just makes it harder for those people who really need help. And then, guys like me, normal guys, end up getting accused of all kinds of crazy stuff (22:30).

By attributing this words to someone known to be guilty (both because of his attitude and classmate's accusation), the series also combats the false belief that it is common for women to lie about sexual abuse.

In short, the scenes and sequences made up for this plotline show the private life and relationship between the two lead detectives, underlining their involvement and professional calibre. In addition, they show different reactions to the trauma through the victims' evidence

and present new suspects which makes the detective story more dramatic and, above all, teaches the audience about other rape myths.

## Conclusions

In order to decide how the miniseries *Unbelievable* contributes to a story which journalism had already told well, this article has made a comparative and interpretative analysis of the major and minor modifications in the series as compared to the article and the book.

The small modifications (time, place, details, characters, etc.) simplify the storyline and make it more comprehensible and clearer for the audiovisual format. This is particularly relevant in the scenes in which the detectives (character changes) have conversations with the victims which did not occur in reality, but help to describe the different reactions to trauma, and the professionalism and empathy needed to address a case of sexual abuse.

As regards the major modifications, which include invented scenes within 'common sequences' and sequences fully invented for the series, the following contributions stand out:

1. They show the trauma suffered by victims of sexual abuse and the different ways of addressing it everyday life, which combats the rape myth which states that the victim should be crying and screaming.
2. They represent Marie's second victimization and its consequences. By doing so, they denounce the prevailing idea that a victim of sexual abuse will lie if their conduct does not fit in with the archetype of a virtuous individual.
3. They introduce new suspects which not only helps to build up the tension of the crime drama, but also combats rape myths regarding the aggressor. They give a message: the possibility of an individual committing sexual abuse does not depend on how 'normal'

their role in society is. Moreover, by suspecting the perpetrator may be a male police officer, they picture a hostile setting for female officers in which they seem more aware of the gravity of men's violence towards women.

4. They show how a rape investigation should be carried out through scenes and sequences which denote the detectives' professionalism, their commitment to the case, and their empathy with the victims. They also reveal their private lives and the link between them, which allows for understanding of their involvement in the case. Their professionalism gives even greater stress to the errors made by the officers in charge of Marie's case.

*Unbelievable* fictionalizes an excellent journalistic work and, by doing so, it gives up absolute veracity in favor of a nonliteral truth that endorses the victims' perspectives. The series -which aims to be "as truthful and faithful to the story as possible" (Montgomery 2020)- creates content that delves further into the causes and consequences of Marie's second victimization and that presents the motivations of the two detectives. This content allows the series to denounce and evidence the false beliefs rooted in society that led to Marie's double victimization and that, even now, lead to double suffering for many victims of sexual abuse.

*Unbelievable* is just an example of a tendency that grows every day. There is still so much to investigate about the ability of based on real events productions to create meanings by adding fictional content to nonfictional stories. Perhaps in future research the debate should not be about accuracy (there is no reason to believe that the audience expect a docudrama to be absolutely truthful) or about the dichotomies truth/untruth or believe/imagine (they are problematic even if applied to journalism), but about the way in which a fictional production

can strength the meanings underlying a real story by adding imagined sequences to the facts that have been already told by journalists. Because fictions that are based on quality journalistic narratives, as it is the case of *Unbelievable*, could be great allies to make a real story more believable.

**Bibliography**


Ahmad, Shahid, Shanthi Nadarajan, y Ahmed Shamsul Bahari. 2020. «Silencing of Rape: Treatment of Rape Events and Rape Victims by Media and Fiction». *Jurnal Komunikasi-Malaysian Journal of Communication* 36 (1): 419-35. https://doi.org/10.17576/JKMJC-2020-3601-24.

Armstrong, Ken, y Christian Miller. 2015. «An Unbelievable Story of Rape — ProPublica». 2015. https://www.propublica.org/article/false-rape-accusations-an-unbelievable-story.

———. 2018. «A False Report: A True Story of Rape in America: Amazon.es: Miller, T. Christian, Armstrong, Ken: Libros en idiomas extranjeros». 2018. https://www.amazon.es/False-Report-True-Story-America/dp/1524759937.

Benedict, Helen. 1992. *Virgin or vamp: how the press covers sex crimes*. Recurso electrónico. EBSCO Academic eBook Collection Complete. New York ; London: Oxford University Press.

Blumell, Lindsey E., y Jennifer Huemmer. 2017. «Silencing Survivors: How News Coverage Neglects the Women Accusing Donald Trump of Sexual Misconduct». *Feminist Media Studies* 17 (3): 506-9. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2017.1304714.

Brownmiller, Susan. 1975. *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*. Simon and Schuster. New York. https://pesquisa.bvsalud.org/portal/resource/pt/biblio-941675.

Burt, Martha R. 1980. «Cultural myths and supports for rape». *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 38 (2): 217-30. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.38.2.217.

Burt, Martha R, y Rochelle Semmel Albin. 1981. «Rape Myths, Rape Definitions, and Probability of Conviction». *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 11 (3): 212-30. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.1981.tb00739.x.

Campbell, Rebecca, y Sheela Raja. 1999. «Secondary Victimization of Rape Victims». 1999. https://mainweb-v.musc.edu/vawprevention/research/victimrape.shtml.

Cuklanz, Lisa M. 1995. *Rape on Trial*. https://www.upenn.edu/pennpress/book/430.html.

———. 1999. *Rape on Prime Time: Television, Masculinity, and Sexual Violence*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press. https://www.amazon.es/Rape-Prime-Time-Television-Masculinity/dp/0812217101.

———. 2020. «Problematic News Framing of #MeToo». *The Communication Review* 23 (4): 251-72. https://doi.org/10.1080/10714421.2020.1829302.

Custen, George F. 1999. «Clio in Hollywood». En *Why Docudrama? Fact-Fiction on Film and TV*, editado por Alan Rosenthal, 19-34. USA: Southern Illinois University Press.

Dowler, Kenneth. 2006. «Sex, Lies, and Videotape: The Presentation of Sex Crime in Local Television News». *Journal of Criminal Justice* 34 (4): 383-92. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2006.05.004.

Durham, Meenakshi Gigi. 2015. «Scene of the Crime: News Discourse of Rape in India and the Geopolitics of Sexual Assault». *Feminist Media Studies* 15 (2): 175-91.

https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2014.930061.
Edgar, David. 1999. «Theather of Fact: A Dramatist's Viewpoint». En *Why docudrama? Fact-Fiction on Film and TV*, editado por Alan Rosenthal, 174-87. USA: Southern Illinois University Press.
Emmers-Sommer, Tara M., Perry Pauley, Alesia Hanzal, y Laura Triplett. 2006. «Love, Suspense, Sex, and Violence: Men's and Women's Film Predilections, Exposure to Sexually Violent Media, and Their Relationship to Rape Myth Acceptance». *Sex Roles* 55 (5-6): 311-20. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-006-9085-0.
Franiuk, Renae, Jennifer L. Seefelt, Sandy L. Cepress, y Joseph A. Vandello. 2008. «Prevalence and Effects of Rape Myths in Print Journalism: The Kobe Bryant Case». *Violence Against Women* 14 (3): 287-309. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801207313971.
Franiuk, Renae, Jennifer L. Seefelt, y Joseph A. Vandello. 2008. «Prevalence of Rape Myths in Headlines and Their Effects on Attitudes Toward Rape». *Sex Roles* 58 (11-12): 790-801. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-007-9372-4.
Friend, Stacie. 2012. «Fiction as a Genre». *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society (Hardback)* 112 (2pt2): 179-209. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9264.2012.00331.x.
Glass, Ira. s. f. «Anatomy of Doubt». Accedido 2 de junio de 2021. https://www.thisamericanlife.org/581/anatomy-of-doubt.
Grant, Susanah. 2019. *Unbelievable*. https://www.netflix.com/watch/80153509?trackId=200257859.
Harp, Dustin, Josh Grimm, y Jaime Loke. 2018. «Rape, Storytelling and Social Media: How Twitter Interrupted the News Media's Ability to Construct Collective Memory». *Feminist Media Studies* 18 (6): 979-95. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2017.1373688.
Havas, Júlia, y Tanya Horeck. 2021. «Netflix Feminism: Binge-Watching Rape Culture in Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt and Unbelievable». En *Binge-Watching and Contemporary Television Studies*, editado por Mareike Jenner, 250-73. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd.
Hoffer, Tom W., y Richard Alan Nelson. 1999. «Docudrama on American Television Tom W.Hoffer and Richard Alan Nelson». En *Why docudrama? Fact-Fiction on Film and TV*, editado por Alan Rosenthal, 64-77. USA: Southern Illinois University Press.
Hogan, Jackie. 2021. «Anatomy of a rape: Sexual violence and secondary victimization scripts in U.S. film and television, 1959–2019». *Crime, Media, Culture*, marzo, 17416590211000388. https://doi.org/10.1177/17416590211000388.
Horeck, Tanya. 2004. *Public rape: representing violation in fiction and film*. Recurso electrónico. EBSCO Academic eBook Collection Complete. London: Routledge.
Inal, Tuba. 2017. «The (Re)Production of a Rape Culture through Film: Turkish Cinema's Love Affair with Rape». *Continuum* 31 (6): 802-19. https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2017.1287259.
Lisak, David, Lori Gardinier, Sarah C. Nicksa, y Ashley M. Cote. 2010. «False Allegations of Sexual Assault: An Analysis of Ten Years of Reported Cases». *Violence Against Women* 16 (12): 1318-34. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801210387747.
Lonsway, Kimberly A., y Louise F. Fitzgerald. 1994. «Rape Myths: In Review». *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 18 (2): 133-64. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1994.tb00448.x.
McKee, Robert. 2002. *El Guión*. Traducido por Jessica J. Lockhart Domeño. Barcelona: ALBA.
McManus, John, y Lori Dorfman. 2005. «Functional Truth or Sexist Distortion?: Assessing a Feminist Critique of Intimate Violence Reporting». *Journalism* 6 (1): 43-65. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884905048952.
Merken, Stacie, y Veronyka James. 2020. «Perpetrating The Myth: Exploring Media Accounts of Rape Myths on "Women's" Networks». *Deviant Behavior* 41 (9): 1176-91. https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2019.1603531.

Montgomery, Daniel. 2020. «'Unbelievable' Showrunner Susannah Grant on Helping Viewers Understand What It's like for a Sexual Assault Survivor [EXCLUSIVE VIDEO INTERVIEW]». *GoldDerby* (blog). 10 de agosto de 2020. https://www.goldderby.com/article/2020/unbelievable-emmys-susannah-grant-interview/.

«Myths and Facts». 2015. Resilience. 28 de mayo de 2015. https://www.ourresilience.org/what-you-need-to-know/myths-and-facts/.

Netflix. 2019. «The Critically-Acclaimed Limited Series Unbelievable Has Been Watched by 32 Million Member Households in Its First 28 Days». Tweet. @*netflix* (blog). 16 de octubre de 2019. https://twitter.com/netflix/status/1184567550979399680.

Nilsson, Gabriella. 2019. «Rape in the News: On Rape Genres in Swedish News Coverage». *Feminist Media Studies* 19 (8): 1178-94. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2018.1513412.

O'Hara, Shannon. 2012. «Monsters, Playboys, Virgins and Whores: Rape Myths in the News Media's Coverage of Sexual Violence». *Language and Literature: International Journal of Stylistics* 21 (3): 247-59. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963947012444217.

Paget, Derek. 1999. «Tales of Cultural Tourism». En *Why docudrama? Fact-Fiction on Film and TV*, editado por Alan Rosenthal, 47-63. USA: Southern Illinois University Press.

Pennington, Rosemary, y Jessica Birthisel. 2016. «When New Media Make News: Framing Technology and Sexual Assault in the Steubenville Rape Case». *New Media & Society* 18 (11): 2435-51. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815612407.

Projansky, Sarah. 2001. *Watching rape: film and television in postfeminist culture*. New York and London: New York University Press.

Rosenstone, Robert A. 1999. «JFK: Historical Fact/ Historical Film». En *Why docudrama? Fact-Fiction on Film and TV*, editado por Alan Rosenthal, 333-39. USA: Southern Illinois University Press.

Sánchez-Escalonilla, Antonio. 2014. *Estrategias de guion cinematográfico: el proceso de creación de una historia*. 1ª ed. rev., 2ª imp. Ariel cine. Barcelona: Ariel.

Seger, Linda. 1993. *El arte de la adaptación: cómo convertir hechos y ficciones en películas*. Traducido por Marisa Chacón y Alfonso Méndiz Noguero. Libros de cine. Madrid: Rialp.

Spallacci, Amanda. 2019. «Representing Rape Trauma in Film: Moving beyond the Event». *Arts* 8 (1): 8. https://doi.org/10.3390/arts8010008.

Suboraud, Frédéric. 2010. *La adaptación: el cine necesita historias*. 1ª ed. Los pequeños cuadernos de «Cahiers du cinéma» 11. Barcelona: Paidós.

«T. Christian Miller of ProPublica and Ken Armstrong of The Marshall Project». s. f. Accedido 2 de junio de 2021. https://www.pulitzer.org/winners/t-christian-miller-propublica-and-ken-armstrong-marshall-project.

Tranchese, Alessia. 2019. «Covering Rape: How the Media Determine How We Understand Sexualised Violence». *Gender and Language* 13 (2): 174-201. https://doi.org/10.1558/genl.34445.

Waterhouse-Watson, Deb. 2016. «News Media on Trial: Towards a Feminist Ethics of Reporting Footballer Sexual Assault Trials *». *Feminist Media Studies* 16 (6): 952-67. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2016.1162827.

Williams, J.E. 1984. «Secondary Victimization: Confronting Public Attitudes about Rape». *Victimology,* 9: 66-81.

Willing, Indigo. 2020. «The Film *Kids* 25 Years On: A Qualitative Study of Rape Culture and Representations of Sexual Violence in Skateboarding». *YOUNG*, noviembre, 110330882096645. https://doi.org/10.1177/1103308820966457.

Woodhead, Leslie. 1999. «The Guardian Lecture: Dramatized Documentary». En *Why docudrama? Fact-Fiction on Film and TV*, editado por Alan Rosenthal, 101-10. USA: Southern Illinois University Press.

Worthington, Nancy. 2008. «Progress And Persistent Problems: Local TV News Framing of Acquaintance Rape on Campus». *Feminist Media Studies* 8 (1): 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680770701824878.
———. 2010. «Of Conspiracies and Kangas: Mail & Guardian Online's Construction of the Jacob Zuma Rape Trial». *Journalism* 11 (5): 607-23. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884910373538.