

UVA LAW | 22 02 01 Citron Cahn zoom event

DANIELLE CITRON: Good evening, everyone. I'm Danielle Citron. I am the director of the LawTech Center at UVA Law School and a professor at the law school. And I'm excited to have this wonderful webinar, a chance to talk to Julia Dahl about her book *The Missing Hours*. So let me first, though, start by thanking the folks at the LawTech Center, our co-sponsors, the Law Innovation Security and Technology student group and the Virginia Journal on Law and Technology.

So now, I have the honor of introducing Julia Dahl who is-- she's a crime writer and a journalism professor at NYU. But I first got to Julia when she was a crime reporter for CBS, and then became I think the deputy managing editor of The Crime Report. And over the last eight years, we sort of flipped the script, and I am now the Uber fan for Julia's crime novels.

Her first mystery *Invisible City* won a series of awards for Best First Novel and the Boston Globe's Best Books of 2014. And her mystery keep making its way into all of these best books lists. She has a series of three books. Rebekah Roberts is the protagonist. And I always ping Julia and say, when's the next one coming? I'm on the edge of my seat. I need another one.

The coup de grace so there are three of them, *Invisible City*, *Run You Down*, and *Conviction*. They're brilliant. And this fourth book, though, is not in that series. It's called *The Missing Hours*. And it is a sort of standalone, thriller, gripping crime book. And again, that too has won a series of awards hailed by *The New York Times* as a great reckoning with the moment that we find ourselves in.

So just before we get started, I just want to say to the audience, please put your questions in the Q&A box, which appears at the bottom of our screens. Andrew is going to help me take questions and put them in the chat. So Julia, thank you so much for joining us today.

JULIA DAHL: Hello. Thank you.

DANIELLE CITRON: It's great fun being your fan and turning the tables. As opposed to you calling me for expert advice, I now in the last eight years have been looking to you for inspiration, for art and education. So it's been a great joy.

JULIA DAHL: It's super cool to be here. Thank you, thank you.

DANIELLE CITRON: So Julia would you tell our audience a bit about the book *The Missing Hours* and how your reporting informed the gripping story at the heart of the novel?

JULIA DAHL: Sure. So *The Missing Hours* is a story. Basically, chapter 1 is a young woman of college freshman named Claudia. Wakes up. She knows that she's been sexually assaulted, but she has no idea what happened. She was drunk the night before. And the book is how she and the people around her and the perpetrators deal with it, basically.

It's like the bomb of the assault goes off and the shrapnel goes everywhere. And the book is at some level about her figuring out, and we can talk about this a little more, that the law is not really going to help her and what she's going to do to find her own measure of justice instead of going to the police in the way that we're told we're supposed to do.

But the genesis of the book-- it's funny when I was thinking about talking to you about this, I realized that I've been writing one way or another about sexual assault or abuse since the very beginning of my career as a crime journalist.

I started my career in entertainment and women's magazines, but around 2004, I started writing stories for *Seventeen* magazine about crimes against and by teenagers. And the very first story I was sent on was out to a young woman's home in Tennessee. She had accused her cousin of assaulting her. And it had become a traumatic situation in many ways mostly because law enforcement and her family refused to believe her.

And I remember sitting in her living room with her with my tape recorder. And she just told me the whole story of what she remembered and what she didn't remember. And what she dwelled on, though, was not the assault. What she dwelled on was the pain and the trauma of and then I told my dad, and he didn't believe me, and then I told my mom, and he didn't believe me. And they didn't want me to go to anyone else because they thought we don't believe you.

And those stories kept coming up. That was the first time, but then I moved on. I spent time at the *New York Post*. I was a reporter there, which is what my series *of invisible City* is about. But then I got to work. I went to a nonprofit criminal justice news site called The Crime Report. And that was a really great job because it was like I got to write about anything in criminal justice that I found interesting, which is rare.

And there, I really started to get more serious about writing about sex crimes and issues around them. I wrote a couple of stories that-- and all these stories that I'll tell really informed *The Missing Hours*. It was almost like I was gearing up to write this book after so many years of reporting. And the first one I remember doing a big piece on rape kits and the thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands that are languishing and going bad in freezers all across America.

And I remember interviewing a woman who'd been assaulted years ago, and nothing had happened. And then finally, literally, 20 years later, she gets a phone call, and they're like, we've matched the DNA that we found in you in the early '80s. And just listening to her story of the pain of that 20 years of having the law enforcement be like, well, there's not a lot we can do. You don't have a proper description.

I did another story about the difficulty involved in prosecuting men who sell young women for sex. Especially teenagers, they have difficult home lives. They get caught up with men who say they love them and then sell them. But if they won't testify against the men, it's all but impossible to get the men behind bars, that kind of thing. So I wrote those stories.

And then I moved on to CBS News. And when I was there, I pitched a series about crimes against women, sex crimes against women. And I did two stories that really then informed *The Missing Hours*. This was around-- I think it was about 2013 when college came-- so obviously, campus sexual assault is something that's been going on as long as there have been campuses.

But in the early aughts-- is that right, early aughts? No, early teens. I didn't really how to-

DANIELLE Me too. Don't worry.

CITRON:

JULIA DAHL: Talk about the decades these days. It wasn't the '80s. It was more recently. Students on college campuses, it was like college campuses-- when I was in college in the '90s, nobody talked about sexual assault. If you got drunk and something happened to you, it was like, you shouldn't have gotten so drunk. And that conversation, thank God, has changed.

But what we found out in around 2010, 2012 was that women work girls were coming forward and saying, this happened to me. I was drunk or I was with someone, and he did this. And he lives on my hall, help me. But the colleges hadn't caught up. They didn't really how to deal with it. And at some level, I don't blame them. As we all know, sexual abuse and sexual assault is one of the most complicated crimes for police to investigate.

Colleges don't really have the resources for that. But they needed to get themselves together to have ways to collect this information to deal with the young women, to do some kind of mediation if there was some, to go to cops if necessary. And a lot of universities just couldn't do it, or they wouldn't do it. And so I did a profile of these women at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, who sued the university for the way that the university had dealt with or rather not dealt with their sexual abuse on campus or near campus.

And then I did another story about women in DC who talked about having been sexually assaulted, but that the most traumatic part of the situation was not the sexual assault but when they went to the police, and the police didn't believe them or treated them like they were the ones who should be ashamed of themselves and stuff like that. So all that stuff was in my head, and then in 2012, came the Steubenville case.

Many of you may have heard of that. Maybe not. I realize it's 10 years ago now. But long story short, I was working as a reporter at CBS News. A story broke out of Steubenville, Ohio. And interestingly, enough the story really broke because Anonymous -- you remember that hacktivist group?

DANIELLE Hacktivist group.

CITRON:

JULIA DAHL: Right. So they got involved. Somehow, they learned about it. And basically, what had happened was a teenage girl went to a party, got very intoxicated, and was assaulted by at least two boys. And what made this story be the most egregious was that because everybody has a cell phone, they took pictures, and they took videos.

So the girl wakes up the next morning, and she knows something's happened. She has no idea what, but all of a sudden, these pictures are going around among her friends. And eventually, one of the pictures gets to an adult. And there's a little bit of-- the boys involved were the football team.

The football team was state champions. It's almost like a cliché, the way the town rallied around the boys. And finally, anonymous gets involved and does this thing where they're like, if you don't arrest these boys or do something, we're going to hack into all your computers and destroy you all.

So I covered that case over the next year or so while they were doing the investigation, while people at the school were getting fired, and while they were defending the boys and while then the boys got indicted, and two were convicted.

But the thing I thought about this case over and over was I could not stop thinking about this young girl and what it must have been like for her, but even further, what it must have been for her mom, her sister, her best friend, especially for the girl to know that every time you meet somebody for the rest of your life, especially if you're staying in this town, you would have no idea if they'd seen these pictures of you in this traumatic, humiliating moment.

I couldn't get that out of my head. And over and over, I was starting to see-- and this is when you and I, Danielle, started to connect. Over and over, I was starting to see cases like this. Rehtaeh Parsons, Audrie Potts, these are girls who had intimate photos of themselves either ones that they'd taken or a boyfriend had taken or that had been taken of them surreptitiously spread around the internet. And they committed suicide. Young teenage girls.

And I was seeing that over and over, and I realized-- so as a crime reporter, I'm thinking this is interesting. Let's talk, who should I talk to about-- and a lot of the stories out of the local affiliates were like the parents saying things like, we went to the cops, and they said there was nothing we could do. And that caught my ear, like, nothing you can do?

I found Danielle, and I found Mary Anne Franks, the two of you together. And I realized one of the things that you were talking about was that the ability of technology to perpetrate crimes-- that the law hadn't caught up to what the crimes were. And that was creating this difficulty and trauma for a lot of women. So I started writing about that.

And I always knew that I wanted to write that story of like-- I think of Claudia in some ways, although her personality in life is very different from the young woman in Steubenville, but very much I spent years thinking what was it like for that young woman. And when I wrote *The Missing Hours*, that was what I wanted to do, was explore and try to-- this is what art and literature does. We try to put a mirror up to society and to force people into a moment, if possible, of empathy.

I spent a lot of painful time closing my eyes and thinking, this has happened to you, where do you feel it in your body, what do you do, what questions would you have, and that kind of thing. If this has happened to your sister, what do you do? And that was where I went with *The Missing Hours*, and the fact that it affects, a crime like that affects so many different people.

It's not just the person whose body the crime is perpetrated on, but her family, the perpetrators families. People that aren't even involved get roped in because crimes really just spread. Long-winded perhaps.

**DANIELLE
CITRON:**

No, no. What you captured I think so beautifully in the book, but what I think makes it painful when you first read it and why I read it in four hours, I couldn't put it down I was gripped, is that you really capture the sense of-- because the sexual assault was taped and shared, it would be almost like an endless violation against her body.

And this shame that Claudia feels, and that no one will care and that sense of having been slut shamed before almost like she had that-- she was taped while doing a reality TV show kissing and then slut-shamed.

She had reckoned with this idea of being shamed for her sexuality in ways that seem so prosaic, that how awful to be shamed for that, but then how she suffers when the sexual assault, there is a video witness, and that others are sharing that video. So it hits you. And worth would be I'd love to hear a bit more about your experience as a firsthand as a reporter victim saying to you that they go to law enforcement, and every time, it was like a terrible rinse and repeat, nothing we can do.

Either blaming the victims or not believing them like, oh, you're sure that happened to you? Even if there's video proof of this sexual assault, and you do, you hold up a mirror in a most devastating way. The book does, that is really echo reality.

And there's this one part of the book that it would be interesting for you to talk about a bit, where you say Claudia is thinking about how New York has this newly passed revenge porn law. And she's like, they're not going to help me. And so maybe a bit more because you have this choice I'm sure as a writer, where you think like, do I give any hope? Do you know what I'm saying?

And that I guess is the story of retribution, the non-legal, extralegal part. And you gave us so much to think about in this book, about the criminal justice system and how unfair and random it is and how that costs victims like internalize. Just having a choice, how does that affect you as a writer and as you're thinking about the way in this-- to me, this book is so important as a clarion call of education.

And I have it in my appendix in my new book. Good read because we can really see suffering and how you educate and legal change that you helped launch as a result of your reporting. So just like a little bit more because your work both has helped spur legal change-- it has.

That reporting helped get lawmakers to care as we were advocating. And now serves as education, but it's bleak. In that right in that moment as you're writing, did you think about not having-- police maybe help a little, or was that just I want this to be as brutal and realistic as possible? Do you know like those choices that you [INAUDIBLE] interesting time [INAUDIBLE]

JULIA DAHL:

So one of the things I really wanted to do with this was-- when you're a reporter, and I think this probably happens as an attorney too. When you reporter there's this unspoken thing about who deserves coverage and who doesn't. So if you're watching *Dateline* or 20/20 or whatever, you're not get-- the people that get the one hour or two hour specials are the white ladies in suburbia who've been kidnapped and murdered.

It's not a Black woman who's maybe had a drug problem, or it's not a woman of any race that's been involved in sex work. It tends not to be, frankly, even just someone who doesn't have a lot of money. There's this sense of a good victim and a not so good victim. And that pisses me off. And one of the things that this book for me was so much about was that it does not matter.

The result of getting drunk should not be rape. The result of being sexually active should not be rape. That everyone deserves justice when they've had a violation of their body. But that's just not the case. And so one of the things that I wanted to do with this book was to make the protagonist Claudia not the most likeable person around. She's not the happy the pretty virgin who, oh, I was raped my first time.

That's not terrible, but I wanted to make her somebody that I knew it would be challenging to feel sorry for. She's rich. She's white. She's privileged. She's educated. She's used social media and frankly, her body to get attention. She would be easy-- I think about this like I remember watching reality shows like the Bravo shows.

And I think, God, it's so easy to hate some of those girls. The way they portray them, it just feels so careless and kind of vain and stuff, but none of them deserve to be raped either. So I really wanted to make her somebody that I knew a lot of people are just going to be like, ew. In my generation, it was the Paris Hilton girl, who kind of it's just so easy to be like, ugh.

The script flip a little was that Claudia in-- usually, if you're wealthy and white and connected, you can manipulate the justice system to get what you need. But the one time you can't really do that is sexual assault. Women can't really do that with sexual assault. In fact, they might even be less likely to be-- well, I don't if they'd be less likely to be believed than just frankly a woman who's experiencing homelessness or a woman who has a drug problem.

But they're just as likely obviously by police. Obviously, was the wrong word. I wanted to highlight the fact that even somebody in the super privileged position is not really privileged when it comes to this particular thing and how egregious that is, or how much that shows how far we have to go. And then I also really wanted her to be sort of savvy enough, and I think a lot of young women today are, to look at what happened to her with clear eyes and say, nobody's going to believe me, nobody's going to care.

DANIELLE Great.

CITRON:

JULIA DAHL: And that's the fear, is that if we report enough about-- I don't if you guys have seen-- I think it's based on a ProPublica series. Netflix did that series *Unbelievable* with Toni Collette.

DANIELLE That's another one.

CITRON:

JULIA DAHL: And it's exactly the same thing. It gives me chills thinking about it. This like she didn't believe her. She had maybe lied before, whatever. But this is like this awful double-edged sword because women now that it's going to be a challenge, not just to get people to believe you, but even if they believe you, you're going to have to tell your story 100 times. You're going to have to tell it to strangers.

This thing happened to you once is going to take over your life for-- that's one of the things I learned through the Chanel Miller memoir, *Know My Name*. So she was the young woman in the Stanford swimmer sexual assault case. She's brilliant and her new memoir is brilliant.

And one of the things I learned from reading that memoir, which I read as I was writing this book, was just years, years of reliving the worst moment of your life in the small hope that what? Somebody gets put in prison for, I don't know, a few years maybe, and that's very unlikely.

So a lot of women know this, and so of course, they don't go to police. But I didn't want to continue that cycle because I don't know. I don't know what victims should do. I think every [INAUDIBLE] who survive this has to make the decision for themselves, and it's not an easy decision. And I don't think there's a right or wrong answer.

It's really easy for me to be like, if you're a sexually assaulted, you should go to the police. We can get him. But it's not that black and white.

DANIELLE And if could have a magic wand, then fix everything, Julia, the response would be appropriate from law enforcement. Given your experience, is there any way in which this criminal justice system doesn't hurt somebody?

JULIA DAHL: It's like it's the only crime where the default is to not believe the perpetrator. I'm sorry, the victim. Part of me, I write a little bit about this in the book, doesn't like using the word victim, but it is a victimization. And some people say survivor, but then some people also would say, I'm not sure I've survived this entirely. I'm living but--

I think that it's got to be individual people from the nurses, to the counselors, to the police themselves who lead with-- if the default is I believe you, then maybe we've made progress, but I really don't know how we get there. I really don't. I wish I did. I don't know. Do you?

DANIELLE CITRON: But your book is a step in the right direction. That is the more that we educate lawmakers and law enforcers, parents, teachers, students, that each and every one of us are part of this dialectical conversation, where don't blame the victim, don't assume that she's got it wrong, that's how changing hearts and minds is a huge part to social attitudes. The relation with social attitudes in law, legal change, it's such a tight connection.

And here, I think your work is doing that. It's hard to read. It's necessary. And then you're also imaginative in the-- revenge part to me was like, really? That's the fun of your work too, is that a little of that revenge part as well was slightly satisfying.

JULIA DAHL: Right, exactly. So you're like, do I think you should do what Claudia did? Not necessarily, but I also-- not really. Part of this book was at some level me having a little revenge fantasy, me being like, OK, so this has happened to a young woman. She has decided the cops are not going to help me, but again, she has privilege. She has money. She has resources.

So she's going to be like, I'm going balls to the wall. I'm going to F these guys up, and let the chips fall where they may. I don't think some people find the ending of the book a little bit unsatisfying, and it's very hard to end a book. But I think it's unsatisfying in a way because the Claudia story is not even close to over. Having done this, it's not like it heals her.

She'll be healing from this forever. She maybe takes a little power back, and maybe that is some tiny step toward that. But there's no happy, easy ending for people who've dealt with this or whose family-- and that was part of the reason I spent so much time with her sister in this book, was because her sister sort of isn't there for her in her time of need. She doesn't really know that it was her time of need.

But I think that happens to a lot of us. Like this happens to a friend or it happens to a sibling, and through no real fault of our own, we're not there in that moment. And that shame and guilt can really break people apart. But one of the things I wanted to do in this book was to encourage the idea that we can and should forgive each other with family members and friends, that we have to give each other a break a little bit when we let each other down.

I imagine that if this had happened in my family and probably in a lot of families, there's a lot of strife. And you weren't there for me or you're not there for me in the way I need you to be there for me, but nobody really knows how we need. I don't know maybe how I need you to be there for me and vice versa. And so part of the healing, I think, for this book and maybe for a lot of people is simply figuring out a way to stay close and connected with the people they cared about.

DANIELLE CITRON: So now I'm going to bring our LawTech Center fellow Max Larson into the conversation to ask the first question from our group.

MAX LARSON: Hi. Thanks for speaking with us again today and for writing the book. It's definitely very interesting. And I think I'm certainly in the camp of people you mentioned who found the ending unsatisfying. So I'm curious, you talked about your history of writing from journalism and what the role of having this be fiction played because as you mentioned, it's very much shining a mirror on society. Everything in here felt, I was Professor Citron about this, it felt like, wow, everything in here feels very realistic.

And that was really sad to see, like even this person with so much privilege is like, oh, the police aren't going to help me. The legal system really doesn't help anyone. And the only times we see it playing a role, it feels unjust. Oh, the friend who was in the house, and he was allowed to be there, but the police are coming after him for trespassing.

And so I'm curious what went into the decision of having it be fiction but yet so accurate and not having it be this version of, oh, and it's a fiction where we have some crime fighters who come in or the word vigilantism is a viable option, because I found her revenge deeply unsatisfying like this helps no one. Taunts you more. This is sad. This is not a positive solution for society at all.

Is criminalization really the route we want? You see a little bit of how incarceration ruins people's lives too. So I guess I'm curious-- sorry that was a little incoherent, but you decide, well, the role of this being fiction and yet also hyper realistic and not-- what is the role for lawyers reading this who want to make positive changes? Do we see things in the book, or how does that work?

JULIA DAHL: One of the things I realized as I was writing this and I was thinking about one of the things that Claudia does is that there's not really any good choices when something like this happens to you. There's a great line in-- this is random, but there was a series written based on a Celeste Ng book called Little Fires Everywhere. It's about two Black women and white women, among other things, and their various privileges.

And I remember the white woman saying something like I made good choices. And the Black woman says to her, you didn't make good choices, you had good choices. And I realized as I was writing this that Claudia doesn't really have any good choices. She knows or at least she feels, again, as a 19-year-old with a sense that she's already a slut in the eyes of a lot of the world, that if she goes to the police they're going to say, well, you were drunk, and haven't you already hooked up with this one guy?

And then what's the other option? So she does some really ugly things, and I don't think those are the right things to have done. Crucially, I don't think they will make her happy. I guess the book, and you're right about this, in that way, it's really a dark book because Claudia is not going to leave this book in any way happy. She's not really making good decisions.

But what I wanted to show was that given what got dropped on her plate that night and in the days since, she didn't really have good decisions, that our system, whatever, does not allow her to have good decisions because she knows if she goes to police, say, she's concerned not only that they'll shrug and say, I can't prove that he raped you, or more crucially, I would try, but a jury won't believe me. That's one of the things you talked about what lawyers can do.

In reporting this book, I talked to prosecutors. And there are some prosecutors that say that they will bring a hard case to a jury, a case where maybe the victim-- sorry, I have something in my eyes. I put mascara on for this, and now, it's backfiring. Where they will decide this case is difficult. She was intoxicated. We don't have a witness, but I believe her, I'm going to take it to trial.

But I think a lot of prosecutors are worried frankly, more about their conviction rate and will say, I don't feel good about a jury decision here. I'm not going to take it to trial. But if they don't try, whatever. So I think some of it is there's a way that prosecutors in the system can, like I said before, default toward believing the victim and default toward believing that a jury will believe the victim. So that would be great. I don't know. That would be a big change, I think.

DANIELLE CITRON: OK, great. Thank you so much for talking about the ways in which it's hard for lawyers even to undo these structures of injustice and social attitudes that are challenging. So we have some questions in the queue. One is from my colleague, Professor Kathy Huang, and it is, can you talk a bit about the decision to make Claudia a social media influencer? To me, that sends really a great message to young women that just because you share a part of your life, it doesn't mean that nothing is private? So talk a little bit about that.

JULIA DAHL: That's the thing, you can and should be able to still have boundaries that you decide about in your life. You decide I'm going to share this picture of me in bikini. Cool. If I was 19 and super hot in the year 2022, I might be putting up a picture myself in a bikini too. Why not? That's it.

There are consequences to that, but those consequences at some level are about other people's perception that maybe-- then the question is, how much do you say screw you in your old time perception, but then how much do you have to recognize that the reality is some people are going to look at you and think X? That's something that you have to manage.

I don't think there's a right or wrong way. You have to know as somebody who's-- any of us on social media, we have to find some kind of balance between our real lives and what we share on social media. And I think a lot of us, I certainly do, struggle with this sometimes, sharing a little too much. Just because your social media influencer, just because you're a movie star, just because you're a public person does not mean are not allowed to have privacy.

But I think the media and just the population in general is so hungry for-- I guess it's just a human nature thing; people that we admire, we love to tear them down. People that are beautiful, we love to see them ugly. And that system exists. And so when you are putting yourself out there-- and this is the problem with young people, is because when you're young, your brain is not developed. You haven't figured out life yet.

You can't be expected to have all this wisdom. It's not possible for you to have that at 18 or 19. So there's a risk involved, but I still think, the bottom line is just that, that if you're a social media person, you get to control your social media. That's the deal. Somebody taking your control from you is just that, somebody taking your control from you, and that's a violation, I think, whether or not it's a legal violation.

DANIELLE CITRON: No, no I think so well said. The ways in which we manage the boundaries around our intimate lives ought to be up to us. And it's not an all or nothing proposition, which you make really clear, that is the broader theme that you bring out. Which I think is a real positive, that Claudia is an influencer. She uses these tools, and she shouldn't be condemned for it.

And even to the extent that she would choose sexual expression to be shared, and she didn't in that first incident being on that rich kids of the Hamptons or whatever incident in the book. Unknowingly, they're hiding cameras in the bushes. And then she's sexually shamed for just kissing someone in the pool. We're nuanced in how we think about privacy, and that we ought to be able to manage those boundaries in ways they're nuanced. And that it's not open season on your privacy to say, oh, you were on that reality TV show, so you have no privacy in other aspects of your life.

And I think the book is a really important educative tool to help us see that, that there is nuance here, that it's complicated, and that privacy isn't an all or nothing proposition. So I think that was really beautifully done in the book. So we've got some questions more about sexual assault. So if you want to answer these or feel comfortable, great.

JULIA DAHL: I can try.

DANIELLE CITRON: Oh, I have a question about the creative process, which I think you're going to like too. So Alex asks, what was your creative process for writing *The Missing Hours*? Beyond drawing on your own wealth of experience as a former reporter on sexual assault, cyber assault, and sex crimes, did you feel the need to conduct research and consult legal and criminal justice experts? And did you engage especially in certain types of media or works of fiction that you thought were helpful as you wrote this, *The Missing Hours*?

JULIA DAHL: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. So I read Chanel Miller's memoir, which I highly recommend everyone involved in law read because it's such a detailed and beautiful and harrowing story about what she went through deciding to stand up and testify against this person. So I read that, I read a wonderful book by, oh God, Michelle-- I'm forgetting her name. *Rape is Not a Crime*.

Brilliant. About a woman whose sexual-- and honestly, I think of that all the time when I see headlines, of people getting away with stuff. It's like rape is just not a crime. Brilliant book. I watched-- I'm trying to think what else. And then I did use my reporter and I did interview people. Early in the process with *The Missing Hours* when I was just figuring out what had happened to her and stuff, I interviewed a woman I know who used to be a sex crimes prosecutor, now writes mystery novels Allison Leotta. Do you know Allison?

DANIELLE CITRON: I'm like a fan so Yeah

JULIA DAHL: OK, great.

DANIELLE CITRON: But great stuff.

JULIA DAHL: So she and I, we were actually together at a mystery writers' conference back in the days of conferences having brunch together in New Orleans. And I was telling her about my idea for the story, blah, blah, blah. And she was the one who talked to me a little bit about-- I sort of said like, if you're prosecuting a sex crime and there's been somebody who's been drinking, what are some of the-- and she said those are by far the hardest to do because you can say maybe she consented and didn't remember or maybe he thought she consented, the signals are mixed.

But I remember her saying that but if she loses control of her bodily functions, so if she urinates, if she vomits, if something like that, that can be one of the things that jury-- for a jury, they can be like aw, did she consent, did she not? But something like that, proof of something like that can really put it over the edge for a conviction. So if you read the book, you know that that's a moment that somebody talks about that exact thing.

The movie that most closely hits with this book is a movie that came out last year, *Promising Young Woman*.

DANIELLE Yes. I knew you're going to say that.

CITRON:

JULIA DAHL: I had finished the book by the time that movie got out. And I avoided watching it because when I read reviews about it, I remember thinking, oh, this is so much like what I've written. And I didn't want to watch it, so I was like, oh, what if it's better or what if it is too similar or whatever? Anyway, I finally watched it. I loved it. Oh God it's so painful.

DANIELLE It's a perfect complement that's here.

CITRON:

JULIA DAHL: Right. And I remember finishing it and sighing and going, OK, we have taken very similar stories and material and done different things with them. And that was a relief for me. But definitely, that's a movie that I would recommend when you're thinking about the way that the trauma ripples because the central character in this book or in that movie is not the victim of sexual assault. It's her best friend and the clear trauma she went through after what happened to her friend.

And I do that for most of my books, do some research here and there. The book I'm writing now is much more-- all my other books have been in some way or another inspired by news stories I've covered. But the book I'm writing now is a little more personal. So it's less research intensive, which is fun. But also, I miss research because I get to meet and talk to people like Danielle. I get to call up people who have deep knowledge in something and just pick their brains. And that's super fun.

DANIELLE So no return to Rebekah?

CITRON:

JULIA DAHL: Not yet. I think I will probably write another Rebekah book.

DANIELLE You'll go back to her, though?

CITRON:

JULIA DAHL: I know. But this book that I'm writing does have a reporter. It's a young man. I want to write more-- that was one of the things I missed with *The Missing Hour*. I was like I want to write another reporter. I just like reporters. There's so many different kinds of reporters now, and they are dealing with so much with the changes in the industry and all that stuff. So there is a reporter in this book.

DANIELLE I still love Rebekah, but I had one of my neighbors that worked in [INAUDIBLE], is also a mystery fan and hadn't read the *Invisible City*. So I was like, you must now stop and go on Amazon and buy *Invisible City*.

JULIA DAHL: Thank you.

DANIELLE So you can get to Rebekah and become obsessed with her as I am. So he's like oh, yeah, yeah. He checked in with me later and agreed. What's so interesting about the book too is the ripple effect that you, I think, so carefully draw out.

That is, sexual violence and violations of intimate privacy have a way in which they alienate victims from their families and the rings of damage that happened to victims, their families, and then groups. That is, other people in their situation like other women looking at Claudia's, if other women see what happened, they're like, there's no way I'm going forward either.

And I think that's an important part of the story that you captured really beautifully, was the shattering of communities and loved ones and ways in which it exacerbates silences between people that you almost-- at least we see that in intimate privacy violations that people become super alienated from their families because their families don't believe them. They're embarrassed-

JULIA DAHL: Or they're embarrassed. Oh, God.

DANIELLE About what happened to them and then don't handle it well.
CITRON:

JULIA DAHL: Somebody comes into your home and breaks in and steals things or whatever, you tell everybody. You shout it to the wrap, but nobody's getting on Facebook and being like, last night, something happened to me in the basement in a bar bathroom. You just don't talk about it. It's like you don't talk about it.

And it's a different kind of crime. And so when it's not talked about, it becomes this shameful, secret thing as if being the victim of it is shameful. And that is in the air. So women and men-- actually, there's a wonderful book that came out last year by Caitlin called *The Damage*. Do you this book?

DANIELLE No. I'm writing it down.
CITRON:

JULIA DAHL: Brilliant book. Hold on a second, it's right here. Oh, here it is. Hold on. I'm showing it to you.

DANIELLE OK, [INAUDIBLE].
CITRON:

JULIA DAHL: *The Damage*, Caitlin Wahrer. Just got nominated for the same award I was nominated for, The Best First Novel by the Edgar awards. And it's about a male college student who's the victim of a sexual assault and all the ripple effects of that and the shame involved, maybe even compounded when the victim is a man. A whole different set of problems, and it's a really interesting look at that because it's not just women.

DANIELLE It's the ways in which invidious or bigoted stereotypes and gender norms are inscribed by the silence. And especially when young boys or young male adults are raped by coaches, the difficulty of men coming and boys coming forward is compounded too because it almost feminizes them and reduces them.

JULIA DAHL: Right, exactly. In this book, the young man is like, everyone thinks, well, you're big, you could have fought him off. If it could even be more shameful to come forward for a woman, it's like it's that much more shameful for a man. Yeah, it's ugly.

**DANIELLE
CITRON:**

So I got another great question. So given the subject matter that you write about and your intimate knowledge of the vindictive nature of these types of perpetrators as well as those who engage in online harassment of women who speak out on these subject more generally, have you ever thought of or felt that you might write under a pseudonym? And had you ever considered that?

And what has made you not choose for this book in particular not-- because of course, your other novels-- this is, again, the sort of thing that intimate privacy violations can create, backlashes from men's rights groups. Did you think about writing under a pseudonym for this one?

JULIA DAHL:

I remember interviewing a woman who writes about this. And she was like, if you get on the internet and write about rape, you will be threatened with rape on the internet. That's what happens. You and I are on Twitter, and a lot of people are.

So many of the women who really take these issues to task and take systems and men, people in power to task on this, absolutely, if you start looking at their mentions, it's horrifying. And then sometimes they'll screenshot an email they got, I wish you get raped and this and that.

I have been very lucky. I left CBS News in 2018. And I was writing mostly about sexual assaults, I guess maybe a little earlier like in the 2012, '14, '15. I got a few emails or Twitter posts saying ugly things about me, but somehow, I managed to avoid that. I don't how or why, but I've, knock wood, never been really threatened online. Knock wood right now.

So that didn't really occur to me, but I can certainly understand why people do. And I can understand why people pull back from writing about this stuff because you have to take care of your own sanity at some level and your own safety and your family's safety. But to answer that question, no, I've not been the victim of that. So I've been lucky.

**DANIELLE
CITRON:**

So another question is, so do rape kits and having victims recount their stories for their traumatized victims or how do you think the criminal or medical system could make the process better for victims of sexual assault?

JULIA DAHL:

That's the thing, and that was one of the things that I thought was so beautifully done in that series *Unbelievable*, was that, OK, you've been assaulted. If you decide to call police and go through with I'm going to press charges, and I'm going to allow-- because your body is the crime scene. So then you have to allow your body to have evidence taken from it.

So you go to the hospital. And if you're lucky, you get to a hospital that has what's called a sexual assault nurse. And these are nurses who have specifically been trained to interact with sexual assault victims because they're having to pluck hairs, and they're having to take swabs. They're basically having to invade your body again.

If that's done with care and with some understanding of the fact that you've just gone through a trauma, I think it can be better than if not. But even so, it's going to be painful and traumatic. So if you don't have those nurses who are specially trained-- and that's the thing, at every hospital and urgent care center, we need to have medical professionals who when somebody comes in and says, I've been assaulted, it's like a whole new protocol kicks in.

And that's what happens with the sexual assault nurses. So there's that, which is great, but there aren't enough of them. And then it should be the same way with-- and I think the problem with-- we have what? Is it 15,000 policing agencies in this country? And everyone is its own little fiefdom.

The culture of that little agency depends on the guy or the man usually or sometimes woman at the top. That person decides how they're going to treat victims, how they're going to investigate. Is it going to be that we're going to give them time before we give them an interview? That's one of the things, is that some best practices say that you need to interview immediately to get all the details.

Some say you need to allow them to have the shock wear off. So you give them a little time, and then they'll be more willing to talk. You need to go back and forth. And then there's way best practices in terms of how to conduct an interview so that it doesn't feel like you are interrogating the victim.

And Danielle, you maybe even involved in this. But there are people who are involved, everybody from therapists to lawyers and to police practitioners who are involved in creating these best practices and training first responders, EMTs, cops, whether it be detectives, investigators, prosecutors, all the way on up to deal with sexual assault victims with a certain kind of attitude. But not every agency is going to do that, and not every cop is going to do that even if they've been trained to do that.

And so it's like if you happen to live in a place where the cops have gone through this training, then maybe you get treated a little better. If you happen to live in a place where the cop who got called believes that most women cry rape, you just got that cop, there's nothing you can do about it. The haphazard is so terrible, but I think we just have to keep banging away at there is a way to do this that's not only healthy and supportive, but that is going to end up with a better solution in terms of justice.

If you connect with the victim and make them feel supported and make them feel safe, my guess is they're going to be more likely to help you and give you the information you need to potentially find the person who is the violator. If you treat them terribly, they are going to do what so many women do and drop out of the process. And how can you blame them?

DANIELLE CITRON: So question about just the laws on the books. You talked about how police are always saying like there's thing we can do. Is it really true that the police are unable to respond to rape or sexual assault? And I'm asking the question for someone. That what do tools do police officers have? And through your experience, I realize you're not a lawyer.

JULIA DAHL: Right, I'm not, nor a cop. But my sense is that if you just-- if I call the police and say I've just been assaulted, somebody's going to come to my house or they're going to have them meet me at the hospital or maybe the police agency. And they're going to interview me.

And they're going to make a decision after having interviewed me and maybe looking around my place or whatever information I give them, maybe I can bring my phone, whatever, about whether or not they think this warrants further investigation and what further investigation it warrants.

If I have a name for them, this person did this to me, are they going to go interview that person. Again, they get to make that decision. If I don't have a name for them, if I say I went to a bar and somebody put something in my drink and I wound it up home and this was what happened, are they going to go to the bar with my picture and say, who was this person talking to and da, da, da?

All that is their decision. They decide if they want to investigate. And that's even before we get anywhere near a prosecutor. They could investigate and decide, OK, here's the evidence we believe to charge this person and go to the prosecutor. The prosecutor could say, I don't think this is enough for a jury. We're not going to go ahead and charge. So there's all these steps where law enforcement has all the power to decide what the next steps are.

And then some cases like the Steubenville case, where law enforcement, for whatever reason, had decided we're not going to look at this, the media, in this case, Anonymous, got involved and made it a public outcry. And so that helped.

DANIELLE Hold on, I have another question. I don't want to steal the time away from folks who have questions.

CITRON:

JULIA DAHL: Well, we're done in five minutes.

DANIELLE Yeah, we only have five minutes so I don't want to-- the audience has wonderful questions but was there

CITRON: anything that you edited out of this book? What did you choose to take out? Were there things that you left out that were hard for you to leave out?

JULIA DAHL: So much. So this book, it's actually kind of a short book. It's only about 65,000 words. Most novels are more like 80,000 words. I cut more than 70,000 words from this book.

DANIELLE Oh, my goodness. It's a great question.

CITRON:

JULIA DAHL: Yeah, I wrote so much partly because I didn't really know-- I knew what the main drama was, but I didn't really know how I wanted it to end. I didn't know what the right ending was for Claudia. What would be satisfying but not satisfying?

I don't know. I didn't want it to just be titillating I didn't want it to feel like a happy ending with a bow tied around. It I swear, I wrote four endings. Somebody is asking, I see, if Chad had gone to jail, would it have been happier? I don't know. Maybe for a minute. Maybe it would make her feel a little bit better, but it's not going to erase the trauma of what happened.

And eventually, he'll get out. He's not going to get life for that. He'll get a couple of years. And he's going to get a cushy-- he's going to have the best lawyer in the world. He's going to get out in a year or two. He's going to have a nice experience at a country club prison probably.

I think that the problem for a lot of victims is just that there's just no satisfying resolution. So to answer that, yes, I edited a lot out of the book. A lot of it was back story. A lot of it was false starts going different places with different characters.

DANIELLE And in some ways, the incarceration piece that when the criminal justice when it operates, it operates accurately and well. It sends a message that this is wrongful behavior and can serve an important deterrent value. But you shrug your shoulders, I saw, and rightly so because it's so complicated that all the lives, A, you can't undo it. It's like part of her.

When you read it, you know it's part of Claudia, that you can't shake it out of her and that she can't let it go. And that all that pain and suffering is still there and that ripple effect from her family and loved ones and groups so that it's like the structures that even if all that works and everyone [INAUDIBLE]

JULIA DAHL: Even if all that works, it's like it's not going to-- oh, wait, here. Hold on. This is the book I was telling you about, Michelle Bowdler, *Is Rape a Crime?* [INAUDIBLE]

DANIELLE OK, great.

CITRON:

JULIA DAHL: I'm stage managing with all the books that I want to--

DANIELLE I love that. I feel like I channel you that--

CITRON:

JULIA DAHL: Read this book.

DANIELLE In class, I'm always helping my students about literature that they can read because, as you help show us, that any wonderful book is built on wonderful different other books and literatures and helps us change the way we think. And so this book did that.

CITRON:

And I hope this book does that in classrooms and in conversations around the dinner table so that we can look hard at ourselves and see that intimate privacy violations and sexual assaults are so deeply harmful. And that as a society, we need to integrate those lessons and change our behaviors and support other people.

I think I have to wrap up. So Julia, thank you so much for writing the book. So keep writing all these crime novels. I wish I could say I want to take you back and have you be in the journalism sphere to help work with me on educating--

JULIA DAHL: Well, I'm teaching journalism. There are a lot of amazing young people who are coming into journalism and want to and will make a difference. These are passionate, excited, dogged people. And working with them, it's so much less depressing than being on the crime beat all day long.

DANIELLE Yeah, so we'll see many more journalists working with lawyers and law professors to help change hearts and minds about suffering and harms and privacy invasions so that we can make the world a slightly better place hopefully. So we can try together.

CITRON:

So with that, the LawTech Center is so grateful that you came. You are our first speaker, and this was an amazing inaugural event. And it means the world to me to have been able to work with you all these years and then now to be here just found from the sidelines and have you come speak.

JULIA DAHL: Ditto.

DANIELLE So thank you so much everyone for coming.

CITRON:

JULIA DAHL: Thank you all.

DANIELLE

Yes, it was a wonderful event. Thank you.

CITRON: