



“Labelled a murderer”- A discursive analysis of Amanda Knox’s construction of innocence

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ABSTRACT

The research question for this investigation is how Amanda Knox formulates her discourse to construct herself as being innocent of the murder of Meredith Kercher. To explore this research question, pre-existing data, a 2014 interview with Knox, were transcribed and then analysed according to discursive psychology. The analysis found she constructs innocence by using a variety of practices to perform three key actions. These actions are the construction of: Knox’s ignorance about the murder; Knox as a credible and honest person; and Knox as being victimised. Implications of these findings include that they provide a greater understanding about the ways convicted murderers construct innocence, therefore extending the findings of previous literature on fact construction to a more forensic linguistic field. There is also the possibility of applications and future studies which could explore this area further.

KEY WORDS:	AMANDA KNOX	DISCURSIVE PSYCHOLOGY	INNOCENCE	MEREDITH KERCHER	MURDER
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Introduction

“If you are caught doing something which appears odd...you will want to account for your behaviour...If this account is successful it will make your behaviour seem less odd.”

(Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 74).

The rape and murder of the 21 year old British student Meredith Kercher took place in Perugia, Italy on night of the 1st of November 2007 (Mirabella, 2012). It was widely reported that her death was the result of a “sex game gone wrong” (Lenth, 2013, p. 354) and that three people were jointly responsible: Kercher’s American flatmate Amanda Knox; Knox’s Italian boyfriend Raffaele Sollecito; and Rudy Guede, a mutual acquaintance of Kercher and Knox.

Knox has been convicted, acquitted and reconvicted in the last six years, with continued debate about whether she in particular is guilty of this crime or not. Although there has never been any reliable DNA evidence found that places her at the crime scene (Mirabella, 2012), there are still reasons why many believe that she is guilty in some way for the death of Meredith Kercher. These include the fact that, when questioned by the police in the days following the murder, Knox confessed to being present when Kercher was killed. Knox later retracted what she said, claiming the confession to be coerced. Although it has long been recognised that one of the dangers of questioning someone under duress is the increased likelihood of a false confession (Kassin & Neumann, 1997), her confession still led many to think she played at least some part in the murder of Meredith Kercher. Another reason for this is that, following the murder, Knox was reported to be displaying odd behaviour such as kissing and embracing her boyfriend, Raffaele Sollecito, outside the house moments after Kercher’s body was discovered, doing gymnastics in the corridors of the police station and telling Kercher’s friends “how could she not have suffered? She got her fucking throat slit” (Occupy HLN, 2013; Knox, 2013). This type of negative character evidence can be heavily relied upon in the Italian criminal justice system and was said to be a key factor in Knox’s guilty conviction (Lenth, 2013; Mirabella, 2012).

Despite her sentence, Knox maintains that she is innocent and the research question for this study is to therefore explore the rhetorical procedures she uses in her language to construct herself as being an innocent person. Although Knox has been accused of six crimes in total relating to this same incident: murder; illegally carrying a knife; rape; theft; simulating a robbery; and slander (Knox, 2013), this investigation will predominantly focus on how she constructs herself as being innocent of Kercher’s murder.

For a focused investigation, it was decided that just this one convicted criminal and one key interview with her would be examined, contextualised by other materials such as other interviews and her autobiography (Knox, 2013). Knox was chosen for this single case study as she is particularly intriguing due to her prominent exposure in the media, appearing on many television interviews (ABC News, 2014; Amazon Books, 2013; Occupy HLN, 2013) and releasing her own autobiography (Knox, 2013). She has often been demonised, particularly in the European press (Page, 2014) and, with the decision being made about whether Knox is to be extradited back to Italy or not expected to be made on the 25th of March 2015 (The Guardian, 2015) her case is

still very much a controversial and current one. This could be said to make her attempts to persuade people that she is innocent highly challenging.

Wooffitt (1992) argues that, if a speaker is in a sensitive position, such as Knox is, this may affect how they construct their language. Wooffitt studied the extraordinary accounts of people who claim to have had paranormal experiences. He found that the factual status of these extraordinary (and possibly unbelievable) events were accomplished through the design and organisation of the account, for example the speakers presenting themselves as sane, rational and normal people. Although Knox's account is not of a paranormal experience, it is still extraordinary, with a chance that she may not be believed by the recipients of her talk.

For this reason, Knox could be said to have a dilemma of stake (Edwards & Potter, 1992). This investigation will allow for an exploration of how she manages this dilemma, producing accounts which attend to her interests (to construct herself as innocent) without being undermined as interested. Potter (1996) reviews a range of different practices people use for managing this dilemma of stake. These rhetorical procedures construct factuality and establish a person's account as credible and independent of the speaker. With some simplification, Hepburn (2003) claims these rhetorical procedures can be thought of as a kind of 'reality production kit', containing overlapping practices which include:

- *Category entitlement*: where talk is constructed as coming from a category that is credible or knowledgeable in a way that is relevant to the claim the speaker is making.
- *Stake inoculation*: where talk is constructed as coming from someone whose stake in that talk is counter to what you would expect when they are making the claim.
- *Corroboration and consensus*: where description is constructed as being corroborated by an independent witness and/ or as something that everyone agrees on.
- *Active voicing*: where quotations and reports of thoughts are used to present the views and impressions of others as corroborating the speaker's claims or to show the vivid and unexpected nature of what is being described.
- *Vivid description*: where descriptions are rich with vivid detail, careful observation and things that 'in themselves' would not be surprising. Vivid description invokes a powerful category: witness.
- *Systematic vagueness*: where features of descriptions that are given do not add up or do not draw attention to your stake in the claim you are making.

Discursive psychology analyses often study these sorts of practices, exploring how facts are constructed in language. However, these devices have not previously been explored in the discourse of convicted criminals who claim to be innocent such as Amanda Knox. The majority of investigations about Knox's case simply highlight how the crime was covered in the media (Annunziato, 2011; Boyd, 2013) or exemplify issues with the Italian legal system (Lenth, 2013; Mirabella, 2012) rather than topicalising her language. This investigation therefore is a unique contribution to both the study of Amanda Knox's case and to discursive psychology. It also lends itself well to future study into the psychology of convicted offenders, as further investigations can build on the findings of this case study, exploring how they may apply to cases of other convicted criminals who controversially claim to be innocent.

To reiterate, the research question for this investigation is to use discursive psychology to explore how Amanda Knox formulates her discourse to construct herself as being innocent of the murder of Meredith Kercher. The outcome of the study will not be to decide whether or not Knox's guilty conviction is deserved or to attempt to 'mind read' whether she is lying about her innocence; discursive psychology is anti-cognitivist and deals purely with social practices, not cognitive entities (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Therefore, the focus will not be *if* Amanda Knox is innocent; it will be how she *constructs* innocence.

Method

Design

This investigation is a single qualitative case study of one interview with Amanda Knox (The Daily of the UW, 2014). Her talk in this interview was analysed in order to explore how she formulates her discourse in a way that constructs herself as being innocent of the murder of Meredith Kercher, a crime she has been both convicted and reconvicted of in the past six years.

Data

The data chosen for analysis in this investigation were pre-existing data, an interview with Amanda Knox that was conducted in 2014 (The Daily of the UW, 2014). This was filmed for 'The Daily', the student newspaper of the University of Washington where Knox graduated from last year. This video was uploaded onto YouTube in three parts on three separate days in February 2014. This date was important to take into account when viewing and analysing the data because, at this point, she had recently been reconvicted (Clifford, 2014) and was therefore guilty in the eyes of the Italian legal system. The editor of the newspaper was emailed to inform him of the investigation (see Appendix I) but obtaining permission was not required in order to go ahead with the investigation, as the data were already in the public domain.

This particular interview was deemed appropriate to answer the research question because it is over an hour long, conducted relatively recently, with no cutaways or any advertisement interruptions. Furthermore, interviews are said to be rich data for qualitative researchers to use, as they allow participants to develop long turns and tell things in their own way (Edwards, 1997). This is very much the case with these data, as the interviewer is not even seen on camera; the focus is very much on Knox and her accounts. Furthermore, the fact that the interview includes descriptions of contentious events, such as Knox's apparent discovery of the murder scene, her supposed false confession and her time spent in prison, was also why this interview was deemed most appropriate. This is because it allows for analysis of how she formulates these events, and herself, to construct innocence.

Analytic Procedure

The qualitative data were transcribed using a 'Jefferson-Lite' transcription system (Hepburn, 2004; Jefferson, 1985, 2004; Potter & Hepburn, 2005) (see Appendix II for the notation key used and Appendix III for the full transcription of the interview). This is orthographic in form, but captures some paralinguistic features of Knox's discourse such as pauses, emphasis, volume and also her cries and her laughter. This was so that these interactionally relevant features of Knox's talk could

be examined. The interview was then analysed according to discursive psychology, while taking into consideration what she has said in other interviews (ABC News, 2014; Amazon Books, 2013; Occupy HLN, 2013) and what she has written in her autobiography (Knox, 2013) to examine if these corroborate what she says in the interview with 'The Daily' and whether or not this could be said to affect the persuasiveness of her construction of innocence.

Discursive psychology involves applying the principles of discourse analysis to psychological topics; treating discourse as action rather than as the outcome of cognitive processes (Edwards & Potter, 2001). Furthermore, discursive psychology sees discourse as both *constructed* (by words, rhetorical procedures and accounts) and *constructive* (of the speaker's version of the world) (Edwards & Potter, 2001). It also considers discourse to be rhetorical and looks at how accounts are built up as being plausible representations of the past or dismissed as simply lies or mistakes (Hepburn, 2003). Although conversation analysis also sees talk as a form of action (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2008) this form of analysis was not deemed appropriate for this investigation. This is because a distinctive feature of conversation analysis is that it studies interaction (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990) for example how people take turns when interacting and the occurrence of interruption. The data used in this study are of a very asymmetrical interaction, with the interviewer only speaking for a few seconds four times throughout the hour long video, either to ask another question or to make a short comment. For this reason, discursive psychology was deemed more appropriate to examine the actions performed in Knox's discourse. However, as conversation analysis is said to be particularly influential in discursive psychology (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2008), certain conversation analytic structures such as repair construction were also examined when analysing Knox's discourse.

There is no set method to discursive psychology compared with an experimental or a content analysis method (Potter & Wetherell, 1987); it is a broad theoretical framework which starts by closely examining how thoughts, beliefs and attitudes are topicalised, handled and implied in talk (Edwards & Stokoe, 2004). This analytic procedure was therefore considered the most appropriate method to use to answer the research question. It allowed the key actions, which perform the main action of constructing Knox as being innocent, to be identified and the practices used to perform these actions to also be identified and exemplified, using specialist vocabulary used in other discursive analyses.

Ethical Considerations

As only pre-existing data were analysed, there were no participants in this study. This therefore meant that the consensual and ethical issues associated with collecting data from participants did not apply to this investigation (British Psychological Society, 2009). However, researcher ethics, such as reflexivity, were taken into consideration throughout the analysis. Reflexivity is a process whereby the researcher examines their own role; being aware that their assumptions and preconceptions (their 'conceptual baggage') may affect research decisions (Hsiung, 2008). Adhering to researcher ethics therefore means that the researcher has an obligation to approach data as neutrally and as impartially as possible and, for this reason, the data were analysed in this way for this investigation.

Analysis

The overall action that Amanda Knox performs in her discourse is the construction of herself as being innocent of the murder of Meredith Kercher. This investigation found that she performs this task using three key actions:

1. The construction of her ignorance about the murder at the time it happened.
2. The construction of herself as being a credible and honest person.
3. The construction of herself as being wrongly victimised.

Each of these actions is achieved through a number of practices. Some of these practices may be performed simultaneously (for example active voicing and the use of rhetorical questions) and some practices are flexible, multifunctional and may be used to achieve more than one of the three actions (for example repetition, active voicing and vivid description); there is not a one-to-one correspondence between practices and the actions they perform. Extracts of Knox's talk will be used to illustrate her use of these practices, along with the appropriate line numbers to refer to their location within the transcript of the interview (see Appendix III).

1. Construction of Knox's Ignorance about the Murder

The first action identified constructs Knox as not knowing anything about the murder, supposedly both unaware of and uninvolved in it. This action therefore contributes to performing the main action of constructing her as being innocent. The practices used to perform this action include repetition, evaluative assessments, active voicing and rhetorical questions. These will each be considered in turn.

Repetition. Knox says "I didn't know" and "I don't know" eighteen times throughout the hour long interview, for example saying "I didn't know where Meredith would be" (lines 12-13) and "I didn't know what to think" (line 17) and "I don't know what to make of this" (line 154) when talking about what happened before Kercher's body was discovered. Edwards (2004) claims that "I don't know" is a psychological thesaurus term, used to attend to a person's own character, motives and intentions. In Knox's case she uses it repeatedly to explicitly construct a lack of knowledge that Kercher had been killed, thus countering accusations that she was involved in the murder. Although what is linguistically 'given' need not be psychologically or intermentally given (Edwards, 1997) it is the *construction* of this ignorance (and therefore the construction of innocence) that this study is investigating, not whether this is really the case or not.

However, it could be said that, because her ignorance is corroborated by the claims made in her autobiography (Knox, 2013) it could be said to more persuasively construct innocence. For example she writes about how "I didn't find out until the months leading up to my trial- and during the trial itself- how sadistic her killer had been" (p. 27) and how "until the judge spoke, I had no idea that I was being accused of murder" (p. 215) and how "I don't know anything about this murder" (p. 330) which also explicitly constructs ignorance about the murder and therefore performs the main action of constructing innocence.

Evaluative assessments. Another way that Knox constructs ignorance about the murder is by her use of evaluative assessments. It is said that evaluative assessments are likely to be provided on some basis, with some orientation to the speaker's experiential or other knowledge grounds (Pomerantz, 1984). In Knox's case, they are with orientation to her supposed *lack* of knowledge. For example, when

talking about returning home for reportedly the first time since the previous night, she says

“when I first went in uhm it was very strange to me uhm (2.0) and I didn’t know what to think because yes the front door was open, but everything looked normal. Everything that I saw just in walking in the front door, going to my bedroom and going to the bathroom >the various bathrooms<, everything looked completely normal” (lines 16-21)

and how “when I saw the faeces in the toilet it actually creeped me out uhm because that was just very unusual” (lines 32-33) and how this unusual situation was “not something that is very clear to me. I don’t even know if Meredith is here, but it’s weird to me that her door is locked” (lines 86-88). The evaluative assessments “very strange”, “very unusual”, “not something that is very clear” and “weird” all construct ‘unusualness’ and perform the action of constructing Knox as being ignorant about the murder, as it formulates this was not something she expected to come home to. This therefore performs the main action of constructing her as being innocent of Kercher’s murder. She also does this in another interview (Occupy HLN, 2013) saying how, when she saw blood in the bathroom as she came out of the shower, she “thought it was strange”.

Knox also uses evaluative assessments when describing the discovery of Kercher’s body, saying how

“they said that there was blood everywhere. They were talking about her throat being slit. Uhm and I I I couldn’t picture it. It just seemed so strange because it’s like one thing to see a scene like that on CSI or whatever uhm, and it’s another one to imagine someone you actually know, like some living person who you just talked to yesterday, in those conditions uhm (2.0). And so I was really struggling with it. Like I was very scared uhm and I was very confused uhm and I like had these waves of emotion” (lines 170-177).

The use of the evaluative assessments “so strange”, “very scared” and “very confused” also construct ignorance about Kercher’s murder. This construction of ignorance about the murder therefore performs the main action of constructing her as being innocent of it.

Active voicing. Another way that Knox constructs ignorance is through her use of active voicing. One of Wooffitt’s (1992) observations is that, when a speaker formulates an account of an extraordinary event that may be received sceptically, they often include sections of quoted speech or thoughts, commonly marked out by shifts in intonation. Knox uses active voicing when formulating her ignorant thoughts about the crime scene before the discovery of Kercher’s body. For example, when talking about coming home and Kercher not being there, Knox says how

“granted she also has a whole bunch of English friends and so I had seen her the evening before or the afternoon before going out to meet them. And so I thought ‘well maybe (.) she’s out with them or maybe she’s still asleep’. Uhm I when I first went in uhm it was very strange to me uhm (2.0) and I didn’t know what to think because yes the front door was open, but everything looked normal. Everything that I saw just in walking in the front door, going to my bedroom and going to the bathroom >the various bathrooms<, everything

looked completely normal. So (2.0) I did not think, 'There's been a break in' uhm I just thought, 'Okay well the door doesn't work very well, so maybe (.) someone didn't close it all the way.' And then once I saw the blood in the bathroom uhm (1.0) I – and the and the faeces in the toilet, I thought 'Okay well that's really weird.' Uhm first of all the blood in the bathroom, like it wasn't a lot so I didn't (.) I didn't assume that someone had been murdered hhh I uhm I assumed that either someone kind of hurt themselves or there was menstrual issues uhm and and they hadn't been cleaned up. And so I thought, 'okay maybe someone ran out really quickly and is coming back uhm. Maybe someone went downstairs into the apartment below'" (lines 13-31).

This active voicing formulates Knox attempting to find reasonable explanations for why the house looked the way it did and why Kercher was not around. This constructs ignorance about the murder and therefore performs the main action of constructing innocence. Knox also does this in her autobiography (Knox, 2013), writing how when she saw the open door, she thought

"That's strange. But it was easily explained. The old latch didn't catch unless we used a key. Wind must have blown it open, I thought, and walked inside the house calling out "Filomena? Laura? Meredith? Hello? Hello? Anybody?" (p. 85).

Knox also uses active voicing in another interview (Occupy HLN, 2013), saying that, when she noticed the strange things in her apartment, she thought "don't freak out cuz it could really be nothing". Because the construction of ignorance is corroborated by Knox both here and in her autobiography, it could be said to perform the main action of constructing innocence more persuasively.

Rhetorical questions. Knox also uses rhetorical questions to formulate lack of knowledge about the murder upon discovery of the crime scene. Rhetorical questions maintain the attention of the recipients of her talk as, although they do not require an answer (Han, 2002) they promote thought. For example she talks about how she

"assumed there was a break in. Ah apparently the person only went through Filomena's room, but why? And if there was in her room her camera like sitting right there, like her laptop sitting right there, like what did they take?" (lines 97-100).

thus further constructing a lack of knowledge about the events that had occurred in her house the previous night.

The use of rhetorical questions is a practice that overlaps with active voicing, as she often uses the rhetorical questions *as part of* the practice of active voicing to formulate the questions she was thinking or asking. For example, when talking about reaching the shut door of Kercher's bedroom, Knox says

"so I remember even knocking on it and thinking 'Oh if it's locked, then Meredith must be inside. I mean why else – why like why would she lock the?'" (lines 71-73)

and "like I don't understand wuh. If she's not here like, why would she lock it?" (lines 79-80). This constructs unawareness that Kercher had been murdered and that someone had locked her body inside her bedroom. She also talks about how "when I

heard that they said that it was a body wrapped in a blanket I thought ‘Well then how do they know it’s her? Like how do they know?’” (lines 219-221). This rhetorical question formulates her questioning the possibility that the body could be someone else’s.

Knox also uses rhetorical questions to construct a lack of knowledge in the days following the murder. For example, she talks about being interviewed by the police and how “they had asked me weird questions about like her sex habits and so like of course there was like going through my mind like ‘what happened to her?’” (lines 251-253) and how she

“racked my brain hour after hour and day after day at that, by the end of it, trying to think of what was the answer. Like wv how did this happen? Why did this happen? Who who did this?” (lines 302-305).

This use of rhetorical questions formulates ignorance about who committed the murder and exactly how and why it happened, therefore formulating that she is not the person who did this. She also constructs ignorance using rhetorical questions within her use of active voicing when talking about discussing the murder with her fellow housemates and how she

“kept sitting there with them going like, “How could this be possible? Did was did something – like who would do this? And who would who would break in and then not steal anything but then kill her and why would they kill -?” Like I could not stop thinking about it. And they kept saying, “Well you know, the police are gonna find out, and you know it’s really sad.” And I was just like, “No, lhlike thh like it’s not enough. Like wuhh what happened?”” (lines 310-317).

These questions do not require answers from the recipients of this interview but they do perform the action of constructing ignorance as to what these answers are and therefore perform the main action of constructing innocence.

2. Construction of Knox as Credible and Honest

The second action identified constructs Knox as being a credible and honest person and therefore also contributes to performing the main action of constructing herself as being innocent, formulating Knox as telling the truth about not being the one who killed Kercher. In terms of the ‘reality production kit’ (Hepburn, 2003), some of these overlapping practices are used by Knox to achieve this action. They include category entitlement, vivid description (with the use of repair construction and norm breaches included within this practice) and active voicing. These will each be considered in turn.

Category entitlement. Category entitlement is used by Knox, constructing her talk as coming from a credible and knowledgeable category. It is thought that language is the medium for self-construction (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) and, in Knox’s case, she uses her language as a medium to construct herself as a credible and honest person. Formulations such as “at first I thought but then I realised” are organised in this way to present the speaker’s first assumption as being ordinary (Wooffitt, 1992). This conveys themselves as a normal and rational person (Potter, 1996). For example when Knox says “the blood in the bathroom, like it wasn’t a lot so I didn’t (.) I didn’t assume that someone had been murdered” (lines 26-27) constructs herself as a

credible and honest person as it formulates her admission that her first thought was ordinary but mistaken.

Knox also uses an x/y formulation to construct her as being a credible and honest person. Wooffitt (1992) claims that the x/y formulation has a two part format (“I was just doing x when y”) and is used especially when there is no independent corroboration to the story. He claims that the x component formulates a recollection of what the speaker was doing just before an event in question occurred and the y component reports the speaker’s first awareness of what was happening. X is usually routine or normal whereas y is something unusual. For example Knox says

“I had brought a mop from my place because there was water on the floor in the kitchen. His pipe had gone loose. Uhm and so I was doing that. I was mopping that up and immediately after he got outta the shower I was like (.). “Tell me if I’m crazy, Raffhhaele huhuh like. What what do I do about this?” Uhm and he immediately was alarmed and was like, “No, you have to call your roommates, figure out what happened. Something happened”” (lines 36-42).

The x component constructs the routine or normal activity of Knox mopping up and the y component constructs the alarm of Knox’s boyfriend, the moment when Knox first became aware that something may be wrong. This constructs herself as being a credible and honest person as she is formulating, with precision, when this moment happened. This therefore also performs the main action of constructing her as innocent, someone unlikely to be lying.

Vivid description. Another way this category of Knox being a credible and honest person is established is by Knox providing graphic and vivid descriptions in her account. Vivid descriptions are said to be derived from the careful observing of a scene and they may include features that might seem difficult to make up because of their specificity or their oddness (Potter, 1996). Potter (1996) argues that there is no neat separation between factual accounts and fictional accounts. This is because, often, the resources for formulating vivid and plausible fictions are exactly the same resources that are used for constructing credible facts. For example, Knox goes into great detail in some areas of her descriptions. She talks about “when I went back uhm to my apartment after – the house but like we had the upper floor so it was our apartment” (lines 2-3) and how

“I went back to Raffaele’s and I kept brooding over it > he was in the bathroom < and ah brooding over it. I had brought a mop from my place because there was water on the floor in the kitchen. His pipe had gone loose” (lines 34-37).

“But we had the upper floor” and “his pipe had gone loose” are not necessarily *required* to describe what happened that day, but they do perform the action of constructing her as being a credible and honest person, as they provide detail to her accounts. She also does this when describing her housemate’s bedroom, saying

“I went into the uhm the other bedroom, which was Laura’s, but it was spotless. Like nothing had been touched. Her bedspread was pulled like so wonderfully clean uhm like a like a hotel” (lines 54-57).

and, when describing what happened after Kercher’s body had been discovered, she says

“I remember just like being super out of it when uhm outside of the outside of the house when that was going on. I was cold uhm. Raffaele gave me his his jacket” (lines 181-183).

“Like a hotel” and “Raffaele gave me his jacket” also provide vivid description to Knox’s accounts, therefore constructing her as being a credible and honest person who is not lying about her innocence. Knox also uses vivid description in her autobiography (Knox, 2013) describing the day Kercher’s body was discovered as a “cold, sunny Friday morning” (p. 85).

Repair construction. Self-initiated self-repair is where a speaker both addresses and fixes perceived trouble in their own talk (Hellermann, 2009). Knox uses this repair construction to add more detail to her vivid description of her conversation with the police officers at the crime scene by saying

““So are you here for wuh the call that we made?” And they said, “No.” Well okay- I wasn’t saying this. Raffaele was saying it for me because that wasn’t happening uhm” (lines 115-118).

This self-initiated repair constructs herself as being a credible and honest person as she is correcting herself to get the details of what supposedly happened exactly right. It also attributes some responsibility of what was said to someone else as “Raffaele was saying it for me” constructs that *he* was the one asking questions to the police, not her.

Norm breaches. Knox also constructs her vivid description to formulate herself as being a credible and honest person, and therefore innocent, by using norm-breaches. Norm-breaches are descriptions that are produced at specific junctures in talk. Edwards (1997) claims that these are important, not because of whether they’re true or false, but because of the discursive business that these formulations perform. In Knox’s case, the business they perform is to make her description more vivid in order to construct herself as a credible and honest person. For example, when going back to the house for supposedly the first time and finding Kercher’s door locked, Knox says how

“uhm her door was locked, and that was strange uhm. She didn’t normally lock her door. It had happened at various times but not – it wasn’t the usual thing uhm. And so I remember even knocking on it and thinking ‘Oh if it’s locked, then Meredith must be inside. I mean why else – why like why would she lock the?’ Like it’s not like we were the type of house where you had to worry about people going into each other’s rooms. Like if you close your door it’s fine uhm. And so I remember knocking gently and seeing if she would answer and then knocking harder and seeing if she would answer and finally banging on it” (lines 69-78).

This use of norm breaches in Knox’s descriptions formulate what was and wasn’t normal in their house, constructing the category of a knowledgeable (and therefore credible) witness. For example, the co-occurrence of rhetorical question within active voicing “oh if it’s locked then Meredith must be inside. I mean why else- why like would she lock the?” constructs that this was not normal and that she was therefore questioning this in her thoughts. This action therefore contributes to performing the main action of constructing herself as being innocent of the murder of Kercher.

Active voicing. As well as performing the action of constructing Knox's ignorance of the murder at the time it occurred, active voicing is also used by Knox to construct herself as being a credible and honest person. Active voicing can be used to perform a variety of actions, dealing with credibility issues and concisely formulating information that might otherwise be met sceptically (Wooffitt, 1992). It can also make an account appear more objective as it can be used to show that there were witnesses to the event (Wooffitt, 1992), thus providing corroboration and consensus. For example Knox formulates a conversation with one of her housemates at the crime scene by saying "Filomena was saying, "We have to we have to kick down the door." And I was like, "Well we tried to kick down the door"" (lines 134-136) and with a police officer when she was being questioned by saying

"one of the cops uhm was asking me like, "What? What is it? What are you what is it that you saw? What is it that like" I must have realised something or like like I must have known something. And I was just like 'no I mean like I'm sh it you're it's she was st(hh)abbed to death"" (lines 263-267).

This constructs Knox as being a credible and honest person as she constructs herself as being someone who can vividly recall exactly what conversations took place and that there were witnesses to these. Furthermore, the fact that information formulated in active voicing used by Knox in other interviews (Occupy HLN, 2013) and her autobiography (Knox, 2013) seem to match with that used in the data for this investigation could be said to increase the persuasiveness of her construction of innocence.

3. Construction of Knox as being Victimised

The third action identified constructs Knox as being unfairly victimised, undeserving of the negative ways she has been treated by the police, the press and others. This therefore contributes to performing the main action of constructing herself as being innocent. Practices Knox uses to do this include active voicing, vivid description, repetition, three part lists and extreme case formulation. Again, these will each be considered in turn.

Active voicing. As well as performing the action of constructing Knox's ignorance about the murder and the action of constructing Knox as being a credible and honest person, Knox uses active voicing to also perform the action of constructing her victimisation, formulating her own thoughts and speech and also the speech of others. For this reason, this practice can be said to be multifunctional in performing the main action of constructing Knox's innocence.

An example of the construction of Knox's victimisation is her formulation of the speech of forensic experts on her case. She claims that, when her lawyers asked to see the data which incriminated her, the forensic team responded with "No, impossible. No error. Impossible. No, you can't see that. You don't need to see that. We're professionals. We know what we're doing"" (lines 606-608). This active voicing constructs Knox as being victimised, formulating how she was denied access to evidence that, if examined independently, could have freed her. Another example of Knox using active voicing to formulate her victimisation is when she talks about how she

“was psychologically tortured by people. And then it’s like ‘great. Now I get to tell people, like try to explain to people what it’s like to be psychologically tortured. Good luck Amanda.’ Like good luck trying to explain that to people, especially when you’re being labelled a murderer” (lines 679-684).

This formulates her own thoughts about how it is a difficult task to explain what it’s like to be psychologically tortured and this therefore constructs herself as being victimised and burdened with this task. This also performs the main action of constructing her as being innocent, formulating the victimisation as being undeserved.

Vivid description. As well as performing the action of constructing Knox as a credible and honest person, vivid description is also used by Knox to construct the severity of her victimisation. For example Knox describes herself as being “psychologically tortured by people” (lines 679-680) and a “victim of the criminal justice system” (line 668). These descriptions explicitly construct her victimisation at the hands of the police as being destructive, undeserved and unfair. This therefore performs the main action of constructing her as being innocent of the crimes they are accusing her of. She also does this in another interview (Occupy HLN, 2013) saying how she was “demolished” in her interrogation.

Knox also vividly constructs her victimisation by using dehumanisation to describe how she felt during her time in prison. Tileagă (2007) claims that dehumanisation as a social practice is often used by certain minority groups, such as the Romani population, to construct their suffering of discrimination and oppression. Knox also does this, for example saying that she “felt like a zoo animal uhm a lot of the time” (line 331) and referring to herself as “fresh meat” (line 342). This constructs victimisation that was so severe that she no longer felt like a person. She does this in another interview (Occupy HLN, 2013) saying that she would “like to be reconsidered as a person” and in her autobiography (Knox, 2013), writing how “now I see that I was a mouse in a cat’s game” (p. 104) and “I was like a package on a FedEx truck- on board but untended. The guards’ job was to deliver me. Nothing more” (p. 350). For this reason it could be said that this corroboration of her victimisation as being undeserved also increases the persuasiveness of her construction of innocence.

Repetition. As well as using repetition to construct ignorance about the murder at the time it happened, Knox also uses repetition to construct the relentless and repetitious victimisation she claims to have suffered. For example when Knox talks about the sexual harassment she supposedly suffered in prison, she says, while crying

“and ↑I didn’t know what to ↑doo uhm (1.0) Like he just wouldn’t stop talking to me about it, and I just didn’t know what to do. I would just (2.0) ~uhm~ (4.0) ↓I just don’t know what to do” (lines 367-369).

The repeated formulation of “didn’t know what to do” and “don’t know what to do” constructs her victimisation, as she formulates not knowing how to respond to the abuse. Knox also writes about this sexual harassment in her autobiography (Knox, 2013), writing “he also liked to ask me about sex” (p. 250) and how “every conversation came around to sex” (p. 250). This corroboration of the construction of unfair victimisation could be said to increase the persuasiveness of her construction of innocence.

Knox also talks about “waiting and waiting and waiting” (line 523) for freedom and having “that door close on you second after second after second” (lines 380-381). This repetition constructs the length of her victimisation and therefore the severity of it. Furthermore, Knox uses repetition to frame several sentences in the same way with the same words. For example, when describing how the police’s word was taken for granted to be true, she says

“when the police say that there’s Meredith’s DNA on the knife, there has to be Meredith’s DNA on the knife. And when the police say that this homeless man has a reliable witness testimony, he has a reliable tes urh witness testimony. And when when the police say that they did not do anything that could have contaminated the bra clasp that was associated with Raffaele uhm (.) that means that that’s right. And when the police say that I must have cleaned up the crime scene because that’s the only explanation for how I could have participated in the murder and then left no trace of myself at the crime scene is if I had gone and cleaned up all traces of me but left all of the blood and all of the DNA evidence against the actual perpetrator uhm. And tha- you know we’re just going to take it for granted that that’s the case” (lines 612-624).

In starting each sentence with “when the police say”, this too constructs victimisation that supposedly occurred again and again, with the police supposedly saying untrue things about her. She also does this with the demonstrative “this” to exemplify the many ways and many times she was victimised, for example she says

“And that is what happened uhm. Just this constant like covering up of mistakes and this this so incredibly blatant like (3.0) disregard of defensive rights. Like this presumption of guilt, this suspect-oriented uhm investigation uhm (3.0) this unwillingness to admit that they were wrong that continues to this day” (lines 643-648).

As well as repetition being used by Knox to start sentences in the same way, victimisation is also constructed by the use of repetition to add detail, for example when Knox says that

“it was only after I was convicted that I realised that no matter what the police were planning on arresting me in that interrogation anyway. No matter what came out of it” (lines 581-583).

The repetition of “no matter what” pre-frames her claims and allows the construction of more detailed victimisation. She also describes how the police “kept talkin’ about a knife that I knew was impossible (2.0) It was impossible that it had Meredith’s DNA on it. It was just impossible” (lines 390-391). The repetition of the word “impossible” clarifies and reiterates that Knox’s supposed guilt was impossible and that she is therefore innocent and a victim herself due to accusations made against her. She also does this in another interview (Occupy HLN, 2013). When asked if she cleaned up her DNA from the crime scene, she says “well that’s impossible, it’s impossible to see DNA, much less identify whose DNA it is”. She also repeats “impossible” when describing her victimisation in her autobiography (Knox, 2013), writing how “I thought, *This is impossible, this is impossible, this is a nightmare, this can’t be true, it’s not fair, it’s not fair*” (p. 3) when she was on trial. The repetition of “impossible” performs the action of constructing her victimisation and therefore also performs the main action of constructing her as innocent, undeserving of this treatment.

Three part lists. Knox uses three part lists to construct the ways she was supposedly victimised by the police. Jefferson (1990) claims that it is common for lists to be delivered with three parts or items and are frequently used to summarise some general class of things. Three parts are sufficient to indicate that there are more than just individual instances on their own, constructing some events or actions as commonplace or normal, for example Knox's victimisation. A three part list is used to describe Knox's emotions and how

“it was when they asked me about knives that I flipped out uhm. I I (.) I could not hold in uhm the the the tension, the fear, the the the just like devastating sadness” (lines 255-258).

These three negative emotions: “tension”, “fear” and “sadness” succinctly and sufficiently describe her victimisation, that she was upset and overwhelmed as a result of being asked to identify the murder weapon when she supposedly did not know the answer. This therefore performs the main action of constructing innocence.

Three part lists are also used when Knox formulates how she was described by the police as “A liar. A sex addict. Drug addict” (line 416) and “a monster. Psychopath, split personality” (lines 414-415). Again, this use of three part lists sufficiently summarise the ways she was supposedly victimised as commonplace, constructing that the various things she was accused of being were false and that she was not deserving of this treatment, therefore performing the main task of constructing herself as being innocent of the murder of Meredith Kercher, as she is not the person the police say she is.

Extreme case formulation. Knox uses extreme case formulation which emphasises the victimisation she supposedly suffered. Pomerantz (1986) suggests that, when people are attempting to justify, accuse or argue a claim, for example Knox's claim that she is innocent, they often draw on extreme case formulation. This is a common descriptive practice which involves using extreme points on descriptive dimensions (Potter, 1996). For example Knox claims that, while being interviewed by the police, “they wanted me to like tell them, describe to them about everything that I'd seen when I got back there” (lines 243-245). The use of the word “everything” formulates the police apparently expecting a lot from her, for example when Knox claims that they told her to “remember the details. There might be one small thing that will seem insignificant to you will mean everything to the case” (lines 300-302). This is also done when Knox says that

“they would show me pictures uhm, where Meredith was in in groups of people and want me to identify people and they wu ehh. Like just every single – they wanted to know everything” (lines 285-288)

and again in “I just thought that they thought that I knew everything” (line 296). This use of the extreme case formulation “everything” formulates the police wanting to know more from Knox than she was able to tell, due to her supposed innocence.

As well as the extreme case formulation “everything”, Knox also uses its antonym “nothing” to describe her situation. For example, when she says “everything uhm that I thought, the way the world worked (.) nothing. Like you are nothing” (lines 536-537) this constructs her as being victimised because she has not been treated like the innocent person she claims to be, she has been treated as if she is nothing.

This is supported by her claim in her autobiography (Knox, 2013) that “in reality, prison had taught me I was nothing. Nothing revolved around me. Nothing I said mattered” (p. 385). These extreme case formulations emphasise the victimisation she supposedly suffered at the hands of the police and as a result of being arrested.

Knox goes on to describe prison as “this place where everything is completely unrecognisable” (lines 358-359) and claims that being there “was just like this constant feeling dumbstruck about everything” (line 553). The words “everything”, “completely” and “constant” are the extremities of descriptive dimension and therefore construct the severity of her victimisation and that going to prison was not something she expected due to her supposed innocence. This is also done when Knox claims that her and her lawyers “had to constantly fight to have access to the evidence” (lines 596-597) and when she says that she thinks “no one’s ever gonna believe me” (line 684). Knox also uses extreme case formulation to describe her victimisation in her autobiography (Knox, 2013), writing how “of course the guards would assume I was a murderer. Everyone did” (p. 313). This corroborates her construction of her unfair victimisation and therefore increases the persuasiveness of her construction of innocence.

To summarise the analysis of this investigation, a variety of practices used by Knox have been examined to explore the actions that these perform as part of her construction of innocence.

Discussion

The research question for this investigation was to explore how Amanda Knox formulates her discourse to construct herself as being innocent of the murder of Meredith Kercher. The findings of this investigation were the identification of three key actions: the construction of Knox’s ignorance about the murder; the construction of herself as a credible and honest person; and the construction of her victimisation. Together, these three actions perform the main action of constructing Knox as being innocent, with some practices being used simultaneously with others (for example rhetorical questions being used within active voicing) or to perform one, two or all three of these actions (for example vivid description performing both the actions of constructing herself as a credible and honest person and constructing her victimisation).

These findings relate to previous work as, although there are few studies that can be said to be very similar to this investigation, similar practices have been found to perform similar actions in other studies. For example, Hepburn’s (2003) description of the ‘reality production kit’, Tileagă’s (2007) findings about the use of dehumanisation, Edwards’ (2004) description of the use of “I don’t know”, Pomerantz’s (1984) description of evaluative assessments and (1986) description of extreme case formulation, and Jefferson’s (1990) findings about three part lists all match with the findings in this study about how they are used by Knox and what actions they perform. This is also the case with Wooffitt’s (1992) findings about active voicing and x/y formulations which, although found in accounts of paranormal experiences, this investigation supports Wooffitt’s argument that these can also be found in accounts about *non* paranormal experiences such as Knox’s.

The analytic procedure used in this investigation was discursive psychology. Limitations of discursive psychology include the fact that this method of analysis does not follow the same fixed pattern in every study (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). This means

that the method may be very different depending on who conducted the investigation, making it potentially difficult to directly compare the different discursive analyses even though they use 'the same' analytic procedure. This is a limitation to this particular investigation as, if another researcher were to replicate it, they would not necessarily examine the same actions (or practices to perform these actions) used by Knox, as the analytic procedure may have been conducted in very different ways.

Furthermore, although this research was conducted whilst taking reflexivity into account, with the data being approached as neutrally as possible with no preconceived ideas about Knox's guiltiness or innocence affecting the analysis, Mauthner and Doucet (2003) argue that data analysis methods are not neutral techniques. They claim that they reflect and are imbued with, theoretical, epistemological and ontological assumptions. In addition to the 'conceptual baggage' of the researcher (Hsiung, 2008), it is also important to consider the motives of the creators of the data. The staff at the newspaper of the University of Washington where Knox attended may have had an agenda in terms of the portrayal they wished to present of her. Although the data appear to be unedited, with no cutaways, there may have been footage omitted from the start or end of each of the three parts of the interview. Furthermore, the questions asked by the interviewer may have been selected in order to show Knox in a particular light, especially as the interview was being uploaded to YouTube, with the potential for a large global audience.

However, despite these limitations, this investigation could be said to be valuable as it topicalises language use. Potter and Wetherell (1987) claim that there are a number of very good reasons why psychologists should be interested in language. They argue that it is so central to all social activities and is not just a code for communication, but is inseparably involved with processes of thinking and reasoning. This investigation's analytic procedure, discursive psychology, allows for the constructive and flexible way in which language is used to be a central topic in itself, as Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest it should be. This is a particular strength when investigating Amanda Knox's case, as the main focus of previous studies has been how the crime was covered in the media (Annunziato, 2011; Boyd, 2013) or to exemplify issues with the Italian legal system (Lenth, 2013; Mirabella, 2012) rather than her use of language. For this reason, this investigation could be said to be contributing to this important field of understanding (by exploring how accounts can be constructed as factual) and extending it, particularly in the area of forensic linguistics and the psychology of offenders, by exploring how a convicted murderer, Amanda Knox, constructs innocence.

However, a limitation to consider is that, although other interviews and Knox's autobiography (Knox, 2013) were taken into account throughout analysis, the fact that this investigation only used a single interview as data means that it cannot be said to represent the actions performed in other instances of her talk. However, future studies could analyse other interviews with her and her autobiography in more depth and could also explore further how the media constructs her as being innocent or guilty and the rhetorical procedures used to do this. Future studies could also use discursive psychology to explore the actions performed in the discourse of *other* notorious convicted murderers, to see if the findings from this single case study investigation can be found in others. These could include Raffaele Sollecito (Knox's boyfriend at the time of Kercher's murder who was also convicted of this crime), Jeremy Bamber, Guy Heinze Jr, Colin Norris and Rosemary West, all of whom have been convicted of

murder (or multiple murders) yet claim that they are innocent, therefore sharing similarities with Knox's case. Further studies could also be conducted to investigate the discourse of those convicted of less severe crimes than murder such as robbery or assault, yet claim that they are innocent.

Using different types of analysis to study discourse could also be explored, to see what (or if) other qualitative analytic procedures such as thematic analysis can tell us about the discourse of convicted offenders who claim to be innocent. Although these analyses may not answer the research question for this *particular* investigation, if these same data were analysed using a different form of qualitative analysis, alternative interpretations of the data may be drawn. For example thematic analysis would allow for patterns (themes) within the data to be identified, meaning that using other analytic procedures may still draw valuable findings when examining the discourse of Amanda Knox and other convicted criminals who claim to be innocent.

To conclude, in terms of applications, the findings from this investigation may apply to defence lawyers advising what rhetorical procedures may be used to construct innocence. In terms of implications, the findings of this investigation provide a greater understanding about the ways convicted murderers construct innocence. They extend the findings of previous discursive analyses on fact construction to a more forensic linguistic field and extend the findings of previous investigations into Amanda Knox's case in a way that makes her use of language the central topic.

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