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Atalanta Goulandris and Eugene McLaughlin (2016) 'What's in a Name? The UK Newspapers' Fabrication and Commodification of 'Foxy Knoxy'.

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### **Abstract**

This chapter analyses how, immediately after the arrest of Amanda Knox, the UK's national press played a pivotal role in transforming the American student into 'Foxy Knoxy', the duplicitous, psychologically disturbed femme fatale who orchestrated and participated in the sexually motivated murder of her flatmate, Meredith Kercher. This case exemplifies what happens when UK reporting restrictions do not apply, leaving journalists free to employ imaginative practices to create the infotainment spectacle that 'Foxy Knoxy' became and to ignore her legal right to a presumption of innocence. It is also the first example of journalists mining suspects' social media sites and re-contextualising their text and images to provide 'evidential' sources of a guilty persona.

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the pivotal role played by the U.K. national press in transforming Amanda Knox into the priceless news commodity Foxy Knoxy. On 27 March 2015 Italy's highest court overturned the guilty verdicts of Amanda Knox and Raffaele Sollecito, terminating their convictions for the murder of fellow student Meredith Kercher, who had been killed in her bedroom on 1 November 2007 in the house she shared with Knox and two Italian women in Perugia. This unexpected ruling brought to an end an extraordinary legal saga that had seen the pair convicted of Kercher's murder in December 2009, acquitted in October 2011 and then reconvicted in January 2014, when Sollecito's original sentence of 25 years was upheld and Knox's increased from 26 years to 28 years and six months. Throughout their experience with Italy's procedurally complex legal system, which included four years in jail, Knox and Sollecito maintained their innocence. At a separate fast-track trial, Rudy Guede, a third person charged with the sexual assault and murder of Meredith Kercher, was found guilty and sentenced to 30 years' imprisonment, later reduced to 16 on appeal.

The lurid details of the murder case, entangled in an ever-expanding web of claims and counter claims, generated a true-crime page-turner. Ostensibly, Perugia was home to a hard-partying study-abroad culture, fuelled by drugs, alcohol and sexual temptations and jealousies, with a 'slasher' murder denouement that became a global media event. Although Knox and Sollecito were convicted and acquitted of the murder in the same trials and appeals, the media spotlight fell on Knox who attained celebrity status, triggering global speculation as to whether Foxy Knoxy was innocent or guilty of the sexually motivated murder. Given the crimes she stood accused of—not just facilitating but also participating in the attempted group rape and brutal murder of her flatmate—it is not surprising that from the moment of her arrest, Knox was the focus of a media feeding frenzy. From a journalistic perspective this was a truly exceptional, electrifying news story. As the following statements make clear, Knox's news 'gold'-worthiness resided not just in the fact that she would be the first such sex killer, but because of who she was—a white, middle-class, attractive, well-educated all-American student.

When an attractive young woman from a privileged British family is murdered in Italy, you've got a popular crime story. When the person suspected of killing her is an attractive young woman from a privileged American family, you have tabloid gold. When the prosecutor hypothesizes that the victim

was slaughtered during a satanic ritual orgy, you've got the crime story of a decade. (Rich 2011, *Rolling Stone*, 27 June)

The Amanda Knox case became a cable news wet dream, what with its beautiful American co-ed nicknamed 'Foxy Knoxy', reports of twisted sex games with Sollecito, and the recounting of a grisly murder scene. (Ruiz 2013, *Cosmopolitan*, 26 March)

Knox became a multi-mediated celebrity, vilified and eroticised as the sex-crazed she-devil Foxy Knoxy or, by her online support groups, sanctified as Amanda, an innocent young woman ensnared in a corrupt Italian criminal justice system. The Daily Mail was one of the first newspapers to use her nickname, lifted from her MySpace account, to re-characterise her as Foxy Knoxy. On the day of the final acquittal, the newspaper led with the headline 'Foxy Knoxy, free at last'. Such was the definitional power of the Foxy Knoxy re-characterisation that Knox has herself noted the significance of her metamorphosis:

Overnight my old nickname became my new persona. I was now known to the world as Foxy Knoxy, or in Italian, Volpe Cattiva—literally, 'Wicked Fox'. 'Foxy Knoxy' was necessary to the prosecution's case. A regular, quirky schoolgirl couldn't have committed these crimes. A wicked fox would be easier to convict.... 'Foxy Knoxy' also helped sell newspapers. (Knox 2013, pp. 267–268)

For her lawyer, Carlo Dalla Vedova, the inaccurate and inflammatory re-characterisation was central to what he defined as her public crucifixion (Daily Telegraph, 29 September 2011). Sollecito, who failed to gain such global notoriety, nonetheless noted the same:

In the newspapers and on the nightly news, we were turned into monsters, grotesque distortions of our true selves. It did not matter how thin the evidence was, or how quickly it became apparent that the culprit was someone else entirely. Our guilt was presumed, and everything the prosecution did and fed to the media stemmed from that false premise. (Sollecito 2012, p. xi)

Family and friends of Meredith Kercher also reacted angrily to the characterisation, for a very different reason:

When I arrived home to see 'Foxy Knoxy' emblazoned across the tabloid front pages, I hit the roof. How dare they eroticise the person who had been accused of taking my friend's life. How dare they! (Rivalland 2012, p. 39)

There is someone missing from this obsession with 'Foxy Knoxy', as the 23-year-old student was quickly nicknamed in the press. Meredith Kercher, my daughter, was killed that night in Perugia, Italy, 3½ years ago. It's time to tell her story—and the story of her family, for whom there are no appeals against Meredith's death, but only a long, painful and extremely expensive emotional limbo as the Knox saga grinds its way through the Italian courts. (John Kercher, *Sunday Times*, 13 March 2011, p. 22)

## **Data Sources and Research Methods**

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the pivotal role played by the U.K. national press in transforming Amanda Knox into the priceless news commodity Foxy Knoxy. Our research concentrates on the 7 November 2007 coverage of the previous day's arrest and detention of Amanda Knox as one of three people responsible for the murder of Meredith Kercher. Four main reasons underlie the choice to examine this particular moment in the unfolding murder investigation:

1. This is the day that the story was transformed into an exceptional murder news story.
2. Being outside the jurisdiction of England and Wales, the story did not attract the usual reporting restrictions that apply after arrest under the Contempt of Court Act 1981 (CCA), and many of the British newspapers bypassed inconvenient concepts of presumed innocence and due process (Linklater 2007; Greer and McLaughlin 2011, 2012).
3. Comparison of their content exposes contrasting representations of those arrested but also the early stages and defining moment of the construction (and demonisation) of the female suspect, Knox, only hours after her arrest. It was not Nils Christie's (1986) the ideal victim that kept this exceptional murder story rolling, but an exceptional ideal offender—an attractive, privileged, sex-obsessed, duplicitous, mesmerising, unrepentant and essentially evil young American woman.
4. This is the first example of the U.K. press lifting text and images from suspects' social media sites, and reworking that information to create killer identities. In so doing, Knox and Sollecito become one of the main evidential sources of their guilt.

To date there has been no criminological research pinpointing the exact moment when and how an iconic criminal representation is fabricated by the news media, becoming the dominant narrative and overshadowing other images or understandings about a particular murder case. Such transformations have a cultural legacy that often outlasts the details or case outcome, and have a profound, often inescapable, effect on the individual involved. In an attempt to fill this research gap, we carried out a comparative, qualitative content analysis of the textual and visual coverage of this case in the British national press on 7 November 2007. Because of the centrality of the visualisation of Knox, original newspapers were used where possible. Where they were not, missing coverage was identified via searches on the LexisNexis database and hard copies of the originals obtained at the British Library. In fact, originals or hard photocopies of all coverage in this case, from 2007 till the final acquittals in 2015, were collected and analysed.

For the purposes of this chapter, the week leading up to Knox's arrest and the weeks that followed were studied closely to contextualise the chosen day's coverage.

In order to make our study systematic, having read and re-read this first month's coverage multiple times, we created a uniform and coded analytical framework, which we applied to each newspaper, isolating units of analysis thus: position and prominence in a newspaper; in relation to text: sources used, tone, language, factual content, innuendo and implicit content, missing information; for the visual representations: content, size, placement, number of photographs, captions, juxtaposing and visual innuendo. We further carried out a comparative analysis of how each of these units contrasted with coverage of the other two suspects and of how each of the newspapers structured the story. We were thus able to identify patterns and methods of construction, similarities and differences in techniques, content and approach across the range of newspapers under study.

### **Analytical Framework: News Media Constructions of Women Who Kill**

Our analysis indicates that the newspapers were, in varying degrees, able to fabricate the Foxy Knoxy psycho-killer persona with such speed and resonance for three interconnected reasons:

1. They were able to typify Knox as a particular 'killer type'—an exceptionally dangerous young American woman, who evoked, but also reworked, the cultural archetype of a woman who stood accused of a sexually motivated murder.
2. Knox had photogenic 'killer looks', which enabled the newspapers to work up a powerful visual field.
3. Journalists' access to Knox's MySpace site allowed them to get inside and expose her 'killer mind'.

### ***The 'Killer Type'***

In the case of the criminal woman, research across a variety of jurisdictions confirms that misogynist cultural scripts are employed by the newsmedia newspapers that annihilate her identity yet appear to account for her behaviour. At a general level, the criminal woman is slotted into a sad, mad or bad frame (Appignanesi 2008; Lloyd 1995). Most criminal women are constructed within the first two categories, largely removing agency and responsibility for their actions (Morrissey 2003; Downing 2013). The exceptional woman who kills normally kills her child, an abusive male partner or someone she is caring for. Seal (2010) argues that, although

shocking, such murders are not culturally unthinkable. The scripting of the woman who kills an abusive male partner, for example, can be sympathetic if she did so in self-defence. However, the nearest we get to the truly dangerous woman, the monstrous feminine, is the woman who is convicted of killing or enabling or encouraging a man/men to kill for sadistic sexual gratification or entertainment (Cameron and Frazer 1987; Goetting 1988; Kelleher and Kelleher 1998). Birch (1993, p. 61) notes that society does not have a language to make sense of the profanity of women who are incriminated in sexual murders, because such women disrupt 'the very terms that hold gender in place.' The exceptionality of this type of criminality forms the basis of a culturally inflected news script of incomprehensible and unforgivable radical evil. Such psycho-killers reveal the darkest corners of the human psyche subverting the whole idea of moral order. Further, complicit or acquiescent women in such joint ventures are deemed to be more culpable, partly because they have defied gender expectations, but also because they are viewed as the prime movers behind the men's sex crimes. In these cases, a woman's agency and responsibility are magnified and the balance of moral blame is irreversibly tilted against her (Edwards 1984; Heidensohn 1996; Wykes 1998; Chesney-Lind 2006).

Sexually motivated female killers are a scarce and therefore extremely valuable news commodity (Kelleher and Kelleher 1998). In the UK, the most notorious examples of allegedly sexually motivated female killers remain Myra Hindley and Rosemary West. As serial killers, who seemingly achieved sexual entertainment or gratification from the extremity of their actions, the cultural scripts used to explain their actions are dominated by public revulsion (Storrs 2004 ). The media coverage of West's radical evil relied heavily on the abnormality of her violent, sexual depravity (Wykes 1998), but her nondescript, middle-aged looks, together with her rural underclass status, meant that she failed to acquire any lasting cultural significance. By contrast, Hindley, who was convicted in 1966 of participating in the sexual torture and murder of children in the north-west of England, was transformed into the instantly recognisable personification of evil. Birch (1993) argues that the black-and-white police photograph of Hindley, taken in October 1963 when she was 23 years of age, depicting her with short, bleached blonde hair, porcelain skin, hooded eyes, cold gaze and emotional disconnect has come to represent the radical evil of a woman who not only can facilitate but also take enjoyment from the kidnapping, sexual torture and murder of young children. Hindley's identity prior to the murder has been annihilated and replaced by a cultural construction of radical evil, condensed into this one photograph.



The image of Myra Hindley and the bizarre grip it holds over the public imagination has become detached from the subject, the woman who committed those crimes all those years ago. For what Myra Hindley has come to represent, the symbolic weight she carries, exceeds the crimes of two individuals at a particular place and time. (Birch 1993, p. 33)

The evil of Hindley is also evidenced by the fact that amongst the many photographs she and Ian Brady took of themselves were ones with the children whom they murdered and ones at what turned out to be the graves of the murdered children (Goodman 1973; Lee 2012).

In the scripting of Amanda Knox as a psycho-killer, her radical evil is represented as both freakish and grotesque, but fabricated as Foxy Knoxy, she has the added sensational primary news value of embodying the neo-femme fatale archetype, a culturally evocative manifestation of the alluring ‘evil woman whose raison d’être is to murder and deceive’ (Grossman 2007, p. 20; Simkin 2014). For Reilly (1999, p. 155) the ‘beguiling sirens of ancient myth luring male mariners to their doom founded the perdurable image of the fatal female, leaving it to generation after generation of males to inscribe her place in all the genres of art and literature’. Visually the femme fatale was developed fully in the twentieth-century Hollywood film noir genre (Doane 1991; Kaplan 2000; Hanson and O’Rawe 2010). Her desires, malevolence, self-centredness and domineering will, representing American modernity’s female sexuality, pose a threat to any male. She can deploy her irresistible attractiveness and sexual power to entrap and lure him, leading to his emotional, moral or physical ruin. The femme fatale’s sexualised ability to wreak havoc is signalled by her ambivalent attitude towards other women whom she encounters (Stott 1992). A contemporary cinematic reworking of the classic femme fatale archetype has envisaged a new generation of post-modern female psychopaths—‘pathologically manipulative and violent females who threaten to or take the lives of men and other women but whose beauty and charms mask their evil nature’ (Frigon 2006, p. 17; Emre 2014 ; Hesse 2014). The defining psychopathic feature of this post-modern femme fatale is that her true nature is concealed by a mask of normality. Such is the threat that she poses that this woman must be punished.

### ***Killer Looks***

A fundamental attribute of this day’s news story was the construction of a remarkable visual field that captured the ‘Foxy Knoxy’ persona. Eye-tracking research has found that photographs are the point of entry for news consumers—what they look at first, together with headlines, and the larger the image, the longer a reader looks at it (Holmqvist and Wartenberg 2005). Visual images define the way in which we understand people (Barrett and Barrington 2005) and news agencies search for indelible ‘money shot’ images that personalise the story (Howe 2005).

Visual symbolism is so fundamental to our cognitive systems that its effects often occur without active thought or sense making, even if its illusory qualities far outweigh its evidentiary ones (Hall 1973/1981; Huxford 2001). Photographs in murder news stories are subject to selection criteria, like newsworthiness. Whether they are unique, add a dramatic edge, controversy or a particularly photogenic face to a name, they are re-contextualised by the news process, transmitting powerful ideological messages (Greer 2003; Banks 2012). Since photographs are disconnected from time and place, their meaning is reduced to ‘bytes of information’, allowing news workers and editors to re-contextualise them creatively to fit in with their preferred news narrative (Huxford 2001, p. 47; Sontag 1973; Banks 2012). Further, by cropping, formatting, placing, juxtaposing and captioning photographs in any particular way, newsmakers encourage unwitting readers to interpret them in a specific way, implying a narrative progression that may not be there, often creating photographic validation they do not possess (Jones and Wardle 2008).

### ***Killer Mind***

The newspapers’ 7 November coverage relied heavily on the content of Knox’s and Sollecito’s social media pages, where in a combination of photographs, stories and biographical information, they presented themselves, giving the reader a special insight of their ‘killer minds’. In Goffman’s analysis (1959) of self-presentation, he illustrates how, in an ongoing process, people manage and negotiate information about themselves, as part of a performance in social interaction. In the digital era people can manufacture a virtual self to produce media content for a mass audience, often as a form of entertainment to potentially unknowable audiences (Burnett and Marshall 2003; Van Dijck 2008; McQuire 2013). As we will demonstrate, this day’s coverage provides us with a classic case study of news workers lifting unconnected images and text from a suspect’s own web pages and re-contextualising them in the reconstruction of a criminal event, implying a connection with that event when there is none and creating photographic and textual ‘evidence’ of Knox’s killer mind. Reworking Amanda Knox’s own material, journalists were able to give their construction of her dark double, Foxy Knoxy, the authority to seem utterly authentic (Wardle 2007).

### **The Emergence of Amanda Knox in the Meredith Kercher Murder News Story**

In the early evening of 2 November 2007 Sky News reported that the Italian police had launched

a manhunt after the murdered body of Meredith Kercher, a 21-year-old English exchange student, studying in Perugia, had been discovered that afternoon in her bedroom. The U.K. press reporting between 3 and 6 November 2007 centred on the components of the macabre murder mystery—the butchered dreams of the British murder victim so at odds with the seemingly postcard-perfect surroundings, the gruesome Halloween slasher movie nature of Kercher’s death, Perugia’s student party culture, the intensifying police investigation and extensive speculation as to the identity and motivation of the still-at-large killer(s).

On Sunday, 4 November Amanda Knox and her boyfriend, Raffaele Sollecito, first appeared in the press coverage of the murder story, identified as having ‘discovered’ Kercher’s body. Sollecito had given an exclusive eye-witness interview with the *Sunday Mirror* (quoted also in the *News of the World*), in which he ‘relived the horror’ of the ‘blood-spattered bedroom’. He focused on Knox’s return to the house: the front door was open and there was blood in the bathroom; she had been afraid and returned to his flat; they returned to the house together to find another bedroom ransacked and Kercher’s room locked and, at this stage, they called the police. When the bedroom door was finally knocked down he recounted that Knox was ‘crying and screaming “how could anyone do this?”’ (Mansey 2007, pp. 10–11). The *Mail on Sunday* (Dunbar and Pisa 2007, pp. 18–19), from an interview with Knox’s mother in Seattle, reinforced this image of Knox’s distress upon seeing the ‘horrific murder scene’, saying she was ‘freaked out’, ‘in a state of shock’ and ‘too upset’ to give her mother more details. Another of Kercher’s flatmates asserted that Knox had called her from the house, before the body was discovered, concerned that ‘thieves are here’ (*Sunday Times*, Follain and Gadher 2007, p. 9). Four newspapers, therefore, established that Knox had suspected something was wrong when she first went to the house, and that both she and Sollecito experienced deep distress upon the disturbing discovery of Kercher’s body.

Two newspapers introduced the incredible possibility that Kercher might have been killed by a woman (*Mail on Sunday*) and, moreover, one whom she knew (*Sunday Times*). The *Mail on Sunday* reported that police were narrowing the focus onto a ‘close circle of friends’, questioning Kercher’s female housemates and friends, naming only Knox of the first group. This juxtaposition of information—the possibility of a female killer and police questioning Knox — was the only implicit suggestion that her role was something more than a traumatised witness to the discovery of the body.

Three newspapers had photographs of Knox, with detectives outside the house (*Sunday*

Telegraph, News of the World, Sunday Mirror). The Sunday Times had a smaller headshot of Knox in a discrete column on 'Exchange Life'. The Sunday Mirror had a headshot of Sollecito to accompany his exclusive interview. The Observer, Independent on Sunday, Sunday Express and Daily Star Sunday did not identify any of Kercher's flatmates by name or the fact that Knox and Sollecito had alerted the police.

On 5 November 2007, there was passing mention of Knox in the Daily Telegraph, Daily Express, Daily Mail, the Sun and the Times, as the person who raised the initial alarm. The following day the Times reported that Knox and the two other Italian flatmates had returned to the crime scene with the police. There was no reference to Sollecito in any of the papers. There was also no hint of what was to come in the following day's press coverage. At that point the police were juggling different theories that Kercher knew her killers, had been killed by one or two men, possibly a woman, possibly migrants or a drug addict and the salacious suggestion that she had died in a sexual encounter/sex game in which she had willingly participated.

### **Knox's 'Confession'**

When news of the arrests of the three prime suspects broke on 6 November, the following morning all the national newspapers, with the exception of the Guardian, reported that in a truly sensational twist Amanda Knox had confessed to being involved in what the police confirmed was the sexually motivated murder of Meredith Kercher. The other two suspects were Knox's boyfriend Raffaele Sollecito and Patrick Lumumba, the owner of a bar where Knox worked. The three suspects had been arrested hours after students had held a candlelit vigil for Kercher, outside the Cathedral. It was Knox who dominated the headlines:

Girl 'confesses' over her flatmate's murder (Daily Telegraph, p. 3).

Flatmate 'admits involvement' in British woman's murder as two others are held (Independent, p. 4).

Flatmate 'confesses' over student murder (Times, p. 1).

Girl flatmate's 'confession' as she and two men are arrested (Daily Mirror, p. 5).

Unfettered by reporting restrictions under the CCA, which only applied to cases in the UK and which would have limited coverage on the name of the suspects and the nature of the charges they faced, two papers went further and reported Knox's confession as a matter of fact, not even bothering to use words like alleged or use inverted commas. Three others cited police sources for the confession to give it official validity:

Flatmate admits violent attack on Mez (Daily Star, p. 4).

Dark Secret of flatmate who confesses role in Meredith murder (Daily Mail, p. 1).

Police sources in Perugia said pals were detained after Knox broke down and confessed (Sun, p. 4).

Police are said to have detained them after Knox broke down and confessed (Daily Express, p. 8).

Flatmate broke down during questioning and confessed to involvement in the killing, Italian police said (Independent, p. 4).

The Sun, Daily Mail, Daily Express and the Times led with the story on their front pages, though the ‘group sex murder’ headlines and text were lurid across nearly all the papers. Meredith Kercher had died

as she fought off repeated attempts to force her into the perverted group sex session (Daily Express, p. 1)

fighting off a group sex attack by 3 of her pals [in an] ‘Orgy of Death’ (Sun, p. 4)

for refusing violent group sex (Daily Mirror, p. 5)

The victim of a sick fantasy (Daily Mail, p. 1)

fighting off three sex fiends trying to lure her into an orgy (Daily Star, p. 4)

in a bizarre and sadistic attack (Independent, p. 4)

she had been made to have sex by her killers (Guardian, p. 4)

killed after refusing to take part in a violent orgy (Times, p. 3)

she struggled as she was forced to have sex with at least one of the men before being killed (Daily Telegraph, p. 3)

The newspapers further reported the various connections between the suspects, with Knox as the lynchpin. Sollecito was her Italian boyfriend and Lumumba was her Congolese boss, in whose Le Chic bar, some reported, Kercher had also hoped to work. The Italian police, officially and via unnamed sources, supplied the news media with information about the details of their investigation, which, in turn, were published uncritically by the UK national press. With impressive speed, journalists had accessed Knox’s MySpace and Sollecito’s Facebook accounts, gathering a significant amount of written and equally importantly visual material. They variously contacted Knox’s parents and stepmother, Sollecito’s father and aunt, a number of Lumumba’s friends, as well as the Kercher family for comments. They revisited Sollecito’s interview given to the Sunday Mirror, in which he recounted the finding of Kercher’s body and many quoted the Italian media. Whilst all the newspapers used nearly all the same sources for their reporting, the degree to which they relied on them and the manner in which they used them

varied.

### **Patrick Lumumba**

Lumumba had no social media presence, evidenced by comparatively few visuals of him, most papers relying solely on his perp walk arrest photographs. Despite interviewing a number of friends and work acquaintances, journalists could find nothing negative to say about him, even though the Sun, Daily Mirror and Daily Mail repeated Italian media reports that he was the suspect who had actually ‘wielded the blade’ (Daily Mirror) that killed Kercher. Thirty-seven-year-old Lumumba was well known and respectable, had been a legal resident in Italy since 1988, ‘from the upper echelons of Congolese society’, reputedly of excellent pedigree, perhaps even the grandson of President Lumumba, the first democratically elected president of the Congo, who was assassinated after coming to power in 1961 (Independent, Times, Daily Mail, Sun, Daily Express). His mother was understood to be a newspaper owner (Independent). He had originally come to Perugia to study and was married to a Polish woman named Ola, ten years his junior, who had also studied at the university. He was the father of a one-year-old baby boy called Davide, a musician and cultivated man (Times, Guardian, Telegraph, Independent, Daily Mail, Daily Express). Those interviewed provided Lumumba with strong character references, expressing incredulity that he could have been involved in Kercher’s death: ‘He would never hurt anyone. He is incredibly gentle and well educated. They must have got the wrong man’ (Daily Telegraph); he was a ‘gentle, relaxed person’ (Daily Mail). The Daily Star had almost nothing to say about him at all. It simply featured a photo of his arrest along with the other two suspects, named him and stated that Knox had worked in his Le Chic bar for a month. The Daily Telegraph and Daily Mail reported that Lumumba had handed out flyers for Kercher’s vigil, the Guardian that he had told reporters he ‘liked Miss Kercher, and was about to give her a job’ (p. 4), but none overtly capitalised on the point that this was a shocking deceit if he was her killer.

The relative lack of interest in Lumumba is striking particularly as journalists at this stage had no information about the actual killing, save for the fact that Lumumba was reportedly the one who had stabbed Kercher. It is not unreasonable to assume that the absence of a social media presence and positive characterisation gave them nothing to work with, highlighting that much of the creative work on this day’s coverage emanated from Knox’s and Sollecito’s web pages. Thus, the characterisation of Lumumba was, across the board in the UK press, limited but overwhelmingly favourable, depicting him, despite his arrest and alleged primary responsibility,

as a respectable, integrated, kindly, educated family man who, from his friends' perspectives, had been inexplicably arrested.

### **Raffaele Sollecito**

Sollecito was of much more interest to the newspapers than Lumumba because he was Knox's boyfriend, he had a disturbing Facebook persona and he had provided the only detailed eye-witness account of how he and Knox had discovered Kercher's body, in his interview with the Sunday Mirror. In all the newspapers, the 23-year-old University of Perugia student's primary status was that he was Knox's boyfriend. Sollecito came from 'a well-off family in Bari, southern Italy' (Guardian); he was the son of 'a rich doctor' (Daily Telegraph) or more specifically a 'well-off' urologist (Daily Mail). He lived in his own flat close to the murder scene (Daily Mail). The press did not carry any character references for Sollecito from fellow students or friends. It was left to his aunt to state that he was 'a model student and would not harm a fly' (Guardian; Daily Telegraph).

An altogether more incriminating characterisation of Sollecito was achieved as a result of mining his social media site. This provided an invaluable window into who he might really be, illustrated by his startling appearance. In a photograph gleaned from his Facebook page, Sollecito is dressed as a horror movie 'psycho doctor', wearing white overalls, his head and his face half-masked with white bandaging. He brandishes a meat cleaver with one hand and holds a bottle with bleach or lab cleaning fluid in his other ('psycho doctor photograph'). Several newspapers noted that there was no clue as to where the photograph was taken. This psycho doctor photograph subverted the other photographs of a bookish Italian student published by the papers. Journalists reproduced a Facebook post, describing his travels to Nuremburg and the Nazi concentration camp of Dachau and his self-description as 'very honest, peaceable, sweet but sometimes totally crazy' (sic) (Daily Star, p. 4; Sun, p. 5; Daily Mirror, p. 5; Independent, p. 4; Daily Express, p. 8, Daily Mail, p. 8).

His arrest in conjunction with his Facebook persona raised fundamental questions about the eye-witness account that he had provided through the Sunday Mirror interview. If the police were correct, Sollecito had lied about why he was able to provide this first-hand account and had attempted to derail the murder investigation. Rather than being there when Kercher's dead body was discovered, he and Knox were actually present when she was sexually assaulted and murdered. What the account highlights is his cold-heartedness in feigning shock at the discovery. As an indication of his psychopathic killer state of mind, a composed Sollecito was

quite happy to ‘re-live’ the murder scene for a U.K. journalist. His interview had also allowed him to craft a ‘cover-story’ for himself and Knox, which was now shown to be false. He received more coverage and characterisation than Lumumba and was portrayed in a wider variety and larger number of photographs. However, in the Daily Mail and the Daily Express, like Lumumba, he was subordinate to Knox, in terms of characterisation, column inches and visual representations.

### **Amanda Knox**

Three newspapers reported that it was Lumumba who was thought to have stabbed Kercher. Four used Sollecito’s psycho doctor photograph and all the newspapers referred to or quoted from Sollecito’s earlier Sunday Mirror interview, in which he described the ‘discovery’ of Kercher’s body, an interview which now exposed him as living a lie. Despite all this, the UK press coverage of 7 November 2007 focused on Amanda Knox. Given that she had sensationally ‘confessed’ to being a participant in the sexually motivated murder of her flatmate it is not surprising that she was located centre stage by the press spotlight. Further, as we noted previously, as a sexually motivated female killer—with her looks and background—her case was exceedingly rare, ripe for newsworthy ‘gold’ status. What is significant, however, is the speed with which some journalists and editors created a persona that went well beyond information supplied to them from official/unofficial police sources and local media and the degree to which they developed it.

The common coverage across the newspapers established the same biographical information about Knox, and why she had been arrested. Knox was a 20-year-old, well-educated, privileged, middle-class American, an improbable prime suspect and therefore extremely newsworthy. She was an exchange language student from the University of Washington, studying at Perugia’s Università per Stranieri. She had been in Italy for six weeks, having had a summer job in Germany. She had been privately educated at an expensive Jesuit college, her parents were divorced and both had remarried. Knox shared a flat in Perugia with Kercher and two Italian girls and had recently acquired an Italian boyfriend, Sollecito. She worked part-time in Lumumba’s Le Chic club and handed out leaflets for the club. Together with Sollecito, she had raised the alarm that led to the discovery of Kercher’s body.

Because the reporting restrictions under the CCA did not apply, the U.K. newspapers were free to reproduce prejudicial ‘evidence’, leaked by the Italian police, which enabled them to transform Knox into a plausible suspect. As Nick Pisa, the Daily Mail correspondent, later



remarked:

That's what made it such a great story for us as well in England, because in England...once someone is arrested, stop. You cannot write anything else about them, because they say...contempt of court, prejudice to a trial...you can't write anything once someone is arrested in charge, so formally accused. (Quoted in Felicetti 2008, p. 17)

The mere reporting of Knox's alleged confession was damning. It was later ruled inadmissible in evidence at the criminal trial, as she had no lawyer or interpreter present during the all-night interrogation. The press did not just report it, but used it to reveal what sort of person Knox really was. Knox was strong-willed enough to be able to withstand repeated police questioning. She did not voluntarily confess, but when faced with the contradictions in her evidence she finally 'crumbled' (Times, Daily Mail, Daily Telegraph) or 'broke down' (Sun, Independent, Daily Express) or 'came clean' (Daily Mirror). Knox lied repeatedly:

The story kept changing and didn't square. In the end she collapsed. What she told us helped bring the case to a close but it was only a matter of time. It was obvious that those responsible were from a close circle of friends. (Anonymous police source, Sun, pp. 4–5)

Knox was brazen. She had made no attempt to flee the scene of the crime but had 'talked casually to police in the garden of the home she shared with Miss Kercher' (Independent). The press was reassured by the police that there was additional evidence against her and reported it:

Records of calls made and received on Miss Kercher's mobile phones, as well as fingerprints found at the crime scene were crucial in identifying the three suspects taken into custody. (Guardian, p. 4)

The Sun went further and focused on the evidence that implicated Knox in particular:

Tell-tale clues in the flat were said to include a footprint from a small female shoe, impressed in blood, and ripped-out long hair that did not belong to the victim. (Sun, p. 4)

The U.K. press uncritically reproduced all the material that was being fed to them by the Italian police and their claim that the case was officially closed. Not only had Knox been arrested, she was clearly guilty. The question as to why such a respectable young woman would be involved in this sexual murder was answered by accessing her social media site.

### **Knox's Myspace Persona—The Emergence of 'Foxy Knoxy'**

It was Knox's unsecured MySpace account that provided newspapers with additional material to create a far more damning understanding of the 'different—sexually disturbed—world' of the 'outwardly respectable' Knox (Daily Star). With the exception of the Independent, the papers, in varying degrees, were able to fabricate a much more imaginative characterisation of Knox, exploiting the material on her social media pages, plucking text and visuals out of context for

full impact. An altogether different image emerged, belying the image of a young, attractive, distraught American student abroad. Beneath the surface Knox was portrayed as a sexually obsessed, disturbed, cold and detached deviant.

From the material used it is clear that reporters had a number of choices to make about what to use. In terms of photographs, Knox's web page offered up three distinct images that were used that day: one of her pretending to fire a Gatling gun, whilst travelling through Germany the previous summer ('the Gatling gun photograph'); another of her smiling to the camera, holding up a little teddy bear in a transparent bag ('the teddy bear photograph'); and a third of her fully made up and dressed in black, in clearly staged 'model pose' (the 'femme fatale' photograph). The remaining photographs used were either taken when she was outside the crime scene during the early days of the investigation or of her being arrested and led away. So far as textual information was concerned, Knox had recorded, in various posts, details of her travels around Europe, her interests and impressions of her life in Perugia and had posted a number of short stories that she had written. By using Knox's own comments and images, she became the primary source of material and the primary definer of what kind of person she was. This use of her material cleverly masked the ideological bias of the reporting. The coverage fell within three categories, portraying Knox as one of three suspects, one half of a good-looking killer couple and, finally, as Foxy Knoxy, the photogenic lynchpin.

### **Amanda Knox—The Suspect**

The Independent appears not to have accessed Knox's MySpace account, using neither text nor images from it, relying solely on police and Italian media sources for its coverage. The Guardian was the most circumspect in its use of Knox's social media site and reported nothing controversial, in the main relying on police sources for its coverage of Knox and simply drawing on her MySpace page to report that she worked in Lumumba's bar. The photographs accompanying the piece were a large one of Knox and Sollecito outside the crime scene, looking either bewildered or haunted and worried, with a much smaller inset of Lumumba and a very small headshot of the victim. The main photo was a 'having been there' image that recorded an event, without implying much more (Barthes 1977, p. 44), though by representing Knox and Sollecito together in the main frame and Lumumba inset in smaller form, the focus was on the couple.

The Times coverage was similar, but further quoted Knox's online assertion that 'I don't get embarrassed and therefore have very few social inhibitions' and reported she had been fined in

the USA ‘over a residential disturbance’, leaving these two insights to linger, in innuendo and without context, but permitting the reader to conclude that Knox was capable of inappropriate behaviour of some sort. It splashed with a large photograph of a smiling Knox, taken from her webpage, under the headline ‘Flatmate “confesses” over student murder’ and the inside page featured a large ‘perp walk’ photo of her, head covered, being led away by two female detectives. Two very small photographs of the other two suspects were woven into the text, with another tiny photograph of the victim. Although relatively restrained in its textual coverage, the Times therefore visually placed Knox as the central character in the story of the arrests. Both the Times and the Daily Telegraph chose to use one of Knox’s MySpace photographs that presented an attractive young woman, smiling at the camera as she held up a small, plastic, transparent purse, revealing a miniature teddy bear within. This innocent rendition of a young woman, almost childlike, contrasted sharply with the crime she was suspected of to maximum effect. Her innocent, girl-next-door image concealed her true nature. Knox, however, was clearly capable of subterfuge. This disjunction between her appearance and her true character developed as a common theme across many of the papers, reinforcing the notion of an evil nature concealed behind an attractive façade.

The Telegraph’s characterisation in the text was similarly sparse, but it did include the additional information that ‘she wrote a short story about the rape of a woman’. In the context of her arrest for murder and sexual violence, this juxtaposition implicitly hinted at Knox’s involvement, but the journalist chose not to expand on this.

### **Amanda Knox—One Half of a Killer Couple**

The Sun, Daily Star and Daily Mirror chose to make much more of Knox’s and Sollecito’s web material, fully sexualising the crime and in particular Knox. Although all three suspects were ‘sex killers’ (Daily Star) involved in a ‘crazed sex attack’ which led to an ‘[o]rgy of death’ (Sun), or ‘violent group sex’ (Daily Mirror), Lumumba received less attention both in the text and in the number and size of the images used. The Daily Star and Sun featured only one photograph of him, compared to the four of Sollecito and two of Knox (Sun) or the three apiece in the Daily Star. The Daily Mirror capitalised on Sollecito’s psycho doctor image as its main visual, with smaller insets of the other suspects, though the captions revealed Knox to be the key connecting feature in the enterprise: Sollecito was the ‘Housemate’s Boyfriend’ and Lumumba was the ‘Housemate’s Boss’.

More was made in these papers of Knox’s short stories and of Sollecito’s photograph, and the

material was used to reveal the true and shocking nature of the relationship between this disturbed couple of fantasists as well as providing clues to and forebodings of their shocking actions. She had ‘penned sick stories about sexual violence’, one of which ‘graphically describes a rape. Another tells of a model being ravaged by a man with ‘big rough hands’ (Daily Mirror) and the Sun reported that ‘[c]ops were last night probing several short stories written by Knox including one about two brothers discussing a drug-fuelled rape’ immediately after repeating the Italian Interior Minister’s assertion that it was ‘an ugly story in which people—friends in her home—tried to force her (Kercher) into relations she didn’t want.’ By lifting Knox’s fictional stories from her web page and placing them in the context of the sexually motivated group murder of Kercher, these journalists gave credence to the apparent connection between them. The police were ‘probing’ these pornographic stories because they were linked to the investigation and hence the murder. The fact that Knox wrote them was somehow evidence of her sexually disturbed character and of her guilt. Further, more could be read into these reports by virtue of the fact that Knox’s stories were just one illustration of her warped mind, as they were recounted in tandem with a myriad of other little details that contributed to the overall picture of what kind of a person she was. Knox was ‘sex mad’, her trip to Hamburg had ‘turned wild’ as she had visited the ‘notorious red light district’, where ‘an uncle tried to seduce her’. She posted on MySpace that one of her Italian flatmates ‘had bedded a man who had gone to the house to fix the washing machine’. In the light of this, a reader might have no problem recognising that Knox had an obsessive interest in all things sexual and could easily envisage her as part of the ‘four in a bed’ ‘sex romp’ that had ended in Kercher’s death (Daily Star).

Although Sollecito’s Facebook account provided limited material to work with, it was sufficient to show that both these lovers were well suited, sharing a disturbed inner life. The Sun juxtaposed an account of Knox’s Gatling gun photograph and her claims to be a ‘Nazi on the inside’ with one of Sollecito’s ‘disturbing’ psycho doctor photographs, further adding that he had travelled to Nuremberg and the ‘Nazi concentration camp of Dachau’, thus linking these two pieces of information to imply a common fascination with evil. The Daily Star took the same approach and featured a smaller article under the headline ‘Couple’s Sick Pictures’ with the same two photographs, Knox’s claim to be a hidden Nazi and Sollecito’s assertion that he was ‘sometimes totally crazy’ (sic). Lumumba was not mentioned.

Although the Sun had placed Sollecito’s photograph on the front page, it was the large Gatling gun picture of Knox that dominated the inside spread, thereby giving the couple equal visual

prominence in that papers' coverage. This was primarily a joint enterprise, led by the 'sick couple', with Lumumba in the background.

### **Foxy Knoxy**

The ultimate portrayal of Knox's darker side appeared in the Daily Mail and, to a lesser degree, in the Daily Express. These papers were the first to pick up on her MySpace nickname Foxy Knoxy and transform it from an innocent reference to her childhood dexterity on the football field to imply her sexual prowess as a woman. This is how Knox had defined herself, and any additional 'foxy' connotations—sneaky, cunning, sexy, manipulative—must, therefore, be true. As this murder news story rolled and rolled during the next 7 years, many other papers, websites, blogs, books and tweets would pick up on this, making it the globally recognisable, enduring nickname for Amanda Knox.

The Daily Express and the Daily Mail far exceeded the other dailies in their positioning of Knox as the central figure in this crime. Their primary visual focus was on her, both in terms of number and size of photographs, creating a powerful visual field that in one day's coverage transformed a good-looking American exchange student into the sexually voracious Foxy Knoxy. One page in the Daily Express used three photographs of Knox, two of Sollecito and one of Lumumba, but the montage of Knox's three images, framed together under the caption 'Foxy Knoxy' accounted for a full half page, dominating the impact on a reader and leaving the male suspects to share the other half. The Daily Mail's inside spread similarly used more and bigger photographs of her, again presenting the overriding impression that Knox was the main protagonist in this disturbing murder, with the men captioned off as 'the boyfriend' and 'the bar owner' and seen only in relation to her. Irrespective of the photographs' content, but on the premise 'that relative size equates to relative importance' (Huxford 2001, p. 62), the papers intentions were clear.

The main Knox photograph, in both the papers, was the Gatling gun photograph, where she is depicted laughingly manically, as she pretended to fire the gun. She is wearing a figure-hugging, strappy, yellow dress and the phallic implications are obvious. Whereas Sollecito's psycho doctor photograph was at worst bizarre, and clearly an image of him in fancy dress, this Knox visual was sexual and disturbing, the large body of the Gatling gun pointing straight at the reader. The Daily Mail went further, publishing this in its double-page feature, with an additional, very different photograph of Knox. In this image, she reclined slightly on a stool, dressed in black, one leg up, arm outstretched on her knee, a glimpse of a high-heeled sandal.

She was made up, poised and posing, as if a professional model or femme fatale. The third photograph was of her and Sollecito very much looking like classic students kissing outside the ‘murder house’. In isolation these photographs could mean very little or a number of things, but in the context of the headlines, captions and text, the reader is compelled to make associations (Barthes 1977; Burgin 1977/2003 ; Becker 2003; Valverde 2006). The Daily Mail’s photo montage in its double-page feature is an ingenious performance in itself, with Knox’s true identity revealed: cool, sexual, dangerous, in other words, ‘foxy’ (Fig. 2.1).

The ultimate textual depiction of Knox’s darker side appeared in the Daily Mail, which splashed the story of Knox’s confession under the headline ‘Victim of a sick fantasy’. The reader only had to look above the headline to learn whose fantasy the reporters were referring to: ‘Dark Secret of flatmate who confesses role in Meredith’s murder’, further expanded on in a double-page feature entitled ‘Twisted World of Foxy Knoxy’ in bold letters across the whole spread. The paper then gave a much closer examination of her MySpace site giving ‘a worrying insight into the bizarre life which has led the 20-year-old brunette to an Italian police cell’. Her ‘sick’ violent stories were given more detailed attention, revealing her disturbing sexual fantasies, which would explain her otherwise inexplicable involvement in Kercher’s murder. Interspersed in the text are references to further evidence her deviant mind: her Catholic education, from which she has clearly lapsed; her ‘single’ status on her webpage, despite being in a relationship; her ‘meandering’ stories which reflect her own, directionless life; her ‘fun’ trip to Hamburg’s red light district, her ‘cold and distracted demeanour’ and brash, socially aggressive style; her enjoyment of violent films. Although much of the information is similar to that referred to in many of the other papers, the Daily Mail’s creative use of visuals, headlines and innuendo coalesced to create a fully fleshed-out portrayal of an aggressively sexual deviant with disturbing fantasies, the true Knox, concealed beneath a veneer of normality.

Negative testimonials from people who knew her in Italy dominated the last section of the text. Knox was ‘brash’, ‘very vocal’, ‘very cold’ and ‘distracted’, ‘in a different world’. These fragments of opinion validated the paper’s portrayal of Knox. Combined with the headlines, captions and her visual dominance, the narrative construction created a moral frame, steering a reader to understand this story in a particular way (Langer 2003; Peelo 2006).

## **Conclusion**

To date there has been no criminological research that has identified the exact moment when and how an iconic criminal representation is successfully fabricated in the news media. In this

chapter we have pinpointed and analysed the innovative journalistic practices through which Amanda Knox was first transformed into what would become the global infotainment commodity known as Foxy Knoxy. This transformation ‘explained’ who Knox really was, how she could plausibly be the lynchpin in the sexually motivated murder and the pivotal role she played in that murder. Foxy Knoxy was a one-of a-kind young American neo-femme fatale, with killer looks and a killer mind. Hiding behind a respectable façade was a scheming puppeteer who could initiate and take pleasure in the grotesque murder of her flatmate. By definition, this dramatic reworking of the cultural archetype of a woman deemed to be capable of a sexually driven murder amplified her guilt, making her more culpable than her male co-accused. This redefinition was facilitated by the melding of Knox’s ‘confession’, her own MySpace archive of personal information, stories and photographs and press investigations defined by a lack of restrictions on reporting. As we have demonstrated, Knox was trapped in the centre of a powerful discursive and visual field that resonated at multiple, sexually loaded, levels.

Although all the newspapers were clear that Knox’s stories were works of fiction, the innuendo created by referring to them, in whatever degree of detail, was intended to leave the reader with the impression that these lurid stories revealed Knox’s true nature, her psychopathic fantasies exposed. Similarly, the extensive use of the ‘gun/Nazi on the inside’ photo or the ‘foxy’ model pose were further intended to show what lay beneath the more ‘normal’ images of a pretty, young student. The context of the photos (fun holiday snaps?) and the stories (a college assignment for creative writing?) were ignored. Instead they were isolated, chosen and re-contextualised as ‘proof’ of what kind of person Amanda Knox really was. The newspapers in this case lifted, de-contextualised and re-created her identity, shifting between her ‘fictional’ online performances and the ‘facts’ of the police investigation, to great (and damning) effect, fusing the two, reconstructing Knox within its desired frame and providing irresistible infotainment. These non-linear, de-contextualised narratives and images, interspersed with the fact of her arrest, created a singularly post-modern frame, where truth, meaning and reality were not easily discernible amongst the constructions that emerged, highlighting the risks of such on-line portrayals that linger indefinitely in the global cloud and can be plucked and re-packaged at any time, with potentially infinite effects (Ferrell et al. 2008; Nerenberg 2012). Further by using material that purports to come from the ‘source’, despite its manipulation, the news media lend validity to such constructions, inviting consumers to assume they are true. The material lifted from Knox’s social media account enabled journalists to explain and represent the inexplicable

and un-representable. The Knox case raises broader questions as to the evidentiary value of images and text and how they testify in the digital milieu (McQuire 2013).

Misogynist constructions of female criminality and character annihilation in the U.K. press usually occur after the trial and conviction of the deviant woman, not before charges have even been brought. The Amanda Knox case study demonstrates why reporting restrictions are effective in ensuring that those arrested are not prejudiced before a trial takes place and what happens when they are not imposed. Although the reporting on 7 November 2007 was not in breach of the provisions of the CCA, the legacy of Amanda Knox's construction as Foxy Knoxy remains, irrevocably associated with the murder of Meredith Kercher. This master status is endlessly reproduced and her guilt or innocence forever questioned in a continuous feedback loop. In the following two days the Foxy Knoxy persona was used in the Times, Daily Telegraph, Sun, Daily Mirror and the Daily Star. Three newspapers quoted an unnamed police source to highlight that it was Knox's wickedness that led her co-accused astray, as she had 'shown an unscrupulous tendency to lie repeatedly to investigators, involving the young Sollecito in such a serious affair' (Guardian, Daily Mirror, Independent, 8/9 November). The theme of a besotted, out-of-his-depth, Italian male, ensnared by Foxy Knoxy, the dangerous seductress, would be developed by his lawyers, family and sections of the Italian media.

In the weekend newspapers of 10 and 11 November 2007, we witness the next stages in their development of Foxy Knoxy with a sensationalist interpretation of every aspect of Knox's personality and life, including her sex life. At the same time the sordid details of the allegedly drug-fuelled, sexual murder were embellished, her 'confession' was leaked and reproduced, as was 'startling' new incriminating evidence in the form of Judge Matteini's decision to endorse the detention of the three accused. This leaked judgment further reinforced the police projection of Knox's guilt. The weekend U.K. press coverage, unfettered by journalistic ethics, produced a sexplanation. The genesis of the horrifying murder lay with Knox's sexually disturbed, attention-seeking personality. Her desires and fantasies had been unleashed in a Bacchanalian student lifestyle defined by drugs, alcohol and casual sex. As events swiftly spun out of control, Knox, the schemer and sex maniac, was driven to orchestrate and partake in the brutal murder of Meredith Kercher. Her co-accused all but disappeared within this frame. As this chapter demonstrates, almost a year before she was formally charged, the U.K. newspapers, working within a fevered pack mentality, quickly fabricated a sensational murder script out of facts, rumour, conjecture, opinion, prejudices and allegation that would enable them to exploit both



the gruesome details of the Meredith Kercher murder and the remarkably photogenic Amanda Knox in a ruthless manner. U.K. press investment in Foxy Knoxy as infotainment bait trumped all sense of journalistic objectivity, responsibility and integrity. There was no interest, for example, in questioning the improbable police/prosecution case against Knox. The merciless press preoccupation with Foxy Knoxy annihilated the presumption of innocence. As Madison Paxton, one of Knox's college friends, noted at the time of her first conviction on 5 December 2009 (Seattle Times 2009): 'They're convicting a made-up person. They're convicting "Foxy Knoxy".'

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