

Amanda Knox

Journalist, broadcaster & exoneree

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Welcome to media masters, a series of one-to-one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today I'm joined down the line from Seattle by Amanda Knox, the writer and campaigner who was fought to regain the narrative of her own life after being wrongfully convicted of murder. The global media seized on the case of Amanda, after her arrest on suspicion of the 2007 murder, a British foreign exchange student Meredith Kercher in Italy. Amanda spent almost four years in an Italian prison before being exonerated by Italy's highest court. Although that acquittal was more than a decade ago, Amanda's case continues to be exploited as a source of profit for news organisations and filmmakers. As an author, she's fighting back against a world in which her reputation continues to be a source of what she calls "distortion by a voracious rumour mill." Amanda, thank you for joining me.

Thank you for having me. I'm honoured. I feel like I'm certainly not at the top of my media game, so I guess fake it till you make it!

Well, it's interesting cause a lot of my guests so far have sort of spent their career working to become media masters. And you're the first one who initially came to international media attention, frankly, against your will.

Yeah and I feel like I've been ploughing my way out of a media grave for a long time.

I can't begin to ask you what it would feel like to be at the centre of that kind of storm. I mean, not only have you got the four years that you spent in prison undeservedly and all of the stress that that must give you but frankly you must have seen the very best and worst of people since you've got out because as you so eloquently said many times there's people on Twitter and all over, I just say, "oh, she obviously did it. She's a wrong'n."

It's interesting how when an accusation, especially in a wrongful conviction case, but also in any story that ends up being big news in the media, what ends up happening is your life story and therefore your identity is stolen from you and then transformed into an entertainment product. And that is a shocking thing to find yourself at the

centre of when you are basically media illiterate. I was a 20 year old kid when this happened to me. I was both illiterate in terms of what the criminal justice system is really like. And I was also illiterate when it came to what the media is really like.

You were acquitted, you returned home, you were almost entering another type of prison, were you not. Because you're never going to be allowed to return to anonymity. And as you very eloquently said there you are productised aren't you as this thing "Foxy Knoxy."

Yeah. And what I've discovered sadly is that I thought that that product, that Foxy Knoxy product, once it was disproven, once I was acquitted, once I was exonerated, I thought that I would then sort of get my identity back. I thought that ownership of my identity would revert back to me and I would get to be the one to define who I was and what my role was in the world. And I sadly realised that again, like you said, I was not allowed to return to an anonymous life. That wasn't a possibility for me, nor was it a possibility for me to be the authoritative voice in my own life. I very much have to compete with other people's narratives about who I am and what my role in the world is. And a lot of people who have big platforms and a lot of resources continue to frame me in terms of this murder that I had nothing to do with.

It's an odd quirk of human nature. Isn't it? That if you're defined as being innocent of something, people are always going to say "there's no smoke without fire," but also it's not a nice conversation to have. The old tabloid trick was to knock on someone's door and say, "when was the last time you cheated on your wife?" And if a politician would say, "I've never cheated on my wife," they could then run a front page story saying "politician denies he's cheated on his wife." And of course everyone reading thinks, well, he must have done it if he's denied it.

Yeah. The stigma of an accusation is something that I think we need to take more seriously in society. I think we tend to both personally, as individuals spend a lot of time judging others and sort of accusing people in our own minds of things without enough information, but also there's a whole industry that bases its entire work off of scandal mongering and that really digs deep into our human psyche because why does that industry exist? It's because we as human beings really latch onto stories of scandal and you can get into evolutionary biology if you really wanna dig deep enough. But we as consumers of media have as much say about the kind of stories that we are told as the people who are telling those stories to us.

What irritates me about the way that you're portrayed sometimes, which is a double level of unfairness is not whether you did it or not. And of course you exonerated, we know you didn't, but the narrative goes she's exploiting that notoriety, that to me is even more offensive in some ways.

Yeah and the other really offensive thing I've had thrown my way is that it's somehow my fault that Meredith Kercher has been largely forgotten in this story. And the thing

that I want to point out to people is that I was not the one who was leading the charge in how the story was told during my four years in prison and eight years on trial. I was a lot of that time in prison or in a big way, limited and hiding. And the fact that I've felt the compulsion because my freedom and my life and my identity was stolen from me to at the very least add my one voice to all of these voices who are authoring my personal experience. I think that the media has not taken responsibility for how they repeated a story without any evidence and we're doing it for the sake of selling a story at Meredith Kercher's expense and at the expense of justice in this case. One of the things that I wish the media looking back on this case would do a sort of self audit and realise that when they just repeated what the prosecution's theory of the crime was, they very much made this case, not about what happened to Meredith, but about how do we assassinate another woman's character in this case at the expense of the evidence.

And another layer of offensiveness, as I'm understanding, as I'm hearing you say, is that actually, the media will never own up to that because they benefited from it, they sold more newspapers by introducing your character and they got more clicks on their website. And then for her to say, "well, she's not sufficiently upset about poor Meredith's death." Actually. It's just covering the fact that they're the ones profiting from the tragedy that happened to both of you. Obviously she was horrifically murdered, what happened to you is almost as horrible in my view.

Clearly I feel like I'm the lucky one because here I am living my life, I've experienced a lot of pain and a lot of limitations, but I'm alive. And so of the two of us, I do feel like I'm the lucky one. And at least I have the opportunity to try to author my own experience and Meredith doesn't, but you're right. The media has not taken responsibility for the way that they helped this case become not about what really happened to Meredith. And instead became about a morality play about female sexuality, where Meredith became this invisible asexual victim. And I became the epitome of female sexuality, but in vilified form. And it's not a true story, and it's not what happened to Meredith and therefore instead of holding the authorities accountable, in this case to the truth, the media just took advantage of a false story and went with it in order to sell newspapers.

And the sexism is odious too, because as you say, there's the painting her falsely as this asexual victim, there's you as this voraciously sexual evil murderer and all of this nonsense, right? Rudy Guede, the man who actually killed Meredith hardly gets any attention by contrast.

Yes. It's shocking to me how often he is referred to as the other guy who was accused and is not even named. And when people think of his actions, the result of his actions, they don't think of him, they think of me. And they continue to feel like the most interesting thing about this case is how a young woman could be implicated in a sex crime when what's really the most interesting thing about this case, or what should be in the public interest is the question of how a young man could have spiraled out of control in such a way that it resulted in the rape and murder of a

innocent young woman. We need to know how that happened and understand why in order to prevent these things from happening in the future. And instead, we're just, again, constantly revisiting this false story of female on female violence that is sexualised, which doesn't really happen in the world. It's so rare that something like that actually happens. And instead it's covering up a more common story, a less interesting story, but a very important story, which is when young men take advantage of and hurt young women.

Which for some reason is eclipsed by the fact that you were doing some exercises in the police cell which must make you guilty for some reason.

Yeah. The issue of finding reasons afterwards for justifying one's suspicions about a person like I'm not going to say that there are no suspicious behaviours that one could possibly have. Rudy Guede acted suspiciously after the crime, when he fled the country, that is suspicious behaviour, doing stretches after sitting on a hard chair in a police office for several hours is not suspicious behaviour. It's just behaviour that you've then retroactively looked at in a way to justify your suspicious lens on that person to justify accusing them. And the way that the prosecution in this case bent over backwards to try to find fault in my behaviour in the days leading up to my arrest. And the fact that the media never ever questioned it is astonishing to me to this day.

If someone is accused of a crime and I'm watching them on the news, my view is that they're innocent or proven guilty. I don't know enough about the case. They could be guilty or they might not be, you could have been a murderer, the evidence clearly said that you weren't. What fascinated me at the beginning though, is even those initial reports were sexualising you basically inferring that you did it. It just seemed to be almost prejudicial before the trial. Obviously we now know that the prosecutor, frankly, was deranged in my view. But to go through that, you must have thought you were in an episode of the Twilight zone or something.

It was incredibly surreal because I had grown up in a very safe, crime free environment. I trusted the police, I trusted the media. And so to have this story be spun about me on no evidence whatsoever and feeling like there was nothing I could possibly do to prove them wrong. It was almost Freudian in that sense where they say you're a sex monster and here's all the proof. And you're like, wait, that's not proof. How do I prove a negative? It was astonishing to me how helpless I felt in that environment because I did feel a little bit like I was Alice who had tumbled down the rabbit hole. All of the rules were suddenly very different and the world was a lot more monstrous, all of a sudden. And at the very beginning, I blamed myself a lot. I was this 20 year old kid who didn't speak Italian very well. And I thought maybe there was this misunderstanding about who I was and what I had done, because I couldn't explain myself very well in Italian. And it was only later as the story kept going, as there was a continual story about, oh, well, Amanda's DNA is not at the crime scene. She must have cleaned up her DNA somehow. The mental gymnastics that I saw my prosecution and the detectives who were investigating this case going through in

order to justify their preconceived notion about me, that I was guilty. That made me realise slowly that in this case, the truth didn't matter. And what mattered was the story, what mattered to these investigators was that they were not wrong. They couldn't be wrong. So if they couldn't be wrong, then how could I be guilty? In what way can I look at anything about Amanda or anything around the crime scene or the evidence, and I can twist it so that it means that Amanda is guilty. What I've realised is that this is not an actual uncommon thing that happens in human minds. These are all actual, very familiar cognitive biases that human beings do. I mean, you know, we can talk about the conservatism bias that you do not reevaluate your own theory based on new evidence and you always try to find ways to reconfirm your hypothesis and confirmation bias, looking for evidence to confirm your preconceived ideas and ignoring evidence that does it otherwise, which is to say that you call my prosecutor deranged. And a part of me wonders how he was constructing a false narrative, or if he was unconsciously constructing this false narrative, because he genuinely believed he was right.

That's the bit that fascinates me as much as the horrendous ordeal that you've gone through is his mentality. Because as you say, some people that I've dealt with in my life genuinely believe or start to believe the lies that they construct. And you were talking there about the lack of logic. On a much smaller level, you can see it on Twitter where if someone abuses me, I block them, I don't interact with them. And that's it. I forget about it. I move on. They then proudly screenshot me blocking them as evidence that either they will right to call me rouge or whatever they wanna call me or better still they say I've been triggered or they take pleasure in the fact that I must be upset if I blocked them. When you were talking about the topsy turvy logic of this, if you are this deranged sex killer, that's what sex killers do, don't they, they deny having done it. So she must be guilty because she is denying it. You can't escape from that kind of inverted topsy turvy logic.

Exactly. And I'm so sorry that you find yourself at the brunt of that because there is a sort of perverse pleasure I see people indulging in, especially online when they latch on to a see certain individual and they decide that no matter what that individual does, it means that they're guilty in their eyes. It just confirms their preconceived notion about them. And it's really a disappointing thing. And also something that we all potentially can fall prey to that is the mindset that we all have a predisposition for, which is why it's so important to do that kind of self-auditing of introspection and reflecting when you are encountering a story or an individual, in person or online, giving them the benefit of the doubt and considering that your immediate instinctual impulse about that person, that impulse of judgement about that person could be wrong because there's a lot of context that a lot of times people are missing when they don't understand people's actions,

I've had maybe a dozen, half a dozen people be rude to me on Twitter and it's unpleasant and you block them and move on. But compared to what you've gone through on social media, I was wondering how you deal with that psychologically, because you know, I have friends that say, don't block them, just mute them. And then you don't give them the satisfaction or some

engagement. Others, just say no, block them and move on. How do you actually cope with a litany of horrible people around the world that would just want to come up and say abusive things?

It's interesting, I've had a kind of personal evolution with regards to this because very early on when I first at interacting with people on the internet, I felt like you, I was like, well, I shouldn't block anyone because if someone is reaching out to me even just to send a hateful message, they are potentially open to more information and I should allow that kind of content to first of all hit me, so that I understand everything that's being said about me. I kind of, in a way, want to understand what the worst thoughts about me are in the world so I can prepare myself to confront them. But also I didn't like the idea of cutting people off. I wanted to feel like I was engaging with humanity, even if I was, as I said, early on feeling like I was clawing my way out of a grave. And I didn't feel like I could do that without engaging with the worst of it. And unfortunately what I found is that sometimes people are communicating to communicate and sometimes people are communicating to hurt you. And I slowly had to realise that some conversations are worth having, because they are genuine conversations. And other times it's just people using words as weapons. And I don't have to engage with that because that's ultimately a reactive mindset. It sort of keeps me prisoner to their perception and I'm not a prisoner to their perception. I am only a prisoner to the perceptions of those who are gatekeepers for me. And so as I navigate the world, I definitely feel like I understand that the people who are flinging hatred at me and I get it on a daily basis and I do a lot of blocking at this point in my life, they don't even hate me. They hate an idea of me that they were given by people who had the power to tell the story before I ever had a chance to defend myself. And on their side, those trolls willingly engaged with that story, accepted that story and held onto that story, despite the evidence. And I feel bad for them, honestly, because what does it mean about a person that the story of an evil woman matters more to them than the truth? It sounds to me like they have a lot of psychological issues and I feel bad for them, but I don't feel personally attacked because they hate a person who doesn't even exist. And she just happens to have my face and my name.

It's bizarre that they would try to bully you in that way though. Isn't it? Because I would say a large majority of them would probably know deep down that you were innocent and therefore why are they doing it? Is it just wickedness? Are you being too kind to your trolls?

Well, I don't know. I don't know if it's ever wrong to be too kind. I feel like it's good to air on the side of kindness and air on the side of the benefit of the doubt, because again, I don't know what's going on in that person's life and what their context is for their behaviour. I know that it's hurtful and that it's directed at me despite the fact that it's an idea of me, so I don't take it personally. However, I do feel like the the Piers Morgans of the world and the prosecutors of the world should do way more self auditing than they do precisely because of the impact they can have on people, the individual troll is going to impact me emotionally, but is not going to potentially take away my freedom or perpetuate a false narrative about me to a large audience. They are individually attacking me one on one. And I have more hard feelings for those

who exploit their power to vilify people who don't deserve it, in those kinds of positions of power.

I just find it bizarre that people might think you are guilty of murder because you did some stretches in a police cell and Piers Morgan says he thinks you did it. It just seems odd that they have such a low threshold. And you would hope that if we live in a fair society, that if they were accused of something, they'd rightly want to hold the prosecutor to a high standard about whether they did it or not.

Indeed. And it's striking to me how quickly and easily a large number of people in the world decided they were entitled to hate and abuse a young woman, fascinating to me how they held onto that sense of entitlement despite the evidence. It seems to me that we're still struggling with a bit of misogyny in society and that's a little bit where that's coming from because who is I? I was not somebody who had impacted these people's lives. I was a 20 year old girl who had never been in trouble with the law before, who had never been in trouble with anyone before. Why was it so easy for people to feel entitled to hate and abuse me and force me to suffer when there was no evidence? That is a very good question.

It's a topsy turvy world and it gets even more annoying with my next question, because there's another layer of frustration I have with this, because obviously you've done the stretches in the cells so you must be guilty. But like the fictionalised portrayals are another matter. You spoke recently about the film Stillwater, which was clearly inspired by your case. But again, you've got Piers Morgan saying you did it, you're stretching in the cells and that fictional character did the murder. So maybe Amanda Knox did it as well.

Yes, exactly. And I think that it's a really important point that storytellers should be mindful of how they are inspired by real life events. And with a lot of these inspired by the Amanda Knox saga stories, Stillwater is not the only one, there have been a number of different TV shows that have not hidden the fact that they were very much referencing Meredith's death and the accusations made against me. I feel like when they play into that false narrative and they say, 'inspired by the Amanda Knox case,' what they don't realise is that just because they have fictionalised it, doesn't mean that it doesn't have reputational costs that I end up bearing. When you repeat a false story about female on female sexual violence, and you do it over and over again in this movie and that movie and that novel and that novel, it gives people a false impression about reality. And it has a very real impact on my life because it, again, nails me down and puts me into this tiny box of 'girl who was accused of a sex crime.' And who I am has nothing to do with that. I did not take part in a sex crime. I was accused of that, but I have survived and I've moved on and I've tried to do a lot of wonderful things with my life. And I've tried to take the perspective that I've gained from that experience and put it to good work and over and over again, I see people looking at who I am and what I've experienced and telling me the only value you have is that you were accused of a horrific crime. And by the way, we're gonna tell your story without your consent and without your input.

It's unethical.

I agree. And when I wrote my Twitter thread that I turned into an Atlantic article about this, it wasn't really to slam anyone. It was more because I felt like the storytelling industry had overlooked a way that they were probably unintentionally being unethical. And I wanted to take a stand as someone who was directly impacted by big Hollywood storytellers who had taken my real life as inspiration and have a conversation, suggesting that maybe there was an aspect of humanity that was being overlooked in the storytelling process in a very similar way that there have been conversations about representation in Hollywood. And does it matter if you're telling the story of a trans woman that a trans woman is working on that show. Like there are interesting conversations about appropriation and exploitation that have been interestingly happening in Hollywood, but not on this individual level of individual people's stories who are being exploited for media content. So I wanted to offer the opportunity to have that kind of conversation. And I was disappointed that Matt Damon and Tom McCarthy did not choose to engage well.

Well they have delivered that decision and as I know what my view on it is. I'd be fascinated to ask you, because you've been at the centre of this is, the clickbait social media culture ring, has it made people worse? Has Twitter made people nasty or was it that there's always been a certain amount of people that were nasty and Twitter's made it easy for them to reveal their true selves behind the keyboard warrior, anonymity, and so on. And there was always an element of say village gossip and people being not very nice about each other and it's just been amplified or is there something innately about the platform itself that's been made it worse?

You know, it's interesting in the same way that I feel like media is a tool, social media is a tool and how it gets used is ultimately what makes it good or bad. I think that the problem with social media is not that it has democratised the ability to share information. I think that that ultimately is a good thing. The problem with social media is that the thing that makes a story resonate or ultimately have the biggest impact is whether or not it goes viral and the gateway for whether or not this person's tweet or that person's tweet goes viral, oftentimes has to do with how outrageous it is. Does it stir outrage? And so, I've felt this on my own skin, in a lot of ways. And I've been surprised when tweets of my own go viral or not. And a lot of times the ones that get the most attention are the ones that are pushing boundaries more. And that people who hate me decide that can be taken out of context. And I think instead of ones where I'm raising awareness about a certain issue, those often get overlooked or ignored. And so I find it interesting how our human impulse again for scandal ultimately inadvertently is leading people to limit the kinds of stories that they're exposed to. Because again, like in the same way that the problem with the traditional media is that what gains the most attention is what sells and so you're going to put more money and invest more resources into telling scandalous stories that get more attention. The same issue is on Twitter. So I think that the answer to this issue is that people become more media literate, both traditional and social media literate. They're

more mindful of the kinds of content that they are being exposed to and seeking out and retweeting. And there's a reframing in your own mind of the kinds of content that you want to consume, because ultimately, I don't think the industry is going to change until the consumer changes. And that's a big, big issue. And it's one that requires a lot of collaborative effort. And I don't think that we would have realised the importance of media literacy until we all started feeling like we had a role in it. We had a chance to take part in the conversation, the way that we do through social media.

I also think there's a basic psychological insight that I've gained over the years that I use social media. What I call it is the TripAdvisor problem, where if you are angry or negatively motivated, you are much more resourceful and motivated to do something. So we have a local Italian restaurant here in the village. It's very nice. If you go on TripAdvisor, there's five or six positive reviews and there's like 200 negative reviews. And of course I've been a patron of them for many years. It never occurred to me that I should write a positive review because I'm busy, but of course it's full of people who are negatively motivated to want to reduce the reputation of the restaurant.

Yeah. And I think that's a very interesting point and also points to how I think that we don't, as an international community, practice enough gratitude. I think that if there was more of an impulse to actively express gratitude, that might help with the TripAdvisor problem. But of course that's not what deep down, if you get down to the deep psychological roots of our actions, that's not what's motivating us in a big way.

It is fascinating though, like Google's algorithm rewards people sharing and the most clicks. So if you Google anyone or something, it's always the negative stuff that comes up first because no one's going to share a piece in Forbes praising someone. Whereas if something bad happens to them or they say something controversial, people want to share that. So there's almost a systemic bias isn't there? To anger and hostility because that's the thing that generates action.

Yeah, it is. And I suppose the big question is what do you do about that? Knowing that that's true about our psychology, how do we all become better consumers and sharers of content? And I feel like for me, it took feeling the consequences of that kind of outrage psychology on my own skin to reevaluate my personal investment in the kinds of media content that I both produce and share and consume. But of course, I don't think that many of us truly feel that impact and understand the consequences personally in a big way and in a way that limits our life in a huge way. So I think maybe it's telling stories of people who have struggled with that kind of impulse, that impulse to judge, that impulse to hate that will remind people that there is a human cost and that they are potentially at risk of falling prey to that impulse as well.

I was going to ask you how people are with you in public, in real life, strangers that you don't know. One of my friends is an actor, she is quite prominent in

Game of Thrones, she's very well recognised and when I'm having a meal with her in public, people just come up to our table and ask for selfies. And she's very gracious but to be honest it's annoying, but I see it from her point of view that they just assume that she will do it. Like if she says, actually I'm having a private meal at the moment, they'll go on Twitter saying, "oh this actors a stuck up cow, all I asked for was a selfie" and that fascinates me. Sometimes I've felt a vibe of physical threat and I've just felt uncomfortable. And I wondered, do you get recognised in the street? Do people come up and say, "well, I think you did it" or do they leave you in peace?

I have yet to have somebody just walk right up to my face and say, "you did it, you psychopath." Usually that kind of direct address happens to me online, but I do have that version of people who approach me with a sense of entitlement to my time, my attention and above all, to my story. So sometimes I understand that impulse is coming from a good place in the same way that the people who are approaching your friend, wanting a selfie are doing it because they think she's really cool. And it's their one opportunity, they never get to encounter her in real life, they see her in real life, they go this is my one chance to have a connection with her without realising that it comes at a cost to her. Her attention is diverted and her time is taken up in a way that she did not consent to. I think the interesting thing from my experience is people not realising that when they are asking me for their attention, the reason why they want my attention is because they feel a sense of entitlement over the worst experience of my entire life. And sometimes it's to express sympathy, which is very nice and appreciated, but sometimes it's to express doubt and curiosity, and people want to ask me about those cartwheel that I supposedly did or what was it like in the interrogation room or what was prison like. Without thinking, you're asking me about the absolute worst experience of my life. And I feel like I'm constantly on call to respond to people's curiosity about the worst experience of my life. I feel bad for the people around me because there is a sense again that a person approaching me thinking that that person next to me doesn't matter because I'm having a conversation with my husband, we're in the airport and we're trying to get to our gate and someone approaches me well, I'm no longer available to my own husband in the way that I would if I was just an anonymous individual.

I just think it's odd that if you were to meet an acquaintance at a family barbecue that had served in the army, for example, who was suffering from PTSD, you wouldn't go up to them and say, "there's your beer and the hotdog and can you tell us about that traumatic time in Nam," it's odd that they feel that you would want to continuously have to justify and explain it to them, a complete stranger?

Yes and I think the difference between me and that person who had survived a traumatic experience in Vietnam is that my trauma was on the front page of headlines around the world for many years. And so people feel a sense of ownership, over the worst experience that ever happened to me because they followed it. And if that is coming from a place of empathy and shared humanity and wanting to reach out and say, I see you, and I witnessed your pain and I want to convey that to you, that I fell for you. I feel like that is ultimately a positive impulse, even if it is somewhat

interrupting my day. What's more of a negative impulse is the people who don't realise that their curiosity and their feelings of wanting to interrogate me about that worst experience of my life is not more important than me having the freedom to walk away from that kind of conversation, because I don't owe them anything. And it's a difficult problem though, because like you said, your friend gets accused of being a snob, well, I get accused of being a murderer when I don't do what people like me to do and, and I have to always weigh that impulse of people to assume the worst about me if I don't do what they want of me.

Did telling your story in the book, 'Waiting To Be Heard,' help change perceptions? Was it a cathartic experience?

Yeah. So when I first wrote my book, it was shortly after I came home from Italy. I was still on trial technically I was still facing a potential extradition battle. But it was the first opportunity that I had to talk about the trial, talk about the evidence from my own perspective, because I had not had a real opportunity to do so, and it was very important to me. I look back on what I wrote in 'Waiting To Be Heard' and years have gone by, I have much more information now and a better understanding of how wrongful convictions happen. And there are certain perspectives that I think are different today. I feel like I blame myself less today because I very much was still reeling from internalised self blame from the world blaming me and victim blaming me for what had happened. So it's been interesting because feel like I have continued waiting to be heard in my ongoing journalism and in my podcast labyrinth where I am still to this day processing my experience, processing how much agency I actually had in those days leading up to my arrest and what it all means, what it means to be a young woman who is wrongly accused of my friend's rape and murder. What does that mean for society today and what good can come from understanding it better? I do think that there have been interesting moments in the media history of this case that have had big impacts in the way other people treat me though. So I think that less so with 'Waiting To Be Heard,' interestingly, it was the Netflix documentary. As soon as that came out, people started sending me messages on Twitter and Instagram telling me that they were sorry that they had treated me like a monster, sorry that they had treated me like entertainment. It was the first time that a large quantity of people, all of a sudden, reached out to me and said, "oh my goodness, you aren't who we thought you were." And that was a tremendous moment for me because I never thought that that was going to happen. I was just grateful to be free and grateful to be able to live my life, not inside of a prison cell. And I had given up on the idea that people would recognise my experience and perspective as valuable and not just as a villain. And I've had an interesting moment more recently that's maybe just as impactful ever since my daughter was born and I wrote that Atlantic article piece and I've done a number of interviews since then that people have paused to reconsider whether or not my experience of trying to reclaim my own life, and my own identity is a valuable story to tell. It has certainly been an incredible journey for me, of pushing back against the boundaries of people's expectations and limitations on my life and who I am and what my life means. And it's been very positive, another big moment was I recently did my first Italian interview in a very long time. I was asked to speak about the case of an Italian man who was wrongfully convicted here in the United States, named Enrico Forti, who was wrongly

imprisoned in Florida. And there are a number of interesting parallels between his case and mine as there are with a number of wrongful convictions cases, how interrogations are coercive and not recorded. And how detectives will be afflicted by confirmation bias and seek out evidence of guilt and ignore evidence of innocence. And I did this interview and it was one of the first times that I had a flood of Italian people reach out to me and say that they were sorry that they had just mindlessly consumed and regurgitated the lie of me being this wicked female sex monster. It's been an incredible experience to have people reach out to me and say that they didn't realise that they had been lied to. And it's deeply emotional for me every time something like that happens. And I feel so lucky because in some ways having that story constantly told on loop and revisited all the time means that I'm having to face my traumas all the time, but it also means that potentially people are looking at it through a new lens. And it's given me the opportunity to evolve alongside the evolution of people's understanding of my story.

I wonder to what extent people are complicit with the public. I feel dreadful for myself for clicking on stories about you. To what extent are we all complicit in driving this, this narrative? I mean, it's obvious that you were innocent right from the get go, but following the ups and downs of the case is in a sense feeding the monster.

It is. And I hope you don't give yourself too much of a hard time because I don't think people realise the deep consequences of following a viral story. And it's a good thing that we get to revisit these kinds of issues, because then we understand how we have potentially hurt others by realising it. And it's that kind of revisiting of an old story or a difficult case that is worthwhile and does mean healing. So I appreciate you reaching out and giving me the opportunity to talk about the case in this way, because this is a way that we can talk about something bad that happened, a viral story that was in the media that has positive consequences for me. I greatly appreciate you being willing to value my perspective and my humanity.

I actually wanted to pay you an even deeper compliment than that, which is do you realise the extent to which you engender trust and inspiration by what you've been through? Like there's the whole 1980s, alpha male inspirational sort of Tony Robbins type thing. But like sure, through no fault of your own, you've found yourself the victim of a horrific set of circumstances and you've come through it and you're making the best of it. And you've built an amazing life. I mean, many other people would've crumbled.

Again, I feel like I'm very lucky because as crazy as this story is, I cannot help but feel grateful for a number of insane things that have made me able to survive and attempt to thrive today. I still cannot get over the fact that if I had not met Raffaele five days before this crime occurred, I probably would be dead today. And if I hadn't grown up in a family that loved me and was there for me my entire imprisonment, I'd probably be insane today. And if I hadn't met my husband in 2015, when his book came out, I'd probably be alone today. You can always look at your life and find the

ways that you weren't lucky and I can't help but find all the ways that I am lucky. And I'm grateful to try to pass the good that I'm able to find in my own life forward.

I think this podcast is part of the problem of the question I'm about to ask you really, which is that you formed a bond with Monica Lewinsky, another young woman at the mercy events, largely controlled by powerful men. She produced the series impeachment about her case. Would you ever consider doing sort of a definitive onscreen version of your story and then sort of make saying, I'm not going to discuss it anymore because I worry that we're not helping you, obviously it's your prerogative to choose whether to talk about it, of course, but ultimately, do you want to carry on talking about it for the next 60 years? That doesn't seem fair to you either.

I mean, clearly not the next 60 years, I would love it if something that I had done since the worst experience of my life could be of as much interest as this worst experience of my life. I do feel that there are interesting ways to talk about my story that I don't think have been tapped into because the way that my story has always been told is a who done it? Did she, or didn't she? And I feel like the psychological story of surviving wrongful imprisonment and trying one's best to reclaim one's life afterwards is a very, very interesting story and worthy story to be told in the same way that I think that an interesting story for all exonerates, a lot of times the way that the exonerate story is told is it goes through the whole trial process and they get out and they have their first hamburger at McDonald's and then curtain closes. And for me, the really interesting story is what happens behind that curtain. The 'now what?' question, how do you reclaim your life after years have been stolen from you after your identity has been taken away? I have friends who are accused of rape and murder, who are trying to hit the dating scene. Those are fascinating stories that are worthwhile to tell, and they really get at the heart of human experience in a worthwhile way. So I'm definitely open to exploring that option.

That's fascinating, isn't it? I mean, if you were mistakenly accused of rape and then you're rightly released, there's there's coverage in the media of that trial. How do you have that Google problem where you say, "hi, I'm Tim, I'd love to on a date with you, by the way, I was accused of rape three years ago, but I'm innocent. Don't worry." It's human nature. Isn't it? That you'd think I can't take the small chance that they might not be innocent and move on, but that seems terribly unfair of course, as well.

Absolutely. And even those who are supportive of you oftentimes have to be specially select for the interest in somebody who has been accused of that kind of crime. So weirdly even when you're free, you still are living under the shadow of the accusation that was made, and you are trying to reclaim your life and not feel like you are living under that shadow .

Is speaking up for other victims of miscarriages of justice important to you, obviously you're starting to do that now, is there a campaigning element there?

Absolutely. I mean, I spend a lot of my time trying in my own journalism writing about cases of wrongful conviction of cases where say there's a guilty party, but the sentencing laws here in the United States are outrageous and putting into context a person's crimes even is of interest to me. I spent years living alongside people who were guilty of crimes, but many of them were victims of crime in the first place. So having a more nuanced discussion about crime, about wrongful conviction, about what is really happening in the courtroom and in prison so that we all have a better understanding of how to live in a safer, more just society is a really important issue for me, because I have been given this unique glimpse into this very, very complicated world.

I was very active in politics for many years. Well, over ten years. And I was very active in the Labour party, Tony Blair was prime minister. And I remember once having a conversation with him about criminal justice reform and we called it the Norway problem because they treat their prisoners there with dignity. They can't read and write, they teach them to read and write, they give them a trade. And it of course has huge reductions in the numbers of recidivism. You'd be much less likely to be a victim of violent or inquisitive crime in Norway than you are here in the UK, or even in the US. And Tony said something very interesting. He said, the problem is though, people don't want justice, they want vengeance. You understand that most acquisitive crime is driven by drugs and if we could get them off drugs, you'd be less likely to be a victim. But if you yourself had your car broken into or your auntie was punched in the face and robbed, you want that particular person to be given the death penalty, he said and that's the bit of human nature we haven't worked out yet. The balance between vengeance and justice.

And I do think that part of that is because we have very limited ways, at least here in the United States and I imagine potentially in the UK as well, of acknowledging the harm that was done to the victim. Especially here in the United States, the only consolation, the only acknowledgement of that harm that we offer people who have been victims of crime is through punishing the individual who can commit the crime. And if we instead had a justice system that cared for the victim in ways, other than punishment of the person who hurt them, then I think there would potentially be the opportunity to have a more rehabilitative instead of retributive kind of justice.

I want this fictional attacker of mine to face justice, but I also don't want to warehouse that person for the next 50 years in prison. I want them to go to prison and then I want the system to help them genuinely go straight. I mean, that seems as much in my selfish interest as the humane thing to do. And yet that's not what sells newspapers. You want to read that someone was caged.

Yeah. Although It is interesting that there is that sense of what feels like justice to us, the story of what justice even is. It tends to be this very black and white story. And yet I think that if you look at rape, for instance, this is a really interesting example of a very harmful thing that is done to a person, but one of the reasons why people don't bring rape to the attention of police is not just because police are prone to mistreating

rape victims, but also because rape victims often don't want to punish the individual who raped them. They just want them to acknowledge what they did and to not do it again, to not harm another individual in the same way. And I think that that's a really interesting point of how our justice system is falling short of what victims really want and need: a sense of safety and security and a reclaiming of their own agency and not feeling like they or someone else is going to be victimised in the same way. I think that that is a very instinctual understanding and a different way of defining what justice means and is, but it obviously is more complicated and requires more of a response from society in helping victims to get back to the place that they were before they were harmed, than does locking up an individual wrongdoer.

And the whole deterrence thing fascinates me as well, because there's clearly no evidence at all that the death penalty, for example, deters people from committing murder. And would someone say, "I was going to go out and rape someone tonight, but given the quality of forensic DNA testing these days, I don't think I'll bother." It seems to me that that's a construct as well.

It's a false story that the idea of how bad the punishment is is what deters actually what studies have shown is that what really acts as a deterrent is the certainty of being caught for the crime. So it's not about how bad the punishment is. It's whether or not that perpetrator feels certain or not that they are going to be caught.

And that then ultimately becomes a resources issue. The better equipped the police are, the more detectives they have getting out on the streets and using shoe leather to find out stuff, the more likely they are to be caught, but here in Britain and across the west that the law enforcement is not being it that way just doesn't have the resources to do it.

And instead we're spending tons and tons of money on incarcerating individuals for very, very long periods of time, in ways that are not actually beneficial to the public interest.

My friend is a prosecutor here in the UK, and he told me that if you committed a tax fraud and it's under quarter of a million pounds, unless there's an aggregating factor on top of that, it could be an element of racism or coercion or whatever it might be, They will prosecute it as a policy. So I said, "what? So as long as I'm not racist, or do something to aggravate the offences, I can steal a quarter of a million and I won't be prosecuted?" And he said, "no, because we don't have the resources to do it, we have to dedicate the people that have stolen a million pounds and 2 million pounds and 20 million pounds."

That's fascinating.

This could be a three hour podcast!

Well, there you go.

Tell us about Labyrinths, your new podcast.

So Labyrinths is this brilliant podcast that I've been producing with my husband, Christopher, where I am interested in the stories of when people have felt lost, either on a journey in their life that they were not expecting to find themselves on, or they're encountering an idea that they never thought that they would encounter. And a great example of this is I very recently gave birth to my daughter.

Congratulations!

Thank you. The experience of going through first infertility and then pregnancy was an insane journey where I very much felt like I was lost and didn't have enough information and didn't know exactly what the right direction to go was. And I found that a lot of women feel this way when they are going through fertility issues. And so I covered that in my podcast, Labyrinths. But I've also covered criminal cases. And I've talked to people like Brent Spiner and LaVar Burton about nerdy things. So I cover a lot of ground, but my goal is to help people regain agency over their own stories, especially when they've gone through traumatic experiences that have felt very overwhelming and that have denied them agency in their own life. So that's what I do today.

What's it like working with your husband professionally? I've been happily married for 20 years and the secret of our marriage is that we don't work together. I want to come home at night and complain about the people that I work with to my wife, Heather and her go "oh there there" but not be one of them. Cause like if she said, well actually you're complaining about Bob, but he was actually right in that meeting, then she would be part of the problem.

I love working with my husband. We have a good dynamic. We're very good communicators. We very much treat each other as teammates. So I completely understand that impulse. And at the same time, I feel like we have a good method to work through work and work through disagreements about work and challenge each other in interesting ways. And I think it just makes our work all the better.

What else have you got cooking in the pipeline if you don't mind me asking?

I can't say a few of them because they're in the works, but I've been exploring stories of people who have had their real life stories turned into entertainment products by Hollywood. So based on true story type stories and how the real world impact has gone overlooked by the greater society. What happens to you once your story has been taken and told by Hollywood is an interesting line of storytelling that I'm pursuing at the moment.

Amanda, that was a hugely interesting conversation. I find you utterly inspiring considering what you've gone through and how you inspire people. I'm so

grateful that you took the time to talk to me on the podcast. Thank you so much.

Oh, thank you so much. It was such a pleasure. Thank you.