

## **Casey Anthony, a Case Study**

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CRJ 475: Digital Evidence

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October 15, 2023

Casey Anthony was the mother of Caylee Anthony, a two year-old girl who was murdered in 2008. Casey Anthony became well known to the media soon after her daughter was reported missing. One day, Caylee's grandmother reported Caylee missing after receiving various explanations from Casey and eventually learning that she had not seen her daughter in weeks. She also reported that Casey's car smelt like "a dead body". Casey provided multiple stories to law enforcement, one being that her nanny had kidnapped her a month prior. Police later found that the nanny was a lie told by Casey after discovering the apartment her nanny supposedly lived in had been abandoned for over four months. Additionally, Casey lied about working at Universal Studios and even led police into the office building before finally admitting she hadn't worked there in three years. She was arrested soon afterwards. Months later, Caylee Anthony's body was found in a forest near the Anthonys home. Casey Anthony was charged with first degree murder of her daughter. During her trial, the prosecution argued it was intentional murder while the defense claimed it was possibly an accidental drowning and cover up with the help of her father, George Anthony. In the end, she was found not guilty but was eventually convicted of providing false information to law enforcement. She served little jail time. The verdict and details in this case remains a subject of controversy and debate.

Digital evidence was heavily present throughout the case. In fact, a majority of the non-circumstantial evidence is digital. Firstly, the media exposed many photographs and videos that depicted Casey Anthony at parties and clubs whilst her daughter was missing. These obviously contributed to her negative image in the media and were used by prosecutors as evidence to argue that Casey was not concerned about her daughter's disappearance and was not acting as a mother usually would whose child had gone missing. Additionally, her call logs and text messages were collected which gave great detail on Casey's timeline and her family's the

day the disappearance happened and the weeks following. There is also cell tower location information that was used in the trial for all members of the household. This evidence contradicts the family story at points. For example, George Anthony, Casey's father, claimed Casey left for work at one point during the day Caylee went missing– but her cell phone pinged near her house at this time. The browser evidence is by far the most incriminating. Hours after Casey supposedly left for work someone at the Anthony household logged into her password protected account and searched multiple things like “chloroform”.

There were a few mistakes concerning the forensic part of the investigation. Firstly, the browser evidence was not thoroughly investigated. There were many deleted Firefox searches in the months leading up to the death that pointed to premeditated murder such as "neck breaking," "death," and "how to make chloroform” and “fool-proof suffocation”. Also, MySpace, used only by Casey, was used shortly after these searches. However, not all of these were used in the trial. In terms of physical evidence– the forensics used were a high point of debate. Some forms of evidence used during the trial were considered “junk science” by many. For example, one party from the prosecutors side said Casey's car contained chloroform, while the defense's experts identified it as a chemical agent found in cleaning supplies. Additionally, odor analysis used by the prosecutors to prove the presence of decomposition in the car was used in this case and has been criticized as well. One might argue that most of the physical evidence was handled properly like the duct tape and hair in the car , but wasn't presented well enough in court by prosecutors to get a guilty verdict.

These mistakes likely contributed to the prosecution losing this case. However, the handling of evidence did not convince me Casey did not commit the crime. In fact, the missed browser searches prove that the accidental death claim is even more unlikely than before. The

disputed pieces of evidence like the decomposition detection may not be credible but they also do not offer any alternative explanation to how Caylee died and do not convince me Casey did not commit the crime.

There were many different types of evidence used in the case. As discussed previously, digital physical, and forensic evidence played a huge role in this case. Another large piece of evidence used to aid the defense was testimonial evidence from Casey parents, George and Cindy. Cindy testified she was the one who searched for chloroform, despite cell phone records showing her near her workplace at this time. There was also testimony from multiple friends and other people involved in the case such as investigators. This also ties into character evidence as it is likely many of these witnesses were used by the defense or prosecution to make a statement about the kind of person Casey was.

The most prevalent type of evidence in this case was definitely circumstantial. It played a large role in this case especially because of how often Casey lied to the police in this case. Prosecutors argued that Casey must be involved because lying to police would only hinder the investigation and if she were innocent she would be much more invested in finding her daughter.

It's possible the death penalty played a role in the jury's final verdict. The jury was likely even more hesitant to give a guilty verdict because they knew it would cause her death. I don't think that it would have changed the verdict because the alternative would still be a very large punishment, life in prison. Overall, the prosecution didn't do enough to prove her guilt.

My personal opinion on the death penalty is that it can be used very sparingly, only in cases if the family of the victim approves of the use of the death penalty and there is hard evidence which proves certainty of the defendant's guilt. However life in prison is sometimes considered and even worse punishment.

As mentioned previously, internet searches played a large role in this case. The ones used in the trial like “how to make chloroform” prove that someone in the household, likely Casey, was planning and it was premeditated. Without these searches I think there is no proof that the murder was planned but this search along with the thousands of Firefox searches not included in the trial prove absolute guilt to me. The MySpace logs and cell phone tower information strongly point to Casey being the one to search and makes it hard to believe the accidental death claim. This evidence largely points to Casey acting alone and her family being uninvolved, despite Cindy's claims.

I can relate the Anthony trial to a recent high profile case– the University of Idaho murders. I would definitely be biased if I was on the jury in this case because I have seen a lot of coverage on the case and seen people speculate details on the Internet. In order to safeguard evidence and avoid mob rule, police and prosecutors should be cautious when sharing details, especially ones that can greatly affect the public's emotions and ability to rule fairly.

Now, Casey Anthony is a legal assistant to the private investigator in her trial. She is still in Florida and helped create a documentary on Peacock about her case. She no longer keeps in regular contact with her parents.

If I could go back in time I think it would be to interrogate Casey differently and try and catch her in more lies, or attempt to interrogate the parents better because it seems like they were helping her get away with it in the end. Additionally, I think the prosecution maybe should have tried for a lesser charge instead of first degree and shouldn't have sought out the death penalty because they didn't have evidence directly linking her to the case but they had enough circumstantial evidence to prove she was involved. Finally, I would ensure the digital evidence was thoroughly processed.

## References

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