



W8 A Decade Later: *The State of Florida v. Casey Marie Anthony* Revisited—Truth? Justice? Both? Neither?

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will be better able to consider differing interpretations of data specific to the presented case as well as apply principles to the broader arena of the forensic sciences in general. The goal of this presentation is to help individuals to better understand the forensic practitioner's role in evaluating the evidence and the propriety of the outcome and to evaluate the analyst's role in the overall totality of the case. Ultimately, the forensic analyst, regardless of discipline, should understand his/her duty to the truth and objectivity above all else.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing attendees with the knowledge to allow them to better understand and articulate the nature of their role in forensic cases and to apply that comprehension, whatever the overall outcome of a case. In addition, attendees will be better positioned to effect positive change to ensure that impartial, objective scientific and medical analyses are employed in casework and testimony.

July 15, 2008: "The happiest place on earth." A decade ago, the case that would captivate a country begins with a simple phone call. A woman contacts the local police to report her granddaughter had been missing for a month.

October 14, 2008: The girl's mother is indicted for first-degree murder, even though, to that point, no body has been found.

December 11, 2008: The badly decomposed body is found in a wooded bog just down the street from the family's home. After extensive forensic work and investigation, with the homicide determined to be due to "undetermined means," the venue moves to the courtroom for the death penalty case two years later, in May 2011.

Under the glare of television lights, the high-profile trial of the day began in earnest. The recent explosion of social media changed forever the nature of such cases. With the surging popularity of infotainment, the public followed the case—many with minds fully decided as to guilt or innocence of the accused (who came to be known as "the most hated woman in America") prior to opening statements or even the first witness being heard. The public literally took to the streets to stand in line for a chance at courtroom seats. The diametrically opposed versions of events played to a packed house in what became a theater of the courtroom.

The indisputable facts of the case remain clear and simple: a 2-year-old toddler disappeared and her then-22-year-old single mother never reported her missing. The mother subsequently lied to investigators, inventing a non-existent theme park job, a "Zanny the nanny," and a conversation with the child (the very day she was reported missing).

The state presented extensive investigative and forensic evidence. The defense countered with allegations of unproven science and bias. The focus quickly shifted to a battle of experts. The defense suggested alternate theories to account for some of the findings. Tensions between the sides ran so high that the judge ordered that neither side could disparage the other and had to admonish counsel during closing arguments. After a six-week trial, the mother was acquitted of murder but convicted on four misdemeanor counts.

This session will examine forensic and legal aspects of this contentious trial and verdict. The multidisciplinary analysis includes critical players from the actual trial and a distinguished group of other experts. Disciplines covered include forensic pathology, anthropology, toxicology, entomology, criminalistics, and jurisprudence. Experts are expected to occasionally have widely varied perspectives and opinions regarding case materials and analyses; however, differences in professional opinions should not be clouded by unrelated issues. In an effort to seek a fuller, objective understanding of the case and what happened, the speakers will attempt to distinguish fact from allegation, insinuation, suspicion, etc. An important issue in this case is defining the line separating accepted forensic expertise from mere opinion and understanding that such a line may not, in fact, be clear. An often underappreciated codicil is: "Who is best qualified to establish such a line?"

With the blurred edge between fact and supposition and with the polarization of opinions regarding this case and its outcome, it is hardly surprising that this tragic case can still serve as a valuable example for the forensic practitioner. A decade later, interest in the case remains high—as does emotions regarding the case. Some bemoan what they describe as a "fantasy of forensics" and a "free-for-all of forensics" targeted at convicting the accused. Others wonder how on earth an abundance of compelling evidence of guilt could have resulted in the verdict. The distinguished seminar faculty will present divergent views of the facts of the case and their interpretation. In the end, only the jurors know the answer to the questions of "Why?" and, ultimately, "Was justice served?"

Casey Anthony, Objectivity, Decomposition