

Constructing Whiteness: Identity and Imagery in the Legal Battle of  
*State of Florida v. Casey Anthony*

Faraasa Lawrence  
St. Mary's University  
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

There has been a lot of material devoted to the high-profile, capital murder trial of Casey Anthony. Americans were (and some may certainly argue, are still) invested in this story of the murder of a little girl and her young, out-of-control mother. The trial proceedings and not-guilty verdict only ignited their passion and outrage all the more. I use the articulations of whiteness narrated by the prosecution and defence as the focal point from which to begin my analysis, by looking at how both victim and perpetrator statuses were ascribed to (the body of) Casey Anthony. Considering how different narrations intersect with each other, the social discourses that shape our understanding of those narratives, and the by-products of that intersection, I look at the courtroom constructions of Casey Anthony along multiple dimensions of identity including race and gender to examine the role of privilege in fostering the jury's final verdict.

In particular, I use the Casey Anthony case to examine how the defendant was framed through discourses of whiteness and femaleness/femininity. These discourses were themselves subject to different interpretations and functions by the prosecution and defence in the two prominent texts describing the case of *State of Florida v. Casey Anthony: Presumed Guilty – Casey Anthony: The Inside Story* by Jose Baez and *Imperfect Justice: Prosecuting Casey Anthony* by Jeff Ashton. Through close readings of these texts, which together form the bulk of my data set for this thesis, I assess how one narrative upholds an assumed and hegemonic social norm concerning the un-criminalised status of white womanhood, while the other narrative serves to destabilise or reposition that norm by “trashing” Casey Anthony's white, feminine identity.