# Final Project Case Studies

## Case 1. Hot burglary

At 16, Ray seemed to have a good life. He had a high IQ and a 4.0 GPA. He had lots of friends, and they enjoyed hanging out. What no one knew was that Ray’s home life was miserable. His stepfather, a successful businessman who had married Ray’s mother 10 years earlier, had always rejected Ray the boy. The stepfather constantly belittled Ray in public and at home. Ray’s mother could do nothing to protect her son. Nor could she protect herself from the physical abuse her husband inflicted on her. Frequently Ray witnessed his stepfather assaulting his mother, throwing her to the floor and punching her. His half-sister, 11 years his junior, was adored by the father because she was his biological daughter. The rejection by the stepfather and earlier separation from his biological father impacted Ray’s self-perception, and by age 17 Ray was acting out. His MO was burglarizing the homes of the affluent. Sometimes he had help from friends and other times he went in alone. As he progressed in his criminal behavior, he found himself entering homes where people were present and asleep, also referred to as *hot burglaries*. He reported how powerful and in control he felt when standing in a bedroom of his victims while they slept. Later he would masturbate while thinking about the burglaries.

## Case 2. Family Homicide

A devout Christian, married woman living in Florida had 6 children. She suffered from depression for many years. Each pregnancy and the addition of another child added to her stress and depression. Over time her conditioned worsened and her family insisted that she seek therapy. She was prescribed anti-psychotic medications and regular visits with a therapist. Over time her doses of medications doubled but her depression pulled her down into states of psychosis. There were moments of clarity. She admitted to her therapist that she was having thoughts of harming her children. That admission resulted in someone being with her at all times to supervise.

Her husband was not convinced that there was anything really wrong with her other than that she could use a “good swift kick in the pants” to get her back on track. Besides, they both wanted children. They even decided that she would go off her anti-psychotic medication so she could get pregnant again. Besides, he argued, it was God’s will for them that they have lots of children. In truth the woman had actually reported to her therapist that it was her husband who wanted more children and that he convinced her it was the right thing to do and that all would be well according to God’s plan.

The husband soon decided that his wife really did not need constant supervision and, without notifying the therapist, he went off to work leaving her alone with the 6 children. He believed she needed some independence. The wife waited until she knew he was gone and placed the family dog in a secure space so he would not interfere with what she was about to do. She knew that she could never raise her children properly and believed what she was about to do was in their best interests even though she would be damned to hell for eternity. She filled the bathtub and one by one brought in the children and drowned them. The eldest boy who was 11 was difficult because he resisted and tried to escape, but she was stronger and faster. When she was done killing them all she called her husband at work and calmly announced that she had done something very bad to the children.

Prosecutors believed that she had intentionally killed the children. Yet in her defense, her sanity became a key issue. Was she responsible or criminally responsible for the killings?

## Case 3. A Child Murderer

Luke, age 12, appeared on the surface to be a normal child who seemed reasonably happy and respectful of others. But there were differences in his appearance that made him a target for his schoolmates. His ears were a bit deformed; he had a noticeable speech impediment, wore thick glasses, and had a hearing impairment. Luke also was struggling in school due to his ADHD, and as a result he was 2 years behind his classmates. Luke struggled to fit in with kids younger than him. He greatly resented the taunting and had no real friends. He was very sad and angry at the recent loss of his grandfather, with whom he had been living since his parent’s divorce. His new stepfather had a violent temper and was very controlling. The tension was so severe that his 17-year-old sister announced one day that the stepfather had molested her and promptly moved out. Luke had also learned accidentally from another student at school that Luke’s real father lived just 30 miles away and that he had met him before. Luke had never seen his biological father. All of these factors deeply affected Luke’s self-esteem and his growing anger toward others.

One day while walking alone in a local park Luke noticed a young, cute little boy by himself. Luke called to the boy and offered to show him some kittens he had just found in the woods nearby. Once inside the wooded area Luke attacked and strangled the boy. He then smashed in the boy’s skull with a large rock and sodomized him with a stick. After making up several misleading stories, Eric eventually confessed that he alone had killed the boy but could not explain his actions, nor did he appear particularly concerned about the killing. What was it that made Luke kill? Was Luke biologically predisposed to violence? Was it lack of parental nurturing? Could there have been other environmental factors influencing Luke? Luke was sentenced to several years in prison.

## Case 4. A Ponzi Scheme

A prominent New York City businessman operated a very successful investment firm on Wall Street. He made such sound investment decisions that investors made unusually high returns on their money. Over the years more and more people came to the businessman for investment advice and to invest their money with him. There were, of course, federal investigators who expressed concerns with his ability to give such high returns on investor’s monies. But nothing ever came of the investigations because the businessman was thorough and very, very careful not to make any mistakes to upset his investors. Over the years he attracted thousands of investors, handing him billions of dollars to be invested. The only problem with the business was that it was all a scam. The businessman simply kept two sets of books: one for federal auditors and the other for himself. Indeed, investors made great returns, but that was all contingent upon new investors coming on board with the company.

Nothing lasts forever. Eventually a significant recession hit the country that caused two critical things to happen: People stopped investing and many of those who had invested wanted their money back. Recessions usually are the downfall of fraudsters because they gradually become exposed, get arrested, prosecuted, and sent to prison, usually for a few years. In this extreme case, thousands of people lost most of their investments, getting pennies on the dollar in return. Some investors committed suicide as they had entrusted the businessman with all their assets. The businessman lost everything, including his family, and was sentenced to many years in prison.

What drives a person to take such risks knowing that he could be exposed any time the economy ceased to thrive and people stopped investing? He put everything on the line: his family, his freedom, and his reputation. Yet, knowing the risks, he still pretended to be someone he wasn’t, and in the end it caused irreparable harm to many, many people. What makes a person like this businessman choose to commit felony fraud on a daily basis? How does a person justify such choices when so much is at stake?

## Case 5. A True Pedophile or Child Molester in Our Midst?

A well-respected college football assistant coach founded a charity organization to help underprivileged youth. Many dozens of youth were assisted over several years, especially young boys. Everyone, including his family, was very proud of the efforts he made to help youth. However, the coach was also grooming these boys for sexual encounters. For 30 years he molested boys at their schools, in his basement, his car, on the college campus, at his favorite golf resort, in locker rooms, and in hotel rooms. Others suspected things were amiss but reports never seemed to go very far. The public scandal would be devastating to any university, and the financial costs would be in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Eventually, however, a report by one of the football staff became public. Part of the reason the coach’s behavior could be overlooked or dismissed for so many years was because he was a married man with children. True pedophiles are not interested in sex with adults. However, the coach’s children were all adopted. During the trial, one of the adopted boys came forward and admitted that he too was one of the coach’s victims.

In some cases, true pedophiles marry to access children, and they are very good at manipulating members of the family, including their spouses. After many years of grooming, the coach had a system worked out where nobody in his family was willing to report him even if there were suspicions. Besides, he loved these children, or at least that was the public impression. If you were prosecuting this case, how might you explain the coach’s attraction to young boys in order for the jury to understand why it occurred? Was he a child molester, or a true pedophile?

## Case 6. Cary Stayner, the Yosemite Park Signature Killer

Cary Stayner could have easily been a model gracing the pages of *GQ* magazine. Tall, dark, and striking, he was rated high on the “attractiveness” scale by many women. Due to his artistic gifts, Cary was voted “most creative” by his graduating class and was expected to become a famous cartoonist. I had the opportunity to examine several drawings done by Mr. Stayner around 1995. These drawings depicted scenes of death and destruction, with heads of victims on the ground. The backdrop was Yosemite National Park. Those who knew him describe him as amiable, easy going, and quiet. He was described as a naturalist, with a penchant for nudity, frequenting secluded lake areas to sunbathe unencumbered. His acquaintances were shocked at his confessions of multiple murders and even more so by the macabre means by which he killed.

First born of five children, Cary was eldest brother to Steven Stayner, who in 1972 was kidnapped and held prisoner by a child molester for almost 8 years. Steven escaped, bringing with him a 5-year-old child who had also been abducted. Making national headlines, Steven became the hero, his notoriety pushing his sibling into obscurity. Disgusted by the book written about his brother and the made-for-TV movie, Cary’s resentment grew.

At Merced High School, Cary was considered a good student and was thought of positively. But his home life was deteriorating with the separation of his parents. He moved in with his uncle, Jesse Stayner, until 1990, when tragedy struck and an intruder shot Jesse to death. Cary was never considered a suspect and was believed to have been at work. His employers considered him a diligent worker and a proven employee, always showing up on time and never the object of customer complaints.

Between 1996 and 1997, Cary moved to El Portal in Yosemite National Park, where he worked as a handyman at several hotels. Those who knew him described him as likeable, but he was also a loner who never dated and was not inclined to close friendships. Though he occasionally smoked marijuana, he was not disposed to drinking, even when generous tourists at the hotel offered to indulge everyone with a “round.” But such benign behavior only masked the brooding predator within. Rarely does evil not masquerade. For many years, Cary Stayner had fantasized about killing women.

In the winter of 1999, Eureka, California, resident Carol Sund, 42, her daughter Julie Sund, 16, and an Argentine friend, Silvina Pelosso, 16, were visitors to Yosemite National Park in California. On February 14, they checked in at Cedar Lodge, where Stayner worked and lived. They were last seen alive February 15. One month later, Carol and Silvina’s charred bodies were found in the trunk of their burned-out rental car. On March 25, Julie’s decomposed body was found several miles away. Her throat was cut so severely she was almost decapitated. Stayner was not considered a suspect. Almost 5 months later, Yosemite naturalist Joie Armstrong’s body was found in a creek near her home after she was reported missing by her friends. She was decapitated. A similar vehicle to Stayner’s had been seen in the vicinity of Armstrong’s home. Three hours after the body was found, Stayner told authorities he had nothing to do with her death. When he didn’t show up for work the next day, authorities began searching for him and found him at a nudist colony in Wilton. He has confessed to all four slayings. The FBI had originally arrested other suspects and kept reassuring the public they had the right people in custody, only to suddenly retract those statements when Stayner gave them specific incriminating information that was privy only to law enforcement officials. Stayner has since pled guilty to the Joie Armstrong murder. He was convicted for the other murders and given the death penalty.

One of the most important clues linking these murders was the manner in which the victims died. Decapitation or nearly severing a person’s head is not just about murder but is also about sexual fantasy and gratification. The offender becomes sexually gratified by the fantasy of cutting into a victim’s throat. The sense of sexual power overwhelms the offender. Stayner had been fantasizing and drawing his fantasies of decapitation for several years. The method of killing became his sexual signature that could link him to other similar murders. While awaiting trial at the Fresno County Jail, Stayner enjoyed drawing pictures on the walls of his cell of decapitated heads of females. He also tried and failed to sell autographed photos of himself to the public. In one of his public statements he said, “I would like to say how deeply sorry I am for all the pain and sorrow I’ve brought upon so many people. Not only the Sunds, Pellossos [sic], Carringtons and the Armstrongs, but my fellow employees at Cedar Lodge, the community of El Portal, the people of Argentina, and all those across the nation who felt the sorrow of my victims’ families. I am truly sorry.” He then requested that a movie be made about his murders and sought an interview with NBC’s Jane Pauley.

(Hickey, E.W. 2015. 7th Edition. Pg. 214-215. Just this case)