

Blaming the Victims: The *Telegram-Tribune* and *Mustang News*'s Coverage of the
Disappearance of Kristin Smart and the Murders of Rachel Newhouse and Aundria Crawford

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by

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Introduction

On May 25, 1996, Kristin Smart was last seen walking back to her dorm room on Cal Poly's campus after leaving an off-campus party with Paul Flores, another Cal Poly student. Smart's keys and wallet were found in her dorm room when her roommate returned from a trip she had taken over Memorial Day weekend, but there was no sign of Smart. When her roommate and Smart's parents reported her as missing, the Cal Poly University Police believed that Smart had gone away for the weekend without informing anyone. When Smart did not return in the following days, university police treated her disappearance as a runaway. The university police's negligence prevented the media from reporting on Smart's disappearance until six days after she disappeared. In the following weeks, foul play was suspected and the case was given to the San Luis Obispo Police Department. A case with little evidence also became riddled with sloppy police work when the university police allowed Flores to move out of his dorm room before it was investigated for evidence and the San Luis Obispo Police lost a potential piece of evidence, a turquoise earring found on the Flores family's driveway in Arroyo Grande.¹ Although Flores is the primary suspect in Smart's disappearance, the police have never had enough evidence to convict him of the crime.

Two years later, on November 12, 1998, a Cal Poly student in her junior year, Rachel Newhouse, disappeared while walking home from Tortilla Flats, a restaurant in downtown San Luis Obispo. Blood found on the nearby Jennifer Street Bridge made the foul nature of Newhouse's abduction abundantly clear. A few months later, on March 12, 1999, Cuesta student Aundria Crawford was abducted from her Branch Street duplex. When police entered her

¹ Sara Henrikson, "Smart, Newhouse-Crawford Investigations were Different," *Mustang Daily* (San Luis Obispo, CA), April 29, 1999, goo.gl/oKCNur, accessed February 2, 2017.

apartment two days later and discovered signs that a struggle had taken place, they concluded that someone had kidnapped Crawford.²

After reading an article about the Crawford case in the *San Luis Obispo County Telegram-Tribune*, parole officer David Zaragoza recalled one of his parolees, Rex Krebs, committing similar home invasions. Zaragoza reported his hunch to the police who arrested Krebs on a parole violation. While he was in prison, the police revealed that they found Rachel Newhouse's blood on the back seat of his truck. A day later, Krebs admitted to murdering both Rachel Newhouse and Aundria Crawford and led investigators to their bodies on April 12, 1999.³

While Newhouse and Crawford's cases were concluded, Kristin Smart's disappearance remains an open case which still impacts Cal Poly students. For instance, in the summer of 2016, multiple areas on Cal Poly's campus were excavated in search of any clues on Smart's disappearance. Furthermore, these cases are vital in evaluating how the San Luis Obispo media—specifically, the San Luis Obispo County *Telegram-Tribune* and Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo school newspaper, *Mustang News*—have treated cases of violence against women in the past. On a larger scale, looking at the cases of these three women will reveal how missing female college students were treated by the media in the 1990s and if this treatment has changed in recent years. In the cases of Kristin Smart and Aundria Crawford, the *Telegram-Tribune* followed the predominant trend of media outlets by subtly blaming female victims for the crimes committed against them. However, the *Telegram-Tribune* chose to not blame Rachel Newhouse for her own disappearance. In contrast, *Mustang News* presented Smart in a positive manner but agreed with police that underage drinking was a large factor in Newhouse's disappearance and

² Brent Marcus, "Police Reflect on Murders, Ongoing Investigations," *Mustang Daily* (San Luis Obispo, CA), November 18, 1999, goo.gl/Uh652Y, accessed January 27, 2017.

³ Amy Asman, "Her Story: Not to be Forgotten," *Mustang Daily* (San Luis Obispo, CA), April 12, 2006, goo.gl/aaakIO, accessed February 2, 2017.

did not adequately report on Crawford's disappearance. Although the *Telegram-Tribune* and *Mustang News* varied on their coverage of each victim, these newspapers both followed the predominant trends of media outlets of subtly blaming female victims for the crimes committed against them and presenting victims as having unfavorable personalities.

While the disappearance of Kristin Smart and the murders of Rachel Newhouse and Aundria Crawford have been compared since these young women disappeared from the San Luis Obispo area, there is yet to be a comprehensive work discussing the role media played in these cases. However, scholars have extensively researched how the media portrays missing women, the factors that affect the portrayal of the victim, and the amount of media coverage a victim receives. Marian Meyer in *News Coverage of Violence Against Women: Engendering Blame* argues that local newspapers and television stations help shape a community's awareness and perception of a victim. The way the media presents missing women and how often the media mentions them influences the likeliness of the victim being found.⁴ The *Telegram-Tribune* framed Kristin Smart as a partier who was having difficulty adjusting to college and had likely run away. Since the *Telegram-Tribune* viewed Smart as a troubled teenager, she did not initially receive much front-page coverage. Unlike the *Telegram-Tribune*, *Mustang News* portrayed Smart as an outgoing and friendly person. In contrast, the *Telegram-Tribune* and *Mustang News* both portrayed Newhouse as a friendly and responsible person. However, *Mustang News* also blamed Newhouse's underage drinking as a factor in her disappearance. Furthermore, the *Telegram-Tribune* described Crawford as having negative personality traits, and *Mustang News* did not report on her disappearance because she was not a Cal Poly student. Carol Liebler, in "Tales Told in Two Cities: When Missing Girls Are(n't) News," argues that race and class

⁴ Marian Meyers, *News Coverage of Violence Against Women: Engendering Blame* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996), 53.

determine the amount of media coverage a missing woman receives and how the media portrays them.⁵ On average, white middle-class women receive more coverage than minority and working-class women. While Smart, Crawford, and Newhouse were all Caucasian, the *Telegram-Tribune* subtly critiqued Newhouse for her family's working-class socioeconomic status.

In *Nothing Bad Happens to Good Girls: Fear of Crime in Women's Lives*, Esther Madriz explains that the situation in which a victim disappears influences how the media portrays women and whether the media represents the victim as innocent or somehow responsible for violence against them. Furthermore, Madriz states, that the media separates female victims of violent crime in a "virgin-whore or good girl-bad girl dichotomy [which] divides female victims of male violence into innocent victims or women who are guilty of causing or provoking their own suffering."⁶ Since Smart vanished after a party while possibly intoxicated, the *Telegram-Tribune* portrayed her in a negative fashion. In contrast, *Mustang News* seemed more skeptical about her disappearance, subtly suggested that Smart was abducted, and discussed positive attributes of Smart's personality. While Newhouse also disappeared after leaving a party, the clear evidence of her abduction led to more sympathetic reports from the *Telegram-Tribune*. Although *Mustang News* criticized her for engaging in underage drinking, they represented her personality favorably. Since Crawford was kidnapped from her home, the *Telegram-Tribune* did not blame her for her own disappearance.

⁵ Carol Liebler, "Tales Told in Two Cities: When Missing Girls Are(n't) News," in *Class and News*, edited by Don Heider (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc, 2004), 199.

⁶ Esther Madriz, *Nothing Bad Happens to Good Girls: Fear of Crime in Women's Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 20.

The Importance of Prevalent Media Coverage

How often the media mentions a missing person influences the likeliness of them being found. In *When Your Child is Missing: A Family Survival Guild*, the Department of Justice explains that using the media—including television news and newspapers—is the quickest way to show a large amount of the public pictures of the missing person and reveal important information about the circumstances under which the person disappeared. The first forty-eight hours are vital for generating media interest for a missing person because the victim is more likely to be found alive if the police locate them quickly.⁷ Early media coverage allows the public to help look for the missing person and report any information they might know about the disappearance. In the cases of Smart, Newhouse, and Crawford, both the *Telegram-Tribune* and *Mustang News* did not report on these cases until after the first forty-eight hours that the victims were missing. In Smart's situation, this was due to the university police believing she went home for the weekend. Furthermore, for Newhouse and Crawford, there was a delay in discovering that they were missing. However, both media outlets reported on the missing victims as soon as they received information about their disappearances.

Although the media reporting on missing people is often vital for the person to be found, race and socioeconomic class influence the likeliness of the media reporting on a case. Crimes against white women from a middle-class background are more likely to be deemed newsworthy and are mentioned more often than crimes against minorities, especially if they come from a lower-class background.⁸ Smart, Newhouse, and Crawford all being Caucasian played a role in the media extensively covering their stories. However, Crawford came from a working-class background while Smart and Newhouse came from middle-class families. In articles about Smart

⁷ Department of Justice, *When Your Child is Missing: A Family Survival Guide* (Appleton: Fox Valley Technical College, 2002), 28.

⁸ Meyers, 64.

and Newhouse, the middle-class professions of these young women's parents were repeatedly mentioned. Kristin Smart's father, Stan Smart, was the principal of Vintage High in Napa, and her father had the means to temporarily relocate to help look for Kristin.⁹ Phil Newhouse, Rachel Newhouse's father, also had a middle-class profession and was an engineer with Southern California Edison.¹⁰ Both of these young women's mothers were homemakers. In contrast, Crawford's parents were divorced and held working-class jobs: "Her father is an electrician. Her mother works for Sears."¹¹ Due to Gail Eberhart, Crawford's mother's working-class position, her and mother lived at her grandparent's house when Crawford was not at school.¹² Due to Crawford's working-class background, the media critiqued Crawford for her life choices, even though these details did not pertain to her abduction.

In addition to race and socioeconomic class, where the story is placed in the newspaper influences the amount of attention a story will receive. The media tends to be most interested in a missing person directly after the disappearance occurs and will more likely place a story of the missing person on the front page: "A front-page story with an accompanying photograph communicates importance and will attract attention. A small story inside the paper is less likely to do so."¹³ However, after the first few days a person goes missing, the media usually will only report significant developments, such as important leads in the case. While Smart's story remained in the *Telegram-Tribune* throughout May and June of 1996, after the first two days of being on the front page, articles about her migrated to the interior of the paper in the "SLO County" section. One reason articles about Kristin Smart were rarely placed on the front page

⁹ "Missing Student Seen as Criminal Case," *Telegram-Tribune* (San Luis Obispo, CA), June 24, 1996.

¹⁰ Jerry Bonin, "Federal Agents Boost Search Effort Family Offering \$10,000 Reward," *Telegram-Tribune* (San Luis Obispo, CA), Nov. 19, 1998.

¹¹ Mike Stover, "Aundria Crawford: An Interrupted Journey," *Telegram-Tribune* (San Luis Obispo, CA), April 1, 1999.

¹² Stover.

¹³ Liebler.

was because few developments occurred in her disappearance. However, developments such as the FBI joining her case failed to make the front page. The *Telegram-Tribune* not placing developments in Smart's case on the front page reveals that, like the police, they did not take her case seriously. It was not until June 24th, nearly a month after she disappeared, that she made the front page again in an article titled "Missing Student Seen as Criminal Case."¹⁴ Once the *Telegram-Tribune* felt convinced that Smart was abducted, they took her case seriously and gave her more media attention. In addition to the police learning from Kristin Smart's disappearance and taking Newhouse and Crawford's abductions seriously, the *Telegram-Tribune* also learned from Kristin Smart's case and continuously placed articles about Newhouse and Crawford on the front page, even when there were no new developments in their cases.

In contrast, *Mustang News* constantly placed stories about Kristin Smart on the front page of the newspaper. However, *Mustang News* attracted a smaller target audience than the *Telegram-Tribune* because it catered only to Cal Poly students and faculty. Furthermore, since Smart disappeared near the end of the school year, follow-up articles were only seen in a weekly publication called the *Summer Mustang*. Also, since many Cal Poly students returned home over the summer, fewer people were exposed to these articles. *Mustang News* also consistently printed stories about Rachel Newhouse's disappearance on the front page. Since she disappeared in the middle of the school year, *Mustang News* kept the Cal Poly community better informed about this situation. However, since Aundria Crawford was a Cuesta student rather than a Cal Poly student, *Mustang News* did not report on her disappearance until April 2, 1999, three weeks after she went missing.

The Media's Construction of a Missing Person's Public Image

¹⁴ Dukstra.

In addition to the prevalence of media coverage, the way the media constructs the public image of a missing person also influences the likeliness of the missing person being found. While media influences a society, it also often reflects a society's values, as Meyers writes: "Society often blames women for their own victim status and this attitude is reflected in crime coverage."¹⁵ Instead of solely blaming the perpetrator for the attack, the media portrays female victims as either completely innocent or somehow at fault for the violence against them. Whether the media blames the victim or assailant corresponds to patriarchal notions and assumptions of how a proper woman should behave. These notions separate women into a "virgin-whore or good girl-bad girl" dichotomy.¹⁶ As a result, "a woman depicted as immoral or to blame for her own disappearance is less likely to gain public sympathy than one portrayed as a model citizen"¹⁷ In *Nothing Happens to Good Girls: Fear of Crime in Women's Lives*, Esther Madriz lists situations of a victim's disappearance in which the media tends to represent the woman as responsible for violence against her:

She is a woman of dubious reputation, she was attacked while engaged in an activity considered improper for women, she was at a place and/or time considered unsafe for women, she is strong and she could have protected herself, she dresses in a provocative or revealing manner, she associates with the wrong crowd, and/or she was attacked by one of her disreputable friends or by a disreputable stranger.¹⁸

Rather than blaming the assailant for what happened to the victim, the media often portrays the actions of the woman as provoking the perpetrator or allowing the violence to occur.

¹⁵ Meyers, 67.

¹⁶ Meyers, 65-66.

¹⁷ Liebler, 201.

¹⁸ Madriz, 88.

The Media's Construction of Kristin Smart's Public Image

While Smart came from a middle-class family, she was presented unfavorably by the *Telegram-Tribune*. Since there was no evidence of foul play, the police and the media initially believed she ran away. In the first article the *Telegram-Tribune* published about Smart's disappearance, the media included the opinion of Denise Smart, Kristin Smart's mother, that someone abducted her daughter. However, the *Telegram-Tribune* chose to focus on information that made it seem like Smart disappeared on her own accord by using statements such as "Kristen Smart may have decided to leave school abruptly because she was under a lot of pressure."¹⁹ Furthermore, in an article the following day, the Cal Poly Chief of Police, Tom Michael, indicated that Smart had run away: "This is a funny age—things are done without much thought sometimes,"²⁰ and he hoped to boost his credibility by saying he had a daughter who was the same age as Smart. By quoting the head of Smart's investigation to support their theory, the *Telegram-Tribune* portrayed to their readers that Smart had run away.

Since the *Telegram-Tribune* believed Smart voluntarily fled Cal Poly, they chose to highlight negative aspects of her personality and emphasized that she may have been intoxicated when she disappeared. For instance, the newspaper claimed that Smart regularly hitchhiked even though this information did not pertain to her disappearance: "Smart, who goes by the nickname Roxy, loved to surf at the beach. She didn't have a driver's license and often she hitchhiked to get around."²¹ By claiming that Smart hitchhiked, the media presented her as an agent in her own disappearance and portrayed her as irresponsible. In addition to not questioning the police's assumption that Smart ran away, the *Telegram-Tribune* also did not question the police's remark

¹⁹ Coleen Bondy, "Police Intensify Search for Missing Poly Student," *Telegram-Tribune* (San Luis Obispo, CA), May 31, 1996.

²⁰ "Still No Leads in Case of Missing Student," *Telegram-Tribune* (San Luis Obispo, CA), June 1, 1996.

²¹ Bondy.

that Smart seemed “fairly intoxicated”²² when she left the party at two in the morning. The newspaper failed to mention the conflicting witness testimonies of whether she was drinking nor did they mention the possibility that she was drugged. Also, whether Smart had been drinking or not was unimportant in reporting the facts of the case and instead gave the readers a negative impression of her. Giving readers details about the time and location an attack occurred is useful for providing information for if a reader saw something pertaining to the disappearance and for warning other women of a potential sexual predator; however, Carol Liebler explains, “details involving the victims’ actions prior to, during, or after the assault are not necessary to warn others of a rapist in the neighborhood.”²³ By emphasizing that Smart disappeared while engaged in an activity considered improper for women, the *Telegram-Tribune* conformed to Esther Madriz’s notion that the media subtly blames victims for their own disappearances.²⁴

Similar to the *Telegram-Tribune*, *Mustang News* did not report on Smart’s disappearance until May 31st, six days after her disappearance, because the university police believed that Smart would return after the long weekend. However, *Mustang News* did not portray her as having a poor reputation and told the facts of her case to help find her. In the first article *Mustang News* wrote about Smart, staff writer Sandra Naughton began her article by writing about the circumstances of Smart’s disappearance. The factual manner of the beginning of the article gave the reader a clear understanding of where Smart was last seen and what she was wearing so the reader would know if they had seen her or knew any information on her disappearance. *Mustang News* portrayed Smart as being a normal college student who enjoyed going to parties, but was also dedicated to doing school work; Corrina Jones a student who lived across the hall from Smart said, “She liked to party, but she still completed her own responsibilities. She didn’t lose

²² “Still No Leads in Case of Missing Student.”

²³ Liebler, 201.

²⁴ Madriz, 88.

touch with school—she still had her priorities.” Although *Mustang News* explained that the police believed Smart ran away, Jones said, “She’s really friendly, so some of us think she may have been more at risk of being abducted.”²⁵ By placing this quote near the end of the article, *Mustang News* used this statement to give their final impression on the situation to the reader. *Mustang News* simultaneously portrayed Smart as a kind person and showed that they felt skeptical about the university police’s claim that she ran away.

The Media’s Construction of Rachel Newhouse’s Public Image

While the *Telegram-Tribune* subtly blamed Kristin Smart for her own disappearance, the newspaper was careful to not make a similar mistake and condemn Rachel Newhouse as responsible for her own abduction. Although the newspaper mentioned that Newhouse “had not been traveling with anyone in particular [on her walk home from the party] and appeared to have been drinking,”²⁶ the *Telegram-Tribune* placed a greater emphasis on the possibility that she was abducted. Normally, similar to Smart’s case, the media would consider drinking and walking alone at night as inappropriate for a woman and would therefore use methods to subtly blame the victim for her disappearance. However, the blood on the railroad bridge showed the violent nature of the attack.²⁷ Although the police stated they were not sure if the blood belonged to Newhouse, the article portrayed Newhouse sympathetically because she was likely violently abducted by an “ideal criminal,” a stranger. Esther Madriz explains that women are more likely to be presented as an innocent victim by the media if their attack results in a serious injury or death and if they are attacked by someone they do not know.²⁸

²⁵ Sandra Naughton, “Student Disappears After Party,” *Mustang Daily* (San Luis Obispo, CA), May 31, 1996, goo.gl/W0wac8, accessed March 4, 2017.

²⁶ Lore Lawrence, “Cal Poly Student Missing,” *Telegram-Tribune* (San Luis Obispo, CA), Nov. 16, 1998.

²⁷ Dave Wilcox, “Rail Seized in Search for Student: Blood Found on Piece of Jennifer Street Bridge,” *Telegram-Tribune* (San Luis Obispo, CA), Nov. 17, 1998.

²⁸ Madriz, 88.

In addition to not condemning Newhouse as an agent in her own disappearance, the *Telegram-Tribune* portrayed Newhouse as a respectable woman with a close group of friends. In the first article written by the *Telegram-Tribune*, Newhouse's coworker Adam Olson was quoted at the beginning of the article saying, "It's unlike her to disappear like this. There's no way she would vanish without telling anybody where she was going."²⁹ Olson's comment set the tone for this article and the concept of not blaming Newhouse for her own disappearance appeared in subsequent articles. On November 18th, the same day the search was upgraded to a criminal investigation, the article "'Happy and Cheery' Newhouse Not the Type to Just Run Off, Friends Say" appeared on the front page of the *Telegram-Tribune*.³⁰ The article described Newhouse as a "cheerful responsible person who likes running, working out in the Cal Poly gym, and being there for her friends."³¹ The article continued to describe Newhouse as someone who was popular in both high school and college, the activities she was involved in including student government, California Scholarship Federation, various sports, and that she was a straight A student.³² By appearing on the front page, this article portrayed Newhouse's friendly and responsible disposition to a wide audience. An article the following day even criticized the San Luis Obispo Police Chief Jim Gardiner for making a comment that linked under-age drinking with Newhouse's disappearance. In the article, Newhouse's Uncle Morreale expressed fear that the police chief's comment "left the impression that Rachel had caused the problem."³³ By critiquing the police chief and including Morreale's input, the *Telegram-Tribune* reminded their

²⁹ Lawrence.

³⁰ Carol Roberts, "Happy and Cheery" Newhouse Not the Type to Just Run Off, Friends Say," *Telegram-Tribune* (San Luis Obispo, CA), Nov. 18, 1998.

³¹ Roberts.

³² Roberts.

³³ Bonin.

readers to blame the assailant for Newhouse's disappearance rather than underage drinking or Newhouse herself.

Although the *Telegram-Tribune* placed an emphasis on not blaming Newhouse's disappearance on underage drinking, *Mustang News* chose to write about Chief Jim Gardiner's comment without critiquing the police. Although most of the article discussed that the police changed the case to a criminal investigation, *Mustang News* chose the title "Search Shifts to Criminal Investigation: Police Say Underage Drinking May Have Contributed to Disappearance." Also, the first line of the article paraphrased Chief Jim Gardiner: "Excessive drinking on the part of Newhouse last Thursday night may have been a contributing factor in her disappearance."³⁴ While *Mustang News* chose to report what Gardiner said, they lost a valuable opportunity to critique the police for blaming Newhouse's underage drinking—and by extension Newhouse—for her disappearance rather than the perpetrator.

However, in a previous article, *Mustang News* praised Newhouse's friend group for helping look for her and used quotes from Newhouse's friend, Heather Baker, to uphold Newhouse's reputation. Backer explained that many of Newhouse's friends from home came to San Luis Obispo to post fliers on campus and downtown with a picture and information about Newhouse.³⁵ By revealing that Newhouse had a close group of friends that cared about her, *Mustang News* helped support that Newhouse was a popular, likeable person. Furthermore, Heather Backer explained that Newhouse would not run away without telling her friends and would not simply get lost on her way home: "She's really dedicated to her work and her friends. She has no enemies... She's very, very smart. I think she knows the area and she has a really

³⁴ Steve Noone, "Search Shifts to Criminal Investigation: Police Say Underage Drinking May Have Contributed to Disappearance," *Mustang Daily* (San Luis Obispo, CA), November 18, 1998, goo.gl/dalagn, accessed February 27, 2017.

³⁵ Jeremy Roe and Kimberly Kaney, "Poly Student Vanishes; Friends Search," *Mustang Daily* (San Luis Obispo, CA), November 17, 1998, goo.gl/gc472h, accessed February 27, 2017.

good sense of direction.”³⁶ Baker’s quote reveals the suspicion that Newhouse was abducted and upholds her reputation as a dependable and caring person.

The Media’s Construction of Aundria Crawford’s Public Image

In contrast to Smart and Newhouse, Aundria Crawford corresponded to Esther Madriz’s notion of what society views as an “good victim”; Crawford was attacked by a stranger while engaged in an activity and place viewed as respectable for women, sleeping in her own house. However, while Smart and Newhouse both came from middle-class families, Crawford came from a working-class background which caused the *Telegram-Tribune* to subtly criticize her for her life choices even though these factors did not pertain to her disappearance. Although sharing details about a missing person’s interests and endearing qualities can personalize an article and make people more likely to remember and care about the woman, these stories can also be used to blame the victim for their own disappearance if written in a negative manner.³⁷

In the article “Aundria Crawford: An Interrupted Journey,” Mike Stover attempted to portray Crawford as having an array of positive and negative personality traits but instead highlighted her negative characteristics. Stover quotes Crawford’s grandfather saying, “She made some poor choices in friends and let her schoolwork slip. But people shouldn’t jump to conclusions... She did not do drugs and she didn’t drink. She was just a good girl.”³⁸ While Crawford’s grandfather tried to portray his granddaughter in a positive fashion, much of the rest of the article features Crawford’s negative characteristics. One of her past employers portrays Crawford as irresponsible and that she was fired from her job “because she had trouble getting to work on time.”³⁹ Also, Stover mentions multiple times that Crawford fell behind in high school,

³⁶ Roe and Kaney.

³⁷ Department of Justice, 33.

³⁸ Stover.

³⁹ Stover.

could not graduate with her class, and had to do a home-study program to graduate.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the article ends with a quote by Gail Eberhart, Crawford's mother, that unintentionally portrays Crawford poorly: "Aundria has many passions. She knows a lot about cars. She loves monster trucks. She and her friends would go out and do quarter-mile racing, until the police chased them off."⁴¹ In an article full of positive and negative characteristics, Stover ultimately portrays Newhouse as a young woman who would engage in dangerous situations and break the law. As the last line of the article, this quote gives the reader their final impression on Newhouse. While presenting Crawford as a person with both positive and negative attributes might seem more realistic than how the *Telegram-Tribune* represented Newhouse, portraying the victim as having many negative characteristics can make readers critical of the victim and blame the victim for her own disappearance.

Although the *Telegram-Tribune* presented Crawford as a person with multiple negative attributes, they consecutively placed stories about Crawford on the front page of the newspaper to generate interest in her case. However, since Crawford was a Cuesta student rather than a Cal Poly student, *Mustang News* did not report on her until April 2, 1999, three weeks after she went missing. Instead of mentioning the facts of her case, Crawford was mentioned in passing when a Cal Poly student explained she felt concerned about her personal safety due to the disappearances of Newhouse and Crawford.⁴² Although it seems that Cal Poly students were aware of Crawford's disappearance, her story was not extensively covered until her and Newhouse's bodies were identified on April 26th.⁴³ By not reporting on Crawford's

⁴⁰ Stover.

⁴¹ Stover.

⁴² Chatman.

⁴³ Ryan Huff, "Remains Identified: Newhouse, Crawford Found Dead," *Mustang Daily* (San Luis Obispo, CA), April 26, 1999, goo.gl/usn1Ky, accessed March 4, 2017.

disappearance, *Mustang News* did not reveal information that was vital for student and faculty safety and that could have helped in finding Crawford.

Conclusion

To various extents for each victim, the *Telegram-Tribune* and *Mustang News* followed the predominant trends of media outlets of subtly blaming female victims for the crimes committed against them and presenting victims as having unfavorable personalities. Since the *Telegram-Tribune* believed that Kristin Smart ran away, they blamed her for her own disappearance and portrayed Smart as having a poor reputation. Although the *Telegram-Tribune* seemed to learn from Smart's case and portrayed Rachel Newhouse in a positive manner and did not blame her for her own disappearance, they presented Aundria Crawford unfavorably due to her working-class background. In contrast, *Mustang News*, presented Smart in a positive manner but portrayed underage drinking as a large factor in Newhouse's disappearance. However, since Crawford was not a Cal Poly student, *Mustang News* did not adequately report on her disappearance.

Articles where women are subtly and directly blamed for violence against them are not unique to the San Luis Obispo area nor is this an archaic practice of the 1990s. Stories of female victims of violent crime are reported in a similar manner in newspapers throughout the country. Only with an awareness of techniques that newspapers use to subtly blame the victim, can one be critical of these practices. Furthermore, journalists need to be made aware of and avoid methods that portray victims as responsible for their own disappearance and of having a poor reputation. When a person goes missing, it is not just a story; that person's life is at stake. Sometimes—such as when David Zaragoza read a *Telegraph-Tribune* article about Aundria Crawford's kidnapping and recalled one of his parolees committing similar home invasions—it is a person reading a

newspaper article that knows the right information to help catch a criminal. To make the readers sympathize with the missing person, the victim should be presented in a positive manner and not blamed for the violence against them.

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