

OPINION

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Kohberger was a lousy student of murder



HEATHER MALICK
OPINION

The strange case of Bryan Kohberger, who last week pled guilty to stabbing four University of Idaho students to death in their off-campus house in 2022, is instructive.

I use that last word because Kohberger, a hulking 6'3" man in his late 20s with bushy eyebrows and an intense stare remarked on by just about everybody, was studying murder and how to get away with it while instructing grad students on that same subject.

The man had a plan.

The internet's huge slop of (mis)information plus Netflix has inflated American murders, fuelling an obsession with mass and serial killers that began with Ted Bundy, creating new and easier paths to femicide, and an online fascination with crime-solving.

Kohberger's criminology professor back in Pennsylvania where he grew up is eager to talk to him. A self-described expert on serial killers, Katherine Ramsland said he "was very polite, respectful, seemed genuinely engaged with the material as a potential researcher, teacher, somebody who was interested in a career."

A warning bell.

To my eye Kohberger, whose plea let him escape the death penalty — in Idaho it's a firing squad — always looked guilty, almost cartoonishly so. His 4 a.m. slaughter of three sorority sisters plus a fraternity boyfriend on Nov. 13 may have copycatted Bundy's 1978 massacre at an off-campus Florida university sorority house, even to the point of similar mistakes.

When Bundy, who Kohberger studied, was facing trial, one reporter wrote that he was either guilty or the unluckiest man on earth. Kohberger wasn't unlucky. He was just a lousy student. Arrested six weeks after the murders, his details were red flags.

What kind of man wants three degrees in serial killing? Kohberger had surveilled the students' house dozens of times in his white Hyundai Elantra, as CCTV and cellphone pings would reveal. At 4 a.m., headed for one particular bedroom with a student's favourite pink cowboy boots in the window — a signal of femininity — he stabbed two female students in their beds, killed another coming upstairs by chance after a DoorDash, and then stabbed her sleeping boyfriend.

Hours after the murders but before police were called, Kohberger was home smiling in an appalling thumbs-up selfie in his bathroom. Bundy-like, he scrubbed his car and apartment meticulously, and later hid his garbage as police watched. Still, DNA caught him, on the knife sheath he left on a bloodied bed.

If Ramsland had liked Kohberger, no one else did. He was a loner and a bully. All his life girls and women had been alarmed by his manner and behaviour, had felt menaced by him and to their credit complained. This is the "gift of fear," an increasingly valued theory that tells women to respect their instinctive alarm.

He had been fired from many jobs for conflicts with colleagues, customers, professors and female students. Just after losing his job, scholarship and student access at Washington State, Kohberger — like 2014 incel Elliot Rodger shooting the blond student "Stacys" who rejected him — set out with a knife bought on Amazon.

As with Bundy, Kohberger beat his first sorority victim, the blond and extremely pretty Madison Mogen, in the face and head before stabbing her to death. Why?

Like many authoritarian men who seek status via uniformed jobs enforcing petty rules, Kohberger yearned for power. He was a Dwight Schrute from "The Office," a rule-enforcing martinet, a "category error in human form," out of place and angry.

That blue Idaho house where they died, now demolished, was full of Stacys, young beautiful women who saw men as friends, who radiated happiness and hope for a brilliant Midwestern future.

Their names were Madison Mogen, Kaylee Goncalves, and Xana Kernodle, plus dear friend Ethan Chapin. I dwell on their photos. Such sunshine.

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Embracing my future face with a new wrinkle



THOMAS FROESE
OPINION

My boy took my photo the other day. Ever the fun-loving young man — he turns 20 in two weeks — he then ran it through an AI app to show me my future face.

I appeared in a somewhat flattering light as an old man with a beard, grey and long and expected. OK. But by some wild AI manoeuvre, I also somehow stood beside a giant fish that measured almost as long as I'm tall. My day's catch, apparently.

I laughed. In its artificial wisdom, AI had recreated me to resemble Santiago from Hemingway's "The Old Man and the Sea." As book characters go, he's very fine, having, in truth, horrible luck with fish, but a certain unshakable outlook. Hemingway writes, "Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same colour as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated."

On Monday, I'll become an old man, sort of, on one of those birthdays that's a multiple of 20. If I were to listen to the psychologists, I'd now write myself a letter. Apparently, it's a way to better integrate with your life's various selves. But really, what would I say?

What would you say?

"Dear Past Self. Well, you're 20 now. This is the year you'll leave home for good. Best thing you've ever done, my friend. Don't let it go to your head. Just saying, at 20 you think you know more than you do."

Or how about this? "Dear Past Self. Well, you're 40 now. You're one lucky dog. Wife. Kids. Travel. Don't let it go to your head. You had help. Just saying, at 40 you know more than when you're 20, but you still don't know what you don't know."

So I think we can have symmetry in these letters. But let's be wary. Past Self doesn't know Future Self. So let's tell Past Self to stop worrying about life, sure, but let's use care, like this: "It will all work out. Even when it doesn't, it does. Don't ask me how. It just does." Write sensibly without divulging the future.

Now what about Future Self? An entirely different ball game.

Take the old man with the fish. Say he's 80. "Dear Old Man." I mean, "Dear Future Self. I guess it's just you and me from here on in. We'll know each other better day by day, so let's make the best of it. Because what choice, really, do we have?" This seems reasonable. But remember, life is narrowing, so if you're not yet integrated with your other selves, now is the time.

The other funny thing about aging is this. In our heads, we

often feel younger than our years, often by about 20 per cent. (This phenomena is more common in North America, Europe and Australia than in, say, Japan, where older people are given higher honour.) So as we age, we do and don't know it.

This is why it's probably safe for a 60-year-old to go fishing but not cliff jumping. It's also why if you and your love throw a joint 60th birthday party — we did — then your playlist will be from that golden era of the 1970s and '80s, the time when you experienced life more intensely alongside those songs.

This is the thing. I feel 40. An Atlantic article by Jennifer Senior, "The Puzzling Gap Between How Old You Are And How Old You Think You Are," explains why.

Of course, Hemingway's old man with the "cheerful and undefeated eyes" — among my favourite descriptions in all literature — didn't feel his age. He just appreciated what life handed him, even the struggle. Fish or no fish, he just put his boat out there to explore that big, beautiful sea.

It's a good thought for a summer day. Whatever your age.

But now, you, young man? Happy Birthday. That's right, Happy Birthday to all your selves.

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Too much time spent waiting for urgent care



MULUGETA DILNESAHU
OPINION

Canadians generally express pride in their universal health-care system, but the reality of ten doesn't match.

In theory, it's great. We all have access to medical professionals and necessary treatments, regardless of our ability to pay for the services.

In reality, though, people can wait months — even years — to access the care that can improve or save their lives.

A member of our community was referred for an "urgent" CT scan at the former Grand River Hospital in Kitchener. After almost three months of waiting

in pain, she went back to her doctor to see if there was another option and was told to wait patiently.

I have a close family friend whose child was diagnosed with mild autism symptoms. They have been told they will have to wait years for help, despite professional advice that early intervention is crucial for children with autism spectrum disorder or developmental delays. Early treatment, such as speech, physical and behavioural therapies, can significantly improve outcomes, yet they wait.

Mental health services, especially among young adults, is another sector that concerns many people. My community was shocked when two men in their early 20s died by suicide in the last year. Their parents



DREAMSTIME

It seems difficult to believe there is a cure on the horizon for our health-care system, writes Mulugeta Dilnesahu.

were devastated by the loss, as well as by their inability to help avoid the tragedy. One parent told me that, due to patient privacy issues, they could not discuss the mental health of their adult children with professionals.

Individual and family health is

directly tied to the health of our society, and delays in accessing health-care services mean we are missing the mark.

Last month, the provincial government announced a program in Toronto that is part of a \$2.1-billion plan to secure a family physician or nurse prac-

itioner by 2029 for two million Ontarians who don't have one.

The government also says it is opening new medical schools, but they won't graduate physicians for several years.

Combine that with the Ontario Medical Association reporting about 8,600 physicians have retired or left their practices since 2018 — and a growing population — and it seems difficult to believe there is a cure on the horizon.

If Canadians have to rely on our universal health-care system, let's make it reliable. Proudly talking about its availability and then falling short of delivering the services in a timely fashion is paradoxically frustrating.

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