[**Dead girls**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1731038/dead-girls)

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THEY say you cannot tell if a man is a murderer simply by looking at his face. In the case of Bryan Kohberger this may not be the case. Kohberger was recently charged with the murder of four University of Idaho students in their off-campus apartment in Moscow, Idaho. In nearly all the photos taken since his arrest, Kohberger’s eyes look flat and dead if there was no soul behind them at all.

His arrest comes after over a month of gruesome details of the crime that took place in the early morning hours of Nov 13, 2022. Around noon that day, the police department in the tiny university town of Moscow, Idaho were called to an off-campus apartment shared by the five female students. When they got there, they found a terrifying scene. The two surviving girls who had called the police were hysterical, one fainted and had to be revived by the police and the other could not be understood. It was only when the police entered the home and went through its three floors that they saw that four students, three girls and one boy, had been stabbed to death.

The days until Kohberger’s arrest were harrowing ones for the students at the University of Idaho — a low-crime environment where police mostly deal with underage drinking and loud parties. The parents of many students were so horrified that they drove to the campus and picked up their children before the semester was over. With a killer on the loose, it appeared to be the smart thing to do.

In the meantime, everyone from psychic mediums to astrologers to amateur internet sleuths got into trying to solve the case. It was only when Kohberger was arrested at his parent’s home in Pennsylvania, thousands of miles away from Idaho, that speculation about who had killed the students finally came to an end.

Victim-blaming is endemic. Had the girls locked all their doors? Were they being careful in making sure no one was following them?

The details in the probable cause affidavit released to the public are bone-chilling. It reveals how cell phone data allowed the police to conclude that the girls who were killed were deliberately targeted by Kohberger. (The sole male victim happened to be staying over for the night.) Kohberger’s cell phone pinged near the girls’ home at least 12 times between August and the November killings. Most of these instances were in the late evening or early morning. It can be assumed from this that Kohberger was watching and stalking the students from outside their home for months before he decided to carry out his heinous plan. The girls, Kaylee Goncalves, Madison Mogen, Xana Kernodle and her boyfriend Ethan Chapin (along with the two girls who survived) would have had no idea that they were being watched.

According to the affidavit used to arrest him, one of the surviving students whose room was on the main floor of the house heard voices on the second floor including a female voice saying, “Someone is here”. At one point, this girl opened her bedroom door and saw a man clad all in black and wearing a black mask walking toward her. She stood frozen in fear, but somehow the man just walked past her and to the sliding door and out of the house. It was this girl’s eyewitness testimony that allowed the police to arrest Kohberger.

It appears unlikely that Kohberger knew the girls at all. A PhD student in the criminal justice programme at Washington State University, the alleged killer was also a teaching assistant at the campus and was taking classes even after the murders occurred. The fact he was so nonchalantly going about his life after apparently committing a massacre of four people is particularly terrifying.

The killers of young women seem ubiquitous around the world. Everyone remembers the gruesome barbarity with which Zahir Jaffer murdered Noor Mukaddam. Despite the fact that he was arrested at the scene and had confessed to killing Mukaddam, it was only after a long-drawn-out trial that he was finally sentenced to death. His parents who appeared to be busy engineering a cover-up, roam free even today. In the Idaho case too, it was Kohberger’s father who appeared to have given refuge to his son. Once the police in Idaho had identified a car that was involved, they tracked it driving from the state in the west of the United States to Pennsylvania in the east. When police pulled the car over, Kohberger was with his father, both of them trying to act like nothing was the matter at all.

Murders of women reveal the extent and intensity of misogyny in society. It is not simply the murdering men that are culpable but an entire system around them that enables cover-ups and exonerations. Even more endemic are all the people still devoted to blaming the victims of the crimes. Had the girls locked all their doors? Were they being careful in making sure no one was following them? Why did the surviving girls take as long as they did to call for help? America or Pakistan, the questions come fast and furious, all of them revealing why such barbarity and cruelty continues to take the lives of women every single day.

The focus should be on the crimes and on the question of why, despite religion and civilisation, femicide continues to thrive in all corners of the world. These dead young women are a reminder of just how primitive men continue to be, with the urge to kill and control and overpower existing just beneath a thin and porous surface of seeming civility. The killers will be punished we always hope and pray, and certainly they should be. But it is too late for these innocent dead girls, and it will be too late for others living among us at this very moment unaware of what awaits them.

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