



LGBTQ community vigil held at The 519 Tuesday Feb. 13, 2018 to remember the recent lives taken by an alleged serial killer. (RUSHANTHI KESUNATHAN/TORONTO OBSERVER)

 SPECIAL REPORTS • TORONTO • News

## Toronto's missing and murdered gay men

The impact of alleged serial killer Bruce McArthur on the gay community

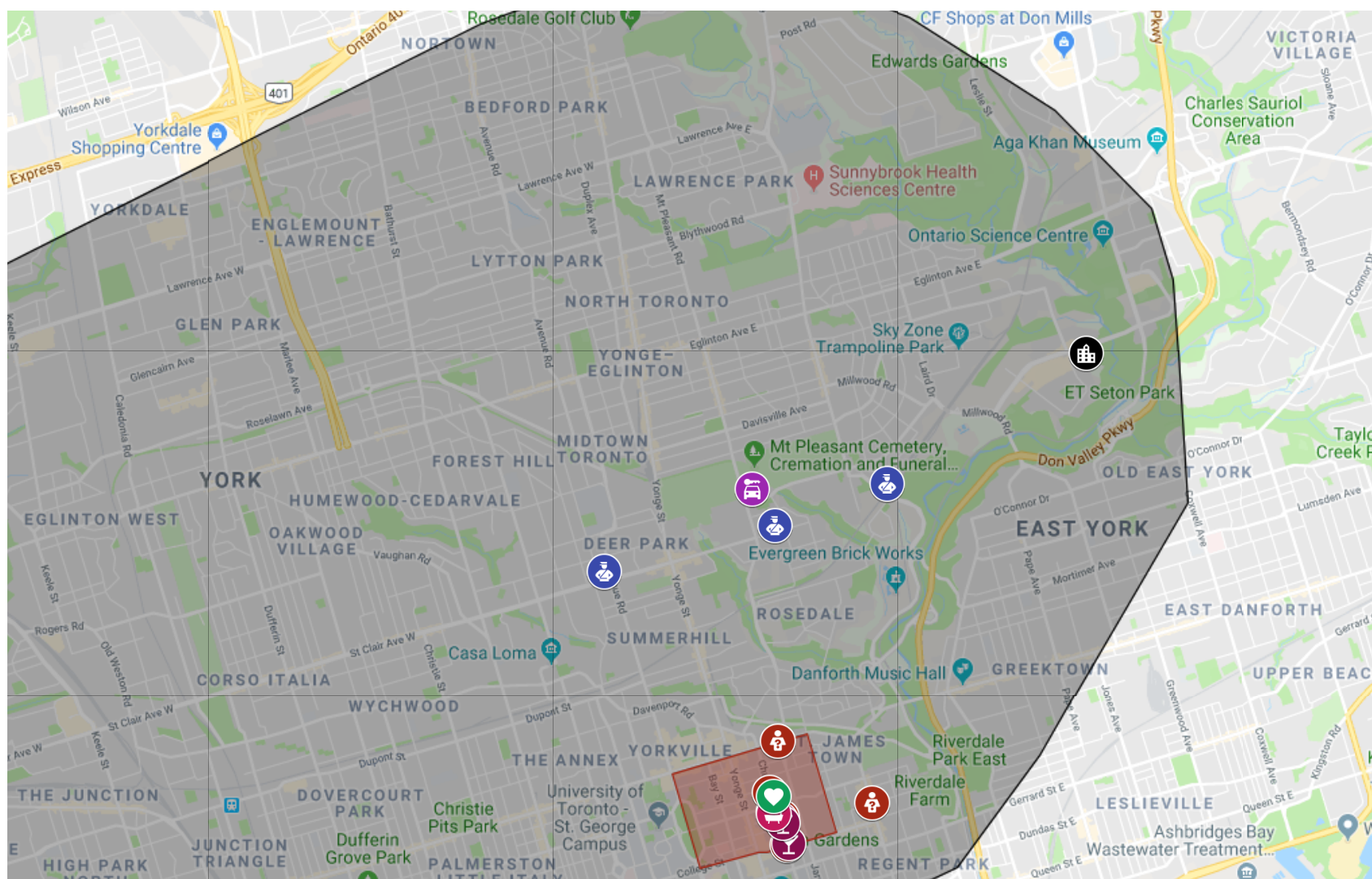
     

By **Bobby Hristova**, **Taylor Bridger**, **Sergio Arangio**, **Rushanthi Kesunathan** and **Anjelica Balatbat** on March 15th, 2018.

When two men who frequented Toronto's gay village went missing in 2010, police did not formally launch a comprehensive police investigation. But when a third man, Majeed Kayhan, vanished two years later, Toronto police began *Project Houston*, a task force to locate missing men from Toronto's gay village.

That investigation would unknowingly expose a series of killings – the worst in Toronto’s history. Yet, the terrifying trend continued – six more men missing in the span of seven years until a new police task force with a new name led to the [eventual arrest](#) of a suspect, Bruce McArthur, in January 2018.

Toronto Observer ☆



Map of Toronto's missing and murdered men out of Church and Wellesley's gay village. Map made by Taylor Bridger/Toronto Observer

After unearthing human remains belonging to some of these missing men, police charged McArthur, 66, a former landscaper, with [six counts](#) of first-degree murder. Police later [released the photo](#) of an unknown deceased man who they think is also linked to the case. More charges are expected, police say. It remains unclear how long police will continue their investigation of McArthur’s apartment at 95 Thorncliffe Park Drive, also known as Leaside Towers.

### Bruce McArthur's apartment building in Toronto under the microscope



Toronto police have spent more than a month examining the 19th floor apartment at 95 Thorncliffe Park where the suspect in the city's gay village serial killer murders lived. Some local residents are a little tired of the media attention, as Toronto Observer reporters Anjelica Balatbat and Taylor Bridger found out.

As the investigation continues, and while the public and political leaders are trying to understand how this could have happened, attention is now on the fallout that the murders have had on the city’s gay community.



Photo courtesy Michael Cooper

While Toronto police investigated the cases of missing gay men linked to Bruce McArthur, a new theatre play about the challenges facing gay South Asian men debuted at Toronto's [Theatre Passe Muraille](#) in February.

[Acha Bacha](#), by Toronto playwright Bilal Baig, revolves around Zaya, a gay man exploring his identity as a Muslim and queer person. Zaya faces a choice between working on his relationship with his partner or caring for his ill mother, who shames him for his lifestyle. While Zaya's mother suspects he is gay, he never explicitly comes out to her. He also wrestles with early incidents of abuse by an imam at his religious school.

Baig insists that he did not write *Acha Bacha* with the McArthur case in mind, since he created it long before the case broke.

Five of the missing men were racialized, of Middle Eastern or South Asian origin, including four who police now say were murdered.

While Baig declined to be interviewed on the record about the timeliness of his current play, which ran Feb. 1 to Feb. 18, it has prompted discussion in a community rocked by the serial killer case. Rahim Thawer, an organizer at [Salaam Canada](#), a volunteer association helping queer and trans Muslims, says his community is "in shock."

The play, he says, highlights key community issues.

“It talks about our stories in a way that does not shy away from... issues of shame, issues of abuse, issues of family pressure and the complexities of religion,” he said, from his office in [The 519](#) on Church Street, a community centre located at the heart of Toronto’s gay village.

“What’s really difficult to wrap my head around is whether or not [the murders were] racially motivated and whether or not this person thought it would be less noticeable to target people who are racialized and perhaps leverage them not being as out as other people and that emotional vulnerability,” Thawer said.

The playwright, Baig, has a record of commenting on social issues involving gender and diversity impacting young South Asians. However, Baig told the *Toronto Observer* he didn’t want the play to be associated with this story.

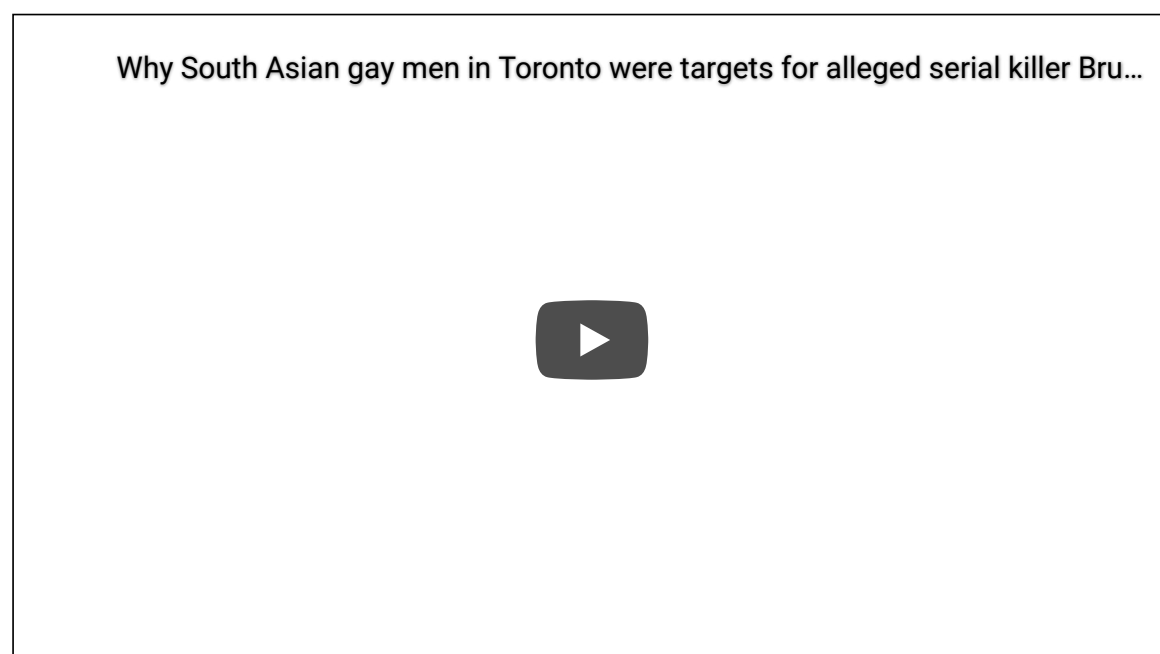
Not speaking out is a crippling issue in the community, said Haran Vijayanathan, executive director of the [Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention \(ASAAP\)](#).

“For a lot of folks in the South Asian and Middle Eastern community, it’s a little bit harder to leave your family and come out of the closet and live your life the way you want to live it,” he said.

The obligations which some South Asians and others have to their traditional family values continue to influence them, whether they recently immigrated or have been settled in Canada for generations.

“I have a friend who was born and raised here in this country and his family pressured him into getting married even though he came out to them... and he’s married,” Vijayanathan said, in an interview. “It’s highly common. We work with a lot of international students who use coming here as a student as an escape to safely explore who they are.”

And even then, he says, there are still risks.



Haran Vijayanathan, executive director of the Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention (ASAAP), speaks out about the challenges facing gay South Asian men in Toronto who want to come out of the closet. Family pressures in traditional South Asian communities, he says, often mean the gay person has to choose between living a true life or losing their family’s respect. His comments come in the wake of the investigation into suspected Toronto serial killer Bruce McArthur, now charged with six murders. Vijayanathan spoke to Toronto Observer reporter Bobby Hristova.

Vijayanathan said he helps many clients who fear they will meet someone connected to their own families and may send word back home, which could

lead to estrangement or excommunication. This pressure forces some to come out selectively.

Two of the missing men, Navaratnam, and Abdulbasir Faizi, 42, both hid their identities, [family](#) and [authorities](#) said.

“Coming out... depends on their access. Who do they know, where are they welcome (and) what feels like a safe place to access,” Thawer said.

However, the community needs resources for more than just coming out, experts say. When relationships between gay men turn abusive, it is especially volatile for visible minorities.

“If one person has citizenship status, [and] the other person doesn’t, there’s opportunity for abuse to happen,” Vijayanathan said.

Even worse, when victims, particularly males, report disappearances, Vijayanathan said police aren’t doing a good enough job.

“When the community comes to say that there’s something wrong, ‘The cat’s not being taken care of’ or ‘The dog’s not being taken care of, this is unlike their character,’ and they go to the police and the right system to complain, then those complaints should be taken seriously,” he said.

Thawer said the murders and the police response have been “terrifying”.

“I think we haven’t had a lot of information from the police... about whether or not there was a serial killer, [if] gay men in the community should be concerned, or what we should do,” he said. “There’s this experience of our community having to rally for itself because larger institutions are not there to do that.”

But Thawer acknowledges that perhaps police may not know what to do.

“I’m not sure that they understand our community well enough to say ‘Here’s what you have to look out for.’” Thawer said. “Police or any official institution that wants to focus on keeping minority populations safe is going to have to understand those populations and clearly they don’t.”

Vijayanathan’s organization, ASAAP, is creating a SAFE program, which launches Friday. It allows clients to notify them of their whereabouts and follow up to ensure they are safe – especially for dates. If they go missing, ASAAP follows up with police. They hope to crowdfund \$50,000 to expand the pilot project.

“A majority of the men were in a heterosexual relationship and didn’t have family or friends they could talk to and share

where they're going and what they're doing and that's something ASAAP has recognized we need to have," he said.

ASAAP will request an internal investigation on Project Houston and Project Prism after the investigation ends. They also demand a third-party review of how police handle missing-persons cases, which both Mayor John Tory and the chair of the Toronto police board have [recently supported](#).

"We clearly think there is racism, homophobia and classism that played a part in how this investigation was conducted," Vijayanathan said. "We are not going to step back on this."

Det.-Sgt. Hank Idsinga, the lead detective on the Bruce McArthur case, responded to AASAP's concern during a [press conference on March 5](#).

"If people want to look at what we've done, I welcome that," he said.

## TIMELINE OF MISSING MEN IN TORO

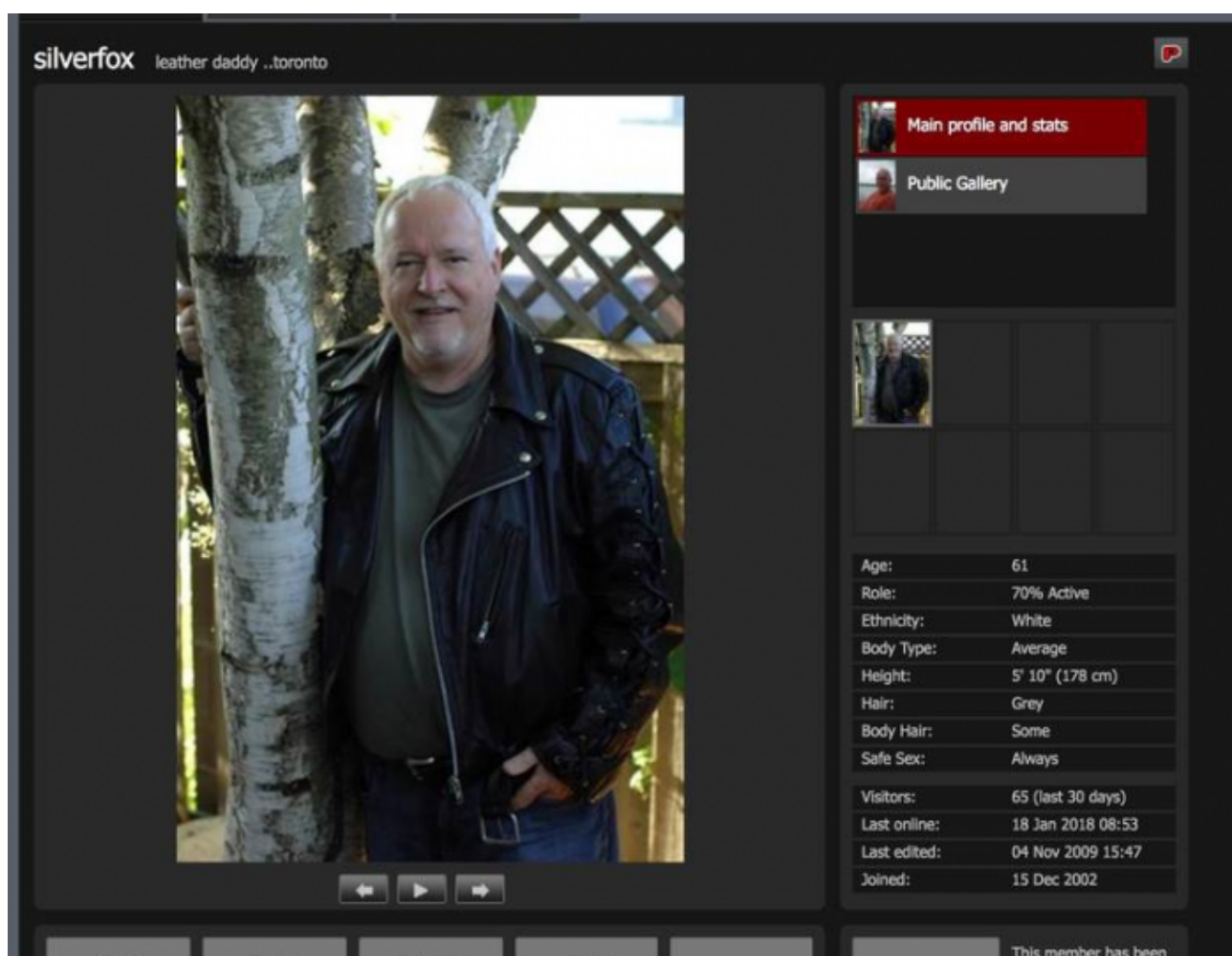
When men who frequented Toronto's gay village vanished.

Timeline by Bobby Hristova/Toronto Observer



The quote above was from alleged serial killer Bruce McArthur's profile on [Silver Daddies](#), a dating app for mature gay men, according to [The Toronto Star](#). The landscaper, now charged with six murders of men from Toronto's gay community, created various profiles on [niche dating apps](#).

Toronto police have also reported that multiple victims of the alleged serial killer were frequent users of gay dating platforms, as well as social networking sites used for anonymous encounters.



Bruce McArthur's profile on a fetish app called Recon. (SCREENSHOT OF PROFILE COURTESY OF THE GLOBE AND MAIL)

In an era of online dating, experts acknowledge that there are no foolproof ways to protect yourself from possible bad dates, or worse. Now they are advising gay men and others that they, themselves, are solely responsible for being careful when they use these services.

## The fine print

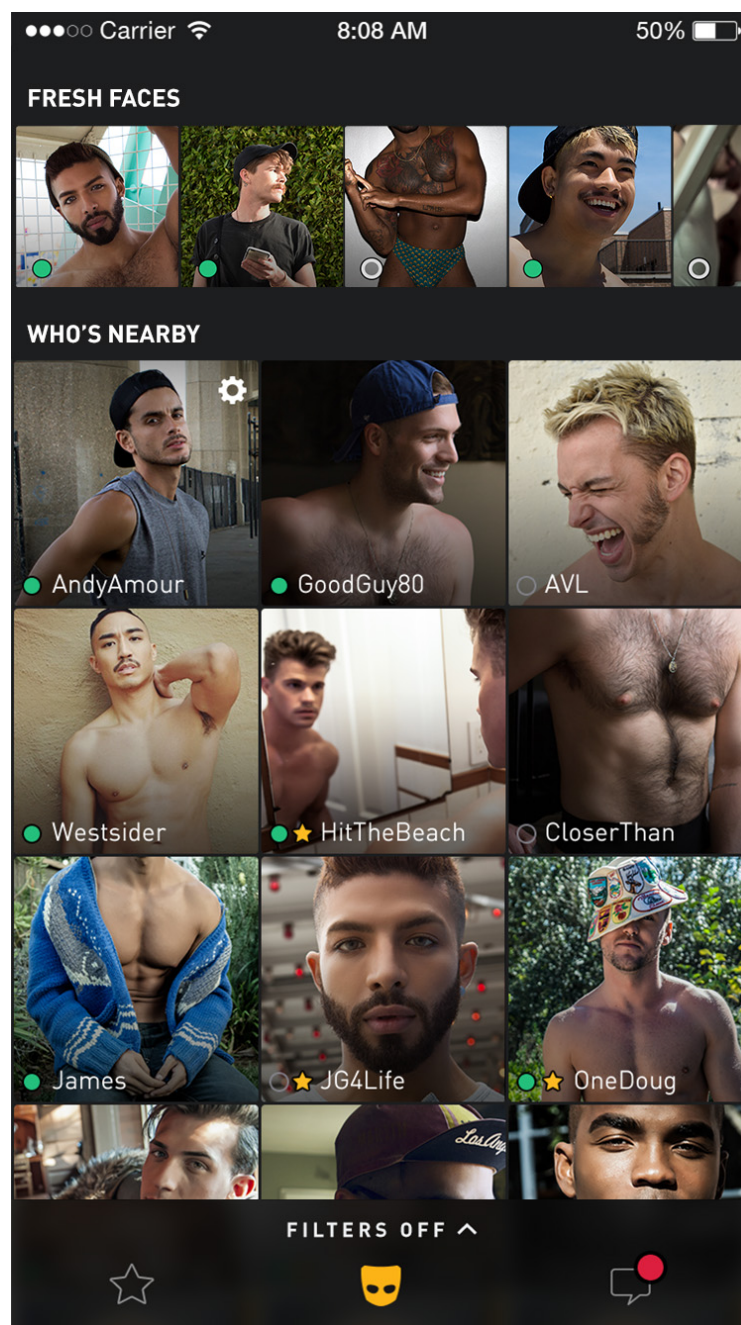
Many dating apps provide important information on how their users can protect themselves when meeting dates online. The [profile guidelines](#) on Grindr, an online dating app for the LGBTQ community, states that it permits no pornography, impersonation, racism or bigotry, and asks users to not promote unsafe sex. Grindr, which has 2.4 million daily active users and 6 million monthly active users worldwide, has [safety tips](#), although the website also features a [statement](#) releasing the app from any liability.

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Screenshot of a section from Grindr's Terms of Service.



A typical user's Grindr page of profiles (PROVIDED BY GRINDR)

As a niche dating platform, [Recon](#) provides users with features that cater specifically to fetish dating. The Events feature lists worldwide kink-based happenings such as Fetish Week London, Recon Paris, and CLAW 18. Like McArthur, a large demographic of members using Recon is middle-aged men in search of potential male sexual partners.

To make a Recon account, you must create a profile by inputting personal information such as date of birth, ethnicity, body type, role, and whether you intend to practice safe sex or not.

Following this, you must choose at least five fetishes you're interested in, and upload a minimum of one photo of yourself. To ensure real people are



creating accounts on the app, the email used at the time of registration must be verified before Recon will approve a profile. Here are [Recon's safety tips](#).

Another app linked to the accused is [Manjam](#), a self-described social network for gay men and their friends.

McArthur had been a member of Manjam since December 2002, using the same alias "silverfox". His profile described him as a 61-year-old white male with grey hair. His profile has since been taken down.

The website [eHarmony](#) claims that a quarter of all Canadians ages 18-34 have tried online dating, while 16 per cent have had sex through these encounters. It may come as no surprise that studies show most users of social networking apps don't actually read the terms of service. According to eHarmony, 53 per cent of people lie on their online profiles, mainly about their photos and their jobs.

So, while Toronto police investigate McArthur's online profiles, here are a few ways you can protect yourself when you're finding "the one" or simply "the one for right now."

### Spot the red flags

It's important to remember that the platforms themselves are not to blame.

The people using the platform are ultimately responsible for their own safety and the safety of those they interact with, said Julie Spira, founder of Cyber-Dating Expert, a dating coaching service based in Los Angeles.

While she believes most online dating has positive outcomes, there are warning signs to watch for. Spira says you need to notice profiles and messages with incorrect spelling and grammar. She also encourages "daters not to communicate with someone who requests moving the conversation off the site to a private email and those filled with negative descriptions in their profiles."

While Spira has built her career advising straight couples, her advice applies to gay daters as well.

"Users can easily report suspicious profiles to the sites, often right on the person's profile, as well as block someone who might be harassing them from contacting them," Spira says.

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### Safety tips from the Apps themselves

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- [Tinder](#)
- [OkCupid](#)
- [Grindr](#)
- [Recon](#)

An article on [Meet Mindful](#) points out “The Picky Profile”. If a user lists detailed requirements on their profile, that’s a red flag. This user could potentially be controlling or abusive.

## Let your friends know

Spira suggests getting reviews from other people who also know the potential date, both about them and about where you are supposed to meet up.

“If you share friends, you can get their vote of approval on the potential date location as well. If not, meet in a public place and let your friends know where you are meeting, and avoid meeting late at night.”

Police also recommend that regardless of the app being used, let others know about your dates.

“When you decide to meet someone, even for a casual connection, do so in a safe space and consider telling a friend or family member where you are going,” said Katrina Arrogante, a media relations specialist with Toronto Police Services. If this is not possible, consider leaving a note behind with that information, she added.

Also, Arrogante also advises people to let authorities know about bad dates.

“At any time, if the situation has left you feeling suspicious or uncomfortable, please consider reporting this information to Police or Crime Stoppers.”

Although it was aimed at preventing sexual assault against women, The Maple Leaf Tavern, in concert with Pinkerton’s Snack Bar, put forward the idea of an [awareness campaign](#), in 2017, centred around a code word that will get you out of a sticky situation if you feel at all uncomfortable or threatened. For example, “Diana” is a drink that women at those bars could order if they felt the need to have bar staff provide a safe space away from an unruly date.

Vigil for victims of Toronto's serial killer by residents of the Church-Wellesley gay village



Dozens of people gathered at Barbara Hall Park outside "The 519" community centre on Church Street in Toronto on Feb. 13, 2018 in memory of the missing and murdered men from the gay village. Toronto Observer's Rushanthi Kesunathan reports.

Martin Flemming\* of Toronto has not seen anything similar to the "Diana" safeguard while on dates in Toronto's gay village, however he has been using online gay dating apps and websites on and off since 2011. Fleming, an actor and personal trainer, doesn't prefer cyber dating over old fashioned face-to-face introductions, but acknowledges that it is where the direction of gay dating is moving, he said.

"Meeting people online isn't easy," he said, adding that he uses Tinder, Grindr and [Scruff](#). These location-based apps allow users to connect to people near you.

"A good 75 per cent of meeting people on apps happens at home, people often ask me where I live, if I am close by and whether I'm free," he said. This removes the public and bar atmosphere of a first date, and leaves the user in a potentially dangerous situation.

Flemming doesn't meet anyone without knowing their name, seeing a photo of them and interacting with them away from the app through text messages or a chat on the phone. He takes further precautions, too.

"I'll never meet anybody (no matter who or how long I've been talking to them) for the first time without sending a photo of the person, address, any details I got off their profiles, and a phone number, to a friend," he said. Fleming also asks that friend to check in on him the next morning, if he himself hasn't already sent a message on his way home that night.

"That's how I protect myself!"

As for bad experiences with using online dating apps, Flemming recounts frequent incidents when his date shows up not looking exactly as their profile pictures. One time he was uncomfortable continuing his date and tried to gently let the man know, but his date didn't take the hint easily.

"When it came down to it [sex], I tried to politely let them down and the person reacted aggressively," he said. "That was the first time I became fearful."

He claims a lot of users on gay dating apps come on merely to collect photos of you.

"They chat with you for a few days, then you're blocked suddenly," he said, explaining that members who misuse these apps are causing other users to take more risks just to meet people.

"The way users abuse these apps creates more sadness and isolation- it affects your self-esteem. One rejection leads to another and this scenario is not good," he said. "Frustrated users are going to be more willing to take more risks because they can't meet people outside."

*\*Not his real name.[ed.]*

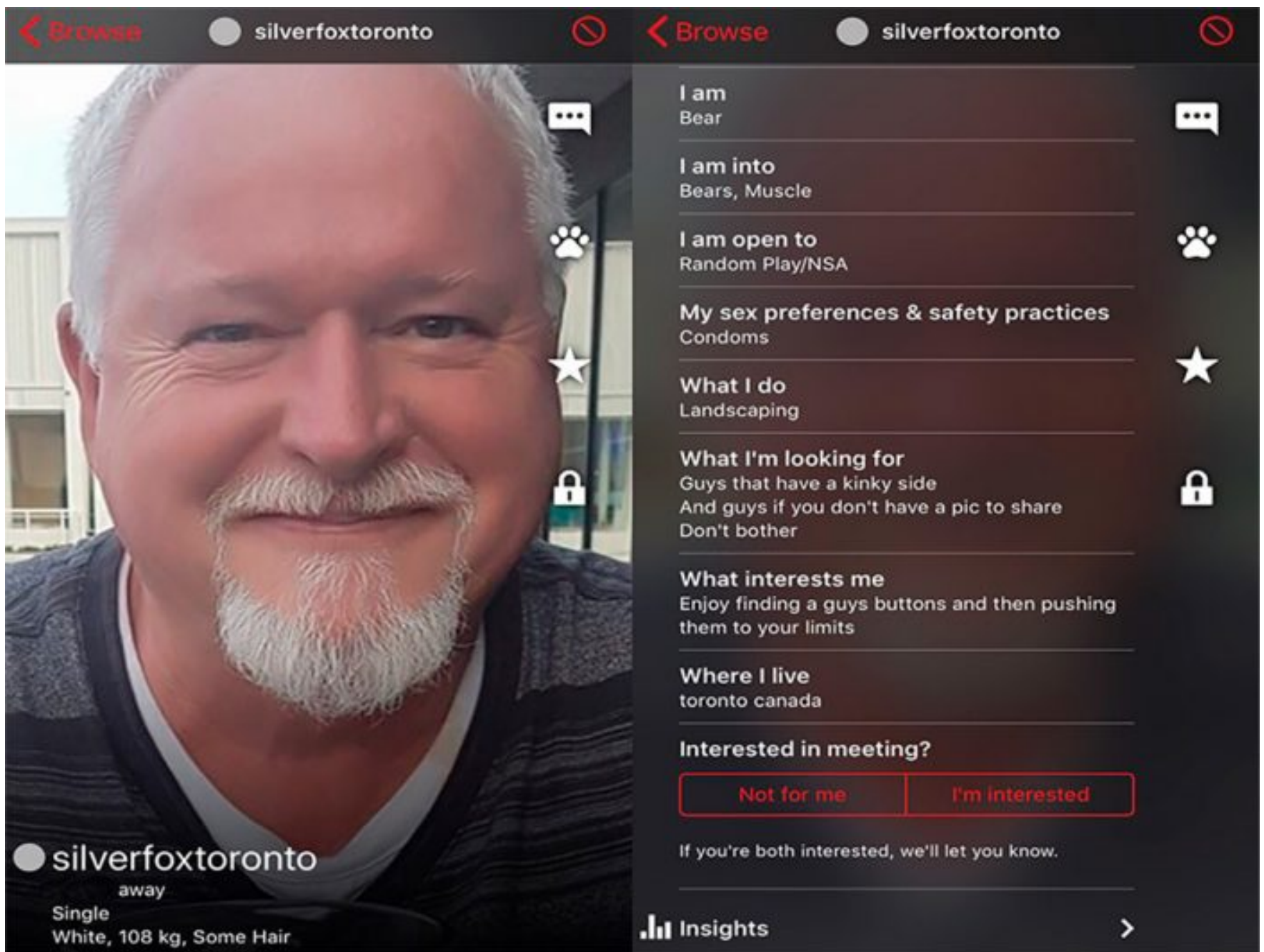


# **Sexualizing Violence**

**The world of kink and Toronto's missing and murdered gay men**

*"I enjoy finding a guys buttons and then pushing them to your limits."*

McArthur's profile on the app Scruff



Bruce McArthur's profile on Scruff until all of his social media accounts were scrubbed (SAM KATZ / TWITTER USER)

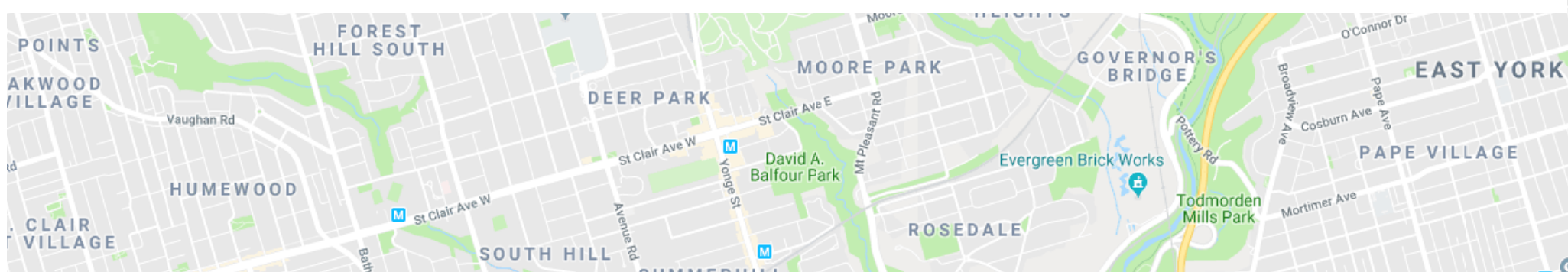
Published reports and comments from police allude to the suspect's frequent use of dating apps which cater to men who enjoy a certain kind of sexual activity: the world of kink, which could include fetishes and what is known as BDSM, for bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, and sadism and masochism. Some of the victims linked to the accused have had varying degrees of presence in the segment of the LGBTQ community that engages in BDSM and fetish play. [Vice News](#) profiled two of the missing men, Abdulbasir Faizi, and Majeed Kahyan, as being regulars at Toronto's [Black Eagle](#).

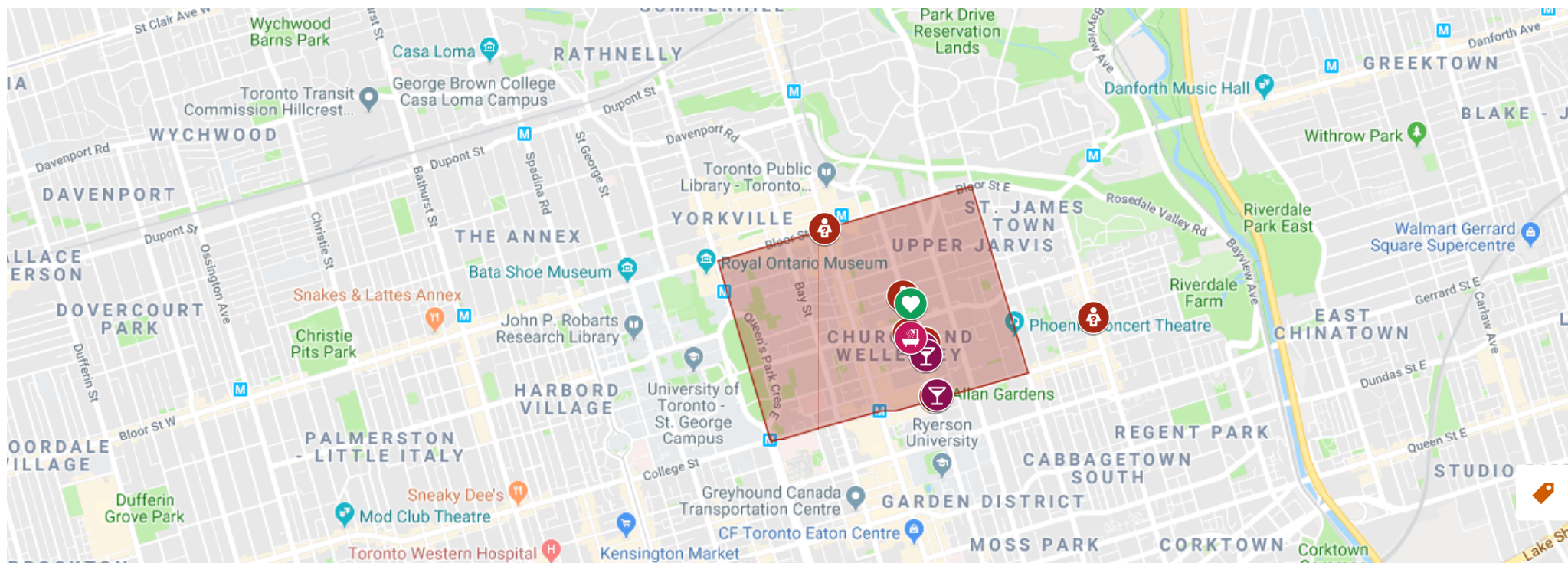
Black Eagle bills itself as "an adult venue with dark, industrial decor catering to the gay leather and denim communities."

Faizi was last seen at Toronto's [Steamworks](#) baths, a bath house that hosts events for gay men interested in sexual encounters in a public setting. Steamwork's event list includes "The Bears, The Baths and Beyond". McArthur frequently described himself on his online profiles as into "Bears" and "Muscle."

Faizi and Kahyan are not the only two men linked to the McArthur case who police also linked to sexual encounters involving fetish, or anonymity.

Toronto Observer ☆





Missing and murdered men out of Church and Wellesley's gay village (Taylor Bridger/Toronto Observer)

Dean Lisowick, 47, was last seen in 2016 by shelter workers. They knew him as a kind but troubled man who struggled with addiction, and earned a living as a sex worker in Church and Wellesley's gay village.

Lisowick was remembered during a candlelight vigil Feb. 13, organized by The 519, a community centre in the Church and Wellesley area. Carol, who wishes to keep her last name private, said Lisowick was a "kind gentleman." She knew him as "Laser."

"He was a gentle and kind soul," she said. Carol used to work in the Church Street area and recalled the murdered man always asking her if she needed help and handing her little gifts.

"He used to always just say 'Hi, Miss! How are you, Miss?'" Carol said. "Its heart wrenching to see that he is gone."

It's a world that doesn't get much exposure and is often misunderstood by outsiders, according to activist Haran Vijayanathan, with the [Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention](#). Both partners should be aware of and follow the rules of rough sex, he advises, so as to avoid the encounter turning into an assault.

*"Even in the heterosexual community, they mislabel kink versus sexual violence. There's a conversation that needs to happen around kink sex and BDSM."*

Haran Vijayanathan

Vijayanathan believes LGBTQ+ people have only just started addressing the wider issue of domestic sexual violence, as a community, in the last decade. Victims often don't even realize they have been subject to an assault, and those who do, choose not to come forward to police, [studies show](#).

"There should be a positive relationship, with communication built in, to say where the safe lines are," Vijayanathan said.

Recon, the gay fetish app, offers many tips and common practices used by the BDSM and fetish communities to maximize safety.



Safer play is about being aware of possible risks and deciding what action to take to minimise them.

Two common acronyms within the BDSM (Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, Sadism and Masochism) scene are SSC (Safe, Sane and Consensual) and RACK (Risk Aware Consensual Kink). Whole books and website have been written on this, but much is down to your own personal judgment.

- Ensure you know your partner's limits. Talk about them in advance, either online or in person. And stick to the agreed limits!
- If you are into bondage or any kind of BDSM play, agree a "safe-word" up-front. This is a code word that means "Stop!". It should be something you can remember easily and that won't come up in the normal course of conversation. When you say it, your partner knows it's a signal that something is wrong and that they should immediately stop. Always STOP if your partner asks you to. A common "safeword" system is Red, Amber, Green:
  - Red = STOP NOW
  - Amber = Approaching Red
  - Green = I'm fine!
- If playing with gags or any form of headgear, ensure that a safe action (instead of a safe-word) is agreed, as your partner may be unable to talk. Ensure that there is a clear means by which they can signal that they are in difficulty.
- If you restrain your partner, check their circulation and breathing regularly. Do not leave a restrained person alone - for any reason - always be in the room with them. Do not place ropes around the throat, or tightly round the chest. There are courses available for those interested in learning about safer Bondage and S&M.
- Keep a pair of strong blunt ended scissors (or medical shears) handy, in case you need to get your partner loose quickly. Avoid pointed scissors or knives as you could cause more damage.
- Be aware that your play partner needs to breathe, so don't cover the nose and mouth at the same time. Breath control is an extremely dangerous sexual practice. Make sure you know the risks and learn the basics of CPR/resuscitation.
- If you or your partner have any specific medical conditions (e.g. epilepsy, allergies), are on any medication, or suffer from any phobias (e.g. claustrophobia), ensure both of you are aware of this, and comfortable to proceed.



[Rainbow Health Canada](#), a Toronto-based health provider based in the Church and Wellesley area, has a helpful fact sheet on intimate partner violence in the LGBTQ+ community.



Paul Bernardo. Robert Pickton. Clifford Olson. The list of notorious Canadian serial killers may soon have another name added, with the high-profile murders and disappearances of men from Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village.

Experts who study serial killers are now weighing in on the habits and personality of the former Toronto landscaper who stands charged with six murders of local gay men.

Sasha Reid, a Ph.D. candidate in applied psychology and an expert in psychopathic serial killers, says killing can come quite easily to certain people, particularly psychopaths.

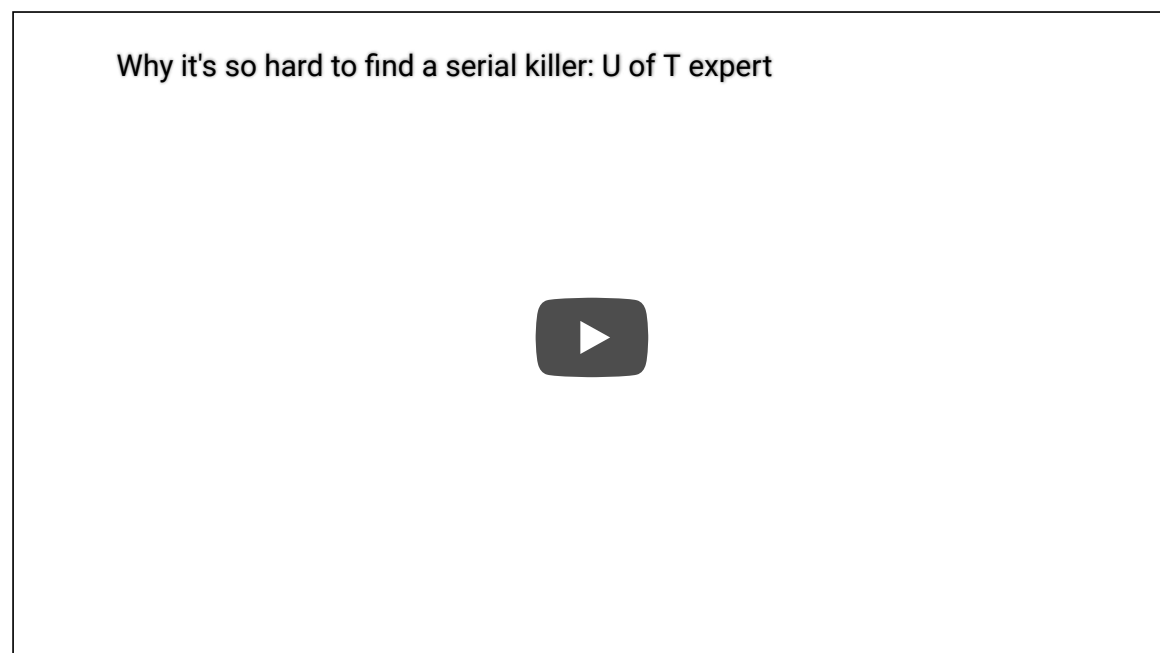
"They only care about themselves," she said in an interview at her University of Toronto office.

Canada has seen around 60 serial killers in its history, according to a [report from Radford University](#). Of those, some of the country's most notorious murderers, like Bernardo and Pickton, have also been diagnosed as psychopaths. But Reid pointed out that it is not necessarily the case for all of them.

The gold standard for diagnosing psychopaths is the Hare Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R). It was developed by Canadian criminal psychology researcher [Dr. Robert Hare](#) in the 1970s. Now in its second edition, the checklist rates a subject on 20 items such as superficial charm, lack of guilt, and lack of remorse. The subject is interviewed by a psychologist and scored from zero to two on each item (zero is weak, one is somewhat, two is strong). If the subject's score reaches 30 or higher, that person is classified as a clinical psychopath.

While psychopaths make up only one per cent of the general population, Reid said the proportion of psychopathic serial killers is much larger. She admits, however, that it's hard to know just how many psychopathic serial murderers there are.

"[Some] never see a psychiatrist, and so we would never know whether they were psychopaths or not," she said.

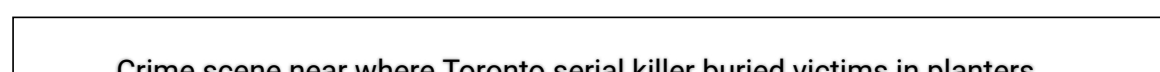


A University of Toronto researcher into serial killers says police need clearer guidelines when investigating potential suspects, because serial killers behave normally on the outside. Developmental criminologist Sasha Reid spoke with Toronto Observer's Sergio Arangio about her new database that might help police catch killers sooner.

[Michael Arntfield](#), a former London, Ont. police officer, criminologist and expert in serial killers, proposes that the suspect in the Toronto case may very well be a psychopath, too.

"The telltale indicator ... is the fact that [the suspect is] dismembering the bodies," the associate professor at the University of Western Ontario said. "This is extremely rare."

The remains of seven people have been found in planters at a Leaside home. Three of the victims have since been identified by police as Andrew Kinsman, Soroush Mahmudi, and Skandaraj Navaratnam. The four remaining victims have not been identified.



Crime scene near where Toronto serial killer buried victims in planters



Two views from the popular city hiking trails below 53 Mallory Crescent in Leaside, where Toronto police forensic officers found the remains of at least seven victims in the ongoing Bruce McArthur case. Videography by Toronto Observer reporters Anjelica Balatbat and Taylor Bridger.

Arntfield said the act of hiding a victim’s body parts in planters outside people’s homes is extremely rare – even for a phenomenon like serial murder. This suggests a more emotional and sexual drive, he said, as well as a sort of performance by hiding the victims right under people’s noses.

“That would ... provide them with a great sense of power,” Arntfield said.

While psychopathy may make it easier to murder, what sets serial killers apart from the rest of society is an urge to commit horrible acts and possibly take pleasure in doing so, experts say. That’s the view of forensic psychology professor [Matthew Shane](#), who is also an assistant dean at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology.

“They don’t kill people unless they get something out of it,” he said.

[ENLARGE](#)



Dr. Matthew Shane, University of Ontario Institute of Technology

COURTESY UOIT

Even still, a serial murderer is not just born that way, as Reid pointed out. She explained that the development of a serial killer can stem from a poor relationship with parents or guardians, which keeps them from having warm,

caring personality traits, and developing social ties with people. This leads to them turning inward, she continued and fantasizing about a world where they have power, control, and domination.

Anyone can experience this and not become violent, but serial killers do, she explained, while glancing at a photo of [Ted Bundy](#) pinned to her office wall, and it is usually due to a strong sexual desire. At some point down the line, they cannot keep these urges under control.

“Fantasy is not enough for them,” Reid said. They start feeling the need to live out their desires by committing small crimes, and then become increasingly violent, eventually leading to outright homicide.

“Some people will fantasize for years or decades before they act,” she said.

Arntfield, who has written books on crime and serial killers, said a major red-flag is a history of making obscene phone calls to people.

“That is actually an antecedent to often very sadistic behaviour,” he said, adding that the joy a person gets by terrorizing strangers on the phone leads them to become more confident, adventurous, and dangerous.



Leaside Towers at 85-95 Thorncliffe dominates the skyline above the Don Valley. (TAYLOR BRIDGER/TORONTO OBSERVER)

Serial killers come in a variety of forms, as Arntfield’s research shows. One category of a serial murderer is what he calls “The Poacher” or “The Commuter Killer”. This person chooses a career that allows them to be mobile, so they can conceal their more sinister actions as they move from place to place.

“A job on the road, whether it’s as a trucker or a travelling salesman, is among the best covers,” he said.

As they claim their victims, Arntfield said, they tend to space out their murders over time. Serial killers experience a cooling-off period between murders, he said. During this time, they find other ways of “compensating for their urges,” but there is eventually a personal trigger that brings them back to that bloodlust.

As one can imagine, it is not very easy to kill someone and get away with it. Which is why, as Reid explained, serial killers must be calculated in where they choose to kill and then hide their victims. Often times, she said, people who target members of the LGBTQ community lure their victims home or get invited to their victim’s home before killing them.

The suspect could have picked victims from the Church and Wellesley area easily since the killer would have been very familiar with the community. However, as to why the specific victims were murdered, Reid theorized that they could have been easy targets.

“Some people choose strangers; some people choose acquaintances. It’s just whatever is convenient at that time,” she said.

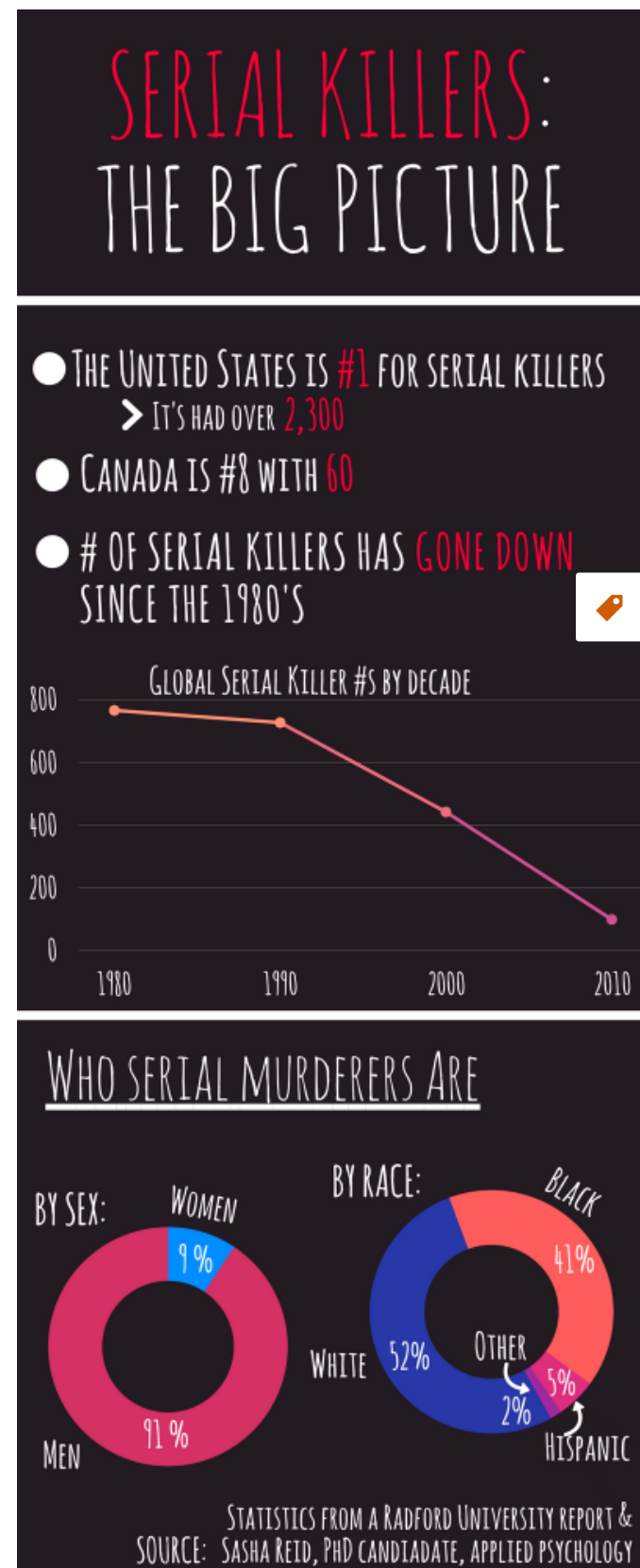
After committing the act, serial murderers tend to hide the bodies at home or nearby, so they can relive the experience. Reid said many serial killers like to hide bodies outdoors. She is still trying to figure out why that is.

### The problem with defining serial killers

Researchers say part of the problem is that police forces must have a better definition of what a serial murderer is. The FBI defines serial murder as “the unlawful killing of two or more victims by the same offender(s), in separate events.” What bothers Reid, is the ambiguity of that definition.

“Gang members would fit within the FBI definition of serial homicide,” she said. “So, too, would a hitman, or a whole range of people who for whatever reason commit two [or more] homicides in separate events over a period of time.”

Such a broad definition with so much irrelevant data can inhibit the ability of people who study serial killers to do proper research. To combat this, Reid has created a new definition for serial killer which she hopes researchers will use without getting needlessly lost in a sea of police records. Her definition, called “compulsive criminal homicide”, sets the minimum criteria for serial killing at two murders and one attempted murder. It also makes the distinction that serial murderers use self-gratification as a baseline motivation.



Where does Canada rank in serial killer statistics? Graphic by Sergio Arangio/Toronto Observer

## Compulsive Criminal Homicide (CCH)

The goal-based and ritualized murder and/or attempted murder of human beings where:

- (A) The total achieved murders numbers 3+ OR the total achieved murders numbers 2 *and* there was at least one more attempted murder\*
- (B) The combination of total achieved *and/or* attempted murders can be linked forensically *and/or* upheld judicially\*\*
- (C) The primary goal of the perpetrator is intrinsic and based in psychological motivations of personal gratification
- (D) The murder is not carried out at the behest of another or in response to a personal attack on oneself or a loved one\*\*\*
- (E) The offender exercises independent conscious deliberation, purposeful control, planned forethought, and intentional action in the acquisition, constraint, handling *and/or* eventual elimination of the victim\*\*\*\*
- (F) Each event of murder occurs as a discreet event which occurs at different intervals of time and which are interrupted by a break or dormant period between homicides wherein the offender returns to their usual way of life \*\*\*\*\*
- (G) Subsequent killings meet corollaries A – G

(SLIDE COURTESY OF SASHA REID)

Reid hopes that having clear-cut criteria “created by academics, for academics” will help researchers get consistent data, so they can focus on studying the people that give the term “serial killer” its meaning. This should, she believes, make police investigations more efficient as they consult with criminologists about the data they collect on serial murderers.

For his part, criminologist Arntfield has gripes with Toronto police’s handling of the gay village investigations, and their failure to admit they had a serial killer on their hands.

“In Canada, [police are] very scared to use the term,” he said.

Instead, Arntfield said a perfect example of how a police force should operate was the case of a serial shooter in Tampa Bay, Florida in Nov. 2017. He highlighted how the local police department warned the public of a serial killer in their midst, which kept the community on alert. According to [Fox News](#), it led to 5,000 tips being sent to police, one of which led to the suspected gunman’s arrest.

If Toronto officers had had a similar mentality, Arntfield said, an arrest in the Church-Wellesley murders could have been made much faster. He added that police should have done a better job of looking into the Village’s missing person’s cases early on.

“These were not treated and investigated as suspicious until *Project Houston* was formed. And then it disbanded.”

*Project Houston* was assembled by Toronto police to investigate the disappearances of Skandaraj Navaratnam, Majeed Kayhan, and Abdulbasir Faizi. The project shut down in April 2014, due to insufficient evidence. Arntfield compared it to how Niagara police badly handled disappearances and murders that would later be connected to Paul Bernardo.






The solution to overlooking strange groups of disappearances can be as simple as better training for officers, he said, and proper distribution of workloads so that public concerns are taken seriously. Once they are, police must be able to put the pieces of missing person cases together in order to find out if a serial killer is behind them.

To that end, Reid has developed a [missing person’s database](#) and a [serial homicide database](#) that can be used to identify strange disappearances and make profiles. Reid hopes to one day make it public to help people recognize unsettling patterns before they get worse. She hopes they will help draw

attention to strange disappearances, and “speed up investigations and make them more effective.”



#### About this article:

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