

## Happy like Profilers: Gordon Burn, Modernity and Serial Killing

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### Abstract

Happy like Profilers: Gordon Burn, modernity and serial killing Haggerty (2009) has outlined the ways, in which, “serial killers” can be seen as a product of modernity. In particular, he highlights the ways, in which, a symbiotic relationship has developed between the media and “serial killers”. A significant feature in this new firmament is the psychological profiler. From Cracker onwards, the psychological profiler has become a key feature of the TV crime drama. As Dowleer et al ( 2006) note the line between reporting crime and crime as entertainment is a very blurred one. The viewer is just as likely to come across a “psychological profile” on a “news” programme such as Crimewatch as in a TV drama. Trevor Hardy was convicted of the brutal murder of three young women Janet Stewart (15), Wanda Skalia (18) and Sharon Mosoph (17) in 1977. He has been given a whole life tariff so will never be released. Despite this, Wilson et al (2010) highlight the fact that the case is not that well-known and consider the reasons for this. This paper argues that this approach is an extension of the medical- psychological discourse, which concentrates on generating a comforting taxonomy of serial killers. It goes on to argue that this approach marginalises the suffering of the victims and the cataclysmic impact that these events have on the lives of their loved ones. The novelist, Gordon Burn, has explored the nature of modern celebrity. He has also examined in extensive details the environments that produced Peter Sutcliffe (Somebody’s Husband, Somebody’s Son) and the Wests (Happy like Murderers). As an alternative to the profiler approach, which focuses on the perpetrator and marginalises victims and their families, the work of Burn – in particular his novel Alma Cogan is examined in depth. This disturbing novel challenges the ways, in which, celebrity is constructed. By so doing, it forces the reader to confront not only the full brutality of sexual violence but also their own complicity in the “serial killing industry”.

### Introduction

*“The freedom conferred by masks. The freedom conferred by cities. In the city the forbidden – what is most feared and desired becomes possible”*

(Gordon Burn, *Happy Like Murderers: The True Story of Fred and Rosemary West*)

Wilson et al’s (2010) article presents a case study of the serial killer Trevor Joseph Hardy. Hardy was convicted in 1977 of the murder of three young women in Greater Manchester. He is now one of the

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longest serving prisoners in the UK. However as Wilson and his colleagues point out his case is not widely known. The article considers why this might be the case at a time as when Haggerty (2009) suggests serial killers have become part of the hyper-reality of media celebrity. This paper will argue that Wilson et al are part of this creation of the serial killer as *media celebrity*. It will suggest that the work of Gordon Burn can be read as a counter weight to the “*psychological profiling*” school of the discussion of mass murder. By so doing, it will be argued this work forces the reader to contemplate the appalling nature of these crimes and the long-term impact on the lives of the victims’ families and local communities. This should be the focus of our interest not the ultimately futile search for some comforting taxonomy of serial killers.

### **The Right Profile?**

“ Psychological profiling” is a very recent development. It has become a feature of the law and order landscape. There have clearly have always been attempts to solve crimes through an analytical or psychological approach. The figure of Sherlock Holmes represents a very early literary form of the cool calculating thinker, who can solve crimes using by applying his supreme intellect. Psychological profiling has moved from the real world to TV, film and fiction. Virtually all cop shows now include either a profiler as a many character (*Law and Order: Special Victims*) or a scene where a detective outlines the main features of the offender that the profiler thinks the team should look for or can use to exclude possible suspects.

Profilers make the claim that by the analysis of crime scenes and a series of other factors, it can provide a detailed psychological portrait of an offender that will either assist the police in his ( as we shall see below it is much weaker on the explanation of female killers) capture and possible treatment. Ressler, Burgess and Doulgas (1988) are leading figures in the development of profiling. Following the controversial involvement of Paul Britton in the hunt for the brutal murder of Rachel Nickell, profiling faced a professional crisis of confidence. Britton’s involvement in the investigation was severely criticised when the case against Colin Stagg was thrown out at the Crown Court. Following Britton’s advice, a female undercover police officer encouraged Stagg to write her letters including violent sexual fantasies. These letters were then see to confirm that the murder of Rachel Nickell mapped Stagg’s fantasies – fantasies that had been essentially instigated in the honey trap operation that the police had initiated. In his own account, Britton(1998) seems loathe to accept any of the criticisms levelled against him. However, there have been a series of attempts to “professionalise” the work of profilers (Alison and Rainbow, L 2010).Profiling – still the term that is used in the media and popular culture has been replaced by the term *Behavioural Investigative Advice (BIA)*. In this new approach, emphasises that the role of the BIA is to support the police investigation rather than lead it – as Britton appeared to be doing in the Stagg case. The media of the “profiler” as a pathologist, police interviewer and an analyst of crime scenes for the clues that inevitably lead to the arrest of a suspect remains a dominant cultural trope.

Haggerty (2009) notes the media and serial killing have a symbiotic relationship. The creation of the celebrity profiler is part of that process. The leading figures such as David Canter and David Wilson in the UK appear in the media following major crimes to provide psychological explanations of the motivations of the offender – based presumably on the media reports generally available rather than their own assessments. In the academic world, offender profiling has become a recognised subsection of forensic psychology – with all that entails in terms of research funding, academic status and prominence. For example, on his website ([www.davidcanter.com](http://www.davidcanter.com)) David Canter is described thus

*“David Canter PhD, AcSS, FAPA, FBPsS, FRSM, FRSA, CPsychol  
Director International Centre for Investigative Psychology President Int. Academy for  
Investigative Psychology  
Professor David Canter, the internationally renowned applied social researcher and world-*

*leading crime psychologist, is perhaps most widely known as one of the pioneers of "Offender Profiling" being the first to introduce its use to the UK"*

David Wilson is Professor of Criminology at Birmingham City University. On his personal website <http://www.professorwilson.com> we are invited to "Meet Professor David Wilson, Britain's leading criminologist and arguably its most controversial. He did time as a prison governor, and is now an academic, a campaigner, a regular in our media and according to *The Guardian* he's a "celebrity academic". Indeed he's twice topped a *Times Higher* poll of the most quoted criminologists in the country"

In Wilson's Channel 5 series *Killers Behind Bars*, he looks at cases of "Britain's most famous modern serial killers". The programme outlines the brutal crimes of individuals such as Robert Black and questions if they might have committed unsolved crimes. The focus of the programme is very much on Wilson and his attempts to analyse these crimes using the insights of forensic psychology. The programme is constructed within the standard media frame of the profiler providing illuminating insights that have been missed or not fully appreciated by the traditional law and order professionals.

Ressler, Burgess and Douglas's work is based on interviews with 36 serial killers - Douglas has his own website - [www.mindhunter.com](http://www.mindhunter.com). From these interviews, they suggest that serial killers can be divided into two groups: *organised (non-social)* and *disorganised (asocial)*. They suggest that an *organised* killer will plan his crimes and leave little evidence whilst *disorganised* killers act in a more spontaneous way thus the crime scene is filled with more evidence. Alternatively taxonomies have been presented. Kelleher and Kelleher (1998) produce a typology of female serial killers: *the black widow, the angel of death, the sexual predator, and the revenge or profit killer*. It is possible to see this as a tabloid short hand rather than a worthwhile investigative tool. Holmes and De Burger (1988) outlined a different classification: *power/control killers, visionary-orientated, mission orientated and hedonistic -orientated -* this group apparently has three divisions: *lust, thrill and comfort killers*.

In their discussion of these different classification approaches Taylor et al (2012) note these disputes as a technical problem within the discipline. There is a complete disjunction between these technical aspects and the subject matter. The result is a series of to the outsider, frankly bizarre discussions - for example is Peter Sutcliffe a mission -orientated or visionary- orientated mass murderer? Taylor et al (2012) have produced a cluster analysis of the various serial killer profiling categories. Various reports of crime scenes are analysed. These *crime scene criteria* include for example; *murdered indoors, removal of sexual organs and disconnection from the crime scene*. These explanations do not appear to offer any real explanation of the nature of the crimes being studied. In a sense, they reduce the awful reality of what is being studied. Presdee (2004) argues that biographical accounts provide superior understanding. He uses the phrase "*nurtured ignorance*" to describe the accounts provided in the rational scientific tradition. These sorts of analyses would be examples of the work that he is attacking - on the surface there appears to be a detailed explanation but below this there is very little to help us understand these events in any meaningful or useful way.

The psychological discourse has been challenged. The leading work in this field is the anthropologist, Elliot Leyton's *Hunting Humans* (1986). Leyton argues that the psychological tradition ignores or cannot answer questions that relate to the cultural and historical nature of serial killing. It might - and this is not uncontested - provide insights into the motivations of individuals. It does not answer any questions as to who the victims of serial killers are most likely to be and what that actually tells us about the nature of the society, in which, these events occurred.

As Wilson (2007) notes the victims of modern UK serial killers overwhelmingly come from marginalised groups: *older people, gay men, prostitutes, and working class children*. In this book he argues that he is rejecting the approach outlined above, which cloaks the increasingly detailed description of violence in a veneer of academic science by referring to them as "*crime scene criteria*". "*I am less interested in the serial killers themselves than I am their victims*" P18. This claim by Wilson is not sustained throughout the book which contains a number of graphic descriptions of brutal acts as does the

Hardy article. The cover of the book is a list of names of victims of serial killers but the most prominent name on the cover is actually Professor Wilson's.

### **Serial Killers and Modernity**

As Haggerty (2009) notes the study of serial killing has almost solely focused on the biography and description of individual offenders. The true life crime section of any book shop is usually one of the largest sections. A search for “*serial killers*” on Amazon UK produces over 7000 possible titles. The leading titles include: *Serial Killers: Notorious Killers Who Lived Among Us* (Murray), *The Serial Killers: A Study in the Psychology of Violence* (Wilson and Seaman), *Serial Killers: The World's Most Evil* (Blundell) *Talking with Serial Killers* (Berry-Dee) and *Serial Killers: The Methods and Madness of Monsters* (Vronsky). These titles give a flavour of the long-standing interest in uncovering the psychological traits of individual killers and developing taxonomy of killers. It is claimed that by understanding this typology will allow law enforcement agencies to apprehend the offender more quickly. It does not, of course, prevent any offences.

Haggerty (2009) argues that serial killing is essentially a phenomenon of modernity. One of the key features of modernity is the role of mass media and the rise of celebrity culture. He suggests that there is a symbiotic relationship between the media and serial killers. The modern mass media provides many more opportunities for the construction of an identity or personality. *Serial Killer* thus becomes one of the forms of identity that can be created. This is not to suggest that the media coverage is the cause of serial killing rather it has a key role to play in the creation of the category of “*serial killer*”. Brandy (1986) notes the modern celebrity does not have a heroic status, s/he is simply someone who is talked about – often for reasons that are not wholly clear. Two examples of this phenomenon in the UK would be Kerry Katona and Peter Andre. Two minor pop stars that have gone on to live a life almost totally consumed by the production of media of that existence. As Burn throughout his work, celebrity is a category all of its own divorced from the origins of that fame. In the hyper-reality of the modern media, the serial killer joins the former member of the boy band, the winner of a TV cooking competition and the reality TV star as an inhabitant of the celebrity world. The tabloid press and TV report their lives in the minute detail. Egger's analysis (2002) of seven US serial killers concluded that they all seemed to enjoy their celebrity status.

Bauman (1989) argues that the Holocaust represents not a break from the rational, scientific and technocratic development of modernity, rather it is in many senses its culmination. As he suggests, the murder of the Jews required a bureaucratic structure to be accomplished. The architects of the Holocaust included not only anti-Semitic demagogues but also the planners and timetablers who ensured that the infrastructure existed to carry out mass murder. This rationality clearly devoid of any ethical considerations can equally be applied to serial killers.

Most murders are impulsive acts committed by individuals in some state of intoxication. Serial killing is planned and this planning appears to form part of the motivation of the killer. The victims are seen by the killer as simply a means to an end. That end being the creation of the killer's or fulfilment of his or her own desires. This combined with the anonymity of modern life allows for the creation of the category of the *serial killer*. In the modern urban “*society of strangers*”, the serial killer is able to operate in the depersonalised modern environment, preying on strangers, such as one journalist described the victims of Hardy “*girls who missed the bus*”. This is an environment, in which, there are greater opportunities to commit such crimes. As both Wilson (2007) and Egger (2002) both note the victims of serial killers tend to be drawn from marginalised groups. This partly explains why the initial murders in such cases are often not adequately investigated or given a great deal of media coverage. In Egger's phrase these victims are the “*less dead*”.

## Trevor Hardy

Trevor Hardy is one of those individuals who been sentenced to a whole life tariff –i.e. they will never be released from prison. He was sentenced to life for the murders of three young women, Janet Stewart (15), Wanda Skalia (18) and Sharon Mosoph (17). Wilson et al (2010) outline the nature of Hardy’s crimes. All three of his victims were subjected to the most appalling and degrading violence. When sentencing him, Judge Caulfield described Hardy as “*hopelessly evil*”.

As the authors point out this case had a number features in common with other high profile cases such as the Moors Murders, which have received almost constant tabloid coverage over the past fifty years and the Soham murders. These features include, a female accomplice and appalling sexual violence. Using Jewkes (2004) “*news values for a new millennium*” one would expect that the Hardy case would have received much wider coverage. It clearly crosses Jewkes’ threshold of interest and it includes elements of sexual violence. The fact that these acts were not linked until Hardy confessed to the murder of Wanda Skalia adds another of Jewkes’s criteria as these random acts of violence give the impression that all of us are at risk when in reality very specific group in society faced this.

The paper interviews four journalists based in Manchester, who covered the case to seek an explanation for the apparent anonymity of Hardy. The journalists suggest the fact that Hardy was only identified as a serial killer at his trial will have reduced the impact of his crime. This is linked to the second point that the journalist raise. Hardy did not have a “*catchy nickname*”. In addition, there were no photographs of Hardy that could be used thus denying the tabloid press of its favourites – “*the face of evil*” portrait of an individual convicted of a series crime. The interviewees go on to suggest there was (is still) a clear North/South divide. In the mid 1970s, Manchester had a strong newspaper industry and northern editions of the major tabloid newspaper were produced. The appalling murders that Hardy committed did not make it across this divide into the national consciousness. Jewkes highlights that the media highlight crimes involving particular victims. Cases involving children will always be given a high profile. This is explicitly acknowledged by the journalists in the Wilson paper. The victims – essentially young working class women in Greater Manchester – were not in that horrible tabloid phrase “*sexy*”. The fact that this led to their brutal deaths and the mutilation of their bodies was not sufficient to make them interesting to the tabloid press. Gekoski et al’s (2012) study confirms that despite being the most newsworthy of crimes, not all homicides receive the same level of media coverage or interest. As they conclude

*“homicides involving ‘perfect’ victims, statistically deviant features, killers on the run, sensational elements and/or serial killers will almost always be newsworthy, while those involving ‘undeserving’ victims in commonplace circumstances will almost always not”*

## The work of Gordon Burn

The late Gordon Burn a British novelist who used a mixture of fact and fiction in his work to explore the nature of fame, celebrity and the media representations of individuals caught up in events, including investigations into notorious murders. In a series of non-fiction works and novels, Burn sought to dissect the ways, in which, the modern world of celebrity and the media interact and operate. In particular, Burn explored the amoral world of fame, fans and tabloid journalism. In his novel, *Fullalove* a cynical tabloid hack exploits the grief of those who are the victims of crime to boost the circulation of the paper.

In *Alma Cogan*, the 1950s star is reinvented and she is living in reduced circumstances away from the media spotlight but still the object of a fan’s morbid fascination. In his non-fiction work, Burn explored the nature of fame in the sports world. *Best and Edwards* he examined the lives of two of Manchester United’s most celebrated players. *Snooker* .. was a first hand account of that, on reflection, bizarre period

in the 1980s when snooker was the boom sport in the UK. Burn seeks to strip away the layers of glamour that fame allegedly produces. This is done most starkly in his portrayal of the final years in the life of George Best. Gone is the “*Fifth beatle*” and all that remains is a broken man devastated by years of alcohol abuse.

Burn argued that celebrity was a form of death. He brings these to themes in his work together in portrayals of two of the most appalling crimes that the UK has seen. Burn’s *Somebody’s Husband* *Somebody’s Son* (1990) is a detailed factual portrait of the community where Sutcliffe spent his life. *Happy Like Murderers* is a detailed and harrowing account of the lives and crimes of Fred and Rosemary West. Both these works are clearly influenced by Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* (2000) and Norman Mailer’s *The Executioner’s Song* (1991). Capote’s account of the random killing of the Clutterbuck family in Kansas in the 1950s is a blueprint for a number of studies of real life crime. Mailer’s painstaking account of the Gary Gilmour case follows a similar approach. In both these works, a detailed intimate account of the communities where the crimes occurred and the perpetrators’ place within them is developed. Burn follows the same path in both of these works. He does not attempt to give psychological explanations for these crimes. In fact, Burn takes the view that such explanations are ultimately impossible. He sees the crimes as a product of place and time, he argues in *Somebody’s Husband*, *Somebody’s Son* that these crimes are the product of a deeply misogynistic society. After completing his study of the Wests, Burn concluded that he had no real idea or explanation for their crimes.

### Reading Alma Cogan

Gordon Burn’s novel was published in 1991. It won the Whitbread prize for a first novel that year. It received critical acclaim in the London Review of Books it was described as

*“A bravura feat of the imagination... Gordon Burn has turned over the furniture of modern iconography...Alma Cogan tears off celebrity’s mask and examines what lurks beneath..”*

*Alma Cogan* explores two of the major themes in Burn’s work: the nature of celebrity and the media’s depiction of crime and particularly murder. Alma Cogan was a singing star of the 1950s and early 1960s – *The Girl with the Giggle in her Voice*. She was the leading female performer of the day. She is one of that group of British performers who were essentially wiped away by Beatle mania and all that followed in its wake. Alma Cogan as Burn notes represented a form of ersatz American glamour in drab post-war Britain recovering from the trauma and privations of conflict. In the novel, Burn imagines that Cogan did not die in 1966 but is living out a life of obscurity in mid 1980s Britain. This is the starting point for a meditation on the nature of fame. Alma contemplates her own reduced circumstances thus

*“The low wattage of the has-beens is understandable and mostly involuntary and can be put down to age, obscurity and the extended season of disappointment and failure”*  
(p97)

The Moors Murder is one of if not the most high profile murder case in Britain in the 20th Century. In 1966, Ian Brady and Myra Hindley were convicted of the abduction, sexual assault and murder of Lesley Anne Downey (10) and John Kilbride (12) and Edward Evans (17). The victims’ bodies were buried on Saddleworth Moor. Two other children Pauline Reade (16) and Keith Bennett (12) had gone missing in Manchester in the period when Hindley and Brady had committed these murders. It was always felt Pauline Reade and Keith Bennett had been victims of the *Moors Murderers* but despite a huge search

their bodies were not found. In 1985, Brady and Hindley eventually confessed to the murders of Pauline Reade and Keith Bennett. In a huge police operation, they were taken back to the moors in an attempt to find the missing bodies. Pauline Reade was found, but to this day the body of Keith Bennett has never been found.

Hindley despite or possibly even because a sustained campaign for her release by Lord Longford remained in prison until her death in 2002. Brady was transferred to Ashworth Special Hospital in 1985. He is now Britain's longest serving prisoner. The Moors Murders and its aftermath has been a persistent feature of the media and wider culture life in the UK for nearly 50 years. The pictures of Brady and Hindley taken at the time of their arrest must be among the most reproduced images in modern media. The picture of Hindley – with her dyed blonde hair part of a tribute to her lover's obsession with Nazi atrocities has become an iconic image – the cover of first paperback edition of *Alma Cogan* was a Andy Warhol screen version of this image. It has been reproduced over and over again in the forty-seven years since it was taken at Hyde Police Station. In the novel, Alma sees it on a TV report of Brady and Hindley's return to the Moors. Burn makes the reader question the ways, in which, this image has been essentially drained of its real meaning and context -

*Is it possible to discern evil, as many have supposed, in the cavernous upturned eyes, the pasty planes, the heavy bones, the holed head of bleached blonde fringe, the fondant of deep shadow...*

*As usual Hindley looks like a composite, an identikit, a media emanation, a hypothetical who never existed in the flesh.( P93-94)*

It would be difficult to over estimate the impact of this image – it has come to be part of a modern cultural lexicon of “evil”. This can be illustrated by the response to Marcus Harvey's painting of Hindley that was part of the *Sensation* exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1998. Even Hindley wrote to *The Guardian* to complain. The image is a huge, 11 ft by 9ft representation of the police photograph but as you get nearer, it becomes clear that the painting consists of handprints of children. The critics of the painting saw it as a cynical piece of media manipulation. Harvey must have known the reaction that it would receive – the exhibition was called *Sensation* after all.

Other more considered criticism emphasised that the actual painting had the quality of an advertising hoarding so leant glamour to a woman who had committed appalling crimes. On the other side of the argument, critics pointed out that this was the process that Harvey was attacking. In addition, Walker (1998) suggest a semiotic analysis would emphasise that the use of the plaster cast of a child's palm print to make the painting is a way of indicating that Hindley will never escape her crimes. This is a theme that appears in other cultural considerations of these crimes. Morrissey has stated that the Smiths took their name from David Smith the key prosecution witness in the case. The song, *Suffer little children* includes the line “*you may sleep but you will never dream*”. It is interesting to note that it is the context that creates this furor not the image itself. The authors recently were able to buy copies of *Alma Cogan* and *One of Your Own: The life and death of Myra Hindley* both of which the photograph prominently on the cover, in a Manchester bookshop with no comment being passed.

How and why does Burn link a faded 50s pop star with such crimes of brutality and degradation? When Brady and Hindley were arrested a tape was found in a left luggage office at a Manchester Train station. This tape was made by Brady and Hindley of the torture and murder of Lesley Anne Downey. The tape was played in open court at their trial. On it the terrified girl can be heard pleading for her mother as Brady subjects her to a series of degradations. In the background Alma Cogan's version of the *Little Drummer Boy* can be heard. In the novel, the Alma Cogan character agrees to meet an obsessive fan. In the run up to the meeting, the news is reporting the return of Brady and Hindley to the Moors. Burn uses this to explore the ways, in which, the media uses images of missing children and the way that this, in effect, sanitises the reporting of brutality, empties sadism of its meaning. These themes come together in a very powerful section when Alma sees a newspaper report of the search for the bodies of

Pauline Reade and Keith Bennett – first there the photographs used at the time of their disappearance are used:

*The piece is illustrated with what are clearly victim pictures –pictures uncontaminated by news values or documentary purpose when they were taken and informed by nothing more than childhood notions of presenting the self. P135*

These images are contrasted with the meaningless computer generated images of “*what they might look like if...*” – the if being if they had been abducted from the streets of Manchester, sexually assaulted, murdered and buried on the Moors

*The two sets of pictures are patched on to the page in such a way to suggest a natural progression, a trajectory: from the innocence of faces that they don't know they are going to die, to discarnate beings built up from encoded rays and glazes of numerical light ...  
And in between? The decomposition, the decay, the mulch down they are trying to pinpoint on the vastness of the Moors. Mud in the caves of eyes; slit and mud in the tunnels of the nose; sheep dung, hoar grass and bracken commerating the spot where a named individual lies. P136*

The climax of the novel sees Alma visiting the obsessive fan. She finds a tape and plays it. It is a recording of the sexual torture and murder of Lesley Anne Downey. Alma Cogan is obviously disgusted at the tape but also the way, in which, she has somehow been associated in the fan's mind with these events. The fan does not see why this she is so outraged

*I don't see what the fuss is about...  
A few years anybody could buy a copy in Manchester. If you went to the right pub. You could buy **pictures** of the girl if you knew the right channels. P190*

The fan then sums up the obsessive nature of fandom

*My only interest was you. The unavailability of those tracks anywhere else. The rarity value.*

*Alma Cogan* is a disturbing novel that explores our current obsession and interest in the perpetrators of violent crime. The way that the media seeks to exploit the suffering of the victims of these events and the ways, in which, the perpetrators become celebrities with all the media interest that entails. It also explores the symbiotic relationship between the media, crime and killers. Burn forces the reader to contemplate fundamental questions about the nature of violence. In so doing, they shift their “*gaze*” from the individual or individuals who have committed these acts to those whose lives have been shattered by the loss of a loved one in such dreadful circumstances. In addition, Burn unpicks the formulaic media reporting of these events and the way that there is a meta-narrative that all but the families know will end in the finding of body and an arrest. This Burn's description of the reports of a missing child

*We're going to leave her room just as it was the morning she walked out of here ...  
He just ran round to the shop to buy crisps and pop  
It wasn't late. She just went round her nan's to show her new watch.  
Please Please. Just give us something to let us know she's safe.  
Then later ( sometimes so much later that the portrait on the evening news only rings distant bells): the figure under the prison blanket with hand hovering over its head<sup>9</sup> the cranial bones and meninges; the cerebro-spinal fluid, the vagus nerve) to protect it from the door arch all instinct is to smash it against.*

## Discussion

The Wilson *et al* paper asks the not unreasonable question why is the Hardy case is not more well known. In fact the same question could be asked of a number of whole life tariff sentence prisoners in England and Wales: as the criteria for the imposition of a whole life tariff include more than one victim, murders following the abduction and or torture of the victim. Why particular cases, offenders or victims are given a higher profile than others needs to consider a wide variety of questions. However, one of the reasons why serial killers are allowed to continue is the fact that their victims are not usually missed. Wilson notes that despite writing a history of modern British serial killers he had until recently “*never heard of Trevor Hardy*. On the surface, this is a case that should have been given much greater prominence. The paper makes it clear that there were a number of features of the case that would pass even the tawdry tabloid media’s threshold for ongoing interest.

The explanations provided all relate to the functions of the tabloid press at that time. They do not go to consider in depth the wider questions about the nature of that press or the implicit ways, in which, the lives of some are valued more highly than others. The criteria that Jewkes (2004) outlines are ones that the media has produced or decided to use. They needed to be examined within the political, social, economic and cultural context which produced them (Hall 1978). There are not some objective criteria which can be applied.

In the introduction to his history of serial killers in the UK, Wilson (2007) indicates that he has been influenced by some of Burn’s work and is seeking to move away from the focus on the killer to the wider questions of who are the victims, what is the impact on individuals whose loved ones are taken from them in such brutal fashion. The work of Burn confronts these issues in a much more direct way.

His work is brutal, disturbing, harrowing and includes a series of descriptions of the violations visited upon the victims. In a joint with interview with the novelist David Peace (1974, 1977, 1980, 1983), (Esquire), they question their own motivations but also explore the impact on themselves. Burn makes it clear that the time he spent researching and writing *Happy like Murderers* almost made him physically ill. Peace expresses disgust at the way that he added graphic details to a murder scene in 1974.

Grover and Soothill (1999) note that the “*serial killing industry*” is booming. This boom has continued in the twenty years since that paper was written. There have been more crimes but also, related areas such as the media and academic have seen substantial expansion in areas related to its portrayal or study. Part of this boom is the profile in the academy and the media of leading “criminal psychologists” such as Professors Wilson and Canter. The main focus in this field has been to try and understand the motivations of the killers rather than the wider impact of their offences. Within this, there is still a tendency to portray killers as sophisticated planners, who uses their intellect to evade capture. For example, Canter’s (2003) description of Fred West as “*A clever killer who developed a well-articulated, deviant philosophy, using his intellect to tie the investigators in knots. He survived for so long because of the world he created for himself*” does not really square with the detailed portrait that Burn provides of the dishevelled, almost functionally illiterate and chaotic West.

The digital revolution only added another area of expansion including a phone app : *Psychopedia : an encyclopaedia of serial killers and unsolved serial murders*. For those who have not migrated to a smart phone they can access: *murderpedia; the encyclopaedia of murder or deathpenaltyUSA.org. the database of executions in the USA*. Within this, the killers become part of the tawdry world of modern celebrity whilst those whose lives they have destroyed become what Burn calls , *a para-celebrity- a celebrity by association* (Alma Cogan; p106) In popular culture, the dominant portrayal of crime is one of heightened drama with the investigation of serious crimes particularly sexual crimes, serials killers and murderous assaults by strangers dominating. This image has been developed to include the new technologies and techniques available. The high technique crime solvers of *CSI* are a modern version of the Holmesian detective genius. One result of this is that such programmes along with *Prime Suspect*, *Waking the Dead* and *Silent Witness* – all of which feature gruesome crime scenes and post mortems or

both – create pornography of death. This allows for the showing of images of brutally assaulted and defiled women or children – overwhelming the victims in such programme – to become acceptable on mainstream TV largely without comment.

Burn through a mixture of reportage and fiction allows them to examine society's response to the most serious crimes that are committed. Peace and Burn rightly sees that crime writing has the potential to be a political act. It allows them to explore a wide range of themes including the impact on deindustrialisation, the effects on working class communities of the neo-liberal retrenchment of the welfare state and the construction of masculinity. Within in this body of work, they explore the long-term impact of sexual violence. They challenge the media edifice that has been constructed around serial killers. The question they force us to ask is not *why do we not know Trevor Hardy but how and why have the names of Janet Stewart (15), Wanda Skalia (18) and Sharon Mosoph (17) and any account of how their lives were cut short disappeared from the public view?* .

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