Title: Exploring the boundaries of Missing Persons: Hidden interplay between policing and private entities in relation to cases on the periphery.

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Abstract: *This discursive article explores the argument that, by gently tweaking core parameters of what it means to be a missing person- specifically relating to definition and risk- that the role played by private organisations and entities in managing the missing persons problem can be interrogated. The examination begins by inquiring into the extent to which police take ownership of missing persons as an issue, utilising net-widening and pluralisation concepts to investigate the limits of the police role. To inquire into the role of definitional widening, the case of lost children in commercial spaces is used, arguing that private providers are routinely responsibilised with managing lost child cases that would otherwise enter into missing person statistics. To explore tweaks to the definition of risk in relation to missing, the debtor tracing industry is explored. The final argument is made that further exploration of the periphery of 'missingness' ought to be undertaken.*

The handling of missing persons cases has become one of the largest challenges for modern police forces, taking up an increasing proportion of their time and resources at a cost equivalent to around 14% of routine police time (Smith & Shalev Greene, 2014). The volume of cases and the burden they create arguably goes to the very core of the police function. The most recent official figures indicate that the police in United Kingdom received 340,000 missing persons reports in the last year, the equivalent of one person being reported missing every 90 seconds (Missing People, 2018). The number of missing persons reports appears to be steadily growing, by approximately 100,00 cases per year (Missing Persons Unit, 2016; 2017). Alongside the well-documented budget cuts and staffing issues facing police (e.g. Millie, 2014), this only increases the relative burden that the minimum estimated cost of £1,422 (Shalev Green & Pakes, 2013) places on the policing institution.

Police seemingly take 'ownership' over missing persons as an issue- whenever there is a missing persons report, police assume primacy of the search and subsequent investigation (Hutchings, Browne, Chou & Wade, 2019) even if there is a large multi-agency response (Yarwood, 2015). By proxy, this also indicates that the state take primacy for this *prima facie* crime control role (Garland, 2000). Despite this, there are a range of circumstances in which a person may go 'missing' or otherwise become unaccounted for where the police will not or cannot respond (see Biehal, Mitchell & Wade, 2003), or where the responsibility passes to or is shared by others. There are multiple opportunities to consider police sharing, load-shedding or otherwise pluralising (see Lister, 2006) missing persons related responsibilities- launching appeals alongside families and the third sector (Holmes, 2016); collaborating with social work to respond to repeat runaways (Shalev, 2011); overlaps with mental health services; and some search capabilities being handled by volunteer or maritime agencies (Perkins, Roberts & Hope, 2016). The role played by private entities in managing the burden placed by missing persons has so far not been explored, and presents a research gap which this paper seeks to begin exploring.

In particular, this article seeks to examine how the influence of private entities can potentially be identified even when interrogating two of the most basic and fundamental activities that relate to missing persons investigation- reporting, and definition. Following calls from recent missing persons scholarship to utilise more inclusive definitions of what disappearance and missingness means

(Sarkin, 2018; Taylor, Woolnough & Dickens, 2018), this paper presents the argument that making very small tweaks to how these concepts are traditionally laid out has the potential to unveil a range of previously unrecognised private sector activities relating to missing people.

Police Ownership Missing Persons: The Expansion and Contraction of the 'Net'

Before embarking on this exploration, it is necessary to briefly consider the changing nature of police attitudes to 'ownership' over the missing persons issue. For the purpose of this part of the discussion, the police's own definition of a missing person, as offered by the College of Policing (2016) is used:

"Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed" (Colle of Policing, 2016).

Given that missing persons cases can often overlap with offending, e.g, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, forced marriages, abductions and kidnap, and more, at first glance the issue of missing persons may seem to clearly fall within the most obvious police remit, that of crime control (Collier, 2006, p. 162). However, the vast majority of missing persons events, do not include a criminogenic element (Parr, Stevenson, Fyfe & Woolnough, 2015)- a person goes missing and is often returned without much fanfare (Henderson, Kiernan & Henderson, 2010), and where harm does occur this is most likely to be by accident, exposure to the elements, or infliction of harm on ones-self (Newiss, 1999; Newiss, 2004; Koester, 2008; UK Missing Persons Unit, 2014). The bulk of police missing persons 'business', then, does not involve crime.

That being said, the view that police play a wider role than that of crime prevention and control is well established (Bittner, 1990)- they do not just control crime, but protect the public and their property. Charman (2018), utilising foundational works by Broudeur (1983) and Millie (2013), chronicles how the police role has expanded significantly in the last several decades. While police themselves suffer budget cuts, their role has had to expand as rollbacks have effected mental health services (Mattheys, 2015), social work functions (Taylor-Gooby, 2012), and other key services that have been significantly pared back since the announcement of austerity. Without those services to deal with those in need, the role has fallen to police. This connects directly to the current landscape of policing missing people- substantial minorities of missing people have mental health issues and related vulnerabilities, e.g., dementia, depression, or are thought to be suicidal (see Perkins, Roberts & Feeny, 2011; Shalev Greene & Schaefer, 2009; Bonny, Almond & Woolnough, 2016). The presence of social issues and illness is strongly associated with going missing and experiences while missing (Parr, Stevenson & Fyfe, 2015)- provision for these underlying issues now passes to police, and resultantly the police 'ownership' over missing people expanded as well. Financial issues can also be highly relevant for missing people- the rise of the foodbank and the emergence of increased levels of hand-to-mouth living (see Loopstra et al, 2015) potentially contribute to the underlying social issues that contribute not just to driving crime but also to people experiencing crisis and therefore becoming at risk of going missing. The argument can therefore be made that the police 'net' has had to widen to account for the growing number of missing people, and this is compounded by the other responsibilities, e.g,. for mental health, that police have taken on which overlaps with the profiles of missing people.

As the net widens, the relationship between the police and the subject within the net might change. Hayden and Shalev Greene (2018) document how the increasing expectation for police to deal with missing persons cases challenges ground-level, officer conceptions of their own role, with some feeling that this activity is often outside their remit and more closely resembling a social work

function. Officers highlight the relentless nature of these cases, the perception of repeat cases, and even the feeling that it is not their role to intervene if someone wishes to go missing (Hayden & Shalev Greene, 2018). This aligns with recent findings that officers ascribe the status of 'deservingness' to victims they feel are worthy of their time, and in turn resent those they feel are 'undeserving'- certain types of routine missing person who lack perceived vulnerability may fall into this paradigm (Charman, 2019). This appears to highlight a conflict between police preference to align with their core crime prevention identity, and resistance to the increasing expectation that they engage in alternative, more community-based activity.

That said, the expansion of policing into the realms of a 'social service' is far from new, with Punch (1979) having attached this label to the policing function decades ago. Bowling et al (2016), in their review of the modern history of the police, highlights that looking for missing people has become one of the various social service-esque functions police are routinely asked to fulfil in their day-to-day duty. They align this with the dealing with people with mental health issues as part of a portfolio of activity that, in all likelihood, outstrips the amount of time police spend dealing with actual crime- in this sense, the social work role of police has perhaps become the over-riding function, at least of the front-line response officers. This leads to the premise that crime and its management ceases to be central to the police role, thus enabling their remit to extent to more social issues, including missing persons.

Finally for now, there is a further argument to be made that the general policing of missing persons introduces another layer of challenge to policing in the form of it potentially bringing undesirable connotations with regards to social control if the 'net' widens too far. In order to accept that premise, however, one must accept that 'missing persons' is a homogenous issue. Biehal, Mitchell and Wade's (2003) conceptualisation of a 'missing persons continuum' perhaps best captures the variation that might be seen between missing persons incidents- they can range from fully intentional episodes where an adult decides to go missing, to instances where a person is forced to go missing, and anything in between. The presence of intent to go missing can be pointed to as an explanation of why this topic challenges police sensibilities- if a person with full agency has decided to go missing, and the police intervene anyway, this raises a range of questions as to the appropriateness of state intervention and the grounds for this to occur, thereby potentially contravening (or questioning the existence of) rights to self-determine and 'to disappear' (Payne, 1995; Parr & Fyfe, 2012). If we accept that (some) people do go missing intentionally, police intervention has implications not just for the role of individual police officers, but the social functioning of the police service at large. Indeed, such intervention opens the police up for theoretical criticism on multiple fronts- police intervention in the lives of people exercising autonomy belies a neo-conservative outlook with potential critique that police are engaged in over-regulation (Hoogenbook, 1991); the monitoring and control of individual movement falls into neo-liberal discourses, especially surrounding complicity in expansion of surveillance (Lyon, 2004) and the inappropriate control, denial or even criminalising of alternative lifestyles (Johnsen, Fitzpatrick and Watts, 2018). Conversely, such intervention, even if done so altruistically and with wellbeing in mind, runs into potential critique for social welfarist nannying of the populous (Sparks, 2003)- the use of the police to fulfil this function means an especially blunt instrument is being utilised. However, prevailing perspectives question the extent to which people who go missing do so in a truly unconstrained manner. Taylor, Woolnough and Dickens (2018) recently highlighted the centrality of mental health issues to the bulk of missing persons incidents involving adults. In their ground-breaking study of missing people's social geography, Parr et al (2015) examine the experiences of those who have gone missing, ostensibly by choice- their in-depth, near ethnographic analyses unveiled complex, underlying issues faced by those who had gone missing and the

vulnerabilities they appeared to face. Their research indicates that going missing persists itself as one of an ever-shrinking set of options to cope with stressors, which raises doubts as to whether the decision to go missing is made with true agency even in cases at the 'intentional' end of Biehal et al's continuum. In conjunction with the ambiguous, uncertain nature of missing persons cases- e.g., that police must verify wellbeing in order to know if someone has gone missing- this returns us to the question of police 'ownership'.

Diluting Responsibility for Missing Persons: Pluralisation; Responsibilization; Privatisation

Returning to the original premise; police appear, then, to take ownership over missing persons even though it creates a range of challenges and ambiguities for them. Various mechanisms and frameworks, e.g.,. JESIP, College of Policing; UK Search and Rescue frameworks, continually give priority to police in all missing persons scenarios. At the same time, there is a drive to exclude some missing persons related activity as being outside the bounds of pertaining to 'deserving' police clients (Charman, 2019) or as falling outside the appropriate policing role (Hayden & Goodship, 2013). It can be argued, therefore, that there is a conflict to at once expand and contract police roles in relation to missing people.

The repeated resistance to shed responsibility for missing persons is of particular note, given the willingness of police to cede responsibility to other actors in other circumstances, particularly those where a net-widening had occurred (Charman, 2018). Most readers will be aware of various ways in which police might relinquish or displace responsibility. Popularised by Shearing and Stenning (1981), and expanded on by many others since, pluralisation examines how a range of police functions have become shared by other institutions of various kinds, leading to a shared, collective approach to control of certain issues. Most well-known, and most relevant for this special issue, is the notion of privatisation, where previously public duties are relinquished wholesale and passed to private entities. Such processes have seen police responsibility for various functions returned to other actors, e.g., monitoring of disorder-based crime to private door staff (see Brands & van Doorn, 2018); the placing of call handling duties to non-police security contractors (see White, 2014); and even the role of police governance to the electorate via police and crime commissioners (see Lister & Rowe, 2015).

The question of pluralisation of police functionality and the use of private or other bodies to fulfil traditional criminal justice functions can be highly controversial. Doing so can not only be criticised for shifting burden from police, but can also lead to inappropriate responsibilization of other actors or even of the public or victims- sometimes with dangerous consequences (Campbell, 2016). At the very least, the reality of pluralisation leads to serious questions about police identity and monopolisation (Marks, Shearing & Wood, 2009). The less criminogenic nature of missing persons, however, arguably gives rise to additional dimensions and considerations that bear examination.

The following sections proposes and examine the argument that police may, in fact, share responsibility for missing persons reasonably extensively, especially when the periphery of missing persons cases are examined. The following sections present the argument that 1) approaches to counting missing people, and 2) to defining missing people, by their nature create gaps which private entities fulfil and which necessitate investigation and intervention by said private parties.

It should be said at this point that this issue of load-shedding and load-sharing with regards to missing persons by no means extends only to private entities- indeed, there are a range of cases to be made for police sharing or passing on functions relating to missing people with various other

entities, e.g., the public; the third sector; etc. These are matters for another time that merit individual study- to promote consistency, this paper focuses on private entities for the most part.

Private Spaces and Private Security- pre-empting missing persons ('pre-missing')

At this point our understanding of missing persons statistics should be revisited. While police may be reluctant to (or, perhaps, prevented from) ceding control of a missing persons case once they take hold of it, in order for them to take action it must first enter into their control in the first place. For a missing persons incident to be entered into the police statistics- and thus for it to enter the police remit- it must first be *reported* (Hedges & Shalev Greene, 2016). There are a range of circumstances in which a person might be missing and not immediately be reported to police, e.g,. worried family members waiting before calling police (Shalev Greene, Clarke, Pakes & Holmes, 2019); people who are briefly missing and not noticed (Finkelhor et al, 1990); those who 'drift' out of contact and become unaccounted for (Biehal et al, 2003); and so on.

Newiss (2011) traces the differences between police reported and non-reported missing people, alluding to an additional 'dark figure' of missing people. While many or even all of these might be of interest to police, the lack of reporting means police never respond to them, or at least only do so retrospectively. The extent of these non-reported cases is potentially huge. Missing People estimate that only around 30% of missing incidents are reported to police (Missing People, 2018). In attempting to establish the scale of child abduction by non-family members, Finkelhor et al (1990) employed several data-gathering methodologies. Their examination of secondary police data appeared to indicate that there were approximately 3200-4600 non-family child abductions each year. To supplement this, Finhelhor conducted phone interviews with parents and caregivers, asking them if they had been targets of abduction. Their findings indicate a stark contrast in numbers where parents had not reported incidents that could have amounted to an abduction or attempted abduction, extrapolating that there were 114,600 such cases each year. Non reports were for various reasons, e.g., no harm done, not realising seriousness until later, etc. In summary, even with these potentially very serious abduction cases, vast numbers of potential missing persons incidents were going unreported and thus unrecorded. Similar parallels can be observed in other more 'traditional' areas of missing persons business, for example, dementia patients who briefly become unaccounted for before returning or being traced by family in advance of being reported to police (Shalev Greene, Pakes & Holmes, 2019) and children who technically become missing from care but return before being reported (Hayden & Goodship, 2013). This appears to indicate that there exist many situations, even quite serious ones, where a person is technically missing but does not quite cross the threshold into being brought to police attention- we can tentatively refer to these cases as 'near misses'. If one accepts this line of reasoning- that one can be missing and yet not under the police remit by virtue of non-reporting- there therefore must be a substantial number of missing persons cases which are not handled by police. This raises the question- who then, is handling them, if anyone at all outside of immediate family or carers?

Given this article's focus on private investigation, with this question in mind we can now turn to the issue of private space, which provides a fairly clear example of a routine 'near miss' case- that of the lost child who becomes separated from a parent. A potential challenge to the police monopoly over the issue of missing people is the proliferation of private space in late modernity. The issues such proliferation of 'mass private property' raises for modern policing have been well documented and extensively theorised, especially by Shearing and Stenning (1981; 1983). These large private spaces- shopping centres; stadiums; theme parks- push out traditional policing as the main agent of social control and, in their place, are regulated by commercial agents and private firms.

While private in ownership and regulation, many such spaces have the appearance of a public venue and enable and encourage public footfall- indeed, they rely on this footfall for commercial survival and actively encourage as many (desirable) bodies to pass through their premises as possible, within tightly controlled paradigms that are strictly enforced, with punishment taking the form of exclusion, removal and restricted access (Shearing & Stenning, 1987). While crime that takes place on these premises can and often will become a police issue, regulation and control of individuals on the premises falls to the private organisation, and is enforced by their employees and in-house security. There is a vested interest in managing and monitoring the location of individuals in these settings. This, of course, creates an overlap with missing persons- if there is a desire to control people in the commercial setting, there is in turn a drive to ensure they are accounted for at all times.

Wakefield (2004; 2008) examines the case of the shopping centre. An increasingly common site in late modernity, such large stores, e.g., shopping centres and chain superstores, have become the de-facto shopping experience for many and indeed are symbolic of late modern consumerism (Warnaby & Medway, 2016). As Lofstrand, Loftus and Loader (2016) point out, in such settings the private security take on the most overt and visible form of security vision, over and above that of traditional police patrols, with Crawford and Lister (2017) highlighting that police presence in such spaces continues to fall due to financial constraint and willingness to pass cost on to the private sector. Surveillance, oversight and regulation of these spaces, therefore, falls to private security (Wakefield, 2004).

Despite the enhanced levels of regulation in these highly fiscal private commercial spaces, people can become unaccounted for. The most acute example, this paper might argue, is that of the lost child. Most of us can recall a situation where a tanoid announcement seeks to reunite a child with a misplaced parent of vice-versa. This phenomenon is almost entirely unresearched, with the incidence, nature and typology of such incidents being largely unexplored. Following a process of ethical approval from the University of Portsmouth, access to missing child logs at a shopping centre in England was granted- over a 5 year period, the centre had on average 63 lost child incidents reported per annum (range 55-84), of which less than 1% result in a call to police. Even these most modest of findings presents crucial questions.

First, let us consider the terms upon which private security are obliged to investigate a missing persons case against that of traditional police. As posited by Crawford (2014) private security, by their nature, do not act in the public interest but in the fiscal interest. This matter draws on various discussions surrounding the role of private security- particularly in a commercial setting- as focusing on 'loss prevention' rather than crime control. This role in preventing financial loss is often used to place private security actors outside the traditional crime control role (Shearing & Stenning, 1983; Joh, 2005; Berndtsson, 2012).   The issue of lost children raises potential challenges to this conception.   In the first instance, this discussion is reminiscent of the preceding debate within traditional policing that, by and large, missing persons investigations are not criminogenic in nature- police are not necessarily exercising their crime control function when investigating such cases, but rather engaging in public protection. While searching for a lost child- and shouldering the cost of the investigation- private security can be said to be fulfilling the same public protection function as police. However, is this the case? Thinking again of loss prevention, on the face of it locating lost children appears to be within the general public interest. However, Joh (2005) clarifies that *loss prevention* gears towards not just loss as a result of crime, and not just economic loss, but loss of efficiency and so on. This could potentially include loss of reputation- the association of a lack of security oversight or presence of serious crime, such as child abduction, can permanently tarnish a venue or company's name. Concluding for now, the basis on which private entities take

responsibility for a missing child is uncertain- it has hallmarks of both public interest as well as loss prevention paradigms, and may sit at a liminal space between.

Second, let us consider that very few cases appear to be reported to police, but *are* coming to the attention of security personnel and, thus, being reported to them instead. Considering the relationship between police and private security, Button (2009) examines the weight of literature which indicates that private security personnel are viewed with suspicion by police (Shearing et al, 1985), government (Button, 2009) and the public (Audit Commission, 1996) as being ineffective or even criminalistic (Button, 2009). Crawford and Lister (2004) found that private security lacked a symbolic presence in relation to crime control when compared to other providers, e.g., police. They were viewed as lacking legitimacy and authority. This would all seem to indicate that security personnel are not to be trusted with serious issues, e.g., a missing child. The fact that such cases are coming to the attention of security seems to refute this. Furhtermore, Cobbina et al (2016) recently demonstrated effects whereby security personnel over-estimate their ability while under-estimating need for ongoing training, lending support to some of the notions that security personnel may introduce gaps to service. On this point, the fact that missing child cases are not just being reported to security personnel but are also being *resolved* by them, indicates they are able to handle these cases with some efficiency.

There is an argument to be made that, within the private space, the role of private security may be elevated and therefore that it is natural reports would come to them. Crawford and Lister (2017) posit that private patrols, potentially including patrols by guards in stores, exist primarily to reassure. Wakefield (2004) who, conducting case studies at shopping centres, noted that members of the public seemed content to bring issues to security personnel. This returns to the issue of the *space* being policed- the private area where value sets change from public-interest to corporate-interest. A tentative argument can be made that being in such spaces leads individuals to accept alternative governance structures and the frameworks that come with these.

Finally, let us consider the incidence of missing persons reports in order to gain a wider view of the extent to which private store security are potentially responsibilised for such 'near-miss' cases. It is very difficult to gain a picture of how many shopping centres there are in the UK- as Pitt and Musa (2009) point out, the size, type and characteristics of locations given thislabel can vary greatly. To take a conservative approach, a recent research report conducted by asset management firm AMAP (2018) identified at least 200 such locations in the UK- using our average size estimate of 70 cases per annum, this extrapolates to at least 14,000 missing child cases being reported to private security rather than police, and which in turn are being resolved by them. This figure is almost certainly a gross under-estimate as it does not account for chains of megastores such as IKEA, larger supermarket spaces, and the range of other similar spaces regulated by private security. Crawford and Lister (2017) also discuss the cost-saving that arrangements with private security can bring in the shopping centre (and similar) contexts. By not having to provide foot-patrols, police save money, although this can come with the objection that private bodies 'pay twice' for security via tax and via employing their own private patrols. Returning to the 14,000 figure as our absolute lowest end estimate, and the lowest cost of a missing persons investigation of £1422, private entities therefore burden at least £19,908,000. Private security, therefore, are playing the role of a sort of buffer, taking responsibility for handling missing persons cases that exist in a pre-official status. In this sense, they are performing a role not unlike police- they are receiving a report and conducting preliminary investigations. Much like a large majority of police-handled cases, the person returns without fanfare. However, this potential role in managing and handling cases goes largely

unrecognised, which is particular interest given that children are almost always conceptualised as vulnerable and of high-risk in a missing persons setting (Tarling & Burrows, 2003).

This similarity of the function played in this regard also leads to a potential by which to examine the relationship between policing and private security personnel, which has routinely been recognised as complex and has been chronicled by a series of researchers as being at once complimentary and antagonistic. Van Steden, van der Wal and Lasthuizen (2015) found that the values of police officers and private security personnel largely overlapped, and yet police looked down upon the security personnel while the security personnel looked up to police. Other perspectives view the priorities of private security and police, or at least their relative perceptions of one another, as being more at odds, with police championing the public interest while private security focus on loss prevention in its various forms. The discussion around police sharing responsibility with private security has also been fraught, presenting a long-standing question around who should provide crime control (Gill, 2012; Garland, 2000). While arguments centre around the notion that the state- and thus, the police- should provide security, the debate appears to acknowledge the inter-connectedness between state and non-state providers and responders (Gill, 2012).

The private security sectors relationship towards missing persons adds a potential new dimension to this dynamic- as Button explains (ABOUT NOT SHARING), issues often arise at the point when police have already taken control of a situation. People who go missing on these commercial places are, predominantly, never entering the realm of policing as a result of never being reported.

Commercial Tracing Services: The not-missing missing

So far, we have considered missing persons cases that have not entered the police remit by virtue of not being reported, e.g., those that have not quite met the (perceived) threshold for urgency and seriousness to be officially reported but merited sufficient concern to have notification raised to security personnel- or indeed, have met such a threshold but have been reported to private bodies *instead* of police. The stake security personnel have in investigating these is unclear, but can be speculated to be out a mixture of moral responsibility, a duty to safeguard those on the premises, and as a form of loss prevention to encourage repeat custom and reduce reputational harm to the represented agency.

We now turn to other conceptualisations of 'missing' that again do not enter the police remit, but for different reasons, and our second small 'tweak' to traditional missing persons paradigms. This time, we will interrogate the *definition* of a missing person and what it means to be missing in different contexts. As police respondents to Shalev Greeen's (in press) survey of missing persons definitions note, being unaccounted for in any way can technically be perceived as that person being missing, even within the official definition used by the College of Policing (CoP, 2016). Taking this view leads to a vast expansion of the already high numbers of missing persons cases- far more than police can hope to handle.

However, as we know, not all people who are briefly unaccounted for or who 'drift' out of contact are actually treated as missing, and do not enter the policing remit (Biehal, Mitchell & Wade, 2003). The reasons for these not entering into the police remit are a potentially complex combination of factors, which appears to come down to the issues of urgency, seriousness and- especially- risk (Tarling & Burrows, 2003). A recent controversy in the policing of missing persons revolves around the definition and categorisation of less serious missing persons cases. In 2013, the National Policing Improvement Agency piloted a new category of case- that of the 'absent' person- to be used instead of the more serious 'missing person' label. In practice, this led to greater ambiguity and uncertainty,

with the new classification effectively being scrapped. Instead, the idea of an 'absent' person is now included within the missing persons remit via the process of risk assessment- previously, there had been three classifications of risk, which were low, medium and high. There is not a fourth, less serious risk classification, known as absent or 'no risk' (See CoP, 2016).

This process of introducing the notion of absenteeism speaks to the complex relationship between police and the issue of missing people. The initial attempt to essentially 'define out' less serious missing persons has hallmarks of load-shedding, with the subsequent re-integration of absent people into missing persons risk classifications seeming to renege on this and reclaim the matter. Nevertheless, the role of risk assessment is to allocate resources- categorisation as an absentee still appears to communicate a similar message, e.g., that this case is not entirely within the policing remit- in particular, it is a communication that the person is not at risk, they present no apparent danger to themselves or others and thus the police should not (or at least, are not obliged to) intrude. This leads to a sub-set of people who are, in a sense, not missing *enough* to engage police services.

Tracing Services: The Fiscal Side of Missing Persons

Within this sub-category of people who are not missing enough, one can still observe efforts to locate individuals who are unaccounted-for by various parties for various reasons. Services to locate such individuals can loosely be described as 'tracing services'. In the charitable sector, examples of these can be seen in the International Tracing and Message Service offered by the Red Cross, and the Family Tracing Service offered by the Salvation Army. These services are usually utilised to re-connect people who have lost touch over a long period, and often include an international element, e.g., separation across countries following conflict, and often with a genealogical bent with families seeking one another (see Edkins, 2011) – this speaks to an entire additional sub-set of people who are unaccounted for but fail to enter into policing remit due to falling below standards to be considered 'vulnerable' or 'at risk'.

Turning again to the private sector, there is arguably yet another sub-category of un-traced, missing people who are of little-to-no interest to police, but of potentially huge interest when a fiscal element is introduced. A range of private companies specialising in tracing, or employing people within their organisations to carry out this function. One example, most closely aligned with the function of finding-out-of-contact family members are so-called 'heir hunters' or 'heir locators', who continue to emphasise the genealogical function of tracing services, albeit in the context of finding the families of the recently deceased who might stand to inherit, and in turn making a commercial enterprise of this by claiming a percentage of said inheritance as payment (Gill & Hart, 1999, p. 245). Despite being fairly widespread according to UK-based financial advice outlet Money Wise (2018), such services rarely seem to feature in academic discussion (e.g., Capper, 1997).

Other private tracing services tend to return to the 'harder edge' of investigation, and, despite not emphasising crime, do emphasise enforcement. A range of private agencies exist whose specialism is to trace debtors and to serve them warnings, arrange payment plans, and, ultimately, to threaten legal action on behalf of client or parent companies (Prenzler, 2001). Private investigators, specialist tracing services, or in-house tracing agents may all serve this function in a similar fashion. Generally, such agents will be acting on behalf of large, powerful institutions such as banks (King & Prenzler, 2003).

Returning to the issue of definitions and risk assessments, the people being traced are, in a sense, missing. To utilise Edkin's (2011) discussion of missing, they are missing from records rather than in

the traditional sense. The missingness of debtors is especially interesting as it overlaps more with the traditional policing role of enforcement- their lack of presence is only notable as they are wanted for some reason, somewhat mirroring the situation where police will attempt to trace suspects to a crime. These types of people would also fit well into Biehal et al's (2003) missing continuum- the family member who had gone out of contact is an easy match for the drifted missing person, while debtors attempting to avoid detection, with their concrete reason to not wish to be found, could be considered as more intentionally missing. One could even argue that, in a way, they have been forced by circumstance, thereby enabling them to situate two ends of the continuum at once.

However, being missing due to money owed- unless a crime is committed, e.g., if it crosses into theft or fraud - falls short of traditional conceptualisations of being at risk and thus requiring any kind of police response. These fiscally driven tracing services potentially add a new dimension to assessing what it means to be missing and how 'risk' works in different contexts. From a traditional policing perspective, if such individuals were to even be considered missing at all, they would fall into the absent category as being unaccounted for and not suitable for a police response- the risk to them and posed by them is minimal. Returning to notions of loss prevention (), in this private commercial sector, however, the need to find the individual is driven by fiscal concern- the individual presents a risk of loss to the corporation, or, in the case of heir hunting, of a potential source of income generation. The harm the individual presents by remaining unaccounted for is a fiscal one- in this sense, there is an argument to be made that one can be 'fiscally missing', e.g., of little interest to traditional police, but of great interest to the corporations who are unable to account for you.

Considering heir hunters and debt tracers together, an alternative paradigm of being missing can be observed- one which the state has little to no interest in, but which entire corporate industries have arisen to control or to leverage. The risk posed by the individual here is not measured in physical or emotional harm to themselves or others as per traditional conceptualisations of risk in a missing persons context, but rather in terms of monetary loss or gain.

Theoretically, there are some potentially concerning implications of these paradigms. This parallel set of 'missing people' are regulated with a great deal of effort, but only become of interest in a capital sense. A regulatory framework, accounting for movements with a high degree of surveillance focus is highly reminiscent of the physical regulation of bodies entering private spaces. The mechanisms and machinery for locating individuals is not unlike those of the state pursuing a criminal warrant- debtors are traced and served with notification, with the weight of power resting squarely with the corporate entity.

Finally, returning to the issue of police ownership, one can consider the reasons police might want to exert authority over this matter. The line between debtor and potential criminal, e.g., fraudster, is potentially narrow, however, as Gannon and Doig (2010) mention, investigation of such activity is costly, so extending police remit to these even more borderline cases would be even moreso. Indeed, Lewis et al (2014) point towards an appetite for further handover of such cases in the form increased use of private courts. Rather, then, might the police prefer for private organisations to bear these extensive costs (Button et al, 2015).

Perhaps this willingness to cede this cost to private organisations is down to whom the harm befalls. Debt is a natural risk to businesses and banks, and one which forms a part of the reality of their operation (Zou & Adams, 2008). Short of clear and concrete interest in a missing debtor being at severe risk or a crime occurring, then, it could be said there is potential incentive to cede this to others. Similarly, turning to heir hunters, one might raise the concern that tracing heirs actively harms the state, or at least, it's coffers- those dying investigate will have their estate fall to the

Crown. It seems highly unlikely that police actively choose to ignore reconnection of families and heirs for this reason, but nevertheless demonstrates that by following fiscal considerations, alternative conceptions of obligation can be recognised.

Discussion and Conclusions:

This discursive paper has attempted to examine the topic of missing persons in a new light by making very small changes in the angle from which to topic is generally approached. Extremely light touches to considering official definitions of missingness and of risk, and accounting for the existing paradigms and mechanisms that already exist to deal with cases that fall within these slightly extended parameters, has enabled discussion of relationships and dynamics that have not, so far as this author is aware, been considered. The smallest tweaks to established viewpoints has enabled an almost entirely different avenue for exploration to be made. From the above discussion, a number of modest conclusions can be drawn.

The paper indicates that examination of the periphery of the policing remit is a potentially rich area for examining how private entities interact with and potentially reconfigure missing persons paradigms. Even this brief discussion has enabled consideration to be made of the role played by private store security, the interface between private spaces and being missing, and raises questions about who bares costs for not just the policing of missing persons, but potentially also the *prevention* of what could tentatively be described as 'pre-missing' or 'near-miss' cases.

The scale at which private entities deal with missing persons incidents, and perhaps even more interestingly, with their precursor incidents, calls for further research. This is very much in alignment with scholarship around loss prevention and debt recover itself, which has spent a great deal of effort simply asking how big of a problem this issue is. Similarly, this brief discussion also aligns with fraud literature, which again is largely occupied with ascertaining the scale of the issue, and indeed indicates that there may be some overlap between fiscally missing debtors and fraud, especially when one, again, looks at the periphery of what we currently conceptualise as being 'missing.

In this regard, the paper greatly supports the suggestions made by Sarkin (2018) and by Taylor, Woolnough and Dickens, (2018) that a reflexive, inclusive account of what it means to be missing should be taken. Taylor, Woolnough and Dickens (2018) note that failure to reflect core elements of what it means to be 'missing' into considerations can lead to wildly different analyses while ostensibly discussing the same subject matter. This concern appears to be well founded- the extremely light shifts explored in this paper meant that wildly different paradigms could be explored. Discussion of the missing persons topic without due consideration can lead to inappropriately wide discussions being reflected all at once. At the same time, Sarkin (2018) calls for inclusivity in thinking about what it means to be missing, noting that failure to take a wider view can lead to the exclusion of groups who are should rightfully be considered in missing persons discussions- this paper seems to support this as well, as it has been possible to highlight groups who are missing when a non-policing perspective is employed. Together, a conclusion can be drawn that considerations of what a missing person can be and should be creative, but at the same time must be conducted with caution to ensure conceptually distinct types of missing person are not conflated.

While not the main focus of this paper, the discussion also leads to questions around the extent to which police role in relation to missing persons relates to core arguments around freedom, self-determinism and state intervention. The continual dilemma police in the UK face in the perpetual widening and retracting of the 'net' over this topic alludes to a fine balance between state control over people's lives on one hand, and a duty to protect and safeguard citizens on the other, all while

attempting to clarify whether police primary functions relate to crime control or to wider safety. Only recently, the inability of Canadian police (see CBC, 2019) to investigate missing persons cases without a clear criminal missing persons cases meant they were, in effect, powerless to deal with a raft of high risk and long term cases, which only further begs the question as to who, if anyone, was stepping in to fill this void.

Further research and examination is required for several of the issues encountered. The prevalence and nature of people missing in private spaces, particularly before they are reported to police, is necessary- it will be especially useful to understand how security providers understand the issues emanating from these situations. Examination of other private actors with a stake in missing persons investigation can be interrogated- there was not space, for instance, to consider the encroachment of private providers of Search and Rescue technologies to be examined. The ways in which police share, shed or otherwise withdraw from missing persons investigations to sectors besides the private sector should be examined more thoroughly. Finally for now, and perhaps most significantly, the parameters within which missing persons exists, especially within the institutional definitions utilised within the UK, should continue to be stretched and explored.

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