'Everyone was questioning everything': Understanding the derailing impact of undercover policing on the lives of UK environmentalists.

Between 1968 and 2011, over 150 undercover police officers (spycops) covertly infiltrated more than 1000 political groups in the UK, a large majority of which are believed to have been left leaning (Woodman, 2018; Evans, 2018b). Undercover officers perpetrated a range of harmful practices including deceiving women into sex (Lewis & Evans, 2013a); fathering children whilst undercover (Evans, 2014); active participation in criminality & acting as agent provocateurs (Apple, 2019); appearing in court under false identities thus contributing to potential miscarriages of justice (Davies, 2013), as well as using the identities of dead children without obtaining consent from families (Evans and Lewis, 2013a). Based on qualitative, biographical interviews with spied-on environmentalists, this article explores the impact of undercover policing on the lives of UK activists. It argues that, in addition to the documented harm and trauma caused by spycops, three further dimensions of impact can be identified. These are ontological uncertainty, whereby activists conceptions of a fixed and stable external reality are fundamentally challenged; derailing, whereby activists were diverted away from environmentalism in a number of different ways both pre and post exposure of spycops, including diversions into anti-state surveillance activism; and finally, resilience, whereby the agency of activists in the face of egregious human rights abuses is evident. The article argues that the concept of derailing can help to conceptualise the chilling effect of state incursions into activism, whilst also accounting for those who maintained their activism following the revelations.

Keywords: undercover policing, covert surveillance, criminalisation of protest, environmental activism, spycops, biographical research

Introduction

Between 1968 and 2011, 150+ undercover police officers (spycops) infiltrated 1000+ political groups in the UK (Evans, 2017). In many cases this intimate state surveillance had a traumatic impact on activists, especially in cases where undercover officers coerced women into sex (Evans, 2018a). However, the impact spycops had on

environmentalist activism in the UK more broadly is still being dissected (Apple, 2019). The article explores the impact of spycops on the environmentalist movement in the UK through the biographies of activists. Drawing on data generated through qualitative interviews with spied-on activists, this article examines the biographical impact of undercover policing. In doing so it offers an insight into state repression of activism more broadly.

The research identified three key themes. These were ontological uncertainty, whereby activists' perceptions of reality were radically challenged and disrupted by the experience; derailing, whereby activists have been directly or indirectly diverted away from environmental activism; and resilience, whereby activists demonstrated sustained engagement in activism despite spycops. In some cases, this has seen activists maintain a similar level of activism, but their focus now on anti-state surveillance activism. The article begins by contextualising the spycops case. It then explores theoretical and empirical literature in the field, providing a conceptual framework for this research. After briefly reflecting on methodology, the discussion of findings is broken up under the headings of ontological uncertainty, derailing and resilience. To conclude, the article underlines the resilience of activists as a significant but rarely acknowledged dimension of the spycops case. The paper also offers a theoretical contribution to the field, chiefly through the concept of 'derailing'. Derailing provides a useful means of conceptualising spycops' 'chilling effect' on activism that acknowledges activists' agency and resilience in the face of state repression (Loadenthal, 2014; Woodman, 2018b).

Contextualising spycops

Most of what we know about spycops, we owe to the investigative work of victims, activists and journalists, with the state primarily acting as an obstacle to efforts to uncover the truth (Apple, 2019). The spycops case first made headlines in 2011 after

newspapers reported the exposure, by activists[1], of undercover National Public Order Intelligence Unit (NPOIU) officer Mark Kennedy. Kennedy had been infiltrating a variety of leftist groups, in particular environmental groups, since 2003. Following Kennedy's exposure several other undercover officers were identified including Special Demonstration Squad (SDS) officer Bob Lambert (Evans and Lewis, 2013a). During deployments officers engaged in a range of harmful practices, including deceiving targets into sexual relationships. This is believed to have been a tactic employed by 20+ undercover officers, with at least two officers fathering children whilst undercover (Evans, 2014; Campaign Opposing Police Surveillance, 2018). Lambert fathered a child with an activist known as 'Jacqui', who the Metropolitan Police (Met) subsequently paid £425,000 in an out-of-court settlement (Kelly & Casciani, 2014). Other controversial tactics employed by spycops include adopting the identities of dead children without family consent (Evans and Lewis, 2013a), appearing in court under false identities (Davies, 2013), as well as alleged participation in criminality, including criminal damage (Evans and Lewis, 2013a; Evans, 2018a; Apple, 2019). It is estimated that the vast majority of groups that were spied on were left wing, demonstrating the highly politicised nature of state interest in activism (Woodman, 2018a, 2018b; Evans, 2018b).

In 2013 former spycop turned whistle-blower Peter Francis revealed he had been instructed to spy on and attempt to smear the family of Stephen Lawrence, as they campaigned for justice for their murdered son (Evans and Lewis, 2013b). This led to the establishment of the Undercover Policing Inquiry (UCPI) in 2015, by then Home Secretary Teresa May. The UCPI purports to investigate undercover policing of

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[1] Kennedy was initially exposed by activists in 2010, but this only captured significant media interest in 2011.

activism since 1968, but has been criticised for its secrecy, limited scope and slow pace, resulting in what Schlembach (2016: 57) calls a 'legitimacy deficit'. Some activists have fiercely objected to the inquiry Chair Sir John Mitting, based on his background as a judge in the highly secretive investigatory powers tribunal and questionable gender politics (Campaign Opposing Police Surveillance, 2018; (Freedom News, 2017).

In May 2018 core participants, campaigners and their legal teams staged a walkout calling for Mitting to step down on the grounds that he was complicit in an attempted cover up by Police (Evans, 2018d). Lady Doreen Lawrence, a core participant in UCPI, criticised Mitting for 'turning what should be a transparent, accountable and public hearing into an inquiry cloaked in secrecy and anonymity' (Evans, 2018d: np). The perceived inadequacies of the UCPI have led activists to seek alternative routes toward truth and justice. An Investigatory Powers Tribunal (IPT) in which environmentalist Kate Wilson had brought a case against the Met, confirmed that Kennedy's managers knew he had deceived Wilson into sex, and allowed him to continue (Evans, 2018a). This point had been repeatedly denied by the Met, including in an earlier apology to Wilson and other activists (Wilson, 2018). The subject of institutional culpability has been a key point of conflict within and beyond the inquiry, with activists and academics arguing that these abuses are culturally endemic and systemic within police and state, and accusing the inquiry of attempting to renege responsibility, placing blame on individual officers, who have been framed as 'rogue agents' (Woodman, 2018a, 2018b). The spycops case must therefore be viewed in structural, systemic terms, and must avoid reproducing 'rotten apple' explanations of police misconduct, which removes state accountability (Punch, 2003).

Field of Study

This section briefly discusses key theoretical and empirical literature on spycops, and

the criminalisation of protest, in order to situate and contextualise this research in the field of study. There is a growing body of research specifically focussed on the spycops case from various angles, which informs this project, but not all of which is discussed in-depth here (Fitzpatrick, 2016; Loadenthal, 2014; Lubbers, 2015; Schlembach, 2016, 2018; Spalek and O'Rawe, 2014; Woodman, 2018a, 2018b).

Spycops and undercover policing research

The spycops case should be understood through the prism of repression and criminalisation of protest (Tilly, 1978), and must be viewed in its political, social and cultural context. Critical criminologists have long since sought to understand crime, policing and social control in the context of structural relations of power in society and the material conditions of capitalism (Taylor, Walton and Young, 1975; Hall et al, 1978; Scraton, 1987). It is therefore important to understand the spycops case in relation to the longstanding historical use of police, state and private security to disrupt, undermine and repress political opposition in western capitalist liberal democracies and beyond (Choudry, 2019). Many of today's covert and overt policing strategies have their roots in counter-insurgency strategies developed to ward off independence and anti-colonial resistance movements (Choudry, 2019; Bunyan, 1983). Woodman (2018a; 2018b) places spycops units (SDS and NPOIU) firmly within this tradition of political policing designed to suppress dissent.

Choudry (2019) argues that in capitalist liberal democracies terms like 'terrorist' and 'extremist' are deliberately used to criminalise legitimate forms of resistance, and the spycops case offers evidence of this in practice. Schlembach's (2018) research on spycops highlighted the inconsistent and opportunistic use of terms like 'domestic extremist' by police, demonstrating contradictions between police justifications for infiltration, and practice whilst undercover. Drawing on a case study of 2008 protests at

DRAX power station, where activists halted a train carrying 1000 tons of coal, Schlembach (2018) argues that that police aimed not to prevent serious crime, but to prevent disruptive protest, drawing from Neocleous' critical criminological work on policing.

Apple (2019) identifies four principles of political surveillance: intelligence gathering; deterrence; disruption; and protection of government/corporate interests. Covert surveillance can be said to primarily rest on the first principle, but seldom did spycops' 'intelligence gathering' result in prosecution or conviction, posing questions as to the true purpose of these lengthy, costly, invasive deployments (Apple, 2019). We know spycops activities went far beyond intelligence gathering, committing human rights abuses and participating in illegal activities themselves, so it is worthwhile gaining a qualitative understanding of the narrative impact of these incursions.

Adopting a Foucauldian approach, Loadenthal (2014) argues that the use of sexual infiltration by police is indicative of a strategic deployment of surveillance technology by the state, as a means of disrupting target communities and their social networks in order to create inactivity. Discussing the deliberate use of sex as a means of establishing cover, Loadenthal (2014: 34) argues that such practices alter 'the nature of social bonds amongst communities'. By creating an atmosphere of insecurity, police serve to atomise targeted individuals and their social networks, thus limiting potential for further action. Loadenthal argues that the inevitability of exposure is built into the logic of undercover policing, and serves a beneficial purpose after deployments have ended, leaving behind traumatised individuals and severed social bonds. Atomisation of these groups pushes those activists who remain engaged further towards engaging in lower risk individual actions, which can be more easily framed in terms of a 'lone-wolf' terror discourse (Loadenthal, 2014).

Criminalisation of protest and the 'chilling effect'

Zedner's (2007) concept of pre-crime provides a lens through which to understand spycops in the wider context of criminalisation of protest. Zedner's (2007: 262) analysis of the post-1980s shift from 'post-crime' to 'pre-crime' criminal justice strategies identifies increasing police focus on anticipating and preventing 'that which has not yet occurred or may never do so'. Zedner links this to the expansion of surveillance, profiling and the proliferation of new offences (e.g. 'conspiracy' and 'risk creation' offences). As Gilmore (2013: 135) states 'in criminalising behaviour that would previously not have been punishable as a crime, the [post-1980s] reforms provided a much-enhanced discretionary power to the police in public order situations'. Research on public-order policing of anti-fracking activism at Barton Moss demonstrated that police prioritise commercial interests of fracking companies over rights of protestors (Jackson, Gilmore and Monk, 2016: 43). In practice, uniformed police' purported commitment to a human-rights approach to protest facilitation is contingent on the focus and form of political activism, with police distinguishing between what is 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable', and effectively deciding on who has rights on this basis (Jackson, Gilmore and Monk, 2018).

There is evidence to suggest that forms of surveillance, including intimate state-surveillance have had a 'chilling effect' on the right to free assembly, a freedom protected under national and international human rights law (Big Brother Watch, 2018; Ellefsen, 2016; Lovitz, 2010; Potter, 2011). Scholars in the fields of social movement studies and surveillance studies have examined the impact of repression and criminalisation on protest itself. Ellefsen (2016) researched the Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) campaign as case study through which to examine the role of law and criminal justice in the repression of social movements, focusing on forms of

repression occurring after arrest. He argues criminal justice is an important aspect of the process by which repression occurs. Gillham (2011) discusses the increasing use of 'strategic incapacitation' in US protest policing since 9/11. This is accomplished through surveillance and information sharing; pre-emptive arrests and less-lethal weapons to selectively disrupt or incapacitate 'disruptive' protesters in the field; and the control of public space in order to isolate and contain 'disruptive' protesters, all of which can have a chilling effect on participation.

Tarrow (1998) has discussed the significance of protest cycles in understanding peaks and troughs in social movement activism. Any analysis of the impact of spycops on activism more broadly must take the complex relationship between state repression and activism, as well as the natural life cycle of a protest movement into account, and take care not to confuse organic desistance from activism with this 'chilling effect'. This article seeks to build on and bridge some of the above literature, developing a qualitative empirical basis from which to understand the repression of spycops on environmentalists' lives. It does this specifically, by exploring whether or the 'chilling effect' described in the literature can be evidenced in the biographies of activists impacted by spycops. It also adds to empirical academic accounts of this highly specific variety of criminalisation of protest, in particular building on Loadenthal's (2014) work on the 'atomisation' of targets.

Methods

This article is based on data generated through semi-structured qualitative interviews with eight spied-on activists. The sample of eight is small, partly due to this being a difficult to access group. Findings are therefore not generalizable. However, the research hopes to offer a degree of qualitative validity rooted in the experience of the participants, and benefits from the depth of the qualitative data. Research involving

smaller sample sizes is common within the field of biographical sociology (Merrill & West, 2009; Morse, 1994; Steedman, 1986). This project sought in-depth accounts of those who knew spycops, focussing on a small number of participants with a wide variety of relevant experiences to draw from, as opposed to aiming for the generalizability of a larger sample. The project develops a qualitative empirical basis upon which further research might be conducted. Hopke's (2015) research on the global Frackdown protests and Saunders (2012) research on the 2008 British Climate Camp have been conducted using small sample sizes, and represent valuable research in the field of social movement studies. Nevertheless, the small sample size represents a limitation of the project. This is something I reflect on further in the conclusion.

The research rests on an interpretive theoretical framework, and the methods used are rooted in a biographical sociological approach (Roberts, 2002). Biographical research seeks to understand the changing outlooks and experiences of individuals through the prism of their daily lives (Roberts, 2002), and so the research took an explicit interest in the impact of spycops on participants' biographical life narratives. Phoenix and Sparkes (2006: 219) argue that stories are central to the way we understand the world and that storytelling is an 'ontological condition of human life'. As such interview discussions were not strictly limited to the spycops case and at times sought wider context of participants biography, in order to develop life stories within their broader historical, political and social context. Biographical interviews typically lasted ~2 hours. They entailed a deliberate sensitivity towards identifying what Denzin (2001) calls 'turning point' moments in participants' narratives. For Denzin (2001: 145) 'meaningful biographical experience occurs during turning-point interactional episodes. In these existentially problematic moments, human character is revealed and human lives are shaped, sometimes irrevocably'. The methodological approach had advantages

and limitations, which are discussed in more detail in the conclusion section.

The research sought a sample of activists who have (a) engaged in some form of environmental activism and (b) come into contact with spycops. Attempting to conduct interviews within a community of activists who have been subject to intimate state surveillance posed distinct challenges in terms of access. Activists are entirely justified in their suspicion of strangers wielding recording devices, even where they have supposedly authentic credentials. This was an obstacle I encountered previously whilst conducting prior research on veganism and animal advocacy (Stephens Griffin, 2017). When it came to developing this project, these concerns were at the forefront of my approach. I was able to establish access with a small number of activists through gatekeepers, who vouched for me and helped me reach suitable participants. With the help of these gatekeepers, I was able to use a form of opportunistic purposive snowball sampling to build the sample further.

There are obvious ethical concerns when conducting research of this kind, and the duty of care to participants was paramount in my approach. Participants had the purpose of the research explained to them, gave their informed consent to participate, and were informed of their right to withdraw. I also maintained dialogue with participants via email after the interviews, and offered them a chance to feedback on the findings of the research. Participants' names and other identifying details have been changed to protect their anonymity.

Whilst several participants in this study had personal relationships with spycops, none of the participants were themselves directly deceived into sexual and/or romantic relationships. There are a number of reasons for this. Those who were deceived into sex by spycops are an especially vulnerable and difficult to reach group, which made access difficult. From an ethical perspective, I tempered my own efforts to reach out to those

most closely impacted by spycops with a respectfulness to their right not to participate, and with an awareness of the trauma I know many have experienced. I did not want to bother people who have been the centre of much of the media reporting on these issues with repeated requests to participate. Furthermore, methodologically, the specificity of the experience of those who have been deceived into sex by spycops, arguably warrants a specific focus on that precise gendered dynamics of sexual coercion. A similar project focussing on sexual coercion would be a very worthwhile and necessary future project, but that has not been the predominant focus of the discussions I have had owing to the experiences of the sample group.

Data Analysis

The project used thematic analysis in order to identify themes in the interview transcripts. Braun and Clarke (2006) stress the need for clarity over how thematic analysis is conducted in practice, highlighting researchers' tendency to passively claim that themes 'emerged' from the data, thus obscuring the active role researcher's play in the process. Here the thematic analysis followed a 3-step process. First, I re-listened to and transcribed the interviews, making notes and familiarising myself with the data. Second, I systematically produced initial codes relating to the dataset (e.g. activism, family, work, confusion, uncertainty, trust, derailing, bizarre in hindsight), and identified 'turning point' moments within the data. Third, I reviewed and consolidated these codes based on patterns across the data and areas of overlap in order to produce themes (e.g. codes of 'confusion' and 'uncertainty' were consolidated into the theme of 'ontological uncertainty'). Figure 1 is a Venn diagram of the three themes identified, which also serves to acknowledge the overlap between the themes within specific participants narratives.

Findings & Discussion

We know that spycops had a profoundly harmful impact on the lives those who were targeted (Undercover Research Group, 2018; Lewis and Evans, 2013a). These harms have been a central organising principle in the resultant truth and justice campaigns that have emerged following the outing of Mark Kennedy (Campaign Opposing Police Surveillance, 2018). Activists have experienced trauma, damaged abilities to form social relationships, and mental illness as a direct consequence of being spied upon, and this harm is something the Met has acknowledged and as a result has paid damages to victims and undercover officers (Kelly and Casciani, 2014; Finn, 2017). Activists who were deceived into sex have described this as a form of rape or sexual assault (Lewis, Evans and Pollak, 2013), and on-going legal action seeks to determine whether a legal precedent can be established whereby undercover officers can be prosecuted on sexual offence charges (Evans, 2018a). Activists were victims of profoundly significant human rights abuses, for example the 'inhuman and degrading treatment' many experienced, as protected against by Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (Council of Europe, 1950; Lawrence and McDonnell, 2018). Families of dead children whose identities were used without permission have expressed severe distress and upset as a result of this (Hill, Lewis & Evans, 2013). Furthermore, numerous miscarriages of justice are believed to have occurred as a consequence of officers appearing in court under false identities (Ellison and Morgan, 2015; Evans, 2015). From a zemiological perspective, the harm caused in these cases is severe and wide ranging, including physical, emotional, psychological and financial/economic harms (Hillyard and Tombs, 2004).

Acknowledging these documented harms as a starting point, the purpose of this research has been to explore the impact undercover policing had on activist biographies,

and as such asked activists to reflect on the ways in which their own activism was impacted. Discreet dimensions of impact identified through the research have been organised under the headings 'ontological uncertainty', 'derailing' and 'resilience'. Table 1 offers an introductory overview of participants, illustrating both the nature of their relationship with spycops and the nature of their activism at the time of knowing spycops, in order to better contextualise their experiences.

Table 1: Detail on participants

Participant details	Nature of participants relationship with spycop(s) - Closer (E.g. Close Friendships; Affinity Groups; Frequent Contact) - Medium (E.g. Friendships; Semi-regular contact) - Distant (E.g. Acquaintanceships; Occasional and/or in-direct contact)	Nature of participation in environmental activism - Higher risk (E.g. Direct action, rule/law breaking) - Medium risk (E.g. Activism; street demonstrations, stalls) - Lower risk (E.g. Public facing work; public relations; participation in legal system)
James, 40s	Closer	Higher risk
Madeleine, 40s	Closer	Lower, medium & higher risk
Megan, 40s	Medium-distant	Medium & higher risk
Ashley, 50s	Medium	Medium risk
Rachel, 40s	Medium	Medium risk
Stewart,40s	Medium	Higher risk
Carol, 30s	Distant	Higher risk
Eli, 30s	Distant	Higher risk

Ontological uncertainty

Recurrent throughout participants' accounts of the impact of undercover policing were notions of an insecure, crumbling or fractured reality, grouped here under the heading 'ontological uncertainty'. Eli[2] summarised it succinctly when describing the immediate impact of the revelations in his social circles: 'Everyone was questioning everything'. Participants frequently framed the impact of the spycops revelations in terms of how it

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[2] Pseudonyms have been assigned to all participants in the study.

damaged the stability of their 'reality'. For example, the below quote from Megan:

> 'It was completely surreal and it felt like I'd lost… all that connection…
> Everything was a little bit gone and weird and changed… If anything it was just
> very surreal and made me question the whole reality of it… Because you just
> wouldn't really imagine… [that] someone's life in your circles is such a fabrication,
> that's also just really bizarre and really quite hard to get your head round…' –
> Megan.

Eli described the processes he, his partner and many of his closest friends went through
of scrutinising every encounter they had ever had with the newly identified undercover
officers, looking for clues or things that didn't add up, as well as scouring media
reporting of their personal lives:

> 'Emotionally everyone was really upset… especially during the weeks where it
> was coming out in the papers, it was all anyone was talking about. My partner was
> obsessively getting up in the morning and going and getting all of the papers, I
> guess like trying to piece together this like lie that had been spun through their
> friendship groups for the past like god knows how many years… just trying to
> figure out what their reality of that was now' – Eli.

For Eli, the revelations represented a turning point moment in his life, a point at which
conceptions of reality were fundamentally challenged (Denzin, 2001). The resultant
search for a fixed and coherent narrative through media reporting illustrates this.

The notion of 'ontological uncertainty' is further evidenced through specific
events or experiences participants identified as being bizarre with the benefit hindsight.
For example, Madeleine described the absurdity of a situation in which Kennedy was
absolutely central to funding and organising equipment for protest camps at the 2005
G8 summit at Gleneagles, whilst simultaneously sharing information with the police in
order to stop the camps he was funding and organising from being established.

'We had a transport working group for the G8 Summit which Mark was pretty much the only active person really and he hired a fleet of mini buses and bought a load of biodiesel with his own money for that. So, like, all of those mini buses that went round the G8 Summit carrying activists to blockading points were paid for by Mark Kennedy, which is something I've never been able to get my head round… So essentially paid for by the police…. The blockades didn't particularly work because they knew exactly where we were going and all the rest of it, so… It's totally bizarre. It's a really bizarre thing to get your head round and there's a few other things like that… you're just thinking 'What the fuck is going on really?' You know?' – Madeleine.

Discussing events at Drax power station Eli described similar feelings of disbelief that the key instigator and funder of an action could have been working for the state: "Everybody was saying 'but he orchestrated this?' He gave the money… he was like I can pay for the hire of a van, or whatever the people needed at the time, and he was really pushing for it". The situations described by Madeleine and Eli are so bizarre as to be surreal and farcical, whereby the state is paying for a covert police officer to build protest camps/actions, whilst sharing information with other officers, who it is also paying to dismantle these protest camps/actions.

Another participant, Rachel, recounted the intense paranoia she and her family felt following a raid of their home, which they later learned had come as a response to Kennedy's intelligence. These events represented a turning point moment in Rachel's narrative. The raid had taken place whilst her daughter, then thirteen-years-old, was home alone painting Halloween costumes. Rachel described how the police 'dragged [her daughter] outside, barefoot, in her pyjamas, in front of the neighbours whilst they tore the place apart', and coming home to a 'hysterical child' who was traumatised. The raid had an on-going impact on Rachel's sense of personal security.

'We were all knocked a little off balance… One incident really stands out as a measure of how paranoid and uncomfortable we became. Someone donated a

really lovely fox Teddy for a hunt sabs benefit gig. It sat in our living room for less then a day before I began to wonder why it had been given, questioning the motives and background of the person it came from… We couldn't rest and ended up beheading it and pulling all the stuffing out looking for bugs or covert devices. Looking back that was so bizarre but at the time it made perfect sense, even when we had to go out an buy a replacement raffle prize.' – Rachel.

The beheading of a stuffed fox demonstrates the levels of fear and paranoia experienced by those coming to terms with the after effects of being spied upon.

Clowns, drugs & rock 'n' roll

Several participants described specific notably unusual, bizarre or absurd activities of officers whilst undercover. Brevity precludes an in-depth discussion of these but they include a spycops' infiltration of the 'Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army' (CIRCA), an activist group that dressed as clowns and took part in non-violent protest opposing war and globalisation. Eli discussed a spycop apparently selling drugs at a party, and the subsequent bewilderment and consternation this caused after his true identity was revealed. In addition Ashley discussed a spycop playing in a band with fellow activists whilst undercover. With the benefit of hindsight, the notion of undercover officers dressing as clowns, selling drugs, and playing in rock bands challenged what are quite fundamental assumptions about the world in which these activists were living. If these things are possible, what else is possible? Who else could be hostile?

Varieties of impact

Contrary to other participants, James did not feel personally surprised to discover there were spies within the movement. Awareness and sensitivity to state surveillance was arguably high in animal rights in the late 2000s due to a number of high profile cases

brought against Stop Huntington Animal Cruelty (SHAC) activists, which resulted in 13 members of SHAC being jailed for between fifteen months and eleven years on conspiracy to blackmail charges (Weaver, 2010). The legal case against those activists relied heavily on covert recording of conversations between activists and police bugging of activist meetings. As a result of his involvement in animal rights activism, James described being hurt but unsurprised by the news about Kennedy.

> 'I knew there was going to be somebody. It wasn't a case of if, it was a case of who? Which of our friends it was going to be?... My immediate reaction was "oh well, there had to be one, that was the fucker"… so immediate disappointment, but also very aware of the damage it was going to do to…

Being good friends with him and those closest to him, James' role became supporting others through their disbelief and trauma, as well as vouching for the veracity of the claims with those who were unconvinced or sceptical. James had been one of the initial people told by the group who first confronted Kennedy.

> There was a lot of disbelief, there was a lot of saying 'well where is the evidence, it's just this anonymous post on Indymedia, take it down?' And I'm the one who is going, "no I know who put that up, I can verify it's true", using the weight of my own reputation within activism… and my connection to Kennedy and those closest to him… to say "we've got to accept this is true"…

> My experience from speaking to people, and theirs contrasting with my own was there was a huge background difference. Those of us who grew up in conflict with the state, dealt with it much better' – James.

Whilst the experience did not produce uncertainty in James' conceptions of reality, his discussion of the profound shock experienced by others supports is further demonstrative of ontological uncertainty. The next section describes the second substantive impact identified in the research: derailing.

Derailing

The second dominant theme to emerge from the interviews was derailing. The notion of derailing refers to activists being diverted away from their environmentalism due to the actions of spycops whilst undercover, or the subsequent revelations around their infiltrations. It is problematic to try to condense a highly complex picture regarding the impact of spycops on activism. As discussed above, Tarrow (1998) has highlighted the significance of protest cycles whereby activism has a natural ebb and flow. It is therefore important not to ascribe a natural and more organic movement away from activism as being a result of the impact of spycops. In some cases, revelations around intimate state-surveillance coincided with activists' unrelated desire to transition away from activism. Life course changes, career, family, burnout and a wide range of factors can contribute to desistance from activism.

Derailing by spycops is potentially significant as it diverts people away from the environmentalist movement weakening it, and in that sense can be understood within conceptions of the 'chilling effect' on activism (Big Brother Watch, 2018; Lovitz, 2010; Potter, 2011). However, the concept of derailing is used as opposed to the concept of the 'chilling effect', as there have been numerous instances where activists have actually been derailed into other forms of activism.

Derailing functioned in a number of ways discussed below. These diversions include trauma, as discussed by Eli: 'There were definitely a small amount of people that will have been so shaken and so traumatised by the personal attack on their trust with their friends, that they'll have just taken a step away, I've no doubt about that.' But derailing also occurred by arrest, prosecution and the actions of 'agent provocateurs'; through breaking the bonds of trust among activists, and through diminished opportunities for protest. In some cases derailing has diverted activists away from

environmentalism, towards anti-state surveillance activism, strengthening and consolidating resistance against state incursions. This section ends by discussing resilience, arguing that this derailing into anti-state surveillance and the way in which activists adapted to revelations is evidence of the strength & tenacity of activists, pointing to a more hopeful narrative of resistance that can be identified within the spycops case.

Arrest, prosecution & agent provocateurs

An indicative example of the theme of derailing is evidenced in the activists' experiences of being encouraged and facilitated to break the law, potentially leading to their arrest, prosecution and subsequent diversion from activism. There is evidence that spycops deliberately and directly orchestrated situations in which their targets were likely to be arrested. Ashley described the way in which Kennedy had acted as an *agent provocateur* in the course of their friendship, directly leading to their arrest and prosecution. This fits into a long tradition of such tactics by the British state (Bunyan, 1983). In a widely publicised case involving a planned action at Ratcliffe-on-Soar Power Station, 114 activists were arrested as a direct result of Kennedy's actions, including Ashley.

> 'Kennedy was really instrumental in creating a situation where there were loads of people in one place to get arrested, which was interesting… Kennedy was the one who drove out to Ratcliffe to check on the police presence, yeah, and he came back and he said that there were… that the police presence had gone, so on that basis we decided to go ahead with the action. Now, if that's not being an agent provocateur I don't know what is…' - Ashley.

This is further supported in Madeleine's story. She discusses the ways in which she was shielded from the potential damages of Kennedy's provocations due to her public facing

role within activism. Having primarily been involved in press and public relations dimensions within activist organisations, Madeleine was aware people would know her identity. This meant she was less likely to get involved in more radical direct action endeavours despite Kennedy's attempts to get her involved.

> 'I know that Mark [Kennedy] encouraged me, for example, to… Mark said to me before the G8 Summit in Germany, he said "Listen, I've got… I hired a house and I've buried a load of stuff that can do some real damage in the garden. Why don't you come and join me?" And I was like "No, Mark, I'm not doing that. I'm doing media stuff"… But the point is that maybe somebody did go and join him and maybe somebody who was much younger, maybe somebody who was much less experienced... Then what happens to that person?'– Madeleine.

The simultaneous criminalisation of protest by uniformed police at protest sites, coupled with the covert surveillance of activists by police spies who in many cases encouraged them to take part in actions, knowing it would lead to their arrest, acted together in a pincer-like attack to derail activists away from environmentalism and stifle the movement.

Breaking bonds of trust

On an inter-personal level, revelations around undercover policing significantly damaged bonds of trust among activists. As discussed above, Loadenthal (2014) argues that this was deliberate tactic employed by the state, designed to atomise activists. Generally speaking, the data in this project supports Loadenthal's claim that the spycops revelations served to atomise activists, and that this derailed many away from further activism, at least temporarily. Eli reflected on the deep interpersonal impact Kennedy's exposure had on those close to him, and the way in which the impact rippled out from those most closely connected, to the wider community: 'When that news came out, everyone was personally devastated and their trust was completely like destroyed'.

Ashley's account echoed this, reflecting on the impact this interpersonal damage the revelations had on local organising, and atomisation of activists.

> 'I think, in a sense, out of all of the bad stuff that came out of Kennedy, one of the worst things… I mean, if you set aside the individual awfulness of it all, the worst collective thing was how badly it affected the [local] activist community…Really broke it apart… It was a beautiful thing back in the mid to late 2000s. It was amazing what they were managing to sort out [locally]. Really sorted bunch of people… [It] hasn't been anything like it was in the mid 2000s since then' – Ashley.

Carol's account further demonstrated the way that the revelations had impacted trust within her own activist network.

> Even if you meet someone who is really trusted by other people, you've got that in your head 'yeah but has he been fooling them for ages?' or 'is she just a really good manipulator?' and even if it doesn't effect you personally and your trust, the people that you're working with, you suddenly see other people being less trusting and other people that are new saying 'everyone's just paranoid' and you're like 'yeah but they're not, because it has actually happened before'– Carol.

Opportunities for activism

A further derailing impact was how opportunities for activism were diminished. There was a natural cautiousness around organizing in response to the revelations and this was underlined in Ashley's discussion of the way opportunities 'dried up', which coupled with the interpersonal harm done, represented a definite turning point in Ashley's narrative (Denzin, 2001).

> 'Opportunities for activism dried up, actually, back in the old days, it would be quite common for somebody to say "Can we go for a walk without our phones?" and then they'd offer an outline, possibility, "Would you like to be involved?" That used to happen a load, yeah? And it just didn't. It really stopped happening' – Ashley.

These derailing impacts can all be said to support the premise that spycops had a straightforwardly 'chilling effect' on activism. However, a further theme, organised under the heading resilience, demonstrates the agency of activists.

Resilience

A final theme identified in participants' narratives was that of resilience. This was apparent within some of the narratives of derailing, in particular those where activists were derailed away from environmental activism into anti-surveillance activism. There were several instances in which the spycops revelations led to heightened awareness of information security, and strengthened activists understanding of the importance of security practices. This is illustrated in the following quote from Eli.

> 'I think everybody was already practicing in a way like they were being watched…
> so if anything that just sort of made sure everyone did it and knew why they were
> doing it. I don't think people stopped doing activism so much… some people even
> switched their activism to, "okay I'm gonna fight this injustice that's just been
> done to us by the cops"… but yeah, people still always do their activism' –Eli.

This illustrates the resilience shown by activists in the fact of egregious state incursions into their private lives, and their determination to hold the state to account. Similarly, Megan described the way the experience had helped her to better value those people she did trust.

> 'It made me really value the people that I did trust and know well... I think I do
> believe in… people doing their best, trying to organize and trying to do stuff and
> trying to pursue other values and, you know, not just in terms of direct action
> either… Trying to create good things or foster genuine relationships and build
> better communities, fight back also against things that are happening and… you see
> there's always, always a constant stream of inspiring struggles and stories around'
> – Megan.

James discussed how his role developed, and his desire to try and strengthen the movement based on these experiences. Whilst the revelations did derail people away from environmentalism, often this was as a result of them taking up anti-state surveillance activism, and as such represented a turning point moment.

> 'I moved from being involved in general security to just focussing on 'what did we learn from this whole thing around undercover policing?', 'How do we progress?' 'How do we get out of this state of "oh my god what's just happened to us"? On a personal level, this has become our politics. It hasn't dissuaded me from doing political stuff, but it has taken over the space I would be doing other political stuff around climate change and animal rights…' – James.

James account of moving away from environmentalism into anti-state surveillance activism was also echoed to an extent in Madeleine's account, and the assertion that '*this has become our politics*' demonstrates a displaced, as opposed to extinguished struggle. Given the profound harm caused by spycops, these narratives offer evidence of the steadfast determination of these activists and demonstrate that the complex dimensions of impact in the case.

Conclusion

This project sought to examine the spycops case in narrative terms in order to investigate the impact on activism, supplementing other accounts of interpersonal harm (Lewis and Evans, 2013a). The diagram below offers an overview of the way spycops impacted environmentalism in the UK and the ways these impacts overlap and combine.
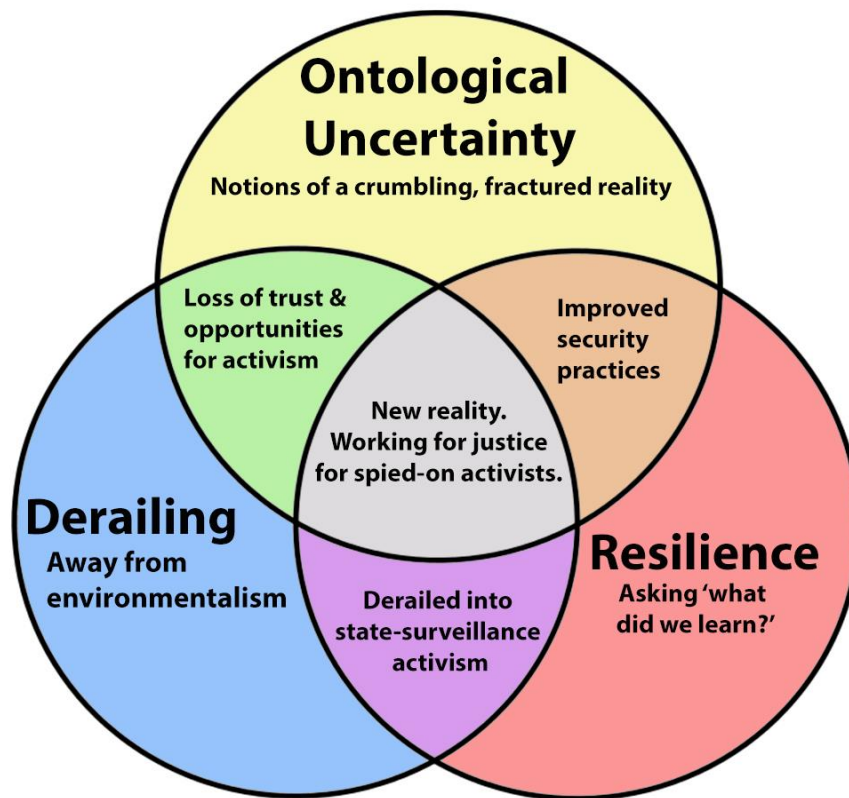
Figure 1: Venn diagram of key themes

The main contribution of this article has been delineating the concept of 'derailing'. This has helped conceptualise the chilling effect of state incursions into activism, whilst also accounting for those whose activism continued following the spycops revelations. Spycops served to 'derail' environmentalists in a number of ways, including derailing prior to exposure through arrest, prosecution and bail conditions, all of which have been highlighted as ways in which non-violent protest is criminalised in the UK (Gilmore, 2013). Post-exposure, some activists experienced ontological uncertainty, whereby their conceptions of reality were fundamentally challenged. In some instances this was traumatising, derailing people out of activism completely. In other cases, activists became less active due to the impact on trust and opportunities for activism.

In outlining and developing the concept of 'derailing', the research has contributed to theoretical literature around the 'chilling effect' of state surveillance discussed above. The research supports Loadenthal's (2014) argument that some activists were 'atomised', however, the concept of derailing acknowledges the complex nature of the impact, and emphasises the resilience of activists. Some activists transitioned away from environmentalism into anti-state surveillance activism, thus opening up opportunities for anti-state surveillance activism for others. The concept of 'derailing' therefore provides a nuanced means of conceptualising state repression and the 'chilling effect' on activism whilst also acknowledging the agency and determination of activists. Activists may have been derailed but not always in ways that saw them desist from activism.

Biographical research of this kind offers strengths in terms of the in-depth, rich data produced, Interviews are flexible enough to allow participants to lead the discussion whilst maintaining focus on the topic, which is appropriate given the interpretive theoretical framework (Stephens Griffin, 2017). However, qualitative research of this kind is not generalizable or necessarily replicable, as it is so attuned to the subjectivity of the participants. Therefore, an interesting avenue for future research would be a large-scale survey of individuals impacted by spycops. This would allow for a broader, quantitative picture of the impact of spycops, and provide a means of empirically substantiating the ideas discussed in this paper and measuring the nature and extent of the derailing discussed above.

The harm endured by activists and much of the derailing they have experienced must be understood as a result of modes of repression employed by the state. In trying to understanding the complexities of the spycops case and its enduring impact, we must never understate the very real trauma and harm experienced by many of those affected.

This study demonstrates the resilience of many activists in the face of such adversity, something that should be acknowledged in discussions surrounding the spycops case and its impact.

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