



What to do if you are being stalked

First edition

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Notes

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WHAT TO DO

IF YOU

ARE BEING

STALKED

by

ANGELINA SOUREN

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Foreword

I dedicate this booklet to Bijan Ebrahimi (RIP) and Lauren McCluskey (RIP) and Shana Grice (RIP) and Molly McLaren (RIP) and Katrina Makunova (RIP) and Alice Ruggles (RIP) and Helen Pearson and way too many others.

These “others” have often needed to relocate across a major distance, some multiple times, after they became the target of a stalker who frequented their shop once or who was a friend of a friend and came along for a joint meal once or who found them on Twitch or YouTube and ordered some merchandise that happened to have a home address on it.

Many have lost their job or their business, some their home.

This booklet is not about me or about who or what I have been dealing with. This book is also not about the gaslighting attempts that I have been exposed to and often running into strangers who had clearly been told by someone that I was badly flawed in some way. It is not about me having felt for years that I couldn’t breathe, that I had no breathing space. Let’s just say that I started exploring the topics of stalking, neurodiversity, personality disorders, inclusivity and otherisation not only out of interest but also out of necessity.

This booklet is for the many others out there who keep saying that they can’t breathe and who are not being heard. It is for the many who have not said this yet but will at some point. Yes, it’s rather ironic that this later also became the theme in violence against black men, but I’d already described it as having a pair of hippos sitting on my chest years before. I talked about tentacles of cling film wrapped around the throat of my life back in a poem I wrote in 2011.

This booklet is also because of the many people who are demonised by the police and by society, instead of supported. I am talking about some of the people who engage in stalking behaviours. Many are merely misunderstood and perceived as stalkers because lay people do not know how to interpret their behaviour. A communication mismatch can cause a lot of anger and frustration on both sides as well as fear.

For a lay person, it is impossible to know whether someone who’s become a little obsessed with you will eventually break into your home and stab you to death or strangle you unless you take action now to

prevent it or whether you are merely dealing with an innocent soul whose communication style does not match yours. You cannot tell this by looking at a person. Many people whose brains tick slightly differently apply a different kind of logic and are highly functional. The things they do and say can be immensely flabbergasting to neurotypicals, but often, their main misfortune is that they're part of a minority. If neurotypicals were a minority, we would be seen as the ones causing problems.

Genuinely dangerous psychopaths are relatively rare, tend to go undetected for a long time and are often perceived as sweet and charming, by contrast.

We need a new way of dealing with stalking and harassment and this should not involve the police. Stalking is mainly a public health issue that often has far-reaching consequences for both the stalkers and the people they obsess over. That idea now suddenly fits well within the growing call to defund and dismantle the police all around the world. I believe that politicians often misinterpret this call. This is not about wanting anarchy and condoning harmful crimes. See it as akin to wanting to abolish the abacus if that makes it clearer. Policing no longer works and does more harm than good nowadays.

Although it is less of an issue in some countries than in others, the global problem with police violence, racism and other forms of inequality perpetuated by the police and the many lives that are lost as a result has highlighted that there is at least a need for reform of the police.

For starters, as others have pointed out as well, you are more likely to be arrested for having stolen a sandwich than after having committed a much more serious crime. You are also far more likely to be tasered or subjected to other forms of police violence if you are not white or are not neurotypical or, hey, are deaf and simply don't notice that a police officer is barking something at you, which you therefore ignore and which subsequently can make you considered potentially dangerous.

"Policing is a threat to public health and human rights" is the title of a paper that was published in the British Medical Journal in December 2020. To be a threat was never the intention of policing. Is this where our taxes should go to? To funding a threat to public health and human rights?

I started following the art and science of policing years ago, though it

was not my main focus. I have a stack of papers on the topic, not newspapers but articles published in professional journals, sitting in a now dusty box. That policing had gotten out of whack and that police officers were not being held to account by society for just about anything they did that was not right got my attention long before the murder of George Floyd took place.

Like most upstanding citizens, I had always had a great deal of faith in as well as respect and admiration for police officers, and also gratitude. I had no negative experiences with police officers until relatively recently.

Even after they stopped being the people to go to, for me, when you are dealing with serious trouble, I took a box of donuts to exhausted and stressed police officers guarding a local shopping centre during the 2011 riots in Britain. They saw me approach with tense anticipation, clearly expecting a complaint or lament from me. The change in the expression on their faces when they realised that all I had for them was donuts told the story of policing better than I can ever paint it in words.

For the sake of police officers, too, we need big changes. I have been living in the English county of Hampshire since the end of 2004. A few years after those 2011 riots, my attention was drawn to the low level of job satisfaction among police officers in Hampshire Police. It was not a temporary thing related to the heavy workload caused by the riots.

My interest in policing was renewed after I encountered an article in a Dutch major newspaper about the relentless and perhaps even sadistic tasering in so-called pain compliance mode of a patient who had already been separated from the general hospital population hence posed no risk of harm to others. The hospital, Amnesty International and many others spoke out, with Amnesty going as far as calling the incident torture. This got me to look into taser use in other countries and what I found was quite disturbing.

So now, strangely enough, a paper that I wrote before the murder of George Floyd took place and that I am incorporating into this booklet fits very well within current views that it is best to dismantle existing police forces and start over. As the police community is highly insular, it would be very hard to reform the police without ending up with the same structural problems.

In this booklet, I talk about drastic steps that you can take that tend to

work very well but will come at a high cost. Rather than help you get out of a stalking situation, I'd like to help you prevent that you ever become stalked.

Please note that I cannot possibly take any responsibility for any decisions anyone makes on the basis of anything I state in this booklet or articles that I mention or for anything that may or may not happen to you or to someone you hold dear.

For starters, I do not know you, dear reader. I do not know your situation and I do not know who might be stalking or harassing you or one of your loved ones. If you're in England, however, you may be able to get my practical and emotional support, someone who brings a little light into the darkness of being stalked. I also have a booklet with practical tips for the self-employed and I can sit down with you and walk through your home to go over things that you can do to improve your sense of security and shield yourself a little better.

Stay well. Stay safe. Stay true to the good and strong person you know that you are, no matter how much bad stuff happens in your life. That said, you do not need to be strong all the time. It's okay to be merely human.

Angelina

1. Stalking (and harassment)

Seen from the powerless target's viewpoint, stalking is when someone who is not part of your household makes living your life impossible. The behaviour that causes this has to take place repeatedly and over a long enough period of time to be able to have that effect on your life. Also, it is (therefore) specifically targeted at YOU.

It can be done through excessive loitering, calling, texting and e-mailing but it doesn't have to.

It can just as easily be done through a pattern of sabotage, and for example concern theft of postal mail as well as hacking of equipment, cyber bullying, e-mail tampering, lock-picking, taking of trophies, destruction of things that you own, and defamation. It can include physical abuse.

So, yes, it includes harassment, which is currently a lesser crime in England and Wales.

At the end of 2022, more than twenty experts and organisations who call themselves the National Stalking Consortium launched a so-called super complaint against the police in England and Wales for how the police forces deal with stalking. In January 2023, that complaint received the official go-ahead.

Did you know that in 2017/2018, the police recorded 10,334 incidents of stalking whereas the Crime Survey for England and Wales estimates that there were over 1,000,000 self-reported victims of stalking each year for roughly the same time period? That's a whopping difference.

A little under half of these cases likely concerned strangers or vague acquaintances. Quite a few of these will have affected the professional activities or businesses of the victims.

In 2017, the police forces in England and Wales had already admitted that they were failing stalking victims by default. Not much change has happened since then.

A lot of this has to do with otherisation of the victims. They are mostly women. Stalking is often perceived as an "anxiety problem" that women suffer from. Is stalking really merely a figment of feeble-minded women's overactive imagination? Of course not.

Stalking, however, is a public health matter and an economic issue, not something that policing can fix. That's part of the reason why the police forces are so ineffective in this area.

I don't like the word "victim", but I don't like the word "target" either and have recently started to use "tamagotchi" instead for any person who is on the receiving end of someone's obsessive thoughts and unwanted actions. I'll use this word from now on because it has the benefit of removing some of the feelings of fear from the topic. I don't want you to feel afraid or threatened. It may make what I write sound slightly ridiculous here and there, but that is on purpose. I do not want to undermine your confidence; I want to empower you.

Speaking of which, if you're under a great deal of physiological stress, you are likely to underestimate danger so keep that in mind. It's a mechanism from the endocrine system to help you stay healthy. So don't beat yourself up for staying as positive as possible no matter what happens because it helps keep inflammation down in your body that often results from being exposed to prolonged severe stress.

What usually happens when anyone files a complaint about stalking and/or harassment is that police officers make an arbitrary assessment of the action needed, if any, and take it from there. Any evidence is often taken at face value. Investigating cases of stalking and harassment is time-consuming and knowledge-intensive. It is very expensive, in other words, and in practice is rarely seen as justifiable, also because it's very hard to prosecute stalking. An attack that lands a human being in hospital qualifies as warranting an investigation.

These days, stalking often involves IT aspects on which the average police officer has no good grasp. I've been in the position that I had a printed traceroute that showed that some of my internet traffic was being diverted, but I didn't take it to the police because I knew it would mean zilch to them.

No IT expertise is at hand and no psychology or psychiatry expertise either. Within one police department, let alone between different police departments, there is no exchange of the type of information that would enable effective risk assessments in cases in which complaints have been made. A quick look at various stalking cases makes that clear enough.

It's happened to me twice that a police officer told me to do as much investigating as I could and then report back to them. If you're in England or Wales and ever need to do that too, then learn the following phrase by heart:

"Subsection 3 of Section 1 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 applies."

When you start to investigate on your own, you may sometimes run into people who accuse you of harassing them. You are, however, allowed to conduct yourself in a way that may be perceived as harassment if you do so for the specific purpose of preventing or stopping crimes. If someone complains to the police about you, the police won't tell you that and a duty solicitor is not likely to do so either. So if you do start to investigate on your own, tell people about it. Tell authorities about it too. Create a record of what you are doing.

The first time when I was advised to do my own investigating by a very up-front and respectful officer, I ran into the problem that credit card companies only want to talk with the police. A second organisation, however, was highly cooperative and gave me a lot of useful information without revealing any confidential details of the person who was pestering me. The second time I did some investigating of my own, other police officers at the same station asked me why on earth I was reporting back to them and an officer from another station rang my doorbell to enquire what I was up to.

Tamagotchis are often abandoned, not only by the police but also by friends and family, including partners. I am aware of one case in which the police advised a woman to relocate to a town to which she had no ties after her (ex) boyfriend had already tried to kill her once and continued to pursue her. Friends and family did not abandon her either. Her entire life got turned upside down.

That stalker did manage to locate her four years or so later, but when he turned up at her address, she was not home and a housemate told him to get lost. By then, his pursuit had lost enough steam and he left her in peace from then on. She is a postdoctoral researcher these days.

The teenage tamagotchi portrayed in the 1993 film "Moment of Truth: Stalking Back", about a stalking case that took place in St Petersburg, Florida, also found that several friends and boyfriends turned their backs on her. That stalking case actually represented a health care gap, not a policing matter. That stalker should have received better support and he should never have been ridiculed as much as he was by everyone else except the girl he adored because she did not make fun of him. Kindness and compassion should not be risk factors; by contrast, otherisation is the behaviour that society needs much less of.

The parents of that tamagotchi (Laurisa Anello) have said that the film depicts their experiences pretty accurately. There is a scene in which the parents and the stalker are sitting in front of a judge and the latter asks – eager to please – "You want me to sign this? Okay." He proceeds to sign

the document and – on the stairs to the court building – happily continues to talk with the people he has just promised to have no further contact with. He had no understanding of what he had just signed or why the Anello family wanted him to stay away. He at times felt wronged by them. He applied a different and often very innocent kind of logic to the situation than most people do.

He was drawn to the tamagotchi in this case because she didn't make fun of him and for that reason, he "loved" her. Many people were upset over the stalking because the guy in question was in his twenties and the object of his "love" was a young teenager.

His own mother has described him as learning-disabled, however. Online, both his mother and the stalker have been called "weird" by people who lived in the same neighbourhood. That – "weird" – is often how autistic people are described, so maybe he was slightly autistic. Autistic people can have trouble understanding how their actions are perceived by others and often use a different kind of logic, but many are able to function at a very high level in society and their autism is often not recognised.

If, in spite of all the existing research and knowledge, societies (communities, cities, states, countries) still let stalking victims down as a rule, the same must also go for stalkers who want to change their behaviour. If stalking victims have nowhere to turn to, stalkers who know that they have a problem and would like support with that will have nowhere to turn to either.

As long as police forces keep failing tamagotchis and no alternatives are available, tamagotchis have to be highly proactive and claw back their freedom for themselves. In view of the obvious healthcare gap out there that means that some people engage in stalking behaviours unwittingly, we must also be compassionate. Anger can be a useful and powerful source of energy, but when it becomes toxic, mustering up empathy and compassion can be the solution for overcoming anger that's a burden.

2. Tamagotchis and their keepers

Most stalkers don't like to be called stalkers. A stalker can get really angry when you call him or her a stalker and call his or her behaviour stalking. It can make the person more determined and feel more justified. However, until you do, the person may not realise at all that he is causing you distress and is very likely breaking the law. Most stalking is done by men to women, remember? So that's how I tend to talk about it.

I on the other hand strongly dislike the word "victim" and I am not very fond of the word "target" either. So I've started using the word "tamagotchi".

Strangers or vague acquaintances who stalk us and who want to control every aspect of our lives may not really care whether we live or die. "When one dies, we can always find another one." That means that we are like tamagotchis to them. How much stuff can a tamagotchi take before it dies? If a tamagotchi dies, you can just get another one or press the reset button. (Tamagotchi = digital pet, a toy)

So-called sadistic or resentful stalkers can keep us as if we are their tamagotchis. They determine everything that happens in our lives. That makes them our keepers, of us women who have been turned into tamagotchis.

Some of these "keepers" are manipulative sadists but others are men who have been otherised and rejected for a long time and became immensely resentful.

Some of them simply have no idea what a relationship is supposed to be like.

They take the word "provider" and start "looking after you". They are the ones who may pick the locks to do the dishes for you. They don't know how to communicate well and how to read cues. They find it very hard to figure out what another person wants and it may not even occur to them that different people want different things.

So some of them start keeping us as if we were pets, at a distance, because that is how they see relationships or because they think it is the only way for them to be in some kind of relationship.

Yet others know that they suck at relationships, that their relationships always fall apart, for example because they have a profound narcissistic personality disorder of which they are aware but which cannot change.

They too can start keeping someone as if she were a pet, at a distance, perhaps as a way of not being condemned to loneliness.

The following stalking typology is more or less what I mean (but there are many different typologies):

Rejected: *Usually targeting ex-intimate partners, this typology of stalker demonstrates a complex mixture of desire for revenge and reconciliation. They feel a sense of loss, combined with anger, jealousy, and sadness in changeable proportions.*

Intimacy seeker: *Usually targeting strangers or acquaintances, half of this group delusional disorders and serious mental illness. Many were morbidly infatuated and some had personality disorder. The purpose of their stalking was to establish a relationship, and many would be enraged at their would-be partner's indifference to their approaches.*

Incompetent suitors: *Usually intellectually limited and/or socially incompetent, and some experienced a sense of entitlement to a partner but no capacity, or willingness to start by establishing some lesser form of social interaction. Often previously stalked others.*

Resentful: *Stalking is usually perpetrated to frighten and distress the victim. Half targeted as a vendetta and half randomly targeted, holding a sense of grievance.*

Predatory: *Usually preparing for a sexual attack, with elements of rehearsal and pleasurable antecedent fantasising. They enjoy the sense of power produced by stalking.*

I took this classification from "What drives men who commit stalking offences and how practitioners can best respond to their needs", doctoral thesis by Rachael C Wheatley (2019). It is based on work published in 1999 by Mullen, Pathé, Purcell and Stuart (not included in the references).

Predatory stalkers are probably the ones most people are most worried about. However, particularly rejected stalkers should be taken very seriously. It's not true that because you were once in a relationship with someone, he won't hurt you, yet that is how the world at large usually seems to think about this. It's not uncommon for police officers to discount victim accounts as soon as they discover that it concerns a former boyfriend or spouse.

Unfortunately, people's intentions are not written on their foreheads.

That's part of the reason why people who don't kill you or physically attack you can still "destroy" you or at least cause a great deal of upheaval.

So-called incompetent suitors are usually of least concern, but can still cause a lot of upset. These are the men I am talking about when I mention "cognitive deficits" or "cognitive differences", rather. (What we mainstream folks consider logical often isn't actually that logical. To people who do apply strict logic, that can be very puzzling. Their misfortune is that they're a minority. Things could easily have been the other way around.)

These are the ones that society owes a debt too, in my view. They should have gotten (better) support.

Two examples are the stalking of Laurisa Anello and the stalking of Tracey Morgan. Tracey Morgan's stalker had progressed into resentful stalking. Both cases resulted in major changes to the legislation.

Laurisa Anello's stalker was younger, but had been badly otherised throughout his life. It's why he became obsessed with Ms Anello. Unlike everyone else, she didn't ridicule him. Such men can feel betrayed and immensely confused when their attention then backfires.

Laurisa Anello's stalker didn't understand why sending a person flowers once is nice (and can still be over the top, but will be accepted if it is only once) and why sending someone flowers repeatedly very quickly becomes annoying and creepy.

3. How you know that you are being stalked

None of us know what stalking is – the worrisome kind that comes from a stranger or vague acquaintance – unless we have dealt with it before or until it is too late and our lives have already fallen apart.

Take sadistic stalking. It's also known as resentful stalking. It tends to come from people we barely know or may not even know at all.

A vague sense of unease, the feeling that things are not adding up about a particular person or strange and unpleasant things starting to happen in your life, those are good indicators, if they occur together.

Nowadays, these unpleasant things can be a mix of real-life happenings such as items left on your doorstep or the feeling that someone has been in your home and digital communications such as strange comments left on your website.

Ignore all the people who say that you are crazy or overreacting. If you know that something is wrong, you are probably right. You can use the old adage “trust, but verify”, also with regard to your impressions in this regard. You will likely find that people who have been stalked themselves are much more likely to take you serious and not dismiss your concerns as silly.

Keep the following in mind too. We all tend to want to believe in the good, the positive, because it is healthier. It helps keep our physiological stress levels down.

When we are under a great deal of physiological stress, we tend to underestimate danger.

This happens for the reason that I mentioned in the previous chapter, namely to keep physiological stress levels down.

In various media, you will read the advice not to respond to stalkers at all as well as the advice to tell a stalker in a clear manner that you are not interested in him or her and want the person to go away. In reality, there is no “one size fits all” communication approach that always works.

Besides, how do you know that that business e-mail from Carol Shipley is actually coming from your stalker, for example? Carol Shipley is a name that I am making up right now, with my apologies to anyone who

goes by that name. You click on that business mail. How can you not? You may even reply and whoever sent you that e-mail may end up bouncing in his chair with joy. A solution for independent professionals, the owners of small businesses as well as YouTubers and other influencers is to outsource all handling of comments, e-mails and incoming phone calls.

With regard to direct contact, some approaches may backfire with some stalkers. Some stalkers read anything they want into anything that you do or don't do. Some stalkers are encouraged if you ignore them or tell them off. Others had no idea that what they were doing was stalking and get a wake-up call when you call them "stalker". They often back off after that.

Stalking is mainly done by men to women, so that is how I talk about stalking in this booklet. It's simply more convenient for me.

Not responding to anything he does can be misinterpreted by him as a lack of protest. Singing a song in your kitchen can be misinterpreted by your stalker as a declaration of love for your stalker. You may not know that he is listening to you through your mobile phone that is on the counter, has placed a listening bug under your kitchen table or has approached your neighbour asking him or her to report any songs you may be singing so that he knows what gifts to give you for your birthday.

Any open sign of compassion usually serves as encouragement, however. This likely has a great deal to do with the level of otherisation in society. We are all after acceptance of who we are.

In a sense, some stalkers are looking for someone who can heal them, re-parent them, regardless of whether they are aware of it or not. Don't kid yourself that you can do this – no matter how strong you are – because particularly sadistic stalkers will isolate you from the rest of the world in any way that they can come up with and they may well literally drive you crazy in the end. Some really love to mess with your mind.

Make sure you maintain a healthy distance. Even if you serve as a surrogate mother to a stalker on one level, on another, you are likely no more than an inanimate toy to him.

If you defend your personal boundaries and stand up for yourself, you will often be made to feel guilty, as if you are abandoning someone who really needs you and as if it is your fault that he is behaving the way he

does. Your main obligation is to yourself, also because it puts you in the best position to look after others. Be loyal to yourself first. Look after yourself first.

What follows first is a description of sadistic stalking. (Recognise anything?) It comes from work done by forensic psychologist Lorraine Sheridan and her co-workers when she was based at the University of Leicester. See for example: Boon, J.C.W. and Sheridan, L. (2001). Stalker typologies: A law enforcement perspective. *Journal of Threat Assessment*, 1, 75-97.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SADISTIC STALKING

– *victim is an obsessive target of the offender, and her life is seen as quarry and prey (incremental orientation)*

– *victim selection criteria is primarily rooted in the victim being:*

(i) *someone worthy of spoiling, i.e. someone who is perceived by the stalker at the commencement as being:*

– *happy*

– *'good'*

– *stable*

– *content*

and (ii) *lacking in the victim's perception any just rationale as to why she was targeted*

– *initial low level acquaintance*

– *apparently benign initially but unlike infatuation harassment the means of intervention tend to have negative orientation designed to disconcert, unnerve, and ergo take power away from the victim*

– *notes left in victim's locked car in order to unsettle target (cf. billet-doux of infatuated harassment)*

– *subtle evidence being left of having been in contact with the victim's personal items e.g. rifled underwear drawer, re-ordering/removal of private papers, cigarette ends left in ash trays, toilet having been used etc.*

- ‘helping’ mend victims car that stalker had previously disabled
- thereafter progressive escalation of control over all aspects (i.e. social, historical, professional, financial, physical) of the victim’s life
- offender gratification is rooted in the desire to extract evidence of the victim’s powerlessness with inverse implications for his power => sadism
- additional implication => self-perpetuating in desire to hone down relentlessly on individual victim(s)
- emotional coldness, deliberateness and psychopathy (cf. the heated nature of ex-partner harassment)
- tended to have a history of stalking behaviour and the controlling of others
- stalker tended to broaden out targets to family and friends in a bid to isolate the victim and further enhance his control
- communications tended to be a blend of loving and threatening (not hate) designed to de-stabilise and confuse the victim
- threats were either overt (“We’re going to die together”) or subtle (delivery of dead roses)
- stalker could be highly dangerous – in particular with psychological violence geared to the controlling of the victim with fear, loss of privacy and the curtailment of her social world
- physical violence was also entirely possible – especially by means which undermine the victim’s confidence in matters normally taken for granted e.g. disabling brake cables, disarming safety equipment, cutting power off
- sexual content of communications was aimed primarily to intimidate through the victim’s humiliation, disgust and general undermining of self-esteem
- the older the offender, the more likely he would have enacted sadistic stalking before and would not be likely to offend after 40 years of age if not engaged in such stalking before
- victim was likely to be re-visited after a seeming hiatus

Case management implications

- should be taken very seriously
- acknowledge from outset that the stalker activity will be very difficult to eradicate
- acknowledge that there is no point whatsoever in appealing to the offender – indeed will exacerbate the problem
- never believe any assurances, alternative versions of events etc. which are given by the offender
- however, record them for use in legal action later
- the victim should be given as much understanding and support as can be made available
- the victim should not be given false or unrealistic assurance or guarantees that s/he will be protected
- the victim should carefully consider relocation. Geographical emphasis being less on distance per se, and more on where the offender is least able to find the victim
- the police should have in mind that the sadistic stalker will be likely to:
 - (i) carefully construct and calculate their activity to simultaneously minimise the risk of intervention by authorities while retaining maximum impact on victim,
 - (ii) be almost impervious to intervention since the overcoming of obstacles provides new (iii) and potent means of demonstrating the victim’s powerlessness (ergo self-perpetuating) and,
 - (iii) if jailed will continue both personally and vicariously with the use of a network.

4. What to do next

Okay, you are being stalked and it worries you. What do you do? You take drastic steps because that is the only thing that really works. You'll pay a price, but you're very likely to regain your full freedom as a result.

You act. You choose to be as proactive as possible.

A sense of unease or fear is a good indication that something really is wrong.

You do not wait to see what will happen. You do not reassure yourself that it will surely fizzle out. You don't tell yourself that you refuse to be driven away. You don't say to yourself that you are surely imagining it and making a mountain out of a molehill. You don't remind yourself that running away is not your style even if that is true.

You bolt.

If you can, plan it, quietly. Plan it on paper, in handwritten notes that you keep with you at all times. Plan it in your mind. Quietly plan to move away, suddenly, unannounced, to a location to which you have no ties so that it will be much harder for your stalker to find you again.

Do tell your loved ones that you're disappearing and why but don't tell them anything else. You don't want to leave them upset and launch a major police search operation. Move to a medium-sized town with good public transport so that you won't have to rely on a car, which would make you traceable. If, as happened to me, someone has a valid, identical copy of your driving licence, that person may be able to track you down if you need to update your driving licence to your new address, so don't do that. If it needs to be renewed soon, do that before you vanish.

Try to use cash as much as you can. It can be useful to build up a small supply of cash before your disappearance. Just before you disappear, get a prepaid credit card for when you need plastic, but arrange that in another town, and use a brand-new e-mail address and a brand-new phone number for it. Keep all evidence of its existence on your person at all times so that your stalker can't find out that you have it.

If you have to leave stuff behind that can easily be replaced, do it. If you have to abandon items that cannot be replaced, abandon them. Shred any paperwork that you can't take with you, including names and

contact data for people you used to know as well as bills. You'd be surprised to hear how all sorts of things can be used to either track you down again and mess with your life in the future.

Try to change as many details of your life as you can. If you used to play tennis, stop playing tennis. Heck, play squash or badminton instead. Change your name, or at least your nickname. Change what you do professionally. Change your appearance. These changes do not need to be dramatic. If you are known for always wearing a hat, stop wearing hats. That kind of thing is what I am talking about. Implement as many of these small changes as you can.

Stop using all your old e-mail addresses, social media and other accounts, such as Amazon. Never log in to them again. Create brand-new ones, but no earlier than at least a month after you've left and only for those services that you feel you really need. Stop by at an HMRC office to explain what happened, if you need to be able to communicate with them, so that they will not send any more postal mail and e-mail to your old address. See if you can find a local credit union rather than a proper bank or pick an online bank. Try to avoid anything that would trip a credit score search as that might alert your stalker about what you are doing and where.

If you go to a small bank or credit union or to HMRC, explain to them that you're fleeing from a violent stalker. Use the word "violent" to impress the seriousness of the situation. Tell them that if possible, they should only communicate with you in person about anything that is important, never over the phone and never by e-mail. Tell them that your stalker can mimic your voice, using simple software, and make calls pretending to be you. (Tell them to google "voice cloning".) Arrange two safety questions with them and make sure that the answers to these questions are anything that your stalker does not know. If your favourite colour is blue and you hate yellow, arrange that you will say that green is your favourite colour, or red. (You can use index cards that you keep in your wallet or in your toiletries case to keep track of this for yourself.) If your first car was a Vauxhall, your second a Fiat, and your most recent one a Skoda, make the answer to the question a Ford or Toyota.

Think about all of this before you bolt. Have solutions ready.

If you can't leave, upgrade your home security. Think high-end locks, and I mean several of them. Rotate them. Change them every few

months or maybe even once a month. No lock is unpickable but being able to pick a lock requires practicing on that type of lock, so if you upgrade, you may buy yourself a month of respite. The more locks you have, the longer it takes for someone to pick them and enter your home. Locks can delay entry long enough to thwart.

Cameras may deter, but only if they are out of reach and have no remote access options. Motion-operated wildlife cameras usually have no remote access.

Use simple magnetic sound alarms in strategic places. Use them when you're out and also when you're in. Below is a photo of a product that Amazon recommends.



Assume that all your electronic equipment has already been hacked into. Whenever you want privacy, take the battery out of your phone. (Sadly, this is no longer possible with many phones.) Do not use wifi, not at home either. Keep your cameras on phones, laptops etc covered unless you are actively using them. You can already achieve that by always keeping them in an earthenware pot.

Change the passwords for your e-mail addresses, Amazon login, eBay login, Depop login, Netflix login and anything else where you have an online account and do this from a friend's or relative's home, preferably in another town. The point is to do this from equipment that has not been hacked into. You may also want to talk to your bank.

Close your curtains in the evening. Have lights go on and off on timers, on all days, so that it is not instantly clear to anyone looking at your home whether someone is in or not and what your daily pattern is (where you are when). Consider doing the same for TV or radio or have a recording of you talking on the phone play or of you coughing. You can

easily make it look and sound as if someone is in when you are in fact out. It can help you create some doubt that can deter someone from breaking into your home when you're out.

My locks got picked for years. In fact, at the end of 2022, I suddenly realised that my locks were already getting picked at my previous address. Looking back, I can pinpoint two specific days in 2010 on which someone picked the locks back then. It was as late as 2015 when I discovered with absolute certainty that my locks were getting picked.

Shred all your outgoing paper and do not recycle anything that has not been shredded. You have no idea what information someone can pull from your trash.

Check the security of all the companies you have accounts with, such as electricity and internet, by having a friend call, pretending to be you. Ask the friend to try to change your address on your account to her address. If she succeeds, you need to switch to a different company, with better security.

Inform employer, colleagues, friends and family so that if someone were to call them, with some story about how he is your ex or a good friend or your doctor or dentist or vet and claims the best of intentions, they won't fall for it. Keep it simple. Make it a business-like statement that informs people rather than arouses fear or accuses them. Ask them to write down the person's contact details but not say anything over the phone. Also make them aware of the existence of voice cloning. If you can record someone's voice, then you can use those voice samples to make phone calls or leave voice mail with someone else's voice.

"It looks like I may have a stalker. He may start calling people with some question that is easy to fall for, to fish for information. So, just to be on the safe side, should someone call about me, can you ask the person's details, write them down and then hang up, please? If the caller is genuine, he will call back. Or I can call the person on the basis of the information he gave you. There probably is no problem at all, but hey, better safe than sorry."

He may be an ex-boyfriend who's decided to stalk you or someone you do not even know but who became obsessed with you on the basis of your social media activity. You do not want anyone to reveal information about you. Telling people not to give out any information over the phone

– even if nobody ends up calling – is better than having them accidentally reveal information and then later beat themselves up about it. You don't want this guy sitting next to you in the waiting room at your dentist or at the vet's or tap on your shoulder while you're at a restaurant having dinner with your sister.

5. When to contact the police

The official advice is always to contact the police and to gather as much evidence as you can.

If you want to drive yourself crazy and/or want to end up feeling even more powerless than you already are, sure, go ahead and do both.

You can easily end up with hundreds of pages after you have only gone through a short period of what's happened after your stalking began. The sheer amount of paperwork you are dealing with can be overwhelming and often only emphasises your powerlessness.

Anyway, what can you do with that mountain of evidence?

I once kept something in a freezer for a while, because of this instruction to keep all evidence, until I decided that I was not going to take it to the police after all. That turned out to be a wise decision. Because a police officer later informed me that he was not accepting any evidence that couldn't be scanned into a computer because "it would only get lost".

Police officers usually won't be able to do a thing until after you have been physically attacked. Attacked pretty seriously, that is. Even worse is that most police officers will dismiss your concerns as silly anyway. Many will assume that it concerns a simple (former) lovers' spat.

If you do report your experiences to the police, your stalker may well find out about it. Chances are that your stalker will not only be enraged that you ratted on him and will likely retaliate. He – it is usually men who do this to women, yes – will also feel empowered by the fact that the police won't do a thing.

Congratulations, you have just made things a lot worse for yourself.

There is more... Your stalker may have friends among the local police officers who he successfully fools. He might even be a (former) police officer. Here in England, the police forces have far too many rogue officers who pester, rape and hit women.

You may also find that police officers become annoyed with you and start harassing you too.

The only time when it makes sense to contact the police is if you really believe that you are in lethal danger and can't get away fast enough.

Warning: It gets extreme now because you need to be focused purely on your safety. Do not go to the police and mention the word stalking or anything like that. Do something that will make the police see you as a threat and force the police to take you into custody or at least take you to a police station. This does risk abuse from officers, true, but you will be able to assess who is a greater danger to you, who is more likely to kill you, the police or your stalker. Create a scene at a book store. Knock over a display, start throwing books, whatever. Yes, that is bad, but whether you end up in a police cell or in a room at a psychiatric hospital, your stalker will be less likely to get to you there.

Again, I am well aware that this sounds quite extreme, but you need to work with the reality that you are facing, not with a wishful-thinking scenario. If police officers can only take action after you have been seriously wounded or killed and are likely to dismiss you if you tell them that you are being stalked and think you're in danger, then you have to do something to force them to protect you if urgent physical protection is what you need, before that happens. Before you end up seriously injured or dead.

Don't bother completing a stalking risk assessment such as the 2009 VS-DASH if you only do it to hand it in to your local police. Most often, they won't care. You may want to complete one to assess your risk, though.

There is another reason for not going to the police to report concerns about stalking. If (when) they dismiss your concerns, they may decide to fine you for having wasted police time.

When they leave you struggling on your own, you will often have no choice but try to negotiate a workable situation with your stalker and do your best to keep whoever is pestering you in a positive mood. You will need to find a way to make your life work, after all, keep it liveable.

One way is to relocate to Timbuktu overnight, as I have already mentioned, yes, but not everyone can do that instantly. So another way is trying to find out who you are dealing with and what he wants from you, so that you can hopefully limit the damage being done to your life. This is something that a lot of people will want to do, because it is a natural thing to want to do. The police and possibly also later the prosecutor will usually hold that against you if you have reported your concerns. It could also weaken the case if your stalker were to be

prosecuted. It's often a Catch-22.

As goes for the rest of this book, I take no responsibility for any decisions you make on the basis of anything I have written here. For starters, I do not know you. I do not know your situation and I do not know anyone who might be stalking or harassing you or a loved one.

6. What others can do

Something very important that you can do is listen to any woman who tells you that she believes she is being stalked or who talks to you about some crazy experiences she is having that she doesn't know what to make of.

A lot of people walk away at that point and abandon the tamagotchi. Some husbands do that too. While stalking happens to many of us, it still only happens to a relative minority of people. This means that it is hard for many people to feel empathy for tamagotchis. The reason for that lies in the fact that it's metabolically disadvantageous for the brain to feel empathy for people and situations that seem very alien.

I daresay that a great deal of the psychological damage that can result from being stalked is caused by the many people who let tamagotchis down.

If you are in any position to help, for example, by letting the tamagotchi stay in your holiday cottage in France for a while, offer that help. Don't make an offer of help to anyone who is being stalked only to withdraw it at the last minute, though. It is an extremely low and cruel thing to do.

I don't know why people sometimes do that, why some people offer and pledge help and then withdraw it at the last minute. One time, when I was about to go to Sweden for two months (geological fieldwork), I had arranged that a friend who lived a few streets away from me in Amsterdam would look after my cat. The day before I was about to leave, she called me and said that she had changed her mind because she was worried that my very sweet and well-behaved cat might scratch her furniture. Fortunately, it just so happened that a friend of one of my sisters, who both were 200 kilometres away, was in a nearby town and was able to swing by to collect my cat and take it to one of my sisters.

People also do that kind of thing to tamagotchis. Maybe they have concerns about the danger the stalker poses or maybe they secretly seriously doubt the mental health of the tamagotchi and think that she's making it all up. Whatever the reason, please don't do this. Do not ever do this kind of thing to someone. Do not offer a way out only to withdraw your offer at the very last minute, when the tamagotchi takes you up on it and decides to rely on you.

Also, give the person space! Do not victimise and the person any further.

Don't tell her that she is overreacting, for example, or otherwise suggest that something is wrong with her. That is gaslighting and it's despicable. It means that you are effectively taking over the role of the stalker. (This also applies for victims of narcissistic domestic abuse.)

It is not true that only celebrities get stalked. It's not true that only young women get stalked. It's not true that the victim must have done something to deserve it. Anyone can get stalked. A victim may have passed a man on the pavement or talked with a shop employee and unwittingly reminded the man of his mother or his first girlfriend.

Also, don't throw your compassion overboard for stalkers just because stalkers can do a lot of damage to a woman's life. Obsessive sadistic stalkers clearly can't help what they are doing. Their lives are ruined, too, by the stalking. They may simply see a reality that is not shared by the world at large and they may consistently adjust their explanations – also to other people – to make “reality” fit their view of it.

This is why these stalkers can be very convincing when they talk with, for example, police officers. It's because they are convinced that what they are saying is true. Tamagotchis, on the other hand, sound insecure and crazy. They're often all over the place and don't know what to think. They may have no idea what it is that they're dealing with, let alone what to do about it.

The way we humans tick, the way our brains work, anyone who challenges someone else's firm beliefs will – certainly initially – be experienced as unpleasant and possibly even threatening. That too is simply how our brains work. Neuroscience.

Finally – and this is very important – if you are being contacted by someone about the victim, whether you are actively helping the victim or not, you must assume that it is the stalker. It does not matter whether the person tells you that he or she is a doctor or a police officer or a good friend, you must assume that it is the stalker. There is free and paid software out there that enables a stalker to change the gender and accent of his voice. It is even easily possible to sample someone else's voice and use it to make yourself sound like that person. It's called “voice-cloning”.

Stalkers are often highly driven and persistent. They can go to extreme lengths. Stalking is their 24/7 occupation. They dedicate as many of

their waking hours as possible to the stalking.

Has it occurred to you that someone may also record someone else's voice during a phone call, then call someone and play bits of these recordings – without using voice-cloning – to make it look like it is the person whose voice has been recorded who is making the call? Phone numbers can probably more easily be faked than e-mail addresses and IP addresses.

7. Verbal self-defence

If you are in danger of being raped, do what you can to convince whoever is threatening to rape you that you are HIV-positive or have some similar contagious serious disease.

This is a tip from a woman who was drugged and abducted into a cult in Canada while temporarily working at a Canadian university as part of a PhD in her home country. She did survive, she did not get raped, she was rescued and she is a full professor now.

If you are being accosted in public, by any male, threaten – or, rather, **ask** – to cut off his dick if he comes any closer. “I have a knife. Want me to cut off your dick?” “Come here, then. Let’s see if you’re still laughing when you’re bleeding from the hole where your dick used to be.” Repeat versions of “I can cut off your dick” a few times. Make sure you convince him that you mean it or at least confuse him enough to make him stay at a safe distance.

The mere idea that you might be a really crazy dangerous woman can be enough to make someone leave you in peace. Chances are that the person will be too embarrassed to report you to the police, but in case he does, focus on saying “do you want me to...” in a friendly voice rather than “I will” or “I am going to”

Extreme? Yes. But it already starts with this being about his life versus yours and it does not get more extreme than that.

8. Hacking and cyber-stalking

Stalking tends to include the digital realm nowadays. Police forces but also many stalking victim advocacy organisations are still firmly stuck in the 20th century in that regard. This is slowly starting to change, but the bottom line is that you have to assume that all your equipment has been hacked and that there is nothing you can do about it.

If you can, restrict all your communications to real-life contacts and video calls only. If you have any doubt about the authenticity of a video call, ask the person to turn around instantly. If he or she cannot do that, or takes too long, you may be talking to pre-recorded or deep-fake video.

The many things that we all thought we could rely on, those you can no longer depend on. I, for example, used to think that I could rely on knowing people's voices, but I learned the hard way that I was wrong about that. It's one of the downsides of the rapid technological developments.

Within the context of stalking, you must also assume that "hacking" means that someone has full control over everything you do on your tablet(s), phone(s), computer(s) and/or laptop(s). Do not rule out that he has also hacked into your friends', relatives' or partner's equipment. It's not a matter of changing your Facebook password or blocking someone.

I have one tip for you that you can use if you have the feeling that someone is messing with you on your screen, in a DM, your phone, e-mail, whatever. If you are being stalked, try this. Type:

"Hi, this is PCSO 1646212. I am assisting [your name]. Who are you?"

But only this, no more! You cannot impersonate a police officer but you can make it sound like you are one.

Unless your stalker literally has eyes and ears on you, he has no way of knowing whether a police officer is there with you or not, sitting by your side to support you. The collar number is bullshit that I made up, so you aren't actually impersonating a police officer. I have no idea what PCSO stands for. (You?) You can turn it into PCBO or PCFO or PCTO if you want. You are not impersonating a police officer but desperately making up shit in the hope to get your stalker off your back and your life back.

Did you know that Apple Air Tags can be used to track you? Someone

can drop them into your bag or into the lining of your coat or stick them onto your car. There is a video on YouTube in which a police officer tells you how to deal with that. Toronto Police Service 22 Division on Apple Air Tags: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfXyRUwvQ8Q>

Bugs that have been placed in your home can be hard to spot, certainly if you look for them when they are not transmitting data: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/women-spy-cameras-hidden-public-places-peeping-toms-a8689626.html>

9. Keep smiling

Particularly if you are being stalked anonymously, your overwhelming powerlessness – not even being able to yell at whoever is making your life hell – will cause you to act out at times.

Me, I have sometimes found myself yelling at strangers, such as the driver of a car that cut me off when I crossed a side street. I was not yelling at that driver. And I knew it. So did he.

Do anything that makes you feel good and combats your sense of powerlessness. It does not matter whether it is fixing a door, rehabbing a pigeon, helping someone cross a busy street, cheering when two women win a historically highly significant Nobel Prize in Chemistry or soaking in a bathtub.

Stay grounded.

Fixing things and helping others are examples of activities that do a lot towards helping you stay grounded.

This too shall pass, sister.

With regards to the people who have let you down, it can be helpful to know that many of them did that so that they could reassure themselves and tell themselves that something like this will never happen to them.

That said, you have my permission to hit them on the head with a baseball bat... Figuratively speaking, of course. That's because on the one hand, the difference between verbal aggression and physical aggression is not a difference in kind but of degree, but on the other hand, you also need to be able to vent and express your anger. Do not suppress it and bottle it up. Acknowledge it, embrace it, do not judge it and then breathe deeply, smile and let it go.

Eat a healthy diet, make sure that you get enough sleep (use white noise such as the sounds of the ocean surf to blot out other noise) and keep fit by exercising. Also, again, take time to relax. Indulge in activities that bring you pleasure and joy can help you manage the stress of being stalked. If possible, create a network of people who will be there for you to support you if the situation escalates. These are people who offer non-judgmental emotional support or practical support such as a place to stay to get some reprieve for a short while. Both are important.

10. A new way forward

The current practice of dealing with cases of stalking and harassment fails both victims and (potential) offenders.

A solution is to establish new, specialised national organisations that deal exclusively with such cases and to encourage as well as enable victims – particularly of sadistic stalking, which seeks to isolate the victims – to assist each other via local self-support groups. These new national organisations should also provide support to (potential) offenders. Existing stalking clinics are of little use even if they provide high-quality services if stalking victims tend to be dismissed as a rule because it means that very few stalkers are ever referred to such a stalking clinic.

The current practice of dealing with cases of stalking and harassment is letting both victims and perpetrators down, while even the past contains important lessons that continue to be ignored. The recent cases of Shana Grice, Bijan Ebrahimi and Molly McLaren in the UK and of Lauren McCluskey in the US are unfortunate illustrations of why the current practice of dealing with serious stalking and harassment behaviours is inadequate and why random police officers should stop having to play a role in mental health assessments of both victims and perpetrators.

Shana, Bijan, Molly and Lauren were all murdered by their stalkers/harassers. Each of these victims had contacted the police.

Shana Grice was subsequently fined for having wasted police time (see for example BBC News, 2017a), in spite of the fact that the man who ended up killing her previously been reported to the police by thirteen other victims (Roberts, 2017). Her stalker had indicated that something was wrong with him and that he might need “to be locked up or something” (Le Duc, 2017).

In a horrible case of discrimination and targeted harassment, the police and others (council staff and neighbours in two neighbourhoods) victimised Bijan Ebrahimi (see for example BBC News, 2017b and Morris, 2017, 2018). Two police officers received custodian sentences after his death. They went to prison.

In the case of Molly McLaren, a police officer may have unwittingly provoked the murder as well have missed the stalker's announcement of that murder (see for example Harrison, 2018 and BBC News, 2018).

In the case of Lauren McCluskey, the required IT expertise was not at hand. The availability of that expertise could have saved her life as it might have led to the timely identification of her stalker as the sender of various spoofed communications (Anderson, 2018).

These four cases alone highlight the main causes of the problem. Random police officers lack the expertise needed to assess such cases, in the areas of mental health and stalking as well as of IT. There is also a lack of operational coordination and communication.

Unfortunately, there have been many more cases. Alice Ruggles was killed by her ex-boyfriend days after she reported him to the police for stalking (Wilford, 2017) and Helen Pearson was stabbed in the face and neck after 125 reports that she made to the police (Bulman, 2017a).

When a stalking victim in the UK goes to the local police station, usually a version of the following happens. The current practice in other countries is likely not very different. The officer at the desk will respond with what comes across as boredom and/or annoyance, certainly when compared against the eager response police officers give when someone claims to have a tip about ongoing money-laundering.

If the victim is persistent, a police officer may tell the victim to be prudent and to try and take a photo of the stalker. If the victim brings

any evidence along, the police officer will take this at face value and assess it without any applicable knowledge. A print of an e-mail, whether genuine or faked, is likely to be accepted. Any evidence that cannot be scanned into the computer is only likely to get lost, according to a police officer at Southampton's central police station. The police officer may also tell the victim to call the police if the victim is being attacked. That is hard to do if the victim's phone has been hacked and the victim may not even be able to make such a call. He or she may also tell the victim frankly that investigating stalking takes up too many resources, particularly when digital technology is involved, but such honesty is still much better than offering the victim false reassurances or giving her the impression that the officer in question is dismissing the victim's report and disbelieving her.

The police officer may advise the victim to go to the police station where the first report was filed, if such an earlier report was filed elsewhere, and state that it is not possible for police officers at the present station to access that information on the computer system. If the victim, for who it may take some time to scrape the travel sum together, finally makes it to the police station in the other town, the officer at that desk may refer the victim back to the police station in the town where the victim just came from.

What can also happen is that a police officer at a main police station advises a stalking victim to do her or his own investigating if the identity of the stalker is not known. If the victim follows up on this, however, it may then prompt officers from another, smaller station in the same town to inquire as to what the victim is doing as those officers appear to have no knowledge of the communications between victim and officers at the desk of the main police station.

In fact, even at the same station as where the advice is given, other

police officers at the same desk may be completely unaware of that advice and of the request to report back to police, causing them to ask the victim why she keeps handing in her reports. This lack of coordination or access to the police's own files was also a problem in for example the cases of Shana Grice and possibly in the case of Katrina Makunova as well.

Doing one's own investigating can pose risks to the victim as 1) the stalker or someone in the stalker's environment may respond with anger and 2) the stalker or someone in the stalker's environment may report the victim for criminal harassment and may leave the victim with a criminal record. The victim is unlikely to be aware of the details of the applicable legislation that do allow a victim to carry out such activities (at least in England and Wales). A duty solicitor may well choose to disregard the applicable details of the law that allow the victim to engage in a behaviour for the sake of stopping or detecting crime (at least in England and Wales) for the sake of his or her time management.

In the interactions between victims and police officers, police officers may come across as considering themselves experts in the areas of IT, mental health and stalking techniques as well as stalkers' motives. In reality, most police officers have no more knowledge of these areas than a typical industrious takeaway owner without website or the average homeless drug addict. Police officers also tend to assume that stalkers always contact their victims under their own names.

In reality, some stalkers may even deliberately hand police officers proof of their activities, safe in the knowledge that the police officers will not even recognise it as such. In the UK, particularly the work of Sheridan and co-workers (e.g., Boon and Sheridan, 2001) should be well known among police officers, yet does not appear to be at all.

I can set up an e-mail account under someone else's name, send myself

a horrible e-mail, print it, take it to a police station and it is likely to be accepted as evidence of someone else having sent me a horrible e-mail.

In some cases, police officers decide to target the victim after he or she contacted the police, perhaps because they are of the opinion that the victim's age or physique makes it unlikely that he or she is being stalked and suspect that the opposite is the case and/or blindly accuse the victim of lying. This happened in, for example, the case of Shana Grice.

In summary, going to the police tends to victimise victims of stalking further.

Firstly, because the victims feel not heard and secondly, because when a stalker becomes aware of the fact that the victim has contacted the police, the stalker may become enraged as a result and subsequently feel empowered upon the discovery that the police is not responding to the victim's complaints. In some cases, stalkers even have friends among police officers.

Thus, victims of severe forms of stalking may struggle for years (sometimes only to be vilified by police officers when victims desperately try to make their lives work in spite of being stalked and, for example, make attempts to remedy the situation) or be murdered by their stalkers shortly after.

At the moment, the best advice to victims of stalking and harassment, in my opinion, is to refrain from contacting the police at all in any cases of stalking and harassment, but instead to relocate across a great distance immediately and start living under an assumed name.

Unfortunately, none of us know how stalking begins if we have never been stalked before. It is neither logical nor feasible to expect everyone to be a possible stalker.

A “joint report by the Inspectorate of Constabulary and the CPS released in July 2018 looked at 112 cases of stalking in England and Wales and found that not one of them had been dealt with properly” (Ditum, 2018; HMIC, 2017). One could consider this too an example of policing being “a threat to public health and human rights” (Deivanayagam et al., 2020).

Investigating stalking and harassment should not be a standard police matter at all. Instead, I argue for the establishment of independent national organisations, which have teams containing specialised IT professionals, specialised psychologists and psychiatrists as well as experienced specialised investigators.

Ideally, this would have the following advantages:

- Reported cases of stalking can be swiftly and accurately assessed for their risk levels (triage).
- Professional mediation can take place. Some police stations have posters on the wall about organisations that can mediate in cases in which people with certain learning disabilities engage in behaviours that pose no risk but are experienced as so puzzling, worrisome or upsetting by others that those others report them to the police.
- Individuals at risk of committing serious crimes are not ignored, as happened in the case of Shana Grice, but receive the assistance they need.
- It would also take a big load off existing police forces (that is, if they continue to exist) and would diminish the resulting mental fatigue among police officers.
- It would result in a much more effective use of the funds that are currently associated with all reports of stalking and harassment.
- It would save lives, both of victims and of offenders.

These teams might have to acquire the power to add various types of brain scans to the practice of taking DNA and fingerprints (already standard in England and Wales), as individuals who may be more likely to engage in serious stalking behaviours and be incapable of compliance, such as those with a narcissistic personality disorder or with antisocial personality disorder, have structural brain differences (see for example Schulze et al., 2013).

Not only could this help in the assessment of the risk in individual cases and of what might be the best suitable approach, it could also stop potential offenders from becoming actual offenders, as it might enable them to receive timely specialised support. Health care for such brain-related conditions and neurodivergence lags behind considerably on health care for physical conditions that have no consequences for behaviour.

There are obvious ethical issues attached. However, while it may not be possible to support some offenders or potential offenders (perhaps notably those who have these structural brain differences without having experienced abuse), it may be possible to do something for those whose brains developed abnormally as a result of persistent severe early-childhood abuse.

As it is already standard police practice in many jurisdictions to take DNA and fingerprints from possible offenders (including those who are innocent), the step to brain scans may not be as large as it may initially seem. Also, within the medical community, there are calls for including brain scans as a standard component of health checkups.

All of this is also connected with how police officers currently sometimes victimise victims of serious stalking even further. In a way, they hold victims responsible for not knowing how to deal with a stalker and for doing what he or she can in order to make his or her own life as liveable

as possible in the presence of stalking, which I've briefly mentioned before in this booklet. This can include negotiating with a stalker, as this would be a normal behaviour in normal circumstances, or attempting to find out who or what they are dealing with. Police officers sometimes even seem to blame victims for not having recognised that someone was a potential stalker, hence for not having relocated instantly upon having met the person in question, in spite of the fact that this person may have been a stranger who the victim may not even have had any dealings with in person. Finally, the immense stress that stalking victims experience, particularly when they are not heard by police and perhaps in particular when the stalking occurs anonymously, can cause victims to act out, potentially leading to further victimisation by police. Here too, having specialised teams deal with all cases of stalking and harassment could make a major difference.

It might be a good idea to start local groups for stalking victims, in which they can support each other and prevent the isolation as well as ameliorate feelings of vulnerability that are common among stalking victims. While it may in first instance sound regrettable to put some of the onus on victims, the potential benefits for them far outweigh the downsides. The powerlessness experienced by stalking victims could be greatly reduced this way and lead to actual empowerment, with women educating each other on best practices, for example for women who run their own businesses and therefore have to be active and visible online.

Apparently, 1 in 5 women in the UK will get stalked in her lifetime, and 1 in 10 men. Based on data from a Crime Survey for England and Wales in combination with data from a study by Sheridan and co-workers (Boon and Sheridan, 2001), I arrived at a number of up to roughly 45 women being subjected to sadistic stalking in a town like Portsmouth (Hampshire, England), which has a little over 200,000 inhabitants. In

reality, some types of stalking will be more prevalent in areas in which that type of stalking is easier.

According to National Stalking Advocacy Service Paladin, "data from the Crime Survey of England and Wales shows up to 700,000 women are stalked each year (2009-12)". If 12.9% of those cases concern sadistic stalking, as in Sheridan's study, that could include 90,300 victims of sadistic stalking, then. The size of the combined populations of England (53.01 million in 2011) and Wales (approximately 3,063,456 in 2011) was 56,063,456. 700,000 stalked women represent a little over 1% of that total population, but that population also contains minors and men. So let's say that about 0.5% of women are stalked. (This excludes stalking that is 100% cyber stalking.) For this calculation, I assumed that stalking is distributed evenly across the population and geography, which it won't be as some environments make stalking easier to do.

Portsmouth's population in 2010 was 207,100; its working-age population was 145,000. If I take 50% of that as the number of women, I end up with up to about 360 stalked women in Portsmouth alone. If 12.9% of those cases concern sadistic stalking, as in Sheridan's study, then about 45 women in Portsmouth were targeted by sadistic stalkers in 2010/2011.

What this means in practice, is that the numbers of local victims appear to be sufficiently high for local victims' self-support groups to have the potential to make a real difference. For starters, it could help victims break out of the isolation they are often backed into.

Clearly, establishing a new agency that deals exclusively with cases of stalking and harassment would require funds. However, this could likely be simply a matter of reallocating funds that are currently spent by police forces on such cases. The 2017 report (HMIC, 2017) did not include any budget data and I received no response to an e-mail inquiry

I made in 2019. I followed this up with a Freedom of Information request (FOI 2021-27). The HMICFRS responded to me and let me know that they keep no records of funds spent by type of crime or complaint (“we do not hold data on the costs associated with particular groups of offences, such as stalking and harassment”).

As the police forces would be able to function much more efficiently from that point on, working on other types of crimes, and the new agency would undoubtedly be much more effective, the establishment of such an agency also makes sense from a budget perspective (if you do not abolish existing police forces).

Victims of serious stalking and harassment are currently often left in the cold, along with (potential) offenders who require support. Investigations of stalking and harassment should not be a standard police matter, but should become the task of specialised national organisations with teams of specialists in IT, psychology, psychiatry and investigative techniques. This would unburden police forces, should stop some (potential) offenders from becoming offenders or from committing even more serious crimes and prevent that some victims are either murdered or have their lives ripped to shreds. Local support groups in which victims join hands might go a long way toward undoing or preventing some of the damage stalking can do to victims’ lives. Professional support and mediation instead of criminalisation of should be offered to offenders and potential offenders. Brain scans should become standard in medical checkups as well as in stalking and harassment risk assessments to detect brain-based conditions over which the affected individuals have little control but that can affect behaviour, including compliance with laws.

11. What stalkers want

The main thing that all stalkers effectively seem to be after, even the ones who rejoice in messing with their victims’ minds, is full acceptance of what and who they are, without judgement. It is a cry for attention in all cases and it is sometimes a call for help. Stalkers do not necessarily want an understanding of who they are and how they tick because they either don’t expect that to be possible or may not want to be understood at all because that would make them vulnerable. Acceptance and/or acknowledgement, that is what they seem to be after, whether they realise it or not.

In the first version of the white paper in Chapter 9, I was still largely focusing on stalkers who have a narcissistic personality disorder (NPD). While it is easy enough to see NPD as an expression of neurodiversity, I have since started to pay much more attention to what is more traditionally seen as neurodiversity (notably autism) and the different type of logic that can be applied by autistic people and also by people with so-called learning-disabilities.

What I wrote in this chapter continues to hold true. Many or maybe even most stalkers are after acceptance of who they are. That they can have a stubborn disregard for or ignorance of how their behaviours can affect others does not change that.

The great discrepancy between the estimated number of over a million self-reported stalking cases in the same period that the police forced in England and Wales only received 10,334 reports or stalking indicates that there seems to be a big need for support and mediation. That said, many stalkers fade away after a few weeks or months. That too can be part of the reason for the discrepancy.

Being stalked can be very costly, however, in terms of mental and physical health but also financially. A big problem with being stalked is that it isolates you. If you want to learn more about the impact that stalking can have on the victims, or the tamagotchis as I call them, read the article by Suzannah Riggs.

I believe that one of the best ways to handle being stalked and keep yourself mentally and physically well is the use of humour, as much humour as possible. It’s your situation, so you can joke about it any way you want. Nobody can criticize you for it.

Joke about having dementia if you come home and your locks have

gotten picked again and stuff has disappeared or been moved around.

Joking that you have dementia and simply have forgotten that yourself must have moved those things around helps combat that overwhelming feeling of powerlessness.

Another example of a something that you can do? Stand in front of your mirror and pull ridiculous faces. You won't feel like it at all, but you can just do it, like a task, as if you are doing the dishes, even though you don't feel like it at all. It will help, a little or a lot. Every little bit helps.

Humour is not expensive. You do not have to order it from Amazon and you do not need to make an appointment for it. There are no long waiting lists for it and it cannot get lost in the postal mail either.

If your ex keeps calling you, pull a face and joke out loud that George Clooney or Prince Harry is calling you again and begging you again to go out with him. Because it is something that you can DO, it will help for that reason alone already.

You can also talk on the phone as if you are not hearing the other person and pretend that you're talking to Prince Harry. Heck why not? In fact, heck, yes, do it. Do it, because this may help you break your stalker's addiction to the feeling – or to the dulling of the feeling – that he gets from stalking you.

That's right. Stalkers can have the urge to be in contact with someone because of the good feeling it produces in them or because of the bad feeling in them that that the contact makes go away. Think of for example loneliness. Someone who feels excruciatingly lonely suddenly no longer feels lonely when he hears the voice of someone whose phone he has hacked so that he can listen to her over the phone or whose home he has bugged. It's almost like an addiction. Stalkers often get stuck in a particular feeling and that stops them from moving on.

Stalkers may get confused by what they see as mixed messages. There is not much that you can do about that. An example can be that if you don't ask an ex to delete nude photos of you, he can interpret it as a sign that you don't consider his behaviour worrisome enough. "She called me a stalker then didn't treat me like one."

On the other hand, if you do contact him to ask him to remove the nudes from his phone, he may see it as you wanting contact with him and even perhaps wanting intimacy. Besides, how do you know that he's really deleted the photos? Maybe you've now let him know what you feel vulnerable about and what he can manipulate you with or punish you

with.

Here are a few other things that stalkers in treatment have said.

"I knew that she wanted to talk to me even though she acted like she didn't."

"I saw her car parked on the left side of the street instead of the right side of the street. That's a special message to me." This is why social media use can be problematic. Some stalkers will insist in reading special messages into anything you utter. There's nothing you can do about that besides avoiding social media completely.

The above examples are from a 2018 article by Christine Ro in VICE. The following examples are from a scientific article by Jerath, Tompson and Belur (2022).

My behaviour as an adult has always been controlling, manipulative ... Although I am an offender, I have realized that I was also the victim as a child. There were so many things that therapy uncovered that made me think. (O6)

I think I was aware that it would cause distress, but I didn't care. Because I think on a level, in a weird way, I was distressed myself, and I just wanted to get my emotional needs met. I was thinking about it so much, like every day, day in day out, that it was almost like a reprieve to ... Obviously, breaking into someone's house is serious, but that alone was enough to keep me going for a few more weeks; it sort of sustained me, I felt like I got some sort of contact, and I desperately needed contact. (O5)

I struggled to communicate and socialize; I was socially awkward, so there was a bit of a barrier there ... I wanted something more out of it in my mind, and I thought the only way I'm going to get it was to sort of make it happen (by repeatedly contacting and following her). (O5)

It was alright at first because we were mates, but I wanted more and I believed she wanted more ... I thought I loved her because I thought we were meant to be together and all that fairy-tale stuff ... It was just me buying stuff and buying her love. (O3)

I was hoping that we could work it out ... I wanted to be loved, I wanted to be cared for, I wanted to be needed. That was the overall thing, just to be back together and know that it would be the right thing to do. (O4)

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About the author

According to the urban slang dictionary, Angelina Souren is a boss. She goes her own way. She is not into consumerism, is a feminist, and went to university relatively late in life. She is not married, does not have any children, but has certainly done a lot of mothering, particularly as a teenager.

She's been residing in southern England (Hampshire) since the end of 2004. She's previously lived in balmy and blissful Florida as well as in Amsterdam and its environs.

Souren is a highly versatile critical thinker and researcher with a solid background in the earth & life sciences. She recently developed an interest in bioethics sensu lato. She is therefore also an advocate for nonhuman animals as well as for the planet, the habitat that we all share. She's increasingly looking into the effects of otherisation as well as where it comes from.

She is a former board member of the Environmental Chemistry (and Toxicology) Section of the Royal Netherlands Chemical Society and a former associate editor of the international newsletter of the US-based Geochemical Society. She has also been very active in the NIMF foundation, a Dutch network for women in science and technology, which she joined in 1988 when she was working on her Master's degree.

Prior to her scientific endeavours, she was employed in tourism and hospitality in Amsterdam. She graduated with distinction and with an extra diploma for chemical oceanography research as well as two course certificates from the Netherlands School for Journalism. Her parents had little more than a mere primary school education, so by that time, she had already come a long way. She became self-employed in 1997.

She has one long-term good friend who happens to have NPD and for even longer had a friend who is slightly autistic. She had known both women for decades before this dawned on her after she started reading up on neurodiversity and personality disorders. The autistic friend has meanwhile confirmed the autism, but had only recently become aware of it herself. The NPD was mentioned in a different context, by the friend with NPD, causing Angelina to read up on what that was. Angelina initially responded very badly to the realisation that she has a friend with NPD as there is a lot of fear-mongering but very little good education about NPD. She herself is fairly neurotypical.

A few fun facts about her? She flew a small aircraft for a few minutes during a flying lesson that she took before she had even learned how to start a car. She's had blue, pink and turquoise hair a few times. She's also parked her car in a deep ditch while she was carrying out geological fieldwork in Sweden. She had to be towed out by helpful Swedes. Not once but twice.

If you would like to connect with her or check out more recent news articles, head on over to angelinasouren.com.



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