

Victim impact statement

Aoife Barry

Working in online media, I am aware that my work and name is out on the internet for anyone around the world to access. I anticipate that I will sometimes receive criticism or comments that are unwanted. However, I did not anticipate the scale of the contact I received from Brendan Doolin for the bulk of the last decade.

His approach of sending nasty, negative and personal emails to me through my work address was bad enough, but that he went and found my personal email address and also looked at my instagram just added to the sense of anxiety I felt due to his actions.

At first, I put his behaviour down to him being in need of contact with people. But soon it became clear he intended to send me these emails in order to make me feel bad - to elicit an anxious response in me. He wanted me to feel bad about myself - to feel stupid and watched. To know that someone who didn't like me was out there and they weren't afraid to tell me my 'flaws'. Every email showed me that he was out there, a stranger, watching my behaviour online and feeling like he could comment on it. That he believed he had a right to say whatever he thought about me to me, and that I had no recourse to respond to him.

No matter how many times I asked him not to, he did not stop sending those emails until the gardaí got involved. He did not care about what I wanted, or that I did not want to receive his emails. He used multiple email addresses so that if I blocked one address, he could just use a new one. He made me realise that it didn't matter how I felt, all that mattered was that he wanted to email invective after invective to me. It was depressing and dispiriting to see this sort of unwarranted behaviour, which felt very personal and targeted, aimed at me. There was a misogynistic tone to it that was upsetting. To open an email and see a photograph of me that he had found online added another level to his online abuse.

The internet is a place of freedom, but that freedom also enables some people to believe they can do whatever they want, without consequence. While sending emails might be seen as a harmless thing, to receive tens of unwanted, negative, nasty and personal emails from one person over a period of years is a deeply uncomfortable experience.

I have stopped posting identifying details on my social media online because of this, and I have worried at public events that he might turn up. I have wondered about whether he would escalate his contact, or whether he was reading my Twitter account every day and working out my daily actions

All I wanted was for the emails to stop - but because he did not want to stop sending them, despite my pleas, the emails continued. Now that I no longer receive his emails, it has made me realise what an impact they had on me, and I don't think the fear of a similar thing happening again will leave me. It has taught me that sadly there are people out there who believe they can say and do whatever they want, with little thought about the person on the receiving end of their actions. Without the intervention of the gardaí and their stellar work in finding the man behind the 'BOD emails' as we called them, I have no doubt that I and others would still be receiving emails from him.