

I Tried to Get My Name off People-Search Sites. It Was Nearly Impossible. | Consumer Reports

By Mara Hvistendahl

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As a child in the 1980s, I remember staring at my mother's listing in the white pages, which back then was an actual book issued by the phone company and printed on white paper. The entry revealed our phone number, but the address line was blank, and the spot for a first name held only my mother's initial. She was single and working as an immigrant-rights advocate in Minneapolis. Before omitting her address, she'd gotten hate mail. She worried about being targeted by creeps. "I don't want people to think that it's a woman living here alone," she told me.

A generation on, women and vulnerable groups can add online harassment to the threats faced by our mothers and grandmothers. As a journalist I have covered conspiracy theorists, white supremacists, and militant nationalists, and like many women who occupy public positions, I've been the target of vicious social media and email messages. As the reaction to recent Black Lives Matter protests has underscored, the threat faced by women of color is even more acute. And yet, as I discovered when I tried to conceal the details of my life from public view, going unlisted is now a herculean task. In most cases, it doesn't take a police union tweeting your personal information—as happened to Chiara de Blasio, New York City mayor Bill de Blasio's daughter—for it to surface. It's out there in plain view.

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