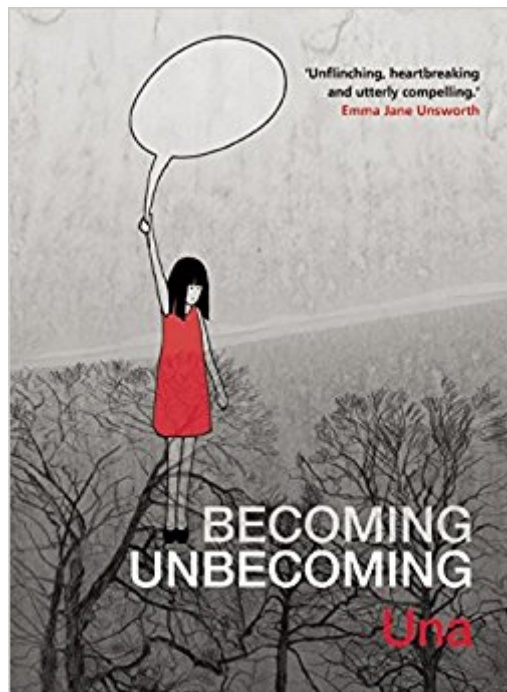


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# Becoming Unbecoming



## Synopsis

This extraordinary graphic novel is a powerful denunciation of sexual violence against women. As seen through the eyes of a twelve-year-old girl named Una, it takes place in northern England in 1977, as the Yorkshire Ripper, a serial killer of prostitutes, is on the loose and creating panic among the townspeople. As the police struggle in their clumsy attempts to find the killer, and the headlines in the local paper become more urgent, a once self-confident Una teaches herself to "lower her gaze" in order to deflect attention from boys. After she is "slut-shamed" at school for having birth control pills, Una herself is the subject of violent acts for which she comes to blame herself. But as the police finally catch up and identify the killer, Una grapples with the patterns of behavior that led her to believe she was to blame. *Becoming Unbecoming* combines various styles, press clippings, photo-based illustrations, and splashes of color to convey Una's sense of confusion and rage, as well as sobering statistics on sexual violence against women. The book is a no-holds-barred indictment of sexual violence against women and the shame and blame of its victims that also celebrates the empowerment of those able to gain control over their selves and their bodies. Una (a pseudonym) is an artist, academic, and comics creator. *Becoming Unbecoming*, which took seven years to create, is her first book. She lives in the United Kingdom.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The first line of dialogue is written on a cloud: 'I am Una.' That simple declaration begins a searing indictment of sexual violence &#133; As a preteen, Una suffered not only sexual abuse but also

blistering shame, which made her believe she was damaged. But Una survived, and her book is a roar on behalf of women all over the world." [Oprah.com](#) ("Best Memoir of the Year") "Una's personal experience is less the center of this story than the springboard for an extended examination of what she calls 'the four horsemen of gender violence -- shame, isolation, disbelief, ridicule.'" [New York Times](#) "A graphic manifesto for female empowerment and a punch to the gut of predatory males ... A powerfully disturbing graphic narrative from an author with a lot to say and plenty of creative chops to say it provocatively." [Kirkus Reviews](#) (starred review) "In Una's simple, spare text and artwork, we get a story about learning how to take ownership over your memories, however painful they might be, and how to gain power by putting brutality into a larger social context and calmly calling your fellow travelers to arms." [Vulture.com](#) "A feminist call to arms ... A graphic memoir on sexual violence against women that everyone should read." [Bustle.com](#) "Among the most powerful books published on misogyny, sexual assault and survival in recent years ... Becoming Unbecoming reads with a visceral, gut-wrenching power that cannot be ignored." [Popmatters.com](#)

Una: Una is an artist, academic and comics creator. Her self-published graphic narratives have explored disability, psychosis, political activism and violence against women and girls. *Becoming Unbecoming* is her first book.

I could go into so much detail about my own experiences as a wide-eyed girl, an impressionable teenager, and a jaded adult woman, and how Una's experiences were so, so different, and yet so, so familiar. If you're wondering how "graphic" this graphic novel might be: it's not. It deals frankly with topics like rape, abuse, and sexual violence, but these are usually depicted by mundane images such as closed doors, hedge rows, or switched-off lights, which for me made them all the more evocative. The main narrative of the book is Una's autobiography, which melds into her experiences as a young teenager against the backdrop of the unfolding case of the Yorkshire Ripper, then becomes an examination of both past and current statistics of sexual violence. The narrative is non-linear and freeform, as it should be: This is Una's personal story, as well as the story of the local phenomenon that took over her community, but it could be the story of so many other women in any other community at any other point in time. The third quarter of the book, largely composed of facts and statistics, doesn't truly integrate into the narrative and became difficult to read. Not because it is boring, but because the lack of narrative means there's nothing to distract the reader from the depressing and infuriating subject matter. I read this book several months ago and so much

of it sticks with me and still makes me angry. One case in point: during the investigation of the Yorkshire Ripper, after the first few incidents the police began characterizing the victims as "loose women" for reasons such as being a prostitute, being divorced, and having a boyfriend of a different race, which led them to dismiss the testimony of one escaped victim, who was a young schoolgirl and therefore seen as "undeserving" of being attacked by the same predator. If there's a problem with this book, it's that it's preaching to the choir. If you've read the description and are thinking you'd like to read this book, chances are you are at least somewhat aware of the ideals hammered into many young girls' heads, and how quickly those ideals are wielded as weapons or barriers once a woman fails to meet them. There is hard information: facts, numbers, transcripts of police reports, that could have the power to open up hearts and minds, but I have 100% confidence that this novel will be ignored and dismissed by those who could learn something really profound from it. But if you've made it to this review page, and made it to the end of this review, go ahead and read this book. It's worth your time.

*Becoming Unbecoming* is a challenging but important read that thoroughly illuminates the culture of violence against women that still exists today. Content warning of violence and sexual assault, as well as light narrative spoilers. Visual metaphors explain how the author has coped with trauma that she has survived and impart an idea of the psychological effects to the reader. Una's personal experiences with sexual violence are backgrounded by the Yorkshire Ripper serial killings of the 1970s in England, which provides context for the lack of serious concern that society has with violence against women. Statistics and a variety of individual accounts of the ongoing violence ground the story and build up the image of a clearly male-centric community that is somehow able to simultaneously make light of the issues with jokes and a police department that follows irrelevant leads in the investigation that allows the killer to remain at large for several years. The novel has overt references to Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* that visually represent how Una feels about the way she is viewed by others at her school. As the description notes above, she analyzes how she is slut-shamed at school and notes the many double standards and Catch 22s that boys and girls her age use and are subjected to when passing such labels around through gossip and direct confrontation. I appreciated the periodic aspects of the story that explain her and other survivors' resiliency and ability to lead fulfilling lives after acknowledging and processing what has happened to them. A core component of her perspective on the Ripper case is the tragic lack of remembrance of the victims and the lives they could have lived if this case had been given proper attention. As the Ripper primarily focused his attacks upon prostitutes, the public had a disgusting lack of empathy for

attacks against working women, and acted like the attacks on non sex workers were uniquely transgressive to Yorkshire and that the killer had broken some kind of code he was supposed to be following. The tragic story of this graphic novel is a powerful argument for increasing understanding of consent, psychological support, and the presence of female voices in our communities.

This is an unusual approach to story telling but still one that I found very engaging and thought provoking. It's a story with more questions than answers, but given how little we walk about these topics that makes perfect sense.

Very interesting

This is an exceptional book. With illustrations that are emotionally moving and beautiful to look at, this is a story that most females will relate to and most males should read. And discuss.

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