

THE COMIC AS
'ALTERNATIVE
JURISDICTION':
SEEKING RECOGNITION AND
HEALING FOR CHILD SEXUAL
ABUSE SURVIVORS.

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MADDIE WILLIAMS
MAI 130 ESSAY



Content Warning:

This essay contains discussion and reference to child sexual abuse and its impacts. As well as illustrated depictions of child sexual abuse.

The Comic as 'Alternative Jurisdiction':

Seeking Recognition and Healing for
Child Sexual Abuse Survivors.



Fig. 0.1. Our Little Secret (Carrington, 2021a:143)

Maddie Williams
MAI 130 Essay

MA Illustration Authorial Practice
Falmouth University

"We suggest that comics offers an **alternative jurisdiction**-or forum of judgment-convened by the graphics artist in book form. In this jurisdiction, sexual violence will be visualised as injury, men will be drawn as both everyday actors and as sexually violent and predatory, and readers will be required to see the violence from the artist's point of view because of the form."

(Gilmore & Marshall, 2019:Chapter3, Section 8)

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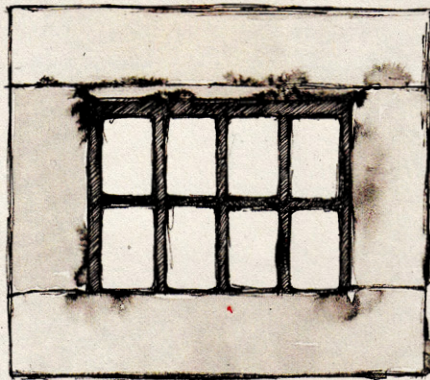
Fig 02 Becoming Unbecoming, (Una, 2015:119)

0. Opening Statements

In this essay I will explore ways comics can become sites for seeking extralegal justice for the injustices of childhood sexual abuse (CSA), both for the authors and their audiences. I am undertaking this enquiry out of personal curiosity. As someone who experienced sexual trauma as a minor I am considering exploring autobiographical comic making as it [REDACTED] relates to CSA experiences within my illustration practice. Through examining the work of authors who have represented their experiences of abuse and justice-seeking through comics I hope to learn more about the processes of healing and comic making.

The Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse (CSA Centre) for England and Wales estimates that at least 15% of girls and 5% of boys are sexually abused before the age of 16. They report █████ the amount of police investigations into CSA allegations that result in a charge or summons is low; a defendant was charged/summonsed in only one in nine cases (Karnsa, 2022). In an earlier report the CSA Centre notes most minors do not tell anyone at the time of the abuse, and many wait til adulthood to disclose. The data suggests █████ far more children experience abuse than is recorded by police or identified by child protection services, these trends are reflected in international studies as well (Karnsa and Kelly, 2021).

*
BOLD



SINCE RECENT REVELATIONS ABOUT THE SCALE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN THE UK, REPORTING LEVELS ARE INCREASING BUT SUCCESSFUL PROSECUTIONS FOR SEXUAL ASSAULTS ARE UP AND DOWN.

COMPARING ACROSS SEX OFFENCES, RAPE OF A FEMALE HAS A LOWER CONVICTION RATE THAN RAPE OF A MALE, AND A LOWER CONVICTION RATE THAN FOR OTHER, NON-SEXUAL CRIMES.

IN 2011 IT WAS ONLY

39%

CONVICTION RATES FOR CHILD SEXUAL OFFENCES ARE NOT EASY TO WORK OUT, DUE TO THE WAY DATA IS RECORDED. IN FACT, BECAUSE OF LOW REPORTING IT'S NOT EASY TO REALLY KNOW MUCH AT ALL.

WHAT DO WE KNOW?¹¹

WE KNOW THAT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IS NOT RARE.
WE KNOW THAT MOST VICTIMS NEVER DISCLOSE AND DON'T REPORT.
WE KNOW THAT MOST ARE ASSAULTED BY SOMEONE THEY KNOW.

IN 2011 NINE THOUSAND, NINE HUNDRED AND NINETEEN DEFENDANTS WERE PROCEEDED AGAINST IN COURT FOR A RANGE OF SEXUAL OFFENCES. OF THESE:

FIVE THOUSAND, NINE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-SEVEN

WERE FOUND GUILTY AT THE MAGISTRATES' OR CROWN COURT (SO AROUND HALF WENT TO PRISON). THE CONVICTION RATE MORE GENERALLY WAS 83%.

IN ADDITION TO THESE CASES THERE WERE:

FIFTY-THREE THOUSAND, FIVE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-NINE

SEXUAL ASSAULTS THAT WERE REPORTED BUT DIDN'T GET TO COURT. BROKEN DOWN, THERE WERE:

THIRTY-FOUR THOUSAND, FIVE HUNDRED AND FORTY-SEVEN

CASES OF RAPE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT AGAINST FEMALES.

THREE THOUSAND, FIVE HUNDRED AND FORTY-SEVEN

CASES OF RAPE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT AGAINST MALES.

FIVE THOUSAND, SEVEN HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-EIGHT

CASES OF SEXUAL ACTIVITY WITH A MINOR.

NINE THOUSAND, SEVEN HUNDRED AND NINETY-THREE

OTHER SEXUAL OFFENCES.

* Fig 0.3 Becoming Unbecoming, (Una, 2015:124)

In her book Tainted Witness Leigh Gilmore argues women witnesses lack 'institutional security and control' when it comes to securing justice for sexual violence offences. [REDACTED]. Therefore, extralegal pathways for recognition must be established if a victim is to find justice and healing (2017:Introduction).

Dr. Angela Marinari, explores survivors' experiences of sexual abuse and their subsequent sense of justice (or lack of) in her book Restorative Justice for Survivors of Sexual Abuse (2020). Marinari notes that all the participants in her book wanted their experiences of abuse to be recognised in some form and that 'control over their narrative' was imperative to gaining a sense of 'empowerment'; strength in the understanding of their own narrative moved victims into a more 'settled, peaceful state' (2020:Chapter 4, Section 5). Dr Gillie Bolton, expert in therapeutic writing, backs up Marinari's findings in The Therapeutic Power of Creative Writing, stating that writing can create pathways to memories, feelings, thoughts and clarity which are 'otherwise lost in the depths of the mind' (1999:22).

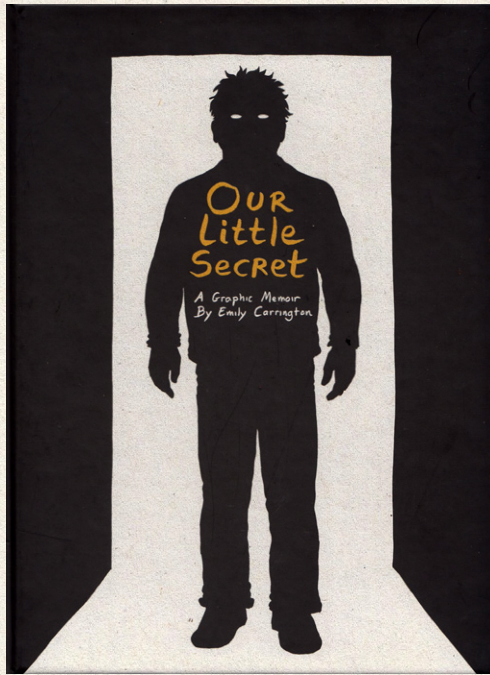
*Our memories are created by languages.
The finding of just the right words
sharpens and enhances our understanding
of ourselves. This is healing and self-
affirming, whether the experience (and
resulting writing) is comedy or tragedy.*

(Bolton, 1999:25)

Sometimes I wonder though,
maybe justice doesn't exist



Fig.04:
Our Little Secret
(Carrington, 2021a:144)



05.
Our Little Secret
 (Carrington, 2021)

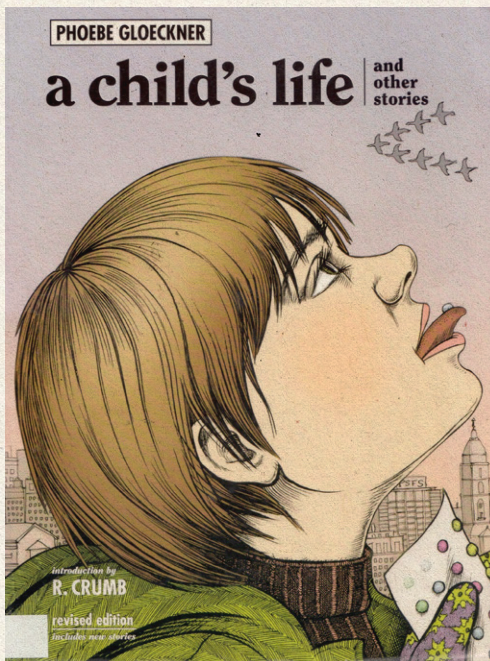


Fig.06.
A Child's Life
and Other Stories
 (Gloeckner, 1998)

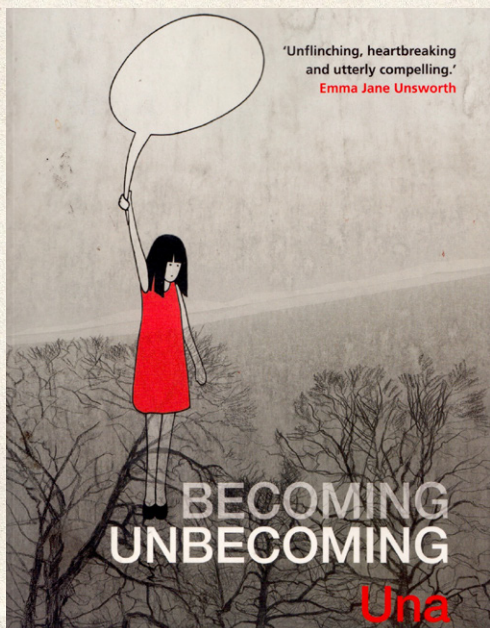


Fig.07
Becoming Unbecoming
 (Una, 2015)

In this essay I will focus on three core examples of comics practice; Our Little Secret (Emily Carrington, 2021a), A Child's Life and Other Stories (Phoebe Gloeckner, 1998), and Becoming Unbecoming (Una, 2015). These graphic autobiographies are accounts of CSA experienced by the authors, none of whom have received legal justice. I will look at how authors use comics to advocate for their child-selves by making use of their temporal shifting abilities, their power to render both the visual and verbal, and the way comics' accessibility make them an effective educational tool.



Fig. 1.1.
Becoming
Unbecoming,
(Una, 2015:81)

1 Advocating for the Child Self:

The Transformational Power of Reclaiming Your Own Story.

In an interview in 2022 with CNMN Magazine Emily Carrington described her Autography Our Little Secret (2021a) as belonging to the 'failure of Justice category', Carrington's book recounts the tale of her sexual abuse at the hands of a family friend at age 15, and her subsequent ordeal when seeking justice 25 years later.

"I DON'T FEEL LIKE I GOT JUSTICE. I STRUGGLE WITH THIS."

*
(Carrington, 2022)

Although Carrington's book tells the story of a failure to achieve legal justice, the book itself manifests her testimony and renders readers judge and jury. Our Little Secret displays [REDACTED] comics' ability to centre child victim and adult survivor simultaneously, and how the adult narrator can seek justice and healing by assuming a sisterly responsibility for their 'child selves.

"No longer representative of static subaltern silence, girls emerge in these narratives as figures of sympathy represented by politically active women autobiographers"

(Gilmore and Marshall, 2010: 668)

As Hillary Chute explains in Graphic Women (2010), comics' ability to display multiple temporalities on one page allows for 'tacit conversation across media between different versions of self', meaning that [REDACTED] the child victim and the adult survivor can be represented. This double narration technique allows [REDACTED] the author and audience to visualise the 'tension' between the child 'I' that is experiencing the abuse and the adult 'I' who is reflecting upon and interpreting their past trauma (Chute, 2010: Introduction, Paragraph 10).

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

" IN THE END I HAD TO TURN AWAY FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD AND EXPLORE THE INSIDE WORLD. THE PLACES I WAS GOING TO HAVE TO GO IN MY OWN HEAD WERE FRIGHTENING. BUT EVERY OTHER WAY I HAD TRIED HAD BEEN BLOCKED!"

(Carrington, 2021b)



Fig. 1.2 Our Little Secret, (Carrington, 2021a:77)

Throughout Our Little Secret Carrington draws herself sat across a table addressing the audience, framed in neat squares, narrating and interjecting. This representation brings to mind the image of a witness taking the stand at trial, or of a video statement made to the police.

Carrington employs this technique to clearly illustrate the contrast between the adult version of her, who is in a safe environment reflecting upon and making sense of her past, and the child version of her who is living through the abuse in real time.



Fig. 1.3 Our Little Secret, (Carrington, 2021a:138)

By telling her story Carrington is able to give voice to the silenced and shamed child ~~██████████~~, and the adult who was silenced by the legal system. This 'return to girlhood experiences of sexual violence' helps Carrington 're-present the legacy of trauma' in her life and allows her, as Leigh Gilmore and Elizabeth Marshall put in their book Witnessing Girlhood, the possibility of 'posttraumatic agency' (2019:chapter 3, paragraph 2).

"THE FEELING OF BEING SILENCED NOT ONLY BY [MY ABUSER] RICHARD BUT ALSO BY THE LEGAL SYSTEM WAS MORE THAN I COULD LIVE WITH. THE FEELING OF GETTING IT OUT, THE MAIN FEELING IS RELIEF!"

(Carrington, 2021b)

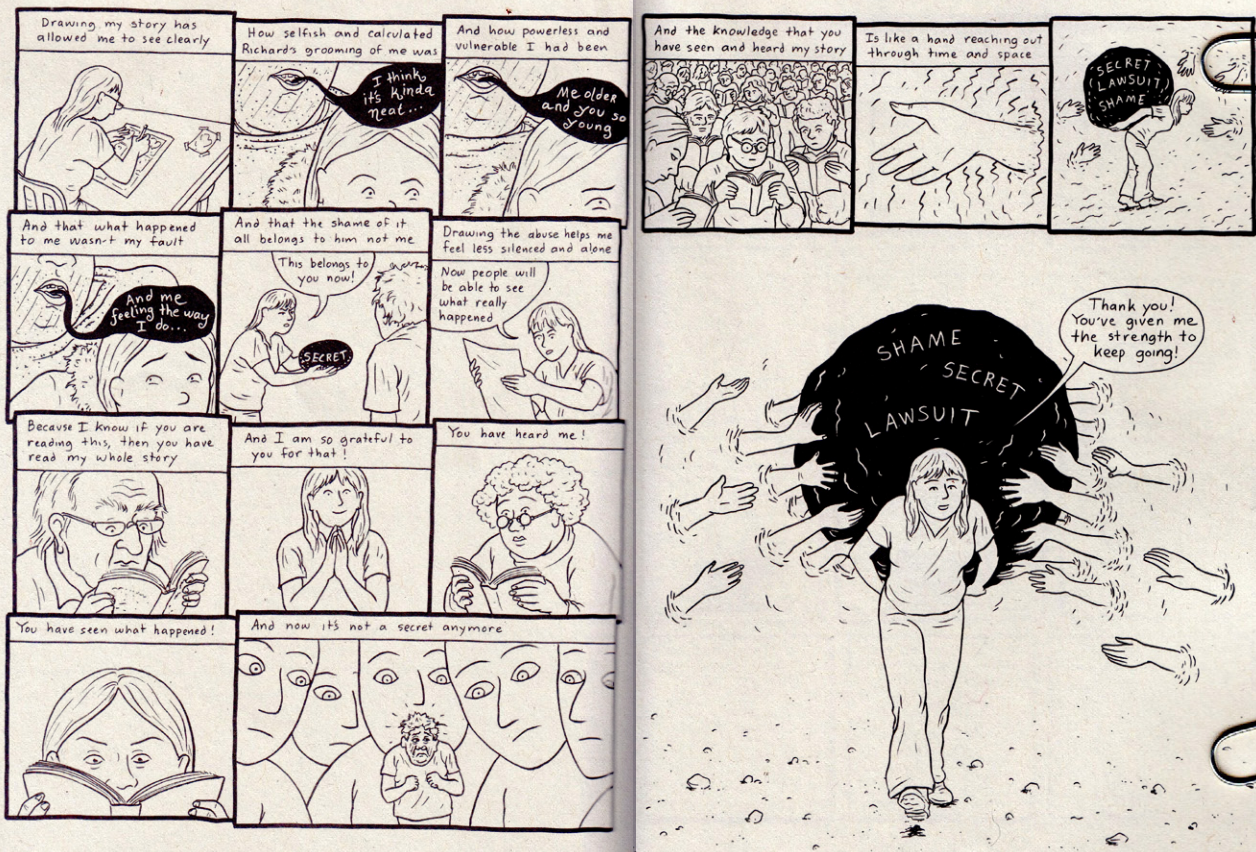
Mukul Chaturvedi, associate professor of English at Delhi University suggests in her essay on 'Ethical Witnessing' that 'testimonial narratives explicitly demand of their readers a moral and ethical response to the social and political struggles' portrayed by their author 'and solicit support and solidarity' for the author's cause (2015:2). Chaturvedi argues 'witnessing allows women not just a validation of their experience of suffering and strife but also represents them as responsible social actors', allowing them to transform their personal pain into something that can help further the cause of justice (2015:6).


Carrington explicitly represents this notion in a series of panels where she laments 'justice delayed is justice denied', but seeks comfort in the idea that through drawing and writing her story she could 'prevent even one child from being abused' (Carrington, 2021a:146).



Fig. 1.5.
Our Little Secret,
 (Carrington,
 2021a:146)

Political Science and Philosophy scholar, James Booth, writes that witnesses carry a 'remembrance' 'without which [their] life would be better', suggesting there is something 'dutiful' and 'heroic' about the way a witness will 'shoulder and move forward with [their] burden' (2006:86). Booth also writes that bearing witness is an act of 'defiance and resistance [...] against the desire to forget or conceal' (2006:73). Carrington again reflects this [REDACTED] idea plainly through the motif of a large black boulder she carries on her back, emblazoned with the words SECRET, SHAME, LAWSUIT (Carrington, 2021a). Although we never see Carrington set the boulder down, she shows that through sharing her story her load is lightened by the hands of her readers.



 Fig. 1.6 Our Little Secret, (Carrington, 2021a:200-201)

In this story, the main character fails

Fig. 1.7 Our Little Secret, (Carrington, 2021a:191)

"I THINK THE WAY THE STORY WORKED OUT, FORTUNATELY, IS TO SAY, YOU CAN FAIL AT GETTING JUSTICE [...] AND YOU CAN STILL BE OKAY. YOU KNOW, IT'S NOT GREAT, BUT YOU CAN STILL BE ALRIGHT."

(Carrington, 2022)

"I JUST WANTED TO ALLOW THE READER TO BE A WITNESS TO WHAT HAPPENED TO ME, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY TO WHAT HAPPENS TO EVERY CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE ~~SURVIVOR~~ VICTIM BECAUSE THE FIRST THING A CHILD ABUSE VICTIM IS GOING TO THINK IS "WILL ANYBODY BELIEVE ME?"

BECAUSE THERE ARE NO WITNESSES. AND I'M SORT OF SAYING, "YES, THERE WAS A WITNESS TO WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU," AND NOW EVERYBODY CAN SEE IT WITH THEIR OWN EYES".

(Carrington, 2022)

2. Commanding the Gaze:

~~Giving Victims Agency through Making Sexual Abuse Visible~~
Centering Victims' Perspectives.

Phoebe Gloeckner's 1998 collection of short comics A Child's Life and Other Stories was described as 'a how-to book for pedophiles' and banned from local libraries by the mayor of Stockton, California in 2004 (Kinsella, 2004), and was 'confiscated' by both French and English customs officials who 'deemed it pornographic' (Joiner, 2003). The collection contains, among other things, fictionalised depictions of Gloeckner's childhood experiences of sexual abuse beginning at age 15. Gloeckner trained and worked as a medical illustrator, lending her illustrations a 'visual precision' that is 'central to how her work conveys its horror' (Chute, 2010: Chapter 3, para.1).

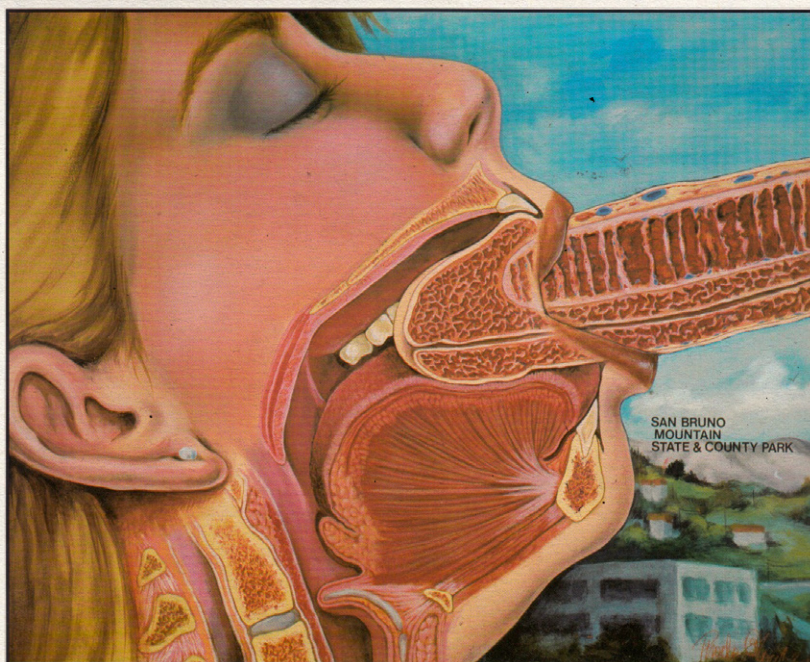
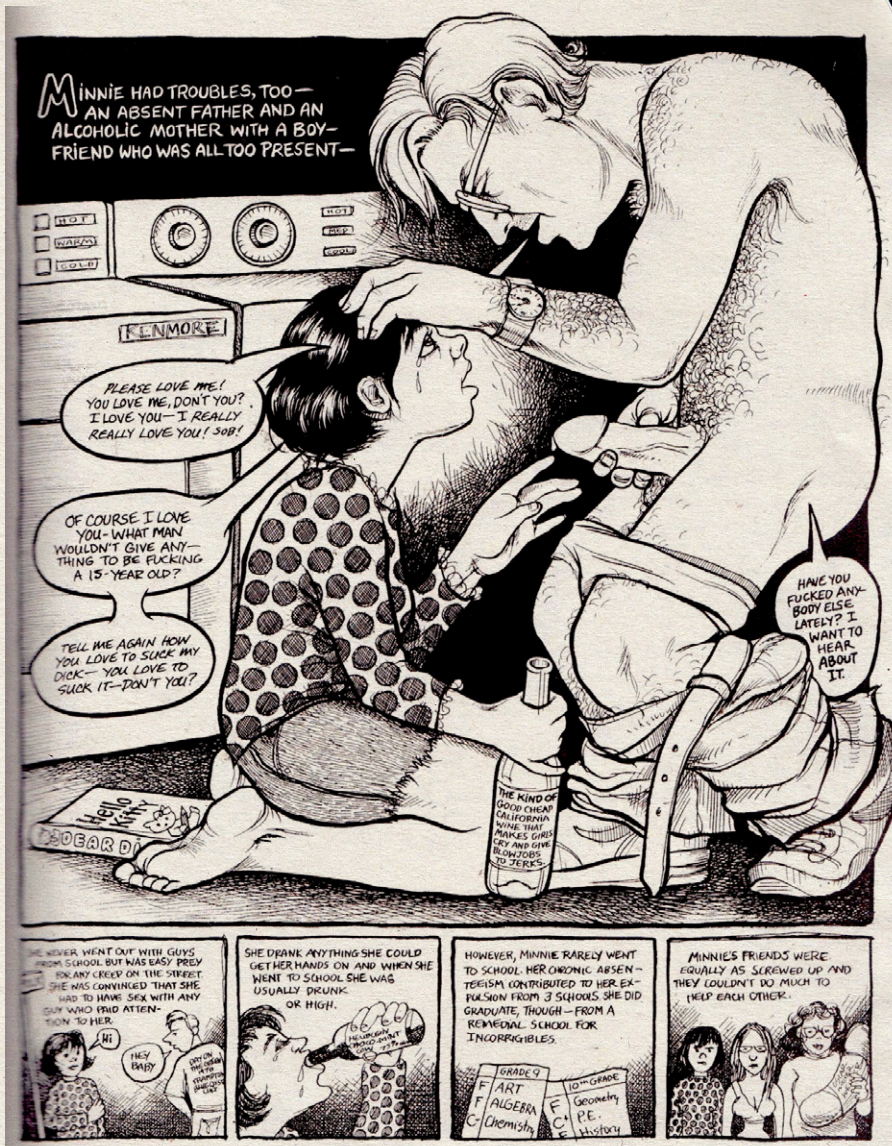


Fig. 2.1.
San Bruno Mountain,
1991.
In: A Child's Life and
Other Stories.
(Gloeckner, 1998: 138)



Handwritten red mark resembling a star or asterisk.

Fig. 2.2.
A Child's Life and Other Stories.
 (Gloeckner, 1998:73)

Minnie's 3rd Love or: "Nightmare on Polk Street", contains one of the most challenging and graphic depictions of child abuse in the collection (It was this image that led customs officials to confiscate the book). In the image a weeping Minnie kneels on the floor, Hello Kitty diary by her side, a bottle of wine in her hand. Her mother's boyfriend, Monroe, is hunched over her, one hand seemingly patting, or pushing, her head towards his erection. Monroe's body fills the frame, spilling out of it, giving a sense of Minnie's perspective and how this 'all too present' man looms so large both physically and emotionally in her life. Minnie pleads with him to 'please love me!' ~~giving~~ the reader insight into Minnie's state of mind as a young girl trapped in a physical relationship with a male authority figure (Gloeckner, 1998:73).

ALLOWING

"To be a witness [...] is to bring the gift of memory. Sometimes, however, that gift is unwelcome, more a source of shame, guilt, or remorse than something welcome."

(Booth, 2006:87)

Comics scholar Nicola Streeten expresses her discomfort in a 2019 essay, claiming that A Child's Life 'sexually aroused' her, and this response made her 'recoil in horror' and shame; she offers that Gloeckner's work gives readers a 'guilty sense of enjoyment', arguing this is no good thing (para.1). Streeten's concern is that by 'explicitly' depicting sexual abuse a 'cautionary tale' can be turned into 'titillation' and even run the risk of 'condoning sexual violence' (2019: para.3). However, there are many who would disagree with Streeten. Hillary Chute, for example, argues that visualising trauma testimony, in this case, of child abuse, allows us to rethink beliefs around the subject's inherent 'unspeakability, invisibility, and inaudibility' (2010: Introduction, para.7). Similarly, Gilmore and Marshall suggest that moving violation from 'the gutter' of a comic and into 'plain sight' can allow a reader to view sexual abuse from the survivor's perspective, and that [REDACTED] this shift 'transforms the experience of the violated girl into the self-representation of a feminist child witness' (2019: Chapter 3, Section 6, para.3).

" | MEAN, REALLY, MY MOTIVATION IS, 'THIS ALL HAPPENED TO ME. I FEEL REALLY TOTALLY FUCKED-UP. I DON'T UNDERSTAND ANY OF THIS. LET'S LOOK AT IT. LET'S NOT LOOK AT IT SIDWAYS OR MAKE IT LOOK PRETTIER, BUT LET'S JUST LOOK AT IT FOR WHAT IT IS. "

(Gloeckner, 2003)

Chute reasons that the 'ambivalent' nature of Gloeckner's work has led to its labelling as [REDACTED] 'pornographic', but that this ambivalence highlights the 'confusion sexual trauma may provoke' (2010: Chapter 2, Section 3, para.7), bringing the reader closer to feeling the emotional truth of sexual violence. Indeed, Streeeten herself said that: 'my own understanding of Gloeckner's comic was generated from questioning my discomfort' (2019:para.3), suggesting that creating a sense of unease in an audience can be productive for generating a deeper understanding and interrogation of sexual abuse.

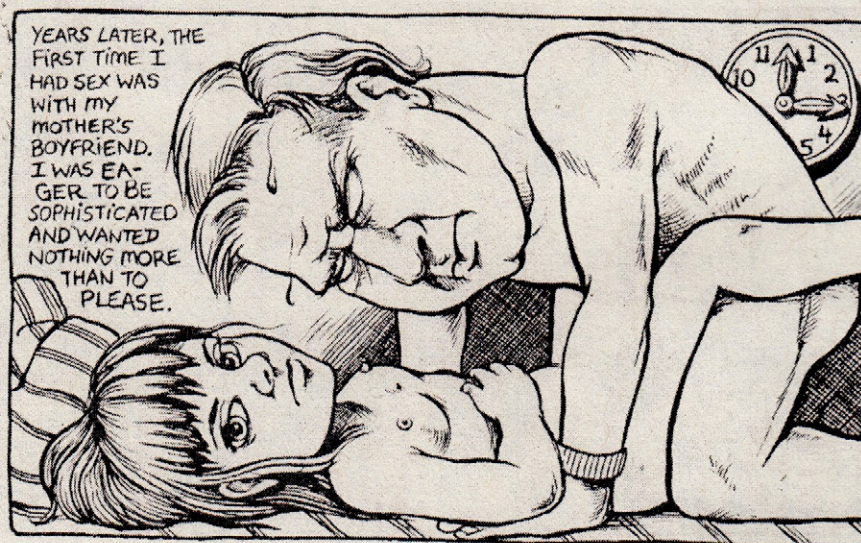


Fig. 2.3. Fun Things To Do With Little Girls, 1993. In: A Child's Life and Other Stories. (Gloeckner, 1998:67)

But as Gloeckner stated in an interview in 2003 'art is artifice, it's creation. By reading that book, you're not experiencing what I experienced. You're perhaps experiencing my interpretation of it, but you're bringing yourself to it'. Gloeckner uses the character Minnie, and occasionally Mary, as a proxies for herself, and this distancing technique could have been beneficial as a therapeutic aid to exorcising her story. Dr Gillie Bolton (1999) writes that 'truth and facts are slippery things' (30) and that 'the line between autobiography and fiction is very slim' (107), the use of fiction and metaphor in therapeutic writing is common and encouraged, anything that will assist a writer in illuminating the dark places within them and turning their pain into a written story that exists as an object outside of them will help them gain clarity, perspective (Bolton, 1999).



* Fig. 2.4 Mary the Minor, 1976. In: *A Child's Life and Other Stories*. (Gloeckner, 1998:82)

It is the work of image makers and writers to bring what has been lost or exiled by memory, or by law, or society back into the light of day. And when the image maker or writer is the bearer of their own painful experienced reality, who are we to judge the usefulness or appropriateness of its telling?

Gloeckner's agent Richard Grossinger is quoted in a 2003 article explaining that Gloeckner's work 'especially resonates with girls and women who have experienced sexual abuse';

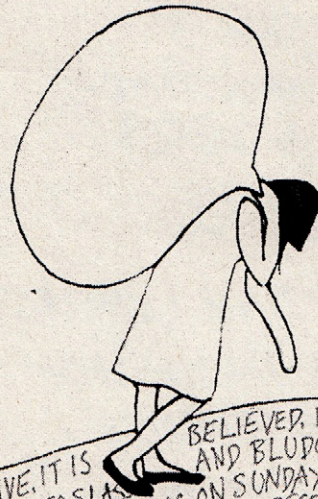
"I DON'T THINK
THEY'RE
COMFORTING
STORIES

[...]

BUT THE COMFORT
LIES IN HAVING
THE STORIES
TOLD AT ALL."

~~*~~ (Grossinger, 2003)

THE NEWS WAS SINKING IN...



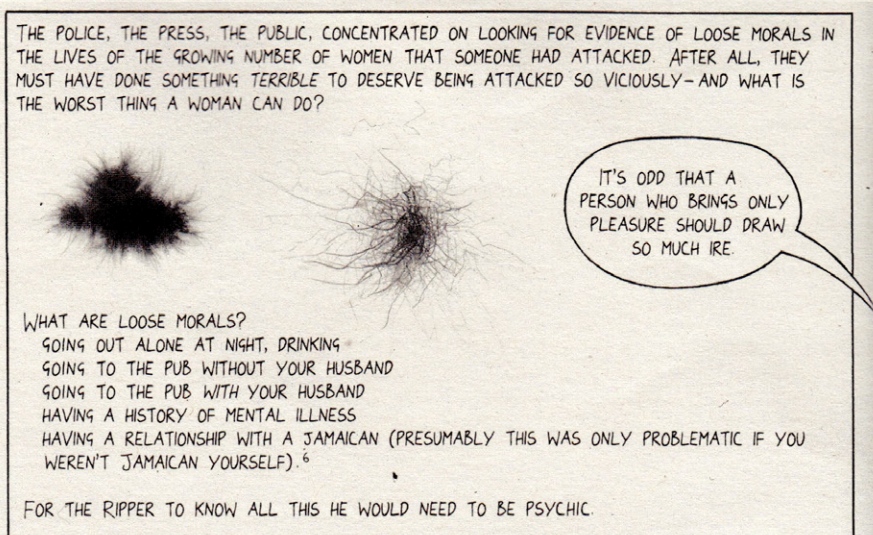
YOU HAVE KILLED FIVE TIMES NOW... YOUR MOTIVE, IT IS BELIEVED, IS A DREADFUL
HATRED OF PROSTITUTES, A HATE THAT DRIVES YOU TO SLAS AND BLUDGEON YOUR VICTIMS.
BUT INEVITABLY, THAT TWISTED PASSION WENT HORRIBLY WRONG ON SUNDAY NIGHT, AN INNOCENT
SIXTEEN-YEAR-OLD LASS, A HAPPY, RESPECTABLE WORKING-CLASS GIRL FROM A DECENT LEEDS FAMILY,
CROSSED YOUR PATH. HOW DID YOU FEEL YESTERDAY WHEN YOU LEARNED THAT YOUR BLOODSTAINED
CRUSADE HAD GONE SO HORRIBLY WRONG? ... SICK IN MIND THOUGH YOU UNDOUBTEDLY ARE, THERE
MUST HAVE BEEN SOME REMORSE AS YOU RID YOURSELF OF JAYNE'S BLOODSTAINS. YORKSHIRE
EVENING POST, 28TH JUNE 1977. I AM CONVINCED THINGS COULD HAVE WORKED OUT DIFFERENTLY
HAD PETER MARRIED A GIRL MORE ON HIS OWN LEVEL WHO DIDN'T HAVE SO MANY PROBLEMS OF
PHOBIC AND RIGID EXISTENCE IN SONIA'S WORLD. SUNDAY MIRROR, 24 MAY 1981. IF WE HAD
TWENTY OR THIRTY SUSPECTS IN ONE ROOM WE WOULD KNOW VERY QUICKLY WHICH ONE WAS THE
"RIPPER". GEORGE OLDFIELD, ASSISTANT CHIEF CONSTABLE OF WEST YORKSHIRE, SUNDAY TELEGRAPH,
23 NOVEMBER 1980. DETECTIVES FAILED TO UNCOVER AN ALMOST PERFECT PHOTOFIT LIKENESS AND
DESCRIPTION OF SUTCLIFFE DATING BACK TO AUGUST 1975, SOON AFTER HIS ATTACKS BEGAN. A 14-YEAR
SCHOOLGIRL, TRACEY BROWNE, SURVIVED THE HEAD INJURIES SHE RECEIVED
AN UNSOLVED ATTACK WHICH BORE ALL THE EARLY IDENTIFIED
MARKS OF WHAT LATER WAS
"THE RIPPER"

Fig 3.1. Becoming Unbecoming (Una, 2015:57)

3 Dispelling J. Myths:

Comics as Educational Tool.

In contrast to Gloeckner's unflinching illustrations of child abuse, Una, in her graphic autobiography Becoming Unbecoming (2015), encourages readers to look away from the act of abuse and towards its wider repercussions. Una draws attention to the ways society blames or disbelieves victims and excuses (typically) male violence. Becoming Unbecoming tells the story of Una's various experiences of sexual abuse growing up in 1970s Yorkshire amidst the turmoil and misogyny of the Yorkshire Ripper murders. [REDACTED] Una makes use of visual metaphor, infographics and newspaper cuttings to educate her audience on the myths that swirl around the subject of sexual abuse in a visually accessible way.



~~X~~ Fig. 3.2. Becoming Unbecoming, (Una, 2015:64)



~~*~~ Fig. 3.3 Becoming Unbecoming, (Una, 2015:144-145)

"CERTAINLY, DURING THE RIPPER HUNT, THE MESSAGE WAS VERY CLEAR: THERE WAS A GROUP OF WOMEN THAT IT WAS OK TO WANT TO KILL."

(Una, 2015)

The messages Una received growing up from the press, the police and her community led to a belief that she must have done something wrong in order to have been abused. The Ripper victims were labelled prostitutes or morally loose in order to justify the violence done to them. This way, the general public could rest easy knowing **they** would not be targeted because **they** were good people. Leigh Gilmore suggests the transformation of harm women experience into harm they tempt men to do to them relabels victims as catalysts responsible for their own suffering (2017).



* Fig. 3.4 Becoming Unbecoming, (Una, 2015:51)

Gilmore argues victim blaming degrades a woman's 'capacity to receive sympathy, understanding, and justice' (2017: Introduction, para.14). By transferring responsibility from perpetrators onto victims women become tainted witnesses who's testimony is 'messy' and 'compromised'. The term 'tainted' brings to mind stains and impurities, and the 'metaphorical suggestion of ruination' (Gilmore, 2017: Introduction, para.28). Una illustrates this feeling of being tainted using plumes of bleeding black ink, that drip down drains and surround her. In Becoming Unbecoming, the blame and shame Una feels silences her, and this silence leads to further victimisation. In Surviving Sexual Violence (1988) Liz Kelly, professor of sexualised violence at London Metropolitan University, interviews 60 women about their experiences of sexual violence and how they define those experiences. One common observation Kelly makes is that when women are defined as loose by men, future harassment is justified (1988).

SO I BECAME AN UNRELIABLE WITNESS AND A PERFECT VICTIM.



Fig. 3.5 Becoming Unbecoming, (Una, 2015:82)

Casting victims as the real wrongdoers allows society to breeze past the inconvenient truth of male violence. But the same brush that paints women as conniving 'temptresses' labels men 'incapable of restraint or judgment' (Gilmore, 2017: Introduction, para.14), these lazy stereotypes prevent us from challenging the status quo. Una demystifies the rapist, showing it is far more likely for a perpetrator to be an ordinary middle-class man (Like Peter Sutcliffe) than an evil genius or shadowy outcast. In his book Sexual Abuse and the Sexual Offender psychiatrist Dr. Barry Maletzky explains that perpetrators of sexual offences may be 'upright citizens', and still commit 'horrendous crimes' (2018: Introduction, para.5). Maletzky goes further stating there is no 'type' of person who commits these crimes, typically perpetrators appear 'normal', they are your 'friendly neighbours, your children's nurturing granddad or uncle, or the man you sleep with every night' (2019: Epilogue, para.1). Naturally this concept is unsettling, we like to think we can differentiate between safe and unsafe people, but usually we can't.

" AS LONG AS ABUSE IS SEEN AS A HYPOTHETICAL THING - A MYSTICAL, EXCITING, HORROR FILM THING, NO ONE WILL EVER GET TO GRIPS WITH WHAT CAUSES THE MISOGYNY THAT LEADS TO MALE VIOLENCE. "

(Una, 2015)

"The role of other people in sexual abuse is more complicated than as merely witnesses or bystanders to the abuse. People interact with both the survivor and the abuser, in such a way that they can either protect the survivor, or enable the abuser and cause further harm."

(Marinari, 2020)

One frequently overlooked area Dr. Angela Marinari explores, is harm done to victims by friends and family, who may fail to protect victims from abuse, or fail to support them emotionally post-disclosure. This further harm can come about deliberately or naively (2020). Victims may seek restorative justice through ~~_____~~ dialogues with friends or family to understand why they did not, or were not able to, help them at the time (Marinari, 2020).

**"PEOPLE THAT WERE
SUPPOSED TO
PROTECT YOU DIDN'T,
AND FOR SOME
REASON THAT MAKES
YOU FEEL SHAMEFUL.
THERE'S MULTIPLE
LAYERS OF SHAME."**

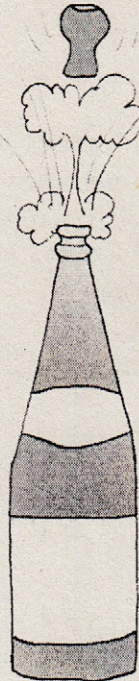
***** (Carrington, 2022)

IT'S NOT EASY TO DISCUSS ANY OF THIS OPENLY...

Why are you crying AGAIN?

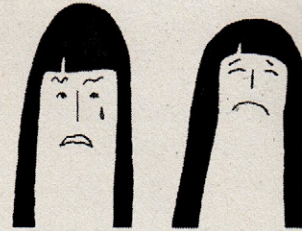


THOSE CLOSEST TO ME DIDN'T LIKE IT IF I DEMONSTRATED HOW I WAS FEELING...



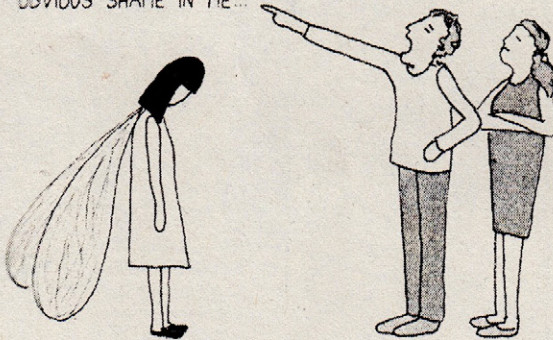
IT MAKES OTHER PEOPLE UNCOMFORTABLE, EMBARRASSED AND ANGRY. NOT THE RESPONSE YOU NEED IF YOU ARE DISTRESSED OR TRAUMATISED.

BUT IF YOU CAN'T TALK ABOUT IT, HOW ARE OTHER PEOPLE SUPPOSED TO MAKE SENSE OF YOUR EMOTIONAL RESPONSES?



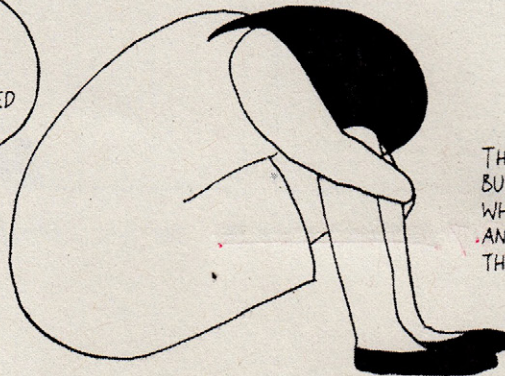
BUT THEY ALSO SAID I SHOULDN'T BOTTLE THINGS UP.

THE EFFORT OF TRYING (AND FAILING) TO BE NORMAL IN SOME ELUSIVE WAY, THAT AND MY FAMILY'S OBVIOUS SHAME IN ME...



MADE ME FRUSTRATED AND ANGRY

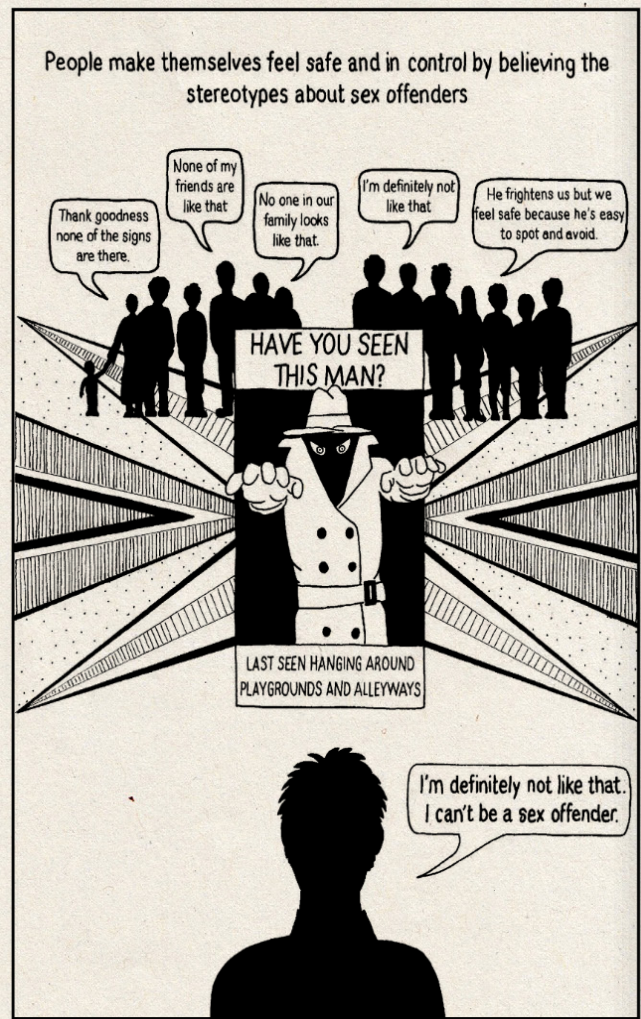
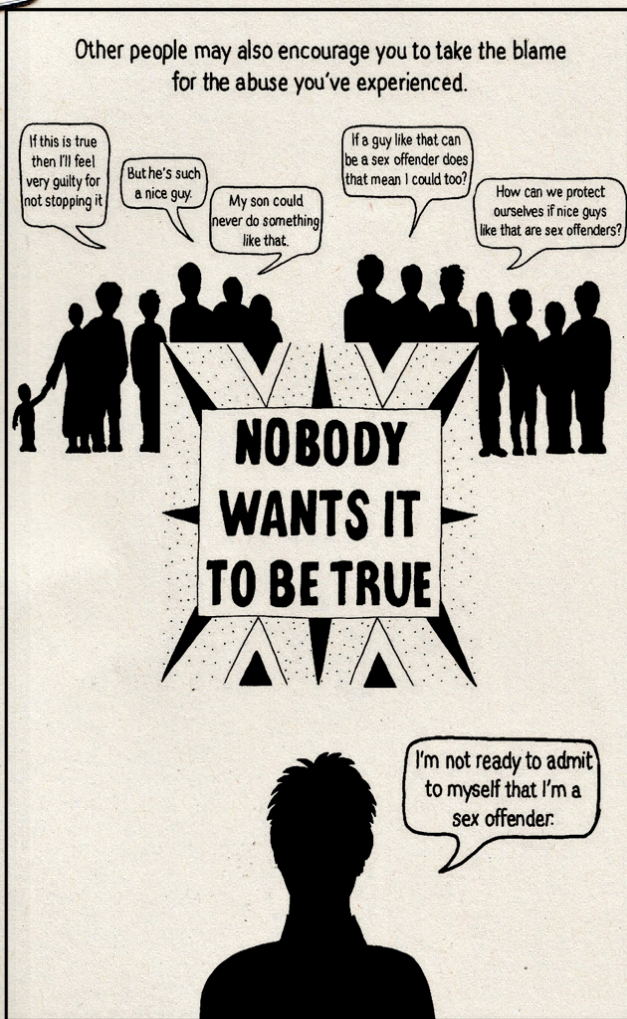
IT'S NOT UNCOMMON TO FIND YOURSELF OSTRACISED AFTER EXPERIENCING SEXUALISED VIOLENCE.




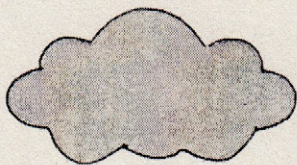
THEY LIKED ANGER EVEN LESS, BUT THEY STILL DIDN'T GUESS WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO ME AND I STILL COULDN'T TELL THEM, NOT IN WORDS ANYWAY.

Fig. 3.6. Becoming Unbecoming, (Una, 2015:107)

People may deny victims' experiences of sexual abuse because of their own fears or pride. Dr. Nina Burrowes' communicates this reaction in her comic The Courage to Be Me (2023) which tells stories of life after rape or sexual abuse.



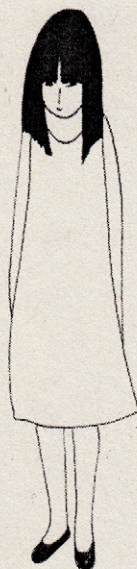
 Fig. 3.7 The Courage to be Me, (Burrowes, 2023:72-73)



THE CULTURE WITHIN WHICH ALL OF THIS WAS POSSIBLE RELIED ON SILENCE... RELIED ON SHAME.



IT'S NOT EASY TO STEP OUT FROM BENEATH THE CLOUD OF MORTIFICATION THAT ERRONEOUSLY FOLLOWS US AROUND, BUT MORE AND MORE WE DO.



THE TRUTH IS AWFUL BUT WE MUST ALL LEARN TO LIVE WITH IT IF WE ARE TO LEAVE THE 1970S, AND ALL THE REST OF HISTORY, BEHIND FOR GOOD.

SO, WHAT'S THE TRUTH? MAYBE IT'S SOMETHING LIKE THIS:

ORDINARY MEN ARE CAPABLE OF EXTRAORDINARY VIOLENCE. WOMEN AND GIRLS ARE NEITHER VIRGINS NOR WHORES.

NONE OF IT IS FUNNY.



Figure 3.8
Becoming
Unbecoming
(Una, 2015:128)

In creating Becoming Unbecoming Una seeks a witness to both validate her own abuse and to visualise the quotidian reality of CSA. Una encourages readers to think about how they judge victims and abusers, inviting them to move the stigma from ~~survivors~~ survivors onto the perpetrators.

~~Have had co~~
" I HAVE HAD CONTACTS FROM STRAIGHT, WHITE, MIDDLE-AGED MEN, MOSTLY FATHERS, WHO HAVE TOLD ME HOW MUCH THE BOOK MEANT TO THEM, AND HOW THEY FEEL MORE EQUIPPED TO TALK TO THEIR DAUGHTERS ABOUT THESE PROBLEMS, AND ALSO THEIR SONS "

(Una, 2016)



Fig. 4.1. Our Little Secret, (Carrington, 2021a:226)

4 Closing Statements

"If we do not control our stories, they will control us."

(Bolton, 1999:105)

Through examining Our Little Secret, A Child's Life and Other Stories, and Becoming Unbecoming with the insight of various critical voices from comics scholars to psychiatrists in mind, I ~~conclude~~ these books to ~~be~~ acts of self love, or self therapy undertaken by adults on behalf of their child-selves in order to seek recognition, justice, and meaning.

→ CONSIDER

I have learnt that CSA survivors are still 'remarkably restricted' in the pathways to legal justice available to them and that the 'experience of victimisation remains shrouded in shame, secrecy and myth' (Marinari, 2020:Conclusion, Section 2, para.1). But that through telling their stories of CSA survivors can regain a sense of ~~control~~ control and agency.

"Validation can be achieved through legal means but, as shown in this research, it is fundamentally a social process. Recognising the act of abuse and the harm caused by it, hearing a survivor's story and holding abusers accountable can be achieved socially by those around a survivor and an abuser. This allows for alternative routes to a sense of justice."

(Marinari, 2020:Conclusion, Section 2, para.2)

Carrington, Gloeckner and Una have sought extralegal justice through creating autobiographical comics, that act as witness statement and rebellion against the acceptance, or brushing under the carpet, of their abuse. By creating their ~~books~~ books the authors are asking the audience to become adequate witnesses, to resist the rush to judgement, to simply observe their truth, to respect and acknowledge it.

Representations of CSA in comics may be uncomfortable to see, but there are times when discomfort is necessary and beneficial to aid learning and reflection. Proliferation of stories that reveal the reality of CSA experiences, both how it happens and how it affects the survivors, may help signs of abuse be more easily recognised, and help lighten the load of secrecy and shame a survivor carries with them.

"IN EVERYDAY LIFE I
TEND TO HATE MYSELF
HALF THE TIME, BUT
YET, I LOVE THAT
POOR LITTLE GIRL
[...]

AND BY EXTENSION,
I UNDERSTAND ALL
THOSE OTHER LITTLE
GIRLS THAT THIS
MIGHT BE HAPPENING
TO, OR WHO MIGHT
BE HAVING THESE

DISTURBING
FEELINGS, AND
I LOVE THEM ALL

AND I'D LOVE TO
GIVE THEM A VOICE.

SHE'S NOT ME
ANYMORE. SHE'S
MINNIE. SHE'S ALL
THESE GIRLS...

SHE DOESN'T HAVE TO
BE ME.

SHE'S BIGGER THAN ME."

(Gloeckner, 2003)

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" I BELIEVE IT'S IMPORTANT
FOR PEOPLE TO TELL THEIR
STORIES IN WHATEVER WAY
WORKS FOR THEM. BECAUSE
WHEN YOU TELL YOUR STORY IT
ALLOWS OTHER PEOPLE TO
TELL THEIRS. " - CARRINGTON
2021 b

" AS LONG AS
ABUSE IS SEEN AS
A HYPOTHETICAL
THING - A MYSTICAL,
EXCITING, HORROR
FILM THING, NO ONE
WILL EVER GET TO
GRIPS WITH WHAT
CAUSES THE
MISOGYNY THAT
LEADS TO MALE
VIOLENCE. "
- UNA, 2015.

