

Take It As A Compliment

Take It As A Compliment is an award winning series of graphic stories by writer and illustrator Maria Stoian that tackle harassment, abuse, and other negative behaviours.

Straight from the outset this book is incredible impressive. It's one of those books that some refer to as coffee table books because they just look gorgeous. It's bright, with a beautifully illustrated cover, and it is as bold as the stories inside.

I acknowledge that I write about this book from a place of privilege. I am a CIS gendered middle class male who lives in an affluent part of one of the greatest cities in the world – and so my review is written through that lens. Although it was recommended to me, and indeed bought for me, by my amazing feminist girlfriend so I have a strong belief that it has worked to support the people and communities that are in the book and that it tells their stories appropriately.

Each of the twenty stories inside is a real life anonymous story, from someone who was interviewed by Maria, retold by Maria using the illustrative style of a graphic novel.

What Maria does with aplomb is to tell the stories that have been shared with her in a manner that is not shocking or confrontational, but rather they are matter a fact. The author and illustrator asks you to read closely, look at her illustrations, and make your own judgements. She does not preach or condemn, and the book contains stories from the whole spectrum of gender, age, and sexuality.

You simply cannot fault the bravery of the author and illustrator, or the people who have told their stories in the book. You only have to take a look online, listen out in the streets, or open your eyes in pubs and bars, to see the harassment suffered by

women, people of colour, the trans community, the LGBTQIA+ community and others. It is not easy to be a voice speaking out in that darkness, and I applaud all involved in this book for doing so.

As we stride onward with the #MeToo movement, Maria's book – which was first published in 2016 – is more relevant than ever: It confronts harassment and abuse in an accessible way showing that behaviour that some may consider the norm are in fact just not okay.

We should have long moved past having to listen to people say "but she was wearing..." or "I don't even know if I can hug a woman any more". As a society, we should recognise harassment and abuse and confront it head on. Not because "...they could be someone's daughter/wife/sister/aunt/mother/cousin/etc" but because for us to have the society we want, the community we desire, we must check our own behaviour and check others too.

I know this is a tough ask, and again to recognise

my privilege I am a male who is over six foot tall and quite stocky. However, we can at least do it in our own homes, work places, and social groups, and change our own worlds because it may well grow from there.

We are extremely lucky to be living in the community that we do. It is one that welcomes strangers, that has good grace for others, and I for one am proud of it. Yet as **Take It As A Compliment** shows – bad behaviours that negatively affect others aren't consigned to bad places and bad communities.

Take It As A Compliment is a book I would consider required reading, for it is honest, impactful, and shines a light on something that we are ever more aware of in our world.

