

Media Information

Title

How Could You

Creator

Ren Strapp

Format

Paperback, Ebook

Version reviewed

Ebook provided by the publisher

Publication date

2024

Length

220 pages

Audience

New Adult

Reviewer Information

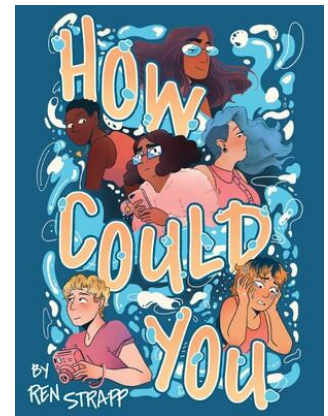
Sierra Schuman

Arizona State University

Editorial information

Peer reviewed by JJ Pionke, copy edited by Jessica Schomberg.

DisLIS Journal v. 2 (2025)
How Could You book review



Schuman
CC BY 4.0

Critical Review

How Could You is the debut graphic novel by Ren Strapp, a visual artist best known for her lesbian webcomics *Reine* and *The Shepherd's Sword*. A coming-of-age romance-drama featuring several lesbian relationships (romantic and platonic), this story follows Molly and Lou's quest to find new girlfriends in Hillock College while their exes, Olene and Yona, seek self-discovery during their study abroad in Marseilles, France. With supporting characters to round out the cast, these different relationships grow, blossom, strain, and even shatter in some cases. This premise differs from wholesome series like Alice Oseman's *Heartstopper*, embracing a more new adult approach to college life and imperfect humans.

Strapp's artwork initially attracted me to *How Could You*, and how could it not? The entire color story – incorporating blue, pink, purple, yellow, and green – not only designates characters and their thoughts, but also illuminates the mood and intensity of scenes. Strapp's illustrations are contained within square or rectangular panels, with diagonal panels capturing dynamic scenes and full pages set aside for location shots. Each character is identifiable by appearance and *Scott Pilgrim*-style infoboxes, which include their names, ages, college years, majors, and astrological star signs. Furthermore, Strapp acknowledges that her art style is based on risograph printing and American traditional tattooing, which is very unique.

Disability isn't a main focus of *How Could You*, but one character offers disability representation: Lou. Lou wields a cane to relieve leg pain and improve mobility. Strapp accurately conveys the cane use throughout the story, maintaining consistency and proper form. Apart from one instance where Lou mentions her leg acting up from excess unassisted movement, her disability is not a plot device nor treated as a detriment by other characters. In addition to using a cane, Lou displays social anxiety when faced with larger social situations,

which I found relatable as someone who sometimes struggles with big parties and conferences. Apart from Lou, perhaps another representation is Molly's heartbreak and depression after getting dumped over email (trust me on this, digital breakups are the worst).

Despite Strapp's illustrations, interesting premise, and important queer representation, some plot points and characters seem underdeveloped. Even with perspective shifts, their personalities can fall flat since there isn't major character development across the entire cast. I empathize with the characters acting messy or making bad decisions, especially concerning romantic relationships; after all, humans can learn lessons through mistakes and conflicts. However, with the story's overall pacing and shorter length, the decisions some characters make can feel too sudden or unexpected. And maybe I have a penchant for happy endings, but I put the book down feeling disappointed about what was left unresolved.

How Could You has short sections for multiple reading sessions, or for a balanced single-sitting read. As mentioned earlier, this graphic novel doesn't specifically focus on disability, so keep that in mind if the intent is to select books to highlight disability experiences. For the artwork and representation, *How Could You* is worth checking out, though the story might leave more to be desired.

In sum, this book is

Recommended with Reservations

If You Like This, You'll Also Like

Roaming by Mariko Tamaki and Jillian Tamaki

Mimosa by Archie Bongiovanni