

“I Hear You Just Fine”: Disability and Queer Identity in Yuki Fumino’s *I Hear the Sunspot*

**Corinna Barrett Percy**

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**Abstract:** Yuki Fumino’s currently ongoing series, *I Hear the Sunspot*, is a manga that provides a voice for those on the “outside” of society as it examines Japanese cultural attitudes toward both disability and homosexuality. Employing a range of characters, the manga confronts the problem of compulsory able-bodiedness and the need for disabled persons to fill prescribed roles, the process of moving away from self-isolation to self-acceptance, and the debate between living insularly within a disabled community or community building between disabled and nondisabled communities. Fumino uses the figure of Kohei to represent the struggles of self-acceptance as it relates to intersectional queer and disabled identities, and the figure of Taichi to represent the ‘bridge’ of community building as a catalyst to this self-acceptance in a society where both disabled and queer communities are seen as outsiders.

**Keywords:** Disability, Queer Identity, Discrimination, Cultural Attitudes, Social Interaction, Compulsory Able-Bodiedness

**Author Bio:** Corinna Barrett Percy received her PhD in English and the Teaching of English from Idaho State University. Her research focuses on the intersections of gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. She has taught courses in composition, gender in literature, ethnicity in American literature, and gender and sexuality studies.

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In a study done about individualism and collectivism in the United States and Japan, Takeshi Hamamura notes that it is a common belief that “cultures are becoming more individualistic over time, especially in those parts of the world where the economy is growing.”<sup>1</sup> However, his findings indicate that this is not true for Japan. Hamamura writes:

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this research is the persistence of collectivism in Japan: In several indices, there were signs of persisting, even rising, collectivism. One commonality in these indices is that they assessed the importance of collectivistic living (increased importance in social obligation, social harmony, and social contribution and decreased importance in individual rights). In fact, these findings confirm prior cross-temporal analyses of Japanese society that reported continuing emphasis on group orientation, social harmony, and obligation.<sup>2</sup>

Because of the increased importance of group orientation, this collectivist attitude tends to silence those who are outside the norm or urges them to fit in with what is expected from society, so as not to disrupt social harmony. To be unique is not necessarily seen as a strength. However, because manga is so widely popular in Japan and read by all ages, it provides a voice for people and groups outside of the norm and can be utilized “as a social acculturation and teaching tool.”<sup>3</sup> This visual mode of communication conveys cultural ideas, societal perceptions, and the interpersonal interactions of those on the periphery of society, bringing to light issues or groups that might otherwise be ignored.

Yuki Fumino’s currently ongoing series, *I Hear the Sunspot*, is one manga that provides a voice for those on the “outside” of society as it examines cultural attitudes toward both disability and homosexuality. It does this through one of the main characters, Kohei Sugihara, by showing his struggles in dealing with his hearing impairment, his interactions with other university students, and his relationship with

Taichi Sagawa, a fellow male student. Kohei is isolated from the hearing community due to his hearing impairment and is also cut off from the deaf community because of the late onset of his disability. He started losing his hearing in the third year of middle school, and though he can partially hear and read lips, he does not know how to sign at the beginning of the manga. Kohei faces difficulties as a student and in social situations as he tries to navigate new relationships with others and with his changing sense of a disabled identity due to his increasing loss of hearing. He also deals with a changing awareness of his own sexual identity, as his friendship with Taichi evolves into attraction and he begins to recognize his own sexual preferences. Employing a range of characters, the manga confronts the problem of compulsory able-bodiedness and the need for disabled persons to fill prescribed roles, the process of moving away from self-isolation to self-acceptance, and the debate between living insularly within a disabled community or community building between disabled and nondisabled communities. Fumino uses the figure of Kohei to represent the struggles of self-acceptance as it relates to intersectional queer and disabled identities, and the figure of Taichi to represent the ‘bridge’ of community building as a catalyst to this self-acceptance in a society where both disabled and queer communities are seen as outsiders.

This article will open with a brief overview of discrimination and marginalization against disabled and LGBTQ+ persons in Japan, followed by a discussion of the evolution of Kohei and Taichi’s relationship and how it affects Kohei’s self-acceptance in terms of his hearing impairment. It will then discuss interactions between disabled and nondisabled communities within the manga and the problem with compulsory able-bodiedness, the difficulties in navigating the intersectionality of a queer and disabled

identity, and the battle between self-acceptance and self-isolation as demonstrated through the character of Maya. The final section will discuss the character of Ryu and how he represents the idea of complete community isolation for deaf individuals.

## **Discrimination and Marginalization Against Disabled and LGBTQ+ Persons in Japan**

In the onset of the manga, Fumino portrays relationships between people with and without disabilities and later in the manga also includes the tentative beginnings of a homosexual relationship, illustrating different kinds of isolation and prejudices in Japanese society. Nanette Gottlieb explains that:

Japanese disability law emphasiz[es] special needs over equal rights and mandating quotas. . . . Despite some progress in recent years, full participation in education and employment in Japan remain out of reach regardless of government quotas. . . . The medical model, to which...Japan subscribes, constructs disability in terms of individual flaws which prevent people from living a 'normal' life and require medical intervention and rehabilitation.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, people with disabilities are on the periphery of Japanese society because they are seen as abnormal, and their “special needs” prevent them from claiming equal rights.

Similarly, those in the LGBTQ+ community in Japan are also seen as abnormal. Some people point to male-male relationships that were common among the samurai and Buddhist priests in medieval and early modern Japan as evidence that homosexuality has traditionally been tolerated. Donald Richie even notes that in Japan, “homosexuality has never, strictly speaking, been criminalized.”<sup>5</sup> It appears that there is wide acceptance of homosexual identity based on the upsurge

in the popularity of “Boy’s Love” manga and novels and increased production of gay movies and television shows. Yet, this perceived tolerance of homosexuality in Japan’s past and the present popularity of gay-themed media belies the reality of the acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community in present day Japan. Kazuyoshi Kawasaki explains:

the method of exclusion is not to produce homosexual subjects within the society and culture and then violently deny them, but to construct the ‘outside’ of the society. . . and project same-sex sexuality onto the outside, and then to erase same-sex sexuality within the normativity of Japanese society or within the present. . . . ‘[R]epression’ of gender and sexual minorities in Japan is achieved through projection towards the outside of present-day Japan, treating the minority people as ‘foreign’ or anachronistic/futuristic objects rather than directly rejecting them within the culture and society: *repression through denial rather than through violence*.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the lack of criminalization of homosexual activities or publicized discrimination, homosexual individuals themselves are perceived as on the outside of Japanese society. Nagayasu Shibun notes that people in the LGBTQ+ community in Japan “will have to get used to being regarded as ‘weird’ or deviant, laughed at, avoided, or outright ignored. In some cases, they may even face violence.”<sup>7</sup> He goes on to state, “Whenever a phenomenon or person identified in any way with sexual minorities is mentioned in Japan, you can almost guarantee that the immediate result will be mockery and uneasy laughter. Presumably by joining in the laughter people hope to prove to themselves and others that they are ‘not like that.’”<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, in a largely collectivist society, individuals tend to keep with the norm, and most LGBTQ+ people tend to keep their identities hidden because they realize that they would most likely be ostracized.<sup>9</sup> They are also ignored in the country’s legal systems, as same-sex marriage is not legal in Japan and same-sex couples are

ineligible for the same legal protections available to heterosexual couples.

### **Kohei and Taichi's Friendship: Building Bridges Between Disabled and Nondisabled Communities**

Kohei, who has a hearing impairment and is attracted to a man, must contend with these aspects of societal acceptance, or marginalization. It is in meeting Taichi that Kohei is able to navigate these aspects of his identity that he had previously been handicapped by, because Taichi becomes his friend and avoids typical “normate” behavior by not reducing Kohei to the single aspect of his disability. Not all the characters in the manga interact with Kohei as Taichi does, with many of them only seeing Kohei as his disability or expecting him to behave in a certain way and cater to them because he is disabled. Therefore, Taichi and Kohei's friendship is important as it represents effective communication between disabled and nondisabled persons, without expecting the disabled individual to fit into a prescribed role.

In the first pages of *I Hear the Sunspot*, readers are introduced to Taichi as he is trying to find a job and discover that he was fired from his previous job because his voice is too loud. Taichi does not have a disability but is looked down on because of his overly loud voice and is unable to be gainfully employed because of it. He is a child of divorce who lives with his grandfather and is also poor, blunt, clumsy, a bad student, and perpetually hungry – further facets of his identity that make him a type of outcast. He meets Kohei because he literally falls over a wall onto a roof where Kohei is eating lunch. When Taichi comments how delicious Kohei's lunch looks, Kohei gives it to him and then leaves even as Taichi is still talking to him. Taichi is the

only one who speaks during their first encounter, demonstrating their opposite personalities; Taichi is loud and overly excitable, while Kohei is quiet and used to isolation. The manga medium also literally illustrates the difference in their personalities – in the first few pages Taichi’s face conveys a range of emotions, from drooling over food, to shock and excitement, while Kohei’s face remains passive, sad, and



Figure 1: *I Hear the Sunspot*, pp. 2-3

almost expressionless (Fig. 1).

Later, Taichi learns that Kohei is a freshman like him, and a law student. His friend tells him that Kohei is “kind of famous”<sup>10</sup> because he stands out in a crowd (i.e. he is handsome) and is popular with the girls. Despite these advantages to his social status, Kohei is placed in the periphery. Though neither Taichi nor his friend know much of anything about him, they assume he is deaf when they see a notice advertising his need for a note taker.<sup>11</sup> When Taichi sees Kohei again and starts to



follow him to return his bento box, Taichi's friend tells him, "You probably should keep your distance from him. I told you. He stands out... He's antisocial and not a good friend to people. I never hear anything good about him. The senpai say he's bad news. Probably best not to get mixed up with him."<sup>12</sup> Although Taichi's friend does not know Kohei, he has made assumptions about him based on other people's perceptions and rumors, and those rumors are caused by a misunderstanding of Kohei's disability and situation. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson explains:

Besides the discomfiting dissonance between experienced and expressed reaction, a nondisabled person often does not know how to act toward a disabled person: how or whether to offer assistance; whether to acknowledge the disability; what words, gestures, or expectations to use or avoid. Perhaps most destructive to the potential for continuing relations is the normate's frequent assumption that a disability cancels out other qualities, reducing the complex person to a single attribute.<sup>13</sup>

Similar to the behaviors Garland-Thomson observes, nondisabled students around Kohei do not know how act toward him and therefore reduce him to the "single attribute" of his disability. Though he is a complex individual, they only view him as cold and antisocial because they have not taken the time to get to know him or understand what his disabled identity means for him. Taichi, never one to conform to societal expectations, chooses to ignore his friend and others' perception of Kohei, returning the bento box, and candidly telling him, "I heard that you have a bad reputation. But I figured only nice people give their food away! So I knew that you had to be a good person!"<sup>14</sup> As repayment for the lunch, Taichi offers to be Kohei's note taker, learning that he has some hearing and can understand if he speaks slowly. Because of his upbringing and socioeconomic status, Taichi is a type of outcast in Japanese society, but he further pushes against the idea of conformity



with his personality by not subscribing to typical Japanese “polite behavior.”<sup>15</sup> He does not hesitate to acknowledge Kohei’s disability or offer assistance, but he also does not reduce him to the single attribute of his disability by assuming that he is helpless or antisocial because of his hearing impairment. Instead, he ploughs headfirst into a friendship with Kohei.

Taichi and Kohei’s friendship becomes one of reciprocal giving – Taichi takes notes for Kohei (although rather poorly) and Kohei provides lunch for Taichi (heaven for one who is perpetually hungry) – and through their friendship, readers learn more of Kohei’s disability. When they are eating lunch together and see a girl using sign language, Kohei tells Taichi that she invited him to join her sign language group, but explains that people with hearing disabilities differ because they have different



Figure 2: *I Hear the Sunspot*, pp. 16-17

levels of impairment and different levels of signing knowledge (Fig. 2).

Kohei does not know sign language and prefers to lip read. Ellen Samuels, in her article “My Body, My Closet: Invisible Disability and the Limits of Coming Out,” posits that “people with nonvisible disabilities not only are marginalized in disability communities but walk an uneasy line between those communities and the dominant culture, often facing significant discrimination because our identities are unrecognized or disbelieved.”<sup>16</sup> Kohei has a type of nonvisible disability because people cannot physically see that he has trouble hearing, only learning about it from others or figuring it out once they speak with him. He is also marginalized in the deaf community for not knowing sign language but feels out of place in the hearing community as well. He walks an uneasy line between the two. However, Taichi represents a kind of bridge for Kohei, one because he immediately becomes his friend, and two because of his loud voice. When Taichi complains that people call him a loudmouth all the time, Kohei responds, “That’s a good thing. It means people can actually hear what you are trying to say. That’s why you’re easy to talk to. I don’t have to ask you to repeat yourself.”<sup>17</sup> Their friendship of giving and receiving notes and lunch moves into giving and receiving of emotional support. Kohei, who constantly cannot understand what people are saying around him, can hear Taichi and, therefore, be understood himself, and Taichi, who is constantly told he is too loud, is complimented on his clear, distinct voice. Again, because Taichi does not reduce Kohei to the single entity of his disability, they are able to form a friendship that symbolizes effective communication between their two groups.

## **“Supplicants and Minstrels”: How the Nondisabled Majority Expects Disabled Individuals to Act and the Problem of Compulsory Able-Bodiedness**

Because of the late onset of his disability, Kohei often does not know how to interact socially, and, therefore, nondisabled characters feel that Kohei does not behave in a way that is societally acceptable as a disabled person. But Taichi allows him to embrace his identity through community building. In flashbacks, readers learn that his sudden hearing loss was most likely caused by a high fever when he was in the third year of middle school, and he has a hard time adjusting. In high school, he feels embarrassed when teachers announce his disability to the whole class, his fellow students get annoyed when he asks them to repeat themselves, one girl acts like he is helpless (offering to help him take out the trash because “it must be so hard when you can’t hear”<sup>18</sup>), another girl asks if he has a cold because his voice sounds weird, and former friends tell him that he is now boring. Because nondisabled people do not know how to interact with him and become annoyed, Kohei also struggles to familiarize himself with his new disabled identity. Garland-Thomson explains:

To be granted fully human status by normates, disabled people must learn to manage relationships from the beginning. In other words, disabled people must use charm, intimidation, ardor, deference, humor, or entertainment to relieve nondisabled people of their discomfort. Those of us with disabilities are supplicants and minstrels, striving to create valued representations of ourselves in our relations with the nondisabled majority. This is precisely what many newly disabled people can neither do nor accept; it is a subtle part of adjustment and often the most difficult.<sup>19</sup>

Because Kohei is newly disabled in high school, he has not learned how to manage relationships with nondisabled people. Instead of using the aspects that

Garland-Thomson lists (charm, intimidation, humor, etc.), he merely tells people he cannot hear them. “Normates” then become annoyed because Kohei is not fulfilling his prescribed role as a disabled person who accommodates them so that they are not uncomfortable, and they in turn do not grant him fully human status. This causes Kohei to withdraw from society, finding it easier to be alone. By the time he is in college, he has still not learned how to manage relationships and interact with the fully hearing world; therefore, others label him as antisocial, bad news, and not a good friend.

However, Taichi is an instigator in pushing Kohei from isolation into a community (notably a hearing community because Taichi is nondisabled) because he does not assume Kohei needs to accommodate him; Taichi is fundamental in helping Kohei have pride in his identity because he is unafraid to be his friend and tells him his hearing impairment is not his fault. Garland-Thomson explains, “Becoming disabled demands learning how to live effectively as a person with disabilities...[i]t means moving from isolation to community, from ignorance to knowledge about who we are, from exclusion to access, and from shame to pride.”<sup>20</sup> Kohei begins to move away from ignorance into knowledge of who he is and from shame to pride, in large part because Taichi befriends, accepts, and pushes him out of his comfort zone. Additionally, Taichi breaks down the barriers around Kohei because he does not expect him to fulfill a prescribed role that the dominant society has established and sticks up for him when other normates deride him because of his disability. For instance, when they go to the university cafeteria together, Kohei is bombarded with fast talking girls who flirt and invite him to a party. In one of the panels during this



exchange, half of Kohei's face is drawn in shadow and his mouth is set in a straight line. When another young man enters the conversation saying he wants to go to the party too, a panel illustrates Kohei's face fully in shadow, his eyes looking away, and his mouth turned downward. The increasing amount of shadow on Kohei's face depicts his increasing amount of confusion. He cannot hear them, they are talking too fast for him to lip read, and too many voices have entered the conversation (Fig. 3). Rather than engage with them, Kohei merely leaves.



Figure 3: *I Hear the Sunspot*, pp. 22-23

The other young man exclaims, "Who does he think he is? He didn't even say hello,"<sup>21</sup> accusing him of being rude and snobbish. When the girls tell him that Kohei

can't hear and that he "should feel bad for him,"<sup>22</sup> the young man claims that Kohei is "just looking for your sympathy!"<sup>23</sup>

Robert McRuer notes that "compulsory able-bodiedness functions by covering over, with the appearance of choice, a system in which there is actually no choice."<sup>24</sup> The young man, even if it is unintentionally so, caters to compulsory able-bodiedness, assuming that Kohei has a choice in the matter of his hearing loss, or how much he understands, accusing him of using his disability for sympathy. Taichi immediately punches the young man, but later Kohei tells him that he should not have bothered because, "I can't even hear them."<sup>25</sup> However, Taichi yells at Kohei, telling him, "You think they can say whatever they want just because you can't hear them? Do you always act like this? If you can't hear, then say something. Ask them to repeat it again and again! Why do you have to hold back for people like that? It's not your fault you can't hear!"<sup>26</sup> Taichi does not want Kohei to feel isolated and always be by himself, nor does he expect him to use charm, ardor, or humor to build relationships with "normates" to be seen as fully human. Taichi already sees Kohei as fully human and encourages him to interact with others, not to accommodate them but to stick up for himself. He does not cater to compulsory able-bodiedness, knowing that Kohei does not have a choice regarding his disability. Kohei cries after Taichi tells him it is not his fault he cannot hear, most likely because it is the first time someone has made the effort to acknowledge that fact, or the first time a nondisabled person has not assumed able-bodiedness was a choice.

Just as Taichi does not expect Kohei to pander to normates, he also does not assume Kohei is limited by his disability. For example, when Miho, a girl who is

interested in Kohei, expresses how their situation is like a novel she loves where the girl falls in love with a deaf man, she exclaims, “I love how the main character does all she can for the helpless man!”<sup>27</sup> Taichi instantly becomes angry, telling her, “He can take care of himself just fine! Don’t turn him into a character from some book! And ... this all might be some kind of fun story for you, but for him, it’s reality!”<sup>28</sup> Fiona Kumari Campbell defines ableism as “a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human. Disability then is cast as a diminished state of being human.”<sup>29</sup> Because Miho’s body meets the corporeal standard, she views herself as fully human while interpreting Kohei’s disability as a “diminished state of being human,” therefore calling him helpless without knowing anything about him. She thinks that he is handsome and “cool” and because of these superficial aspects casts herself as a type of heroine who can navigate his life for him. Taichi, as someone who has taken the time to get to know him, becomes angry because Miho has reduced him to the single aspect of his disability. Though Taichi helps Kohei by taking notes, he never thinks he is better than him, and again, theirs is one of reciprocal friendship. And though Taichi does not view Kohei as limited by his disability, he also never succumbs to labeling him what Eli Clare calls a “supercrip.” Clare explains that supercrip stories “focus on disabled people ‘overcoming’ our disabilities. They reinforce the superiority of the nondisabled body and mind. They turn individual disabled people, who are simply leading their lives, into symbols of inspiration.”<sup>30</sup> Taichi treats Kohei as a friend, not an inspirational story, and because of this, Kohei starts coming out of his shell when



he is around Taichi – he eats lunch in different (more visible) places, he goes with Taichi to play baseball, he learns how to make the meatballs that Taichi loves, etc. Their relationship allows Kohei to gradually come to terms with his disabled identity, and his self-acceptance evolves throughout the manga series.

### **Disabled and Queer: The Difficulties in Navigating an Intersectional Identity Outside the “Norm”**

The manga uses the figure of Kohei to describe the difficulties in navigating the intersectional identity of both disabled and queer, identities which are often seen as “abnormal.” This is important representation as it illustrates the differences in lived experiences for different communities and how self-acceptance in one area can lead to self-acceptance in another. For instance, as Kohei comes to terms with his disabled identity, he must readapt to his level of disability, which is changing. When he learns that his hearing may be getting worse, he thinks, “Someday... I’ll lose even the things I can hear now.”<sup>31</sup> The next page is split into three panels, one with a close-up of Taichi’s laughing face, one with a close-up of Kohei’s face in shadow, his expression distraught, and one of almost complete blackness (Fig. 4). The drawings indicate that the first thing Kohei thinks about losing is the ability to hear Taichi’s voice, something that has brought a type of light into his life – he is the sunspot of the title that Kohei can hear. The thought of not being able to hear Taichi’s voice distresses him, which leads into the almost entirely black panel, symbolizing the kind of aural darkness Kohei is afraid of slipping into. John Swain and Colin Cameron write:

Coming out . . . for disabled people, is a process of redefinition of one’s personal identity through rejecting the tyranny of the *normate*, positive recognition of

impairment and embracing disability as a valid social identity. Having come out, the disabled person no longer regards disability as a reason for self-disgust, or as something to be denied or hidden, but rather as an imposed oppressive social category to be challenged and broken down.<sup>32</sup>

Because of his friendship with Taichi, Kohei has slowly been redefining his personal identity and forming a positive recognition of impairment. There are still some hiccups along the way – some misunderstandings and miscommunications, some self-pitying – but, as a whole, Kohei learns to be more self-accepting of his disabled identity. And because he is more easily able to “come out” as disabled because of Taichi, he is then able to come out as queer because of Taichi as well. His realization that the thing he fears losing the most is Taichi’s voice makes him realize that Taichi means more to him than just a friend. Before this point in the manga, readers are not

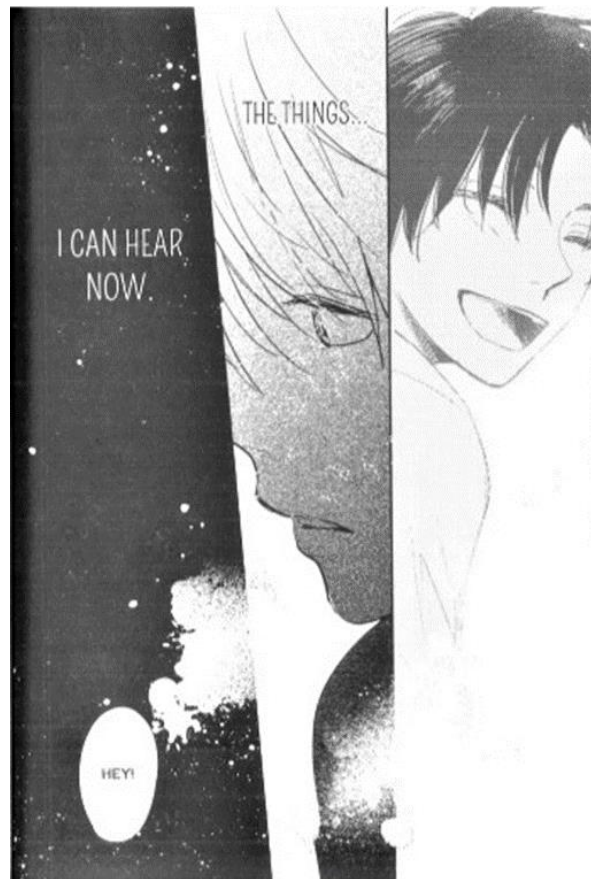


Figure 4: *I Hear the Sunspot*, p. 112

aware of Kohei's sexual orientation, most likely because he is not aware of it either.

His disability kept him in isolation throughout his teenage years, which would generally be the time when people begin to understand their sexual identity and preferences through finding targets of their romantic desires and forming relationships. However, Kohei does not find targets of his romantic desire because of his social isolation, and, therefore, is not fully aware of his preferences. It is only once he learns to take pride in his disabled identity, largely in part because of Taichi, that he begins to be aware of and accept his queerness. Again, Kohei's character represents the evolution of self-acceptance and acknowledgement of intersectional identities for communities outside the "norm."

Disability scholars including Swain and Cameron, McRuer, Samuels, and Clare discuss disability in connection with queer identity, because queerness, like disability, is seen as outside the norm. McRuer notes, "Compulsory heterosexuality is intertwined with compulsory able-bodiedness; both systems work to (re)produce the able body and heterosexuality. But precisely because these systems depend on a queer/disabled existence that can never quite be contained, able-bodied heterosexuality's hegemony is always in danger of being disrupted."<sup>33</sup> Kohei's character disrupts "able-bodied heterosexuality's hegemony" because he is hearing impaired and because he is attracted to another man; his existence cannot be contained within the hegemony of a collectivist Japanese society. These two prevalent aspects of his identity label him as outside the norm, and, therefore, he disrupts the idea that there is a norm in a collectivist society.

Taichi's straightforwardness and his accepting without hesitation of Kohei's

disability and without demeaning him because of it, propel Kohei to come out to Taichi. He overhears Taichi speaking with his friend, Yoko, about him. When Yoko asks why Taichi cares so much about Kohei, Taichi shares that he is smart, cool, nice, and handsome. He explains, “But no one cares enough to get to know him. They just made up their minds about him and left him all alone. So I ... I just don’t think he should be alone.”<sup>34</sup> Kohei is confused, flustered, and touched and at first tries to pretend that he did not hear anything that Taichi has said because his hearing is getting worse. But he finally admits that is a lie, saying, “I can’t hear so many things...but... for some reason, I can always hear your voice.”<sup>35</sup> This is a recurring motif in the manga – even when his ears start ringing, other sounds are fading, or he can hear nothing else, Kohei can always hear Taichi’s voice. It speaks to the connection between them. Yes, Taichi’s voice is overly loud, but what this motif signifies is not just hearing but understanding. Kohei can hear Taichi’s voice because Taichi sees him as a person, not just as a handsome face or a disability. This connection, and attraction for Kohei, drives him to kiss Taichi and confess his feelings (“I like you that way”<sup>36</sup>). Kohei admits, “Even more than losing my hearing, I was more afraid that you would hate me. I’m sorry. But I’m glad I said it.”<sup>37</sup>

The way Kohei phrases his confession illustrates the degree to which same sex attraction is seen as abnormal in society. McRuer notes that “the ongoing subordination of homosexuality (and bisexuality) to heterosexuality allows for heterosexuality to be institutionalized as ‘the normal relations of the sexes,’ while the institutionalization of heterosexuality as the ‘normal relations of the sexes’ allows for homosexuality (and bisexuality) to be subordinated.”<sup>38</sup> This

subordination of homosexuality leads Kohei to assume the Taichi would hate him for being attracted to him because it is not seen as “normal.” The way he confesses also illustrates the lack of actual acceptance of homosexuality in Japan. As Shibun explains, those in the LGBTQ+ community in Japan must become accustomed to being mocked, avoided, and seen as deviant. So when Kohei expresses his feelings to Taichi, he fears this reaction.

In *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics and the Ethics of Queer Life*, Michael Warner maintains, “Nearly everyone wants to be normal. And who can blame them, if the alternative is being abnormal, or deviant, or not being one of the rest of us? Put in those terms, there doesn’t seem to be a choice at all.”<sup>39</sup> Before it is even revealed that Kohei is queer, he is seen as abnormal because of his disability, which distances him from able-bodied individuals and the corporeal standard society has set. Others view him as abnormal, and he feels that way himself, uncomfortable in other people’s company. Kohei feels more “normal” around Taichi 1) because he can hear Taichi’s voice without asking him to repeat things, and 2) because, again, Taichi does not reduce him to the single characteristic of his disability and becomes his friend. Interestingly, this feeling of normalcy for Kohei leads to his queer attraction, something that is most often seen as outside the norm. This is why he is at first afraid to confess his feelings to Taichi, but ultimately his feelings are too strong and what feels right (or normal) for him overrides his fear. These two aspects of Kohei’s identity intersect as his disability was the instigator in his friendship with Taichi, which leads to him understanding his sexual orientation.

Though Taichi is surprised by the kiss and confession, admits that he didn’t

know what to do, and thought so much about it that he could not eat, he tells Kohei, that “no matter how much I thought about it...I couldn’t find any reason to hate you.”<sup>40</sup> Once again, Taichi does not conform to expected, typical responses of society. He is not disgusted that Kohei kissed him or by the fact that Kohei likes him; he is merely shocked. And that shock most likely stems from Taichi’s own self-deprecating image of himself, believing that no one thinks about him in *that* way. Just as Taichi does not reduce Kohei to the single entity of his disability, he also does not reduce him to the single entity of his sexuality. His friendship is not contingent on Kohei separating aspects of himself, but rather on a desire to understand the intersectionality of his identity. He even tells Kohei, “Even if I don’t understand everything...can’t you tell that I want to?”<sup>41</sup> Taichi’s desire to understand Kohei is what helps Kohei embrace the different aspects of his identity and become more comfortable with himself, which leads him to becoming more active in university – joining the sign language club, going to group activities, and making new friends. The art of the manga also highlights the physical changes that Kohei goes through after his dual “coming out” – he smiles and laughs more often, his body language becomes more open (not just in respect to using sign language but to posture as well), and he gets a new, shorter haircut that reveals more of his face and facial expressions. He becomes more comfortable with people seeing more of him.

### **Maya and the Battle Between Self-Acceptance and Self-Isolation**

Yet even as Kohei becomes more comfortable and begins to find a place within different communities, there are characters who push against the idea of relationships

between hearing and hearing-impaired individuals. In the second volume of the manga, *Theory of Happiness*, Kohei and Taichi, now sophomores, become acquainted with Maya, a freshman who has partial hearing loss. Maya is an important figure in the manga as she represents how societal expectations on proper disabled/abled person interactions lead to the isolation of disabled individuals and lack of meaningful relationship building between these communities. Her failure in communicating with nondisabled communities is partially due to her failure at self-acceptance and illustrates how she plays into the idea of disabled people needing to accommodate the nondisabled majority.

Because of shared experiences, she and Kohei become friends, but she views Taichi as a nuisance and an outsider. She assumes that those without disabilities “breeze through life without any trouble at all,”<sup>42</sup> so when Taichi contradicts her, saying she cannot know what trouble people have had in life and that she “shouldn’t judge peoples’ lives by [her] own standards,” she straightaway takes a dislike to him. She reacts, yelling that he’s awful and that “People like you – people who think they understand – you’re the worst kind!”<sup>43</sup> She then accuses him of sponging lunches off of Kohei when other more qualified note takers would volunteer for free. Maya represents the type of person Kohei was before he met Taichi, wishing to seclude herself from able-bodied individuals because she thinks they can never relate. On a larger scale, Maya signifies how a lack of self-acceptance can get in the way of communication, relationships, and community building between abled and disabled persons, even with nondisabled individuals who do not expect disabled persons to fit into prescribed roles or cater to them. She is comfortable with Kohei because she feels



they can understand each other, and she wishes to protect him from the likes of Taichi whom she views as an invader into, and even a detriment to, their hearing-impaired community. She tells Taichi that he is “no help to anyone,”<sup>44</sup> and expresses a kind of anger at non-disabled individuals, most likely because she has not yet formed a positive recognition of her own impairment and mirrors her self-disgust into disgust of others.

Maya is consistently rude to Taichi and complains to Kohei that he is noisy, but instead of agreeing with her, he comments that Taichi’s voice is easy to hear. The illustrated panel that accompanies this conversation is one of few that show a close-up of Kohei’s laughing face – he’s thinking about Taichi’s antics (Fig. 5). The change of Kohei’s facial expressions from the beginning of the manga to the second volume



Figure 5: *Theory of Happiness*, p. 90

is drastic, transitioning from sullenness, confusion, and expressionlessness to laughter and contentment. Kohei tells Maya, “He’s like a wild boar, isn’t he? Always rushing straight ahead. He can’t turn. He can’t get out of the way. He just rushes straight ahead until he slams into something. That’s what I’ve... always liked about him.”<sup>45</sup> Kohei is not only talking about Taichi’s literal physical clumsiness, but also his personality. Perhaps Kohei is tired of people tiptoeing around him, being polite and concerned without really knowing how to interact with him. He appreciates Taichi’s straightforward and bumbling ways, and these characteristics that Maya finds annoying and even damaging, Kohei finds refreshing. While Maya’s character represents someone who has not yet fully accepted her disability as a vital part of her identity and, therefore, hinders communication and relationships with abled-bodied individuals, Kohei represents someone who has made that transition into self-acceptance and can, therefore, effectively communicate with able-bodied individuals and build communities between the two groups.

Despite their differing feelings about Taichi, Maya is the second person Kohei comes out to about his sexuality. Though she is perceptive enough to ask if Kohei likes Taichi, he does not shy away from the question or deny his feelings. Maya posits, “There are better people for you out there! He’s so stupid and violent and simple! He can’t help you. He can only hurt you.”<sup>46</sup> However, he explains that before he met Taichi, he often thought about what life would be like if he could hear, imagining it would be prettier and more comfortable, and he forgot about smiling or getting angry: “I didn’t think about anything. I was just breathing and staying alive.”<sup>47</sup> When he shares his feelings about Taichi to Maya, Kohei’s dialogue is central in highlighting

his evolving acceptance of his disability and himself. He explains:

But when I'm with Taichi...I start to remember all those things. He runs around and wears himself out. He gets so upset for other people, more than for himself. He forgets about the lecture and tells me all the professor's jokes. Before I knew it, I was laughing too. I'm glad I met him. It's because of him...that even if I can't hear I think I can be happy, as I am. There's been so many awful things. So many times I've hated this life, this disability. But since I met Taichi, it feels like it's all worth it. Even if I had to do it all over again, I'd still...I think I'd still choose this life. Because since I met him...I've been so happy.<sup>48</sup>

Here, Kohei comes out to Maya, not only as queer, but as disabled too. Even though Maya was already aware of Kohei's disability, his speech indicates him coming out as accepting of his disability, again emphasizing his move from isolation to community, from exclusion to access. Not only is he accessing social relationships but also happiness, which he had, in part, been denying himself.

Maya's character is important because she embodies another lived experience for disabled individuals – those who are still adjusting to their disability, struggling with self-acceptance, and succumbing to the idea of compulsory able-bodiedness. Maya has not moved from exclusion to access in the same way Kohei has, and notwithstanding her desire to distance herself from those in the hearing community, she also caters to compulsory able-bodiedness by pretending to understand others by using context clues. This occurs several times throughout the manga, and in thinking of her past she divulges, "I didn't want anyone to know my weakness. I didn't want their pity. I was so set on catching up with everyone else. I didn't want to depend on anyone. I wanted to do everything on my own."<sup>49</sup> This dialogue reveals, again, how Maya has not yet embraced disability as part of a valid social identity, seeing it as a weakness or as something she can merely overcome.

She is still at the point of denying and hiding her disability. And because she does not want others to see her “weakness”, she pretends to be able to hear more than she actually does, not asking people to speak louder, slow down, or repeat themselves, with the exception of Taichi. Early on in *Theory of Happiness*, Maya frankly tells Taichi, “What? I can’t hear anything you’re saying.”<sup>50</sup> She most likely says this because she doesn’t like him, and he is trying to talk to Kohei, which she doesn’t want. It is a ploy to get him to go away. However, it also reveals that Maya is unconcerned about showing her “weakness” to Taichi – again Taichi acts as a sort of bridge to help someone “come out” as disabled.

It is also significant because he is the one who calls her out for catering to able-bodiedness. He tells her, “You can’t hear nearly as well as you pretend to, can you? . . . But what does that do for us? People think they’re having a conversation. But you’re forcing them to talk to themselves. How is anyone supposed to have a conversation like that? You think that’s okay?” When Maya responds, “I know... You’re going to say I don’t try hard enough! That I need to try harder!,” Taichi completely disagrees with her. He counters, “How could you try any harder than you already are? I can tell you’re reading lips and trying to fill in the blanks. Don’t you get tired? If you keep that up, you’ll always be exhausted. So why not just tell the truth up front? Why should you have to take all the responsibility?”<sup>51</sup> Just as he had with Kohei, Taichi doesn’t expect Maya to humor normates in order to build relationships with them. Rather, he wants her to become comfortable enough with her disability that she is not afraid to ask for assistance when she needs it; he never believes that she is less than human because of her disability. During the scene where Taichi berates Maya, an image of Kohei is

inserted within the panels, saying, “There are people who understand,”<sup>52</sup> because Maya is recalling what Kohei has said about Taichi. After Taichi’s exclamation, Maya cries, just as Kohei had when Taichi told him it is not his fault that he cannot hear, and she yells, “You don’t... know anything...so why...how can you...say that?” (Fig. 6). The parallel between Maya and Kohei both crying after Taichi speaks with them, illustrates the similarities in their situations – trying to cater to or humor the hearing community, feeling isolated, and believing that no one truly understands. But Taichi stands apart from other hearing people because he never assumes that they just need to try harder or that they need to overcome a weakness.



Figure 6: *Theory of Happiness*, pp. 179-180

Even when he doesn’t understand, he wants to. Kohei cries because it is the first time someone has tried to understand him and he feels relieved, while Maya cries for

much the same reason, but responds with shock because she can't quite comprehend how a hearing person, let alone Taichi who she views as simple and stupid, can speak what she is feeling. Taichi represents nondisabled individuals in society who want to understand, effectively communicate, and build relationships with disabled people without stereotyping them, expecting them to accommodate the nondisabled community, or believing they should fit into prescribed roles.

It is important to note that Kohei tells Maya about his feelings toward Taichi when he believes that his attraction is still one sided. He and Taichi are still friends, but they have not discussed their relationship further, and Kohei has even promised that he will not do anything Taichi will hate (i.e. kiss him). But despite not having his feelings returned, Kohei still feels the most comfortable around Taichi. Ann Pointon and Chris Davies, the editors of *Framed: Interrogating Disability in the Media*, explain:

In the social model the impairment is seen as much less important. Instead it is a disabling environment, the attitudes of others (not the disabled person), and institutional structures that are the problems requiring solution. Disability is thus not a fixed condition but a social construct and open to action and modification. One may have an impairment (or “condition”) but in the right setting and with the right aids and attitudes one may not be disabled by it.<sup>53</sup>

Prior to meeting Taichi, the attitudes of others hinder Kohei, but his character development illustrates how his disability is a social construct that is open to modification. Taichi's treatment of him affects how others treat him, creating change in social attitudes, and he becomes less disabled by his disability. Therefore, he still feels comfortable around Taichi even after he confesses his feelings.

Moreover, Taichi gradually comes to comprehend his reactions to Kohei throughout *Theory of Happiness* – his heart pounds loudly when they hug, he gets



jealous when he hears Kohei has a girlfriend (a false rumor), and he greatly misses him when they cannot see each other for long periods of time. He thinks, “I wanted him to smile all the time. But I don’t want to imagine him smiling with a stranger,”<sup>54</sup> realizing that he too likes Kohei “that way.” When Taichi confesses his feelings to Kohei, in fact telling him, “I love you,” Kohei is concerned he is not hearing him correctly. Taichi repeats it over and over, thinking, “I’ll say it twice. Ten times. A hundred times. That’s it. I’ll say it until you believe it. Until you know it’s the truth.”<sup>55</sup> (Fig. 7). Taichi, once he recognizes his own feelings, does not hesitate to express



Figure 7: *Theory of Happiness*, pp. 268-269

them. He, who desires to understand the intersectionalities of Kohei’s identity, also comes to understand Kohei’s feelings toward him and reciprocates them. This adds another layer onto Kohei’s re-adaptation of his identity and to his happiness. Just has



Taichi's friendship helped him to open up and express more sides of himself, their romantic relationship continues to push Kohei to open up. He becomes even more comfortable around Taichi (no longer afraid he will do something Taichi hates), so he is more affectionate and willing to express his desires.

### **The Character of Ryu and the Idea of Complete Community Isolation**

However, as the manga progresses, Kohei encounters another hearing disabled character who does not see the value in hearing/deaf relationships. Ryu, who is introduced in the third volume of the manga, *Limit Vol. 1*, is a character that pushes against the idea of disabled persons needing to accommodate normates, by not even associating with them. The figure of Ryu represents the debate between self-acceptance and self-isolation, because his version of self-acceptance revolves solely around the deaf community while pushing away anyone in the hearing community. Ryu is “almost completely deaf”<sup>56</sup> and chooses to live insularly within the deaf community, believing that other hearing-impaired and deaf individuals should also. Kohei meets Ryu after attending a deaf “futsal” group, and when the group goes for drinks afterward, Ryu learns that Kohei is studying law and is interested in labor regulations. Ryu, who works for a gaming company with all deaf employees, asks Kohei to look at a document about corporate regulations to check if “everything’s aboveboard.”<sup>57</sup> Kohei explains that he is not a lawyer and is not certified, so Ryu should have a real legal advisor look at it. Ryu explains that they tried to find one, but it did not work out because none of them could sign. He then tells Kohei, “We don’t need anyone who can hear at our company.”<sup>58</sup> The panels illustrate Ryu vehemently

signing these words, while Kohei's face registers shock (Fig. 8). Ryu provides an interesting foil to Kohei in several respects. First, Ryu, who was born with his disability, has had longer to navigate the relationship between disabled and nondisabled communities and chooses to isolate himself within his deaf community. He works with all deaf people and sees no reason to bring hearing people into the mix. Kohei, who at this point of the manga has been disabled for about six years, is still adjusting to these relationships. He is technically in between the hearing and deaf communities because he has partial hearing and also because he is recently disabled, and, therefore, was once part of the nondisabled community. Secondly, Ryu uses sign



Figure 8: *Limit* Vol. 1, p. 111

language as his medium of communication, while Kohei (by the third volume of manga) is still learning how to sign and uses speaking as his main form of communication. Though he increasingly uses sign when he speaks, he has trouble following Ryu when he signs too fast. The dynamic between these two characters is significant because it shows the variations of people within disabled communities and represents the differences in disabled experiences and views on acceptance and inclusion.

For Ryu, his move from isolation to community is specifically into a deaf community, which for him is living effectively; he finds pride in that identity and he tries to force other hearing-impaired and deaf people into this way of thinking. For example, when he finds a pamphlet about cochlear implants in Kohei's bag, Ryu rips it in half and tells Kohei, "You don't need it. Life's just fine without ears."<sup>59</sup> (Fig. 9). Cochlear implants have caused significant controversy in the deaf community, and Anelise Farris explains that because of the nature of the device, which transfers sound signals to the brain, "effectively avoiding the damaged part of the ear altogether . . . this surgery raises a contentious question: When a deaf person receives a cochlear implant, are they no longer in the deaf community? Are they forever in a limbo between hearing and deaf?"<sup>60</sup> Perhaps Ryu rips the pamphlet because he understands the difficulty in answering these questions and views it as easier for those with hearing disabilities to move completely into the deaf community. His comment that life is just fine without ears, expresses the important idea that deafness does not need to be fixed and that deaf (or hearing impaired) identity is valid and valuable. However, what Ryu represents as a character is the failure of some within

the deaf community to understand that others with hearing disabilities may wish to associate with both deaf and hearing communities, that just because one is hearing impaired doesn't mean they cannot have valuable relationships with nondisabled individuals, and there is no right or wrong side of the cochlear device debate.



Figure 9: *Limit* Vol. 1, p. 117

Just as Kohei stated earlier that “everyone has hearing disabilities to a different extent,”<sup>61</sup> those individuals also have different social needs and may wish to move from isolation into multiple communities, from exclusion into multiple modes of access.

Additionally, both Maya and Ryu are concerned by Kohei and Taichi's relationship, even though they are technically outsiders from it. Maya worries because

she thinks Taichi is “stupid and violent and simple,” and he will not be of any help to Kohei. However, as she gets to know Taichi better and sees how he makes Kohei happy, she becomes more open to trying to understand. She represents disabled individuals who take steps into self-acceptance and community building with non-disabled persons. Ryu, on the other hand, instantly condemns the relationship because it is between a hearing and hearing-impaired person. He does not know Taichi or that he is a man; he only knows that Kohei is in a relationship with a hearing person, and tells him, “Then break up. It’s gonna happen eventually anyway. You live in different worlds. . . . You’re never going to hear, so you should just come be on our



Figure 10: *Limit* Vol. 1, p. 231

side.”<sup>62</sup> Ryu represents disabled communities who view self-isolation as superior to any sort of relationships with able-bodied individuals. The panels that accompany

these words show the back of Ryu's head and an image of him stretching out his hand, his face ominously obscured by shadow (Fig. 10). It symbolizes, perhaps, the fear Kohei has at going completely deaf, a dark figure trying to pull him to "their side," but it also symbolizes the lack of understanding Ryu has about Kohei. Kohei's and Ryu's characters are also being used to represent larger, community struggles – the debate between insular living in a deaf community or community building between deaf and hearing groups.

Ryu has only met Kohei a couple of times, and when they have talked, it is mostly Ryu trying to convince Kohei to exist in an insular deaf community and push him to think the same way he does. When Ryu tells him to come to their side, it is not a friendly face welcoming him, but a dark stranger endeavoring to force him over. In contrast, whenever Kohei imagines Taichi, he thinks of him fondly, usually with a laughing face. The difference is striking. Ryu assumes that Kohei and Taichi can never truly understand each other because of the differences in their experiences, but what he fails to understand about their disabled/nondisabled relationship is "that in fact there are multiple ways of communicating and connecting, and that preconceived notions and black and white thinking do not hold up in a gray world."<sup>63</sup> Ryu also doesn't seem to understand that each disabled person must form their own identity and embrace their disability in different ways and by different means. Forcing his mindset on others does not work. Kohei formed a positive understanding of his disabled identity with the help of Taichi, so simply telling him to give up that relationship is like telling him to give up a part of himself. Kohei wants to embrace the intersectionalities of his disabled and queer identities that Taichi helped uncover.

## Conclusion

*I Hear the Sunspot* is still an ongoing manga series, and Yuki Fumino has only begun to address the complex intersections of disabled and queer identity and convey cultural ideas, societal perception, and interpersonal interaction of those within these groups. Using a range of characters, the manga confronts the problem of compulsory able-bodiedness, the process of moving away from isolation, and the debate about cochlear implants and Deaf culture,<sup>64</sup> while at the same time illustrating the process of coming out as disabled and queer in a society where both of these communities are seen as outsiders. Fumino uses the character of Kohei to demonstrate that coming out as disabled, or forming a positive recognition of disability, can occur after a disabled person no longer feels isolated. For Kohei, his accepting of his disabled identity allows him to accept his queer identity as well. Julia Carpenter notes that “coming out usually isn’t a singular pronouncement — an Ellen DeGeneres moment or a ‘*Glee*’ moment. Instead, it’s a series of moments.”<sup>65</sup> Ellen Samuels also explains that the “analogies between queerness and disability” suggest that for some people “the specifics of coming out in each context as a person whose bodily appearance does not immediately signal one’s own sense of identity.”<sup>66</sup> Both of these statements apply to Kohei, whose body does not immediately signal his disabled identity or his queer identity, contributing to the fact that coming out for him is not one moment, but many. He must continue to come out as disabled to people who do not know him, and though Kohei and Taichi have come out to each other about their sexuality, as the manga progresses, they will, most likely, have to continue to come out to others.

The characters around Kohei represent many different ideas about self-



acceptance, the intersectionality of identity, and relationships between disabled and nondisabled communities. Taichi's character acts a bridge between these two communities, specifically because he wants to build relationships without stereotyping disabled individual or expecting them to accommodate the nondisabled community. Therefore, his friendship with Kohei leads to Kohei's self-acceptance in terms of his hearing impairment and later his sexuality. Maya's character symbolizes disabled individuals who are still trying to negotiate the meaning of their disability, while gradually moving toward self-acceptance and away from compulsory able-bodiedness. And Ryu's character represents disabled individuals who have moved into self-acceptance in the form of community isolation. Each of these characters illustrate the variations of disabled identity and the differences of lived experience for those with hearing impairments. As these characters continue to interact and evolve throughout the manga, this opens the door for further discussions about societal perceptions of disabled lived experiences, compulsory able-bodiedness, same-sex relationships, the queering of norms, and the intersections of queer and disabled identity.

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<sup>1</sup> Takeshi Hamamura, "Are Cultures Becoming Individualistic? A Cross-Temporal Comparison of Individualism-Collectivism in the United States and Japan." *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, no. 16 (2011): 20.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 16

<sup>3</sup> Andrea Wood, "Drawing Disability in Japanese Manga: Visual Politics, Embodied Masculinity, and Wheelchair Basketball in Inoue Takehiko's REAL," *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry*, no. 4 (2013): 639. DOI 10.1007/s11013-013-9342-y

<sup>4</sup> Nanette Gottlieb, *Linguistic Stereotyping and Minority Groups in Japan* (London: Routledge, 2006), 99, 102, 108.

<sup>5</sup> Donald Richie, "A Trove of Love Fiction, All for the Love of Women," *The Japan Times*, Dec 21, 2008, Accessed Nov. 5, 2019. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2008/12/21/books/a-trove-of-fiction-all-for-the-love-of-women/#.XcHsvuhKjIW>

<sup>6</sup> Kazuyoshi Kawasaki, "Between Nationalisation and Globalisation: Male Same-Sex Politics in Post-War Japan" (PhD diss., University of Sussex, 2015): 38.

<sup>7</sup> Nagayasu Shibun, “Sexual Minorities in Japan: The Myth of Tolerance,” *Nippon.com*, Oct 21, 2016, Accessed

Nov. 5, 2019. <https://www.nippon.com/en/currents/doo253/sexual-minorities-in-japan-the-myth-of-tolerance.html>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Yuki Fumino. *I Hear the Sunspot* (New York: One Peace Books, 2017). 4.

<sup>11</sup> The manga explains that a note taker is “for students that have hearing disabilities because they can’t understand the lectures... [they] take notes in class and then explain the lectures to students that need help.” Fumino, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Fumino, *I Hear*, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 12.

<sup>14</sup> Fumino, *I Hear*, 9.

<sup>15</sup> Tao Lin, “The Concept of ‘Politeness’: A Comparative Study in Chinese and Japanese Verbal Communication.” *Intercultural Communication Studies*, no. 22 (2013): 161.

<sup>16</sup> Ellen Samuels, “My Body, My Closet: Invisible Disability and the Limits of Coming Out,” in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2013), 324.

<sup>17</sup> Fumino, *I Hear*, 17.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>19</sup> Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 13.

<sup>20</sup> Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “Becoming Disabled,” *New York Times*, August 19, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/21/opinion/sunday/becoming-disabled.html>

<sup>21</sup> Fumino, *I Hear*, 24.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>24</sup> Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 8.

<sup>25</sup> Fumino, *I Hear*, 28.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 88-89

<sup>29</sup> Fiona Kumari Campbell, *Contours of Ableism: The Production of Disability and Abledness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 44.

<sup>30</sup> Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness and Liberation* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1999), 2.

<sup>31</sup> Fumino, *I Hear*, 111.

<sup>32</sup> John Swain and Colin Cameron, “Unless Otherwise Stated: Discourses of Labelling and Identity in Coming Out,” in *Disability Discourse*, ed. Mairian Corker and Sally French (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999), 76.

<sup>33</sup> Robert McRuer, “Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence” in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2013), 324.

<sup>34</sup> Fumino, *I Hear*, 151

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>38</sup> McRuer, “Compulsory Able-Bodiedness,” 370.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 53.

<sup>40</sup> Fumino, *I Hear*, 165.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 156

<sup>42</sup> Fumino, *Theory of Happiness*, 33.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 90-91.

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- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., 144.  
<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 147.  
<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 148-152.  
<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 167-168  
<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 44.  
<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 177-179.  
<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 179.  
<sup>53</sup> Ann Pointon and Chris Davies, introduction to *Framed: Interrogating Disability in the Media*, ed. Ann Pointon and Chris Davies (London: British Film Institute, 1997), 2.  
<sup>54</sup> Fumino, *Theory of Happiness*, 254.  
<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 268-270.  
<sup>56</sup> Fumino, *Limit Vol. 1*, 108  
<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 110.  
<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 111.  
<sup>59</sup> Fumino, *Limit Vol. 1*, 117.  
<sup>60</sup> Anelise Farris, “‘Deaf is Not a Bad Word’: The Positive Construction of Disability in *Switched at Birth*,” in *ABC Family to Freeform TV: Essays on the Millennial-Focused Network and Its Programs*, ed. Emily L. Newman and Emily Witsell (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2018), 240.  
<sup>61</sup> Fumino, *I Hear*, 16.  
<sup>62</sup> Fumino, *Limit Vol. 1*, 228-231  
<sup>63</sup> Farris, “Deaf is not a Bad Word,” 239.  
<sup>64</sup> Writing about deafness often configures the term deaf in various ways. Sometimes the d is lowercased when discussing hearing loss and capitalized when discussing deaf culture. I have followed this tendency throughout this article. See Jamie Berke, “Deaf Culture – Big D Small D,” *Very Well*, June 28, 2016. <https://www.verywell.com/deaf-culture-big-d-small-d-1046233>.  
<sup>65</sup> Julia Carpenter, “Coming out as LGBTQ: It’s not one moment, but several,” *The Washington Post*, June 30, 2016.  
<sup>66</sup> Samuels, 316.

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