A TALL TALE: THE MYTH OF SEXUAL DIMORPHISM

AND THE QUEERING OF HETEROSEXUAL BODIES IN

AYA NAKARA'S *LOVELY COMPLEX*

by

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Human sexual dimorphism has been employed in the creation and perpetuation of naturalized heteronormativity and essentialist gender roles on the basis of biological differences. The connection between size and gender is often made evident within expectations of what a heterosexual couple must look like, with the man taller and the woman smaller. The following is a queer and feminist theoretical analysis of Aya Nakahara's <u>Lovely Complex,</u> a shojo anime that follows a taller than average high school girl and her failure to properly perform femininity within the norms of her social context. Her romance with a shorter than average male peer provides a platform for this analysis, which aims to reveal the heteronormative myth of sexual dimorphism. Heterosexual bodies which cannot successfully and seamlessly inhabit the heteronormative dimorphic spaces around them are effectively *queered* by those spaces. This queering is important to understand by way of attending to the process of negotiating and deconstructing heterosexual dimorphism, as well as the ways in which heterosexuals creatively achieve feelings of "comfort" in spaces that are actually restrictive and that have never allowed them to feel comfortable before.

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Introduction

Sexual dimorphism—the difference in appearance between males and females of the same species— is often referenced in order to naturalize social differences between men and women, as well as maintain gender role expectations in the interest of heterosexual reproduction. Sexual dimorphism is relied upon as phenotypical "proof" for the belief in the "innate" and "obvious" differences between the sexes. Ironically, however, this correlation between phenotype and innate social role differentiation has led to a coercive understanding of sexual dimorphism, requiring certain forms of exaggerated phenotypical differentiation and impacting ideals for physical attractiveness.

Height, for example, is an observable trait of human physicality that has congealed over time to have socially constructed meanings in relation to heterosexual gender roles and understandings of attractiveness. In many societies, men are expected to be taller than the women they are attracted to, and women are likewise expected to be attracted to "taller" men.[1] While actual mating preferences often reflect this pattern, it is too often presumed that this outcome is a consequence of innate, biological predispositions. In a study on reproductive success, Daniel Nettle found that taller than average men have the most reproductive success, while shorter than average women have the most reproductive success (Nettle, 1919-1922). As far as an evolutionary hypothesis, it make sense for heterosexual women to prefer larger men as a way to ensure likelihood of survival, which mirrors other mammalian mate selection strategies. This preference appears to have survived, despite the fact that, as Nettle points out,

[1] On assumptions about body size and gendered traits explored in feminist theory see Wilchins 2013, Beauvoir 1973, Young 2005

fitness-related, "direct selection pressures may well be relaxed under more recent living conditions" (1922). In other words, from an evolutionary standpoint, we no longer need to select mates based on who can protect us in battle or from predators, but women continue to select for taller men. Further confounding evolutionary arguments is the fact that, according to Nettle, men *are not* selecting for taller women, and are instead mostly selecting for shorter than average women (1920-22). Nettle does not see an obvious answer as to why a taller height in women is not being selected for. If "height is highly heritable and polygenic… taller women would have taller sons" (1922). With a higher chance of giving birth to taller sons and helping to guarantee the survival of his genetic lineage, it would make sense that "a male preference for tallness in a mate would also evolve, unless there were some fairly direct counter- acting pressure" (1922).

Nettle's caveat about a potential "counter-acting pressure" functioning to skew evolutionary rationales for selecting tall mates of *any* gender, offers us an opportunity to clarify how height (as it relates to "attractiveness") is imbued with culturally specific, socially constructed gendered meanings. As Piotr Sorokowski and his colleagues have concluded in multiple anthropological studies, the patterns for selection of mates based on sexual dimorphism in stature (SDS) are too inconsistent across world cultures to be considered universal or linked to essentialist, "biological" gender norms (Sorokowski et. al, "Body Height Preferences"). Instead, there is far more evidence to suggest that cultural norms and pressures within a given social context have a stronger influence on the actual dimorphism observed in heterosexual couples.[2]

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[2] For more on the cultural variations in SDS preferences and the adjusting of scope relative to dating pool size, see Sorokowski et. al 2012 (two studies in 2012), 2015, Salska et. al 2008, Stulp et. al 2012, 2013, Fink et. al 2007, Pawloski 2003

"Heteronormativity" is perhaps the most tangible example of a socially constructed pressure influencing dominant heterosexual mate selection. First articulated as "compulsory heterosexuality" by Adrienne Rich, heteronormativity refers to the ways that non-heterosexual desire or non-normative gender expression is marginalized and oppressed by setting heterosexuality as the naturalized default. This compulsory default is coercively engrained—through institutions, policies, practices, and discourses—to the point that heterosexuality is experienced as normal, seamless, invisible, and automatic, making any other sexual desire or identity divergent or even intolerable.[3] However, in this paper I call attention to the power of heteronormativity to restrict people with normative heterosexual desires, and how it coerces them to perform heterosexuality in specific ways.

Heteronormativity is a force capable of policing more than one's sexual orientation. Feminist and queer theorists often make a point to separate and validate the different ways that one can inhabit gender and sexual identity, distinguishing between gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation, and how one is not indicative of the others. For example, a person who identifies as male could dress very femininely, and have only heterosexual desires, despite the common stereotypical assumption that "feminine men" are "gay."

While it is possible for some spaces to hold this understanding of fluidity and multiplicity, dominant spaces of heteronormativity are not so flexible. In other words, heteronormativity applies not only to a societal reinforcement of heterosexuality as the

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[3] On heteronormativity and the implicit oppression of non-heterosexual or non-cisgender people: See Rich 1980, Rubin 1994, Waner 1991, Pitman 1999
On anti-LGBT violence, see D'haese et. al 2015, Meyer 2008, Stotzer 2009

norm, but also to certain physical traits as being associated with femininity and masculinity. It is not enough for a heterosexual woman, for example, to be sexually and romantically interested in the opposite sex. She must also inhabit certain constructed gender norms to signal heterosexuality and to be attractive to potential partners. A woman who is interested in men is not automatically meeting the demands of heteronormativity; she must also make her body conform to sexually dimorphic expectations, dressing, behaving, and *physically looking* like a "natural," "different, but complimentary" pair.

Aya Nakahara's shojo anime, <u>Lovely Complex</u> provides a heterosexual romantic storyline through which we can examine the constraints and challenges of a naturalized, taken-for-granted belief in sexual dimorphism, specifically what it means to have heterosexual desire when one's body is perceived to not meet heterosexual dimorphic gender expectations. <u>Lovely Complex</u> is set in contemporary Osaka, Japan, and follows the unlikely and comedic love story of the tallest girl in school, Koizumi Risa, and the shortest boy in school, Ōtani Atsushi.[4]. Koizumi and Ōtani share a complex about their height, a struggle to fit in socially and romantically while being constantly reminded that there is something wrong with them. Koizumi as a "too-tall" woman and Ōtani as a "too-short" man have the shared experience of an impossible desire to embody the heteronormative expectations of their gendered physicality. Due to the ways in which femininity and masculinity have been linked to physical size, the two of them must learn to navigate their gender identity amidst the constant blows to their self-esteem,

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[4] Koizumi Risa will mostly be referred to as Koizumi, while Ōtani Atsushi will mostly be referred to as Ōtani. These are their family names, which are most traditionally the way people are referred to in Japan.

their failure to embody the traits expected of them within their social context, and the invalidation of their potential as a romantic pair.

Through an analysis of these characters—and the social and narrative worlds that give their lives meaning—I explore the embodied experience of heterosexual identity and desire, particularly as it is inflected by height. The taken-for-granted belief that heterosexual men should be taller than the heterosexual women they are romantically interested in, combined with an attentiveness to what heterosexuals feel as they inhabit bodies that fail to achieve this taken-for-granted ideal, makes Lovely Complex a rich cultural text for feminist analysis and queer theoretical reflection. This study of Lovely Complex reveals how heterosexual bodies can also be queered by their inability to embody an acceptable performance of heterosexuality. Furthermore, this study shows how heteronormativity, as a structural and ideological process that presumably "favors" heterosexuals at the expense of queer people, actually harms "straight" people in acute, seemingly invisible ways.

My analysis begins with an introduction and analysis of some of the storytelling tools found in shojo manga and anime as they create the narrative world and social situations within Lovely Complex. The kinds of romantic discomfort that Koizumi and Ōtani are experiencing are conveyed with specific language and visuals, with their failed embodiments in sharp contrast to the successful embodiments surrounding them. Within these successful embodiments, I pay particular attention to the different ways that height and bodies are used to articulate these visual meanings. Analyzing Lovely Complex as a globally popular shojo product requires an understanding of these particular storytelling tools, tropes, and meanings within the animation of the story as

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they translate to viewers in the United States and around the world. Additionally, while performing a queer and feminist theoretical analysis of a heterosexual shojo story, I will also be in dialogue with scholarship around gender bending and queer romances within the shojo genre, namely yaoi and BL (boys love).[5] While making arguments about the ways that heterosexual characters are queered via shojo visual tropes, it is significant to take note of different and overlapping ways in which the same shojo visual tropes are applied to queer and homosexual narratives. Finally, by examining Koizumi and Ōtani's (sometimes failed, sometimes successful) experimental attempts to embody romance, I use tools provided by queer and feminist theorists as well as insights from manga studies scholars to break down social constructs in order to expose the myth of a naturalized requirement of heterosexual dimorphism in romantic couples.

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[5] Yaoi and Shojo: Camper 2006, McLelland et. al 2016, Nagaike 2012, 2015, Takeuchi 2010

<u>Lovely Complex</u> in the Context of Globalization, Gender Play, and Shojo Aesthetics

Lovely Complex is an anime (Japanese animation) adaptation of an early 2000's manga (Japanese comic) of the same name. The manga ran from 2001 to 2006, and is 17 volumes in total. In order to work with a more finite (24 episodes) sample and also deal with motion and the additional language tools, like sound effects and voice acting, I will perform my actual analysis on scenes from the anime.[6] However, as explained by visual media scholar Kukhee Choo, "most anime have been adapted from manga narratives even since the 1960s. Therefore, to better understand anime one has to look into manga's visual narratives"(1). To better analyze the social constructs present in <u>Lovely Complex</u> and to see their broader applications, it is important to understand it as a global product in dialogue with its genre, and the storytelling tools that come with it.

In the last two decades, shojo has transcended its typical generic definition as Japanese manga and anime written by and for young girls in Japan.[7] While their roots are certainly traceable to specific moments in Japanese history and cultural production, anime and manga are now an influential part of pop-culture consumption around the world.[8] As Yukari Fujimoto observes, shojo specifically made its break into US consumption in 1992, with the popularization of Naoko Takeuchi's <u>Sailor Moon</u> (33-34). <u>Sailor Moon</u>'s "girl power" driven super hero action plot changed the world of comics in the U.S. forever: it provided an open door for young women to enter the

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[6] I'm not fluent, but I find that I can glean more context and a more accurate translation of what is happening when I can both hear it and read the subtitles.

[7] For historic perspective and general overview of the genre of shojo manga and anime, see Aoyama et. al 2010, King et. al 2010, LaMarre 2009, Masuda 2015, Shamoon 2015, Takahashi 2008, Takeuchi 2010, Toku 2015

[8] On global influence of Japanese pop culture through anime and manga: Choo 2009, Honda 2010, Prough 2010, Suan 2017, Toku 2015

world of comic book fandom, which had been dominated by male fans up to that point. Suddenly, more and more girls wanted to participate in cosplay, read comics, and attend comic book conventions. Sailor Moon appealed to a larger base of female readers than American comics had thus far. Fujimoto cites the notion of strong super heroes who are also extremely feminine, emotional, and all-around "girly" for its appeal to girls in and outside of Japan (34). She explains that it was significant to see "that girls can fight without being men or dressing like men"—that a superhero story could be full of complex emotions, strong female friendships, and romance (Fujimoto 38).

Before its journey overseas in 1992, shojo manga had been a long established media form with a strong bond between its writers and readers. According to Nozomi Masuda, shojo manga authors often grew up reading shojo themselves, and some made their writing debut very young, creating little distance between the writers and the consumers (26-27). Shojo authors write things that they themselves would like to read, creating valuable cultural tools for self-expression and communication between women of different ages. While shojo manga can be divided into several different subgenres, Lovely Complex falls neatly into the "Otometic" branch (Masuda 27). Otometic manga features stories about the self in ordinary life, with relatable settings and themes such as school, romance, and relationships. Through these manga, young women can, as Masuda explains, "experience different types of the "I" and can relate to the real world by simulating the characters' thoughts and relationships" (27). Shojo manga of this type are both constantly influenced by and influencing the lives and perspectives of their readers, to the point that Masuda describes them as "textbooks for living", in that

reading them "conclusively influences the process of readers' growth and their lives"(28).

I point out this specific subgenre of shojo manga to draw a closer connection between the social happenings in <u>Lovely Complex</u> and the realities of socially constructed rules around gender and dimorphism present locally in Japan, as well as globally in societies like the US that hold similar standards around stature and heteronormative performance. Otometic stories are rooted in ordinary life, and provide insights and perspectives toward understanding stories both relatable and different from one's own. The notion that these stories are written to be realistic enough to act as "textbooks for living" with local and global implications, further supports my connection between the happenings in <u>Lovely Complex</u> and their basis in actual socially constructed ideals as they exist in global and local contexts.

The continued global fascination with Japanese pop culture, especially that of anime and manga, is a growing scholarly topic across disciplines both in Japan and abroad. According to Choo, "Anime has become a part of mainstream media in the US. Scholars in media studies, cultural studies, sociology and anthropology have also recently picked up on the phenomenon, bolstering anime studies in the West"(1). As one of the many scholars interested in the global success of anime, Stevie Suan sets out to analyze the particular ways in which such a vast multitude of anime and manga products have become uniform enough to be conceptualized as all fitting within the same category. Suan employs language and frameworks of performativity created by Judith Butler to understand gender, creating an interdisciplinary approach to understanding anime's particular ability to cross multiple boarders to be embraced and

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understood by multiple cultures. Citing Butler's original presentation of the theory of gender performativity, Suan argues that "anime's media-form can be seen as produced through, using Judith Butler's…turn of phrase, a 'stylized repetition of acts' that negotiates anime identity in each performative instance"(67).

Suan utilizes Butler's language describing a repetition of acts eventually coming to make up the gender of a given body, and how those acts are produced and reproduced within their social context to the point of feeling solid and concrete, to discuss the repetitive acts that have come to make up anime. In other words, as Suan explains, "anime's identity is constituted…by audio, visual and narrative conventions" in addition to the "medium of animation they are performed in. These conventions, when performed, bring anime into being, producing 'acts of anime', so to speak: a 'doing' of anime" (67). He emphasizes that there are particular traits present across genres of anime and manga, **"**and the viewers who recognize those traits will have varying degrees of knowledge about them, producing many different viewing experiences globally" (Suan 64).

These uniform and repetitive traits that Suan views as a congealed performance of a globally interpreted "anime-ness" refer to the wide variety of story telling tools and visual tropes that are necessary to understanding and contextualizing Lovely Complex within shojo anime and manga. Most of these traits will be explored in depth in the next section, as their meanings are often tied to gender and are demonstrated through different characters throughout the story. Indeed, Suan's application of Butler's performance theory in creating and defining "anime-ness" is useful in analyzing the performance of these traits by specific characters. Performativity theory here applies to

both a congealed representation of shojo anime gender in a larger, more global

interpretation of visual language, but also for the individual characters and their

different expressions of gender within <u>Lovely Complex.</u> For instance, <u>Lovely Complex</u>

is rich with examples of specific anime visual tropes, which cue attractiveness,

femininity, discomfort, and gender bending in relation to heteronormativity and social

roles as demonstrated by different characters throughout the story.[9]

Shojo manga as a whole has been known to play with gender bending in the

form of reversed gender roles, cross-dressing, and other non-normative performances of

gender. In fact, entire subgenres of shojo have evolved out of stories about homosexual

couples. A globally popular example of a subgenre of this nature features male-male

erotica written and primarily consumed by straight women, known as "yaoi".[10] The

etymology of the term, as described by Rea Amit and Cathy Camper, includes a

combination of the terms yamanashi(no climax), ochinashi (no punch line), and

iminashi (no meaning). As a genre, yaoi often plays with traditional gender roles and

aesthetics, including portrayals of men as having beautiful, feminine features, and cross-

dressing. As detailed by Kazumi Nagaike, it's also common to see yaoi couples

mirroring heterosexual models of dimorphism, with one tall and masculine partner

dominant to a short and feminine partner and invoking aesthetics and tropes common to

shojo manga as a whole ("Queer Readings", 65).

While there is not a unanimous understanding between scholars as to why

straight female readers and writers have fixated upon erotic relationships between two

men, there seems to be at least some agreement that women may be trying to explore a

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[9] Explorations of Japanese aesthetics and manga story telling tools: Amit 2012, Choo 2007, Macwilliams et. al 2015, Masuda 2015, Shamoon 2015, Suan 2017, Toku 2015 (book and interviews within), 2007

[10]More on Yaoi: Camper 2006, McLelland et. al 2016, Nagaike 2012, 2015, Takeuchi 2010

creative space in which to play with gender norms in a patriarchal society full of misogyny and constrictive gender roles.[11] Camper suggests, **"**a romance between two men can bypass misogyny and female stereotypes; removing the femme avatar can open up a freedom of sexual exploration and imagination for female artists that they don't find in heterosexual erotica" (24). In another argument, put forth by Fujimoto, "in an all-male world in which no biological sexual difference exists", oppression on the basis of anatomic essentialism is eliminated, allowing the creators and readers to imagine different "couplings by freely combining all sorts of gender factors and power dynamics as they like" ("Evolution of BL", 85). This, Fujimoto proposes, "is the pleasure of yaoi and BL: a thoroughly gender-blended world" ("Evolution of BL", 85).

Kayo Takeuchi draws a connection between the yaoi genre and gender theory, due to the various ways "yaoi and BL are seen as fulfilling the desires of both shojo and women restrained by the patriarchal system of Japanese society. Naturally, yaoi and BL are often discussed from a gender studies point of view. In particular, those works that symbolize an opposition to the doctrine of heterosexual love have increased in appeal"(92-93). While Lovely Complex is not a story about homosexual love, it certainly does "symbolize an opposition to the doctrine of heterosexual love" in so far as it plays with gender performance, expression, and the way that bodies in heterosexual couples are supposed to look. Similar to yaoi narratives, Lovely Complex also plays with role reversals, cross-dressing, and other tweaks in normative gender performance in order to transgress and call attention to heteronormative social constructs, specifically a failure to meet a normative embodiment of sexual dimorphism.

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[11] On Yaoi as homophobic female escapism: Camper 2006, Fujimoto (BL) 2015, Takeuchi 2010

In the following section, I begin my close reading by analyzing supporting characters in <u>Lovely Complex</u> and the ways they illustrate different shojo and yaoi visual tropes and gender performances, and how they connect to more successful embodiments of sexual dimorphism.

Representations of Successful Sexual Dimorphism and Aesthetic

Performance in <u>Lovely Complex</u>

Before analyzing Koizumi Risa's experience as the too tall, failed physical expression of femininity as it is situated within heteronormative expectations, it is useful to look at the other female identifying characters in the story and the way that their femininity is portrayed within shojo aesthetic tropes. Because gender is socially constructed and reinforced by the people in any given space, observing Koizumi's embodiment of gender alone is not enough. As Sarah Ahmed would explain it, Koizumi's failures are only made obvious and apparent in contrast to her climate, when compared to the congealed gender expressions of those around her and the way they create a space with certain physical expectations. Within transgender theorist Riki Anne Wilchins' framework, there would be no way to perceive that Koizumi as too tall without a standard height to which she is compared. Three supporting female characters accompany Koizumi's story: Ishihara Nobuko, Tanaka Chiharu, and Kotobuki Seiko.[12] Like Koizumi, they are all high school students, experiencing the turmoil of youth and self-discovery while navigating new worlds of romance. All three female costars are drawn to exemplify several quintessential tropes of the shojo feminine aesthetic. They're much shorter than Koizumi, and while I'm unable to find conclusive measurements, Nobuko looks to be the second tallest, but still much shorter than Koizumi, while Chiharu an Seiko are both distinctly a few inches shorter than our short hero, Ōtani.

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[12] Unlike Koizumi and Ōtani, these characters all primarily go by their first names, and will be referred to in this paper as Nobuko, Chiharu, and Seiko.

Nobuko is sassy, spunky, and speaks her mind. She's often the instigator of social scheming and matchmaking, and takes a lot of pride in being cute and feminine, to a sometimes-competitive degree. Nobuko has a boyfriend, Nakao, who she is very gushy and romantic with, often calling him "darling" and "honey". Her boyfriend is much, much taller than her, even taller than Koizumi, exemplifying an exaggerated portrayal of sexual dimorphism that is romanticized within many shojo stories. While I've struggled to find much along the lines of academic sources regarding this height difference, I can cite my own experience as an avid consumer of shojo anime and manga in asserting that extreme height differences like the one between Nobuko and her boyfriend are very popular lately.

Considering the ways in which shojo media can act to reflect the desires, expectations, and dreams of girls and women in Japan, as described by Masuda previously, it comes as no surprise. As Masami Toku has pointed out in agreement with other shojo scholars, "manga not only reflects social aesthetics and values throughout Japan, it influences them,"("Shojo Manga!", 30) raising questions about which came first: romanticizing real life height differences, or romanticizing height differences in manga? My hypothesis is that the height differences we see in reality and their so-called biological origin of sexual dimorphism are reflected and then exaggerated in manga and anime to enhance the aesthetic affect of "kawaii"(cuteness) and "kakkoii"(coolness), which I will elaborate on later, in the short woman and tall man respectively.

 It's worth mentioning, however, that the reversal of this height difference trope in which Koizumi is significantly taller than Ōtani, comes with questions about physical logistics and how romantic expression between such a pair would even work. When

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questions about whether or not the two have feelings for each other start to arise, Ōtani imagines the two of them sitting on a dock with a sparkling lake before them, leaning toward each other to kiss. With a look of disdain and disgust he asks Nakao (Nobuko's boyfriend, who reported this conversation back to the girls), "don't you think that's kind of comical?" The image of a woman leaning down and a man reaching up to kiss each other makes him uncomfortable enough that he can't imagine Koizumi ever being his girlfriend, despite his developing feelings for her.

Later, Koizumi, Nobuko, and Seiko are sitting in a cafe, and Nobuko doodles an illustration playing on the same discomfort around Koizumi and Ōtani's height difference, with Koizumi standing normally and Ōtani on his tiptoes, body shaking with exaggerated strain and pursed lips. Nobuko hides her face behind the doodle and attempts to quiet her laughter as she teases that "Ōtani-kun probably couldn't even reach Risa's lips". Koizumi responds by trying to imagine kissing Ōtani, bending at the waist awkwardly while he strains his neck up toward her, while a distorted "chyuu"(a Japanese onomatopoeia for kissing) echoes over a twisting blue background, all to signify a dizzying kind of "kimoi", or disgusted discomfort, at the thought of embodying such a backwards image of heteronormative romance.[13] Koizumi, too, admits that the image is "funny", so strange it must be a joke.

These questions of physical possibility as well as discomfort to the point of humor are not raised about the height differences between multiple couples in the series in which the man is tall and the woman is short. Koizumi and Ōtani alike have been conditioned to include physical size as a trait to consider in a romantic interest, in

[13] "Kimoi is a popular abbreviation of kimochi warui. It literally means to feel nauseous and refers to any general ill feeling, including a physical reaction." Amit 2012

alignment with essentialist ideas about the biological difference between men and women and the gender norms they support. Koizumi has been taught that she, as the woman, must be smaller in comparison, in order to occupy a physical embodiment of femininity, of being smaller than. In turn, Ōtani has been taught that the woman for him must be shorter than he is, establishing himself as the larger, more masculine partner. Difference in physical size in this direction is accepted and encouraged, further reinforcing an exaggerated sexual dimorphism as the taken-for-granted norm.

We see another example of the idealized and exaggerated heteronormative height difference when the timid Chiharu find herself in a relationship with another boy who is significantly taller than our heroine. Chiharu represents a frequently occurring archetype for female characters in the manga and anime world: the sweet, feminine, silent type. She very rarely speaks, and when she does, she is very quiet, polite, and particularly kind. She is a loving devoted friend to Koizumi and Nobuko. However, she cannot bear to be alone with a boy, let alone to speak to one, without becoming embarrassed, cued by blushing an exaggerated bright red. Notably, Ōtani tells Koizumi that he thinks Chiharu is "kawaii", specifically because of the combination of her petite stature and her shy silence.

While the complicated world of kawaii aesthetics is enough to fill multiple volumes, the way it used here implies the various things that can be found attractive about a woman or girl. Rea Amit explains that, while it's commonly translated to simply mean "cute" in English, its aesthetic reach in Japanese visual culture as well as its etymology are far more complex than that (178). Recently, kawaii is a word you might use to describe a colorful decorative pastry, a furry animal, an outfit, a pencil

pouch, or a person who you are attracted to. Kawaii culture has global reach and popularity, with its own tangible visual culture, which, according Masuda, developed along side shojo (girls') culture, and made popular on the global stage by anime and manga. Since the around the turn of the 20th century, the word kawaii has been used to describe things and people who are "small, innocent or innocent-like, and childish or girlish" (Masuda, 29). Here we see the direct link between aesthetic attractiveness, size, youthfulness, and femininity. Chiharu, by being small, innocent, and certainly like she could use a little protection, is archetypically written to occupy kawaii in a way that Koizumi cannot.

When Chiharu begins her first relationship, it consists of a lot of silently standing next to her equally shy boyfriend, both of them bright red (another symbolic representation of kawaii-ness) at even the slightest comment about romance. Koizumi feels sad and jealous about Chiharu's ability to get a boyfriend despite her admitted fear of men and being nearly silent around them. The way that Koizumi sees it, Chiharu is able to get a boyfriend (a tall boyfriend, importantly, whom I'll say more on later) because she is short and more traditionally feminine and therefore a person people see as kawaii.

Last but far from least is Kotobuki Seiko. Seiko appears a little further along in the plot, as an incoming freshman at the beginning of a new school year, as Koizumi is just barely starting to muse that she might have feelings for her unlikely companion. Ōtani rescues Seiko from a growling dog (because as we know, damsels in distress in need of protection are very kawaii), and she falls for him instantly, complete with

flushed cheeks, a soft pink background, the sound of tinkling chimes and trilling harps, and huge, glimmering eyes.

Seiko serves as the most clear example of another major shojo visual trope, as noted by Mizuki Takahashi: the use of eye size and detail to convey the inner emotions of a girl's heart and evoke empathy from the readers. While all of the female characters are drawn with large and glimmering eyes at one point or another, Seiko's eyes never seem to not be full of hearts or stars or ready to overflow with all of the feelings bubbling inside her feminine soul.

Large, star filled eyes are a major visual trope of the kawaii effect, with its origins in shojo manga. According to Masuda, eyes in shojo manga act as a "mirror of girls' desire"(30) and a way of expressing a variety of inner feelings. She credits Junichi Nakahara, an influential author from the early ages of shojo manga, for first creating the concept of "decame"(big eyes), which Suan notes as a continuing performative act that helps to make up a recognizable "anime-esque"-ness across mediums and genres (Suan, 70). In addition to the use of "glimmering for overflowing emotion," Suan notes the repetitive acts of anime eyes becoming "arches when smiling, or circular, all white eyes for comedic shock and despair"(70).

As Seiko gets to know everyone, Koizumi and Nobuko alike are dismayed by how overwhelmingly cute she is. Nobuko acts as if there's a new gushing romantic cute girl on her turf, and Koizumi is heartbroken to be reminded that girls as kawaii a Seiko exist in the world. Seiko's voice is very high pitched and childish, and her statements are often accompanied by sound effects and floral backgrounds, aesthetic cues to reflect her personality and inner feelings that Takahashi traces back to earlier eras of shojo

manga. Compared to the other female characters, Seiko is given the most close ups of this type from the moment we meet her, explaining with clarity to the viewer that she is the cutest, most over-the-top kawaii character we have met so far.

Seiko's kawaii factors can also be seen in alignment with another, more difficult to define aesthetic effect known as "moe". Amit describes moe as an emotional affect, "invoked for our innermost primordial phenomena when encountering an appealing object. It is the feeling of gradually growing and bubbling over from oneself"(178). Seiko's exaggeratedly girly voice and speech patterns, as well as the use of sensuously swelling jazz instruments in the background of her most dramatic moments, are also examples of this stretching and expanding from kawaii and into moe, both as a descriptor of Seiko herself, and the reactions her expression of femininity and overflowing emotions invokes from the other characters.[14]

While Seiko's feelings toward Ōtani become more apparent in what often feel like parody caricatures of flirtation, Koizumi becomes increasingly jealous, and feels even more defeated about her own appearance and lack of ability to ever be so cute or feminine. After several dramatically romantic scenes full of roses and sparkles to depict Seiko and her feelings for Ōtani, it is revealed in a comedic and bizarre turn of events that Seiko is a transgender woman. I don't want to dwell on the ways in which she was outed or the language used around the revelation, because its clumsiness is worth writing an entirely separate analysis of just how transphobic it is. The way Seiko's identity is explained in Lovely Complex, transgender identity is reminiscent of gender play and cross dressing narratives within yaoi about beautiful boys who look like girls,

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[14] For much more on moe, it's etymology, and different historical interpretations of the word and corresponding aesthetics, see Amit 2012

and the reactions of Seiko's peers invoke undertones of transphobia and homophobia often criticized in yaoi. As described by Nagaike and Takeuchi, straight women writer's of yaoi have been criticized for their stereotypical, homophobic, and perverse portrayals of gay men, as well as a disconnect from the realities of oppression faced by actual queer people in Japan. Once Ōtani learns that Seiko is "really a boy", he reacts as if a boy had been hitting on him, and is deeply uncomfortable, including dark backgrounds and uneasy sound effects to once again convey the uncomfortable feeling of kimoi. We also see Koizumi come to Seiko's defense after she is bullied by other girls, who mock her and insist that Ōtani would never date a freak like her. In this sense, <u>Lovely Complex</u> is at least slightly more connected to the realities of oppression of queer people, clearly portraying the social backlash of deviating from the hegemonic norms of gender and sexuality. Once we move past the clumsy reveal, her friends overwhelmingly accept Seiko's gender identity, with her pronouns always respected, and goes almost entirely unmentioned throughout the rest of the story.

The one response to Seiko's trans-ness that I will consider relevant, perhaps precisely because of how transphobic it is, is Koizumi's. Suddenly, Koizumi's shock and awe and jealousy toward this incredibly cute girl who was making advances toward Ōtani, is redirected to horror and devastation to find out that this incredibly kawaii person is "really a boy". As referenced previously, Suan employs Butler's theory of gender performativity to describe the ways in which repetitive acts within anime congeal to create a uniform sense of the anime-esque. Butler used the same concept of a repetition of performed acts, which eventually congeal within a specific moment in time and social context to create gender. This is often more simply referred to gender as

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something we do rather than something we are. Both Butler's theory and Suan's interpretation of it acknowledge the lack of an essential core being, that both gender and anime only exist as "the stylized repetition of acts".

In the sense that Koizumi and Seiko are both performing the same gender, Seiko is doing a better job at convincing her peers that she is feminine and attractive. Koizumi's awareness that Seiko was not assigned female at birth makes her feel as though she is so unwomanly and unattractive that this "boy" is more girly than she is-- revealing classically essentialist notions that Koizumi should have a natural advantage in performing femininity because of her anatomy.

Seiko's character and gender expression add further nuance to an incorporation gender performance theory and bodied experience. Because gender is a performance for transgender and cisgender people alike, Seiko's success acts as further proof of Koizumi's failure.[15] Koizumi was already disheartened after comparing herself to Chiharu, a petite, classically feminine, archetypically kawaii cisgender woman. With Seiko, we see Koizumi grappling with the idea that someone who is "not really a woman" is better at being a woman than she is. Why can't Koizumi be short and petite? Why doesn't she get to have a high pitched and attractive voice?

These same questions can be applied to Seiko's performance--would she be perceived so definitely as a woman if she was as tall as Koizumi and had a masculine sounding voice? Even having been assigned male at birth, her anatomy embodies more traits associated with woman-ness than Koizumi's allows, including a small stature in alignment with extreme heterosexual dimorphic expectations for women. In other

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[15] Cisgender: to not be transgender--to identify with the gender you were raised in from birth based upon your genitalia. If a person born with a vagina identifies as a woman, she is cisgender.

words, Koizumi's physical reality is disadvantageous to her performance as a woman, while Seiko's is advantageous. Although the deployment of a transgender character as a plot device is deeply problematic, it is an opportunity to point out the ways that cisgender people's sense of gender identity and performance have become naturalized and taken for granted, only questioned when they cannot match the norm. This tension, as framed by Sarah Ahmed, will be explored further in the next section as we analyze Koizumi's performance specifically as she bumps up against the boundaries of what it means to be different, to not fit, to be queered.

Queering of Space, Experimental Embodiments, and Creative Transgressions

Koizumi Risa's role as a romantic lead homes in on the big question: how is a cisgender heterosexual woman's gender performance and perception of her own gender affected by being taller than men? Koizumi performs traditional femininity. Her personal gender identity and sexual orientation are not in question. She is very romantic, and is always day dreaming about boys, falling for the first tall handsome man she sees. Even though she is teased for being unladylike because she plays video games and loves rap music, she is pretty, thin, and dresses in traditionally feminine ways, with a bonus of wearing elaborate hairstyles. With some rare out-of-school-uniform exceptions, Koizumi is the only female character in the anime whose hairstyle regularly changes. It's not unusual for anime characters to look exactly the same in every episode, and most of the characters in Lovely Complex do. But almost as a small gesture of good faith, a sign of the extra effort Koizumi knows she must make to seem feminine, her hairstyle is the only one in the series to regularly change.

And yet, despite doing and being all things normative and expected of her in a heteronormative society, she is doing it wrong. By no intent or action of her own, Koizumi is constantly informed by teachers, peers, love interests, and parents that she is doing the whole woman thing incorrectly. The crucial difference here, in an otherwise ordinary if not a little quirky high school girl, is her physical size, and it's impediment to her ability to correctly embody the heterosexual dimorphic traits required of womanhood.

As a woman with heterosexual desire, Koizumi is made to feel this sense of dread and discomfort because she is taller than men are comfortable with her being. Men who are shorter than Koizumi are uncomfortable, because they have been taught they are supposed to be big and powerful, and women are supposed to be small and submissive. In other words, heteronormativity creates social pressures around not only the gender of your romantic partner, but their physical appearance and performance as well.

In "Queer Feelings", Sarah Ahmed explores what it means to "inhabit a body that fails to reproduce an ideal"(146). Although her theory focuses on the discomfort of queer bodies in heteronormative space, it can be applied to the bodies of anyone failing to meet an ideal, including an ideal within heterosexual desire. Heteronormativity is restricting and detrimental in ways that many people never notice or interrogate, because they have the tools to succeed in the roles they have been taught. Heteronormativity and it's multiple unseen rules are much stricter than policing just one's sexual orientation, so much so, that one can be heterosexual and still feel the discomfort of "inhabiting spaces that do not take or 'extend' their shape"(Ahmed, 152) . It is a privilege of those capable of fitting the ideal to not be aware that they are trying to fit in. Just like whiteness is made invisible as an ethnicity and heterosexuality is made invisible as a sexual orientation, cisgender performance is made invisible as a gender performance. Some cisgender heterosexuals do not fit the norm, despite being taught that they should. Ahmed's ideas can be applied here to explore the way that all bodies-- cisgender or transgender, straight or queer--are confined and impressed upon in the production and reproduction of the gender binary and the norms that enforce it.

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The gender binary, like many other binaries, requires two options, that are not just different, but opposites. This binary is reproduced over and over again by pervasive heteronormativity, teaching men not only that they are supposed to be attracted to women, but also what kind of women they must be attracted to and how they must behave to attract them. The rigidity of "man" and "woman" are entirely dependent on relation to each other, and relation to a patriarchal power related roles in society— which insists that bigger is better, men are better, and therefore men are bigger than women.

As discussed above in Chiharu and Nobuko's relationships, there is not social unrest over a very tall man dating a very short woman, and this is seen as the natural state of things. Koizumi is only "too tall" because she is taller than men. Ōtani is only "too short" because he is shorter than women. Height difference is not failure, but instead height difference in relation to their peers, and eventually, in relation to each other. Koizumi and Ōtani are socially punished for one of their traits occupying the wrong side of the naturalized, heteronormative binary that is sexual dimorphism.

Koizumi's height violates the heteronormative notion that deems attractiveness to men a critical part of womanhood itself. Koizumi, as a woman with heterosexual desire, in a heteronormative society, is not allowed to be comfortable. According to Ahmed, the discomforted body "feels out of place, awkward, unsettled…[One's] out-of-place-ness and estrangement involves an acute awareness of the surface of one's body...when one cannot inhabit the social skin, which is shaped by some bodies, and not others"(148). By being written off as a potential romantic partner, Koizumi is not just

being told she is unattractive. She is being told she in un-womanly. And even further, that she is just one of the guys.

There is a painful example of this experience in the very first episode of <u>Lovely Complex</u>. On the first day of summer school, which Koizumi is mandated to attend as punishment for falling asleep while standing up ("like a giraffe") during the opening ceremony because she was up all night playing video games, Suzuki Ryoji enters the classroom. Koizumi is instantly in awe of Suzuki, not just because of his cool, blank expression, but because he is taller than she is. He sits in the desk behind her, and Koizumi instantly turns and apologizes for being so tall, hoping she isn't blocking his view. This is something we can infer she is used to--apologizing for her size, for taking up so much space, for feeling like she is in the way. Suzuki has made no comment or complaint to warrant the apology--Koizumi is already used to feeling guilty about it, her body has already had the notion that she must shrink impressed upon it.

This knowledge that she is too big and always in the way is demonstrative of Ahmed's understanding of the "discomforted body"—Koizumi is aware of her surface area, how much she is imposing upon others in the space around her, and apologizes before anyone can point it out for her. When Suzuki responds that he can see just fine, Koizumi is star struck. This is a new feeling--a man for whom her height is not a burden or embarrassment. Someone she can feel feminine beside, because she is the smaller one for once. From this early point in the story, we see that Koizumi is following the script of heteronormativity in her choice of love interest, and is therefore invested in its reproduction.

As Ahmed elaborates, "compulsory heterosexuality shapes which bodies one 'can' legitimately approach as would-be lovers and which one cannot. In shaping one's approach to others, compulsory heterosexuality also shapes one's own body, as a congealed history of past approaches"(145). The ways in which Koizumi has been objectified and made to feel wrong in her body in relation to men have limited her perceived capabilities as a subject, "enabling some action only insofar as they restrict capacity for other kinds of action" (Ahmed, 145). She cannot sit up straight in class. She cannot wear high heels. She cannot find a shorter man attractive. She cannot be attractive to a shorter man. She cannot be feminine, or perceive herself as beautiful, or like her body. Because of these congealed past approaches—or really, in Koizumi's case, congealed past failures—her body is predisposed to shrink itself, and has yet to encounter another body it was actually allowed to orient towards.

In Koizumi's romanticizing of Suzuki and tall men in general, she makes an effort to assimilate to what is expected of her. As Ahmed explains, "assimilation involves a desire to approximate an ideal that one has already failed; an identification with one's designation as a failed subject,"(150) and Koizumi seems to have long since identified her failure. Koizumi's physical body as an object transgresses what is expected of her as the female subject. Not all transgressions are intentional rebellions. According to Ahmed, "assimilation and transgression are not choices that are available to individuals, but are effects of how subjects can and cannot inhabit social norms and ideals"(153).

In the same episode, we learn that Ōtani is interested in Koizumi's good friend Chiharu. Chiharu is small, quiet, shy, terrified of boys and dating. Ōtani notes her fear

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of boys and dating and his desire to show her what she's missing out on, like a prince come to kiss sleeping beauty into romantic awakening, as a large part of her kawaii factor. She is also shorter than Ōtani, which he is not afraid to admit is a plus for him, because "small birds need to flock together." Ōtani sees Koizumi pining after Suzuki and suggests they work together--Ōtani would get to know Suzuki so that he could invite him to hangout, and Koizumi would talk Ōtani up to Chiharu.

After a day at the pool full of awkward moments of trying to push these two couples together, Ōtani and Koizumi are learning they have a lot in common. When they try to invite their love interests to go on a water slide with them, both Chiharu and Suzuki decline because they are scared. Instead, Ōtani and Koizumi ride the slide together, with Koizumi sitting behind Ōtani on the raft, looking exaggeratedly larger than he is, and inverting the imagery of a prior shot of Nobuko and Naoko on the slide, with Nobuko in the front and Nakao behind her. While they're having a blast on the water slide, Suzuki and Chiharu, both quiet and shy, end up spending some time together. Later, Koizumi and Ōtani are dismayed to notice that Chiharu and Suzuki seem like they might be interested in each other.

Koizumi is saddened and instantly starts comparing herself to Chiharu. Of course the boy she likes would rather have someone small and feminine. Desperate to deny the possibility, she tries to suggest that Chiharu should go out with Ōtani. She shrugs off the suggestion, explaining that she doesn't really see him that way. While she is usually terrified of boys, she finds Ōtani very easy to talk to, supposing that she "probably just [doesn't] perceive him as a boy, because he's so short." Unfortunately, Ōtani overhears the conversation, and is devastated. His pride is so wounded he starts

referring to himself as Kotani (the same name Koizumi and others use to tease him about being small). Koizumi responds with some more classic heteronormativity, and shames him for being so crushed by this, insisting that he's a man, he can take it. Ōtani poignantly retorts: "I believe she said that BECAUSE I'm small, I'm NOT a man."

Later in the same episode, Koizumi and Suzuki are both running late to class. Koizumi is already feeling discouraged because of Chiharu, when Suzuki brings her up, wondering if the shy girl had been afraid of him. Koizumi assures him that Chiharu is always nervous around boys, it's not his fault. Suzuki remarks that he's not usually good at talking to girls, either, but he finds it easy to talk to Koizumi. In a glimmering moment of hope, Koizumi's eyes widen and shimmer, her cheeks turn red, and she looks at him like he might actually like her. Until he continues, supposing, "Probably because you're at eye-level. You just don't seem much like a girl to me."

Suzuki and Chiharu are both nervous around members of their binary opposing genders, with the exception of people whose height is so far out of the expected dimorphism that they cannot even be romantically perceived as a member of the gender to be nervous around. It's not just that Koizumi is tall so she is at eye level and therefore easier to relate to--it's that her being at eye level makes her less of a woman to Suzuki, further evidence of the essentialist connection between one's body and gender. Ōtani and Koizumi are both cursed to never be able to perform gender in the normative way, and therefore deemed not just less attractive, but less of a man or woman. There is a specific performance being demanded of both of them by the hetero-binary, and they are both, tragically, failing. These socially constructed rules are not some kind of

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unspoken abstract, they are produced and reproduced, both consciously and subconsciously, by people all around them on a daily basis.

This invalidation of one's sense of self and desire to belong to a certain gendered category based on another's perception of their gender performance can be compared to being misgendered. Misgendering is a term created by transgender communities to describe the act of, accidentally or deliberately, referring to someone in a way that assumes their gender incorrectly, often insisting on referring to someone based upon their assigned sex and not their gender identity. It exposes people, makes them extra vulnerable to a society that would rather they don't exist. In a world in which trans people around the world are being murdered at catastrophic rates, something as simple as refusing to use the correct gender pronouns, refusing to respect a person's identity, can act to reinforce and justify violence against them.[16]

Koizumi being compared to a man is not nearly so violent as misgendering a trans person. Tall women are not being murdered because of their height making men insecure. However, Koizumi's situation can be analyzed through lenses similar to those of trans people and their discussion of "passing". Passing can be understood as one looking enough like a cisgender person and performing their gender well enough that they are no longer spotted as being transgender, lowering their risk of being misgendered or facing violence.[17]

Through the framework of "passing", society is constantly assessing how well one is performing their gender, how believable they are, how much they blend in. If gender performance can be thought of as a test that one passes or fails based on

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[16] For more on misgendering and violence against transgender people, see Stotzer 2009, Kaputsa 2016, Mclemore 2014, 2016, Perez-Brumer et. al 2015,

[17] For more on queer and trans identity and passing: Lingel 2009, Pfeffer 2014, Tyler 2017

performance and acceptance from peers, Koizumi and Ōtani are often not passing, but Nobuko, Chiharu, and Seiko are.

Queer and trans theorists and thinkers like Ahmed provide critical insight on current systems and norms, because they reside outside those norms, and face the social consequences of transgression. Just like Koizumi, a tall trans woman cannot help that she is tall and a woman. She cannot perform shortness, even though it would help to guarantee her safety by helping her to pass. In a world in which stature and gender expression are linked by essentialist constructs such as sexual dimorphism, she is more likely to have her gender identity called into question because her height associates her with masculinity. Tall trans women, similar to tall cisgender women, have trouble finding shoes and clothes that fit, further reminding them that they are too big, too much, and literally do not fit into the social and physical space around them.

It is a product of cisgender privilege that cis people do not actively have to think about how to pass as the gender they identify with. Their daily routines and performances are made invisible because they are in compliance with hegemonic gender norms, but that doesn't erase the fact that all gender is performative. Some people are just allowed to think their gender is natural, while others must actively petition society to believe their performance. But of course, it is completely possible to be cisgender and benefit from cisgender privilege, while being reminded that your supposedly natural, effortless gender, is wrong. In other words, cis people don't have to actively think about gender performance, unless they are failing somehow. Maybe they dress too masculinely or like to burp or do other things that people consider less than lady like. Maybe they're too thin, and their voice is too high, and no matter how much

they have always wanted to be, will never be the masculine man that the world expects

of them. Maybe they keep their hair too long, or not long enough. And in cases like

Koizumi and Ōtani, they are too tall or too short.

Wilchins describes her own experience of learning that, as a trans woman, her

height is directly related to the way her gender is perceived. In her book Read My Lips:

Sexual Subversion and the End of Gender, she wrestles with the experience of being

perceived as tall for the first time. During life before transition, Wilchins was never

made aware of her stature being unusual in any way. When she was being perceived as

a man, no one felt the need to point out her height. However, as Butler would explain it,

Wilchins' pattern of stylized acts, her performance of womanhood eventually congealed

into something that passed to the outside world as womanly enough, that she was

suddenly exposed to the world of misogynistic entitlement to women's bodies--

including unsolicited comments about her height:

> Over a terrifyingly short period of only one year, my entire perception of
> my body changed to match the social truths everyone else read
> there...What had happened was that I'd started being read by others "as a
> woman." That my body became the site of all kinds of social inspection
> and pronouncements didn't surprise me...In many ways I imagine that
> what happened to me is not much different from what happens to many
> teenagers once their bodies hit puberty and are seized by the cultural
> machine. (34)

As Wilchins points out, her experience is not so different than those of newly pubescent

teens', learning that their bodies are meant to look and behave and be a certain way.

Wilchin's perspective is a useful insight into that uncomfortable process of being

gendered and sexualized as a woman entering her teen years. Because she experiences it

again as an adult, when cis people have settled into believing their gender is natural,

innate, and invisible, it can be analyzed as a specifically social and constructed

phenomenon, rather than a biological, "natural" process that silences and normalizes the sometimes terrifying event that is being forcibly assimilated into the heteronormative gender binary. Experiences like Wilchins' call attention to what people with cisgender privilege take for granted and do not question--the effort to pass, to have your performance of gender be believable. Wilchins in particular learns that her biggest challenge to blending in, even once she's successfully being "read as a woman", is her height.

As explained previously, Koizumi's height is a physical reality of her embodied gender expression that she cannot change, and can only be perceived in comparison to some kind of congealed standard in the space around her. Her physical size is not a social construct or an idea that can be debated, but the meaning impressed upon her experience due to her height certainly can be. Wilchins calls attention to this comparison to a standard when she declares "tallness looks suspiciously to me like something you read on me instead of some innate feature in me. My measurable height may not be arguable, what it means is" (37).

The queer theory lenses of both Wilchins and Ahmed closely examine the naturalized norms of compulsory heterosexuality and the attached bodily expectations, shedding light on the ways that some people don't have to think about fitting in, and others either assimilate or transgress. Wilchins' acceptance of her physical size but rejection of its meaning complement Ahmed's spatial understanding of the ways that norms are built out of the consistent impressions of spaces on a body, like a comfortably worn in chair. Wilchins would be one of the transgressors in Ahmed's narrative,

squirming uncomfortably in the chair that so many others find so comfortable, without the satisfaction of sinking into the space.

With this understanding of the way bodies fit spaces and spaces fit bodies, I turn to Koizumi's experience to consider Ahmed's powerful question: "What happens when bodies fail to 'sink into' spaces, a failure that we can describe as a 'queering' of space (152)"? Koizumi's stature as a woman queers the spaces around her, and the backlash of social consequences push back to queer Koizumi herself. The mocking and judgment from Koizumi's peers, her acute awareness of her too-tall body, and the resulting anxiety and insecurity have affected her identity, her expression of her femininity, her orientation toward potential partners, and her comfort in her own body over all. Height is far from the only physical feature that might make one unable to comfortably move through and blend into a normative space by affecting their ability to properly do their gender. Expanding far beyond just examples of gender and sexuality, different spaces have been naturalized to different norms that are easily disturbed by/disturb bodies that do not fit there. Acknowledging these moments of disruption, of failure to fit in, creates valuable space call attention to these norms and the constructs upholding them.

Ahmed describes this process, specifically in regard to sexuality, as the "heterosexualisation of public spaces"--places like streets or parks become heterosexualized "by the repetition of different forms of heterosexual conduct (images on billboards, music played, displays of heterosexual intimacy and so on), a process which goes unnoticed by heterosexual subjects" (148). This idea can easily be applied to things like race, class, gender, or ability level. A black woman is queered when she walks down a street in a very white neighborhood, that does not have enough

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representation of or experience with bodies like hers yet, and she queers the space in return by existing there. Perhaps she doesn't hear music she likes, or see anyone who looks like her--in person or in posters. People are speaking and acting differently than she is used to in her home community, and looking at her strangely. A person in a wheelchair is queered when they enter a space that does not have wheelchair accommodations. They queer the space back by making able-bodied people feel uncomfortably aware of the way that the space they have built does not have room for this newcomer.

I don't mean to equate a person's obstacles around height to violent systems of oppression like racism or ableism. This comparison, however, allows us to pick apart the way that these systems of oppression are swept under the rug and made invisible by people with privilege. There is something to be said about the world feeling like it was not built to fit you—on social as well as infrastructural levels, and many of us are able to take fitting in for granted. To be too big or too small creates a constant awareness of the different ways one will have to navigate one's body. Particularly in women, Iris Marion Young describes this as the creation of a distance between the self as subject, and the body, an inconvenient object to be dragged along.

In Lovely Complex, we see evidence of the ways in which the idea of a space and its norms can affect an individual bodies as they try to exist as a romantic couple-- how a romantic couple is both existing within a heterosexualized space, and creating a space of their own. With forces like heteronormativity in place, societal gender roles and expectations about what bodies can do and how bodies should move can infiltrate a space between romantic partners. Throughout Koizumi and Ōtani's rivalry-turned-

friendship-turned-romance, the two of them become very aware of what their bodies

mean in the space they inhabit. As feelings develop, both of them question what it

means to fall for someone that they "can't" date, and both of them grow increasingly

insecure about the comments of peers and strangers about how strange they look

together. They are being shamed and repressed from within and without--by

heteronormative laws dictating their inner thoughts, and by the world that taught them

those laws in the first place.

Aside from countless obvious cases of an almost self misgendering--variations

of Koizumi denouncing her status as a woman or girl over things like forgetting her

purse, not being feminine enough, not being seen as a romantic option for men and

therefore not a woman--as well as heteronormative observations from peers ("But she's

taller than him! That's against society's rules!") throughout the series, there are also

observable failures within physical interactions and the way they are performed in the

visual language of anime. There are moments of awkwardness, moments of the kind of

discomfort described by Ahmed that is happens when one bumps up against the norms

of a space, as Koizumi and Ōtani's bodies learn what it means occupy romantic space

together, and what their bodies mean to their peers in the space surrounding them,

especially in relation to other bodies, and the romanticized illusion of heterosexual

dimorphism.

Early in the series, Koizumi is reunited, to her surprise, with her childhood

friend Haruka, who used to be made fun of because of his girlish name and for looking

like a girl.[18] He has since grown taller than Koizumi, and is very forward about wanting

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[18] Haruka is more commonly a girl's name.

to ask her out. He's just come back from living abroad, and plans to transfer to the same high school as Koizumi and Ōtani. Despite his height and admiration, and absolutely enjoying the flattery, Koizumi isn't interested in Haruka romantically, citing the fact that he is too feminine for her taste. I find this to be revealing in the way that it complicates Koizumi's heteronormative preferences about height; height is not the only factor that can make or break someone's masculinity. While Koizumi is already wrestling with the possibility of having a crush on Ōtani, her issue is with his height, never mentioning him seeming feminine because he's short. Despite her fixation on height, Koizumi understands on some level that masculinity and femininity are more complex than just being defined by a person's size.

Haruka is threatened by Koizumi's friendship with Ōtani, and insults him and emasculates him via comments about his size in order to try and convince Koizumi to fall for him instead. Haruka even makes a surprise appearance at school, having made Koizumi a lunch to try and win her over, throwing more insults at Ōtani along the way. After Koizumi pulls Haruka out of the classroom to get him to leave, their classmates start asking Ōtani about Haruka, adding that he and Koizumi looked nice together, that they're both "tall like models". One boy notes, "Come to think of it, Koizumi is really pretty, isn't she?" adding that she always just looks like part of a comedy duo when she stands next to Ōtani.

This classmate is observing Koizumi's beauty for the first time, in relation to a taller man. When standing next to Ōtani, Koizumi doesn't look pretty, just funny. Her relation to the male bodies around her determines whether or not her height is a flattering feature or a comedic one, as well as her attractiveness over all. When Ōtani

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gets defensive and declares that it's not his fault that Koizumi is so tall, his classmates laugh and say "it sure seems that way!" And, in a way, they're correct: Koizumi, as Wilchins and Ahmed would agree, is only tall in direct comparison to the perceived standard that has congealed among the bodies around her. She is tall next to her female friends; she is tall next to most of her peers. But because Ōtani is not only shorter than average, but a man, her height becomes an exaggerated and laughable feature. In this sense, it's not Ōtani's fault, but it is in direct comparison to his body that Koizumi's body seems even more out of place than usual.

Two episodes later, Koizumi finds out she's grown another two centimeters, and just after meeting the super short super feminine Seiko, is feeling extra discouraged about her height. In a moment of tough love, Nobuko calls her out, reminded Koizumi that the only reason she really cares about her height might have something to do with falling for someone shorter than her. After several pep talks from Seiko and Nobuko about how much she shouldn't be dwelling on her height, Koizumi begins to feel inspired and accepts that she may actually have feelings for Ōtani. Following a shot of Koizumi giggling and smiling fondly at Ōtani as he expresses kindness and acceptance toward Seiko (insisting that her "really being a boy" doesn't disgust him or make him dislike her the way his rude fan girls had suggested) the animation cuts immediately to the day of the sports festival, and we hear Ōtani's cries of protest.

The group decides to sign up to be on the cheer squad for the school's sports festival, and just for fun, they decide the girls will be wearing traditional men's cheer uniforms, while the boys wear women's uniforms. Apparently, Ōtani was not a fan of this decision. We see him running through the school halls, followed by Koizumi, and

already dressed in the men's cheer uniform. As she runs, we get a twinkling pink background and a slow motion close up of her starry eyes as she has a flashback to a conversation with Seiko: Seiko has inferred that Koizumi likes Ōtani, and tells her not to worry about her height, and to do her best. This blessing has an impact on Koizumi because she knows Seiko has her own feelings for Ōtani and has tried so hard to win him over, but still wants to see Koizumi happy. The shot returns to the present and Koizumi is still chasing Ōtani down, thinking to herself that she should try being more honest with her feelings. When she finally catches up to him, Koizumi wraps her arms around Ōtani's shoulders from behind, pulling his head back against her chest. As their bodies collide, the scene is a serene glowing white with blue and purple sparkles and flowers overlaid, as well as the sound of chimes.

Here we see the same kinds of visual cues of a romantic moment that would typically involve the taller boy hugging a shorter girl from behind, within both the norms and codes of heterosexual dimorphism and shojo visual language. Koizumi embodies a physical role that has become congealed within social understanding of bodies and spaces to belong to the man--bigger, taller, embracing and pulling in the smaller, shorter one. All the while, she is wearing a men's cheerleading uniform. As he struggles to get away, we see Koizumi's big, sparkly, kawaii eyes against a pink and green glowing background, as she thinks to herself "He fits snugly in my arms". Then, in a shot that follows Ōtani's feet dangling off the ground and struggling against her grip, his feet disappear as Koizumi's feet turn and run the other direction, having scooped him up into her arms to carry him. "It doesn't matter if I can carry him in my arms. It doesn't matter if he's shorter than me," Koizumi thinks to herself, as students in

the halls stare in confused wonder. When they arrive in the classroom where the others

are prepping for their cheer routine, Koizumi opens the door with a big smile on her

face and blushing cheeks, holding a squirming Ōtani in what can be described as a

"princess hold", visually named for the way a prince may scoop up a damsel in distress

(one hand behind her shoulders and the other behind her knees, similar to cradling a

baby). With yet another kawaii twinkling overlay, we see Koizumi standing in the

doorway in a men's uniform, holding Ōtani, and thinking to herself for the first time

"Because I like Ōtani!" Their classmates laugh and point out that "he's being carried"

"like a princess" and Koizumi laughs along, not because she's being made fun of, but

because she's happy.

It is of course no small coincidence that this swapping of gendered modalities

This physical sequence of events is significant to me in the ways that Koizumi is

not feeling the awkwardness, the out-of-place-ness, or the push back from the space

around her. Ōtani is wrestling with her and resisting her actions, which draw attention to

them both, particularly to the fact that he is small enough to be carried by a girl, and she

is large enough to carry a boy. For the first time in the series, Koizumi is able to

transcend this awkwardness and discomfort, transcend the expectations being pressed

onto her feminine body, creating a space in which these actions are romantic, and

worthy of kawaii visual and auditory cues. She has shaken off the heteronormative

impression on her body that tells her this should be uncomfortable, enough so to feel

romantic, hopeful, and joyful in her feelings for him.

It is of course no small coincidence that this swapping of gendered modalities

within the hug and the princess hold all occur while Koizumi is cross dressing, as if the

men's wear emboldens her with the power to be and feel something that her body had

never been allowed to do before. Takeuchi and Fuijimoto describe this frequently

occurring trope of women in men's clothing in queer and heterosexual shojo heroines

alike, as an example of the connection between appearance and the construction of

gender roles. According to Fujimoto, girls who cross-dress "in shojo manga do so in

order to achieve a social status or take on a social role that would be denied to them as

women… demonstrating an inherent drive to escape from being forced to fit into a

defined" gender role (81). For Koizumi, who has spent so much time trying to force

herself to fit into the expected expression of femininity, it's more an acceptance of the

freedom that comes with abandoning her anxieties around gender performance and

sexual dimorphism in order to express her romantic feelings for Ōtani.

However, there are also examples of moments in which Koizumi makes an

attempt at something her body has never done before and the push back is stronger,

further pushing Koizumi's body into discomfort and broadcasting her failure. Within

Ahmed's framework, Koizumi is usually uncomfortable in a space, but sometimes tries

to assimilate, to make her body fit into the comfortable worn in chair of

heteronormative femininity. By living her gender expression and performance with

constant internal and external reminders that she doesn't fit, that her body is not only

uncomfortable for her but for those around her, Koizumi has had to find ways to move

through and exist in spaces where the chair will never be comfortable. Her physical size

and the meaning that has been imprinted upon her body have limited the things that her

body is actually capable of doing. In other words, Koizumi's body isn't innately

unfeminine because she is tall, it is unfeminine because the people making up the space

around her told her that she cannot be feminine.

In her essay "Throwing Like A Girl", Iris Marion Young provides a framework to argue that patriarchal oppression, misogyny, and the specific expectations impressed on female bodies have the power to create a tangible dissonance between mind (subject) and body (object), enough to actually limit the physical ways women can move their bodies. As young girls begin to conceptualize their own identities as a girl and distinguish themselves as different from boys, a potential split off in performance between the two is one of limitation of physical movement:

> The young girl acquires many subtle habits of feminine body comportment— walking like a girl, tilting her head like a girl, standing and sitting like a girl, gesturing like a girl, and so on. The girl learns actively to hamper her movements. She is told that she must be careful not to get hurt, not to get dirty, not to tear her clothes, that the things she desires to do are dangerous for her. Thus she develops a bodily timidity that increases with age. In assuming herself to be a girl, she takes herself to be fragile. (153)

Young goes on to explain that this perception of a girl's own fragility contributes to a disconnect between thoughts and actions, in which she perceives her body as an object. Rather than the physical embodiment of herself as the subject, her body is a thing, "a fragile thing, which must be picked up and coaxed into movement, a thing that exists as looked at and acted upon"(148). Young emphasizes that "the source of this is that patriarchal society defines woman as object, as a mere body, and that in sexist society women are in fact frequently regarded by others as objects and mere bodies"(153-154) with an awareness of the constant possibility of being looked at. This constant awareness of being a thing that is looked at and acted upon "by others intentions and manipulation," rather than as a subject with her own "action and intention" hinders a woman's belief in her own physical agency to the point of actually limiting the things her body is capable of (Young 154).

To illustrate Young's framework, imagine a woman is trying to lift a heavy object. Her muscle mass is not distinctly lesser than that of her male peers, but her life-long experience of limiting her movements to look ladylike and to make herself smaller and more timid have actually lead to a tendency to not use her whole body to its full potential in order to attempt to lift the object. She is physically strong enough to do it, but her body can't seem to coordinate all the connected muscle groups necessary to use her full strength. This lack of physical muscle memory in lifting heavy things combined with the belief that her body is a fragile object she must move hesitantly has rendered her actually incapable of the task before her.

All of this is conditional upon a girl's perception of herself as feminine, and the specific ways a feminine body is meant to move. In other words, Young suggests, "the more a girl assumes her status as feminine, the more she takes herself to be fragile and immobile and the more she actively enacts her own body inhibition" (153). If learning feminine body comportment in all of its limitations require perceiving oneself as feminine, Koizumi's height and understanding of her body specifically as an object that is too big and cannot be feminine, create an exception to this framework. She is still existing in a disconnect between subject and object, still aware of her body as something she must move, something that is always being looked at, but not as a feminine object. In consequence, Koizumi is actually lacking certain "skills" in feminine body comportment. Flirting, for example.

Throughout Lovely Complex, Koizumi makes several attempts to embody these ideas about how a feminine body should move and look, despite never having imagined her body to be capable of doing so. After a series of rejections and attempts to get

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Ōtani's attention as more than just a friend, Nobuko tells Koizumi she needs to tell him how she feels more directly. Koizumi doesn't know how to go about such a directly flirty conversation, so Nobuko attempts to demonstrate. Her stance becomes pigeon toed, one knee tucked inward toward the other, one hand at her side with her fingers outstretched in a particularly dainty, feminine pose, while the other hand is curled beneath her chin, both shoulders curled inward toward her chest. Her head is tucked down bashfully, her cheeks blushing pink, while a background of pink and orange flowers twirls behind her. She looks away shyly and speaks in an exaggeratedly girly, high-pitched voice, her shoulders squirming in an expression of innocence and nervousness. "Hey, there's something I just have to tell you, if that's okay?" she asks, smiling sweetly and looking up from beneath her long eyelashes. Her voice has a soft resonance to it, floating over the sound of twinkling chimes.

Koizumi instantly assesses this as something she cannot do. In the middle of this pep talk with Nobuko, Ōtani approaches. Nobuko leaves the two of them alone, putting Koizumi on the spot to try and flirt. Koizumi's attempt at the same posture comes with awkward trembling back and forth, and a distorted attempt at a coy smile. The background is dark purple, with large red and white flowers with large, hollow centers, depicting the flower known as the stinking corpse lily, a particularly strong representation Koizumi repeats what Nobuko told her to say, but her own voice is low, shaky, and unsettling, as an eerie hollow sound echoes in the background, like wind through a long dark tunnel. When she tries to smile at the end, her face looks closer to a villainous grin than a coy smirk. In response, Ōtani looks terrified, and blurts out "disgusting!"

As a teenager, Koizumi is already experiencing the awkwardness of puberty and encountering romance in the context of an almost adult body. Perhaps, when the other girls her age were learning to mimic the sexy or flirtatious movements they saw in media depictions of attractive women and how they interact with men, the physical gestures and congealed rituals that go into a performance of seduction, Koizumi had already learned that her body was not feminine. Somewhere along the line, the impression of "unfeminine" on Koizumi's body actually served to not only limit her capabilities because she's a woman, but how well she can perform as a woman.

In contrast, while Ōtani has been emasculated and made to feel like he has failed his performance of manliness due to his size in some situations, he is not subject to the same patriarchal, misogynistic constraints on his body or his mind's connection to it.[19] In spite of being teased for his size, Ōtani remains a star basketball player, with a group of fan girls in attendance at every practice, closely jealously scrutinizing any girls who become close to him. He has also has had a romantic relationship before, which Koizumi has not succeeded in finding. It would seem that, all things considered, the impact of Ōtani's dimorphic performance on his confidence and perceived attractiveness is less severe than it is for Koizumi. His small stature is not enough to stop him from embodying "kakkoii"(coolness, seen as the masculine opposite of the feminine kawaii) handsomeness, while Koizumi's tall stature is enough to stunt her performance of kawaii femininity as described above. These social reactions are supportable by the different ways in which living in a hetero-patriarchal society affects people of different genders and sexualities. In other words, the socially constructed

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[19] For a fascinating queer theory take on the embodiment of masculinity, see Koenig 2003

narratives around how a woman must look to be considered attractive are more strict than those around how a man must look, which is a hypothesis reflected in the reality that taller than average women have lower rates of reproduction than shorter than average men within the recent trends of sexual dimorphism.[20]

Ultimately, as Koizumi and Ōtani's unlikely romance begins to blossom, they must come to terms with the reality that they are attracted to bodies they have never been allowed to see as attractive. In learning to be romantic together, they are positioning themselves to be ridiculed and mocked for not occupying the norm when it comes to heteronormative expectations around size in a romantic couple. The heterosexualized space surrounding them has never seen a couple like this--their individual bodies don't know how to fit into the space, and their bodies as a couple don't know how to fit into the space together. Instead, as Ahmed would put it, Koizumi and Ōtani must navigate whether or not to accept the fact that they will never fit in or be comfortable in this shared space, or to find a way to approximate the heteronormative ideal they have always failed at. They have an opportunity, rich with the potential to "embrace a sense of discomfort, a lack of ease with the available scripts for living and loving, along with an excitement in the face of the uncertainty of where the discomfort may take" them (Ahmed, 155). Perhaps, they can both transgress the rules of the space around them by loving each other, while creating their own space as a couple in which to inhabit the norms they never imagined possible. Together, they can attempt to answer another question posed by Ahmed, "When does this potential for "queering" get translated into a transformation of the scripts of compulsory heterosexuality?" (152)

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[20] On comparatively lower reproductive rates of taller women and sexual dimorphism, as cited previously: Nettle 2002, Stulp et. al 2012

A quintessential embodiment of romance, a physical behavior of two people in love that is present in nearly every romance story ever told, happens to be the same act both Koizumi and Ōtani have been dreading from the beginning: kissing. When the time comes for the two of them to find out if it is indeed physically, logistically possible for their lips to reach each other, their difference in height is either not a factor or is intentionally danced around, allowing them to bend their bodies closer to what is expected of them in their heteronormative surroundings. In finding ways to kiss that do not make them feel out of place or uncomfortable, their romance creates a liminal space in which their bodies combine to finally sink comfortably into the chair.

They have already reached a level of transgression simply by accepting and admitting to their feelings for each other, despite the rigidity of heterosexual dimorphic expression surrounding them and the often less than kind feedback from their peers. But this transgression is not enough to remove the discomfort that comes with failing to inhabit a norm and trying to re-orient their bodies to do things that they have no muscle memory for—loving someone whose body they've never been told is a possibility, whose body emphasizes their own failures. Even if Koizumi and Ōtani try to assimilate and embody heterosexual dimorphic norms in order to feel more comfortable, "their difference from the ideal script produces disturbances--moments of 'non-sinking'--that will require active forms of negotiation in different times and places"(153).

These moments of active negotiation and creativity make their romantic discomfort a fruitful and radical one, and this discomfort, Ahmed emphasizes, "is generative, rather than simply constraining or negative" (155). When the time comes for the two of them to find out if it is indeed physically, logistically possible for their lips to

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reach each other, their difference in height is either not a factor or is intentionally danced around, allowing them to bend their bodies closer to what is expected of them in their heteronormative surroundings.

The first time they kiss, it is Risa's birthday. They'd had a fight, and Ōtani hadn't shown up to her birthday party, which happened to be on the same day as a firework festival, a frequent occurrence in the summer in Japan. They move to the roof of the school to watch the fireworks, but Koizumi can't enjoy the show because she's missing Ōtani. As she solemnly stares up at the sky, Koizumi receives a text from him, telling her to look behind her. Ōtani is hiding in the shadow beside the door to the building, a serious look on his face, and waves her over. In the moment that Koizumi sees Ōtani, her cheeks flush, her eyes grow big and sparkly in kawaii romantic cue tradition, and her hair is suddenly moved by a dramatically time wind and the sound of chimes. She backs away from the others to join him. Ōtani is crouched down, avoiding eye contact, as he reaches up to hand her a birthday gift. With Ōtani crouching and Koizumi standing, their difference in size seems more exaggerated than ever. They're both blushing as she looks down at him, he up at her, his neck bent back at a sharper angle than usual. For the first time, the difference, the distance between them, is holding a romantic tension.

After reaching down to accept the gift, she sits down beside him to open it. It's a little bunny phone charm, and she's so excited that he insists she keep it down, to make sure that their friends don't see something as embarrassing as Ōtani giving Koizumi a thoughtful gift. He blushes bright red and quietly insists that she put it away. She's looking down at the gift and smiling, tickled at the idea of Ōtani braving the

embarrassment of shopping at a girly store for her gift, when he says her name, bringing her back to the present. As she turns to face him, he has leaned toward her to boost up on one knee, closing the small height difference that remained with them sitting down, and kisses her, as the colorful lights of the fireworks bounce off their faces and the wall behind them. No kawaii sound effects or dramatic, slow motion floral backgrounds--just the real, diegetic fireworks. When they finally kiss, there are no frills, no fantastical imagery to let the audience know how to feel. And yet, as the rom-com cliché goes: actual fireworks. He tries to act nonchalant, and Koizumi bursts into awkward laughter. Ōtani reaches out for her hand, leans into her laughter to push through the awkwardness, drawing her into a romantic space with him, and as the fireworks continue to burst, they kiss again, triumphant orchestral music swelling over the scene.

Their first kiss is seated, and the height difference between them rendered completely non-existent and irrelevant. For the first time, their love is on level ground. It's worth pointing out again, that this kiss didn't earn the same magical-realism background and sound effects as most all the other romantic or cute moments in the show. Perhaps this world, this space, doesn't see a kiss like this, between these two out of place bodies, as a moment that is kawaii and deserving of a floral background, the sound of chimes. But to the sound of fireworks exploding, in their own private liminal space in the shadows, they make their own space, their own romance, no special effects necessary, no attention paid to the failed dimorphism that had limited their bodies and kept them apart all this time. By finding a way around the physical and psychological obstacle of her height, Koizumi inhabits a norm she had failed to meet, that she had never imagined possible; with a person she had struggled to consider as a possibility.

They only kiss standing up once in the series, and again they come up with a creative way to assimilate, to feel comfortable inhabiting norms they are usually denied as a couple. They're walking down a long set of stairs through a park when Ōtani stops to kiss Koizumi while standing a couple of steps above her. The shot cuts out to show the two of them in silhouette, what looks like a taller boy leaning down to kiss a shorter girl. This physical alignment, Koizumi leaning her neck back and looking up for a kiss, is something she has never been able to experience before. After pulling away from the kiss, Koizumi blushes and giggles, joyfully calling him out on standing on a higher step on purpose. Ōtani blushes and looks away, trying to act aloof as he explains that it "wouldn't have looked as cool on level ground", with him on tiptoes and her leaning down, like in Nobuko's drawing from before. They continue down the stairs, and Koizumi smiles and grabs his hand, hopeful music swelling once again as they walk off into the night, Koizumi thinking to herself that she hopes they can be happy like this from now on. An essential tool to breaking through the awkwardness they have been taught to feel about their bodies is humor, a sense of playfulness that provides laughter to fill the awkward pauses, to reframe their discomfort as a comical moment in a romantic scene.

This creative attempt to make both of their uncomfortable bodies feel comfortable together is not so simply assimilating and accepting the norms that are expected of them, so much as finding a way around their own learned embodied awkwardness to be comfortable enough to be romantic with each other in relation to the norms they have been conditioned within. As they relate to and negotiate with these norms, Koizumi and Ōtani explore Ahmed's hypothesis that this kind of uncomfortable

"inhabitance is generative or productive insofar as it does not end with the failure of norms to be secured, but with possibilities of living that do not 'follow' those norms through" (155). They exist both in the space they have created as a couple and the space surrounding them.

They can create their own comfortable interpretation of norms surrounding height and physical affection, but these creative solutions don't affectively follow through into the space around them. By walking around holding hands and publicly displaying their inverted heterosexual dimorphism, they continue to queer the space, drawing attention and stirring discomfort within other inhabitants of their heterosexualized social context. In continuing to pursue their feelings for each other instead of finding someone who would help them to correctly embody a socially constructed, compulsory sexual dimorphism, they remain optimistic and playful, building a separate space in which their bodies can orient toward each other and sink into a new chair that will become worn into the shape of their bodies. Together, Koizumi have the potential to over come their shared complex about their height, and negotiate with their uncomfortable bodies in order to experience a newly forged comfort in their uncomfortable, queered bodies.

Conclusion

Societies are rife with socially constructed rules that have become naturalized and invisible in ways that reproduce restrictive norms that act to privilege some bodies and oppress others. As a cultural product situated within shojo manga's very gendered lens of women's inner emotions and desires, <u>Lovely Complex</u> provides examples of the ways that people who are marginalized by these norms are made to feel in their bodies, and then how to take steps toward a creative, liberating negotiation between inhabiting norms and transgressing them.

Koizumi and Ōtani's experiences demonstrate a narrative through which we can explore embodiments of sexual dimorphism, and ultimately dispute it as a natural, scientific fact and interrogate the reality of its social construction. By exploring the ways that Wilchins, Ahmed, and Young would understand Koizumi's body and how it must navigate gender norms, we can better understand the methods through which societal norms define, influence, and restrict the bodies and identities of women who do not or cannot inhabit those norms.

The spaces we navigate in society and the impact those spaces have on our bodies are all socially constructed, and analyses like this one could help us to move toward a deconstruction of the meanings projected onto bodies in the enforcement of oppressive stereotypes, micro aggressions, and identity policing. Queer and feminist theorizing provides potential frameworks through which to imagine a radical deconstruction of, and liberation from, socially constructed categories and institutionalized oppression.

While the close readings above focus on a specific example, Ahmed's conceptualization of space and what it means to experience discomfort in space can be utilized in asking new questions to interrogate the normalized social spaces built around us and how they impact the bodies who encounter them. Sexual dimorphism and its attachment to anatomical heteronormativity demonstrate just one of the many ways that a body could affectively queer a space and/or be queered by a space, and it is far from the most dangerous way that a body can be impacted in uncomfortable or even unsafe ways when entering a space that does not fit them.

As Wilchins explains, bodies have meaning when in comparison to a standard, and the current standard in the U.S. is a cisgender, heterosexually oriented, white, able-bodied man. Anyone that differs from that standard is vulnerable to micro (and macro) aggressions, institutionalized oppression, and violent assault on the basis of the meanings that people have attached to their bodies. Whether it's sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, or ableism, the hateful and oppressive things that people believe about others are rooted in pervasive, historically traceable constructs, often linked to scientific language.

By situating hateful stereotypes within scientific beliefs (which are also socially constructed), these stereotypes come to be understood by the public as absolute truth. The idea that people of different races, genders, sexualities, or levels of mental or physical ability are innately different or lesser on a biological level further justifies interpersonal and institutionalized violence against marginalized people. Young's ideas around the ways in which patriarchal oppression impacts women's subjective relationships with their bodies as objects could surely be drawn upon to understand the

methods by which other forms of oppression impact and confine movement and embodied experiences throughout various spectrums of identity and modality.

The more we call our societally produced and naturalized norms into question, the closer we come to a more liberated society, free of hierarchical hegemonic forces of oppression that privilege some bodies and their ability to comfortably inhabit space more than others. Perhaps, in deconstructing the privilege in a given space, we can achieve true equality by eliminating the forces that insist upon emphasizing our differences on the basis of oppression. In this new space, there may simply be a multitude of different comfortable chairs, in which multiple bodies and identities can find a comfortable way to share space. Or maybe, there are no chairs at all--no objects for the objectified body to sink into, no pushback to make some bodies more comfortable as objects than others—only subjects, sinking into the company and meaning of other liberated subjects.

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