

## Sexuality, Virginity and Disability: Analyzing the Movie *Why Do You Love Me* (2023)

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### ABSTRACT :

Some research indicates that sexuality and disability are two taboo concepts that are rarely combined. Individuals with disabilities are often portrayed as asexual or hypersexual. The film *Why Do You Love Me* (2023) attempts to break these stereotypes and depicts sexuality as a symbol of empowerment through the story of three friends with disabilities embarking on a journey to lose their virginity. This study aims to analyze how the film portrays sexuality and virginity of individuals with disabilities. Using a qualitative approach, the research uses critical disability theory and multimodal discourse analysis with critical standpoint to identify dialogues and scenes in the film related to dominant ideologies and accuracy in disability representation. Despite raising a unique theme and diversifying the representation of individuals with disabilities in mainstream media, the results reveal that the practice of "cripping up" perpetuates dominant perspectives and diction in the film's lexical and visual elements. It uses sexuality and virginity as selling points to determine the social status of men with disabilities amidst societal norms of masculinity. Humor and cinematographic techniques still employ ableist discourses, suggesting the need of men with disabilities for accommodation from the dominant group. Insights for altering cinematic representations of disabilities are explored.

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### INTRODUCTION

Films wield a profound influence on enhancing memory retention and mitigating audience's boredom more effectively than other forms of media, owing to their utilization of visual and auditory communication elements (Pratama & Alfikri, 2022). Representing individuals with disabilities in cinematic productions holds significant importance as it directly shapes societal beliefs and perceptions of this demographic, reflecting and reinforcing hegemonic values to reach mass audiences (Arawindha et al., 2020; Botha & Harvey, 2024). As

explained by Stuart Hall (1977), the analysis of cinematic representation hinges upon two intertwined aspects: narrative structure and cinematic techniques (Nurani, 2020). The linguistic framework embedded within films, subtly communicated through written, spoken, and visual cues, inherently reflects cultural norms and plays a pivotal role in deciphering, generating and reshaping societal conceptions on social strata, lived experiences and specific communities (Nurani, 2020).

Several studies have shown that individuals with disabilities are often stigmatized, being perceived as strange, weak, objects of pity, or even the subject of jokes, while those who excel are sometimes viewed as exceptional because their "abnormal" conditions are seen to surpass those of "normal" humans (Anggraeni & Sukmono, 2019; Arawindha et al., 2020; Hu et al., 2023; Nurani, 2020; Treacy et al., 2018; Wicaksono & Tutiasri, 2023). A dichotomy between "normal" and "abnormal" frequently emerges as a recurring theme in local Indonesian films featuring characters with disabilities, particularly in post-New Order cinema (Arawindha et al., 2020). Notably, the website [filmindonesia.or.id](http://filmindonesia.or.id) documents a minimum of ten films released between 1998 and 2019 that prominently feature disabled characters, including *Pengabdil Setan* (Satan's Slave, 2017), *My Idiot Brother* (2014), *Dancing in the Rain* (2018), *The Gift* (2017), *Satu Hati Sejuta Cinta* (A Heart of a Million Loves, 2013), *Jingga* (2016), *Malaikat Kecil* (The Little Angel, 2015), *Recto verso* (2013), *Selebgram* (The Influencer, 2017), and *Ayah, Mengapa Aku Berbeda* (Dad, Why Am I Different?, 2011) (Arawindha et al., 2020). These films often adhere to what scholars have termed "superscripts", narratives that have drawn criticism for maintaining structural issues such as power imbalances, ableism and social exclusion (Hu et al., 2023).

In July 2023, Indonesian moviegoers were again presented with a movie that tells the story of a disabled character but with an unconventional approach. Adapted from the Belgian film, *Hasta La Vista* (2011), the production house Max Pictures collaborated with director Herwin Novianto to bring forth *Why Do You Love Me* (2023). This comedy-drama, also available for viewing on the Netflix streaming platform, emerges for its pioneering exploration of the seldom-addressed theme of sexuality among individuals with disabilities within the Indonesian context. The film revolves around the journey of three disabled companions, Baskara (portrayed by Adipati Dolken), Danton (Jefri Nichol), and Miko (Onadio Leonardo), as they embark on a transformative quest to experience intimacy by traversing the overland route from Jakarta to Surabaya. Along their journey, Baskara, coping with paraplegia, Danton, grappling with paralysis resulting from a brain tumor, and Miko, navigating the confines of retinitis pigmentosa-induced blindness, confronting hurdles. Accompanied by their hired driver and nurse, Endang (TJ Ruth), the trio embarks on a journey into the red-light district of Dolly Lane in pursuit of sexual liberation. The characters of Baskara, who struggles with unresolved anger; Danton, skilled at masking his anxieties and pain with humor and cheerfulness; and Miko, often providing comedic relief through unpredictable behavior, bring vibrant colors to their interactions (Mondal, 2023). In the end, their bold journey not only ventures into physical closeness but also delves deep into the true essence of love.

It is widely acknowledged that representations of the sexuality of individuals with disabilities are notably scarce within mainstream media (Malinowska, 2018). The convergence of sexuality and disability remains infrequently explored. When it does, it is often depicted in a manner that conforms to prevailing societal norms (Loeser et al., 2018). Both sexuality and disability carry connotations of intimacy and 'perversion,' topics that are often regarded as taboo in societal discourse, further complicating their intersection (Malinowska, 2018; Treacy et al., 2018). Within heterosexual sexual culture, the concept of virginity is frequently aligned with the hegemony of masculinity, wherein it serves as a determinant of male virility (Zajdel, 2020). This dominance of masculinity perpetuates inequality not only between genders but also among men, as it pressures them to demonstrate their sexual prowess (Reddy et al., 2019).

In addition to sexuality, virginity stands out as a determining factor in assessing a man's masculinity. Notable films in youth culture, such as *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* (2005) and *American Pie* (1999), represent how popular culture addresses virginity anxiety through a comedic lens (Fleming & Davis, 2018). Multiple studies have illuminated the shame and anxiety experienced by men regarding their virgin status, with sexual activity often construed as a marker of masculine dominance or achievement (Fleming & Davis, 2018). Within social contexts where masculinity prevails, virgin shaming disproportionately targets individuals who have not engaged in sexual intercourse. Consequently, a virgin's social standing within peer groups is often diminished, rendering virginity undesirable among young men (Fleming & Davis, 2018). This stigma is intricately tied to cultural norms dictating that men should assume the role of the more sexually experienced partner in heterosexual relationships (Fleming & Davis, 2018; Palit & Allen, 2019).

Thus, this study will examine the portrayal of sexuality and the significance attributed to virginity among individuals with disabilities in the film *Why Do You Love Me* (2023). Although the film emphasizes sexual liberation as a symbol of empowerment for people with disabilities, the strong association between sexuality, virginity, and manhood underscores its alignment with dominant cultural norms. Therefore, a deeper analysis is warranted to uncover the underlying meanings conveyed through the film's visual and linguistic elements, which may serve as instruments of social control in line with prevailing ideologies. Additionally, the researcher will observe the use of elevated language in the film's dialogue, situating it within a broader socio-cultural framework. By analyzing how the visual and verbal elements interact, this research aims to deconstruct the narrative the film builds around sexuality and disability and whether it reinforces or challenges dominant ideological purposes.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach with critical paradigm, emphasizing the imperative of challenging the prevailing status quo to address power imbalances and amplify the voices of marginalized individuals (West & Turner, 2020). The primary unit of analysis in this research is the visual components within the film *Why Do You Love Me* (2023), available on Netflix. Data collection involves a documentation study, which includes watching the film, analyzing dialogue, selecting relevant scenes, and capturing screenshots concerning the

portrayal of sexuality and virginity among individuals with disabilities. Researchers will also incorporate secondary data from books, scholarly journals, and online articles to bolster the analytical framework.

The components from the film will then be analyzed using the perspective of critical disability theory which argues that disability is not primarily a medical or health issue but a matter of politics and power (Gillies, 2024). It focuses on exposing and analyzing ableism, by scrutinizing social norms that label certain attributes as impairments and the conditions that stigmatize particular populations. The theory examines disability as a cultural, historical, social, and political phenomenon, emphasizing the material impacts of these constructs on marginalized groups, particularly at the intersections of race, class, gender, nation, and sexual identity (Hall, 2019). There are four primary principles of Critical Disability Theory according to Helen Meekosha and Russell Shuttleworth (2009): 1) Critical social theory goes beyond quantitative analysis and sees facts and numbers as inadequate for analyzing complex social phenomena; 2) Critical social theory connects theory with practice to create a more autonomous and participatory society, requiring a deep understanding of systemic issues and ongoing real-world involvement. In this context, autonomy is understood as liberation from dominant ideologies rather than merely individual independence; 3) Critical social theory is self-aware of its historical context, recognizing that its analysis is shaped by the time and place in which it is produced; 4) It promotes dialogue across cultures, aiming to engage with diverse human rights perspectives without imposing Western ideals on non-Western cultures (Hall, 2019).

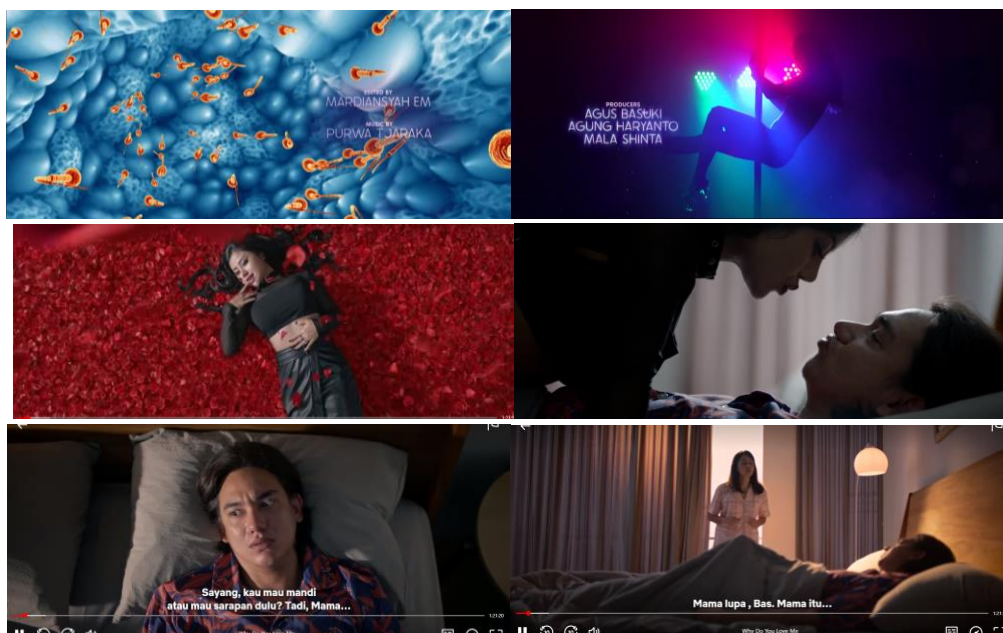
The analysis method will also involve multimodal discourse analysis in critical standpoints, which combines different concepts drawn from Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen's interpretations (2006) alongside those delineated by David Machin and Andrea Mayr (2012). Kress and van Leeuwen argue that communication is usually made through the interplay of different modes to create meaning (e.g., images, text, sound, gesture). Just like language, these visual elements create "grammar", offering a structured way of understanding how images convey meaning in a way that reflects societal power structures.

The analysis will scrutinize both lexical and visual components within the *film Why Do You Love Me* (2023), with a focus on perceiving underlying meanings (Hermawan, 2021; Machin & Mayr, 2012). Lexical elements will analyze word connotation by scrutinizing specific word choices from a set of available options selected by the production team for their motivational reasons. Visual elements will be used to analyze elements, like 1) actors (or participants, as termed in Kress and Van Leeuwen's book, 2006) who are observed in terms of their roles, analyzed through a) gaze, b) angle, c) frame, d) gesture, and; 2) salience refers to particular features in the composition that attract attention and convey specific meanings, including a) cultural symbols, b) size, c) color, d) tone, e) focus, and f) foregrounding.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*Why Do You Love Me* (2023) opens with graphics of moving sperms and ovum, followed by a silhouette of a woman pole dancing. This opening sequence then transitions into the first

scene in **Figure 1** showing main character Baskara who is dreaming of meeting his ideal woman, described as a sexy figure, moaning while saying the dialogue, "*Baskara, I can't wait to see you. We can hold hands, we can chat, we can...* (advances her lips to kiss)".



Source: (Movie "*Why Do You Love Me*", 2023)

**Figure 1** Scene at minute 01:30 featuring Baskara, his mom, and a woman in his dream

However, his dream is soon shattered when his mother enters the room and accidentally sees him having an erection. The scene is framed in a full shot to capture Baskara's erection and his mother's awkward reaction. The element of salience is seen from the use of red and black colors in the dream scene that depicts a symbol of women's sexuality (Pazda et al., 2012) and the low brightness that emphasizes the intimacy and tranquility of Baskara's 'wet' dream (Kim et al., 2018).

These opening sequences in **Figure 1** are immediate and apparent examples of how the movie portrays Baskara's character with stereotypical hypersexuality. By placing sexuality front and center after the opening credits, with images of silhouetted women dancing and animated depictions of sperm and ovum, the film establishes the notion that sex has long been Baskara's obsession. In its attempt to portray the empowerment of people with disabilities through sexual liberation, it instead depicts the objectification of another vulnerable group, in this case, women, emphasizing the minimal clothing to the sensuous way of speaking (moaning).

The movie then continues to **Figure 2**, which shows a scene of Baskara being spoon-fed by his mother while watching a soap opera. The soap opera depicts a male character proposing to his girlfriend. Shortly after, Baskara's father appears in front of the TV while holding a wedding invitation and says, "*Ma, Hendro's kid is getting married? Hendro's doing great. Soon he'll have grandchildren*". The camera then shifts to a medium close-up of Baskara's face, detaching him from the framing with his parents, revealing his sense of unease and disappointment.

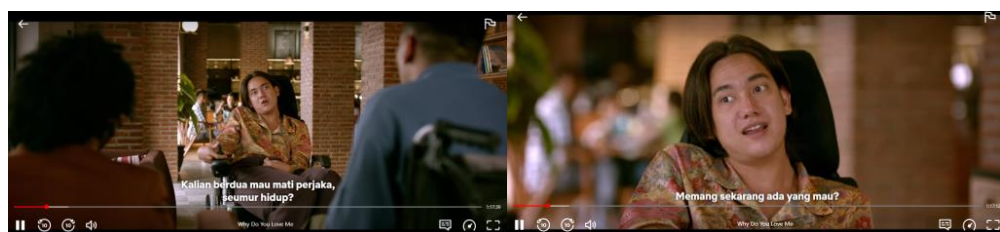


Source: (Movie "Why Do You Love Me", 2023)

**Figure 2** Scene at minute 02:42 featuring Baskara, Mom and Dad talk about marriage

In "The Cinema of Isolation" (1994), Martin F. Norden, who focuses on disability representation in media, writes how films featuring disabled characters often portray them as isolated, not only in the storylines but also in the visual composition, such as the framing on screen. This separation arises from able-bodied perceptions of "normalcy," where disability is viewed as both unsettling and intriguing due to physical differences (Sutton, 2014). Disability is often seen as incompatible with traditional notions of masculinity due to stereotypes of weakness, vulnerability, dependence, and passivity (Rozengarten, 2020). It also perpetuates the stereotype of dependence, leading to a lack of privacy and increased vulnerability to unwanted intrusions (Rozengarten, 2020).

Baskara's dependency on his mother, as seen in **Figure 2** where he is being spoon-fed, along with the lack of privacy during his wet dream in **Figure 1**, further contributes to his sense of isolation related to his sex life, such as feelings of inferiority and powerlessness. The discussion of marriage by his father serves as the "cherry on top," undermining his sense of masculinity even more. In Indonesian culture, where heterosexual and monogamous relationships are the norm and parents play a significant role in their children's marital decisions, marriage is closely tied to social conformity (Himawan, 2019; Himawan et al., 2022). Consequently, this discussion reinforces Baskara's sense of personal failure.





Source: (Movie " *Why Do You Love Me*", 2023)

**Figure 3** Scene at 05:13 featuring Baskara convincing Danton and Miko

After what happened at the house, **Figure 3** shows Baskara convincing his friends Danton and Miko to take a road trip to Dolly Lane to lose their virginity. He bombards them with questions like, *"Do you want to die a virgin? I don't want to die a coward. When was the last time you dated? Does anyone want to date you now?"*. He also claims to have researched services for people with disabilities in Dolly Lane to persuade them. It is crucial for him that his friends agree to his plan. Baskara links the concept of virginity, death, and cowardice to touch upon their masculinity, ultimately leading them to agree with his idea.



Source: (Movie " *Why Do You Love Me*", 2023)

**Figure 4** Scene at 07:34 featuring Baskara, Danton, Miko, and their parents when they ask permission for doing road trip

**Figure 4** shows how Baskara, Danton, and Miko struggled to convince their parents to grant them permission to go on a road trip to Surabaya. They cover up their intention to look for commercial sex workers (PSK) in Dolly Lane with the excuse that they want to have freedom and be independent. When Danton's mother asks, *"Without us?"*, Danton immediately says, *"I don't want to go as a loser"* which appeals to the emotions of their parents. Baskara then completes the argument with humor, *"We promise we'll get back to Jakarta safely, even though we're still cacat (a derogatory term for disabled)"*, which suggests that he can be a guardian hero for himself. From a visual perspective, the blue color highlighted in the scene can be interpreted as the 'sense of security' the parents want to give their children (Babbiotti & Hernández-Gil, 2021). However, it also underscores the parents' distrust in their disabled son's ability to live independently.



Source: (Movie " *Why Do You Love Me*", 2023)

**Figure 5** Scene at 40:30 featuring Baskara, Danton, Miko, and an angry man they encountered in the restaurant

In **Figure 5**, during their trip to Dolly Lane, Baskara suddenly flirts with a woman dining with her partner at the opposite table. He urges Danton to look at her, saying, *"It's the girl behind you. Hurry up and look! The watchdog is angry. He's jealous"*. Baskara's use of the term "watchdog" degrades the woman's partner. Visually, the scene shows the angry man looking down at the friends with disdain and laughing sarcastically. The low camera angle on the man implies his superiority, while the high angle on Baskara conveys the sense of weakness and insignificance (Baranowski & Hecht, 2018).

Baskara's flirting with a woman who already has a partner reflects ideology of masculinity that values "locker room talk," which demeans women and reinforces the belief in male superiority, often associated with being an "alpha male" or "player" (Marrone et al., 2019; Vaynman et al., 2020). His behavior aligns with patriarchal ideology, which assumes men have power over women and can act with entitlement (Damayanti & Sevilla, 2024). Additionally, fear is seen as a weakness, while aggression is viewed as dominance (Marrone et al., 2019).

His action sparking anger is not an isolated incident. Throughout the film, viewers witness Baskara's frequent outbursts of anger, particularly towards his caretaker, Endang. Early in the road trip, Baskara does not hesitate to curse at and refuse Endang's help, such as when he needs to urinate and ends up wetting himself in the car. Portraying disabled characters as perpetually angry, especially towards caretakers, often reflects the "bitter disabled person" stereotype, linked to what Norden (1994) theorized in his book as the "Obsessive Avenger" trope. In such portrayals, disability is depicted as the root of the character's frustration, leading to their anger being directed at those around them, including caregivers. This one-dimensional depiction, favoured by filmmakers, simplifies the character's experiences and reinforces ableist stereotypes, suggesting that disabled people are ungrateful, emotionally unstable, or challenging to care for (Wilde, 2018).





Source: (Movie " *Why Do You Love Me*", 2023)

**Figure 6** Scene at 01:06:52 featuring Baskara and Danton with the sex workers handpicked by Endang

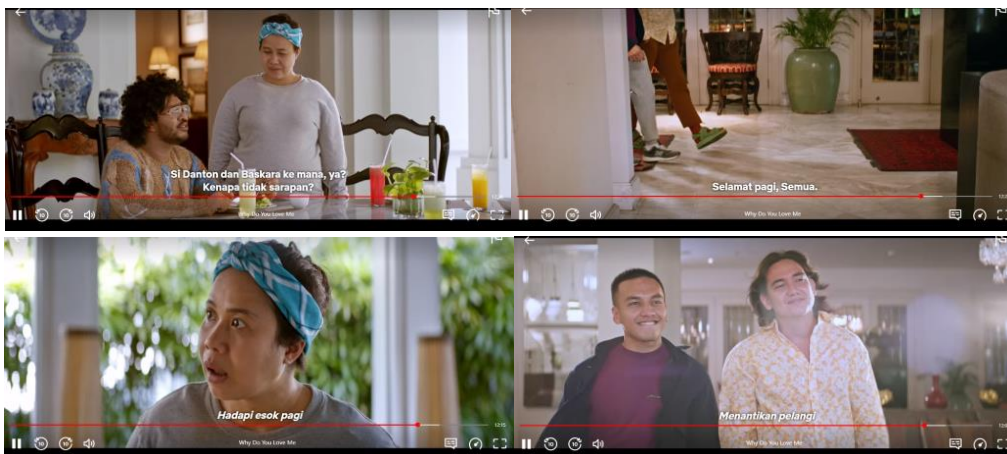
After learning that Dolly Lane had ceased operations, Endang suggested calling commercial sex workers to the hotel to fulfill the three disabled friends' dream, especially given Danton's deteriorating condition. **Figure 6** depicts the scene where sex workers arrive at Baskara and Danton's room and invite them to engage in intimate activities. The camera work highlights how the sex workers demonstrate their experience in bed, while Baskara and Danton remain passive participants. Again, the low camera angle, especially on the sex worker in Baskara's room, shows her control and superiority, while the high angle on Baskara conveys his inexperience (Baranowski & Hecht, 2018). The scene continues as the sex workers get out of the room after finishing their "task" from Endang. They say, "*Everything was done according to Ms. Endang's instructions. We never disappoint*".

When discussing sex, Judith Butler (1990) talked about how the traditional Masters and Johnson (1966) model is often referenced, outlining sexuality from arousal to resolution. This model emphasizes specific physical responses, particularly those leading to genital sensation and climax, reinforcing dominant ableist views on sexual functioning and responses (Ebrahim, 2019). Consequently, cinematic portrayals of disabled men often focus on sexual incapacity and the idea that they need able-bodied people to restore their self-esteem, perpetuating the myth that they are unattractive and unlovable. This silences disability pride and encourages able-bodied pity resulting in the "cure narrative" as a popular trope in mainstream films (Carter-Long, 2019; Greenberg, 2022; Rozengarten, 2020).

Hollywood has a long history of portraying disabled men purchasing sex as a symbolic step in their physical and psychological recovery after becoming disabled. Movies like *Coming Home* (1978), *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), and *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1974) depict prostitution or stripping, with non-disabled female sex workers, as a temporary yet essential part of this rehabilitation process (Kim, 2010). Meanwhile, movies like *The Intouchables* (2011) and *Me Before You* (2016) highlight the significant dependency of disabled characters on their caregivers.

This puts the ableist idea that disabled people need to be "fixed" or "completed" through able-bodied experiences, particularly through the use of a surrogate figure like a prostitute or, in this movie, a caregiver, framing them as rehabilitators (Kim, 2010; Rozengarten, 2020). Unfortunately, these portrayals often fall short of representing disabled bodies as fully capable of mutual sexual pleasure. Instead, sexual pleasure is often depicted as something commercial, positioning disabled people as recipients rather than equal participants, while silencing discourses that promote the desirability of disabled bodies and their ability to provide sexual pleasure (Rozengarten, 2020).

The danger of the "cure narrative" can also be seen in **Figure 7**, which takes place the morning after the three friends managed to lose their virginity to prostitutes the night before. Baskara and Danton both express their happiness to the point that Endang looks at them as if they have been "cured" of paralysis. The lexical element shows how Baskara, being typically angry, looks genuinely happy as he greets Endang and Miko. The visual element shows Baskara and Danton staring proudly at each other with big smiles. The high level of brightness, combined with the slow-motion effect, wind, and twinkling lights, adds a sense of excitement to both (Kim et al., 2018).



Source: (Movie " *Why Do You Love Me*", 2023)

**Figure 7** Scene at 01:11:06 featuring Baskara, Danton, Miko and Endang at the day after they release their virginity

The way this scene is portrayed with such brightness and happiness, compared to other scenes in the movie, can promote the misconception that the only acceptable outcome for a disabled character is to regain full physical ability. This undermines the experiences of those living with disabilities, implying that their worth is tied to overcoming or "curing" their condition (Greenberg, 2022).

Scenes in **Figures 3, 5 and 6** also perpetuate ideologies of disabled individuals as undesirable romantic partners, implying that they are unworthy of the same love and commitment as able-bodied people causing inferiority within them (Botha & Harvey, 2024). This is illustrated in some of the dialogues that question their worth, such as " *When was the last time you dated? Does anyone want to date you now?*", hence their virgin state adds more

social pressure on them. The dominance of masculinity requires men to have sexual prowess (Reddy et al., 2019). Therefore what Baskara, Danton and Miko do in **Figure 6** is a manifestation of overcoming the fear of being ostracized from the world of "real men" (Bourdieu, 2001 in Reddy et al., 2019).

The lack of experience in romantic relationships is also frequently depicted in mainstream media as fraught with a heightened potential for rejection, leading people with disability to employ humor as a coping mechanism to alleviate anxiety (Davies et al., 2022). Humor is pivotal in dismantling ableism within dramatic and comedic genres by normalizing individuals typically deemed "abnormal" (Wilde, 2018). Nevertheless, individuals with disabilities often resort to self-deprecating jokes, leveraging their weaknesses and vulnerabilities to elicit laughter from others. This reliance underscores their dependence on the validation of non-disabled individuals, wherein individuals with disabilities internalize ableist cultural norms as a means of integrating into a perceived superior social hierarchy (Wilde, 2018).

The use of self-deprecating jokes is illustrated in **Figure 3** when Baskara jokes in front of his parents by saying, "*We promise to reach Jakarta again safely, even though we are still "cacat" (disabled)*". This kind of humor occurs not only once. There is also a scene when Danton is offered a book by his dream woman, Karmila. When Karmila says that there's only one book left, Danton says "*It's okay, I'll take it. It's useless; one can't read, the other can't even get the book back*", which was greeted with laughter from Baskara and Miko. This playful form of resistance, once again, becomes a form of dependence to gain recognition from non-disabled people (Wilde, 2018).

Based on all the findings above, this research argues that stereotypical portrayals of disability continue to persist in contemporary mainstream films, even in those that claim to offer empowering narratives, such as *Why Do You Love Me* (2023). There are three discourses identified within the film that seem to reinforce negative stereotypes about disabled individuals, including 1) the repeated imagery and dialogue that perpetuate stereotypes of hypersexuality; 2) the portrayal of sexuality and virginity that aligns with dominant ideologies of masculinity; and 3) the use of ableist humor and visual cues that further entrench these harmful stereotypes. These dynamics ultimately can be linked to the concept of "cripping up," which contributes to the ongoing perpetuation of ableist and masculine discourses, ultimately resulting in inauthentic and stereotypical portrayals of disability in popular media.

For years, audiences have been accustomed to consuming ableist stereotypes in mainstream media, shaping how people interact with and understand disability. The success of films like *Me Before You* (2016) and *Wonder* (2017) underscores the bias towards non-disabled creators and narratives focused on able-bodied perspectives (Wilde, 2018). This practice, exemplified by *Tropic Thunder* (2008), faced backlash from disabled people for its "satirization without representation" of disability, highlighting the issue of "cripping up" (Carter-Long, 2019). By continuing to allow ableist tropes in the media and hiring people without disabilities to produce and act as disabled characters, the risk arises of perpetuating tiring and insulting stereotypes that compensate for a lack of lived experience (Lane, 2019).

The fact that practice of "cripping up" still dominates, where the Nielsen survey noted that around 95% of disabled roles are still played by non-disabled actors (Botha & Harvey, 2024; Syarifah, 2021), cause the shortage of genuine representation in mainstream media and also contributes to the misunderstanding surrounding the sexuality of individuals with disabilities. This practice also offers a different perspective on "cure narratives." Susan Nussbaum, a prominent disability rights and culture activist, critiques this in "Code of the Freaks" by highlighting how able-bodied actors, upon winning awards for portraying disabled characters, symbolically leave behind the "disability" they represented on screen, marking a return to "normalcy" (Greenberg, 2022). This reinforces the idea that disability is a temporary condition to overcome, reducing it to a mere performance rather than an authentic lived experience. Consequently, "cripping up" marginalizes disabled actors and perpetuates inauthentic representations in popular media.

Most representations are scripted, produced, and portrayed by abled persons based on their own conceptualizations and lack of real-life disabled experience, maintaining mistaken assumption that individuals with disabilities are either depicted as uninteresting asexual beings or portrayed in hypersexualized, sensationalized roles (Botha & Harvey, 2024; Loeser et al., 2018). Consequently, they can have harmful and irrational effects on the social group being depicted, leading to inaccurate and misleading portrayals of disabled individuals that are based on stereotypes and caricatures (Botha & Harvey, 2024; Maria Borges et al., 2024).

The use of the word "cacat" in **Figure 4** as part of a joke is one of the real examples which reflects a lack of knowledge and empathy from the filmmaker. Since the issuance of UU No. 8/2016, this term is no longer used because it carries a discriminatory stigma, implying imperfection, disadvantage, neediness, and a lack of honor and dignity (Widinarsih, 2019). Meanwhile, Endang's imaginary scene of Baskara and Danton being able to walk after sex in **Figure 7** is shown over-the-top, in slow-motion and with excessive lighting, which potentially encourages the notion that people with disabilities may dream of being what society considers healthy and perfect, which is very much in line with the dominant culture of ableism (Ilcessor & Kirkpatrick, 2017 in Cuelenaere et al., 2019; Greenberg, 2022).

These ableist perspectives, starting from shooting techniques and dialogues, can actually be avoided if this movie involves actors and production teams within the disability community. While complete authenticity is perhaps not 100% achievable or even desirable, involving disability communities throughout every stage of movie production is crucial (Sandahl, 2019). Actors with disabilities can provide more insight into authentic characteristics, and avoid clichéd narratives that continue to emerge, such as the obsession with people with disabilities as a hero, source of inspiration or someone to be "fixed" (Lee, 2021). This also means reimagining the narratives shared, the writers and actors employed, ensuring access and representation, and actively listening to diverse voices while raising awareness in political struggles concerning power and privilege (Elcessor & Kirkpatrick, 2019).

When people with disabilities are excluded from any stage of creating a film, the depiction of a character with a disability is unlikely to resonate with those who have disabilities and is more likely designed to make able-bodied viewers feel more comfortable (Lane, 2019).

Involvement from the disability community will create a final product that is more well-rounded, substantial, and diverse than it would be if their voices were excluded.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes by highlighting the need for more nuanced portrayals of disabilities and more dynamic interactions between able-bodied and disabled characters, with realistic depictions of disabled experiences by the involvement of the disability community. Positioning the community within the broader social context helps counter disempowering narratives, reduce sensationalism, and challenge stigma and ableism. This shift can also promote the view of individuals with disabilities as independent members of society and challenges cultural taboos by encouraging portrayals of disabled sexuality as whole and authentic, rather than fragmented or distorted by popular culture.

In Indonesia, featuring a disabled character as the main protagonist on a major platform like Netflix is rare, thus, *Why Do You Love Me* (2023) has the opportunity to reach a larger audience and promote social activism. This opportunity could have been maximized by the filmmaker, not just by remaking a non-Indonesian movie, but also by contextualizing it within the realities of disability in Indonesia. Depictions of public accessibility, healthcare, and sexual education would have enhanced its relevance and impact.

Structural challenges remain significant for the disability community in Indonesia, where 22.97 million people, or 8.5% of the population, live with disabilities (Supanji, 2023). Public awareness remains low and many lack adequate familial or community support, compounded by poverty and informal employment. As of 2021, 71.4% of people with disabilities work in the informal sector, 11.42% live below the poverty line, and 26.8% are uninsured (Bappenas, 2021). Films like *Why Do You Love Me* (2023), similar to *The Intouchables* (2011) and *Me Before You* (2013), overlook these structural issues by portraying characters who are financially secure, with no concern for healthcare costs or accessibility. This unrealistic depiction sidelines the challenges faced by many disabled individuals (Carter-Long, 2019).

Finally, in recent decades, disability studies have evolved with the influence of digital media and technology, offering new insights into cinema's role in social change. Despite ongoing misrepresentations of disabled sexuality in popular culture, such portrayals also present opportunities for resistance and progress. Films like *Why Do You Love Me* can create space for more authentic representations of disability to be explored and critically examined in the future.

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