

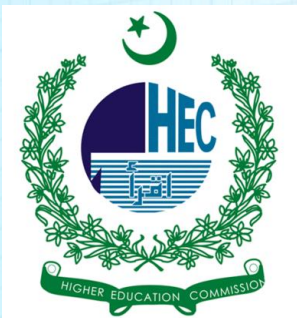
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**Reclaiming Normalcy: Exploring Disability Narratives in the
Netflix films *Keys to the Heart* and *Big World***



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Abstract

This research analyzes disability narratives in Netflix films *Keys to the Heart* (2023) and *Big World* (2024) through the lens of Disability Theory by Lennard J. Davis. One represents disability in Filipino culture and the other portrays disability in Chinese culture, respectively. Davis says that disability is not only a medical condition but a social and political issue as well. The purpose of the study is to explore how disability is depicted in two different Asian cultures in the selected films. Furthermore, this research aims to explore how normalcy is constructed in both films. The main focus of this study is to examine disability as constructed by society or by persons with disabilities (PwDs). Additionally, the analysis of this research uncovers the relationship of disabled characters with the able-bodied characters in the both films. The goal of this study is to raise voice and awareness for the disabled people as marginalized group. The findings of this research reveals that disability has gained success and achievement through the ability of both disabled characters; Jayjay and Chunhe. Overall, the study unveils that both character have gained self-acceptance and such representations are aimed to create a fair society in which PwDs are treated equally.

Keywords: Disability, normalcy, stereotypes, social construction, Davis, film analysis

1. Introduction

Disability Studies has now a recognized academic field with its main focus on disability as an issue requiring both social and political aspects. Traditionally, disability stands as an individual issue and faced nationalization through a system that recognized disability as an identity issue rather than something shaped by social elements. Historically, Media and literature have created negative stereotypes by showing disabled individuals as three types of characters victims, villains and inspirations. Through this illustration, the society has formed its own understanding of disability which results into the shifting of fear and pity (Coleridge, 1993).

In this transition, Davis emerged as a major personality in Disability Studies. In *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body*, he explains that the

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concept of being ‘normal’ is not natural but socially constructed. He refers to the 19th century when statistics started defining what was an average or ideal body. Those that could not fit in such measurements, including PwDs, racial minorities, or other classes of society were declared abnormal (Davis, 1995).

These notions have been developed by other Disability Studies scholars. Linton (1998) notes that disability has to be reclaimed as a source of identity and culture. She says that disabled individuals ought to be in charge of the narration of their stories, their voices should take the centre stage in the academic circles as well as in the media. On the same note, Garland-Thomson (2009) tells about the role of the public gaze, which defines the experience of disability. She says that disabled individuals are usually regarded as visual objects and are either subjected to curiosity or pity and this dehumanizes them. She challenges the society to shift towards more ethical and respectful approach of the difference.

Moreover, the role played by the media is also important in increasing awareness of the audience concerning disability. Barnes (1992) explores the misrepresentation of the disabled in advertisement that has only presented as pity for charity which took the focus on impairments as opposed to social isolation. Haller (2010) shows that individuals can acquire their knowledge about disability mostly by media but most of them hardly engage with PwDs as they are blinded by certain biases that members of society have towards disability. According to Zhang and Haller (2013) PwDs experience media representation mostly through supercrip roles or as an object for charity. Beacom et al. (2016) shows that mainstream media usually treat disabled individuals as objects when it comes to raising funds and personal cases of tragedy. According to Jeffress (2022), the media representation is important since the minority groups and it should appropriately portray disability groups as this will provide awareness regarding disabilities and the stereotypes.

This research analyzes how disability appears across selected films; *Keys to the Heart* (2023) and *Big World* (2024). This study applies the key concepts of Disability Theory by Davis proposed from his three major works. This study aims to unite the theory presented by Davis and the analysis of the films which will prove the fact that cinema can be a place where one may reconstruct the idea of disability not as

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a difference or a lack but as a part of being a human.

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1.1. Research Questions

- What insights do *Keys to the Heart* and *Big World* offers into the construction of normalcy through their portrayal of disability?
- How do the films represent disability either constructed by society or by persons with disabilities (PwDs)?

1.2. Significance of the Research

This research is significant because it shows how contemporary media depicts disability while investigating existing social views about persons with disabilities (PwDs). This study is important as it focuses on two Asian films because past studies were more focused on Western films regarding disability. The study examines *Keys to the Heart* and *Big World* to explore how disability is presented in different Asian cultures. Future researchers and scholars will gain practical value from this research. Because this study presents a thorough disability narrative study method and promotes film analysis of marginalized voices. This research is helpful as it gives voices to the disabled people who have been discriminated in the society and challenges traditional stereotypes. This research provides fresh insights on how films can be used to generate empathy, awareness, and more inclusive forms of perceiving disabled persons to students, researchers, and educators.

2. Literature Review

Disability Studies is an academic discipline that examines the social construction of barriers which affects disabled people rather than treating them as individual. Scholars of Disability Studies explores that how PwDs experience the world depends on societal expectations. Lenard J. Davis' work on Disability studies provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the life and struggles of disabled individuals that how they manage to achieve their goals as normal human beings. This literature review aims to explore the existing knowledge on Disability studies across various literary genres to build up ground for the present research.

Dorn (1997) appreciates *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body* by Davis (1995). As Davis shows how the idea of normalcy determines the state of disabled and non-disabled body types as it determines how the world views these conditions. Academic disciplines receive criticism from Davis concerning their failure

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to incorporate disability into their discussions about oppression and inequality.

Moreover, Aspler et al. (2022) touch upon the concept that television presents the image of autistic and disabled individuals through the cycles of the same stereotypes of either poor people, inspirational figures, or burdensome. This research adds to the discussion that media should do more than stereotyping negatively and allow some space to bring out the actual disability stories.

Additionally, Chaplin (2004) examines the issue of disability and ableness in achievements in the film *300*. He explains that this film portray disabled characters as vulnerable, wicked or deviant and able-bodied characters as being heroes and idols. His work emphasizes the fact that to this day, the cinema still tends to employ disability as a symbol instead of presenting it in a form of normal human diversity and demands more diverse and more realistic depiction in the films.

Furthermore, Cuelenaere (2019) explains that the way disability is portrayed in films is mostly based on emotional manipulation other than realistic narrative. According to him most films exploit disabled characters to either produce sympathy or moral lessons to the audience rather than depicting them as whole and multi-dimensional human beings. He recommends that the films need to shift towards presenting disability in a normal aspect of life and depict disabled characters in real manner.

Moreover, Kimble (2015) argues that the disabled faces stereotyping in society in the form of being feeble, incompetent, or inferior to the rest of society. According to Kimble, these negative perceptions persist within the society since people seldom question them and most often they view them as reality and accept them. The research demonstrates that media can be used to reduce stereotypes and promote respect towards persons with disabilities.

Additionally, the research by Dawn (2014) analysis English and Hindi films (1960-2010) and reveals that cinema tends to form false or detrimental images of people with disabilities. This study demonstrates that in movies disability is normally associated with fear, pity, or abnormality which influences the way the society perceives the disabled. The disabled characters in the films are sometimes depicted as victims, villain characters or inspirational characters rather than ordinary human

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beings with life. He recommends that the cinema must present disabled characters more realistically and concentrate on their strengths instead of their weaknesses.

Moreover, Hayes and Black (2003) investigates how 13 Hollywood films represent disability by drawing on pity as their central theme. This research examines the way films display disabled people as limited and reliant while needing therapeutic treatment to reinforce dominant authority systems. These films show disability through restriction and some of the films attempt to fight against the stereotypes. The study confirms that media requires more enabling portrayals and realistic depictions of disability to better reflect the needs of the disabled community.

Additionally, Black and Pretes (2007) studied how 18 feature films (1975-2004) depict people with physical disabilities. The research analyzes repeated disability stereotypes which included being ‘the maladjusted own worst enemy’, ‘supercrip’, ‘better-off dead’, ‘burden to society’ and “unable to live a successful life”. Media organizations need to improve their representations of disability because people with disabilities should be shown in their full diverse range of potential experiences.

Furthermore, González (2009) analyzes Spanish films and states that most of the films remain depicting disability as a symbol or dramatic element rather than depicting it as a human experience. The research goes ahead to suggest that the filmmakers ought to transition into more realistic and diverse images of the disabled as full-fledged people and not representative figures. The study makes significant contribution that Hollywood and Bollywood are not alone in misrepresenting disability, but European films also contribute to it.

Moreover, Rice et al. (2017) examines 12 short narrative films made by women and Trans living with disabilities under the Project *Re.Vision*. This research describes disability as a good and necessary part of the human life as opposed to presenting it as a tragedy, crippled person as burden, something which needs to change. They subvert the traditional media discourses that assert the future as being perfect and capable and show the theme of interdependence, vulnerability, creativity and resistance. This research challenges the stereotypes and develops the alternative and positive ways of defining disability.

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Furthermore, Beckett et al. (2010) examine the observations of children in schools about disability in their study and how they develop attitudes based on what they watch on the media and what they learn during normal conversations. This research reveals that a lot of children are socialized to believe that disability is something bad and disabled people are distinct to normal people. These are not natural thoughts but are learnt through stories, films and social attitudes. The study believes that schools as well as media have much influence in transmission of these messages and they must raise awareness.

2.1. Research Gap

Previous studies examine Western films while others examine the breaking of traditional stereotypes about disability. However there is limited work on Asian films. This research fills the gap by providing fresh insights on representation of disability in Asian films by analyzing *Keys to the Heart* and *Big World* which challenges traditional stereotypes.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework is proposed based on concepts extracted from two major works by Lennard J. Davis; *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (1995), *The Disability Studies Reader* (2013a). The key concepts of Lenard J. Davis' idea of disability theory are as follow:

3.1.1. Normalcy

According to Davis, society has generated its concept of standard normative categories. Before 19th century people did not consider normalcy when differentiating between human characteristics. The development of statistics and medicine led people to establish categories for normal and abnormal. This is one of the standards under which people have been judged and those who do not fit have been cast aside. Davis states; *"The problem is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the 'problem' of the disabled person"* (Davis, 1995). This implies that disability is not a problem rather it is constructed by society in terms of how it creates and upholds what is normal. The problem is that many issues faced by PwDs would not exist if the concept of normal was different, or if it has more

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diversity. Davis demonstrates that normal maintains inequality and alter the lives of disabled people. He suggested that we have to alter the meaning of normalcy itself (Davis, 1995).

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3.1.2. Disability as a Social Construct

Davis supports social model that the disability identity is constructed by society and its culture. He argues that disability is not only a medical condition it is an identity fixed in our minds from 19th century. Davis examines that disability is a political and social issue, in which disabled characters has been marginalized by the society. He uncovers that PwDs faces systemic oppression. *“Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society”* (Davis, 2013a). According to these lines Davis states that disability is not just about mental or physical impairments but also about how society views those who have them. The root of the issue is social obstacles such as the inability to access buildings, discriminating attitude, lack of employment and education opportunities. Because of their needless seclusion and inability to fully engage in social life, disabled people are oppressed, not because of their physical characteristics (Davis, 2013a).

3.2. Research Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach with the focus on film analysis. The research analyzes two Netflix films *Keys to the Heart* and *Big World* to study the representation of disabled characters. This research is concerned with the way disability is constructed in the social attitudes, cultural expectations and narrative structures. The process would involve viewing the films attentively, identifying appropriate dialogues, explaining them on the basis of the concepts of disability studies. This research employs key concepts of Disability Theory by Lennard J. Davis. The research analyzes the disabled characters ethically and respectfully. This research aims to raise awareness for disabled individuals and giving voice to a marginalized group.

4. Analysis and Discussion

The analysis has devoted to the issue of the representation of disability in the films *Keys to the Heart* and *Big World*. Through the lens of Disability Theory by Davis, this section has analyzed and discussed how both films portray disabled characters, their lives, and the attitude of society that surrounds them. The analysis has been based

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only on the dialogues that have been taken from the selected films. The dialogues are original and have not been paraphrased.

4.1. Normalcy Narrative

This part discusses the ways in which both films build and disrupt the concepts of normalcy. It examines the ways in which lives of disabled person are affected by the pressure to be or act in a normal way.

4.1.1. Normalcy Narrative in *Keys to the Heart*

Normalcy is portrayed in *Keys to the Heart* in the story based on the life of Joma and his brother Jayjay who is autistic and gifted in music. The need to be normal within the society is present in the film through the life of Jayjay whose unusual behavior and communication pattern is misunderstood.

Jayjay's teacher asked Sylvia to get Jayjay into a piano competition then she replied, "*See, Jayjay, whenever he goes to a place he's unfamiliar with, or with a bunch of people he's never met before, you know, sometimes he gets...*" (*Keys to the Heart*, 2023, 00:03:00). Then Jayjay's teacher said; "*Well, I think it would be good for him to experience. We won't be able to be there for Jayjay forever, right?*" (*Keys to the Heart*, 2023, 00:03:07). Sylvia thinks that Jayjay will not adjust while talking about the competition. But Jayjay's teacher thought that it would be a great experience and we will not always with him. Parental concern of long term care and autonomy is brought out in the context, a subject that is intimately related to the idea of normal adulthood. The conversation is taken within normalcy as Jayjay is not seen as normal and is also expressed as pressurizing Jayjay to learn how to perform independently.

Sylvia wants Joma's help to go with Jayjay to Centre but he refuses and in favour of Jayjay; she said, "*No, he won't do anything. Because Jayjay is a good boy. Right?*" (*Keys to the Heart*, 2023, 00:31:14). This dialogue presupposes the idea that Jayjay can be problematic just due to his disability. In stressing that Jayjay is a good boy Sylvia attempts to match him up to the acceptable standards of society that he is a normal human being. The meaning of disability here is demonstrated as something that needs to be addressed and checked against and how the normalcy is associated with obedience and predictability.

When Sylvia was leaving the house for one month, she instructed Jayjay that

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“Jayjay. Behave yourself, okay? Do what your big brother Joma says.” (Keys to the Heart, 2023, 00:53:20). Through this dialogue, it is quite obvious that how the disabled are expected to self-govern themselves in order to fit into the social-established expectations of acceptable behavior. The guidance to Sylvia presupposes that the nature of his behavior can be out of what is perceived as normal and thus has to be corrected by Jayjay. The concept of disability is depicted as something to be victimized in order to make Jayjay look normal in the society.

4.1.2. Normalcy Narrative in *Big World*

In *Big World*, Chunhe is the disabled character who is also pressured to fit into the life of the society. It is seen in the film that normalcy is moulded by those surrounding him. It shows that how the other abled characters treat him differently.

Chunhe wants to go to Normal University and asked for permission from his mother; he said, “*If Normal University accepts me, can I go?*” (Big World, 2024, 00:33:48) but his mother refuses, “*Not that school*” (Big World, 2024, 00:33:52). His demand is the request to be independent and to be self-determined. The rejection is dismissive and categorical, this proves how the dreams are restricted to him. With regards to the issue of normality, it is noted that higher education is not for disabled as they are not considered normal. Disability is modeled as one of the excuses that can be used to restrict life decisions.

Chunhe gave interview for job at cafe but the interviewer said, “*To be honest... I just want to hire a normal person.*” (Big World, 2024, 00:52:46). The word ‘normal’ clearly locks out Chunhe, where disability is portrayed as not equal to work competence. He is not seen as a normal person as describes by Davis that disability is is not considered as normal.

Chunhe and his Grandma were standing on the roof where Chunhe asked, “*Can I get a driver's license?*” (Big World, 2024, 01:12:32). Chunhe is confronting the limitation of his freedom. The symbol of driving represents normal adult life and the symbol of the roof reveals restriction. Disability has been displayed as a limitation to ordinary life milestones. The discussion is appropriate to normalcy in illustrating that ordinary is determined by movement and independence, which are deprived to Chunhe.

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Chunhe in his dream said, “*Why can't people be like cicadas? Every time it sheds a shell...it gets a new life.*” (Big World, 2024, 01:40:44). This figurative dialogue is uttering one of the times of contemplation when Chunhe is yearning to change a situation. The cicadas is a symbol of a new beginning and transformation of the body that is in a complete contrast to the situation with Chunhe who was weak socially and physically. The concept of disability is being translated here as the thing that does not allow one to have access to socially desirable normalcy, including reinvention and new beginnings. He wanted to be normal as expected by society.

4.2. Disability as a Social Construct

This section explores the ways in which the films portray disability as something that is created by the society and not only a physical or a medical condition. It is based on the treatment of the disabled characters by other people and impact of the culture on their lives.

4.2.1. Disability as a Social Construct in *Keys to the Heart*

In *Keys to the Heart* disability is depicted as a thing that is created by the family and social attitudes. The autism of Jayjay is not a problem that it is his disability but main problem is in the perceptions and treatment of other people around him.

When Apple and Jayjay playing video games, Joma said “*Don't worry 'bout him, he's acting retarded*” (Keys to the Heart, 2023, 00:24:07) in responds to the behavior of Jayjay. The use of language transforms the actions of Jayjay into a social issue in the form of ableism. This dialogue demonstrates that Jayjay is dismissed due to his actions rather than having them comprehended. . Then Apple replied “*He is not retarded. He's special, you understand that?..He's a person so be respectful.*” (Keys to the Heart, 2023, 00:24:09) to Joma, for what he said about Jayjay. The situation is a confrontational situation in which the social meaning is being put into question. Apple warns to not use such stereotypical words for Jayjay. This discussion is within the social construct theory as it reveals that disability is not an obvious problem that is predetermined but an issue that is addressed by society.

When Sylvia asked Joma to take Jayjay to the Center tomorrow, Joma replied to Sylvia; “*Why me? What if he pulls something?*” (Keys to the Heart, 2023, 00:31:11). This dialogue reveals the pre-assumptions about disability that society

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preassumed the behaviour of disabled person. This dialogue unveils disability as something that exists in the minds of other people in the form of stereotypes and concern.

Joma was having dinner with his friend and told him what happened at the home that “*Sylvia's son peed on the floor*” (Keys to the Heart, 2023, 00:32:18) and makes the incident out of context and turns it into a joke. It show the social construction of disability since it is not only the act that is retold as a shameful way to become disabling. The troubling experience of Jayjay is socialized to produce embarrassment.

When Sylvia talking to Joma about Jayjay that she wants to protect him there she said “*Because when it comes to Jayjay, I want to protect him as much as I can.*” (Keys to the Heart, 2023, 00:51:01) This dialogue portray that Jayjay is not alone in his disability, but also his loved ones particularly his mother. This dialogue proves that vulnerability is created in social surroundings; it can either be unsafe or judgmental.

4.2.2. Disability as a Social Construct in *Big World*

The social construction of disability emerges in the *Big World* by how the society reacts to the difference of Chunhe. The perceptions of other individuals such as pity and avoidance determine the way Chunhe views himself. The film introduces disability as an issue that is caused by unwillingness of the society to accept but not the body.

There is a dialogue takes place when Chunhe was there on a trial lecture whereby children respond to his body movements and said, “*What kind of disease is this? He must be crazy!*” (Big World, 2024, 00:14:24). The situation portrays ignorance as opposed to the fact that there was no direct danger or teaching incompetence. The discourse has constructed disability as abnormal and frightening as represented in the society.

When Chunhe fell down in the bus then bus driver stops the bus and said, “*Don't take a bus in your condition*” (Big World, 2024, 00:21:53). “*Why can't he take the bus? The disabled have no rights?*” (Big World, 2024, 00:22:02). This is what Chunhe's grandmother replied to bus Driver as a reaction to discrimination. The situation is one of challenge, and the question reveals the unfairness of the situation. It can be seen that disability is constructed by society.

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During the interview, the interviewer said to Chunhe, *“It takes IQ and EQ alike. I have to make sure you can... handle it”* (Big World, 2024, 00:49:26). He is being interviewed and is already being assumed incompetent even before he regulates how well he performs. This discussion represents disability is socially constructed in terms of intellectual and emotional incompetence.

Chunhe gives his speech on the stage when he was invited by Shuchuan Bus Group where Chunhe complaint about the bus driver and he said, *“I fear I can't even do a simple task. And I fear that if those who do these tasks for me are gone one day... I may not be able to carry on. I've asked my grandma... I've asked my parents... and I've asked my doctor... Why does it have to be me? I didn't get an answer. I'll never get an answer. In the crowd, I've met all kinds of gaze. Gazes of pity... Gazes of fear... Even gazes of disgust... But I've rarely seen a gaze that dared to stare at me and tell me I'm one of them. These old folks showed me that gaze. When I see that they don't know mobile payment... or identity authentication... I feel like I've found my people”* (Big World, 2024, 01:58:46). This long monologue comes in place as Chunhe recollects how he has been treated his entire life and perceived as something to be avoided and judged. It is a philosophical context which provides one of the most understandable descriptions of social disability in the film. Chunhe talks of being looked at with pity, fear and disgust, this illustrates how the disability is created by the social interaction but not the bodily state. This speech shows clearly how the determination of disability is built on gazes, culture, and social exclusion as social construction.

4.3. Success and Ability Beyond Disability

In this section, the research examines the definitions of success in both films and the ways in which the disabled characters demonstrate emotional, intellectual, social or artistic skills that are not expected by the society. Rather than defining success based on physical perfection or conventional norms of independence, the analysis discusses how both films point to various types of development, strength and self-esteem.

4.3.1. Success and Ability beyond Disability in *Keys to the Heart*

In *Keys to the Heart* success is depicted in the form of musical ability of Jayjay and his emotional growth. However, his disability does not stop his capability to learn,

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express and master the playing of the piano.

One night, at table conversation Sylvia requested Joma to take Jayjay to the piano competition. First he refuses then he accepts and asked Sylvia that *“He can play”* (Keys to the Heart, 2023, 00:43:01) and Sylvia replied *“He has a lot of talent, even if he is different, you know? With just one listen to any song he can play it again flawlessly. It’s amazing really”* (Keys to the Heart, 2023, 00:43:04). This conversation reveals the talent of Jayjay despite disability that disability didn't stop him to pursue his passion This conversation about disability fits in success and ability as it states it out without denying disability. Disability is portrayed as compatible with highly proficient abilities which break traditional assumptions that disabled people are incompetent.

Annette told Cesar about the talent of Jayjay despite his disability, as she said *“Jayjay has a special gift. That boy has never taken a single music lesson, but he plays like that. He can hear something, just one time, and no matter how hard the piece, he can do it”* (Keys to the Heart, 2023, 01:08:27). This dialogue is appropriate to the success as it situates ability as a practical and quantifiable activity instead of being a symbolic or inspirational one. At this point, disability is positively portrayed as irrelevant to Jayjay succeeding, where it becomes important to focus on competency despite diagnosis.

There is a conversation during the time Jayjay is officially got his chance into the competition and Annette gave this news as she said *“Because the competition is letting Jayjay join!”* (Keys to the Heart, 2023, 01:14:20) and Joma happily said to Jayjay *“Hey, you're gonna compete. Did you hear that?”* (Keys to the Heart, 2023, 01:14:24) This is appropriate to the success since it demonstrates access, opportunity and achievement. The issue of disability is manifested as no longer an obstacle and the focus is on the ability and success.

Sylvia sees the piano performance of Jayjay and told him *“My Jayjay was so good earlier. I'm so proud of you, Jayjay.”* This dialogue takes place immediately after the performance of Jayjay and is based on emotional support. The environment conditions pride and success without mentioning the disability. This also fits in the success that it makes achievement that has to be celebrated. Disability is symbolized

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as belonging to Jayjay and not the scale of his value or achievement.

4.3.2. Success and Ability beyond Disability in *Big World*

In the *Big World*, the power of emotions, ability to teach and personal change is the form of success for Chunhe. His poetry lessons, playing in front of the crowd, and calm acknowledgement of what kind of a person he is shows that he possesses a great inner talent, which overcomes the physical limitations.

“He got top-tier at the college exams” (Big World, 2024, 00:06:00). The context is relevant in the sense that intellectual achievement is the focus of his existence instead of physical difference. The statement goes directly against the widely held beliefs that disability is a constraint to cognitive capacity or academic achievement. This dialogue proves the point that disabled people are still capable of becoming and surpassing the institutional criteria of success, which continues to disrupt the deficit-based discourses of disability.

‘You sneaky brat. You got the job?!’ (Big World, 2024, 00:54:13). Chunhe’s grandma is surprised when she knows about her grandson has found a job. The context is the focus on success in a real-life context where Chunhe had been underestimated before. The employment of Chunhe overcomes the stories of disabled people as unemployable or dependent and establishes competency and agency.

When Yaya came to meet Chunhe; she sees his diary full of poem and asked *“you wrote these poem”* (Big World, 2024, 01:03:31) Chunhe replied *“yup”* (Big World, 2024, 01:03:32) This conversation represents disability as self-identification and self-cognition as a creative process. The situation changes to being more about survival and struggle to self-expression and intellectual creativity. The significance of admiration but not pity is shown by Yaya, centered on the talent of Chunhe. This discussion qualifies as success in a very significant way.

“Look... Normal University accepted me.” (Big World, 2024, 01:51:03). This dialogue takes place at the moment when Chunhe tells that his acceptance to school will occur and it is a significant success. This depicts disability as being acceptable to institutional success and intellectual achievement. This is further reinforced by the symbolism of Normal University where Chunhe has been accepted into a place that is synonymous with regularization and quality even though he is considered socially as

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abnormal.

“*I am what I am*” (Big World, 2024, 02:00:57). This talk is uttered when Chunhe has grown, struggled and got recognition. Disability is not an erasable, overcoming phenomenon, but is a component of identity. This statement seems as victory that is not estimated by the physical change but based on the self acceptance and pride.

5. Conclusion & Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

This research examines the representation of disability in *Keys to the Heart* and *Big World* by employing the key concepts of Disability Theory by Lenard J. Davis. This research demonstrates how these films use disability as a social construct that originates from both family ties and community values and social standards. The study shows that both films provide powerful and intricate depictions of disability with the ability to challenge the mainstream cultural discourse. By examining the role of both disabled characters Jayjay and Chunhe, it can be seen that disability has been constructed by society. The aspect of disability is not displayed as a symbol of tragedy, but it is a valuable aspect of the lives of both characters. Their family sees them as normal human being but the misconceptions of society unveils that how stereotypes has been in minds of society. The disability in both films has been constructed by the society not by PwDs.

These films also illustrate some of the best ways to overcome ableism with the characters going against the expectations that others have formed about them. Their life show self-confidence, emotional intelligence and talent which changes the perception of disability in the audience. Through this research the analysis unveils that disabled characters who go against stereotypes share multiple dimensions beyond their disabilities. Their experiences show their strengths and wishes, and struggle with oppositions.

Success and ability in both films is redefined to be more than a disability. Both Jayjay and Chunhe are successful, Jayjay in music and Chunhe in academic. Above

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all, these two films uncover that disabled characters do not need special help to become successful. The musical ability of Jayjay and the teaching, confidence and self acceptance of Chunhe employs that not only physical perfection can make a person successful instead their achievements portray that disability is strong not weak.

In general, *Keys to the Heart* and *Big World* are inviting to a more inclusive approach to disability. They criticize ableist values, highlight the social impediments, and turn the handicapped characters into human beings, having emotions, skills and desires. The research proceeds to the point that such representations are aimed at creating a fair society in which the PwDs are treated equally. This research sheds much light on the attitude to disability representation and the way the attitudes and opinions of the society influence the life of the disabled characters in both films.

5.1. Recommendations

It is recommended that disability studies can be further expanded by researchers in the future by examining other Asian films that depict disability. There should be more research that must focus on disabled characters that are complex, unique, and driven rather than trying to work from stereotypes. Filmmakers are advised to engage the disabled societies to make sure their films are represented rightfully and respectfully. When people recognize the meaning of disability as a social construct, the society will be better placed and supportive of people living with disabilities. Future researchers may investigate the reactions of audiences, compare the various films in a certain country or how the cultural personalities affect representation of disability. It would contribute to the establishment of the Disability Studies in Asian film on academic basis.

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