

A critical disability studies reading of Beauty and the Beast: Détournement in pedagogical practice

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ABSTRACT

Disney's interpretation of the fairy tale, *Beauty and the Beast*, and the decisions made to include or exclude certain key elements of the original plot, provide insight into how ideas about what it means to be human have changed over time. Specifically, a critical disability studies reading of *Beauty and the Beast* brings to light the taken-for-granted category of disability as a social construct, the ever-shifting indicators of an individual's normality/Otherness, and the socio-historical context that results in such distinctions. The intent of this paper is to (1) explain the theoretical framework behind a détournement, or counter-text, I created in order to articulate a critical disability studies reading of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, and (2) describe my experience of presenting this détournement to undergraduate education students, and the implications for incorporating critical disability studies into teacher education programs.

Keywords: *critical disability studies, teacher education, Disney, critical literacy, popular media.*



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INTRODUCTION

The winner of three Golden Globe Awards, and the first-ever animated film to be nominated for Best Picture, Disney's 1991 version of *Beauty and the Beast* is "arguably the most successful feature Disney has ever produced" (Berberi & Berberi, 2013, p. 197). The film presents a version of Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's 1756 fairytale, which also served as the script for Jean Cocteau's film, *La Belle et la Bête*, in 1945. Disney's interpretation of the tale, and the decisions made to include or exclude certain key elements of the original plot, provide insight into how ideas about what it means to be human have changed over time. Specifically, a socio-historical analysis of how the Beast is portrayed may shed light on how dis/ability, "a bifurcated concept that captures the contradictory nature of what it means to be human" (Liddiard et al., 2019, p. 158), is constructed and positioned in specific sociocultural contexts. This type of analysis is in line with Henry Giroux's (2000) call for a "new analyses of Disney that connect(s) rather than separate(s) the various social and cultural formation in which the company actively engages" (p. 110). From a critical disability studies perspective, Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* provides an avenue to understand "the key cultural terms determining what are the right and wrong ways to be a human being" (Zipes, 2011, p. 24). Ultimately, such an analysis might help us "to reimagine what we want to hold dear about humanness" (Liddiard et al., 2019, p. 160). The intent of this paper is to (1) explain the theoretical framework behind a *détournement*, or counter-text, I created in order to articulate my critical disability studies reading of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, and (2) describe my experience of presenting this *détournement* to undergraduate education students, and the implications for incorporating critical disability studies into teacher education programs.

The evolution of *Beauty and the Beast*

Before providing my analysis of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, I will provide an overview of the fairytale's evolution. In his 2011 book, *The Enchanted Screen: The Unknown History of Fairy-Tale Films*, Jack Zipes explains that the traditionally oral fairy-tale "enabled people to store, remember, and reproduce the plot of a fairy tale and to change it to fit their experiences and desires due to the easily identifiable characters who are associated with particular social

classes, professions, and assignments" (p. 21). Keeping in mind the idea that fairy-tales are modified to fit specific socio-cultural moments in time, I will briefly describe the most widely known versions of *Beauty and the Beast*, focusing on how the details of this fairytale have evolved.

The 1740 tale of *La Belle et la Bête*, written by Gabrielle-Suzanne de Villeneuve, was popularized when Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont published a 1756 version in order to provide "a juvenile audience with reading material suitable to their level of comprehension and adapted to their immediate interests" (Korneeva, 2014, p. 233). During this time, the concept of childhood as a distinct stage, as well as the idea that children should be subjects of social regulation, emerged in response to their role "as future workers requiring moralization and skills" and "the threat which they posed now or in the future to the welfare of the state" (Rose, 1999, p. 125). Beaumont's tale aimed to engage a young female audience using the enchantment of a fairytale, while covertly teaching them "ideas, norms, and values... considered worthy of emulation" (Zipes, 1981, p. 119). These esteemed norms are exemplified through the tale's heroine, Beauty (called "Belle" in the Disney version), who is hardworking in the face of adversity and loyal to the needs of her family. After Beauty's father loses his high social status and fortune, she works without complaint to support her family. Then, when Beauty's father upsets the Beast by picking his prized roses, she takes it upon herself to sacrifice her freedom and live in the custody of the Beast. Eventually, Beauty discovers the Beast's kind nature and agrees to marry him. The Beast, previously condemned to live in his ugly form by a wicked fairy, transforms into his former state of a handsome Prince. As Beauty and the Prince live happily ever after, they offer exemplars of good character for boys and girls: "The mark of beauty for females is to be found in submission, obedience, humility, industry, and patience; the mark of manliness is to be found in self-control, politeness, reason, and perseverance" (Zipes, 1981, p. 124). Ultimately, the goal of Beaumont's tale is to instill values that alleviate any tension between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, instead encouraging a peaceful coexistence. In other words, "Beauty and the Beast are suited for one another because they live according to the code of civility. They subscribe to prescriptions that maintain the power of an elite class and patriarchal rule" (Zipes, 2011, p. 229).

In 1945, Jean Cocteau created a film adaptation of Beaumont's tale, *La Belle et la Bête*. Cocteau made major modifications to the script in order to challenge the values of passivity and submission promoted in Beaumont's version. As Zipes (2011) explains, "Cocteau seriously intended to expose the hollow myths and fairy tales with which we tend to guide our lives and have become staples in the culture industry" (p. 232). Additionally, Cocteau's film premiered in the aftermath of World War II, and offered a new outlook in response to "France's shame and complicity in the spread of 'bestial' Nazism" (Zipes, 2011, p. 230). These motives create a version of the fairytale that distorts the typical "happily ever-after" ending, and offers a tale that exposes the culture industry's attempts to influence human behavior and relationships.

Targeting an adult audience, Cocteau asks viewers "to dwell on literal meanings rather than hastily reproduce codified figurative associations projected onto difference" (Berberi & Berberi, 2013, p. 201). For example, Cocteau's depiction of the Beast emphasizes his animal nature in order to communicate to the audience that the Beast and Beauty are completely separate species. The Beast is not to be interpreted as human in any way, or to be viewed allegorically, for Cocteau's aim lies in "maintaining a kind of integrity of the Other" (Berberi & Berberi, 2013, p. 201). Beauty describes the Beast's suffering to her father in order to convince him that the Beast indeed has a soul, a conversation that reveals the dominant Cartesian notion of a "correlation between an unsightly appearance and a blemished soul" (Berberi & Berberi, 2013, p. 197). Cocteau's Beast pushes the audience to consider alternative notions of humanity, as Beauty comes to love the Beast in his 'non-human' form. In fact, once the Beast transforms into a prince, Beauty reacts with uncertainty and expresses her preference for his prior form. Cocteau's film forces the audience to look behind the curtain of the fairytale, and recognize the tale as merely an "illusion of a just and happy world in which conflicts and contradictions would always be reconciled in the name of a beautiful ruling class" (Zipes, 2011, p. 23).

The disneyfication of *Beauty and the Beast*

In Disney's 1991 version of *Beauty and the Beast*, an old woman seeking shelter from the cold approaches a castle door. When she offers a rose as a token of gratitude, the prince of the castle laughs, denying her request. As punishment for his selfish behavior, the old

woman casts a spell that turns the prince into a beast until the day he is able to earn the love of another. The old woman offers the intended lesson, "for beauty lies within," moments before transforming into a beautiful enchantress. This introductory scene sets up two key themes that are woven throughout Disney's interpretation of the tale. First is the idea that beauty represents honorable character, while ugliness is associated with poor morals.

The good/bad, beautiful/ugly dichotomy runs counter to the tale's explicit lesson: true beauty is found within. Another prevalent, but perhaps less overt, idea is the message about reliance tied to the prince's punishment. He will be transformed from an ugly/bad Beast into a beautiful/good prince when he is able to convince the beautiful/good Belle of his worthiness. In other words, an essential component to breaking the spell lies in the Beast's ability to successfully conform to Belle's dominant standards of goodness and humanity.

The old woman's transformation into a beautiful enchantress brings these two themes together. Instead of casting the spell in the form of an old woman, which may have been interpreted as evil, she becomes young and beautiful so that her spell may be viewed as an important lesson in moral behavior. Her transformation suggests both the relationship between beauty and goodness, and the need to conform to standards of beauty/normality in order for one's actions to be interpreted as 'good'. In this manner, Disney's tale "lead(s) the viewer on a quest that legitimates a reality of violence and injustice by making it appear, through fixed stereotypes and values fostering violence and exploitation, that contradictions can be reconciled through a collective fantasy, namely the sets of images that constitute a Disney fairy-tale film" (Zipes, 2011, p. 25).

While Disney's adaptation of the fairytale most closely follows Beaumont's storyline, it borrows many of the fantastical elements from Cocteau's film. The enchanted household objects that play a major role in the Disney film come from Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête*. However, Disney abandoned Cocteau's agenda of exposing the farce of the fairytale, and instead elected to incorporate Beaumont's patriarchal messaging disguised as a tale of feminism. Berberi & Berberi (2013) presented their reading of the fairytale through the lens of disability studies, arguing that Disney's version "incorporates elements that seem to acknowledge progressive historical developments, making way for alternative readings of disability and a

place for the Beast at the table” (p. 206). It is clear that the work of disability rights activists has resulted in major shifts in policy, as well as changes to how disability is understood within society. However, I utilize a critical disability studies lens in order to argue that Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* promotes the message that a disabled body is a problem that must be overcome, with the heroic help of the able-bodied, in order to transform into an economically productive, “able” body.

A critical disability studies reading of *Beauty and the Beast*

The very term that permeates our contemporary life- the normal- is a configuration that arises in a particular historical moment. It is part of a notion of progress, of industrialization, and of ideological consolidation of the power of the bourgeoisie. The implications of the hegemony of normalcy are profound and extend into the very heart of cultural production. (Davis, 2013, p. 12)

Lennard Davis (2013) articulates the importance of examining popular media through the lens of critical disability studies, as this practice allows us to “question the idea of normality” (p. 13). In other words, by considering the language and images used in *Beauty and the Beast*, as well as the socio-historical context in which the film is situated, we can identify how normality is being constructed in order to trouble the “naturalized understanding of being fully human” (Campbell, 2009, p. 6).

The field of critical disability studies is engaged in the project of understanding why the “dominant discourse continues to mark some people – but not others – as inherently excessive to normative boundaries” (Shildrick, 2012, p. 31). Additionally, critical disability studies provides “a platform or plateau through which to think through, act, resist, communicate, engage with one another against the hybridized forms of oppression and discrimination that so often do not speak singularly of disability” (Goodley, 2013, p. 641).

A critical disability studies reading of *Beauty and the Beast* brings to light (1) the taken-for-granted category of disability as a social construct, (2) the ever-shifting indicators of an individual’s normality/ Otherness, and (3) the socio-historical context that results in such distinctions.

My reading of Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*, as articulated through a détournement, focuses on the

discourse of dis/ability within the sociohistorical context of the film’s premiere. In the following section, I will provide a brief background on the practice of détournement before I describe its construction and contents.

METHOD

Methodology of détournement

Détournement as a practice involves “reusing artistic and mass-produced elements to create new combinations or ensembles” (Trier, 2014, p. 16). In James Trier’s book, *Detournement as Pedagogical Praxis*, he explains that this practice, attributed to the “Paris-based avant-garde group called the Situationist International” (p. 1), “does not mean merely randomly juxtaposing incongruous elements, but (1) creating out of those elements a new coherent whole that (2) criticizes both the existing world and its own relation to the world” (p. 17). I created a détournement utilizing video clips drawn mainly from Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* and the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which coincides with the release of Disney’s animated film.

In order to fulfill the first détournement criterion suggested by Trier (2014), I combined elements in a manner that tells the story of *Beauty and the Beast* in socio-historical context through a critical disability studies lens. I will elaborate more on the specifics of this process in the next section. The second criterion suggests the need to “expose the always already mediated status of the seemingly immediate and ‘natural’ world constructed in classical, or pre-situationist, cinema” (Levin, 2002, p. 331). As I created my détournement, I intended to highlight the problematic nature of the discourse of humanity found within popular media, and to point out how normalized this discourse has become. Additionally, I wanted to demonstrate how the discourse surrounding the *Americans with Disabilities Act* explicitly suggested an inclusive attitude while simultaneously perpetuating narratives of reliance, and establishing a prerequisite for the acceptance of disabled people: their successful adherence to able-bodied norms. These aims echo the purpose of détournement, as described by Karen Kurczynski (2008): “Détournement was an explicitly political practice... intended to devalue the discourse or institution it attacked” (p. 296).

In order to construct my détournement, I used iMovie to combine, cut, and strategically piece together

clips from Jean Cocteau's 1945 *La Belle et la Bête*, Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, Disney Jr.'s *Once Upon A Princess*, and former president George H.W. Bush's statement prior to signing the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. I also included images that highlight historical responses to disability, and the work of disability rights activists. The final product is just over seven minutes in length. The following sections will provide a more in-depth description of the segments included in the détournement.

Breaking down binaries

The introductory sequence of the détournement aims to highlight the good/beautiful and bad/ugly binaries that underlie the tale of *Beauty and the Beast*, and to demonstrate how the naturalization of this binary way of thinking has been used to construct "right and wrong ways to be a human being" (Zipes, 1995, p. 24). The détournement begins with a clip from the trailer for Jean Cocteau's 1945 *La Belle et la Bête*. Cocteau explains to viewers that his film is based on Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's 1756 fairytale, and defines his target audience as, "grown-ups who haven't lost touch with their childhood." I include clips of Cocteau's film throughout the détournement to call attention to how certain aspects of what it means to be a 'good human' have shifted over time, while others have remained the same, suggesting that "the very notion of 'properly human' alone should give pause for thought" (Shildrick, 2012, p. 31). Next, viewers see a clip from Disney Jr.'s *Once Upon A Princess*, a feature in which children narrate and reenact the story of *Beauty and the Beast*. In this segment, a young girl introduces Belle to the audience, describing her as both 'kind' and 'pretty'. Clips from this feature are included throughout the détournement in order to demonstrate the potential impact media, such as Disney films, have on:

regulating the meanings, values, and tastes that set the norms and conventions that offer up and legitimate particular subject positions- what it means to claim an identity as male, female, white, black, citizen, or non-citizen as well as to define the meaning of childhood, the national past, beauty, truth, and social agency. (Giroux, 1998, p. 254).

The same three sources are drawn on in order to introduce viewers to the Beast, a character whose undesirable appearance triggers fear. All versions of the fairytale present the characters of *Beauty and the Beast* in a manner that equates "beauty" with "goodness", and "ugliness" with "evil". The

good/beautiful, bad/ugly binaries demonstrate how ableism results in a "network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human" (Campbell, 2009, p. 44). Ableism can be easily identified when considering the history of discrimination towards disabled people, an idea that is reflected in the next segment, which shows former President H.W. Bush addressing the nation as he prepares to sign the 1990 *Americans with Disabilities Act*. Bush's speech is incorporated throughout the détournement, as it illustrates how dominant ideas about disability were constructed when Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* premiered. In the first segment of Bush's speech, viewers hear him introduce the Act as a step towards removing the "physical barriers we have created, and the social barriers we have accepted." Following this clip, viewers hear the audio from a song in which an angry mob discusses their plans to kill the Beast, alongside images that show how physical appearance has been utilized as an indicator for criminality and a lack of capability. Viewers also see Maurice, Belle's father, manipulating Cogsworth, a talking clock, who voices multiple demands for Maurice to stop with his prodding. This clip is included in order to highlight how the differently-abled have long been investigated and subject to intervention at the hands of the so-called 'normal'. The combination of these clips demonstrates how *Beauty and the Beast* calls attention to the widely accepted harmful responses to difference that Bush points to in his speech.

Notions of humanity in *Beauty and the Beast*

The next segment of the détournement begins with a few lines from Bush's speech, in which he explains that the *Americans with Disabilities Act* will afford those with disabilities, "independence, freedom of choice, control of their lives" and "the opportunity to blend fully and equally into the rich mosaic of the American mainstream." Here, Bush implies that given the ability to act independently, individuals with disabilities would choose to conform as closely as possible to mainstream norms. Immediately following Bush's speech is a clip of Lumière beginning to talk about what it would mean to be "Human Again," the title of a musical number that was originally excluded from Disney's 1991 *Beauty and the Beast*, but added in the 2004 edition. Lumière exclaims, "Human again:

think what that means!” This combination is meant to ask the audience to consider the role of able-bodied norms in constructing a definition of humanity. Lumière’s provocation also calls attention to how this able-bodied notion of humanity is portrayed as an ideal desired by all.

Viewers are then faced with a sequence of clips meant to draw their attention the notion of humanity presented within *Beauty and the Beast*. In Cocteau’s version of the tale, humanity is tied to the ability to speak, walk upright, and consume the proper kind of food and drink in a civilized manner. Disney Jr.’s enactment suggests similar ideas about humanity, but adds that the Beast’s unrefined behaviors are cause for exclusion from society. How does one become “human again” in order to “blend fully and equally into the rich mosaic of the American mainstream?” (*Americans with Disabilities Act*, 1990). By including clips of Belle teaching the Beast the proper way to be ‘human’, the détournement suggests the reliance of those who fall outside of able-bodied norms on the instruction and support of the able-bodied. In this way, the portrayal of achieving humanity in *Beauty and the Beast* strips away the possibility that the Beast’s unique ways of being could be accepted within society. This portrayal also does not allow room for the idea that alternative ways of being and doing have value, and does nothing to push the audience to question or expand their likely taken-for-granted ideas about humanity.

Notions of productivity as humanity: Interest convergence theory

In the musical number, *Human Again*, enchanted household objects sing about their desire to return to a human form, and consider what this achievement would allow them to do. As the brooms dance around, sweeping the ballroom floor, they sing, “We’ll be human again, only human again, when the girl finally sets us all free.” From a critical disability studies perspective, these lyrics suggest that the disabled body may only be considered human when the non-disabled individual adopts this view. In order to call attention to this message, and to provide an alternative narrative, I incorporated images of disability rights activists working to advocate and effect change. These images allow viewers to critique a representation of disability that portrays disabled people as reliant and objects of pity.

The lyrics and overall visuals incorporated throughout the musical number indicate the importance

of economic productivity and normative appearance that is linked to being considered human in the eyes of the non-disabled population. For example, Lumière sings wistfully about a life where he would be able to return to his former occupation of cooking, and gain back his “good-looking” appearance. His comments align with those presented by Bush, and convey ideas about what it means to be “human”, specifically the importance of adapting to normative physical characteristics, and of being a productive member of the workforce. The idea that one’s humanity is contingent upon serving the interests of the dominant class could be described as “interest convergence,” a concept articulated by Derrick Bell in his 1980 article, *Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma*. Bell explained that the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to desegregate schools occurred only when the interest of racial equality expressed by the black community aligned with the interests of white policymakers. Throughout Bush’s speech, he stresses the idea that making accommodations to include individuals with disabilities will positively impact the productivity of the workforce. In this manner, Bush explicitly describes how the interests of the disabled community converge with the interests of nondisabled business owners. This segment ends with Bush stating: “When given the opportunity to be independent, they will move proudly into the economic mainstream of American life, and that’s what this legislation is all about.”

Becoming human: Reliance and conformity

The final segment of the détournement focuses on the Beast’s transformation into human form. A clip from Bush’s speech, which continues to promote the concept of interest convergence, introduces this segment: “You have in your hands the key to the success of this act, for you can unlock a splendid resource of human potential that, when freed, will enrich us all.” Bush’s words perpetuate the belief that individuals with disabilities require the help of the nondisabled in order to be fully human. Next, I include the transformations that occur in *Beauty and the Beast*: the old woman who transforms into a beautiful enchantress, and the beast who transforms into a handsome prince. These visuals are meant to build on Bush’s argument, demonstrating how, with the help of the nondisabled community, the disabled body may be transformed into something recognized as human. I also wanted to push viewers to consider the physical

and visual aspects of being recognized as fully human. When the old woman becomes a beautiful enchantress, her words suddenly have more power. Likewise, when the Beast transforms into a prince, he is recognized as an acceptable partner for Belle. The idea that societal acceptance is dependent upon one's ability to successfully conform to able-bodied standards is expressed throughout Bush's statement as well: "This act is powerful in its simplicity. It will ensure that people with disabilities are given the basic guarantees for which they have worked so long and so hard... the opportunity to blend fully and equally into the rich mosaic of the American mainstream." Bush's choice of words here also suggests that what the disabled community most desires is to "blend" into society, rather than to be included and accepted without having to conform to able-bodied norms. I end the détournement with the closing from Disney Jr.'s rendition of *Beauty and the Beast* in order to remind viewers that this pervasive disability narrative caters to the audience of young children, beginning the process of normalizing the medical model of disability.

Détournement as a method for introducing critical disability studies

I wanted to explore how the use of this détournement, designed to present a critical reading of *Beauty and the Beast*, might allow undergraduate students in an education course to consider how humanity and dis/ability are represented in the film. Specifically, I was interested in whether the détournement would be a useful tool for introducing critical disability theory. In order to investigate the utility of the détournement, I asked twenty students in an undergraduate education course to view and write a response to the détournement. I conducted this project several weeks into the semester. By this time, students had developed familiarity with the process of viewing and writing responses to media texts. Throughout the course, students were expected to post weekly responses to an online class forum. Prompts for these forum posts generally asked students to critically reflect on a media text, and to provide their analysis of this media text through the lens of an assigned reading. This project took place over the course of two seminars. Prior to the first seminar, students were asked to view *Beauty and the Beast*, and to write a forum post describing their experience with Disney films and products, and their reaction to viewing the film. Next, students viewed the détournement, read an

article that provided a disability studies reading of *Beauty and the Beast* (see Berberi & Berberi, 2013), and wrote a response to the following prompt:

Write a brief response (about 300 words) to the détournement. In your response, you should comment on some portion of the détournement and draw connections to the assigned reading. If you are writing about a portion that does not make sense to you, you must explain your thoughts on the intended message, or your specific critique of the sequence.

Student responses to the détournement demonstrate an exploration of the qualities that lead an individual to be considered an 'Other'. In other words, students began to think about how ideas of humanity and dis/ability are constructed within society. They reflected on how *Beauty and the Beast* reinforces the Othering of individuals who fall outside of the norm by requiring the Beast to change form in order to gain acceptance. One student explained, "society is always seeking to change people in order to have a place in society. The more normal one is, the higher the chance there is to be liked and succeed in the social ladder." Students compared Disney's interpretation of *Beauty and the Beast* to Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête*, noting that Disney made the choice to create a more sympathetic and human-like Beast in order to appeal to a young audience. As they reflected on the role that one's physical appearance plays in being considered normal, or human, students noted the enduring belief that inner-beauty and outer-beauty are linked. Additionally, students questioned the construct of traditional beauty or humanity. One student wrote:

I found it to be an interesting juxtaposition of words and imagery that put into question what humanity is "supposed" to look and sound like- why can't the Beast keep his beastly form and still be considered human? He has all the emotional and mental qualities of being a human as seen through most of his interactions with Belle.

This response shows the student grappling with the norms of conventional beauty and physical appearance, and how these norms are associated with ideas of humanity. However, the latter portion of the student's response in which he states: "He has all the emotional and mental qualities of being a human..." suggests that the student is not yet questioning the socially constructed norms of mental and emotional health. His response indicates the importance of moving the focus of critical disability studies beyond the body, "to question the idea of normality, and to expand the definition of disability into such concepts as

neurodiversity, debility and capacity, chronic illness, invisible conditions, and the like” (Davis, 2013, p. 13).

Students also focused on how the visuals incorporated during the song *Human Again* helped them to clearly see how individuals with disabilities are assigned to the status of Other or Object within society. This scene mixes together images of brooms dancing across the floor while singing about their desire to be human, and images of individuals with disabilities advocating for their rights. One student reflected, “In my mind, it created a connection that by signing this act, the people with disabilities were also now becoming human again, in a twisted sense.” This student’s response recognizes the Othering of individuals with disabilities within society. She also acknowledges how the link between disability and inhumanity is perpetuated through the “twisted” language used to introduce the *Americans with Disabilities Act*. Another student reflected on the combination of images in the *Human Again* segment of the détournement, writing:

I think by juxtaposing this musical number with Bush’s clip, this détournement does a good job of offering a critique of the way that we think about people with disabilities and how they ‘fit in’ to society. In particular I think this détournement is arguing against this idea that the ADA is ‘transforming’ people with disabilities into ‘normal humans’ so that they may participate in our ‘normal society,’ or the Spectacle.

Through her response, this student articulates an understanding of disability and normality as social constructs. She also recognizes the problematic nature of requiring the Other to conform to socially constructed standards of normality in order to be accepted in society. The final segment of the détournement features the Beast’s transformation into a prince alongside George Bush welcoming individuals with disabilities into mainstream society. Students reflected on what the Beast’s transformation suggests about societal responses to difference and disability. Specifically, students noted that transformation should not be necessary, “nor is a ‘reward’ necessary for completing some sort of change to reach a more ‘normal,’ socially accepted state of personhood” (Student). The following student’s response suggests a need for an expanded understanding of acceptable ways of being, appearing, thinking, and communicating:

Beauty and the Beast, at least in some ways, denies the unique set of abilities, the humanity that people with disabilities have, that the ‘Others’ have, and the transformation that the Beast undergoes overshadows the important message, that what is

necessary is to be able to see the humanity underneath the exterior rather than needing the ‘Other’ to change to fit the conception of normal that society has for people.

This student explains the need to move away from efforts to teach conformity, or attempts to “include disability under the rubric of normal” (Davis, 2013, p. 13). Other students drew different conclusions when reflecting on the transformation scene, suggesting that the *Americans with Disabilities Act* of 1990 resulted in a transformation of how individuals view disability. These students wrote that the passage of this legislation “created an equal playing field” and resulted in the disappearance of stigma around disability. Overall, students reflected on what a disability-focused reading of *Beauty and the Beast* allows them to see about how the Other is constructed within society. After viewing the détournement, students identified how Disney’s seemingly innocent children’s film “really shed a light on what the right way to be a human is” (Student).

CONCLUSION

Implications for critical disability studies in teacher education

Students expressed some initial hesitancy to draw connections between disability theory and *Beauty and the Beast*. One student explained that connecting the plotline of an animated film to the political context of disability rights seemed “a little too out there.” Overall, student responses made it clear that they did not have previous experience with the topic of media portrayals of humanity and disability. This is consistent with Nirmala Erevelles’ (2005) point that curriculum often leaves out “any critical discussion of disability” (p. 421). After reflecting on the détournement, students generally saw the importance of critically examining the values and ideas about dis/ability and humanity communicated through film. For example, one student wrote, “I think that the détournement highlights the space that *Beauty and the Beast*, and other Disney movies can provide for productive conversations about certain topics that actually matter to people.” This student makes the point that analyzing a popular film through the lens of a theory provides a wide range of opportunities for students to engage in conversations. These conversations allow students to make sense of a theory through an experience and discussion that is personally meaningful. Students also recognized the importance of reflecting on the discourse of disability circulated through popular media, writing, “Although it

obviously would not be the first thing to come to mind when watching *Beauty and the Beast*, I can now see how the film makes way to ‘alternative readings of disability’ (Berberi & Berberi, 2013, p. 206).”

While the pedagogical project I describe in this paper is only one small example of incorporating critical disability studies into teacher education, I believe that the détournement proved to be a useful tool for, as one student wrote, “making the theory feel more credible.” Why is it important for future educators to engage with critical disability studies? Dan Goodley (2013) explains that the field of “Critical disability studies start with disability but never end with it: disability is *the* space from which to think through a host of political, theoretical and practical issues that are relevant to all” (p. 632). During a time when “the majority of citizens of the globe are pushed outside of [the] narrow definition of what counts as a successful human” (Liddiard et al., 2019), the field of critical disability studies provides an important lens for understanding “the contradictory nature of what it means to be human” (p. 158). Future teachers must be equipped to identify and counter the ways in which “disablism and ableism increasingly play a role in... sifting and sorting of members of the population” (Liddiard et al. 2019, p. 158), impacting the school experience of students who fall outside of the elusive norm.

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