

People with disabilities unite to create buzz on political fronts

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There's a buzz penetrating the political scene this election year and it's coming from the world's largest minority group: people with disabilities.

Enter [#CripTheVote](#), a Twitter/social media conversation that encourages voters and political candidates to exchange concerns and views on disability rights.

When people with disabilities consider themselves part of a group, they take action, such as through #CripTheVote, according to Michelle Nario-Redmond, Ph.D., professor of psychology at Hiram College. Nario-Redmond's "Disability Group Identification and Disability-Rights Advocacy: Contingencies Among Emerging and Other Adults" (Emerging Adulthood: 2016) reveals this phenomenon.

In her study of 204 emerging adults with disabilities, Nario-Redmond found those who identify themselves as members of the disability community are more involved in political activism and civil rights advocacy and are also more in tune with discrimination than their counterparts who identify less as group members.

"They see the unfairness in the world and recognize discrimination as a problem of those who impose it, not those inflicted by it," says Nario-Redmond, who explains that group membership opens communication channels. It gives people a chance to hear others' opinions and in turn, perhaps, validates their own.

Ceara Nario-Redmond, a 20-year-old Hiram College junior majoring in [early childhood education](#), says she has witnessed varying degrees of discrimination since her elementary school days. Ceara, who has spina bifida, has been active in generating community awareness of the disability community for years. She and her mother, research author Michelle Nario-Redmond, present a program on disability culture and participate in Society for Disability Studies marches regularly. Ceara reflects on her past impressions and current views.

"I was this 7-year-old getting all of these little gifts. At the time I thought, 'They think I'm adorable.' Now, at almost 21, I realize they saw my wheelchair and felt bad," says Ceara, Nario-Redmond's daughter. "Don't feel bad for me. I'm moving around the world as you are in my own special way."

While not all people living with disabilities self-identify as members of the disability community, those who do rally for causes that affect them. Nario-Redmond shows in her research that people living with disabilities who unite as a group also unite as change makers.

Consider Nina Lester, an active member of Social Justice Warriors, a club that spreads awareness about [human rights violations](#) and [social injustice](#). Lester, a Hiram College senior majoring in psychology, says her involvement in the group has educated her to explore all sides of disability-related issues.

"This group has given me more confidence on how to approach social injustice. It has helped me see just how disenfranchised this group of people are," says Lester, who lives with an "invisible" disability, post-traumatic stress disorder.

Nario-Redmond points out that [people](#) with disabilities who come together as group members are likely to vote in elections. Her daughter,

a registered voter since she was 18, encourages this year's presidential candidates to look at history and, in particular, at last year's 25th anniversary of the American with Disabilities Act.

"Look at where we've been and what we had to do to get to where we are. Then focus on the future," Ceara advises politicians. "If you want to make the future better, change what wasn't changed in the past."

More information: M. R. Nario-Redmond et al. Disability Group Identification and Disability-Rights Advocacy: Contingencies Among Emerging and Other Adults, *Emerging Adulthood* (2015). [DOI: 10.1177/2167696815579830](https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696815579830)

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