

# Yes We Can Change: Disability Studies - Enabling Equality

**Michael A. Rembis, Ph.D.**  
**University at Buffalo**

## Abstract

In this article, I offer a brief assessment of the international disability rights and culture movements and disability studies, as well as a commentary on the future of disability and disability studies. A diverse group of activists, artists, and scholars have brought about momentous legal changes in dozens of countries around the world. They have also enabled a critical rearticulation of what it means to be disabled. Yet, this revisioning of disability and this repositioning of disabled people remains fraught. I contend that while movement participants, scholars, and their allies are off to a great start, they have yet to grapple in any serious way with some of the most important and contentious issues within the disability rights and culture movements and disability studies, namely their own internal diversity and the material reality of many disabled peoples' lives. Despite these complexities, I maintain that the disability rights and culture movements and disability studies have tremendous transformative potential.

We are living at a critical moment of history. The election of Barack Obama as the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States on November 4, 2008 was greeted the world over with a potent mixture of unrestrained joy and hope by those individuals, groups, and organizations who rallied around his campaign slogan, "Yes we can change" (Obama, 2008b). Especially moved were people of color, people with disabilities, and women; people who have historically been excluded both structurally and culturally from power.

When President-elect Obama delivered his victory speech to the more than one million people crammed into Chicago's Grant Park and millions more watching around the world, he directly acknowledged his constituency, the "young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled," who welcomed new possibilities, supported democracy, and believed that their voices could make a difference in the future of the United States and the world (Obama, 2008a).

For those of us active in the disability rights and culture movements and disability studies, Obama's victory speech was truly an historic event. Though the most politicized among us balked at Obama's choice of words (the "disabled"—as if we were some immutable

monolith), we recognized that we, the disabled, had arrived socially and politically. Or had we?

In this article, I will offer a brief assessment of the recent past and a commentary on the future of disability and disability studies. I will highlight the major legal and theoretical contributions that a diverse group of activists, artists, and scholars have made in opening the world to people with disabilities, and I will show that despite momentous achievements in many areas, much work remains to be done. By forcing legislators, administrators and academics, architects and building contractors, city planners and business owners, to allow equal access, the disability rights and culture movements and disability studies have made people with a broad range of disabilities an increasingly salient minority. Activists, artists, and academics have also enabled a critical rearticulation of what it means to be disabled.

We are seeing in K-12 and post-secondary education, in the media, and in our everyday lives, the tremendous potential that this new access and this new understanding of disability hold. Yet, this re-articulation of disability and this repositioning of disabled people remain contentious and incomplete. While we are off to a great start, those of us closest to the movement and to disability studies have fallen short in our attempts to

contend with some of the most important issues within the disability rights and culture movements and disability studies, namely our own diversity and the material reality of many of our lives.

### **Activists, Artists, and Scholars**

In this first section, I will provide a brief historical account of the rise of the international disability rights and culture movements and disability studies. All three movements emerged roughly at the same time and were very much interrelated. They, moreover, are the reason why President-elect Obama included disabled people in his victory speech.

Disabled people and their allies have been active socially and politically for well over one hundred years. Recent scholarship (Burch, 2001; Kudlick, 2001; Longmore, 2003) has shown that in the United States for example, both blind people and deaf people have been actively building and defending their own cultures and communities since at least the turn of the twentieth century. Longmore (2003, p. 105), moreover, has argued that by the mid-twentieth century, the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) had a “vigorous” lobby in Washington that took a “consistent” civil rights approach to disability issues. Parents and other allies of cognitively disabled and learning disabled individuals have also been active in gaining and protecting their civil rights and their access to education, employment, and community living for decades (Noll & Trent, 2004). Yet, scholars agree that the modern disability rights movement, which in most countries consists of a broad cross-section of the disabled population and highlights a politicized disabled identity, emerged out of the social turmoil and civil rights struggles of the 1960s and 1970s.

Initially based primarily in the United States and the United Kingdom, the modern disability rights movement focused largely on access, accommodation, and independent living (Barton & Oliver, 1997; Campbell & Oliver, 1996; Charlton, 2000; Fleischer & Zames, 2000; Hahn, 2002; Oliver, 1996; Shapiro, 1994; Switzer, 2003). Throughout the 1970s, numerous disability rights groups emerged in other parts of Europe, and in New Zealand, Australia, Latin America, and southern Africa as well. Although they never lost sight of their original goals, by the early 1980s, disability rights organizations in various parts of the world became increasingly involved in broader global human rights struggles and national liberation movements (Charlton, 2000).

Prodded by movement participants and its member states, the United Nations (UN), in many ways, became a global standard bearer for disability rights. Though it remained focused largely on the rehabilitation and reintegration of so-called productive disabled people, especially those living in the “developing world,” by the early 1970s the UN began to advocate for the rights of people with disabilities. According to the UN’s own history, it began during the 1960s to recognize an increasing awareness of the importance of new rehabilitation strategies (United Nations, 2003-04a). On December 20, 1971, the UN General Assembly introduced the Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons and called for national and international action to ensure that it became “the accepted basis and frame of reference for protecting the rights of the disabled” (United Nations, 2003-04b). In 1973, the UN recognized the suggestion that it increase recruitment of disabled people in its own organization, and in 1975, at its 24<sup>th</sup> session, the Commission for Social Development recommended the elimination of physical and architectural barriers that were preventing “the full social integration of disabled persons.” In December of the same year, the UN General Assembly adopted its Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons, which stated that “all persons with disabilities are entitled to the rights stipulated, without respect to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, national or social origin, state of wealth, birth or any other situation.” The following year, the General Assembly suggested that member states take into account the recommendations highlighted in the Declaration, and designated 1981, the International Year for Disabled Persons (United Nations, 2003-04b).

The period from the late 1970s to the early 1990s proved to be an important transitional time for the disability rights movement, both locally and globally. Local groups such as ADAPT (American Disabled for Accessible Public Transit) raised the stakes by putting their bodies on the line for disability rights—by positioning themselves in front of inaccessible buses (Charlton, 2000; Fleischer & Zames, 2000; Hahn, 2002; Johnson & Shaw, 2001; Shapiro, 1994; Switzer, 2003). Other activist groups, such as the American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities, led sit-ins at the offices of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) in New York, Washington D.C., Denver, and San Francisco to demand implementation of section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act. Protestors in San Francisco remained in HEW offices for 25 days in 1977,

making it the longest occupation of a federal building by political protestors in U.S. history (Longmore, 2003). At the global level, the UN adopted an increasingly progressive position on disability. Following the First Founding Congress of Disabled Peoples International, held in Singapore in November and December 1981, the UN adopted its World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, shifting disability policy toward three main areas: prevention, rehabilitation, and equalization of opportunities. Then, on December 3 1982, the UN General Assembly declared 1983-1992 the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons (United Nations, 2003-04c).

The international disability rights movement gained momentum throughout the 1980s. From Brazil to South Africa, Zimbabwe to India, Thailand to Nicaragua, and most places in between, people with disabilities were organizing and demanding that their voices be heard (Charlton, 2000). National governments began to respond. Though there had been early attempts at inclusion, such as Section 504 of the United States' 1973 Rehabilitation Act and other laws designed to mainstream educable children with disabilities, anti-discrimination laws and policies designed to protect the civil rights of people with disabilities were not passed until the 1980s and 1990s. Canada was one of the first countries to protect the legal rights of its disabled citizens with its Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982). Shortly thereafter, Germany passed its Severely Handicapped Persons Act (1986). South Korea passed its Welfare Law for Persons with Disabilities in 1989. In the nearly twenty years since the United States passed its Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), there have been approximately 85 major disability laws passed in more than 75 countries around the world (Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, 2008). In most countries, including those in the vanguard of disability rights issues, the end of legal apartheid did not always result in equally vigorous enforcement of those laws, nor did it necessarily produce a concurrent rise the relative standard of living of most disabled people. In some countries, like the United States, there was a marked backlash to legal challenges made by disabled claimants (Johnson, 2003). This, however, should not minimize the tremendous gains that disabled people and their allies achieved at the end of the twentieth century.

At the root of the international disability rights movement is a fundamental rearticulation of what it means to be disabled. Early on, activists abandoned

what they referred to as a medical model of disability and began fashioning a socio-political model of disability. Put simply, the socio-political model of disability makes a critical distinction between impairment and disability and places the voices and experiences of disabled people themselves at the center of any analysis of their lives. It roots disabled people's oppression in social, cultural, and environmental barriers that disable them, not in any individual deficit or impairment (Davis, 2002, 2006b; Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare, 2006; Thomas, 2002; Tremain, 2006a, 2006b). As The Union for the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) explained, disability is "a form of [socially constructed] disadvantage which is imposed on top of one's impairment, that is, the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organization that takes little or no account of people with physical impairments" (quoted in Tremain, 2006b p. 187). Early, mostly white, mostly male, mostly spinal cord injured advocates of the socio-political model of disability focused almost exclusively on physical impairments. More recent movement participants influenced by feminist, queer, and critical race theory, as well as disability studies, have expanded the socio-political model to include a broad range of impairments, such as mental illness, learning and developmental disabilities, and chronic illness (Barnes, Oliver & Barton, 2002; Davis, 2006a; Longmore & Umansky, 2001; Smith & Hutchison, 2004; Tremain, 2006a, 2006b). The advent of the disability rights movement and the socio-political model of disability have enabled activists, artists, and scholars to reposition the disabled subject and ultimately redefine disability itself. As Bonnie Smith has noted (2004), "Gone are the days of a simple and dominant physiological or medical definition of disability" (p. 1).

Concomitant with this new understanding of disability has been a burgeoning disability culture movement that seeks to give meaning and voice to the lived experience of disabled people while also critiquing dominant modes of cultural production and the place of the disabled subject in literature, film, poetry, dance, theater, painting, and other cultural forms. Community-based arts initiatives and independent artists and groups are thriving in the United Kingdom, which historically has been the home of a vibrant, and quite vocal, disability rights movement. Disability art and artists are gaining a foothold in other countries as well. In Canada, for example, organizers at Ryerson University launched their first disability cultural event in 2000, which was

followed by other cultural events in Vancouver and Calgary. In 2006, the artistic director of Stage Left Productions, also in Calgary, received funding to start a national Disability Arts and Culture Network (Gorman, 2007). Disability art and artists are critical both to the larger movement and to its broad rearticulation of what it means to be disabled, because they subvert commonly held expectations and assumptions, not only about the capacity of disabled people to produce art, but about disability and aesthetics.

Perhaps the most important product (other than numerous legal changes) of the disability rights and culture movements has been the almost simultaneous rise of disability studies. As an active, integrative, interdisciplinary academic endeavor, disability studies seeks to explore and analyze disability from the perspective of the social sciences, humanities, and arts, not the medical or applied fields. Disability studies programs, initiatives, seminars, and projects in numerous universities around the world have been flourishing since the early 1990s (Taylor & Zubal-Ruggieri, 2008). Organizations such as the U.S.-based Society for Disability Studies, the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies, the Canadian Disabilities Studies Association, the Asia-Pacific Disability Development Centre, the All Russia Society of People with Disabilities, the All Russian organization, New Choices, and the All Ukrainian Association of Disability Organizations are only a few examples of the types of organizations at the forefront of the global disability studies movement.

By discarding the notion that disability is negative and rooted in the individual, and by thinking critically about the taken-for-granted nature of various diagnoses, labels, categories, and conditions, disability studies scholars have been able to develop a powerful understanding of what it means to live differently in the world. While all disability studies scholars use their work to combat the stigma (Goffman, 1963) associated with disability and expand popular notions of what qualifies as the human and the livable (Butler, 2006), there are some scholars who take a more incisive approach to the study of disability. This latter group of scholars uses the socio-political model, along with other theoretical frameworks, such as feminist, queer, critical race, and Marxist theory both to highlight and to analyze the oppression under which most disabled people live, and reveal the central role of class, race, gender, and sexuality in the formation of disabled identities—something recent theorists refer to as intersectionality (Barnes,

Oliver, & Barton, 2002; Charlton, 2000; Davis, 2006;a Longmore & Umansky, 2001; Smith & Hutchison, 2004; Tremain, 2006a, 2006b).

Christine Sleeter's important 1987 article, "Why is there learning disabilities? A critical analysis of the birth of the field in its social context," is an excellent example of this second type of disability studies scholarship. In her analysis of the creation of the category learning disabled, which occurred in the United States during the early 1960s, Sleeter argues convincingly that the standard historical narrative, which is deeply rooted in dominant notions of progress and consists of a standard story of schools and parents, and medical and psychological experts identifying, researching, and solving a problem that has always existed, is not the only available explanation of the creation of a category of disability that by the early 1980s affected 41% of students enrolled in special education and 4.4% of all students enrolled in public schools. After surveying the available data, Sleeter argues (1987, p. 212) that the category learning disabled did not emerge organically and was not merely discovered by concerned adults, but rather that it was created for a social and political purpose: "to differentiate and protect white middle-class children who were failing school from lower class and minority children." "Rather than being a product of progress," Sleeter continues (1987, p. 212), "the category was essentially conservative in that it helped schools continue to serve best those whom schools have always served best: the white middle and upper-middle class." Sleeter's article is worth revisiting because it clearly shows the forceful critical analysis we can begin to engage in when we wrench ourselves free of the powerful grip of standard narratives of medical and scientific progress and taken-for-granted categories of disability.

Disability studies scholars, and activists and artists, do not seek to deny or to minimize the existence of impairment. Rather, they work to show that dominant ideas about disabled people and various disability categories (like learning disabled) are historically, culturally, socially, politically, and economically contingent; that they change over time and vary by culture, region, and social class. Activists, artists, and academics have shown, moreover, that the social, economic, and psychic costs of disability are increased exponentially in a society that ignores or greatly devalues its disabled citizens. The current move toward universal design in everything from curriculum and instruction to new housing construction is a direct result of the work done by disabled

activists, artists, and scholars, as well as their allies, to teach the value of difference and force themselves into the consciousness of the larger society.

Taken together, the disability rights and culture movements and disability studies offer a powerful means of transforming our lived experience by supplanting notions of disability as an individual deficit in need of cure or rehabilitation and by uprooting ideas about disabled people as difficult, passive, childlike, or asexual, as angry, bitter, and combative, or as successful, super-human individuals who have overcome their disability—the myth of the super-crip. Yes, we can change. We as a society can use disability studies, as well as the important gains made by the disability rights movement and the insights of the disability culture movement to change the subjective experience of people with disabilities. But only if we, like President Obama, work at the grassroots level—both locally and globally—to build coalitions among a broad range of actors, especially educators, administrators, service providers, and students who can incorporate disability studies concepts not only into their work, but into their lives outside the classroom and the office. These coalitions, moreover, must extend beyond individual impairments, and perhaps more importantly, beyond class, race, sexuality, gender, national, and religious divides.

### **Changing Laws, Changing Minds, Changing Ourselves?**

Building coalitions and mobilizing an historically marginalized and alienated citizenry is not easy. In this next section, I will offer a comment that I hope addresses the complexities of not only building and sustaining a broad-based social movement, but also engaging in disability studies scholarship and incorporating the social model of disability into everyday practice. I will conclude by providing at least one possible course for the future.

As noted earlier, various groups have a long history of disability activism and community building. Yet, scholars (and activists) agree that for the last forty years, a diverse lot of people with a broad range of disabilities who loosely identify with the modern disability rights movement and espouse the socio-political model of disability have been transforming their own lives and the world around them. They have forced society to grant disabled people access in the very broadest sense of the word; access to education and employment; to

healthcare and various disability benefits; to print media, the internet, and telephone communication; to buses, trains, and airplanes; and to local parks, movie theaters, taverns, and restaurants. The level of access movement participants have obtained remains woefully incomplete, and many of us, like Lennard Davis (2002), long for the day when we can “extend the concept [of disability] so that it applies broadly across society as a civil right for all—the right to be ill, to be infirm, to be impaired without suffering discrimination or oppression” (p. 1). Yet, it is undeniable that we (disabled people) have made tremendous gains over the last forty years. We are now rolling, limping, signing, tapping, shouting, jerking, and sometimes sulking our way through the lives of “ordinary” citizens. Our mere presence speaks volumes for the decades-long struggles of people with disabilities, their allies, friends, family members, and advocates to dismantle many of the legal and structural barriers that had historically kept us segregated and isolated, lonely and desperate.

Part of the success of the disability rights movement and of disability studies has been rooted in its ability to expand the definition of disability to include a broad range of impairments, illnesses, and conditions, and to show that disability will touch everyone at some point in their life. Whether we become disabled or not, all of us at some point in our lives, will feel the effects of disability, as we age, as we interact with co-workers, clients, and customers, and as we care for the ones we love. The tremendous diversity among the world’s disabled population and the broad range of experiences we all have with disability have been a source of empowerment. They have also been a point of contention. On one hand, a very broad definition of disability enables movement participants in the United States, for example, to claim that they are part of the largest minority group in the country. At about 54 million, people with disabilities make up about 20% of the U.S. population (Siebers, 2008). These numbers and percentages have been critical in making civil rights claims against the state. On the other hand, this broad definition of disability makes it difficult to think about and talk about a shared identity, a common culture, or a collective consciousness. The fact that only about 15% of disabled people are born with their disabilities—85% of disability is acquired—and that about 80% of the 500 million people with disabilities live in what is commonly referred to as the “developing” or “third” world only serves to complicate both the movement and disability

studies (Charlton, 2000; Siebers, 2008).

For years, scholars have been theorizing about the alienation that many disabled people feel. Most authors argue that it is one of the powerful legacies of the individualization, medicalization, and pathologization of disability (Siebers, 2008). We (disabled people) are divided, the argument goes, by our impairment; by medical professionals, physiotherapists, social workers, educators, and a larger society that sees us as nothing more than our own individual impairment(s) and treats each one of us as an individual case, patient or client, different from all the other cases, patients or clients. *They*, of course, can find similarities in our physiology, our neuro-chemistry, our symptoms, but *we* remain isolated and alone, trapped by our own internalization of a depoliticized, pathologized, individualized, and ultimately devalued sense of ourselves. Only when we shed this false consciousness can we become free to see the world and our place in it for what it really is, only then can we see the discrimination, segregation, isolation, and outright violence and oppression we all face every day.

According to this liberal ideology, we (the disabled) become empowered when we embrace our disabled identity and make it our own; when we begin to associate, demonstrate, and generally identify with other folks who have done likewise. Once we have experienced this consciousness raising, we are (in most situations) able to live life on our own terms. Some of us choose to “let our freak flags fly.” We flaunt our (disabled) bodies and revel in our (usually hetero-) sexuality. Others among us choose to “pass;” to minimize the extent of our impairment or mute our disabled identities (usually when in the presence of mixed company). Most of us, however, choose to live what Siebers (2008) calls a complex embodiment, which is some mix of all of these extremes. Within this liberal framework, everything we choose to do, every utterance we make, and every cultural artifact we produce gets politicized. The personal becomes political (Siebers, 2008).

While this is a very powerful and important analysis of the alienating effects of disability, I would briefly like to consider an alternative explanation. I would like to argue that it is not necessarily a false consciousness that keeps us isolated and alone, living on the margins of society, but rather a lack of access to much needed support and economic resources. Much of the world’s disabled population lives in abject poverty. The rise over the last thirty years of a global neo-liberal economic order that

favors privatization, so-called free market economics, and military engagement has only served to deepen the plight of people with disabilities, especially those living on the periphery (Charlton, 2000; Holden & Beresford, 2002; Rioux, 2002). People who have no prosthesis cannot choose to pass. People who have no wheelchair cannot choose when or if they will use one. People who have no access to a screen reader or a Braille printer may be forced to live in ignorance. People who never learn to sign may never feel part of the larger deaf culture. And people who have no access to education, or are forced out of poverty to work from a very young age, may never have the opportunity to come out and identify as disabled. For a long time now, we (activists, artists, and scholars) have been talking about how disability is socially constructed (Liachowitz, 1988). It is time we reconsider how disability is socially created—through war, famine, inadequate healthcare, fierce competition for scarce resources, as well as rising profit margins, and general neglect.

It is also time that we begin to think seriously about our own privileged position. Now more than ever, we as movement participants, artists, and academics, or as service providers, educators and administrators need to take a step back and think about all of the benefits that our class, race, gender, (dis)ability, sexuality or citizenship status bring us. Yes, we can change. But the change must begin with us. We need to begin to think more critically about the human relations that create disability and perpetuate stigma, and we need to be more reflexive in our scholarship, our teaching, and our service provision. Ultimately, this change must extend beyond our own minds, our own ‘best practices’, and our own experiences to address the larger systemic causes of disability and the social and economic inequality that separate us. This is what disability studies and the disability rights and culture movements seek to do.

## Conclusion

When thinking about the future of disability and President Obama’s call for change, it might be beneficial to contemplate ever so briefly the origins of his campaign slogan. A strikingly similar variation of “Yes we can change” was first uttered by the U.S. (Yuma, Arizona) born, mid-twentieth century labor organizer and civil rights leader, Cesar Chavez. In the midst of organizing migrant farm workers in California and other states throughout the southwestern United States, Chavez

began declaring, “*Si se puede*,” often translated into English as, “Yes, we can!” (Ferriss & Sandoval, 1998; Levy, Moulton, Ross & Levy, 2007). If we have learned anything from the social turmoil and civil rights struggles of the post-World War II period, it is that although it can be difficult and even deadly, ending legal apartheid is much easier than empowering those individuals, like migrant farm workers, who historically have clung precariously to life on the margins of society.

Though they have always led a tenuous existence, people with disabilities have been especially oppressed at least since the beginning of the nineteenth century, when industrialization and a growing market economy, as well as new theories of human evolution and statistical normality, or the bell curve, made it increasingly difficult for them to make their way in the world (Davis, 2006c; Finkelstein, 1980; Gleeson, 1997, 1990; Oliver, 1990). In some ways, little has changed. Legal apartheid has ended (in most countries), but rigid social, cultural, and economic barriers remain stalwart. As Harlan Hahn has noted (2002 p. 183), “Animus toward disabled people seems to be an endemic and deep-seated characteristic of most cultures of the world.” In order to move forward and break down the barriers that still separate many of us from society, we (disabled people) must, along with our allies, work toward not only empowering ourselves, but also empowering those around us so that together we can affect real lasting change. Teaching, learning, and working from the disability studies perspective and incorporating the socio-political model of disability into our thinking and our practice will go a long way in empowering us all.

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## About the Author

Dr. Rembis is a visiting scholar in the Department of American Studies and the Department of History at the University of Notre Dame. In Spring, 2010, he will also be the inaugural fellow in the Center for Disability Studies and the Department of History at the University at Buffalo. He has published widely on disability and eugenics. His work, which has appeared in *Disability and Society*; *Disability Studies Quarterly*; *Sexuality and Disability*; and *History of Psychology*, has won several awards, including the 2008 Irving K. Zola award, awarded annually by the Society for Disability Studies to emerging scholars. His first book, 'Defining Deviance: Sex, Science, and Delinquent Girls, 1890-1960' is forthcoming from the University of Illinois press.

## Professional Perspective

**Amanda Kraus**  
**Project Director,**  
**Disabled Veterans Reintegration and**  
**Education Project**  
**University of Arizona**

In his article, Michael Rembis, Ph.D. offers a history of disability activism, rights, culture, and studies. More than this, Dr. Rembis has elicited a call to action for service professionals. Those of us in the disability community—professionals, scholars—question the gap between disability studies and our practice. While we would all swear by the social model of disability, is there congruency between our values and our action?

What I find most heartening about this article is the reminder that disability activism is alive and well. While we are often criticized for our lack of collective action, our inability to find a common voice, a shared experience, Dr. Rembis reminds us that we have a rich history punctuated with major accomplishments in procuring legislative recourse, changing the face of design, and increasing access. He does point out the challenges we in the disability community have in identifying with one another, also, the societal resistance with which we are met when asking to be considered a cultural group. These persistent and interconnected barriers will impede our action. Therefore, we must take pause and ask why. In an effort to propel this movement, how can professionals grapple with these concepts, engage students, and challenge colleagues to advance our communities?

As professionals, we must consider our own conceptualizations of disability. Do we consider ourselves benevolent gatekeepers to accommodations, “problematizing” our students and diagnosing their individual needs? Or do we consider ourselves agents of systemic change? How do we intersect with the disability community, or validate disability identity? Can we connect to the disability history Dr. Rembis presents in this article? What are we representing to disabled students and the community at large through our professional actions?

Perhaps the role of service provider should not be limited to determining individual accommodations and facilitating campus access, but expanded to that of an ambassador for disability culture. We have the unique opportunity to reframe disability, push forward progressive ways of thinking, and challenge antiquated ideas. In our roles, we represent disability to our campuses and community. This is a big responsibility—one that, if we do not take it to heart, will simply maintain status quo for the disability community. However, should we heed this professional call to action, we can reshape disability one changed mind at a time. So, can we be more critical of ourselves, our practice, our profession? Can we demand more congruency between our values and our practice? Can we pioneer new ways? Yes we can.