

mobility-related disability is the cause of the problems that people face. The human-built world is never viewed as the cause of people's problems—the cause is always the disability. Third, people assume that persons with disabilities are victims and that they see themselves as such. Persons with disabilities are not in control and can never have a viable, rich life; they are victims of a great and all-encompassing tragedy. Fourth, related to the preceding assumption, people assume that disability is the center of life for people with disabilities. It is central to their self-definition, to their patterns of friends, and to their comparisons of themselves to others. Persons with disabilities have no other basis on which to establish a social reference group than other people with disabilities. The fact that they may be male or female, a member of an ethnic minority group, or part of a professional interest community has little or no bearing on their associations—only the disability is a factor. And fifth, people assume that terms such as “person with a disability” and “disabled person” are synonymous with the statement “I need help.” Disability means helplessness. A wheelchair user needs the door opened for her. A person who is blind needs to be helped across the street. It is the disabled equivalent of the term “white man's burden.” Help is always given with the expectation of the reward of feeling good and being thanked, much the same as the white colonialist missionaries' expectations in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Africa toward native people.

Pejorative social constructs of people with disabilities addressed decades ago remain in current world thinking. Vilchinsky, Findler, and Werner (2010) found that Israeli students studied harbored negative attitudes toward people with disabilities and approached them with anxiety unless there had been prior personal contact. Brown et al. (2009) found that occupational therapy students from Australia, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, and the United States shared feelings of sympathy, uncertainty, and vulnerability concerning people with disabilities. Study after study affirms the current rooted stereotypes of disability, many of which seep into the very professions designed to empower disabled individuals (Franco, Cardoso, & Neto, 2012; Keller & Siegrist, 2010; Sahin & Akyol, 2010; Silván-Ferrero & Bustillos, 2013).

Stereotyping produces direct results. Bogdan and Biklen (1977) discuss the concrete results of stereotypes and assumptions or prejudices about persons with disabilities. Persons with mobility disabilities are generally portrayed in a negative light by the media. Physical differences are associated with crime and horror. Humor is presented at the expense of persons with mobility disabilities. The lives of persons with mobility disabilities are depicted as tragic. Telethons present pathetic images of persons with disabilities in order to raise money. Persons with disabilities are portrayed as noble for choosing to live rather than commit suicide in the wake of such tragedy and pathos. Death is portrayed as a natural wish of persons with disabilities.