Social and Cultural Environmental Factors That Create or Contribute to Disability*

Social Factors Contributing to the Construction of Disability

- War, terrorism
- Violent crime — shootings, rapes, knifings, beatings
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Lack of basic resources — water, food, clothing, shelter
- Tolerance of dangerous working conditions
- Neglect of children
- Low public safety standards
- Degradation of the environment by contaminating water, air, food
- Daily grind, overwork and stress of poverty
- Lack of medical care, inappropriate medical care — prenatal care, innoculations
- Improved medical techniques and practices increase the numbers of people with disabilities who live or people live long enough to become disabled

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*The concept of social construction of disability and these examples are from Susan Wendell's book, *The rejected body: Feminist philosophical reflections on disability*. (New York: Routledge, 1996).

- Increase in the pace of life that leads to accidents, stress, alcohol, and drug abuse, increased performance/output expectations, lack of rest, and recreation
- Physical structure and social organization of society – physical barriers in architecture, inadequate public transportation, communication systems, inflexible work arrangements
- Failure to give people the amount and kind of assistance needed to participate fully in public sphere, especially work and school
- Assumption that temporarily able-bodied people do not receive assistance (for example job training, social support, child care, transportation, and communication assistance is taken for granted)
- These social factors affect some groups more than others because of racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism

Cultural Factors Contributing to the Construction of Disability

- Lack of representation and experiences of people with disabilities
- Pervasive stereotypes of people with disabilities
- Stigmatization of physical and mental limitations
- The cultural attitude that physical or mental differences that deviate from "normal," but do not in and of themselves affect ability, are disabling (eg., facial scarring)
- Invisibility, stigmatization, stereotypes of disabilities and people with disabilities feed fear, ignorance, and pity in temporarily able-bodied people
- Assumption that disability is a personal, family problem rather than a matter of social responsibility