



## Stories that Stereotype

By its very nature, journalism often causes those of us who are reporters to evaluate and categorize our sources based on certain characteristics or views. We can't interview every person about every issue. Instead, we might interview one or two people who we think will offer a representative view of an issue.

While this can become second nature, it's also problematic. Over time, we might be tempted to take the shorthand too far by lumping people into different groups based simply on stereotypes. While stereotypes may have some basis in truth, people (and issues) are much more complex.

This exercise challenges you to identify the labels and stereotypes we journalists often use, thereby allowing you to see how your views of the world might unwittingly influence your work.

### Assignment:

Find several stories where people have been divided into camps based on stereotypes or other kinds of labels. Remember, stereotypes aren't always easy to identify at first glance, so take your time and really think about the people and how they're characterized in the story. Then, answer these questions:

- What stereotypes are at work in the story?
- How might the use of those stereotypes have influenced the reporter's coverage of the story?
- Did the journalist attribute certain characteristics to groups and people based on commonly held stereotypes (i.e. the underdog is weak; the company is cold and heartless)?
- Would the story be valid without using those labels? Would it have to be written differently? Scrapped altogether?
- Does the story contain trigger words that prompt a certain response in the reader? Trigger words can be as obvious as calling someone a conservative Christian or saying someone is a housewife.
- How would you rewrite this story to eliminate such labeling?