

LANGUAGE AND STEREOTYPES

Language can be biased against women by ignoring their existence. Biased language can also reinforce people's false ideas of what men and women are. A fixed image of someone based on unsourced evidence and observation is called a stereotype.

For example, television is full of stereotypes. A "normal" British family depicted by television advertisements has two children at school, a father who works full time and a mother who stays at home and looks after the house. The trouble with this picture of a "normal" family is that it is totally false. Only 5% of households are really like this.

Stereotypes can be useful but they can also be dangerous because they give a false impression of a group of people. Many stereotypes are concerned with being male or female and how males and females are supposed to behave. For example women are supposed to be "gentle" and men "aggressive", girls are supposed to be "quiet" and boys "noisy". But just think of how many noisy girls and quiet boys you know and you realise what a false impression stereotypes can give.

Here are some characteristics of people. Say which you think are more appropriate to describe a man, and which for a woman.

efficient	lazy
disorganised	slim
good administrator	decisive
good talker	bossy
active	polite
lacking in confidence	overweight
good at inventing things	a chatterbox
clever	attractive
good at taking notes	good at helping people
has leadership ability	bimbo

Discuss your answers with a partner. Then discuss your answers with the class. Attempt the same exercise with people you know and in your family.

See if you can think of alternatives for these words that are neutral and can be used to denote either sex

Barmaid
Mankind
Man eating
Man trap
Headmistress
Storeman
Schoolmaster
Nanny
Postman
Chairman
Policeman

Apply the same thinking to age, disability, race and ethnicity in terms of use of language.