

and prejudices and stereotypes are unjustifiable by their very nature. We often make broad, sweeping generalizations such as:

- Liberals are soft on crime.
- Elderly people aren't interested in sex.
- Young men are interested only in sex.
- Jocks are cool.
- Blondes are dumb.
- Cheerleaders are airheads.
- Intellectuals are nerds.
- Learning is boring.
- School doesn't have anything to do with life.

The problem with assumptions such as these is that they cause us to make basic—and often serious—mistakes in thinking. Because they aren't justifiable, they cause us to prejudice situations and people and draw faulty inferences—or conclusions—about them. For example, if we believe that all intellectuals are nerds, whenever we meet an intellectual, we will infer that he or she is a nerd (and act unfairly toward the person).

In sum, justifiability, or fairness, is an important standard in thinking. It forces us to see how we are distorting our thinking to achieve our self-serving ends (or to see how others are distorting their thinking to achieve selfish ends).

5.11, 5.12 *Think for Yourself*

ANALYZING ASSUMPTIONS FOR JUSTIFIABILITY (FAIRNESS)

Look back at the assumptions you came up with for Think for Yourself 4.1.1. For each one, decide whether it is justifiable given the situation. For each assumption that is not justifiable, re-create an assumption that would be justified in context.

APPLYING INTELLECTUAL STANDARDS TO EVERYDAY LIFE DISCUSSIONS

Record a discussion/debate between you and several other people (friends or family) on an important controversial issue (for example, "What is the best solution to the drug problem in this country?"). Then play back the recording two or three remarks at a time. Comment on which of the standards are being met and which are violated at each "step" along the way. Notice how seldom people tend to use intellectual standards in their thinking, how unclear everyday thinking often is, and how people may feel just as confident in their positions even after you point out violations of intellectual standards. What does that tell you about them?

EXHIBIT 5.1 *To evaluate thinking, we must apply intellectual standards to the elements of thought.*

Clarity

Understandable; the meaning can be grasped

Could you elaborate further? Could you give me an example? Could you illustrate what you mean?

Accuracy

Free from errors or distortions; true

How could we check on that? How could we find out if that is true? How could we verify or test that?

Precision

Exact to the necessary level of detail

Could you be more specific? Could you give me more details? Could you be more exact?

Relevance

Relating to the matter at hand

How does that relate to the problem? How does that bear on the question? How does that help us with the issue?

Depth

Containing complexities and multiple interrelationships

What factors make this a difficult problem? What are some of the complexities of this question? What are some of the difficulties we need to deal with?

Breadth

Encompassing multiple viewpoints

Do we need to look at this from another perspective? Do we need to consider another point of view? Do we need to look at this in other ways?

Logic

The parts make sense together; no contradictions

Does all this make sense together? Does your first paragraph fit in with your last? Does what you say follow from the evidence?

Significance

Focusing on the important; not trivial

Is this the most important problem to consider? Is this the central idea to focus on? Which of these facts are most important?

Fairness

Justifiable; not self-serving or one-sided

Is my thinking justifiable in context? Am I taking into account the thinking of others? Is my purpose fair given the situation? Am I using my concepts in keeping with educated usage, or am I distorting them to get what I want?