

Avoiding Bias and Preparing Balanced Research

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The Office of Legislative
Research and General Counsel

Pop Quiz



Thoughtful decisions made by dedicated, experienced, educated staff are generally free of bias.

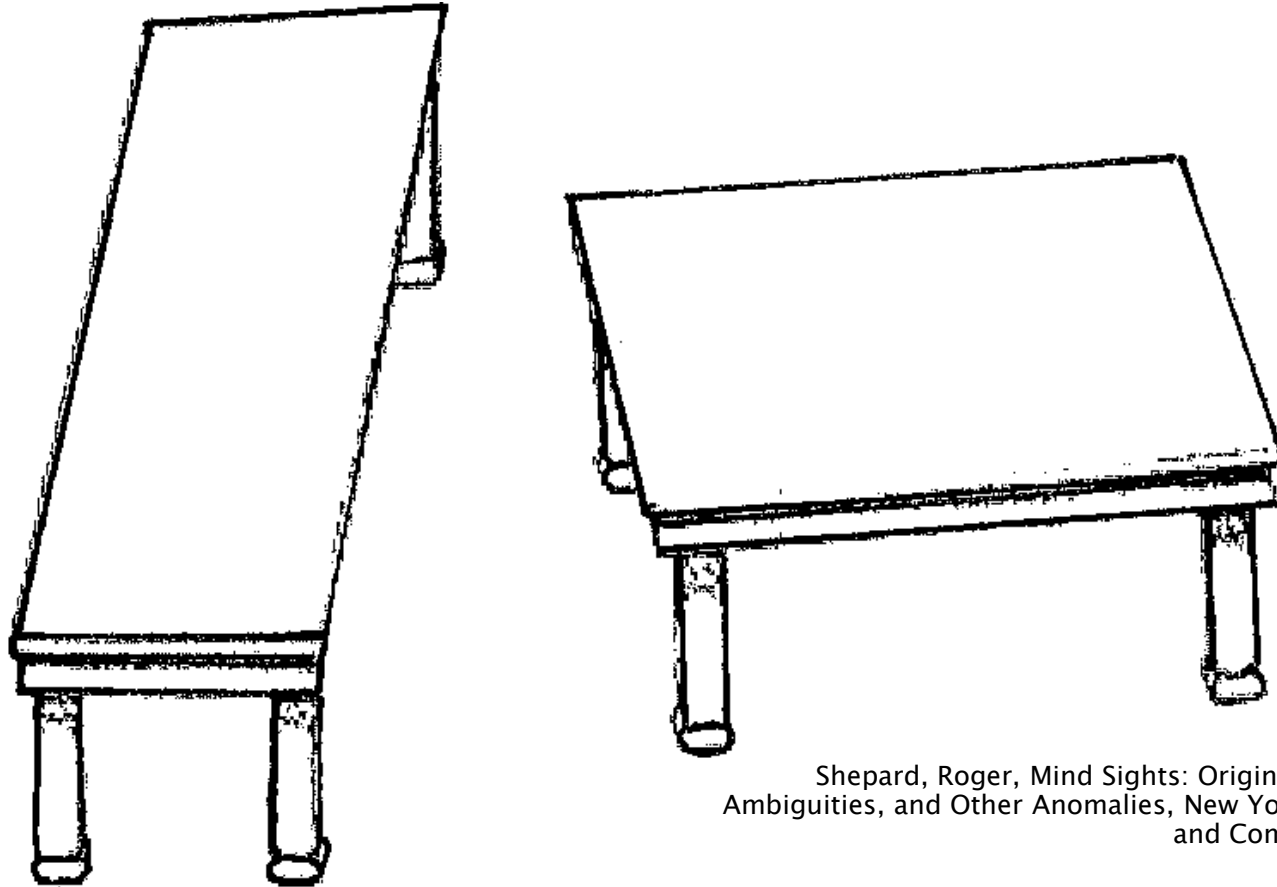
Bias is Everywhere

- ▶ Medicine
- ▶ Media
- ▶ Pharmaceuticals
- ▶ Education
- ▶ Corporations
- ▶ Politics
- ▶ Employment
- ▶ Pay
- ▶ Government
 - Executive
 - Legislative
 - Judicial

Causes of Bias

- ▶ Human decisions about others are generally based on what makes us feel safe, likeable, and valuable.
- ▶ The perceptions, interpretations, and preferences that teach us what is comfortable and safe are generally learned from experience.

Exercise the Unconscious



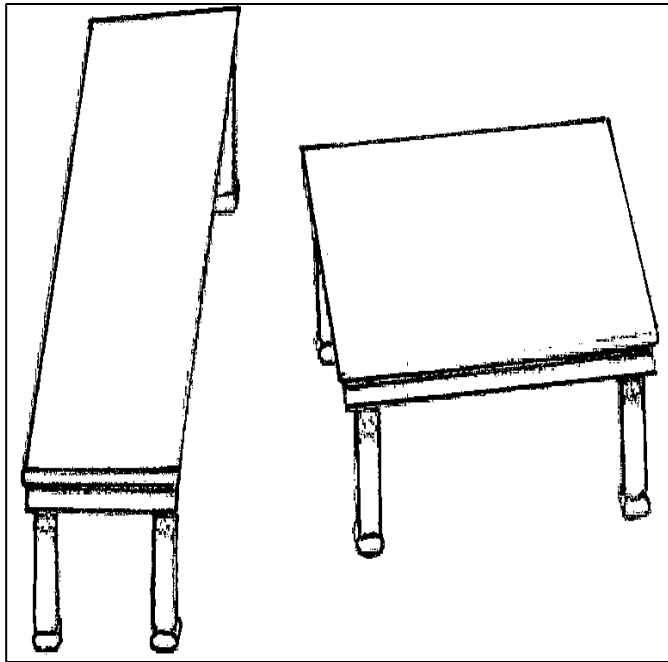
Shepard, Roger, *Mind Sights: Original Visual Illusions, Ambiguities, and Other Anomalies*, New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1990, p.48

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Exercise the Unconscious

Things are not always
as they appear.



We become
comfortable with the
way we do things.



Points to Ponder

- ▶ Just because we may be comfortable with a process or decision, does not mean that decision or process is without bias.
- ▶ Like the side-view mirror, objects are not always as they appear.
- ▶ Even thoughtful decisions made by experienced, educated employees are not always without bias.
- ▶ We generally believe our brains are making rational choices, when in reality most of our decisions are made emotionally, and then we collect the facts to justify the decision.

Consider This: Bias Runs Deep!

- ▶ One cannot expect to eliminate bias in our respective employment situations just by hiring thoughtful, experienced, and educated employees.

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Keep Bias in Check

- ▶ Leaders must model attitudes of fairness.
- ▶ Require employees to work in teams.
- ▶ Establish a bias free culture by rewarding employees who exemplify qualities of fairness.

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Keep Bias in Check

- ▶ Require peer reviews for bill drafts, briefing papers, legal opinions, and other important documents that the office produces.
- ▶ Encourage open and honest conversations about winners and losers in one's legislative work.

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Keep Bias in Check

- ▶ Remind employees when they appear to be making decisions based on emotion rather than research (*do not attempt this recommendation at home*).
- ▶ Talk about bias and ways to avoid bias in performance reviews.