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Simpson's Paradox and Tests of Racial Discrimination

Simpson's paradox is a well known statistical phenomenon in which a probabilistic association in a population reverses, emerges, or disappears when the population is partitioned into subpopulations. Despite the existence of satisfactory probabilistic and causal analyses of the paradox, it continues to be a source of confusion among scientists and philosophers. In my talk, I illustrate the significance of the paradox for benchmark tests of racial discrimination. Neil and Winship (2019) correctly note that the paradox undermines the uncritical use of such tests, but their analysis is weakened by severe misconceptions about the paradox. I show how the causal analysis of the paradox avoids these errors and highlight the under-appreciated role of causal methodology for interpreting data.