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“Strategic Research Bias”

Abstract

We present an agency model of biased research design. Principal evaluators rely on evidence from experiments designed by agent researchers. The researcher is biased in favour of powerful experiments. The researcher's design problem has a non-convexity: If the available evidence sufficiently convinces the evaluator, the researcher has a strict preference against producing a little more information. The evaluator can potentially use several types of instruments: commitment to ignore parts of the experimental results, mandating replication of the researcher's experiment, monitoring the design choice, supporting research with higher failure risk. Research design transparency may facilitate beneficial building of reputations for unbiasedness.