SFU SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
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PROTECT INTERNATIONAL
RISK AND SAFETY SERVICES INC

Stephen D. Hart

Cultural Issues in Threat Assessment

What is Culture?

- The sum of work and thought expressed or produced by members of a population, including their social practices, beliefs, institutions, and arts
- Most nations comprise multiple distinct cultures
  - Cultural majorities
  - Indigenous Peoples
  - Romani (Roma, Sinti, Kale, Gitan)
  - Travellers
- All nations encounter cultural diversity
  - Visitors, immigrants, asylum seekers

Culture and Violence

- Prevalence and nature of violence
- Prevalence and relevance of risk factors
- Social response to violence

Big Question

To what extent are threat assessment procedures equally valid across cultures?

Big Answer

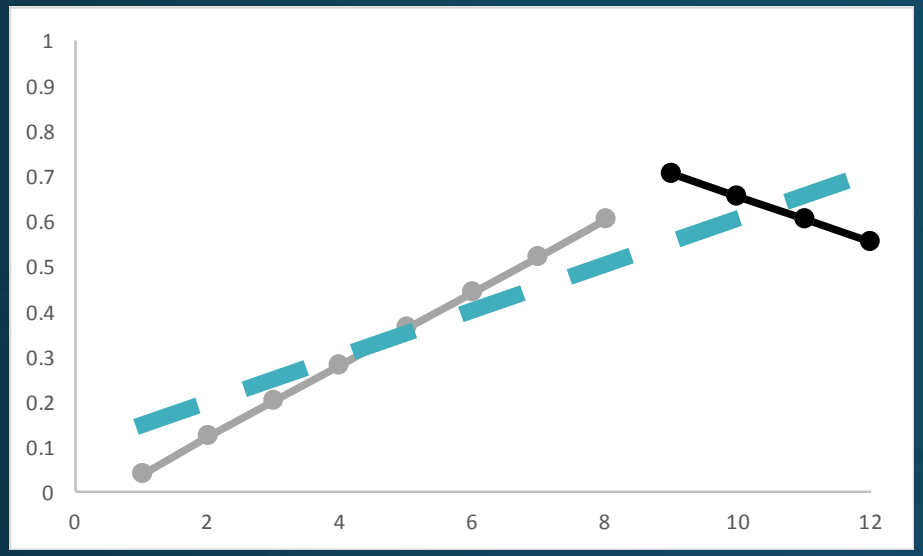
We don’t know.

Big Problem

Simpson's Paradox.

Big Problem

- Special case of omitted variable bias
- AKA
  - Yule-Simpson effect
  - Veridical paradox
  - Reversal paradox
  - Amalgamation paradox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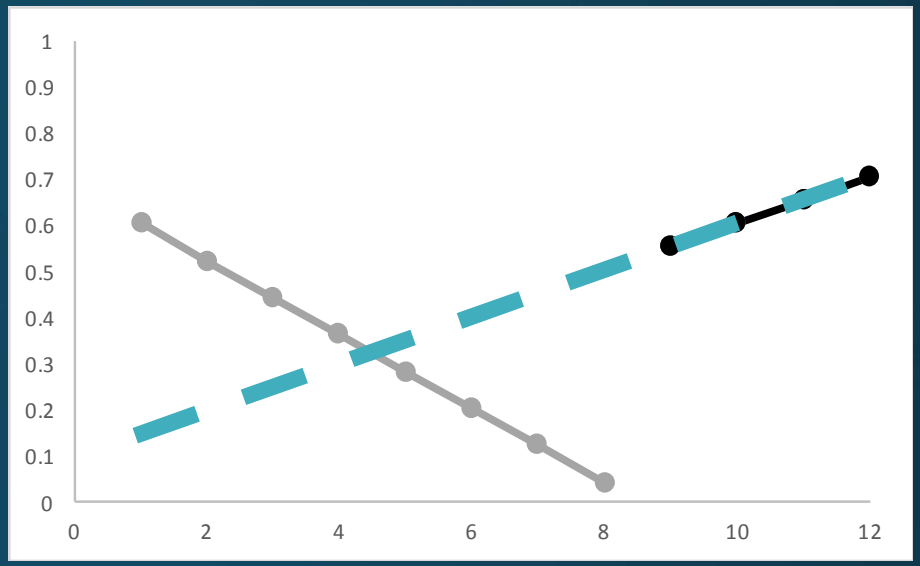
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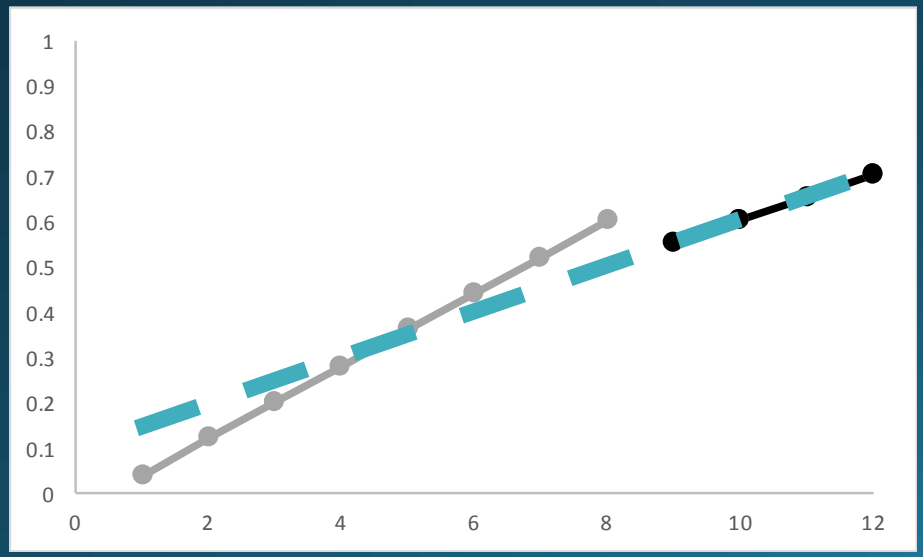
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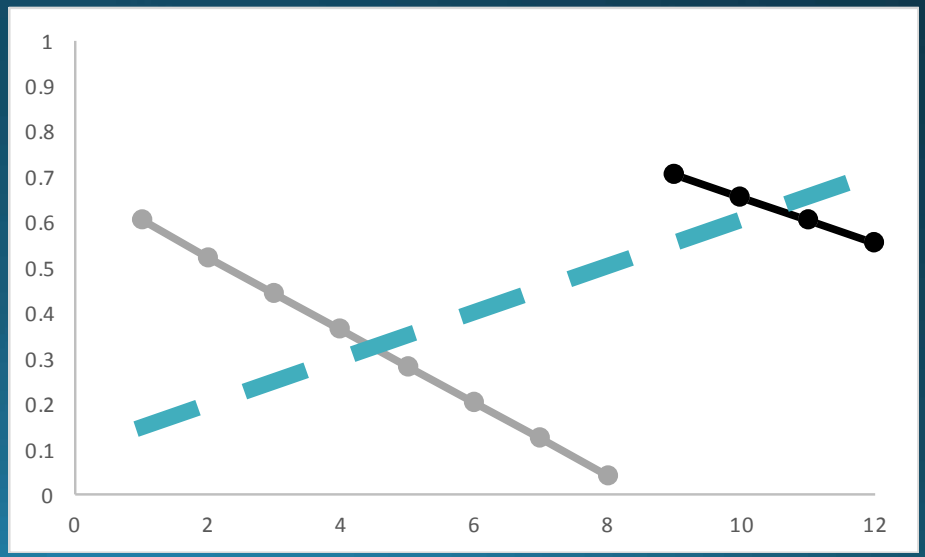
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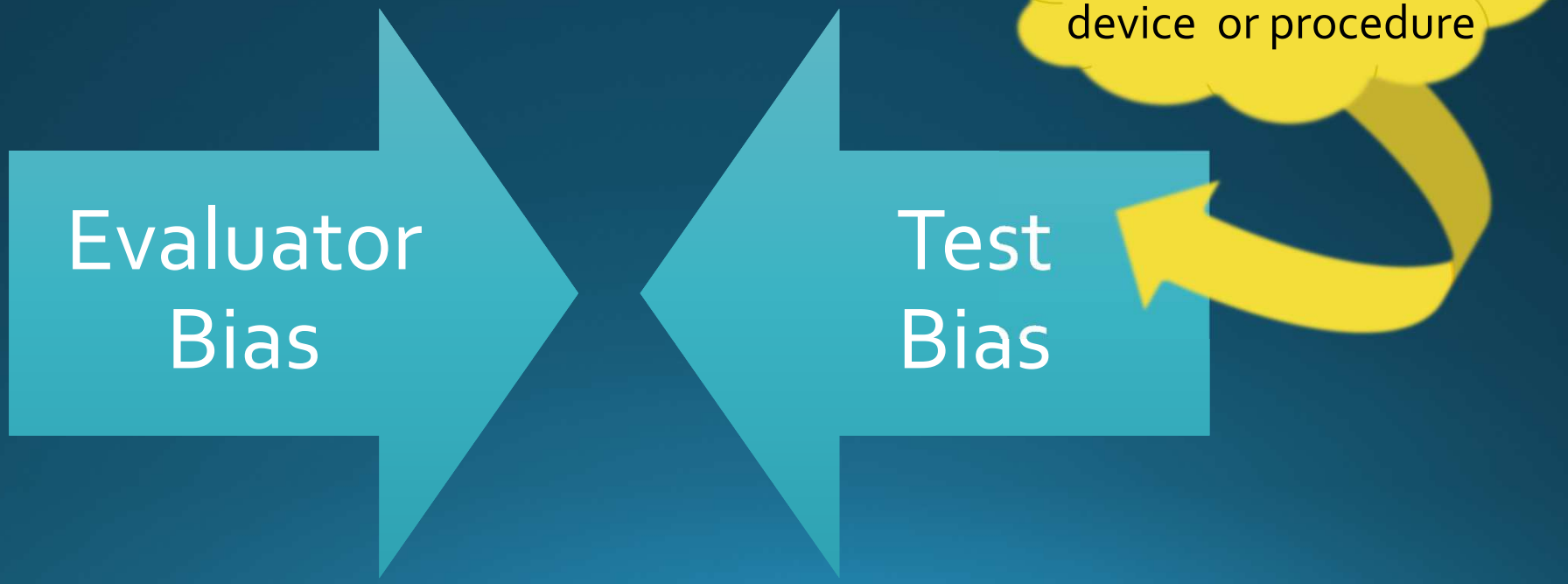
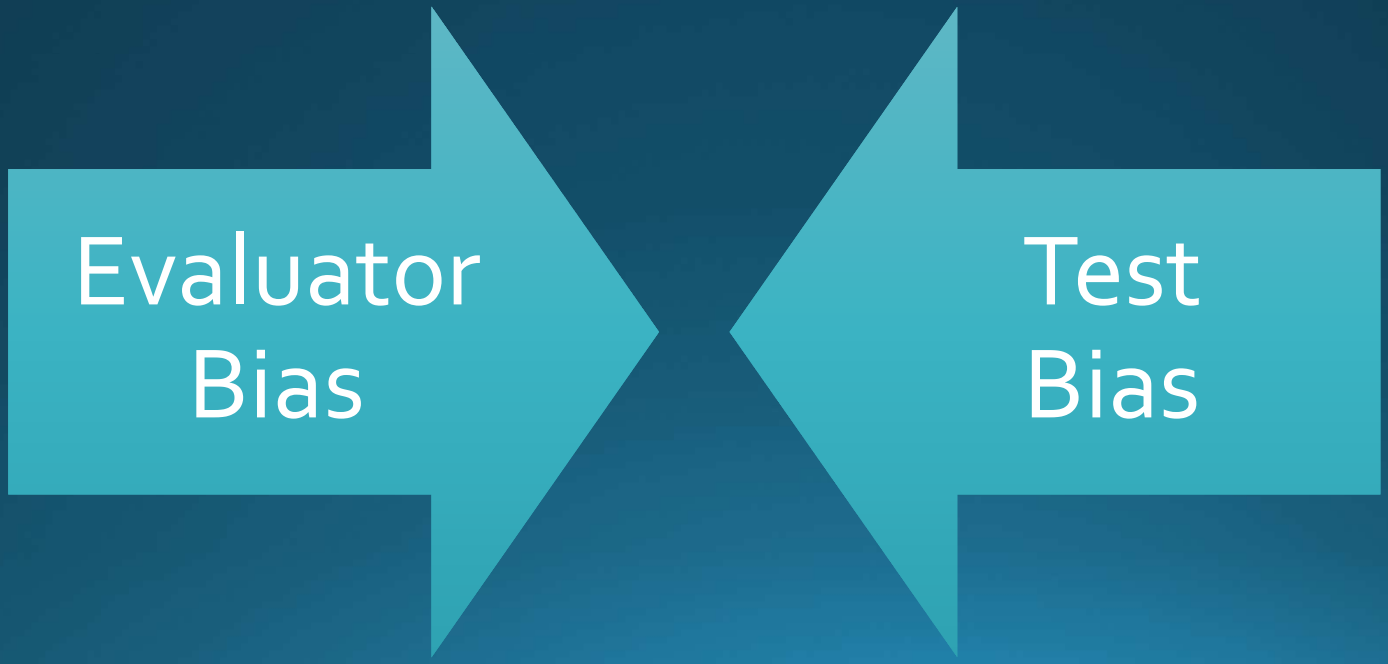
Cultural Bias in Threat Assessment

- Non-random error due to cultural factors
  - Random error (noise) is relatively simple to fix
  - Non-random error (interference) is difficult to fix



Cultural Bias in Threat Assessment

- Evident from logical analysis of evaluation
- Evident from statistical analysis of tests



Identifying Evaluator Bias

Assumes:

- Evaluators are aware of and communicate clearly about how they reached findings and formed opinions

Identifying Evaluator Bias

1. Identify and gather relevant information
2. Determine presence of risk factors
3. Determine relevance of risk factors
4. Develop primary scenarios of violence
5. Develop case management plans
6. Communicate findings

Identifying Test Bias

1. Conceptual invariance
2. Measurement invariance
3. Predictive invariance

1. Conceptual Invariance

- Are the latent variables (constructs) being measured or modelled by the test consistent across cultures?
- Requires qualitative and quantitative analyses in emic tradition

2. Measurement Invariance

- Are the relations between latent variables and test scores consistent across cultures?
  - Configural invariance
  - Metric invariance
  - Scalar invariance
  - Error invariance
- Requires application of MTT analyses (MGCFA, MGIRT, MACS, etc.) in very large samples ($N \geq 500$ per group) with $\beta \geq .90$ to minimize Type II error
  - Cannot use EDA or CTT analyses

3. Predictive Invariance

- Are the relations between test scores and criterion variables consistent across cultures?
  - Model structure
  - Predictive accuracy
- Requires modeling analyses (e.g., LMR, LR, EHA) in very large samples ($N \geq 500$ per group) with $\beta \geq .90$ to minimize Type II error
- Or, requires classification or categorical analyses (e.g., frequency, proportion, logistic, logit, probit analysis) in very large samples ($N \geq 1{,}500$ per group) with $\beta \geq .90$ to minimize Type II error
  - Cannot use simple correlational or ROC analyses

Case Vignettes

Past TAPAs Presentations

- White
- Palarea
- Camilleri
- Hart

TAPAs Presentations

- White
- Palarea
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Conclusions

General Conclusions

- The issue of culture is, and always has been, important
- Professionals should acknowledge the importance of culture, as well as the potential bias due to culture, in threat assessment
  - All threat assessment procedures are susceptible to ***evaluator bias***
  - Highly structured, quantitative evaluative devices or procedures are also susceptible to ***test bias***

General Recommendations

- Don't panic
- Assessments: Identify and try to minimize potential bias due to culture
- Communications: Discuss culture and potential bias due to culture, and the how the latter might affect assessment methods, findings, and opinions

Recommendations: Evaluator Bias

- Consider culture at every step of the administration procedures
  - Gather information, presence of risk factors, relevance of risk factors, scenarios of violence, management strategies, conclusory opinions
- Education
  - Review existing cultural competency guidelines (e.g., from mental health)
- Practice
  - Seek "cultural translation" from subject matter experts
  - Seek information from person(s) of interest, collateral informants

Suggested Interview Question

- Before we get into specifics, I want to make sure I understand [your] background. Is there something important I should known about [you] that would help me to understand [you]?
  - Cultural background/identity
  - Languages
  - Religion/spirituality
  - Family structure, childrearing experiences
  - Beliefs or interests

Recommendations: Test Bias

- Consider cultural appropriateness of test content, administration, scoring, and interpretation procedures
- Education
  - Review reviews of and research on cross-cultural validity of tests
- Practice
  - Use most appropriate cross-culturally valid test
  - Contextualize interpretation of test
  - Don't "adjust" test scores to avoid anchoring bias (focusing illusion)

The Future

- Better (emic) research on culture and violence
  - Example: Research on SPJ guidelines in Korea, Singapore
- Better practice guidelines for respecting cultural diversity in violence risk assessment
- More attention paid to other group differences in violence risk assessment
  - Age, gender, sexuality, mental disorder, etc.

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