

# Statistical Quantification of Discovery

## Bayesian and Frequentist Perspectives

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INFN School on Statistics 2024

# Search and Discovery

*The New York Times*

2012-13 Higgs Discovery

## Science

### Physicists Find Elusive Particle Seen as Key to Universe



#### Scientific and Statistical Themes

- High-stakes science: discovery vs. estimation.
- Model selection is much harder than estimation.
- Frequentist and Bayesian methods: different conclusions.
- Is a non-partisan approach possible?

# Outline

- 1 Motivating Problems
- 2 Statistical Criteria for Discovery
- 3 Mass Hierarchy & CP-violation
- 4 Bump Hunting
- 5 Advice and Resources

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# Motivating Problem: Neutrino Oscillation

## Neutrino Oscillation

- Neutrino created as electron, muon or tau may later be measured with different flavor.
- Flavor probability varies periodically as neutrino travels through space and *depends on several parameters*.

## Mass Hierarchy

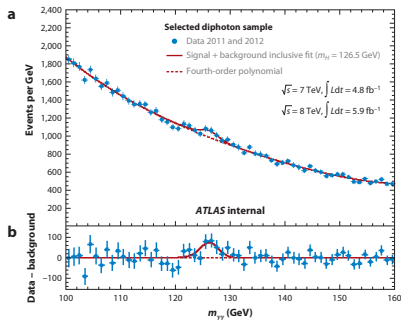
...ordering of the mass eigenstates

- normal ( $\Delta m_{32}^2 > 0$ ) vs inverted hierarchy ( $\Delta m_{32}^2 < 0$ )
- $|\Delta m_{32}^2|$  well constrained, degeneracy of sign with  $\theta_{23}$  or  $\delta_{CP}$ .

## CP-violation

- Is there evidence to counter  $\delta_{CP} \in \{0, \pi\}$ ?
- Current data is limited.

# Motivating Problem: Higgs Search



## Searching for a Bump above Background

- Expect excess counts at invariant mass of Higgs boson.
- Statistically: no bump vs bump.
- The Location of possible bump unknown.
- What is the bump location if there is no bump?

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# Statistical Framework for Discovery

## Model / Hypothesis Testing

$H_0$ : The null hypothesis (e.g., no CP-violation,  $\delta_{CP} = 0$ )

$H_1$ : The alternative hypothesis (e.g., CP-violation)

- Without further evidence,  $H_0$  is presumed true.
- “Deciding” on  $H_1$  means scientific discovery: new physics.
- **Model Selection**: No presumed model. (normal/inverted hierarchy)

## Appropriate Statistical Approach Depends on

- Is  $H_0$  the *presumed* model? or more than 2 possible models?
- Is  $H_0$  a special case of  $H_1$ , “nested models”
- Parameters: (i) Unknown values under  $H_0$ ?  
(ii) No “true value” under  $H_0$ ?, (iii) Boundary concerns.
- Bayesian vs. Frequentist methods



# Statistical Criterion for Discovery

The most common criterion is the p-value,

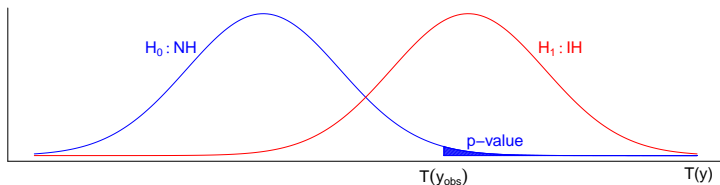
$$\text{p-value} = \Pr \left( T(y) \geq T(y_{\text{obs}}) \mid H_0 \right)$$

- $T(\cdot)$  is a *Test Statistic*, e.g.,  $\Delta\chi^2$  or likelihood ratio statistic

$$\text{Likelihood Ratio Test} = -2 \log \frac{\max_{\theta} p_0(y \mid \theta)}{\max_{\theta} p_1(y \mid \theta)}$$

Likelihood under  $H_0$

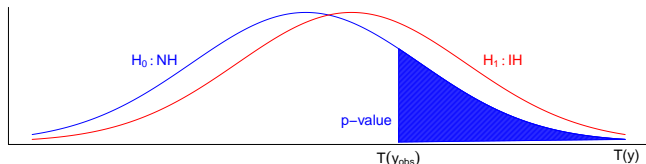
Likelihood under  $H_1$



# Computing p-values

The most common criterion is the p-value,

$$\text{p-value} = \Pr \left( T(y) \geq T(y_{\text{obs}}) \mid H_0 \right)$$



## Requires distribution of $T(y)$ under $H_0$

- Distributions depend on unknown parameters (e.g.,  $\delta_{CP}$ ,  $\theta_{23}$ )
- Standard Theory:
  - estimates of unknown parameters converge to true values
  - models nested, parameter values under  $H_0$ , “large” data.  
*... often violated in physics*
- Monte Carlo toys infeasible with  $5\sigma$  criterion.

# Misuse of P-values

The most common criterion is the p-value,

$$\text{p-value} = \Pr \left( T(y) \geq T(y_{\text{obs}}) \mid H_0 \right) \text{ with } T = \text{test statistic}$$

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But....



NATURE | RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS: SOCIAL SELECTION

## Psychology journal bans $P$ values

Test for reliability of results 'too easy to pass', say editors.

Chris Woolston

26 February 2015 | Clarified: 09 March 2015

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But....

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## Statisticians issue warning over misuse of $P$ values

Policy statement aims to halt missteps in the quest for certainty.

Monya Baker

07 March 2016

(ASA Statement on Statistical Significance and P-values)

February 5, 2016

# The Problem with P-values

## The misuse of P-values:

- **Do not measure relative likelihood of hypotheses.**
- Large p-values do not validate  $H_0$ .
- May depend on bits of  $H_0$  that are of no interest.
- **Single filter** for publication / judging quality of research.
- **Should be viewed as a data summary, not the summary**

*Reviewers, Editors, and Readers want a simple  
black-and-white rule:  $p < 0.05$ , or  $> 5\sigma$ .*

*But, statistics is about quantifying uncertainty,  
not expressing certainty.*

# A Bayesian Criterion for Discovery

To determine mass hierarchy, suppose we find

$$\text{p-value} = \Pr \left( T(y) \geq T(y_{\text{obs}}) \mid \text{NH} \right) = 0.0001$$

## Questions

- Can we conclude NH is unlikely?
- Does  $\Pr(\text{data} \mid \text{NH})$  small imply  $\Pr(\text{NH} \mid \text{data})$  is small?

## Order of conditioning matters!

Consider  $\Pr(A \mid B)$  and  $\Pr(B \mid A)$  with

**A:** A person is a woman.

**B:** A person is pregnant.

# Bayesian Methods

## Bayes Theorem

$$\Pr(\text{NH} \mid \text{data}) = \frac{\Pr(\text{data} \mid \text{NH}) \Pr(\text{NH})}{\Pr(\text{data} \mid \text{NH}) \Pr(\text{NH}) + \Pr(\text{data} \mid \text{IH}) \Pr(\text{IH})}$$

## Bayesian methods

- have cleaner mathematical foundations
- more directly answer scientific questions

... *but they depend on **prior distributions***

- $\Pr(\text{NH})$  = probability of NH before seeing data.

*Prior distributions must also be specified for model parameters.*



# The Problem with Priors

## Bayesian Criteria for Discovery:

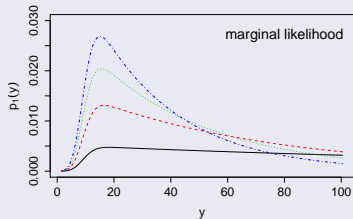
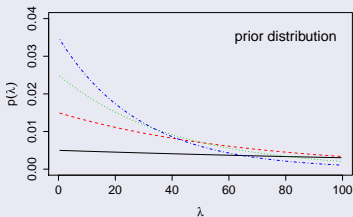
$$\text{Bayes Factor} = \frac{p_0(y)}{p_1(y)} \text{ with } p_i(y) = \int p_i(y|\theta)p_i(\theta)d\theta.$$

$$\Pr(H_0 | y) = \frac{p_0(y)\pi_0}{p_0(y)\pi_0 + p_1(y)\pi_1} = \frac{\pi_0}{\pi_0 + \pi_1(\text{Bayes Factor})^{-1}}$$

## Example: (simplified) Higgs search

**Likelihood:**  $y|\lambda \sim \text{Poisson}(10+\lambda)$

**Test:**  $\lambda = 0$  vs  $\lambda > 0$



*Value of  $p_1(y)$  depends on prior!*

# Choice of Prior Matters!

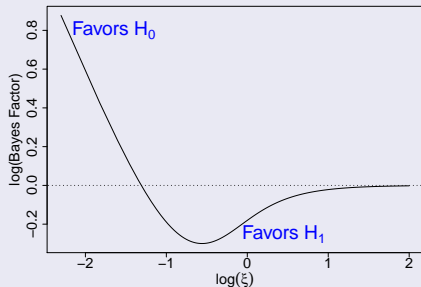
## Bayes Factor

$$H_0 : y \sim \text{Poisson}(10).$$

$$H_1 : y \sim \text{Poisson}(10 + \lambda).$$

with  $\lambda \sim \exp(\xi)$

- Observe  $y = 15$
- $\log(\text{Bayes Factor})$



*Must think hard about choice of prior and report!*

# Bayes Factors vs Likelihood Ratios

Likelihood Ratio optimizes parameters, whereas Bayes Factor marginalizes.

$$\text{Likelihood Ratio} = \frac{\max_{\theta_0} p_0(y | \theta_0)}{\max_{\theta_1} p_1(y | \theta_1)} \neq \text{Bayes Factor} = \frac{\int p_0(y | \theta_0) p(\theta_0) d\theta_0}{\int p_1(y | \theta_1) p(\theta_1) d\theta_1}$$

*...unless there are no parameters under either model.*

## A Bayesian Occam's Razor

- Suppose  $p(\theta_i)$  are both essentially flat over range where corresponding likelihoods are non-negligible.

$$\text{Bayes Factor} = \frac{\int p_0(y | \theta_0) p(\theta_0) d\theta_0}{\int p_1(y | \theta_1) p(\theta_1) d\theta_1} \approx \frac{p(\hat{\theta}_0) \int p_0(y | \theta_0) d\theta_0}{p(\hat{\theta}_1) \int p_1(y | \theta_1) d\theta_1}$$

- The term  $p(\hat{\theta}_0)/p(\hat{\theta}_1)$  is sensitive to dimension and scale.
  - At mode, multivariate normal prior  $\propto 1/|\Sigma|^{d/2}$ .
- Bayes Factor penalizes larger models. *...and depends strongly on choice of prior.*
- The degree we penalize complex models is a subjective choice.
- Don't hide your priors!

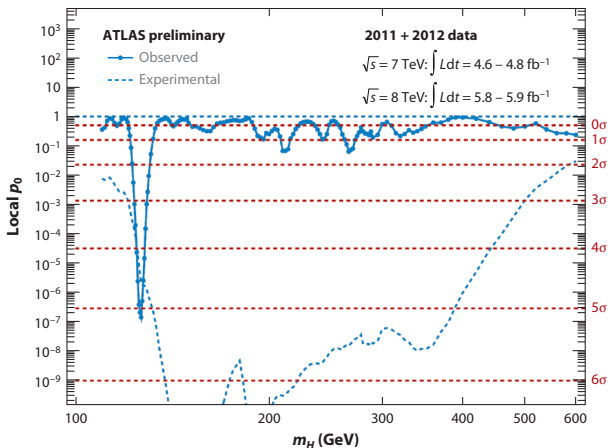
# Frequentist vs Bayesian: Does it Matter?

## Model Testing and Model Selection

- Frequency and Bayesian methods **may not agree**.
  - Bayes automatically penalizes larger models (*Occam's Razor*)
  - and adjusts for trial factors / look elsewhere effect.
- Choice of prior distribution **is often critical**.
- **Problem cases:** Dimension of model parameters differ.
  - CP-violation:  $H_0 : \delta_{CP} \in \{0, \pi\}$  vs.  $H_1 : \notin \{0, \pi\}$ .
  - Higgs search: location and intensity of bump above bkgd.
- Anti-conservative:  $p\text{-value} \ll \Pr(H_0 | y)$ .
- *Remember:*  
 *$p\text{-value}$  and  $\Pr(H_0 | y)$  quantify different things!*

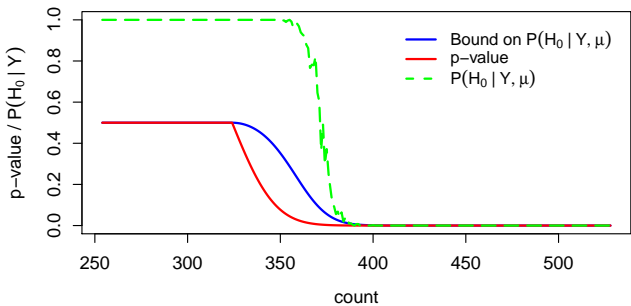
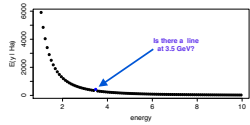
*Interpreting  $p\text{-value}$  as  $\Pr(H_0 | y)$  may significantly overstate evidence for new physics.*

# Trial Factors, Local, and Global p-values.



*Reporting the minimum (local) p-value  
is cheating.*

# Example: Searching for a Bump above Background.



.... but researchers interpret p-value as  $\Pr(H_0 | y)$ .

***Solution: Report both.***

# $5\sigma$ Discovery Threshold

## $5\sigma$ is required for “discovery”

- High profile false discoveries led to conservative threshold
- Treat Higgs mass as known (multiple-testing)
- “What would you have done had you had different data”
- **Calibration, systematic errors, and model misspecification**
- But **cranking up required  $\sigma$  doesn't address these issues**

*“In particle physics, this criterion has become a convention ... but should not be interpreted literally<sup>1</sup>.”*

At PhyStat-nu....

**Cousins:** *Two  $3.5\sigma$  results are better than one  $5\sigma$  result.*

**van Dyk:** *Calibrated  $3.5\sigma$  result better than uncalibrated  $5\sigma$ .*

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<sup>1</sup> Glossary in the *Science* review of the 2012 CMS and ATLAS discoveries.

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# Normal Hierarchy versus Inverted Hierarchy

## Non-nested parameterized models

$H_0$  : normal hierarchy      i.e.,  $\Delta m_{32}^2 \leq 0$

$H_1$  : inverted hierarchy      i.e.,  $\Delta m_{32}^2 > 0$

## Computing a p-value using LRT

- Non-nested models: If no unknown parameters in either model.
  - LRT follows a Gaussian distribution under  $H_0$  or  $H_1$ .
- With unknown parameters (e.g.,  $\Delta m_{32}^2$ ,  $\delta_{CP}$ ,  $\theta_{23}$ ):
  - Std theory (Wilks, Chernoff) does not apply: dist'n of LRT unknown.
  - Some results, but strong assumptions (Blennow, et al. arXiv:1311.1822)  
*Apply with reactor neutrino experiments, not accelerator experiments which involve  $\delta_{CP}$  (E. Ciuffoli).*
  - What about uncertainty in  $|\Delta m_{32}^2|$ ?

*Are we back to Monte Carlo (toys)? at  $5\sigma$ ??*

# Is There an Easier Solution?

## Two paradigms for statistical inference:

**Likelihood:** inference based on  $p(y | \theta)$ . ... and *LRT, p-value, etc.*

**Bayesian:** inference based on  $p(\theta | y) \propto p(y | \theta)p(\theta)$ .

### Model Fitting

- Specify one model, fit parameters, estimate uncertainty.
- Frequency and Bayesian methods tend to agree.
- Choice of prior distribution is often not critical.

*Some “model selection” can be accomplished via model fitting, e.g., confidence intervals.*

# Normal versus Inverted Hierarchy: Easier Way?

## Non-nested parameterized models

$H_0$  : normal hierarchy     i.e.,  $\Delta m_{32}^2 \leq 0$

$H_1$  : inverted hierarchy     i.e.,  $\Delta m_{32}^2 > 0$

*Is there an easier solution??*

Why not just compute  $\Pr(H_0 | y) = \Pr(\Delta m_{32}^2 \leq 0 | y)$ ?

In this case Bayes Criterion is particularly easy:

$$\text{Posterior Odds} = \frac{\Pr(\Delta m_{32}^2 \leq 0 | y)}{\Pr(\Delta m_{32}^2 > 0 | y)}$$

*...model fitting with  $\Delta m_{32}^2$  a free parameter.*

*One model and one prior, easy to compute,  
not sensitive to prior... what's not to like?*

*Bayesian solution is easier in this case.*

# CP-violation

Test:  $H_0 : \delta_{\text{CP}} \in \{0, \pi\}$  versus  $H_1 : \delta_{\text{CP}} \notin \{0, \pi\}$

## p-value

- Standard theory (Wilks, Chernoff) applies...  
but insufficient data for asymptotics.
- Monte Carlo (toys) required to assess p-value.
- More data required! (For  $5\sigma$ ??)

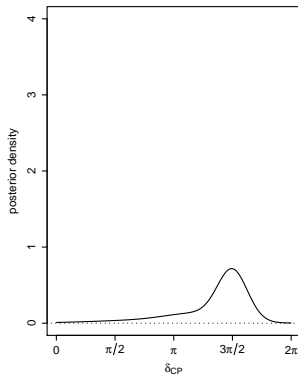
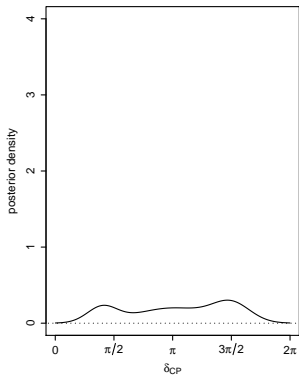
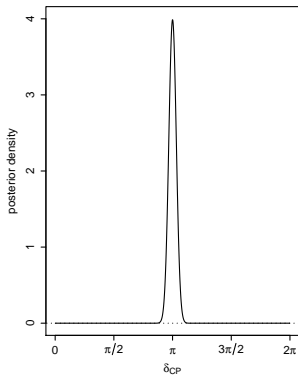
## Posterior Odds or Bayes Factor

- Sensitive to prior on  $\delta$ , but finite support.  
*Again, Bayesian solution is easier (with limited data).*

## Still Easier:

- Report a confidence interval for  $\delta_{\text{CP}}$ .
- Employ model fitting rather than model selection.

# Assessing CP-violation via Model Fitting



*Is data consistent with  $\delta_{CP} \in \{0, \pi\}$ ??*

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# Higgs Search: Statistical Framework

## A Mixture Model:

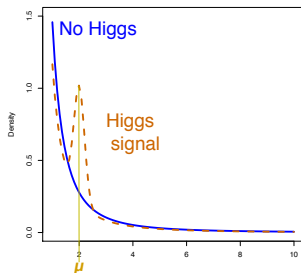
$$\begin{aligned} f(y_i|\theta) &= (1 - \lambda)f_0(y_i|\alpha) + \lambda f_1(y_i|\mu) \\ &= \text{background} + \text{Higgs} \end{aligned}$$

Compare

$$H_0 : \lambda = 0 \quad (\text{no discovery})$$

$$H_1 : \lambda > 0 \quad (\text{discovery})$$

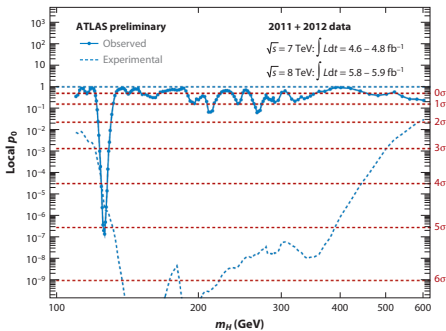
(And  $\lambda < 1$ , there will always be background!)



## Types of Parameters:

- 1  $\alpha$ : (nuisance) parameter for  $H_0$
- 2  $\lambda$ : parameter determining hypothesis
- 3  $\mu$ : bump location, *has not value under  $H_0$* .

# Trial Factors, Local, and Global p-values.



- For fixed  $\mu$ : Chernoff's Theorem applies, asymptotic null distribution known, and we can compute local p-values.
- *But, reporting the minimum (local) p-value is cheating!!*
- Global p-values correct for multiple looks.



# Bounding the Global P-value

Consider the stochastic process  $\{T_\mu(y), \mu \in M\}$  indexed by  $\mu$ .

- **Statistic:**  $T^+(y) = \max_{\mu \in M_R} T_\mu(y)$ , maximize over grid of size  $R$ .
- **Global P-value:**

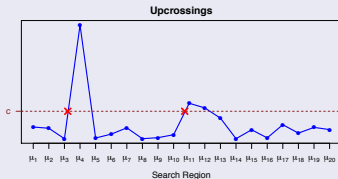
$$p_G = \Pr \left( \max_{\mu \in M_R} T_\mu(y) \geq \max_{\mu \in M_R} T_\mu(y_{\text{obs}}) \mid H_0 \right)$$

## Bounds on global p-value

- 1 Bonferroni:  $p_G \leq R p_L$ .
- 2 Markov (Davies, 1987):

$$\begin{aligned} p_G &= \Pr \left( \max_{\mu} T_\mu(y) \geq c \mid H_0 \right) \\ &\leq p_L + \Pr(N_c \geq 1 \mid H_0) \\ &\leq p_L + E(N_c \mid H_0). \end{aligned}$$

$N_c$  = number of upcrossings.



# Background on Bounds

## Bonferroni Bound

Suppose we conduct two tests, with  $\Pr(T_i \geq c) = \epsilon$ ,

$$\begin{aligned}\Pr(T_1 \geq c \text{ or } T_2 \geq c) &= \Pr(T_1 \geq c) + \Pr(T_2 \geq c) - \Pr(T_1 \geq c \text{ and } T_2 \geq c) \\ &\leq \Pr(T_1 \geq c) + \Pr(T_2 \geq c) = 2\epsilon.\end{aligned}$$

Thus, bound on global p-value is twice local p-value.

## Markov Bound

Let  $X$  be a random variable that can take on values  $0, 1, 2, \dots$

$$\begin{aligned}E(X) &= \sum_{x=0}^{\infty} x \Pr(X = x) \geq \sum_{x=1}^{\infty} x \Pr(X = x) \\ &\geq \sum_{x=1}^{\infty} \Pr(X = x) = \Pr(X \geq 1).\end{aligned}$$

# Evaluating the Bounds

## Questions:

- 1 Which bound is sharper?
- 2 Which bound is easier to compute?

## The method of Gross and Vitells (2010)

- To avoid MC evaluation of  $E(N_c | H_0)$

$$E(N_c | H_0) = E(N_{c_0} | H_0) \left( \frac{c}{c_0} \right)^{(s-1)/2} \exp \left( -\frac{(c - c_0)}{2} \right), \quad c_0 \ll c$$

- $6\sigma / 5\sigma$  significances reduce to  $5.1\sigma / 4.6\sigma$  (ATLAS/CMS)

# Higgs Search: Is a Bayes Factor Possible?

Types of Parameters:

- ①  $\alpha$ : parameter for  $H_0$
- ②  $\lambda$ : determines hypothesis
- ③  $\mu$ : no value under  $H_0$ .

**Basic Model:**

$$\begin{aligned} p(y_i|\theta) &= (1 - \lambda)f_0(y_i|\alpha) + \lambda f_1(y_i|\mu) \\ &= \text{background} + \text{Higgs} \end{aligned}$$

**P-values are “biased toward discovery.” How about  $\Pr(H_0 | y)$ ?**

## Strategies for Setting Prior Distributions

- Easiest case: Bkgd parameters common to both models.
- Diffuse prior: flat over region where  $p_i(y|\alpha)$  non-negligible.
- Fixing  $\lambda$  and  $\mu$ ,

$$\text{BF} = \frac{\int \prod_i f_0(y_i|\alpha) p(\alpha) d\alpha}{\int \prod_i [(1 - \lambda)f_0(y_i|\alpha) + \lambda f_1(y_i|\mu)] p(\alpha) d\alpha} = \frac{p(\hat{\alpha}_0) \int p_0(y|\alpha) d\alpha}{p(\hat{\alpha}_1) \int p_1(y|\alpha) d\alpha}$$

- The choice of prior on  $\alpha$  is not critical.

# Hypothesis Indexing Parameter: $\lambda$

## Lower Bound on Bayesian evidence for $H_0$

- P-values tend to favor  $H_1$  more strongly than  $\Pr(H_0 | y)$ .

*[At least when  $H_0$  is "precise".]*

- Using a parameterized prior  $\lambda \sim p(\lambda | \beta)$ ,

$$\bar{p}_1(y | \mu) = \sup_{\beta} \int p_1(y | \lambda, \mu) p(\lambda | \beta) d\lambda$$

$$\Pr(H_0 | y, \mu) = \frac{\pi_0 p_0(y)}{\pi_0 p_0(y) + \pi_1 p_1(y | \mu)} \geq \frac{\pi_0 p_0(y)}{\pi_0 p_0(y) + \pi_1 \bar{p}_1(y | \mu)}$$

## Example

$y_i \stackrel{\text{indep}}{\sim} \text{POISSON}(f_0(\alpha, i) + \lambda f_1(\mu, i))$

Test:  $H_0 : \lambda = 0$  vs  $H_1 : \lambda > 0$

- $\lambda \sim \text{GAMMA}(\alpha, \beta)$
- Prior should peak at zero:  
we set  $\alpha = 1$ .

# Parameters Not Identifiable Under $H_0: \mu$

Local  $p(H_0|y)$ :  $\inf_{\mu} p(H_0 | y, \mu)$

Global  $p(H_0|y)$ : properly average over  $p(\mu)$

Like global p-value, averaging over  $p(\mu)$  penalizes wide search

$$p_1(y) = \int p_1(y | \mu) p(\mu) d\mu \leq \sup_{\mu} p_1(y | \mu)$$

$$\Pr(H_0 | y) = \frac{\pi_0 p_0(y)}{\pi_0 p_0(y) + \pi_1 p_1(y)} \geq \frac{\pi_0 p_0(y)}{\pi_0 p_0(y) + \pi_1 \sup_{\mu} p_1(y | \mu)}$$

$$= \inf_{\mu} p(H_0 | y, \mu) = \text{Local probability of } H_0$$

- Simplest choice of  $p(\mu)$  is uniform over the search region.
  - Look-elsewhere correction similar to frequency methods.

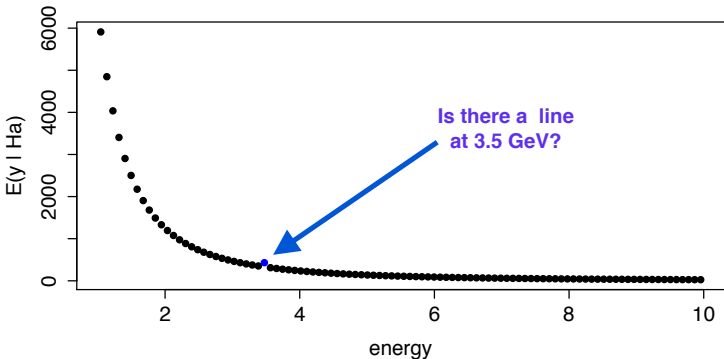
# Example: Are P-values Biased in Favor $H_1$ ?

**Model:**

$$y_i \stackrel{\text{indep}}{\sim} \text{POISSON}(f_0(\alpha, i) + \lambda f_1(\mu, i))$$

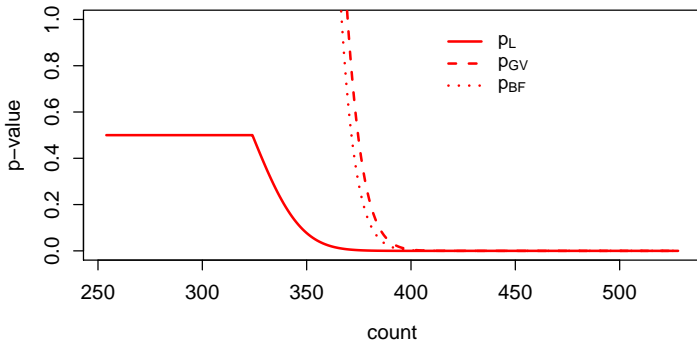
Test:  $H_0 : \lambda = 0$  vs  $H_0 : \lambda > 0$

- $f_0 =$  power law
- $f_1 = \mathcal{I}\{i = \mu\}$
- 100 bins



## Example: Local vs Global P-values

- Varying the count in the line bin (3.5 GeV).
- The expected count in this bin under  $H_0$ : 330.



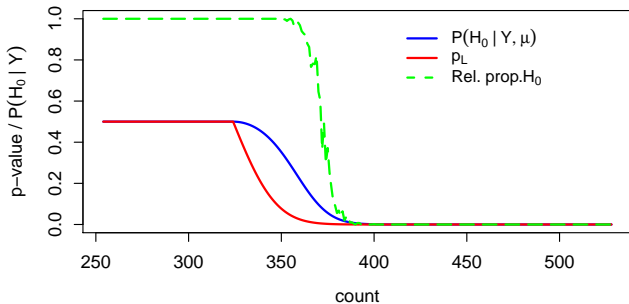


# Example: Comparing $\Pr(H_0 | y)$ with p-value

Consider physicists who repeatedly conducts hypothesis tests

- Half the time  $H_0$  is true; when  $H_1$  is true,  $\mu = 3.5\text{GeV}$ .
- Dashed green line: relative frequency of  $H_0$ .

We compute lower bound on  $\Pr(H_0 | y)$ .... *[Recall prior on  $\lambda$ .]*



.... but researchers interpret p-value as  $\Pr(H_0 | y)$ .



# Outline

- 1 Motivating Problems
- 2 Statistical Criteria for Discovery
- 3 Mass Hierarchy & CP-violation
- 4 Bump Hunting
- 5 Advice and Resources**

# Frequentist or Bayesian?

## Do you have to choose??

- Bayes prescribes methodology.
- Frequentists evaluate methods.
- Frequency evaluation of Bayesian methods.
- Model fitting: often little difference in fits and errors.
- Why not control rate of false detection  
*and* assess probability of new physics?
- Why throw away half of your tool box?

## *Neutrino physicists open to both Bayesian / Frequency methods*

- Lots of Bayesian and Frequentist proposals at PhyStat- $\nu$ .
- My experience with cosmologists and particle physicists.

# Strategies

## What is a physicist to do?

- Controlling false discovery is critical in physical sciences.
- Comparing p-values with a predetermined significant level can control false discovery.... *if used with care, e.g., no cherry picking!*
- When confronted with small p-values researchers *...even statisticians!!...* may believe  $H_0$  is unlikely.
- Bayesian solutions can better quantify likelihood of  $H_0 / H_1$ .
- **Solution:** Compute both *global* p-value *and* Bayes Factor.

## *But be Careful...*

- ① *quantification of p-values in non-standard problems*
- ② *choice and validation of prior distributions*

*remain challenging!*

# Resources

## PhyStat- $\nu$ Tokyo

- <http://indico.ipmu.jp/indico/conferenceDisplay.py?confId=82>
- Summary Document in preparation

## PhyStat- $\nu$ Fermilab

- Continuation of meeting in Japan.
- <https://indico.fnal.gov/conferenceDisplay.py?confId=11906>



## PhyStat Repository

- Links to ten PhyStat meetings, with slides, papers, and proceedings.
- Some software packages and tools
- <http://www.phystat.org>

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