Causal Diagrams in R

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Draw your causal assumptions with causal directed acyclic graphs (DAGs)

The basic idea

1. Specify your causal question
2. Use domain knowledge
3. Write variables as nodes
4. Write causal pathways as arrows (edges)

ggdag

`dagitty`

`ggplot2`
`ggraph`

dagitty

ggplot2
ggraph

powerful,
robust
algorithms

dagitty

powerful,
robust
algorithms

ggplot2
ggraph

unlimited
flexibility

beautiful
plots

dagitty

ggplot2
ggraph

Data structure: tidy DAGs

Step 1: Specify your DAG

```
dagify(
  cancer ~ smoking,
  coffee ~ smoking
)
```

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)
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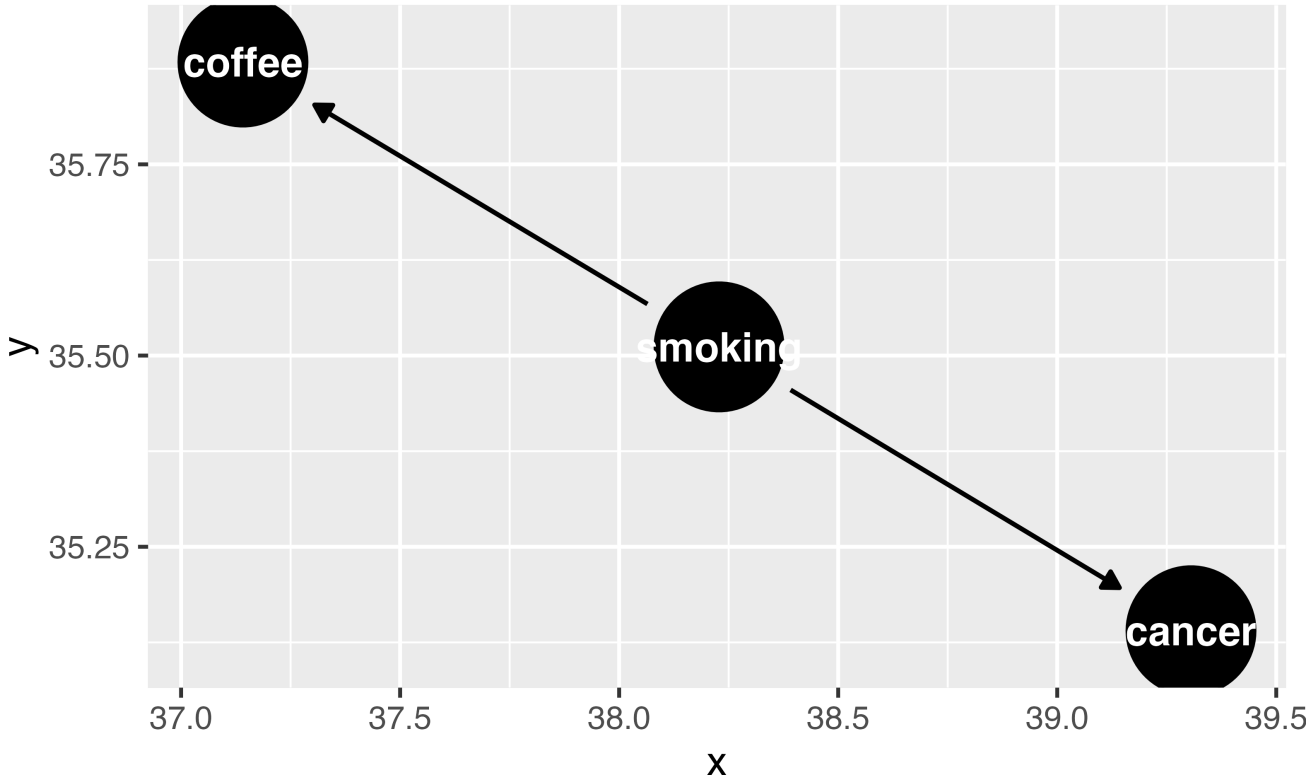
dagify(
  cancer ~ smoking,
  coffee ~ smoking
)
```

Step 1: Specify your DAG

```
dagify(
  cancer ~ smoking,
  coffee ~ smoking
) %>% ggdag()
```

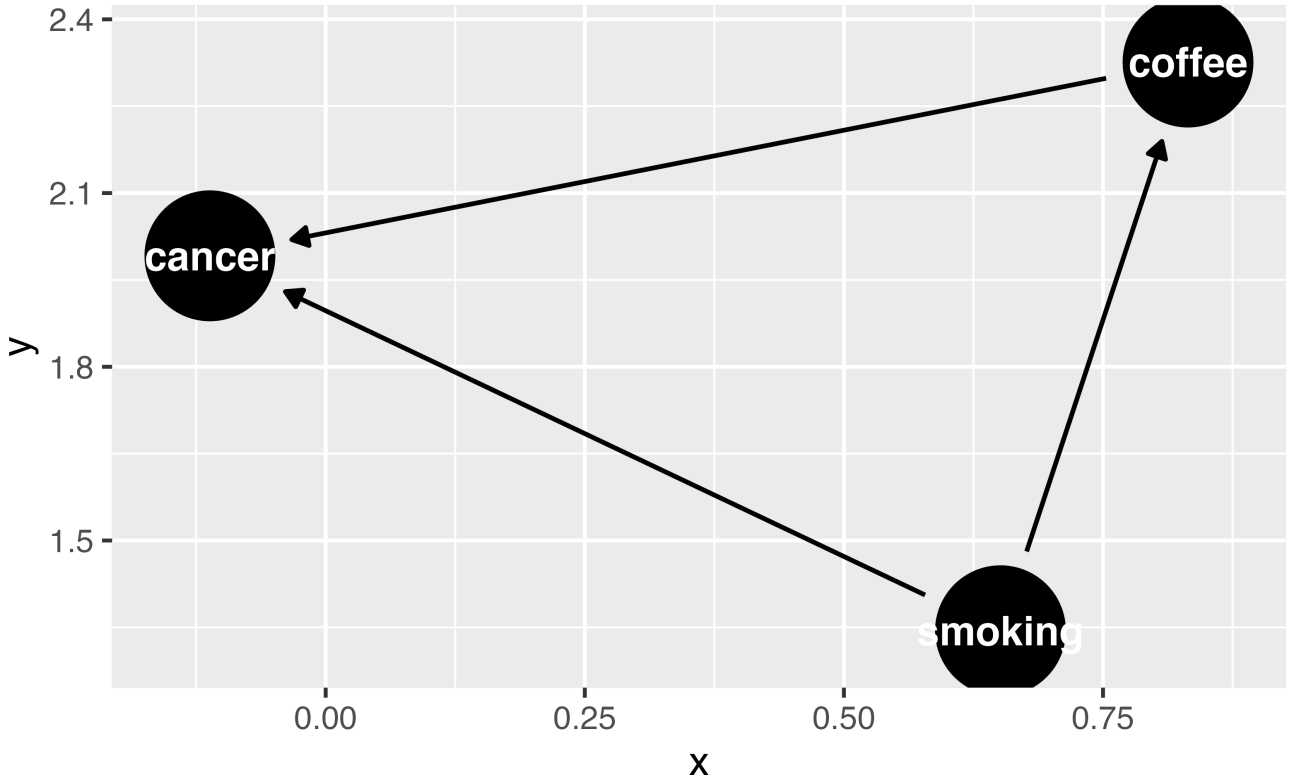
Step 1: Specify your DAG



Step 1: Specify your DAG

```
dagify(
  cancer ~ smoking + coffee,
  coffee ~ smoking
) %>% ggdag()
```

Step 1: Specify your DAG



Your Turn 1 (02-dags-exercises.Rmd)

Specify a DAG with dagify(). **Write your assumption that** smoking **causes** cancer **as a formula.**

We're going to assume that coffee does not cause cancer, so there's no formula for that. But we still need to declare our causal question. Specify "coffee" as the exposure and "cancer" as the outcome (both in quotations marks).

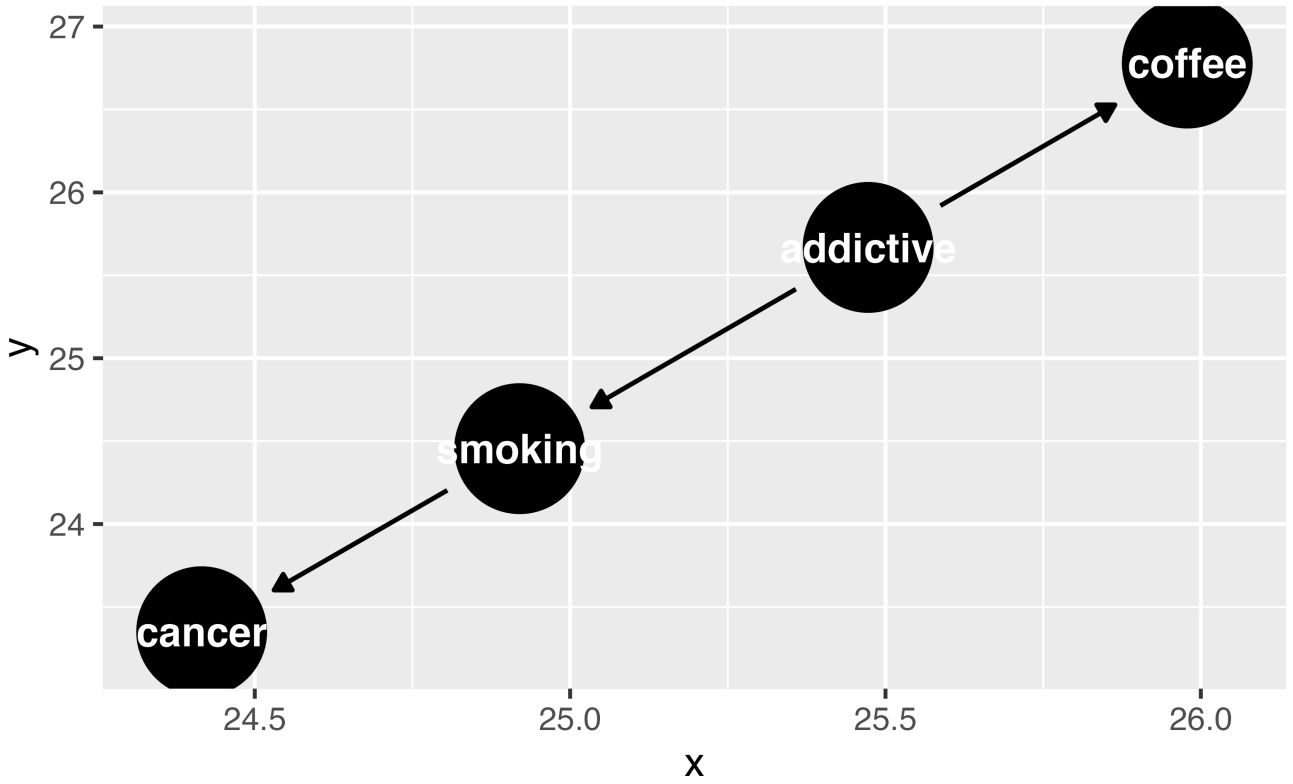
Plot the DAG using ggdag()

05:00

Your Turn 1 (02-dags-exercises.Rmd)

```
coffee_cancer_dag <- dagify(
  cancer ~ smoking,
  smoking ~ addictive,
  coffee ~ addictive,
  exposure = "coffee",
  outcome = "cancer",
  labels = c(
    "coffee" = "Coffee",
    "cancer" = "Lung Cancer",
    "smoking" = "Smoking",
    "addictive" = "Addictive \nBehavior"
  )
)
```

```
ggdag(coffee_cancer_dag)
```



Causal effects and backdoor paths

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Ok, correlation != causation. But why not?

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We want to know if x -> y**...**

Causal effects and backdoor paths

Ok, correlation != causation. But why not?

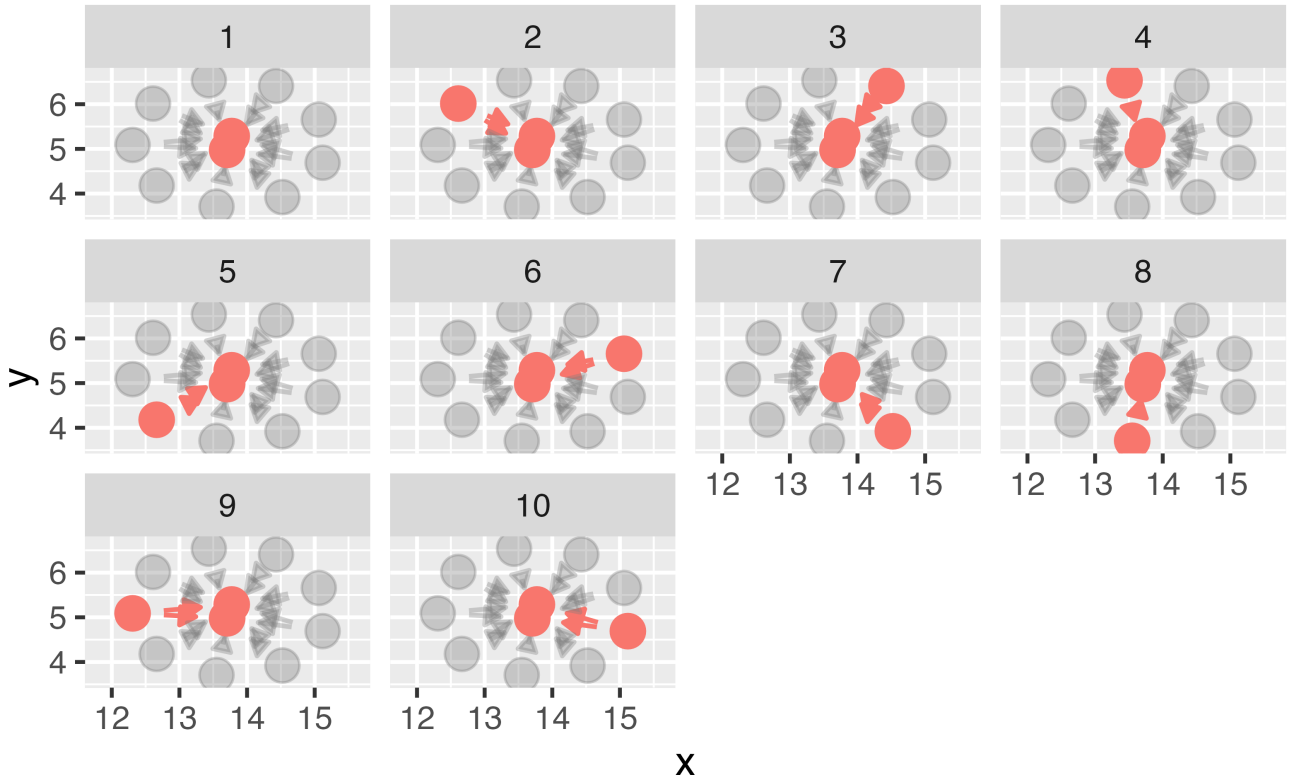
We want to know if x -> y...

But other paths also cause associations

ggdag_paths()

Identify "backdoor" paths

```
ggdag_paths(smk_wt_dag)
```


1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
y
x
6
5
4
12
13
14
15

Your Turn 2

Call tidy_dagitty() **on** coffee_cancer_dag **to create a tidy DAG, then pass the results to** dag_paths(). **What's different about these data?**

Plot the open paths with ggdag_paths(). **(Just give it** coffee_cancer_dag **rather than using** dag_paths()**; the quick plot function will do that for you.) Remember, since we assume there is no causal path from coffee to lung cancer, any open paths must be confounding pathways.**

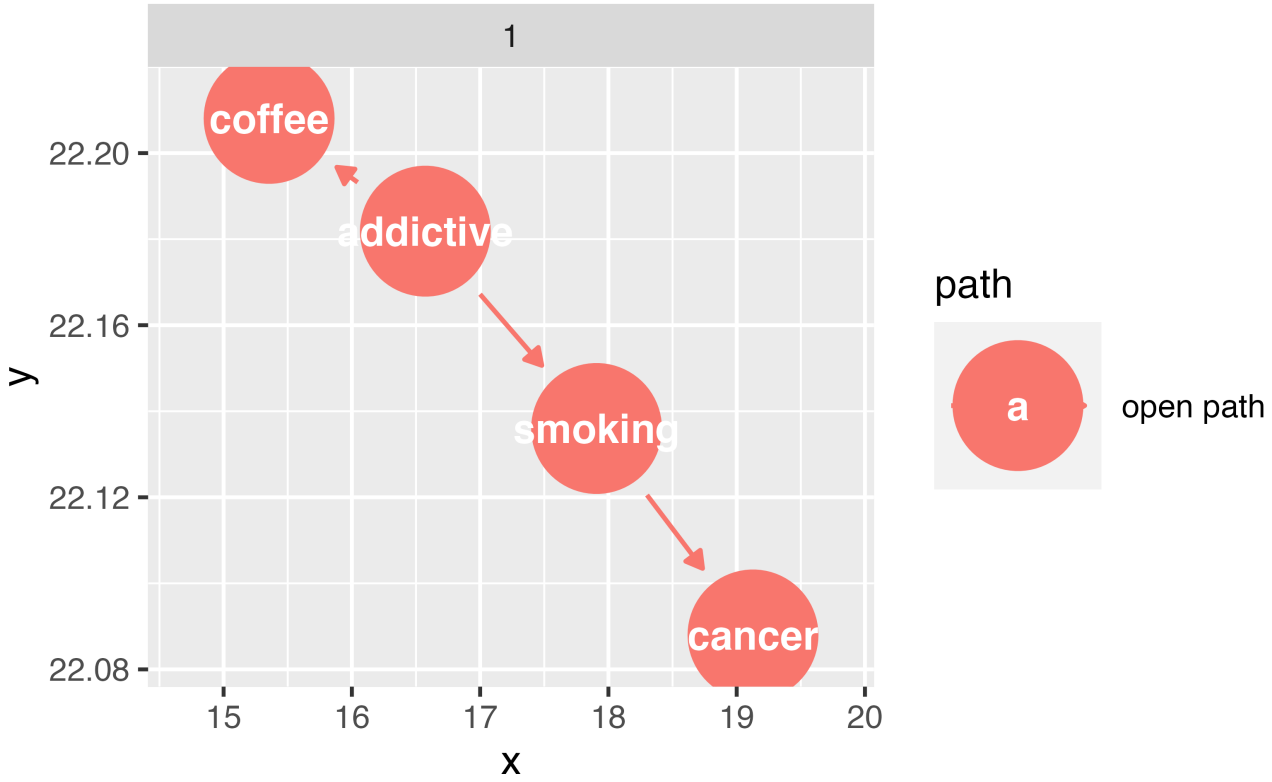
05:00

Your Turn 2

```
coffee_cancer_dag %>%
  tidy_dagitty() %>%
  dag_paths()
```

```
## # A DAG with 4 nodes and 3 edges
## #
## # Exposure: coffee
## # Outcome: cancer
## #
## # A tibble: 5 × 11
##   set   name          x     y direction to       xend  yend
##   <chr> <chr>     <dbl> <dbl> <fct>     <chr>   <dbl> <dbl>
## 1 1     addictive  25.7  28.1 ->        coffee   24.5  27.9
## 2 1     addictive  25.7  28.1 ->        smoking  27.1  28.2
## 3 1     smoking    27.1  28.2 ->        cancer   28.3  28.3
## 4 1     coffee     24.5  27.9 <NA>      <NA>     NA    NA
## 5 1     cancer     28.3  28.3 <NA>      <NA>     NA    NA
## # … with 3 more variables: circular <lgl>, label <chr>,
## #   path <chr>
```

```
coffee_cancer_dag %>%
  ggdag_paths()
```



Closing backdoor paths

Closing backdoor paths

We need to account for these open, non-causal paths

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Randomization

Closing backdoor paths

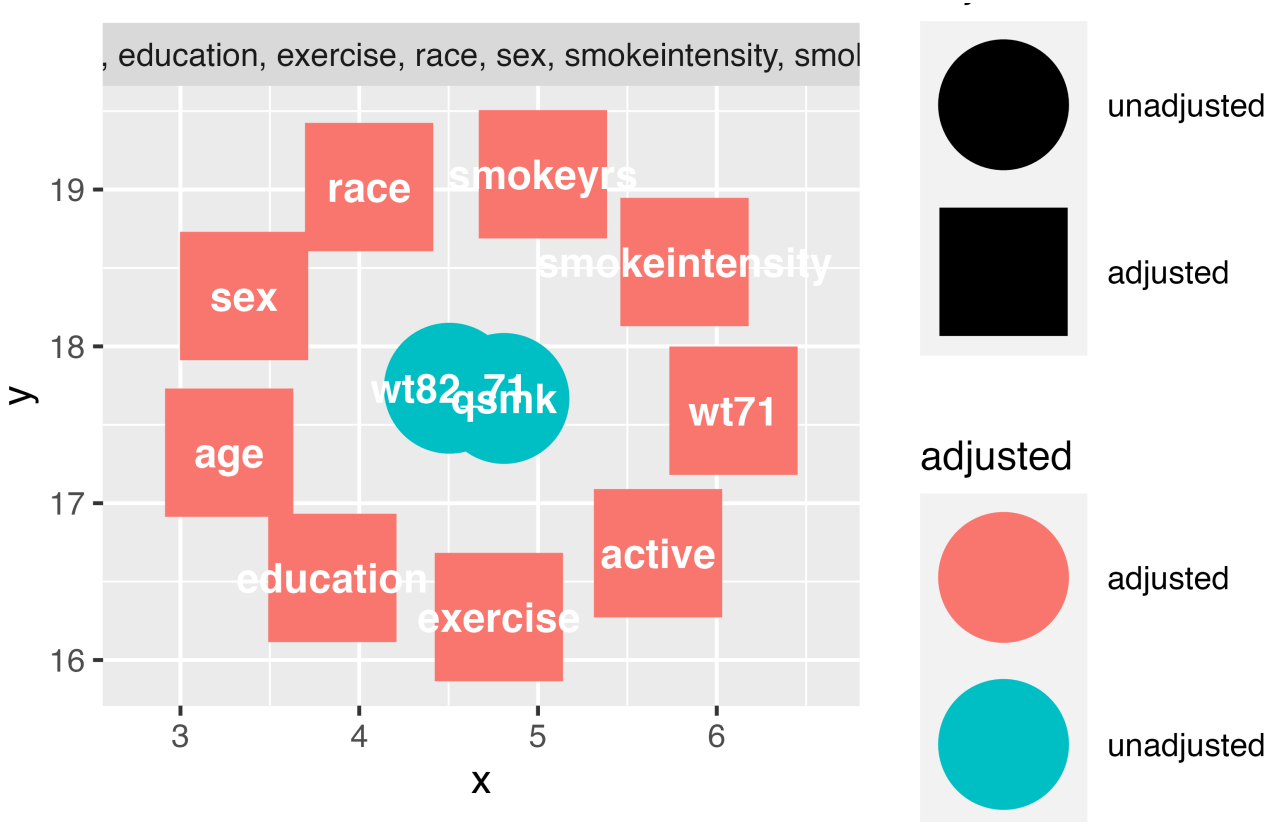
We need to account for these open, non-causal paths

Randomization

Stratification, adjustment, weighting, matching, etc.

Identifying adjustment sets

```
ggdag_adjustment_set(smk_wt_dag)
```


, education, exercise, race, sex, smokeintensity, smol
race
smokeyrs
sex
smokeintensity
wt82_71
qsmk
wt71
age
active
education
exercise
19
18
17
16
y
3
4
5
6
x
unadjusted
adjusted
adjusted
adjusted
unadjusted

Your Turn 3

Now that we know the open, confounding pathways (sometimes called "backdoor paths"), we need to know how to close them! First, we'll ask {ggdag} for adjustment sets, then we would need to do something in our analysis to account for at least one adjustment set (e.g. multivariable regression, weighting, or matching for the adjustment sets).

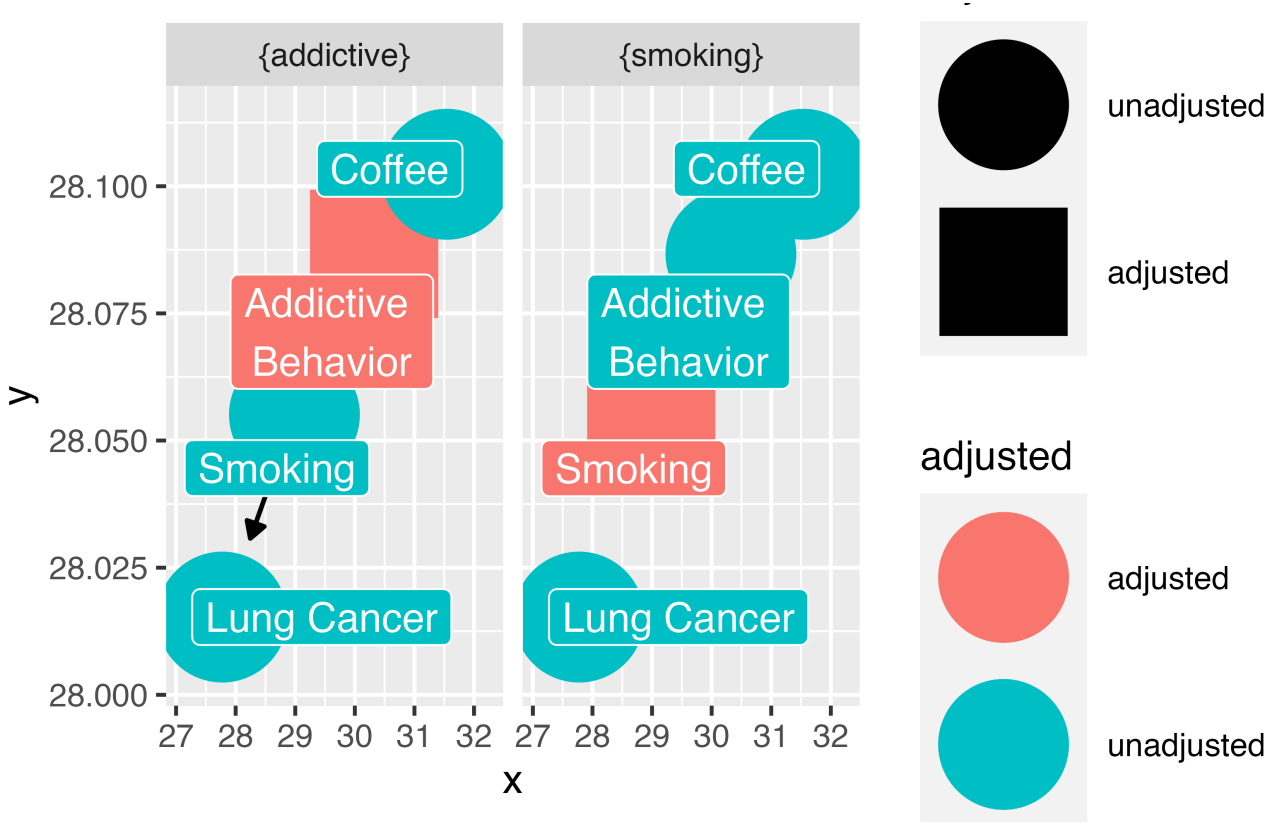
Use ggdag_adjustment_set() **to visualize the adjustment sets. Add the arguments** use_labels = "label" **and** text = FALSE**.**

Write an R formula for each adjustment set, as you might if you were fitting a model in lm() **or** glm()

05:00

Your Turn 3

```
ggdag_adjustment_set(
  coffee_cancer_dag,
  use_labels = "label",
  text = FALSE
)
```


{addictive}
{smoking}
Coffee
Addictive Behavior
Smoking
Lung Cancer
28.100
28.075
28.050
28.025
28.000
y
27 28 29 30 31 32
x
unadjusted
adjusted
adjusted
adjusted
unadjusted

Your Turn 3

```
cancer ~ coffee + addictive
cancer ~ coffee + smoking
```

Resources: ggdag vignettes

An Introduction to ggdag

An Introduction to Directed Acyclic Graphs

Common Structures of Bias