

Why model?

UCLA SOCIOL 114

Winter 2025

soc114.github.io

11 Feb 2025

Arc of the course

We began by asking causal questions

- ▶ Defining counterfactuals

Then we discussed causal assumptions

- ▶ Exchangeability and experiments
- ▶ Consistency and positivity
- ▶ Directed Acyclic Graphs

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5 weeks

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5 weeks

0 statistical models

Learning goals for today

At the end of class, you will be able to

- ▶ explain the curse of dimensionality
- ▶ recognize the possible futility of nonparametric estimation

Motivating a research question¹

Income inequality across households depends on

1. inequality across individuals
2. how individuals pool into households

A college degree affects (1) and (2)

¹[Mare 1991](#), [Schwartz 2013](#)

Research question

To what degree does finishing college increase the probability of having a spouse who finished college?

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To what degree does finishing college increase the probability of having a spouse who finished college?

Data. National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997

- ▶ Probability sample of U.S. non-institutional civilian youth age 12–16 on Dec 31 1996
- ▶ Surveyed annually 1997–2011, then biennially
- ▶ $n = 8,984$

Data access

To access these data, first

- ▶ set your working directory where you will be working
- ▶ download two supporting files from us
 1. [nlsy97.NLSY97](#) is a tagset file containing the variable names
 2. [prepare_nlsy97.R](#) is an R script to prepare the data

Data access

Now go to the data distributor

1. [Register](#) with the survey
2. [Log in](#) to the NLS Investigator
3. Choose the NLSY97 study
4. Upload the tagset [nlsy97.NLSY97](#) that you downloaded from us
5. In the Investigator, download the data. Type to change the file name from default to nlsy97
6. Unzip the file. Drag nlsy97.dat into the folder you will work in
7. In your R console, run the line of code below
 - ▶ this will take about 30 seconds to run
 - ▶ you will need these R packages: tidyverse and Amelia

```
source("prepare_nlsy97.R")
```

In the future, you can now load the data with

```
d <- readRDS("d.RDS")
```

Register with the survey

NLS Investigator

Tell us about yourself - Only email is required

| | |
|------------------|----------------------|
| First name: | <input type="text"/> |
| Last name: | <input type="text"/> |
| Organization: | <input type="text"/> |
| Email: * | <input type="text"/> |
| Confirm Email: * | <input type="text"/> |

Enter your username and password - All fields are required

| | |
|---|--------------------------|
| Username: * | <input type="text"/> |
| Username is automatically filled in from email field. | |
| Password: * | <input type="password"/> |
| Confirm password: * | <input type="password"/> |

Password must be 8 characters or more and contain at least one numeric and one non numeric character.
In addition the password must not be based on username.

☐ I agree to the NLS Investigator [Privacy Policy](#).

* Required field

Register

Choose the NLSY97 study

NLS Investigator

Select the study you want to work with:

NLSY97 (National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997) ▾

Select a substudy:

NLSY97 1997-2019 (rounds 1-19) ▾

Released November 01, 2021

Upload our tagset

Choose Tagsets

Variable Search

Review Selection

Upload Tagset (from PC):

Choose File

No file chosen

Upload

Download the data

| | | | | |
|----------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|----------|-----------------|
| Choose Tagsets | Variable Search | Review Selected Variables (6) | Codebook | Save / Download |
|----------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|----------|-----------------|

| | | | |
|-------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Save Tagset | Basic Download | Advanced Download | Manage Downloads |
|-------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------|

Customize your advanced download:

☒ **Create Download of Data**

- ☒ Tagset (list of selected variables)
- ☐ SAS® control file (includes the datafile of selected variables)
- ☐ SPSS® control file (includes the datafile of selected variables)
- ☐ STATA® dictionary file of selected variables
- ☒ R® Source code (includes the datafile of selected variables)
- ☒ Codebook of selected variables
- ☐ Short Description File
- ☒ Comma-delimited datafile of selected variables (to be read in Excel, etc.)
Column headers -- Use ☒ Reference Number ☐ Question Name (does not guarantee uniqueness)

☐ **Create Frequency / Table**

☐ **Apply Universe Restrictors** ([How to use Universe Restrictors](#))

☐ Notify me by email when download is complete.

Filename:

Filename must only contain alpha, numeric, hyphen or underscore characters.



Run our code

This code prepares the data file (one time, takes about 30 seconds)

```
source("prepare_NLSY97.R")
```

This code loads the prepared data (after the above, very fast)

```
d <- readRDS("d.RDS")
```

Research question

To what degree does finishing college increase the probability of having a spouse who finished college?

Research question

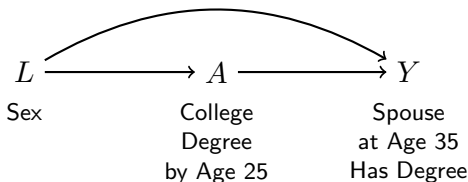
To what degree does finishing college increase the probability of having a spouse who finished college?

- ▶ Treatment A : Finished BA by age 25
- ▶ Outcome Y : Spouse or partner at age 30–40 holds a BA
 - ▶ 0 if no spouse or partner, or partner with no BA
 - ▶ 1 if spouse or partner holds a BA

Research question

To what degree does finishing college increase the probability of having a spouse who finished college?

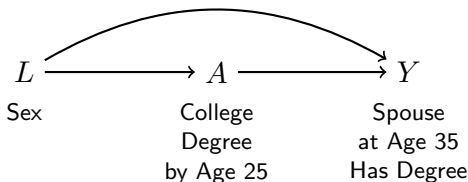
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Research question

To what degree does finishing college increase the probability of having a spouse who finished college?

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 - ▶ 0 if no spouse or partner, or partner with no BA
 - ▶ 1 if spouse or partner holds a BA



Adjustment procedure

- 1) Estimate within subgroups defined by $\{\text{sex}\}$
- 2) Aggregate over the subgroups

Data

```
d %>%  
  select(sex, a, y) %>%  
  print(n = 8)
```

```
# A tibble: 7,771 x 3  
  sex      a      y  
  <chr> <chr>   <lgl>  
1 Female college FALSE  
2 Male   no_college FALSE  
3 Female no_college FALSE  
4 Male   no_college TRUE  
5 Female no_college FALSE  
6 Male   no_college FALSE  
7 Female college FALSE  
8 Male   college TRUE  
# i 7,763 more rows
```

1) Estimate in subgroups

```
ybar_in_subgroups <- d %>%  
  # Group by confounders and treatment  
  group_by(sex, a) %>%  
  # Summarize mean outcomes and nber of cases  
  summarize(ybar = mean(y),  
            n = n(),  
            .groups = "drop") %>%  
  print()
```

A tibble: 4 x 4

| | sex | a | ybar | n |
|---|--------|------------|-------|-------|
| | <chr> | <chr> | <dbl> | <int> |
| 1 | Female | college | 0.467 | 896 |
| 2 | Female | no_college | 0.102 | 2953 |
| 3 | Male | college | 0.614 | 637 |
| 4 | Male | no_college | 0.174 | 3285 |

1) Estimate in subgroups

```
# A tibble: 4 x 4
  sex      a      ybar      n
<chr> <chr>   <dbl> <int>
1 Female college 0.467   896
2 Female no_college 0.102 2953
3 Male   college 0.614   637
4 Male   no_college 0.174 3285
```

1) Estimate in subgroups

```
# A tibble: 4 x 4
  sex      a      ybar      n
  <chr> <chr>    <dbl> <int>
1 Female college  0.467   896
2 Female no_college 0.102  2953
3 Male   college  0.614   637
4 Male   no_college 0.174  3285
```

```
pivoted <- ybar_in_subgroups %>%
  pivot_wider(names_from = a,
              values_from = c("ybar","n")) %>%
  print()
```

```
# A tibble: 2 x 5
  sex      ybar_college ybar_no_college n_college n_no_college
  <chr>          <dbl>          <dbl>      <int>      <int>
1 Female          0.467          0.102      896      2953
2 Male            0.614          0.174      637      3285
```

1) Estimate in subgroups

```
# A tibble: 2 x 5
  sex      ybar_college ybar_no_college n_college n_no_college
<chr>      <dbl>         <dbl>      <int>      <int>
1 Female    0.467         0.102      896      2953
2 Male      0.614         0.174      637      3285
```


1) Estimate in subgroups

```
# A tibble: 2 x 5
```

| | sex | ybar_college | ybar_no_college | n_college | n_no_college |
|---|--------|--------------|-----------------|-----------|--------------|
| | <chr> | <dbl> | <dbl> | <int> | <int> |
| 1 | Female | 0.467 | 0.102 | 896 | 2953 |
| 2 | Male | 0.614 | 0.174 | 637 | 3285 |

```
cate <- pivoted %>%  
  mutate(conditional_effect = ybar_college - ybar_no_college,  
         n_in_stratum = n_college + n_no_college) %>%  
  select(sex, conditional_effect, n_in_stratum) %>%  
  print()
```

```
# A tibble: 2 x 3
```

| | sex | conditional_effect | n_in_stratum |
|---|--------|--------------------|--------------|
| | <chr> | <dbl> | <int> |
| 1 | Female | 0.365 | 3849 |
| 2 | Male | 0.440 | 3922 |

2) Aggregate over subgroups

```
# A tibble: 2 x 3
  sex      conditional_effect n_in_stratum
<chr>          <dbl>          <int>
1 Female          0.365            3849
2 Male            0.440            3922
```

2) Aggregate over subgroups

```
# A tibble: 2 x 3
  sex      conditional_effect n_in_stratum
<chr>          <dbl>          <int>
1 Female          0.365            3849
2 Male            0.440            3922
```

```
cate %>%
  summarize(population_average_effect = weighted.mean(
    conditional_effect,
    w = n_in_stratum
  ))
```

```
# A tibble: 1 x 1
  population_average_effect
          <dbl>
1              0.403
```

Recap: Intuition

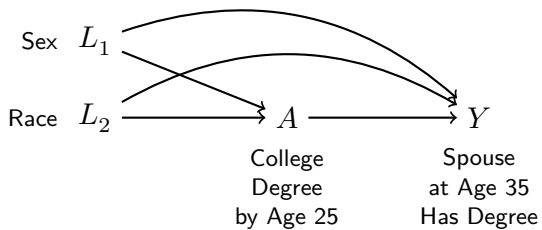
| | |
|--|--|
| <div data-bbox="358 241 428 262">College</div> <div data-bbox="344 581 441 601">No College</div> | <div data-bbox="937 218 1007 239">College</div> <div data-bbox="923 558 1020 579">No College</div> |
| Female | Male |

Recap: In code

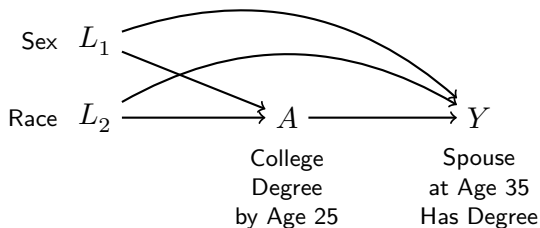
```
d %>%  
  # Group by confounders and treatment  
  group_by(sex, a) %>%  
  # Estimate within subgroups  
  summarize(ybar = mean(y),  
            n = n(),  
            .groups = "drop") %>%  
  pivot_wider(names_from = a,  
              values_from = c("ybar", "n")) %>%  
  mutate(conditional_effect = ybar_college - ybar_no_college,  
         n_in_stratum = n_college + n_no_college) %>%  
  # Aggregate over subgroups  
  summarize(population_average_effect = weighted.mean(  
    conditional_effect,  
    w = n_in_stratum  
  ))
```

```
# A tibble: 1 x 1  
  population_average_effect  
                <dbl>  
1                0.403
```

Adjust for sex and race



Adjust for sex and race



- 1) Estimate effects within subgroups defined by {sex, race}
- 2) Aggregate over subgroups

Adjust for sex and race

Hispanic



Female

Male

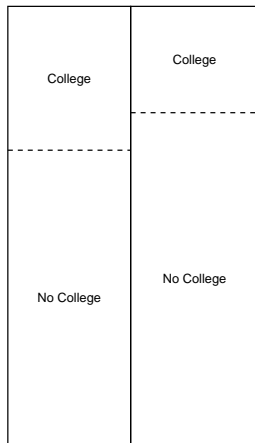
Non-Hispanic Black



Female

Male

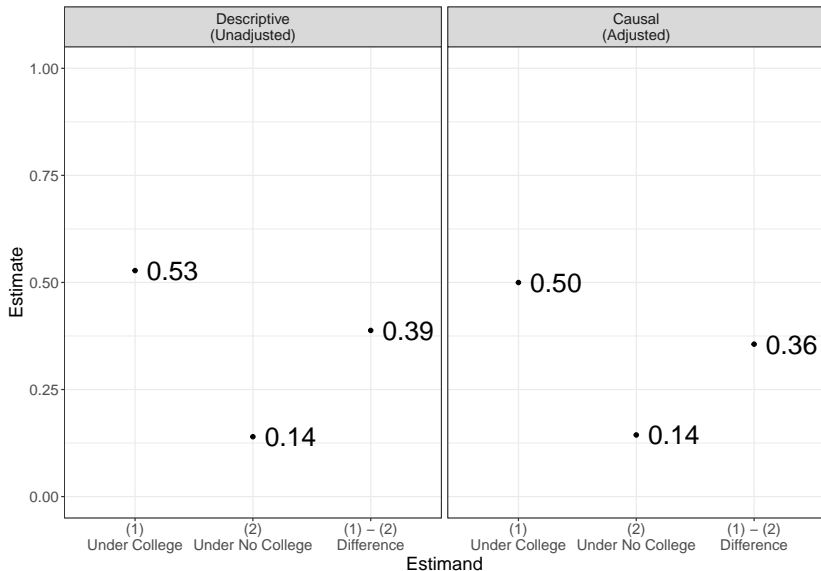
Non-Hispanic Non-Black



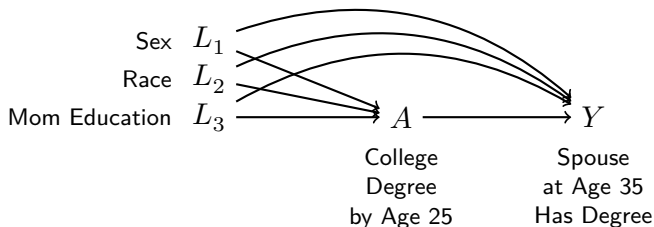
Female

Male

Adjust for sex and race

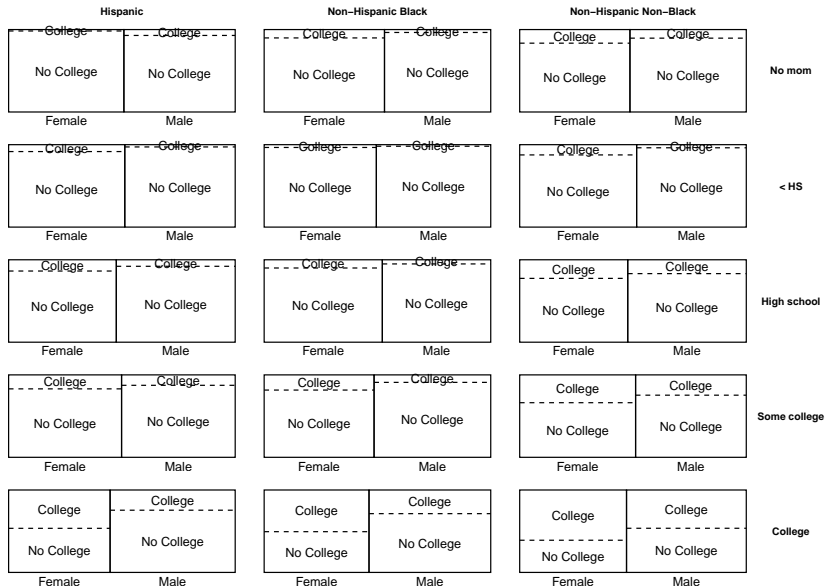


Adjust for sex, race, mom education

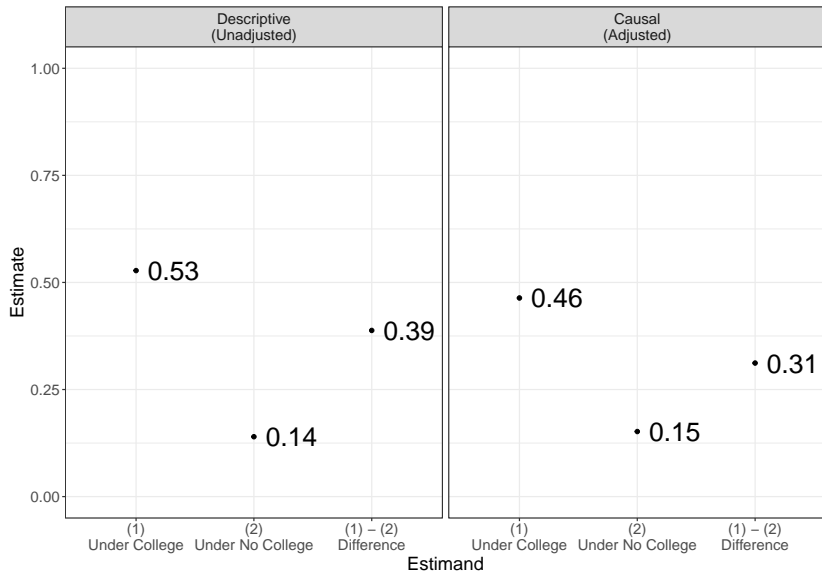


- 1) Estimate effects within subgroups defined by $\{\text{race, sex, mom education}\}$
- 2) Aggregate over subgroups

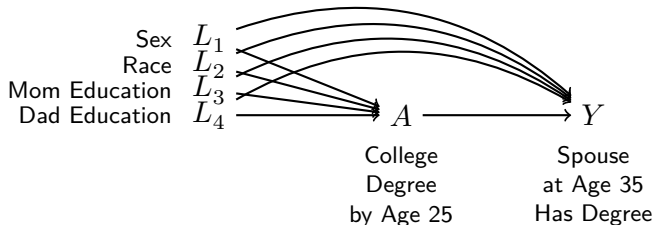
Adjust for sex, race, mom education



Adjust for sex, race, mom education

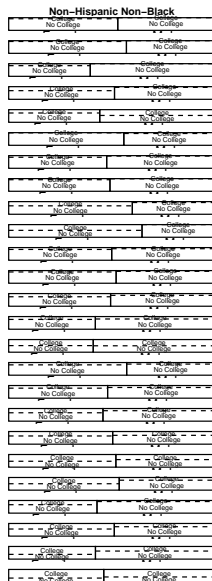
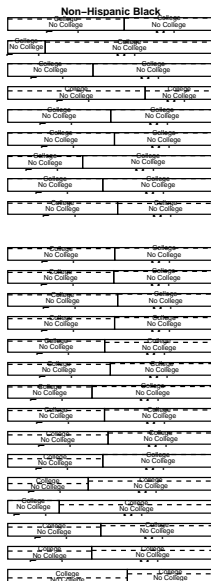
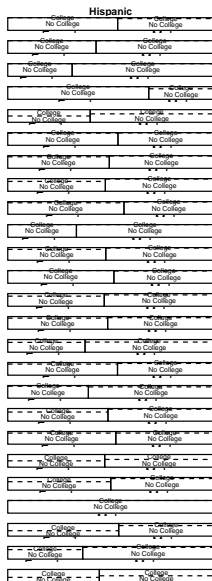


Adjust for sex, race, mom education, dad education



- 1) Estimate effects within subgroups defined by $\{\text{race, sex, mom education, dad education}\}$
- 2) Aggregate over subgroups

Adjust for sex, race, mom education, dad education



| | |
|--------------|--------------|
| No dad | No mom |
| < HS | No mom |
| High school | No mom |
| Some college | No mom |
| College | No mom |
| No dad | < HS |
| < HS | < HS |
| High school | < HS |
| Some college | < HS |
| College | < HS |
| No dad | High school |
| < HS | High school |
| High school | High school |
| Some college | High school |
| College | High school |
| No dad | Some college |
| < HS | Some college |
| High school | Some college |
| Some college | Some college |
| College | Some college |
| No dad | College |
| < HS | College |
| High school | College |
| Some college | College |
| College | College |

Adjust for sex, race, mom education, dad education



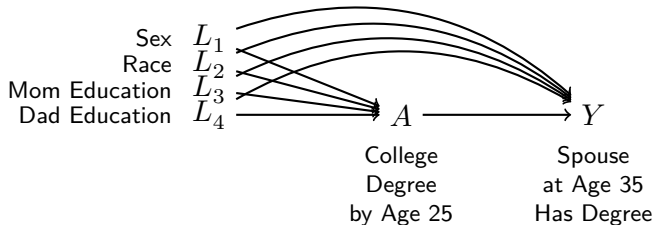
Curse of dimensionality: Unpopulated cells

```
# A tibble: 147 x 6
```

| | sex | race | mom_educ | dad_educ | n_college | n_no_college |
|----|--------|---------|-------------|--------------|-----------|--------------|
| | <chr> | <chr> | <fct> | <fct> | <int> | <int> |
| 1 | Female | H | No mom | No dad | NA | 32 |
| 2 | Female | H | No mom | < HS | NA | 6 |
| 3 | Female | H | No mom | High school | NA | 5 |
| 4 | Female | H | No mom | Some college | NA | 13 |
| 5 | Female | H | < HS | College | NA | 1 |
| 6 | Female | H | High school | < HS | NA | 34 |
| 7 | Female | Non-H B | No mom | < HS | NA | 2 |
| 8 | Female | Non-H B | No mom | High school | NA | 12 |
| 9 | Female | Non-H B | No mom | College | NA | 4 |
| 10 | Female | Non-H B | < HS | High school | NA | 24 |

```
# i 137 more rows
```


Curse of dimensionality



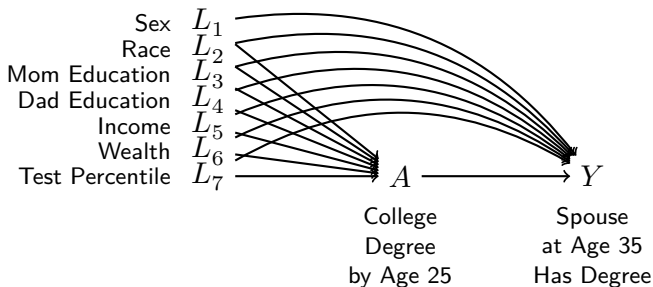
4.2% of the sample

is in a subgroup with either 0 treated or 0 untreated units

Curse of dimensionality



Curse of dimensionality



100% of the sample

is in a subgroup with either 0 treated or 0 untreated units

Learning goals for today

At the end of class, you will be able to

- ▶ explain the curse of dimensionality
- ▶ recognize the possible futility of nonparametric estimation

After class, you should

- ▶ read [Hernán & Robins Ch 11](#)
- ▶ attend discussion: you will learn to use models!