4.1 Practical: hierarchical models

Benjamin Rosenbaum

October 27, 2022

Aim: learn what a random effect is.

Learn about hierarchical levels of parameters. Bayesian statistics is great for hierarchical models! Random / mixed effects models (LMM, GLMM) can be more robust in a Bayesian framework than frequentist / maximum likelihood. Even nonlinear models with random / mixed effects are possible.

Think in terms of **no pooling**, **partial pooling** and **complete pooling** of parameters rather than **random effects** and **fixed effects**.

Setup

```
rm(list=ls())
library(rstan)
library(coda)
library(BayesianTools)
library(brms)

setwd("~/Nextcloud/teaching Bayes 2021")

rstan_options(auto_write = TRUE)
options(mc.cores = 4)
```

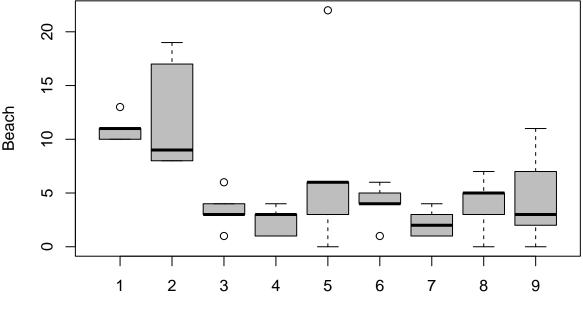
Read dataset

We load an example dataset from Zuur et al. 2009 "Mixed Effects Models and Extensions in Ecology with R". It contains Species Richness data for five samples each taken on different beaches. Additional covariate NAP is the height of a sampling station compared to mean tidal level.

We want to estimate mean species richness, and in this first session we'll ignore the predictor NAP and concentrate on fitting means only.

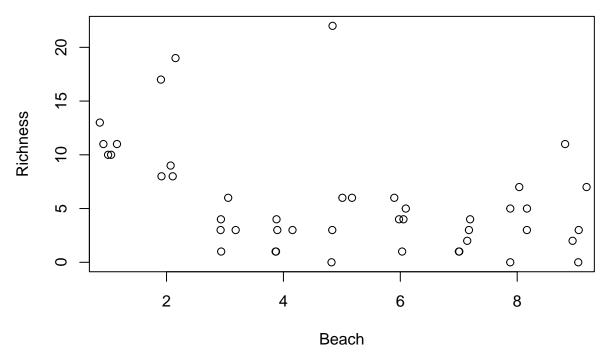
```
df = read.table("data/RIKZ.txt", header=TRUE)
head(df)
```

```
Sample Richness Exposure
                                   NAP Beach
##
## 1
          1
                   11
                            10 0.045
## 2
          2
                   10
                            10 -1.036
                                           1
## 3
          3
                   13
                            10 -1.336
                                           1
## 4
          4
                   11
                            10 0.616
                                           1
## 5
          5
                   10
                            10 -0.684
                                           1
## 6
                    8
                             8 1.190
```



Richness

```
plot(0, 0, xlim =c(1,9), ylim = range(df$Richness), type = "n",
    ylab="Richness",
    xlab="Beach")
points(Richness ~ jitter(as.numeric(Beach), factor=1), data=df)
```



The following approach is similar to frequentist ANOVA.

No pooling / Fixed effects model

We want to estimate the mean species richness per beach (=group), and test if there are differences between groups.

The statistical model is identical to yesterday's "t-test" model, but now there are more than 2 groups:

$$y_i \sim \text{normal}(a_{group(i)}, \sigma), \quad i = 1, ..., n \quad (n \text{ observations})$$

Note that there are no assumptions on a_j , i.e. the means of the different groups are estimated independently. They are assigned prior distributions, e.g.

$$a_j \sim \text{normal}(0, 10), \quad j = 1, ..., m \quad (m \text{ groups})$$

We use (very) weakly informative prior information on the a_j , but note that the priors for a_j are assigned independently. They could also have an individual prior distribution each if we want to.

"group" is treated as a fixed effect. Because there can be misunderstandings when using the terms "fixed effect" / "random effects", this is also called "no pooling". No information on the a_j is pooled across the groups. Keep that in mind for later!

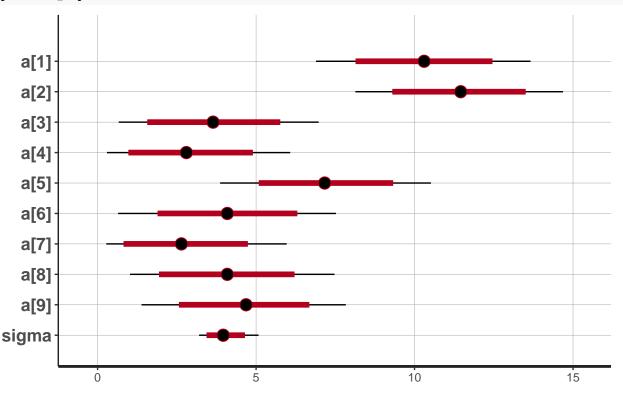
Here, we used the same variance across all groups (σ) , but we could also use different sigmas.

When preparing the data for Stan, note that we use as.integer() to code the factorial variable group, so we can use it as an index.

```
## $v
## [1] 11 10 13 11 10 8 9 8 19 17 6 1 4 3 3 1 3 3 1 4 3 22 6 0 6
## [26] 5 4 1 6 4 2 1 1 3 4
                                     3 5 7 5 0 7 11 3 0 2
##
## $group
## [1] 1 1 1 1 1 2 2 2 2 2 3 3 3 3 3 4 4 4 4 4 5 5 5 5 5 6 6 6 6 6 7 7 7 7 7 8 8 8
## [39] 8 8 9 9 9 9 9
##
## $n
## [1] 45
## $n_group
## [1] 9
stan_code_nopool =
data {
 int n;
 int n_group;
 real y[n];
  int group[n];
parameters {
 real<lower=0> a[n_group];
 real<lower=0> sigma;
}
model {
  // priors
 for (j in 1:n_group){
   a[j] ~ normal(5,5);
 sigma ~ normal(0,10);
 // likelihood
 for(i in 1:n){
   y[i] ~ normal( a[ group[i] ] , sigma);
 }
}
stan_model_nopool = stan_model(model_code=stan_code_nopool)
fit_nopool = sampling(stan_model_nopool, data=data)
print(fit_nopool, digits=3, probs=c(0.025, 0.975))
## Inference for Stan model: adfaa9670b959b5ad1ecaa70c59a9e09.
## 4 chains, each with iter=2000; warmup=1000; thin=1;
## post-warmup draws per chain=1000, total post-warmup draws=4000.
##
                                       97.5% n_eff Rhat
##
                                 2.5%
           mean se_mean
                           sd
## a[1]
         10.307
                 0.034 1.708
                                6.894 13.660 2544 1.000
## a[2]
        11.438
                  0.029 1.665
                                8.134 14.685 3389 1.000
## a[3]
          3.673
                 0.030 1.617
                               0.667
                                       6.974 2864 1.000
## a[4]
          2.892
                 0.037 1.518
                               0.296
                                       6.076 1656 1.001
## a[5]
          7.193
                 0.029 1.664
                                3.865 10.517 3300 1.000
## a[6]
          4.108
                 0.044 1.716
                                0.648
                                      7.519 1509 1.003
## a[7]
          2.752
                 0.031 1.504
                               0.274
                                      5.966 2398 1.000
```

```
## a[8]
                   0.035 1.651
                                         7.477 2245 1.001
          4.114
                                 1.024
## a[9]
          4.656
                  0.035 1.615
                                 1.387
                                         7.841 2089 1.000
## sigma
          4.015
                                         5.078
                                                2561 1.000
                   0.010 0.484
                                 3.201
        -71.644
                  0.106 3.029 -78.963 -67.214
                                                 817 1.002
## lp__
## Samples were drawn using NUTS(diag_e) at Mon Oct 11 14:30:01 2021.
## For each parameter, n_eff is a crude measure of effective sample size,
## and Rhat is the potential scale reduction factor on split chains (at
## convergence, Rhat=1).
```

plot(fit_nopool)



As in the "t-test" example from yesterday, we can look at the individual differences between groups, also called "contrasts". E.g., the posterior distribution of $a_4 - a_5$.

```
posterior_nopool = as.matrix(fit_nopool)

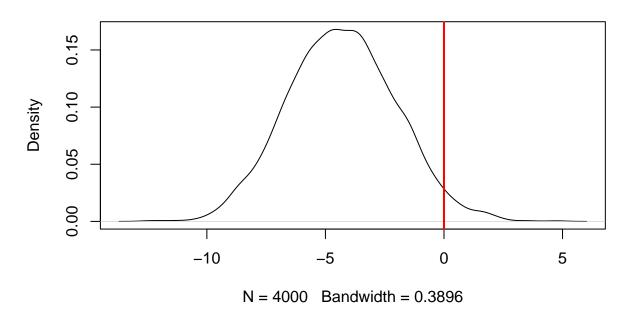
contrast45 = posterior_nopool[,"a[4]"]-posterior_nopool[,"a[5]"]

mean(contrast45)
```

```
## [1] -4.301041
sum(contrast45<0)/length(contrast45)</pre>
```

```
## [1] 0.97025
plot(density(contrast45))
abline(v=0, col="red", lwd=2)
```

density.default(x = contrast45)



Partial pooling / Random effects model

Until now, we assumed that the different group means a_j are completely independent and we fitted them all individually.

Assume we want to estimate overall species richness and we're not really interested in the exact richness of each beach. Then we can assume a joint mean μ_a across all groups (beaches) and each group mean a_j differs from this joint mean with a group-level standard deviation σ_a .

And we can explicitely model that:

$$y_i \sim \text{normal}(a_{group(i)}, \sigma), \quad i = 1, ..., n \quad (n \text{ observations})$$

 $a_j \sim \text{normal}(\mu_a, \sigma_a), \quad j = 1, ..., m \quad (m \text{ groups})$

This looks similar to the equations above, but instead of the prior distributions for a_j , we have a joint normal distribution with parameters mean μ_a and sdev σ_a . These are free parameters to be estimated, and get their own prior distributions, e.g.

$$\mu_a \sim \text{normal}(0, 10)$$

 $\sigma_a \sim \text{cauchy}(0, 1)^+$

For the joint mean μ_a , we can use the same expectation we used for the group means before.

For the between-groups standard deviation σ_a , it is standard procedure to use positive half-Chauchy distributions (student-t distribution with 1 degree of freedom, more heavy-tailed than a normal distribution).

 σ describes within-groups variation of response values as before and also gets its own prior.

Here, group is treated as a random effect. Some information is shared / pooled across groups. Each group data informs μ_a , σ_a , which then informs the other group means a_j and vice versa. This is also called "partial pooling"

Because a_j 's distribution depends on μ_a and σ_a , this is a **hierarchical model**. μ_a is a **population-level** parameter (first in hierarchy), while a_j are **group-level** parameters (second in hierarchy).

The partial pooling model differs from the no pooling model above only in the joint distribution of the a_j and additional parameters μ_a and σ_a (with their own priors).

```
stan_code_partpool = '
data {
  int n;
  int n_group;
 real y[n];
  int group[n];
}
parameters {
  real<lower=0> a[n_group];
  real<lower=0> sigma;
  real<lower=0> mu_a;
  real<lower=0> sigma_a;
}
model {
  // priors
  mu_a ~ normal(5, 5);
  sigma_a ~ cauchy(0, 10);
  for (j in 1:n_group){
    a[j] ~ normal(mu_a, sigma_a);
  }
  sigma ~ normal(0,10);
  // likelihood
  for(i in 1:n){
    y[i] ~ normal(a[group[i]], sigma);
}
stan_model_partpool = stan_model(model_code=stan_code_partpool)
fit_partpool = sampling(stan_model_partpool, data=data)
print(fit_partpool, digits=3, probs=c(0.025, 0.975))
## Inference for Stan model: c64ee8fef431865984092735c87e8060.
## 4 chains, each with iter=2000; warmup=1000; thin=1;
## post-warmup draws per chain=1000, total post-warmup draws=4000.
##
##
                                    2.5%
                                            97.5% n_eff Rhat
              mean se_mean
                              sd
## a[1]
             9.621
                     0.065 1.853
                                   5.880
                                           13.150
                                                    807 1.006
                                           13.954
## a[2]
            10.518
                     0.058 1.861
                                    6.731
                                                   1032 1.004
## a[3]
             4.006
                     0.046 1.618
                                   0.933
                                            7.212 1235 1.004
             3.333
                                   0.506
                                            6.589
                                                   975 1.006
## a[4]
                     0.052 1.621
## a[5]
             6.964
                     0.033 1.617
                                   3.898
                                           10.132
                                                   2458 1.001
             4.456
                                   1.274
                                            7.562 1540 1.004
## a[6]
                     0.041 1.608
## a[7]
             3.258
                     0.050 1.583
                                   0.495
                                            6.488 1013 1.004
## a[8]
             4.480
                     0.033 1.552
                                   1.407
                                            7.545
                                                   2251 1.000
## a[9]
             4.891
                     0.034 1.620
                                   1.711
                                            8.057
                                                   2318 1.003
## sigma
             4.099
                     0.013 0.503
                                   3.242
                                            5.211 1579 1.002
                                                   1517 1.004
             5.678
                     0.034 1.339
                                   2.918
                                            8.370
## mu_a
## sigma_a
             3.557
                     0.060 1.388
                                   1.132
                                            6.759
                                                   531 1.008
```

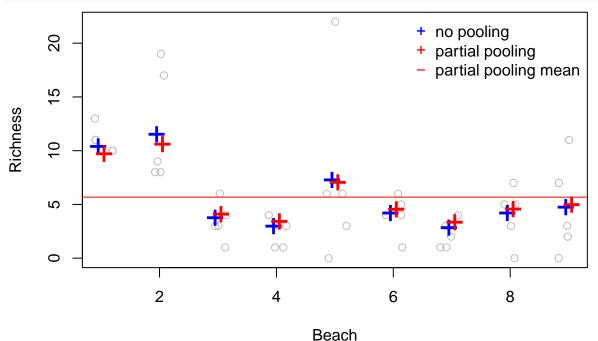
```
-81.918 0.150 3.311 -89.339 -76.523
## lp__
##
## Samples were drawn using NUTS(diag_e) at Mon Oct 11 14:31:47 2021.
## For each parameter, n_eff is a crude measure of effective sample size,
## and Rhat is the potential scale reduction factor on split chains (at
## convergence, Rhat=1).
plot(fit_partpool, pars="a") + xlim(c(0,15))
a[1]
a[2]
a[3]
a[4]
a[5]
a[6]
a[7]
a[8]
a[9]
                                                                                  15
plot(fit_partpool, pars=c("mu_a", "sigma_a", "sigma")) + xlim(c(0,15))
   mu_a
sigma_a
  sigma
                                                           10
                                                                                  15
```

Comparison

Now we compare the results of the "no pooling" and the "partial pooling" models.

The mean estimates for the parameters a_j can directly be extracted from the summary table.

```
summary_nopool = summary(fit_nopool)$summary
summary_partpool = summary(fit_partpool)$summary
```



The red line is overall mean μ_a , while individual groups have individual means.

The difference between "no pooling" and "partial pooling" estimates is that extreme values tend to be pulled towards the joint mean by partial pooling (**shrinkage**).

Statistical power is borrowed across groups. This can be helpful if some groups have a low number of observations.

In addition to both models, there is also **complete pooling**. Here, all information across groups would be pooled:

$$y_i \sim \text{normal}(\mu, \sigma), \quad i = 1, ...n$$

There is no effect of group included, i.e. all groups share the same mean.

"partial pooling" is a compromise between "no pooling" and "complete pooling".

Further reading

Read more about complete pooling, partial pooling, no pooling and shrinkage:

https://www.tjmahr.com/plotting-partial-pooling-in-mixed-effects-models/

brms complete pooling

We start with the "complete pooling" model in brms, which fits just the mean species richness (intercept only), ignoring the predictor Beach.

```
fit.b.compl = brm( Richness ~ 1,
                   data=df )
fit.b.compl
   Family: gaussian
##
    Links: mu = identity; sigma = identity
## Formula: Richness ~ 1
      Data: df (Number of observations: 45)
##
##
     Draws: 4 chains, each with iter = 2000; warmup = 1000; thin = 1;
            total post-warmup draws = 4000
##
##
## Population-Level Effects:
             Estimate Est.Error 1-95% CI u-95% CI Rhat Bulk_ESS Tail_ESS
##
                           0.73
                                    4.14
                                              7.01 1.00
## Intercept
                 5.63
##
## Family Specific Parameters:
         Estimate Est.Error 1-95% CI u-95% CI Rhat Bulk_ESS Tail_ESS
##
             5.07
                       0.54
                                4.14
                                          6.27 1.00
                                                        3090
                                                                 2351
## sigma
##
## Draws were sampled using sampling(NUTS). For each parameter, Bulk_ESS
## and Tail_ESS are effective sample size measures, and Rhat is the potential
## scale reduction factor on split chains (at convergence, Rhat = 1).
```

brms no pooling

Next, "no pooling" fits each level of the categorical predictor Beach separately. But first we must code Beach as a factor, otherwise it would be interpreted as a continuous predictor.

```
str(df)
```

```
45 obs. of 5 variables:
## 'data.frame':
##
   $ Sample : int 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ...
  $ Richness: int 11 10 13 11 10 8 9 8 19 17 ...
## $ Exposure: int
                    10 10 10 10 10 8 8 8 8 8 . . .
                    0.045 -1.036 -1.336 0.616 -0.684 ...
   $ NAP
              : num
   $ Beach
                    1 1 1 1 1 2 2 2 2 2 ...
              : int
df$Beach = as.factor(df$Beach)
fit.b.no = brm( Richness ~ Beach,
                data=df )
```

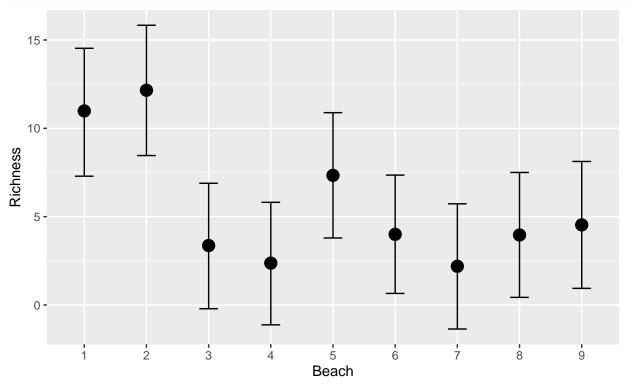
Like lm(), brms uses dummy coding for categorical predictors. I.e., it does not fit the means for each level, but an Intercept for the first level and an "effect" (difference to the intercept) for all other levels.

```
fit.b.no
```

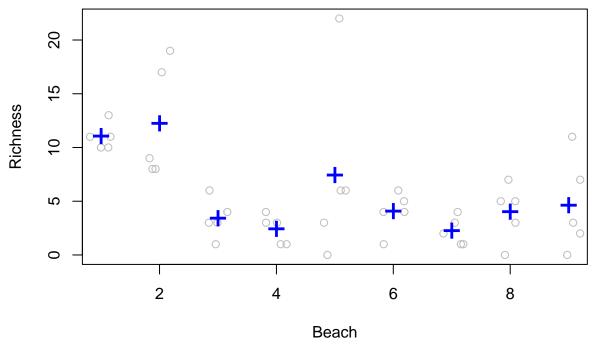
```
## Family: gaussian
## Links: mu = identity; sigma = identity
## Formula: Richness ~ Beach
## Data: df (Number of observations: 45)
## Draws: 4 chains, each with iter = 2000; warmup = 1000; thin = 1;
```

```
##
            total post-warmup draws = 4000
##
## Population-Level Effects:
             Estimate Est.Error 1-95% CI u-95% CI Rhat Bulk_ESS Tail_ESS
##
## Intercept
                10.97
                            1.82
                                     7.29
                                              14.53 1.00
                                                              1105
                                                                       1511
                 1.18
                            2.61
                                    -3.80
                                               6.36 1.00
                                                              1709
                                                                       2510
## Beach2
## Beach3
                -7.64
                            2.57
                                   -12.73
                                              -2.29 1.00
                                                                       2288
                                                              1584
                -8.63
                                   -13.59
## Beach4
                            2.58
                                              -3.461.00
                                                              1456
                                                                       1716
                -3.63
## Beach5
                            2.55
                                    -8.47
                                               1.53 1.00
                                                              1642
                                                                       2469
                -6.98
                                   -11.93
## Beach6
                            2.51
                                              -1.84 1.00
                                                              1504
                                                                       2154
## Beach7
                -8.80
                            2.60
                                   -13.94
                                              -3.54 1.00
                                                              1626
                                                                       2095
## Beach8
                -7.03
                            2.59
                                   -12.03
                                              -1.90 1.00
                                                                       2313
                                                              1684
                -6.43
## Beach9
                            2.60
                                   -11.45
                                              -1.11 1.00
                                                              1620
                                                                       2231
##
## Family Specific Parameters:
##
         Estimate Est.Error 1-95% CI u-95% CI Rhat Bulk_ESS Tail_ESS
             4.02
                        0.49
                                 3.24
                                           5.16 1.00
                                                          3677
                                                                   2558
## sigma
##
## Draws were sampled using sampling(NUTS). For each parameter, Bulk_ESS
## and Tail ESS are effective sample size measures, and Rhat is the potential
## scale reduction factor on split chains (at convergence, Rhat = 1).
```

However, when using conditional_effects() or fitted(), the group means in each level are predicted. plot(conditional_effects(fit.b.no))



```
levels = levels(df$Beach)
for(i in 1:9){
   group.mean = fitted(fit.b.no, newdata=data.frame(Beach=levels[i]) )
   points(i, group.mean[, 1], pch="+", col="blue", cex=2 )
}
```



brms partial pooling

With a partial pooling model, we're not interested in Beach as a fixed effect, but fit an overall intercept or mean, while each group level prediction has a random intercept.

```
fit.b.part = brm( Richness ~ (1|Beach), # same as "Richness ~ 1+(1|Beach)"
                  data=df )
fit.b.part
    Family: gaussian
     Links: mu = identity; sigma = identity
##
## Formula: Richness ~ (1 | Beach)
##
      Data: df (Number of observations: 45)
     Draws: 4 chains, each with iter = 2000; warmup = 1000; thin = 1;
##
            total post-warmup draws = 4000
##
##
  Group-Level Effects:
   ~Beach (Number of levels: 9)
##
                 Estimate Est.Error 1-95% CI u-95% CI Rhat Bulk_ESS Tail_ESS
##
                     3.46
                                1.21
                                         1.50
                                                  6.25 1.00
                                                                 1213
                                                                          1602
  sd(Intercept)
##
## Population-Level Effects:
##
             Estimate Est.Error 1-95% CI u-95% CI Rhat Bulk ESS Tail ESS
                                     2.97
## Intercept
                 5.49
                           1.27
                                              7.94 1.00
                                                             1579
                                                                      1522
## Family Specific Parameters:
```

```
## Estimate Est.Error 1-95% CI u-95% CI Rhat Bulk_ESS Tail_ESS
## sigma 4.07 0.50 3.23 5.19 1.00 2417 2548
##
## Draws were sampled using sampling(NUTS). For each parameter, Bulk_ESS
## and Tail_ESS are effective sample size measures, and Rhat is the potential
## scale reduction factor on split chains (at convergence, Rhat = 1).
```

In the summary table, population-level mean μ_a is presented as Intercept, while for the group-level effects only their standard deviation σ_a is presented as sd(Intercept). The residual standard deviation is σ is sigma. brms always uses the variable names sigma for residuals and sd for random effects.

When interested in the single group-level effects, use ranef()

ranef(fit.b.part)

```
## $Beach
  , , Intercept
##
##
##
       Estimate Est.Error
                                Q2.5
                                        Q97.5
## 1
     4.1001769
                2.077448
                          0.2888656 8.323663
## 2 4.9871039 2.154849
                          0.8611748 9.347415
## 3 -1.5010852 1.870968 -5.2156725 2.109744
## 4 -2.2602815
                1.885351 -6.0119151 1.430784
## 5 1.4486500
                1.928202 -2.1606646 5.419085
## 6 -1.0941946 1.877480 -4.8437490 2.514381
## 7 -2.4196677
                 1.901968 -6.3006079 1.103256
## 8 -1.0637608 1.850571 -4.6964704 2.587625
## 9 -0.6486799 1.884597 -4.4507644 2.918655
```

Now we see how brms fits these. Instead of presenting the single a_j (group-level means), the difference $\alpha_j = a_j - \mu_a$ from the overall mean μ_a is shown! This is an equivalent model formulation using $a_j = \mu_a + \alpha_j$ with

```
y_i \sim \text{normal}(\mu_a + \alpha_{group(i)}, \sigma), \quad i = 1, ..., n \quad (n \text{ observations})

\alpha_j \sim \text{normal}(0, \sigma_a), \quad j = 1, ..., m \quad (m \text{ groups})
```

assuming that mean difference is zero (and same standard deviation σ_a). This formulation is helpful, especially when there are more than one random effects, e.g. y ~ 1 + (1|x1) + (1|x2).

But wait... what about priors, we didn't define any. What did brms choose?

```
print(prior_summary(fit.b.part, all = FALSE), show_df = FALSE)
```

```
## Intercept ~ student_t(3, 4, 4.4)
## <lower=0> sd ~ student_t(3, 0, 4.4)
## <lower=0> sigma ~ student_t(3, 0, 4.4)
```

brms automatically took care on the random effects structure for the a_j / or rather the α_j (not shown here). Default priors (based on the values of y) are assigned for the μ_a (Intercept), σ_a (sd) and σ (sigma).

If we want to assign priors e.g. for the overall mean, we can do so:

```
fit.b.part
   Family: gaussian
    Links: mu = identity; sigma = identity
##
## Formula: Richness ~ (1 | Beach)
      Data: df (Number of observations: 45)
##
##
     Draws: 4 chains, each with iter = 2000; warmup = 1000; thin = 1;
##
            total post-warmup draws = 4000
##
## Group-Level Effects:
## ~Beach (Number of levels: 9)
##
                 Estimate Est.Error 1-95% CI u-95% CI Rhat Bulk_ESS Tail_ESS
## sd(Intercept)
                               1.22
                                        1.45
                                                  6.28 1.00
                                                                1183
##
## Population-Level Effects:
             Estimate Est.Error 1-95% CI u-95% CI Rhat Bulk_ESS Tail_ESS
## Intercept
                 5.67
                           1.35
                                    3.09
                                             8.44 1.01
                                                            1079
                                                                     1396
##
## Family Specific Parameters:
         Estimate Est.Error 1-95% CI u-95% CI Rhat Bulk_ESS Tail_ESS
             4.07
                       0.51
                                3.23
                                         5.20 1.00
                                                        2609
                                                                 2982
## sigma
##
## Draws were sampled using sampling(NUTS). For each parameter, Bulk_ESS
## and Tail_ESS are effective sample size measures, and Rhat is the potential
## scale reduction factor on split chains (at convergence, Rhat = 1).
ranef(fit.b.part)
## $Beach
## , , Intercept
##
       Estimate Est.Error
                                Q2.5
                                        Q97.5
## 1 3.9208242 2.068261 0.1170315 8.194879
## 2 4.8630510 2.147823 0.8017441 9.340667
## 3 -1.6731544 1.910771 -5.5480820 1.964943
## 4 -2.4141567 1.946965 -6.4995070 1.240531
## 5 1.2436709 1.912178 -2.4964078 5.030099
## 6 -1.2714226 1.946873 -5.2263237 2.426271
## 7 -2.5599606 2.015151 -6.5917169 1.219517
## 8 -1.2367727 1.907484 -4.9749819 2.365029
## 9 -0.7832589 1.904452 -4.6440013 2.985740
print(prior_summary(fit.b.part, all = FALSE), show_df = FALSE)
## Intercept ~ normal(5, 5)
## <lower=0> sd ~ student_t(3, 0, 4.4)
## <lower=0> sigma ~ student_t(3, 0, 4.4)
Next we want to plot some predictions.
plot( conditional_effects(fit.b.part) )
## Error in h(simpleError(msg, call)): error in evaluating the argument 'x' in selecting a method for f
```

The convenient function conditional effects() prints an error message. It only plots fixed effects, and

since there are none (except for the intercept μ_a), it doesn't plot anything.

So we have to do this manually using fitted() and specifying the group-level a_j newdata=data.frame(Beach=...), or specifying no group level newdata=data.frame(Beach=NA) which predicts on the population level μ_a .

```
plot(0, 0, xlim =c(1,9), ylim = range(df$Richness), type = "n",
     vlab="Richness",
     xlab="Beach")
points(Richness ~ jitter(as.numeric(Beach), factor=1.0), data=df, col="grey")
levels = levels(df$Beach)
for(i in 1:9){
  group.mean = fitted(fit.b.no, newdata=data.frame(Beach=levels[i]) )
 points(i-0.05, group.mean[, 1], pch="+", col="blue", cex=2 )
for(i in 1:9){
  group.mean = fitted(fit.b.part, newdata=data.frame(Beach=levels[i]) )
 points(i+0.05, group.mean[, 1], pch="+", col="red", cex=2 )
total.mean = fitted(fit.b.part, newdata=data.frame(Beach=NA) )
abline(h = mean(total.mean), col="red")
legend("topright",
       legend=c("no pooling", "partial pooling", "partial pooling mean"),
       pch=c("+","+","-"),
       col=c("blue","red","red"),
       bty="n")
```

