

Sampling from a Population

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Activity

I've brought with me a bag containing 100 pieces of candy, it is your job to correctly determine the weight of the bag

With your group, you will:

1. Sample 5 candy pieces from the bag
2. Weigh your sample
3. Multiply your sample's weight by 20 to get an estimate the entire bag's weight
4. Return your sample to the bag

The group (both sections included) whose estimate is closest to the bag's weight will be given the entire bag to consume or distribute as they see fit (no eating during class though)

How Accurate is an Estimate?

Today we will discuss sampling from a population. A lot of effort in statistics is devoted to analyzing data, but how the data are collected is *absolutely critical* - often *much more important* than the analysis techniques used

Today we will discuss the following concepts:

- ▶ **Populations** versus **samples**
- ▶ **Statistical inference**
- ▶ **Simple random samples**
- ▶ **Bias** and **Variability**
- ▶ Sources of bias

Populations vs. Samples

Every statistical analysis begins with a question - ie: How much does the bag of candy weigh?

- ▶ The obvious approach is to weigh the entire bag
- ▶ But what if your access to the bag is limited?
- ▶ In our example, the 100 pieces of candy in the bag represents a **population** - all of the cases we want to learn about
- ▶ I didn't allow you access to the entire population, but rather a **sample** - a subset of cases from the population

We describe the size of a sample using the letter n , ie: $n = 5$

Practice

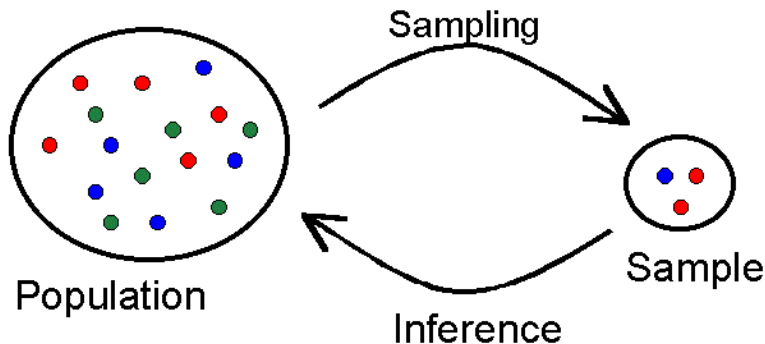
In a study on hand washing researchers in several cities across the United States pretended to comb their hair in public restrooms while observing whether or not people washed their hands after going to the bathroom. They found that 85% of the 6,000 individuals they observed washed their hands.

What is the population in this study? What is the sample?

- ▶ It is reasonable to conclude the population is all people in the US that use public restrooms
- ▶ But people are likely to behave differently when someone else is in the restroom with them
- ▶ It would be wise to restrict the population to people in the US using a restroom with another occupant

Statistical Inference

- ▶ A *fundamental goal* of statistics is to use the information in a sample to make reliable statements about a population
- ▶ The process of using data from a sample to reach conclusions about a population is called **statistical inference**



Now Let's Weigh the Bag

*I didn't know what the class estimates would be when I made these slides. . . but I predict that all of them are **way too high!***

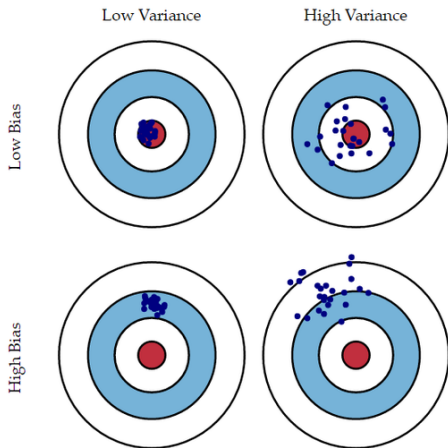
Simple Random Samples

- ▶ It is essential for a sample to be **representative** of the population for statistical inference to be valid
- ▶ The best way to get representative samples is to use **random sampling**
- ▶ Random is NOT the same as haphazard, was your sample of candy random? How could you make it random?

It has been well-studied that humans are surprisingly bad at randomness (unable to generate realistic sequences of coin flips for example). Technology has been a major boon to random sampling and the field of statistics

Bias and Variability

There are two reasons why a sample might not accurately represent a population, **bias** and **variability**:



Variance decreases for larger sample sizes
Bias is not improved by a larger sample

Case Study - The 1936 President Election

- ▶ In 1936, Franklin Roosevelt was up for re-election versus Republican candidate Alfred Landon
- ▶ The country was in the midst of the Great Depression with nearly 20% of the country unemployed and real income at roughly two-thirds of what it was in 1929 before the depression
- ▶ Roosevelt and Landon had very different views about the role of government in bringing the United States out of the depression

Case Study - The 1936 President Election

- ▶ Since 1916, the *Literary Digest* magazine had correctly predicted the winner of 5 straight presidential elections
- ▶ Prior to the 1936 election, the *Literary Digest* sample 2.4 million people and predicted a landslide victory for Landon: 57% - 43%
- ▶ In the actual election, Roosevelt won by a landslide: 62% - 38%

How could the Digest have been so far off?

Case Study - The 1936 President Election

Selection Bias

- ▶ The *Literary Digest* mailed 10 million questionnaires to addresses they gathered from telephone books and club memberships
- ▶ This disproportionately screened out the poor; Only 1 in 4 households owned a telephone at the time, and club members tended to be upper class
- ▶ Selection bias resulted in a non-representative sample

Non-response Bias

- ▶ Of the 10 million questionnaires, only 2.4 million were returned
- ▶ Responders tend to be different from non-responders
- ▶ The 2.4 million respondents likely weren't even representative of the 10 million people polled

That was 1936, surely the modern press understands sampling bias... right?

Case Study - CTE and Football

Chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) is degenerative brain disease found in individuals with a history of repetitive brain trauma. In July 2017 a paper published in JAMA by researchers at Boston University generated a lot of media buzz:

- ▶ *"CTE in 99% of former NFL player's brains in new study"* - Sports Illustrated
- ▶ *"111 NFL Brains. All But One Had CTE"* - NY Times
- ▶ *"CTE found in 99% of studied brains from deceased NFL players"* - CNN
- ▶ *"99% of Deceased NFL Players in One Study Had CTE"* - Forbes
- ▶ *"Brain disease affects 99% of NFL players in study"* - BBC News

Case Study - CTE and Football

Article Link: "I'm a brain scientist and I let my son play football"

The study population in the most recent CTE paper represents a biased sample, as stated by the authors themselves. This means only the brains of self-selecting people who displayed neurological symptoms while living were studied. This is important because this sample was not a reflection of the general football population. The study was based on 202 brains out of the millions of people who've played football – 111 of which are former NFL players.

So, when you hear "99 percent of football players had CTE," that doesn't mean that almost every football player will get CTE, and it doesn't mean your child has a 99-percent chance of developing CTE if he or she plays football. It means 99 percent of a specifically selected study sample had some degree of CTE; not 99 percent of the general football population. This is an important distinction.

Examples of Sampling Bias - CTE and Football (cont.)

Because of this sampling bias, we cannot estimate the prevalence or incidence of CTE (meaning the total number of cases and the number of new cases expected each year in football players); nor can we establish risk or a cause-effect relationship between head injury and development of CTE. To do that you need a randomly selected population comprised of people with the disease and people without the disease.

Some Other Sources of Bias

When collecting data it is *crucial* to be aware of potential sources of bias, some examples include:

1. Social Desirability Bias - Respondents tend to answer questions in ways that portray themselves in a positive light [Link](#)
2. Habituation Bias - Respondents tend to provide similar answers for similarly worded or structured questions (the brain going on autopilot) [Link](#)
3. Leading Questions - The wording of a question impacts how people respond, great examples in the textbook
4. Cultural Bias - Questions are often to be constructed with one's own culture in mind, they might not even make sense to people from other cultures.

This isn't a complete list, there are countless reasons for data not being representative of the population of interest

Practice

With your group, discuss whether each of the following are a **sample** or a **population**. If the data are a sample, describe the target population and whether the sample is biased

1. To estimate the size of trout in a lake, an angler records the weight of the 12 trout he catches over a weekend
2. A subscription based music website tracks the listening history of its active users
3. The Department of Transportation announces that of the 250 million registered cars in the US, 2.1% are hybrids
4. An online poll seeking to learn about adult workers asks:
“What do you think of having an everyday uniform for work, like what Steve Jobs did?” 24% of people said they loved the idea

Conclusion

Right now you should. . .

1. Be able to describe the population represented by a sample
2. Understand the importance of random sampling
3. Be able to recognize sources of bias
4. Know that the phrase *statistical inference* refers to the process of using a sample to learn about a population

These notes cover Section 1.2 of the textbook, I encourage you to read through the section and its examples