

Why model?

UCLA SOCIOL 114

Winter 2025

soc114.github.io

11 Feb 2025

Arc of the course

- ▶ Working with data
- ▶ Inference without models
- ▶ Inference with models

Learning goals for today (Part 1)

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)

¹Mare 1991, Schwartz 2013

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?

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. [nlisy97.NLSY97](#) is a tagset file containing the variable names
 2. [prepare_nlisy97.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?

- ▶ 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?

- ▶ 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



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

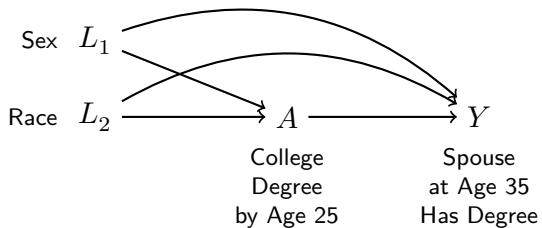
<div data-bbox="358 239 428 262">College</div> <div data-bbox="344 581 441 603">No College</div>	<div data-bbox="937 216 1007 239">College</div> <div data-bbox="923 556 1020 579">No College</div>
Female	Male

Recap: In code

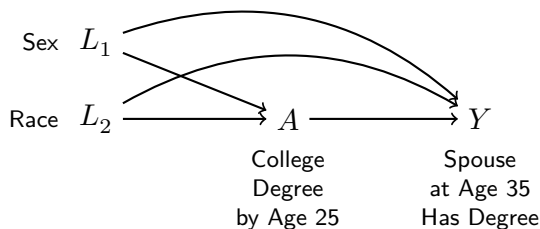
```
d %>%  
  # Group by confounders and treatment  
  group_by(sex, a) %>%  
  # Estimate within subgroups  
  summarize(ybar = mean(y),  
            n = n(),  
            .groups = "drop") %>%  
  pivot_wider(names_from = a,  
              values_from = c("ybar", "n")) %>%  
  mutate(conditional_effect = 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

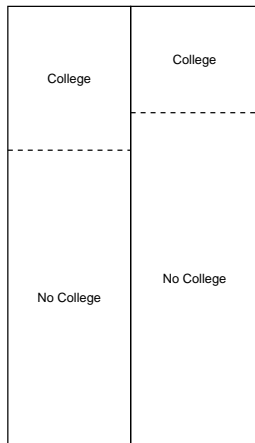
Non-Hispanic Black



Female

Male

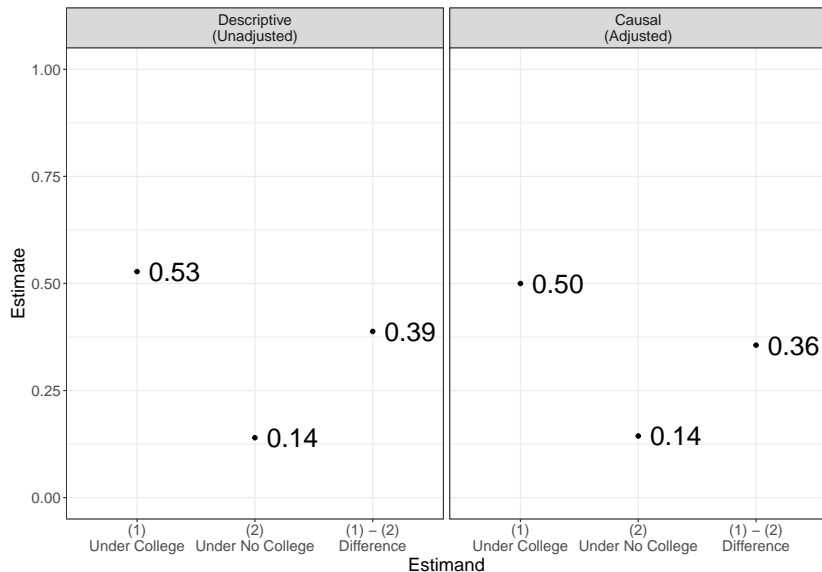
Non-Hispanic Non-Black



Female

Male

Adjust for sex and race

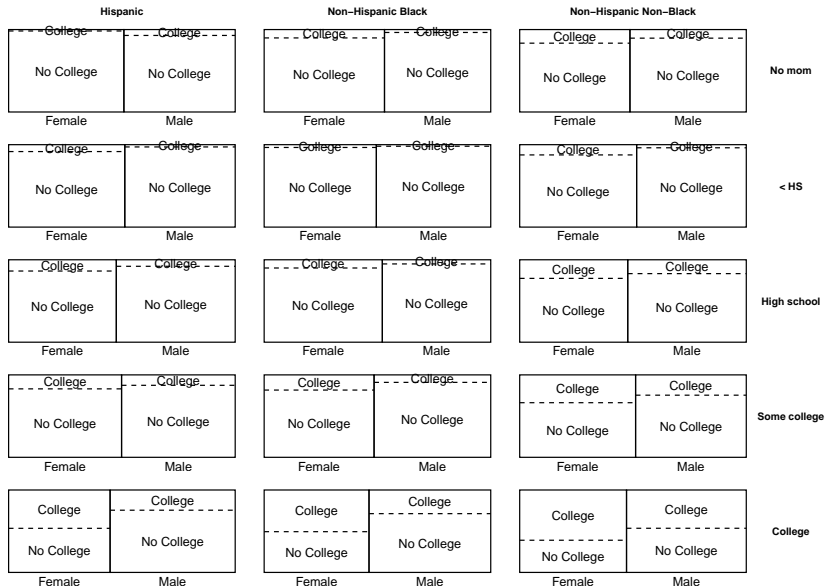


Adjust for sex, race, mom education

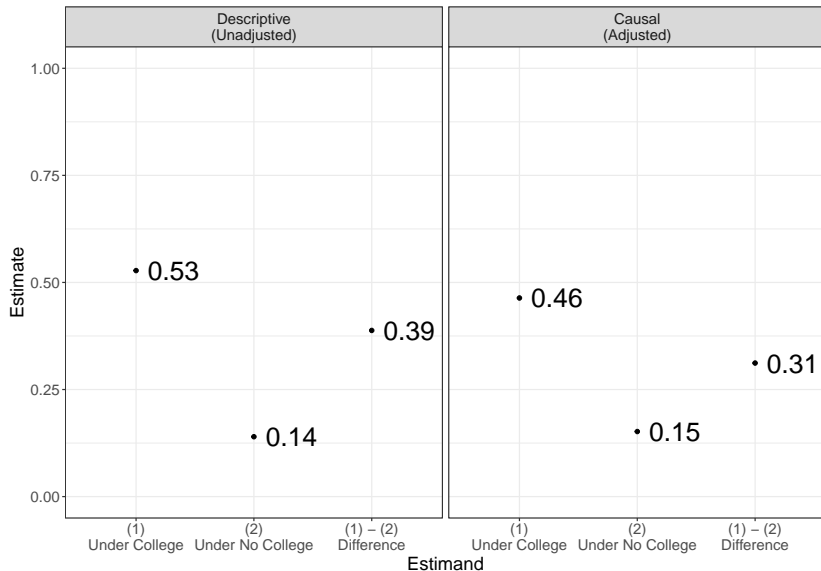


- 1) Estimate effects within subgroups defined by $\{\text{race, sex, mom education}\}$
- 2) Aggregate over subgroups

Adjust for sex, race, mom education



Adjust for sex, race, mom education

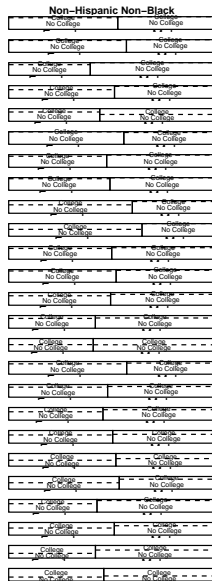
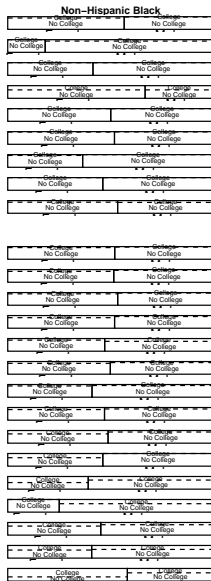
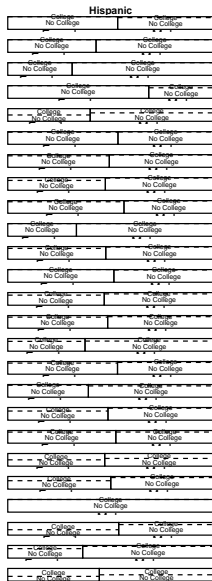


Adjust for sex, race, mom education, dad education



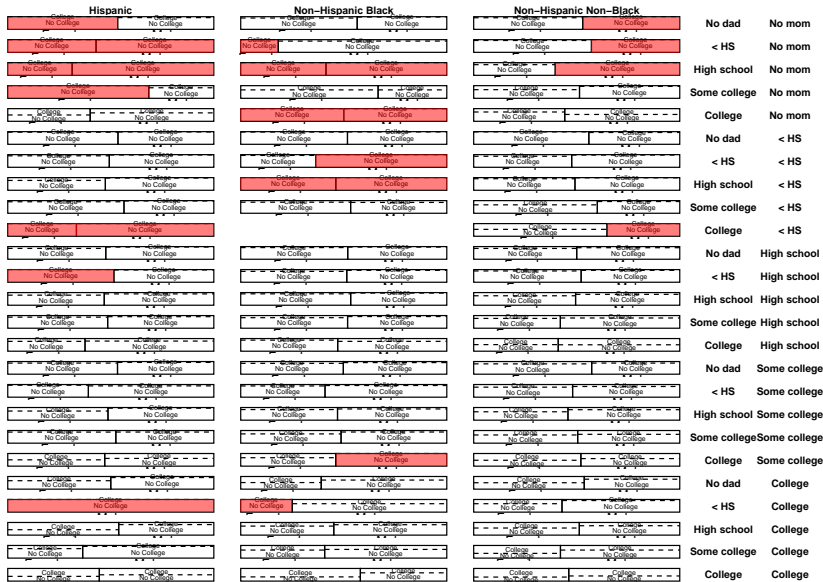
- 1) Estimate effects within subgroups defined by $\{\text{race, sex, mom education, dad education}\}$
- 2) Aggregate over subgroups

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



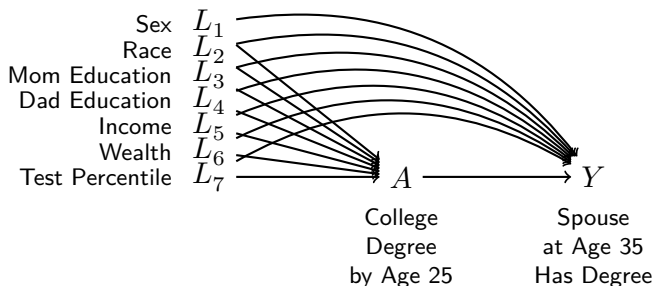
4.2% of the sample

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

Optionally, read [Hernán & Robins Ch 11](#)