

# Why model?

UCLA SOCIOL 114  
Winter 2025  
[soc114.github.io](https://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 question<sup>1</sup>

Income inequality across households depends on

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

A college degree affects (1) and (2)

---

<sup>1</sup>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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### 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

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 Sele**

**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

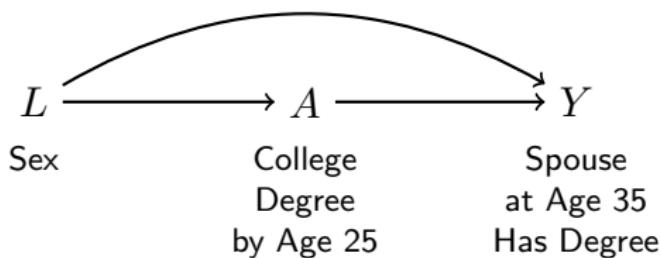
To what degree does finishing college increase the probability of having a spouse who finished college?

- ▶ 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

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

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  - ▶ 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
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```

# 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
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```

# 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
```

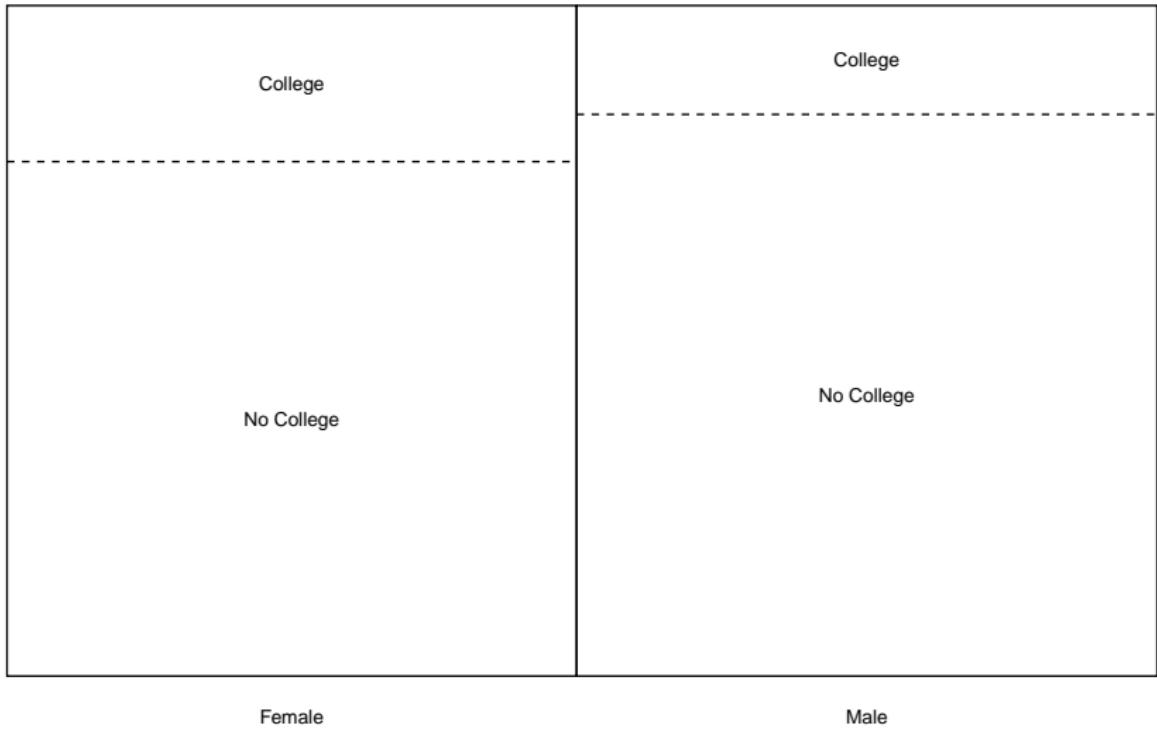
## 2) Aggregate over subgroups

```
# 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



## 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



# Adjust for sex and race



## Adjust for sex, race, mom education



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

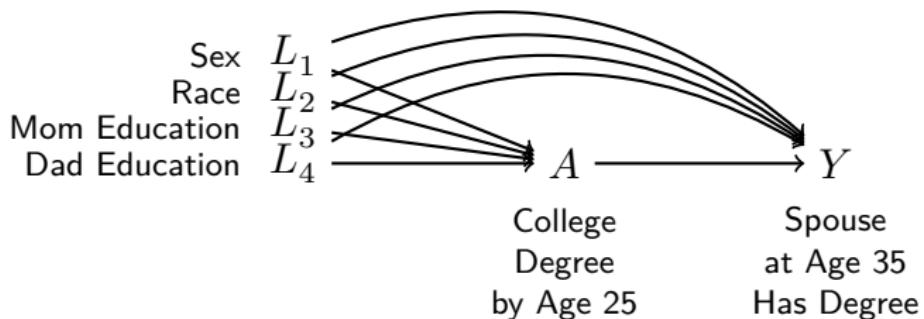
# Adjust for sex, race, mom education

Hispanic	Non-Hispanic Black	Non-Hispanic Non-Black																																					
<table><tr><td>College</td><td>College</td><td>College</td><td>College</td></tr><tr><td>No College</td><td>No College</td><td>No College</td><td>No College</td></tr><tr><td>Female</td><td>Male</td><td>Female</td><td>Male</td></tr></table>	College	College	College	College	No College	No College	No College	No College	Female	Male	Female	Male	<table><tr><td>College</td><td>College</td><td>College</td><td>College</td></tr><tr><td>No College</td><td>No College</td><td>No College</td><td>No College</td></tr><tr><td>Female</td><td>Male</td><td>Female</td><td>Male</td></tr></table>	College	College	College	College	No College	No College	No College	No College	Female	Male	Female	Male	<table><tr><td>College</td><td>College</td><td>College</td><td>College</td></tr><tr><td>No College</td><td>No College</td><td>No College</td><td>No College</td></tr><tr><td>Female</td><td>Male</td><td>Female</td><td>Male</td></tr></table>	College	College	College	College	No College	No College	No College	No College	Female	Male	Female	Male	No mom
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# Adjust for sex, race, mom education



# Adjust for sex, race, mom education, dad education



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

# Adjust for sex, race, mom education, dad education



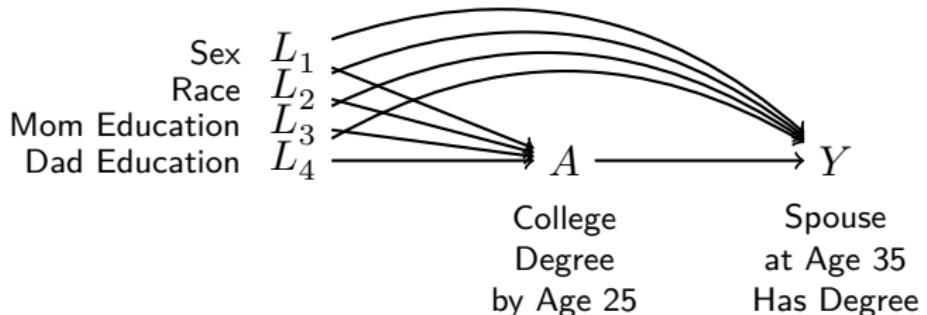
# Adjust for sex, race, mom education, dad education



## 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](#)