# Friday, Apr 8

Explanatory and Response Variables

Frequently when looking at the relationship between two variables we consider the *distribution* of a **response variable** (also known as a "dependent variable") for *each value* of an **explanatory variable** (also known as an "independent variable"). The question we often have is if/how does the *distribution* of the response variable change when the *value* of the explanatory variable changes.

Example: Dot plots of samples of observations of beak size from before (1976) and after (1978) a drought in 1977.
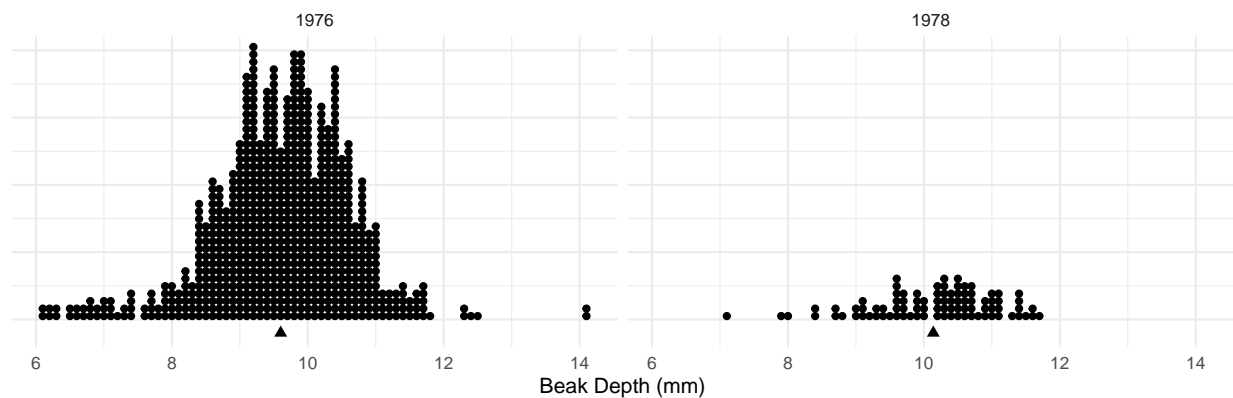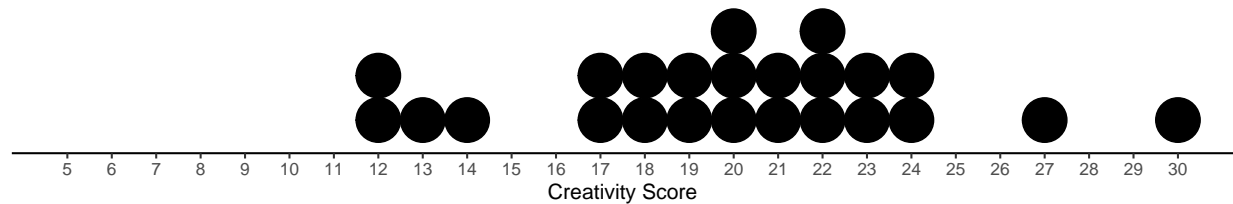

What are the response and explanatory variables?

Example: Creative writing students were "primed" with either extrinsic or intrinsic motivation. They were then asked to write a poem in the Haiku style about laughter. Each poem was then scored for "creativity" on a 40-point scale by judges.

Intrinsic Motivation

Creativity Score
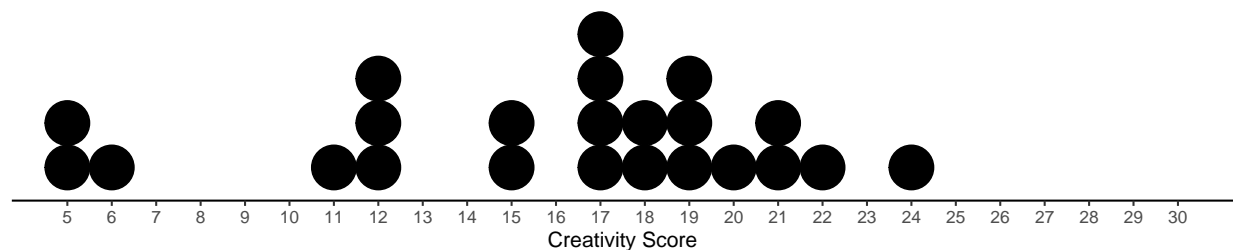
What are the response and explanatory variables?

Average Treatment Effect

Sometimes our goal is to estimate the **average treatment effect**, which is the average change in the **response variable** *caused* by changing the **explanatory variable** from one value to another.

The difference $\mu_1 - \mu_2$ or $p_1 - p_2$ is the average treatment effect *provided that the difference between the parameters is not, in part, caused by any confounding variables.*

Confounding Variables

A **confounding variable** (sometimes called a *lurking variable*) is a variable with a causal effect on both the explanatory and response variables.
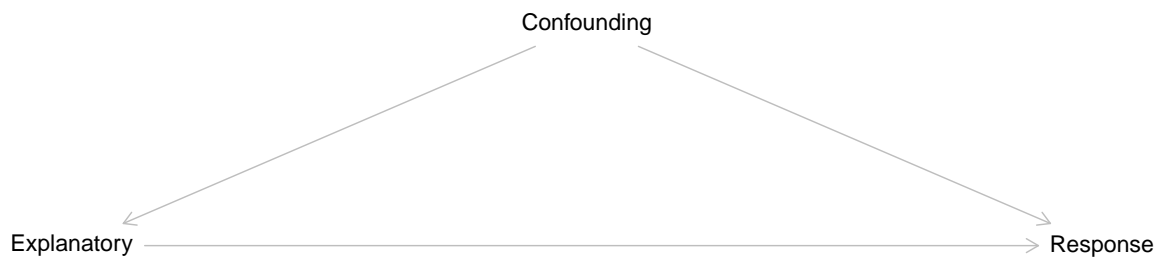
Failure to deal with confounding variables can result in a biased estimate of the average treatment effect. Three methods of dealing with confounding variables are *conditioning*, *randomization*, and *instrumental variables*.

Conditioning

By **conditioning** we "hold constant" the confounding variable when estimating the average treatment effect. If the confounding variable is constant it cannot have a causal effect on the explanatory or response variables.

Confounding

Explanatory $\longrightarrow$ Response

Randomization

With **randomization** we allow *only* a random variable (e.g., coin flip, dice roll) to have a causal effect the explanatory variable. Then any confounding variables cannot have a causal effect the explanatory variable.

Confounding

Random Variable   ——————▷ Explanatory ————————————————▷ Response

The presence of randomization is often used to distinguish between *(randomized) experiments* and *observational studies*.

In an **experiment** the researchers control the value of the explanatory variable, typically through the use of randomization.

In an **observational study** the researchers do not control the value of the explanatory variable.

Instrumental Variable

An **instrumental variable** is a variable that has a causal effect the explanatory variable, but does not (directly) have a causal effect on the response variable, and does not affect and is not affected by any confounding variables.

Confounding

Instrument ⟶ Explanatory ⟶ Response
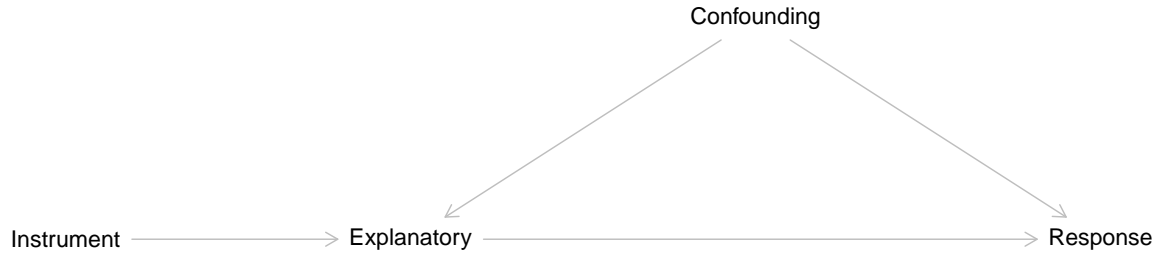
The treatment effect can then be adjusted to "remove" the effect of any confounding variables.

Direct Versus Indirect Effects

Causal effects of an explanatory variable on a response variable can be *direct* and *indirect*. It is sometimes important to be able to distinguish between these two kinds of effects. Two examples of indirect effects are the *placebo effect* and the *observer-expectancy effect*.

Placebo Effect

The **placebo effect** can be characterized by an *indirect* causal effect of the explanatory variable on subject expectations, which in turn has a causal effect on the response variable.

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                              Subject Expectations




Random Variable ────────→  Explanatory ──────────────────────→  Response
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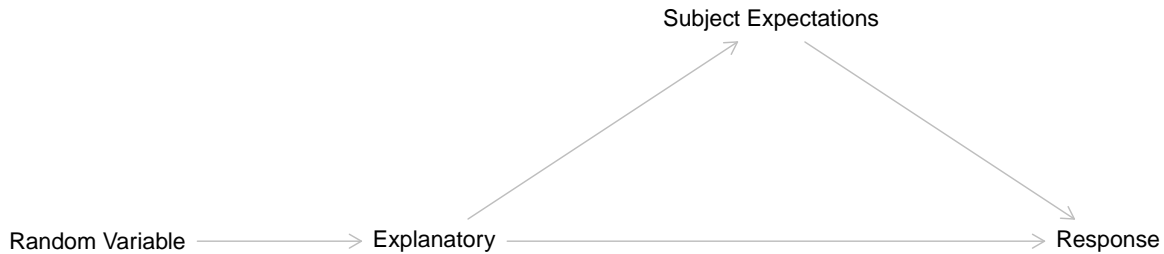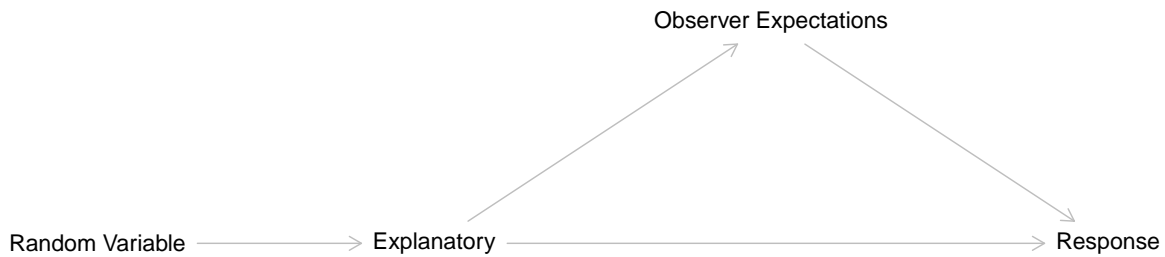
Use of a **single-blind** can eliminate the indirect causal effect of the explanatory variable through subject expectation, so the causal effect of the explanatory variable is only *direct*.

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                              Subject Expectations




Random Variable ────────→  Explanatory ──────────────────────→  Response
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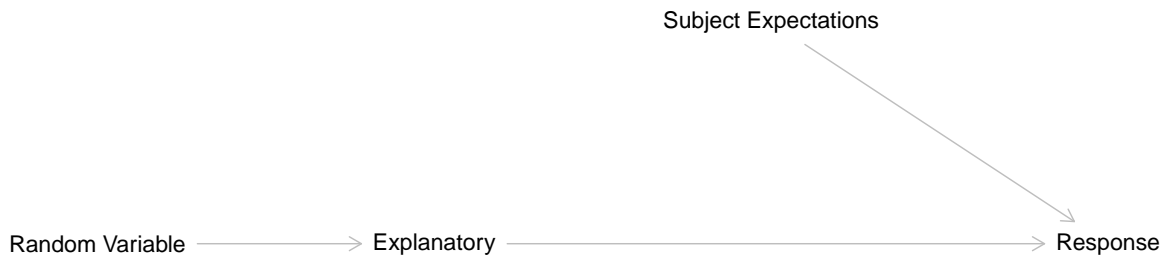
Observer-Expectancy Effect

The **observer-expectancy effect** is when the explanatory variable has a causal effect on the expectations of the observer, which in turn has a causal effect on the response variable.

Observer Expectations

Random Variable ⟶ Explanatory ⟶ Response

This effect can also occur when the observer expectation has a causal effect on the subject expectation, which then has a causal effect on the response variable.

Observer Expectations ⟶ Subject Expectations

Random Variable ⟶ Explanatory ⟶ Response

Use of a **double-blind** can eliminate the indirect causal effect of the explanatory variable on observer expectations, so the causal effect of the explanatory variable is only *direct.*