Primer on Causal Inference for Intelligent Systems

CS7792 – Bias and Fairness in Learning Systems

Spring 2020

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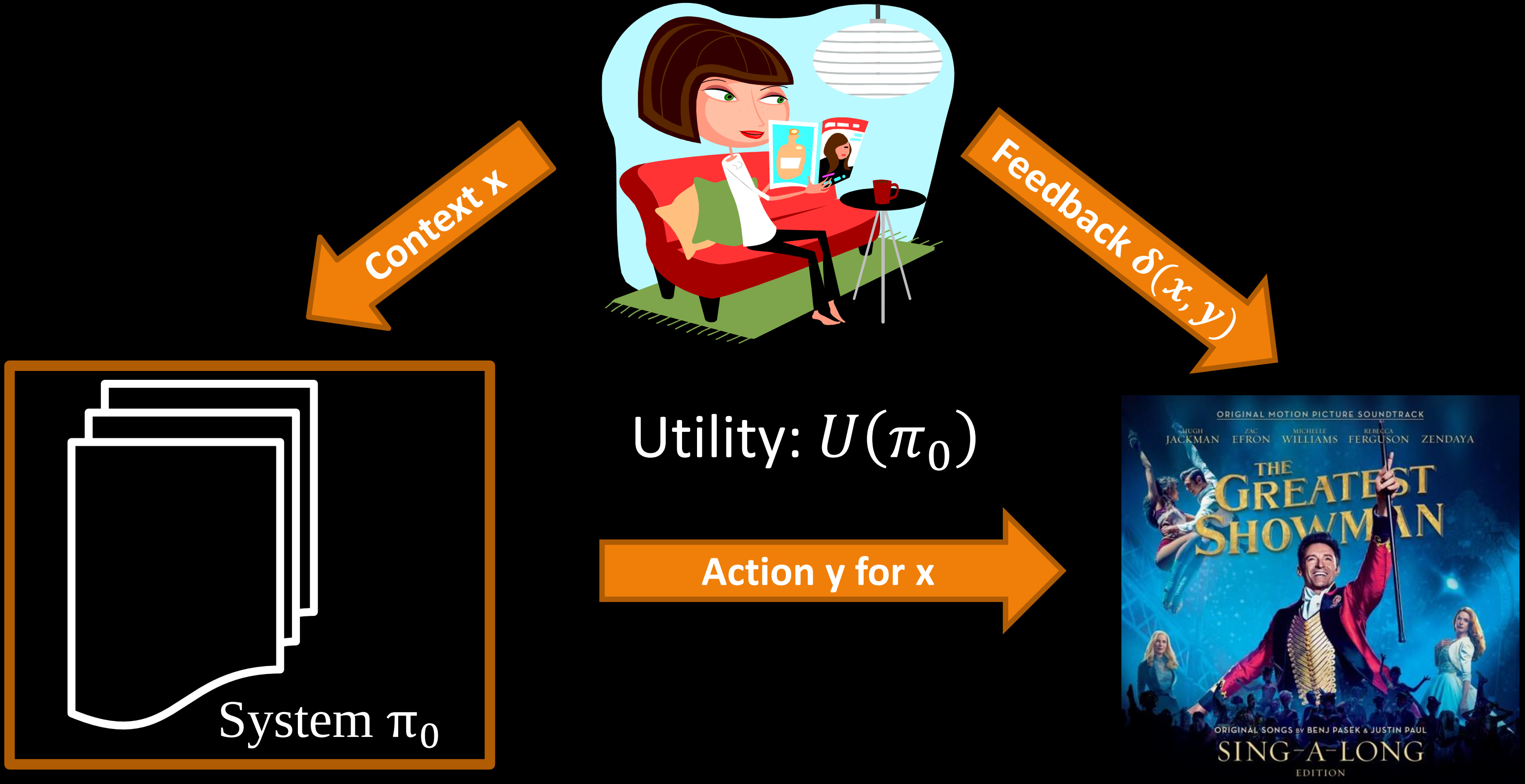
Reading:

G. Imbens, D. Rubin, Causal Inference for Statistics …, 2015. Chapter 1.

Interactive System Schematic



Music Voice Assistant

- Context x:
  - User and speech
- Action y:
  - Track that is played
- Feedback $\delta(x, y)$:
  - Listened to the end

News Recommender

- Context x:
  - User
- Action y:
  - Portfolio of newsarticles
- Feedback $\delta(x, y)$:
  - Reading time in minutes

Hiring

- Context x:
  - Set of candidates
  - Job description
- Action y:
  - Person that is hired
- Feedback $\delta(x, y)$:
  - Job performance of y

Log Data from Intelligent Systems

context

π_0 action

reward / loss

- Data

$$S = \big((x_1, y_1, \delta_1), \dots, (x_n, y_n, \delta_n)\big)$$

→ Partial Information (aka "Contextual Bandit") Feedback

- Properties
  - Contexts x_i drawn i.i.d. from unknown $P(X)$
  - Actions y_i selected by existing system $\pi_0 \colon X \to Y$
  - Feedback δ_i from unknown function $\delta \colon X \times Y \to \Re$

[Zadrozny et al., 2003] [Langford & Li], [Bottou, et al., 2014]

Goal

Use interaction log data

$$S = \big((x_1, y_1, \delta_1), \ldots, (x_n, y_n, \delta_n)\big)$$

- for evaluation of system π

  - Online performance estimates of some system π.
  - Offline performance estimates, where system π can be different from π_0 that generated log.

- for learning new system π

Evaluation: Outline

- Online Evaluation
  - A/B Testing (on-policy)
    → Counterfactual estimation from logs (off-policy)
- Offline Approach 1: “Model the world”
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Online Performance Metrics

Example metrics
- CTR
- Revenue
- Reading time
- Job performance
- Etc.

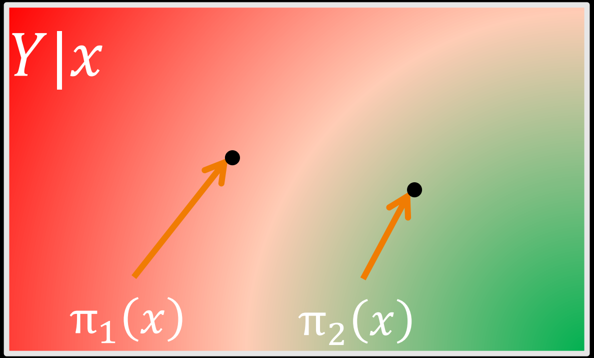
→ Correct choice depends on application and is not the focus of this lecture.

This lecture:

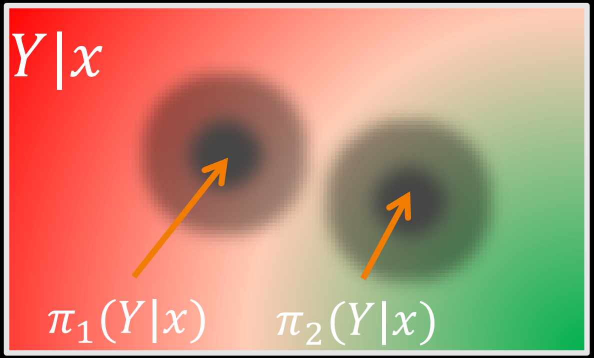
Metric encoded as $\delta(x, y)$ [click/payoff/time for (x,y) pair]

System

- Definition [Deterministic Policy]:
  Function
  $$y = \pi(x)$$
  that picks action y for context x.



- Definition [Stochastic Policy]:
  Distribution
  $$\pi(y|x)$$
  that samples action y given context x



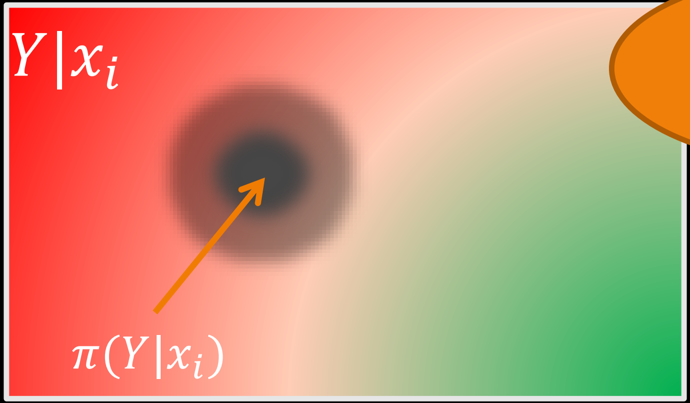
System Performance

Definition [Utility of Policy]:

The expected reward / utility $\mathrm{U}(\pi)$ of policy π is

$$\mathrm{U}(\pi) = \int\int \delta(x, y)\pi(y|x)P(x)\, dx\, dy$$

e.g. reading time of user x for portfolio y



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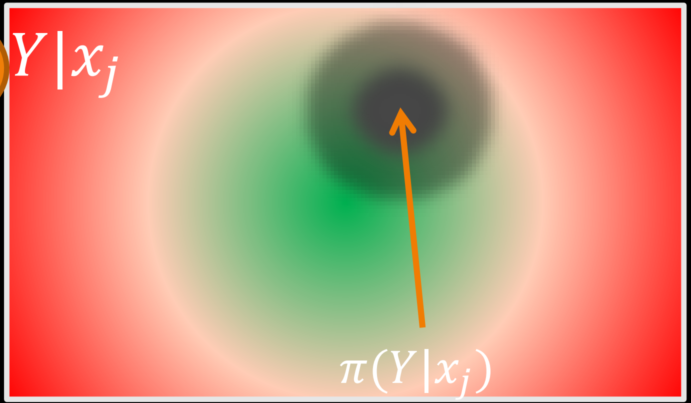

Online Evaluation: A/B Testing

Given $S = \left((x_1, y_1, \delta_1), \ldots, (x_n, y_n, \delta_n)\right)$ collected under π_0,

$$\hat{U}(\pi_0) = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^{n} \delta_i$$

→ A/B Testing

Deploy π_1: Draw $x \sim P(X)$, predict $y \sim \pi_1(Y|x)$, get $\delta(x, y)$

Deploy π_2: Draw $x \sim P(X)$, predict $y \sim \pi_2(Y|x)$, get $\delta(x, y)$

$\vdots$

Deploy $\pi_{|H|}$: Draw $x \sim P(X)$, predict $y \sim \pi_{|H|}(Y|x)$, get $\delta(x, y)$

Pros and Cons of A/B Testing

- Pro
  - User centric measure
  - No need for manual ratings
  - No user/expert mismatch
- Cons
  - Requires interactive experimental control
  - Risk of fielding a bad or buggy π_i
  - Number of A/B Tests limited
  - Long turnaround time

Evaluating Online Metrics Offline

- Online: On-policy A/B Test

Draw S_1 from π_1 → $\hat{U}(\pi_1)$

Draw S_2 from π_2 → $\hat{U}(\pi_2)$

Draw S_3 from π_3 → $\hat{U}(\pi_3)$

Draw S_4 from π_4 → $\hat{U}(\pi_4)$

Draw S_5 from π_5 → $\hat{U}(\pi_5)$

Draw S_6 from π_6 → $\hat{U}(\pi_6)$

Draw S_7 from π_7 → $\hat{U}(\pi_7)$

- Offline: Off-policy Counterfactual Estimates

Draw S from π_0 →

$\hat{U}(\pi_6)$ $\hat{U}(\pi_{12})$ $\hat{U}(\pi_{18})$ $\hat{U}(\pi_{24})$ $\hat{U}(\pi_{30})$

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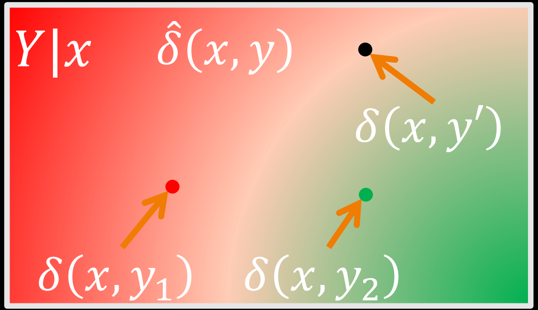
Approach 1: Reward Predictor

- Idea:
  - Use $S = \big((x_1, y_1, \delta_1), \dots, (x_n, y_n, \delta_n)\big)$ from π_0 to estimate reward predictor $\hat{\delta}(x, y)$

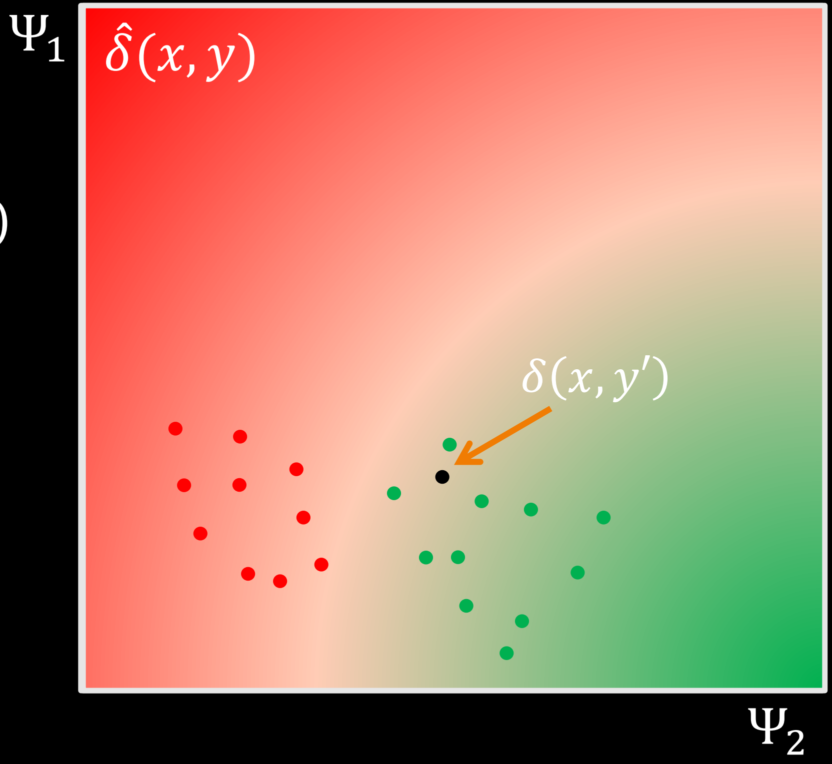


- Deterministic π: Simulated A/B Testing with predicted $\hat{\delta}(x, y)$
  - For actions $y_i' = \pi(x_i)$ from new policy π, generate predicted log $S' = \Big(\big(x_1, y_1', \hat{\delta}(x_1, y_1')\big), \dots, \big(x_n, y_n', \hat{\delta}(x_n, y_n')\big)\Big)$
  - Estimate performace of π via $\hat{U}_{rp}(\pi) = \frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n} \hat{\delta}(x_i, y_i')$
- Stochastic π: $\hat{U}_{rp}(\pi) = \frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n} \sum_{y} \hat{\delta}(x_i, y)\, \pi(y|x_i)$

Regression for Reward Prediction

Learn $\hat{\delta}: x \times y \to \Re$

1. Represent via features $\Psi(x, y)$
2. Learn regression based on $\Psi(x, y)$ from S collected under π_0
3. Predict $\hat{\delta}(x, y')$ for $y' = \pi(x)$ of new policy π

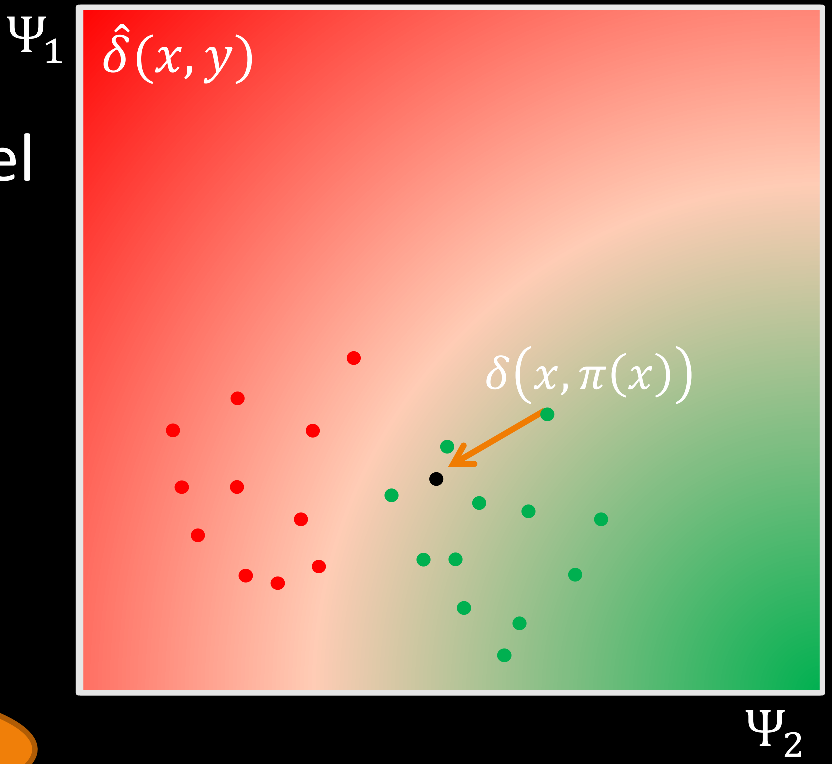


Problems of Reward Predictor

- Modeling bias
  - choice of features and model
- Selection bias
  - π_0's actions are over-represented

$$\rightarrow \hat{U}_{rp}(\pi) = \frac{1}{n}\sum_i \hat{\delta}(x_i, \pi(x_i))$$

Can be unreliable and biased



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Approach “Model the Bias”

- Idea:

  Fix the mismatch between the distribution $\pi_0(Y|x)$ that generated the data and the distribution $\pi(Y|x)$ we aim to evaluate.

$$\mathrm{U}(\overset{\pi}{\cancel{\pi_0}}) = \int\int \delta(x,y)\overset{\pi(y|x)}{\cancel{\pi_0(y|x)}}P(x)\,dx\,dy$$

Potential Outcome Model

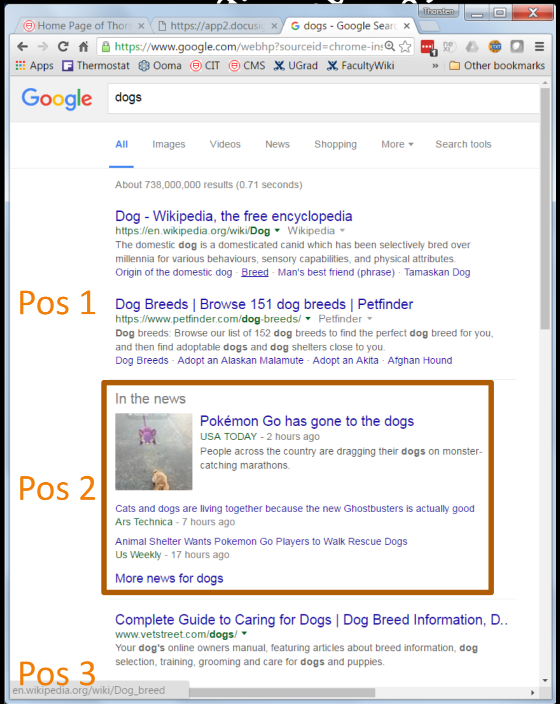
- Example: Treating Heart Attacks
  - Treatments: Y
    - Bypass / Stent / Drugs
  - Chosen treatment for patient x_i: y_i
  - Outcomes: δ_i
    - 5-year survival: 0 / 1
  - Which treatment is best?

$$\begin{array}{cc}
 & \begin{array}{ccc} \text{Bypass} & \text{Stent} & \text{Drugs} \end{array} \\
\text{Patients } \mathrm{x}_i \in \{1,\ldots,n\} & \begin{bmatrix}
0 & & \\
 & 1 & \\
 & & 1 \\
 & 0 & \\
 & & 1 \\
1 & & \\
 & & 1 \\
 & & 0 \\
0 & & \\
 & 1 & \\
1 & &
\end{bmatrix}
\end{array}$$

Counterfactual Model

Placing Vertical

- Example: ~~Treating Heart Attacks~~
  - Treatments: Y
    - ~~Bypass / Stent / Drugs~~ Pos 1 / Pos 2/ Pos 3
  - Chosen treatment for patient x_i: y_i
  - Outcomes: δ_i
    - ~~5-year survival: 0 / 1~~ Click / no Click on SERP
  - Which treatment is best?



Potential Outcome Model

- Example: Treating Heart Attacks
  - Treatments: Y
    - Bypass / Stent / Drugs
  - Chosen treatment for patient x_i: y_i
  - Outcomes: δ_i
    - 5-year survival: 0 / 1
  - Which treatment is best?
    - Everybody Drugs
    - Everybody Stent
    - Everybody Bypass

    → Drugs 3/4, Stent 2/3, Bypass 2/4 – really?

$$\begin{array}{cc}
 & \begin{array}{ccc} \text{Bypass} & \text{Stent} & \text{Drugs} \end{array} \\
\text{Patients } \mathrm{x_i}, i \in \{1, \ldots, n\} & \begin{bmatrix}
0 & & \\
 & 1 & \\
 & & 1 \\
 & 0 & \\
 & & 1 \\
1 & & \\
 & & 1 \\
 & & 0 \\
0 & & \\
 & 1 & \\
1 & &
\end{bmatrix}
\end{array}$$

Treatment Effects

- Average Treatment Effect of Treatment y
  - $\mathrm{U}(y) = \frac{1}{n} \sum_i \delta(x_i, y)$
- Example
  - $\mathrm{U}(bypass) = \frac{5}{11}$
  - $\mathrm{U}(stent) = \frac{7}{11}$
  - $\mathrm{U}(drugs) = \frac{3}{11}$

Factual Outcome

Counterfactual Outcomes

$$\begin{array}{cc} & \begin{array}{ccc} \text{Bypass} & \text{Stent} & \text{Drugs} \end{array} \\ \text{Patients} & \begin{bmatrix} 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 & 0 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 1 & 0 \end{bmatrix} \end{array}$$

Assignment Mechanism

- Probabilistic Treatment Assignment
  - For patient i: $\pi_0(Y_i = y|x_i)$
  - Selection Bias
- Inverse Propensity Score Estimator
  - $\hat{U}_{ips}(y) = \frac{1}{n} \sum_i \frac{\mathbb{I}\{y_i = y\}}{p_i} \delta(x_i, y_i)$
  - Propensity: $\mathrm{p_i} = \pi_0(Y_i = y_i|x_i)$
  - Unbiased: $E\left[\hat{U}(y)\right] = U(y)$,
    if $\pi_0(Y_i = y|x_i) > 0$ for all i
- Example
  - $\hat{U}(drugs) = \frac{1}{11}\left(\frac{1}{0.8} + \frac{1}{0.7} + \frac{1}{0.8} + \frac{0}{0.1}\right)$
    $= 0.36 < 0.75$

$$\pi_0(Y_i = y|x_i)$$

$$\begin{bmatrix} 0.3 & 0.6 & \boxed{0.1} \\ 0.5 & 0.4 & 0.1 \\ 0.1 & 0.1 & 0.8 \\ 0.6 & 0.3 & 0.1 \\ 0.2 & 0.5 & 0.7 \\ 0.7 & 0.2 & 0.1 \\ 0.1 & 0.1 & 0.8 \\ 0.1 & 0.8 & 0.1 \\ 0.3 & 0.3 & 0.4 \\ 0.3 & 0.6 & 0.1 \\ 0.4 & 0.4 & 0.2 \end{bmatrix}$$

$$\begin{array}{cc} & \begin{array}{ccc} \text{Bypass} & \text{Stent} & \text{Drugs} \end{array} \\ \text{Patients} & \begin{bmatrix} 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 & 0 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 1 & 0 \end{bmatrix} \end{array}$$

Interventional vs Observational

- Interventional Controlled Experiment
  - Assignment Mechanism under our control
  - Propensities $p_i = \pi_0(Y_i = y_i | x_i)$ are known by design
  - Requirement: $\forall y: \pi_0(Y_i = y | x_i) > 0$ (probabilistic)
- Observational Study
  - Assignment Mechanism not under our control
  - Propensities p_i need to be estimated
  - Estimate $\hat{\pi}_0(Y_i | z_i) = \pi_0(Y_i | x_i)$ based on features z_i
  - Requirement: $\hat{\pi}_0(Y_i | z_i) = \hat{\pi}_0(Y_i | \delta_i, z_i)$ (unconfounded)

Conditional Treatment Policies

- Policy (deterministic)
  - Context x_i describing patient
  - Pick treatment y_i based on x_i: $\mathrm{y_i} = \pi(x_i)$
  - Example policy:
    - $\pi(A) = drugs, \pi(B) = stent, \pi(C) = bypass$
- Average Treatment Effect
  - $U(\pi) = \frac{1}{n} \sum_i \delta(x_i, \pi(x_i))$
- IPS Estimator
  - $\hat{U}_{ips}(\pi) = \frac{1}{n} \sum_i \frac{\mathbb{I}\{y_i = \pi(x_i)\}}{p_i} \delta(x_i, y_i)$

$$\text{Patients}\quad \begin{array}{c} \begin{array}{ccc} \text{Bypass} & \text{Stent} & \text{Drugs} \end{array} \\ \begin{bmatrix} 0 & \boxed{1} & 0 \\ \boxed{1} & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & \boxed{1} \\ 0 & \boxed{0} & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & \boxed{1} \\ 1 & \boxed{0} & 0 \\ 1 & 0 & \boxed{1} \\ \boxed{0} & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & \boxed{0} \\ \boxed{1} & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & \boxed{1} & 0 \end{bmatrix} \end{array} \quad \begin{array}{c} X \\ \begin{bmatrix} B \\ C \\ A \\ B \\ A \\ B \\ A \\ C \\ A \\ C \\ B \end{bmatrix} \end{array}$$

Stochastic Treatment Policies

- Policy (stochastic)
  - Context x_i describing patient
  - Pick treatment y based on x_i: $\pi(Y|x_i)$
- Note
  - Assignment Mechanism is a stochastic policy as well!
- Average Treatment Effect
  - $U(\pi) = \frac{1}{n}\sum_i \sum_y \delta(x_i, y)\pi(y|x_i)$
- IPS Estimator
  - $\hat{U}(\pi) = \frac{1}{n}\sum_i \frac{\pi(y_i|x_i)}{p_i}\delta(x_i, y_i)$

$$
\begin{array}{c c}
 & \begin{array}{ccc} \text{Bypass} & \text{Stent} & \text{Drugs} \end{array} \quad X \\
\text{Patients} & \begin{bmatrix} 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 & 0 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 1 & 0 \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} B \\ C \\ A \\ B \\ A \\ B \\ A \\ C \\ A \\ C \\ B \end{bmatrix}
\end{array}
$$

Counterfactual Model = Logs

	Medical	Search Engine	Ad Placement	Recommender
Context x_i	Diagnostics	Query	User + Page	User + Movie
Treatment y_i	BP/Stent/Drugs	Ranking	Placed Ad	Watched Movie
Outcome δ_i	Survival	Click metric	Click / no Click	Star rating
Propensities p_i	controlled (*)	controlled	controlled	observational
New Policy π	FDA Guidelines	Ranker	Ad Placer	Recommender
T-effect U(π)	Average quality of new policy.			

Recorded in Log

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