ALGEBRAIC STATISTICAL MODELS

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Abstract: Many statistical models are algebraic in that they are defined in terms of polynomial constraints, or in terms of polynomial or rational parametrizations. The parameter spaces of such models are typically semi-algebraic subsets of the parameter space of a reference model with nice properties, such as for example a regular exponential family. This observation leads to the definition of an 'algebraic exponential family'. This new definition provides a unified framework for the study of statistical models with algebraic structure. In this paper we review the ingredients to this definition and illustrate in examples how computational algebraic geometry can be used to solve problems arising in statistical inference in algebraic models.

Key words and phrases: Algebraic statistics, computational algebraic geometry, exponential family, maximum likelihood estimation, model invariants, singularities.

1. Introduction

Algebra has seen many applications in statistics (e.g. Diaconis, 1988; Viana and Richards, 2001), but it is only rather recently that computational algebraic geometry and related techniques in commutative algebra and combinatorics have been used to study statistical models and inference problems. This use of computational algebraic geometry was initiated in work on exact tests of conditional independence hypotheses in contingency tables (Diaconis and Sturmfels, 1998). Another line of work in experimental design led to the monograph by Pistone et al. (2001). 'Algebraic statistics', the buzz word in the titles of this monograph and the more recent book by Pachter and Sturmfels (2005), has now become the umbrella term for statistical research involving algebraic geometry. There has also begun to be a sense of community among researchers working in algebraic statistics as reflected by workshops, conferences, and summer schools. One such workshop, the 2005 Workshop on Algebraic Statistics and Computational Biology held at the Clay Mathematics Institute led to the *Statistica Sinica* theme topic, of which this article forms a part. Other recent work in algebraic statistics has considered contingency table analysis (Aoki and Takemura, 2005; Dobra and Sullivant, 2004; Takemura and Aoki, 2005), phylogenetic tree models (Allman and Rhodes, 2003; Eriksson et al., 2005; Sturmfels and Sullivant, 2005), maximum likelihood estimation under multinomial sampling (Catanese et al., 2006; Hoşten et al., 2005), reliability theory (Giglio and Wynn, 2004), and Bayesian networks

(Garcia et al., 2005). A special issue of the *Journal of Symbolic Computation* emphasizing the algebraic side emerged following the 2003 Workshop on Computational Algebraic Statistics at the American Institute of Mathematics.

The algebraic problems studied in algebraic statistics are of a rather diverse nature. At the very core of the field, however, lies the notion of an algebraic statistical model. While this notion has the potential of serving as a unifying theme for algebraic statistics, there does not seem, at present, to exist a unified definition of an algebraic statistical model. This lack of unity is apparent even when reading articles by the same authors, where two papers might use two different, non-equivalent definitions of an algebraic statistical model, for different theoretical reasons. The usual set-up for discussing algebraic statistical models has involved first restricting to discrete random variables and then considering models that are either conditional independence models or defined parametrically with a polynomial or rational parametrization. However, many statistical models for continuous random variables also have an algebraic flavor, though currently there has been no posited description of a general class of algebraic statistical models that would include models for continuous random variables.

The main goal of this paper is to give a unifying definition of algebraic statistical models, as well as illustrate the usefulness of the definition in examples. Our approach is based on the following philosophy. Let $\mathcal{P} = (P_\theta \mid \theta \in \Theta)$ be a statistical model with parameter space $\Theta \subseteq \mathbb{R}^k$. In this paper, a model such as $\mathcal{P}$ is defined to be a family of probability distributions on some given sample space. (For a discussion of the notion of a statistical model see McCullagh (2002) who proposes to refine the traditional definition to one that ensures that the model extends in a meaningful way under natural extensions of the sample space.) Suppose that in model $\mathcal{P}$ a statistical inference procedure of interest is well-behaved. If this is the case, then the properties of the inference procedure in a submodel $\mathcal{P}_M = (P_\theta \mid \theta \in M)$ are often determined by the geometry of the set $M \subseteq \Theta$. Hence, if the set M exhibits algebraic structure, then the inference procedure can be studied using tools from algebraic geometry. This philosophy suggests the following definition. The semi-algebraic sets appearing in the definition will be defined in Section 3.

Definition 1. *Let $\mathcal{P} = (P_\theta \mid \theta \in \Theta)$ be a "well-behaved" statistical model whose parameter space $\Theta \subseteq \mathbb{R}^k$ has non-empty interior. A submodel $\mathcal{P}_M = (P_\theta \mid \theta \in M)$ is an* algebraic statistical model *if there exists a semi-algebraic set $A \subseteq \mathbb{R}^k$ such that $M = A \cap \Theta$.*

Definition 1 is intentionally vague and the precise meaning of the adjective "well-behaved" depends on the context. For example, if asymptotic properties of maximum likelihood estimators are of interest then the word "well-behaved" could refer to models satisfying regularity conditions guaranteeing that maximum likelihood estimators are asymptotically normally distributed. However, one class of statistical models, namely regular exponential families, can be considered to be well-behaved with respect to nearly any statistical feature of interest.

Definition 2. *Let* $(P_\eta \mid \eta \in N)$ *be a regular exponential family of order* k*. The subfamily induced by the set* $M \subseteq N$ *is an* algebraic exponential family *if there exists an open set* $\bar{N} \subseteq \mathbb{R}^k$*, a diffeomorphism* $g : N \to \bar{N}$*, and a semi-algebraic set* $A \subseteq \mathbb{R}^k$ *such that* $M = g^{-1}(A \cap \bar{N})$*.*

Definition 2 allows one to consider algebraic structure arising after the regular exponential family is reparametrized using the diffeomorphism g (see Section 2.2 for a definition of diffeomorphisms). Frequently, we will make use of the mean parametrization. Algebraic exponential families appear to include all the existing competing definitions of algebraic statistical models as special cases. Among the examples covered by Definition 2 are the parametric models for discrete random variables studied by Pachter and Sturmfels (2005) in the context of computational biology. Other models included in the framework are conditional independence models with or without hidden variables for discrete or jointly Gaussian random variables. Note that some work in algebraic statistics has focused on discrete distributions corresponding to the boundary of the probability simplex (Geiger et al., 2006). These distributions can be included in an extension of the regular exponential family corresponding to the interior of the probability simplex; see Barndorff-Nielsen (1978, pp. 154ff), Brown (1986, pp. 191ff), and Csiszár and Matúš (2005). Models given by semi-algebraic subsets of the (closed) probability simplex can thus be termed 'extended algebraic exponential families'.

In the remainder of the paper we will explain and exemplify our definition of algebraic exponential families. We begin in Section 2 by reviewing regular exponential families and in Example 9 we stress the fact that submodels of regular exponential families are only well-behaved if the local geometry of their parameter spaces is sufficiently regular. In Section 3, we review some basic terminology and results on semi-algebraic sets, which do have nice local geometric properties, and introduce our algebraic exponential families. We also show that other natural formulations of an algebraic statistical model in the discrete case fall under this description and illustrate the generality using jointly normal random variables. We then illustrate how problems arising in statistical inference in algebraic models can be addressed using computational algebraic geometry. Concretely, we discuss in Section 4 how so-called model invariants reveal aspects of the geometry of an algebraic statistical model that are connected to properties of statistical inference procedures such as likelihood ratio tests. As a second problem of a somewhat different flavour we show in Section 5 how systems of polynomial equations arising from likelihood equations can be solved algebraically.

2. Regular exponential families

Consider a sample space $\mathcal{X}$ with σ-algebra $\mathcal{A}$ on which is defined a σ-finite measure ν. Let $T : \mathcal{X} \to \mathbb{R}^k$ be a statistic, i.e., a measurable map. Define the *natural parameter space*

$$N = \left\{ \eta \in \mathbb{R}^k \ : \ \int_{\mathcal{X}} e^{\eta^t T(x)} d\nu(x) < \infty \right\}.$$

For $\eta \in N$, we can define a probability density p_η on $\mathcal{X}$ as

$$p_\eta(x) = e^{\eta^t T(x) - \phi(\eta)},$$

where

$$\phi(\eta) = \log \int_{\mathcal{X}} e^{\eta^t T(x)} d\nu(x)$$

is the logarithm of the Laplace transform of the measure $\nu^T = \nu \circ T^{-1}$ that the statistic T induces on the Borel σ-algebra of $\mathbb{R}^k$. The support of ν^T is the intersection of all closed sets $A \subseteq \mathbb{R}^k$ that satisfy $\nu^T(\mathbb{R}^k \setminus A) = 0$. Recall that the affine dimension of $A \subseteq \mathbb{R}^k$ is the dimension of the linear space spanned by all differences $x - y$ of two vectors $x, y \in A$.

Definition 3. *Let P_η be the probability measure on $(\mathcal{X}, \mathcal{A})$ that has ν-density p_η. The probability distributions $(P_\eta \mid \eta \in N)$ form a regular exponential family of order k if N is an open set in $\mathbb{R}^k$ and the affine dimension of the support of ν^T is equal to k. The statistic $T(x)$ that induces the regular exponential family is called a canonical sufficient statistic.*

The order of a regular exponential family is unique and if the same family is represented using two different canonical sufficient statistics then those two statistics are non-singular affine transforms of each other (Brown, 1986, Thm. 1.9).

2.1. Examples

Regular exponential families comprise families of discrete distributions, which were the subject of much of the work on algebraic statistics.

Example 4 (Discrete data)**.** Let the sample space $\mathcal{X}$ be the set of integers $\{1, \dots, m\}$. Let ν be the counting measure on $\mathcal{X}$, i.e., the measure $\nu(A)$ of $A \subseteq \mathcal{X}$ is equal to the cardinality of A. Consider the statistic $T : \mathcal{X} \to \mathbb{R}^{m-1}$,

$$T(x) = \left(I_{\{1\}}(x), \dots, I_{\{m-1\}}(x)\right)^t,$$

whose zero-one components indicate which value in $\mathcal{X}$ the argument x is equal to. In particular, when $x = m$, $T(x)$ is the zero vector. The induced measure ν^T is a measure on the Borel σ-algebra of $\mathbb{R}^{m-1}$ with support equal to the m vectors in $\{0,1\}^{m-1}$ that have at most one non-zero component. The differences of these m vectors include all canonical basis vectors of $\mathbb{R}^{m-1}$. Hence, the affine dimension of the support of ν^T is equal to $m-1$.

It holds for all $\eta \in \mathbb{R}^{m-1}$ that

$$\phi(\eta) = \log\left(1 + \sum_{x=1}^{m-1} e^{\eta_x}\right) < \infty$$

Hence, the natural parameter space N is equal to all of $\mathbb{R}^{m-1}$ and in particular is open. The ν-density p_η is a probability vector in $\mathbb{R}^m$. The components $p_\eta(x)$ for $1 \leq x \leq m-1$ are positive and given by

$$p_\eta(x) = \frac{e^{\eta_x}}{1 + \sum_{x=1}^{m-1} e^{\eta_x}}.$$

The last component of p_η is also positive and equals

$$p_\eta(m) = 1 - \sum_{x=1}^{m-1} p_\eta(x) = \frac{1}{1 + \sum_{x=1}^{m-1} e^{\eta_x}}.$$

The family of induced probability distribution $(P_\eta \mid \eta \in \mathbb{R}^{m-1})$ is a regular exponential family of order $m-1$. The interpretation of the natural parameters η_x is one of log odds because p_η is equal to a given positive probability vector $(p_1, \ldots, p_m)$ if and only if $\eta_x = \log(p_x/p_m)$ for $x = 1, \ldots, m-1$. This establishes a correspondence between the natural parameter space $N = \mathbb{R}^{m-1}$ and the interior of the $m-1$ dimensional probability simplex. □

The other distributional framework that has seen application of algebraic geometry is that of multivariate normal distributions.

Example 5 (Normal distribution)**.** Let the sample space $\mathcal{X}$ be Euclidean space $\mathbb{R}^p$ equipped with its Borel σ-algebra and Lebesgue measure ν. Consider the statistic $T : \mathcal{X} \to \mathbb{R}^p \times \mathbb{R}^{p(p+1)/2}$ given by

$$T(x) = (x_1, \ldots, x_p, -x_1^2/2, \ldots, -x_p^2/2, -x_1x_2, \ldots, -x_{p-1}x_p)^t.$$

The polynomial functions that form the components of $T(x)$ are linearly independent and thus the support of ν^T has the full affine dimension $p + p(p+1)/2$.

If $\eta \in \mathbb{R}^p \times \mathbb{R}^{p(p+1)/2}$, then write $\eta_{[p]} \in \mathbb{R}^p$ for the vector of the first p components η_i, $1 \leq i \leq p$. Similarly, write $\eta_{[p\times p]}$ for the symmetric $p \times p$-matrix formed from the last $p(p+1)/2$ components η_{ij}, $1 \leq i \leq j \leq p$. The function $x \mapsto e^{\eta^t T(x)}$ is ν-integrable if and only if $\eta_{[p\times p]}$ is positive definite. Hence, the natural parameter space N is equal to the

Cartesian product of $\mathbb{R}^p$ and the cone of positive definite $p \times p$-matrices. If η is in the open set N, then

$$\phi(\eta) = -\frac{1}{2}\left(\log\det(\eta_{[p\times p]}) - \eta_{[p]}^t \eta_{[p\times p]}\eta_{[p]} - p\log(2\pi)\right).$$

The Lebesgue densities p_η can be written as

$$p_\eta(x) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{(2\pi)^p \det(\eta_{[p\times p]}^{-1})}} \exp\left\{\eta_{[p]}^t x - \operatorname{trace}(\eta_{[p\times p]} x x^t)/2 - \eta_{[p]}^t \eta_{[p\times p]}\eta_{[p]}/2\right\}.$$

Setting $\Sigma = \eta_{[p\times p]}^{-1}$ and $\mu = \eta_{[p\times p]}^{-1}\eta_{[p]}$, we find that

$$p_\eta(x) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{(2\pi)^p \det(\Sigma)}} \exp\left\{-\tfrac{1}{2}(x-\mu)^t \Sigma^{-1}(x-\mu)\right\}$$

is the density of the multivariate normal distribution $\mathcal{N}_p(\mu, \Sigma)$. Hence, the family of all multivariate normal distributions on $\mathbb{R}^p$ with positive definite covariance matrix is a regular exponential family of order $p + p(p+1)/2$. □

The structure of a regular exponential family remains essentially unchanged when sampling independent and identically distributed observations.

Example 6 (Samples)**.** A sample $X_1, \ldots, X_n$ from P_η comprises independent random vectors, all distributed according to P_η. Denote their joint distribution by $\otimes_{i=1}^n P_\eta$. An important property of a regular exponential family $(P_\eta \mid \eta \in N)$ of order k is that the induced family $(\otimes_{i=1}^n P_\eta \mid \eta \in N)$ is again a regular exponential family of order k with canonical sufficient statistic $\sum_{i=1}^n T(x_i)$ and Laplace transform $n\phi(\eta)$. For discrete data as discussed in Example 4, the canonical sufficient statistic is given by the vector of counts

$$N_x = \sum_{i=1}^n I_{\{x\}}(x_i), \quad x = 1, \ldots, m-1.$$

For the normal distribution in Example 5, the canonical sufficient statistic is in correspondence with the empirical mean vector $\bar{X}$ and the empirical covariance matrix S; compare (4.1). □

2.2. Likelihood inference in regular exponential families

Among the nice properties of regular exponential families is their behavior in likelihood inference. Suppose the random vector X is distributed according to some unknown distribution from a regular exponential family $(P_\eta \mid \eta \in N)$ of order k with canonical sufficient statistic T. Given an observation $X = x$, the *log-likelihood function* takes the form

$$\ell(\eta \mid T(x)) = \eta^t T(x) - \phi(\eta).$$

The log-Laplace transform ϕ is a strictly convex and smooth, that is, infinitely many times differentiable, function on the convex set N (Brown, 1986, Thm. 1.13, Thm. 2.2, Cor. 2.3). The derivatives of ϕ yield the moments of the canonical sufficient statistic such as the expectation and covariance matrix,

$$\zeta(\eta) := \frac{d}{d\eta}\phi(\eta) = \mathrm{E}_\eta[T(X)], \tag{2.1}$$
$$\Sigma(\eta) := \frac{d^2}{d\eta^2}\phi(\eta) = \mathrm{E}_\eta\left\{[T(X) - \zeta(\eta)]\,[T(X) - \zeta(\eta)]^t\right\}.$$

The matrix $\Sigma(\eta)$ is positive definite since the components of $T(X)$ may not exhibit a linear relationship that holds almost everywhere.

The strict convexity of ϕ implies strict concavity of the log-likelihood function ℓ. Hence, if the *maximum likelihood estimator* (MLE)

$$\hat{\eta}(T(x)) = \arg\max_{\eta \in N} \ell(\eta \mid T(x))$$

exists then it is the unique local and global maximizer of ℓ and can be obtained as the unique solution of the likelihood equations $\zeta(\eta) = T(x)$. The existence of $\hat{\eta}(T(x))$ is equivalent to the condition $T(x) \in \zeta(N)$; the open set $\zeta(N)$ is equal to the interior of the convex hull of the support of ν^T (Brown, 1986, Thm. 5.5).

If $X_1, \ldots, X_n$ are a sample of random vectors drawn from P_η, then the previous discussion applies to the family $(\otimes_{i=1}^n P_\eta \mid \eta \in N)$. In particular, the likelihood equations become

$$n\zeta(\eta) = \sum_{i=1}^n T(X_i) \iff \zeta(\eta) = \bar{T} := \frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^n T(X_i).$$

By the strong law of large numbers, $\bar{T}$ converges almost surely to the true parameter point $\zeta(\eta_0) \in \zeta(N)$. It follows that the probability of existence of the MLE, $\mathrm{Prob}_{\eta_0}\left(\bar{T} \in \zeta(N)\right)$, tends to one as the sample size n tends to infinity. Moreover, the *mean parametrization* map $\eta \mapsto \zeta(\eta)$ is a bijection from N to $\zeta(N)$ that has a differentiable inverse with total derivative

$$\frac{d}{d\eta}\zeta^{-1}(\eta) = \Sigma(\eta)^{-1},$$

which implies in conjunction with an application of the central limit theorem:

Proposition 7. *The MLE $\hat{\eta}(\bar{T}) = \zeta^{-1}(\bar{T})$ in a regular exponential family is asymptotically normal in the sense that if η_0 is the true parameter, then*

$$\sqrt{n}[\hat{\eta}(\bar{T}) - \eta_0] \xrightarrow[d]{n\to\infty} \mathcal{N}_k(0, \Sigma(\eta_0)^{-1}).$$

A submodel of a regular exponential family $(P_\eta \mid \eta \in N)$ of order k is given by a subset $M \subseteq N$. If the geometry of the set M is regular enough, then the submodel may inherit the favorable properties of likelihood inference from its reference model, the regular exponential family. The nicest possible case occurs when the submodel $(P_\eta \mid \eta \in M)$ has parameter space $M = N \cap L$, where $L \subseteq \mathbb{R}^k$ is an affine subspace of $\mathbb{R}^k$. Altering the canonical sufficient statistics one finds that $(P_\eta \mid \eta \in M)$ forms a regular exponential family of order $\dim(L)$.

Given a single observation X from P_η, the *likelihood ratio test* for testing $H_0 : \eta \in M$ versus $H_1 : \eta \in N \setminus M$ rejects H_0 for large values of the *likelihood ratio statistic*

$$\lambda_M(T(X)) = \sup_{\eta \in N} \ell(\eta \mid T(X)) - \sup_{\eta \in M} \ell(\eta \mid T(X)).$$

If we observe a sample $X_1, \ldots, X_n$ from P_η, then the likelihood ratio statistic depends on $\bar{T}$ only and is equal to $n\lambda_M(\bar{T})$. For a rejection decision, the distribution of $n\lambda_M(\bar{T})$ can often be approximated using the next asymptotic result.

Proposition 8. *If $M = N \cap L$ for an affine space L and the true parameter η_0 is in M, then the likelihood ratio statistic $n\lambda_M(\bar{T})$ converges to $\chi^2_{k-\dim(L)}$, the chi-square distribution with $k - \dim(L)$ degrees of freedom, as $n \to \infty$.*

In order to obtain asymptotic results such as uniformly valid chi-square asymptotics for the likelihood ratio statistic, the set M need not be given by an affine subspace. In fact, if M is an m-dimensional smooth manifold in $\mathbb{R}^k$, then $n\lambda_M(\bar{T})$ still converges in distribution to χ^2_{k-m} for any $\eta_0 \in M$. A set M is an m-dimensional *smooth manifold* if for all $\eta_0 \in M$ there exists an open set $U \subseteq \mathbb{R}^k$ containing η_0, an open set $V \subseteq \mathbb{R}^k$, and a diffeomorphism $g : V \to U$ such that $g\big(V \cap (\mathbb{R}^m \times \{0\})\big) = U$. Here, $\mathbb{R}^m \times \{0\} \subseteq \mathbb{R}^k$ is the subset of vectors for which the last $k - m$ components are equal to zero. A *diffeomorphism* $g : V \to U$ is a smooth bijective map that has a smooth inverse $g^{-1} : U \to V$. An exponential family induced by a smooth manifold in the natural parameter space is commonly termed a *curved exponential family*; see Kass and Vos (1997) for an introduction to this topic.

The fact that many interesting statistical models, in particular models involving hidden variables, are not curved exponential families calls for generalization. One attempt at such generalization was made by Geiger et al. (2001) who introduce so-called *stratified exponential families*. A stratified exponential family is obtained by piecing together several curved exponential families. However, as the next example shows, stratified exponential families appear to be a bit too general as a framework unless more conditions are imposed on how the curved exponential families are joined together. Example 9 is inspired by an example in Rockafellar and Wets (1998, p. 199).

Example 9. Consider the regular exponential family $\mathcal{P}$ of bivariate normal distributions with unknown mean vector $\mu = (\mu_1, \mu_2)^t \in \mathbb{R}^2$ but covariance matrix Σ equal to the identity matrix $I_2 \in \mathbb{R}^{2\times 2}$. The natural parameter space of this model is the plane $\mathbb{R}^2$. When drawing a sample $X_1, \ldots, X_n$ from a distribution in $\mathcal{P}$, the canonical statistic is the sum of the random vectors. Dividing by the sample size n yields the sample mean vector $\bar{X} \in \mathbb{R}^2$, which is also the MLE of μ. In the following we will assume that the true parameter μ_0 is equal to the origin. Then the rescaled sample mean vector $\sqrt{n}\,\bar{X}$ is distributed according to the bivariate standard normal distribution $\mathcal{N}_2(0, I_2)$.

If we define a submodel $\mathcal{P}_C \subseteq \mathcal{P}$ by restricting the mean vector to lie in a closed set $C \subseteq \mathbb{R}^2$, then the MLE $\hat{\mu}$ for the model $\mathcal{P}_C$ is the point in C that is closest to $\bar{X}$ in Euclidean distance. For $n = 1$, the likelihood ratio statistic $\lambda_C(\bar{X})$ for testing $\mu \in C$ versus $\mu \notin C$ is equal to the squared Euclidean distance between $\bar{X}$ and C. Hence, the likelihood ratio statistic based on an n-sample is

$$n\lambda_C(\bar{X}) = n \cdot \min_{\mu \in C} ||\bar{X} - \mu||^2 = \min_{\mu \in \sqrt{n}\, C} ||\sqrt{n}\,\bar{X} - \mu||^2,$$

i.e., the squared Euclidean distance between the standard normal random vector $\sqrt{n}\,\bar{X}$ and the rescaled set $\sqrt{n}\,C$.

As a concrete choice of a submodel, consider the set

$$C_1 = \{(\mu_1, \mu_2)^t \in \mathbb{R}^2 \mid \mu_2 = \mu_1 \sin(1/\mu_1),\ \mu_1 \neq 0\} \cup \{(0,0)^t\}.$$

This set is the disjoint union of the two one-dimensional smooth manifolds obtained by taking $\mu_1 < 0$ and $\mu_1 > 0$, and the zero-dimensional smooth manifold given by the origin. These manifolds form a stratification of C_1 (Geiger et al., 2001, p. 513), and thus the model $\mathcal{P}_{C_1}$ constitutes a stratified exponential family. In Figure 1, we plot three of the sets $\sqrt{n}\,C_1$ for the choices $n = 100, 100^2, 100^3$. The range of the plot is restricted to the square $[-3,3]^2$, which contains the majority of the mass of the bivariate standard normal distribution. The figure illustrates the fact that as n tends to infinity the sets $\sqrt{n}\,C_1$ fill more and more densely the 2-dimensional cone comprised between the axes $\mu_2 = \pm\mu_1$. Hence, $n\lambda_{C_1}(\bar{X})$ converges in distribution to the squared Euclidean distance between a bivariate standard normal point and this cone. So although we pieced together smooth manifolds of codimension 1 or larger, the limiting distribution of the likelihood ratio statistic is obtained from a distance to a full-dimensional cone.

As a second submodel consider the one induced by the set

$$C_2 = \{(\mu_1, \mu_2)^t \in \mathbb{R}^2 \mid \mu_2 = \mu_1 \sin(-\log(|\mu_1|/4)),\ \mu_1 \in [-3,3] \setminus \{0\}\} \cup \{(0,0)^t\}.$$

The model $\mathcal{P}_{C_2}$ is again a stratified exponential family. However, now the sets $\sqrt{n}\,C_2$ have a wave-like structure even for large sample sizes n; compare Figure 2. We conclude that in this example the likelihood ratio test statistic $n\lambda_{C_2}(\bar{X})$ does not converge in distribution as n tends to infinity. □

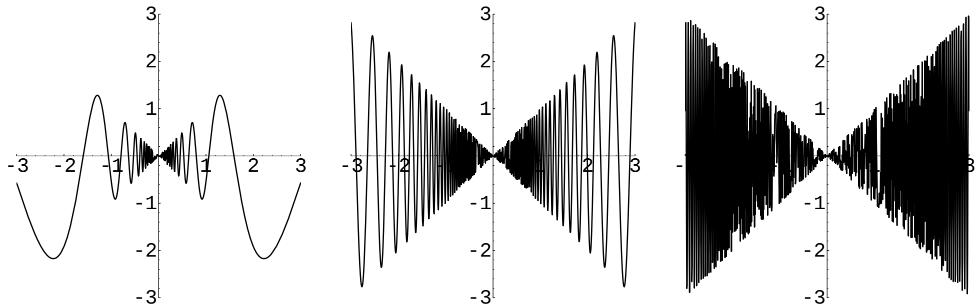

Figure 1: Sets $\sqrt{n}\,C_1$ for $n = 100, 100^2, 100^3$.

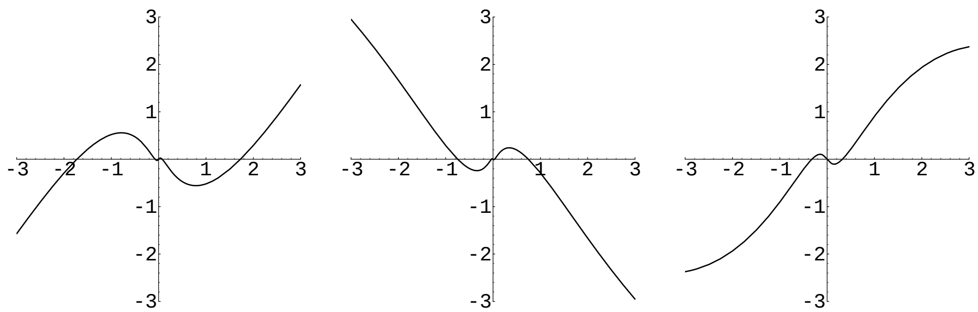

Figure 2: Sets $\sqrt{n}\,C_2$ for $n = 100, 100^2, 100^3$.

The failure in the previous example of nice asymptotic behavior of the likelihood ratio test is part of our motivation for restricting to the class of *algebraic exponential families*, which we introduce next.

3. Algebraic exponential families

In the following definition, which was anticipated in the introduction, we propose the use of semi-algebraic sets to unify different definitions of algebraic statistical models. Using semi-algebraic sets eliminates phenomena as created in Example 9 because these sets have nice local geometric properties. In addition, imposing algebraic structure allows one to employ the tools of computational algebraic geometry to address questions arising in statistical inference. (More details on both these points are given in Section 4.)

Definition 2. *Let $(P_\eta \mid \eta \in N)$ be a regular exponential family of order k. The subfamily induced by the set $M \subseteq N$ is an algebraic exponential family if there exists an open set $\bar{N} \subseteq \mathbb{R}^k$, a diffeomorphism $g : N \to \bar{N}$, and a semi-algebraic set $A \subseteq \mathbb{R}^k$ such that $M = g^{-1}(A \cap \bar{N})$.*

The definition states that an algebraic exponential family is given by a semi-algebraic subset of the parameter space of a regular exponential family. However, this parameter space may be obtained by a reparametrization g of the natural parameter space N, which provides the necessary flexibility to capture the algebraic structure found in interesting statistical models including ones that do not form curved exponential families. The mean parametrization $\zeta(\eta)$ is one example of a useful reparametrization.

Before giving examples of algebraic exponential families we provide some background on semi-algebraic sets; more in depth introductions can be found, for example, in Benedetti and Risler (1990) or Bochnak et al. (1998).

3.1. Basic facts about semi-algebraic sets

A monomial in indeterminates (polynomial variables) $t_1, \ldots, t_n$, is a formal expression of the form $\mathbf{t}^\beta = t_1^{\beta_1} t_2^{\beta_2} \cdots t_n^{\beta_n}$ where $\beta = (\beta_1, \ldots, \beta_n)$ is the non-negative integer vector of exponents. A polynomial

$$f = \sum_{\beta \in B} c_\beta \mathbf{t}^\beta$$

is a linear combination of monomials where the coefficients c_β are in a fixed field $\mathbb{K}$ and $B \subset \mathbb{N}^n$ is a finite set of exponent vectors. The collection of all polynomials in the indeterminates $t_1, \ldots, t_n$ with coefficients in a fixed field $\mathbb{K}$ is the set $\mathbb{K}[\mathbf{t}] = \mathbb{K}[t_1, \ldots, t_n]$. The collection of polynomials $\mathbb{K}[\mathbf{t}]$ has the algebraic structure of a *ring*. Each polynomial in $\mathbb{K}[\mathbf{t}]$ is a formal linear combination of monomials that can also be considered as a function $f : \mathbb{K}^n \to \mathbb{K}$, defined by evaluation. Throughout the paper, we will focus attention on the ring $\mathbb{R}[\mathbf{t}]$ of polynomials with real coefficients.

Definition 10. *A* basic semi-algebraic set *is a subset of points in* $\mathbb{R}^n$ *of the form*

$$A = \{\theta \in \mathbb{R}^n \mid f(\theta) > 0 \ \forall f \in F,\ h(\theta) = 0 \ \forall h \in H\}$$

where $F \subset \mathbb{R}[\mathbf{t}]$ *is a finite (possibly empty) collection of polynomials and* $H \subseteq \mathbb{R}[\mathbf{t}]$ *is an arbitrary (possibly empty) collection of polynomials. A* semi-algebraic set *is a finite union of basic semi-algebraic sets. If* $F = \emptyset$ *then* A *is called a* real algebraic variety*.*

A particular special case of a general semi-algebraic set occurs when we consider sets of the form

$$A = \{\theta \in \mathbb{R}^n \mid f(\theta) > 0 \ \forall f \in F,\ g(\theta) \geq 0 \ \forall g \in G,\ h(\theta) = 0 \ \forall h \in H\}$$

where both F and G are finite collections of real polynomials.

Example 11. The open probability simplex for discrete random variables is a basic semi-algebraic set, where $F = \{t_i \mid i = 1, \ldots, n-1\} \cup \{1 - \sum_{i=1}^{n-1} t_i\}$ and $H = \emptyset$. More generally, the relative interior of any convex polyhedron in any dimension is a basic semi-algebraic set, while the whole polyhedron is an ordinary semi-algebraic set. □

Example 12. The set $\Sigma \subset \mathbb{R}^{m \times m}$ of positive definite matrices is a basic semi-algebraic set, where F consists of all principal subdeterminants of a symmetric matrix Ψ, and G is the empty set. $\square$

In our introduction, parametrically specified statistical models were claimed to be algebraic statistical models. This non-trivial claim holds due to the famous Tarski-Seidenberg theorem (e.g. Bochnak et al., 1998), which says that the image of a semi-algebraic set under any nice enough mapping is again a semi-algebraic set. To make this precise we need to define the class of mappings of interest.

Let $\psi_1 = f_1/g_1, \ldots, \psi_n = f_n/g_n$ be rational functions where $f_i, g_i \in \mathbb{R}[\mathbf{t}] = \mathbb{R}[t_1, \ldots, t_d]$ are real polynomial functions. These rational functions can be used to define a rational map

$$\psi : \mathbb{R}^d \to \mathbb{R}^n, \quad \mathbf{a} \mapsto (\psi_1(\mathbf{a}), \ldots, \psi_n(\mathbf{a})),$$

which is well-defined on the open set $D_\psi = \{\mathbf{a} \subset \mathbb{R}^d : \prod g_i(\mathbf{a}) \neq 0\}$.

Theorem 13 (Tarski-Seidenberg)**.** *Let $A \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d$ be a semi-algebraic set and ψ a rational map that is well-defined on A, that is, $A \subseteq D_\psi$. Then the image $\psi(A)$ is a semi-algebraic set.*

Pachter and Sturmfels (2005) define an algebraic statistical model as the image of a polynomial parametrization $\psi(A) \subseteq \Delta$ where A is the interior of a polyhedron and Δ is the probability simplex. The emphasis on such models, which one might call *parametric algebraic statistical models*, results from the fact that most models used in the biological applications under consideration (sequence alignment and phylogenetic tree reconstruction, to name two) are parametric models for discrete random variables. Furthermore, the precise algebraic form of these parametric models is essential to parametric maximum a posteriori estimation, one of the major themes in the text of Pachter and Sturmfels (2005). The Tarski-Seidenberg theorem and Example 4 yield the following unifying fact.

Corollary 14. *If a parametric statistical model for discrete random variables is a well-defined image of a rational map from a semi-algebraic set to the probability simplex, then the model is an algebraic exponential family.*

3.2. Independence models as examples

Many statistical models are defined based on considerations of (conditional) independence. Examples include Markov chain models, models for testing independence hypotheses in contingency tables and graphical models, see e.g. Lauritzen (1996). As we show next, conditional independence yields algebraic exponential families in both the Gaussian and discrete cases. The algebraic structure also passes through under marginalization, as we will illustrate in Section 4.

Example 15 (Conditional independence in normal distributions)**.** Let $X = (X_1, \ldots, X_p)$ be a random vector with joint normal distribution $\mathcal{N}_p(\mu, \Sigma)$ with mean vector $\mu \in \mathbb{R}^p$ and positive definite covariance matrix Σ. For three pairwise disjoint index sets $A, B, C \subseteq \{1, \ldots, p\}$, the subvectors X_A and X_B are conditionally independent given X_C, in symbols $X_A \perp\!\!\!\perp X_B \mid X_C$ if and only if

$$\det(\Sigma_{\{i\}\cup C \times \{j\}\cup C}) = 0 \quad \forall i \in A,\ j \in B.$$

If $C = \emptyset$, then conditional independence given $X_\emptyset$ is understood to mean marginal independence of X_A and X_B. □

Example 16 (Conditional independence in the discrete case)**.** Conditional independence statements also have a natural algebraic interpretation in the discrete case. As the simplest example, consider the conditional independence statement $X_1 \perp\!\!\!\perp X_2 \mid X_3$ for the discrete random vector (X_1, X_2, X_3). This translates into the collection of algebraic constraints on the joint probability distribution

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{Prob}(X_1 = i_1, X_2 = j_1, X_3 = k) \cdot \text{Prob}(X_1 = i_2, X_2 = j_2, X_3 = k) \\ = \; & \text{Prob}(X_1 = i_1, X_2 = j_2, X_3 = k) \cdot \text{Prob}(X_1 = i_2, X_2 = j_1, X_3 = k) \end{aligned}$$

for all $i_1, i_2 \in [m_1]$, $j_1, j_2 \in [m_2]$ and $k \in [m_3]$, where $[m] = \{1, 2, \ldots, m\}$. Alternatively, we might write this in a more compact algebraic way as:

$$p_{i_1 j_1 k} p_{i_2 j_2 k} - p_{i_1 j_2 k} p_{i_2 j_1 k} \;=\; 0,$$

where p_{ijk} is shorthand for $\text{Prob}(X_1 = i, X_2 = j, X_3 = k)$. In general, any collection of conditional independence statements for discrete random variables corresponds to a collection of quadratic polynomial constraints on the components of the joint probability vector. □

4. Model geometry

Of fundamental importance to statistical inference is the intuitive notion of the "shape" of a statistical model, reflected in its abstract geometrical properties. Examples of interesting geometrical features are whether or not the likelihood function is multimodal, whether or not the model has singularities (is non-regular) and the nature of the underlying singularities. These are all part of answering the question: How does the geometry of the model reflect its statistical features? When the model is an algebraic exponential family, these problems can be addressed using algebraic techniques, in particular by computing with ideals. This is even true when the model comes in a parametric form, however, it is then often helpful to translate to an implicit representation of the model.

4.1 Model invariants

Recall that an ideal $I \subset \mathbb{R}[\mathbf{t}]$ is a collection of polynomials such that for all $f, g \in I$, $f + g \in I$ and for all $f \in I$ and $h \in \mathbb{R}[\mathbf{t}]$, $h \cdot f \in I$. Ideals can be used to determine real algebraic varieties by computing the zero set of the ideal:

$$V(I) \quad = \quad \{\mathbf{a} \in \mathbb{R}^n \mid f(\mathbf{a}) = 0 \text{ for all } f \in I\}.$$

When we wish to speak of the variety over the complex numbers we use the notation $V_{\mathbb{C}}(I)$. Reversing this procedure, if we are given a set $V \subset \mathbb{R}^n$ we can compute its defining ideal, which is the set of all polynomials that vanish on V:

$$I(V) \quad = \quad \{f \in \mathbb{R}[\mathbf{t}] \mid f(\mathbf{a}) = 0 \text{ for all } \mathbf{a} \in V\}.$$

Definition 17. *Let A be a semi-algebraic set defining an algebraic exponential family $\mathcal{P}_M = (P_\eta \mid \eta \in M)$ via $M = g^{-1}(A \cap g(N))$. A polynomial f in the vanishing ideal $I(A)$ is a* model invariant *for $\mathcal{P}_M$.*

Remark 18. The term “model invariant” is chosen in analogy to the term “phylogenetic invariant” that was coined by biologists working with statistical models that are useful for the reconstruction of phylogenetic trees.

Given a list of polynomial $f_1, \ldots, f_k$ the ideal generated by these polynomials is denoted

$$\langle f_1, \ldots, f_k \rangle \quad = \quad \left\{ \sum_{i=1}^{k} h_i \cdot f_i \mid h_i \in \mathbb{R}[\mathbf{t}] \right\}.$$

The Hilbert basis theorem says that every ideal in a polynomial ring has a finite generating set. Thus, when working with a statistical model that we want to describe algebraically, we need to compute a *finite list* of polynomials that generate the ideal of model invariants. These equations can be used to address questions like determining the structure of singularities which in turn can be used to address asymptotic questions.

Example 19 (Conditional independence)**.** In Example 15 we gave a set of equations whose zero set in the cone of positive definite matrices is the independence model obtained from $X_A \perp\!\!\!\perp X_B \mid X_C$. However, there are more equations, in general, that belong to the ideal of model invariants I. In particular, we have

$$I \quad = \quad \left\langle \det \tilde{\Sigma} \mid \tilde{\Sigma} \text{ is a } (|C|+1) \times (|C|+1) \text{ submatrix of } \Sigma_{A\cup C, B\cup C} \right\rangle.$$

The fact that this ideal vanishes on the model follows from the fact that any Σ in the model is positive definite and, hence, each principal minor is invertible. The fact that the indicated ideal comprises all model invariants can be derived from a result in commutative algebra (Conca, 1994).

In the discrete case, the polynomials we introduced in Example 16 generate the ideal of model invariants for the model induced by $X_1 \perp\!\!\!\perp X_2 \mid X_3$. For models induced by collections of independence statements this need no longer be true; compare Theorem 8 in Garcia et al. (2005). $\square$

One may wonder what the use of passing from the set of polynomials exhibited in Example 15 to the considerably larger set of polynomials described in Example 19 is, since both sets of polynomials define the model inside the cone of positive definite matrices. The smaller set of polynomials have the property that there lie singular covariance matrices in the positive *semi*definite cone that satisfy the polynomial constraints but are not limits of covariance matrices in the model. From an algebraic standpoint, the main problem is that the ideal generated by the smaller set of polynomials is not a prime ideal. In general, we prefer to work with the prime ideal given by all model invariants because prime ideals tend to be better behaved from a computational standpoint and are less likely to introduce extraneous solutions on boundaries.

For the conditional independence models described thus far, the equations $I(A)$ that define the model come from the definition of the model. For instance, conditional independence imposes natural constraints on covariance matrices of normal random variables and the joint probability distributions of discrete random variables. When we are presented with a parametric model, however, it is in general a challenging problem of computational algebra to compute the *implicit* description of the model A as a semi-algebraic set. At the heart of this problem is the computation of the ideal of model invariants $I(A)$, which can be solved using Gröbner bases. Methods for computing an implicit description from a parametric description can be found in Cox et al. (1997), though the quest for better implicitization methods is an active area of research.

The vanishing ideal of a semi-algebraic set can be used to address many questions about it, for instance, the dimension of a semi-algebraic set. The following definition and proposition provide a useful characterization of the dimension of a semi-algebraic set.

Definition 20. *A set of indeterminates* $p_{i_1}, \ldots, p_{i_k}$ *is* algebraically independent *for the ideal* I *if there is no polynomial only in* $p_{i_1}, \ldots, p_{i_k}$ *that belongs to* I*.*

Proposition 21. *The dimension of a semi-algebraic set* A *is the cardinality of the largest set of algebraically independent indeterminates for* $I(A)$*.*

The proof that algebraically independent sets of indeterminates and Proposition 21 meshes with the usual geometric notion of dimension can be found in Cox et al. (1997).

The subset $V_{\text{sing}} \subset V$ where a variety V is singular is also a variety. Indeed, suppose that polynomials $f_1, \ldots, f_k$ generate the vanishing ideal $I(V)$. Let $J \in \mathbb{R}[\mathbf{x}]^{k \times n}$ denote the Jacobian matrix with entry $J_{ij} = \frac{\partial f_i}{\partial x_j}$.

Proposition 22. *A point $\mathbf{a} \in V_{\mathbb{C}}(I)$ is a singular point of the complex variety if and only if $J(\mathbf{a})$ has rank less than the codimension of the largest irreducible component of V containing $\mathbf{a}$.*

The singularities of the real variety are defined to be the intersection of the singular locus of $V_{\mathbb{C}}(I)$ with $\mathbb{R}^n$. Proposition 22 yields a direct way to compute, as an algebraic variety, the singular locus of V. Indeed, the rank of the Jacobian matrix is less than c, if and only if the $c \times c$ minors of J are all zero. Thus, if I defines an irreducible variety of codimension c, the ideal $\langle M_c(J), f_1, \ldots, f_k \rangle$ has as zero set the singular locus of V, where $M_c(J)$ denotes the set of $c \times c$ minors of J. If the variety is not irreducible, the singular set consists of the union of the singular set of all the irreducible components together with the sets of all pairwise intersections between irreducible components.

Removing the singularities V_{sing} from V one obtains a smooth manifold such that the local geometry at a non-singular point of V is determined by a linear space, namely, the tangent space. At singular points, the local geometry can be described using the tangent cone, which is the semi-algebraic set that approximates the limiting behavior of the secant lines that pass through the point of interest. In the context of parameter spaces of statistical models, the study of this limiting behavior is crucial for the study of large sample asymptotics at a singular point. The geometry of the tangent cone for semi-algebraic sets can be complicated and we postpone an in-depth study for a later publication. For the singular models that we encounter in the next section, the crucial point on the tangent cone is the following proposition.

Proposition 23. *Suppose that $A = V_1 \cup \cdots \cup V_m$ is the union of smooth algebraic varieties and let $\mathbf{a}$ be a point in the intersection $V_1 \cap \cdots \cap V_j$ such that $\mathbf{a} \notin V_k$ for $k \geq j+1$. Then the tangent cone of A at $\mathbf{a}$ is the union of the tangent planes to $V_1, \ldots, V_j$ at $\mathbf{a}$.*

4.2 A conditional independence model with singularities

Let $X = (X_1, X_2, X_3)$ have a trivariate normal distribution $\mathcal{N}_3(\mu, \Sigma)$, and define a model by requiring that $X_1 \perp\!\!\!\perp X_2$ and simultaneously $X_1 \perp\!\!\!\perp X_2 \mid X_3$. By Example 15, the model is an algebraic exponential family given by the subset $M = \zeta^{-1}(A \cap \zeta(N))$, where $\zeta(N) = \mathbb{R}^3 \times \mathbb{R}^{3\times 3}_{\text{pd}}$ is the Gaussian mean parameter space and the algebraic variety

$$A = \left\{ (\mu, \Sigma) \in \mathbb{R}^3 \times \mathbb{R}^{3\times 3}_{\text{sym}} \mid \sigma_{12} = 0,\ \det(\Sigma_{\{1,3\}\times\{2,3\}}) = \sigma_{12}\sigma_{33} - \sigma_{13}\sigma_{23} = 0 \right\}.$$

Here, $\mathbb{R}^{3\times 3}_{\text{sym}}$ is the space of symmetric 3×3-matrices. The set A is defined equivalently by the joint vanishing of σ_{12} and $\sigma_{13}\sigma_{23}$. Hence, $A = A_{13} \cup A_{23}$ for

$$A_{13} = \{(\mu, \Sigma) \in A \mid \sigma_{12} = \sigma_{13} = 0\},$$
$$A_{23} = \{(\mu, \Sigma) \in A \mid \sigma_{12} = \sigma_{23} = 0\}.$$

This decomposition as a union reflects the well-known fact that

$$[\, X_1 \perp\!\!\!\perp X_2 \,\wedge\, X_1 \perp\!\!\!\perp X_2 \mid X_3 \,] \iff [\, X_1 \perp\!\!\!\perp (X_2, X_3) \,\vee\, X_2 \perp\!\!\!\perp (X_1, X_3) \,],$$

which holds for the multivariate normal distribution but also when X_3 is a binary variable; compare (Dawid, 1980, Thm. 8.3). By Proposition 23 the singular locus of A is the intersection

$$A_{\text{sing}} = A_{13} \cap A_{23} = \{(\mu, \Sigma) \in A \mid \sigma_{12} = \sigma_{13} = \sigma_{23} = 0\},$$

which corresponds to diagonal covariance matrices Σ, or in other words, complete independence of the three random variables $X_1 \perp\!\!\!\perp X_2 \perp\!\!\!\perp X_3$.

Given n independent and identically distributed normal random vectors $X_1, \ldots, X_n \in \mathbb{R}^3$, define the empirical mean and covariance matrix as

$$\bar{X} = \frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n} X_i, \quad S = \frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n}(X_i - \bar{X})(X_i - \bar{X})^t, \tag{4.1}$$

respectively. The likelihood ratio test statistic for testing the model based on parameter space M against the regular exponential family of all trivariate normal distributions can be expressed as

$$\lambda_M(\bar{X}, S) = \log\left(\frac{s_{11}s_{22}}{s_{11}s_{22} - s_{12}^2}\right) + \min\left\{\log\left(\frac{s_{33.2}}{s_{33.12}}\right), \log\left(\frac{s_{33.1}}{s_{33.12}}\right)\right\}, \tag{4.2}$$

where for $A \subseteq \{1, 2\}$, $s_{33.A}$ is the empirical conditional variance

$$s_{33.A} = s_{33} - S_{\{3\}\times A} S_{A\times A}^{-1} S_{A\times\{3\}}.$$

The three terms in (4.2) correspond to tests of the hypotheses

$$X_1 \perp\!\!\!\perp X_2, \quad X_1 \perp\!\!\!\perp X_3 \mid X_2, \quad \text{and} \quad X_2 \perp\!\!\!\perp X_3 \mid X_1.$$

Note that a joint distribution satisfies $X_1 \perp\!\!\!\perp (X_2, X_3)$ if and only if it satisfies both $X_1 \perp\!\!\!\perp X_2$ and $X_1 \perp\!\!\!\perp X_3 \mid X_2$.

If (μ, Σ) is an element of the smooth manifold $A \setminus A_{\text{sing}}$, then $\lambda_M(\bar{X}, S)$ converges to a χ_2^2-distribution as n tends to infinity; but over the singular locus the limiting distribution is non-standard as detailed in Drton (2006).

Proposition 24. *Let* $(\mu, \Sigma) \in A_{\text{sing}}$. *As* $n \to \infty$, *the likelihood ratio test statistic* $\lambda_M(\bar{X}, S)$ *converges to the minimum of two dependent* χ^2_2*-distributed random variables, namely,*

$$\lambda_M(\bar{X}, S) \longrightarrow_d \min(W_{12} + W_{13}, W_{12} + W_{23}) = W_{12} + \min(W_{13}, W_{23})$$

for three independent χ^2_1*-random variables* W_{12}, W_{13} *and* W_{23}.

Similar asymptotics arise in the model of joint marginal and conditional independence in the discrete case with X_3 binary. In this case the variety breaks again into the union of two independence varieties $X_1 \perp\!\!\!\perp \{X_2, X_3\}$ and $X_2 \perp\!\!\!\perp \{X_1, X_3\}$, whose intersection is the complete independence variety corresponding to $X_1 \perp\!\!\!\perp X_2 \perp\!\!\!\perp X_3$. Non-standard asymptotics will occur at the intersection of these two varieties. However, as both of the varieties $X_1 \perp\!\!\!\perp \{X_2, X_3\}$ and $X_2 \perp\!\!\!\perp \{X_1, X_3\}$ are smooth, the tangent cone is simply the union of the two tangent spaces to the two component varieties. The asymptotics behave in a manner similar to the Gaussian case, as the minimum of chi-square distributions.

4.3 Hidden random variables

Another important use for the implicit equations defining a model are that they can be used to determine a (partial) description of any new models that arise from the given model via marginalization. In particular, algebraic methods can be used to explore properties of models with hidden random variables. In this section, we describe how to derive model invariants via elimination in the presence of hidden variables for Gaussian and discrete random variables.

Proposition 25. *Suppose that the random vector* $X = (X_1, \ldots, X_p)$ *is distributed according to a multivariate normal distribution from a model with ideal of model invariants* $I \subset \mathbb{R}[\mu_i, \sigma_{ij} \mid 1 \le i \le j \le p]$. *Then the* elimination *ideal* $I \cap \mathbb{R}[\mu_i, \sigma_{ij} \mid 1 \le i \le j \le p-1]$ *comprises the model invariants of the model created by marginalizing to* $X' = (X_1, \ldots, X_{p-1})$.

The indicated elimination can be computed using Gröbner bases (Cox et al., 1997). A similar type of elimination formulation can be given for the marginalization in the discrete case.

Proposition 26. *Let* $X_1, \ldots, X_p$ *be discrete random variables with* X_k *taking values in* $[m_k] = \{1, \ldots, m_k\}$. *Consider a model for the random vector* $(X_1, \ldots, X_p)$ *that has the ideal of model invariants* $I \subset \mathbb{R}[p_{i_1,\ldots,i_p}]$. *Let* $J \subset \mathbb{R}[q_{i_1,\ldots,i_{p-1}}, p_{i_1,\ldots,i_p}]$ *be the ideal*

$$J \quad = \quad I \; + \; \left\langle q_{i_1,\ldots,i_{p-1}} - \sum_{j=1}^{m_p} p_{i_1,\ldots,i_{p-1}j} \mid i_k \in [m_k] \right\rangle.$$

Then the elimination ideal $J \cap \mathbb{R}[q_{i_1,\ldots,i_{p-1}}]$ *is the ideal of model invariants of the model created by marginalizing to* $X' = (X_1, \ldots, X_{p-1})$.

Up to this point, we have made very little use of the inequality constraints that can arise in the definition of a semi-algebraic set. In both of our conditional independence models, the inequality constraints arose from the fact that we needed to generate a probability distribution, and were supplied by the positive definite cone or the probability simplex. In general, however, we may need non-trivial inequality constraints to describe the model. Currently, very little is known about the needed inequality constraints, even in simple examples. This occurs, for instance, in the marginalization of conditional independence models.

Example 27 (Marginalization of an Independence Model)**.** Let A be the semi-algebraic set of probability vectors for a discrete random vector $X = (X_1, X_2, X_3)$ satisfying the conditional independence constraint $X_1 \perp\!\!\!\perp X_2 \mid X_3$. Let $\psi(A)$ denote the image of this model after marginalizing out the random variable X_3.

The joint distribution of X_1 and X_2 can be represented as a matrix (p_{ij}). Assuming as above that X_k takes on values in $[m_k]$, the conditional independence constraint $X_1 \perp\!\!\!\perp X_2 \mid X_3$ implies that the matrix (p_{ij}) has rank less than or equal to m_3. The set of equality constraints that arise from this parametrization are the set of $(m_3+1) \times (m_3+1)$ minors of the matrix (p_{ij}). However, it is not true that these equality constraints together with the inequality constraints arising from the probability simplex suffice to define this model. The smallest example of this occurs when, $m_1 = m_2 = 4$ and $m_3 = 3$. In this case the ideal $I(\psi(A))$ is generated by the determinant of the generic 4×4 matrix (p_{ij}). Fix a small value of $\epsilon > 0$. The matrix

$$\frac{1}{8(1+\epsilon)} \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 1 & \epsilon & \epsilon \\ \epsilon & 1 & 1 & \epsilon \\ \epsilon & \epsilon & 1 & 1 \\ 1 & \epsilon & \epsilon & 1 \end{pmatrix}$$

represents a probability distribution that satisfies the determinant constraint (the matrix has rank 3). However, it can be shown that this probability distribution does not belong to $\psi(A)$. That is, this bivariate distribution is not the marginalization of a trivariate distribution exhibiting conditional independence. Thus, in addition to the equality constraint, there are non-trivial inequality constraints that define the marginalized independence model. More about this example can be found in Mond et al. (2003). □

5. Solving likelihood equations

Let $\mathcal{P} = (P_\eta \mid \eta \in N)$ be a regular exponential family with canonical sufficient statistic T. If we draw a sample $X_1, \ldots, X_n$ of independent random vectors from P_η, then, as detailed in Section 2, the canonical statistic becomes $\sum_{i=1}^{n} T(X_i) =: n\bar{T}$ and the log-likelihood function takes the form

$$\ell(\eta \mid \bar{T}) = n\,[\eta^t \bar{T} - \phi(\eta)] \tag{5.1}$$

For maximum likelihood estimation in an algebraic exponential family $\mathcal{P}_M = (P_\eta \mid \eta \in M)$, $M \subseteq N$, we need to maximize $\ell(\eta \mid \bar{T})$ over the set M.

Let A and g be the semi-algebraic set and the diffeomorphism that define the parameter space M. Let $I(A) = \langle f_1, \ldots, f_m \rangle$ be the ideal of model invariants and $\gamma = g(\eta)$ the parameters after reparametrization based on g. If boundary issues are of no concern then the maximization problem can be relaxed to

$$\begin{aligned} &\max\ \ell(\gamma \mid \bar{T}) \\ &\text{subject to } f_i(\gamma) = 0, \quad i = 1, \ldots, m, \end{aligned} \tag{5.2}$$

where

$$\ell(\gamma \mid \bar{T}) = g^{-1}(\gamma)^t \bar{T} - \phi(g^{-1}(\gamma)). \tag{5.3}$$

If $\ell(\gamma \mid \bar{T})$ has rational partial derivatives then the maximization problem (5.2) can be solved algebraically by solving a polynomial system of critical equations. Details on this approach in the case of discrete data can be found in Catanese et al. (2006); Hoşten et al. (2005). However, depending on the interplay of g^{-1} and the mean parametrization ζ, which according to (2.1) is the gradient map of the log-Laplace transform ϕ, such an algebraic approach to maximum likelihood estimation is possible also in other algebraic exponential families.

Proposition 28. *The function $\ell(\gamma \mid \bar{T})$ has rational partial derivatives if (i) the map $\zeta \circ g^{-1}$ is a rational map and (ii) the map g^{-1} has partial derivatives that are rational functions.*

Example 29 (Discrete likelihood equations)**.** For the discrete exponential family from Example 4, the mean parameters are the probabilities $p_1, \ldots, p_{m-1}$. The inverse of the mean parametrization map has component functions $(\zeta^{-1})_x = \log(p_x/p_m)$, where $p_m = 1 - p_1 - \cdots - p_{m-1}$. Since $d\log(t)/dt = 1/t$ is rational, ζ^{-1} has rational partial derivatives. Hence, maximum likelihood estimates can be computed algebraically if the discrete algebraic exponential family is defined in terms of the probability coordinates $p_1, \ldots, p_{m-1}$. This is the context of the above mentioned work by Catanese et al. (2006); Hoşten et al. (2005). □

Example 30 (Factor analysis)**.** The mean parametrization ζ for the family of multivariate normal distributions and its inverse ζ^{-1} are based on matrix inversions and thus are rational maps. Thus algebraic maximum likelihood estimation is possible whenever a Gaussian algebraic exponential family is defined in terms of coordinates $g(\eta)$ for a rational map g. This includes families defined in the mean parameters (μ, Σ) or the natural parameters $(\Sigma^{-1}\mu, \Sigma^{-1})$.

As a concrete example, consider the factor analysis model with one factor and four observed variables. In centered form this model is the family of multivariate normal distributions $\mathcal{N}_4(0, \Sigma)$ on $\mathbb{R}^4$ with positive definite covariance matrix

$$\Sigma = \operatorname{diag}(\omega) + \lambda\lambda^t, \tag{5.4}$$

where $\omega \in (0, \infty)^4$ and $\lambda \in \mathbb{R}^4$. Equation (5.4) involves polynomial expressions in $\theta = (\omega, \lambda)$. For algebraic maximum likelihood estimation, however, it is computationally more efficient to employ the fact that condition (5.4) is equivalent to requiring that the positive definite natural parameter Σ^{-1} can be expressed as

$$\Sigma^{-1}(\theta) = \operatorname{diag}(\omega) - \lambda\lambda^t, \tag{5.5}$$

with $\theta = (\omega, \lambda) \in (0, \infty)^4 \times \mathbb{R}^4$; compare Drton et al. (2007, §8). When parametrizing Σ^{-1} the map g is the identity map.

Let S be the empirical covariance matrix from a sample of random vectors $X_1, \dots, X_n$ in $\mathbb{R}^4$; compare (4.1). We can solve the maximization problem (5.2) by plugging the polynomial parametric expression for $\gamma = \Sigma^{-1}$ from (5.5) into the Gaussian version of the log-likelihood function in (5.3). Taking partial derivatives we find the equations

$$\frac{1}{\det(\Sigma^{-1}(\theta))} \cdot \frac{\partial \det(\Sigma^{-1}(\theta))}{\partial \theta_i} = \operatorname{trace}\left[S \cdot \frac{\partial \Sigma^{-1}(\theta)}{\partial \theta_i}\right], \qquad i = 1, \dots, 8. \tag{5.6}$$

These equations can be made polynomial by multiplying by $\det(\Sigma^{-1}(\theta))$. Clearing the denominator introduces many additional solutions $\theta \in \mathbb{C}^8$ to the system, which lead to non-invertible matrices $\Sigma^{-1}(\theta)$. However, these extraneous solutions can be removed using an operation called *saturation*. After saturation, the (complex) solution set of (5.6) is seen to consist of 57 isolated points. These 57 solutions come in pairs $\theta_\pm = (\omega, \pm\lambda)$; one solution has $\lambda = 0$.

When the empirical covariance matrix S is rounded then we can compute the 57 solutions using software for algebraic and numerical solving of polynomial equations. For the example

$$S_1 = \begin{pmatrix} 13 & 2 & -1 & 3 \\ 2 & 11 & 3 & 2 \\ -1 & 3 & 9 & 1 \\ 3 & 2 & 1 & 7 \end{pmatrix}$$

we find that (5.6) has 11 feasible solutions in $(0,\infty)^4 \times \mathbb{R}^4$. Via (5.5), these solutions define 6 distinct factor analysis covariance matrices. Two of these matrices yield local maxima of the likelihood function:

$$\begin{pmatrix} 13 & 2.1242 & 0.9870 & 2.5876 \\ 2.1242 & 11 & 0.89407 & 2.3440 \\ 0.9870 & 0.8941 & 9 & 1.0891 \\ 2.5876 & 2.3440 & 1.0891 & 7 \end{pmatrix}, \qquad \begin{pmatrix} 13 & 2.1816 & 1.0100 & 1.0962 \\ 2.1816 & 11 & 2.3862 & 2.3779 \\ 1.0100 & 2.3862 & 9 & 1.1990 \\ 1.0962 & 2.3779 & 1.1990 & 7 \end{pmatrix}.$$

The matrix to the left has the larger value of the likelihood function and we claim that it yields the global maximum. For this claim to be valid we have to check that no matrix close to the boundary of the set $\{\Sigma^{-1}(\theta) \mid \theta \in (0,\infty)^4 \times \mathbb{R}^4\}$ has larger value of the likelihood function. Suppose this was not true. Then the likelihood function would have to achieve its global maximum over the cone of positive definite matrices outside the set $\{\Sigma^{-1}(\theta) \mid \theta \in (0,\infty)^4 \times \mathbb{R}^4\}$. In order to rule out this possibility, we consider all the complex solutions $\theta \notin (0,\infty)^4 \times \mathbb{R}^4$ of (5.6) that induce real and positive definite matrices $\Sigma^{-1}(\theta)$. There are ten such solutions, which all have $\omega \in \mathbb{R}^4$ and purely imaginary $\lambda \in i\mathbb{R}^4$. There are five different induced matrices $\Sigma^{-1}(\theta)$, but at all of them the likelihood function is smaller than for the two quoted local maximizer. This confirms our claim.

As a second interesting example consider

$$S_2 = \begin{pmatrix} 31 & 11 & -1 & 5 \\ 11 & 23 & 3 & -2 \\ -1 & 3 & 7 & 1 \\ 5 & -2 & 1 & 7 \end{pmatrix}.$$

The equations (5.6) have again 11 feasible solutions $\hat{\theta}$. Associated are 6 distinct factor analysis covariance matrices that all correspond to saddle points of the likelihood function. Hence, if we close the set of inverse covariance matrices $\{\Sigma^{-1}(\theta) \mid \theta \in (0,\infty)^4 \times \mathbb{R}^4\}$, then the global optimum of the likelihood function over this closure must be attained on the boundary.

In order to determine which boundary solution provides the global maximum of the likelihood function, it is more convenient to switch back to the standard parameterization in (5.4), which writes the covariance matrix as $\Sigma(\theta)$ for $\theta = (\omega, \lambda)$ in $(0,\infty)^4 \times \mathbb{R}^4$. The closure of $\{\Sigma(\theta) \mid \theta \in (0,\infty)^4 \times \mathbb{R}^4\}$ is obtained by closing the parameter domain to $[0,\infty)^4 \times \mathbb{R}^4$. Since S_2 is positive definite, the global maximizer of the likelihood function must be a matrix of full rank, which implies that at most one of the four parameters ω_i can be zero. In each of the four possible classes of boundary cases the induced likelihood equations (in 7 parameters) have a closed form solution leading to a unique covariance matrix. We find that the global maximum is achieved in the case $\omega_1 = 0$. The global maximizer of the likelihood functions over the closure of the parameter space equals

$$\begin{pmatrix} 31 & 11 & -1 & 5 \\ 11 & 23 & -0.3548 & 1.7742 \\ -1 & -0.3548 & 7 & -0.1613 \\ 5 & 1.7742 & -0.1613 & 7 \end{pmatrix}.$$

In the factor analysis literature data leading to such boundary problems are known as Heywood cases. Hence, our computation *proves* that S_2 constitutes a Heywood case. □

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we have attempted to present a useful, unified definition of an algebraic statistical model. In this definition, an algebraic model is a submodel of a reference model with nice statistical properties. Working primarily with small examples of conditional independence models, we have tried to illustrate how our definition might be a useful framework, in which the geometry of parameter spaces can be related to properties of statistical inference procedures. Since we impose algebraic structure, this geometry can be studied using algebraic techniques, which allow one to tackle problems where simple linear arguments will not work. In order to apply these algebraic techniques in a particular example of interest, one can resort to one of the many software systems, both free and commercial, that provide implementations of algorithms for carrying out the necessary computations. A comprehensive list of useful software can be found in Chapter 2 of Pachter and Sturmfels (2005).

While we believe that future work in algebraic statistics may involve reference models in which the notion of "nice statistical properties" is filled with life in many different ways, we also believe that the most important class of reference models are regular exponential families. This led us to consider what we termed algebraic exponential families. These families were shown to be flexible enough to encompass structures arising from marginalization, i.e., the involvement of hidden variables. Hidden variable models typically do not form curved exponential families, which triggered Geiger et al. (2001) to introduce their stratified exponential families. These stratified families are more general than both algebraic and curved exponential families but, as our Example 9 suggests, they seem in fact to be too general to allow the derivation of results that would hold in the entire class of models. In algebraic exponential families, on the other hand, the restriction to semialgebraic sets entails that parameter spaces always have nice local geometric properties and phenomena as created in Example 9 cannot occur. In light of this fact, our algebraic exponential families appear to be in particular a good framework for the study of hidden variable models, which are widely used models whose statistical properties have yet to be understood in entirety.

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