

## Lecture 7 – Identification in structural models

Economics 8379  
George Washington University

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## Identification in parametric models

Del Boca et al. (2014)

Semiparametric and nonparametric identification

Partial identification

# Identification

- Let  $f_{Y|X}(Y_i | X_i; \theta)$  denote the conditional density of  $Y_i$  given  $X_i$ , which depends on a parameter vector  $\theta$ , which must be in a parameter space  $\Theta$ .
- The model is identified at  $\theta_0$  if  $f_{Y|X}(y | x; \theta) = f_{Y|X}(y | x; \theta_0)$  implies that  $\theta = \theta_0$ .

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- The model is identified at  $\theta_0$  if  $f_{Y|X}(y | x; \theta) = f_{Y|X}(y | x; \theta_0)$  implies that  $\theta = \theta_0$ .
- The model is identified if this holds for any possible value of  $\theta_0 \in \Theta$ .
- The model is *locally identified* if this is true only for values of  $\theta$  in a neighborhood around  $\theta_0$ .

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  - If  $f_{Y|X}(y | x; \theta) = f_{Y|X}(y | x; \theta_0)$  then  $\theta_1 = \theta_{10}$ .
- The model is partially identified if  $f_{Y|X}(y | x; \theta) = f_{Y|X}(y | x; \theta_0)$  implies that  $\theta \in \Theta_0 \subseteq \Theta$ 
  - $\Theta_0$  is called the “identified set”.

# Identification

- It is *often* the case that we have to restrict  $\Theta$  in order for the model to be identified.
  - Sometimes these restrictions have testable implications.
  - Sometimes they don't.
- If  $\theta_0$  is “close” to a point outside  $\Theta$  where the model is not identified, inference may be effected.
  - This is called “weak identification”
- We will see an example of this shortly.



# Maximum likelihood

- The MLE of  $\theta$  is  $\arg \max_{\theta \in \Theta} \sum_{i=1}^n \log (f_{Y|X}(Y_i | X_i; \theta))$ .
  - The estimator is consistent if  $\mathcal{L}_n(\theta) \rightarrow_p \mathcal{L}(\theta)$  and  $\mathcal{L}(\theta) = \mathcal{L}(\theta_0)$  implies that  $\theta = \theta_0$ .

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  - If the model is identified, the likelihood is correctly specified, and  $\mathcal{L}(\theta) = E (\log(f_{Y|X}(Y_i | X_i; \theta)))$  then this condition holds.

## Maximum likelihood

- A failure of local identification can often be detected by observing that the likelihood function is flat in some region.
- (Global) identification failures are harder to detect empirically.
- In complex models that require numerical integration or simulation, even local identification failures may be overlooked, particularly when  $\theta$  is high-dimensional.
- Therefore, generally, identification should be proved theoretically.

## MLE example

- Suppose that

$$y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_{1i} + \beta_2 x_{2i} + u_i$$

$$x_{1i} = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 x_{2i} + v_i$$

and  $(u_i, v_i) \mid x_{2i} \sim N(0, \Sigma)$ .

- Consider the likelihood with  $Y_i = (y_i, x_{1i})$  and  $X_i = x_{2i}$ .
  - Let  $\theta = (\beta_0, \beta_1, \beta_2, \gamma_0, \gamma_1, \Sigma)$ .
  - The distribution is a bivariate normal with mean  $\mu(x_{2i}; \theta) = (\beta_0 + \beta_1 \gamma_0 + \beta_1 \gamma_1 x_{2i} + \beta_2 x_{2i}, \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 x_{2i})$  and variance

$$\Sigma = \begin{pmatrix} \sigma_u^2 + \beta_1^2 \sigma_v^2 + 2\beta_1 \sigma_{uv} & \beta_1 \sigma_v^2 + \sigma_{uv} \\ \beta_1 \sigma_v^2 + \sigma_{uv} & \sigma_v^2 \end{pmatrix}$$

# MLE example

- Identification failure:
  - For any  $s \in [0, 1]$  define  $\beta_1^s = s(\beta_1 + \beta_2/\gamma_1)$  and  $\beta_2^s = (1 - s)(\beta_1\gamma_1 + \beta_2)$ .
  - Then notice that  $\beta_1^s\gamma_1 + \beta_2^s = \beta_1\gamma_1 + \beta_2$  for every  $s$ .

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  - and  $\sigma_u^s$  so that
 
$$(\sigma_u^s)^2 + (\beta_1^s)^2\sigma_v^2 + 2\beta_1^s\sigma_{uv}^s = \sigma_u^2 + \beta_1^2\sigma_v^2 + 2\beta_1\sigma_{uv}$$



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  - then  $\mathcal{L}(\theta^s) = \mathcal{L}(\theta)$ .
- Solutions:
  - assume that  $\sigma_{uv} = 0$  (i.e.,  $X_{1i}$  is exogenous)
  - or assume that  $\beta_2 = 0$  (i.e., an exclusion restriction)

## MLE example

- Consider the second solution that  $\beta_2 = 0$ .
  - Under this restriction, the model is identified if  $\gamma_1 \neq 0$ .
  - Even after imposing  $\beta_2 = 0$ , we have to restrict  $\Theta$  further to get identification.
    - This is an example of a testable restriction.
  - But what happens if  $\beta_2$  is close to 0?

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    - This is an example of a testable restriction.
  - But what happens if  $\beta_2$  is close to 0?
    - *weak identification*

# GMM

- Consider GMM estimation of  $\theta$  based on the moment conditions,  $E(w_i m(y_i, x_i, \theta_0)) = 0$ .
  - Then the model is identified at  $\theta_0$  if  $E(w_i m(y_i, x_i, \theta)) = 0$  implies that  $\theta = \theta_0$ .
  - The model is identified if this holds regardless of the value of  $\theta_0$ .
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  - The model is identified if this holds regardless of the value of  $\theta_0$ .
  - The model is *locally identified* if this is true only for values of  $\theta$  in a neighborhood around  $\theta_0$ .
  - n.b. It is possible that (a)  $f_{Y|X}(y | x; \theta) = f_{Y|X}(y | x; \theta_0)$  implies that  $\theta = \theta_0$  but (b) there is some  $\theta \neq \theta_0$  such that  $E(w_i m(y_i, x_i, \theta)) = 0$ .

## Indirect inference

- Last class we also saw a condition for identification based on indirect inference (i.e., the method of simulated moments).
  - The binding function  $\theta(\beta)$  must be one-to-one.
- This is often hard to verify.
- Del Boca, Flinn, Wiswall (2014, REStud) provides a good example.

## Del Boca et al. (2014) model

- Parents choose time ( $\tau_{1,t}$  and  $\tau_{2,t}$ ) and goods ( $e_t$ ) to invest in child, along with leisure and work hours ( $l_{j,t}$  and  $h_{j,t}$ ,  $j = 1, 2$ ) .
  - Child quality:  $k_{t+1} = R_t \tau_{1,t}^{\delta_{1,t}} \tau_{2,t}^{\delta_{2,t}} e_t^{\delta_{3,t}} k_t^{\delta_{4,t}}$  .
  - Period utility:  $u = \alpha_1 \ln l_{1t} + \alpha_2 \ln l_{2t} + \alpha_3 \ln c_t + \alpha_4 \ln k_t$
  - Period budget constraint:  $c_t + e_t = w_{1t} h_{1t} + w_{2t} h_{2t} + l_t$
  - Time constraint:  $T = l_{j,t} + h_{j,t} + \tau_{j,t}$  for each  $j = 1, 2$



## Del Boca et al. (2014) model

- Finite horizon optimization.
  - There are  $M$  time periods (ages) and parents maximize expected discounted sum of utility over the  $M$  periods.
  - This requires specification of a terminal value.
  - The model can then be solved by backwards induction.

## Del Boca et al. (2014) model

- Solution.

- $\tau_{j,t} = (T - h_{j,t}) \frac{\phi_{j,t}}{\alpha_j + \phi_{j,t}}$  and  $e_t = (w_{1t}h_{1t} + w_{2t}h_{2t} + l_t) \frac{\phi_{3,t}}{\alpha_3 + \phi_{3,t}}$   
 where  $\phi_{j,t} = \beta \delta_{j,t} \eta_{t+1}$
- The  $\eta_t$  are solved recursively as a function of  $\alpha_4$  and  $\delta_{4,t}$ .
- Labor supply also has a convenient closed-form solution, though corner solutions needed to be accounted for.

## Del Boca et al. (2014) econometric specifications

- Children are observed at different ages so specify

$$\delta_{j,t} = \exp(\gamma_{j,0} + \gamma_{j,1}t)$$

- The TFP sequence includes a stochastic component,

$$R_t = \exp(\gamma_{0,0} + \gamma_{0,1}t + \bar{\omega}_t)$$

- Individual heterogeneity in  $\alpha$ : distribution  $G(\alpha)$  that enforces  $\alpha_1 + \alpha_2 + \alpha_3 + \alpha_4 = 1$
- Joint wage equations for spouses (education, age, age squared, year of birth, correlated errors).
- Censored process for non-labor income:  $l_t = \max\{0, l_t^*\}$ .

## Del Boca et al. (2014) identification

- Suppose we observe each child  $i$  for two periods starting with period  $t_j$ .
- We could estimate:  $\ln k_{i,t_j+1} = \gamma_{0,0} + \gamma_{0,1} t_j + \delta_{1,t_j} \ln \tau_{i,1,t_j} + \delta_{2,t_j} \ln \tau_{i,2,t_j} + \delta_{3,t_j} \ln e_{i,t_j} + \delta_{4,t_j} \ln k_{i,t_j} + \eta_{i,t_j}$

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  - “Under our model specification, we can ‘correct’ our estimator of model parameters for the non-randomly missing data using the DGP structure from the model.”
  - “In this case, both the wage processes and the parameters characterizing preferences and production technologies must be simultaneously estimated.”

## Del Boca et al. (2014) identification

- Suppose we know  $\beta$ .
  - Given  $\delta_{j,t}$ 's we can estimate  $\alpha$  for each household using the input demand equations.
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  - Given  $\delta_{j,t}$ 's we can estimate  $\alpha$  for each household using the input demand equations.
  - $G(\alpha)$  is nonparametrically identified
- Suppose  $\alpha$  is known.
  - Use the labor supply equations to estimate  $\beta$ .

## Del Boca et al. (2014) identification

- This is *not* a rigorous identification argument, though for many it is “good enough”.
- Issues:
  - Is  $G(\alpha)$  really identified?
  - The input demand and labor supply equations have to be linearly independent.
  - Labor supply censoring ...

## Del Boca et al. (2014) identification

- Once we're convinced the model is identified, we also need to use moments (auxiliary models) that are sufficient for the binding function to be one-to-one.
- The identification argument should inform us in this regard.

Identification in parametric models

Del Boca et al. (2014)

Semiparametric and nonparametric identification

Partial identification

## Semiparametric models

- A semiparametric model is one in which  $\theta$  is composed of  $\theta_1$  and  $\theta_2$  where  $\theta_1$  is finite dimensional (i.e., a length  $K$  vector) and  $\theta_2$  is infinite-dimensional (i.e., a function, or a vector of functions).
- The model is identified at  $\theta_0$  if  $f_{Y|X}(y | x; \theta) = f_{Y|X}(y | x; \theta_0)$  implies that  $\theta = \theta_0$ .

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example:

- $Y_i$  is binary and  $Pr(Y_i = 1 | X_i) = F_\varepsilon(\beta' X_i)$ .
- Unless we assume that  $F_\varepsilon$  is known (for example,  $F_\varepsilon = \Phi$ ), then  $\theta_1 = \beta$  and  $\theta_2 = F_\varepsilon$  and this is a semiparametric model.
- This model is not identified without restrictions on  $F_\varepsilon$  and/or  $\beta$ .

## Nonparametric models

- A nonparametric model is one in which  $\theta$  is infinite-dimensional (i.e., a function, or a vector of functions).
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example 1:

- $Y_i$  is binary and  $Pr(Y_i = 1 | X_i) = m(X_i)$ .
- Here if we don't assume anything about the function  $m(x)$  then this is a nonparametric model.
- The function  $m$  is identified (at points  $x$  in the support of  $X_i$ ).

example 2:

- $Y_i$  is binary and  $Pr(Y_i = 1 | X_i) = F_\varepsilon(m(X_i))$ .
- This is a random utility model where  $m(x)$  and  $F_\varepsilon$  represent distinct parts of the underlying structural model. This is also a nonparametric model.
- This model is not identified!



## Identification of some features

- Sometimes some parameters in the model are identified and others are not.
  - In the bivariate normal model above,  $\gamma_0$ ,  $\gamma_1$  and  $\sigma_v$  are identified without any restrictions on  $\Theta$ .
- Sometimes certain combinations of parameters are identified even when none are individually identified.
  - In the semiparametric RUM model above, if  $F_\varepsilon$  is differentiable with derivative  $f_\varepsilon$  then

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial x_k} \Pr(Y_i = 1 \mid X_i = x) = \beta_k f_\varepsilon(\beta' x)$$

- Therefore,  $\beta_k/\beta_l$  is identified as long as  $\beta_l \neq 0$ .
- This result can be proved under weaker assumptions as well.

## Identification of some features

- Both of these cases fit within the following definition.
  - A feature of the model, represented by a mapping  $\psi(\theta)$ , is identified if  $f_{Y|X}(y | x; \theta) = f_{Y|X}(y | x; \theta_0)$  implies that  $\psi(\theta) = \psi(\theta_0)$ .

## Partial identification

- The *identified set* for a parameter  $\theta$  is

$$\Theta^I = \{\theta \in \Theta : f_{Y|X}(y | x; \theta) = f_{Y|X}(y | x; \theta_0)\}$$

- The identified set depends on  $\theta_0$  and  $\Theta$ .
- The identified set for a feature of the model,  $\psi(\theta)$  is

$$\psi(\Theta^I) = \{\psi(\theta) : \theta \in \Theta^I\}$$

# Example 1

- Consider estimation of the *ATE* when the common support condition is not satisfied.
  - Let  $CS$  denote the common support.
  - Suppose  $0 \leq Y_i \leq 1$  and that  $Pr(X_i \in CS) = \pi$ .
  - Note that

$$\begin{aligned}ATE &= \int \delta(x) f_X(x) dx \\ &= \int_{CS} \delta(x) f_X(x) dx + \int_{CS^c} \delta(x) dx\end{aligned}$$

## Example 1

- First,  $-(1 - \pi) \leq \int_{CS^c} \delta(x) dx \leq 1 - \pi$ .
- Second, the ATE on the common support is  $ATE_{CS} = \int_{CS} \delta(x) \frac{f_X(x)}{\pi} dx$ .
- Therefore,

$$ATE_{CS}\pi - (1 - \pi) \leq ATE \leq ATE_{CS}\pi + (1 - \pi)$$

- If  $\delta(x)$  is identified for  $x \in CS$  then these two bounds are identified, meaning that the identified set for  $ATE$  is the interval  $[ATE_{CS}\pi - (1 - \pi), ATE_{CS}\pi + (1 - \pi)]$ .

## Example 2

- Economic models with multiple equilibria only provide moment *inequalities*.
- Suppose that  $E(w_i m(y_i, x_i, \theta_0)) \leq 0$ .
- Then the identified set for  $\theta$  is

$$\Theta^I = \{\theta \in \Theta : E(w_i m(y_i, x_i, \theta)) \leq 0\}$$

- See, e.g., Manski and Tamer (2002) and Ciliberto and Tamer (2009).

## Bounds and sharp identified set

- As in example 1, suppose we can prove that  $L \leq \psi(\theta_0) \leq U$ .
  - It is not automatically the case that for every  $z \in [L, U]$ , there is a  $\theta$  such that  $z = \psi(\theta)$  and  $f_{Y|X}(y | x; \theta) = f_{Y|X}(y | x; \theta_0)$ .
  - When this distinction is important, sometimes  $[L, U]$  is referred to as the identified set and  $\psi(\Theta^I)$  as the *sharp* identified set.

## Ciliberto and Tamer (2009)

- This is a game-theoretic model of entry into a market.
- Suppose there are two players with random best response functions,

$$y_{1m} = \mathbf{1}(\alpha_1 X_{1m} + \delta_2 y_{2m} + \varepsilon_{1m} \geq 0)$$

$$y_{2m} = \mathbf{1}(\alpha_2 X_{2m} + \delta_1 y_{1m} + \varepsilon_{2m} \geq 0)$$

for player  $i$  in market  $m$ .



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for player  $i$  in market  $m$ .

- For some values of  $\delta_1, \delta_2, \alpha'_1 X_{1im}$  and  $\alpha'_2 X_{2m}$ , there is a unique Nash equilibrium.
- For other values of  $\delta_1, \delta_2, \alpha'_1 X_{1im}$  and  $\alpha'_2 X_{2m}$ , there are multiple Nash equilibria.

## Ciliberto and Tamer (2009)

- Player 1 enters and 0 does not is a Nash equilibrium if:  

$$-\alpha_1 X_{1m} \leq \varepsilon_{1m} \text{ and } -\alpha_2 X_{2m} - \delta_1 \geq \varepsilon_{2m}$$

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- Player 1 enters and 0 does not is a Nash equilibrium if:  
 $-\alpha_1 X_{1m} \leq \varepsilon_{1m}$  and  $-\alpha_2 X_{2m} - \delta_1 \geq \varepsilon_{2m}$
- Player 0 enters and 1 does not is a Nash equilibrium if:  
 $-\alpha_1 X_{1m} - \delta_2 \geq \varepsilon_{1m}$  and  $-\alpha_2 X_{2m} \leq \varepsilon_{2m}$

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 $-\alpha_1 X_{1m} \leq \varepsilon_{1m}$  and  $-\alpha_2 X_{2m} - \delta_1 \geq \varepsilon_{2m}$
- Player 0 enters and 1 does not is a Nash equilibrium if:  
 $-\alpha_1 X_{1m} - \delta_2 \geq \varepsilon_{1m}$  and  $-\alpha_2 X_{2m} \leq \varepsilon_{2m}$
- If  $\delta_1, \delta_2 < 0$  then these regions overlap!!

## Ciliberto and Tamer (2009)

- The probability that player 1 enters and 0 does not can be written as

$$\begin{aligned} &Pr((\varepsilon_1, \varepsilon_2) \in R_1(X, \theta)) \\ &+ \int \pi(\varepsilon_1, \varepsilon_2) \mathbf{1}((\varepsilon_1, \varepsilon_2) \in R_2(X, \theta)) dF_{\varepsilon_1, \varepsilon_2} \end{aligned}$$

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- Since  $\pi(\varepsilon_1, \varepsilon_2)$  is a probability it has to be between 0 and 1 and therefore,

$$\begin{aligned} &Pr((\varepsilon_1, \varepsilon_2) \in R_1(X, \theta)) \leq Pr((1, 0) | X) \\ &\leq Pr((\varepsilon_1, \varepsilon_2) \in R_1(X, \theta)) + \int \mathbf{1}((\varepsilon_1, \varepsilon_2) \in R_2(X, \theta)) dF_{\varepsilon_1, \varepsilon_2} \end{aligned}$$

## Moment inequality estimation

- One approach to estimating the identified set based on  $E(w_i m(y_i, x_i, \theta_0)) \leq 0$ :

- Define

$$Q_n(\theta) = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \mathbf{1}(w_i m(y_i, x_i, \theta) > 0) w_i m(y_i, x_i, \theta).$$

- Then  $\hat{\Theta}^I = \{\theta \in \Theta : Q_n(\theta) \leq \nu_n\}$  where  $\nu_n$  is nuisance parameter that must be specified.
- And a confidence set is given by  $\{\theta \in \Theta : n(Q_n(\theta) - \min_t Q_n(t)) \leq c_\alpha\}$ , where  $c_\alpha$  is a critical value.