# HTSFilter: Data-based filtering for replicated transcriptome sequencing experiments

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#### Abstract

This vignette illustrates the use of the *HTSFilter* package to filter replicated data from transcriptome sequencing experiments (e.g., RNA sequencing data) for a variety of different data classes: *matrix*, *data.frame*, *CountDataSet* (the S4 class associated with the *DESeq* package), the S3 classes associated with the *edgeR* package (*DGEList*, *DGEExact*, *DGEGLM*, and *DGELRT*), and the S4 class associated with the *DESeq2* package (*DESeqDataSet*).

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## 1 Introduction

High-throughput sequencing (HTS) data, such as RNA-sequencing (RNA-seq) data, are increasingly used to conduct differential analyses, in which statistical tests are performed for each biological feature (e.g., a gene, transcript, exon) in order to identify those whose expression levels show systematic covariation with a particular condition, such as a treatment or phenotype of interest. For the remainder of this vignette, we will focus on gene-level differential analyses, although these methods may also be applied to differential analyses of (count-based measures of) transcript- or exon-level expression.

Because hypothesis tests are performed for gene-by-gene differential analyses, the obtained p-values must be adjusted to correct for multiple testing. However, procedures to adjust p-values to control the number of detected false positives often lead to a loss of power to detect truly differentially expressed (DE) genes due to the large number of hypothesis tests performed. To reduce the impact of such procedures, independent data filters are often used to identify and remove genes that appear to generate an uninformative signal [2]; this in turn moderates the correction needed to adjust for multiple testing. For independent filtering methods for microarray data, see for example the genefilter Bioconductor package [5].

The HTSFilter package implements a novel data-based filtering procedure based on the calculation of a similarity index among biological replicates for read counts arising from replicated transcriptome sequencing (RNA-seq) data. This technique provides an intuitive data-driven way to filter high-throughput transcriptome sequencing data and to effectively remove genes with low, constant expression levels without incorrectly removing those that would otherwise have been identified as DE. The two fundamental assumptions of the filter implemented in the HTSFilter package are as follows:

- 1. Biological replicates are present for each experimental condition, and
- 2. Data can be appropriately normalized (scaled) to correct for systematic intersample biases.

Assuming these conditions hold, *HTSFilter* implements a method to identify a filtering threshold that maximizes the *filtering similarity* among replicates, that is, one where most genes tend to either have normalized counts less than or equal to the cutoff in all samples (i.e., filtered genes) or greater than the cutoff in all samples (i.e., non-filtered genes). This filtering similarity is defined using the global Jaccard index, that is, the average Jaccard index calculated between pairs of replicates within each experimental condition; see (author?) [7] for more details.

For more information about between-sample normalization strategies, see [3]; in particular, strategies for normalizing data with differences in library size and composition may be found in [1] and [9], and strategies for normalizing data exhibiting sample-specific biases due to GC content may be found in [8] and [6]. Within the *HTSFilter* package, the Trimmed Means of M-values (TMM) [9] and DESeq [1] normalization strategies may

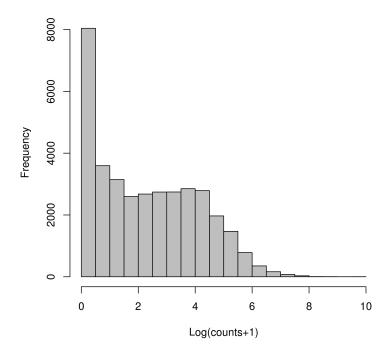


Figure 1: Histogram of log transformed counts from the Sultan et al. data [10], illustrating the large number of genes with very small counts as well as the large heterogeneity in counts observed.

be used prior to calculating an appropriate data-based filter. If an alternative normalization strategy is needed or desired, the normalization may be applied prior to filtering the data with normalization="none" in the HTSFilter function; see Section 7 for an example.

The HTSFilter package is able to accommodate unnormalized or normalized replicated count data in the form of a matrix or data.frame (in which each row corresponds to a biological feature and each column to a biological sample), a CountDataSet (the S4 class associated with the DESeq package), one of the S3 classes associated with the edgeR package (DGEList, DGEExact, DGEGLM, and DGELRT), or DESeqDataSet (the S4 class associated with the DESeq2 package), as illustrated in the following sections.

Finally, we note that the filtering method implemented in the *HTSFilter* package is designed to filter transcriptome sequencing, and not microarray, data; in particular, the proposed filter is effective for data with features that take on values over a large order of magnitude and with a subset of features exhibiting small levels of expression across samples (see, for example, Figure 1). In this vignette, we illustrate its use on count-based measures of gene expression, although its use is not strictly limited to discrete data.

## 2 Input data

For the purposes of this vignette, we make use of data from a study of sex-specific expression of liver cells in human and the *DESeq* and *edgeR* packages for differential analysis. Sultan et al. [10] obtained a high-throughput sequencing data (using a 1G Illumina Genome Analyzer sequencing machine) from a human embryonic kidney and a B cell line, with two biological replicates each. The raw read counts and phenotype tables were obtained from the ReCount online resource [4].

To begin, we load the *HTSFilter* package, and attach the gene-level count data contained in sultan:

```
> library(HTSFilter)
> library(DESeq)
> library(edgeR)
> library(DESeq2)
> data("sultan")
> hist(log(exprs(sultan)+1), col="grey", breaks=25, main="",
    xlab="Log(counts+1)")
> pData(sultan)
          sample.id num.tech.reps
                                      cell.line
SRX008333 SRX008333
                                 1 Ramos B cell
SRX008334 SRX008334
                                 1 Ramos B cell
SRX008331 SRX008331
                                        HEK293T
SRX008332 SRX008332
                                 1
                                        HEK293T
> dim(sultan)
Features
          Samples
    9010
                4
```

The unfiltered data contain 9010 genes in four samples (two replicates per condition).

## 3 matrix and data.frame classes

To filter high-throughput sequencing data in the form of a matrix or data.frame, we first access the expression data, contained in exprs(sultan), and create a vector identifying the condition labels for each of the samples via the pData Biobase function. We then filter the data using the HTSFilter function, specifying that the number of tested thresholds be only 25 (s.len=25) rather than the default value of 100 to reduce computation time for this example. Note that as it is unspecified, the default normalization method is used for filtering the data, namely the Trimmed Mean of M-values (TMM) method of Robinson and Oshlack [9]. To use the DESeq normalization method [1], normalization="DESeq" may be specified.

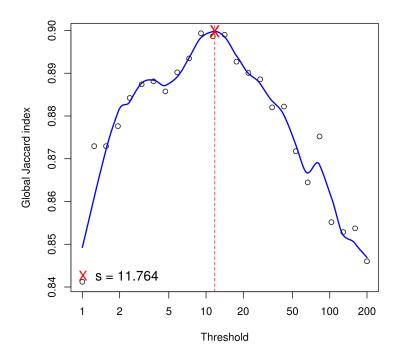


Figure 2: Global Jaccard index for the sultan data calculated for a variety of threshold values after TMM normalization [9], with a loess curve (blue line) superposed and databased threshold values (red cross and red dotted line) equal to 11.764.

```
> mat <- exprs(sultan)</pre>
> conds <- pData(sultan)$cell.line
> ## Only 25 tested thresholds to reduce computation time
> filter <- HTSFilter(mat, conds, s.len=25)
> mat <- filter$filteredData
> dim(mat)
[1] 4995
            4
> dim(filter$removedData)
[1] 4015
```

4

For this example, we find a data-based threshold equal to 11.764; genes with normalized values less than this threshold in all samples are filtered from subsequent analyses. The proposed filter thus removes 4015 genes from further analyses, leaving 4995 genes.

We note that an important part of the filter proposed in the HTSFilter package is a check of the behavior of the global similarity index calculated over a range of threshold

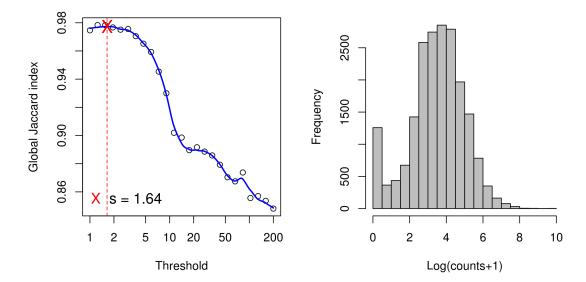


Figure 3: (left) Global Jaccard index for the sultan data calculated for a variety of threshold values after TMM normalization [9], with a loess curve (blue line) superposed and data-based threshold values (red cross and red dotted line) equal to 11.764. (right) Global Jaccard index for the previously filtered sultan data, with loess curve (blue line) superposed as before.

values, and in particular, to verify that a reasonable maximum value is reached for the global similarity index over the range of tested threshold values (see Figure 2); the maximum possible value for the global Jaccard index is 1. To illustrate the importance of this check, we attempt to re-apply the proposed filter to the previously filtered data (in practice, of course, this would be nonsensical):

In the lefthand panel of Figure 3, we note a plateau of large global Jaccard index values for thresholds less than 2, with a decrease thereafter; this corresponds to filtering no genes, unsurprising given that genes with low, constant levels of expression have already been filtered from the analysis (see the righthand panel of Figure 3).

## 4 DESeq package pipeline: S4 class CountDataSet

The HTSFilter package allows for three potential applications of the proposed filter within the DESeq analysis pipeline:

- 1. Estimation of library sizes and dispersion parameters (the estimateSizeEffects and estimateDispersions functions in *DESeq*), followed by data filtering on normalized data (recommended);
- 2. Estimation of library sizes (estimateSizeEffects), data filtering on normalized data, and estimation of dispersion parameters (estimateDispersions);
- 3. Data filtering on normalized data, followed by re-estimation of library sizes and estimation of dispersion parameters (estimateSizeEffects and estimateDispersions).

We note that the primary difference among the three strategies would be seen in the dispersion parameters estimates for genes with low levels of expression; because fitted dispersion values are estimated based on the mean-dispersion relationship observed across the full data in the *DESeq* package, estimates obtained on filtered data will necessarily be slightly different from those obtained on unfiltered data, as genes with low levels of expression would have been removed from the former. On the other hand, we note that the filtering thresholds (and as such, the genes filtered from the analysis) are identical for the three strategies listed above. The estimated library sizes may differ slightly in the third strategy as compared to the first and second strategies; however, this difference will be minimal as only genes with weak, constant levels of expression are filtered from the analysis. A full discussion of these three strategies is beyond the scope of this vignette; however, in practice we recommend the use of the first strategy: estimation of library sizes and dispersion parameters prior to data filtering.

To filter high-throughput sequencing data in the form of a *CountDataSet* (the class used within the *DESeq* pipeline for differential analysis), we coerce **sultan** into an object of the class *CountDataSet*. Once again, we specify that the number of tested thresholds be only 25 (s.len=25) rather than the default value of 100 to reduce computation time. For objects in the form of a *CountDataSet*, the default normalization strategy is "DESeq", although alternative normalization strategies may also be used.

```
> cds <- newCountDataSet(exprs(sultan), conds)
> cds <- estimateSizeFactors(cds)
> cds <- estimateDispersions(cds)
> ## Only 25 tested thresholds to reduce computation time
> cds <- HTSFilter(cds, s.len=25)$filteredData
> res <- nbinomTest(cds, levels(conds)[1], levels(conds)[2])
> class(cds)
```

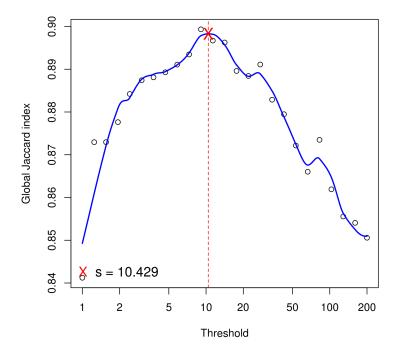


Figure 4: Global Jaccard index for the sultan data calculated for a variety of threshold values after DESeq normalization [1], with a loess curve (blue line) superposed and data-based threshold values (red cross and red dotted line) equal to 10.429.

```
[1] "CountDataSet"
attr(,"package")
[1] "DESeq"
> dim(cds)
Features Samples
5143 4
```

As the normalization strategy used here was slightly different, the proposed filter now removes 3867 genes from further analyses, leaving 5143 genes. Again we verify the behavior of the global similarity index calculated over a range of threshold values (see Figure 4). For this example, we find a data-based threshold equal to 10.429; genes with normalized values less than this threshold in all samples are filtered from subsequent analyses.

## 5 edgeR package pipeline

We next illustrate the use of HTSFilter within the edgeR pipeline for differential analysis (S3 classes DGEList, DGEExact, DGEGLM, or DGELRT). For the purposes of this vignette, we will consider the S3 classes DGEExact and DGELRT. The former is the class containing the results of the differential expression analysis between two groups of count libraries (resulting from a call to the function exactTest in edgeR); the latter is the class containing the results of a generalized linear model (GLM)-based differential analysis (resulting from a call to the function glmLRT in edgeR). Although the filter may be applied earlier in the edgeR pipeline (i.e., to objects of class DGEList or DGEGLM), we do not recommend doing so, as parameter estimation makes use of counts adjusted using a a quantile-to-quantile method (pseudo-counts).

#### 5.1 S3 class *DGEExact*

We first coerce the data into the appropriate class with the function DGEList, where the group variable is set to contain a vector of condition labels for each of the samples. Next, after calculating normalizing factors to scale library sizes (calcNormFactors), we estimate common and tagwise dispersion parameters using estimateCommonDisp and estimateTagwiseDisp and obtain differential analysis results using exactTest. Finally, we apply the filter using the HTSFilter function, again specifying that the number of tested thresholds be only 25 (s.len=25) rather than the default value of 100. Note that as it is unspecified, the default normalization method is used for filtering the data, namely the Trimmed Mean of M-values (TMM) method [9]; alternative normalization, including "pseudo.counts" for the quantile-to-quantile adjusted counts used for parameter estimation, may also be specified. We suppress the plot of the global Jaccard index using plot = FALSE, as it is identical to that shown in Figure 2.

#### > topTags(et)

```
Comparison of groups:
                      Ramos B cell-HEK293T
                     logFC
                             logCPM
                                           PValue
ENSG00000133124 -14.394468 11.56788 0.000000e+00
ENSG00000105369 11.925756 11.23368
                                    0.000000e+00
ENSG00000135144 10.921903 11.05897
                                    0.000000e+00
ENSG00000111348 13.797203 10.92307 1.299113e-315
ENSG00000177606 -9.731883 10.81414 2.902641e-299
ENSG00000012124 10.171680 10.29618 2.879471e-286
ENSG00000118308 13.494132 10.61474 4.245092e-272
ENSG00000046604 -12.906279 10.10888 1.234351e-242
ENSG00000166165 -8.648658 10.13930 5.232947e-230
ENSG00000100721 14.399178 11.53329 7.945829e-230
                         FDR
ENSG00000133124 0.000000e+00
ENSG00000105369 0.000000e+00
ENSG00000135144 0.000000e+00
ENSG00000111348 1.622267e-312
ENSG00000177606 2.899739e-296
ENSG00000012124 2.397160e-283
ENSG00000118308 3.029177e-269
ENSG00000046604 7.706978e-240
ENSG00000166165 2.904286e-227
ENSG00000100721 3.968942e-227
```

Note that the filtered data are of the class *DGEExact*, allowing for a call to the topTags function.

#### > topTags(et)

```
Comparison of groups:
                      Ramos B cell-HEK293T
                                          PValue
                    logFC
                            logCPM
ENSG00000133124 -14.394468 11.56788 0.000000e+00
ENSG00000105369 11.925756 11.23368 0.000000e+00
ENSG00000135144 10.921903 11.05897
                                    0.000000e+00
ENSG00000111348 13.797203 10.92307 1.299113e-315
ENSG00000177606 -9.731883 10.81414 2.902641e-299
ENSG00000012124 10.171680 10.29618 2.879471e-286
ENSG00000118308 13.494132 10.61474 4.245092e-272
ENSG00000046604 -12.906279 10.10888 1.234351e-242
ENSG00000166165 -8.648658 10.13930 5.232947e-230
ENSG00000100721 14.399178 11.53329 7.945829e-230
```

```
FDR
ENSG00000133124 0.000000e+00
ENSG00000105369 0.000000e+00
ENSG00000135144 0.000000e+00
ENSG00000111348 1.622267e-312
ENSG00000177606 2.899739e-296
ENSG0000012124 2.397160e-283
ENSG00000118308 3.029177e-269
ENSG000000166165 2.904286e-227
ENSG00000100721 3.968942e-227
```

#### 5.2 S3 class *DGELRT*

We follow the same steps as the previous example, where the estimateGLMCommonDisp, estimateGLMTrendedDisp, and estimateGLMTagwiseDisp functions are now used to obtain per-gene dispersion parameter estimates, the glmFit function is used to fit a negative binomial generalized log-linear model to the read counts for each gene, and the glmLRT function is used to conduct likelihood ratio tests for one or more coefficients in the GLM. The output of glmLRT is an S3 object of class DGELRT and contains the GLM differential analysis results. As before, we apply the filter using the HTSFilter function, again suppressing the plot of the global Jaccard index using plot = FALSE, as it is identical to that shown in Figure 2.

```
> design <- model.matrix(~conds)</pre>
> dge <- DGEList(counts=exprs(sultan), group=conds)</pre>
> dge <- calcNormFactors(dge)</pre>
> dge <- estimateGLMCommonDisp(dge,design)</pre>
> dge <- estimateGLMTrendedDisp(dge,design)</pre>
> dge <- estimateGLMTagwiseDisp(dge,design)
> fit <- glmFit(dge,design)</pre>
> lrt <- glmLRT(fit,coef=2)</pre>
> 1rt <- HTSFilter(1rt, DGEGLM=fit, s.len=25, plot=FALSE)$filteredData
> dim(lrt)
[1] 4995
             4
> class(lrt)
[1] "DGELRT"
attr(, "package")
[1] "edgeR"
```

Note that the filtered data are of the class DGEList, allowing for a call to the topTags function.

### > topTags(lrt)

```
Coefficient:
              condsRamos B cell
                     logFC
                              logCPM
                                           LR
                                                      PValue
ENSG00000133124 -14.394460 11.551268 1571.967
                                                0.000000e+00
                 11.925768 11.254350 1712.406
ENSG00000105369
                                               0.000000e+00
ENSG00000135144
                 10.921893 11.081746 1486.253
                                               0.00000e+00
ENSG00000111348
                 13.797195 10.947753 1463.959 2.656591e-320
ENSG00000012124
                 10.171676 10.331336 1335.896 1.788742e-292
ENSG00000118308
                 13.494137 10.644652 1303.113 2.381268e-285
ENSG00000177606
                 -9.731883 10.788439 1302.851 2.713889e-285
ENSG00000046604 -12.906279 10.071821 1120.002 1.484717e-245
ENSG00000100721
                 14.399175 11.550154 1084.526 7.623798e-238
ENSG00000213402
                 10.364993 9.692685 1064.316 1.882215e-233
                          FDR
ENSG00000133124
                 0.000000e+00
ENSG00000105369
                 0.000000e+00
ENSG00000135144 0.000000e+00
ENSG00000111348 3.317418e-317
ENSG00000012124 1.786953e-289
ENSG00000118308 1.936554e-282
ENSG00000177606 1.936554e-282
ENSG00000046604 9.270203e-243
ENSG00000100721 4.231208e-235
ENSG00000213402 9.401664e-231
```

## 6 DESeq2 package pipeline: S4 class DESeqDataSet

The HTSFilter package allows for a straightforward integration within the DESeq2 analysis pipeline, most notably allowing for p-values to be adjusted only for those genes passing the filter. Note that DESeq2 now impelements an independent filtering procedure by default in the results function; this filter is a potential alternative filtering technique and does not need to be used in addition to the one included in HTSFilter. In fact, each filter is targeting the same weakly expressed genes to be filtered from the analysis. As such, if the user wishes to make use of HTSFilter within the DESeq2 pipeline, the argument independentFiltering=FALSE should be used when calling the results function in DESeq2.

To illustrate the application of a filter for high-throughput sequencing data in the form of a DESeqDataSet (the class used within the DESeq2 pipeline for differential

analysis), we coerce sultan into an object of the class DESeqDataSet using the function DESeqDataSetFromMatrix. Once again, we specify that the number of tested thresholds be only 25 (s.len=25) rather than the default value of 100 to reduce computation time. For objects in the form of a DESeqDataSet, the default normalization strategy is "DESeq", although alternative normalization strategies may also be used.

```
> dds <- DESeqDataSetFromMatrix(countData = exprs(sultan),</pre>
+
                                 colData = data.frame(cell.line = conds),
                                 design = ~ cell.line)
> dds <- DESeq(dds)</pre>
> filter <- HTSFilter(dds, s.len=25, plot=FALSE)$filteredData</pre>
> class(filter)
[1] "DESeqDataSet"
attr(,"package")
[1] "DESeq2"
> dim(filter)
[1] 5143
            4
> res <- results(filter, independentFiltering=FALSE)</pre>
> head(res)
log2 fold change (MAP): cell.line Ramos B cell vs HEK293T
Wald test p-value: cell.line Ramos B cell vs HEK293T
DataFrame with 6 rows and 6 columns
                 baseMean log2FoldChange
                                              1fcSE
                <numeric>
                               <numeric> <numeric>
ENSG00000000003 15.490806
                              -6.2823663 1.5065344
ENSG00000000419 15.414261
                               0.9205672 0.6815883
ENSG0000000457 18.491907
                              -0.8627927 0.6236037
ENSG00000000460 9.704518
                               0.2755672 0.8156650
                              -5.4044899 1.5915665
ENSG0000001036 7.847756
ENSG0000001167 77.332720
                              -0.3702755 0.3163472
                      stat
                                 pvalue
                                                 padj
                 <numeric>
                              <numeric>
                                            <numeric>
ENSG00000000003 -4.1700782 3.044951e-05 0.0001448676
ENSG00000000419 1.3506206 1.768170e-01 0.2773314581
ENSG0000000457 -1.3835594 1.664934e-01 0.2645275087
ENSG00000000460 0.3378436 7.354810e-01 0.8185702590
ENSG0000001036 -3.3957047 6.845218e-04 0.0022830710
ENSG00000001167 -1.1704717 2.418112e-01 0.3531417082
```

>

As may be seen above, the filtered data remain an object of class *DESeqDataSet*, and subsequent functions from *DESeq2* (such as the results summary function results) may be called directly upon it.

# 7 Alternative normalization using *EDAseq*

As a final example, we illustrate the use of the *HTSFilter* package with an alternative normalization strategy, namely the full quantile normalization method in the *EDASeq* package; such a step may be useful when the TMM or DESeq normalization methods are not appropriate for a given dataset. Once again, we create a new object of the appropriate class with the function newSeqExpressionSet and normalize data using the betweenLaneNormalization function (with which="full") in *EDASeq*.

Subsequently, HTSFilter is applied to the normalized data (again using s.len=25), and the normalization method is set to norm="none". We may then make use of the on vector in the results, which identifies filtered and unfiltered genes (respectively) with 0 and 1, to identify rows in the original data matrix to be retained.

# 8 Session Info

```
[9] LC_ADDRESS=C LC_TELEPHONE=C
```

[11] LC\_MEASUREMENT=en\_US.UTF-8 LC\_IDENTIFICATION=C

#### attached base packages:

[1] splines stats4 parallel stats graphics [6] grDevices utils datasets methods base

#### other attached packages:

[1] DESeq2\_1.6.0 RcppArmadillo\_0.4.450.1.0 [3] Rcpp\_0.11.3 GenomicRanges\_1.18.0 [5] GenomeInfoDb\_1.2.0 IRanges\_2.0.0

[15] BiocGenerics\_0.12.0

#### loaded via a namespace (and not attached):

[1] AnnotationDbi\_1.28.0 BBmisc\_1.7

[3] BatchJobs\_1.4 BiocParallel\_1.0.0 [5] DBI\_0.3.1 Formula\_1.1-2 [7] Hmisc\_3.14-5 MASS\_7.3-35

[9] RColorBrewer\_1.0-5 RSQLite\_0.11.4 [11] XML\_3.98-1.1 XVector\_0.6.0 [13] acepack\_1.3-3.3 annotate\_1.44.0

[15] base64enc\_0.1-2 brew\_1.0-6 [17] checkmate\_1.4 cluster\_1.15.3

[19] codetools\_0.2-9 colorspace\_1.2-4 [21] digest\_0.6.4 fail\_1.2

[23] foreach\_1.4.2 foreign\_0.8-61 [25] genefilter\_1.48.0 geneplotter\_1.44.0

[27] ggplot2\_1.0.0 grid\_3.1.1 [29] gtable\_0.1.2 iterators\_1.0.7 [31] latticeExtra\_0.6-26 munsell\_0.4.2 [33] nnet\_7.3-8 plyr\_1.8.1

 [35] proto\_0.3-10
 reshape2\_1.4

 [37] rpart\_4.1-8
 scales\_0.2.4

 [39] sendmailR\_1.2-1
 stringr\_0.6.2

[41] survival\_2.37-7 tools\_3.1.1

[43] xtable\_1.7-4

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