

Ch. 4: Causation

Can We Say What Caused the Effect?

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4.1: Association and Confounding

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Introduction: Association vs. Causation

- Association (correlation): Two variables are associated, or related, if the value of one variable gives you information about the value of the other variable
 - When comparing groups, this means that the proportions or means take on different values in the different groups
 - Or as one variable decreases, the other variable may decrease too. We'll see other examples in chapter 10



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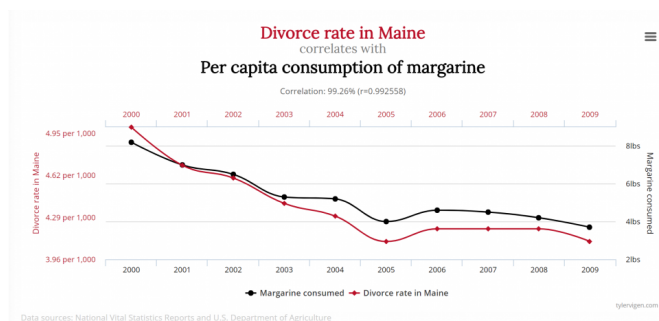
We Record Two Variables Now

- Explanatory Variable(s): variable(s) that may explain the change in the variable of interest
 - Called the independent variable
- Response Variable(s): variable(s) of interest we measure on observational units
 - Called the dependent variable
 - Chapter 1 and 2, we did hypothesis tests about the response variable. In chapter 3, we estimated the response variable
- We hope that changes in the explanatory variable will affect the response variable => **cause-and-effect** relationship
 - **End goal** = find cause-and-effect relationships

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Association vs. Causation

- Often in scientific studies, we see associations
- Association, alone, is not enough to prove cause-and-effect relationships exist

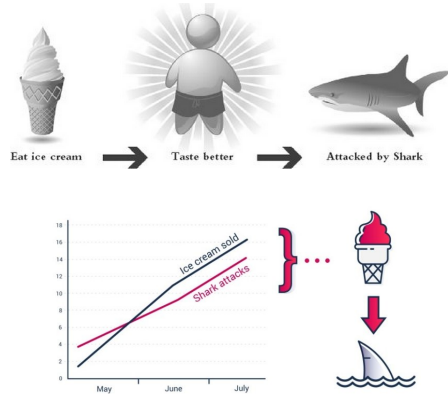


See more *spurious correlations* [here](#)

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Try to Explain This Association

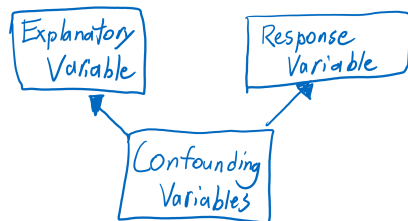
- For example, try to explain to your group how this association could be a cause-and-effect relationship



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Why Can't Associations Determine Cause-And-Effect?

- Confounding Variable(s) affect both the explanatory and response variables enough to make cause-and-effect impossible to determine
 - These are other variables that you may not know about, or aren't measured in your study
 - What are possible confounding variables in the association between ice cream sales and shark attacks?



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Another Example

- Phil Sokolof, an Omaha native, caused McDonalds to change their french fries <http://revisionisthistory.com/episodes/19-mcdonalds-broke-my-heart>



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Possible Confounding Variables Phil Could Have Considered

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4.2: Observational Studies Vs. Experiments

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Observational Study

- The values of the explanatory variable are simply observed. Researchers cannot change or assign them to observational units. Examples are:
 - Does your child sleep with a night light?
 - Which NBA team does a player play for?
 - Which country were you born in?
 - An animal's gender
 - Number of social media profiles
 - Amount of video games a person owns
 - Commute to work in minutes

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Experiment

- Researchers can assign the values of the explanatory variable to observational units
 - In experiments, we can say observational units are called experimental units
- Examples:
 - Treatment vs. Control (do nothing or give a placebo)
 - Did you use the internet to play a game or pencil and paper?
 - Amount of days a plant doesn't have any water

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Setting Up a Good Experiment

- We want to avoid two things:
 - **Sampling Bias**
 - **Confounding Variables**

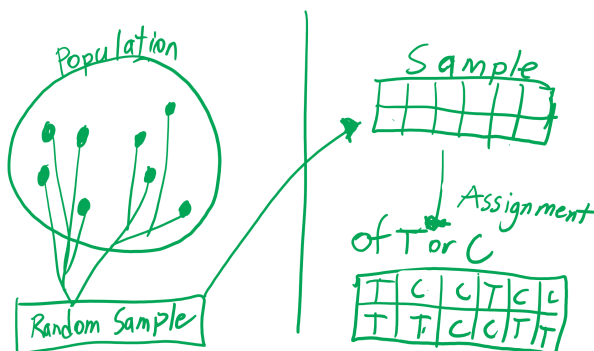
We use two strategies in STAT 218

- Simple Random Sampling
- Random Assignment: Use a random/chance device to assign values of the explanatory variable to experimental units
 - Randomly assign groups (categorical explanatory variable)
 - Randomly assign a measurement (quantitative explanatory variable)

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Random Sampling and Random Assignment

- You can use neither, one of them, or both to do your experiment



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Example and Benefits

- I need some random students from the class...
- I will randomly assign them a group
- Benefits:
 - Random sampling gets rid of sampling bias. We can **generalize our conclusions** to the whole population
 - Random assignment removes the effect of confounding variables. We can determine **cause-and-effect** if we have enough evidence to reject H_0

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Observational Study Vs. Experiment

- Therefore, we aren't justified in determining cause-and-effect in an observational study
 - Observational studies may be affected by confounding variables

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Types of Experiments

- No random assignment
 - quasi-experiment (observational study)
- Random assignment
 - randomized experiment
- Random assignment and neither the researcher or experimental unit know what group or measurement they have
 - double-blind experiment

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Answer These Questions with your Group

Suppose you want to measure the average daily weight gain of steers. You assigned each steer dry-rolled corn or wet (fermented) corn. Then, you measured their average daily weight gain. You gathered a sample of 60 steers.

- What is the explanatory variable?
- What is the response variable?
- How could you gather a random sample of steers?
- How would you do random assignment in this study?
- Can you identify a confounding variable?

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Exploration 4.2

- Do questions 1 through 11 with your group
- We will periodically review answers as a class

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