

Correlation describes the mutual relationship between two factors or variables. Causation is the relationship between cause and effect.

While two variables can be correlated, it is sometimes difficult to determine if one variable causes change in another variable

A good example of 'correlation, not causation' is the relationship between stress and physical health problems. While there is a correlation between increased stress levels and more frequent bouts of illness (such as the common cold, the flu, strep throat, etc.), there is no way to determine that stress directly causes these illnesses. It could be that these individuals were exposed to the virus through their children (if they have kids), through a sick patient (if the person is a doctor, or nurse), or through a student who brought the illness with them from home (which is especially common in preschool and elementary school settings). Though there are a multitude of studies done to show that stress lowers one's immune system-- thus making someone more vulnerable to contracting an illness-- it is unlikely that stress would be the ONLY variable present in a person becoming sick or feeling under the weather

Another example is the correlation between gender congruency in trans and gender non-conforming individuals and the levels of anxiety they experience. There are many studies out there that discuss the positive impact that gender congruency can have on trans individuals, which makes complete sense! Looking like the gender with which one

identifies-- and more importantly, being able to express oneself freely-- is extremely validating and can be very liberating for trans and gender non-conforming persons. Though there are studies that show a correlation between increased gender congruency and decreased levels of anxiety in trans individuals, there are also other factors that could be causing this decrease in anxiety-related symptoms. For example, the trans individual could have been living in an abusive household, or could have been going to a school where they were being bullied. Moving away from these situations would be considered contributing factors to a decrease in an individual's overall anxiety. Furthermore, the individual could also have had a generalized anxiety disorder, and could have since been on SSRIs and therapeutic treatments .to help manage the symptoms

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