

17.871

Spring 2012

Hard-Nosed Empiricist Assignment

**Assignment**

Write a paragraph or two about a causal claim that you believe (or someone you know believes), but for which you are unaware of any scientific evidence. Briefly, look up and describe one or two studies on your causal claim. You can choose causal claims about politics or about humans more generally. (E.g., “McCain lost because he was too old” or “People get sick because of cold weather.”) Turn the paragraph into me at the beginning of class and be prepared for a brief discussion about your causal claim.

In your paragraph, briefly answer the following questions:

1. What is the causal claim? That is, what  $x$  is causing what  $y$ ?
2. What have researchers found? Check Google scholar, etc.
3. Did researchers use experimental studies? Or are the studies merely observational?
4. Are there any obvious problems with the studies?

Your causal claim must be at least somewhat widely believed and non-trivial. If in doubt, search for it using a search engine or peruse [skeptical.com](http://skeptical.com) or [snopes.com](http://snopes.com).

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17.871 Political Science Laboratory  
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