

**Title** – Mental Optometry: The Effects of Cognitive Bias Modification on Anxiety

**Program of Study** – Psychology

**Presentation Type** – **Choose one of the following:** PowerPoint

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**Category** – **Choose one of the following:** Experimental (Applied)

**Abstract:** In this presentation, the newly created concept of mental optometry is thoroughly explained, leading to a greater understanding of the foundations of many mental illnesses. Mental optometry describes the neurobiology and various emotions and behaviors that results from one's perceptions in which they base reality. There is a well-established link between neurological structures, sight, and physical orientation, supporting the notion that you go where you're looking. How one sees with their mind's eye, their perceptions or biases, has the potential to negatively influence their behavior. Mental optometry seeks to perfect the vision of the mind's eye. Providing a general understanding of mental optometry, this presentation also addresses how this specific concept is measured in experimental research. Cognitive bias modification is a tool used to modify one's biases by decreasing negative interpretations and changing what one attends to. There has been much research published showing the positive effects of cognitive bias modification on reducing one's vulnerability to anxiety and decreasing anxious symptomology. This presentation outlines the findings from our case studies of 11 participants which utilize an internet-based cognitive bias modification program. The experimental group showed a significant decrease in anxiety symptoms compared to the control group. Though the sample is relatively small, the effects are similar to other research experiments. This research further supports cognitive bias modification interventions which may help anxious clients to identify and

modify their skewed interpretations of reality, leading to greater mental health. Furthermore, by developing a new term of mental optometry, a way is provided for a client's problems to be conceptualized, increasing their likelihood of recovery.

**Christian worldview integration:** As Christians, we possess a worldview in which we hold fast to the truth of God's Word, yet we are certain that it is not the source of all truth. Therefore, we sought to research a specific topic and conduct an experimental design in order to understand the truth regarding mental optometry. Just as Jesus sought to heal the sick and disabled, as Christians, we seek to emulate his example by providing alternative methods of treatment for individuals with anxiety. Our research focuses on the concept that you go where you are looking. Not only is this foundational for cognitive behavioral therapy, as one's thoughts impact their behavior, but it also has vast implications for the Christian faith. There are multiple examples in the Bible in which we are told to fix our eyes on Christ and His Word because he knows that if we direct our gaze anywhere but on him, we will eventually move towards that object or become consumed with thoughts that do not honor and glorify him. Our research greatly impacts the culture by providing support that cognitive bias modification is a useful treatment for the symptomology in anxiety disorders. This method of treatment is easily accessible and can be used in a home setting which may be beneficial for individuals who are unable to attend to a location outside of their home. As followers of Christ, our mission is to glorify the Lord, and we have a desire to see others be mentally healthy. In our study, we are attempting to shift the individual's focus to positive stimuli in the environment in order to diminish negative biases and skewed perceptions so that they achieve a greater level of mental health.