

# Beliefs Underlying Treatment Choices

Amanda L. Romano & Jessecae K. Marsh  
Department of Psychology, Lehigh University

## Background

### Causal Basis of Mental Disorders and Treatment Decisions

- Mental disorders perceived as coming from different causal origins: psychological, biological, and environmental (Ahn, Proctor, & Flanagan 2009)
  - Biological cause strongly negatively correlated with psychological/ environmental cause
  - Psychological and environmental cause strongly positively correlated
- Identifying the cause of a mental disorder dictates perceived appropriate treatment (Proctor 2008).
  - Psychological cause = psychotherapy
  - Biological cause = medication
- However, the causes of many mental disorders are unknown (APA, 2000) and people may just experience symptoms as feeling medically or mentally related.

### Use of Alternative Medicine

- Complex health decisions often involve deciding between alternative and conventional medicine. (Shumay et.al., 2001)
- Alternative Medicine use on the rise in Western world (Coulter & Willis, 2004)
- Those with psychiatric disorders are more likely to use Alternative Medicine than those with medical disorders (Mamtiani & Cimino, 2002)

## Research Questions

- How does the perceived domain and severity of health symptoms influence how one chooses to pursue treatment of that illness?
- Under what circumstances is the use of alternative medicine considered acceptable?

## Study 1

### Participants

- Lehigh University Undergraduates ( $n=35$ )
- Lay participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk ( $n=63$ )

### Measures and Procedure

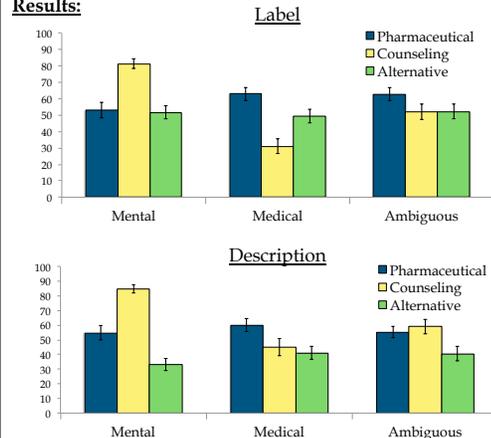
- Participants read three vignettes describing novel health conditions
- Each vignette consisted of 3 symptoms of moderate severity that were rated to either be mentally-based, medically-based, or neither
- Participants rated how helpful 3 possible treatments would be in treating the individual on a scale of 0 (not at all helpful) to 100 (completely helpful).
- Participants assigned to 1 treatment description condition:
  - Label ( $n=48$ ): Pharmaceutical Medicine, Evidence-Based Alternative Treatments, and Mental Health Counseling.
  - Description ( $n=50$ ; mirroring labels respectively): pharmaceutical drugs intended to regulate neurotransmitter dysfunction or other chemical processes, traditions outside of conventional medicine that treat the body in a holistic way, and speaking to a mental health clinician about these issues.

### Sample Vignette and Rating Question

Mark has been experiencing excessive anxiety concerning social interaction. He has also been feeling an exaggerated distrust of others. Additionally Mark has been engaging in activities that cause him to disregard his own personal safety and sometimes the safety of others as well

For the person you just read about how helpful do you believe Evidence-Based Alternative Treatments would be in treating this individual?  
Drag the slider to make a rating; 0 (not at all helpful) - 100 (completely helpful)

### Results:



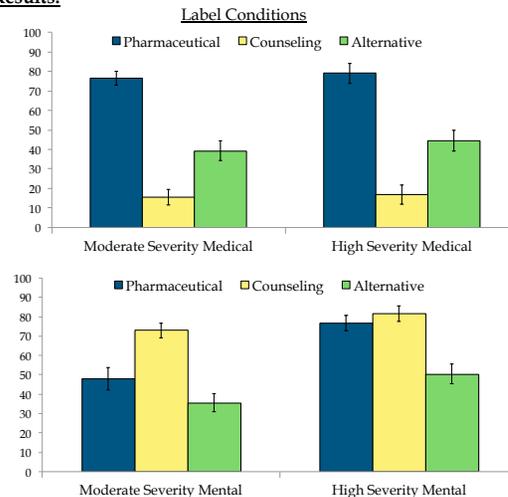
## Study 2

The goal of this study is to determine the impact of illness severity on treatment choice.

### Methods:

- Participants rated the effectiveness of the same three treatment options from Study 1 for 18 vignettes, three vignettes in each of the six Domain-severity categories
  - Medical: High and Moderate Severity
  - Mental: High, Moderate, and Low Severity
  - Ambiguous: Moderate Severity
- Participants assigned to one of two conditions, labels or descriptions, as in Study 1

### Results:



### References

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## Conclusions

### Study 1

- Does the domain matter? Yes.
  - When the domain of health symptoms is apparent, the perceived appropriate treatment is the treatment corresponding with that domain. When looking at symptom groups that were ambiguous, there was less of a dominant choice for treatment.
- Does the description of treatment options matter? Yes.
  - Description
    - Descriptions may allow for validations of biases or assumptions.
  - Label
    - "Evidence-based Alternative Medicine" may bring a strong connotation of an unscientific practice, but with the "evidence-based" modifier, participants may have been reluctant to downgrade their ratings of this practice.

### Study 2

- Does the severity matter? Sometimes
  - Medical: Does not change preference
  - Mental: High severity lessens dualistic tendencies

### Overall

- Innate dualistic views influence treatment decisions
- Alternative Medicine, not always the worst but never the best
- Health practitioners should consider the implications of how they present treatment options to a patient.