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Reflection Paper #1: CBT

Historical Application: Assessment and Diagnosis

I was raised as an only child in my family while my parents were still together. At the age of 11, after my parent's separation, my mother got pregnant by her boyfriend and she gave birth to my brother who was born with light skin, light blonde hair and blue eyes. Growing up in a predominantly multicultural neighborhood in New York, I was surrounded by people with mixed ethnicities. I myself, being Brazilian, had tan skin, dark hair and green eyes, which are not always common, even in Brazil. Even with all the differences I grew up around, the ideal appearance that was cherished in my family, and even in the movies and television shows I grew up watching, was the appearance of having light skin, blonde hair and light eyes. If you looked that way, my cognitive inference was that you would be adored and loved.

When my brother was born, my assumption was that he would receive more love by my family and especially by my mother. He was the reason my mom moved out of our apartment and moved in with her boyfriend. One summer in particular, I had just come back from Brazil, tanner than I had ever been while my mother and grandmother were always with my brother. I do not remember this behavior but apparently my mom found me later in the bathroom crying and scrubbing my skin to become "whiter". There were other instances when I received a black doll at school as a gift and cried until they exchanged it for a white, blonde doll. This schema core-belief that I upheld was reinforced by watching my family love my

brother while I felt ignored and even abandoned after my mom moved out. This event made my distorted thoughts no longer an inference but a truth in my mind and therefore, led to my maladaptive behaviors. This also led me to bully my brother and even resent him for being what my mother wanted and for receiving that kind of attention. These cognitive inferences were learned by watching how my family members spoke about colored people and hearing my mom share that my great grandmother's dream was to have a blonde grandchild. Therefore, this became an unacknowledged belief system that I received from my family, especially since I wanted to be loved by others and this belief led me to behave in those ways.

Historical Applications: Treatment Strategies

Through Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, I would treat my 11-year-old self by identifying my core beliefs through self-evaluation while giving myself behavioral assignments to change my cognitions. This would be better explained using Social Learning Theory fundamentals. During self-evaluation, I would identify that my thoughts about my appearance came from my environment. Bandura's theory would identify that I held these beliefs by observing and therefore modeling the beliefs, which surrounded me. I observed through movies, where the leading roles were always white women, that they had "happy endings" and unconditional love. By witnessing my brother receive that kind of love, I immediately felt the need to change my appearance and treated him bad for having the appearance I wanted. Therefore, my behavior was a symptom that was reinforced by being ignored and left to live without my mother while my brother received attention and care.

To treat the symptom behaviors that I had as a child, I would suggest parent-child training. Through Contingency Contracting, there could be an agreement between my mother and myself where she would spend more time with me alone rather than with just my brother or with my brother and me and I would agree to be nicer to my brother. By receiving the attention that I desired, I would no longer feel the need to change myself to become accepted and or hate my brother. In addition, by receiving praise from my mother rather than criticism, this would shape my behavior to act in ways that not only accepted myself as beautiful but to see other people with darker complexions as also beautiful. Through Contingency Management, I would be rewarded when I would be nicer to my brother and have those rewards taken away when I bullied him in any way, which would teach me to stop the unwanted behavior.

Current Application: Assessment and Diagnosis

Today, there are still moments where I struggle with my appearance, however my belief system has changed in some ways. Our society now celebrates those from mixed races, which has made it easier to accept myself despite the irrational cognition of what I grew up believing as “ideal beauty”. I no longer desire to look like my brother for attention as he has grown up with his own challenges. His relationship with my mom became difficult after he decided to live a homosexual lifestyle. He and my mother argue and I have become the peacemaker between the two. However, I still struggle with the distorted belief of my brother being her favorite, even with all of their issues, and that makes it hard for me to connect with him.

My irrational cognitions attribute to my behavior where I ignore my brother, even if it's not on purpose, so that I may receive attention from my mom. To not be a burden to my family and as a way to receive acceptance from my mom, my behavior has been to hide my feelings rather than to speak about how my mother and brother's relationship still affect me. I acknowledge that this belief is a distortion of reality and as a defense mechanism; I have learned to build walls for myself so that I may appear "perfect" with no real struggles. This behavior is reinforced the more my mother does whatever my brother wants and guilt trips me into doing whatever he wants.

Current Application: Treatment and Strategies

I believe I would benefit from Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy through the Speaker-Listener Technique with my mom and brother. I find it hard to express what I am feeling, especially when my mom cuts me off or doesn't actually listen to what I am saying. Therefore, by speaking my truth and having her and my brother replay it and acknowledge it, might make a big difference. It would also be beneficial to hear from their side as well. I feel that if I were in an environment where I feel understood and that my emotions are acknowledged, my behavior would change. Not only my behavior, but by listening to each other, I can rid myself of the false cognitions that have led me to behave in such an isolated and defensive way.

In addition to the Speaker-Listener Technique, another form of treatment that could help change the pathology of my distorted belief system and therefore my behavior is through the problem solving. Within the scopes of family therapy, if we could figure out what the antecedents of what causes my behavior of withdrawal

then we could avoid the consequences of my behavior, which is letting more feelings bottle up inside of me. If we could come up with a solution that worked for all three of us, and possibly use the Social Exchange Theory, we can set new expectations in the relationships and minimize “punishments” and add more “rewards” in our relationships. By realizing what we all expect from each other as a family, we can come up with a better solution. An example would be if my mom and me had more bonding moments together while I did the same with my brother. This would cause our independent relationships to grow and therefore make us stronger as a unit. By rewarding ourselves with quality time, it removes my irrational cognition of feeling ignored and therefore decreases my maladaptive learned behavior of hiding my true feelings.