

## Case Conceptualization

### I. CASE HISTORY

- A. **Identifying Information:** Michael Scott is a 55-year-old Caucasian male.

Michael has worked as a regional manager at a paper supply company for the past 15 years. The client was referred to the clinic, by one of his coworkers.

- B. **Chief Complaint:** The client seeks treatment for his depression and anxiety. At a recent work event, all of Michael's work subordinates expressed animosity towards him and provided detailed explanations for why they hold negative feelings towards their boss. Michael explains that some comments made were in regards to his management style, his physical features, and his relationships in the office. Michael believed that this event, which he referred to as a "roast", was intended to be fun for both his employees and himself. The client expresses that he experiences high levels of anxiety since the event occurred. When asked to describe his anxiety, Michael said that he is constantly worried about what his peers are thinking about him and cannot focus on his work at the paper supply company. Michael expresses concern for his job and does not want to receive a poor performance review from his boss. He describes his subordinates as his "family members" and believes that family should not treat their "father" the way that they have been. Michael has always believed that he is the "world's best boss" and he wishes to continue to hold this title. Michael denies any suicidal ideation at this time.

**C. Psychosocial History:** Michael's anxiety at his job has been present for the past 15 years, but it escalated after the work event. In his time at the paper supply company, he has made a conscious effort to ensure that his subordinates like him. The client claims that this need for connection with his coworkers is far more important than his daily businesses tasks as a regional manager. In order to cope with the anxiety, Michael constantly tells jokes at work and imitates famous people. He holds events during the workday that are not approved by corporate. For example, Michael orchestrated a movie event, where all employees take a two-hour break from work to watch a movie in the conference room. The client additionally likes to vocalize his hate for human resources manager in the office to reduce his anxiety levels. The client explained that he has used these coping mechanisms for the past 15 years in the office. In the past five years, the client mentioned that he shops to cope with his anxiety and is now experiencing unmanageable financial debt. Michael does not recall experiencing the feelings of anxiety prior to the start of his job position. Michael grew up in Scranton, PA. His caregivers consisted of his biological mother and his stepfather. The client has no recollection or information about his biological father. The client has an older brother and an older half-sister, neither of which he feels he has ever had a close relationship with. When asked about his childhood experiences, Michael mentions that frequently he went to baseball games with his stepfather. He recalls his stepfather emphasizing the importance of the team's respect for the their manager. The client describes various birthday parties from his childhood, all of which ended poorly for him. He describes one

instance, where a girl he liked went on a date with a different Michael on his birthday. Since Michael was five-years-old, his life goal was to get married and have multiple children. He claims that his motivation for the goal was to have tons of friends that could not leave him. The client explains that he has never been able to attain this goal. Michael also mentioned that he does not have any intimate relationships in his life at the moment. In terms of Michael's medical history, he has not been diagnosed with any physical conditions. The client emphasizes that he recently burned his foot on his portable grill and went to the hospital. There was no evidence of severe injury, but Michael expresses extreme concern for the health of his foot. The client does not have a history of any psychiatric care. He claims that he has never felt the need to seek treatment in the past.

## **II. Case Formulation**

**A. Cross-Sectional View of Current Cognitions and Behaviors:** The client identified several automatic thoughts, when asked about his work life experiences (Beck, 2011). During the "roast" event, Michael was able to describe the thoughts running through his head. The clients thoughts included "they do not respect me as their boss", "these people must really hate me", "I am not doing my job correctly", and "I really do not have any friends". Michael mentions that he has similar thoughts in the office, when interacting with his subordinates. He claims that he often believes that there is "something wrong with these people" (in reference to his subordinates), but at times he starts to wonder if there is something wrong with himself.

Some day-to-day thoughts in the workplace include, “why do I even bother coming to work” and “I never will be able to connect with my coworkers in the ways that they do with each other”. After discussing automatic thoughts with Michael, he was able to identify some of his intermediate and core beliefs. Salient intermediate beliefs include, “if the people in my life do not constantly praise me, I am failing at my job”, “coworkers are family members”, and “I need my coworkers to worship me in order to succeed in life”. The client’s core beliefs include, “I am unlovable”, “I need to be liked” and “I am incompetent”. Michael and this writer identified that his beliefs lead to his feelings of anxiety, which lead to his actions in the office that offend coworkers and distract them from their daily work obligations. The coworkers’ presentations of their frustrations reinforce Michael’s thoughts and beliefs and lead to the same maladaptive behavior patterns.

- B. **Cognitive Distortions:** Michael has identified several cognitive distortions that he frequently entertains (Beck, 2011). The client engages in all or nothing thinking (i.e. he sees situations in black and white) in the work environment. The client’s intermediate belief that if he is not constantly praised at his job, then he is failing as a manager reflects this cognitive distortion. Michael also exhibits overgeneralization: the perception that a single event applies to all scenarios. The client believes that the comments made about specific instances in the “roast” event mean that his coworkers view him as a failure in every situation. The client uses emotional reasoning to formulate his thoughts and beliefs. Michael begins to feel anxious and

insecure in his interactions with his coworkers and translates these emotions to facts. When Michael's coworkers ignore his jokes, he feels incompetent and, therefore, believes he must be incompetent.

**C. Longitudinal View of Cognitions and Behaviors:** Michael has, historically, had a tendency to view himself as unlovable and incompetent. During his childhood years, he struggled to befriend peers and establish relationship with his siblings. Michael's memories of repeatedly negative childhood birthday parties encompass certain assumptions he has made: "If the other kids do not have fun at my party, I am not a fun person to be around"; "I must always tell jokes in order to get people to like me". The client's salient relationship with his stepfather helped formulate earlier views and assumptions about bosses: "People must always treat their boss with utmost respect"; "Subordinates will respect you, and therefore act like friends and family". Michael's compensatory behaviors became to act as the comedian and to make jokes, regardless of how offensive they may be. Michael has consistently had positive beliefs about the world and other people. He views his stepfather and mother as people, who want the best for him. He also views his work as a phenomenal company filled with wonderful people.

**D. Culture and Other Historical Contributions:** American culture values individualism, which the client may struggle to connect with. Michael expresses that he often wants the office to be a team, which is his reasoning for gathering the staff in the conference room for various activities. He mentions that his subordinates often describe his meetings as superfluous,

but he believes they do not understand the value of working together. In a culture that values individualism, Michael prefers collectivity. In addition, Michael identifies as White, cisgender, heterosexual, and male. He claims that his subordinates are often offended at some comments he makes towards minority individuals in the office (e.g. a gay and Latino office member).

Michael believes that these individuals are too sensitive and do not understand his jokes. It is important to consider Michael's lack of awareness around his privileges in the context of his office relationships.

- E. Strengths:** The client uses humor to cope with his anxiety and personal insecurities. Despite negative energy from his coworkers, Michael consistently shows up to the office with a positive attitude. He continuously entertains himself, by performing to the office and formulating jokes. After work hours, the client regularly attends improv classes to channel his comedic side. Michael is a loyal employee and has maintained a managerial job position for 15 years. The client values his company and explains that he would never engage in any behavior that would defy the organization. Michael expresses profound care for his subordinates and truly wants to see them succeed in the company.
- F. Working Hypothesis:** It appears that Michael's childhood experiences may translate to his current cognitions and behaviors. From Michael's recollection of his interactions with his stepfather, it appears that the client may have developed unrealistic expectations about his job title. Michael emphasized that his stepfather taught him the value of a manager and the expectation

that managers deserve the utmost respect. Michael's subordinates, especially during the "roast", do not fulfill these expectations. It is possible that Michael believes that he is unloved by his coworkers because they do not show him the respect that he learned managers deserve as a child. The cognitions and behaviors may also be a result of Michael's ongoing search for a sense of love and belonging. The client described his childhood as lonely, and he may still hold similar feelings in regard to his social life. Michael believes that his coworkers serve as the central people in his social life to the point that he feels they are his family members. It is possible that Michael's high expectations for his coworkers are unfulfilled and relate to his beliefs and behaviors.

**G. Case Conceptualization Diagram:** See diagram on page 10.

### **III. Treatment Plan**

#### **A. Problem list:**

- Increased debt from overspending on unnecessary items
- Failure to meet work responsibilities
- Formal complaints from coworkers
- Increased absences at work

#### **B. Goals:**

- Discover healthier outlets to decrease anxiety
- Teach basic cognitive tools
- Identify and respond to automatic thoughts

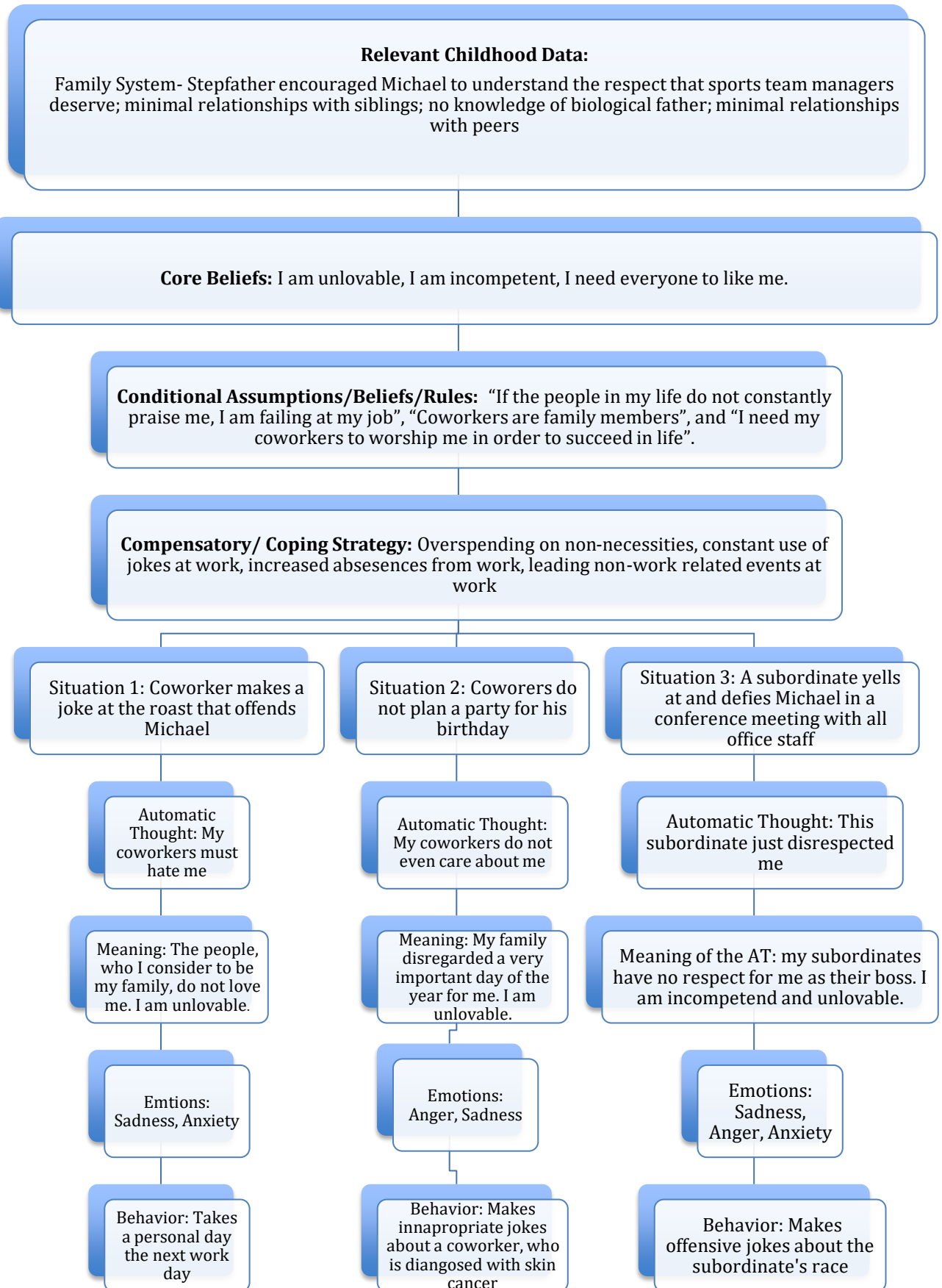
- Reevaluate client's view of managerial role (i.e. responsibilities and expectations)
- Rebuild relationships with coworkers

**C. Plan for Treatment:** Michael's treatment plan will aim to help him respond to automatic thoughts related to his core belief of being unlovable, to problem solve difficulties related to his finances, to build interpersonal and professional skills related to his job environment. The therapist will utilize collaborative empiricism, Socratic questioning, and thought detachment to address Michael's automatic thoughts (Beck, 2011). The therapist plans to use the Collaborative Empiricism technique to meet the client's goals. They will evaluate the validity and utility of the thoughts to develop more adaptive responses in the workplace. Socratic questioning will aid this process, by exploring evidence for and against automatic thoughts and potential advice that a close family member or friend would give him. The therapist will utilize psychoeducation with Michael to help him to separate himself from his thoughts and to view them objectively.

**IV. Elicitation of Feedback from Client:** Michael expressed that the interview was helpful for him; this is the first opportunity he has had to share extensive details about his life. The client felt that the therapist exemplified comprehensive listening skills and empathy. Michael noted that he felt that the therapist was targeting him at times, when his coworkers were the ones to blame for his problems. This writer discussed the complaint with the client and explained that it is not her job to place blame on any individual in the client's life. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy techniques, rather, are tools for the client to use in difficult, stressful situations and are not intended to blame the



client. The therapist appreciated the feedback and will incorporate the ideas into future case conceptualizations.



## References

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