CHAPTER SIX

Assessing the Mental Health Concerns of the Hip-Hop Generation for Culturally Competent Health Care

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Abstract

Assessing the mental health affairs of this generation is critical to their overall development. Failure to adequately address the mental health needs of the hip-hop generation will have adverse effects on this population and future generations. The mental health of this population continues to be a hot-button topic. African Americans from this generation are more likely to suffer from one or more mental health disorders. The lack of a comprehensive database focusing on mental health and the hip-hop generation makes working with this population very difficult. It should not come as a surprise that this generation continues to experience an array of emotional struggles. Their concerns are many; the lack of economic opportunities, education, housing, employment, safety and welfare has increased the opportunity for mental health and cultural realities of this generation, ranging from substance-related disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, antisocial personality disorders and lack of access to health care that is culturally sensitive to their needs.

Introduction

I think it's time I made a song for niggaz who don't know me.

I think it's time I made a song for niggaz who don't know me.

I graduated out the streets, I'm a real O.G. I been trappin', shootin' pistols since I stood 4 feet.

So all you niggaz actin' bad, you gon have to show me.

You gon make me bring this Chevy to a real slow creep.

My niggaz hangin' out the window, mouth fulla gold teeth

(T.I., 2004).

As evident through this short excerpt from the rapper T.I., many older African Americans are clueless and even more fearful of interfacing with members of the hip-hop generation. This is particularly true for many health care providers. It is important to note that many hip-hoppers represent a different set of generational values that are connected to the streets, denoting a mental attitude that is closely related to the preceding verse by T.I. For the purpose of this discussion, the hip-hop generation is defined as those individuals born after 1965. In particular, young African Americans from the hip-hop generation between the ages of 13 and 24 today are twice as likely to carry around with them daily a mixture of emotional baggage.

The hip-hop culture represents the expression of relationships between youth and their environment. It represents the deep rooted culture of Black and Latino people. Other aspects of their culture such as language, styles of dress and politics are of great importance. The hip-hop culture is commonly recognized by its main elements: Graffiti, DJing, Break Dancing, B-Boying, Mcing (Rapping), and Beat Boxing (Kitwana, 2002)). The origins of hip-hop culture can be traced back to New York City, during the mid to late 1970's. The hip-hop culture represents the expression of relationships between youth and their environment. It represents the deep rooted culture of Black and Latinos people. Other aspects of their culture such as language, styles of dress and politics are of great importance. The hip-hop culture is fundamentally an "oppositional culture," which is categorized as a youth subculture, protesting the cultural values and norms of the mainstream. The culture is distinguished by its language, style, fashion, culture, values, beliefs, and mental orientation.

The origins of hip-hop culture can be traced back to New York City during the mid to late 1970's. The culture is so much more than mere art and entertainment, as seen on television or heard on radio, or on internet broadcasts. It is constantly evolving in the form of sprit and consciousness. The culture keeps recreating itself in a never ending cycle of culture realities. From a therapeutic standpoint, hip-hop culture, through its music and various multi-media outlets has presented moments of joy, pleasure, sorrow, pain, victory, defeat, confusion, anger, humor, and even life and death. In its truest form, the spirit of hip-hop culture connects the past to the present and

lays the forward path towards future mental scrutiny. The hip-hop culture should not be assimilated, diluted or watered—down; it should be valued and used according to the mental liberation of this generation.

The many forms of emotional baggage that this generation has been confronted with have become a major concern for both health care and human services providers. If members of the hip-hop generation are going to be successful, they must first and foremost be in total control of their emotions. This generation cannot afford to allow their emotions to control their every action. The emotional intelligence of this generation is definitely worthy of investigation. Many of these young people have no clue as to how to manage their emotional intelligence, not to mention their attempts to define emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is characterized by a person's social and emotional skills; it also encompasses self-insight and self-control (Salovey, Stroud, Woolery, & Epel, 2002). It is important to note that the life experiences of this generation have reshaped the level and lack of emotional intelligence, as it relates to life challenges and events. Many from this generation continue to demonstrate poor self-control and self-insight. Furthermore, many non-hip hoppers believe that this generation lacks the ability to control their social and emotional feelings. Emotional behaviors ranging from substance use and abuse, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and antisocial disorders have become very problematic, not to mention a public health concern, among mental health professionals. These and other behaviors are keeping the mental health and counseling professionals extremely busy.

The hip-hop generation is that sub-group within the African-American community that mental health service agencies have the hardest time reaching, because of the cultural gap between the service providers and the people in need of services. This is due in part to inherent mistrust on both sides resulting from the level of cultural difference and misunderstanding. As a result the mistrust they are most likely to be negatively impacted by the influence of the culture and lack of mental health education. Service providers should employ a non-culturally relevant approach to addressing the mental health needs of the hip-hop generation. The primary mental health issues facing the hip-hop generation are wellness and mental health issues. Other common diagnosable mental health illnesses among this

generation include bi-polar disorder, schizophrenia and depression. It is estimated that 15 million people suffer with serious mental disorders. Among these risk factors, violence, incarceration, and unemployment also play a significant role. The hip-hop community continues to struggle with mental health issues, because they are often hesitant to seek treatment or openly speak about their problems.

Figure 1 illustrates some of the major social realities associated with the hip-hop culture. This generation embraces thrill seeking and seeks instance gratification. Violence, aggression negative behaviors and challenging lifestyle modeling are all too common with this population. The social realities clearly show that disproportionately members of the hip-hop generation continue to struggle with substance-related disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder, and antisocial disorders. Individuals who experience Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are persons who have recently experienced large amounts of social unrest and community conflict. Specific cultural assessments about the traumatic events are needed by therapists to know the best way to proceed when serving this population. Some of the associated features of PTSD include environmental violence, sexual assault, physical abuse, death, serious injury, natural disasters, incarceration, and life threatening events. It is important to note that interpersonal stressors may also foster negative feelings of hopelessness, and despair among its members.
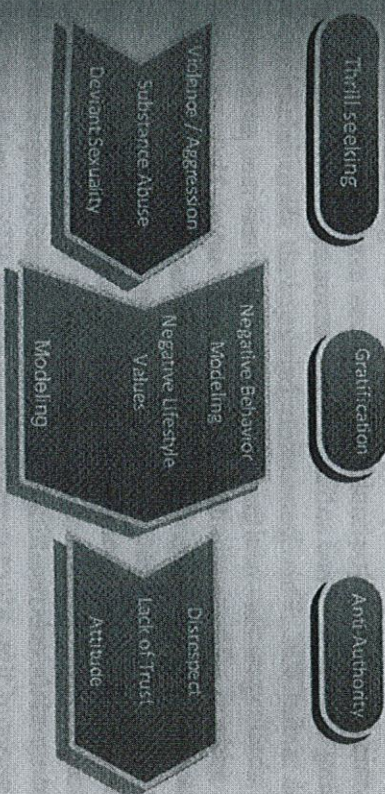

Figure 1. Understanding the social realities of the Hip Hop generation

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among members of the hip-hop generation has been largely ignored by the larger community. The correlation between the hip-hop generation and PTSD can no longer be overlooked. PTSD symptoms include outbursts of anger, trouble sleeping, inability to concentrate, and heightened anxiety. PTSD, as with many other mental disorders, if left untreated can interfere with this generation's overall success and functioning. The newest group to become victims of PTSD is the hip-hop generation population. Some potential causes of PTSD observed in the hip-hop generation population include poverty, violence, and drug abuse that result in a constant reminder of the negative aspects of life, not to mention personal negative life experiences. It is estimated that one third of all children in the United States are living in urban war zones and have experienced some form of PTSD. Personal experiences including environmental incarceration, abusive relationships, drug addiction, and violence are sure to play tricks on the minds of young African Americans who represent the hip-hop generation.

Many individuals who represent the hip-hop generation that have been directly exposed to violence, substance abuse, physical and inappropriate sexual behaviors are twice as likely to experience problems. The high prevalence of traumatic life events has the potential to increase the number of PTSD outbreaks among members of this generation. It should not come as a surprise that so many young hip-hoppers are suffering from serious traumatic community and social ills. This generation brings with them a unique set of challenges for health care and human service professionals to address. These challenges are based upon their childhood experiences, including, but not limited to abuse, abandonment, poverty, and violence within their families and communities. It is amazing that more members of the hip-hop generation are not experiencing forms of PTSD based on the years of rage and pent-up emotions resulting from the daily negative experiences and stressors of life. More research in the area of PTSD and the hip-hop generation is needed in order to help service providers to better serve this generation.

Substance Use Disorder

The second disorder is substance use disorder, which refers to the use of drugs or abuse of alcohol. The continued use of chemical substances can lead to the development of substance-use disorder. Substance use disorder is divided into eleven substance sub-groups: alcohol, amphetamine, caffeine, cannabis, cocaine, hallucinogens, inhalants, and nicotine, opioids, phencyclidine, and sedatives hypnotics.

Substance use and abuse among the hip-hop population continues to be very problematic, and a major public health problem (Kitwana, 2002). There appears to be a correlation between substance use and the hip-hop generation population (Morgan, 1999). The constant referencing and modeling of alcohol and drugs in hip-hop music lyrics and videos appears to be a form of endorsement or sanctioning. Furthermore, product placement by several alcohol beverage companies has also increased the visibility of alcohol consumption among the hip-hop culture (Ogunnaike, 2005). Rap artists Petey Pablo, Busta Rhymes, and Jay-Z all endorse alcoholic beverages. In addition, Lil Wayne and T-Pain have been tagged for the *Nuvo Black Label Liqueur*. These artists have all helped to reshape and promote alcohol consumption among the hip-hop generation. Many of these companies are getting free advertisement by attaching and marketing their products to hip-hop generation artists (Ogunnaike, 2005). Today, many rap musicians make constant reference to one of the most popular and addictive illegal drugs to surface since crack cocaine. Ecstasy appears to be the drug of choice for the hip-hop generation (Brown, 2000). It is not uncommon to hear Eminem or Jay-Z rapping about Ecstasy (Brown, 2000). Even the late Notorious B.I.G. made reference to Ecstasy in his first album, Life After Death, on which his lyrics include "some say that the X makes the sex spectacular" (Brown, 2000).

In 1992, Dr. Dre released an album entitled *The Chronic*. After the release of the CD, the use of marijuana seemingly increased within the hip-hop generation culture. This CD introduced thousands of African Americans to an array of inappropriate lifestyle modeling. Even today, the term, "the chronic," continues to be a popular term among college students and particularly African Americans.

The term, "the chronic," refers to a high grade of marijuana that is heavily consumed by members of the hip-hop generation. A Dr. Dre video from this album depicts young adults smoking marijuana and consuming alcohol, and the album's lyrics remain fresh in the minds of African American hip-hop generation college students. According to Majors and Billson (1992), many within the hip-hop group use substances as a means of being cool and coping with life's everyday stressors, including depression. It would appear that substance use and abuse is a way of life for some African Americans. Despite the fact that researchers suggest that African Americans drink less alcohol and consume less illegal drugs than their European American counterparts, the issue remains that any alcohol and drug use is problematic within the hip-hop generation population (Kapner, 2003). More empirical research is needed to assess the alcohol and drug consumption habits among members of the hip-hop generation.

Antisocial Personality Disorder

Antisocial personality disorder is the third disorder discussed. This disorder represents a pervasive pattern of disregard for, and violation of, the rights of others. For this diagnosis to be given to an individual, that person must be at least 18 years of age or older. Individuals with antisocial personality disorder fail to obey social norms; they repeatedly engage in unlawful behaviors often resulting in arrest. They also frequently engage in deceitful maladaptive manipulative behavior aimed at gaining some form of pleasure. In addition, they often lie or steal. Most importantly, antisocial personality disorder appears to be associated with low socioeconomic status and urban setting, which is highly represented of the hip-hop culture generation.

Deviant sexual behaviors, violence, and aggression among members of the hip-hop generation are problematic concerns classified in the category of antisocial disorders. Sexual promiscuity is more prevalent today than ever. Sexual references in songs and music videos are very appealing to the hip-hop generation. African American women continue to be exploited in music videos as unfiltered sexual images by artists and music producers to help market and sell hip-hop music (Morgan, 1999). These powerful images and values can easily be learned and modeled, thus causing damaging consequences (Franklin & Franklin, 2001).

Some music videos challenge the perceptions and values of this generation because they have the ability to model and teach new sexual experiences. The musician, Ludacris, for example, raps about a sexual fantasy with a woman vividly illustrated in the song and video entitled, *What's Your Fantasy*.

> I wanna, li-li-li-lick you from yo' head to yo toe and I
> wanna, move from the bed down to down to the flo'. Then
> I wanna, ahh ahh, you make it so good I don't wanna leave.
> But I gotta, kn-kn-kn-know what's your fantasy. (Ludacris, 2000).

In the video, partially nude women dance provocatively as male and female rappers describe their gender-specific sexual fantasies. Many of the women who appear in music videos are often considered sexual play toys for males (Rose, 1994). Music videos that offer suggestive innuendo and half-naked girls are appealing to viewers. The modeling of this type of sexual experience has the ability to challenge cognitive perceptions about appropriate and inappropriate sexual behaviors (Truglio, 1998). According to Truglio (1998), this results in poor social cognitive constructs of reality. Brown (1985) suggested that the types of sexual stimuli found in music videos send conflicting messages, leave viewers overwhelmed and confused about what is appropriate and inappropriate. This type of media exposure has desensitized viewers, thus increasing the risk of irresponsible thoughts and behaviors and resulting in negative consequences such as STDs including HIV/AIDS, sexual assault, and pregnancy. It is equally important to note that the hip-hop generation has one of the highest rates of HIV infection among African Americans.

In 2002, Ward found that hip-hop music videos have the ability to influence sexual politics by promoting and sanctioning irresponsible sexual behavior. Today, historically Black college and university communities are witnessing the very same sexual politics played in music videos being acted out on their campuses. In addition to music videos, the hip-hop generation population

continues to be exposed to a variety of sexual stimuli ranging from magazines to daily television and radio programming (Ooms, 1981). Violence and aggression have also become very problematic for the hip-hop culture generation. In the early days of hip-hop, rap musicians rapped about deterring violence; today, they are rapping openly about violence. In fact, their microphones can be compared to weapons, and rap lyrics are similar to gunshots (Kelley, 1997). For example, Fifty Cent raps about alcohol consumption, drugs, sexual behavior, and violence. His song, *Don't Push Me*, promotes aggression and violence as demonstrated in the following lyrics:

Right now, I'm on the edge, so don't push me, I am straight
For your head, so don't push me. Fill your ass up with lead,
so don't push me. I got somethin' for that ass, keep thinkin'
I'm pussy (Fifty Cent, 2003).

When artists like Fifty Cent and others use the microphone to rap about aggression and violence, the microphone becomes a dangerous cognitive tool. McCall (1997) explained that these rap lyrics can be psychologically damaging to African Americans. Despite this, Fifty Cent and others are recognized as role models, as noted in Kitwana (2002). It is unfortunate that more and more hip-hop artists are viewed as role models, as many of the explicit forms of their role modeling include selling drugs, pimping women, hustling, and misogyny.

Wade and Gunner's (1993) research suggests that some males who watch repeated sexually violent music videos are more likely to engage in aggressive and criminal sexual behavior. In fact, they found that the attitudes of African American male students toward sexual assault were more likely to be influenced by some forms of rap music—in particular, gangsta rap. Wade and Gunner (1993) believed that criminal sexual behaviors such as gang rape and sexual assault by males are likely to be influenced by some forms of suggested gangsta-related rap music and music videos. The perceptions of many from the hip-hop generation have been psychologically damaged as a result of the violent lyrics and inappropriate modeling found in hip-hop music and videos. According to McCall (1997), the very chants and rhythms in hip-hop music appear to be reshaping the attitudes and values of

young African Americans. Rose (1994) believed that lyrics found within hip-hop music today suggest that aggression and violence are normal behaviors. A number of issues today continue to challenge health care and human service professionals as they attempt to monitor the pulse of this generation in an attempt to provide competent quality care and service for them.

Counselors or therapists who seek to address the concerns of the hip-hop generation must understand the need for offering a social menu that includes the development of service planning that is connected to the hip-hop culture generation. Disproportionately, this generation has fallen victim to their social environments and stressful circumstances. Counselors who serve this generation cannot afford the luxury of prolonging or possibly confusing the client about the nature and role of the counselor/therapist. Service providers must alter their current strategies in order to enhance the mental health care for the hip-hop generation.

Culturally Competent Strategies

To better understand the impact of hip-hop culture and the roles that society plays in providing mental health services, one must understand that the key to developing effective mental health services includes being more responsive to, and accepting of, the cultural and social context of the hip-hop culture population. Valuing, not de-valuing hip-hop culture is most important, because it bears upon what the client will bring into the clinical setting. This is extremely true in terms of the culture; hip-hop has a tremendous amount of influencing power. The health and mental health care industry in the United States are embedded in Western science and medicine, which places little or no emphasis on hip-hop culture. What follows are four examples, which depict how hip-hop culture has influenced the way that mental health services are being offered:

Example One

Dr. Catherine Sori, Associate Professor of Counseling at Governors State University has been using hip-hop in her counseling sessions for several years. According to Dr. Sori,

hip-hop works as a counseling technique because it offers the client the opportunity to utilize a culturally relevant approach to solving their underlying problems. It also allows clients to share relevant stories and themes about their lives in their own words. Within the therapeutic community, hip-hop culture can be used to gain insight about multiple sensory experiences that incorporate illustrations of lifestyle behaviors and interactions (Sori and Hecker 2008). Specific application of using hip-hop in therapy could include allowing the clients to write and perform a mini rap songs telling about their lives, daily struggles, and even hope for the future. The use of various forms of hip-hop culture in the counseling session is a great way to promote positive feelings about oneself and others, thus enhancing the therapeutic experience.

Example Two

The incorporation of hip-hop culture into local community-based mental health centers has proven to be effective. Important messages pertaining to HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, violence and other antisocial behaviors can be communicated through the medium of hip-hop culture (Kitwana, 2002). Traditional mental health prevention efforts have failed to reach this generation because of inadequate methods of reaching out to this population (McLaurin & Juzang, 1993). According to (McLaurin & Juzang, 1993), the mental health community can address behaviors such as sexual promiscuity, substance abuse and HIV/AID prevention through the use of hip-hop culture. Mental health professionals must be able to identify specific lifestyles, behavioral clues and social values of this generation This identification could be the music, attitudes, cultural values, fashion, language, and/or the ability to be expressive, or not. One of the more recent campaigns targeting HIV/AIDS was the BET "Rap It Up" campaign. This campaign was co-sponsored by the Kaiser Family Foundation and BET. This campaign featured a number of popular rap artists discussing the importance of safe sex. These campaigns were intended to reach, teach, and re-direct casual sexual behavior of this generation. The "Rap It Up" campaign was an example of the industry becoming more socially responsible, thus promoting social change. Rap musicians have the ability to articulate critical messages about sexuality and sexual politics, through their music and music videos (Ward, 2002).

Example Three

In a study published in the *American Journal of Public Health* in 2003, an important finding was that adolescents who watched excessive amounts of negative rap videos were more likely to engage in anti-social behaviors such as violence against teachers or to have been arrested (Kirchheimer, 2003). They were also found more likely to have contracted a sexually-transmitted disease or have used alcohol and drugs. On the opposite side of the coin, mental health professionals can use positive lyrics, as an attempt to engage their clients and offer them positive alternatives. If a client shows an interest in hip-hop culture, counselors/therapists should consider engaging their clients in assignments associated with hip-hop culture. Linking modern-day mental health issues to hip-hop culture will help to foster a stronger bond between this generation and community mental health centers, whereby the clients can use their creative talent to express their emotions in a control setting. Hip-hop culture has demonstrated that it has the ability to promote a public policy agenda capable of focusing on the reduction of aggression and violence in poor underclass communities (Kitwana, 2002). The powerful voice of hip-hop culture has the ability to reach and articulate critical messages to this generation (Boyd 2003; Kitwana 2002). Utilizing hip-hop culture to increase awareness among this generation about mental health, and public health issues can be an effective weapon. Through various forms of hip-hop culture, critical social issues can be addressed. More importantly, if properly used, it can be an effective communication tool for promoting positive change. Hip-hop culture has significantly increased the awareness of this generation about the horrific social conditions facing this most unstable population. Hip-hop culture can be an effective tool in addressing a number of public health concerns including mental health, substance abuse and behavioral issues impacting this generation.

Example Four

Rha Goddess created the "Hip Hop Mental Health Project" after a close friend committed suicide in 2002. He was largely silent about his depression and life struggles. The Hip Hop Mental Health Project was created because there was a lack of safe outlets for those

who are struggling with mental health issues. Goddess realized that mental illnesses were having a disproportionate impact within the hip-hop community, and it wasn't being directly addressed at all (Newton, 2009). The Hip Hop Mental Health Project was created to break the silence in the hip-hop generation about mental health and wellness, by providing a culturally relevant, artistic and social justice approach to supporting individuals and groups in being well.

The project approaches wellness from the perspectives of hip-hop culture and social justice (Newton, 2009). According to Goddess, the Mental Health Project's use of hip-hop culture as a vehicle for healing and resiliency made their approach and their work within the hip-hop community a natural fit. Other risk factors, including violence, incarceration, and unemployment, also disproportionately impact the hip-hop community, as well as contribute to the overall wellness and mental health of this generation.

The culture of the mental health service system is also equally important to the success of services. In order to adequately address the mental health well-being of this generation, providers must embrace and welcome the hip-hop culture generation with diagnostic, treatment, and case management services that are representative of their culture. It is all too easy to not respect the importance of culture. The overall culture of hip-hop, including the social contexts are critical elements when providing services to members of the hip-hop generation. Cultural misunderstandings will bring about serious fragmentation of services, thus discouraging members from this generation from accessing and receiving appropriate mental health care. With respect to the context of mental health services broader social issues such as racism, discrimination, social economic status, and education all affect mental health services. Disproportionately, these interrelating problems are manifested on some members who represent the hip-hop culture generation.

The failure of the health care and human service community to develop strategies aimed at addressing these very experiences will continue to be problematic if service providers do not take the time to study this generation collectively in an attempt to rehabilitate the psyche of this generation. Furthermore, the proliferation of dysfunctional experiences that this generation has witnessed has led to a lack of emotional intelligence and poor decision-making skills. It is important to note that attitudes transcend into values and beliefs

for this generation. The lifestyles that are presented by hip-hop culture have afforded many from this generation the opportunity to develop a tough, or thug, mentality. This is particularly true in terms of African American males. Attitudes and values ranging from drug use, alcohol use, sexuality, and violence have been associated with the hip-hop generation and become yet another problem for service providers. Moreover, these attitudes and values are being transmitted, sanctioned, and approved by members from this generation. The sexual politics associated with hip-hop culture, for example, have influenced the attitudes and values of this generation significantly. The same can be said in terms of this generation's attitudes and values regarding alcohol, drugs, and violence. Getting to the root of why this generation feels this way is critical to their very development and survival.

Figure 2 illustrates some of the major challenges that therapists and counselors are facing when it comes to addressing the mental health needs of the hip-hop culture population. Effectively addressing the poor decision making and problematic fixed behaviors of this generation has derailed many of the mental health attempts. As seen in the figure, the challenges confronting counselors and therapists emanate from lifestyles, negative behaviors of others, the valuing of hip-hop culture, widespread substance use and abuse among peers, violence, and poor role models. Consequently, there is poor decision making, fixed behaviors that are resistant to change, and, resulting in anti-social behavior. The figure shows that the counselor or therapist must understand the interrelationships between these cultural factors and, subsequent, individual behavior in order to effectively help individuals from the hip-hop generation

Poor Decision Making → Fixed Behaviors → Anti-social

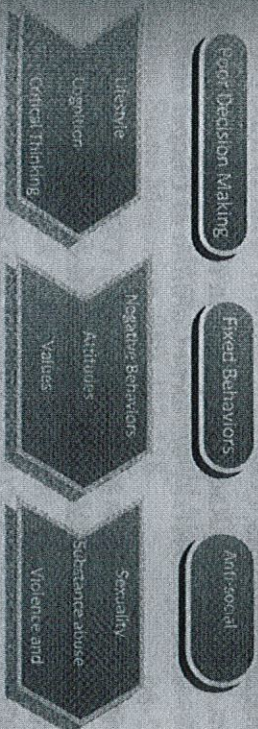| Lifestyle | Negative Behaviors | Sexuality |
| Cognition | Attitudes | Substance abuse |
| Critical Thinking | Values | Violence and |

Figure 2. Major challenges to the therapeutic community