

Taking a Hard Look at Ourselves & Creating Change for the Future

By Curtis Clearsky

For Battered Women's Support Services

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In July 2008 BWSS invited men and boys to come together for two showings of Byron Hurt's groundbreaking film Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats & Rhymes then to discuss the themes detailed in the film. The film is a critique of mainstream hip hop music and music videos. Twenty men and boys participated, men of colour, white men and Indigenous men were present representing ages from 17 – 60.

Some older Indigenous men had problems with Hip hop, they didn't understand it. It was necessary to address this because there is a disconnection between the generations that needs to be bridged. Hip hop is medicine created to uplift the young people despite living in a society where we are being oppressed. Hip Hop is not what is represented on TV or in mainstream music. Hip hop was created from Bronx, the ghetto, the slum, where marginalized Black and Latino youth were displaced from their environment and land. Just like many Indigenous youth who have had their land and culture stolen and displaced and forced into urbanization because there is no opportunity on the reservations. Indigenous people have the oldest graffiti in the world on the mountains and cliffs that tell the stories of the time and it's no different than the graffiti in the back alley. Indigenous oral history is no different than rhyming expressing and sharing stories of the present.... After mentioning these things many of the older men said they could see what we younger people are talking about.

Many great things happened in the discussions and thank you for giving me the opportunity to be apart of this initiative. All My relations, Curtis Clearsky

Here are the questions and a summary of the responses.

1, How do you think you have been influenced to behave as a man?

- The process colonization and its systemic influence has created perceptions of how men should behave, by defining manhood by very narrow definitions that grow from religion, male dominated catholic religion has influenced these definitions.
- Men are dominant in society, specifically white men, they are privileged and we are taught to believe we have the right to be powerful and dominant.
- Many males are raised by women/ so males have had to figure out how to be a man on their own so our peers play a powerful role in how men are taught to be men.
- Men objectify women, men have been encouraged to be anti women, I learned that women are objects
- Men have struggled with sexuality
- "I have had hard time with how I feel about women" When women are out of the room or not around my behavior changes
- Men have physical strength/ women have mental strength, Men need to use their minds too
- Saying what I was feeling might have changed the situation
- Sexism is a daily issue
- My idea of what it is to be a father is jaded
- Legacy of abuse through residential school
- Absence of fathers growing up/ Hip hop raised me
- Men have fear and hide it by behaving tough; We always have to be tough
- Have you called out men's behaviors? If you do they will ostracize you and not listen- its easier to tell younger guys cause they will listen
- Indigenous culture has a different way of looking at gays as 2 spirited rather than colonial-euro-influenced
- Womanizing - "I worry about getting laid and trying to prove to my friends" - bragging about getting laid
- Dealing with abstaining from womanizing, I carry lust and have to deal with it
- Expectations to behave a certain way, influenced by media, TV and music
- UFC hype perpetuates violence and tough behaviors that create violence amongst young people
- Monogamy issues problems with being with only one woman; Are men suppose to be with only one woman?

2. How can we individually create change towards ourselves, women and men?

- What is in it for us?
- How do we encourage and promote the change?
- We all have women that we love in our lives, mothers, sisters, daughters and aunts
- What makes us different from women?
- We as men have privilege; Men have the privilege and responsibility to make the change amongst men
- Some men don't listen to women but they will listen to men
- Take the risk; Be a leader and not a follower
- We need a symbol or a commonality
- Need to love each other
- Utilize traditional culture; Learn and share indigenous teachings
- Recognizing what is healthy and unhealthy; Understanding healthy sexuality
- We treat our families differently, more aggressively than others. Start treating our families good
- Choosing to treat our families healthy
- Meditate; Holding onto spiritual selves; Recognizing human selves

3. How can we create change collectively?

- Hear and listen to women more
- Teaching younger males positive values; Adulthood is about becoming the teacher to the youth
- Create space for conversations for men; Have a men's gathering; Teaching classes and workshops
- Men have a hard time sharing emotions but if given the space we will
- Apathy towards change is prevalent
- Men need to be acknowledged that they have gone through change and have become men. Women go through change when they go through puberty. We need to acknowledge our change
- Bring forth indigenous culture; Rights of passage ceremonies
- Support each other in calling out
- Assertiveness; Being positive
- Support individual change collectively
- Create more space for men to discuss, create men's groups, have a men's gathering or conference
- Bringing younger brothers out
- Knowing that there's a possibility
- Not dwelling
- Recognizing media influence
- Work at being violence free
- Create family support
- Recognizing those around you
- Reaching out

Comments About Hip Hop

- I don't like hip hop I don't dig it, its not our culture
- Hip Hop is medicine; Hip hope comes from the Bronx slums, the same social issues as reservations, slums and urbanization worldwide. Celebration of life despite them trying to kill us
- Mainstream idea of hip hop is not hip hop, there is nothing hip hop about what is in the media
- Support healthy Hip hop
- Recognizing healthy Hip hop

Curtis Clearsky was born and raised in the Vancouver area, and is from the Blackfoot (Blood)/Anishanabe (Saulteaux) Nations. Curtis performs and records Hip-hop and in 2006 at the World Urban Forum, Curtis was inducted by the United Nations and given the title of Messenger of Truth, a project focused on addressing global urbanization issues through Hip Hop. Curtis's passion lies within the grassroots movement; he is a community activist/organizer and is a founding and former member of several grassroots movements. <http://www.myspace.com/curtisclearsky>