Enhancing the Well-Being of Criminalized Indigenous Women

A Contemporary Take on a Traditional Cultural Knowledge Form

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Over the past decade academic scholarship and community efforts have increasingly recognized the association between traditional cultural knowledge and well-being for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in Canada (Hopkins and Dumont 2009; McCormick and Quantz 2010; Brockman et al. 2013). This increasing recognition has been facilitated by the awareness raised through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and other Indigenous-led health initiatives addressing Canada’s colonial history. Situated at the centre of these efforts is a recognition that cultural knowledge is foundational to individuals’ understandings of their self and relations with their collective community, land, and ancestors; this knowledge is fundamental to Indigenous well-being (Dell, Hopkins, and Dell 2005; Wilson 2004; Office of Ethnic Minority Affairs, American Psychological Association 2010). As Indigenous scholar Patricia Monture explains, her experiences and identity as a Mohawk woman were essential to her own health and healing (see Monture-Angus 1995; Monture-Okanee 1995).

The social, economic, and political inequities that are integral elements of colonialism have become the source of a disproportionate burden of ill health faced by Indigenous peoples (Adelson 2005; Mitchell and Maracle 2005; Lemstra and Neudorf 2008). The impacts of these inequities are particularly acute on the health status of Indigenous women. Their lives are disproportionately damaged by family violence, sexual harassment, and addiction — all of which have directly translated into disproportionate rates of criminalization (see the Introduction to Part II in this book; Niccols, Dell, and Clarke 2010; Boyer 2006). The urgency of attending to this issue is prominently illustrated in the matter of violence — which has a severe impact on the lives of Indigenous women in Canada (Beavan and Cooke 2003). Their mortality rate due to violence is five times that for non-Indigenous women, depicted most starkly in the alarming number of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada (Native Women’s Association of Canada 2010). Amnesty International points out that poverty is a key factor “exposing Aboriginal women to a heightened risk of violence” (2009: 2). Yet, as Colleen Dell and Jennifer Kilty (2013: 53) note, “State responses to the victimization of Aboriginal women generally and drug users specifically often fail to recognize them as legitimate ... victims, in spite of their lengthy histories of intersecting trauma and victimization.” Clearly, strategies for engendering Indigenous women’s well-being — including healing from addictions — must attend to the trauma trails of colonialism (Atkinson 2002; Comack et al. 2013).

Healing and Decolonization

Western approaches have been dominated by attempts to locate individualized solutions to healing from addictions. These approaches have generally overlooked the sacred relationships between Indigenous peoples and their spirit, family, community, nation, and the land. The majority of the National Native Alcohol and Drug Program centres in Canada, for example, were founded on individualized Western approaches to treatment in the 1980s, and only later began to incorporate holistic Indigenous understandings of healing and personal growth. These understandings continue to develop in their acknowledgement that healing is a way of seeing, a way of relating, a way of thinking, and a way of being (Assembly of First Nations, Health Canada, and National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation 2011). The specificity of this issue for Indigenous women remains a challenge in Canada (Niccols, Dell, and Clarke 2009).

Decolonization — the process whereby Indigenous people reclaim their traditional culture, redefine themselves as a people, and reassert their distinct identity — can take many forms. Community development, by which people participate directly or through organizations that they control in bottom-up planning and community action (Wharf and Clague 1997), is one decolonization strategy adopted by researchers and community activists alike. Jim Silver and his colleagues, for instance, report on their work with Indigenous community development workers in Winnipeg. They note how community development is about community healing, is led foremost by women, and is holistic: “It focuses on the individual, the community, the creation and operation of Aboriginal organizations, and an Aboriginal-specific, de-colonized way of understanding and interpreting the world” (Silver et al. 2006: 3). Others have applied this intricate connection...
between decolonization and healing in developing an Indigenous social work practice (see, for example, Hart 2003; Bruyere, Hart, and Sinclair 2009; Carriere and Strega 2009; Duran 2006).

A parallel transformation has taken place in developing research practices. Decolonizing approaches to research, as initially espoused in the work of Linda Tuhiswi Smith (1999), critically reflect on how Western scholarship has perpetuated colonizing practices. At the same time, authors such as Margaret Kovach (2009) have highlighted how Indigenous research methodologies can be a source of decolonization when they flow from tribal knowledge and are undertaken in an appropriate way; that is, with mindfulness to community connection, participation, and empowerment. As in the case of reconceptualizing healing for Indigenous peoples, we need to find alternatives to the generic and individualized Western approach to research. Failing to do so will result in a perpetuation of the status quo.

Another potentially powerful strategy of decolonization is song and music. Around the globe, song and music are recognized as traditional sacred forms of Indigenous knowledge (Sefa Dei, Hall, and Rosenberg 2002). In Canada, song and music have held a significant place within Indigenous cultural traditions, rituals, and ceremonies (Cajete 2004). An essential plank of Canada's assimilationist policies and practices, however, was to disparage and outlaw Indigenous knowledge and culture. Colonialism resulted in significant cultural loss for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, including the demise of their languages (Papequash 2011; Arbogast 1995). Reviving traditional language and culture is, then, essential to decolonization.

The revival of traditional culture among First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples is strong in Canada and is key to increasing health status (Niesen 2007; Papequash 2011). Song and music have an important place in the contemporary manifestation of cultural identity. Song writers and musicians such as Buffy Sainte-Marie, Susan Aglukark, Eekwol, Violet Naytowhow, and A Tribe Called Red blend modern-day compositions with powerful lyrics and traditional sounds to educate, share stories, and connect to cultural pride (Lashua and Fox 2006). While the use of song and music as therapeutic tools in Western society — such as in cancer care and dementia clinics (Daykin, McClean, and Blunt 2007; Beard 2012; De Medeiros and Basting 2013) — has been well documented, little has been written about their contemporary use as a source for Indigenous well-being and as a form of resistance to colonialism (Iwasaki et al. 2009).

Our interest in the potential for song and music to engender Indigenous well-being and contribute to a process of decolonization emerged from a study that our research team undertook to examine the role of identity and stigma in the healing journeys of criminalized First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women. Specifically, the study aimed to remedy the limited research on how the stigma linked to drug abuse, criminal involvement, and being an Indigenous woman has an impact on women's healing (Carter 2002; Razack 2000; Ridlon 1988). The research team organized interviews with sixty-five First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women in treatment for illicit drug abuse at six National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (NNADAP) treatment centres across Canada, and with twenty women who had completed treatment. The team conducted an additional thirty-eight interviews with percentage of those living a healthy lifestyle.

Our study affirmed that culture is foundational for women to reclaim — and for some to claim for the first time — a healthy self-identity as Indigenous women and to respond effectively to the harmful impacts of stigma. Following the guidance of Elder Joyce Paul, our team committed to sharing this finding in a format that honours traditional cultural knowledge in a contemporary form, and we identified a combination of song and music as a potentially far-reaching means to contribute to the cultural well-being of criminalized Indigenous women.

Traditional Indigenous Knowledge, Cultural Identity, and Song

Traditional Indigenous knowledge is generally described as “the expression of the vibrant relationships between the people, their ecosystems, and the other living beings and spirits that share their lands” (Battiste and Henderson 2000: 42). One writer identifies it as an “extensive and valuable knowledge system” that is vital, dynamic, and capable of helping to solve contemporary problems (Battiste 2002: 7). Central to Indigenous knowledge is recognition of the historical foundation of current understanding — a foundation that can be found in ceremonies, teachings, traditions, and values, many of which contain song and music (Bicker, Pottier, and Sillitoe 2002; Larry Laliberte, traditional cultural practitioner, personal communication, Dec. 14, 2013). It follows that the sharing of traditional Indigenous knowledge inherently revitalizes and honours Indigenous language, culture, systems, and ways of knowing at both the individual and communal levels (Smith 1999; McMaster and Martin 1992; Graveline 1998).

A First Nation woman recovering from substance abuse told how language, through her grandfather's gift of song, was central to her eventual healing:
It's a good thing that someone ... refreshed my thoughts in my memory in regards to where I come from, what I used to see my grandfather do when he used to pray on his own, when my mother's dad used to go to stretch on the lake, [location], and refresh my memory, because I remember my grandfather sitting in that tipi singing the songs that our Elder sang this morning. But I didn't get it, I didn't get it ... When my grandfather used to do ceremonies in sweat lodges ... (speaking Cree) ... I learned how to speak my language. (Cited in Tempier et al. 2011: 10–12)

The origins of Indigenous knowledge are situated within an oral tradition that has been transferred from generation to generation in cultural teachings and practices. Indigenous educators are recognized as "family members, community members, and leaders who share what they know about living a good life through their actions, through apprenticeship, through spiritual guidance, and through their words" (Kaplan-Myrth and Smylie 2006: 23). Wisdom is shared by Elders, the keepers of much sacred and traditional knowledge. Historically, in some communities, women had a central role as keepers and imparters of traditional knowledge, but this role drastically deteriorated with colonization.

The relationship between traditional Indigenous knowledge and cultural identity is intricate. Pride in cultural identity is a recognized factor for well-being and is associated with traditional culture, way of life, and language (Assembly of First Nations, Health Canada and National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation 2011). A national framework published by the National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation and the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) in partnership with Health Canada states that identity for First Nations people comes "from family and, by extension, community and traditional land and clan systems" (p. 12). The loss of cultural identity has been particularly destructive to the health of Indigenous women in Canada (Office of Ethnic Minority Affairs, American Psychological Association 2010). Rooted in attempts at colonization, stereotypes of Indigenous women as substance abusers are rampant and the associated stigma has had a devastating impact on their lives and the erosion of their cultural identity (Dell and Kilty 2013). These stereotypes, unless countered, are absorbed, internalized, and reproduced. As one woman in our study shared:

When I came here [to the treatment centre], you know, I found my culture. 'Cause I didn't know nothing about who I was as a Micmac woman. I thought being Native was drinking, drugging, being in trouble. That's what I thought, you know, what Natives were.

We know that interventions are needed to assist women in reclaiming their Indigenous identity by offering culturally significant healing experiences, such as the medicine wheel approach, sweat lodge, and other cultural ceremonies, as well as Aboriginal food, art, language, and traditional teachings (Wilson 2004; Poole 2000; Vinding 1998). Fostering cultural identity through traditional Indigenous knowledge offers empowering stories and discourses that can cultivate cultural identity, community connectedness, and pride (Assembly of First Nations, Health Canada & National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation 2011).

Although Western science was slow to recognize non-written forms of knowledge — as well as their linkage to cultural identity and its role in well-being — Canada has a strong oral tradition in Indigenous culture. Music and song are a near-universal means of sharing traditional Indigenous knowledge. For example, the Plains Cree (Nehiyawak) sing ceremonial songs in the traditional sweat lodge to pray, connect with the Creator, and share their values and beliefs in stories. Songs were traditionally treasured, sacred, and purposeful, and they belonged to individuals, families, or tribes; they were only shared with others if given away in ceremony or purchased (Kingman 2003). For Indigenous people, storytelling has traditionally been understood as "a means to connect the listener to the universe, to the past, to the present and to the future; it establishes a relationship to the souls and minds of human beings, animals, and the land" (Williamson 2000: 142). Song and music, as a traditional form of storytelling, also bring with them specific duties, such as their role in healing ceremonies (Aboriginal Healing Foundation Research Series 2012: 2, 30).

Music and song have historically preserved Indigenous culture, identity, language, memory, and values. Indigenous ceremonies are most often sung in a traditional language, which not only communicates the intended meaning of the ceremony, but also helps to maintain the language, and helps others to learn it. Neal McLeod emphasizes the importance of this practice: "Language is our own vehicle for the transmission of ideas and worldviews ... Language guides a people and helps to create space wherein tribal memories linger" (2000: 29). The importance of language and song is also reflected in the words of a woman on her healing journey:

I knew who I was but it wasn't until much later, probably into my sobriety, that I actually learned about who I was and where I come from and how important that is to me now, you know, like knowing my culture, learning my language, the songs; it means so much to me now. Well, I come from a matrilineal society and, you know, they always talk about
The strengths of — the women are always the backbone of the community and we don’t need to be out in the front but we’re always behind supporting and we’re the ones who are nurturing. Yeah, I’m really proud of who I am and where I come from and, you know, I have a responsibility as an Aboriginal woman; as a mother; as a daughter; as a sister.

Song and music offer a means of engendering the healing process. As a study by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation concluded:

Any of the music-making processes bring healing to both the listeners and the players. It is long known in our culture that drumming and traditional songs are intended to be healing. They allow clients to feel a sense of belonging and/or identity. The songs are often ways to shift energy; to wrap clients in culture; to allow them to cry sometimes; and to bring joy to others. (Aboriginal Healing Foundation Research Series 2012: 2)

Song and music are also recognized for their ability to inspire social change. For example, a song titled “Angel Street,” by Inuk musician Lucy Idlout, inspired the city of Iqaluit to recognize the role of domestic violence in their community by renaming the street that their local women’s shelter is on — changing it to Angel Street. The mayor of Fredericton, NB, did the same and would like to see an Angel Street in every capital city of Canada (Aboriginal Healing Foundation Research Series 2012).

“From Stilettos to Moccasins”
As a decolonizing strategy, cultural identity is crucial to the healing process of criminalized Indigenous women. Healing from drug abuse must address the need for women to reclaim a healthy self-identity as Indigenous women. This includes understanding the negative impacts of stigma. Our team was challenged with sharing what we learned in a way that honoured traditional cultural knowledge in an accessible and contemporary form. The imagined solution, guided by the wisdom and confidence of our Elder Joyce Paul, was to produce a song and accompanying music video. It was our team’s intent that “the knowledge gained in the study ... be translated through a culturally-relevant technique that would recognize, legitimize and celebrate Indigenous women’s historically-silenced voices” (Dell 2012: 11). Prioritizing the often silenced voices of women with lived experience, the song and video were intended to convey the interconnection between the negative impacts of stigma and the resilient benefits of a cultural identity. What we did not fully anticipate was the positive impact that developing and distributing the song and video would have in terms of serving as a means for well-being and empowerment, thereby contributing to a process of decolonization.

Our research team gathered in February 2009 to develop the song based on the key findings of the study in relation to stigma, identity, and healing. The team collaborated with Woodland Cree singer and songwriter Violet Naytowhow. About thirty people attended the gathering, including the women we had interviewed, researchers, treatment providers, Elders, policy-makers, and government and non-government decision-makers. This compilation of individuals represented the diversity of our original research team. The goal was to collaboratively create a song portraying the healing experiences of Indigenous women who have struggled with criminalization and drug abuse. The song served as a neutral means by which all our team members could work together, because the vast majority were not songwriters.

Violet initiated the song development process by introducing songwriting to our group. She started off by sharing several different genres of music and then explained how songwriting was analogous to storytelling. The songwriting process involved dividing into four groups to brainstorm lyrics for the song, which included two sets of lyrics plus the bridge/chorus. Each group was facilitated by an individual familiar with the songwriting process: Violet Naytowhow, Talla Tootoosis, Jonathon Couchman, and Douglas Parcell. Lyrics were constructed based on the themes from the study produced by the team alongside individuals’ personal contributions to the lyrics. The writing took each of the groups about three hours. All four groups then met together with Violet to review and combine the lyrics. In what remains surprising to this day, the group consensus was to change only one word. This large group also discussed different ways to frame the song; for example, having the song begin with drumming and an Elder speaking, and ending with children’s laughter. In the end, not only is the song a means of well-being and empowerment, as the feedback suggests, but so too is the process of its development and distribution.

Given Violet’s background in traditional Indigenous song and singing, alongside her contemporary work, following the gathering she and guitarist Kevin Joseph worked with the lyrics to add a melody. The draft of the song was distributed to all team members (including those not able to attend the gathering) for feedback. It was at this point also that people from Mae Star Productions began to work on developing an accompanying music video. They attended the original songwriting gathering and went through several
The song's development led to the creation, by the research team, of a half-day health intervention workshop, "From Stilettos to Moccasins: A Guide for Group Discussion." It is an interactive workshop intended for Indigenous women in addictions treatment centres, community-based agencies, and correctional facilities across Canada. The goals of the workshop are to discuss the role of identity and stigma in the healing journeys of Indigenous women in treatment for drug abuse; to offer hope and inspiration, gathered from over one hundred Indigenous women in substance abuse treatment who shared their healing journeys; and to reflect on participants' understandings of identity, stigma, and the healing journey and to learn from one another. The workshop, available at no cost to communities, is designed to be facilitated by community members with community members.

Responses to the Song

The “From Stilettos to Moccasins” song and music video was posted on YouTube in November 2011 and generated thousands of views. In addition to comments posted online, feedback on the impact of the song and video was collected following the delivery of service provider workshops and treatment client workshops. Our analysis of the comments posted on YouTube and the feedback from treatment clients and service providers who participated in the intervention workshops confirm that the song and music video have had a lasting impact. The YouTube comments specifically mentioned the beauty and inspirational power of the lyrics, as well as their linkage to cultural identity and healing. Overall, the feedback we received identified seven themes.

First, women and service providers said they were able to relate to the song. When relaying what they enjoyed the most about the workshop, the majority of participants noted the song and music video. One of the women said, “The song and video was great. There was so many things I could relate to and I felt like it was written about me (I’ve worked the streets since I was 16).” The song resonated with other people's lives. One woman described the music video as "singing my song." Another wrote, "It reminded me of my healing journey. I could put myself in her place." And yet one more said: "This song is real. It touches your soul when you've 'walked the walk' and I made good and walked that path. I am one of the lucky ones." These individual stories were also understood as part of a larger fabric. Although the journey as an individual was solitary and lonely — "I remember the song goes from feeling very lonely and lost and feeling more inspired as the journey progresses" — continuing on one's journey meant looking to culture and a common identity.
as Indigenous people, and as women. One participant shared: “Stay strong, continue the healing journey. Strong message about what Aboriginal women have and continue to go through. To keep going.”

The workshop participants were also specifically able to relate to the song’s message of transformation and change as a journey, as evident in the simple statement of one woman, “She [woman in music video] was on a healing journey, you know?” They also appreciated that hope is an important part of the journey. The journey was solitary yet shared, and the journey was one of transitions, a journey that required strength and hope. A service provider commented: “Well my interpretation of the whole thing was one of hope. There’s hope for women in our community to change their lifestyle, to go specifically from a dangerous lifestyle to one of healing and productivity.”

The metaphor of shoes was interpreted both literally and symbolically as a journey. One woman said, “I like the part about where you come from—talking about walking the journey. I literally walk in stilettos and moccasins because that is how my life is. I thought the song was pretty cool.” Others reported metaphorical meanings such as “Being in your own shoes and being yourself” or “Finding the shoe that represented you, thinking about who you are and what you want to become.” Another woman simply said, “Loved the shoe identity and self-esteem.” A person who posted on YouTube was inspired to extend the metaphor:

Stilettos have no places on Mother Earth. They are only meant for hard places where we don’t belong. They jolt and jar the entire body. Only sink into the dirt, poking holes in our Mother. Always Walk Softly on Mother Earth... Leave the stilettos for those who must wear them... Welcome home beautiful First Nations women! Ahseen!

In addition, service providers commented that they used the song for inspirational and educational purposes, with one saying that “the song is inspiring and something that I can use.” Another said, “[I] remember the song because it was so different. I have never heard a song like that before. I found it was very empowering. The whole workshop was empowering.” A service provider spoke of sharing the song and video with colleagues and individuals from other organizations: “We always show the song and video [to practicum students that come here]. It’s always in our waiting area room for anyone that wants to see it.” Similarly, a service provider talked about extending the use of the song to ceremonial occasions such as graduations and to spiritual gatherings as part of healing circles and prayer: “We used the song in one of our women’s groups — we used it as our graduation song. Used it in a healing circle. We had prayer and then listened to the song... It’s good to wake emotion up to that song.”

Specifically notable about the song, and most repeated in the YouTube comments, are its deeply felt special qualities: “Beautiful and Powerful song”; “Beautifully Done”; “beautiful song and video”; “very beautiful and had a lot of emotion in it”; “it is inspirational!”; “Inspirational, moving, I loved it”; “This song really inspires me to stay sober and clean.” The journey of the women in the music video is touching and rouses feelings; some women and service providers were moved to tears.

Women who provided feedback three months after the workshop said they used the song and music video to keep inspiration alive in their daily lives. One said, “I still listen to that song on YouTube. When I’m feeling low, I just sit there and go on the computer and that is when I play that song. It is a beautiful song.” Another woman commented, “I have a CD of the song. It’s over at my sister’s and the book with the story in it [from the workshop]. I loved it; it was so close to home. It was really good. I’m glad whoever initiated it, initiated it.” A third woman talked about repeatedly listening to the CD in the first few months following the workshop:

I don’t remember the lyrics specifically but I still remember the emotions. What I took from it — it was in my car and CD player for days and days and days. It kept me going when I was feeling down. It made me cry but it also gave me strength. For the first couple of months I always had it in my head. It was very encouraging. I related to it very well and it helped me see where I wanted to be.

Yet another theme raised in the feedback related to how the shoe metaphor was a powerful way to evoke cultural identity. As one woman said, “Cultural part is the key factor for me. And that is the whole idea from the fancy high heels to moccasins.” A metaphor’s strength comes from its subjectivity; its use of one thing to symbolize something else. But as evidenced by one service provider’s literal interpretation, metaphors can also be problematic:

To me, it gives an inappropriate message to Aboriginal people about what health looks like. We already have a distorted perspective. Traditional Indian is really hard to attain — particularly for Urban Aboriginals. It seemed like that was the ultimate goal, and that it is set up to fail. It can give a message that you haven’t reached your full potential. Seems the message is “Well, you aren’t a real Indian if you don’t wear Moccasins.” To me, being Aboriginal means being healthy and happy — it doesn’t mean to wear feathers and moccasins. [The song] suggests one extreme to another.
On the other hand, the song and music video prompted many expressions of positive cultural identification and a belief that culture can be a way of both changing and healing. One woman commented: "Recovery can happen ... just go to culture. Things can change. They don't have to stay the same... It really validates the human power of women." And another said, "To see that women are very special and that we have a uniqueness about us. To see that I wasn't alone. Find my roots and spirituality."

And last, extending the theme of cultural identity, the respondents articulated a voice of connection and sisterhood. Words and phrases such as "Mother," "Mother Earth," "Sisters," "Blessings," and "Female Spirits" were used. The song was described as "an honour to our sisters" and as something that "beautifully expressed the strength of the female spirit." YouTube was described as "a fantastic venue to showcase our talent and tell our stories." The project challenged stigma and promoted cultural pride.

Resisting Colonialism
A wealth of indigenous culture was lost in the Canadian state's attempts at colonization, as evidenced by the lack of well-being among First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples today. Not lost, however, was an understanding about the importance of carrying cultural knowledge forward for future generations (Mitchell and Maracle 2005; Mundel and Chapman 2010). Equally recognized is the need to address specifically the impacts of colonization for Indigenous women. The "From Stilettos to Moccasins" song and music video attempt to honour the role of traditional cultural knowledge in well-being in a contemporary form, especially within the context of Indigenous women's efforts to (re)-claim their culture and self-identity. This is particularly the case in the lives of criminalized Indigenous women who are working to heal themselves from drug addiction. Empowerment is fundamental to an individual's cultural identity and thus protects against the destructive stigma overshadowing the strengths of Indigenous culture. As the "From Stilettos to Moccasins" song says, "My spirit I now reclaim/ Coming home to who I am/ Taking honour in my name."

Traditional Indigenous knowledge and its oral origin were honoured in our team's identification of song and music as the means by which we could share knowledge. As Katherine Gordon says in We Are Born with the Songs Inside Us: Lives and Stories of First Nations People in British Columbia, traditional cultural knowledge is inherent to Indigenous people. Music is a keeper of Indigenous knowledge; it is used to share oral traditions and preserve memory. "For many First Nations family wealth is not held or mea-

sured in the form of material items, but in their family's own dances, songs, and stories" (Aboriginal Tourism BC, n.d.). Choosing to bring about change through a traditional cultural form — song and music — recognizes this. Music has been described as "speaking to the heart of Indigenous peoples" and "the soundtrack of humanity. Music is the soundtrack to culture. Music is to help us remember the story" (Educational CyberPlayGround n.d.).

The experiences of "From Stilettos to Moccasins" show that healing also requires giving voice to Indigenous women's stories, which colonization has tried to silence. As one of our team members commented, "When the Indian agents left our communities, 'brown patriarchy' took its place... Our own people learned to lead by domination and power and control relationships. The power of the church also continued to dominate our communities and a very powerful teaching was that men had to control women and children in order to be men." Smith (1999) maintains that singing is one way in which Indigenous people, including women, can have a voice. The song and music video, as an act of decolonization, gives voice to the women's stories. Although all of the women who participated in the study did not participate in the song's development, a ceremony was held to ensure that their words were honoured. Further, not all members of the song-making team were Indigenous, but they were recognized as allies (Kovach 2009; Bishop 2002).

The stories of the women in our study were developed as a collective narrative and shared with the guidance of a contemporary, inspirational Indigenous female artist. During the songwriting process itself, our Indigenous team members' voices were given priority. In the end, not only is the song a means of well-being and empowerment, as the feedback suggests, but so too is the process of its development and distribution. It also helps to address the diminished role of women in their communities as keepers and imparters of traditional knowledge due to colonization.

There was richness in the breadth of feedback received on the "From Stilettos to Moccasins" song and music video. When considered in its entirety, the feedback received was congruent with our team's goal of creating a song that offers hope and inspiration, revitalizes and honours Indigenous culture (Smith 1999), and validates Indigenous knowledge systems and philosophies (McMaster and Martin 1992; Iwasaki et al. 2009; Daykin 2004). Specifically, individuals were able to relate to the song and video and their message of cultural identity in the journey of healing. We were also influenced by the understanding that with a loss of traditional Indigenous knowledge and cultural identity among the participants in our study, we needed to develop a form of knowledge dissemination that would be meaningful...
to them in a contemporary sense but still drew upon traditional cultural knowledge. We attempted to bring back ceremony in a contemporary way to Indigenous women who are often far removed from it. Ultimately our team did not use traditional language in the song, but we do recognize that language is "one of the most tangible symbols of culture and group identity" and also "a link which connects people with their pasts and grounds their social, emotional and spiritual vitality" (Norris 1998: 8). The music for the song, however, does have the traditional drum beat throughout.¹

Traditionally, Indigenous women have been honoured as the teachers, observers, life-givers, and caregivers for their children, families, and Elders in their communities. Attention needs to be refocused on these roles and their application in women's present-day lives. As Kim Anderson (2006: 23) states:

As Aboriginal peoples, we can move forward by building on traditions that kept our people healthy in the past.... Our women were traditionally granted significant authority in recognition of their power as creators and nurturers. These core values and principles are built into our various and multiple creation stories, our traditional political and economic structures, our extended family structures, and our spiritual practices. It is up to us to retrieve these concepts and to plant them like seeds in our new world.

Decolonization is a specific process for women. Song and music video creation offers one strategy for contributing to this decolonization process. Other strategies include storytelling (Mehl-Madrona 2005), working with the land (Mundel and Chapman 2010), and dance and art (Iwasaki et al. 2009), as well as ceremonies such as sweat lodges and smudging (Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2006). Such strategies support the importance of traditional cultural knowledge, which contributes to self-identity and is foundational to well-being. This, in turn, combats stigma and the overwhelming stereotypes Indigenous people, and especially women, are subject to (Salmon 2005; Currie 2001; Poole and Isaac 2001; Padayachee 1998; Copeland 1997).

An unsolicited email to one of our team members, after the song was played at a conference for addictions service providers, captures the potential of this cultural knowledge form:

It [the music video] was a dramatic punctuation to the end of the conference. To say that it was well received would be an understatement. It evoked a visceral response in many people. Dare I say that people left energized and centred, knowing why they are here, and who we serve. With much appreciation.

The crafting of the song "From Stilettos to Moccasins" was a powerful and far-reaching way for the women to connect with the transformative stories of cultural identity, many similar to their own, and it served as a reminder of hope and inspiration for women's own personal healing journeys. It was a reminder for many that they are not alone.

Notes

This chapter is dedicated to our team Elder, the late Joyce Paul. We also acknowledge the "From Stilettos to Moccasins" research and song team members, as well as the research assistance of Jennifer McAllister in analyzing the data for this chapter. The study was funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Institute of Aboriginal Peoples' Health. The authors' names are listed alphabetically. The idea for this chapter originated from a paper JGS wrote on the traditional role of music in Aboriginal peoples' health for a graduate class in public health. CAD and JHN extended JGS's paper, including further literature, incorporating data analysis, and drafting the chapter. NK, JGS, and VN critically reviewed and suggested revisions for the chapter and approved the final version. Correspondence concerning the chapter should be addressed to Colleen Anne Dell, Department of Sociology, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7N 5A8. E-mail <colleen.dell@usask.ca>.

1. For more information on these artists, please visit these websites: Buffy Sainte-Marie at <creative-native.com/>; Susan Aglukark at <susanaglukark.com/>; Eekwol at <myspace.com/eekwol>; Violet Naytowhow at <myspace.com/violetnaytowhow/>; A Tribe Called Red at <atribecalledred.com/>.

2. The song is available on line at <addictionresearchchair.com/creating-knowledge/national/cihr-research-project/hear-about-our-findings-through-song/>.


4. The workshop is available online at <addictionresearchchair.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/On-Line-workshop-now-available-December2012.pdf>. It comes with a thirty-minute training video and all required materials, a CD of the song, and feedback forms to be returned to our project team.

5. Our team's production of a second song, "Step By Step," under the leadership of Eekwol and Joseph Naytowhow, blends traditional Indigenous and English language and cultural and contemporary Western music <tinyurl.com/StepByStepSong-Watch>. 