

Teaching Tradition: Diverse Perspectives on the Pilot Urban American Indian Traditional Spirituality Program

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Highlights

- Describes pilot implementation of a traditional indigenous spirituality program.
- Includes perspectives from six university- and community-based stakeholders about the program.
- Demonstrates the updating of indigenous tradition for modern indigenous lives in urban settings.

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Abstract Many urban American Indian community members lack access to knowledgeable participation in indigenous spiritual practices. And yet, these sacred traditional activities remain vitally important to their reservation-based kin. In response, our research team partnered with an urban American Indian health center in Detroit for purposes of developing a structured program to facilitate more ready access to participation in indigenous spiritual knowledge and practices centered on the sweat lodge ceremony. Following years of preparation and consultation, we implemented a pilot version of the Urban American Indian Traditional Spirituality Program in the spring of 2016 for 10 urban AI community participants. Drawing on six first-person accounts about this program, we reflect on its success as a function of participant meaningfulness, staff support, mitigated sensitivities, and program structure. We believe that these observations will enable other community psychologists to undertake similar program development in service to innovative and beneficial impacts on behalf of their community partners.

Keywords American Indians · Traditional spirituality · Sweat lodge ceremony · Program development · Community psychology

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Roughly two-thirds of the American Indian (AI) population in the United States resides “off-reservation,” having relocated throughout several generations to urban centers across the nation. One consequence of this urban migration is cultural assimilation to mainstream American mores, and yet community psychologists have reported that many AIs living in urban contexts continue to express interest in and embrace aspects of indigenous traditional spirituality (Hartmann & Gone, 2012; Moghaddam, Mopper & Fong, 2015). Indeed, affiliation with AI spiritual traditions appears to play an important role in ethnoracial and cultural distinctiveness for these populations, revealing clear links between identity, spirituality, health, and wellness (McCabe, 2007; Moorehead, Gone & December, 2015). One consequence is that urban AIs may continue to underutilize biomedical services offered by mainstream healthcare providers, in part because conventional services fail to reinforce cultural identity, community cohesion, and political empowerment, all of which might benefit from traditional spiritual practices (Gone & Trimble, 2012). Participating in such traditions appears to be a powerful cultural resource with long-standing precedents for bolstering resilience in the face of adversity and affording relief from overwhelming distress (LaFromboise, Trimble & Mohatt, 1990).

In this article, published as a First Person Account (a submission category that is uniquely solicited by this journal), we integrate the narrative reflections of multiple authors—written in their own voices—that convey their diverse and situated experiences as these originated from a long-standing collaboration between our research team at the University of Michigan (UM) and an urban American Indian health center in Detroit. These accounts reflect

a variety of perspectives from stakeholders who were collectively involved in the pilot implementation of a new community-based intervention known as the Urban American Indian Traditional Spirituality Program (UAITSP). Originating in 2009 from conversations between the first author, a cultural-community psychologist and faculty researcher at UM, and Jerilyn Church, the Executive Director of American Indian Health and Family Services (AIHFS) in Detroit, this academic-community collaboration was founded on a shared interest in integrating indigenous healing traditions into mental health services at the health center. The project subsequently unfolded in five phases.

First, the research team consulted with four main constituencies at AIHFS—administrators, service providers, community members, and traditional healers—to cultivate ideas about effectively achieving services integration. Second, once it became clear that the variety of solicited ideas did not yield a consensus (Hartmann & Gone, 2012), the research team presented a range of possibilities to AIHFS partners for subsequent action. In response, AIHFS staff enthusiastically commissioned the research team to develop a programmatic orientation to traditional indigenous spirituality for interested community members that substantially broadened our focus well beyond healing practices or mental health concerns as such. Third, under the careful guidance of a Traditional Teachers Advisory Council comprised of locally-recruited AI elders, the research team consulted with a regional ceremonial leader named Paul Syrette for an academic year to create appropriate program content. Fourth, based on these detailed consultations, the research team drafted a fully structured program curriculum—designed for general use by Urban Indian Health Organizations beyond Detroit—for purposes of implementation and evaluation. Finally, we together implemented the UAITSP in pilot fashion for 10 urban AI participants from Detroit in the spring of 2016 as both a “proof of concept” and an opportunity to refine the curriculum for future implementation.

The UAITSP curriculum consists of 12 weekly 3-hour sessions centered on the pan-Indian sweat lodge ceremony (Garrett et al., 2011). Besides formal participation in two actual sweat lodge ceremonies, the program offers didactic orientation and instruction for many aspects of traditional indigenous spirituality, including a variety of practices that come together in the sweat lodge proper (e.g., praying, smudging, singing, smoking, and feasting). Tailored for members of the urban AI community with minimal knowledge of traditional spirituality, the signature innovation of the UAITSP is the recasting of sacred traditional teachings into a structured didactic curriculum that lends itself both to future dissemination for other

(similar) community settings as well as to formal scientific evaluation of associated outcomes (e.g., enhanced cultural identity, increased social support, and reduced distress). In light of such innovation, it is important to note three related sets of commitments that grounded our development of the program. First, the program was developed “by Indians, for Indians,” in deference to community sensitivities surrounding misappropriation of AI spiritual traditions by unaccountable outsiders. Second, the program was developed with an emphasis on participant tolerance and open-mindedness with respect to the great cultural diversity of tribal representation reflected in any large urban AI population. Finally, the program was developed with attention to proactively managing gender distinctions that inhere in many indigenous ceremonial traditions in light of modern conceptions of gender identity and equity.

The first-person reflections presented below express perspectives from six UAITSP organizers, sponsors, and participants in the effort to provide a clearer sense of the “big picture” results of this collaborative work. More specifically, in adhering to this journal’s expectations for the First Person Account submission category, we aim to provide a metaphorical 360-degree window into the diverse experiences of those involved in this innovative and distinctive project to “teach tradition” to those urban AI community members who hunger for meaningful engagement in indigenous spiritual practices, but who frequently lack access to the necessary (typically reservation-based) socialization processes. Although not a systematized research method per se, the First Person Account incorporates features of approaches that have sometimes been described as “culturally appropriate methodologies,” especially as these have been tailored for research in indigenous community settings (Allen, Mohatt, Beehler & Rowe, 2014; Fisher & Ball, 2003; Hogan & Topkok, 2015; Wendt & Gone, 2012). These methodologies frequently include sociohistorical and political contextualization of research findings, deep commitments to participatory engagement with community partners, adoption of interpretive or qualitative data analysis, preservation of respondent narratives and voices, and so on.

In creating this First Person Account, we hope to illuminate the prospects for undertaking such a complex collaboration in service to personal and community growth, purpose, and well-being. Each author of an account responded to a shared prompt: In this effort to teach tradition in an urban environment, what were some of the most memorable or profound experiences for you? We begin each account with a brief introduction to the author as background context for appreciating her or his perspective on the program.

Ashley Tuomi: Reclaiming Tradition in an Urban Context

Ashley Tuomi is the Chief Executive Officer of AIHFS. She assumed this role in 2012 in the midst of program planning and consistently offered her support throughout the development of the UAITSP. Her experience prior to joining AIFHS included service to various UIHOs through training, quality improvement, policy refinement, grant writing, and program development. The current President of the Board of Directors for the National Council of Urban Indian Health, Tuomi is a member of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde in Oregon.

The concept of an urban AI spirituality program began before I arrived at AIHFS, and I am excited to be a part of something so innovative and essential to our community. This is an opportunity to assess the effects of a traditional spirituality program, as well as to provide an opportunity for less culturally experienced community members to receive the cultural knowledge that will guide them through a spiritual life. There is an expectation and assumption that because people are Native, they are automatically spiritual and practice their tribal traditions. The reality is that many Natives in urban areas have become disconnected from their cultural practices and language. There are also people who may feel embarrassed because they are not as knowledgeable or experienced compared to other Natives. This program allows them a safe place to learn and grow free from guilt or shame they may have about not knowing their traditions.

One of the challenges of creating a program in an urban environment is tribal diversity. Government policies were written with the intent of displacing people and weakening Native culture. Many also become a part of Detroit communities when they left their tribes in hopes of making better lives for themselves and their families, rarely if ever returning to their reservations to learn their language and traditions. Unfortunately, this program cannot tailor to the needs of all individuals. There were a lot of conversations in the beginning of this project to try to figure out how to write a curriculum for something that is not as rigid as a typical curriculum. We also recognized that we could not be vague enough in the curriculum to facilitate multiple tribal traditions. Ultimately, the curriculum was created with local and regional tribes in mind. Implementing this program in other areas would require tailoring the curriculum to fit the needs of specific communities. Traditional Native practices have not been as widely accepted as other alternative medicines, and the U.S. is focused on funding programs that can provide data supporting the effectiveness of their treatments. My hope is that we will be able to provide data that prove our program is essential for healing both body and mind, which will generate funding so that

hopefully the program will be refined and replicated to help Natives in other urban areas.

Nickole Fox: By Natives, For Natives

In addition to serving as a certified prevention consultant at AIHFS, Nickole Fox is the director of Health Education and Prevention at the center. She was the primary staff contact and administrative coordinator of the UAITSP, having worked closely with the research team since the beginning of the project. Her many contributions included selecting the program facilitators, recruiting program participants, communicating with other staff, arranging participant transportation, and providing food and materials. Without her tireless dedication, the program would not exist. Fox is of self-identified Cherokee and Blackfoot ancestry. In her account, Fox mentions a powwow, which is a public celebration focused on dancing and socializing.

It was such an honor to be a part of the pilot of the UAITSP this spring after 6 years of collaboration with the UM team, the Native community in southeast Michigan, staff at AIHFS, and our Traditional Teachers Advisory Council. As an urban Native person, some of my first experiences with the urban Native community were because of my involvement with the Indian education program housed at my school. In college, I became involved in the Native American Student Association and upon graduation, I began working with AIHFS. While I can say that many of my personal and spiritual values have come from my family, most of what I know and hold close to my heart in regard to cultural teachings and spirituality has come from my involvement with the larger Native community(ies) in Michigan. This involvement has shaped much of who I am and how I live my life, including my goal to foster community in a way that is inclusive and strives to connect individuals and families with each other and with culture.

When I started my role at AIHFS as the Tobacco Project Coordinator, and a few months later as the Youth Program Coordinator, I was able to engage with the youth and their families. While culture is at the core of the youth work we do and it impacts youth in very dynamic ways, there has been a gap in how we engage with adults. I realized this even more as we began to take participant registrations for this pilot. Many of those interested in the program expressed strong interest in being involved in the community, especially around culture and spirituality, but did not know where to start. They felt uneasy because of past issues with their own family, a fear of rejection from the Native community, or a lack of knowledge. This program was specifically set up as an introduction to culture/spirituality for urban Native people, facilitated by Native

people, to help connect individuals (and families) in a way that was more comfortable and intentional.

From the outset, we tried to be conscious of barriers that participants may be facing in order to actively and regularly participate. Because of this, we arranged for transportation and childcare each week, which facilitated commitment among participants and was crucial for some to be able to participate. Seven of the 10 participants that were in the program utilized either transportation assistance, childcare, or both. We also provided lunch/refreshments each week, but found that as the group grew together and learned about feast traditions together, participants contributed to bringing food as well. I also took some extra time to learn what some of the participants' communication barriers might be, and communicated with each person in ways that worked best for them. Some participants/facilitators utilized social media; for others, text, phone calls, or email worked better. Some participants appreciated additional reminders about sessions and others appreciated follow-ups when they were not able to attend a session.

Not only did I grow personally, learn a great deal, and make some new friendships but I was also most impacted by the strong sense of community that I saw growing each session, especially after the first sweat lodge. I had participants and our amazing facilitators offer to help each other with childcare, transportation, learning, and emotional support beyond the program. When a participant was in the hospital, others expressed interest in visiting. When someone was not able to attend a session, others expressed concern and offered support. Older children/teens also helped to keep the younger children/toddlers/infants happy and engaged with activities. A few participants also became connected with other services at AIHFS including our maternal child health program, mental health services, and the youth program. Many participants even attended programs outside of AIHFS, including a tribal gathering in northern Michigan and a local powwow. As we approached the last session, many participants expressed interest in continuing to get together to learn, grow, and socialize.

Joan Jacobs: Pride in Teaching and Participation

Joan Jacobs was selected by AIHFS staff to co-facilitate the UAITSP with her husband, Joe. The couple often participates in local powwows and leads prayer and moon ceremonies, among other community activities. They are known throughout Michigan for their efforts to bring people together through traditional spirituality and Native cultural heritage. Jacobs is a member of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians near Petoskey, MI, where the couple resided for 3 years prior to relocating

closer to Detroit. In her account, Jacobs refers to the water ceremony, a sacred activity that links the life-giving power of water with women. For the water ceremony featured in the UAITSP curriculum, participants ventured to Flint, Michigan, for a public gathering of Native people from throughout the region to pray for a cleansing of the city's lead-contaminated water supply. She also mentions sacred pipes, which designated pipe carriers ritually smoke for purposes of prayer and ceremony, including within the sweat lodge. Finally, Jacobs uses terms rendered in the language of the Anishinaabe, which refers collectively to the regional peoples of the Three Fires (Ojibwe, Odawa, and Pottawatomie).

When I was asked to be one of the facilitators for my viewpoint of my spirituality and knowledge of my culture, I had a sense of pride going through my veins! I was honored that I was one of the facilitators. I have always taught my knowledge of my culture from the heart from what I was taught by my parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and so on. When I saw this huge curriculum book, it overwhelmed me, but when I went to the first meeting to discuss it and the program in general, I realized they had the same point of view as I did. We had outlined topics with time limits in itemized order, however, and this is not what I am used to. When we as *Anishinaabe* speak, we speak from the heart, which is guided by the Creator. I was not sure if I could meet the needs of the organizers, but as time went on and with note-taking, prayer, practice, and constructive feedback, I managed time and subjects as previously discussed with the organizers. The curriculum took some getting used to, I forgot some minor details, but I covered the most important information. This curriculum was a challenge to me, but I nailed it!

Talking about the water is a passion of mine and to do a water ceremony with the class was gratifying. I enjoyed sharing my water teachings, and included several women in the class to participate with the water ceremony and feast. The water ceremony and feast would not have been such a success without their help; *Miigwech* to those who helped! I believe that hands-on participation will assist our long-term memory. I have included in the class as much of the curriculum as I could, and I believe the students enjoyed it by the interest they have shown. I realize that not everyone is interested in spirituality, and I am not trying to push it on anyone. I live my life by being close to *kchimanido*, the Creator of all. I will go before the Creator in my journey to the spirit world, and what I do on this earth will be how I will be judged. *Aho*.

To reduce time spent searching for the materials for the crafts and visuals of the lesson plans, I propose that certain artifacts for each lesson be stored and easily accessible. Most *Anishinaabe* are visual learners, and having

artifacts available for future UAITSP facilitators would make it easier for teaching the class. It would also add consistency to the curriculum. For example, most of the class had not heard, seen, or touched *sumac* or pipestone for pipes. I passed them around in the class, and they were amazed. Similar items like *sumac* or pipestone would benefit the participants in their learning about items being discussed in each new lesson plan.

I brought food that I had obtained, but wondered if we could get a grant to keep the feast food more traditional. We could then all come up with a menu and swap recipes for the upcoming weeks, maybe delegating the different dishes and recipes to volunteers to keep the feast food more traditional and healthy. I suggest volunteers because I am conscious that some may not be able to do this. This will also teach the class about making sensible decisions on eating healthy food. Overall, the participants learned new things about our culture, including the spiritual closeness to the Creator. The participants were so interested in learning more that they did not want the program to end. The participants got a little taste of the *Anishinaabe* culture and are now hungry for more. I hope they will continue in their spirituality and walk the red road! I am so grateful that I was chosen to teach my culture to my Native brothers and sisters. We discovered caring friendships and have become a family. *Miigwech kina goya!*

David Dominic: A Desire for Culture, Confidence, and Connection

David Dominic, a Detroit resident and UAITSP participant, entered the program as an initial step in the process of connecting with other local AIs. Although previously a board member of AIHFS, he felt largely uninvolved with the local Native community and was motivated by a life-long interest in learning more about traditional spirituality. Dominic is a member of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians. In his account, Dominic distinguishes between complex ceremonies such as the sweat lodge and water ceremonies, and simple rituals such as smudging (burning sacred herbs) and praying that can be easily practiced by an individual.

I grew up mostly without my culture and away from my tribal relations. As a result, I did not practice the rituals and participate in our ceremonies, except for the random powwow once a year where I always felt like an outsider. I did not have the confidence to participate and lacked the knowledge to do so properly. What I did have all of my life was a connection with the Earth, animals, and plants, which was a very important part of our culture. This still left a yearning in my heart to be closer to my people. I was delighted to be able to participate in the program.

Before beginning the program, I had some apprehension that is typical when going into new settings with unknown people. Additionally, I was not sure exactly what would be shared and if it was what I was seeking. Ultimately I knew that my main goal was to gain confidence in practicing our culture. Fortunately, I had met and worked briefly with the leaders of the sessions, Joe and Joan Jacobs. They immediately put me at ease, as did the other participants. Each session was informative and the open format allowed us to explore our culture and its ceremonies, while being guided through tradition. The larger ceremonies such as the sweat lodge and the water ceremonies were clearly great events that made me feel a part of our community. In everyday life, though, these are not practical to practice.

It was the smaller things that I could do in daily practice that were the most beneficial to me because I could do things that connected me to the Earth and our culture on a daily basis. Smudging, water blessings, and prayers to the Creator, are some examples of my daily practices that help remind me where I come from and give me the confidence to practice our culture while alone or with others. My only hope going into the program was to gain confidence in practicing the rituals and ceremonies of my culture. Ultimately I gained so much more. I learned history and meanings behind the rituals and each of their components. I gained a stronger connection to the Earth and its creatures. Finally, I practiced our culture with strangers who quickly became friends and members of our urban tribe.

Michelle Martinez: On Spirituality, Identity, and Mental Health

Michelle Martinez, a Detroit resident and UAITSP participant, entered the program hoping to learn more about Native tradition and spirituality, although she wondered how closely the program's ceremonial teachings would align with those held and practiced by her ancestors. Martinez has long wanted to know more about the ritual and philosophy that form part of her Native roots. She identifies as mixed-race of Apache descent. Martinez mentions saging in her account, which means smudging with burning sage.

Since my matriculation to UM as an undergraduate from Howell, MI—a town known for its legacy of White supremacy and Klan activity—I have struggled to understand what identity, race, and nationality means for me. My mother and father both lost their parents as children. It has left a generational gap, residual sadness, and various manifestations of loss. For example, my mother will often say she did not have a role model as a mother of

three. In 2013, she discovered that our matriline was Apache, leaving our family asking what does it mean to be American Indian (the only living Apache relation that knows our migration story will not speak of it).

With this I enrolled in the UAITSP at AIHFS with little to no expectation for the class except that it might provide me with some direction in understanding this question. I was 4 months pregnant when the class began, full of anxiety about having recently lost my job, the unexpected health risks for my unborn child, and other family difficulties. I thought perhaps that when I entered the class I would have a greater amount of skepticism, and reject the practices outright. But when I met Joe and Joan, they were very approachable, humble, and said overtly there are so many ways to practice, this is ours, take it or leave it. I found this to be opposite to the dogmatic spirituality of Catholicism that I was raised with.

In late February, I was hospitalized and prepped for a 27-week delivery. Instead of falling to my knees, I turned to the four directions and asked for the power to heal the child I held in my body, which calmed me as the doctors were prepping me with premature birth risk categories. Learning indigenous, Earth-centered, land-based spirituality made things accessible for me in a complicated way. It felt natural asking my ancestors, my guardian angels (as my mom calls them), to watch over us. I hope that I can take this into my life in an honest way. As I am not *Anishinaabe*, it is up to me to explore Apache tradition in the same way, and to respect the people and the land of the nations that are indigenous to the lands we occupy. I have begun already to share some of these practices (e.g., tobacco bundles, saging) with other spiritual practitioners. I am committed to helping my mom remember these practices at critical moments, encouraging her to put a feast plate for her father on the anniversary of his death, attending a powwow in Ann Arbor on her birthday, and planning to sage the house she just bought when she moves in.

I have yet to figure out the way to discuss this with my father and others in my family who are Christian and refuse to accept this part of who we are. I am uncertain how to approach it without being ridiculed or mocked by others outside my family, both Natives and non-Natives, who romanticize indigeneity and question my wanting to adopt Native identity late in life. I worry about the questioning and being accepted by others. Within our community, I witnessed questioning authenticity in a way that challenged the who, what, when, and why of each practice. However, this program—with Joe and Joan as teachers, Nickole as the coordinator, Dr. Gone, and many who helped realize this—gave me an opportunity to begin to reclaim a history and a past that has been denied to me and my family, and the community from which we come.

Rebecca S. Lynn: Modernizing Culture and Traditions

Rebecca S. Lynn is a senior at UM. A sociology major, she has been involved with the development of the UAITSP throughout her undergraduate years. As a student research assistant, Lynn has played an instrumental role in packaging program ideas and organizing program content into the form of a standardized and usable curriculum. She is a member of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians. In her account, she mentions Anishinaabemowin, which is the language of the regional Three Fires peoples.

Growing up in northern Michigan, immersed in the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians community, I experienced Native spirituality and cultural teachings as interwoven into my childhood. Through family members and community programs, I was taught how to harvest traditional medicines, build a lodge using birch bark and cattail mats, and appreciate the basics of *Anishinaabemowin*. I spent weeks during the summer traveling the traditional water ways of my ancestors with other youth, learning from elders and community members. It was not until I came to UM, where Native American students make up <0.01% of the student body, that I realized how fortunate my childhood had actually been. I went from being surrounded by my Native community to searching for the smallest representation of my identity on a campus where some did not even realize that Native Americans still existed. For the first time in my life, I felt isolated on campus and distant from my own community.

It was during the first semester of my freshman year that I got involved with the UAITSP through an initiative on campus designed to give undergraduate students research experience. This research offered me an alternate way to connect with my Native American identity in an urban area while also marking the beginning of my research career. Under the instruction of Dr. Gone, I designed the program protocol throughout the next year, incorporating the knowledge of cultural advisor, Paul Syrette, and my own personal knowledge of *Anishinaabe* culture. We adjusted the protocol as needed, adding PowerPoint slides and printed agendas, and reworked one session to converge with a public water ceremony for the Flint Water Crisis.

As an Indigenous millennial, I understood the importance of contemporizing culture and creating accessible resources for those who do not have access to their tribal communities. Innovative programs such as the UAITSP are reframing ideas of tradition and spirituality in a modern way that better corresponds with the lives of urban Native Americans. Watching how eager the participants were to learn from Joe Jacobs, Joan Jacobs, Nickole Fox,

and other guests, only reiterated this need for a more contemporary culture. They had been looking for this connection to their Native identity, but had never had the opportunity because of their geographic location and the resources available to them. With more and more Native people relocating to urban areas, it is necessary for this ideological shift around culture and spirituality to create a more supportive environment for all Native people. This project illustrates the importance of community-based research for Native American communities.

Discussion

In our estimation, the pilot implementation of the UAITSP not only demonstrated the viability (“proof of concept”) for this collaborative endeavor but also achieved remarkable progress in facilitating and enhancing the spiritual development of program participants. This was particularly inspiring because it demonstrates the future prospects for innovatively “updating” the teaching of tradition to better accommodate the roles and demands that shape contemporary indigenous life in urban settings. Whether acknowledging the funding advantages that accrue to programs that can demonstrate benefits through outcome data, or rearticulating informal processes of cultural socialization as a formal 12-session curriculum with accompanying PowerPoint slides, this demonstration project affirms that “culture” is always “on the move,” reflecting agentic, creative processes that both adopt important traditions and adapt them to new modes of living, even while preserving a vital continuity with the ancestral past. Based on the first-person accounts included in this article, we trace four specific facets of program implementation that appeared to contribute to success in “teaching tradition” to urban AIs.

First, the UAITSP addressed a clear and pressing dilemma for urban AI community members, many of whom maintain a robust interest in indigenous spiritual practices (Moghaddam et al., 2015) even as they face formidable obstacles to accessing such practices in a metropolitan setting (Hartmann & Gone, 2012). As reflected in these accounts, the *meaningfulness* of participation in such practices for grounding cultural identity, connecting to a Native community, and meeting personal spiritual needs was the foremost appeal of the program. Beyond the particulars of any specific set of religious beliefs, opportunities for such meaning-making in a wider U.S. society that promotes neoliberal individualism (i.e., free agents navigating free markets in pursuit of personal happiness; see Adams, Dobles, Gomez, Kurtis & Molina, 2015) are increasingly scarce, so the prospect of communal engagement on the basis of cultural identity and

spiritual devotion is a desirable alternative for many people, including AIs.

Second, the UAITSP depended on consistent engagement and accommodation by staff and facilitators for soliciting regular program participation. As reflected in these accounts, the significance of both moral and material *support* for participants was paramount for program success. Such support assumed many forms. For example, the openness, encouragement, and warmth that were routinely communicated by staff and facilitators were key to promoting participant resolve to attend weekend sessions despite busy—and sometimes chaotic—lives. Equally important was the provision of transportation, childcare, and meals for community members who otherwise could not have participated. These contributions were of no small import for an urban AI community that weathers complex legacies of adversity such as poverty, discrimination, and marginality that impact daily lives in striking ways. Thus, one clear lesson from this pilot implementation is the need for adequate program capacity—including the right people occupying the right roles with access to the right resources—for realizing program goals.

Third, the UAITSP aspired to mitigate *sensitivities* stemming from a lack of cultural knowledge and loss of indigenous spiritual traditions. As reflected in these accounts, such participant sensitivities can be triggered through interactions with more knowledgeable community members (or reservation visitors) who either inadvertently or deliberately question the authenticity of one’s AI identity. Because AI reservation settings exhibit long histories of segregated community activity, these contexts more readily incubate the cultivation of distinctive cultural practices and the preservation of sacred ritual observances. But many urban AIs—especially those whose ancestors first relocated to the big city—are limited in their ability to partake in reservation-based sacred ceremonies for a host of reasons, ranging from lack of transportation to busy work schedules. Thus, the creation of a novel context in which the lack of spiritual awareness or cultural familiarity was construed not as a liability, but rather as a precondition for appropriate participation, afforded distinctive possibilities for alleviating anxiety and vulnerability in relation to traditional culture and spirituality.

Fourth, the UAITSP endeavored to achieve a few distinctive aims, including effective engagement of local AI community members, innovative creation of a programmatic approach to teaching tradition, and replicability for purposes of sharing and evaluating program outcomes across multiple urban AI community settings. As reflected in these accounts, the *structure* of the program was the key to simultaneous realization of all of these goals. For example, the cultural diversity of any multi-tribal urban AI community necessitates trade-offs between cultural

specificity and pan-Indian generality. In this regard, a focus on the sweat lodge ceremony served the program especially well because of this ritual's proliferation throughout "Indian Country." Moreover, curricular emphasis on cultural tolerance and participant open-mindedness helped to create an atmosphere in which community members were made aware from the beginning that, even though the program could not stand in for immersion in one's own tribal traditions, true benefit from a focus on regional practices remained possible. And despite the novelty of teaching tradition through a structured format, facilitators were in fact able to master this task over time.

Conclusion

Many urban AI communities routinely lack opportunity for knowledgeable participation in the sacred traditional activities that remain vitally important to their reservation kin. In response, our research team partnered with an urban American Indian health center in Detroit for purposes of developing a structured program to facilitate access to knowledge and participation in indigenous spiritual practices associated with the sweat lodge ceremony. Following years of preparation and consultation, we implemented a pilot version of the UAITSP in the spring of 2016 for 10 urban AI community participants. Drawing on six first-person accounts, we have reflected on the program's success as a function of participant meaningfulness, staff support, mitigated sensitivities, and program structure. We believe that these observations will enable other community psychologists to undertake similar program development in service to innovative and beneficial impacts on behalf of their community partners.

Acknowledgments Funding for this project was awarded to the first author by the Office of Research; the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; and the Department of Psychology; all at the University of Michigan. We are grateful to the Traditional Teachers Advisory Council at AIHFS for their guidance and support throughout the development of the UAITSP, including Gerald Cleland, Bruce Elijah, George Martin, Jose Marcus, and Mona Stonefish. We also acknowledge additional administrators, staff, and consultants at AIHFS for their assistance in designing and implementing the UAITSP, including Jerilyn Church, Anthony Davis, Sharon George, John Marcus, Margaret A. Noodin, Eliza Qualls Perez, and Paul Syrette. Finally, several students in the Culture and Mental Health

laboratory in the Department of Psychology at UM also contributed to the development, implementation, and pilot evaluation of the UAITSP, including graduate students Rachel L. Burrage, William E. Hartmann, and Andrew Pomerville, and undergraduate students Sarah H. Klem, April Yazzie, and Phoebe Young.

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