

inSocialWork Podcast Series
University of Buffalo School of Social Work

Episode: A Conversation About the Place of Spirituality in Social Work

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Prof. Peter Sobota [00:00:10] It's said that if you want to avoid argument, don't talk about money, politics or religion. We're going to break one of those rules. Or at least we're going to get close. From the School of Social Work at the University of Buffalo, welcome back to the inSocialWork Podcast. It's good, as always, to have you along everybody. I'm Peter Sobota. Social work's historical origins are intertwined with spiritual leanings. Followed by a more secular approach, as the field professionalized. More recently, it's been easier to find plenty of support for infusing spirituality in social work practice and education. What is spirituality? What's religion? Is spirituality always correlated with positive health and well-being? In this episode, our guest, Edward Taylor, PhD, opens a conversation about the place of spirituality in social practice and education. He'll address potential ethical issues and ask if spirituality as defined by social work and popular culture is a fundamental aspect of human development. Doctor Taylor suggest that the profession would benefit from adopting an evidence based concept of spirituality and establish accountability standards for its application. He will argue that, "the time has come for social work to establish ethics, accountability and limitations on the practice of spirituality." Edward Taylor, PhD, is an associate professor, mental health clinician, and researcher; the past director of the School of Social Work at the University of British Columbia; and, currently the associate Dean for Faculty of Health and Social Development at UBC.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:02:04] Hi Ed. Welcome to inSocialWork.

Edward Taylor [00:02:06] Thank you. It's a joy to be here.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:02:09] Wow. Okay, well, I hope you say that at the end. So I'm very envious before we get going here, because I know you're in British Columbia, and it is a sunny day here in western New York. It's about 75 degrees. And I, in a very petty way, I hope it's raining in beautiful, gorgeous.

Edward Taylor [00:02:30] Well, we win, you win. We're having a wonderful. It's sunny, dry, and about 68 degrees out with a very slight wind that just keeps you cooled off versus cold.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:02:46] Oh, man. Now you're rubbing it in. Those of you listeners who have never been to the Pacific Northwest, it's the real deal. Whether you go to the US or to Canada. All right, let's get going here. Enough about the weather. But before we dive in for our topic today, I'm always curious how our guests ended up, you know, in the social work profession, number one. So if you could, you know, give us maybe the brief tour of how that happened for you. And then the other thing I'm and I know you have other academic and scholarly and research interests, but I'm also really curious what is the word here? What led you to write about the myth of spirituality in social work? So I can't wait to hear that. But if you could begin by telling us how you came to social work, I think that would be a great way to start.

Edward Taylor [00:03:41] Well, actually, the two on what led me to write this and how I came into social work are connected.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:03:49] Oh, okay.

Edward Taylor [00:03:51] I come out of a very religious fundamentalist family and. Unlike some, the experience of children and families that are very conservative and very fundamental. Very. As you can see. Well imagine. I entered my high school as a full believer and made a very strong, concrete concept of Christianity. And by the 11th grade, I was preaching on the corner.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:04:26] Wow.

Edward Taylor [00:04:27] And, part of my identity was that I was called by God to evangelize the world. And that was how I was to do good and doing good. It's almost, I don't want to spend our time getting into theology. Sure, but doing good is a very, from a theological point of view of conservative fundamentalism, it is a cornerstone, that we're to love people and care for people as we believe that God has cared and loved for us. Yeah, and show that as a teenager and to a strong belief that that was my goal when I left high school and went into a Bible college and it was there, and in Bible college, that interestingly, was and I'm not I'm not going to name any names on those because things have changed. But at that time it was a highly segregated college. And that made no sense to me that we were here to learn how to teach the teachings of Jesus. And, I and if you're aware of any color other than white, you weren't privileged to be. So, to make a long story short, I got involved in civil rights movement and primarily and trying to integrate southern churches in the United States. And that. I left to the college where I wasn't doing, by the way, doing very well. I can prove to be a very good theological person at that time. So that show. No one was sad when I left, including myself. But that was also when the Vietnam War was going. I got called up and served in the U.S. Army, and I went through Vietnam. And it was during Vietnam where I started really problem-solving what I wanted to do. And, I had an opportunity to go into business. I had an opportunity to go back to school. I had an opportunity to explore social work, and that that's the route that brought me here.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:07:01] So yeah.

Edward Taylor [00:07:03] The, I guess, the last part of that, I have long left the fundamentalist concept, but out of that has come a concern about where does religion and theology and spirituality belong within the profession of social work. So it's been a thread throughout my life.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:07:27] Yeah. Well, I'm so glad I asked the question. I mean, and for listeners who you just should know, I did not know all of that. So that makes perfect sense, actually, in terms of what we had planned to talk about today. So thanks. No, go ahead, go ahead.

Edward Taylor [00:07:46] And if I can add, I, just from the very beginning, I want to clarify that this paper, my point of view, is not a mission to take and either sanction people's beliefs and Christianity, nor to find fault with people on programs that are steeped in fundamentalism, but rather to ask the question, where does it belong? And not to take and try to debate whether a person has the right to their beliefs?

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:08:26] Yes, exactly. Well, it's that point of view. It is. That's the reason we rang you up. So. Yeah. Well, you know, I'm not sure I'm going to get this right, but I think there's a saying that says if you want to ruin a party, talk about money, politics and or religion. I think it is. So, we're going to do one of those maybe in the context of spirituality. So let's see how we do here. And you've actually kind of hinted on the first thing that I wanted to ask you about in your brief story there, is, you know, I think most of us know that social works historical origins are very kind of intertwined with spiritual leanings and Christian charity. And you know that in many ways, you know, we kind of grew out of that pot, if you will. And then if I have this right now, feel free to correct me because I am not an expert in this. But I think that was followed, you know, social work, at least in the States, and I think in Canada too. There was this movement to professionalize us to, you know, license us and make us credible. And we got, I think, the profession got more secular. I think it's fair to say we kind of moved, I think worked hard to get away from that. But I would also say that the more recent movement, maybe the last 15, 20 years especially, I think there has been a movement back. I mean, the whole what is it? The whole bio psycho social thought has been expanded quite formally to include spiritual. And, you know, spirituality is a fairly accepted conversation, I think, in our profession and, you know, plenty of support for infusing spirituality, I think, in, in social work, education and practice. So the article that got us was the Myth of Spirituality, a fairly provocative title for the current climate we might be in. So I'm curious, you've given us some hints, but why did you title your article of all things, the Myth of Spirituality?

Edward Taylor [00:10:38] A couple of reasons. Exactly what you're saying, a lesser reason, but that we have slid into the acceptance that spirituality belongs in social work, I think for two reasons. One is exactly what you're saying. The profession undoubtedly comes out of the ethics and teachings of Christianity. It's highly founded in that, and it's been through those ethics. I might say that we have made some terrible mistakes in dealing with particularly indigenous people, as an example, because of the way that the ethics of the profession were founded in relation. Have taught us to look at the world view. And so that's one of the reasons that I felt that there's a mythology around it. Secondly is the fact that as we'll get into this conversation, no one really knows what spirituality is. Now people think they know. And I would agree with people that they know what spirituality is for them. As a profession. Neither ourselves or the. Leading denominations and religion, and no one has a good accepted definition of spirituality yet. We in social work, as exactly as you were expressing talk as though we know what spirituality is, and that it is a quantifiable and if not quantifiable, a qualifier will. Element within that is necessary within the lives of everyone. And that, I think, needs to be challenged.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:12:41] Yeah. I want to ask you about that later. Exactly. So maybe if I could I'm going to get away with this or not. Years ago when I was a practitioner. Actually, when I was a graduate student, I was in a clinic where we were forced to send people to a. If they came to see us. It was a rule. I always thought that was weird that we sent we mandated people to go to a program of attraction. But nonetheless, I decided that if I was going to have to send people to these meetings, that I should go to them, because I had never been to one. And it was it was pretty interesting, I have to admit. And. The reason I'm telling this story, I'll get to my point, is that I kind of got almost adopted by some of the folks, really wonderful folks, actually, that I met at a and a very wonderful gentleman drew a picture from me on a napkin in a coffee shop once after a meeting, and he was explaining to me the difference between spirituality and religion and. I actually found that pretty helpful at age 25 or 26. So. You just got finished saying that it's better to

think about spirituality from the context of spirituality for me. If I could ask you if you if you want to bite on this, I'd ask you if would you be willing to take a shot at defining or doing your best? Defining spirituality and also religion if you see a difference.

Edward Taylor [00:14:19] So I think there's a minor difference between spirituality and religion, like some people tend to make into a very large difference and in some cases. On an individual basis. Again, it is a very large difference because they have been insured by. Organized religion, but principally organized religion, incorporate the ideas of spirituality along with the addition of some type, usually some type of sacred writing and some type of expectation of a normalcy of how you communicate with a higher being. Right? We are spirituality in itself. Without religion can be almost anything that takes and brings the person a sense of well-being, at least momentarily. A sense of peace allows a calmness to come through the person that then allows them to take, and either problem solve are to take and believe that there is. A spirit that allows. I message? You might say that. A door to a messenger is opened up.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:15:46] Yeah.

Edward Taylor [00:15:47] So it varies because a person who, for instance, believes in crystals as part of their spirituality believes that the opening of the door is the power within the crystal and their ability to allow that power to work within the. Now, that's not really that far away from a person who believes in Christianity, that through prayer, I open the door through my faith and believe for the power of the Spirit of God to come in and heal me so that there's such a close tie that I almost think that is competition. I, that I that we have to show from a humanistic point of view, we don't want to be lumped in with the religious. So we we try to draw that point. Now there are exceptions on both. And I would want people to understand that there are there are churches, there are religious groups that do great harm, that become cult, that capture people. And restrict them. I'm not talking about those. That's another whole meeting we can have on the, on the extremes, on both ends of the stick and. But I will add one little bias that I have. Okay. And I want to own it as a bias. But I do believe that in social work, one of the things that has fueled the return to spirituality, as I mentioned in my paper of the formal groups that have formed to try to push spirituality as part of the curricula of. The bachelor's and master's program is largely a reaction to conservatives trying to own the concept of religion. So as a humanist, I can say, but I'm spiritual also. So that. We have, in a reactionary way, responded to one of the criticisms of the conservative religious movement that we reject the idea of something being greater than what we are as individuals. So therefore, I take and I move to some form of humanist spirituality, and I can say, see, I'm just as spiritual as you are, Mr. Conservative. Yeah.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:18:31] Got it. Well, thank you for that. So and this is, I think, related. There is a statement in your article. It goes like this. The time has come for social work to establish ethics, accountability and limitations on the practice of spirituality. So when I read that and, you know, that was kind of front loaded, I think kind of in your paper, but I thought, okay, so. He wouldn't be saying that if he didn't think that those were lacking. So do you want to say more about that sentence or. It's. There's a lot there in a short sentence.

Edward Taylor [00:19:13] Well, basically, I'm in agreement with the professionalization of social work. I think whether we're talking about from a clinical mental health point of view, from. Poverty social justice point of view. I think we do more in the professionalization of social work now to be professional. We also have to be accountable. And the question

comes, how do we hold individuals accountable for their use of spirituality in their social work practice?

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:19:51] Right. You're talking about practitioners here.

Edward Taylor [00:19:54] Here I'm talking about practitioners. But we can move it in a second to to policymakers and people of social working in agencies that are principally involved in social justice. The same framework is true of the Cop show. Let me give you an example. Sure. If I would have been a social worker in my late teens and early 20s. And you came to me and said, I'm anxious because I'm afraid I'm going to hell. My question would have been as a person striving to fulfill the teachings of fundamentalist Christianity would be, have you given your life to Jesus Christ? So my question comes in the paper and two others is. What is the point of accountability? If I am the person I was at that point in time? If I, as an individual professional, feel more accountable to my beliefs and how I define God and how I believe in God, or in my more responsible to the, the ethical board. That license. Many are sanctioned.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:21:23] Yeah.

Edward Taylor [00:21:24] And I would say that there that there would be a split decision among fundamentalists as to whether they were accountable. You can state a case where, and on a simplified basis that many fundamentalists, they keep very true to the concept of render and procedures. But as Caesar said, if the of law requires that I not go into. To this and refer a person to an active religious counselor. Then that part of there would be people in fundamentalism that I believe I would claim very much for that. But there are other people who would feel that. No. It would be a lack of professionalism not to answer that client according to the beliefs around he was going to heaven and who was going to hell.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:22:28] Got it. There's another thing that I. And you. I think you have addressed this a little bit, but I want to give it more time if you feel it would be helpful. You make a very clear point that you believe in the profession, that there has been a quiet acceptance of the spirituality. I don't know if that's what you were alluding to. Maybe, you know, 5 or 10 minutes ago, but I really that really stayed with me. And I wonder if you'd want to say more.

Edward Taylor [00:23:02] I'm thank you for bringing that up, because I do believe that. Those favoring for infusing spirituality into curriculum and into the profession have been very active. And there there's articles and the journals say there's some research and it there's questionnaires to students that have been very active that has gone virtually unchallenged. By others so that. That is, it has just been that well, the attitude is, I'm not going to teach spirituality in my class, but the person believes in this so strongly, I should just accept that this should be part of our curriculum. And what I'm challenging is that in a profession, the degree that people believe that something should be part of the curriculum is not a test for whether it should go there.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:24:12] Okay. That's fair. Yeah. While you're speaking. I'm thinking I teach a in an MSW program, a foundation year course, and it pretty much is an introduction to the profession, its ethics, its values, and a kind of 101, you know, conceptualization, assessment and intervention across levels of practice. And of course, we spend a fair amount of time on ethics. And. It probably should not be shocking, I think,

but it is often to many laypeople that many people who find themselves in, you know, the ultra lib profession of social work. Many of the students who come to our program are, you know, religion and spirituality is a big part of their lives. And and so we get to that discussion about, you know, they have religious and spiritual values that at least in our curriculum, we're saying, by all means, if those are yours, those are yours. But now you're going to call yourself a social worker. You're going to be licensed as one. And you're going to really have to change where your personal values with the values of our profession. And and the argument that we make is that if you're going to be forced to choose. We really want you to act in accordance. We expect you as a professional. To act in accordance. Especially in a service relationship with a client or clients, or a community with your ethical principles. Leaning and. I think it would be fair if my students heard me say this, that there's a struggle with that. And. I'm not sure that it's, you know, it's easier to talk about it, I think, for people to reconcile.

Edward Taylor [00:26:18] First of all. It has to be a struggle because we see it endorsed in so many ways within the profession and adjacent to the profession. So JCA Joint Commission on Accreditation of[...]. requires that there be a so-called spiritual assessment, which is technically a spiritual screening, but nonetheless there's very mixed messages. And this is one of the reasons I wanted to write this paper, is that we need to take and look at the fact there are so many mixed messages that the question of where does social work stand on such things as whether we do a spiritual screening, meaning, do I ask you questions that says, are you worried about your spirituality versus assessing that? Which means that I'm with you are going to jointly explore this and and we're going to problem solve for how to change. This longing that you have, this worry that you have around spirituality versus from screaming, I see that you would benefit from help with spirituality. And I case management efforts move you to a person who is a reliable spiritual counselor. And so what JCA is really expecting is that nurses, doctors, social workers see where people stand in their need and that usually they refer to a chaplain. Or if they're not Christian, to one of the other spiritual leaders.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:28:12] So almost like a spiritual pro.

Edward Taylor [00:28:15] Exactly. Yeah. Screening is really meant to see if you would benefit from a full assessment.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:28:26] Can I ask you more about this? So I want to make sure that we're. At least I get you. It sounds to me like a spiritual assessment is kind of a deep dive. You're not saying. Do you have beliefs or do you? You're not saying to a person or a client, for example. Do you find comfort isn't important to you? Do you have a belief system that is, you know, related to spiritual or religious practice that's a source of comfort or guidance for you as a way of assessing the whole person? That to me feels like a screening question.

Edward Taylor [00:29:02] Exactly.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:29:03] Okay. All right. But in assessment, it sounds like it is a maybe a multi axis. Questionnaire, almost like something formal.

Edward Taylor [00:29:16] Yeah. Assessment says we are going to take a look at this from enough depth to determine whether treatment or a problem would benefit you.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:29:28] A spiritual problem.

Edward Taylor [00:29:31] If you're going to do a spiritual assessment, that's what you're going to. That's exactly what you're going to assess. So what I'm saying in my paper is, of course, social workers are going to do a spiritual screening, but we're not going to take Be doing a spiritual assessment because I don't think we have the tools to do it.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:29:54] I don't. I was a practitioner for 16 years before I moved into academia. I wasn't qualified to do that.

Edward Taylor [00:30:03] And certainly I have found in working. I've been a clinician for many years and I do not see our students, our faculty, myself in a position. And that's within Christianity itself. Now move me to indigenous, spirituality. Move me to, where? Like, right now we have a young woman. From Afghanistan. Now, she's a very strong. I'm not. I don't want to give a hint that she needs spiritual guidance, but could I take and really assess her spirituality? Having never been trained in and more importantly, to live within the Muslim religion itself. Yeah. And so that's why I say that certainly we screen and we send people to bona fide spiritual individuals that can be of help, but we're not. I don't see us in the position of assessing and the knowledge of assessing for spirituality.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:31:17] Got it. And that seems to me like a great example of when ethics come into play. I mean, I can't quote you the, you know, the standard, but, you know, you don't operate, social workers do not operate outside of their expertise. And, you know, that's. So before I get to what I would call the juicy part that I've been saying, I have one more for you. All right. Like this is a juicy enough. So we were talking about the quiet acceptance of spirituality. That's how we got going here. You go a little bit further. And you say that you also have concerns that beyond this kind of quiet acceptance. That you believe. There's also present a persuasive advocacy. To move spirituality into practice and to social work education that I. What you correctly there.

Edward Taylor [00:32:17] Absolutely. In fact, the second myth is that. There are social workers and other. Professional people interested in spirituality that declare that spirituality is a vital part of human development.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:32:37] Yes. Okay.

Edward Taylor [00:32:39] And my question there is I cannot think of, off the top of my head, any other component of human behavior and human development that we accept simply by declaration. And. Individuals can say, well, there's. How about all of the evidence that people with severe illness say that prayer helps? So do placebos. I don't want to downplay that prayer may help. And we go back to the individual. And certainly there's things about the power that faith and belief can do that I can't really address. But what I can address is that making blanket statements that spirituality is an important part of human development. I think it's a very misleading statement, and as part of the advocacy of why we should have spirituality is because we can now expanded into why it shouldn't it be part of our human behavior in the environment, our hope and type, of course, is, yeah, I would say no, there's no real evidence of that.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:34:09] Well, actually you kind of dip your toe into what I would call the juicy part because I'm sure you have heard some of these. I mean given this stance that you have I'm sure. Either people have said this to you or you've anticipated in

developing your thinking. But, you know, I was thinking about some of the pushback that a person who says what you are saying here might get. And. I would imagine it would go something like. Let's see if I can do this. Because, you know, spirituality has been found and verified in peoples varied all over the globe and that, you know, social workers because we value diversity and inclusion. We must acknowledge people's spirituality. You know, consistent with our commitment to those values. And, you know, if you want to work with the whole person, you must acknowledge their spirituality. When you get that kind of pushback, what do you end up saying?

Edward Taylor [00:35:19] Well, part of it and it does come.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:35:22] It does kick.

Edward Taylor [00:35:24] And there there's. Two things. One is that what is included as part of AI science is not popular vote. And so there is no doubt that you're right. Across populations, across national lines. Internationally, there is some form of what has been identified as spirituality. But that in itself does not prove that spirituality is a key part of the development. It proves that it is part of a cultural phenomenon that has recurred. And if I can take one minute to give you some idea of where my thoughts come. Yeah.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:36:16] Please do.

Edward Taylor [00:36:18] From two quick directions. One is that. I think as social workers, we would not deny that culture has a powerful impact on us. And so one of the things I try to bring out in the paper is the fact that there is overt culture and there is covert culture, and that these boundaries are set and that you that they humankind has had a need to answer questions universally about how they develop and how they live. And that one of the things that has universally come about and been reinforced by society after society, both covertly and overtly, is the idea that there is a part of us that is spiritual. And so we're reminded of this in Christianity. Every time that we see a church, there's we know that's a church. That's a cultural reminder. You're supposed to have spirituality. There is a cultural. Employed that. Guides and explains the universality of this. And verses say, and so we acknowledge that it doesn't mean that that makes a that that's the right explanation. We used to think that the world was the center of the universe. And the fact that that that was universally, in the Western world, anyway, universally accepted, didn't make it correct. And then just one other thing real quick is that. Going back to the idea that we don't really know what. Spirituality is. Brain studies of that in this. I didn't have a it just didn't work into the paper. Right. But it's maybe, another paper at some point. But brain studies show, shows a number of interesting things. One is the fact that prayer and spirituality, it often involves an increase in, of dopamine, which is very chemical in our brain that accounts for us having a positive it and even accounts for our sexuality. And so there's such an overlap where. That doesn't answer the question of what is spirituality from? Neuroscience part. The other thing that's of interest to me is that. When we look. Spiritual while confining it to the Christian concepts of spirituality and religion. When when people pray for help, for others, it. Well, we know from functional MRI studies is that the frontal cortex actually increases blood flow, signaling that the frontal cortex is active. And that means that your problem solving your concentration, like all of the things that allow us to feel like we're making some headway, is active and is working versus. What we know about some Pentecostal Assembly of God religions where their person. Is taking and and it through spirituality. Experiencing the intaking of the Holy Spirit to have where they have what would look like convulsions. Follow the floor. What we know is that in these instances that the frontal

cortex actually slows down. Now that makes perfect sense, because what the person in who is wanting that kind of picture, they're not wanting to experience the world. They are wanting to shut out the world. Bring in the Holy Spirit and to show it and have an internal experience.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:40:47] Yeah.

Edward Taylor [00:40:48] And show range studies don't answer the question of is there a spirituality or not? What it does, and sure is that we start to understand that it's not such a different phenomena from other things that we experience.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:41:07] Yeah, I don't have the expertise that you do, but I've seen some of those MRI studies and, you know, I've heard about, you know, religious experience, meditation, but also that you can get those MRI to light up the same part of the brain when people are having sexual experiences, as you noted, certain drugs. That's part of what makes them attractive. And, yeah, certain forms of music. And other kind of. Temporal experiences that people have. And so how do you sort that out? Yeah. Is I think the tricky part. Yeah.

Edward Taylor [00:41:49] And music is a good example. We see that music that people use and are able to take and say, this puts me into the phase of spirituality. This makes me into that realm. I'm creating the brain, the same thing that people who hear their favorite rock and roll song. And so. Answering the question. We go? No, from a philosophical point of view of what spirituality is, and we certainly don't know from a biological point of view what spirituality is. In fact, from a biological point of view, I would argue that if we went only by biology, which are not pressing for us to do. Yeah, but the biological studies more point toward we should just quit using the term spirituality because it has no meaning.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:42:47] Yeah. I'm going to ask you about that later. Okay. Yeah. Let's kind of parking like that one for a minute. If I could let me get back to the push back. Because I think it's important you're helping a lot of us to think critically about the assumptions that we have. And regardless of where you stand. But I can almost see people saying to add, come on, this is a victimless crime here. No one's getting hurt. And come on, please. Spirituality. It's a helpful trait of human beings. So why don't we just, you know, that's a strength based perspective. And. Come on, let's let's pour some gas on that fire.

Edward Taylor [00:43:35] There. That one that I can answer. But first, when I have to say I have to do a little dancing, I tend to get it through. But this one. Okay. Spirituality is like any thing else. It can do some good for the right person, but it can also do for and where can it do harm? It is in several places. One is depression as an example. Okay. A depressed person. Is has. I think we were just talking about the brain, but one of the things we know about depression is that the brain starts to symbolically close down. The frontal cortex isn't functioning as much as what it should. And that's your problem solving area and your concentration area, your judgment area. So now that last word is a key word to keep in mind thinking about can spirituality do harm if my if through depression my judgment. About being able to take and weigh what is best for me and my family is not functioning. I had. An acceptable rate, and you are taking and advocating, either directly or indirectly, that I should have a spiritual experience. I am extremely. A susceptible to feeling that I am deficient because I haven't. I don't feel now I can start. What does depression

sometimes do? And not with everyone. But what it had to change is now. It can trigger guilt. I could should not be here. I'm getting help. I should be getting my life spiritually correct. And I have let that go. So we can take and create self blame that guides the person if they are clinically depressed. And particularly if you accept the idea that clinical depression is a neuro biological disorder, not something that the person can willed to have, that's not something that, because they're blocked, has been down. And they it's not something that they can pop themselves out of. That if you if you accept that, then there becomes a tremendous responsibility on therapists to understand that they can guide the person into self-destructive thinking. We also can take and during this period of time. There's been a lot of studies on the idea of them being able to change reality, but I think the face wash. So we we can create a false truth. And I propaganda does this all the time. And so we can you know, in theory it's social work. When a client comes in we want to share the power. We don't want to overwhelm. But the truth of the matter is that person is coming in. Maybe they're coming in unable to take and fend for themselves. So all these issues, that's why they're there. So you're in a you're in a powerful position. And your your hints are direct. Talk about spirituality can create false beliefs with it that oh, I'm. Cult leaders do this all the time.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:47:28] And I was just thinking of that. Yeah.

Edward Taylor [00:47:31] And so you may not mean to do that, but if I say to a person and I'm coming from a position of power, have you given thought to the role that you're missing in your life of spirituality? That and start the person into a feeling of a false belief that they are not clinically depressed, but they are spiritually depressed. And if they can get it right spiritually, they can then become well. And if we want to carry that to the next level, that for for the right patient, right client, that then is doomed to fail because they're clinically depressed. And so now they see themselves as a failure that they not only were lacking. Yeah, that's their job. They are a failure that other people are able to come into harmony with spirituality. They are a failure at it. That then plays a role that. Becomes very destructive in their lives. So, yeah, I mean.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:48:48] Hey, I'm sorry for interrupting, but the thought that I had is that, to me, smells like a ticket from the guild that you were talking about. Now to shame. Which is something that seems even more devastating. Then, you know, guilt. Guilt to me as I did something bad. Shame is I'm bad.

Edward Taylor [00:49:07] Yeah, I think that's exactly. I would endorse that completely.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:49:13] I want to save room for the the kind of the the way forward here a little bit. And you did do some talking about how, you know, the misapplication or the untrained application of spirituality can actually be harmful. I'm curious what your thoughts are about. And I know now that you're over in Canada now, but you have spent a lot of time in the States.

Edward Taylor [00:49:42] Yes.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:49:43] How does this fit or not? In curriculums of schools of social work.

Edward Taylor [00:49:52] So I think one, it fits as part of the, the overall screening that we do and, and the arc and the importance of case management to help people determine

whether they would benefit from spiritual guidance and if they if there's a, indication that they would of helping them to sort through all of I mean, everyone obviously, that we we want to send individuals to reputable spiritual practitioners and so that we have a role in doing that. And so I see that incorporated. But I also see incorporated into the curriculum is the dilemma of what is spirituality to include the like, just very likely the issue of what the biology shows, neurobiology, that it is not as open as what many of our students I mean, I teach classes also, and I have people that, students that they really see spirituality as that they nail that down, that they know what spirituality is. And so I think helping to take and look, the fact that the very difficult issue of even saying what I did in the beginning, that which I do believe that spirituality is an individual issue and in it and defined and eventually the difficulty with that statement is so many individuals do not know what they believe spiritually. And then then we get into the danger. Are we the people can guide them into what they think. And I would argue not so well in those events in that sense that that students leave understanding that spirituality is not a universal nailed down. Define that. There's a neurobiological issues that further muddied the water as to what, spirituality and as individuals that certainly it plays or differential roles, but even individuals that feel that they are highly spiritual do not necessarily know what spirituality is. So yeah. So that's where I think it that it belongs.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:52:31] Yeah. What's interesting, you know, as I'm listening to you, there's just a whole bunch of ideas, going on for me. And one of the things that I think I just realized, and I'm going to have to listen to the recording to find out if it's true, but I don't recall either one of us mentioning the words evidence based practice in this conversation. And, you know, at least here at, you know, my school, you know, we're big on evidence based practice. You know, we're pretty committed. So, yeah, I'm not sure what to say about that, other than it just struck me that we would if we were examining any other assessment tool or intervention, we would be talking about the evidence. Yeah. And I think that's a little harder when it comes to spiritually based practice.

Edward Taylor [00:53:22] I would say that at this point, it's impossible.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:53:25] Impossible? Yeah.

Edward Taylor [00:53:27] And that's, we're also heavily evidence based. I'm a strong pusher and believer of evidence based practice. This is one of the things that I'm most concerned about is that and it goes back to that quiet acceptance that I speak of in the first of the paper. As a profession, we either have individuals that are speaking out for spirituality, and the rest of us sitting by and say, well, I don't quite see it that way right there, but we're not really examining that. There is not, for instance, an accepted assessment tool. There's some suggestions but there's, there's problems that everyone out there. But I certainly the thing you could throw back at me in saying that is well you know there's discussion and disagreement among psychiatric assessments and certainly that's true. But we're closer to having an acceptable framework for a psychiatric assessment in regard for spiritual assessment.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:54:38] Okay. That'll be a topic for another podcast. But, so we we're trying to stay within a framework here. But I do want to get with the time we have left. You know, you've been really very clear that, you know, the status quo is something that you have concerns about when it comes to spirituality and social practice in your kind of calling game on it, but at the same time. So how do we move forward? Do we reframe it?

Do we put restrictions? What would be your recommendations if you don't like the way things are going? What would you recommend?

Edward Taylor [00:55:16] I think that there has to be accountability and therefore there has to be accepted ethical regulation like that. But one is that we expect social workers to refrain from the use of common spiritual words. I'm not going to ask if you've been anointed. I'm not going to talk about laying on hands. I'm not going to talk about placing crystals. I think these come in turns. I'm not going to ask if you've had an experience with the Holy Spirit that there be an accepted. From my point of view it would be open play to the regulation board. If I am asking and giving better communications around a night, my salvation I crystal that should be in clear regulations in the same way that in the U.S. and Canada. I cannot take and ask a client of mine out for a date. Right? And there's good reason for that. And we don't pretend that we're not making a statement of policy about that. We need regulation that guides that. We need to have. More refinement around how we do take and ask the questions for referring a person to other religious leaders.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:56:58] Some guidance some some consensus around how to do that. Exact. Yeah okay.

Edward Taylor [00:57:03] And where the boundaries and limits are so that we refrain from use of spirituality language. We take and only survey what their needs are. We refer people, but we don't assess and treat them for spiritual work.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:57:28] Well. Very practical. Thank you. So first of all, I want to thank you for agreeing to come on and talk with us about this. And obviously, you know, there's always a fair amount. And, well, for me, I'll speak for myself. There's always a fair amount of anxiety when you know it's going to be recorded. And so I hope, you know, and you and I spoke about this is that. And you were very clear up front too, about, you know, you're not really bad mouthing and really, you're not the Acme Judgment Company when it comes to people who are. You know, spiritual, religious, but you really do want to have a conversation about how this is utilized and infused in our profession. And I hope that's what we have done here today in this conversation. And I want to thank you. And so by the way. So today we covered spirituality and religion in our next couple of podcasts. And you and I will have to talk about money and then politics. And then we'll have, we'll, we'll have the trifecta and we'll be in search of trouble. Sounds good. And yeah. So thanks again. I want to give you the last word. If you want to take it.

Edward Taylor [00:58:46] Yeah. Well, just very quickly. Thank you. It's been a wonderful experience for me to to be with you as I shared off air, this is the first podcast I've ever done.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:58:56] So you shouldn't have told people that.

Edward Taylor [00:58:58] No one would have believed it. Yeah. Thank you for that experience. And just a final quick statement. I really would want people to know that from my personal belief. If you believed that using crystals helps you. And I just focus on that because it's a concrete example. Sure. Said. I don't understand that. I don't understand how it helps and I don't understand. Whether it is a placebo or a real force, that is. But I'm glad that you have found something that helps you through this difficult life that you travel through. But I don't see because of the anecdotal evidence of it helping you as a person of either incorporating it into my life or incorporating it into the practice until there would be

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evidence to support that. So that's that. But I'm hoping that we can have a conversation. Where are the boundaries within the profession chose not to take and condemn individual beliefs.

Prof. Peter Sobota [01:00:11] Wonderful. That's a great place to end. Thanks again. That is a pleasure.

Edward Taylor [01:00:16] My pleasure.

Prof. Peter Sobota [01:00:18] Thanks again to Doctor Edward Taylor for taking the time with us today. The curious team at the In Social Work podcast includes our award winning tech and web guru, Steve Serman and me, Peter Samir. Finally, it's possible that this might be the last podcast you'll hear the name of our beloved guy, Nic deSmet. For the past two years. Nic has been in Social Work's graduate production assistant, organizer of chaos, audio editor, guest coordinator, content contributor, and all around idea Machine. Nic's contributions to our show are significant, and without their presence, this thing would not be the same. Nic is now a freshly minted MSW graduate, and on to their next story. And it's with gratitude that we acknowledge the major impact Nic has had on our podcast. Nic, we wish you the absolute best. This is where I usually ask you to say hi, but now you can say whatever you want.

Nic DeSmet [01:01:27] Thank you so much, Peter. It has been just an absolute pleasure and an honor to work on this podcast and with you and the team. I, I just can't imagine having gone through the program without this. This is has been really, truly great. Thank you so much.

Prof. Peter Sobota [01:01:48] There is no way we could have done it without you. All right, folks, enough of the sadness. We'll see you next time, everybody.