inSocialWork Podcast Series
University of Buffalo School of Social Work

Episode: Generative AI and Social Work: It’s NOT the End of the World as We Know it.

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Prof. Peter Sobota [00:00:12] 25 years ago with a click. Google gave everyone access to information. Today, everyone gets access to intelligence. From the University at Buffalo School of Social Work, welcome back to the inSocialWork podcast. I'm Peter Sobota. Good to have you along everybody. Will AI replace social workers? Will generative AI transform social work? What are the implications for social work, education, and practice in general? Today on the show, Dr. Lauri Goldkind will discuss the explosive impact of generative AI and ChatGPT, and with it, the promise of its application to social work, education and practice, as well as the fears of the end of our continued existence. I kid. Doctor Goldkind will discussed, the opportunities and caveats inherent in AI and its derivative models, how to engage with AI applications in the field related to both education and practice, all the while exploring the implications and advocating for proactive learning and involvement shaping the most just to use of this rapidly evolving technology. Doctor Lauri Goldkind, is associate professor at Fordham University's Graduate School of Social Services.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:01:35] Lauri welcome to inSocialWork. Thanks for joining us.

Prof. Lauri Goldkind [00:01:40] Thanks so much for having me. Good afternoon.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:01:41] Yeah. I'm in Western New York and it's disappointingly cold here today. So I don't know what's going on in New York, but we've been spoiled by warm weather here. So, I'm getting cranky for winter to end.

Prof. Lauri Goldkind [00:01:55] Yeah, I'm in Westchester County, New York and it is warmish, but also quite overcast.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:02:02] Yeah. All right. Well, we didn't have winter this year, so I'm not going to, I'm not going to complain. All right, let's get going here. I usually begin our podcast by asking folks not only how they came to social work, but also how they came to, you know, their interest in the topic that we're talking about. So that's where I'd like to start. Although, if possible, could we keep it relatively brief, because there's a lot of other things we want to get to as well. So do you mind starting us off, telling us a little bit about how you came to all this.

Prof. Lauri Goldkind [00:02:36] For sure. So I this is my 16th year at Fordham University. We have campuses in the Bronx, Manhattan and Westchester, as well as a fully online program. And I, before that was in youth services and youth development in New York City, primarily with young people who were facing challenges. At some point I was working with high performing young people. And when I came out, I graduated from Stony Brook, a very long time ago, with an MSW. And I, when I came out, I, I also have a my concentration was planning, administration and research and that really meshed nicely with my skill set. And so I had been or was a macro practitioner when I was in the field. So

I worked on data practices, evaluation. We didn't call them data practices at the time, but I inevitably in whatever role I was situated in, was also doing something with data. And, you know, before we had data visualization, we used to just have graphs in Excel. And that was sort of my happy place. And, and I have worked in hardware and software and help to coach principles on how to think about data. And that was my practice life. And so when I came into academic life, I. We're sort of situated in a macro world, but like, brought that interest into technology or interest in technology and technological stuff into my research life.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:04:13] Got it. Yeah. Thank you. And it makes perfect sense. So today we had planned to talk about AI and maybe even more specifically ChatGPT. But before we get going about that related to those, I was wondering, for the purposes of the rest of our conversation, if you would begin by defining, let's say: AI, define ChatGPT, PT, rather, and anything else that you think it's important for folks who are not as familiar with these terms? I have a reason for asking this question based on a conversation I had with somebody the other day. They were equating everything. So, I, and I know there are distinctions among those terms.

Prof. Lauri Goldkind [00:05:05] Sure. Ao, I think that one thing that I sort of try to contextualize when I talk about AI and maybe large language models, but definitely AI, is that I think that, you know, with the launch of ChatGPT, people became very, very excited about generative AI. And I think that what we're less aware of is that computer science has been trying to figure out artificial intelligence since the 1950s. And so, as a formal sort of subdiscipline under computer science, AI has been around, you know, for, 75 years or so. And, that I think that's an important thing to remember is that pretty much since computer science was, has been a formal discipline, a subset of those folks have been trying to imbue machines with the ability to have intelligent decision making comparable to human decision making and human learning, right? Those are sort of two, two kind of components of the AI conversation. And so, I think that that runway is really important, because I do think that generative AI has really bedazzled people and seems like magic. And, there's sort of a runway behind that about, around trying to figure out, like, can machines be smarter than humans? What does that mean? How do we how to machines learn? Can machines learn comparable to sort of human development of understanding and knowledge making? And there's sort of that mechanical kind of dimension. And there's also kind of an epistemological dimension, right? Like, how does? What is meaning making? What is knowledge building and can a computer, which is basically like a machine that crunches data or processes data, can that sort of engage in knowledge building and meaning making comparable to a human?

I'm not suggesting I have good answers to those questions, but I do think that those are the questions. Um, and so and then just to your second point about ChatGPT, I guess I take a little bit of umbrage with ChatGPT being like the representative of large language models, because I don't really believe that OpenAI needs any more press. ChatGPT is a large language model. Large language models are designed to take giant chunks of text-based input and as they are. Gosh. They’re. It's sort of quantities and quantities of text-based media that has trained systems that can probabilistically string words together to answer a question. And so I think there's sort of two innovations that are inherent in the LLMs. One is that they are able to respond to a plain language English prompt or Spanish prompt, or whatever, your home-based language is, and it is easy for a user to understand both the input. Right? I ask a plain language question and it offers me back a plain language answer. It's not computer science, at least on its face. And, and, it's accessible

and, and it is also iterative. So it appears if you ask ChatGPT to put in, say, offer me three treatment goals for for a client who's dealing with anxiety, it will give you back three treatment goals that seem reasonably realistic in, for a client with anxiety. And then you might look at those as a practitioner and say, you know, could you write those in the style of a practitioner with 40 years of experience? And it will iteratively sort of refine what it has written. And I think that that makes plain to even hardcore unbelievers in artificial intelligence, that there is something that is different and useful about that as a utility.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:09:09] Yeah. And I would just add it because as we discussed earlier, I am a late comer, I think relatively speaking to all this. The conversational nature of it almost is, is kind of it just fits with it. It just seems to I think that's part of what I think attracts and maybe even repels some people. I'm I'm not exactly sure, but. Are there other things that you want to clarify before we get going?

Prof. Lauri Goldkind [00:09:36] Well, I mean, they don't call them conversational agents for nothing, right? Like, and so, I think that, you know, these computer science folks are really smart. I mean, so I think that. I think that the big.. I think excitement about generative AI is that it has opened up. Window for people who have not had a consciousness about what the possibilities are before now, in a way that has made it very tangible and tactile.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:10:04] Yeah, I agree. All right. Thank you. So, just for fun here. At the start to get your blood going, although my hunch is that that's not necessary, but I'll do it anyway. In just in the past week, I heard a conversation amongst social workers and who stated. And, I'll do the best I can to quote them, but I it's pretty close. Yeah, AI is going to be helpful, you know, for writing notes and maybe treatment plans and billing paperwork and, you know, those kind of mundane, practical things. But AI will never replace social workers. Thoughts Lauri.

Prof. Lauri Goldkind [00:10:50] I mean. I think. That we need to widen our lens a little bit and understand that within a few weeks of ChatGPT coming out and I will use sorry, I will use that as a shorthand for LLMs.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:11:10] But I think that too I yeah I'm sorry.

Prof. Lauri Goldkind [00:11:13] Yeah I think no, no, I, I think that within a few weeks of the release, there was a conversation on TikTok, which, I have a bias about our social work colleagues engaging with that as a channel for information. But within a few weeks of the release there was a conversation on TikTok across adults with ASD disorders. Autism spectrum disorders, about how they were using the language models as a wellbeing support and as a therapeutic sort of tool. And in the, we actually I worked with a group of colleagues and some data from those TikToks as, as sort of, kind of signal about what's happening in the environment on like how folks who might regularly seek treatment are using the models. And the discourse was very much, “my practitioner doesn't understand me. And this thing that is, you know, basically a pile of data does a great job of listening to me.”

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:12:27] Interesting.

Prof. Lauri Goldkind [00:12:28] And so, I think that, I think that it's really important for us as particularly in behavioral health and mental health treatment, kind of in that subset of social work, to understand the way the rest of the world is thinking about making use of

these utilities. And so, I think that there is a lot more interest in, in therapeutics that are powered by language models, by visual models, by all the other ancillary sort of supports that I might offer. That we are not aware of and not tuned into.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:13:12] Yeah. So in kind of building and the some of the points that you made. I don't know if this is fair, but I'll. I'll just say it. I think historically our profession has not exactly been, you know, the first to embrace technology and to, you know, understand how to apply it and use it. Okay. Send your letters to. And at any rate, that I think that's at least my take. So if you buy that at all, in your opinion, if you had one shot with a bunch of social workers and even academics, what is the biggest thing that you would say that social work, the profession, practitioners and academics, they don't get about AI and another language learning models.

Prof. Lauri Goldkind [00:14:12] I think that there's, gosh. I think that there's.. AI is a really big umbrella and it is now… So it's also been infused, right, for the last decade into all kinds of things that we engage with, including, for instance, like surveillance in older adult services. It's embedded in child-welfare decision making, right, criminal justice decision making in the form of predictive analytics. And, I think there is some real challenges to populations. That social work is very invested in, that happen all the time, right, with AI implementations. But I also think that it's really helpful, I think, to have a basic understanding of how some of these pieces work in order to even understand why, why they're so compelling to people. And so, I think that the computer science people hear about a mental health crisis or like a lack of workers who can deliver mental health services. And those folks are looking at the mental health arena as a problem to be solved with engineering. And they're pretty good at it. And so, I think that I think that it's critically important that we as a profession are tuned in to all of the different domains where computer science and artificial intelligence have application. And in some ways, let's just take any domain that we're practicing in and kind of read outside your literature about what's happening in CS and in AI, because I would make a, I would say reasonably educated guess that we could name almost any social work domain and there will be some AI infusion in it.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:16:09] Yeah, I and I guess, you know, I don't know, it is going to be kind of pithy, but the, I don't always understand our, meaning social workers, kind of reticence around this because in, in many ways that the, you know, the profession on some level should be working hard on doing whatever it takes to work ourselves out of jobs. I mean, if if we're in a … it's not like that is probably ever going to happen, but I'm… it's not a bad goal. And however people get there, either with or without us, I think that's that's a desired outcome. So at any rate, so I don't want to editorialize too much here. So thank you for taking a shot at that. So I'm, I'm going to try and keep the rest of the conversation in the context of social work education, and also if we could maybe bounce back and forth to to practice as well. But, in terms of social work education at least. And I, you know, I was just in, faculty meeting at my, at my school yesterday were where we were kind of, I think, really wrestling hard with some of the impacts of, of what's happening and how quickly it's going to change…. I think. In terms of social work education, what do you see as the the largest near-term impacts? And the promise. Let's talk about the promise of language learning models and AI.

Prof. Lauri Goldkind [00:17:50] I think we need to sort of take it as an opening assumption that students who are going to come into our sections or our classes in the fall have used a language model, in some context. And I think that it, we have a professional

responsibility to orient folks to like the ethical and responsible use of technology. And that is both in our CSWE educational competencies, right.? In the EPAS it does say that we are charged with conveying to students the ethical and responsible use of technology. I think it's it's the language is like the ethical and appropriate use of technology. And there are, we actually do have a set of NASW ASWB technology standards? I think they're from 2018. So I, I think that they are challenging, documented in and of itself. It's very long. It's not as pointed as it could be, but we do have some tech standards to point to as well as like the code of ethics from NASW that all of our students are opting into. But I think that we need to really make it …it would be doing students a disservice not to a prism of the potentials of some of these tools. And I mean from everything as like a course enhancement, right? So many of our social work, I can speak for Fordham, in our environment, a lot of students really are challenged by writing. And I think that the, a large language model really offers a support in a way that is non-threatening and can help folks who may be intimidated by a blank page start, right? Just starting, I think, is a way to think about that as a student support. And so, so just from that perspective, the classroom perspective. But the other thing that, that people are starting to think about as a way to use these generative AI tools is around role play in rehearsal? So before we have students out in the real world with clients, there is… there are some really useful like products for doing role plays and for offering students very immediate feedback. Like in concrete terms, right. The number of open ended questions, the number of closed ended questions. Did you treatment fidelity, right? Are you using motivational interviewing as it's written in the manual? And so I think that we have like an ethical responsibility to engage students with what the potentials and what the perils of these things are. And I also will preview a little a paper that I wrote with some colleagues that will come out, I think, in the next few months, calling really for a new competency on AI and generative AI for social work students, because, I really. I do think that with the kind of launch of OpenAI's large language model with the ChatGPT, it really has captured the public attention. And it maybe it makes a really pointed case for why students need to engage.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:21:06] Yeah. And I will probably have to revisit the code of ethics too even though those were revised for technology. I don't think at the time that this, what we have now, was anticipated. So, yeah, you know, I'm glad. I'm so glad that you answered or you responded to that question in the way that you did, because I think what I heard more than anything else is that especially academic social work educators. It's.. instead of freaking out about, you know, obsessing about plagiarism and then maybe some things we'll talk about later, that we have a kind of, we have a responsibility to, as part of an educational process, to help students and probably ourselves, know how to use this and and enhance the experience. Go ahead. Yeah.

Prof. Lauri Goldkind [00:22:05] Yeah, I know, but I guess I was thinking though. There's a big discourse, right in some social work circles about how social work should be at the table and meaning, like, at the table in technology development. And I think it's really hard for my perspective to be at the table if you don't know, like, the language that's being discussed at the table. You don't understand the potential and the possible harms it… or unintended consequences that a piece of technology might have. And so, I think it… if we really are invested in having social work students who are coming out be leaders in their agencies around sort of digital policy or AI policy or even technology policy in, in an agency setting or in a clinical setting, or how do you handle that in your private practice? Right? Where's your what? How are you going to. How are you going to navigate, you know, generative AI in your private practice? If we're not exposing folks to those ideas, it's

really hard for them to access that educational knowledge, right? Or that academic knowledge after they leave us.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:23:19] Yeah. And. Yeah, this may be a tough one, but if you could lump us all into a big ball, meaning social work academics, speaking generally and in broad strokes, I have a guess that you might argue that we're probably as a whole not ready to do that. We're not ready to help students ask the right questions or guide them. Oh, people, you're making some great faces. I wish I our… I wish our audience could see. But, go right ahead, please.

Prof. Lauri Goldkind [00:23:54] I'm so glad they can't, because I think that… I actually… so I..you know. I think that the Academy and this is not a social work specific problem, but maybe it's amplified by social work, some qualities about social work. The Academy rewards folks for developing a singular expertise. And so, if I'm an expert in, I don't know, poverty alleviation in rural communities. Unless I happen to bump into a computer scientist who has interest in poverty alleviation in rural communities, that's pretty far outside of my domain. And I think that… I think that… I actually don't think it's that big of a lift for our… my colleagues who are social work educators, to be able to infuse some of this critical thinking about a technological dimension into their classes, because we are in kind of imbued with a social justice ethos or the code of ethics. And if we just pointed those toward sort of some of the conversation about technological implementation, I think they would see it really quickly. I just think that we see those two arenas as very, very separate and are less attuned to how much technology has infiltrated, say, rural poverty alleviation.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:25:27] Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Thanks. So. All right. You know, as the famous social work, academic and social work philosopher Sting in, you know, in his song *If I Ever Lose My Faith In You* stated, I never saw no miracle of science that didn't go from a blessing to a curse. What are. What are there as you see them, the caveats or the limits in the near term? That are being kind of fostered by this technology and its impact on social work education.

Prof. Lauri Goldkind [00:26:06] So I think one thing that it's critically important for students and, and faculty and just citizens, right, to understand is that all of these utilities, whether it's like image recognition right now. Both Microsoft and OpenAI have an image generation capacity. Now they can make a video that is it's pretty good. And so, but that's based on sort of a data set of images, right? That's a one pathway where you could take a large language model with text data and that's another pathway. All of those models are built on data, and the data is not often, I would say, primarily coming from secondary data sources that were not originally purposed for training, like large language models or training video models. And the models, the data sets reflect the bias of the folks who collected that data. And in computer science, and in the software industry, that's called a pale male problem. I think that, it's, you know, I think that it's critically important that people recognize that the systems are really just reifying the existing structural inequalities that we already have.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:27:27] Yeah, I was going to ask you about that later… later on. But maybe we should just hang out there for just a second. I mean, and in terms of just even accessibility issues. I mean, you know, people who have, you know, stronger socioeconomic status, they have more options. You know, and they have more accessibility. And I was going to ask you later, but do you and my hunch is that you're

probably going to say yes, but I'll ask anyway. Do you think these disparities might be magnified potentially by the advent or popularity of the language learning models?

Prof. Lauri Goldkind [00:28:07] I think that the models themselves are not… I don't know that. I think that the my gosh,… that's a really good question. It's a really good question because I.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:28:14] Because there are lots of variables. Yeah.

Prof. Lauri Goldkind [00:28:15] For sure. I think it's a really good question. I think that if you ... so we could…. gosh. I think that they are solidifying some of the existing, already kind of historic inequalities and that even the labor that they're built on, right? So one thing that happens with large language models or with any of the any AI models, is that the data has to be coded. And so, you know, there's a big conversation about global south countries or global majority countries that are providing the labor and the energy that is used to sort of run the models. And so I think that, I don't know if I think that it they're accelerating inequality, although I have like there's folks who written about that phenomenon who would disagree with me. But I think, I do think that they are kind of codifying existing inequalities, and… and potentially maybe they are potentially amplifying inequality. I do think I need to think about that one a little bit more. I do.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:29:25] Yeah, I need to I want to think about it as well. And you know, we… we have social structures and institutions that, you know, shape and define our society. And we seem to be one that maybe even increasingly is built and maintained to, you know, kind of keep power in the hands of people who are already have it. And I think, like you said, given that… and maybe I don't know if this is exactly what you said, but this is what I might have heard is… that given that these these tools are being enhanced and developed and even drawn from people who occupy probably positions in the dominant culture. Is it going to really reflect that view that view?

Prof. Lauri Goldkind [00:30:19] Yes, of course it is. Yeah. I mean, in short. Right. Yeah. But I also think, you know, there's a big I sit in a lot of spaces where there is sort of tech for good conversations and AI for good conversations, and in some ways like the most successful kind of technological innovation has been like getting rich people car service. And so I think that, you know? I think that I, I, I am not a proponent that technology alone is going to sort of solve climate change or eradicate poverty. I think that, you know? Or that robotic caregivers are the answer to sort of the silver tsunami. I think that that there's a social and human dimension to these inequalities that are not going to be solved by an algorithmic strategy. And you know, and it's sort of very well documented. There was an article, I think, in the last day or two about how the problem is not a ChatGPT or a Bard and people sort of and people do say really crazy, disgusting and hateful things to the model. And in some cases there's really strong guardrails to that, the model will shut down and say, I can't engage in this. And in other cases people are just finding new ways to kind of test that strategy. But they're also I think the bigger problem is that the a ChatGPT or. A large language model is built into something like, say, a resume screening system. And there was an article it's within the last day or two about how the model automatically excludes folks whose names do not sound traditionally like white and… and English speaking. And so it automatically is excluding folks, right? And so if there's not a person in the loop or again in the CS world, that's like the human in the loop model, right? Where the machine in the human are complementing each other? We really run the risk if we sort of fully automate some of those high stakes decision making systems. And I, you know, it's

arguable that HR is a high stakes decision making system, whether we think of it like that or not where it's able to exclude candidates who never even get in the door. Then I think that that is high stakes decision making.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:32:43] Absolutely. That goes back to the access thing that in many ways that I was talking about before. I also, you know, parenthetically I, I actually don't remember if this was in a journal or even like the New York Times, but I just read in a, an article that talked about language learning models and, and their and their promise and how people were reacting. But studies were… there reporting on some studies, and basically the conclusion was the language learning models are not yet good at critical thinking. It's just not something that they do well. Do you…? Oh..

Prof. Lauri Goldkind [00:33:23] I mean. I think it's… Well. So, I.. two things. Right? Large language model, large language model is the standard title but I like I guess I wonder like who's defining critical thinking and what do we mean by that. And I'll give you a concrete example. I can't remember if it's ChatGPT or Bard, but it just passed the bar. It's passed the pub exam and it's passed a medical board. So, I mean, it at least thinks. I'm being facetious for the sake of example, but it certainly thinks critically enough to be as good as a new MSW or a new JD to pass an exam. So, I think some of that is sort of like, what do you believe critical thinking is and how do people display it? And I guess I would say one more thing about social work education in particular. I think what it does do in higher ed is really reckoning with the language models is it calls into question how we're assessing folks knowledge acquisition. And are there other ways to sort of define and describe and document competency that are not like a ten page paper.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:34:34] Yeah. So I think I just think, can we just think of the example that I had here. I think the maybe where my question was coming from, I'm just going to kind of stick with this for a second. If you'll tolerate. And this is even more of like a practice question. So students I know here at Buffalo, we we are, you know, obviously waving the flag of evidence based practice and… and starting from there. But then we ask people, you know, you have to be knowledge. You have to be facile with the evidence related to the problem that you might be working on with somebody. But what has to sit side by side with that knowledge and that ability is the ability to know when perhaps the evidence is the worst possible thing you could do with this unique individual human being in front of you. And for me, that involves some critical thinking and it. That's what I wonder about is, is that the next step in terms of what things like ChatGPT. Oh, you're smiling. Go ahead. Yeah.

Prof. Lauri Goldkind [00:35:47] Oh I think so. It's interesting right. I so I'm not sure that's I think what you're calling critical thinking, I might call professional judgment. Okay. And I think that… I think that we're in hot water as a field because the computer science folks are trying to figure out how to imbue empathy in a large language model. How to do things like evaluate the therapeutic alliance in a large language model. And that's certainly this sort of academic exercise sort of side of the equation. And then there's a sort of a whole cottage industry that has popped up. And people have been working on this case for a while, but I the generative, AI kind of opening has really has really started to sort of make plain what the potentials are. So there are systems that a psychiatrist or a psychotherapist or a social worker can buy on a subscription model where you record, say you're holding your sessions on Zoom, or you just use your phone right to record a session in real time, and you upload that recording to a platform. The platform transcribes the recording for you, and it also spits out notes or produces notes that are client facing notes. So here's a client

summary that you hand your person as they're going out the door that kind of summarizes what you did and maybe the key takeaways. And it writes professional facing report and then it also… it also offers a progress note that you can paste into your electronic health record. And I think it's not very far behind us or not in the near. It's in the near future that those utilities will be built into the electronic health record. And so it but I think here's what I think is actually really interesting about this. And we're, we're running some research to try to figure out the answer. But I said to one of the vendors of these systems, and there's a there's not just one of them, there's a bunch of them around. I was like, this is really interesting. I'm like, how do you know it's accurate? And they looked at me like I was nuts. And like, ehh. Ee. Aaah..that. It was really a kind of conversation stopping question. I think that folks take on faith that of course these systems are accurate. And so I think that there is… I think minimally right our practitioners need to understand sort of that what is the human in the loop element for a system like that? And clearly we shouldn't just be copying pasting anything an algorithm produces right into a whole cloth, into our progress notes, or into our electronic health records or into our billing systems. But, I do also think that there is.. there's a concept in the AI community that I find really troubling as a social worker called ground truthing, ground truth. Ground. Truth. And it's kind of the idea that. Or it is the idea that there is one truth. And it is the truth, and that it's the truth that you benchmark against all other, you know, claims.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:39:15] Oh, that ground truth. Okay, now I know it's your talking. Okay. Yes. Yeah. Got it.

Prof. Lauri Goldkind [00:39:20] And so? So, for instance, if you I don't know, we're gonna write a system to diagnose, say, depression. There is by logical extension, there is one way to sort of document depression and the constellation of symptoms, right, that construct depression and that's the truth. And then you benchmark all other experiences against that truth. And I have had really interesting conversations with my colleagues who are engineers working on AI about, you know, whose truth that you're really talking about. And so, right, because we know as social workers that individuals experience the same situations quite differently based on their positionality, based on their, the community that they come from, based on truth, social determinants of health factors, right? A broad range of like sort of different dimensions about why my truth might be different than, say, your truth. And they… I think this ground truth problem is really a compelling challenge for us, all of us as humans. But like I, certainly for folks who are engaged in AI systems like. And I... I also think it's really important to just understand that fundamentally as a discipline, that's a way of thinking that is really antithetical to social work's perspective.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:40:46] Yes. Yes. Yeah. Let me ask, this is kind of related in in my mind, but I don't I think that was really… I think we should stop there because that was just I thought, really? Well said. In terms of sticking with social work, education and implications for students and also for academics. In this, I don't want to call it… It's not a new world, but with the tools that are being that are accessible and available to all of us. In this arena does, and I'm going to be vague to give you lots of room, does creativity get redefined. Here's some of the… before. While you're thinking that over, let me just say a little bit more. I'm trying to leave it open, but that sounded even strange when I said it. But, one of the fears in talking with some of the colleagues I have here is that not only will, for example, things be quote, plagiarized, but now everything we're going to get is derivative. And so that that's kind of what's behind my question is, is will we have to think, well, educators and students, all of us really, need to think differently about what it means to be creative.

Prof. Lauri Goldkind [00:42:11] I mean, I think that it I…. All right. The thing that I worry about that's sort of allied is will there become a two tier system where people who are privileged and can afford it will have an artisanal human to human exchange or experience and, will folks who cannot afford it or who are who are undereducated or have not should have been schooled in computational thinking and algorithmic thinking and data awareness. Will those will there be a, sort of a new divide that's really a replication of the old divide about who sort of gets a bespoke experience that is quote unquote real and authentic versus, you know, versus, everybody else who sort of gets whatever is on television. But in some ways, that's not any different than it's ever been, right?. Like that, it's really not any different. And so. I think that there was a homogenization before the generative AI kind of exposure two years ago that is that is right now kind of being amplified, right? So there are whole websites that are just text that's spit out by language models. And I my concern is that folks won't have enough literacy. I can recognize them, right? And so if you're looking for it, sort of recognize and even in in plagiarism detection, right? Like there is a style of wordiness and blandness and homogenization that the language models put forward, unless you're really fine tuning like what your questions are. And I think that we need to be really explicit about teaching folks to evaluate information in better ways. And I know, but I also think that that has been happening. The need for that has been evolving really rapidly, right? Misinformation, disinformation, the idea of like the ways that I've just put it into the young person arena for a second to do some practice context. Like some ways that somebody could be cyberbullied or experience violence online as a young person, and maybe I'm thinking about gender based violence so as a woman in particular, is have accelerated to such a dramatic degree. And like the the idea of being able to create a deepfake that like, puts, you know, my head on some naked person's body and then circulating, that has never been easier. And I think that if our folks are not apprised of the, you know, that this is out there in the world when they're confronted with that in a practice setting, right, or in a school based setting, wherever they're practicing. That they're not going to be ready with like an answer to a client or a consumer who, like, who's experiencing this. And, and so I think that we want to have folks be prepared to engage with the idea of like, what is it, a deep fake? What is misinformation and disinformation, and how are the language models accelerating those ideas? That takes us pretty far from creativity, but I think that.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:45:39] Well, it's all kinds of creativity, though.

Prof. Lauri Goldkind [00:45:41] What's not yet right. And creativity is just like problem solving, right? And so it depends on what you pointed it at. But but I also think there is a big conversation about, you know, what's original work and who owns that work.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:45:57] Yeah exactly. All right. So I want to switch if we can to a little bit more of a focus on practitioners and not so much education and academics. But let's say for a minute talk about practitioners and social workers who are in the field and maybe who have been in the field for quite a bit, quite a long time. I'm just going to assume that progress in terms of AI and generative AI is going to continue to be really rapid. My hunch is that this will be a very different podcast one year from now, and if not only a year. What is your take if you have one? Um if our profession. I think I know the answer. But I'm asking you, what is your take on this? If our profession has a well-trained practice workforce that can use these tools effectively and to navigate a playing field that includes maybe some perils, some of which you've already kind of spoken about. That was a long question. The thought primarily is, the question is. If you think about your at least

your take, obviously you can always speak about your take. In the, In the practice for the current practice world and the people who make it up. Do you think they're ready? Do you think they're sophisticated? And where are they going to get trained if they're not? That's what I wonder about.

Prof. Lauri Goldkind [00:47:42] I said so complicated. I think that. You know. So. I think about lifelong learning and like, how do we keep people engaged with new ideas and be to be intellectually curious about some of these new utilities? So NASW has been very interested in offering like CEUs and education and… and outreach to folks so that they can develop some literacy on AI tools, and in some of the sessions I've sat in… And I think that there's some like selection bias in there, right? So like if NASA is running a drop in about the ethical use of AI tools, the folks who are interested in AI tools are going to come to that session, right? Yeah. And so I do think there's some selection bias embedded in that. But, you know, the practitioners who are early adopters are using these tools, and they want to make sure that they're using them responsibly and ethically. And I so, I so I think there are some selection bias in that. But I also think and maybe you said something about effectiveness, this is a really rapidly changing landscape, and I think we don't yet know exactly what effectiveness looks like. And I think that's actually a good thing because it gives us the pause to say, is there a social work perspective on this, and what's our ethical obligation, right, for having practitioners understand this.. these kinds of utilities, access to these kind of utilities? How do we promote the the positives of these sorts of utilities, right, for practitioners and for AI and for clients? And so, I think there's sort of a moment in time where there's sort of a liminal space where, like, we can really take advantage of… And I'm certainly not the only person who thinks like this in the social work academy. There's just not that many of us yet. And I think there will be. I definitely think there will be. But I think that we need to be really tactile about promoting sort of what can this kind of system do for you? What are the opportunities and challenges? And then, you know, how do you sort of convey protections to clients. I think that all of that is… I do think there's a moment right now where there is a window of opportunity for us to sort of jump in and say: there really isn't yet an evidence based practice for using a large language model or in a clinical setting. Although there are folks outside of social work who are have been on this case for. I mean five, six, seven years. Who have made fully automated, sort of CBT, cognitive behavioral therapy tools where there's no person required. And so, I think that what I do … I guess to come back to this idea about sort of how does the profession find its way. I think that there are early adopters who have found the way, one. And then two I do think that NSW has been very open to providing see you training, hosting workshops, offering resources to people that are effective and ethical ways to engage with these systems.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:51:17] Okay. Thank you. So we're getting to the end of, of our of the time that we had planned to talk. If I could I would like to just ask kind of a strange question. I kind of I'm a film buff and I always think that… I think that if we ever want to think about what's going to happen in the future, all you have to do is watch some films, because they're typically pretty accurate and, in hindsight. And, and so when I was thinking about talking to you and I got… I have to be careful now because all the films that I reference now, nobody has seen, I think this is a sign that something is going on. And I think we all know what that is. I was thinking about, the Kubrick film 2001: A Space Odyssey, right? And, you know, the monolith and that great opening scene where they throw the… monolith shows up, then everybody is… the world is now a different place. So that's my lead up. Man, we're we are going get letters about that one. But do you think that… That the impact of AI and the the derivatives that come with it is going to… is going

to be transformational in the field in social practice and education? Is this going to be the monolith and nothing will ever be the same?

Prof. Lauri Goldkind [00:52:46] No.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:52:47] No. Oh. I didn't think you were going to say that. So can I get you to say more?

Prof. Lauri Goldkind [00:52:51] I want to I want to sort of… Oh, gosh. So, I am sort of constitutionally a skeptic and a contrarian and so … filter my response through that lens. Do you think that there is so much hype and there's so much hype and there is so much money that is being thrown into these systems and these utilities. And right now the power is so centralized, and it's such a very specialized skill set. But like I said.. to my earlier point, right, I think the biggest thing that algorithms have solved so far is.. There is a system in Michigan, and I can send you some literature about it that basically falsely accused people of taking unemployment. And the unintended consequences of that was like millions of dollars on the backs of truly valid people who had a claim. And so, I think that, you know, the eye for good world, which is a very small subset of the overall sort of folks who are working on AI utilities, AI tools. So far we have not really, I think, solved intractable problems of the day. And so I'm kind of skeptical that this is the end of social work or this is the end of, you know, poverty or any of the other things. I do think that it's critically important for us as a profession to understand how computer science and, and folks who are doing AI in health and mental health are thinking about the problems that we're thinking of, particularly for for our practice colleagues who are in the mental health space, behavioral health. Those engineers are 100% coming for you. Like, there's just no question in my mind, they are 100% coming for you. They are trying to figure out everything from can AI evaluate a therapeutic alliance to what are the benefits of an AI that is delivering cognitive behavioral therapy, and all the way across the diagnostic cycle. And so I think that.. it… I do think it's important that social work understand what is outside of social work, but I also don't think that we are yet in a place where like. We're going to be completely laid flat and put out of business. Okay, the hype is hype. I mean, there's a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot of hype, a lot of hype.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:55:37] Well, that and that's a nice let's just stop right there. I think that's a great spot. So Lauri, thank you so much for taking the time to do this and to help us think about this. I found it incredibly helpful. So, thank you so much.

Prof. Lauri Goldkind [00:55:53] Awesome. My pleasure.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:55:55] Thanks again to Doctor Laurie Gold Kind for joining us today. The inSocial Work podcast team is Steve Sterman, our tech and web guru, our GA production assistant, guest coordinator and digital editor Nic Desmet. Stay hi Nic.

Nic DeSmet [00:56:10] Hey everybody.

Prof. Peter Sobota [00:56:11] And, I'm Peter. About the last we heard, these people continue to be sentient and temporal beings. I asked ChatGPT what its favorite thing about the inSocialWork Podcast was, and it replied as follows. “As an AI language model, I don't have personal preferences or feelings, so I don't have a favorite thing about the InSocialWork Podcast. However, I can tell you that the inSocialWork podcast is widely appreciated for its valuable content, which often interviews, discussions and insights

related to social work, practice, education, and research. Many listeners find it informative, insightful, and helpful for their professional development in the field of social work." See you next time, everybody!