

A Journey to Joy for Social Work, Social Policy and Leadership

University at Buffalo School of Social Work inSocialWork Podcast Series

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Peter Sobota [00:00:10] From the University at Buffalo School of Social Work, welcome to the inSocialWork podcast. I'm Peter Sobota, and it's good as always to have you along. Sometimes it's tempting to observe the power and persuasiveness of anger and fear that's utilized so frequently in the interesting times we find ourselves living in. And wondering if using these tools to bring about change might not be a bad idea. Today, our guest, Dr. Desmond Upton Patton, tells us about his recent scholarly pursuit of designing a professional and personal life based on joy. Dr. Patton will describe what joy really means, how he arrived at this perspective after following more traditional research interests, how joy can be an intervention for complex trauma, pain, grief, and loss, and how joy can be a framework for policymaking and leadership. Social workers and change agents of all stripes will learn about how to increase their own experience of joy and bring it to bear in our professional endeavors. Desmond Upton-Patton, MSW PhD, is the 31st Penn Integrates Knowledge University Professor at the University of Pennsylvania, with joint appointments in the School of Social Policy and Practice at the Annenberg School for Communication, where he is the Waldo E. Johnson Jr. Professor of Communication. Dr. Desmond Patton, welcome to inSocialWork.

Desmond Patton [00:02:20] Thank you so much for having me.

Peter Sobota [00:02:21] No, it's really our pleasure. Thanks for taking the time. So we're gonna jump right in here, but... Our listeners heard, you know, your background and as you move through your academic career, your scholarship and research interest, focus on artificial intelligence, social media and gang violence, grief and loss, gun violence, detecting trauma on social media, integrating culture, context and inclusion into machine learning and AI development. And now You have turned to joy.

Desmond Patton [00:02:25] Absolutely.

Peter Sobota [00:02:26] Can you begin by telling us how that happened?

Desmond Patton [00:02:32] First, we need joy. I mean, let's just quit there. No, yeah, this honestly was unintentional, not planned, and the most amazing blessing that I could have ever received. And so. I have spent a career trying to understand the power of human

connection within the context of technology and artificial intelligence. And I would say along that journey of working with youth and computer scientists to design algorithmic systems to find some of the darkest and most complicated moments in our existence both physically and digitally, one of the things that I missed in my research was... How young people were using the concept of joy as a way to deescalate aggressive conversations and engagements online. And what I mean by that is I find in joy is this psychological, emotional concept that often times people have in their head is happiness and fun and smiles. What I'm saying is something that's much more internal, something that is much more driven by heart and soul and human connection. And what I would see is that young people would see their friends and they would know their friends and understand their life stories and would see an escalation happening online. And they would use something that would be a redirect. It would be something that would be promotive of good and positive emotions and so they would use poetry, funny memes that were either local or global in context. They would use anything that would essentially create a smile for their friend who may have been engaged in an aggressive conversation in a form of engagement that could lead to online back-and-forth arguments, or... An online argument that could lead to physical violence outside of the social media platform. So that happened and that happened often. But because of the ways in which we construct problems, particularly as social scientists, I wasn't thinking about that kind of engagement as being a part of the problem solving that we could leverage. And so I finally kind of woke up and was like, okay, this is right here in front of me. So that happens. And then Over the last few years, we've just been in a lot of chaotic times. And so personally, I have been just interested in how to manage and cope personally in this moment. And so two things combined. And I remember being at a dinner and one of the leaders here at the University of Pennsylvania was like, have you thought about teaching a course on joy? And I was like I have not. And so I started to teach this course called Journey to Joy two years ago. And that just pushed me into this pathway of all things joy, both professionally and personally.

Peter Sobota [00:05:52] Yeah, yeah, fascinating. Was joy your word after you observed this online? How did that how did you arrive to enjoy?

Desmond Patton [00:06:00] I love this question.

Peter Sobota [00:06:01] Because most people I think what I'm sorry for interrupting, you know, you mentioned this earlier I think most people just go to happiness right and that's

Desmond Patton [00:06:10] No, so I have been motivated in particular to study the concept of joy within the Black community by my colleague and friend Andre Brock at Georgia Tech, who has for a while been studying Twitter and the Black experience on Twitter and really helped me to understand that Black folks have been using joy as a form of resilience, a form a connection forever, but in particular in the ways in which they structure dialog on platforms like X. And so in his kind of conceptualization of what was happening for black folks on Twitter, he was using joy as terminology that we might leverage in this space. And so I have learned from him how to think about his application for the work that I do.

Peter Sobota [00:06:54] Maybe you feel like you've already said this, but I'm gonna ask anyway. The way that you talk about joy. What would be the definition of that?

Desmond Patton [00:07:09] I love this question because I always, I, I- Oh god, I'm just so-

Peter Sobota [00:07:11] Oh, I'm just so glad that you understood it.

Desmond Patton [00:07:13] I know and I like to push back because I don't, I think that defining joy is an individual thing. There are many definitions of joy out there and I don't think we have kind of universal agreement but in my work and in my class I do two things. I understand joy is a psychological Emotion then that motivates and encourages positive feelings and outcomes. And then I pair it with an Audre Lorde perspective that is focused on liberation and freedom-making. And I love to pair them because I absolutely think that joy is an emotion. It's one of our positive emotions. It's an important emotion. And it's also an emotion that I think derives from and lives alongside pain and trauma and complexity. I think that joy should be conceived as something that's bigger and more robust than emotion. I like to think of joy as an internal resource that we all have, that's a birthright. And that we have control over and intentionality around, and that joy is a practice that we can build like any muscle to maneuver, to navigate, to get through a world, to cultivate and create a world that works for us. And so I believe that I define joy as an intentional practice that can amplify, that we build on and work on, just like we do in the gym. That can lead us towards a set of actions and connections and feelings and emotions that work for us.

Peter Sobota [00:08:59] Yeah, you anticipated, I think, my thought that was going on while you were talking. And so a journey to joy. Includes suffering, disappointment.

Desmond Patton [00:09:14] Absolutely

Peter Sobota [00:09:15] Yes. Okay. And so we're not talking about hedonism here, just to be clear.

Desmond Patton [00:09:20] No, I think that what I observe and learn is that. Joy is one of those things that is experiential, that is immersive, and that in order to fully grasp its power, we have to touch it, we have the smell it, we have see it. And I think in the moments of trauma and chaos, so many emotions are there, are operating. And I in those hard moments is where we get access potentially to joy because we're trying to move from one emotion to the next. Now, it is also a time when it gets really complicated because usually some of us feel really shameful when we're in a hard moment and we're trying to access joy, we feel joy. Because sometimes the trauma and the relief of that trauma brings about joy, but sometimes that can also trigger other emotions as well. And so it's hard, I think, for us as humans to be like... I'm in a hard moment, but if I engage in a set of practices that alleviate some of that stress, that could also be joy for me as well.

Peter Sobota [00:10:40] It's almost like the joy that you're talking about is a kind of a happiness, or maybe a sense of being almost, but it's kind of in relationship to your purpose and what you're experiencing and your thoughts and your emotions and your behavior.

Desmond Patton [00:11:02] So I don't think joy is happiness.

Peter Sobota [00:11:04] Right, right.

Desmond Patton [00:11:05] Right. I got that. I think they're siblings. I think happiness is fleeting. I think happiness can be an output of joy or a response to joy. I'm talking about something that is deep within that can be big or small, something that withstands the test of time, withstands to test of harm. I'm not talking about something that's Instagrammable or something that looks like the definition of joy that you might have in your head because oftentimes that is one that is smiling. That is one that you can look and register the

emotion on me in some way. I think of joy as being this deeply embedded resource that is connected to our heart. In our head, in our limbs, and that it's something that we can call on through practice. And that is something that is deeper, it is an internal, and it is not always registered on our face.

Peter Sobota [00:12:16] So if we could, could we back up to this course that you teach? So can you give us a sense of what, for example, you as the designer or the instructor in the course, what exactly are you trying to foster? And then even more practically, what do you do in this course?

Desmond Patton [00:12:38] So a couple of things, one is that I want folks to feel joy in the class. And so this is really like a non-traditional course and I have to really kind of help my students get there because I'm teaching graduate students and undergraduate students and they are expecting a traditional 14-week course where I sit behind a lectern and I teach you and you take notes and you can take a test. That is absolutely not the point of a joy course and hopefully you would never take a joy of course like that. What I want you to do put is to wrestle with vulnerability and to use vulnerability as a vehicle and a tool to touch, feel, see, smell, and connect with the idea of joy and to us all of what makes us human to define joy for yourself. So one of the things that we do is that folks have a joy assignment every single week. This week in my undergraduate course, they had to script. What a joyful life would look like. They had to practice manifesting and conceiving for themselves what a joy full world looks like. Another example is that they had to go to an event that they thought evokes joy. So they had go to a community event in their community, whatever they define as a community of event and go hang out. And then we processed that in the beginning of every class. And I asked them to do a couple of things, like what emotions were evoked? What was it like being in that moment? And did any form of repair happen for you? Could you source like attention that you had and doing this thing repaired it in some way? And so we spend every class the first 15 minutes during that. I provide a mix of multimodal materials. And so we get scientific articles. We do podcasts, we do documentary, we do film. And I do a reading lab every week in which we dissect and try to identify what is this article? What is this product trying to teach us about joy as a communication scholar? What is the messaging that's happening from the media around how we should be, how we define joy and are we okay with that? What are the things that we... Are pushing back against in that space. And then we do a practice. And so every class, there is an application of the readings. And so for example, in one class, I had students develop their own microinterventions based on the readings, and so we took the readings and identified main arguments and main points, and then we used that to cultivate microintervention around joy. And in order to do that, I asked to leave the classroom. Go out on campus, find your happy place, the place that makes you feel good on campus and sit there and think about the kind of cultivation that you want to activate around joy and then use the readings to create a 60 to 90 second micro-intervention that you can teach someone else. And so it goes from your definition of joy, your activation around joy, scholarship and other multimedia. Productions of joy, and then application of joy. That is the sauce for the Journey to Joy class.

Peter Sobota [00:16:09] Got it. So it's, it's really not as simple as, or as limited as, for example, finding your joy, maybe the better, the better way to say would be find it and then follow your joy.

Desmond Patton [00:16:22] I guess I think follow it, practice it, problematize it, question it, and it's also, I mean, a part of it, a lot of what I do in this class is to demystify it as well,

because what I've noticed is that many folks come to the class and their conception of joy is, I do X and then I earn.

Peter Sobota [00:16:43] That's what I was thinking. Yeah. And then what? I'm sorry. I spoke over you and then they what? Sorry.

Desmond Patton [00:16:49] I do X and then I earn joy. Gotcha. What I want people to understand is that you don't have to earn joy, you don't have to have money to have joy. You don't to do anything in order to know that it exists within you. What you do have to do is recognize it for what it is. So being honest with yourself about what it means and what you need in order to experience joy and not comparing it against other people or the cultures. And that is really hard. So for example, let me talk you through an example. Yesterday, we were studying Black joy. And one of the things that I wanted my students to wrestle with is this concept that my friend and colleague Courtney Cockburn talks about is being unchethered from whiteness. And so what I wanted to have a conversation around is, what does it mean to conceive of and apply Black joy in a world in which oftentimes, Blackness is compared to whiteness or is a response to whiteness? Do we even understand what the concept of Black joy is conceptually and sociologically without it being connected to whiteness? And that threw us, that threw a lot of the students into a tailspin because it was like, oh, I've never thought about that. So that's where we're trying to go. We're trying pull back the layers and untether ourselves from ideas about joy that perhaps we do, we've been doing historically, but maybe actually who we are as a people.

Peter Sobota [00:18:21] I, you know, before we go any further, I know something that came up when you were talking and maybe listeners would want to know this too. Who takes your course?

Desmond Patton [00:18:31] Everybody. So I am a Penn integrates knowledge university professor, which means I have multiple appointments all across campus. And so my graduate course, I have students in social work, social policy, nonprofit leadership, folks getting PhDs in communication and nursing. And then in my undergraduate course, which was really interesting, half of my students are from Engineering and economics. Yeah and having in those programs, because all of them come to me and be like, I'm taking this for a particular purpose. They want to feel joy.

Peter Sobota [00:19:06] I'm laughing because I have an engineer son, and he complains that there's a severe lack of joy in everything they do, including his education. So yeah, that makes perfect sense. So in this course by so I just to be clear, you have social workers, you know, that's kind of our primary audience here. But you have also people from other helping professions, perhaps, and even and at undergraduate level, it's wide open.

Desmond Patton [00:19:34] Absolutely, across the board, from every, I don't know if you have a person from every school, but from most schools, I'm able to touch in this Journey to Joy class.

Peter Sobota [00:19:45] You mentioned this, and again, I want to go back. I'm having a lot of thoughts while you're talking here. As you were thinking and kind of forming and actually continuing to think and form ideas about joy. To what degree did being a social worker inform your thinking? I mean, I'm curious about that.

Desmond Patton [00:20:13] Yeah, I love this question and I think it probably started with the concept of reflexivity, which is a concept that I think we learned in the first year of being an MSW student. So, I have been using reflexivity since I was a first year at the University of Michigan School of Social Work. And I think that concept allows me to do the kind of push and pull about my identity, about my personality, and to think about, you know... Where are the places where I am most vulnerable? Where are the place where I wanna grow? How does my social economic status and my gender and my sexual orientation affect how I view the world, how I connect to people, the mistakes that I make, the places for opportunity. That kind of level setting and way of viewing the world I think has always allowed me to remain open. Open and ready for a deeper level conversation that I think underscores deep listening, that underscours human connection and relational building and understanding. Like those are the things that I learned as a social work student 20 years ago. Those are the things that did in my work is a gun violence researcher and is absolutely carried. On into my work to explore this concept of joy and this application in a variety of contexts.

Peter Sobota [00:21:48] Yeah, as you were talking, I'm thinking about the whole kind of person and environment bias of social work and dignity and worth of all people. So if I could, I'd like to ask a very similar question, but instead of speaking about a social worker, and you kind of referred to this in terms of your positionality, but. Is that a same question when you, when you began and continue your thinking about joy, how was that informed? And you've alluded to this, I think by the fact that you're a black man.

Desmond Patton [00:22:23] Yeah, you know, I think joy and my blackness are intricately connected. What I have understood in my life is that joy is resistance. Joy is the thing that moves us in hard times. Joy, is the things that helps us to understand the good times through gratitude practices. As someone who grew up in the black church, joy was oftentimes a topic of conversation. It was a motivating factor. It was it was a connection to something that was above us and around us. And so I have always been connected to a concept of joy, but what I would say is that that wasn't enough, right? Because it felt, I would say it felt surface level. It felt like repertoire, like say joy, it has a very specific meaning. And I think that was useful on a surface level, but the work that I'm doing now still in my blackness is one that asked me to go deeper, that one that asks me to be very honest about what joy truly means. And that requires me to be. My most authentic self, and to push back against conceptions of joy or blackness that are not actually true to who I am. And so that has required building a muscle where I can discern between what's me and what's not me. But absolutely kind of a interest in joy, connection to joy was one that was structured through my black family, through black church. Being deeply embedded in research that impacts the Black community.

Peter Sobota [00:24:27] Yeah, I'm thinking a lot about that one. I think while you were talking, I was thinking about a couple of years ago reading Isabel Wilkerson's book about caste. And yeah, that's a whole nother podcast, but yeah, thank you. You write and talk about, I'll put this, our listeners can't see us, but you write and about joy as an intervention. How can joy be an intervention or a framework, for example, for practice, for, this is gonna be a bunch of questions, practice, research, community, self-care, learning. How is joy an intervention, as you see it?

Desmond Patton [00:25:10] Yeah, so I, I think the properties of joy can allow for freedom-making and liberatory practices that offer up creative space, that offer up new ways of thinking and reimagining the world. And I think when we put those things into practice, it allows us to see the world in a different way. It allows us to ask different questions. It allow

us to build different types of relationships. It allows for innovation. And so one of the things that we've been doing is two things. One is that we created a platform with youth in New York and Philadelphia called JoyNet. And the goal is for us to use artificial intelligence to identify content on social media platforms that might be defined as joy by young people. And this was particularly created as a redirect for young people that are experiencing loss and grief and however they define it. And it's meant to say there is another option of content and engagement exploration that can happen on social media platforms in which you can experience joy that you have defined. And so we created this platform as a micro intervention to say that we can redirect your experiences within a digital space and that digital world can also be a healing and thriving space. In addition to that platform, we also developed a framework, a joy in AI framework that basically asked you to consider a set of questions about the kind of experiences and relationships that are oftentimes missing from the design of algorithmic systems that should be a part of that conversation that nudge us and steer us towards positive engagement. Positive implementation and positive outputs. But usually in the creation of algorithmic systems and along that product line, things are moving so quickly that we're not really thinking about the connection piece. And so in this, I think for me, intervention, joyous intervention is joyous human connection. And how do we underscore human connection as the tool to help us understand and see the world in a different light. And so it's really, I would say this. Process and methodology is really one that's connected to reflexivity. That's about developing prompts and questions and methodologies that nudges towards a joyful framework.

Peter Sobota [00:27:51] Yeah, and I can see the implications because if this is where you start from, if this is the container for your thinking and your planning and your moving forward, that is, I mean, maybe I'm wrong about this, but I don't think that's where most people start. I think problem solving is exactly the way it sounds. It's problems, it's despair, it is impairment Yeah, that's a paradigm shifter, I'm sure.

Desmond Patton [00:28:21] One of the things that we do with young people is like, you know, what might your experience on Instagram be if the engineers that designed it had a joyful framework? What would it be? What would you experience? What would see? How would you talk to each other? What features would you have or would not have? I want people to have a moment. I think a joint framework says, take the moment. And imagine what that world could be, and then work backwards or work forwards and design it with other people in your communities in a way in which represents a life that is not necessarily optimized for harm. What we've learned is that many social media platforms are optimized for harm. We know that is the problem. We can do something about it. We, in particular, social workers can do with something about. We can reimagine how tools are built. We have the skill and the experience and the relational aspects and the trustworthy building practices that can be a part of product design and engineering with a framing that says joy is a priority, not harm.

Peter Sobota [00:29:48] Yeah, an empowerment approach. It appears simple. Yeah. I think this question probably says more about me than anything else, but do you ever look around, especially currently, more so than ever before, at least for me, and see the and the persuasiveness of fear and anger. And, and how that seems to control people or have you ever, do you ever I think like I do, I have to confess and I wonder if using fear and anger to bring about change might be useful. I'm guessing no.

Desmond Patton [00:30:43] You know, I... A couple of things. I think we're in a joy crisis because of the fear and anger that I think are warranted emotions and are important emotions. And they don't have to be in isolation. I think oftentimes we think as human

beings, okay, so much is happening. The world is on fire. As a black gay man, I'm worried about so many things and that I have to stay there. I think that that is completely unhealthy. And I don't want to live in that world, and I can't, it's hard for me to imagine longevity in a world in which I am only focused on fear and anger. And I think that that is where being Black filters and structures how I see the world. I can sit there. That's not realistic for a long living life for me. I think that... Living a life of intention where joy is a possibility and a practice in world building can open up so many new avenues for conversation and bridge building and future movement. What I have learned that over the last, I started writing about joy on LinkedIn and Facebook right after the election and my entire world has changed. I used to be known as the gun violence person who does stuff with social media. Now people almost exclusively come to me to talk about joy. I created that world because I was intentional. I was vulnerable. I didn't care if people thought it was silly or not. And I began to have conversations with people about joy then people start to share their practices of joy with me. They're sharing some of the learnings that they're having, some of things that they are discovering around joy. Now, my social media experience, which used to be filled with fear and concern, there's still a little bit of that there. Mostly people talking about joy. They're finding joy, they're discovering joy, they're practicing joy. That happened in November. I have changed my social-media life because I intentionally practice joy.

Peter Sobota [00:33:07] That's fascinating. I think I have to admit that for myself, and this is, yeah, I'm just gonna use it anyway. I haven't used the word joy. I've kind of been for many, many years kind of wrapping my head around the term bliss. But I think what I have found is in those lucid moments where I'm able to follow my joy. It's often scary and lonely, and it invites me to doubt myself, sometimes even to be ashamed of myself, and sometimes I give in to that if I'm not on my game. But what I have found over time is once you commit to that journey, or at least that I've committed to that or tried to, I often find myself quite unexpectedly in the company of people who also get me and who are also pursuing an avenue or journey of joy themselves like their comrades all of a sudden and you find them and all of a sudden things that were walls kind of start to turn into doors and you start thinking about things in a different way and it's not so isolating and it is quite the way you described to 10 minutes ago, it's very empowering.

Desmond Patton [00:34:36] I love that story. And I love because what you, I think you're absolutely right. And I think we need to underscore that. This journey is not an easy one. And I think that's what we have to demystify because I think that people are like, oh, I'm gonna find joy that everything is gonna be okay. Actually, it is this peeling and letting go and that can feel lonely and disturbing and complicated. It is like, it is the sharpening that happens. You are doing the polishing work that we do oftentimes in social work to get to this other place that is for us. And we also find community with other people in that space. I think that's the joy journey. So I don't want people to walk away and be like, I'm just gonna go find a self-help book on joy and everything's gonna be okay. It's going to be a process. And you're going to uncover some things that you don't like about yourself. Oh yeah. You don't like about other people, but I think all of that is good. I think, all of it is good and great because you will get to a place that works for you. You're gonna find the people who like, you don't have to explain why you are taking a nap and not working 14 hour days. You have to complain while you're going on a silent retreat because they get it. You need it. So I think that's wonderful.

Peter Sobota [00:36:00] Yeah, thanks. So, okay, so, all right, we kind of got segue there, but let me kind of circle back because I asked you, I was asking you about joy as an intervention and we spoke about practice and community, but you also write about joy

being useful and enhancing policy making and even leadership. Could you say? If you feel like you haven't said what you wanted to say that specifically, how can joy be used for to influence policy making and even a framework for a leadership style?

Desmond Patton [00:36:44] Well, I think for policymaking, I think it starts with the gender setting. What agenda are you setting? How are you constructing that agenda? How are visualizing the impact of your agenda on communities and neighborhoods and families and society at large? And what framework becomes the entry point for that agenda setting? That's why I think Joy can be situated That what if... In developing an agenda and crafting policy and evaluating policy, that joy is used as a measurable metric for which you evaluate success. Who's involved in it? What's missing? How do you create experiences and impact that motivate, enlighten, and help people live healthy and thriving lives? I think joy is integral to the agenda setting. I think joy is paramount for leaders because I think a joyful leader creates a culture, not one of toxic positivity where you're sitting around and having to smile and be happy all the time, but it asks you to think about the human experience. It asks you think about, should I send my employee a message at 5 a.m. To do X, Y, Z tasks? Is that going to help my employee be productive? Or is it more thoughtful for me to think about their life and their family and what they need and think about how do I have engagements that don't take away from joy? So part of this question is like living a life of joy and thinking about what is a life where there is an absence of joy? And I think we should be considering the absence of Joy and then reprogramming and engineering. Structures and practices and policies that fill in those gaps when there is an absence of joy. I think a joyful leader thinks about how they develop teams, how teams connect and talk to each other, how we honor and think about productivity in the way that is healthy, and when have we crossed the boundaries of what it means to have productive relationships as well. And so I think, again, it's really about the kind of questions that leaders ask and then how those questions shape practices, how those practices shape culture, how that culture gets implemented and then our ability to evaluate and try again when we've made mistakes.

Peter Sobota [00:39:31] I'm going through the Rolodex in my head of all the leaders who fit and who have not. I have to find the joy in my travel making. Um, all right. All right, so I'm not trying to provoke you. How's that for a lead-in? I'm trying to not provoke you, but I try to. I make a lot of effort to not remain in a bubble and just not to talk about ideas with academics or social workers, because I'm also a person. So, you know, I live in a community, in a neighborhood where. You know, not everybody thinks the same. And I try to talk to them. So, but I don't even think this would be unusual in an academic environment as well, but here goes. How do you, or would you respond to, you know either feedback or challenges that would suggest to you that studying joy. Frivolous? And nowhere near scientific. I mean, don't study it.

Desmond Patton [00:40:45] Then don't study it. So I enjoy, my joy life doesn't require me to prove to anyone that the study of joy is scientific or not, A. B, there's plenty of, I think people get caught up in language and I really appreciate it when you introduced the idea of bliss. There are so many affiliated emotions and concepts that I think are basically just a part of a family of joy. You can call it joy, you can call a bliss, you can whatever you wanna call it. But we, there is so much psychological research that I thinks supports the idea. Creating goals that are positive and promotive is a strong way to have a happier and more successful life. And sometimes that's called something else and sometimes it's called joy. But for me, there's enough information that says that at least that we should be thinking about joy as a theory as something that can structure how we live our lives and we can test it, right? And so with most things, with any kind of concept. We can define it, we can

theorize it, we can develop hypotheses and we can test it. And so if folks are not convinced, then I would say do more reading. Do individual level experiences with yourself. You as an individual can be testing these concepts out in your own life. You could run your own joy experiments in your life or perhaps you start off in the day and you write a thought about the kind of experiences you want to have by the end of the day. Try them out, try them out in different ways. Try them by tying, by event, by space. Try joy stacking where you load up joyful events and see which ones work, particularly when you're having a complicated day. There's so much that you can do at the individual level as well. But yeah, my joyful life is not about convincing anyone of anything.

Peter Sobota [00:42:53] I love it. You know, I want to go back to the very beginning, because there's something super inspiring about the fact that you were combing through social media. And then you noticed that, of all people, I mean, I guess the stereotype is that social media is like a giant cesspool of, of hate and, and, um... Negativity and fear and anger. So I really loved the story at the very beginning that you're coming through this and you're noticing that young people who don't have a lot of power. I mean, at least overtly in the broader society seem to just intuitively know that joy was a response to moving forward. And the fact that you notice that, that's a very hopeful. Observation and vibe in a very complicated and seemingly messy world right now.

Desmond Patton [00:44:10] Yeah, I learned from studying the life of Gakirah Barnes, a young woman that I've studied for a decade who was murdered in 2014, that I really have to listen to young people and not the kind of listening where you're preparing for the next response, the kind listening that goes, hmmm and that also understands their lived experience as expertise. I think young people do have power and I think when we don't collaborate with young people as folks who have expertise, we are missing the kind of world building that can hopefully be healing, that can, hopefully, help us see and reimagine the world that we live in. And young people, because they haven't been, some of them have not been exposed to the kind things that we are exposed to as adults. There's just kind of freedom and kind of vulnerability that I want us to get in touch with again. And again, that is the power and strength of human connection. And so, yeah, it wasn't something that I was doing that was special. It was young people showing us another way. And as adults, we can listen, we can do more, we can support, we can hold their ideas up as well. So they were doing it. I just happened to be in the right place at the right time. And... Um, and (**Peter Soboto**: and you noticed, you noticed) I noticed, but I want to be clear. I learned from a young black girl who we often times throw away about the power of listening that came from a black child that we would throw away.

Peter Sobota [00:45:50] That I think might be, given that we're bumping up against our time movement, that might be the place to just leave it right there. I would like to ask you one more though, because I'm hoping that people kind of got turned on and jazzed by this conversation. And so the last thing I wanted to ask you is, and I know you mentioned JoyNet. What kind of sources or resources would you recommend to those folks who are listening who might be interested in learning more about joy and the journey to it.

Desmond Patton [00:46:30] Yeah, so one of the things I'm gonna be doing is I'm going, I am developing a professional development course on joy and leadership. And so that will be something that folks can have access to pretty soon. I would say, follow the safe lab and my website is desmondpatton.com where I post all of my writings around joy, various resources around joy. So follow that as well. And then invite me to come hang out with you. I do lectures and workshops and talks around joy. And so if you wanna have deeper conversations around joy, let's connect. Wonderful.

Peter Sobota [00:47:13] What's SafeLab? I'm not sure I know what that is.

Desmond Patton [00:47:14] That's my research lab, SafeLab.

Peter Sobota [00:47:15] Ah, fascinating. All right. Dr. Patton, thanks. Well, before I say thanks, I want to give you the last word. Is there something that didn't come up that you really kind of want to put in here before we wave goodbye?

Desmond Patton [00:47:35] Yeah, I just want people to develop their joy plans. I think having a joy plan is critically important for the world we live in now and for our future. I think a joy plan is one that is honest about what brings you joy. It is one that is vulnerable in which you get in touch with actually the things that make you feel good. And it's one that can be shared in trustworthy spaces and one that you can build individually. So if you haven't already started to build out your joy plan for now and the future, consider it.

Peter Sobota [00:48:10] Perfect. Yeah, I really like the joy plan as opposed to what I have come to perceive as the self-care plan, which sometimes seems very limited to me and too kind of succinct. So thank you again, Dr. Patton. Thanks for joining us and taking the time.

Desmond Patton [00:48:29] Thank you so much for having me.

Peter Sobota [00:48:32] Thanks again to Dr. Patton for joining us. The joyous team at the In Social Work podcast are Steve Sturman, our web and tech guru, Ryan Tropf, our GA production assistant and guest coordinator. Say hi, Ryan. (**Ryan:** Hello!). And I'm Peter Sobota. We'll see you next time, everybody.