



The Theoretical Basis and Therapeutic Elements of the SoulCollage® Method

The SoulCollage® Method

SoulCollage® is a therapeutic method that Seena B. Frost, LMFT, M.Div. began formulating in 1989. After testing the method in her own therapy practice with individuals and groups, she described it in her first book published in 2001 and in a subsequent book in 2010. Frost drew elements from the concepts, methods, and therapy systems of traditional sources, such as Jungian analytical psychology and Jung's concept of "Active Imagination," Virginia Satir's "parts therapy," Fritz Perls' Gestalt Therapy, Humanistic Psychology, Transpersonal Psychology, Narrative Therapy, and Psychosynthesis. Frost fashioned a simple, effective, new method, the SoulCollage® method, from these elements. When therapists use the SoulCollage® method, their clients make collaged cards, arranging self-selected images to represent aspects of themselves and their lives. The clients then use the cards to access their intuition and imagination by entering into a gestalt process, dialoguing with a card, using their own voice and the voice in the image on a card, to discover the card's narrative and its meaning for them in their lives. Below are summaries with citations of the elements of these psychological systems, perspectives, and concepts that are incorporated within the SoulCollage® method.

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Analytical Psychology (C.G. Jung): Archetypes and Active Imagination

SoulCollage® incorporates the concepts of Collective Unconscious, Archetypes, and the function of Active Imagination (the vehicle to Individuation). Active Imagination is a process of:

1. Lowering ego consciousness
2. Inviting the contents of the unconscious to present themselves
3. Giving these contents form
4. Witnessing the form that has emerged to integrate the experience into consciousness.

Active Imagination can be done by visualizing unconscious contents while "dropping in" in a meditative-like state, through guided visualizations, free-association writing, and by engaging in creative "artistic" form of expression such as dance, music, painting, *etc.* Active Imagination invites subconscious messages to show themselves and express whatever information they are ready to reveal to the conscious mind. Ecker, *et. al.* describes using imaginal techniques to assist in transforming unwanted

thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors, in part through identifying a current client experience that disconfirms the schema underlying those unwanted patterns. McNiff (1992) writes, “the Jungian tradition has consistently affirmed the value of dialogue with psychic figures....Psychic pathologies, wounds, and helpers all exist within the imagination his therapy activates. Jung's practice of "active imagination" follows the artistic tradition of encouraging characters and images to reveal themselves, to speak for themselves, and influence the person who contemplates them. This way of working contrasts with the "depersonalization," "depotentialization", "reclamation" and “assimilation” through which the ego brings its projections under its control.” (p. 110)

SoulCollage® as a therapeutic art process uses the visual arts to access and communicate feelings that cannot be accessed by the thinking mind or expressed by words alone. Clinical experience has demonstrated that the images produced in making “art” help externalize and resolve clients’ internalized fears, conflicts, and blocks. The creative process of visualization and art-making is both healing and life-enhancing because of the opportunity it offers to enjoy the life-affirming pleasures of creating, and to organically integrate psychic contents in the process, resulting in augmented ego strength and more balanced self-image.

Weiss, *et. al.* developed an art therapy method called MeCards4Kids™, based on Frost’s SoulCollage® method, but to be used specifically for children aged four through nine, to assist children in expressing emotions.

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Internal Family Systems, Inner Child Therapy, and “Parts” Therapy

The Founder of SoulCollage®, Seena B. Frost, was greatly influenced by the work of Virginia Satir (Satir, 1978) who is regarded as the mother of Family Therapy. Satir described her work as allowing “more joy, more reality, more connectedness, more accomplishment and more opportunities for people to grow.” She invented the “parts party” method as a learning tool for use with adults in an educational, clinical, personal growth, or training setting. Carlock (2015) states that the parts party method helps individuals to identify their personality parts and resources, learn to use their internal resources more effectively, study the dynamics of their system of parts, assume greater leadership of their system of parts, increase assimilation of positive resources, transform parts clients consider negative, and learn how to deal with internal conflicts more effectively. The SoulCollage® method’s goals are identical; it encourages clients to collage cards to represent these parts, then embody those “parts” using the gestalt therapy method to give voice to the parts to achieve those goals (Frost, 2010).

Internal Family Systems (IFS), included in the National Registry for Evidence-based Programs and Practices in 2015, also incorporates these goals and methods for parts work, and in addition offers therapists a published deck of cards (InnerActive Cards, 2015) representing parts similar to the ones that clients choose to represent with their own self-selected images by collaging them on SoulCollage®

cards. In using the cards of either IFS or SoulCollage®, clients uncover the influence of personality parts on behavior and experience, access inner dialogue, and are able to revise the internal system. (Schwartz, 1995; Frost, 2003). Earley (2009) demonstrates the value of visual representations of parts, such as InnerActive Cards or SoulCollage® cards provide.

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Gestalt Therapy

The SoulCollage® process involves making a collaged card for a distinct part of oneself or one's life and then giving voice to the card as one does in a gestalt process. Gestalt concepts (Perls, *et al.*, 1977) such as "personal responsibility," "experiential freedom," and the emphasis on "description" (rather than on "explanation") apply also to the SoulCollage® method. In working with their own cards, clients are encouraged (as in Gestalt process) to speak in the present moment, rather from an historical description of the past. Gestalt believes that it is only possible to know ourselves against the background of our relation to other "things." This "externalization" is supported by the SoulCollage® method. The method by opening the door to dialogue, invites change within the person and in his/her relationship with the external world. The objective of Gestalt Therapy, in addition to helping the client overcome symptoms, is to enable him or her to become more fully and creatively alive and to be free from the blocks and unfinished issues that may diminish optimum satisfaction, fulfillment, and growth (Perls, *et al.*, 1977). The paradox is that the more one attempts to be who one is not, the more one remains the same. (Yontef, 2005). Put in another way, change comes about as a result of full acceptance of what is, rather than a striving to be different.

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Psychosynthesis

The founder of the SoulCollage® method, Seena B. Frost was influenced also by Roberto Assagioli. SoulCollage® incorporates the concept of subpersonalities, the technique of the imagination, and the view of a person as "personality AND soul." Assagioli envisioned an integrated approach to the human being that included the process of "personal growth." Personal growth incorporated personality integration and self-actualization, and even transpersonal development, a dimension glimpsed, for

example, in peak experiences (Maslow, 1964). Maslow wrote that these peak experiences included inspired creativity, spiritual insight, and unitive states of consciousness.

In addition, Psychosynthesis recognizes the process of self-realization, of contact and response with one's deepest callings and directions in life, which can involve either or both personal and transpersonal development. Psychosynthesis allows a variety of techniques and methods useful in attaining these goals: guided imagery, dream work, and sandtray; art therapy, journaling, drama therapy, and body work are equally appreciated. Cognitive-behavioral techniques, object relations perspectives, self psychology, and family systems are acknowledged as viable tools for self-realization. Any effective approach, such as individual and group psychotherapy, meditation and self-help groups, is honored as long as the complexity and uniqueness of each person is respected (Assagioli, 1971). The SoulCollage® method is aligned with the above views and purposes of Psychosynthesis and has adopted and included the following techniques in its method: guided imagery, journaling, and art therapy. The SoulCollage® method can be used by therapists working with most therapy systems, including all the modalities and schools of therapy listed in this summary (Frost, 2010).

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Humanistic Therapy

The SoulCollage® method incorporates Rogerian concepts (Rogers, 1951) of “unconditional positive regard” and “person-centered approach.” Therapists are taught a non-directive facilitation style applicable to both the making of collaged cards and the client's exploration of the images on those cards. Two suits of a SoulCollage® deck are particularly helpful in humanistic therapy: the Committee Suit (cards made for one's own personalities that embody different emotions, ages, or functions) and the Community Suit (cards made for the individuals and groups in one's life, living or dead.) Carl Rogers (1961) wrote, “when the individual perceives and accepts into one consistent and integrated system all his or her sensory and visceral experiences, then he is necessarily more understanding of others and more accepting of others as separate individuals.”

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Narrative therapy

The term “narrative” reflects our “multiplexity”, the multi-storied nature of our identities and the meanings we associate with both our stories and our personal characteristics. Narrative therapy has reiterated and further developed the empirical discovery that telling one's life story is an essential part of making sense of one's life. Narrative therapy has codified the possibility of re-visioning the story we tell ourselves about who we are and what our experiences have been in such a way that the account becomes more coherent. In the process of revisiting one's stories, this coherence becomes infused with new understanding and new meanings emerge, so that our experiences are reinterpreted in a way that fosters

inner peace, balance, and access to strengths rather than promoting doubt and weakness (progressive vs. regressive narratives.) “Externalization” or “Objectification” takes place and facilitates the investigation and the evaluation of the problem's influences on one's life. As clients reflect on their intentions and connect them with the newly acquired meaning, values, hopes, and commitments come together to form a unified base for further life decisions. Together these help “re-author” or “re-story” a person's string of experiences and strengthen one's capacity to meet further life's challenges. (White, 1990.)

In using the SoulCollage® method, therapists encourage their clients to create a visual narrative, illustrated with collaged images and accompanied by subsequent verbal messages. These collages are filled with an inherent transformative power because the self-selected images expose pre-existing associations while simultaneously revealing the transformative aspirations they contain. Once several SoulCollage® cards are assembled, the therapist has many opportunities to help the client/creator discover visual and verbal connections between them allowing new layers of “narrative” meaning emerge and be available for further integration. (Frost, 2003.)

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Transpersonal Psychology

Transpersonal psychology was founded in 1967 by theoreticians, Abraham Maslow, Stanislav Grof, Anthony Sutich, James Fadiman, and Sonya Margulies. Among the pioneers of transpersonal psychology were many prominent psychologists: Jean Houston, Jack Kornfield, Stanley Krippner, Ralph Metzner, Arnold Mindell, John Perry, Kenneth Ring, Frances Vaughan, Richard Tarnas, Charles Tart, and Roger Walsh. (Grof, 1971.) Its contribution relates to the importance of the transpersonal/spiritual dimension in the development and actualization of our human potential.

The following themes, recurrent in Transpersonal Psychology, were considered by Frost as she developed SoulCollage®. Both Transpersonal Psychology and the SoulCollage® method acknowledge:

- The contributions of all spiritual traditions to psychiatry and psychology
- Aging and adult spiritual development
- Guided-Imagery and visualization therapy
- States of consciousness that have “heuristic, healing, even evolutionary potential”
- Meditation research and clinical aspects of meditation
- Consciousness studies and research
- Cross-cultural studies and anthropology
- Ethical issues that arise in transpersonal clinical work

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