

## THE BIG PICTURE: USING SOULCOLLAGE® IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

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These are turbulent times, when the inner grounding of deep self-awareness is sorely needed – perhaps especially by those who cannot afford psychotherapy – as an addition to their personal and spiritual support systems. SoulCollage® is not a psychotherapy and does not substitute for it. In their training, SoulCollage® Facilitators are taught how to spot workshop attendees or coaching clients who may need therapy, and to keep a list of licensed psychotherapists in their community to whom to refer.

However, there are many common life dilemmas, existential twists and turns, even crises on the road of self-actualization – what C. G. Jung called individuation or “coming to selfhood” – that are often addressed in psychotherapy but need not be, since they are not pathological but simply human. In such situations, SoulCollage® can be extremely helpful. An example of this will also illustrate the important point that, as with other depth approaches to the psyche, this one doesn’t work very well unless its provider also practices it with him- or herself.

I wrestled with writing this article for weeks, not finding a coherent way to organize the wealth of material. Finally I remembered to consult my own SoulCollage® deck! I framed this question and pulled two cards at random from among several dozen. The first suggested taking off a Carnival mask to reveal the truth beneath. The second card showed someone hunched over a keyboard. It reminded me of myself crouched intently over my computer, up against the publication deadline, working to legitimize SoulCollage® to my colleagues with a well-read and professional work.

In the context of this situation, seeing again the thrilling riot of colorful dancers I had collaged around the writer’s head, surrendered to the music, immediately brought back up to awareness my great, even rapturous, love of the whole SoulCollage® process, starting with the hands-on shaping of images in collage to express my vision. I realized that what I really want is to share with the reader why I love it. Reunited with the source of my own powerful motivation, I sat sensing it, and the article re-formed itself and began to flow.

This incident may begin to reveal why SoulCollage® is not in itself a psychotherapy, but rather a way of tuning in to alternate inner perspectives on one’s situation. Having to cast about to find my truest motivation for this project does not seem to put me anywhere near meeting criteria for any mental or behavioral disorder! People use SoulCollage® to explore many ordinary life situations: career direction, whether to have a child or to do less as they age, a relationship impasse, health conditions, creative work, bafflement or impatience with their progress on a spiritual path, embarking on a new year or other time of transition, grieving a loss. Indeed, many non-psychotherapists teach SoulCollage®, and practice it in their personal lives, as a way of **getting to know their inner guides, allies, and challengers**, prompted by normal fears, sadness, and lack of knowledge, as well as curiosity to know themselves more deeply and zest for the inner adventure.

On the other hand, I am a psychologist. Since my first Facilitator Training in 2009, I have seen over and over how helpful SoulCollage® can be to psychotherapy when people suffer

from clinical depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, and/or eating disorders, to name a few.

*A nutritionally well-informed man in his 60s has four serious health conditions made worse by his overeating, yet “loves it” although he sometimes stuffs himself to the point of pain. Dave\* remembers having been a skinny child who started overeating at age 5. He links this with his fear of his father’s rages, and of a horror film in which a gigantic monster took over the Earth and even the adults were powerless to stop him. With Internal Family Systems (IFS®) and transference work (therapist, father, wife) over 13 months of therapy, his responsible self-assertion, self-care, and security in his wife’s love increase. The eating binges subside, then recur.*

*Offered the chance to consult some SoulCollage® cards from a deck of about 60 (not collaged by him), Dave asks his intuitive wisdom (as accessed through dialogue with “the cards”), “What do I need to know—no, do to stop this compulsive behavior and start acting in my own best interest?” From a pile of the 8”x5”mat board cards lying face down, he picks four at random, sight unseen. This blind choice ensures that the conscious mind – which does not know what to do in this situation – is not doing the choosing.*

*The first card shows a very muscular man working out with weights, a grim, ferociously determined look on his face. Asked to imagine himself as that man and complete for him the sentence stem “**I Am One Who...**,” Dave says, “**I am completely determined to accomplish something that’s utterly useless. Nothing will get in my way.**” When Dave asks for his response to the question, the image on the card dismisses it with contempt. Dave says, “This is not a guy I’d take advice from at all! He’s so compulsive, so single-minded that he virtually has no mind.”*

The therapist thinks privately, this is one of those cards that depict “the one who is causing the problem!” as Seena B. Frost, MFT, the originator of SoulCollage®, puts it. This bodybuilder seems to speak for an aspect of what Ecker & Hulley (*Unlocking the Emotional Brain: Eliminating Symptoms at Their Roots Using Memory Reconsolidation*, pp. 201 & 205) call the client’s **pro-symptom position**, which as usual has been only semi-conscious. For Dave, this has been the grim determination to become “stronger” through eating more and more. Dave’s **anti-symptom position**, his distress at his worsening diabetes and heart condition, is what brought him into therapy, since – as is common – taking this position has not been effective in the long run at suppressing the unwanted behavior.

\* (SoulCollagers described come from various locales around the United States. Names and identifying information have been changed to further protect confidentiality.)

Through our **Internal Family Systems (IFS®)** work, we had also discovered the overeating part's strong desire to defy his diet-conscious mother – “You can't make me!” (... eat in a healthy manner) – as a first step toward developing his embattled autonomy. This collaged bodybuilder may represent an even deeper motivation: to become big and strong enough (per the parents' commands to eat when Dave was small) to ward off monsters in a terrifying world where no adult could protect him from his father's rages and narcissistic demands. His own real self not fully seen by his parents, and his development thus supported only in a lopsided way, Dave as a child seems also to have taken it upon himself to soothe and “parent” himself with the means ready to hand – food – and the habit stuck. So his eating, while it worsens his physical condition significantly, is trying in its way to fill urgent psychological needs and support the integrity of his very soul.

*The second card depicts an erupting volcano, “full of energy,” that advises him to feel it in himself and harness it in a productive way. Dave reflects, “I guess this guy [card 1] has lots of energy and is wasting it doing something stupid,” and acknowledges that it feels novel to think this might be his own energy.*

*The third card shows a man exploring a cave with a miner's light on his helmet, who seems to Dave to be genuinely curious and non-judgmental and who encourages him to explore his own “innards.”*

*The fourth card is one he says he “can't relate to,” but he is nevertheless able to try on the imagined viewpoint of the champion swimmer portrayed, who says, “Decide what you want to do, then make it the focal point of your entire life.” Two months later, his urges to binge-eat having dissipated, and exploring new directions in his relationship with his wife, he happily leaves therapy, planning to return when his next growth phase beckons.*

Next is a briefer example of what might, in time, have become a similar discovery of the wisdom of the unconscious psyche. At a social gathering, I was asked to demonstrate a SoulCollage® consultation. I invited one man to ask “the cards” a life question that had meaning for him. “Why do things like Ouija boards, psychiatry, mysticism, and religion make me so skeptical? I can't understand how other people can believe this,” he said. The first two cards he drew at random only confused him. On his third card, he became able to speak for, and as, its image of a woman doing a perfect swan dive into clouds far below: “I Am One Who makes the leap.” I –whose main functions in Jung's typology are intuition and feeling – saw a metaphor here, implying to me that my fellow guest would be able to make that intuitive leap. And so he might have, with time. I have often been surprised when people who at first did not take to SoulCollage® later experienced significant revelations.

My own SoulCollage® attitude shift toward the writing of this article illustrates why, throughout my career, I've returned over and over to approaches that tap such experiences and emotions. As much as I enjoy skills coaching and value cognitive-behavioral theory and technique, they address only certain aspects of the many-faceted richness and inter-related intricacy of the psyche. Other important aspects can easily remain unconscious. Everyone behaves, perceives and apperceives, dreams, forms concepts, believes, imagines, creates, values, feels emotion and sensation, relates to others, is rooted in a body, and feels the call of spirit in one form or another. It makes sense that we would best be served by

psychotherapies that are mindful, at least to some degree, of all of these aspects of who we are.

So I was intrigued by Jonathan Shedler's 2010 article in *American Psychologist*®. Shedler identifies as psychoanalytic in origin several **common factors** that the research he cites seems to show underlie good psychotherapy practiced from varying theoretical points of view. Another piece of Shedler's, "That Was Then, This Is Now: An Introduction to Contemporary Psychodynamic Thought" (2006a), likewise shows that he shares my ongoing integrative quest. And indeed, the word "soul" in SoulCollage® refers to one's whole self, including one's embodied, lived experience.

The common factors Shedler (2010) describes are as follows. For each, I give examples of how the SoulCollage® process can help implement these in psychotherapy, including in tandem with other approaches.

### **1. Focus on affect and expression of emotion.**

Laughter, weeping, and heartfelt expressions of esteem and support are common among participants in SoulCollage® workshops and ongoing groups. The power of images to evoke and express emotion is widely known. The word "image" can refer either to a physical likeness or to "a mental representation; idea; conception" (Random House Dictionary), but both are emotionally loaded. The very framing of a question usually shows a person's deepest area of concern at the moment.

In one workshop, participants showed each other cards they had just made. Callie\* held up her card showing a plastic bride and groom atop a wedding cake against a bright red background. "I want to get away from this old idea about how men and women should relate," she said. Divorced, she was exploring various kinds of friendship with men. However, her question for her cards was, "How do I stop my anxiety around eating sugar? I feel so out of control—it goes on for days." To her astonishment, the card she had thought represented a concept of marriage spoke to her, in imagination, as follows: ***"I Am One Who is enslaved to the sugar addiction, and trapped."***

Another of Callie's cards seemed to express her attempts to soothe herself with the idea ***"I Am One Who celebrates my body and accepts my beauty, enjoys my curvy flesh."*** But in giving voice to the card's introduction of itself, Carrie's voice sank on the words "body" and "beauty," sounding dead and resigned. The aspect of herself represented by a third card gave her a pep talk about ways to think herself through her "attachment to how things are supposed to be" and to move beyond sugar to "be in control of your body and achieve great feats." But the image that stood out for her was the red card's cake. "It's hot, the sugar. I'm trying not to live in the polarity of "I can't have any," but it just starts this anxiety! Uchhhhh!" Making a visible image of the loaded substance and voicing the intensity of her emotion seemed to be needed steps towards a workable solution, one that will take the reality of her inner experience into account.

### **2. Exploration of attempts to avoid distressing thoughts and feelings.**

Let's return for a moment to Dave, whose story begins this article. Although overeating was the main focus of his concern, an equally pervasive issue was his unease with a cluster of traits often associated with masculinity: self-assertion, physical drive, aggressive pursuit of goals. His binge-eating was a frequent result of Dave's feeling angry at his wife but fearing her reaction if he were to voice it. He even feared telling her that he preferred a slightly different hotel than she for their upcoming trip. Very rarely did he dare to ask if she might be interested in having sex.

Unwanted, distressing feelings, thoughts, or action tendencies have been referred to by C. G. Jung and others as "the **shadow**." In her latest book (published 2010, Hanford Mead Publishers), *SoulCollage® Evolving: An Intuitive Collage Process for Self-Discovery & Community*, Frost builds upon this concept to identify two ways in which any entity or energy depicted on a SoulCollage® card can become "shadowed" (that is, only dimly seen or known; pushed out of sight): through "an *exaggeration* of its best energy—too much of it—or the *absence* of its best energy—too little of it." Take for example one common pattern, parenting: an idea that one is either smothering or neglectful is distressing to most parents. A shadowed quality is often experienced as alien, as "not me." It is often seen only in projection onto others and suppressed, repressed, hidden, or acknowledged only with shame and discomfort in oneself.

Healing can include becoming aware of the positive elements or manifestations of the energy represented on any one SoulCollage® card. The process of making cards and getting to know their many faces over time, through consulting them and dialoguing with the images, also seems to foster **self-acceptance**.

In SoulCollage®, every entity or energy depicted on a self-made card is seen as a **guide** or **ally** to, or a **challenger** of our conscious stance, of the status quo. Even a clear ally or benevolent guide can challenge our ability to rise to the occasion life presents and to develop. What needs developing may be a more expanded view of a situation, or our contact with innate inner strengths, our patience or equanimity, or the gifts we have to give.

From the pile of recycled magazine images offered at a workshop, Doro quickly picked what she thought was just any old image, in order to participate in the group's introduction to the *I Am One Who* exercise. The picture showed a man in a ski cap glancing furtively over his shoulder while breaking into a car. A law-abiding person, she certainly did not see herself in this figure. But when asked to speak as and for the image, she found herself saying, "***I Am One Who thinks I have to steal what I need.***" Only later did she recognize this shameful, *i.e.*, shadowed, aspect in herself, expressed in her doubts about being truly loved and accepted and her scrounging for crumbs of affection and approval in covert ways.

In therapy, Doro collaged a card on which the thief teetered on the edge of an abyss into which he feared to fall if he did not steal – reflecting her new understanding and compassion for this part of herself and its life history. She glued to the chest area of his jacket a picture of a man lifting a veil, to peer beneath it into the spacious landscape beyond. Gradually she developed more satisfying relationships and activities that led her to feel good about herself, losing interest in her old indirect strategies. Later, Doro came to

appreciate her “shadow’s” resourcefulness in finding something of what she needed even in a difficult childhood.

In practice, much anxiety and depression turn out to be caused by a very common pattern often called “the Inner Critic,” a personality part that strives to avoid even more distressing experiences and feelings such as shame, rejection, ostracism, retaliation, humiliation, grief, powerlessness, and other kinds of pain. The **IFS®** approach recognizes that the Critic, a so-called Protector part, is actually motivated by a loving desire to create happiness. However, it disregards important realities in the here-and-now situation, often causing the very outcomes it is trying to avoid. Its strategies are limited to criticizing (some version of “You’re stupid/ugly/bad”) and invidious comparisons to other people. Over and over, the Critic makes strenuous attempts to motivate the person to “improve” or to refrain from activities it sees as dangerous, so that he or she can have a good life. Unnoticed by the desperate Inner Critic, the unfortunate side effects include anxiety lest one fail to prove the critic wrong—this is chronic or recurring anxiety, because the critic by its nature keeps raising the bar if one does manage to “prove it wrong” about one assertion—and depression if one caves in and believes the critiques.

A client (herself a psychotherapist; no one is immune!) made two SoulCollage® cards. The first depicts a grim-looking woman, the “stern and indifferent” Inner Critic, stalking ahead of a panting and dejected rabbit, which is at the effect of the Critic and which, in her IFS® therapy, the client came to see as an **Exile** (representing an unwanted, painful, vulnerable feeling which she had striven to banish from her life). Another of her cards shows the miserable bunny alone on the barren surface of the moon. Exiled indeed!

A third card, which she made after a year of IFS® therapy, shows the Critic pattern (a stern teacher and an ostrich, both frowning at a guilty-looking Exile schoolboy with a popped chewing-gum bubble stuck to his face) in the background. Between it and a warm group of well-tended bunnies is a helmeted figure sheltering the rabbits next to his heart. This figure represented to the client what was actually happening more and more in her inner life: what IFS® therapists and theorists Jay Earley, PhD and Bonnie Weiss, MFT call the Inner Champion, who does not fight the Inner Critic but simply keeps offering powerful acceptance and support.

In IFS®, the Critic too is questioned with genuine interest about the good it is trying to do for the person and the feared outcomes it is trying to avoid by criticizing. It is sincerely thanked for its good intentions and, if evident, good effects (such as having dissuaded its host from actions that would in fact have been dangerous at the time). Virtually always it then expresses exhaustion in its role and will say, if asked, what role it would now prefer to play in the person’s life. These roles—such as Mentor or Cheerleader—are often exact opposites to the Critic stance the part felt forced to adopt, under pressure, in earlier life circumstances, when the person’s core Self was not yet developed enough to take the lead.

Getting to know and appreciate the Critic in this way tends to work much better than counter-measures that actually only keep the Critic alive, such as fighting or defying the Critic or trying to destroy it. It has the fierce love of a mother for the Exile it is trying to protect. Usually it will not surrender its extreme (and counterproductive) strategy of

criticism as long as it sees that Exile as still being vulnerable to shaming, rejection, or attack and thus needing what it sees as its protection.

Again, the SoulCollage® process consists of collaging cards that turn out to represent these personality parts, then dialoguing with the collaged images. supports all the steps in IFS® therapy. re-connecting with the core Self, which by its nature (*our* basic nature) to connect in a loving, respectful way with all parts and relieve their burdens of shame and fear, thus restoring their natural development and enabling integration and healing. The core Self within every person feels compassion for thoughts or feelings and has no need to avoid them.

### 3. Identification of recurring themes and patterns.

This third factor in good psychotherapy identified by Shedler is the name of the game in SoulCollage®. First of all, each card has a theme which, though often not apparent while it is being made, comes into clear focus as the card introduces itself (voiced from imagination by the person consulting the card), in its answers to one's life questions, or as it turns up again in future consultations. This theme consists of a particular cluster of emotions, intuitions, values, beliefs about the world and one's place in it, physical sensations (relaxation, tension, warmth, unease, and so on), and action tendencies.

Second, the act of making a card, then perhaps naming it, then letting it describe itself through the *I Am One Who* process, and finally by consulting it over time, serves to raise one's awareness of recurring patterns of behavior, thought, fantasy, and feeling in one's life. Simply keeping a card out where one will often see it can yield a rich harvest of insights into one's patterns, helping them develop and shift in positive directions. \*\*\*  
EXAMPLE\*\*\*

Third, the **four suits in the classic SoulCollage® deck** (which can contain any number of cards) each contains a cluster of themes in four different areas of one's life: personality parts (**Committee**), significant individuals, animals, or places forming one's personal network (**Community**), body and instinctual or emotional energies (**Companions**), and those **archetypes (universal patterns in human experience)** of the collective unconscious which turn out to be particularly salient to the card-maker (**Council**). The SoulCollage® process encourages attention to all these areas of one's experience; this tends to strengthen one's access to a broad range of inner resources, which makes for a hardier, more resilient basis for living.

Archetypes range from those related to the body, social roles, and human capacities (Man, Woman, (Grand)Mother, (Grand)Father, Son, Daughter; Hero/Heroine, Temptress, Seducer, Beggar, Artist, Trickster, Clown, Teacher, Healer, Musician, Singer, Dancer, Poet, Actor, Thinker, Medicine Man/Woman, Dreamer, Medium, Shaman, Oracle, Warrior, Protector), to creatures of myth and legend from all centuries and regions of the world (nymphs, faeries, pixies, trolls, monsters, goblins, vampires, dakinis; spirits of place like Pan, the West Wind, sirens, Rhine-maidens, ghosts haunting particular houses; unicorns, giants, dwarves, centaurs), to the Divine in all its manifold different forms and attributes from spiritual and religious traditions throughout history.

These archetypes appear in dreams, fantasies, and works of art of all kinds, and in the outer world in other people, or societal movements, or acts of nature that grip us powerfully, transforming us in positive or negative ways. They also express in recognizable behavioral tendencies that can easily pattern an entire human life. As such, the archetypes present us as psychotherapists with many opportunities to help them express in positive form.

Dave, the overweight man, pulled at random the Volcano card (mentioned above) upside down, saying, "Ooh! Wow!" In his rendition, it said, "*I Am One Who* is full of energy." Dave said, "I can't see if it's being used in a positive or negative way—it's just overwhelming." Turning it right side up: "It's more fearsome, now that I see the ground is down here. Exploding. This is my father." He experienced his father's rages as overwhelming and profoundly intimidating, although there were also good times in their relationship. Here we see how an archetype—we might call this one something like Power of Nature—can be experienced through a person whom we know, *i.e.*, who is influential in our Community.

Turning the card upside down again, Dave said, "This way is awe-inspiring and fascinating—it's not good or bad, it's just there. Attractive and scary at the same time." It was the fascinating and awe-inspiring face of the card that encouraged him, "**Feel the energy in yourself and make use of it in a productive way.**"

It is tempting to speculate that Dave had been trying not only to quiet his fear by overeating, but also to stuff down the rage he feared might destroy his father or their relationship. Certainly he realized that he often relapsed into overeating when angry at his wife and not feeling free to say so and to state clearly what he needed and wanted. Having learned over the months of therapy that his wife—by contrast with his father—actually welcomed his asserting himself by saying how he felt about things, he went on after consulting the SoulCollage® cards to talk about pursuing current interests of his own (*i.e.*, using more of his own power?) instead of almost always doing things that would keep him physically with her in the same room.

Here, the positive side of the Volcano archetype seems to have encouraged Dave to develop a healthy autonomy vis-à-vis his wife. Such differentiation (as opposed to enmeshment) often deepens and expands a couple's bond.

The procedure of SoulCollage® consultations in which unseen cards are drawn at random is based on the principle of **synchronicity** as seen by C. G. Jung, who called it "an acausal connecting principle" and saw it as one indicator of the interconnectedness, within what he called the collective unconscious, of apparently unrelated phenomena. Two relatively rare events, neither of which has caused the other (for instance, the asking of a question and the blind choice of a particular SoulCollage® card from among many), occur simultaneously in a manner that has meaning for the observer. One might say the universe is seen as being **patterned in part by meaning**, not solely by factors noted in either theoretical or applied physics. On a practical level, when individuals ask life questions, completely unexpected but remarkably apt SoulCollage® cards regularly appear and offer guidance, as in Dave's case.



Jung saw what he called the **collective unconscious** as the matrix of the unconscious mind of individuals, as well as a brewing ground for future national and world events, which it foreshadows. Such large-scale events reflect archetypal processes. In Jung's own day, for instance, he observed motifs in the dreams of individuals that seemed to forecast the advent of World War II years before there was conscious awareness of such a possibility. Many such events are more positive, for instance some possible outcomes of the current **global paradigm shift** affecting societal norms, institutions, and ways of relating to the natural world in every country—agricultural, financial, governmental, political, social, technical, commercial, faith-based, scientific, educational, medical, and environmental. All such events of course profoundly affect our own lives and those of our clients.

Seena Frost and others have come to see SoulCollage® as one of many spontaneous grassroots social movements that she now believes have potential to contribute in a positive way to the paradigm shift. A beautiful hour-long video for the public is available on the home page of [www.soulcollage.com](http://www.soulcollage.com). It is both a wonderful introduction to SoulCollage® and a recording of a community SoulCollage® consultation on how best to contribute to the paradigm shift, done at the 2011 International Conference of SoulCollage® Facilitators and Trainers.

While political events around the world in recent years show intensification of “old-paradigm” repression and autocratic rule, we also see tremendous uprisings upholding democracy; skilled and knowledgeable diplomacy instead of war; the irreplaceable value of the feminine, of the spiritual, and of all species, races, ages, and social classes; an immediate and complete transition to renewable energy sources to avoid the most complete devastation of life on earth; cooperation with nature instead of exploitative power-over and control (organic farming, animal rights, plant-based diets); and international and interracial cooperation.

The SoulCollage® vision of wholeness includes the concept of **the One and the Many** at several levels. Many energies or personality parts make up one person, many individuals make a community, and there are countless archetypes within the scarcely imaginable, boundless One of the collective unconscious. Each of these particulars, says Frost, “need to be recognized as manifestations of the One, of Source,” which is seen as being beyond form, the matrix of All That Is, and often as divine. Seena started the tradition (still practiced by SoulCollage® Trainers) of sewing an image of **Indra's Net** on which newly-trained Facilitators glue a jewel, and writes, “From this place we know each person is an integral thread in the Larger Story.”

Similarly, **IFS®** works to help the many personality parts within one core Self cooperate in harmony under its leadership. **Coherence Therapy** posits that, even given the “bizarre and truly strange” permutations of completely contradictory yet simultaneously-held mental “constructions of meaning for any one item of experience” (*Depth-Oriented Brief Therapy*, p. 94), every unwanted behavior or feeling precisely expresses a coherent set of beliefs, memories, and emotional truth. In other words, all personality parts coherently express the whole, and the whole enterprise of coherence therapy aims to discover exactly how this is true in any given person.

#### **4. Discussion of past experience (developmental focus).**

Many people use SoulCollage® to help them work through painful past experiences which have impacted their development. Dave, the client whose story began this article, used SoulCollage® and psychotherapy to resolve a problem handed down by his father (whose own father had not been able to be emotionally present with him): how one can develop beyond narcissistic wounding.

Often the process of making the cards itself aids working-through. “Accidents” during the process and difficulties with the materials being used often turn out to reveal significant truths about the SoulCollager’s process.

Arthur was on a spiritual path and tended to focus on non-ordinary “spiritual” states of consciousness, while his physical health and financial situation were gravely compromised. After the difficult death of a charismatic family member who had also suffered from the family’s intergenerational legacy of conflict, he made a series of three cards (over several months) on the theme of a deep split he felt between the distant realms of lush, glorious fullness of life—where he believed his deceased relative to be—and the barren desert of despair in which he found himself most of the time.

Each card showed a barren landscape and a lush one, separated from each other by an expanse of outer space flecked with distant stars. Carefully Arthur cut narrow strips of color and glued them on either side of the space area, to demarcate it from both types of landscape. He was not used to making things with his hands and was bothered that the space area and the strips of color on the last card came out thinner than those on the prior cards.

On exploration, though, we found that the stark divisions in his inner world were thinning out as well. He went through two more heavy bouts of grieving, then began to take better care of himself physically, and his health improved. He found a job, then a better job where he was promoted. A year later, calm and happy, he said the sense of desolation was gone.

## **5. Focus on interpersonal relations.**

The whole idea of SoulCollage® is to come to know oneself better, which often improves interpersonal relationships. The four suits in a SoulCollage® deck each represent different kinds of relationship: within oneself (the Committee Suit of inner personality parts); with one’s network of significant individuals (the Community Suit); with one’s own instinctual energies (these present themselves, via a guided meditation developed by Seena Frost, as animal companions in the Companions Suit); and with beings greater than oneself who represent universal patterns in human experience, which Jung called archetypes (the Council Suit).

Many questions people ask during SoulCollage® readings are about relationships. In a psychotherapy context, just the one SoulCollage® step of framing a question can yield useful information about a client’s interpersonal surround.

The full particulars of the following case (not given here for reasons of space and confidentiality) also go partway towards showing how, in the hands of a psychotherapist, SoulCollage® offers opportunities to act on Ecker & Hulley's "conviction that **the unconscious constructs generating the client's problem are immediately accessible and changeable from the start of therapy.**" [emphasis mine] Early change also seems to require that certain other of Shedler's common factors be operating, such as a **working therapeutic alliance** (p. 104), which was barely present in this case.

A 19-year-old girl was referred for outpatient treatment as being in danger of relapse into an addiction to pills and heroin after two prior stays in rehab. In the first session, Eve chatted on about her life (school, boys, babysitting), her strategies for avoiding using drugs (watching TV, eating protein), and the greater ease of staying at her father's than at her mother's (where she lived after their divorce) because he trusted her to make her own decisions. When she said, "I'm just rattling on here," the therapist presented some SoulCollage® cards and asked, "What would you ask a really wise person about something that's important to you?" Eve's question: "Why am I so dependent on my parents?" Indeed she was strikingly so for her age, under a faux-mature persona.

To make a long story short, this question alone pointed to the relationship with her parents as a major trigger for Eve's drug use. Eve came to the third therapy session so wasted on drugs that she was barely coherent and kept nodding out. All she would say, when asked, was that she had become enraged at her mother for wanting to send her to her father's again.

Close questioning of Eve's mother revealed her concern over her ex-husband's history of incest-like behavior with Eve and his heavy drinking. However, mother was not able (in her own work with another psychotherapist) to find other ways to arrange time for herself than sending Eve to her father's; father had refused every prior offer of therapy; and Eve was not able even to come to therapy sessions sober. Since funds were available for a long-term stay at a rehabilitation facility with excellent individual and group psychotherapy (geographically far from both parents), that option was chosen as most likely to help Eve get clean and sober and emancipate from family patterns that were harming her.

## **6. Focus on the therapy relationship.**

Like other approaches which help us attune to clients and help them feel seen and understood here and now, SoulCollage® assists this first by revealing things about the client – and the therapist – which either of them might not fully know about the self, but which carry a felt sense of truth when they arise. The more self-aware we are as psychotherapists, the more accurately we can perceive what's going on with a client.

An example: I was anticipating with dread an upcoming session with a client who sometimes became enraged at me when I failed simply to witness his experience of the moment. Quickly, hoping for help, I drew at random a SoulCollage® card from my deck. It turned out to represent what for me was a goddess image: a beautiful pink-veiled woman in a garden full of violet-colored lilacs. I had collaged together a number of flower images, some close-ups, some photographed from farther away; their different scales created a

dream-like feeling. Gazing at the card, I felt the soothing warmth of summer, and the scent of fresh grass and flowers filled my nostrils. My whole body relaxed, and I went to my office in that calm, happy state. Probably I was more receptive to my client than when my busybody Helper part (that so enraged him) was in charge. At any rate, he too was happy and expressed gratitude at being fully seen.

Like IFS® and the Coherence Therapy of Ecker & Hulley, SoulCollage® at its core wholeheartedly accepts the fundamental goodness of every psychic content, even if the form in which it's currently expressing is unwanted or distorted and is better not acted out as is. This therapist orientation is beneficial for clients, besides having the virtue of apparent truth. Experienced IFS® therapists report finding – within child sexual abuse perpetrators, suicidal clients, and incarcerated murderers diagnosed as sociopathic – a calm, kind, genuinely empathic core Self, capable of remorse and having the courage to make amends, able to help the person heal from trauma and live with more confidence and joy.

Third, as a tool for self-exploration, SoulCollage® can keep the therapist aware of her own undercurrents in the exchange with clients, which if worked with cannot help but improve things in the room. I for one find that all these factors profoundly facilitate the psychotherapy relationship.

## **7. Exploration of fantasy life.**

By now it may be apparent that SoulCollage® offers the benefits both of art therapy and of seamless compatibility with talk-therapy methods in exploring both the client's fantasy life and one's own. As just one example, Doro (whose furtive, thieving personality-part "believes I have to steal what I need") was also a psychotherapist who explored in her own psychotherapy some of her fantasies related to this thief pattern. She found, to her dismay, that her clients were for her an important way to feel good about herself (in psychoanalytic terms, a source of narcissistic supply). Frequent dialogues with potent and benevolent SoulCollage® Council Suit archetypes helped her discover her own abundant inner reserves of nourishment, self-esteem, and well-being. Over time, this secure inner grounding enabled her – as it does many of us – to work productively with clients whose issues had previously been beyond her reach.

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As of November 2015, *Internal Family Systems (IFS®) Therapy is now posted on NREPP as an evidence-based practice*. The **National Registry for Evidence-Based Programs and Practices** is a national repository that is maintained by the **U.S. government's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**. Interventions listed in NREPP, now including IFS®, have been subject to independent, rigorous scrutiny and are deemed to show significant impact on individual outcomes relating to mental health.