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**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF  
ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)**

Article DOI: 10.21474/IJAR01/ 23407  
DOI URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/23407>



**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**SOUL COLLAGE® WITH SOCIAL WORKERS: A VISUAL ESSAY ON SELF-CARE & COLLECTIVE CARE**

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**Manuscript Info**

**Manuscript History**

Received: 4 March 2026  
Final Accepted: 8 April 2026  
Published: May 2026

**Abstract**

Social workers are at risk for compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, vicarious traumatization, and professional burnout (Newell & MacNeil, 2010; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). Although self-care is widely regarded as essential for practitioner wellbeing, its implementation is often challenging due to overwhelming needs and limited resources (Neenan & Whelan, 2025). Collective care, an orientation that emphasizes concern for others' wellbeing and promotes collaborative responsibility for both individual and societal health, is essential in organizational culture to meet the same goals (Mehreen and Gray, 2018). In order to support both the self-care and collective care of social work students and professionals, an in-person continuing education workshop featuring the Soul Collage® process was completed and facilitated by a trained Soul Collage® facilitator, the author. Soul Collage® was developed by Seena Frost (2010) as an intuitive process to foster inner knowing. Inspired by Oliveira (2025), a visual essay of five created Soul Collage® cards is presented. The paper aims to explore whether and how the Soul Collage® process, when conducted in a group workshop setting, supports self-care and collective care among social work students and professionals. The research question of this paper is: How do social work students and professionals describe their experience of the Soul Collage® process?

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**Introduction: -**

Social work professionals practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities at the micro, mezzo, and macro level. Despite the rewards that the profession can yield; i.e. compassion satisfaction (Conrad & Kellar-Guenther, 2006); social workers are at risk for compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, vicarious traumatization, and professional burnout (Newell & MacNeil, 2010; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011).

**Literature Review: -**

The National Association of Social Workers and the Council of Social Work Education have thus encouraged social work professionals and students to practice self-care as a tool to prevent such risk factors. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) (2008) issued a policy statement defining self-care as "a core essential component to social work practice and reflects a choice and commitment to become actively involved in maintaining one's effectiveness as a social worker" (p. 269). Although self-care is widely regarded as essential for practitioner

wellbeing, its implementation is often challenging due to overwhelming needs and limited resources (Neenan & Whelan, 2025). Lee and Miller (2013) propose that the social work profession needs to center self-care to both empower and maintain the well-being of professionals. At the same time, the implementation of self-care is often challenging due to overwhelming needs and limited resources (Neenan & Whelan, 2025). Collective care is essential in organizational culture to meet the same goals. Mehreen and Gray (2018) defined collective care as an orientation that emphasizes concern for others' wellbeing and promotes collaborative responsibility for both individual and societal health. They further argued that collective care must address intersectional oppressions and systemic barriers by fostering mutual responsibility and empowerment among all individuals.

In order to support both the self-care and collective care of social work students and professionals, an in-person continuing education workshop featuring the SoulCollage® process was completed and facilitated by a trained SoulCollage® facilitator, the author. The facilitator/ author completed 35-hours of SoulCollage® facilitator training synchronously online through The World of SoulCollage® (<https://soulcollage.com/get-started/soulcollage-faq/>). The SoulCollage® facilitator training prepares and supports SoulCollage® facilitators to share the method of SoulCollage® with others. There are no education or degree requirements to become a SoulCollage® facilitator. Facilitators in training need to complete various SoulCollage® related pre-requisites to prepare for the training. Trainings are held throughout the world by officially designated SoulCollage® Trainers.

During the workshop, the facilitator/author followed the prescribed SoulCollage® workshop protocol as outlined by Seena Frost (2010). SoulCollage® was developed by Seena Frost (2010) as an intuitive process to foster inner knowing. "The SoulCollage® process of selecting images and making personal cards [serves] as a daily reminder to handcraft your own life, to choose pieces that fit together meaningfully and with joy-both for you and for the planet" (Frost, 2010, p. 1-5). Inspired by Oliveira (2025), a visual essay of five created SoulCollage® cards is presented. The paper aims to explore whether and how the SoulCollage® process, when conducted in a group workshop setting, supports self-care and collective care among social work students and professionals. The research question of this paper is: How do social work students and professionals describe their experience of the SoulCollage® process?

### **Workshop Design and Methods: -**

The workshop took place in March 2026. The workshop took place for 2-hours (6:00pm – 8:00pm EST) on a weekday. The location was a large meeting room on a university campus. March is also Social Work Month in the United States and the theme was "Social Workers: Uplift. Defend. Transform" (socialworkers.org). The workshop participants included one Bachelors of Social Work (BSW) student, three Masters of Social Work (MSW) students, seven MSW degree-holding professionals. Out of the seven MSW degree-holding professionals, four hold doctoral degrees and one is a doctoral student. Three individuals present at the workshop had created SoulCollage® cards previously. Individuals could obtain continuing education credit for attending this workshop.

The facilitator is both an MSW degree-holding professional and a doctoral degree holder. The dual role of the author and facilitator introduces potential bias into this paper (Landau, 2008; Snowden et al., 2023). Due to the novelty of SoulCollage® facilitators who are also social workers and academics, the facilitator's style and use of self potentially influenced participant responses and observed outcomes (Landau, 2008; Snowden et al., 2023). While the facilitator/ author engaged in ongoing reflexivity to moderate this and mentorship from academic colleagues in this process, future projects could include independent facilitators or other scholars to gather feedback to reduce this potential bias. The workshop began with introductions and an overview of the program. Then, the facilitator reviewed the Shared Agreements, in order to create a collective space for participants. Next, a brief presentation was given covering the basics of SoulCollage®, the card making process, and the "I Am One Who" exercise. Participants were given space to ask questions or provide comments about the process. Next, participants were given time to make SoulCollage® cards. Supplies were available on site for participants.

When all participants had completed at least one SoulCollage® card, they were given the option to either journal individually about their card or work with a partner using the "I Am One Who" exercise. Among those who partnered up, current students paired up with each other or alumni while current faculty and staff paired up with each other. The "I Am One Who" exercise allows the participant to look at their created card and speak as the image in the card. "First gaze deeply at your image. Is it a person? A child? Is it an animal? Perhaps a cat? Is it a non-being? Perhaps a tree? Step into the image and feel its energy, its mood, its intention. Imagine it has a history, and that it has a voice. Begin to speak, or write if you are journaling, sing the words, I Am One Who... and go on

from there, describing yourself as if you were the image, where you are, what you are doing, giving little personal descriptions:” (Frost, 2010, p. 99)

After this process, participants were given the opportunity to share takeaways in the large group. The workshop ended with final questions and a wrap-up on how to continue practicing SoulCollage®. Additionally, an anonymous electronic feedback form was given to participants to complete. Completing the electronic feedback form was required to request a continuing education credit certificate. Participants gave written consent for their SoulCollage® cards and “I Am One Who” messages to be shared by the facilitator/ author in this paper at least a month after the workshop took place. Using participant feedback and materials consensually shared by participants, the facilitator/ author engaged in a reflexive thematic analysis to showcase that practicing the SoulCollage® process in community allows social workers to engage in both self-care and collective care. A reflexive thematic analysis was utilized because this qualitative analysis technique considers self-perceptions and stereotypes in relation to the research question presented (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2022). This project was not approved by an Institutional Review Board or Ethics Committee. What follows are some of the creations and insights from this process. Some of the participants named their card, as noted (Creation #. NAME).

**Soul Collage® Cards and “I Am One Who” Messages: -  
Creation 1.**



**I am one who brings lightness & freshness during the chaotic waves of life.  
Creation 2. Let Be**



**I Am One Who...**

- Loves joy
- Goes after what I want
- Shows out no matter what
- With a loud laugh
- Kissed by the sun

**What I want from you is...What I want you to know, to do, or to remember...What I want from you is...**

- Your trust
- Remember your ability

**My gift to you is...What I give you is...**

- Pleasure
- Patience and understanding
- The ability to tolerate with ease
- Peace

**You will remember when...**

- The breath is light
- The bass is loud

- The tears flow

**Is there anything else you have to say today?**

- Don't hold on, let it flow
- Don't hold on, let it flow

**Do you have a name?**

- Let Be

**Creation 3.**



**I Am One Who:**

Protects and shields

What I want from you is to reflect what we need and want to be the reality of this world and society

What I give to you is my caring and concern and effort

You will remember when we were all together fighting the fight against oppression and injustice, you will remember all those who came before and those who will continue on...

**Creation**

**4. The Sunflower Path**



I am one who is strong and steady on my path. I am one who thru the rains, or storms, or anything that comes my way, I am prepared And though I am one who will bend, I will not break What I want you to remember is that despite all of the storms and rough weather or difficult paths I may encounter, that there is beauty all around me. There is life and colors and love. My gift to you is peace, peace within uncertainties, peace within your own struggles, forgiveness, and grace. I will remember when I take the time to stop and focus not just on bad things or the difficult things. I will stop and look at the beauty around me, my friends, my family, my dad, and the memory of my mom. You are strong. You are full of life. You are cute. You have the tools you need.

**Creation 5. The Tiger / Patience**



**I am one who... rests, refrains, releases**

- Rests: Tigers enjoy plopping. Trust me, you will too.
- Refrains: Preserve your energy. You don't always have to rush in and act. Allow others to grow by letting them take the lead.
- Releases: You are not responsible for all things, just some things.

What I want from you is...a moment. We tigers live solitary lives...and we value it. Your world is full of people and demands and noise. Take a quiet moment alone. What I want you to know...is life isn't just hunting and work. You don't have to be all things to all people...and felines. What I want you to do...is full of adventure. Despite what others would have you think, rules aren't absolute. Sometimes, things are wild. Devour convention when it doesn't suit you...and to hell with what those who see themselves above you think. What I want you to remember...is that you are strong. We were all cubs once...and dependent on others. But we are no longer cubs. And we don't always need to shy away from conflict. Remember that you have a loud chuff, sharp razor claws, long teeth, and a sexy coat. My gift to you is...play. Being a big cat doesn't mean we never romp! And don't fear your addiction. You have learned how to play in sobriety that makes drunken play so unattractive that you don't give it a second thought. What I give to you is...time. A sober life is a long life. Moments turn into spells. Spells become seasons. Seasons grow into lifetimes. Lifetimes evolve into legacies. You will remember when...you changed your life. You've been through it. We both know it. Your trauma is a part of you but doesn't shackle you. Like a tiger gliding through the water, let your emotions flow through you...and move on. Your history teaches you wisdom. Remember it. Is there anything else you have to say today? Chuff.

**Workshop Feedback: -**

As previously stated, an anonymous electronic feedback form was given to all participants to complete. Completing the electronic feedback form was required to request a continuing education credit certificate. Five out of the eleven participants completed the feedback form (a response rate of 45.6%). Participants were asked to evaluate three objectives of the workshop using a 10-point Likert-scale to rate the degree to which they believe each learning objective was achieved, using a scale of 1 (lowest score) to 10 (highest score). What follows is the outlining of each objective, the average rating score, and participant feedback about each objective.

**Objective One: Facilitate self-discovery by creating intuitive collaged cards that represent different aspects of the self and the world**

The average rating score was 10. Participants provided the feedback, “The action-portion of the card-making was wonderful that led to new insights!” and “I had a great time making my SoulCollage®. The experience was a much more in-depth experience than I was expecting.”

**Objective Two: Encourage personal growth through journaling and dialogue with these cards to deepen self-awareness and understanding of one's inner landscape**

The average rating score was 9.8. Participants provided the feedback, “Sharing with my partner about my card was compelling” and “I discovered that my card displayed a different visual than I originally intended. This surprised me in a good way because it made me think deeper about the process.”

**Objective Three: Providing a healing and life-enhancing experience through a creative and therapeutic art-making process**

The average rating score was 10. Participants provided the feedback, “YAY art!” and “There were so many interactive art aspects that it allowed the user to be very creative and limitless with the materials provided.”

**Additional Feedback**

Participants were asked to “Please rate how well the program met your expectations” and “Please provide an overall rating for the CEU event.” The average rating score for both questions was 10. One participant provided the feedback, “This program widely exceeded my expectations. It was a much more layered activity than I originally thought it would be. I also really appreciated the free refreshments that were offered. the quality of every part of this experience was amazing.” Another participant shared, “Including the people, activities, food, and overall atmosphere I loved the meaning and process of this event.”

Also, one participant provided written feedback about their process to the facilitator/ author after the event. The participant who created Tiger/ Patience wrote the following, “This image is powerful. It depicts a tiger, sitting, relatively at ease, but alert among greenery outside with a background of what appears to be cloudy skies. The first time I looked at it after it was done being constructed, I reflected that a tiger has always been a critically important part of my life. Thinking about it, a tiger is both an incredibly powerful creature, capable of great violence as well as embodying, tremendous strength. Armed with not just jagged teeth and sharp claws, it's muscular frame also houses a quiet strength that communicates much with just a look or a chuff. But this tiger to me was a reminder that I don't always have to be the dominant force in the brush. I can let it be. I can simply observe. I can listen and take in through my whiskers and my eyes into my ears. I could always spring or hunt or pounce, or I could just nap. This tiger reflects balance for me. This is something that has been elusive for me much of my life until the last seven years or so. If you'll notice looking at the picture, what would seemingly appear to be gray skies, is a beautiful rainbow, not hidden, just needing to be observed and noticed- appreciated for what it is, a promise, and a release of beauty after a storm reflected by light.”

**Limitations: -**

The project had several limitations, despite the value of the findings produced. As previously stated, the dual role of the author and facilitator introduced potential bias into this paper (Landau, 2008; Snowden et al., 2023). Due to the novelty of SoulCollage® facilitators who are also social workers and academics, the facilitator's style and use of self potentially influenced participant responses and observed outcomes (Landau, 2008; Snowden et al., 2023). Additionally, the facilitator/ author used a convenience sample of 11 participants who were willing to participate in the SoulCollage® workshop for no reimbursement. Also, we cannot exclude the possibility that the voluntary participants who chose to attend and share may have been inclined toward creative and/or reflective practices. Therefore, the credibility of the findings might be affected by the limited heterogeneity of the sample. This data is not representative of all social work students and professionals. The workshop only occurred once and in one location. No longitudinal analysis was completed. Also, the workshop took place within the United States. The findings may not be transferable to social work students and professionals who are residing outside of the United States. The facilitator/author did not find or locate a specific study to compare his findings to and no control or comparison groups were utilized. However, despite this, the shared experiences of the social work students and professionals who practiced SoulCollage® for self-care and collective care in this paper may be relatable to other social work students and professionals around the globe. Finally, the uniqueness of this project also showcases the need for future evaluation and research on the topic.

**Conclusion: -**

This paper explored whether and how the SoulCollage® process, when conducted in a group workshop setting, supports self-care and collective care among social work students and professionals. The facilitator/ author concludes that the SoulCollage® process meets this benchmark as evidenced by the feedback provided by social work students and professionals regarding their experiences in the workshop. Cozolino (2013) describes social work practice as both an art and a science. This dual reality of social work practice extends to the human experience of social work students and professionals as well. They need sustainable practices that support both their personal and professional development and growth. SoulCollage® allows for both a scientific and artistic exploration. In the examples above, participants were able to share aspirations and possibilities of how they would like things to be and/or magnify that which they do not always recognize. Tapping into these insights can be viewed as an act of self-care that centers self-exploration.

One participant shared in the evaluation, “I enjoyed the message of what SoulCollage® means and that anyone can use it as a self-discovery tool in many different ways.” This feedback reflects the value of the process for inner knowing and reflection. At the same time, this process was conducted in a collective (i.e. collective care) and allows for participants to support each other as well. For example, one participant shared in the evaluation, “Sharing with my partner about my card was compelling.” This reflects that engaging in this process with others is a pathway for support and connection. When personal challenges are shared in a community, the challenge may then become the concern of all present and lead to support being offered. Collective support in an organization can aid in the sustainability and longevity for its members over time (Chamberlain, 2020). However, this practice is not just a strategy to get more labor output from a person. Rather, it responds to the inherent dignity and worth of all persons, which is a core value in the NASW Code of Ethics. In conclusion, Seena Frost (2010) said it best when she described SoulCollage® as “working toward the balance of left- and right-brain hemispheres, and the balance of masculine and feminine energies. We are working to end the dualisms that separate people into good and evil camps by teaching that all beings are unique and at that the same time holy, each being blessed with a spark of Source” (p. 181 - 182).

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