

**AN EXPRESSIVE ARTS WORKSHOP ON HOPE FOR SINGLE MOTHERS**

**MELISHA FAITH LASSEY**

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**MELISHA FAITH LASSEY**

Approved:

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Supervisor: Jim Henry, Ph.D. Date

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Committee Member: Thelma Gunn, Ph.D. Date

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Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies and Research in Education: Date  
Kerry Bernes, Ph.D.

## **Dedication**

No four people in this world are more deserving of this dedication than my children—Alexandra, Nolan, Nathan, and Aaron. I often wish I could turn back time and regain the many hours spent away from you during pursuit of my postsecondary education. I am proud of you all and am so thankful for our little family. I also dedicate this to my mother, Marilyn Halton, for equipping me with the tools of resiliency to multitask my life during this journey. Finally, I dedicate this to my father, Allan Halton, for his unwavering support, patience, and prayer through every stage of this journey.

## **Abstract**

This project aims to offer a synthesis of literature combined with my own experiences as a single mother and personal research of hope, expressive arts, and single mothers into an informal workshop. As a single mother, my experiences give me a direct understanding of the many hardships that single mothers go through. Throughout my journey, I began to wonder what hope really is and what impact it has on single mothers. Can hope be learned in a collective environment and can the process of the expressive arts help to facilitate this learning? My informal workshop, presented in these pages, is a direct result of my lived experiences and a detailed literature review of the nature on hope, single mothers, and the expressive arts. The workshop combines metaphorical self-portraits with aspects from the postsecondary education and professional development opportunities I have engaged in. More significantly, my experiences inspired me to search for something that would help me through the challenges of single parenting. It is this search, this journey, which I share in this project. This project, in its essence, is my journey of hope.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction to the Project**

Hope is a four-letter word, four seemingly insignificant letters—HOPE. Take a moment and imagine this word as a stone. It can be round, flat, jagged, or smooth. I imagine tossing this stone into a lake and watching ripples appear. These ripples signify inspiration, motivation, strength, and determination. In precisely this way, hope has the ability to create and change the environment in which it is thrown. It has the power to create a ripple effect that spreads and interacts, expanding and perpetuating like ripples in a lake.

Hope can be activated by a simple gesture, a smile or a word of encouragement from a friend. It can be drawn out of us by interactions in the community and through vicariously experiencing the ripples of hope from others. Hope has the potential to impact those it connects with, whether by direct action or subsequent ripple effects, but there are many questions that need to be asked.

Can hope be learned? Can those who experience despair, loneliness, and exhaustion truly be changed by hope and persevere through life's challenges? Can single mothers let themselves hope in the face of despair and discover a hopeful self? Personal experience and postsecondary has helped answer these questions for me. Based on those answers, I developed a practice-oriented approach by way of an applied workshop, in order to assist others to come to their own understandings. This project is not meant to alienate single fathers, but I am only focusing on single mothers because of my personal experience in this area.

I am no different than any other single mother, except I threw my stone and experienced the ripples of hope. I overcame adversity and changed my reality. My

experiences, however, cannot be represented in formal terms. In the process of creating this material, as a result of the nature of this project, I have chosen to present it in a personalized way by weaving some of my experiences into it.

This project seeks to assist workshop participants to connect with each other and mutually discover and understand feelings of hope and hopelessness by exploring aspects of the self that either inhibits or enhances a personal connection of hope. Participants will be invited to explore feelings and emotions and fuel their energy in order to gain insight of their own unique conditions of self in order to identify, personalize, integrate, and maintain hope in their own lives. By utilizing metaphorical self-portraits as part of the workshop, I seek to offer single-mother participants an opportunity to symbolize, articulate, and represent themselves in a nonjudgmental environment so they can actually discover and identify how hope is integral to overcoming the barriers that hinder and restrain them, and keep them in a cycle of defeat and despair.

### **General Statement of Problem**

Stress and adversity happen to all of us to varying degrees, but there are some of us who find ourselves in a chronic cycle of defeat and despair and battle with the obstacles of the world. Low-income single mothers, for example, experience more psychological and psychiatric distress than married mothers (Cairney, Boyle, Offord, & Racine, 2003; Jayakody & Stauffer, 2000). As a result of financial deficiency, decreased levels of self-esteem, and limited social resources, single mothers are at higher risk of clinical depression (Peden, Rayens, Hall, & Grant, 2004). Furthermore, mental health concerns in single mothers are seen to generate deficits in financial self-reliance (Jayakody & Stauffer, 2000). Symptoms of mental health problems create interference in

parental ability and impair the ability of mothers to access social resources (Peden et al., 2004). Specifically, single mothers perceive that they have limited social supports, and self-report an increased number of life events (Cairney et al., 2003).

In their study, Peden et al. (2004) described depressive symptoms in low-income single mothers “feelings of hopelessness, low energy, and a negative perception of one’s surroundings” (p. 343). Such feelings limit one’s capacity to feel more hopeful when hopeful thinking is imperative to the task of enhancing strengths and decreasing problems (Snyder, Feldman, Taylor, Schroeder, & Adams, 2000). When I recall my experiences as a single mother, I remember those very feelings and that lack of energy and believed that I did not have the supports necessary to succeed as a single mother. I felt depressed and hopeless because of my financial limitations. Often, I could not see outside this state and believed that hoping for better days was only wishful thinking. Yet somehow hoping actively took root and became a less passive aspect of my life and I began to feel less fear and anxiety. Specifically, I wanted hope to be a dominant factor in my life. As such, it is my belief that if it is to become dominant in the lives of others, the experience of hope must be explored, heard, and shared.

### **Significance of the Project**

There are few studies aimed at discovering the essence of the experience of hope from the perspective of low-income single mothers. Most research has focused on the negative factors correlated with single mothers and how parenting is impacted by increased perceptions of lower social support, and increased rates of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse (Cairney et al., 2003; Lipman, MacMillan, & Boyle, 2001).

The construct of resiliency is emphasized in the literature as the ability to positively respond to challenges and successfully emerge strengthened, confident, and empowered, able to utilize available resources effectively (Simon, Murphy, & Smith, 2005). Since resiliency can be understood as a multifaceted umbrella term including many subcategories for overcoming adversity, this project will focus on the construct of hope as a type of resiliency. This is consistent with research linking hope to increased levels of psychological well-being and predictions of increased levels of life satisfaction (Baily, Eng, Frisch, & Snyder, 2007; Wong & Lim, 2009).

Across all literature, there are many interpretations of hope. What is common to all interpretations is that the experience of hope is significantly related to life situations, quality of life, coping skills, the presence of social supports, and the experience of psychological distress (Benzein, Norberg, & Saveman, 2001; Glass, Flory, Hankin, Kloos, & Turecki, 2009; Yadav, 2010). Achieving or regaining hope has been found to be critical in the development of identity and self-esteem (Singletary, Goodwyn, & Carter, 2009). Hope is thematic in concern for one's future, capacity for relationships with others, and in how the individual perceives and specifies their own degree of hope (Herrestad & Biong, 2010).

In the literature, hope has been defined as "an inner power that facilitates the transcendence of the present situation and movement toward new awareness and enrichment of being" (Benzein et al., 2001, p. 117). Benzein et al. (2001) determined hope to be a dominant element of the lived experiences of those battling cancer. They found that the essence of hope was linked to a strong desire for longer life and for the significance of personal relationships. Furthermore, analyzing the lived experiences of

hope revealed multiple themes, including the presence of goal orientation as a nurturing element of hope.

Thomas Aquinas (as cited in Day, 1991) agreed with this and wrote, “Hope is a movement of appetite aroused by the perception of what is agreeable, future, arduous, and possible of attainment” (p. 23). That is, hope is nurtured when looking forward and when making possible attainable goals.

Snyder, Irving, and Anderson (1991) defined hope to be “a positive motivational state that is based on an inter- actively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy), and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)” (p. 287). In a study on the experiences of hope where patients were hospitalized for intentional self-harm, researchers expanded upon Snyder’s definition of hope beyond that of agency and planning, to include hope in events or people without the participation of the individual (Herrestad & Biong, 2010). Although Snyder would categorize such expression as wishful thinking, Herrestad and Biong (2010) found this to be more than just wishful thinking because of the possibility for such “a future state of affairs to be realized” (p. 7). These authors used the following example to explain this:

I can hope that the sun will be shining tomorrow, even though I am unable to influence the weather. I would regard my hope for sunshine as mere wishful thinking only if I actually thought there was no possibility that the sun will shine tomorrow. (Herrestad & Biong, 2010, p. 7)

Similarly, Miceli and Castelfranchi (2010) interpreted hope as a positive expectation with the belief that such expectation will come into fruition. Miceli and Castelfranchi elaborated on this definition in that the belief of possible outcome of the

expectation is needed with the goal. They stated that agency or the ability to bring about the expectation is not a crucial element of hope. In fact, they stated it is quite different; it is having faith that a possible event may come about.

Abramson, Metalsky, and Alloy (1989) have proposed that if hopelessness leads to deficits in coping mechanisms, the conditions that predispose hopelessness deserve examination. Personal life experiences combined with researching and ongoing professional development has led me to a contrary belief: the conditions that predispose hope need to be identified and understood. What I suggest is that there are conditions unique to the individual that must be explored and identified so to facilitate the discovery and activation of hope and how it can be merged into one's life.

Horton and Wallander (2001) found a relationship between hope and distress. Specifically, mothers who reported higher levels of stress in caring for disabled children demonstrated a greater ability to overcome their stress if they also had higher levels of hope. They discovered that the mothers who perceived themselves to experience greater distress were more positively impacted by hope. I was that mother. When I perceived myself to be in significant distress, it only took a small ripple of hope to impact me. This project is an expression of my ideas and thoughts of how a workshop could provide an avenue for single mothers, who perceive their distress to be high and their hope to be low, to identify the conditions in their lives in which a manifestation of hope can take place and positively impact their lives.

### **Personal Significance**

This project is of personal significance to myself. As a low-income single mother, my experiences cover a spectrum that range from the extremely stressful

situations to the ordinary experiences of daily living. In many of these experiences, both the ordinary and the extraordinary, I have felt both utter hopelessness and absolute hope. However, as I began to recognize internal and external resources in my life, I also began to recognize that as times became more stressful, hope would find a more significant place. This was fostered through contact with others, sometimes directly and, very often, indirectly. For example, I recall spending time with a friend who is also a single mother and vicariously experiencing her hope while she was waiting for approval from her bank on a new mortgage. At first the flickers of hope were parallel to the hope she had for herself. But in later reflection, I realized that hope rooted itself in my mind for myself and I began to feel a great hope for my future. As I realized that I was hoping, my perceptions of my trials changed. I was curious about this change within me and I began to wonder how hope was perpetuated in my life and in the lives of others.

Being identified as a single mother became a source of insecurity for me when I sometimes perceived society's scorn and disapproval. In times of financial duress, I felt an increase of scorn and disapproval. I struggled with my identity and how I was to succeed. The pressures of single parenting depleted my inner resources and took its toll on my self-esteem, my ability to cope, and my perception of social and emotional supports. As I defined myself by my struggles, my identity became enmeshed with how I believed others viewed me. In my mind, I lacked individual identity outside of what I identified as my failures as a single mother.

During these times of defeat, hope took on a life of its own. When I felt the most despair I would feel flickers of hope for something better. Something Victor Frankl (2006) observed in the horrors of Nazi concentration camps was realized within me.



For the meaning of life differs from man to man, from day to day and from hour to hour. What matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific meaning of a person's life at a given moment. (Frankl, 2006, p. 108)

Hope began to take specific meaning in my life and I began to choose a different attitude. As just as Frankl (2006) further observed, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way" (p. 66). I wondered then, if hope was a choice, if it was something I could learn to *choose*. I resolved during a very difficult time in my life, when I felt weak and insignificant, to choose a hopeful attitude. This resolution was not born out of myself though but was gently awakened in my relationships with family and close friends who shared their hope with me through support and friendship.

For example, I began to hope for a better future for my children and in the strength of that hope I began to clarify goals in my life. I started with baby steps. I began to explore the idea of going back to school and looked for courses that caught my interest. I gained courage and started talking about school with family members and friends. I hoped for things that were tangible and achievable, and with those small goals reached, I experienced hope in other areas of my life. Eventually I left a destructive marriage and enrolled in my local college and started my academic journey, terrified of the unknown, but fuelled with flickers of hope inside of me. I did not then understand the power that hope had in my life. In fact, many people in my life labeled me as determined and resilient. I agree with those labels. However, observable determination and resiliency was a result of something deeper within. Perhaps I did not understand that I

was even ‘hoping.’ All I knew was I was drawing from something deep within me, believing that things would get better.

Even more dominant in the memory of those experiences was my preoccupation with the need for relational supports. The desire for practical supports—help with raising my children and the need for positive influence for my children—dominated my thoughts. I desired relationships with friends and family that went beyond what I perceived to be handouts. Instead, I longed for symbiotic relationships where I would feel a mutual interaction, where I would be recognized as a valuable and contributing member of the relationship. When I began to feel more hopeful, my perceptions of my relationships changed. I saw myself through a lens of compassion and as a real friend and as a result, my relationships changed.

It is the power within hope that intrigues me and causes me to reflect on how it has positively fostered my journey as a low-income single mother. Exploring what hope means to me, learning how it has intervened in my life, and finding an identity in hope has motivated me to help others seek it and personally identify it for themselves.

During my journey, I was introduced to the therapeutic value of the expressive arts and discovered the catalytic nature of expressive arts modalities. I learned that I could explore and communicate my feelings without using my own words. I became acquainted with poetry and dance therapy, art and phototherapy, and drama and narrative therapy. As a part of the course requirement, the instructor expected participants to explore all domains of expression. This was not only a foreign concept to me; it was also a challenging and embarrassing experience for me because I had never known any other expression than verbal expression. I learned how to feel my emotions in my body and

express them through art, prose, dance, and photos. I was curiously defiant as I moved instead of spoke. I felt freedom as I visualized and moulded pain through clay instead of talking about painful feelings. I spontaneously experienced inner change when I closed my eyes and danced my story before my peers. Hope finally anchored to my soul its power and strength—through physiological expression rather than verbal articulation.

I spent a lot of mental energy contemplating the freedom I felt after my first expressive arts class. Specifically, I just did not understand it. I felt the need to rationalize, justify, and systematize this freedom from a cognitive perspective. I link this feeling to my experiences of hope. Hope is not something tangible, but is instead is a vehicle to connect me with that with that which I hope for. Similarly, the expressive arts is a vehicle that carries me while I work through the emotion and expression.

### **Project Purpose and Format**

This project's purpose is to synthesize hope into a personalized study and workshop. The intent is to utilize the nontraditional therapeutic methods of the expressive arts, specifically metaphorical self-portraits, as a way to infuse hope into the identity of single mothers. Additionally, while this project will consider the following questions, it does not answer them because of the qualitative nature of the project.

Instead this project seeks to explore these questions:

1. What is hope?
2. What is the impact of hope for single mothers?
3. Can hope be learned in a collective environment?
4. Can expressive arts interventions and activities, such as self-portraits, enhance or facilitate hope?

## Summary

When I consider the existing research, as well as my training and experience, I find myself agreeing with the many of the interpretations of hope in the literature. Accordingly, the aim of this project is to address the significant role hope plays in empowering single mothers to constructively change their world, and in their being able to believe there is a possibility of change in their circumstances. This project includes my ideas for a workshop that will engender hope in single mothers beyond traditional therapeutic methods. It aims to support a creative progression in the discovery and ownership of hope within single mothers through the expressive arts. Such discovery will include creating metaphorical self-portraits of hope of the following:

- Session 1: A Remembrance of Hope
- Session 2: The Duality of Hope
- Session 3: Identifying Hope
- Session 4: Personalizing Hope
- Session 5: Integrating Hope
- Session 6: Supporting and Celebrating Hope

In the following pages, I propose to show that hope is purposeful, unstoppable, and an essential aspect of one's identity. For the purpose of this project, I do not adhere to any specific interpretation of hope and instead leave it as an open interpretation. Just as individuals are unique, so will hope be for the individual. A supportive and collective environment can provide the opportunity for interpretations of hope to expand, like ripples in a pond.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This project includes a literature review addressing research on the concerns that single mothers experience, hope theory, relational cultural theory, and expressive arts. The intent of the research is to provide theoretical support for the proposed workshop for single mothers, which is titled *An Expressive Arts Workshop on Hope for Single Mothers*. The difficulties experienced by single-mother status are magnified by economic poverty, increased levels of mental health concerns, relational poverty, and by the presence or all-too-frequent absence of hope. This chapter outlines the challenges single mothers' experience, an in-depth look into the construct of hope, how a collective environment can support change through relational-cultural theory (RCT), and the nature of the expressive arts, specifically a look at self-portraits, and how single mothers will benefit from the discovery and relationship of hope within their identity.

### Single Mothers

**Overview.** Low-income single mothers face a myriad of daily challenges often without a personal support network. These daily challenges and stresses are intensified by limited income and by the task of sole parenting (Olson, Kieschnick, Banyard, & Ceballo, 1994). Additional influencing factors consist of limited employment, limited education, and limited support networks. Additionally, single mothers are more likely to develop physical and mental ailments and experience higher levels of stress than other groups (Cairney et al., 2003). Moreover, the challenges they face often negatively impact the parenting process because of the limited available time to monitor family dynamics and to develop and nurture relationships with family, teachers, and other parents (Murry, Bynum, Brody, Willert, & Stephens, 2001). Low-income single mothers face the

challenges of societal stigma, strict social policies, and limited employment and education, all of which can trap them within the welfare system. This is revealed by the high proportion of single mothers who receive social assistance in Canada and who exit the welfare system at a slower rate than two-parent families (Cooke, 2009). Additionally, low-income single parents exhibit higher levels of chronic stress than married parents while possessing fewer coping strategies or the resources to initiate coping strategies (Olson et al., 1994). Canadian studies have reported that single mothers are more likely to experience a depressive episode, higher levels of anxiety, and increased levels of substance abuse than married mothers (Cairney et al., 2003; Lipman et al., 2001). Generally speaking, key factors that increase one's ability to exit the welfare system include such things as advanced education and increased work experience, which in turn increase quality of life for single parents. However, the ability to pursue such goals requires mental stamina and the inner resources necessary to overcome the life conditions that stand in the way.

Henry (2004) stated that life conditions could be understood as either constraints or resources that will positively or negatively influence further life conditions. In the case of low-income single parents, challenging life conditions perpetually build constraint upon constraint, specifically when support networks are absent or unrecognized. Moreover, it is these successive negative events that limit the ability to produce and activate the coping mechanisms needed to overcome further adversity (Belle, 1984). While stressful conditions can build inner resiliency, such conditions may also be debilitating if handled in a maladaptive manner (Henry, 2004). Although socioeconomic disadvantage, combined with past and present stressors, is associated with

increased levels of psychiatric disorders in single mothers, it is reported that there are noticeable differences in coping strategies within this population (Lipman et al., 2001). Single mothers perceive formal and informal supports to be less than they actually may be and perceive that they have a less friendships and limited frequency of relational contacts (Cairney et al., 2003). Thus, the above listed research shows that increased numbers of chronic stressors and life events combined with higher levels of depression further exacerbate matters for single mothers.

**Single mothers and economics.** Parenting through poverty in North America has become a near impossible feat because of the nature of how the poor are construed within society (Russell, Harris, & Gockel, 2008). Russell et al. (2008) wrote that while the poor have been characterized as possessing limited coping abilities, they are also characterized as being the ones accountable for coping in their impoverished circumstances. Russell et al. further wrote that single parenting is often viewed as a personal choice without consideration for the circumstances behind a single-mother status. Single parents are expected to maintain their familial obligations and provide an income without the added resources of dual parenting. In Crosier, Butterworth, and Rodgers (2007) study, single mothers “were seven times more likely to report being in the lowest equivalised household disposable income quintile and were nearly six times as likely to report four or more instances of financial hardship over the past year” than were partnered mothers (p. 11).

Economic pressure takes a further toll on low income parents in augmenting their perceptions of reduced capability in parenting and increasing levels of emotional distress (Elder, Eccles, Ardel, & Lord, 1995). According to Olson et al. (1994), single parent

status and low economic status increase stresses to alarming levels. Economic pressure is a factor that is found to harmfully influence positive parenting (Lee, Anderson, Horowitz, & August, 2009). In fact, according to Lee et al. (2009), parents who suffer chronic economic hardship experienced increases of depressive symptoms, which related to reduced parental abilities including parental communication, involvement, and confidence. Elder et al. (1995) found that a diminished sense of parental efficacy was a direct result of financial stress in both black and white families.

**Single mothers and mental health.** The occurrence of mental health concerns in single mothers is more prevalent than in partnered mothers (Crosier et al., 2007). Factors such as low-income, low levels of self-esteem, and limited social supports are found to increase the risk for depression in single mothers (Peden et al., 2004). Peden et al. (2004) stated, “Compared to married mothers, single mothers were at greater risk for a chronic depressive episode lasting a year or more” (p. 338). Peden et al. (2004) also found that the symptoms of depression in this population may hinder them in partaking in educational advancement, employment, and negatively affect how they parent. According to Jayakody and Stauffer (2000), depression or other mental health concerns may impede single mothers from obtaining the financial independence enabling them to rely less on the welfare system. Lee et al. (2009) stressed that it is fundamental to “find ways to buffer the negative impact of economic pressure on parental emotional distress, particularly depression” (p. 425). Lee et al.’s study also demonstrated that social support served as a strong bridge between economic pressure and parental depression. In fact, social support has been found to safeguard against the resulting upsets of loss, failure, and economic struggle (Harber, Schneider, Everard, & Fisher, 2005).



**Single mothers and social supports.** Social systems can be characterized by community or environmental interactions and by emotional support in reciprocal relationships with loved ones (Greenberger, Chen, Tally, & Dong, 2000). There is an emphasis in literature that links the significance of both formal and informal social support networks to a reduction in stress in single parent families (Abrams & Curran, 2009; Anderson, Kohler, & Letiecq, 2005; Murry et al., 2001; Yanicki, 2005). Unfortunately, many low-income single mothers perceive limited social supports compared to partnered mothers (Crosier et al., 2007).

Family and social supports can reduce and buffer stress in situations of adversity and can strengthen parental functioning by improving both child and parent well-being (Thompson & Ontai, 2000; Yanicki, 2005). In *Children of Divorce: Developmental and Clinical Issues*, Bilge and Kaufman (as cited in Everett, 1989) stated that supportive relationships help to increase single-parent households' ability to function in the face of personal or social hardship. According to Harknett (2006), supportive relationships also enable low-income single mothers to lean less on the welfare system and instead to overcome financial crises by working and earning more. Harknett further stated that, unfortunately, those who require a social supportive network the most are unlikely to have one obtainable to them. Yanicki (2005) wrote that such support networks positively affect the ability to work through life challenges, and increases the motivation to seek education and employment. However, without the capacity to mobilize such resources, adaptive coping skills are not employed, thus increasing emotional distress (Kashdan et al., 2002).

Strandmark (2004) wrote that emotionally distressed or vulnerable individuals experience lower levels of self-worth. However, Standmark further wrote, “Human support can compensate for these negative experiences and encourage the vulnerable individuals, helping them to feel more valued” (p. 138). In support of this, levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy increase through positive supportive relationships (Werner, 1993), and resiliency fosters higher levels of self-esteem, higher levels of control, and hope (Brooks, 1994). The lived experience of hope in patients in palliative care also stressed the significance of important relationships (Benzein et al., 2001). While a social network is assumed to provide protective measures in single parent families, it is the perceived satisfaction of the quality of these social supports that determines the presence of positive mental health (Olson et al., 1994).

**Single mothers and life satisfaction.** In assessing life course patterns of single mothers there are many variables to consider. Of these it is the positive ones—those that increase life satisfaction—that need to be examined. There is an impetus of research within the realm of positive psychology that suggests that capacities of confidence, resiliency, hope, and optimism can be learned (Peterson, Balthazard, Waldman, & Thatcher, 2008). It is further suggested that such capacities are not inherently fixed but instead can be taught and successfully measured (Peterson et al., 2008). Of these positive variables, hope is the interest and emphasis of this project.

Low-income single mothers who report increased levels of emotional support also exhibited lower levels of depression and higher levels of life satisfaction (Olson et al., 1994). In a study of college students, Stevic and Ward (2008) found that perceived high life satisfaction was related to both recognition and praise. Recognition and praise are

elements that flow through relationships and supports. As mentioned earlier, hope is necessary to the process of producing the best effort to achieve the best outcome—that is, to increase optimal life functioning. Arguably, low-income single mothers hope for increased optimized life functioning. Additionally, Stevic and Ward (2008) stated that perceived life satisfaction is the motivator behind personal growth. It is this type of hopeful motivation in which agency is connected with the act of hoping (Herrestad & Biong, 2010). Comparatively, the agency component of hope (motivation) is found to be the strongest predictor of life satisfaction (Bailey et al., 2007). Increased life satisfaction will thus result from a strong motivational factor—the relationship between hope and perceived social supports.

According to Harknett (2006), limited social supports for low-income single mothers are associated with limited education, depression, and low levels of self-efficacy. She further wrote, “Those who need social network support the most are the least likely to have it available to them” (p. 187). Harknett’s study confirmed that single mothers who were more economically secure had a greater social support network and that private sources of support are unequal for low-income single mothers. Harknett also argued that single mothers on welfare who have a stronger support network have a greater ability to preserve financial benefits. Finally, Harber et al. (2005), in their study comparing types of support, found that social support that respected the individual’s autonomy was associated with enhanced hope.

### **Relational-Cultural Theory**

RCT addresses how human development, growth, and healing more readily occur through a relational experience (Comstock et al., 2008). In the past, this relational

experience, or relationship, is often recognized as a secondary component to the self within psychodynamic theories (Jordan, 2001). RCT purports that healing transpires within relationship whereas suffering is a result of isolation (Jordan, 2001). According to RCT, the experience of isolation may result in experiences of shame and oppression thus causing a diminished sense of relational connectedness with others (Comstock, Duffey, & St. George, 2002). It is through relationship where healing from the influences of “social, personal, parental, professional, and familial” (Comstock et al., 2002, p. 270) experiences may occur. Specifically, Comstock et al.’s (2002) study showed that mental and emotional growth occurred within the growth-fostering relationships of group psychotherapy. Jordan (2001) wrote that people are silenced or “forced by judgements, prejudice, and bias from more powerful others into inauthentic connection or are allowed to bring only certain parts of themselves into connection” (p. 96). As a result they feel shame, disconnection, marginalization, humiliation, and isolation (Comstock et al., 2008; Jordan, 2001).

According to RCT, we all long to be included, to connect with others, and to belong (Comstock et al., 2008). This longing for connection heightens vulnerability, which in turn causes individuals to avoid connection thus decreasing relational progress (Comstock et al., 2008). Due to this vulnerability-created disconnect, it is necessary for a higher level of cultural counselling competency so that the counsellor or facilitator can assist participants to move through their vulnerabilities and past their experiences of shame and mistrust into a realm of connectedness and belonging (Comstock et al., 2008).

Jordan (2001) wrote that therapeutically working with individuals based on RCT means that one desires to “bring people back into healing connection, where they can

begin to reconnect with themselves and bring themselves into relationship with others” (p. 97). It is through this relational realm that the foundation of this workshop aspires to connect individuals with each other while experiencing the ripple effects of hope both personally and as a group.

## **Hope**

**Interpretations of hope.** There are many interpretations of hope. In its most general sense, hope can be characterized as anticipating that something desired will manifest. The Oxford English Dictionary defines hope as a “feeling of expectation and desire for something to happen” (“Hope,” 2010, para. 6). As such, hope is often constructed as a concept of positive principles that is displayed in our feelings, beliefs, and behaviours. I define hope as a motivator that prevents individuals from falling into despair when they are in pursuit of something realistic and tangible that is tied to a reality of their own.

Hope is represented in positive psychology as a construct of psychological capital. This capital conjoins hope with resiliency, confidence, and optimism and has been utilized within the stream of work motivation (Stajikovic, as cited in Luthans, Luthans, & Luthans, 2004). Further, while hope is very similar to the other constructs of psychological capital, it is for its “conceptual independence and discriminate validity of its *waypower*” (Luthans et al., 2004, p. 47) that hope is researched in this project above the other constructs. Thus, hope is the prime category under the umbrella of psychological capital that this project will examine both as a resiliency factor, and its relationship in overcoming adversity and increasing life satisfaction. On the other hand, hope is also recognized as a “folk concept” (Larsen & Stege, 2010, p. 295) because of its

multiple use in everyday language. Hope is also identified as a concept both highly researched and therapeutically utilized (Larsen & Stege, 2010).

Hope is believed to be an emotional and cognitive method that individuals use in anticipating an outcome they feel is outside of their power (Larsen & Stege, 2010). As mentioned earlier, Snyder, Irving, et al.'s (1991) definition of hope includes goals, pathways, and agency. Snyder, Irving, et al. further stated, "Hope is influenced by the perceived availability of successful pathways related to goals" (p. 570). Hope in this case represents the state of mind an individual is in and the belief that there are accessible means to achieve one's goal. It is in the interactive process between agency and pathways that individuals develop positive cognitions needed during goal pursuit. The central core of hope is the complementary and sustainable relationship between agency and pathways; that is, the will and the ways of hope (Snyder, Rand, King, Feldman, & Woodward, 2002).

McGeer (2004) described hope as a gift of "character, background, current physical and social circumstances, and other contingencies of nature" (p. 125). She also described hope as a skill, which with life experience and practice, can be cultivated. It is this definition of hope that is most intriguing to me. McGeer further wrote of hope in a communal domain. This communal definition of hope is not to be likened to collective hope where individuals hope for their community with a shared hope. Rather communal hope is more like a reciprocal hope where individuals respond to other individual's hopes and one's own hopes are responded to by others (McGeer, 2004). McGeer argued that hope is more than reciprocal but must be, in fact, supported by a responsive individual; she stated, "A responsive world is a world that in some way or another recognizes and

supports the meaning and value we give to our efforts” (p. 109). McGeer elaborated this stating that keeping hope alive without the recognition and support from those in our world is difficult and requires a tremendous amount of “inner strength and imagination” (p. 109).

**Hope as a multidimensional construct.** Recent studies have indicated that hope is related to increased levels of psychological well-being (Wong & Lim, 2009) and that specifically, the agency factor of hope is a higher predictor of life satisfaction (Baily et al., 2007). According to Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Thompsen, and Wadsworth (2001), adapting to stress in a successful manner involves the ability to alter or decrease sources of stress and includes management of affect, the ability to engage in constructive thinking processes, the appropriate regulation and manifestations of behaviour, the comprehension and control of autonomic arousal, and the willingness to interact in both social and nonsocial environments. In view of that, adaptation to life stressors requires a level of competence that utilizes both outer and inner resources in a successful manner, thereby building a resiliency that increases the level of competence, and the capacity for even further adaptation. Hope can be considered to be foundational to this process because of its multidimensional components.

In fact, research suggests that hope is a multidimensional construct that includes goals, agency, and pathways (Snyder et al., 2000); thus, hope encourages a determination to successfully achieve goals, and reciprocally, is in turn fostered by the ability to generate plans to meet those goals (Snyder, Harris, et al., 1991). As goals are defined, hope is instrumental in determining one’s ability to both generate pathways and successfully achieve goals—enabling one to overcome adversity. This relationship of

hope—determination (will) and planning (way)—is significant in instigating positive change, learning readiness, and a general sense of well-being because of the expectancy elements of self-efficacy and outcomes (Magaletta & Oliver, 1999). It is significant to consider each component of hope separately. For example, an individual may believe there are ways to achieve goals but may not believe in her own capabilities to pursue those goals; or an individual may believe in her own capabilities of goal pursuit but may be unaware of what ways she may pursue her goals (Snyder, Harris, et al., 1991). Horton and Wallander (2001) wrote that the dual components (agency and pathways) comprise a higher order of hope. This project will not differentiate between the two concepts of hope and higher order hope.

Snyder et al. (2000) further proposed that hope plays a crucial role in primary and secondary enhancement activities—the former representing optimal and satisfactory achievement of activities and the latter representing those efforts aimed to achieve peak functioning and contentment. From this point of view, hope is necessary in the process of producing the best effort to achieve the best outcome. Horton and Wallander (2001) wrote that hope should then be conceptualized as an “enduring disposition that is subjectively defined as people assess their agency and pathways related to goals” (p. 384). This conceptualization of hope fits with the many interpretations of hope and that hope will be experienced differently for everyone.

Fostering and maintaining a state of hopefulness is dependent on one’s subjective ability to produce similar agency and pathways in alternative situations (Snyder et al., 2002). Snyder et al. (2002) indicated this ability is influenced mainly by one’s perceived ability (will) in connection with how one is able to produce successful strategies that help



to acquire desired goals (ways). Interestingly, Snyder, Harris, et al. (1991) purported that higher degrees of hope relate to increased will and ways-related responses in several life domains. Thus, as degrees of hope rise, so do perceptions of success also rise. Horton and Wallander,(2001) stated that individuals with higher degrees of hope carry out a greater number of goals within life's many domains, and they select more challenging goals without perceiving them to be difficult. Thus, hope is arguably a significant factor in changing one's perception of his/her world. As individuals strive to make positive changes, the need for external resources is likely to increase (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). Therefore, hopefulness may increase with increased social supports. In fact, Short, Erikson, and Erikson Klein (1986) stated, "Without having sufficient hope or resiliency, vast amounts of external resources can be poured into what is essentially a vacuum of despair and surrender" (p. xi). Hope is then essential to eradicating this vacuum of despair and surrender and to changing the perception of the resources of social support.

There is also a relationship between hope and problem solving, adaptive psychological responses, coping skills, and overcoming depression (Kashdan et al., 2002). In fact, research indicates that hope is related to the successful adaptation of overcoming and preventing stress and also to defining and controlling achievable goals (Snyder, Irving, et al., 1991). Further to this, parents who encompass higher levels of hope display better coping strategies and decreased psychological anxiety (Kashdan et al., 2002). Social support networks are factors that may increase levels of hope to full essence. That is, as low-income single mothers experience the positive effects of social supports, they may begin to perceive available pathways toward goals and begin to

believe in their own ability to succeed in reaching these goals and therefore feel higher levels of hope.

Horton and Wallander (2001) reported, “Hope has both direct and moderating relationships with distress” (p. 395). The moderating relationship of hope suggests that as additional resiliency type factors are introduced, hope would adjust to combat distress. Horton and Wallander further reported that social support increases one’s capacity to overcome adversity.

### **Expressive Arts**

Just as individuals are unique, so are the ways that they understand and express themselves. Expressive art therapists are aware that the traditional mode of talk therapy must include nontraditional modes that capture the unique expressive style of the client (Malchiodi, 2005). In fact, Malchiodi (2005) wrote, “When therapists are able to include these various expressive capacities in their work with clients, they can more fully enhance each person’s abilities to communicate effectively and authentically” (p. 1). Further, the expressive arts give opportunity for individuals to share their inner experiences and also provide the means of discovering both personal identity and one’s worldview (Bradley, Whiting, Hendricks, Parr, & Jones, 2008). Bradley et al. (2008) stated that the value of using expressive modalities for teaching and healing could help individuals to modify ideas, change perspectives, externalize emotions, and increase the richness of their experience. It is recognized that art therapy can enable individuals to work through the barriers that alter one’s sense of identity and how one perceives life circumstances (Hanes, 2007). Natalie Rogers (1993) wrote that the expressive arts enable individuals to explore inner thoughts and feelings and to express them in ways other than

verbalization. Specifically, she believed that expression through creative modalities enables therapists to witness and understand a broader and richer aspect of the client's world. Rogers (1993) wrote, "Using expressive arts becomes a healing *process* as well as a new language that speaks to both client and therapist" (p. 3). As such, the language of thoughts and feelings can be guided through "visual art, movement, sound, or writing—thus releasing and transforming them (Rogers, 1993, p. 11). Malchiodi (2003) exemplified this by explaining, "Art expression may help to bridge the implicit and explicit memories of a stressful event by facilitating the creation of a narrative through which the person can explore the memories and why they are so upsetting" (p. 21).

Natalie Rogers (1993) suggested that the expressive arts could assist clients with an array of support—from identification and exploration of feelings and issues to releasing energy, solving problems and realizing deeper issues of the self. She explained that the expressive arts help clients get in touch with their feelings, particularly with those who have mastered the ability to intellectualize and verbalize their feelings rather than to actually feel their feelings. Exploring the unconscious through the modalities of expressive arts helps clients to discover what hovers behind obvious verbalizations and to bring to the surface the unexplored and unrecognized material of self (Rogers, 1993). She further explained that "feelings and emotions are an energy source" (Rogers, 1993, p. 8) which can be guided and freed through expressive arts. As a result, insight is gained from this release of energy that produces knowledge of the self, thus enabling an increased capacity for problem solving and decision making. Subsequently, additional dimensions of the self are discovered through the expressive arts and are invited to emerge (Rogers, 1993).

**Healing aspects of expressive arts.** Rogers (2011) described the healing aspects of creative arts as tools to “break out of the isolation, loneliness, and alienation of modern life and move into awareness of our potential, both as individuals and as members of community” (p. 15). This encapsulates the ideas of this project—to help low-income single mothers to break out of the chains that keep them from realizing their potential and into a healed realm where hopelessness has been transformed into hope. In a group environment, this personal development process has collective implications that will ripple into a “broader sense of community and effective social action” (Rogers, 2011, p. 21). Thus, the ripple effect of hope will spread from the microcosm of the workshop environment into the macrocosm of life for each single mother.

The tools of meditation, art, movement, music, sounding, and journal writing combined in a safe and nonjudgmental environment foster the learning and healing for personal change (Rogers, 2011). Rogers (2011) wrote that meditation is a necessary ingredient in cultivating creativity. She stressed that one’s creativity is connected to inner energy, found in stillness, and in the exploration of reflected awareness, thus enabling the flow of creativity to stream into personal self-expression. In a group environment, this is facilitated with silence and grounding activities.

**Self-portraits.** Integral to the therapeutic process is the necessity for clients to authentically be open to seeing themselves for who they are. However, clients often experience a discord between how they see themselves, what they want in their lives, and how and what others see and want from them (Weiser, 1999). For many, the therapeutic goal is to learn about oneself, that is, to learn about one’s true identity beneath the masks—masks that are created to hide one’s true self (Weiser, 1999). Weiser (1999)

defined self-portraits as “any photographic presentation dealing with the perceptions of oneself by oneself, whether actual or metaphoric” (p. 19). According to Muri (2007), self-portraits are a tool that facilitates such openness to identifying oneself. Self-portraits are a powerful tool that enable individuals to explore and express who they are in the immediate moment (Nuñez, 2009) and provide insight for the therapist to see how clients perceive their identity (Muri, 2007).

Ultimately, because the self-portrait is developed, it has the “potential to be powerfully self-confrontational and undeniable” (Weiser, 1999, p. 19). In Hanes’s 2007 study on chemically addicted individuals, he concluded that spontaneously produced self-portraits are true-life representations of the individual’s reality. Muri (2007) argued that self-portraits assist the therapist to assess self-concept, body image, and how clients identify themselves through the creation of self-portraits. In addition, Weiser (1999) wrote that self-portraits offer clients a means to explore and express themselves as they supply an outside external illustration of the internal self-image. Weiser (1999) stated that this external representation becomes a tangible element for the client to explore, share, and combine with others understanding of the client.

Weiser (1999) further explained that visual information that has not been filtered through the judgments of others is more likely to be accepted and internalized as truth, and that self-confrontation that generates positive information can increase confidence. Rogers (1993) wrote of the therapeutic value of exploring and experimenting with creative modalities in a nonjudgmental environment. As such, the goal of this workshop is to provide an environment that will facilitate self-confrontation in a nonjudgmental atmosphere where the client can strengthen self-esteem and increase her level of hope.

Weiser (1999) wrote that personal significance is found in interaction with photographs. That is to say, the process by which we view a photograph is very personalized and subjective, thus causing us to see something unique to our own being. As such, photographs and other pictures of art become personally symbolic to the viewer. As individuals utilize portraits for self-discovery, their identities are projected into the viewed image (Weiser, 1999). Weiser (1999) further stated that the development of portraits needs only to symbolize the individual, thus moving beyond the confines of photographs by embracing objects, nature, magazines, or other art materials, including sculpting, movement, or other expressive arts modalities. Weiser (1999) wrote that this process enables the individual to utilize anything that signifies how the individual sees herself into a “metaphoric self-portrait” (p. 69). This projective technique, as Weiser (1999) stated, is beneficial to understanding perceptions of the individual. This understanding is furthered by questions about how and why the individual chose to create the self-portrait. For instance, tree imagery is seen as a representation of a “client’s personal emotional history” (Weiser, 1999, p. 69). Questions revolving around the type of tree, the roots, branches, leaves, and trunk offer the therapist insight into the client’s history as well as assisting the client to exemplify how she sees herself, thus allowing the client to see herself as an “external entity, as a separate person” (Weiser, 1999, p. 20).

According to Weiser (1999) self-portrait assignments offer clients a mode of self-exploration—searching to discover other aspects of their identities. Weiser (1999) stated that the therapeutic purpose behind self-portrait assignments is to help the client to birth what she is unable to verbalize. What is birthed from the subconscious can then be discussed, witnessed, processed, and be given meaning to; thus enabling the client to

plainly see herself (Weiser, 1999). Indeed, this is a powerful tool that assists us into a “voyage into our unconscious, it can be shocking or surprising, but never really damaging, since the acceptance it carries produces an essentially positive outcome” (Nuñez, 2009, p. 59). Nuñez (2009) wrote that the self-portrait process initiates an exchange between one’s thoughts and one’s intuition, enabling the expression of vast personal insights. Additionally, the process of self-portrait work supplies an environment that sheds light on clients perceived identities and helps to increase confidence (Weiser, 1999). This process enables clients to positively accept and own these perceptions (Weiser, 1999). The self-portrait process is a valuable tool in assisting clients in recognizing that they are able to “actually do or become something that they previously thought impossible or beyond their abilities” (Weiser, 1999, p. 131). It is in this sense that single mothers will be able to understand and link the powerful use of hope as part of their identities and to utilize self-portraits as a tool—thus claiming hope as both possible and within their abilities to realize. For example, Weiser (1999) stated,

If a person tells me he or she cannot express a certain feeling, then poses pretending to show that emotion, the photographic evidence shows the person expressing the feeling. And there is a chance that the person actually will experience the feeling. When we use our bodies to try to communicate a feeling, we will often connect with that emotion, and sometimes even physically precipitate or cathect it, unexpectedly. (p. 131)

The ideas of this workshop aim to help single mothers to create hopeful self-portraits that will help them to experience the presence of hope (through reflection of the past and future), thus moving into a realm of hopeful possibilities. Weiser (1999) wrote that the

self-portrait method can help individuals to reflect on the past, consider the future, experience the emotions that arise, all while self-witnessing and confronting one's identity as a result of a self-portrait.

### **Summary**

According to Larsen and Stege (2010) it is fundamental to support hope for those whose hope fluctuates depending on their perception of whether hope is warranted or not. That is, for those who hold hope as valuable and yet vulnerable, it is necessary to sensitively help support and strengthen it (Larsen & Stege, 2010). In the case of low-income single mothers, it is paramount to encourage the fragility of hope by protecting any whisper of perceived hope. As Weiser (1999) indicated, even the communication of a feeling (such as hope) can energize that feeling itself. Thus, communicating hope through metaphorical self-portraits is a way to energize hope for single mother participants. That is, individuals can explicitly use hope in a goal-focused manner in hoping “*to be or to become*” (Larsen & Stege, 2010, p. 299). RCT states that in relationships that support and encourage the growth of one another other, healing occurs (Comstock et al., 2008). That is the hope of this workshop—to support single-mothers, in a community setting, to use hope as tool for growth and healing.

Creating future hopeful self-portraits is a way for single mothers to illustrate how they can be or become more hopeful. According to Weiser (1999), assigning self-portraits is a means enabling clients to “explore the various possibilities of their identities” (p. 20). If single mothers can see the possibility of a hopeful self, chances are they will be able to actualize that hopeful self. Weiser (1999) stated, “Self-portrait work has proved to be particularly useful in helping women strengthen, or begin to emerge



into, their own identities” (p. 21). Self-portraits can empower single mothers because it “can be empowering for them to take charge of their identity when so much of it seems to be ruled by others or “fate”” (Weiser, 1999, p. 233). Thus, it is proposed that the ripple effect of hope first experienced in a relational manner of the group workshop process will then be perpetuated into the macrocosm of life for low-income single mothers.

### **Chapter 3: Method**

This chapter outlines the methodology utilized to develop the workshop as well as the research journey behind the literature review. The research journey includes both professional development and my own personal experiences.

#### **Methodology**

This project harvests a passion that was seeded in my undergraduate years. As a single mother I became very interested in the philosophical and psychological nature of hope. However, there were no courses relating to hope where I could learn the various theories pertaining to hope. I knew that the theoretical construct of hope would be the essential in my postsecondary journey and integral to the future of my profession. Therefore, I sought out professors who would support my journey and invest in my passion for hope. Subsequently, I was able to build my theoretical base of hope in both psychology and philosophy. During this time, I also became quite interested in what type of supports single-mothers have and again, sought out an instructor who would invest in my learning through an applied study in anthropology. It was this applied study that enabled me to research and work with single mothers. The direct work experience reiterated many of the concerns I had regarding the struggles that single mothers face. From this experience witnessed deficits of hope in a population of women who struggled economically, lacked resources, faced mental health concerns, and displayed significant low self-esteem.

During this time I also began to explore the nature of expressive arts, and began to appreciate how untapped creativity could help hope blossom within my life as a single mother. During my graduate studies I completed another independent study, by which I

researched how expressive arts are beneficial to youth, specifically at-risk youth. This study reflected an in-depth examination of expressive arts assessments and interventions tailored to meet the needs of at-risk youth. As part of this independent study, I completed a 4-day workshop, *Creating Expressive Arts Groups for Youth*, at the Prairie Institute of Expressive Arts Therapy with Carmen Richardson. It was through this experiential learning that I recognized how utilizing expressive arts in a group setting could be very valuable in assisting single mothers to learn and embrace the significance and usefulness of hope in their lives.

While completing my master's degree, I began to augment and focus my research toward this project and began to extensively research the areas of hope, single mothers, and expressive arts. I chose to focus the exploration and development of my workshop on the creative aspects of self-portraits because of my own personal passion for the expressive arts and because of my experience in learning and growing in the nontraditional therapeutic style of the expressive arts.

Natalie Rogers (1993) recommended that in order to introduce and utilize expressive arts modalities with clients it is necessary to experience the healing qualities of such modalities first hand. I experienced these healing qualities in expressive arts therapy courses in my undergraduate and graduate years. It was in the interactive portion of these courses that I truly experienced the healing qualities of expressive arts modalities in a group framework. In fact, Weiser (1999) explained,

At the "meta" level of personal-experiential training of therapists using these techniques, the work is identical to the clients' experiences in the process itself, as

therapist-trainees will use their photos to search inward and explore feelings much the same way as their clients will. (p. 37)

As mentioned previously, the interactive portion of my graduate level independent study consisted of a four-day workshop where participants learned how to create expressive arts groups for adolescents. Expressive Arts Therapist Carmen Richardson (personal communication, June 18-21, 2010) also recommended that “you have to live experientially first in order to teach it,” “experiment with all the modalities,” and “to be curious of triggers.” Therefore, therapists should experience first-hand the process that the client will experience in therapy. Weiser (1999) cautioned therapists about ““doing unto yourself” before beginning to ‘do unto your clients’” (p. 39).

As a result, I chose self-portraits as the main expressive arts theme because of the four-day workshop I participated in and learned from. According to Weiser (1999), with the use of self-portraits, women are equipped to discover, strengthen, and progress into their own unique identity. Weiser (1999) wrote that self-portrait techniques prove to be “powerful adjuncts to therapy” (p. 124), thereby giving voice to what is silenced or undiscovered. Further, Weiser (1999) stated, “There is no doubt that seeing photographs of oneself taken *by* oneself, without contributions from any person, cannot help but document the identity of that self” (p. 124). Thus, because of my own experience and participation with self-portraits, and because of the powerful process of utilizing self-portraits, it is the goal of this workshop to assist single mothers to witness and document hope as part of their own personal identity.

## **The Narrative Approach**

I chose to utilize aspects of narrative approach so that participants can learn to externalize the concept of hopelessness and the perceived losses of hope rather than to internalize these concepts to be a part of their intricate and personal identity. While the focus of this workshop is not predominately from the narrative approach, it is necessary to understand its characteristics and its usage for introducing each self-portrait. Abels and Abels (2001) wrote that narrative theorists hold that externalization of problems to empower individuals to focus on the problem as the problem rather than seeing the individual self as the problem. They also stated that this process of externalization helps to objectify problems and seeks to give power to the individual by removing blame and personalization. Through the future-oriented practice of the narrative approach, individuals are then encouraged to re-author their story. It is at this point where I have chosen the expressive arts as part of the re-authorization process. Rogers (1993) believed that when individuals share their stories in a group environment, participants are stimulated by and with their own memories and beliefs. Rogers (1993) stated, “These memories, thoughts, and feelings don’t have anywhere to go—they get stored in the mind and body of the listener as she waits her turn to speak” (p. 51). The energy that is created through the narrative approach is then guided and expressed in an authentically personalized manner of the self-portrait.

## **The Role of the Therapist**

Rogers (1993) emphasized the necessity for therapists to be conscious of their value system when working with clients. Rogers (1993) developed a credo that personalized her version of the person-centred approach within a therapeutic setting

(pp. 103–104). This credo significantly impacted my personal philosophy as a therapist and how I choose to facilitate workshops or groups. Her credo empowers participants through the language of respect. Rogers (1993) used phrases like “I will be present for you. . . . I will respect you. . . . I will support you. . . . I may challenge you. . . . I will encourage you. . . . I will honor my boundaries and yours” (pp. 103–104). This person-centred credo enhances the environment and assists clients to be more vulnerable and courageous. Integrating expressive arts within an interactive framework was developed by Malchiodi (2003) who suggested the following guidelines as effective practice:

- Two hours per session scheduled at exact times for each session.
- “Group is bound by time, place, and simple rules” (p. 316).
- Art work involves time, appreciation and processing, and termination
- “The interactive art therapist believes that the group has the resources to find its own solutions and will support any attempts to do this” (p. 316).

The role of the therapist is to facilitate an environment that encourages authentic communication, to track group and individual process, and to intervene in the appropriate moments when the group or individual is in need (Malchiodi, 2003). Use of phototherapy is to be utilized by professionals who have the knowledge and experience to ethically use the appropriate techniques needed to help the client to process the what, how, and why components of phototherapy (Weiser, 1999). In fact, Weiser (1999) advised therapists to practice each phototherapy exercise multiple times, personally and with a professional colleague, before using them on clients. Weiser (1999) stated that phototherapy techniques are to assist clients to “make discoveries and find the personal truths” (p. 37). She encouraged therapists to resist overgeneralizations, interpretations,

and assumptions, but rather to listen without judgment, to observe, and to probe. As themes and patterns emerge, it is then that the therapist can begin to connect and explore further (Weiser, 1999).

According to RCT, we all long to be included, to connect with others, and to belong (Comstock et al., 2008). But because of this longing for authentic connection, vulnerability is heightened which in turn causes individuals to avoid connections thus decreasing relational progress (Comstock et al., 2008). Due to this vulnerability created disconnect, it is necessary for a higher level of cultural counselling competency so that the counsellor or facilitator can assist participants to move through their vulnerabilities and past their experiences of shame and mistrust into a realm of connectedness and belonging (Comstock et al., 2008).

### **Workshop Design**

The *Expressive Arts Therapy Workshop on Hope for Single-Mothers* workshop is an informal design consisting of thoughts and ideas for six sessions. This design does not offer a fully developed workshop, but rather illustrates my thoughts and ideas for execution of the workshop. It is designed to be used as a community resource for those who seek to incorporate the construct of hope into a group environment.

Inspired by the work of Carmen Richardson's *Expressive Arts Workshop for Adolescents*, which speaks of the utilization of self-portraits to assist group participants to discover a hopeful identity, I also considered relational-cultural theory. According to relational-cultural theorists, significant suffering occurs in the absence of connections with others, and healing occurs in environments where growth is cultivated (Jordan, 2001). Jordan (2001) further wrote that it is within an empathic group environment that

women are able to work through change and realize their identity through relational connections over the course of their lifetime. It is through mutual empathy that women can overcome barriers and advance psychological healing (Comstock et al., 2002). Comstock et al. (2002) defined mutual empathy as the “the healing that occurs when individuals believe that others have been genuinely moved or affected by their experiences” (p. 257). Thus, it is within a group environment that single mothers can share their lived experiences and allow mutual empathy to transpire.

### **Participants**

Ideal participants in my project would be mothers—including but not exclusive to low-income and single mothers with limited education or employment and little or no social supports. Single-mother status is to include single, separated, divorced, or widowed. It is encouraged that eligibility requires mothers be single for at least one year so as to have lived the experience of single-parent status.

According to Rogers (2011), group participants will feel a mixture of excitement and insecurity in entering a group environment and experience undeclared thoughts and feelings surrounding issues of safety and risks. Rogers (2011) asserted that there will be concerns regarding group acceptance, sharing of vulnerabilities, publically breaking down, belief that new life meaning can be discovered, and concern whether or not the investment of personal time and finances will be worth it. Thus, this workshop is designed to facilitate safety for group members by keeping it closed and its numbers small.

Rogers (2011) further asserted that trust is often an issue in a group environment. This is a significant issue to be aware of with single mothers. With the occurrence of



mental health symptoms and resulting insecurities, as well as the perception of societal scorn surrounding single mothering and a perceived reduced sense of parental ability and lack of parental support, trust is a sensitive matter for the facilitator to keep at the forefront of each session with each participant. This is better maintained with smaller group numbers. Rogers (2011) appreciated the courage it takes for individuals to join a group experience and states, “it is a part of the person-centered group philosophy to be aware of even the unspoken feelings and thoughts of incoming group members” (p. 70). She wrote that group members will utilize all senses and intuition in deciding if trusting members and the facilitator is a prudent to sharing and staying in the group. It is the facilitator who has a wonderful opportunity to facilitate and encourage this trust.

Thus, as I discussed earlier, it is fundamental that the group facilitator personally experience group sharing, sharing vulnerabilities, and ultimately understanding the trust process. It is then that a group facilitator will be able to authentically create a “safe psychological environment” (Rogers, 2011, p. 67) manifesting qualities of genuineness, acceptance, realness, calmness, openness, boundary setting, nonjudgmental listening, and much more.

### **Group Development**

Rogers (2011) wrote that the invitation into an expressive arts workshop is “an invitation into process, and healing” (p. 89). When she calls a group into being, she invites rather than markets, thus calling participants into an opportunity for exploration and growth. The invitation *An Expressive Arts Workshop on Hope for Single Mothers* will be an invitation that “conveys respect and caring for the invitee” (Rogers, 2011, p. 89). This invitation will focus on the positive allure of hope rather than on the

perceived negative factors of single mothering. It will focus on a value orientation that single mothers experience, believe, and desire, while emphasizing the experiential nature of the workshop. This invitation will clearly outline the workshop objectives, themes, and processes.

Working with group members in an expressive arts environment allows for the utilization of playful ways to decrease fear and anxiety (Rogers, 2011). Facilitating exercises that encourage members to use motion and play will help to reduce antagonism and resistance (Rogers, 2011). Further, Rogers (2011) illustrated how the expressive arts help to build community because they first allow members to connect with their subconscious and glean new perceptions of integral aspects of the self. Members then have opportunity to find connections within an understanding and safe environment. In the process of connecting, members begin to have authentic experiences within dyads and triads, thus empowering them to transition these feelings into the group. Finally, members will creatively partner as a unit, discovering “a higher purpose” (Rogers, 2011, p. 210) while increasing their creative capabilities. Ultimately, such a community undertaking will help develop and maintain trust within the group.

### **Summary**

The method of this workshop was inspired through personal experience and participation in the expressive arts. My first-hand experiences motivated me to research and explore the writings of Natalie Rogers and Judy Weiser, which in turn supported the experiential learning I gained from Carmen Richardson’s training. My ethical practice of a facilitator follows Rogers’s credo as a person-centred practitioner but also seeks to include and understand the components of RCT within group practice. The ideas that

make up the foundation of this workshop are supported by research and grounded in the overarching theory of the expressive arts and phototherapy.

## **Chapter 4: Synthesis of the Project**

The following is a synthesis of the workshop I aspire to fully create in the future. It shares my personal, educational, and professional experiences and how they are intrinsically woven together to provide all the elements needed for this workshop. This workshop outline reveals my ideas, interventions I have created, and how I envision metaphorical self-portraits of hope to be. I have not created a workshop manual for other facilitators nor is it intended for a formal workshop application; rather I seek to use it within the context my own professional experiences on the basis of my own background and formal education. This is only meant to contribute to the literature as a resource on hope, expressive arts, and single mothering for those who are interested. Perhaps it will also offer professionals a creative and personal outlook with regard to a workshop on hope. As such, ethical considerations for other facilitators have not been taken into consideration. While it may be limited by a lack of in-depth formal group facilitation training and experiences, it has been created through life experiences and current facilitation of groups. The strengths of the workshop are evident in my shared stories of a single mother, expressive arts, and in the integration of both the experiential and cognitive interests of hope and metaphorical self-portraits.

### **Limitations**

Natalie Rogers (2011) passionately encourages those who desire to facilitate expressive arts groups to embark on a journey of intense personal development with a trained expressive arts facilitator. I have only begun this journey through the supportive guidance of professors and facilitators. Although I have trained as an individual counsellor, my expressive arts and group facilitation skills are continuing to develop. As

such, ongoing expressive arts facilitation training is needed to appropriately and effectively develop and facilitate this workshop.

### **Strengths**

Personal experience and the desire to fully learn through the expressive arts have enabled me to speak to the necessary ingredients of empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard - the person centred approach of Carl Rogers. In these, I have full confidence. Further, I can speak to the experience of single mothering, searching for and discovering hope, and using the expressive arts for therapeutic growth, transparency, and revelation.

The integration of expressive arts has been positively correlated with an increase in mood, vocational success, intimate relationships, and academic achievement (Lenz, Holman, & Dominguez, 2010). Further, the combination of the expressive arts and Rogers' person centred approach boosts the "experiences of catharsis and connection" (Lenz et al., 2010, p. 142). These are characteristics that this workshop seeks to demonstrate.

The discovery of hope as described by Yeasting and Jung (2010) is complex and nonlinear. Through their study, they identified the need for individuals to actively participate in their own unique hopes by using tangible sources of hope. This workshop seeks to enable participants to do just that—to actively engage, identify, and internalize their hopes. That is, to externalize the problem (perceived loss of hope) and to internalize the concreteness of their own hope from within. Yeasting and Jung (2010) noted that the role of the therapist is significant in guiding individuals to "internalizing and solidifying their own source of hope" (p. 315). Larsen, Edey, and Lemay (2007) discussed that the

benefits of creating a hope collage will initiate a connection and the meaning of hope for individuals. Through the collage experience, individuals are able to identify experiences of hope. Similarly, the metaphoric self-portraits will serve to assist group participants to experience, identify, and discover ownership of hope unique to the participant while guided by the facilitators.

### **Overview**

I specifically chose portraits of hope because of my conviction that metaphoric self-portraits offer individuals a physical and tangible representation of the self. I want to help single mothers actualize hope within this representation so they can foster hope in a community environment and experience it together by understanding it, identifying it in their own lives, personalizing hope intrinsically, integrating it beyond the workshop, and finally supporting and celebrating their new found hope as a fundamental part of their identities. Essentially, I want to offer a promising experience to a group of single mothers so they can begin to experience hope collectively, but also at a very fundamental level—within their own being.

### **Structure**

In the professional development trainings I participated in over the past few years I learned that if a depth of learning is to occur, sufficient time must be made available for group interaction, cohesiveness, and growth. I observed this both as a participant and a small group leader. Shorter sessions tended to result in a feeling of being rushed. Therefore, I choose to structure my workshop in three-hour sessions.

I am especially drawn to Natalie Rogers (2011) Community Building Guidelines in *Creative Connection for Groups*. Rogers (2011) developed these for expressive arts

workshops; specifically, she stated, “Any group that lives or works together over time becomes a community . . . the group becomes an organism reflecting the thoughts and feelings of the people in it” (p. 405). As stated earlier, in order for a depth of learning and experiencing to occur, community building must take place and as such, thoughts and feelings experienced and expressed must be appreciated and given the time to be nurtured and authenticated. While the nature of hope may be somewhat ambiguous for many and has many definitions, group collaboration and exploration of hope will unveil its true nature for the individual. As a single mother myself, sharing my life stories of hope and hopelessness is sometimes a sensitive area. Thus, I appreciate the necessity of a three-hour session in order to familiarize myself with the topic, learn and grow with my community, and build and strengthen trust to actualize hope in a community setting. While Rogers’s (2011) *Community-Building Guidelines* also focus on workshop training, it seems to me that these guidelines support an environment that will build trust, will respect the individual, and will promote congruency and authenticity of the self. This is one aspect—authenticity of the self—that I hope to promote within my workshop as single mothers learn to connect hope and make it an integral part of their identities. Rogers (2011) wrote, “The community we co-create is an important factor in your ability to learn. . . . Practice being congruent—being true to your own thoughts and feelings while being empathic with others” (p. 405). This is what I aim to encourage in my workshop—the co-creation of a community that respects others and the self, while learning and growing toward hope.

I chose six to eight single mothers per group in order to keep the workshop personal and to allow for community building to develop. In the many types of group of

experiences of which I was a part of over my lifetime, I always find it harder to share personal stories of pain, dreams, and hopes for the future in large groups. On the other hand, in smaller groups, I found it to be less daunting to get to know one another, to be vulnerable with another, and to really let go and creatively experience the activities. In my first university level expressive arts course of twenty peers, I felt intimidation and fear. Slowly, I was able to overcome these feelings when the instructor broke us into smaller groups. However, I had an entire semester to build trust and confidence in myself while exploring creativity and taking risks within this group. This group of single mothers will only have six sessions, thus stressing the necessity of smaller numbers.

### **Personal Presentation**

Many facilitators will present differently. However, it is important to remember who the workshop population is. In this case, my personal preference is to provide a more personalized presentation in order to connect with my group as a single mother myself. Rogers (2011) suggested using language that will help the group to connect with the facilitator's beliefs and identity. As such, keeping in mind the ethical responsibilities needed to maintain a proper balance of disclosure, I believe my connection to building and growing this community of single mothers to acquire hope within their identities requires me to share aspects of my own single parenting journey and to model a sharing behaviour to the community. For example, in the check-in process, I would begin by sharing a word, sound, or movement that captures how I feel about hope.

### **Setting**

According to Rogers (2011) the setting for any type of expressive arts workshop must offer enough space for movement and physical creative expression. It must also



support an environment that will promote feelings of safety, comfort, and that offers a large space for movement and physical creative expression. I personally experienced such an environment with Carmen Richardson's (2010) *Expressive Arts Workshop for Adolescents*. Richardson provided an environment that nurtured safety, warmth, and acceptance. The setting provided natural light and fresh air so the group could experience a change of atmosphere from inside to outside. She had pillows and chairs and encouraged us to bring slippers and blankets so we could be as comfortable as we could be. There were bathrooms, accommodations for art clean up, and plenty of floor space and tables for the art experience. Finally, she had a music system for adequate sound, necessary for various activities. In comparison to the educational setting of the university expressive arts courses I took, Richardson's setting offered an environment where individuals could feel at ease. The more ease I felt, the more open I felt to being vulnerable. Additionally, the more I was open to being vulnerable and authentically sharing my feelings, the more I learned about myself and was able to integrate the material the workshop provided into my psyche.

### **Materials**

Rogers (2011) listed necessary resources for an expressive arts workshop. I adapted her list and combined it with the resources I found useful in previous professional development workshops as well as with what I utilized in my practicum experience (see Appendix A). I truly believe in providing a workbook for group members so they may have a structured outline of the workshop, sections for daily journaling, and sections to allow for relevant material to be added. This equips members with an organized tool and keepsake of their learning journey. Further, the workbook is a

tangible resource for the single mothers of this workshop to continue to add to and personalize as a great source of hope.

I will request that participants bring six photographs of themselves to use throughout the six sessions. The only stipulations I will ask are that firstly, participants choose photographs taken by others, because Weiser's (1999) position is that photographs taken by others offer participants the opportunity to see oneself in another light, specifically, to see oneself through the eyes of another. Weiser (1999) also wrote that these photographs offer participants an opportunity to reflect and examine "what it is about us that matters to others in our life and compare this to what we think is, or should be, most important about us to them" (p. 22). Secondly, I ask participants to bring photographs they have taken of themselves looking as they think they will look when they are full of hope. Weiser's (1999) message with this type of photo is that "there is an end; you can achieve change; seeing that image helps make the possibility real" (p. 20). These photographs will then be integrated into the self-portrait activity or as a catalyst for the metaphoric self-portraits.

Looking at myself, for example, when I see myself as full of hope, I see myself gazing into the distance, with a slight smile lifting the corners of my lips, shoulder back, head tilted to the side as my hair flirts with the wind. I am intimate with hope in this picture. I know hope on such a level that I feel her wisdom assuring me, acknowledging me as a great source of hope for others! Writing about my experiences and understanding of hope fuels the fire of hope in my heart at this moment, portraying an example of why photographs, self-portraits, when given as an assignment are so powerful.

## **Themes**

Using stories of hope and hopelessness and participants' capacity for self-healing, I have developed the following themes to create portraits using expressive arts modalities:

- Session 1: A Remembrance of Hope
- Session 2: The Duality of Hope
- Session 3: Personalizing Hope
- Session 4: Claiming Hope
- Session 5: Integrating Hope
- Session 6: Supporting & Celebrating Hope

Each theme will be further discussed within the outline of each session.

## **Workshop Invitation**

I was inspired by Natalie Roger's (2011) way of gathering participants for workshops. Rather than marketing and advertising the workshop, she impresses the attraction of an invitation. When I considered the nature of an invitation, I was reminiscent to my youthful days when I was invited to a best friend's birthday. My invitation was handwritten, personalized just for me. The feelings it evoked were of excitement, curiosity, and of feeling special. Although the workshop invitation may not be hand-written, it truly is personalized to the group it is intended to invite. It bestows an enticement that draws participants as it may speak to someone's life story, to an experience, or to a desire yet fulfilled. Appendix B presents an example of a personalized invitation to my expressive arts workshop for single mothers.

## **Setting the Tone**

I have participated in professional development workshops, training to facilitate workshops, and university expressive arts classes. In each setting, there has been a structure and a method. The experience of structure helped to ease any anxiety I felt while also causing me to begin to develop a memory within my being for the next sessions. This memory caused me to look forward to each session, knowing that although I was going to step out of the box of my own comfort and into a creative realm, it was structured and safe to take risks in this realm. The structure and method of these courses and workshops helped me to build trust with my peers and with the community I was building. Finally, the structure and method helped to keep me grounded, centred, heard, and appreciated. What I mean to say is that the structured environment did more for fostering courage to share, be heard, listen, support others, and learn and grow than an open unstructured environment would. My workshop will follow these educational and professional development workshop experiences to provide the structure needed to encourage trust and vulnerability (see Appendix C).

I liken this structuring to Daria Halprin's (2003) maps and methods of practice. Halprin wrote,

The principles, tools, and models of this practice of movement-based expressive arts therapy provide a structure in which we bring the unconscious and imagination into dialogue; aesthetically tune the body, emotions, and mind; and explore inner life and personal narratives through the metaphors of making art and in the messages of the art itself. (p. 102)

Thus, the meet and greet, check-in process, opening circle, activities, sharing circle, grounding and reflection, and closing circle all are creatively mapped to bring into communication two realms that can produce growth and change through an experiential process.

Halprin (2003) stated that the maps and methods of the expressive arts are to facilitate exploration and focus while keeping participants present in the experiential moment. She shared that there must be a balance between experiential curiosity and exploration and methods and mapping. She compared this balance to the relationship between the skeleton and muscles. The skeleton offers the muscles the support and structure needed for flexibility—thus mapping and methods enables workshop participants to take risks, challenge themselves, and employ consciousness and creativity while stirring up the unconscious in the here and now moment.

According to Rogers (2011), time and setting structures build an atmosphere for goal setting and help form the purpose of the workshop, create a foundation for the building of trusting relationships, and also help participants to familiarize themselves with each other. As I expressed previously, this structure built a memory into my physical, mental, and emotional being while decreasing inhibitions, anxiety, and feelings of unfamiliarity.

### **Sign-In Wall**

The sign-in wall is part of the methods and structuring that I experienced in Carmen Richardson's *Expressive Arts Workshop for Adolescents*. This consisted of a large paper taped to the wall, and markers to write with. Each day we were to answer a question with a word or a phrase on the sign in wall without writing our names. This

simple activity was the first step in building our little community. In session one of my workshop, I will ask participants, “What is Hope?” I understand that this may be hard to answer and will encourage participants to share a life experience that created hope or that fostered hope. This activity is three-fold. It allows participants to take the first step of sharing beyond the traditional verbal way by voicing their idea of hope through art and written words. Secondly, it initiates them into the beginning of the community building process. Finally, it enables them to begin the creative process by creating a collective masterpiece that brings together each session’s theme. I experienced this first-hand in the four day workshop I attended. With feelings of excitement and nervousness, signing the sign-in wall helped to curb the nervousness while also amplifying my excitement for what I was to observe, learn, and participate in. It also exposed me to the first bit of creativity that was a primary aspect of rest of the workshop. In fact, really, it was my first baby step into a world of creative and expressive experiencing. This baby step was crucial in helping me relax; rather than having to jump right into creative activities and expose myself vulnerably with a group of individuals I had never met before.

### **Check-In**

The check-in experience gives individuals in the group an opening to introduce themselves formally in a nonformal atmosphere. The purpose of the initial check-in is to begin the workshop by modeling how the beginning of continuous sessions will run. This will allow me as the facilitator to introduce myself to the group by sharing my name, my background, and a piece of information I would like the group to know. I recall the sincerity and warmth displayed by course instructors and workshop facilitators and how they modeled their introduction to the group. This was truly a wonderful example for me

to follow in how to introduce myself to the group of people I would be sharing and growing with through the duration of the workshop. While still formal, it was a casual way of group initiation that helped me to begin to put names to faces.

### **Welcome and Introduction**

The welcome and introduction portion of the first session is to outline the objectives of the session and to give an overview of the workshop. This is where I will formally introduce myself, offering more details of my background and my experience with the concept of hope. It is also an opportunity for collective brainstorming to occur as I explain confidentiality and share Natalie Rogers (2011) Community-Building and Guidelines from her book *Creative Connections for Groups* (p. 405). By using a flip chart and markers, the group will collectively brainstorm agreed upon guidelines to follow for the duration of the workshop. This collective collaboration furthers the group initiation, yet helps to solidify group unity as each member is invited to share their ideas of what guidelines are important to them. Throughout the duration of the workshop, this list will be displayed and briefed after the check-in process. To personalize this, I will encourage group members to collaborate what to name our community (e.g., A Safe Place For Hope or A Hopeful Community). This personalizes the guidelines and enables each member to own the community name for oneself and as a group.

Rogers (2011) wrote that in the beginning stages of creative arts development, participants would be assessing the environment for security. Rogers (2011) said it is vital to use activities that will “build trust and safety effectively” (p. 101). She further taught that in order for participants to authentically expose their truths, their true identity, trust must be anchored. This is activated with a group discussion on safety and

confidentiality and how to build a safe community for all members to begin the work within the expressive arts workshop. Therefore, community rituals are necessary bring participants into cohesive unity (Rogers, 2011). The purpose of group collaboration of community guidelines is an activity that will commence a ritual for concessive sessions.

In my experience of community building in courses and workshops, this activity was foundational to building cohesiveness and to building my personal trust for individuals and for the group as a whole. It undoubtedly was a ritual that demanded individual and group respect from me and for others. It was a second baby step into the expressive arts world, much like a mother holding her toddler's hand before she releases her to walk on her own. The child feels "safe" taking those baby steps, trusting her mother's hand. The group collaboration of community guidelines is the handholding portion. Trust is built in identifying what guidelines are important and security is felt in the ritual of going over the guidelines in each session.

Personal binders are also an important aspect of building trust. Simply and practically, personal binders will house the handouts and information given in each session. At a deeper level, it also helps to strengthen group trust. I experienced this realizing that I was not alone in filling my binder with personal notes and handouts, but that the binder signified what was important to all members of the group. The binder became the home for a hard copy of the community guidelines and was therefore a tangible resource I could reflect upon.

### **Opening Circle**

The opening circle is another group ritual meant to build trust and camaraderie and to outline the purpose of the session (Rogers, 2011). In my personal experiences in



expressive arts workshops, the opening circle signified that experiential learning was about to begin. With anticipation, I would gather my thoughts and feelings in order to focus on the importance of the opening circle, both experientially and cognitively. It was in the opening circle that I felt a connectedness and power with the rest of the group—a sense of being—joined in the commonality of our lived experiences, our stories, our hopes and dreams, and the present moment. I felt equality, I felt connected, and I began to feel safe. The opening circle is meant to do just that. It is meant to build trust and tear down a power differential. The structure of the opening circle caused me to feel connected to the group even before I got to know them on a more intimate level.

In fact, Rogers (2011) wrote that an opening circle helps to diminish any hierarchical aspects within the group environment. Specifically, I felt a stronger and equal connection to the course instructor or facilitator because of the opening circle. Similarly, it is essential in my workshop that the group of single mothers feel a sense of equality with me as the facilitator because they are more likely to be vulnerable and hesitant to share their life experiences, and desire to be filled with hope.

The mapping and structure of the opening circle helps to facilitate the holding environment for participants as they creatively explore in the experiential moment. Halprin (2003) differentiated between a witness and an audience in the expressive arts process. In particular, Halprin distinguished between performing for an audience and witnessing another's creative exploration of self with "unconditional acceptance and trust" (p. 116). This authentic witnessing is more likely to occur untarnished from hierarchical or judgmental responses when the group, the community, has been released

from the grips of a natural human response and instead is invited into the warmth of an accepting opening circle.

I believe we all experience this as children. In preschool, in Sunday school, or around the campfire where we are joined with our peers and loved ones in a warm and inviting environment we are not judged. We are witnessed. We do not feel that we are performing, or being judged. Instead we are gently encouraged to sing, learn the alphabet, the days of the month, or share in share-and-tell. I experienced this as an adult in my first expressive arts course at the University of Lethbridge. It was a surprising, yet nostalgic experience for me as I was gently guided to participate within my comfort zone. As I became more at ease, I was invited to take more risks and was honoured by a genuine witnessing and appreciation by my peers.

For this single mothers' workshop, the opening circle will also help to gently encourage participants to experience activities and to realize that performance is not synonymous with creatively and experientially exploring. Instead, the opening circle is meant to foster a collective respect for each other and for the group. It is meant to support single mothers to share their unheard stories and untold dreams, and to witness the birthing process of healing and growth.

As a facilitator in my workshop on hope, building trust is paramount in providing participants with an environment to discover what hope is for them. As I share my experiences of hope in a circle, experientially or otherwise, I am providing participants with visible evidence that I am their equal. In fact, Rogers (2011) stated that the opening circle tells participants this: "I want you to know me as a human being, not just as a teacher. And I am hoping you will share yourself with me, and with the group" (p. 113).

That is how I saw the course instructors and workshop facilitators—as human beings, my equals—my partners in vulnerability and in strength.

### **Activities**

There are many experiential activities to choose from. This being said, I seek only to use activities I am prepared myself to use. By this I mean that I aim to use expressive arts activities that I have first experienced personally and have further explored at a professional level. Rogers (1993) wrote of this process as preparing oneself by experiencing the many different degrees of the expressive arts and then being able to “introduce this material from a sense of confidence in its effectiveness” (p. 105). She emphasized the necessity of fully trusting this effectiveness before being able to introduce it to a potential client or group participant. As such, I have chosen activities that I have tested in my own healing and learning processes.

**Mirroring.** The expressive arts activity I vividly remember is the mirroring activity. I recall this specific exercise in my first expressive arts therapy course. I went into the course with predetermined judgments. I intellectualized expressive arts as being something easy to do with an attitude of ‘how hard could it be?’ When my instructor introduced the mirroring activity, I was immediately confronted with my own vulnerabilities and anxieties of ‘performing’ in front of my peers. Instead, I was eased into a playful and nonconfrontational activity with a peer that helped me build trust in my peers and reduced my anxiety about my performance. As I looked around, I was surrounded by pairs of my peers who were nervously laughing and also looking around. I realized at that moment that I was not in this alone! The course instructor began the mirroring exercise with a volunteer and proceeded to sculpt slow and gentle body

movements and suddenly interrupted her sculpting with a sudden motion of tooth brushing. The nervous tension in the room erupted into laughter as the ice was broken. At this point, we were encouraged to keep our focus on our partner and not the room, thus personalizing and reducing the holding space of the activity to each pair. This is where I truly began to understand the difference between a performance and a witnessing. As I witnessed my partner sculpting her body for me to mirror, my heartbeat settled, my anxiety was stilled, and I became aware of only her movements and my responses. This was my first encounter with noticing my own body responses. The instructor called out to us to take notice of what was happening with our physical bodies, our emotional bodies, our mental bodies, and how they were related.

Halprin (2003) wrote of this as the three levels of awareness and response. She says that as we develop our expressive body in accordance with these three levels, our bodies become “like a channel that allows us to access higher levels of consciousness” (p. 105). That is, we open ourselves up to “new perceptions and possibilities” (Halprin, 2003, p. 105). This nonverbal exercise, mirroring, enabled me to see beyond performance anxiety, eliminated my predetermined judgments, and opened me up with anticipation for new possibilities. Specifically, in that moment, it introduced me to a member of my community in a more intimate way.

For the single mothers in my workshop, I predict this exercise will help reduce their performance anxiety and help to foster trust building at a deeper level. Further, I anticipate that this exercise will help single mothers begin to shake off their own misconceptions of their identities and open themselves up to new perceptions and possibilities of how hope can become a secure part of who they are. Purposefully, this

exercise is to begin to ease group participants into the self-portrait activities of the session and subsequent sessions.

**Interviewing.** The next activity I chose for my workshop is an interviewing session in pairs. Each partner will ask questions surrounding hope and hopelessness, without adding opinions. Each partner is then to create two pieces of art to reflect what they heard their partner share about hope and hopelessness. Again, this activity is a two-fold experience of witnessing and authentic sharing. I recall many interviewing sessions in my university counselling courses and professional workshops where I experienced both vulnerabilities and appreciation in the interviewing process. Because it was shared with a partner and not the entire group, I found it easier to be vulnerable and to be honest. When it was witnessed and reflected to the group I felt honoured and my trust in my community increased.

The group sharing of hope and hopelessness will be accomplished through the sharing of the art pieces and the phrases: “I feel hopeless about. . .” “I feel hope about. . .” The group responses are to reflect thanksgiving to the sharer rather than a critical response to the artwork or advice the sharer. This then authenticates the experience at a group level without judgement, but instead with appreciation. After each member has had a chance to share and receive group appreciation, I will utilize the flip chart to write the words surrounding feelings of hopelessness and feelings of hope. This progresses into a group brainstorming activity with the facilitator assisting the group in making connections between shared experiences of hope and hopelessness, thus conceptualizing hope as a whole and strengthening the community around their lived experiences of hope.

**Reflections of your body.** Reflecting on our bodies encourages us to pay attention and to respect what we are feeling physically. I am reminded that every facilitator from every expressive arts group I have participated in insists that each participant be mindful and pay attention to what we are feeling physically in the group experience and to honour our bodies in the process. Ronna Jevne (2000) wrote, “As you come to know your body, listen to it. In turn, it will do its best to make your life enjoyable” (p. 39). Jevne used the analogy of the red light on a vehicle’s dashboard that signals us to pay attention to our car—something may be wrong. Similarly, we need to pay attention to the physical signals our body gives us when something is wrong. Jevne has created a list of questions for individuals suffering through illness to assist them in reflecting on their bodies. I have adapted this list (see Appendix D) for the use of my participants to help them reflect on their bodies during group sessions, but to also use to pay attention in everyday life when feelings of hopelessness arise. Questions such as these can help bring perspective to a problem or concern and as a result, decrease the anxiety or give participants a chance to breathe. Practicing and memorizing the questions before the stressor event will be beneficial to the participant because of the idea of “muscle memory”.

For those who have ever gone skydiving, the following story will resonate. Years ago I experience my first skydiving solo jump. However, the prerequisite to the jump was six hours of ground training. I very vividly recall one young man speaking up in frustration into the third hour of training. He very exasperatedly asked what the point was of doing the same thing over and over. The instructor bluntly replied, “To save your life.” The instructor explained that what we practice when we are not in an emotionally

and physically heightened moment will develop into memory so that when we are in the actual hyper-intense moment of jumping out of an airplane, surrounded by noise and wind and filled with adrenaline, excitement, and fear—we will remember what we have been taught! That is, we will remember the very detailed and necessary physical actions required to safely and successfully jump out of a plane and make it to the ground.

Similarly, practicing these questions and techniques can help to save a participant for whom hope is a life-and-death necessity when any type of anxiety or physical stressor occurs.

**Storytelling.** The interviewing and group brainstorming process is a gentle precursor to storytelling. Lopez, Floyd, Ulven, and Snyder (2000) stated, “An important part of the hope finding process is to recognize the strands of hope that run through our lives” (p. 129). The main purpose of this workshop is to assist participants to recognize strands of hope and to experience and utilize the activities and self-portrait processes as a means to anchor these strands into their identity. Storytelling, or narratives, is a useful way for participants to begin to identify hope themes, express unspoken hopes, and share of specific times when hope was real and present versus times when it seemed distant or absent (Lopez et al., 2000). As such, a storytelling activity will help participants to recognize a past experience and how re-adjusting present thinking can enable them to identify hope in future circumstances (Lopez et al., 2000). The goal of hopeful storytelling is to assist participants to find themes of hope—to provide an evidence of past hope—and to subsequently cause them to actively look for future aspects of hope. Lopez et al. (2000) wrote that explaining the purpose behind narratives will actually prime participants to consider and identify hopeful parts of their past. This is an exciting

aspect of this activity because if participants can be primed to reflect and identify past hopeful experiences through narratives, so too are they priming themselves to search and identify future elements of hope!

Unfinished and untold stories of hope that are revisited and re-authored open the storyteller up to the vulnerabilities of change (Abels & Abels, 2001). Abels and Abels (2001) wrote that the counselling process could help to “explore storied experiences so to discover still unformed, but preferred stories that lie dormant in the subtext of their life narratives” (p. 3). This process of re-authoring one’s story in collaboration with self-portraits and hopeful language can help group participants to analyze and reframe lost or forgotten hopes in an empowering manner. Rewriting one’s own story empowers the individual to shift from internalizing to externalizing the issues where hope was is seemingly absent. Absent—that is to externalize the problem and to then internalize the transformation. Further, Abels and Abels (2001) wrote, “The transformative power of telling their stories, part of the narrative of their lives, frees people to imagine their new stories and move on to productive lives” (p. 16).

This is the intent of this workshop—to assist participants to transform their lives by re-authoring their stories through self-portraits of hope. The workshop seeks to free people and open new doors for moving forward with hopeful identities. I re-authored my story and invited hope to transform my life. The cathartic power of my narrative increased my level of hope as I revisited my hopes and dreams and told my life story as I remember it—replacing the empty gaps with forgotten dreams and painful times with hopeful endings—endings where hope is active and alive. For the purposes of this workshop I have adapted the Lopez et al. (2000) structure of beginning and concluding



narrative exercises to help guide group participants to develop their own narrative about hope (see Appendix E).

I specifically chose the sharing between the child and adult selves because it opens the door for memories, dreams, and hopes to walk through and visit participants in their present and look forward to a presence of hope in their future. This exercise is meaningful to me because of the workshop I attended with Carmen Richardson. Carmen asked participants similar questions about the adolescent and adult selves. This exercise coached me into gentle reflection and prompted a frame of mind for new opportunity. It caused me to reflect on my childhood and adolescence and on what I might tell my adult-self if I had the chance. Subsequently, it was a powerful feeling as I realized that I had an opportunity to change my present outlook because of the metaphoric sharing with both my past and future selves. This metaphoric sharing of the selves, this storytelling, was profound for me because it primed me to search for positive life lessons of my past while at the same time it primed me to search for immediate positive goals and successes to share with a future self.

The narrative exercise is an exploratory precursor for the self-portraits. It will enable clients to take specific memories and experiences of hope and hopelessness and create self-portraits that truly represent the portrait theme. Lopez et al. (2000) suggested that narrative work be consistent and consecutive because one session may not adequately enable participants to fully examine and grasp the concept. In fact, Lopez et al. stated that participants would have a better understanding of their experience of hope in their lifetime if narratives are explored and developed in multiple sessions. As such,

narrative exercises will be utilized as an introduction to each self-portrait in every session.

### **The Self-Portraits**

**Explanation of portraits.** The following self-portraits are reflections of some of the materials I developed and will use in this personalized workshop. It is vital to explain the self-portrait process and outcome to participants—specifically, to explain that each self-portrait is personalized, with no right or wrong way, but rather they are meant to enable participants to explore an identity of hope. Each purpose of a portrait assignment is to offer participants a photographic response to the remembrance of hope without having to share with the group via a traditional verbal approach. To reiterate Weiser (1999), I hold strongly to her approach that “self-portrait work has proven to be particularly useful in helping women strengthen, or begin to emerge into, their identities” (p. 21). This is such a powerful proclamation for me because the entire premise behind this workshop, behind this project, is to assist women to strengthen an identity of hope. Weiser further asserted how self-portrait work has strongly influenced progress with groups of people who have been targets of manipulations and negative delineation. It is this evidence, combined with my personal and professional self-portrait experience that is the basis for this workshop.

**Session one self-portrait: A remembrance of hope.** Utilizing the collaborative list of hope and hopeless words produced from the interviewing and collaboration exercise, participants will create their own hope portrait that illustrates how they identify hope within themselves. This activity will utilize all art supplies, including or excluding photographs they have with them. Lopez et al. (2000) purported the necessity of

identifying an optimistic viewpoint of the future in order to instil and establish a “house of hope” (p. 124). At this point I am asking participants to draw from their memory banks rather than encouraging an advance of hope. I am assisting participants to first remember hope before asking them to optimistically search for hope. In fact, participants will be building the foundation for their house of hope.

The use of all art supplies and symbolism is particularly relevant because it limits any restrictions, or right or wrong ways of completing the self-portrait thus enabling the process to be intimately personalized. When I worked on my first self-portrait in the workshop I attended with Carmen Richardson on expressive arts for adolescents, I felt enlightened as there was no right or wrong way of creating my self-portrait. I was encouraged to close my eyes and use my imagination, being open to the images that filled my mind. It is in this same way that I encourage group participants to be open to creativity and embrace what feels right for them when creating their first self-portrait. I have chosen to ask the following questions for participants to keep in mind as they work on their first self-portrait:

- What do you remember about a hopeful time in your life?
- How do you see yourself today with that remembrance of hope?
- What colour is that hope for you?

These questions are very purposeful to the portrait theme, that is, to encourage participants to think about hopeful times in their past. Colouring hope is a way for participants to begin to see hope as more than a construct and instead to attach personal meaning to it. In fact, hope is transformed through life experiences, thus echoes from the attachments we have made socially and culturally (Scioli & Biller, 2010). In this case,

the purpose of this first self-portrait is to recall hope from the hidden depths of the heart and to begin transforming hope into a very personalized and empowering part of the participant's identity.

**Session two self-portrait: The duality of hope.** There is a dichotomy of between hope and hopelessness but this dichotomy often is false. We often feel either hopeful or hopeless in the same way we separate light and darkness. This portrait however, is to enable participants to recognize that although they may feel this conflict, and the darkness, the hopelessness, they can be assured to know that in the same way that light breaks through the darkness, hope too can overcome hopelessness. For me, as a single mother, I felt many instances of hopelessness. Sometimes all I could see around me was darkness, failure, and fear. I could not recognize a future because I could not see past the overwhelming feelings of hopelessness. I did not have the motivation or the ability to work toward my life goals. However, as I recollect these instances, I am astounded by the memories of how quickly the hopelessness was overcome with hope and the darkness, failure, and fear was forgotten, if only for a moment. It is in these very personal experiences where that I began to believe in the power of hope. However, I realized that I needed to pay serious attention to the signs of hopelessness in my life. These signs, symbols, triggers, and feelings are powerful indicators of how easily I can lose my grasp on hope. Thus, I started to pay attention. I purposefully watched for these signs. I was vigilant. Vigilant, because I knew that these signs indicated the need to utilize hope in a more powerful way—that is, to keep it exercised and to maintain its strength.

In the same way that our muscles need to be continually exercised, so too does hope, for without exercise it will begin to atrophy and allow for hopelessness to take its place. In order to aid participants to create a self-portrait that encompasses the duality of hope, the following questions will be asked:

- Where does your hope go when you feel times of hopelessness?
- What helps to protect your hope?
- How can you exercise your hope?
- Imagine hope as a small child who is lost—who will help you find it?

The language used in these questions emphasizes that even when we feel hopeless, hope is not absent. Instead, the implication is that hope can be found, taken back, or protected. Thus, the purpose of this self-portrait is to portray the ever-present power of hope that participants can exercise and strengthen within their identity.

**Session three self-portrait: Personalizing hope.** This is a mid-session metaphoric self-portrait that offers opportunity for participants to really let go and create how that they have conceptualized hope, understand the duality between hope and hopelessness, and begin to experience emerging styles of personalized hope. The focus in creating this self-portrait will be on the fantasy, dreams, and imagining what a hopeful future would look like. Scioli and Biller (2010) likened hope to a hope chest “filled with emotional, social, and spiritual resources for striving and connecting as well as coping with adversity and transcending the present” (p. 95). I love this comparison because it personalizes hope for each individual. Imagine a hope chest filled with a collection of mementos, items saved for the future, and meaningful knickknacks. Every hope chest will host an assortment of different items unique to the individual. As such, it is a

gathering place for memories, dreams, and imagination. It is truly symbolic of hope and how unique hope is for each individual. As hope will be interpreted differently for each participant, session three's self-portrait will enable each participant to personalize hope in combination with his or her own dreams and emotional, social, and spiritual resources.

The following questions will be asked:

- When you imagine your hope chest, what does it look like?
- What is in your chest? A lot of bad feelings? Or Hope?
- What kind of items in your hope chest make hope real?

**Session four self-portrait: Claiming hope.** This portrait is a powerful mid-session self-portrait that impels participants into ownership mode. For the first three portraits, participants searched, identified, and laid the groundwork of their house of hope. Now they get to claim their hope in a self-portrait that will witness their perseverance and hard work. When I think about what claiming means, I think about taking possession of what is yours. As such, claiming implies an ownership. For me, the act of claiming hope is akin to staking a gold mine claim. After searching and travelling for the places where gold was suspected to lay hidden, prospectors ran the risk of assault and murder from claim jumpers. They also had to determine the difference between the real mine and what was known as salting the claim (i.e., where prospectors would plant gold to deter other prospectors from searching for the real location). Similarly to claiming hope, participants must recognize the vigilance that is involved as they plant their flag and claim their "gold." Hope prospectors search, identify, and personalize hope in their lives. As they stake their claim of hope, they must be watchful of anything or anyone who might assault or murder that claim. They must also be vigilant of claim

jumpers. In this sense, a claim jumper may symbolize the idea of false hope or something that misrepresents the active and living aspect of hope. Further to this, participants must be actively aware of whom or what could steal their hope. When creating session four's self-portrait, the following questions will be asked and ideas will be suggested:

- What does your empowered self look like when you have claimed your hope?
- Whom or what could steal your hope?
- What does claiming a gold (hope) mine look like for you? Imagine staking your flag into the ground as you claim your hope.

**Session five self-portrait: Integrating hope.** It takes time and hard work to build your life around what you have claimed. It is analogous to completing a puzzle. I often ask clients that I counsel who are in the middle of some type of life conflict the following questions: What does your life puzzle look like? What is it like when you begin to put the pieces together? For participants, integrating hope may be much like putting a puzzle together. Think back to the times you have built a puzzle. There is a system to it. First we dump the box out on the table and prop the puzzle picture upright so we can see what we are building. The puzzle picture is analogous to hopes and dreams. It is what is envisioned in our mind's eye. We then begin to take the pieces and put them face up on the table.

For this self-portrait, participants are invited to imagine what their pieces of hope are and to place them face upright so they can view them as they begin to organize. The next step in building a puzzle is to find the corner and edge pieces and begin to build the border of the puzzle. Participants are further invited to imagine what the pieces and

border look like in their lives. These may be identified as boundaries and supports, and then slowly we begin searching and finding the pieces that match up and connecting sections, putting pieces aside, slowly building the “big” picture. It also takes patience and perseverance. Likewise, when building our life puzzle, it takes patience. It takes perseverance. Finally, it takes courage because our claim might not always bear fruit at first and just as certain pieces of the puzzle do not fit, certain pieces we integrate into our lives may not fit. To maintain our claim of hope, we must not force pieces of the puzzle together. Instead, we put pieces aside, not because they are not puzzle pieces, but because they just do not work for that particular part of the puzzle. The idea here is for participants to develop their self-portrait of hope integration around the work involved in building a puzzle. Questions I will ask are:

- What does your life puzzle look like?
- What do you do with the pieces that do not fit at the time?
- How will you build your puzzle?
- When integrating your hope identity into your lives, what does that look like?
- Who supports your hope?
- What does your puzzle boarder look like?
- What boundaries do you need to build to support your hope?

**Session six self-portrait: Supporting and celebrating hope.** Hope can continue to flourish when the vessel that houses it is maintained. In a very practical sense, it is analogous to aspects of wellness. That is—exercise, nutrition, active relaxation and meditation, spirituality, and fun. It is fundamental to take care of this body, or the vessel that contains hope. Think for a moment of a container with holes in it. Every time a



liquid is poured into this container, it drains out. The container cannot physically hold the liquid. Similarly, a vessel cannot hold hope with holes in it. Instead, it must be patched, repaired, and maintained. In a sense, this portrait enables one to widen the context of their lives to pass on the ripple effect of hope by looking after one's mental, physical, and emotional health, thus keeping the vessel of hope strong. Secondly, it is relevant to maintain the relationships identified and built during the workshop or in other areas of life, thus by building and maintaining relationships participants can be of service to one another in their personal communities and keep hope alive. Finally, in celebrating the essence of hope, participants perpetuate the ripples of hope by giving hope away. That is, as I wrote at the very beginning of this project—the ripple effect of hope is unstoppable, just as the ripples in a pond are unstoppable. The nature of hope will ripple toward shore, connecting with those it comes in contact with; thus supporting it from the individual into a community celebration. Questions asked will be:

- How will you keep hope alive?
- Why do you celebrate?
- What do you need to do to keep your hope vessel healthy and whole?
- Who do you want to infect with hope?
- How can you keep yourself infected with hope?
- Who are your resource people?

### **Summary**

This synthesis of ideas and reflections of hope for single mothers was developed intimately and with the belief that the questions asked at the beginning of this project could be answered.

1. What is hope? Hope can be understood and personally interpreted for each single mother through experiential learning of this workshop.
2. What is the impact of hope for single mothers? The impact of hope can be understood through exploration of resources, supports, boundaries, and by attaining hope within one's personal identity.
3. Can hope be learned in a collective environment? Yes. Through meaningful relationship and community building, hope will be explored personally and within the group through shared stories of the lived experience of hope.
4. Can expressive arts interventions/activities, such as self-portraits, enhance or facilitate hope? Yes. The purpose of the metaphoric self-portraits is meant to individualize and help participants to experientially become familiar with hope and how hope can benefit the self.

Therefore, hope can be purposeful, unstoppable, and an essential aspect of one's identity learned through community building and the expressive arts.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to share with the reader how my personal experiences, education, and professional development initiated a passion to develop a personal workshop on metaphorical self-portraits and how these portraits could help to develop hope within single mothers. Initially, I planned to create a complete workshop for facilitators to utilize on this topic. However, as I engaged in ongoing research and began my own experiences in professionally facilitating therapeutic groups, I realized that such a complex and in-depth workshop design would not fit within the scope of this project. Instead, this project allowed me to research and synthesize the areas I am most passionate about. As a result, it has become a spring board for future research and development.

The more research I did on Relational-cultural theory, the more I wanted to incorporate RCT into this project as a connecting piece between sharing the ripple effect experience of hope in a group of mothers who have experienced the many hardships of single parenting. I had a wonderful experience utilizing RCT components within a cultural group for new to Canada parents at my current place of employment. This further ignited my passion to understand RCT and its therapeutic leanings for supporting marginalized, oppressed, or misunderstood individuals, perhaps in a more developed workshop. This theory, RCT, seems to fit with McGeer's (2004) definition that hope is fostered when we take "a hopeful interest in the hopes of others and vice versa" (p. 125).

I anticipate that the group portrait experience will have profound effects for fostering hope within single mothers. Hope, very simply defined as a desiring something positive to happen could certainly be experienced in the group experience between

women with similar stories. Working independently on metaphorical self-portraits within the group experience cannot help but encourage the momentum of hope within participants as they explore and expose their stories in vulnerability. Weiser (2010) wrote of the self-portrait as when the clients themselves “had full control and power over all aspects of the image’s creation” (p. 6). It the intent of this project that it is this type of full control and power that will spread hope into the metaphorical self-portraits and into the creator of these portraits. It is in the process of creating hopeful self-portraits where hope is explored, identified, and developed. It is in the final viewing of the self-portrait in which hope can be personally identified as part of the essence of single mothers.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Workshop Supplies

- Colors
  - Felt markers, permanent and non
  - Oil pastels
  - Chalk pastels
  - Tempera paint
  - Water colors
- Collage material
  - Magazines
  - Fabric
  - Buttons
  - Beads
  - Coloured tissue paper
  - Feathers
  - Objects of nature
  - Be creative with supplies!
- Paper
  - Drawing paper
  - Construction coloured paper
  - Watercolour paper
  - Large roll of paper
- Clay
- Miscellaneous supplies
  - Scissors, tins for paints, brushes, wooden spoons, stir sticks, glues, tapes, wire, string, rocks, wire, foil, stapler, paper plates, lined paper for free writing, poster board, pens, pencils, plastic or cloth tarps, clothes pins or tacks to hang finished portraits.
- Music for introductory connections, transitions between activities, and for opening and closing circles.
- Flip chart or White board for brainstorming and group collaboration
- Instruments for making music. Bongo drums, cymbals, bells, tambourines, triangles, flutes.
- Relaxation music and other genres to include: classical, jazz, rock, new age, etc.

**Appendix B: Self-Portraits of Hope*****Self-Portraits of Hope***

*An Expressive Arts Workshop on Hope for Single Mothers*

***You are invited to learn about hope with other single mothers!***

As single mothers, we each have an identity of hope that is waiting for the opportunity to be heard, discovered, explored, and celebrated! Too often though, this hopeful identity lies quietly within, undiscovered and unheard and uncelebrated because of exhaustion, insecurity, and despair. Through the healing process of the creative arts and personalized self-portraits, we will connect with six portrayals of hope and help hope to blossom as a part of our identities. This is an experiential workshop open to single mothers who desire to celebrate hope through creativity of art, music, and connection with others.

***Self-Portrait Themes***

Session 1: A Remembrance of Hope  
Session 2: The Duality of Hope  
Session 3: Identifying Hope  
Session 4: Personalizing Hope  
Session 5: Integrating Hope  
Session 6: Supporting and Celebrating Hope

**WHAT:** A creative approach to understanding the power of hope through self-portraits

**WHEN:** 6 three hour sessions (dates & times)

**WHERE:** (Location)

\*No artistic experience necessary



### Appendix C: Session Example

#### Session 3:

<i>Personalizing Hope</i>			
<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Instructions &amp; Supplies</b>	<b>Explanation and Notes</b>
10 min	Meet & greet & Sign-in wall	Large paper and markers: Each day will consist of a question to answer with a word or a phrase on the sign in wall (no names). Session three: What color is your Hope?	Name tags not necessary
10 min	Check in	Members to share how they feel starting session 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitator to ask for a volunteer to begin the check in process</li> </ul>
10 min	Welcome and Review of Community Building Guidelines and Confidentiality	Objectives of the day and overview of the workshop: Flip chart and markers. Does anyone have anything to add to our <i>Safe place for hope</i> ? Any concerns? This is a time to bring the Community Building Guidelines to the group's attention and offer a safe environment for communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interactive &amp; fun.</li> <li>• Review flip chart of collectively agreed upon guidelines.</li> <li>• Discussion on safety and confidentiality to build a safe community that will promote vulnerability and sharing</li> </ul>
5 min	Opening Circle	Sitting in a circle and taking 1 minute to breath and reflect and then sharing one word that describes how they are feeling entering the third session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To establish a ritual that will help build community, cohesiveness, trust, and to help members to get to know each other.</li> <li>• Facilitator to ask for a volunteer and then do a popcorn round of sharing</li> </ul>

10 min	Exploration of a hopeful environment: Imagery	To energize the imagination of the participants, to promote creativity and opportunity for participants to begin filling their metaphorical hope chest.	Calming music playing in background Walk around the room and envision your hopeful place. A place to dream, a place you feel secure and happy. What does this place look like? Imagine you find a chest, a hope chest and it is filled with everything that you've ever dreamed of. What is in this hope chest? Does anything need to be added to it?
10 min	Activity reflection	What was this like to fill your hope chest?	This allows the facilitator to debrief the activity and transition into personal interpretations of hope
10 min	Break	Rejuvenate with refreshments and snacks	Keep break on track
15 min	Personal interpretations of hope: Interview process	Members pair up and interview each other using hope generating questions	Participants share in an interview process what their hope chests are filled with, what is missing, what could make hope tangible for them
15 min	Create a collage of these interpretations as a team	All art supplies and nature	Paired participants bring interpretations of hope together in a creative process
10 min	Share with the group the many interpretations of hope that emerge	Flip chart a hope-web	This allows the facilitator to bring interpretations together that surround hope
10 min	Break	Restroom, snacks and refreshments and fresh air if needed	Keep break on track
10 min	Role play: 2 styles of hope	Dyads, spontaneous, nonscripted, 2 styles of hope that can support each other or be contagious to each other	Building and fostering trust within the group while promoting the contagious aspect of hope
20 min	Self-portrait: Personalizing hope	Create self-portrait focusing on the fantasy, dreams, and imagination of what	This is a mid-session metaphoric self-portrait that offers opportunity for participants to really 'let go' and create now that

		a hopeful future you would be like	they have conceptualized hope, understand conflicts, and begin to experience emerging styles of personalized hope
10 min	Sharing Circle: Sharing and honouring the portrait	Each participant to take 1 min to share their portrait, group to honour the experience with the use of movement	It is important to honour the experience and the identification of hope within the portrait and not the final piece itself.
5 min	Grounding and reflection	Participants to each say “My future hopeful self would tell me...” (no right or wrong answer)	This allows each individual to leave witnessing hope in others and imprinting their hope into the community.
5 min	Sharing Circle	Personalized with intent: Hope for me is...	Closing session three by grounding hope into our group community and preparing for session four
1 min	Closing Circle	1 min of silence.	Facilitator to ring the triangle to begin and end

### **Appendix D: Reflections of Your Body**

- Which physical symptom do you typically ignore? (neck ache, headache, clenching teeth, butterflies in stomach, heart racing)
- When you feel a physical symptom, what is your body trying to tell you?
- What would happen if you stopped what you were doing and took a break/rest?
- What are your three favourite pleasures? (bubble baths, walks, cheesecake, laughter, etc.)
- If your body could talk to you, what would it say in this moment?
- What would you like to tell your body in this moment?
- Are you breathing?
- What happens to your body when you take deep breaths?
- What hopeful image would you pick to help you with this physical feeling?
- If you could pick any one person as your hope coach/buddy, who would it be?

### **Appendix E: Narrative Exercises**

1. Relaxation/guided mediation: Assisting mothers to make connections with memories, feelings, images, dreams, and hope through a guided imagery exercise.
2. Exploration of hope and hopelessness: What is your experience of these during times of childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, dating, etc.?
3. Specific questions to ask to begin the narrative exercise: What would your child-self tell your adult-self about hope? What would your adult-self want to share with your child-self about hope?
4. Learn to interpret or reframe events (or the above related questions) from a hope perspective by paying attention to connections of hope in their stories.
5. Concluding the recollection of hope by directing to and reframing participant's current experiences.
6. Link the past and the present to the future: Recognize elements of hope from the past and how they are relevant to their future. Ask the following questions: What would your child-self tell an older adult-self about hope? What would your present adult-self tell and older adult-self about hope?