**Introduction**

Haredi Jews are a distinct segment within Jewish society in Israel and in the world, representing the most ultra-orthodox factions of Judaism. Haredi society is extremely traditionalist, collectivist, and patriarchal, conducting itself as a closed community with emphasis on faith in God, strict obedience to Jewish law, and staunch loyalty to the community and its members (Freund & Band-Winterstein, 2017; Nadan & Ganz, 2018). Even though the Haredi society is composed of different groups (Zicherman & Kahaner, 2012), it is possible to establish a clear system of values common to all of them, such as adherence to religious norms and decrees alongside resistance to the secular lifestyle (Freund & Band-Winterstein, 2017).

The present research examines the approaches of non-Haredi art therapists to treating children from the Haredi community. This kind of treatment is defined as inter-cultural therapy, a term that points to the significant influence that the cultural difference between the different parties has on the process (Fung & Lo, 2017). The patient’s system of cultural beliefs affects their perception of self, their expectations from relationships, their willingness to expose their inner self, as well as their perception of the treatment and its objectives (Cross & Blomer, 2010; Fung & Lo, 2017). Patients from different cultures may have different ways of expressing distress, or even different ways of understanding the source of their distress and how it might be aleviated (Fung & Lo, 2017). Likewise, cultural beliefs regarding the subject of mental illness and health sometimes lead to the development of a stigma, which presents an obstacle and amplifies the feelings of shame attached to experiencing mental distress and seeking treatment (Cross & Bloomer, 2010; Gopalkrishnan, 2018). A patient’s traditionalist-collectivist cultural background may present significant challenges in the course treatment, since the Western system of cultural values underlying the practice of psychotherapy is fundamentally different from the traditionalist system of cultural values (Qureshi & Collazos, 2011).

Studies examining psychotherapy in the Haredi society show that despite the indisputable progress marked in terms of openness to psychotherapy and the validity of receiving aid from outside the Haredi world (Freund & Band-Winterstein, 2013), there is still noticeable ambivalence, suspicion and hostility towards external sources of mental health assistance (Freund & Band-Winterstein, 2017; Popovsky, 2010). These attitudes are sometimes reflected in a restricted ability to assuage doubts, difficulties looking inwards (Hess & Pitariu, 2011), and expectations of practical recommendations (Hess, 2018). In addition, the central place of the community in the life of the individual may undermine the legitimacy of even dealing with individual identity in the first place (Freund & Band-Winterstein, 2017; Schlesinger & Russo-Netzer, 2017). It may also lead to an unwillingness to expose difficulties or to cooperate due to fears of harming the social status of the individual and their family in the community (Barth & Ben-Ari, 2014; Greenberg & Witztum, 2013). That being said, other studies suggest that the external nature of treatment may, to the contrary, boost the patient’s trust and engagement due to the decreased possibility of exposure within the community (Freund & Band-Winterstein, 2013; Stolovy, Levy, Doron & Melamed, 2012). In the case of child therapy, severe difficulties may arise on the part of the child’s parents, stemming from their sense of responsibility for the child’s spiritual and religious upbringing (Schnitzer et al., 2011).

The complexity involved in the Haredi patient’s search for treatment may be particularly elevated when it comes to art therapy. Beyond the fact that there are multiple Halachic ordinances restricting the practice of various art forms, the Haredi community tends to perceive art as a means of cultural, spiritual and moral education. The possibility of using art as a language to express one’s inner world, on the other hand, remains fairly limited (Sari, 2013; Sperber; 2010).

Nevertheless, art therapy exists in the Haredi community. In fact, it has even seen an increase in popularity in recent years. Research on the subject, however, is still extremely scant and consists of studies that focuse on therapy by means of visual art (Padolsky Crouper, 2018) and dance (Souskin & Carnieli, 2015) alone. These studies show that the Haredi society views art therapy as a less legitimate form of therapy due to its perception as less practical or constructive. In addition, this kind of therapy expects patients to explore playfulness and creative expressions, things that Haredi patients find difficult and which make them nervous about the possibility of losing control and exposing themselves. On the other hand, it would seem that having recourse to art in therapy makes it possible to bypass the patients’ defense mechanisms and allows them to express emotions through distancing (Padolsky Crouper, 2018).

In light of the paucity of research on the subject, the current study sought to conceptualize the therapeutic act in inter-cultural art therapy for Haredi children by examining the experiences and impressions of art therapists from outside the Haredi community.