



Moments that Matter: Disappointment and Change in Art Therapy Through Clients' Eyes

רגעים חשובים: אכזבה ושינוי בטיפול באמנות דרך עיני המטופלים

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This presentation integrates findings from a qualitative study exploring adult clients' perspectives on moments of disappointment and factors of change in art therapy. While psychotherapy literature has long examined processes of rupture, repair, and transformation in verbal modalities, limited research has addressed how these processes unfold in art therapy from the client's point of view.

The first study, based on semi-structured interviews with 52 adult clients, explored experiences of disappointment. Thematic analysis revealed three main sources: (1) therapist behaviors perceived as passive or overly directive; (2) relational ruptures marked by misattunement or inconsistency; and (3) creative tensions, especially between verbal and non-verbal modalities. A fourth theme concerned clients' coping strategies, ranging from withdrawal to meaning-making within the rupture. These findings highlight the therapeutic risks of unrecognized or unaddressed ruptures and emphasize the dynamic relationship between client, therapist, and image.

The second part of the study examined what clients see as facilitating change in art therapy. Four interconnected factors emerged: (1) transformative therapeutic relationships that foster trust and self-recognition; (2) cognitive-emotional insight gained through shared image exploration; (3) embodied processing through sensory engagement with materials; and (4) the use of art-making for emotional regulation and grounding. Together, these studies illuminate the cyclical and paradoxical nature of therapeutic journeys in art therapy. Moments of disappointment can disrupt connection and progress, yet they often become key points of return moments that invite renewed engagement, insight, and transformation.



Reflecting the theme of repetition and return, clients' experiences mirror the continuous movement between rupture and repair, familiarity and change, containment and expression. As in Cavafy's Ithaca, these journeys are characterized by internal and external encounters that shape meaning, identity, and homecoming. This presentation emphasizes how art therapy creates space for symbolic repetition, embodied memory, and creative reparation, offering a nuanced view of therapeutic change as a recursive, relational, and meaning-making process.

Biography

Limor Goldner, (MATR, Ph.D.), art therapist, is an Associate Professor at the School of Creative Arts Therapies, Faculty of Welfare and Health Science, University of Haifa, Israel. She is also Director of the Emili Sagol Research Center and the Laboratory for At-Risk Children and Adolescents. Additionally, she is an Associate Editor for Special Issues in *The Arts in Psychotherapy* and at the Journal of Loss and Trauma. Her research focuses on children's emotional and sexual abuse, recovery from gender-based violence, and their representations in visual art. She has authored about 80 papers and book chapters on these topics.

Irit Birger Sagiv, PhD, is an art therapist, lecturer, and researcher specializing in trauma-informed, inclusive art therapy with marginalized populations. She holds a PhD from the University of Haifa, where she explored civic engagement among socially excluded young women. Her work integrates community-based interventions, open studio models, and identity development. She has published in leading journals such as *Frontiers in Psychology* and *AJOT*, and serves as a reviewer for *The Arts in Psychotherapy*. Dr. Birger Sagiv teaches graduate art therapy courses and is committed to bridging clinical practice, research, and social impact.

Recent Publications

Birger, I., Goldner, L. & Carmel, Y. (2022). **Civic engagement in socially excluded young adults promotes well-being: The mediation of self-efficacy meaning in life and identity exploration.** *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health; Health-Related Quality of Life and Well-Being* section, 19(16), 9862.



Birger, I., Goldner, L. & Carmel, Y. (2022). **Civic engagement community participation thriving model (CECP-TM): A multi-faceted thriving model to promote socially excluded young adult women.** *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 955777.

Birger, I., Goldner, L., & Carmel, Y. (2024). **Socially excluded young adult Israeli women's social activism: A new approach for promoting well-being.** *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000691>

Lev-Wiesel, R., Goldner, L., Malishkevich, R., Hait, A., Frid, N., & Lahav, L. (2024). **Adult survivors of child sexual abuse draw and describe the experience of dissociation.** *Violence Against Women*, 30(10), 2655–2673. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012231152694>

Vulcan, M., & Goldner, L. (2024). **Moments of disappointment in art therapy: Patients' perspectives.** *International Journal of Art Therapy*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17454832.2025.2468377>

Goldner, L., Pery, A., Czamanski-Cohen, J., Jaroenkajornk, N., Ben-Bassat, A., Avraham, G., Binson, B., & Lev-Wiesel, R. (2025). **Drawing the mind: Assessing cognitive decline through self-figure drawings.** *Frontiers in Psychology: Psychology of Aging*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1558675>

Wexler, L., & Goldner, L. (2025). **Let them draw: Israeli adolescents' doodle notebooks amid terror and trauma.** *Journal of Loss and Trauma*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2025.2524058>