

## Current Status of Soviet Psychotherapy

W. Lauterbach

**I**T HAS HITHERTO been difficult for Western psychotherapists to get a clear and accurate picture of psychotherapy in the U.S.S.R., and to some extent our judgments have been based on ill-informed prejudice.

When thinking of psychotherapy in the U.S.S.R. we may know hypnosis, sleep therapy, perhaps even Rational Therapy, and that psychoanalysis is forbidden. Western behavior therapists also "know" that, despite Pavlov, there is no behavior therapy in the Soviet Union.

### RATIONAL PSYCHOTHERAPY

One of the most widely used methods is rational psychotherapy (RP). Its essence can be summarized by saying that the objective is to persuade the patient that the way he sees his problems and symptoms is wrong and to teach him the "right way" of seeing them. The "right way" is the scientific, i.e., mainly the Pavlovian view of psychologic disorders.

RP has its origin in the teaching of the Swiss psychiatrist Dubois at the beginning of the century. He assumed that neuroses were the consequence of inaccurate or insufficient reasoning. A rational therapist assumes that if the patient learns to think about his problems more reasonably, he will understand that his phobias are unfounded and will be able to overcome them. Rational group psychotherapy in the U.S.S.R., therefore, consists of lectures given to groups of patients about the development and treatment of various neurotic disorders.

The second most important method of psychotherapy in the Soviet Union is suggestion and hypnosis. Suggestions can be given while the patient is awake, while he is in a hypnotic state (verbally or medically induced) or while he is half asleep. Since hypnotic methods of psychotherapy are well known in the West, I shall select and describe only two examples of indirect suggestion out of a large number of techniques.<sup>2</sup>

Suggestions are given directly or indirectly. Indirect suggestion is, in a sense, nothing but the effective and intended use of placebo effects. For example, a paralyzed or blind conversion-hysteric was told that his disorders were not organic but functional, and that there was a cure for them. A few days later he was put on a couch and given a mask to breathe through, and a nurse put some aromatic fluid, supposedly medicine, on the breathing mask. Nobody talked to the patient, but in the background two doctors could be heard discussing the efficiency of this new method and how the patient would behave after treatment. After "treatment" the patient was told to practice his recovered abilities as much as possible, helped by nurses and fellow patients. Many patients had strong abreactions, and some had

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Since the publication of an earlier article,<sup>1</sup> the author has had the opportunity to go to the Soviet Union to study Russian psychotherapy at first hand.

*From the Psychological Institute, University of Düsseldorf, West Germany.*

Wolf Lauterbach, Dipl.-Psych., Ph.D.; Lecturer in Clinical Psychology, Psychological Institute, University of Düsseldorf, West Germany.

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# Soviet Psychotherapy

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## **Table of Contents Soviet Psychotherapy**

1. Understanding the eBook Soviet Psychotherapy
  - The Rise of Digital Reading Soviet Psychotherapy
  - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
2. Identifying Soviet Psychotherapy
  - Exploring Different Genres
  - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
  - Determining Your Reading Goals
3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
  - Popular eBook Platforms
  - Features to Look for in an Soviet Psychotherapy
  - User-Friendly Interface
4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from Soviet Psychotherapy
  - Personalized Recommendations
  - Soviet Psychotherapy User Reviews and Ratings
  - Soviet Psychotherapy and Bestseller Lists

5. Accessing Soviet Psychotherapy Free and Paid eBooks
  - Soviet Psychotherapy Public Domain eBooks
  - Soviet Psychotherapy eBook Subscription Services
  - Soviet Psychotherapy Budget-Friendly Options
6. Navigating Soviet Psychotherapy eBook Formats
  - ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
  - Soviet Psychotherapy Compatibility with Devices
  - Soviet Psychotherapy Enhanced eBook Features
7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
  - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of Soviet Psychotherapy
  - Highlighting and Note-Taking Soviet Psychotherapy
  - Interactive Elements Soviet Psychotherapy
8. Staying Engaged with Soviet Psychotherapy
  - Joining Online Reading Communities
  - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
  - Following Authors and Publishers Soviet Psychotherapy
9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books Soviet Psychotherapy
  - Benefits of a Digital Library
  - Creating a Diverse Reading Collection Soviet Psychotherapy
10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
  - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
  - Minimizing Distractions
  - Managing Screen Time
11. Cultivating a Reading Routine Soviet Psychotherapy
  - Setting Reading Goals Soviet Psychotherapy
  - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
12. Sourcing Reliable Information of Soviet Psychotherapy
  - Fact-Checking eBook Content of Soviet Psychotherapy
  - Distinguishing Credible Sources
13. Promoting Lifelong Learning

- Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development
  - Exploring Educational eBooks
14. Embracing eBook Trends
- Integration of Multimedia Elements
  - Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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