

The General Assembly and the Congress of the ECPP
New Dynamics in Psychoanalysis

ELENA LEVCHENKO, IRINA SMIRNOVA

RUSSIAN PEOPLES' IDEAS
OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

Abstract: *The objective of this research is to study Russian people's ideas of psychoanalysis in comparison with the data received by Serge Moscovici (1954). The research was conducted in four stages; more than 300 respondents were surveyed. Availability of basic psychological approaches in Russian textbooks on general psychology was studied; Russian people's familiarity with psychoanalysis in comparison with other approaches was explored; images and verbal associations evoked by psychoanalysis were analyzed; and a survey of Russians' familiarity with — and attitude to — psychoanalysis was conducted. It was found that the image of psychoanalyst is positive for Russians while the image of patient is mostly negative. However, change caused by psychoanalysis is perceived by the vast majority of the surveyed Russians as positive.*

Keywords: *social representations, Serge Moscovici, psychoanalysis, image of a psychoanalyst, image of a patient, social representation of psychoanalysis for Russians.*

The objective of this research is to study Russian people's ideas of psychoanalysis in comparison with the data received by Serge Moscovici¹. The research was conducted in four stages.

¹ Moscovici, Serge (2008) *Psychoanalysis: Its Image and its Public*. Polity Pres, 416 p.

The first stage concerned availability of basic psychological approaches in Russian textbooks on general psychology. *The second stage* was an empiric study of Russian people's familiarity with psychoanalysis in comparison with other approaches. *The third stage* concerned analysis of images and verbal associations evoked by psychoanalysis. *The fourth stage* included a survey of Russians' familiarity with — and attitude to — psychoanalysis conducted by means of questionnaire similar to Moscovici's. There were more than 300 respondents.

The first stage. Content-analysis was conducted on chapters about basic psychological approaches in ten textbooks on general psychology recommended for university students and published in 2003—010. Five psychological approaches were found to be most frequently mentioned in the textbooks, that is, psychoanalysis, cognitive psychology, behaviorism, Gestalt psychology and humanistic psychology.

The list of approaches was used as stimulus material for *the second stage* of research when the respondents were asked to rank their popularity. The more popular an approach was the lower grade it was to be given out of 10. The results showed that psychoanalysis is significantly more popular than other approaches (Fig. 1).

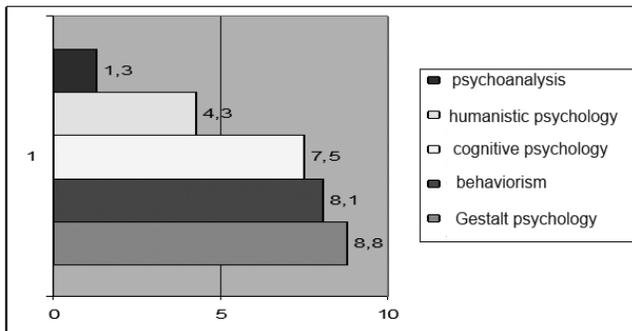


Figure 1. Popularity of psychological approaches
(179 Russians surveyed)

The third stage. Images evoked by stimulus “psychoanalysis” included symbols of **science** (*charts, diagrams, books*), **psycho-diagnostics** (*forms and manuals for testing*), **psychological help** in the specific form (*couch, consulting room, armchair*), **education** (*classroom, whiteboard, pointer*). Verbal associations to this stimulus were analyzed by P.Vergès’s² method, which allows discerning core and peripheral structure of representations. It was found that representational **core** of psychoanalysis includes the following associations: *analysis, psyche, test, psychologist, psychology, help, behaviour*. Representational **peripheral system** of psychoanalysis consists of such concepts as: *research, problem, testing, thoughts, communication, adequacy, revealing, checking, process, mind, result, condition*. **Zone of potential change** included such words as *human being, conclusion, study, character, science*.

The fourth stage. Comparison of the survey findings with the data received by S. Moscovici showed high degree of consistency between French and Russian samples in questions about the founder of psychoanalysis (100%), interest to psychoanalysis (95%), reasons to seek psychoanalysis (81%). The most significant inconsistency (60–63%) was found in the answers to the questions “What is psychoanalysis?” “In which cases is psychoanalysis used?”. Lexical comparative analysis of verbal responses to these two questions showed that Russian respondents used rather uniform lexis in their *definitions* of psychoanalysis. However, more varied and diverse lexis is used in verbal descriptions of *functions* of psychoanalysis. It was typical for Russian respondents to use varied and diverse lexis and very few verbal clichés in their interviews about psychoanalysis. In other words, the Russian culture provides people with a representation of psychoanalysis. A Russian knows what psychoanalysis is, but it might be complicated for him/her to define its functions. It may mean that this representation has been formed but not consolidated yet in the culture and individuals.

² Bovina I.D. Sotsialnye predstavleniya o zdorovie i bolezni: structura, dinamika, mekhanizmy: Dis. ... d-ra psikhol.nauk / I.D.Bovina — M., 2009.

Being asked about psychoanalysis as a treatment, more than half of the respondents reformulated the questions and spoke about acceptable/unacceptable intervention in a person's inner life and about influence of psychoanalysis on personality. Responses to the last question varied: 45% of respondents (group A) think that personality isn't deeply changed during psychoanalysis, while 55% of respondents (group B) believe that the change is significant. However, both groups agreed about the direction of change: prevailing opinion is that the change is positive (71% of answers; See Table 1).

Table 1

Possibility and direction of change during psychoanalysis

Direction of change	Group A (no change or superficial change)	Group B (deep change is possible)
Any change is possible	11%	29%
Change is positive	71%	71%
No change is possible	18%	0%

Group A mostly mentions the following superficial changes: *helps to regulate behavior, gives an opportunity to better understand oneself, helps to change one's attitude, can slightly improve one's personality, helps to solve problems, reveals one's potentials*. Group B mostly stresses the direction, or character, of change: «*positive*», «*only for better*».

In result of the interview the following types of motives (reasons) to seek psychoanalysis were discerned (Table 2).

Table 2

In which cases is it possible to seek psychoanalysis

Types of motives (reasons) to seek psychoanalysis	Percentage of answers (%)
Generalized reasons (<i>in any case</i>)	13%

Internal reasons (<i>inability to resolve one's problem on his \ her own; one's sensitivity to psychotherapy; to understand other people; to understand oneself; one's wish to do so</i>)	22%
External reasons (<i>severe pathology: amnesia, depression, social disadjustment, inadequate personality, neurosis, nervous disorder, psychic disorder, generalized dysfunction; phobias; problems of everyday functioning: shyness, "complexes", behaviour regulation, vocational assessment, psychic trauma</i>)	60%
Mixed reasons	5%

60% of respondents spoke about external reasons to seek psychoanalysis. They mostly mentioned problems of everyday functioning rather than emergency cases or severe pathology. The most frequently mentioned internal reasons were «to understand oneself» and «inability to resolve one's problems on his/her own».

Thus, psychoanalysis is the approach which is the most familiar to Russians in comparison with other psychological approaches. Images and verbal associations evoked by psychoanalysis included, first of all, its **subject** (*psychologist*), **object** (*psyche, behaviour*), **subject's specific activity** (*analysis*), **means** of influence (*test, psychology*) and **its result** (*help*). The **result** is considered to be psychological rather than medical or psychotherapeutic help. Despite the fact that Russians' ideas of psychoanalysis are somewhat unclear and vague, they share a specific emotional and cognitive attitude towards a person who seeks psychoanalysis. In their perception he is a person with psychological rather than medical problems who is somewhat «unsuccessful, inadequate or problematic». An important characteristic of Russians' ideas of the psychoanalytic dyad is that the image of psychoanalyst was positive for most respondents while the image of patient was mostly negative. However, the change caused by psychoanalysis is perceived by the majority of surveyed Russians as positive.

About the authors: **Prof. Elena Levchenko, PhD**, is Chair of Department of General and Clinical Psychology and Director of Center of Psychological Training at Perm State National Research Institute, Russia. E-mail: levchenkoev@yandex.ru
Irina Smirnova is a certified specialist of the ECPP from Perm, Russia, a medical expert and Vice Chair of Military Medical Commission at Federal Penitentiary Service Office in Perm region. E-mail: ira89082510064@yandex.ru.