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Development of Basic Emotional Competencies in OLI Integrative Psychodynamic Psychotherapy: Theoretical and Methodological Foundations of OLI IPP.

Belgrade: Kreativna knjiga and OLI Center, 399 pp.

The book *Development of Basic Emotional Competencies in OLI Integrative Psychodynamic Psychotherapy* represents a systematic and theoretically ambitious continuation of the author's longstanding work on the development of OLI Integrative Psychodynamic Psychotherapy. In continuity with the earlier study *Capacity for Love and Work*, which established the broader theoretical framework of the model, this volume offers a more precise operationalization of one of its central concepts – basic emotional competencies – and elaborates their developmental, structural, and methodological dimensions.

The central thesis of the book is that psychotherapeutic change does not primarily rest on uncovering repressed content, but rather on the development or unblocking of the ego's fundamental capacities for emotional processing and regulation. The author identifies eight such competencies: neutralization, mentalization, object wholeness, object constancy, tolerance of frustration, tolerance of ambivalence, will, and initiative. These competencies are not conceptualized as defense mechanisms; rather, they are understood as developmental achievements that transcend defensive patterns and enable more mature, flexible, and reality-oriented personality functioning.

The theoretical contribution of the book lies in its explicit grounding in four psychoanalytic psychologies – classical drive theory, ego psychology, object relations theory, and self psychology – combined with an attempt at their functional integration. Neutralization is derived and further elaborated from the tradition of ego psychology (Hartmann); object wholeness and object constancy draw upon object relations theory (Klein, Mahler, Kernberg); tolerance of narcissistic frustration is linked to self psychology (Kohut); while the concept of frustration tolerance is rooted in classical Freudian theory. However, the innovative aspect of the model does not consist merely in borrowing these concepts, but in redefining them as competencies – capacities that can be developed, practiced, and gradually automatized within the therapeutic process.

In this respect, the book represents a shift of focus from a predominantly conflict-based model toward a model centered on deficits and developmental arrest, yet without abandoning the psychoanalytic understanding of personality structure. The author retains the concept of conflict but situates it within a broader developmental framework in which the crucial strength of the ego lies in its capacity to neutralize instinctual energy, integrate ambivalence, and maintain stable object representations. In doing so, the OLI model aligns most closely with classical ego psychology, while simultaneously moving beyond its limits through its insistence on an explicitly integrative perspective and a clearly articulated methodological operationalization.

Particularly noteworthy is the concept of “counter-skills” – complex, secondary gain–driven patterns of behavior that represent a misuse of defense mechanisms. This notion introduces an additional clinical differentiation between defense as a structural function and learned manipulative strategies that perpetuate suffering. The introduction of “emotional accounting” as a technique for recalculating gains and losses constitutes an effort to render the process of relinquishing secondary gains both conscious and structured.

The methodological section of the book provides a clear description of the phases of the therapeutic process within the OLI model – from the elaboration and identification of patterns, through the development of competencies, to the final phase in which changes are consolidated and separation anxieties are worked through. In this way, theoretical constructs are directly connected to clinical practice, which significantly enhances the practical applicability of the model.

Within the broader context of contemporary psychotherapy, this study may be read as a contribution to the development of a competency-based model of psychodynamic therapy. While many contemporary approaches (e.g., mentalization-based models or affect regulation–focused therapies) tend to single out particular functions as central, the OLI model seeks to offer a coherent system of interrelated emotional competencies that together constitute the structural foundation of personality.

The book is extensive and theoretically demanding, and is primarily intended for psychotherapists in training, supervisors, and researchers interested in integrative models. Its value lies in its attempt to systematize and clarify concepts that, within the psychoanalytic tradition, have often remained at the level of implicit assumptions. As such, it represents a significant contribution to the domestic and regional psychotherapeutic literature, as well as a stimulus for further theoretical and empirical elaboration of the concept of emotional competencies within a psychodynamic framework.