THE IMAGE AS A PATHWAY TO UNDERSTANDING INTRAPERSONAL CONTRADICTIONS

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.30525/978-9934-26-720-8-12

Intrapersonal contradictions are a complex psychological phenomenon that arises when different needs, motives, values, aspirations, or ways of perceiving oneself come into conflict. Their experience may be accompanied by internal uncertainty, emotional tension, difficulties in decision-making, and the need to reconcile conflicting tendencies. In this context, it is important not only to identify the contradiction itself but also to seek ways of understanding and psychologically processing it. A theoretical analysis of this issue provides grounds for considering intrapersonal contradiction as a dynamic process whose nature is associated with an individual's current needs and personal meanings [1].

The experience of intrapersonal contradictions may also be associated with perceived stress, particularly when the demands of a situation are appraised as exceeding the resources available to the individual. In this case, stress is determined not only by the objective characteristics of the situation but also by its subjective appraisal in terms of difficulty, controllability, and the individual's perceived ability to cope with it [1; 3]. Coping strategies play an important role in this process. They involve cognitive and behavioural efforts through which individuals attempt to manage or mitigate the effects of stressful situations. Research into the relationship between value priorities, personality traits, coping strategies, and perceived stress highlights the importance of taking a comprehensive approach to the factors that shape how individuals experience challenging situations [2].

The issue of intrapersonal contradictions is also directly related to psychological well-being. This construct encompasses an individual's subjective experience of the meaningfulness, fulfilment, and satisfaction associated with their life, as well as its perceived alignment with personal needs and aspirations. Psychological well-being cannot be reduced merely to the absence of negative emotions, as it also involves a positive evaluation of one's life and opportunities to pursue personally significant goals [4]. Accordingly, the prolonged experience of unresolved intrapersonal contradictions may make

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it more difficult to maintain a sense of internal coherence, whereas their awareness and constructive processing may create conditions for a more integrated understanding of oneself.

In this context, the use of images and metaphors in psychological practice is of particular interest. A metaphor makes it possible to represent complex or insufficiently understood experiences in symbolic form, making them more accessible for reflection and discussion. In counselling practice, it can serve not only an illustrative function but also a communicative and diagnostic-reflective one [5]. Working with metaphorical images enables clients to describe their experiences through familiar symbols, comparisons, and associations, which may facilitate the verbal expression of complex emotional experiences.

The use of metaphor in the work of a counselling psychologist can be regarded as one of the means of structuring professional dialogue with a client. A metaphorical image may serve as an intermediary between an immediate experience and its verbal interpretation. This is particularly relevant when individuals find it difficult to formulate their feelings, needs, or internal contradictions in clear and unambiguous terms [6]. In such cases, the image does not replace the content of the experience but provides an additional opportunity to examine it from a different perspective.

The potential of the image-based and metaphorical approach is also evident in work with intrapersonal conflicts. In particular, art therapy techniques can be used to externalise an internal experience and facilitate its subsequent examination and interpretation [7]. An important aspect is the transition from the immediate experience to its symbolic representation, as this creates an opportunity to consider the problem from a certain psychological distance. For the individual, this may provide a way to identify different aspects of the contradiction, relate them to personal needs, and explore possible ways of reconciling them.

At the same time, the psychological value of an image lies not only in the possibility of expressing an already existing experience but also in its capacity to reveal relationships between different elements of that experience. The characteristics attributed to an image – its form, context, emotional associations, perceived dynamics, or relationship between its components – may become a starting point for reflective exploration. For example, an individual may examine what each element of the image represents, which aspects appear incompatible, what maintains the tension between them, and whether there are elements that can connect or transform the opposing tendencies. Such work allows the contradiction to be considered not as an isolated problem but as a structure involving needs, values, emotions, beliefs, and available personal resources.

This perspective also makes it possible to distinguish between the contradiction itself and the individual's relationship to it. The same conflicting tendencies may be experienced as an insurmountable internal conflict, a temporary dilemma, or a situation that requires a new form of integration. Consequently, the use of an image may facilitate a shift from an undifferentiated emotional experience towards a more structured representation of the situation. The subsequent verbal discussion of the image can help clarify its personal meaning and connect symbolic material with the individual's actual life circumstances, current stressors, coping strategies, and psychological needs [2; 5; 6].

Thus, images and metaphors can be regarded as tools for psychological work with intrapersonal contradictions, combining opportunities for self-expression, reflection, and the reinterpretation of personal experience. Their use is particularly promising in situations where an internal conflict is difficult to describe directly in words. At the same time, metaphorical techniques should be applied not in isolation but as part of a comprehensive psychological intervention, linking the imagery produced to the individual's current needs, experiences, coping strategies, and psychological well-being.

A promising direction for the practical application of this approach is the development of a psychological programme in which image-based and metaphorical techniques are used sequentially – from identifying and becoming aware of an intrapersonal contradiction to examining its components, exploring possible ways of reconciling conflicting tendencies, and identifying personal resources. Such a programme may include several interconnected stages: recognition and symbolic representation of the contradiction; exploration of the meanings associated with its components; identification of underlying needs, values, and emotional responses; examination of possible coping strategies; and development of an integrated personal interpretation of the situation. This sequence makes it possible to preserve the individual's subjective experience while gradually expanding the possibilities for its conscious interpretation.

The effectiveness of such an approach should not be understood as depending on the existence of a universally correct interpretation of a particular image. The meaning of a metaphor is determined by the individual's personal experience and should therefore be explored collaboratively rather than imposed by the psychologist. This principle is especially important in counselling, where the professional's task is to facilitate reflection and meaning-making rather than to assign predetermined meanings to symbolic material [5; 6]. In this sense, the image functions as a flexible psychological medium that can support dialogue between emotional experience and conscious reflection.

This approach is consistent with the general principles of psychological assistance, in which an important outcome is not the mechanical elimination of a contradiction but the enhancement of an individual's ability to understand and constructively engage with their internal experience. Consequently, image-based work may contribute to a more differentiated perception of one's needs and values, greater awareness of available coping resources, and the development of personally meaningful ways of responding to internal tensions. The theoretical rationale for such an approach creates grounds for its further development and empirical examination within psychological counselling and psychological programme design.

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