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Ecology of personal boundaries among youth

The article examines the problem of the ecological nature of personal boundaries among youth. It is emphasized that personal boundaries separate the inner world of a person from the outside world, from other people, because life is almost impossible without boundaries. It is noted that the optimal boundaries of the individual give the right to openly express their feelings, to be themselves, ensuring the environmental friendliness of the personal space of young people. The psychological boundary is important in the process of interpersonal communication and people's perception of each other. It is highlighted that without clearly defined comfortable boundaries, people experience significant problems in everyday life, in relationships with relatives and friends, colleagues, environment, etc. The author also draws attention to the fact that a person feels well in the environment with normal and healthy personal boundaries. Such a person is able to communicate, enter into relationships, develop and support them. Healthy boundaries are flexible; a person easily understands and determines at what level they are comfortable communicating, and whether they want this communication at all. A person is able to get closer or, on the contrary, move away if they understand that something is not working out in the relationship.

The article contains the conducted empirical research. The results of the correlation analysis confirm the relationship between self-esteem and personal boundaries in adolescence. That means that a person with low self-esteem has a high probability of difficulty distancing themselves from other people. According to the results of the empirical research, we determined that the ecology of personal boundaries depends on self-esteem of adolescents. The ecology of personal boundaries is a psychological formation that arises as a result of the interaction or establishment of relationships between the desire to preserve spontaneity and authenticity and the need for social adaptation. A person protects their own ecological space from aggressive invasion attempts.

Key words: *ecology of personal boundaries, personal boundaries, psychological boundaries, youth, self-esteem of young people.*

Formulation of the problem. Personal boundaries are a life skill, the practice of open communication and defending personal ones as a way of preserving and protecting them from being compromised or violated. This is a psychological formation that arises as a result of interaction or establishment of relationships between the desire to preserve spontaneity and authenticity and the need for social adaptation. A person protects the psychological space from invasion attempts, which helps them to separate themselves from everything that makes up the natural background of life. In this way, a person maintains their own security, freedom and independence and thus ensures the ecology of personal boundaries.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The problem of the specificity and content of personal boundaries was the subject of research by both domestic (O. V. Grigor'eva, A. V. Drapaka, A. S. Yarotska, etc.) and foreign scholars (Fisher S., Hartmann E., Lewin K. and others). In the philosophical,

psychological and psychotherapeutic literature, different terms are used to denote this phenomenon: the limit of life and the limit of Self-feelings (V. Podoroga), the contact limit (F. Perls), the energy limit (L. Marcher), in particular, O. Grigor'eva puts forward the following definition of psychological boundaries: the psychological boundaries of an individual are an intrapsychic formation that arises as a result of interaction or establishment of parity relations between the desire to preserve spontaneity and authenticity and the need for social adaptation. Two tasks of psychological boundaries are meant: preserving the self in an unchanged form as a guarantee of preserving a harmonious personality and achieving a state of personal happiness and establishing contacts with the surrounding world. The degree of experience of «one's own» and «someone else's» determines the individual's ability to dialogue and joint creativity in any spheres of life. Thus, Ukrainian researchers discover an additional aspect of psychological boundaries as a kind of dilemma between the desire for one's own authenticity and social adaptability, success, communication with others, which the individual is forced to overcome.

Outline of the main material. Personal boundaries separate a person's inner world from the outside world, from other people, because life is almost impossible without boundaries. Even at the cellular level, a person intuitively determines what is harmful for them, and what, on the contrary, improves life, and sets limits according to benefit or harm to the body. The optimal limits of the personality give the right to refuse, to express one's feelings openly, to be oneself. The psychological boundary is important in the process of interpersonal communication and people's perception of each other. It is known that without clearly defined comfortable boundaries, people experience significant problems in everyday life, in relationships with relatives and friends, colleagues, environment, etc. [9].

The psychological boundaries of the personality are formed in early childhood and reflect the child's relationship with their parents. At first, the child does not feel separated from the mother, but gradually becomes more and more aware of themselves as an independent individual [4].

U. James proposed the following components of the psychological space of an individual: physical, social and spiritual. Primary development of physical space occurs in children at an early age, social space is born in 3-6 years on the basis of physical space, spiritual space begins to form later, in adolescence. Therefore, certain aspects of personality are formed at different times, and if a child falls under uncomfortable, unfavorable conditions at a certain age, the formation of certain types of boundaries may be disturbed [3].

If the boundaries are fine and healthy, then a person feels well in the environment. They are able to communicate, enter into relationships, develop and support them. Healthy boundaries are flexible; a person easily understands and determines at what level they are comfortable communicating, and whether they want this communication at all. A person is able to get closer or, on the contrary, move away if they understand that something is not working out in the relationship.

A. Gris highlights the following functions:

1. «Not letting in» - the inclusion of "protection" from external influences that are evaluated by a person as negative. Boundaries become impenetrable and limit the inner psychological space of the individual.

2. Permeable - it reflects the «throughput» capacity of boundaries. It happens in the case of a sufficient level of self-confidence and a person's trust in another person, as well as the absence of dangerous influencing factors. Boundaries seem to dissolve, but at the same time, a person does not lose their sense of self.

3. Absorbing - the boundary allegedly pulls the necessary and desired things from the surrounding reality. This function helps to ensure the internal right to satisfy a person's needs - a person can openly talk about their needs, ask for help, etc.

4. «Giving» function - passes internal impulses. It allows you to express yourself - your feelings and emotions externally.

5. Restraint - if it is necessary, it allows you to restrain impulses for adequate interaction with external stimuli.

6. Calm-neutral - it reflects the calm, neutral state of a person who does not seek to interact with the outside world at the moment [2].

Violation of this function and incorrect assessment of the area of responsibility by a person can lead to taking on too much responsibility, the inability to ask for help, a neurotic sense of guilt or, on the contrary, to infantile manifestations [1].

I. Shapoval offers an interesting classification of the functions of the limits of I. The author advises to divide all functions into two main groups: 1) key or dominant functions; 2) structured functions. The first (key) functions include:

- avoidance of disorganizing emotional experiences;
- preservation of self-respect; maintaining a strong, consistent, positive sense of self;
- encouraging a person to master compensatory forms of behavior;
- preventing the individual from accessing themselves;
- self-restraint and ensuring autonomy through civilizational mechanisms of self-control;
- regulation of adaptation, development and formation of personality due to limitation of its activity.

The author refers to the structured functions of boundaries:

– distinguishing between self and non-self, allowing for what is possible in contact, choosing the form of contact, interacting with important parts of oneself, expanding the range of self-expression;

– birth of subjectivity, definition of personal identity, creation of opportunity and tool of equal interaction, creation of possibility of selection of external influences, definition of limits of personal responsibility;

– active isolation from harmful influences or allowing fusion with the world; active absorption (need satisfaction) or giving (self-expression); active containment, "containment" of internal energy; calm and neutral agreement with the world;

– differentiation, identification and integration of self; communication, socialization and social realization of self;

– encouragement to overcome limits; suppression of activity by external requirements; designation of the boundaries of the virtual state, beyond which it is not relevant to achieve the goal (boundaries-catalysts, inhibitors and markers) [9].

A person, defining their individual space, changes psychological boundaries: sometimes they narrow them, sometimes they expand them. To successfully adapt means to reach such a state of the relationship between the individual and the group, when the individual without long-term external and internal conflicts effectively performs their leading activities, absolutely satisfies their basic sociogenic needs, meets the role expectations set for them by the reference group, experiences states self-assertion and free expression of one's creative abilities. Social adaptation means ways of adjusting, regulating, and harmonizing the interaction of an individual with the environment: at the same time, the individual acts as an active subject who adapts to the environment in accordance with their needs, interests, aspirations and actively determines themselves [5].

It is accepted to distinguish the following types of personal boundaries:

1. Soft, when a person merges with other people.
2. Spongy - to absorb other people's things, people are unsure of themselves.
3. Rigid - a person does not change their psychological space in all situations. Anyone who tries to violate it will be severely rebuffed. Sometimes this leads to problems in personal life.
4. Flexible, which change depending on the situation.

Sometimes the psychological boundaries of an individual are violated by other people.

- They blame other people for their problems.
- They control the behavior of people around them.
- Give advice to others on what and how to do.
- Give settings, which events and how to evaluate.
- Give a negative assessment of appearance and personality [6].

A person whose boundaries have been invaded by others feels fear, anger, frustration, tries to avoid communication.

If the boundaries are weak, they are interfered with quite regularly, such a person feels quite strong stress, they cannot adequately protect themselves from an attack. Such people feel like losers, blame themselves for all failures and troubles.

A person with weak boundaries is at risk of developing depression because they cannot stop the constant intrusions. At the same time, it should be noted that the weaker the boundaries of an individual, the more often they violate the boundaries of others [4].

The modern Ukrainian scientist P. Karelin, who is the author of the scheme for the study of psychological boundaries, emphasizes the importance of studying this phenomenon taking into account social and psychological contexts [4].

Therefore, psychological boundaries are a psychological formation that arises as a result of interaction or establishment of parity relations between the desire to preserve spontaneity and authenticity and the need for social adaptation. In order to be a socialized and self-sufficient person, it is necessary to clearly feel one's own self, as well as the communication partner's, urgent mental states, to be able to reflect, to develop empathy skills. All these things cannot be formed without establishing psychological boundaries during communication.

The need to set boundaries is as important as basic needs. If psychological boundaries are not established or are not clearly established, then a person will feel uncomfortable, depressed, will not be able to perform productive activities and may have problems related to psychological health in the future.

Gris A. [2] emphasizes the non-linearity and non-normativeness of the development of personality boundaries. The formation of a psychological boundary in the ontogenesis includes a successive transition from indivisibility and symbiosis in childhood to the autonomy and independence characteristic of a mature personality (we add that the age of maturity in modern conditions does not have a fixed value and is individual) with the corresponding breadth, differentiation and organization of life space [2]. At the same time, the physicality of the boundaries felt in stressful situations is gradually supplemented by the boundaries of subjectively significant aspects of life that do not have a clear spatial and temporal localization (for example, values, meanings, worldview positions, taste preferences). This process is also accompanied by the complication of ways of marking and protecting boundaries, and the accumulation of episodes of defending boundaries contributes to the sovereignty of the psychological space of the individual.

The most intense period of boundary formation is childhood, when the child is included in the system of social relations, adapts, accumulating life experience. Psychological boundaries act as a kind of «buffer» that helps the child «integrate into society» [5].

It is believed that in adolescence and young adulthood, the boundaries reach optimal indicators: their effective functioning is determined by activity, flexibility, the ability to hold and protect by verbal means; lower efficiency correlates with permeability, undifferentiatedness, non-adaptability, difficulties in regulation and control, physical protection or the use of socially disapproved ways of behaving. The optimal variant of the development of boundaries allows one to build an adequate system of interaction with external and internal reality already in adolescence and young adulthood [7].

Summarizing the theoretical analysis, we can draw the following conclusions: personal boundaries are a necessary component of the harmonious development of the personality, its successful adaptation to society.

The empirical sample of the study consisted of 60 respondents (37 girls, 23 boys), students of the Vinnytsia Mykhailo Kotsyubynskyi State Pedagogical University, aged from 20 to 23 years. Students of several faculties and specialties, both humanitarian and natural sciences, as well as representatives of exact sciences, participated in the study. Taking into account the goal and task of our scientific research, the following methods were used: «Definition of psychological boundaries» (E. Hartman), «Self-assessment scale» and the author's questionnaire «Psychological boundaries».

After conducting the author's questionnaire «Psychological boundaries» it was revealed: *Are you familiar with the concept of psychological boundaries?* 43,3% believe that they are well acquainted with this concept; 45% have read something and have some knowledge about what psychological boundaries are, what they are for, what are their main functions; 11,7% only superficially know about psychological limits, they heard something, but did not study it in detail. Therefore, the majority (57%) believe that they are not sufficiently familiar with this concept.

What do you think psychological boundaries are? 10% could not define psychological boundaries; 50% defined that boundaries are certain principles, desires, emotions, opportunities; 33,3% called psychological limits psychological barriers; 6,7% marked psychological boundaries as a comfort zone. We can claim that, in general, these definitions are not acceptable and those that convey the essence of this concept.

Do you think a person needs psychological boundaries? 65% answered affirmatively that a person needs psychological boundaries, 29% said that they are not needed, others (5%) found it difficult to answer. Interestingly, based on the previous answers, a large part of the respondents believe that a person needs psychological boundaries, while not understanding the essence of this psychological phenomenon.

Do you think there is a benefit to psychological boundaries? 53,3% assured that the benefit of psychological boundaries is protection, 31,7% - it is demarcation and understanding where are one's own boundaries and where are others', 8,3% - assured that there is no benefit, 6,7% - to prevent dangerous actions of others.

Can psychological boundaries help in communication with people? 46,7% - assured that psychological boundaries help in communication by not offending us and helping us to not offend other people, 23,3% - do not see the benefit of psychological boundaries in communication with other people, 11,7% - for advocacy own opinion, interests, 10% - for self-expression, 8,3% - establishing contacts. The respondents' answers, in our opinion, are appropriate and indicate an understanding of the practical use of the construction of psychological boundaries by the individual.

What are the main functions of psychological boundaries, in your opinion? In this question, it was possible to choose several answer options. Protection from external negative influences (81,7%); satisfaction of own needs (56,7%); allows you to express your emotions and feelings (53,3%); restrains impulses if necessary (61,7%).

Summarizing the results of the survey, it should be noted that despite unclear definition of the concept of psychological boundaries, the respondents understand their significance, especially clearly naming their functions. That means, there is an understanding of the importance of some practical application, building personal boundaries when interacting with other people.

After carrying out the method «Definition of psychological boundaries» (E. Hartman), we obtained the following results (see Fig. 1):

37% were found to have «thin» psychological boundaries. Such results indicate that such people can sympathize and emotionally connect with others. They are creative, dreamy, sometimes weak in defending their boundaries, in a stressful situation they would rather retreat than fight, mistrustful, but more easily influenced and lost when pressured.

In 63%, «thick» boundaries prevail, which indicate that the subjects do not experience any difficulties in communicating with others, they can calmly refuse a request if it violates their boundaries. Such individuals can defend their own interests. They keep some people at a distance whom they do not trust, they keep closer ones close. This helps to adequately perceive the surrounding world and filter the resources they spend on communicating with others.

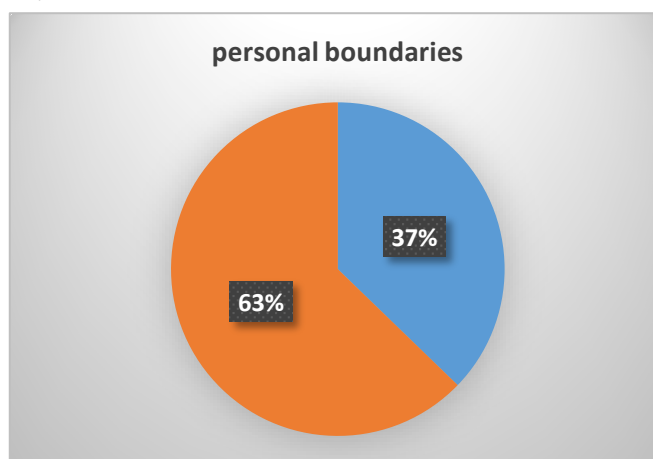


Fig. 1. The results of the study of personal boundaries according to E. Hartman

So, we see a significant prevalence of "thick" psychological boundaries among youth, which indicates both a positive aspect - the ability to defend one's own interests, and a certain lack of trust in society among modern youth, which can be interpreted as a negative aspect of the results.

Results of self-assessment diagnostics. After studying the indicators of the general sample using the «Self-evaluation scale» method, we obtained the following results (see Fig. 2):

26,7% have a low level of self-esteem. They have a negative attitude towards themselves, they give up, lose faith in themselves at the first failures. They are insecure, closed, more often introverted personalities, they treat others with suspicion.

28,3% of the respondents have a high indicator according to the method. Such individuals know how to defend personal boundaries, are confident, have a clear opinion and skillfully convey it to others, they are often extroverts.

45% of the respondents have an average level of self-esteem. This indicates that they adequately perceive themselves, their characteristics, character and situations that happen to them, but negative events and stressful situations can negatively affect the reflection and well-being of the individual.

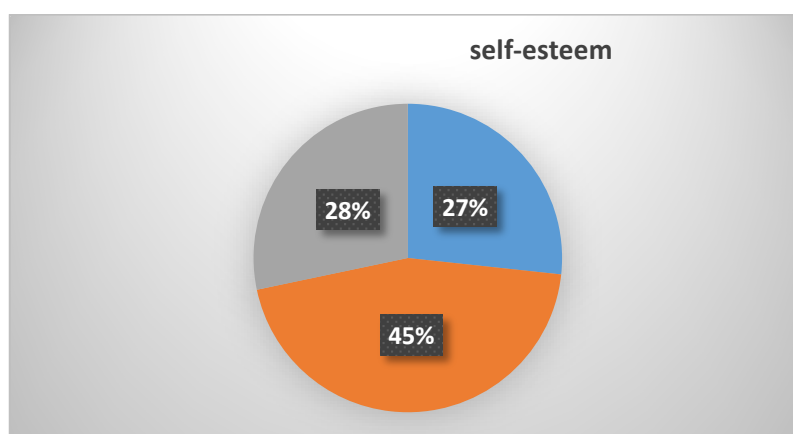


Fig. 2. The results of the study of self-esteem among young men

So, we can see that, in general, the sample is dominated by average indicators of self-esteem, which is generally typical for this age period. For a more detailed analysis, we performed a correlational analysis of the investigated indicators of the relationship between self-esteem and personal boundaries. Direct and inverse correlations were revealed between the following indicators of the methods (see Table 1.):

Table 1. Indicators of correlational research connection of self-esteem and personal boundaries

Indexes	«Thick» boundaries	«Thin» boundaries
Low self-esteem	-0,341	0,385
Average level of self-esteem	-0,145	0,269
High level of self-esteem	0,583	0,312

Let's analyze significant correlations:

- low level of self-esteem and «thin limits» (0, 385, at the level of statistical significance $p < 0.05$). Such a connection indicates that when a person is in a certain «vacuum» of their experiences and emotions, has a vague framework of their own «I», it is difficult for them to defend their position, to prove their opinion. Such a person believes that it is better not to communicate with others at all than not to be able to convey their position to them. Personalities lose meaning in interaction and close in on themselves. Some, on the contrary, due to thin boundaries and low self-esteem, try to get into the boundaries of other people to belittle their certain achievements and achievements.

- a high level of self-esteem and «thick boundaries» (0, 583, at the level of statistical significance $p < 0.05$), which indicates an active position of individuals in personal and interpersonal communication. Such people can stand up for themselves, can often deliberately create conflicts in order to win them, they have clear frameworks and positions in interpersonal and personal communication. Some personalities may have high boundaries and self-esteem, but inflated, and therefore try to encroach on the peace and confidence of others. They sense a certain competition and try to get rid of it.

- an inverse correlation was found between the indicators of low self-esteem and «thick boundaries» (-0.344, at the level of statistical significance $p < 0.05$). This result indicates that when an individual feels insecure, anxious, and has doubts about their thoughts and positions, the boundary score decreases. A person loses the ability to stand up for themselves, closes in on themselves, cannot adequately respond to the situation and believes that in a stressful moment it is better to leave than to defend their own boundaries.

In general, the results of the correlation analysis confirm that a high level of self-esteem and «thick boundaries»; an inverse correlation was revealed between indicators of low self-esteem and «thick boundaries» and vice versa, low self-esteem is associated with the indicator of «thin boundaries». That means, a person with low self-esteem has a high probability of difficulty distancing themselves from other people. According to the results of the empirical research, we determined that the ecology of personal boundaries depends on self-esteem of adolescents.

Conclusions. The ecology of personal boundaries is a psychological formation that arises as a result of the interaction or establishment of relationships between the desire to preserve spontaneity and authenticity and the need for social adaptation. A person protects their own ecological space from aggressive invasion attempts. Thus, a person maintains their own security, freedom and independence. It is at a young age that a person begins to realize their uniqueness and uniqueness, in their consciousness there is a gradual reorientation from external evaluations to internal ones. At a young age, psychological boundaries reach optimal indicators: their effective functioning is determined by activity, flexibility, the ability to hold and protect by verbal means; in the case of unformed boundaries: reduced efficiency is correlated with permeability, undifferentiatedness, inadaptability, difficulties in regulation and control, physical protection, use of socially disapproved ways of behavior.

Prospects for further research in this direction. Prospects for further research can be seen in a comprehensive analysis of the peculiarities of the relationship between the ecology of personal boundaries and the psychological properties of the individual.

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Review received 12.03.2023